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The advertisement features a dark background with a yellow lightning bolt graphic on the right side. The text is primarily in yellow and white. At the top, 'The Crash Course' is written in white on a yellow brushstroke. Below it, 'SANKALP' is in large, bold, yellow letters, with 'CLAT & AILET 2025' in white below it. A yellow banner with 'Batch Features:' is in the center. A list of features follows in white and yellow text. At the bottom, contact information is provided in white text on a yellow background. A small logo for '12 Minutes to CLAT' is in the bottom right corner.

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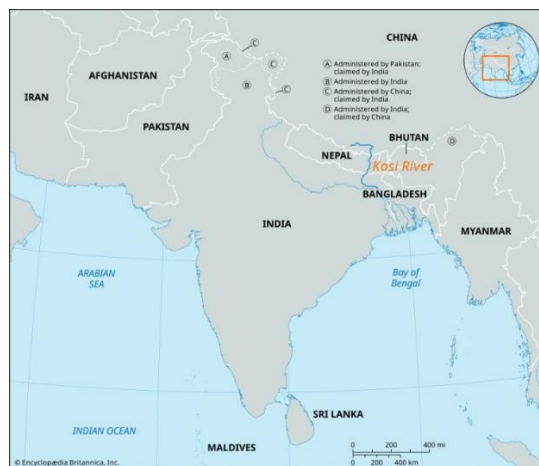
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## National Current Affairs

### Kosi Mechi River Linking Project



Source- <https://images.app.goo.gl/Zr7kV1w5HdYxbvqC9>

**Recently:** Union Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** announced a budget allocation of **₹11,500 crores** for several projects, including Bihar's ambitious and long-awaited Kosi-Mechi Link Project.

- In her budget speech, she emphasized the central government's commitment to financially assist Bihar in combating the recurrent floods that plague the state.

**River Interlinking in India:**

- **Dr. K.L. Rao**, the then irrigation Minister, in the year **1972** first mooted the idea of interlinking of rivers by connecting the **Ganga with the Cauvery river**.
- Subsequently, in **1977 Capt. Dastur** initiated the concept of a “**Garland Canal**” around the **Himalayan, Central** and **Peninsular** India.
- The proposals although received very good response from all sectors of communities, but was not found techno-economical feasible for implementation.
- Later, The Government of India formulated a **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for interlinking of rivers (ILR) in **1980**.
- **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** has been entrusted with the work of Interlinking of Rivers under the National Perspective Plan (NPP).
- The NPP has **two** components, viz;
  - Himalayan Rivers Development Component
  - Peninsular Rivers Development Component
- Himalayan Rivers Development Component envisages construction of storage reservoirs on the principal tributaries of **Ganga and Brahmaputra** rivers in **India, Nepal and Bhutan**.
- Under the **Himalayan Rivers Development Component** of the NPP, there are **3 link projects**, viz;
  - Kosi-Mechi Link project
  - Kosi-Ghaghra link project
  - Chunar-Sone Barrage link project
- These projects envisage transfer of water from **Kosi, Ghaghra and Gandak** rivers flowing down from **Nepal** to the other rivers in the **State of Bihar**.
- Peninsular Rivers Development Component is divided into **four major parts** viz.:
  - Interlinking of **Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery** rivers and building storage at potential sites in these basins.
  - Interlinking of west flowing rivers, north of Bombay and south of Tapi.
  - Interlinking of **Ken-Chambal**.
  - Diversion of other west flowing rivers.



## **What is Kosi – Mechi Project?**

### **Background:**

- The project lies in **Nepal** and the initial agreement between the **Nepalese monarchy** and the **Government of India** was signed on **April 25, 1954**.
- The objective was to overcome the acute problem of shifting of course of Kosi River, heavy sediment load, flooding etc. and to alleviate the severe suffering of the people of Bihar
- It aimed to construct a barrage near the India-Nepal border at **Hanuman Nagar**.
- This agreement included building the **Eastern Kosi Main Canal (EKMC)** in India, which will now be extended to the Mechi River.

### **Details of the project:**

- The Kosi-Mechi Link Project aims to redirect the surplus water from the **Kosi River into the Mechi River**, a tributary of the **Mahananda**.
- The project involves constructing a canal to link the Kosi River with the Mechi River, intending to protect North Bihar from flood disasters caused by continuous rainfall in Nepal's Terai regions.
- The project will originate from the existing **Hanuman Nagar Barrage** across river Kosi located near Hanuman Nagar town close to Indo-Nepal border.
- The total length of the canal will be **117.50 km**, including the existing **41.3 km Eastern Kosi Main Canal**.
- The new project will cover **76.2 km** and feature multiple hydraulic structures such as **9 canal syphons, 14 syphon aqueducts, 42 road bridges, 9 hume pipe culverts, 28 head regulators and 9 cross regulators**.
- This intra-State link project has been accorded **Environmental Clearance** and **Investment Clearance** in **2019 and 2020** respectively.
  - The environment approval involves no displacement of population and there is no acquisition of any forest land.



**River Kosi:**

- The Kosi or Koshi is a **transboundary river** which flows through **China, Nepal and India**.
- From a major confluence of tributaries north of the **Chatra Gorge** onwards, the Kosi River is also known as the **Saptakoshi** for **its seven upper tributaries**.
- The Kosi is the **third-largest tributary** of the **Ganges** by water discharge after the **Ghaghara** and the **Yamuna**.
- The Kosi is **720 km (450 mi) long** and drains an area of about **74,500 km<sup>2</sup> (28,800 sq mi)** in **Tibet, Nepal and Bihar**.
- In the past, several authors proposed that the river has shifted its course by more than **133 km (83 mi)** from **east to west** during the last **200 years**.
  - But a review of 28 historical maps dating **1760 to 1960** revealed a slight **eastward shift** for a long duration, and that the shift was random and oscillating in nature.
- The river basin is surrounded by ridges which separate the Kosi from the **Yarlung Tsangpo** River in the **north**, the **Gandaki** in the **west** and the **Mahananda** in the **east**.

**River Mechi:**

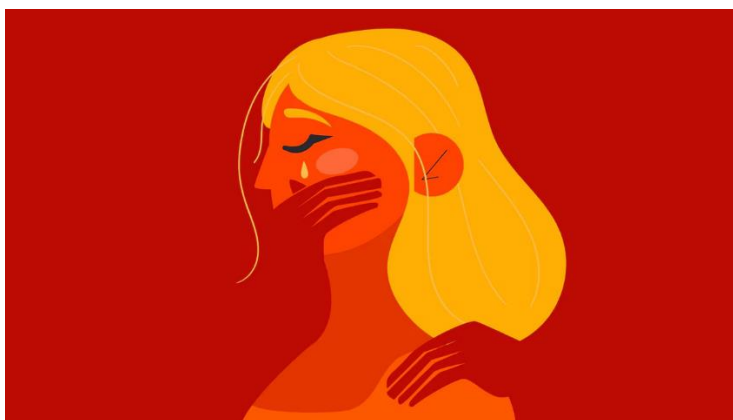
- It is trans boundary river flowing through Nepal and India originates from the **Marabharat range** in **Nepal**.
- It is a tributary of the **Mahananda River** that joins at the **Kishanganj district** of **Bihar**.

**National Water Development Authority:**

- The National Water Development Agency (NWDA), was set up in **July 1982** as Autonomous Society under the **societies registration act 1860**.
- It operated under the then **Ministry of Irrigation** [now Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS)].
- It aimed to carry out detailed studies, surveys and investigations in respect of **Peninsular Component** under **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for Water Resources Development.
- In the year **1990**, NWDA was also entrusted with the task of **Himalayan Component** of National Perspective Plan.

- In **2006**, it was decided that NWDA will explore the feasibility of intra-states links and to take up the work for preparation of **Detailed Project Report (DPR)** of river link proposals under National Perspective Plan (NPP).
- The functions of NWDA were further modified MoWR resolution dated **19.05.2011** to undertake the work of preparation of DPRs of **intra-State links**.
- In **2016** the functions of NWDA were further modified to **undertake implementation of ILR projects** and completion of water resources projects under **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)**.

## **Sexual Harassment in the Malayalam Film Industry**



Source- <https://www.herzindagi.com/society-culture/justice-hema-committee-report-malayalam-film-industry-female-actors-sexual-harassment-article-299532>

**Recently:** The **Justice Hema Committee** report, which looked into the problems faced by women working in the Malayalam film industry was released **four- and-a-half years** after its submission.

- The report found that these problems include sexual harassment, lack of basic facilities like women's toilets, gender bias and discrimination, disparity in remuneration, and the absence of a legally constituted authority to address their problems.

**About the Committee:**

- The panel was set up in the aftermath of the horrific sexual assault on a leading actress in the film industry.
- **Bhavana Menon**, who has worked in more than 80 films in southern Indian languages and won a number of prestigious awards, was assaulted by a group of men while travelling from **Thrissur to Kochi** in **February 2017**.
  - As the Indian laws bar identification of the survivors of sexual assault, her name was concealed initially.
  - Later, in **2022**, she **waived her anonymity** in a post on Instagram and in an interview to the BBC.
- **Dileep**, one of the Malayalam film industry's biggest actors and Menon's co-star in half a dozen films, was named as an accused and charged with criminal conspiracy.
- A few months after the attack on Ms Menon, **Women in Cinema Collective (WCC)**, a group formed by some of her colleagues in a film industry, petitioned the government, seeking swift action in the case and also to address the problems faced by women in cinema.
- The **three-member committee**, headed by retired High Court judge **Justice K Hema**, was formed in **July 2017**.
  - The committee also included **veteran actress Sarada** and retired **IAS officer K.B. Valsala Kumari** as its members.
- The committee had **submitted its report** to the state government in **December 2019**.
- However, the **Cultural Affairs Department** had rejected several RTI applications for the report, saying that making it public would affect the privacy of several witnesses.
- In early July this year, the **State Information Commission** ordered the release of the report without identifying the witnesses.
- However, a film producer approached court and got an interim stay on the report's release.
- Recently, the **Kerala High Court** lifted the stay with a directive to the government to hand over the copies of the report within a week.
- After this, the report, which was originally **295-pages long**, was released after **63 pages** were redacted.
- A public interest petition was recently filed in the Kerala High Court, seeking **initiation of criminal proceedings** against those accused in the report.

- The court ordered the government to submit a copy of the report and the judges said they would decide if criminal action needed to be taken once they had read it.

### **Findings of the Report:**

- The report said the experiences that women have gone through in the industry are shocking, and that many had not even disclosed these to their close family members.
- The Report pointed out total **17 issues** faced by the women in the industry that include:
  - Sexual demands are made to women from the time they enter the industry.
  - Sexual harassment, abuse, and assault against women take place at the work place, during transportation, and at places of accommodation.
  - Women are tortured if they express resentment or unwillingness to fulfil sexual demands.
  - A lack of basic facilities for women, including toilets and changing rooms at places of work.
  - Women lack safety at their workplace and accommodation.
  - Unauthorised and illegal banning of individuals in cinema.
  - The silencing of women under the threat of banning them from working in the industry.
  - Male dominance, gender bias and gender discrimination.
  - The use of drugs and alcohol, disorderly conduct and misbehaviour at place of work, which lead to gross indiscipline.
  - Being subject to demeaning or vulgar comments at places of work.
  - The non-execution of contracts between employer and employee to suit individual requirements.
  - The failure to pay the agreed remuneration.
  - Disparity of remuneration between men and women, and gender discrimination in remuneration.
  - Resistance/reluctance to allow women to work on the technical side cinema.
  - Online harassment.
  - Lack of legal awareness about their own rights.
  - The absence of any legally constituted authority to redress their grievances.

## **Sexual Harassment at Workplace in India:**

### **Bhanwari Devi's Case:**

- **Bhanwari Devi** was a **Dalit government employee** who was engaged in spreading awareness about hygiene and education and running campaigns against dowry and child marriage.
- As part of her employment, she tried to save a **9-month-old** girl who was wedded off by her father, **Ramkaran Gujjar**.
- She tried to resist and carried out a rally but she was not able to stop the marriage due to the involvement of influential people and political personalities.
- In order to take revenge for the rallies and campaigns instituted against them, a group of people attacked Bhanwari Devi when she was walking along the road with her husband and was gangraped.
- When she approached the police, the police delayed in registering her complaint and then the **Rajasthan High Court** acquitted the accused on questionable grounds.
  - These grounds included statements like a woman cannot be gang-raped in front of her husband and that the village head cannot be indulging in such acts.
- The incident spurred widespread protests and demands from women's rights groups for legal reforms to address and prevent sexual harassment at workplaces.
- A group of non-profit organisations who worked towards the safety of women filed a petition in the **Supreme Court of India** seeking justice for Bhanwari Devi and a new set of guidelines for the protection of women.
- This led to the pronouncement of the landmark judgement **of Vishaka and Ors. v. State of Rajasthan** and formulation of the **Vishakha guidelines**.

### **The Vishakha Guidelines:**

- The Vishakha guidelines are a set of guidelines that were instituted by the **Supreme Court of India** in **1997** and were intended to protect women at the workplace.
- The guidelines issued by the Supreme Court widens the meaning and scope of sexual harassment.

### **Definition:**

- The Vishaka Guidelines define sexual harassment as any unwanted sexual behaviour, including physical contact, advances, requests for favours, sexually coloured remarks, and pornography at workplace.

#### Duty of the Employer:

- The guidelines also lay down the obligation of the employer to **file a complaint** if the conduct towards an employee, amounts to a criminal offence which is punishable under the Indian Penal Code.
- The employer needs to initiate an action and ensure that the witnesses are not further victimised.
- If the employee is sexually harassed or tortured by a third party, like in the case of Bhanwari Devi, an employer should assist the employee in every possible manner.

#### Complaint Redressal Committee:

- To handle complaints effectively, organizations are required to establish a **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)**.
- ICC is required to be **headed by a woman employee** and not less than **half of its members** would be **women**.
- They are also encouraged to spread awareness about sexual harassment and women's safety, fostering a culture of respect and awareness.

#### **Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, 2013:**

- The Vishaka guidelines were later replaced by the **Sexual Harassment of Women at the workplace (prevention, prohibition and redressal) Act, 2013**, which broadened the definition of aggrieved women and expanded the scope of workplaces.
- The aggrieved victim under the Act can be a woman “of any age whether employed [at the workplace] or not”, who “alleges to have been subjected to any act of sexual harassment”.
  - In effect, the Act protects the rights of all women who are working or visiting any workplace, in any capacity.
- In addition to the definition of Sexual Harassment given in the Vishakha Guidelines, the PoSH Act mentions **five circumstances** that amount to sexual harassment:
  - Implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment in her employment;
  - Implied or explicit threat of detrimental treatment;

- Implied or explicit threat about the complainant's present or future employment status;
- Interference with the complainant's work or creating an offensive or hostile work environment;
- Humiliating treatment of the complainant that is likely to affect her health or safety.
- The '**Handbook on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace**' published by the **Ministry of Women & Child Development** contains more detailed instances of behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The PoSH Act subsequently mandated that every employer must constitute an **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** at each office or branch that had **10 or more employees**.

Complaint filed under POSH Act:

- Under the Act, the complaint must be made "within **three months** from the date of the incident".
  - However, the ICC can "**extend** the time limit" if "it is satisfied that the circumstances were such which prevented the woman from filing a complaint within the said period".
- It is not compulsory for the aggrieved victim to file a complaint for the ICC to take action.
- If the aggrieved is unable to file a complaint, any member of the ICC "shall" render "all reasonable assistance" to her to complain in writing.
- If the woman cannot complain because of "physical or mental incapacity or death or otherwise", her **legal heir** may do so.
- The ICC may, before inquiry, and at the request of the aggrieved woman, take steps to settle the matter between her and the respondent through conciliation.
  - **No monetary settlement** shall be made as a basis of conciliation.
- The ICC may either forward the victim's complaint to the police, or it can start an inquiry that has to be completed within **90 days**.
- The ICC has powers similar to those of a **civil court** in respect of summoning and examining any person on oath, and requiring the discovery and production of documents.
- When the inquiry is completed, the ICC must provide a report of its findings to the employer **within 10 days**.
- If the allegations of sexual harassment are proved, the ICC will recommend to the employer to take action "in accordance with the provisions of the service rules" of the company.
- The ICC may also recommend that the company **deduct the salary** of the person found guilty, "as it may consider appropriate".



- The compensation is determined based on **five aspects**:
  - Suffering and emotional distress caused to the woman;
  - Loss in career opportunity;
  - Her medical expenses;
  - Income and financial status of the respondent;
  - Feasibility of such payment
- If either the aggrieved woman or the respondent is not satisfied, they may appeal in court within **90 days**.
- **Section 14** of the Act deals with punishment for **false or malicious complaint** and false evidence.

## **Indian Names to Underwater Structures in Indian Ocean**



**Recently:** Three underwater geographical structures located in the Indian Ocean have been awarded names proposed by India.

- These are the **Ashoka Seamount, Chandragupt Ridge, and Kalpataru Ridge**, recently recognized by the **International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)** and **UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)**.

#### **About the Structures:**

- All the three structures are located along the **Southwest Indian Ridge** area of the Indian Ocean and were discovered during an international survey exploration programme.
- They were discovered by oceanographers from the **National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), Goa**.

#### **Ashoka Seamount:**

- It is an **oval shaped** structure that spans over an area of **180 sqkm**.
- It is named after **Ashoka**, the **third king** (after **Chandragupta Maurya** and **Bindusara**) of the **Mauryan dynasty** that ruled around **269 BC**.
- It was discovered with the help of the **Russian Sea vessel Akademik Nikolay Strakhov** by the Indian research team in **2012**.

#### **Kalpataru Ridge:**

- "Kalpataru" is a **Sanskrit term** that translates to "**wish-fulfilling tree**."
- It is spread over an area of **430 sq km**.
- It was also discovered by the **Russian Sea vessel Akademik Nikolay Strakhov in 2012**.
- Experts said that this ridge may have supported marine life, habitat shelter and food for various species.

#### **Chandragupta Ridge:**

- It was discovered in **2020** by the Indian ocean research vessel **MGS Sagar**.
- It was named after **Chandragupta Maurya**, the emperor of **Magadha** and the founder of the **Maurya dynasty**.
- It is an **elongated and oval shaped** body covering a total area of **675 sq km**.

**India's Research and Exploration:**

- Since **2004**, India has been undertaking the **Indian Southern Ocean Research Programme** with NCPOR being the nodal agency.
- These sea explorations aim at studying the bio-geochemistry, biodiversity, lower atmospheric processes, paleoclimate, hydrodynamics, air-sea interactions among a host of other research areas.
- In all, there are now **seven structures** in the Indian Ocean named mainly after Indian scientists or bear names proposed by India in this region of the Indian Ocean.
- Other structures bearing Indian names include –
  - **Raman ridge**: The name was **accepted in 1992**. The structure was **discovered in 1951** by a **US oil vessel** and was named after Physicist and Nobel Laureate Sir **CV Raman**.
  - **Panikkar Seamount**: The name was **accepted in 1993**. It was discovered by India research vessel **Sagar Kanya** and was named after **NK Panikkar**, a renowned oceanographer.
  - **Sagar Kanya Seamount**: The name was **accepted in 1991**. For its successful 22nd cruise in **1986** leading to its discovery, a seamount was named after the research vessel Sagar Kanya itself.
  - **DN Wadia Guyot**: It was named after geologist **DN Wadia in 1993** when an underwater volcanic mountain (guyot), was discovered in **1992** by Sagar Kanya.

**International Hydrographic Organization:**

- Hydrography is the branch of applied sciences which deals with the measurement and description of the physical features of oceans, seas, coastal areas, lakes and rivers, as well as with the prediction of their change over time.
- The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) an intergovernmental organization representing hydrography.
- A principal aim of the IHO is to ensure that the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are properly surveyed and charted.
- The IHO was **established in 1921** as the **International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB)**.
- The present name was **adopted in 1970**, as part of a new international Convention on the IHO adopted by the then member nations.

- The former name International Hydrographic Bureau was retained to describe the IHO secretariat until **8 November 2016**, when a significant revision to the Convention on the IHO entered into force.
- The organization comprises an elected **Secretary-General** and two supporting Directors, together with a small permanent staff.
- It is Headquartered in **Monaco** and comprises **100 members**.
- It also enjoys **observer status** at the United Nations.
- **Mathias Jonas** is the **Secretary General** of IHO.
- **June 21** is observed every year as the **World Hydrography Day**.
  - **"Hydrographic Information - Enhancing Safety, Efficiency and Sustainability in Marine Activities"**, is the theme for this year.

#### **Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission:**

- The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC/UNESCO) promotes international cooperation in marine sciences to improve management of the ocean, coasts and marine resources.
- It was established in **1960** by **resolution 2.31** adopted by the General Conference of the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**.
- It first met in **Paris** at UNESCO Headquarters from 19 to 27 October **1961**.
- Initially, **40 States** became members of the commission which now has **150 member states** (as of 2019 as mentioned in the official website).
- The IOC is in charge of coordinating the **United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030**, the **"Ocean Decade"**.
- Member States oversee the work of the IOC through **two Governing Bodies**, the **Assembly** and the **Executive Council**.
- The **IOC Assembly** meets **once per biennium (two years)**, while an **Executive Council** meets **every year**.
- Both the IOC Assembly and the Executive Council are prepared, supported and run by the **six IOC Officers**, under the leadership of the **IOC Chair**, in close alignment with the **IOC Secretariat**, under the leadership of the **Executive Secretary**.

## **Municipal Corporation of Delhi**



**Recently:** Fifteen months after reserving its verdict, the Supreme Court held on **August 5** that the **Centre-appointed Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G)** has the power to nominate ‘**aldermen**’ to the **Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)** without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers from the Delhi Government.

- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) welcomed the verdict while the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) called it a “big setback” for democracy.
- The order was issued by the bench **comprised CJI DY Chandrachud, Justices PS Narasimha and PV Sanjay Kumar** who validated the nomination of 10 aldermen in **January 2023**.

### **What is the issue?**

- The last elections for the Delhi Municipal Corporation were held in **May 2022** in which the **AAP came out victorious** securing a simple majority of **134 out of 250 seats**.
  - This ended the **BJP’s 15-year run** as the majority party in the MCD.
- In January 2023, **LG VK Saxena** nominated **10 aldermen** to the MCD.
- The AAP moved the Supreme Court over the nominations, saying they were **made without consulting the government**.

- It argued such nominations were earlier made following the **aid and advice** of the government.
- **Section 3** of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi states that the administrator, or the LG, has the right to nominate the 10 aldermen.
- Without proper appointment of the aldermen, the **Standing Committee** cannot be formed as the vote of the aldermen is mandatory in the election of the members.
  - The Standing Committee carries out major functions of the MCD.
- A separate petition was filed in **January 2024** by **Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi** for the SC to allow the MCD to directly exercise the powers of the Standing Committee, while the case against the aldermen nomination is being heard.
- Upon mentioning this case on July 29, the bench led by **Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud** directed Oberoi's counsel, Senior Advocate Dr. A M Singhvi, to wait and indicated that the judgment in the aldermen nomination case would soon be pronounced.

### **The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD):**

- The MCD is among the largest civic bodies in the world and caters to around **20 million** people.
- MCD is one of **three municipalities** in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the others being:
  - New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) (administers the New Delhi area).
  - Delhi Cantonment Board (administers the Delhi Cantonment area).

### **History:**

- There is no written history of autonomous rule in Delhi before 1863, although there is a mention of the existence of a **municipality in 1862**.
- The **first regular meeting** of the municipality was held on **23 April 1863**, in which local people were called.
- On **June 1, 1863** the meeting was presided over by the **Commissioner of Delhi**.
- The **Municipal Corporation of Delhi** was officially established on **April 7, 1958** by the **Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957**.
- The **Delhi Town Hall** at Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi was the seat of the MCD from **1866 till late 2009**.
  - In **2009**, offices shifted to the new **MCD Civic Centre on Minto Road** in **Central Delhi**.

- The Delhi Municipal Corporation Act was amended in **1993** to bring about fundamental changes in **composition, functions, governance** and administration of the corporation.
- In **2011**, by amending the Municipal Corporation of Delhi Act, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi was **trifurcated** into three corporations- **North, East, and South Delhi Municipal Corporation**.
  - The new **North Delhi Municipal Corporation** and **South Delhi Municipal Corporation** each contain **104 municipal wards**, while the smaller **East Delhi Municipal Corporation** contains **64 wards**.
- In **March 2022**, the state Election Commission indefinitely deferred the municipal elections that were scheduled to be held in April 2022.
- In **May 2022**, the Parliament passed the **Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill** to **merge the 3 municipal corporations** back to a single body, the **Municipal Corporation of Delhi**.

#### Features of the MCD:

- The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is classified into **12 zones** – Centre, South, West, Najafgarh, Rohini, Civil Lines, Karol Bagh, SP-City, Keshavpuram, Narela, Shahdara North and Shahdara South.
- The MCD covers an area of **1397.3 sqkm** and these zones are further divided into **250 wards**.
- The MCD Act also creates a '**Wards Committee**' for each zone comprising **elected representatives** and the **aldermen** within that territory.
  - The **Delhi L-G** under **Section 3** the DMC Act is empowered to nominate **10 aldermen** who must be above **25 years** of age and "have special knowledge or experience in municipal administration".
- The ward committees are formed to provide solutions for local issues and enable decentralisation of authority in administration.

#### The Standing Committee:

- The Standing Committee has **18 members** and is the **highest decision-making executive body** of the Delhi Municipal Corporation.
- It is responsible for handling finances and projects as well as drafting regulations and policy implementation.
- It can form **sub-committees** to handle matters related to parking, education, environment and others.



- Ward committees choose the other **twelve members** of the committee. **Six** of them are **elected directly** by the MCD after the **mayoral elections**.
- Each of the **12 Wards Committees** must elect **a member** to be a part of the MCD Standing Committee in their **first meeting**.
- Without this committee, the MCD cannot perform the following important functions:
  - Enter contracts involving expenditure of more than **Rs 5 crore**
  - Appoint MCD officials to key positions
  - Recommend budget revisions
  - Approve the exercise of any power relating to expenditure beyond the current year

### **Powers and Functions of the Aldermen:**

- The word Alderman originates from the Old English word **Aldormonn/Ealdormann**. In ancient times, the elders of a **clan or tribe** were referred to by this term.
- In the **12<sup>th</sup> Century CE**, the term came to be used for **officers of municipal bodies** and this is the sense in which it is used till date.
- As per the Delhi **Municipal Corporation Act, 1957** (DMC Act), **10 people** above the age of **25 years** can be nominated by the **LG** to the MCD.
- Although aldermen do not have the right to vote in MCD meetings, they play an important role in the functioning of the House through the **Ward Committee**.
- Aldermen can vote in the elections for the members of the **Standing Committee** in their respective wards and can also be **candidates** to be elected as a member of the Standing Committee.
- Although the **Mayor is the head of the MCD**, the Standing Committee effectively manages the affairs of the corporation, and cannot be formed without the participation of aldermen in the voting process.

### **Arguments of the Delhi Government:**

- **Article 239AA** of the Constitution of India contains special provisions for the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
  - Crucially, it provides for the creation of the **Delhi Legislative Assembly**, the **Council of Ministers** which comprises members of this assembly, and the offices of the **Chief Minister** and the **Delhi L-G**.
- The article states that the Council of Ministers and the Chief Minister will **"aid and advise"** the Lieutenant Governor in the exercise of his functions in relation to matters with respect to which the Legislative Assembly has power to make laws.
  - The assembly has the power to make laws on all subjects in the **State List** except for laws that **govern 'Public order' (entry 1), 'Police' (entry 2) and 'Land' (entry 18)**.
  - This position of law was confirmed by the apex court in its **2018** decision in ***State (NCT of Delhi) v. Union of India***.
- This is subject to an exception under **Article 239AA(4)** that the LG can exercise his discretion in so far as he is, by or **under any law**, required to do so.
- The Delhi government also pointed out that one of the subjects in the State List is **'Local Government' (Entry 5)**.
- As per the Delhi Government, giving the LG the power to nominate aldermen will effectively mean that he can **destabilise a democratically elected MCD** because these aldermen get appointed to the standing committees.
- As a consequence of the judgment, the aldermen will hold the key with regard to **disbursement of funds** by the standing committees of the MCD.

#### **Arguments of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi:**

- The Lieutenant Governor argued that the DMC Act carved out a specifically defined role for the **'Administrator' (the Delhi L-G)** giving him the power to nominate aldermen.
- He claimed that while exercising this power that was specifically provided under a statute, it is not necessary to seek out the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.
  - This statutory power is argued to flow from **Section 3(3)(b)(i)** of the **Delhi Municipal Corporation Act**.

#### **The Recent judgement and the reasoning given:**

- The bench of Justices **P.S. Narasimha and P.V. Sanjay Kumar** referred to the **five-judge bench** decision in ***Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2023)*** to arrive at its decision.

- In **2023**, the apex court held that Parliament would have the power to legislate over subjects in the State List as well, when it comes to the NCT of Delhi.
- In this case that would include passing laws over '**local government**', which is subject under the **State List** and would cover the DMC Act.
- The basis of the judgment's reasoning is this - the LG is not required to act as per the aid and advice of the Government when he is discharging a statutory function.
- As the DMC Act gives the Delhi L-G the '**explicit**' power to nominate aldermen without any requirement to consult the Council of Ministers, the court held that the nomination of 10 aldermen in January 2023 was a **valid exercise of power**.
- The power as per the court, qualifies the exception under **Article 239AA(4)** and is to be exercised as a **statutory duty** of the LG and not as the **executive power** of the GNCTD (Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi).

### The Governance History of Delhi:

- In **1911**, Delhi was made the **capital of India** by the colonial British government.
  - Delhi was then known as the '**Chief Commissioner's Province**'.
- The following year, **the Delhi Laws Act** was passed, which made specific laws in **Punjab** applicable to Delhi.
- The **1915 Amendment** to the Delhi Laws Act allowed the Chief Commissioner of Delhi to determine the laws that would be applied to Delhi.

### Post Independence:

- In **1951**, the **Government of Part C States Act** was passed. This law established a **Legislative Assembly** in Delhi.
- The Act also empowered the Legislative Assembly to make laws on those matters detailed in **List II (the State List)** of the **Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution of India, 1950.
- However, the Delhi Legislative Assembly was barred from legislating on matters relating **to public order, police** (including railway police), the constitution of and powers of **municipal corporations** and **local authorities**, and **lands and buildings** belonging to the Union situated in Delhi.

Delhi as a Union Territory:

- In **1956**, Parliament passed the **Constitution of India (Seventh Amendment) Act**, which subsequently implemented the States **Re-Organization Act, 1956**.
- Delhi was made a Union Territory and was to be governed by an **administrator**.
- This administrator was to be appointed by the **President**.
- The **Legislative Assembly** and Legislative Council of Delhi were **abolished**.

The Lieutenant Governor:

- The position of Lieutenant Governor was created by the **Delhi Administration Act, 1966**, which provided for representative government in Delhi by setting up a Metropolitan Council.
- The Council consisted of **56 elected members** and **five nominated members**.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs issued an Order stating that the **Lieutenant Government, Administrator or Chief Commissioner** shall all be subject to the President's control.
- **Aditya Nath** was of the first LG of Delhi appointed in **1966**.
- **Vinai Kumar Saxena**, who was appointed in May 2022, is serving as the **current LG** of the Union Territory of Delhi.

Balakrishnan Committee's Recommendations:

- In **1989**, the Balakrishnan Committee, set up by the Union Government in 1987, submitted its recommendations on the administrative status to be conferred on Delhi.
- The Report, headed by civil servant **S. Balakrishnan**, recommended that Delhi should continue to **remain a Union Territory**.
- However, alongside this, a **Legislative Assembly and Council of Ministers** must be instituted.
- Further, a **special status** must be conferred on Delhi through an Amendment to the Constitution. This would preserve the territory's stability.

The Special Status:

- Through the **Constitution (Sixty-Ninth Amendment) Act, 1991**, Parliament inserted **Articles 239AA and 239AB**.
  - The amendment led to the enactment of the **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNTD) Act, 1991**.
- **Article 239AA** of the Constitution created special provisions for Delhi.
- First, it provided that the 'Union Territory of Delhi' would henceforth be known as the '**National Capital Territory of Delhi**' (**NCT**).
  - The administrator of the NCT would be the '**Lieutenant Governor**' (**LG**).
  - Lieutenant Governor is also appointed in the UTs of **Jammu & Kashmir** and **Puducherry**. Other UTs in India have **administrators**.
  - Functions of the LG are defined in Section 41 of the GNTD Act 1991.
- Article 239AA set up a **Legislative Assembly** which would have the power to make laws for the NCT with respect to the matters in the **State List and Concurrent List** of the Constitution.
- However, the Legislative Assembly was not empowered to make laws on **public order, the police, and land**.
- Article 239AA did not deprive Parliament from making laws with respect to Union Territories, Delhi included.
- The provision set up a **Council of Ministers, and a Chief Minister for Delhi**, who would '**aid and advise**' the LG on those matters that the Legislative Assembly was empowered to make laws on.
- In case of a disagreement between the LG and the Legislative Assembly, the **President** shall decide the dispute.
- Article **239AB** laid out provisions that would come into force in case of the **failure of constitutional machinery**.
  - If on receiving a report from the LG the President finds that the administration of the NCT cannot be carried out according to the provisions of Article 239AA, they may pass an order **suspending the operation** of any part of Article 239AA or laws passed under it.

#### Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991:

- Parliament enacted the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, to give effect to the provisions of **Article 239AA**.
- The LG would be appointed by the **President** on the advice of the **Central Government** for a period of **5 years**.

- The LG addresses the House at the start of primary session following each election to the assembly and the start of the first session of each year.
- The functions of the LG are defined in **Section 41** of the said act.
- As per the Act, the LG is to act only with respect to those matters that are **outside the legislative competence** of the Legislative Assembly of the NCT or to those matters that are delegated to the President.
- Additionally, the LG may exercise their discretion when they are required to do so **by any law** or to exercise judicial or quasi-judicial functions.
- The LG cannot exercise their discretion in all matters.
- In 1996, A **nine-Judge** Bench of the Supreme Court in ***New Delhi Municipal Corporation v State of Punjab*** stated that the Union Territory of Delhi constitutes an administrative class by itself and is therefore **distinct from other Union Territories**.

### **The Power Struggle:**

- In **2016**, the Delhi High Court in ***Rajender Prashad v Government of NCT of Delhi*** held that Delhi continues to remain a Union Territory despite the existence of Article 239AA
  - It is the **LG**, and not the Chief Minister, who is the **executive head** of the NCT.
  - **Article 239** empowers the Lieutenant Government to act independently of the Council of Ministers.
  - As per Article 239 of the Constitution, the administration of every union territory (UT) is handled by an administrator appointed by the President of India.
- A **five-Judge** Bench of the SC, in ***Government of NCT of Delhi v Union of India, 2018***, unanimously held that it is the **Chief Minister** who is the **executive head** of the NCT
  - The LG is bound by the '**aid and advise**' of the Council of Ministers on all matters where the Delhi Assembly has the power to make laws.
  - The LG must only be consulted on all matters where the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws—however, the **LG's concurrence is not required**.
  - Further, the LG cannot refer every matter where there is a conflict between the LG and Council of Ministers to the **President**.
  - A matter must be referred to the President only in **exceptional circumstances**.

- The Government of **National Capital Territory (Amendment) Act, 2021**, sought to **overcome the SC's 2018** decision.
  - The Act barred the Legislative Assembly from considering matters on the daily administration of NCT.
  - Further, the Assembly was prohibited from conducting inquiries into administrative decisions by the Union.
  - The Act required Bills passed by the Legislative Assembly to be **reserved by the LG for the President's consideration** if the Bill '**incidentally**' covered matters outside the Assembly's purview.
  - Under the Act, all executive actions taken by the government must **first receive the LG's opinion**.
- The Delhi Government challenged the **2021** Amendment at the SC.
- A **5-Judge bench** of the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the **Delhi government's power** over administrative services in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD).
  - The Bench gave special emphasis to the unique identity of Delhi created by Article 239AA which allows the Delhi Government to make laws related to all matters except public order, police and land.
- In 2023, The Union government issued an *Ordinance* seizing the powers of the Delhi Government to make laws related to '**services**' regardless of what 'any court says'.
  - Further, the Ordinance created a new **National Capital Civil Services Authority** for recommending transfers and posting of officers in Delhi.
- The Delhi Government filed a writ petition challenging the Ordinance. The matter was referred to a **five-judge** bench in July 2023.

### **Pradhan Mantri Jan – Dhan Yojana**





**Recently:** PM Modi marked **ten years** of the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), the national mission for financial inclusion to ensure access to financial services.

### **What is Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana?**

- The scheme, launched in **2014**, is a national mission on financial inclusion encompassing an integrated approach to bring about comprehensive financial inclusion of all the households in the country.
- The plan envisages universal access to banking facilities with at least **one basic banking account for every household**, financial literacy, access to credit, insurance and pension facility.
- **Guinness World Records** has also recognised the achievements made under the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** in **2015**.
- It has certified that the “Most bank accounts opened in one week as part of the Financial Inclusion Campaign is 18,096,130 and was achieved by the Department of Financial Services, Government of India”.

### **Features of the Scheme:**

- Rs 5,000 overdraft facility for Aadhaar-linked accounts and a RuPay debit card with inbuilt **Rs 1 lakh** accident insurance cover.

- In addition, for accounts opened between **August 15, 2014**, and **January 26, 2015**, a life insurance cover of **Rs 30,000** is available to the eligible beneficiaries.
- One of the salient features of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is that after remaining active for **six months**, the account holder will become eligible for an overdraft of up to **Rs 5,000**.
- There is no requirement to maintain any minimum balance in PMJDY accounts.
- Interest is earned on the deposit in PMJDY accounts.

### **Achievements:**

#### **Bridged Gender Gap:**

- The scheme has proven to be the foundation stone in bringing over **80 per cent** of Indian women under the ambit of financial inclusion.
- A significant boost in the bank account ownership of women in a decade, it has gone up from just **26 per cent** in **2011** to **78 per cent** in **2021**.
- The gender gap in accessing financial services was **20 per cent** in **2011**, and it has been reduced to **6 per cent** in **2017** which was less than the Global gap of **9 per cent**.

#### **Alleviated Rural Urban Divide:**

- Over **35 crore** of the Jan Dhan account hail from rural or semi-urban areas.
  - PM Jan Dhana Yojana has diminished the rural-urban divide in terms of bank accounts.
- The percentage of households that have a bank account or a post office account is now almost the same in urban and rural areas, **95 per cent vs 96 per cent** respectively.

#### **Financial Inclusion:**

- The JAM trinity has propelled the financial inclusion rate from **25 per cent in 2008** to over **80 per cent of adults** in the last **6 years**.
- India's account ownership more than doubled from **35 per cent in 2011** to **78 per cent in 2021**.
- India has surpassed China in financial inclusion metrics says the SBI report of **2021**.

- Mobile and Internet banking transactions soared to **13,615** per **1,000 adults** in **2020**, up from **183 in 2015**, while the number of bank branches per **100,000 adults** rose to **14.7**, exceeding those in **Germany, China, and South Africa**.

## **Bombay High Court on Surrogacy**



**Recently:** An egg donor has **no legal right** on the child in a case of surrogate birth and cannot claim to be its biological parent, the Bombay high court held, as it gave a woman access to her **five-year-old twin** daughters born out of surrogacy.

- The verdict is likely to become a landmark in the still-evolving field of surrogacy law.
- The bench, led by **Justice Milind Jadhav**, delivered its judgement while hearing the plea of a Navi Mumbai-based woman whose husband had taken their twin daughters to Jharkhand without her knowledge.
- The twins were born via **in-vitro fertilisation (IVF)** using eggs donated by the woman's younger sister, who now claims to be their biological mother.
- The high court struck down a Thane court order which had refused the petitioner woman (the older sister) access to her twins as she was not the 'biological mother'.

- The surrogacy agreement, executed in **2018**, fell under the purview of the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** guidelines of **2005**, as the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act 2021 had not yet been enacted.
  - As per a rule of the guidelines, the donor and the surrogate mother have to **relinquish all parental rights**, the court noted, adding that in the present case, the twins would be the daughters of the petitioner and her husband.

### **Surrogacy:**

- Surrogacy is an arrangement where a **gestational carrier** carries a pregnancy on someone's behalf if they are unable to carry a pregnancy to term.
- Surrogacy is mainly intended for women who have a missing or abnormal uterus, or have had the uterus surgically removed due to a medical condition.
- It can also be availed by women who have failed to conceive after multiple rounds of IVF (In vitro fertilization).
- Additionally, it is an option for women living with conditions that make it impossible for them to carry the pregnancy to term.

### **Surrogacy and IVF:**

- IVF is one of the steps of having a baby through surrogacy, but IVF can also be undergone by couples without a surrogate.
- In the case of surrogacy as well as IVF being undergone by the mother of the baby, eggs and sperm are harvested from both parents-to-be.
- The sperm is then used to fertilize the eggs in a lab.
- In the case of IVF, the embryo is then transferred back to the woman's womb. However, in the case of surrogacy, the embryo is moved to the surrogate's womb.

**Surrogacy Act, 2021:**

- The act was first introduced in Lok Sabha in **2019** and it was passed by both houses in late **2021**.
- It was signed by the President and **came into force** in **January 2022**.
- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act offers a comprehensive framework to oversee surrogacy arrangements in India.
- The act defined surrogacy as:
  - A practice whereby one woman bears and gives birth to a child for an intending couple.
  - She intends to hand over the child to them after the birth.
- A surrogate mother is defined as "a woman who willingly carries and delivers a child for an intended couple or a single intended parent."
- In **traditional surrogacy**, the surrogate's eggs are used, making her the biological mother of the child she carries.
- In **gestational surrogacy**, the surrogate has no biological link to the baby.
  - It is the only legally recognized form of surrogacy in India.
- The surrogacy is permitted only for **altruistic purposes** or for couples who suffer proven **infertility** or **disease**.
  - Altruistic surrogacy is where the couple only bears the medical expenses of the surrogate mother, and cannot pay her any money beyond reimbursing the medical expenses.
- Surrogacy is prohibited for **commercial purposes** including for sale, prostitution or any other forms of exploitation.
- Moreover, once the child is born, it will be deemed to be the **biological child of the couple**.

**Eligibility for Couples:**

- Under the Act, a couple should procure **certificates of eligibility** and essentiality in order to have a child via surrogacy.
- The couple is deemed '**eligible**' if they have been married for **five years**.
- The **wife** is aged between **25-50 years** and the **husband** is between **26-55 years**.
- The couple **must not have any living child** (biological, adopted or surrogate)

- A child with **mental or physical disabilities**, or one suffering from a **life-threatening disorder** or illness has been exempted from the above criterion.
- A couple can obtain an '**essential**' **certificate** if either partner suffers from proven infertility.
  - The certificate should be certified by a **District Medical Board**.
- They must also secure an order of parentage and custody of the surrogate child which needs to be passed by a **Magistrate's court**.
- The couple is required to have **insurance coverage** for the surrogate mother for a period of **16 months** which will be covering any potential postpartum complications.
- Surrogacy is not accessible to single persons, live-in couples, and LGBTQ couples in India.

#### Eligibility for Surrogate Mothers:

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

#### Regulatory Bodies:

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

Offences:

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

**Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2022:**

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

**Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2023:**

- This Amendment is a major change in the substantive law.
- It disallows for intending couple to perform surrogacy with **donor gametes.**
- Under the previous rules, the use of donor gametes was permitted
- However, the 2023 rules made the law restrictive by providing that:
  - Couple undergoing Surrogacy must have both gamete from the intending couple & donor gametes is not allowed;
  - (Single woman (widow/divorcee) undergoing Surrogacy must use self-eggs and donor sperms to avail surrogacy procedure.”

Challenge:



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

### **2024 Amendment:**

- The Central government again modified the **Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2023**.
- It has been notified that **both gametes need not come from a married couple** in case they are certified as **suffering from a medical condition**.
  - The **Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2024**, state that a **District Magistrate Board** has to certify that either husband or wife suffers from such a medical condition.
- As per the latest amendment, the couple can have a child born through surrogacy but must have **at least one gamete** from the intending couple.
- Also, single women (widow or divorcee) undergoing surrogacy must **use self-eggs and donor sperm** to avail surrogacy procedures, the notification has said.

## **Vadhavan Port Project**



**Recently:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for India's largest deep-water port, **Vadhvan Port**, in **Maharashtra's Palghar** on August 30.

- The Vadhvan port is a part of the Centre's ambitious **Sagarmala programme** that seeks to improve the country's logistics with a focus on the maritime sector.
- Once completed, the port will be one of the **top 10 ports** in the world.
- The port is set to be operational by **2030**.

### **About the Project:**

- The port is poised to enhance India's maritime capabilities and make a substantial impact on global trade.
- In **June**, the Union Cabinet approved the construction of the port.
  - The approval for Vadhvan Port was among the first major decisions made by the **Modi 3.0 Cabinet**.
- The total cost of the project, including land acquisition, is **Rs. 76,220 crore**.
  - This includes development of core infrastructure, terminals and other commercial infrastructure in public-private partnerships (PPP) mode.

- The project is located near **Dahanu town** in **Palghar (around 150 km from Mumbai)**.
- It will be developed by **Vadhvan Port Project Limited (VPPL)**, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) created by the **Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA)** and the **Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB)**, with shareholdings of **74%** and **26%**, respectively.
- The **first phase** of the project will be ready by **2029** while the **second** and final phase is expected to be completed by **2039**.
- The port will handle **15 million TEU containers** in the **first phase** and **23.2 million TEUs** after the commissioning of its **second phase**.
- The project involves the reclamation of **1,448 hectares of area** in the sea and the construction of **10.14 km** of **offshore breakwater** and container/cargo storage areas.
- It will comprise **nine** container terminals, each **1000 meters** long, four multipurpose berths, including the coastal berth, four liquid cargo berths, a Ro-Ro berth, and a Coast Guard berth.
- The port is expected to generate significant employment opportunities, stimulate local businesses and contribute to the overall economic development of the region.
- According to the Centre, the port can create up to **12 lakh jobs** and nearly **1 crore** indirect employment opportunities.
- The port will be a significant driver for Maharashtra's economy, contributing over **1%** to the state's GDP and fostering regional growth and prosperity.
- Additionally, the port will be linked to the **Dedicated Freight Corridors** and the **Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor**, ensuring faster and more efficient cargo connectivity.
- The greenfield port is going to be India's **13th major port**, which will also be an integral part of the ambitious **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)**.
- The port will enhance India's connectivity with **Central Asia and Russia**, boosting trade through the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** and the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**.
- Strategically located in the **Arabian Sea**, it will strengthen trade connections with the **Far East, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas**.

### Sagarmala Project:

- The Sagarmala Programme is an initiative by the **Ministry of Port, Shipping & Waterways**, to utilise India's **7,500 km** of coastline, **14,500 km** long potentially navigable waterways and the strategic location on major maritime trade routes.
- The project was approved by the Union Cabinet in **2015** and aims to reduce logistics costs for EXIM (Export-Import) and domestic trade with minimal infrastructure investment.
- Hon'ble Prime Minister released the **National Perspective Plan (NPP)** for the holistic development of the Indian Coastline and Maritime Sector on **14th April, 2016**.
- It strives to improve connection with major economic centres and beyond by expanding rail, inland water, coastal, and road services.

### **Unified Pension Scheme**



Source- <https://news24online.com/business/pmvvy-scheme-interest-rate-calculation-details-here-married-couples-plan-financially-secure-future/63375/>

**Recently:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government, on August 24, **approved** the **Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)**.

- According to Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, the scheme will positively impact **23 lakh people** who are government employees.
- The Maharashtra cabinet has decided to implement the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for state government employees, making it the **first state to adopt the scheme**.

- This approval aligns with a significant visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the state.
- During his visit, PM Modi interacted with '**Lakhpati Didis**,' women members of self-help groups earning ₹1 lakh annually.

### **What is pension?**

- "Pension" typically refers to a regular payment made by the government to individuals after they retire from public service.
- The Constitution provides for the grant of pensions to various categories of public servants, including judges, government employees, and military personnel.
- **Article 125(2) and Article 148(3) of the Constitution** deal with pensions for judges of the Supreme Court and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, respectively.
- **Article 309** empowers the Parliament and state legislatures to regulate the recruitment and conditions of service of persons serving in the civil services, including pensions.
- The Supreme Court has ruled in plethora of judgements that a pension is not a bounty or a charity but a right earned by the employee after rendering service.
- Pensions ensure **financial security** for public servants after retirement and are seen as a form of social security.

### **Unified pension scheme:**

- Employees with a minimum of **25 years of service** receive a pension equal to **50%** of their average basic pay over the last 12 months before retirement.
- Employees with less than **25 years of service** receive a proportionate pension based on their tenure.
- The minimum qualifying service period for pension is set at **10 years**.
- If an employee passes away, their spouse receives a family pension.
  - The family pension is **60%** of the pension the employee was receiving before their death.
- Employees with at least 10 years of service are guaranteed a minimum pension of **₹10,000 per month upon retirement**.
- Both the assured pension and the family pension are adjusted for inflation to keep pace with rising costs.

- Retirees receive Dearness Relief based on the **All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (AICPI-IW)**, similar to serving employees.
- At the time of retirement, employees receive a **lump sum payment** in addition to gratuity.
- This payment is **1/10th** of the employee's monthly emoluments (including pay and Dearness Allowance) for every completed six months of service.
- This lump sum does not reduce the assured pension amount.
- The government's contribution to the pension scheme will see an increase, rising from the current **14% to 18.5%**.
- Additionally, the government will incur an extra expenditure of approximately **₹6,250 crore** due to the enhanced contribution rate of **18.5%**.
- This is intended to strengthen the pension benefits provided to employees.
- The financial impact of paying arrears is estimated to be around **₹800 crore**. This represents the cost of compensating employees for the period prior to the adoption of the UPS.

#### Eligibility for UPS:

- Last year, the Finance Ministry established a committee led by Finance Secretary **TV Somanathan** to review the existing pension scheme for government employees.
- All government employees who joined the service after **April 1, 2004**, are currently under the **New Pension System (NPS)**.
- NPS subscribers will now have the option to choose between the NPS and the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS).

#### New Pension scheme:

- The New Pension Scheme (NPS) is a defined contribution pension scheme introduced for government employees joining after **April 1, 2004**, and is available to other sectors.
- Employees contribute a fixed percentage of their salary (**10%** for central government employees; percentage may vary for others).
- The **government contributes** a matching amount, initially **14%**, which has been increased to **18.5%** in some cases.
- Subscribers can choose from various investment options such as equities, government securities, and corporate bonds.

- The returns on the pension corpus depend on the performance of the chosen investments.
- Pension Fund Managers, appointed by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**, manage the contributions.
- The remaining corpus is used to purchase an annuity that provides a regular pension.
- Contributions to the NPS are eligible for tax deductions under **Section 80C of the Income Tax Act**.
  - Additional tax benefits are available under **Section 80CCD**.

#### Difference between NPS and UPS:

- UPS provides a **guaranteed pension** based on the last drawn salary and years of service, while NPS offers a pension based on the **accumulated corpus** and annuity purchased.
- UPS requires **no employee contributions**; the government fully funds it.
  - NPS requires employees to contribute a fixed percentage of their salary, with the government providing a matching contribution.
- UPS is fully government-funded. In NPS, the government contributes a matching amount to employee contributions, which has increased from **14% to 18.5%** in some cases.
- UPS is funded **directly by the government** without external management. NPS funds are managed by Pension Fund Managers appointed by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**.
- UPS provides a fixed pension without annuity purchase. NPS allows up to **60% of the corpus** to be withdrawn as a **lump sum**, with the remainder used to purchase an **annuity**.
- UPS benefits are generally **taxable** as income. NPS contributions are eligible for tax deductions under **Sections 80C and 80CCD of the Income Tax Act**.
- UPS is not portable. NPS accounts are portable across jobs and locations.

#### Old Pension Scheme:

- OPS was a defined benefit pension system for government employees in India before the introduction of the **New Pension Scheme (NPS) in 2004**.

- Pension was calculated as **50% of the employee's last drawn salary** and was based on the number of years of service.
- The scheme was fully funded by the government, with no contributions required from employees.
- Employees needed to complete a minimum service period, typically around **20 years**, to qualify for the pension.
- A family pension was provided to the spouse or dependents in case of the employee's death, calculated as a percentage of the employee's pension.
- OPS pensions could be adjusted periodically based on government decisions and pay commission recommendations.
- The benefits were guaranteed and not affected by market fluctuations.
- The OPS continued for existing employees, while the NPS was introduced for new employees from **April 1, 2004**, due to concerns about OPS's sustainability.

### **The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA):**

- PFRDA was established on **January 23, 2004**, under the PFRDA Act, 2004, which was enacted by the Indian Parliament.
- Initially, PFRDA was set up as an **autonomous body** to promote and regulate the New Pension System (NPS) and to ensure the orderly growth and development of the pension sector.
- In **September 2013**, the PFRDA Act was amended to give the authority a **statutory status**, providing it with broader powers to regulate and supervise pension funds.
- PFRDA is responsible for regulating pension schemes, including the NPS, overseeing Pension Fund Managers, and ensuring the safety and efficiency of pension fund management.
- The amendment to the PFRDA Act was passed by the Parliament in **December 2013**, granting PFRDA the status of a statutory body.
- PFRDA continues to play **a crucial role in the pension sector** by introducing reforms, improving transparency, and expanding pension coverage across various sectors.

### **Committees for pension schemes:**



- **Srivastava Committee (1975):** Recommended improvements to the social security system, including enhancements to pension schemes for employees.
- **Kothari Committee (1978):** Suggested implementing a uniform pension scheme for government employees and proposed improvements to existing pension systems.
- **Rangarajan Committee (1998):** Analyzed the necessary pension reforms and recommended setting up a regulatory authority to oversee pension funds.
- **Suresh Tendulkar Committee (2000):** Examined the social security systems and recommended various enhancements to both pension and social security frameworks.
- **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Committee (2004):** Established a framework for regulating pension funds and promoting the National Pension System (NPS).

## Triple Talaq



Source- <https://racolblegal.com/triple-talaq-a-critical-analysis/>

**Recently:** Recently, The Union government in the Supreme Court has justified the Central law **criminalising triple talaq**.

- Centre filed this in response to an affidavit filed earlier this month in response to a plea by the **Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema**, which sought a declaration that the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019**, is unconstitutional and violative of **Articles 14, 15, 21, and 123** of the Constitution.
- It argued that the practice “legitimised and institutionalised abandonment of wives by their husbands” and was “neither Islamic nor legal.”
- A **433-page** counter affidavit filed by the Centre in the Court reminded the Court of its own Constitution Bench judgment of **2017 in the Shayara Bano case**, which had held triple or instant **talaq (talaq-e-biddat) manifestly arbitrary**.

### **What is Triple Talaq?**

- **Talaq** is an **Islamic word for divorce**, denoting dissolution of marriage when a Muslim man can sever all marital ties with his wife.
- Triple talaq or "**Talaq-e-Biddat**" is the practice under which a Muslim man can divorce his wife by simply uttering "**talaq**" **three times**.
- It is prevalent among India's Muslim community majority of whom follow the **Hanafi Islamic school of law**.
- The pronouncement could be oral or written, or, in recent times, delivered by electronic means - telephone, SMS, email or social media.
- **Biddat** — pronouncing divorce in one go by the husband — is **irrevocable**.
- Biddat is considered '**sinful**,' but permissible in Islamic law. An anecdote in this context is about two men meeting in **Medinah, second holiest city to Muslims**.
  - The first man asks whether the second has divorced his wife, to which the latter replies that he has done so a thousand times.
  - The man was produced before **Caliph Umar**, who whipped him. After the lashing, Umar told the man "**triple talaq will suffice you**"
- The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) holds that for the **Hanafis**, who make up more than **90% Sunnis in India**, triple talaq is a matter of faith followed for 1,400 years.

**The journey of Triple Talaq in Indian Legal System:**

- The **Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937** had legalised and allowed the practice of Triple Talaq.
- On **October 16, 2015**, the Supreme Court questioned whether Muslim personal law practices of marriage and divorce reduce women to mere chattels.
- In a rare move, the Supreme Court registered a suo motu PIL petition titled '**In Re: Muslim Women's Quest for Equality.**'
  - The petition aimed to examine whether arbitrary divorce, polygamy, and nikah halala (where a Muslim divorcee marries a man and divorces him to remarry her former husband) violate women's dignity.
- The court rued missing the opportunity to address the question of gender inequality in both the **Shah Bano and Danial Latifi cases.**
  - In the **Shah Bano case, 1985** the court merely goaded the government to frame the Uniform Civil Code.
  - In the Latifi case, it upheld the right of Muslim women to **maintenance till re-marriage**. Many Muslim women and organisations backed the court's initiative.
- However, a Constitution Bench decided to confine itself to examining triple talaq and not polygamy and nikah halala.
- The government argued that Muslim marriage and divorce is codified under **Section 2** of the **Shariat Act of 1937** and came within the ambit of '**law**' under **Article 13 of the Constitution**.
- In **June of 2016**, the Supreme Court made the decision to investigate whether Islamic rules pertaining to marriage and inheritance infringed against women's rights.

**Shayara Bano v. Union of India:****Facts:**

- The matter went ahead with **Ms Shayara Bano** filing a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the practice.
- Ms. Shayara Bano and her husband, **Mr. Rizwan Ahmed**, got married in **April 2002 in Uttar Pradesh**. Ms. Bano claimed that her husband 'compelled' her family to give dowry for the marriage.
- She stated that her husband and his family drugged, abused, and eventually abandoned her while she was sick when her family could not provide additional dowry.

- In **October 2015** Mr. Ahmed divorced Ms. Bano through the practice of talaq-e-biddat, also known as instantaneous triple talaq.

#### Legal Submissions:

- Ms. Bano claimed that these practices violate the **Right to Equality (Article 14), the Right against Discrimination (Article 15), and the Right to Livelihood (Article 21)**.
- She further argued that these practices were not protected by the **Right to Freedom of Religion**—religious freedom is subject to other fundamental rights, public order, morality, and health.
- On **February 16th, 2017**, the SC directed the **All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), the Union Government**, and women's rights groups such as the **Bebaak Collective and the Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan**, to give written submissions addressing the matter.
- All of these groups, besides the AIMPLB, filed submissions in support of Ms. Bano.
- While the AIMPLB conceded that Shariat strongly condemns the practice of talaq-e-biddat, they argued that the Court could not review uncodified Muslim personal law.
  - They further argued that these practices were essential to **Islam and protected by the Right to Freedom of Religion under article 25 Indian constitution**.

#### Judgement:

- On **March 30th, 2017**, the SC created a **5-Judge Constitution Bench** to hear the matter.
- The Bench comprised **Chief Justice J.S. Khehar and Justices Kurian Joseph, R.F. Nariman, U.U. Lalit and Abdul Nazeer**.
- The Bench heard the case between May 11th and May 19th, 2017, and delivered the Judgment on **August 22nd, 2017**.
- In a **3:2 split**, the majority held that the practice of talaq-e-biddat was '**manifestly arbitrary**' and **unconstitutional**.
- The court found the practice to be manifestly arbitrary, enabling the unilateral divorce of Muslim wives without consideration of their rights. Allowing such an arbitrary practice would go against constitutional **guarantees of equality and non-discrimination based on sex**.
- **Chief Justice Khehar and Justice Nazeer** dissented, stating that talaq-e-biddat was protected by the Right to Religion and that it was the job of Parliament to frame a law to govern the practice.

- The Court also examined triple talaq from the perspective of gender justice and equality under **Articles 14, 15 and 21**.

### **The Aftermath:**

- Two years later, in **July**, Parliament enacted the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019**.
- Introduced in the Lok Sabha by the then **Minister of Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad** on **June 21, 2019**, the Act replaced an Ordinance promulgated on **February 21, 2019**.
- This law made the practice of talaq-e-biddat a **criminal act**, punishable by up to **three years of imprisonment**.
- The law also makes Triple Talaq a **cognisable and non-bailable offence**.
- According to **Clause 3 in Chapter 2** of the Act, "any pronouncement of talaq by a person upon his wife, by words, either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever, shall be **void and illegal**".
- The **Clause 4** states that, "whoever pronounces Triple Talaq upon his wife shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to **three years and fine**".
- **Clause 7 (c) in Chapter 3** states that a person accused under the Triple Talaq law cannot be released on bail unless the Magistrate, after hearing the married Muslim woman involved, is convinced there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
- **Clause 6 in Chapter 3** of the act states that, "a married **Muslim woman** shall be entitled to **custody of her minor children** in the event of pronouncement of talaq by her husband, in such manner as may be determined by the Magistrate".

### **Challenge:**

- The **Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema**, and the **President of the Rashtriya Ulema Council** challenged this Act in separate petitions at the Supreme Court in **August 2019**.
- Jamiat claimed in its petition that "criminalising a mode of divorce in one particular religion while keeping the subject of marriage and divorce in other religions only within the purview of civil law, leads to discrimination, which is not in conformity with the mandate of **Article 15**".
- The recent counter by the government said the **2019 Act** was required as Muslim men continued the practice of triple talaq despite the Supreme Court judgment of **2017**.
- The government said criminal sanction was necessary though the act of pronouncing triple talaq by a man to his wife was declared **void** by the Supreme Court in **2017**.

- The Centre has told the Supreme Court that triple talaq legitimised and institutionalised abandonment of wives, as it defended in the Supreme Court the 2019 law criminalising the practice and urged that the petition challenging it be dismissed.

### **Assam's new Muslim Marriage Law**



**Recently:** The **126-member Assam Assembly** passed a Bill to make the **registration of Muslim marriages and divorces with the government compulsory**.

- The **Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024**, introduced in the House by **Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Jogen Mohan**, will replace the British-era **Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935**.

### **What was the current law?**

- The registration of marriages and divorces between Muslims in Assam had been taking place under the colonial-era **Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act, 1935**.
- This Act was in line with Muslim personal law, and authorised the state to grant a licence to “any person, being a Muslim” to register such marriages and divorces.
- The Act governs the **‘nikah** and **‘talaq’** in the state and for the registration, the **‘Kazi’** were appointed by the government.
- There were **95** such **Muslim registrars or kazis** across the state, and they were deemed to be public servants.
- The Act lays down the process for registration of Muslim marriages and divorces and a **2010** amendment replaced the word **‘voluntary’ in the original Act with ‘compulsory’**.
- This change makes registration of Muslim marriages and divorces compulsory in the state of Assam.

### **Why was it repealed?**

- The Cabinet decided to scrap the law in **February** this year.
- In **March**, the government notified an Ordinance repealing the 1935 Act with immediate effect. There has been no legislation governing the registration of marriages and divorces between Muslims in Assam since then.
- A note on the Cabinet meeting referred to it as “**obsolete** pre-Independence Act of the British for the then Province.”
- The registration machinery in the Act is “**informal**” therefore “leaving a lot of scope for non-compliance of extant norms”.
- Authorities in the state, which is governed by **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, had alleged it allowed **child marriages**.
  - **Section 8 of the repealed Act** that lay down the procedure to make an application to the registrar, states that, “...provided that if the bride and groom, or both, be minors, application shall be made on their behalf by their respective lawful guardians...”.
  - **Section 10 of the Act**, which laid down the procedure for making entries in the marriage register, had the same provision.
- In **2023**, the Assam government launched an unprecedented punitive crackdown against child marriages.
- They arrested more than 4,000 individuals and prosecuted most of them under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act**.

- The government has resolved to “eradicate” child marriage by **2026**. The government is also working on a bill to ban **polygamy**, and make it a criminal offence.

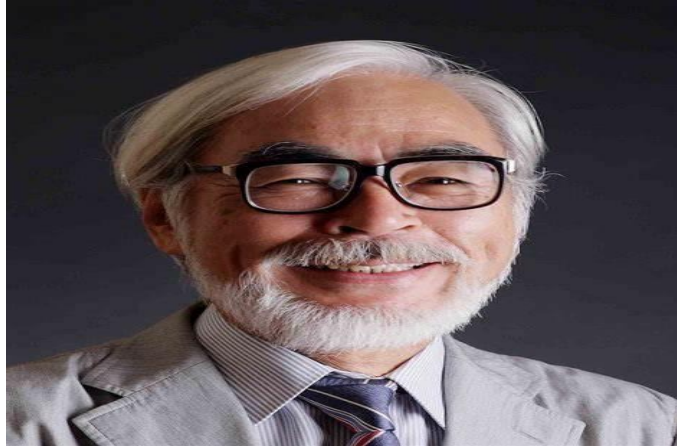
### **Provisions of the new Law:**

- The **Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill 2024** aims to ban **child marriages, ensure consent, protect women’s rights, and curb polygamy**.
- This new law of registering Muslim marriages will no longer require the Kazis or the Muslim scholars to register marriages, as required under the old law.
- The **registering officer** shall be the government’s Marriage and Divorce Registrar in that jurisdiction, who is the **Sub-Registrar**.
- For a marriage to be registered under the new law, **seven conditions must be fulfilled**.
- Important among these conditions:
  - The woman should have attained **18 years of age and the man 21 years of age** before the marriage;
  - The marriage has been solemnized on **free consent of both parties**”;
  - At least one of the parties must be resident within the **district of the Marriage and Divorce Registrar for 30 days** before giving notice of registration to the officer;
  - The parties shall not be within the prohibited degree of relationship as per Muslim law.
- The parties are required to give the registering officer at least **30 days’ notice** before the intended registration, with documents attesting to their identities, age, and place of residence. This provision is similar to one in the **Special Marriage Act**.
- As per the new law, if anyone is found to produce **fake or forged certificates** (to register a marriage or divorce) they can be imprisoned **for up to two years or imposed a fine** of up to **Rs.10,000 or both**.
  - They would also be tried for forgery under relevant provisions of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023**.
- Objections to the marriage are allowed within the **30-day period** on grounds of violation of any of the conditions laid down in the Bill, which will then be inquired into by the Registrar.
- If the Registrar after inquiry refuses to solemnize the marriage, the Bill provides for **two stages of appeal**:
  - To the District Registrar



- Registrar General of Marriages
- The registering officers must act if they find that either of the parties is **underage**.
- If the officer makes this discovery during the scrutiny of documents, she must immediately report it to the jurisdictional **Child Marriage Protection Officer** appointed under the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**.
  - He should also transmit all relevant records for the effective prosecution of persons contravening the provisions of the act and for initiating appropriate legal action.
- An officer who “knowingly and wilfully” registers a marriage that violates any of the conditions is liable to be **imprisoned for up to a year** and **fined up to Rs 50,000**.
- The Bill states that its provisions “shall be in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of the prevailing Muslim personal laws.”
- However, under **Muslim personal law**, the marriage of a bride who has attained puberty is considered valid — and puberty is presumed, in the absence of evidence, on completion of the age of **15 years**.
- Recently, the Supreme Court agreed to an early hearing of a plea by the **National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights** seeking an authoritative pronouncement on whether Muslim personal law allowing child marriages will prevail over the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**.
  - This is a question on which different High Courts have made differing observations.

### **Ramon Magsaysay Award 2024**



**Recently:** Hayao Miyazaki, a renowned Japanese animator and filmmaker, won the 2024 Ramon Magsaysay Award.

- This prestigious award is named after the **former President of the Philippines** and recognizes individuals who have demonstrated exceptional service to the peoples of Asia.
- Miyazaki is celebrated for his contributions to the arts, particularly in animation, making him a deserving recipient of this honor.

### **Who is Hayao Miyazaki?**

- Hayao Miyazaki was born in **1941** in **Tokyo, Japan**.
- His father was the director of a company that manufactured parts for fighter planes during World War II.
- In his book **Starting Point: 1979 to 1996**, Miyazaki recalls some of his earliest memories as being of bombed-out cities, and by age four, he had witnessed the bombing of **Utsunomiya**.
- Miyazaki studied economics and political science before beginning his career as an animator in 1963.
- Prior to founding **Studio Ghibli**, Miyazaki worked on major projects including the long-running series World Masterpiece Theater and directed Future Boy Conan.

- In the **1969 film** *The Wonderful World of Puss 'n Boots*, Miyazaki collaborated with other top Japanese animators to create distinct visual sequences.

### **Professional Career:**

- In **1963**, Hayao Miyazaki joined **Tōei Animation**, Asia's largest producer of animated films at the time.
- At Tōei, Miyazaki met and befriended **Isao Takahata**, who later became his business partner, and **Ota Akemi**, who later became his wife.
- Tōei Animation was known for producing **feature-length animated films** for both the big screen and television.
- Miyazaki and Takahata collaborated on several projects at Tōei, including the 1974 series *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*, directed by Takahata with a screenplay by Miyazaki.
- They also worked on the series **Ōkami shōnen Ken** (Wolf Boy Ken) and **Taiyō no ōji: Horusu no daibōken** (Little Norse Prince), which marked Takahata's debut as a director.
- Miyazaki and Takahata **left Tōei in 1971** and continued to work together at various studios in Tokyo.
- In 1979, Miyazaki released his first feature-length film, **Lupan sansei: Kariosutoro no shiro** (Lupin III: Castle of Cagliostro), which followed the adventures of gentleman thief Lupin.
- In **1985**, Miyazaki, along with **Takahata** and producer **Toshio Suzuki**, founded **Studio Ghibli** with the aim of creating animation films that broke away from the conventional tropes of the time.
- The studio focused on exploring the human psyche, storytelling, and creativity as the foundation of their work.
- Miyazaki's first two films with Studio Ghibli, **Castle in the Sky (1986)** and **My Neighbor Totoro (1988)**, were not commercial successes.
- The studio achieved its first major success with **Kiki's Delivery Service in 1989**.
- Studio Ghibli became known for its gentle, aesthetically pleasing visuals, with many scenes meticulously hand-drawn by Miyazaki, even in the digital age.

### **Ramon Magsaysay Award:**

- The Ramon Magsaysay Award was established in **1957** by the trustees of the **Rockefeller Brothers Fund** based in New York City with the concurrence of the Philippine government and is considered Asia's premier prize and highest honour or the **"Nobel Prize of Asia"**.
- It is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay's example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society.
- Ramon del Fierro Magsaysay, served as the **Philippines' seventh President** from December 30, 1953, to March 17, 1957.
- The award was given in **6 categories initially**:
  - Government Service
  - Public Service
  - Community Leadership
  - Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts
  - Peace and International Understanding
  - Emergent Leadership
- Five of these categories were eliminated in **2009** and now the award is given in field of Emergent Leadership and other unfixed categories.
- It Recognises and honours individuals and organisations in Asia, regardless of race, creed, gender, or nationality, who have achieved distinction and have helped others generously without aiming for public recognition.
- The prize is presented in a ceremonial ceremony in Manila, the Philippines' capital, every year on **August 31**.
- Awardees are presented with a **certificate, a medallion with an embossed image** of Ramon Magsaysay and cash prize.
- **Vinoba Bhave** was the first Indian to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award in award in **1958** in the field of community leadership.

## **International Current Affairs**

### **BIMSTEC Business Summit 2024**



**Recently:** The Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India in association with **Confederation of Indian Industries (CII)** hosted the **1st BIMSTEC Business Summit** in **New Delhi** on 06-08 August 2024.

- The summit was inaugurated by External Affairs Minister **Dr. S. Jaishankar**. Minister of Commerce and Industries **Shri Piyush Goyal** and other leaders delivered the key note addresses.
- The event brought together more than **300 key stake holders** from across the Bay of Bengal region to facilitate economic collaboration.

### **Highlights of the Event:**

Objectives:

- Come out with an actionable plan for improving overall business environment, which is both sustainable and inclusive
- Identify potential sectors of collaboration and engaging industry.
- Locate project opportunities for greater private sector participation.

Free Trade Agreement:

- Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal expressed concern over the slow pace of talks for a trade agreement with the seven member countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) bloc.
- The bloc has been negotiating a proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) since **2004**.
- **22 rounds** of talks have been held so far including the **last round** that was held in **2018**.
- The minister further suggested that member nations consider trade in local currencies to balance out trade imbalances.

Investment Promotion:

- **Mani Pandey**, Secretary General of the BIMSTEC Secretariat stated that investment promotion is another priority area to ensure greater intra-regional trade and establishment of greater value chains.
- Pandey said the idea of holding an annual **BIMSTEC Business Summit** and the proposal to set up a **BIMSTEC Industry Chamber** have given a great beginning to a new phase of enhanced business relationships.

Bangladesh:

- In his speech, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal also added that India is deeply concerned about the evolving situation in Bangladesh.
- Representatives from **Bangladesh did not attend** the summit amid violent protests in the country.

Sri Lanka:

- The **Ceylon Chamber of Commerce**, together with its member companies, represented Sri Lanka at the BIMSTEC Business Summit.

- The delegation conducted a dedicated Country Session with key industries discussed including food processing, pharmaceuticals, and logistics, with a special focus on the opportunities within the processed food sector—particularly in sugar, spices and tea.

### **About BIMSTEC:**

- The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is an international organisation of **seven South Asian** and **Southeast Asian nations**.
- BIMSTEC provides a unique link between South Asia and Southeast Asia, bringing together **1.8 billion people** which is about **22%** of the world population.
- It was established in **1997 in Bangkok** under the name **BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation)**.
- Following the inclusion of **Myanmar** on **22 December 1997** during a special Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed '**BIMST-EC**'.
- In **1998, Nepal** became an **observer**. In February **2004, Nepal and Bhutan** became full members.
- On **31 July 2004**, in the first Summit the grouping was renamed as **BIMSTEC** or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
- The BIMSTEC **Permanent Secretariat** at **Dhaka** was opened in **2014**
  - India contributes **32%** of its expenditure.
- The current Secretary General of the BIMSTEC is Ambassador **Indra Mani Pandey from India**.
- The BIMSTEC uses the alphabetical order for the Chairmanship and **Thailand** is current chair of the grouping.
- In early **2022**, the seven members of BIMSTEC signed the charter at the **5th BIMSTEC summit** held virtually in **Colombo**.
- However, it took two more years for the document to be ratified by all members.
- **Nepal** was the final piece of the puzzle — its parliament endorsed the charter in early April this year.
- This meant that the BIMSTEC charter came into force **27 years** after its inception.

Economic Relations between Indian and BIMSTEC:

- The regional trade between BIMSTEC countries has increased from **USD 4.8 billion to USD 35.96 billion** from the year **2000 to 2022** respectively.
- India's total trade with BIMSTEC countries amounted to **\$44.32 billion in 2023-24**.
- **Thailand** was India's largest trading partner within the bloc, with exports worth **\$5.04 billion** and imports at **\$9.91 billion**, resulting in a trade gap of **\$4.87 billion**.
- **Bangladesh** followed, with exports of **\$11.06 billion** and imports of **\$1.84 billion**, creating a trade balance of **\$9.22 billion** in India's favour.

The 2024 Summit:

- Recently, **Thailand has postponed** its hosting of the 2024 BIMSTEC Summit which was supposed to be held on **3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> September**.
- The new PM of Thailand **Paetongtarn Shinawatra** announced the postponement owing to technical issues over formation of the cabinet.
- Thailand currently has a caretaker government following a court's dismissal of **Srettha Thavisin** as premier last week and his successor, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, has yet to name her cabinet.
- PM Narendra Modi in the light of the current circumstances will not travel to Bangkok.
- He was also scheduled to undertake a bilateral visit to Thailand on September 3.
- Modi is, however, expected to go ahead with the bilateral visit to **Singapore** on **September 5**.

Confederation of Indian Industry:



- CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led and industry-managed organization, with around **9,000 members** from the private as well as public sectors.
- It is a body registered under **Societies Registration Act, 1860** of India.
- The journey of CII began in **1895**, when **5 engineering firms** – Martin & Company, Burn & Company, John King & Company, Jessop & Company, and Turner Morrison & Company – decided to form the **Engineering and Iron Trades Association (EITA)**.
- It was renamed and transformed multiple times throughout the years and was established in its **present form in 1991**.
- Its immediate predecessor is **Confederation of Engineering Industry (CEI)** which was formed in **1986**.
- It is Headquartered in **New Delhi**.
- The highest governing body of CII is the **CII National Council**, composed of leading industry heads and experts.
- For **2024–2025**, **Sanjiv Puri**, Chairman & Managing Director, ITC Limited is the **President** of CII.
- **R Mukundan**, Managing Director & CEO, Tata Chemicals Limited is the **Vice President** of CII.
- **Chandrajit Banerjee** is the **Director General** of CII since May **2008**.

### Protests in Kenya



**Recently:** The protests turned violent in Kenya when lawmakers passed a controversial **Financial Bill**.

- According to the Kenya **National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC)**, over 50 people have been killed and 628 were arrested in the violence.

**What is the reason of the protests?**

- The Finance Bill raised taxes enormously with the objective to collect **\$2.7 billion** in taxes to pay off the debt of **\$80 billion**.
  - This is **68%** of Kenya's GDP.
- The controversial Finance Bill that was introduced in Kenya's Parliament in May, imposed:
  - 16% Value-Added Tax (VAT) on bread,
  - 25% excise duty on cooking oil,
  - 5% tax on digital monetary transactions,
  - An annual 2.5% tax on vehicles,
  - An eco-tax on plastic goods,
  - A 16% tax on goods and services for the construction and equipping of specialised hospitals,
  - An increase in import tax from two to three per cent
- The Bill caused **public distress** due to the increasing cost of living.
- **Kenya's President William Ruto** withdrew the controversial Bill on the next day following country-wide violent protests.
- The protests were an expression of long-standing discontent over Mr. Ruto's administration and financial management.
- A month after coming to power in **September 2022**, Mr. Ruto **scrapped fuel subsidies**.
- In July 2023 protests, against another Bill, which introduced a **5% housing levy** and a **16%** tax on **petroleum products**, killed 23 people.
- The second phase of protests was against police brutality.
- By the third week, it had evolved into **anti-government protests** over unaddressed public grievances, corruption, mis-governance, and a demand for Mr. Ruto's resignation.

**Economic Conditions of Kenya:**

- The trading economics website recorded **Kenya's inflation rate** at **5.1%** in May.

- The World Bank reported that although Kenya is one of the most developing countries in Africa, **a third** of its **52 million people** live in poverty and that **5.7%** of the labour force is **unemployed**, which is the highest in East Africa.
- According to the World Bank, **nine African countries** face a debt crisis in **2024**, and 15 among them are at risk of distress.
- The debt burden often forces the governments to either increase the taxes or wait for a debt reconstruction.

### **About Kenya:**

- The **Republic of Kenya** is a country in **East Africa**.
- Kenya is the **28th-most-populous** country in the **world** and **7th most populous** in **Africa**.
- Kenya's **capital** and largest city is **Nairobi**, while its **oldest** and second-largest city, is the major port city of **Mombasa**, situated on Mombasa Island in the Indian Ocean and the surrounding mainland.
- **Kikuyu** is the **largest ethnic group** comprising around **17%** of the population and **Christianity** is the most populous religion.

### **Political History:**

- Modern-day Kenya emerged from the establishment of **British East African Protectorate** in **1895** and the subsequent **Kenya Colony**, administered by a British Governor which began in **1920**.
- Numerous disputes between the UK and the colony led to the formation of **Kenyan African Union (KAU)** to campaign for independence in **1944**.
- In **1947**, **Jomo Kenyatta**, who is known as the '**Father of Nation of Kenya**', became KAU leader.
- Secret Kikuyu guerrilla group known as **Mau Mau** begins violent campaign against white settlers which though was put down by the Britishers.
- In **1960**, Britain announced plans to prepare Kenya for majority African rule and **Kenya African national Union (Kanu)** was formed by Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga.
- Kenya gained Independence from British Rule in **1963**.
- After independence, Kenya remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.
- The **Republic of Kenya** was formed in **1964** with **Jomo Kenyatta** as its **President** and **Oginga Odinga** Vice - President.

- Kenyatta died in office in **1978** and was succeeded by **Vice-President Daniel arap Moi**.
- In **1982**, Kenya was officially declared a **one-party state** by National Assembly under the leadership of **President Daniel Arap Moi**.
- In **1991**, a special conference of KANU agreed to introduce a **multi-party political system**.
- In **2002**, **Mwai Kibaki** won a landslide victory, ending Daniel Arap **Moi's 24-year rule** in power.
- In **2005**, a new Constitution was proposed which was rejected by the voters in what is seen as a protest against the then **President Kibaki**.
- The **current constitution** was adopted in **2010** and replaced the **1963** independence constitution.
  - This constitution was designed to limit the powers of the president and devolve power to the regions approved in referendum.
- **Uhuru Kenyatta**, the son of Kenya's first president, won presidential election with just over 50% of the vote in 2013.
  - A challenge to the results by his main rival, Prime Minister Raila Odinga, was rejected by the Supreme Court.
- In **2017**, President Kenyatta was declared winner of the presidential election in August as well as the re-run in October.
- In **August 2022**, Deputy President **William Ruto** narrowly won the presidential election, beating his main rival Raila Odinga.

### **Instability in the country:**

- In **1992**, approximately 2,000 people were killed in **tribal conflict** in the west of the country.
- In **1998**, Al-Qaeda operatives bomb the **US embassy in Nairobi**, killing 224 people and injuring thousands.
- In **2002**, disputed presidential elections lead to violence in which more than 1,500 die.
- In **October 2011**, Kenyan troops entered **Somalia** to attack rebels they accused of being behind several kidnappings of foreigners on Kenyan soil. Kenya suffers several reprisal attacks.
- In **2012**, more than 100 people are killed in **communal clashes** over land and resources Coast Province.
- **Somali al-Shabab** militants have been a major reason behind the instability in the Republic of Kenya. They have carried out multiple attacks over the years and have killed thousands of people.

## **Saudi's new Migrant Law**



**Recently:** The **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, one of the world's largest recipients of **migrant domestic workers (MDWs)**, will roll out a new domestic workers law in September.

- The **six GCC (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf) states—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain**—employ close to **5.5 million migrant domestic workers**.
- However, all of these countries exclude MDWs from **labour laws**, with **only four** having passed specific domestic worker laws.
- Qatar, which is preparing to host the next FIFA World Cup in 2022, has recently introduced similar changes to its labor laws.
- The reforms are part of a broader plan known as **Vision 2030** spearheaded by **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** to make the kingdom more attractive to foreign investors

### **Need for the Law:**

- They are a category of workers who provide services in households. Saudi has **14 categories of domestic work**, including domestic worker, driver, nanny, nurse, cook, tailor, farmer, physiotherapist, and private speech and hearing therapist. Some categories are **recent additions**, and concerning, go beyond household work to roles requiring specialist skills.
- As per data, there are more than **20 lakh workers** who fall under the '**servants and house cleaners**' category including domestic workers, nearly **60% of whom are females**.
- The second most recruited category is **drivers**, almost all of whom are male.
- Saudi is the only GCC state where **male domestic workers** constitute the majority in the sector, at nearly **70%**.
- In Saudi, as of the first quarter of 2024, there were 39,13,925 migrant domestic workers with 27,32,344 males and 11,81,581 females, making up **25% of the total workforce**.
- The exclusion of these workers from the labour law leaves huge gaps in protection, as monitoring mechanisms such as labour inspections, complaints mechanisms, and the Wages Protection System do not apply to the sector.
- These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by the systemic marginalisation of migrant workers under the **Kafala system**.
- The employer-tied visa system leaves lower-income migrant workers at the absolute mercy of their sponsors. In effect, the state has outsourced the immigration regime to individuals, the majority of whom are citizens.

### **What is Kafala System?**

- According to the **Council on Foreign Affairs**, the **kafala, or sponsorship**, system defines the relationship between foreign workers and their local sponsor, or **kafeel**, which is usually their employer.
- It has been used in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—**Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates**—as well as **Jordan and Lebanon**.
- The system has become increasingly controversial with reports of exploitation such as lack of regulations and protections for migrant workers' rights often results in low wages, poor working conditions, employee abuse, racial discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Both **Bahrain and Qatar** claim to have abolished the system.
- Under this system, the state gives local individuals or companies sponsorship permits to employ **foreign laborers** (except in **Bahrain**, where workers are sponsored by a government agency rather than individual employers).

- The sponsor covers travel expenses and provides housing, often in dorm-like accommodations or, in the case of domestic workers, the sponsor's home.
- Sponsors sometimes use private recruitment agencies in the countries of origin to find workers and facilitate their entry to the host country than hiring individuals directly.
- Since the system falls under the jurisdiction of interior ministries, rather than labour ministries, workers often have no protection under the host country's labour law.
- In most situations, workers need their sponsor's permission to transfer jobs, end employment, and enter or exit the host country.
- GCC citizens are wealthy and can afford '**engines of liberation**' — mechanised consumer goods that were meant to reduce the domestic labour of women.
- With growing affluence and the assumption that domestic work is menial, these tasks are now delegated to paid MDWs, but the value placed on their work — and by extension them — remains low.
- Many of the mechanisms and institutions set up by Saudi to govern the sector tend to have an employer bias, including its **Musaned system**, the domestic worker recruitment platform, through which all aspects of the recruitment and employment of MDWs are regulated.
- Consequently, the intersection of the Kafala system and labour law exclusion results in a type of bonded labour.
- The cost of recruitment excluding wages is steep — between **US\$2,000 and US\$5,000 per worker** — and employers feel they have 'bought' the worker, instead of seeing it as payment for services.
- Restricted movement and communication, debt bondage, visa trading and dependence for legal residency are some of the major issues with this system.

### **What will the New law Provide?**

- The new law allows —
  - a **maximum of 10 working hours a day** and **entitlement to weekly off day**;
  - prohibition of **confiscation of identity documents**;
  - emphasis on **workers' right to communication**;
  - workers have a right to **terminate the contract without losing entitlements** under certain conditions;

- compensation for **unjust termination; one month paid leave yearly** and employer must pay for the **annual ticket home**.
- **Saudi Arabia** included all new MDWs in its **Wages Protection System from July**, and will gradually cover all existing MDWs by the end of **2025**.

### **What is the status of Indian MDWs?**

- At **26.5 lakh**, Indians constitute the **single largest migrant population** in the kingdom.
- Recruitment of Indian MDWs must be through the **e-Migrate system**.
- **India's minimum referral wage** for the sector is **SAR1,500 (₹33,400)**.
- Special provisions for female MDWs — minimum age must be **30** — include a financial bank guarantee of **U.S.\$2,500** in favour of the **Embassy in Riyadh**. The contract must be attested at one of the missions in **Saudi**.
- However, according to many workers in distress, consular support is limited at best to repatriation and there is no effort to help with access to justice or ensure workers receive all their entitlements before deportation.
- Given the size of the kingdom and the diaspora, the **Embassy in Riyadh and the consulate office in Jeddah** are not equipped enough to deal with these needs.



## **Pacific Island Forum (PIF)’s annual meeting**



**Recently:** The **53<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting** of the **Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)** was conducted from **August 26<sup>th</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>** in **Nuku'alofa**, the capital of **Tonga**.

- The event is being attended by more than **1,500 delegates** from around **40 countries**.
- This year's PIF meeting features the forum's largest-ever delegation from China and a sizable deputation from the US, led by Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell.
- This theme of the 2024 edition of the annual meet was - ***Transformative and Resilient Pasifiki: Build Better Now.***

### **Highlights of the event:**

#### **China – Taiwan Tussle:**

- The forum removed references to Taiwan from a communique released after the meeting following complaints by China's envoy.
- China says Taiwan is one of its provinces with **no right to state-to-state relations**, a position the democratically governed island strongly disputes.

- The bloc includes **three members (Palau, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands)** with diplomatic ties to Taiwan, and 15 members who recognise China, a major infrastructure lender to Pacific Islands countries.
- The communique included a section headed "**Relations with Taiwan/Republic of China**", stating "Leaders reaffirmed the **1992 Leaders** decision on relations with Taiwan/Republic of China".
- The communique was removed from the website after an angry response from China, and a new document was posted with the references to Taiwan removed.
- Taiwan has been a **Development Partner** to the forum since **1993**.
- Taiwan had sent **Tien Chung-kwang**, its deputy foreign minister to Tonga, for the meeting.
- Taiwan's diplomatic allies in the Pacific have reduced in recent years as China has increased offers of development funding.
  - **Nauru** switched ties from Taiwan to Beijing in January, while **Kiribati and Solomon Islands**, which both now host **Chinese police**, switched in **2019**.

#### Climate Change:

- In this year's annual meeting, climate change is high on the agenda — several PIF members are among the world's worst-affected countries, especially due to rising sea levels.
- The South West Pacific was worst hit by sea level rises, in some places by more than double the global average in the past 30 years.
- To tackle the climate challenges, PIF members have been pushing to raise funds for climate action.
- The **Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF)** — a regional financing facility established by PIF — is currently **\$380 million** short of its **\$500 million** target.

#### 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent:

- Leaders reaffirmed the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent as the region's collective commitment to a resilient Pacific, thereby elevating the importance of resilience in framing and shaping how Members develop and monitor regional policy priorities.

### Regional Policing:

- The Pacific Islands Forum has endorsed a plan to boost police numbers among its members, cutting the need to rely on external forces in a crisis, with China security ally Solomon Islands supporting the **Australian-funded initiative**.
- Some analysts see the plan to set up a regional policing unit to be deployed to tackle major incidents as a move by Australia to block China's growing police presence in the region, amid strategic rivalry between Beijing and Washington.

### Others:

- The leaders also agreed to the terms of a fact-finding mission to **New Caledonia**, riven by months of riots, for talks with relevant parties to try and resolve the crisis.
- The forum accepted US territories **Guam** and **American Samoa** as **associate members**.
- The leaders further reviewed the regional architecture, discussed the vulnerability of the region's health systems to climate change effects, importance of resilient education systems, etc.

### **Pacific Islands:**

- The Pacific islands are a group of islands in the **Pacific Ocean**.
- They are further categorized into **three** major island groups: **Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia**.
- Pacific Island Countries in Micronesia:
  - The Federated States of Micronesia
  - Kiribati
  - The Marshall Islands
  - Nauru
  - Palau
- Pacific Island Countries In Melanesia

- Fiji
- Papua New Guinea
- The Solomon Islands
- Vanuatu
- Pacific Island Countries In Polynesia
  - New Zealand
  - Samoa
  - Tonga
  - Tuvalu
- PIC are part of the larger **Indo-Pacific region**, which is vital to international trade, with **90%** of such trade being transported via sea routes.
- The region comprises strategically located (at the crossroads of significant maritime trade routes) small island nations, with small populations and resource-rich Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

### **About Pacific Islands Forum:**

- The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is an inter-governmental organization that aims to enhance cooperation among countries and territories of Oceania.
- It was formed in **1972** and consists of **18 member states** located in the Pacific region.
- Other member states are - Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- The organisation discusses priority issues at its annual meeting, where decisions made by the member states are reached by consensus.
- The decisions are implemented by the **Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat**, which grew out of the **South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC)**.
- The annual Forum meetings are chaired by the Head of Government of the Host Country, who remains as the Forum Chair until the next meeting.

- **Mark Brown**, the **Cook Islands** prime minister, is the current chair of the forum.
- The Secretariat works in coordination with the **Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP)**.
- **Fiji** became the **first member** of the forum to be suspended in **2009** due to its non – commitment towards holding General Elections.
  - Following the Fijian general election of 17 September 2014, the Forum **lifted the suspension** of Fiji on **22 October 2014**.
- **Baron Waqa** is the current **Secretary General** of the Forum.
- **Esala Nayasi** is the current **Deputy Secretary General** of the Forum.

### **Mpox Outbreak in Africa**



**Recently:** The World Health Organization has declared the mpox outbreaks in **Congo** and elsewhere in **Africa** a **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)** under the **International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR)**.

- The WHO chief's announcement came a day after the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention declared the virus a public health emergency in the continent.

**What is Mpox?**

- Mpox is caused by the monkeypox virus, a member of the **Orthopoxvirus** genus.
- It spreads **through close contact** with an infected person, animals, or contaminated materials.
- It includes fever, headache, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes, and a rash that turns into fluid-filled sores.
- To prevent the spread, **avoid contact** with infected animals and people, and practice good hygiene.
- Supportive care and antiviral medications can help manage symptoms. Vaccines for **smallpox** are partially effective against mpox.
- Usually mild but can be severe, especially in people with weakened immune systems.
- Scientists are particularly worried over a new form of Mpox, detected in a Congolese mining town.
- It has the potential to kill up to **10 per cent** of the people and may spread more easily.
- Unlike in previous mpox outbreaks, where lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet, the new form causes **milder symptoms** and **lesions on the genitals**. That makes it harder to spot, meaning people might also sicken others without knowing they're infected.
- The new symptoms make the virus **harder to detect**, thereby increasing the risk of its spread.
- According to WHO, **Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda** recently reported Mpox cases for the first time, all linked to the Congo epidemic, raising global concerns.
- In 2022, the Mpox outbreak affected over 70 countries, with **gay and bisexual men** being the primary group at risk due to factors including sexual contact.
- The current Mpox infection pattern has shifted, with **children under 15** now making up over **70 percent** of cases in Congo.
- Children under 15 also account for **85 percent of Mpox-related deaths in Congo**, marking a significant change in the virus's impact.

Origin of Mpox:

- Mpox was first identified in **1958** when outbreaks occurred in monkey colonies kept for research purposes.
- This led to the naming of the disease as "**monkeypox**" before it was later renamed to "mpox" to avoid stigma.
- The **first recorded human case** of mpox was in **1970** in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, during a period of intensified efforts to eradicate smallpox.
- Mpox is endemic in **Central and West African regions**, particularly in tropical rainforest areas, where the virus is primarily transmitted through contact with infected animals like rodents and primates.
- In **2003**, the **first major outbreak** outside of Africa was reported in the United States, which was traced back to infected pet prairie dogs that had been in contact with animals imported from Ghana.
- The mpox virus is closely related to the **variola virus**, responsible for **smallpox**, but mpox is generally less deadly and less transmissible than smallpox, leading to milder outbreaks.
- In **2022**, a significant global outbreak of mpox occurred, which led the World Health Organization to recommend changing the name from "**monkeypox**" to "**mpox**".
  - The change in name was done in order to **reduce any associated stigma** and misperceptions.
- In **July 2022**, the multi-country outbreak of mpox was declared a **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)** as it spread rapidly via sexual contact across a range of countries where the virus had not been seen before, mostly **affecting gay and bisexual men**.
- That PHEIC was declared over in **May 2023** after there had been a sustained decline in global cases.
- Mpox has been reported in the DRC for more than a decade, and the number of cases reported each year has increased steadily over that period.
- The mpox virus **has two main genetic strains: the Congo Basin strain**, which is more severe with higher mortality rates, and **the West African strain**, which is milder and more commonly encountered.
- Vaccines originally developed for smallpox, such as the **ACAM2000 and JYNNEOS vaccines**, have been found to provide cross-protection against mpox, helping to control outbreaks when administered to at-risk populations.

Human-to-human transmission can happen through:

- **Direct contact** with skin lesions, body fluids, or respiratory droplets of an infected person.
- **Prolonged face-to-face contact** with an infected person.
- **Touching contaminated objects**, such as bedding or clothing that have been in contact with the infectious material, although this is a rare mode of transmission.
- **Animal-to-human transmission** typically occurs through bites, scratches, or direct contact with the blood, body fluids, or wounds of an infected animal.
- The virus enters the body **through broken skin, the Respiratory tract, or mucous membranes** (which include eyes, nose, and mouth).

### **World Health Organisation (WHO):**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) focused on international public health.
- WHO was established **on April 7, 1948**, which is now observed annually as **World Health Day**.
- The idea for WHO was conceived during the **United Nations Conference on International Organization in 1945**.
- Global leaders recognized the **need for an international health organization** at that conference.
- The **WHO constitution was adopted** at the **International Health Conference in New York**, held from June 19 to July 22, **1946**.
- Representatives **from 61 countries signed the WHO constitution**, which came into force on April 7, 1948.
- **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** was elected WHO Director-General for a **five-year term** by WHO Member States at the Seventieth World Health Assembly in **May 2017**.
- WHO's headquarters is located in **Geneva, Switzerland**, with six regional offices worldwide.
- WHO operates **150 country offices** to coordinate and implement its global health initiatives.
- WHO's work includes **tackling communicable diseases** like HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as non-communicable diseases such as cancer and diabetes.
- It is also responding to public health emergencies.
- WHO played a key role in the global eradication of smallpox in 1980 and has coordinated international responses to health crises like the **Ebola outbreak (2014-2016)** and the **COVID-19 pandemic (starting in 2020)**.



- WHO is **funded by member states' contributions** and voluntary donations from governments, organizations, and other entities, supporting its wide range of health programs and emergency response efforts globally.
- The **World Health Assembly (WHA)** is WHO's governing body, consisting of representatives from all member states who set policies and approve the budget.
- The Executive Board, composed of **34 health experts**, advises the WHA. This board is also responsible for electing WHO's chairman.

### **What is International Health Regulations?**

- **The International Health Regulations (2005)**, or IHR (2005), represents a binding international legal agreement involving **196 countries** across the globe, including all the Member States of WHO.
- Their aim is to help the international **community prevent and respond** to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide.
- The purpose and scope of the IHR (2005) is to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease.

### **What is PHEIC?**

- A PHEIC stands for A public health emergency of international concern.
- A PHEIC is **defined in the IHR (2005)** as, "an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response".
- Since 2005, there have **been eight PHEIC declarations**, first one was the **2009–2010 H1N1** emergency declaration.
- Other PHEIC events include:
  - Polio (2014)
  - Ebola (2013–2016)
  - Zika virus (2016)
  - Kivu Ebola (2019–2020)
  - COVID-19 (2020–2023)
  - Clade II mpox (2022–2023)

- Clade I mpox (2024–present)
- A situation can be declared as a PHEIC if that is:
  - Serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected;
  - Carries implications for public health beyond the affected State's national border; and
  - May require immediate international action.

### **Sheikh Hasina's Extradition**



**Recently:** **Bangladesh Nationalist Party** has asked India to extradite ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh under the India-B'desh extradition treaty.

- **Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir**, Former Minister of Agriculture of Bangladesh, alleged that Sheikh Hasina has initiated various plots during her visit to India.
- These plots, according to him, are intended to thwart the revolutionary movements in Bangladesh.

### **Who is Sheikh Hasina?**

- Sheikh Hasina Wazed, born on September 28, 1947, in **Tungipara, East Pakistan** (now Bangladesh), is a prominent Bengali politician and leader of the Awami League party.
- She served as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for one term from **1996 to 2001** and for four consecutive terms from **2009 to 2024**.
- Her fifth term, following the January 2024 elections, was cut short due to mass protests against her government in July and August.
- On **August 5, 2024**, Bangladesh's army chief confirmed Hasina's resignation and announced the formation of an interim government.
- Hasina resigned and fled to India, where she is reported to be staying temporarily.
- During the protests, hundreds of people entered the Prime Minister's official residence in Dhaka, causing significant damage and looting.

### **What is extradition?**

- Extradition involves one country requesting another to hand over a person accused or convicted of a crime.
- It relies on **treaties or laws** between the two countries and requires that the crime be recognized as illegal in both.
- The requested country reviews the request, including evidence and legal standards, and considers protections such as against the death penalty or torture.
- The first act providing for extradition was adopted in **1833** by **Belgium**, which also passed the **first law on the right to asylum**.
- In the **United States**, extradition may be granted only pursuant to a treaty and only if Congress has not legislated to the contrary.
- **Germany and Switzerland** extradite without a formal convention in cases where their governments and the requesting state have exchanged declarations of reciprocity.

Process of extradition:

- **Request:** A country formally requests another country to hand over an individual who is accused or convicted of a crime.
- **Legal Basis:** The request is based on international treaties or domestic laws that govern extradition between the two countries.
- **Dual Criminality:** The crime for which extradition is sought must be recognized as an offense in both the requesting and requested countries.
- **Extradition Hearing:** The requested country holds a legal process to review the evidence and ensure that the request meets all legal requirements.
- **Conditions:** Treaties often include protections, such as assurances against the death penalty, torture, or unfair trials in the requesting country.
- **Decision:** The requested country makes a decision on whether to approve or deny the extradition based on legal and procedural standards.
- **Surrender:** If approved, the individual is handed over to the requesting country to face prosecution or serve their sentence.
- **Appeals:** The person being extradited may have the right to appeal the decision within the requested country before the extradition is carried out.

India- Bangladesh extradition treaty:

- India and Bangladesh recognized the need for a formal extradition treaty in the **early 2000s** to address cross-border crime and insurgency.
- Formal negotiations began around **2010**, with discussions involving legal experts and officials from both countries.
- The treaty was signed on **January 28, 2013**, in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**.
- It came into force on **October 23, 2013**, after ratification by both countries.
- The treaty was **amended in 2016** to address emerging issues and strengthen its provisions.
- Since then, it has been used to extradite individuals involved in serious crimes, including the notable case of extradition of **United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) leader Anup Chetia** from Bangladesh to India **in 2015**.

- The treaty continues to **facilitate cooperation** between the two countries in law enforcement and counter-terrorism.
- Bangladesh has also gained from the treaty, addressing issues with terrorist groups like **Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh** (JMB), whose operatives were found in India.
- Both countries have utilized the treaty to extradite fugitives, improving bilateral cooperation in combating cross-border crime and terrorism.
- The treaty specifies conditions and crimes that qualify for extradition between India and Bangladesh.
- Extradition is required for fugitives “who have been proceeded against” or “who have been charged with, found guilty of, or are wanted for” crimes listed in the treaty as “**extraditable offences.**”
- Only crimes punishable by a **minimum of one year** of imprisonment can be considered extraditable, including financial irregularities.
- The principle of **dual criminality** must be satisfied, meaning the offence must be punishable in both India and Bangladesh.
- **Article 7** of the treaty outlines what constitutes an extraditable offence and how authorities in both countries should handle extradition requests.
- This principle ensures that the legal standards for extradition are consistent and fair in both countries.

#### Exceptions:

- The India-Bangladesh extradition treaty cannot be enforced in cases deemed “**political in nature,**” as specified in **Article 6**, which lists political offences as exceptions.
- **Article 8** of the treaty outlines additional exceptions, allowing either country to refuse extradition requests under certain conditions.
- An extradition request can be denied if it is determined that it has “**not been made in good faith**” or is “**not in the interests of justice.**”
- Article 8 allows **denial of a request** if the person can demonstrate the offence is trivial or minor in nature.
- Extradition requests can also be refused if there has been a significant **lapse of time** since the alleged offence or the person became unlawfully at large.

- A request can be denied if the accusation is not made in good faith, if the offence is military in nature and not a general criminal offence, or if the person is facing a criminal case or is convicted of a crime in the requested country.

### **Charges against Sheikh Hasina:**

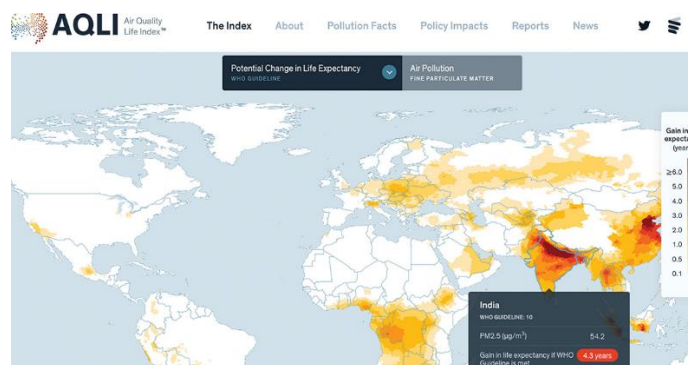
- Sheikh Hasina, as a political figure, faces **serious charges** that complicate her potential claim for political asylum in India.
- She is accused of murdering a grocery store owner who was killed during a police firing incident.
- Hasina is implicated in the enforced disappearance related to the kidnapping of a lawyer in **2015**.
- She faces charges of **murder, torture, and genocide** in a separate case.
- The **2016 amendment** to the extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh removed the requirement for evidence of the alleged crime in extradition cases.
- Now, only an arrest warrant from a competent court in the requesting country is needed for extradition.

### **India's Dilemma:**

- Charges against **Sheikh Hasina**, including murder and terrorism, are not covered by the political offence exception in the treaty.
- The charges are significant, and there has not been enough time passed to invoke Article 8's provisions for **denying extradition**.
- **Article 8** allows denial if charges are "in good faith" but not "in the interests of justice," which could be a reason to refuse extradition.
- Denying the request could strain India-Bangladesh relations, especially with a new **non-Awami League** government and rising influence from China and the US.
- India may opt for diplomatic measures to dissuade the Yunus government from making a formal extradition request.
- India's approach will balance legal obligations with diplomatic and geopolitical considerations.

## Reports, Indices & Awards

### Air Quality Life Index 2024



**Recently:** The **2024 edition** of the Air Quality Life Index was released by the **Energy Policy Institute** at the **University of Chicago (EPIC)**.

#### What is Air Quality Life Index?

- The Air Quality Life Index, or AQLI, converts air pollution concentrations into their impact on life expectancy.
- It is produced by the **Energy Policy Institute** at the **University of Chicago (EPIC)**.
- The AQLI is based on frontier research by EPIC's director **Michael Greenstone** that quantified the causal relationship between human exposure to air pollution and reduced life expectancy.
- The AQLI estimates the relationship between air pollution and life expectancy by leveraging results from a pair of studies set in **China [Chen et al (2013), Ebenstein et al (2017)]**.

- The results of the studies are combined with detailed global population and **PM2.5 data** to estimate the impact of particulate matter on life expectancy across the globe.
  - PM2.5, a fine particulate matter that can penetrate deep into the respiratory system and trigger respiratory problems.
- The AQLI measures potential gains in life expectancy by lowering PM2.5 concentrations to meet either the **WHO guideline** for particulate matter concentrations or **nationally administered air quality standards** (National Standards).
- The WHO's guideline is **5 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )**, which corresponds to the lowest level of long-term exposure that the WHO found to raise mortality with greater than **95%** confidence.
- The WHO updated its standard from **10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  to 5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in September 2021.**
- This was the first update since establishing air quality guidance in **2005**.
- Country-specific nationally administered annual standards were identified for **83 countries** and range from **8–40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .

### **Highlights of the Report:**

#### **Global:**

- Though global pollution was slightly lower in **2022**, its burden on life expectancy remains, as per the report.
- If the world were to permanently reduce fine particulate pollution (PM2.5) to meet the WHO guideline, the average person would add **1.9 years** onto their life expectancy—or a combined **14.9 billion life-years** saved worldwide.
- While **37 out of 94 countries** with **National standards** for air quality, aren't meeting them, more than half of all countries and territories have not set a standard at all.
  - Together, **77 percent** of countries and territories worldwide have either not met or do not have a national standard.
- Of the countries with no standard, almost none (less than 1 percent) of the governments provide fully open pollution data and two-thirds don't have any government pollution monitoring.
- To help confront this challenge, this year EPIC launched the **EPIC Air Quality Fund** to support local groups and organizations in installing monitors and providing open data to communities that could benefit the most.



- The AQLI establishes that the impact of PM2.5 on global life expectancy is comparable to that of smoking, more than **3 times** that of **alcohol use and unsafe water**, more than **5 times** that of **transport injuries** like car crashes, and more than **7 times** that of **HIV/AIDS**.

#### South Asia:

- Global pollution declined in **2022** due almost entirely to a trend reversal in South Asia.
- While pollution had been on the rise for more than a decade, it declined by **18 percent** in one year.
- Even with the decline, the region remains the **most polluted** in the world, accounting for **45 percent** of total life years lost due to high pollution.
- The average person living in these countries would **gain 3.5 years** onto their lives if pollution were permanently reduced to meet the **World Health Organization** guideline.
- Compared to 2021, PM2.5 levels decreased across all South Asian countries except **Sri Lanka**.
- The most significant decline occurred in **Bangladesh**, where annual PM2.5 concentrations fell by over **15 µg/m³**.
- **India and Nepal** followed, each recording reductions of approximately **9 µg/m³**, while **Pakistan** saw a decrease of **4 µg/m³**.

#### Middle East and North Africa:

- Pollution has been on the rise in the Middle East and North Africa—2022 was no exception, with pollution increasing **13 percent**.
- If this high level of pollution continues, residents are expected to lose about **1.3 years** off their lives on average and **3 to 4 years** in the most polluted areas such as **Qatar**—the world's **fourth** most polluted country

#### Central and West Africa:

- Air pollution is as much of a health threat in Sub-Saharan Africa as well-known killers in the region **like HIV/AIDS, malaria and unsafe water**.
- Pollution takes away much as **5 years** of the life of the people in the most polluted areas.

- The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea are among the ten most polluted countries in the world.
- Yet, out of **27 countries** in this region, only two have a national pollution standard.

#### Southeast Asia:

- Like South Asia, most of Southeast Asia experienced a decline in pollution in 2022, though pollution levels have remained dangerously high and largely unchanged for two decades.
- Almost all Southeast Asian residents breathe air deemed unsafe by the WHO guideline, reducing average life expectancy by **1.2 years**.
- **China** has had remarkable success, reducing pollution by **41 percent** since **2013**, the year before the country began a “war against pollution.”
  - Due to these improvements, the average Chinese citizen can expect to live **2 years longer**, provided the reductions are sustained.
  - However, China still accounts for **20 percent** of the world’s air pollution burden.
  - The average person in China could see their life expectancy increase by **2.3 years** more if the country met the WHO guideline for pollution.

#### Europe:

- In Europe, residents are exposed to about **30.2 percent** less pollution than they were in **1998**, soon after the Air Quality Framework Directive started, gaining **5.6 months** of life expectancy because of it.
- Yet, **96.8 percent** of Europe still doesn’t meet the WHO’s guideline.
- In **2022**, the EU proposed ratcheting down their standard of **25 µg/m³ to 10 µg/m³ by 2030**.
  - But **75 percent** of the population in 12 out of 28 EU member countries don’t meet this standard.
- The more polluted areas are in eastern Europe, where residents are living **4.8 months** less than their western neighbors due to dirtier air.

**India:**

- India experienced a notable **19.3 per cent** reduction in particulate pollution in **2022 compared to 2021**, marking the **second-largest** decline globally after **Bangladesh**.
  - In 2022, India's PM2.5 concentrations were approximately **nine micrograms per cubic metre**, reflecting a 19.3 per cent reduction from 2021.
- This decrease is estimated to have added an average of **51 days** to the life expectancy of every Indian citizen, according to a recent report.
- The report warns that if India fails to meet the World Health Organisation's (WHO) annual PM2.5 concentration guideline of 5 micrograms per cubic metre, Indians could lose an average of **3.6 years** of life expectancy.
- The report noted that the **northern plains**, India's most polluted region, experienced a **17.2 per cent decrease** in particulate matter levels in 2022 compared to 2021.
- Despite these improvements, the average resident of the northern plains may still lose about **5.4 years** of life expectancy if current pollution levels persist.
- However, if the reduction in particulate matter continues at the same rate in the coming years, life expectancy in the region could increase by **1.2 years**, according to the report.
- In India, the **annual PM2.5 standard** is set at **40 micrograms per cubic metre** but over **40 per cent** of the population is exposed to air exceeding this limit.

**Delhi:**

- 1.8 crore people living in the **National Capital Territory (NCT)** of Delhi, one of the most polluted regions in the northern plains, are on track to lose an average of **11.9 years** of life expectancy compared to the WHO guidelines.
- However, the report also said if India were to meet its **national PM2.5 standards**, life expectancy for Delhi's residents could increase by **8.5 years**.

- If India met the **WHO standards**, nearly **12 years** could be added to the life expectancy of Delhi's residents.

#### National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

- The report also indicated that districts participating in India's flagship National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) saw an average **19 per cent** reduction in PM2.5 levels, while districts not included in the programme experienced a **16 per cent** reduction.
- However, except for **Dhanbad**, none of the districts with the highest reductions in PM2.5 concentrations were covered by the NCAP framework.
- Launched in **2019**, NCAP is **India's first national initiative** aimed at setting clean air targets, with an initial goal of reducing particulate pollution by **20-30 per cent by 2024**, using **2017** as a baseline.
  - The revised target now aims for a **40 per cent reduction by 2026**, with **2019-20** as the base year.
- The programme includes **131 non-attainment cities** that failed to meet national ambient air quality standards consistently between **2011 and 2015**.
- As of **2022**, pollution levels in districts with **non-attainment** cities have decreased by **18.8 per cent** relative to **2017**.
  - This has extended life expectancy by **10.8 months** for 446.7 million residents in these areas and by **four months** to India's national average life expectancy.

### **NIRF Rankings 2024**



**Recently:** Education Minister **Dharmendra Pradhan** has announced the NIRF Rankings for all the categories on August 12, 2024 at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**.

- Minister of State for Education **Sukanto Majumdar** along with other dignitaries was also present at the event.

### **What is NIRF ranking?**

- **The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF)** was developed by the **Ministry of Education** (formerly the Ministry of **Human Resource Development**), Government of India.
- NIRF was launched in **2015** to create a reliable and transparent method to rank Indian higher education institutions.
- The framework aimed to encourage institutions to improve their standards and provide students and stakeholders with a credible basis for comparison.
- NIRF was the first government effort to **rank higher education institutions (HEIs)** in India.
- Before NIRF, HEIs were typically ranked by **private entities**, especially news magazines.
- Initially, participation in NIRF was voluntary, but in **2018** it became **compulsory** for all government-run educational institutions.

- Participation has grown significantly, with around **6,000 institutions** taking part this year, nearly **double** the number from **2016**.
- Institutions are assessed based on **five parameters**: teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practices, graduation outcomes, outreach and inclusivity, and perception.
- NIRF ranks institutions across **11 categories**, including overall national ranking, universities, engineering, colleges, medical, management, pharmacy, law, architecture, dental, and research.
- The participation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in these rankings has grown from **3,565** in **2016** to **10,845** in **2024**.
- The number of categories and subject domains expanded from **four in 2016 to sixteen in 2024**.
- The Ministry is even considering **"sustainability"** as a criterion, probably from next year.
- **Three new categories**- state universities, skill universities and open universities have been added this year.
- The **parameters** on which institutes are ranked are teaching, learning, and resources, research and professional practice, graduation outcome, outreach and inclusivity, and perception.

### **The inspiration:**

- The idea of NIRF has its roots in the global rankings. The union government and government-run HEIs were quite **upset about their standing** in **QS World University Rankings** and the **Times Higher Education World University Ranking**.
- During the Winter Session of **Parliament in 2015**, the then **Education Minister Smriti Irani** had attributed their poor performance in global league tables to subjective ranking methodology.
- To counter this, India decided to emulate **the Chinese example**.
- When China encountered the same problem about two decades ago, they responded with a university ranking system of their own.
  - They named their system as **The Shanghai Rankings**.
- The Shanghai Rankings, done by the **Shanghai Jiao Tong University**, was born out of this in **2003**.

- The Shanghai Ranking, also known as **Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)**, is one of the annual publications of world university rankings.
- Nine Chinese universities and three from India (**Indian Institute of Science (IISc), IIT Kharagpur and IIT Delhi**) made it to the top **500** in the **first edition** of the Shanghai Rankings.
- ARWU is regarded as one of the three most influential and widely observed university rankings, alongside **QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education World University Rankings**.
- It has received positive feedback for its objectivity and methodology.
- It draws **wide criticism** as it fails to adjust for the size of the institution, and thus larger institutions tend to rank above smaller ones.

### **The Rankings:**

- **IIT Madras** has topped the overall category followed by **IISc Bengaluru** in second place, **IIT Bombay** in the third position.
  - **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras** was adjudged the best education institution in the country for the **sixth time since 2019**.
- Under **engineering** category, **IIT Madras** has again topped followed by **IIT Delhi** in second place and **IIT Bombay** in the third spot.
  - IIT Madras also ranked first in engineering for the **ninth consecutive year** since **2016**
- For **medical** category, **AIIMS Delhi** has ranked on top, second spot is acquired by **PGIMER, Chandigarh** and third place is acquired by **Christian Medical College, Vellore**.
- This year, **Hindu College, Delhi** has secured the top position in the colleges category while **IIM Ahmedabad** has topped in the management category.
- **IISc Bengaluru** leads the universities category, with **JNU New Delhi** taking second place and **JMI New Delhi** securing third.
  - IISc Bengaluru topped the list of universities and research categories, holding the positions since **2016 and 2021** respectively.
- **IIM Ahmedabad** continued to be the top management institute for the **fifth year**.

- For the seventh consecutive year, **National Law School of India University, (NLSIU) Bengaluru** has topped the list of best law schools in India.
  - **NLU Delhi, NALSAR Hyderabad, WBNUJS** have retained their second, third and fourth place respectively.
  - NLU Delhi has a score of **77.48**, NALSAR University Hyderabad with a score of **77.05** stands at the third place and **WBNUJS** at the fourth place has a score of **76.39**.

### **Gallantry Awards 2024**



**Recently:** On the occasion of **India's 78th Independence Day** on **August 15, 2024**, the Government of India announced several prestigious gallantry awards and recognitions for members of the armed forces, police, and other services.

- The gallantry awards serve as a powerful tribute to the bravery and dedication of the nation's armed forces, police, and naval personnel.
- These honors highlight the commitment of our heroes in safeguarding India's security.

### **What are Gallantry Awards?**



- Gallantry awards in India are honors given to **military personnel**, and **sometimes civilians**, for their acts of bravery, valor, and sacrifice in the service of the nation.
- These awards are classified into two categories: **Gallantry in the Face of the Enemy** and **Gallantry Other than in the Face of the Enemy**.
- Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, and Vir Chakra were **instituted on 26th January 1950**, with effect from **15th August 1947**.
- **Ashoka Chakra Class-I, Ashoka Chakra Class-II, and Ashoka Chakra Class-III** were instituted on **4th January 1952**, with effect from **15th August 1947**.
- In **January 1967**, Ashoka Chakra Class-I became Ashoka Chakra, Ashoka Chakra Class-II became Kirti Chakra, and Ashoka Chakra Class-III became Shaurya Chakra.
- Gallantry awards are **announced twice a year**: on **Republic Day (26th January)** and **Independence Day (15th August)**.
- **Order of Precedence**: Param Vir Chakra, Ashoka Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra, Kirti Chakra, Vir Chakra, Shaurya Chakra.
- These awards recognize acts of bravery, valor, and self-sacrifice in both wartime and peacetime.

### **Gallantry in the Face of the Enemy:**

#### **The Param Vir Chakra (PVC):**

- PVC is India's **highest military decoration**, awarded for displaying the most conspicuous bravery or pre-eminent act of valor, or self-sacrifice in the face of the enemy, presented by the President of India during the Republic Day Parade in **New Delhi**.
- It is eligible for members of the armed forces, including officers, men, and women of all ranks.
- The award was instituted on **26th January 1950**, with retroactive effect from 15th August 1947.
- The first recipient was **Major Somnath Sharma**, who was awarded **posthumously** for his bravery during the **Indo-Pakistani War of 1947**.
- The medal is circular, made of bronze, featuring a star and the Ashoka Chakra in the center, and is worn with a plain purple ribbon.

- The PVC has been **awarded 21 times**, with 14 posthumous awards, 16 during Indo-Pakistani conflicts, and 20 to the Indian Army, with one recipient from the Indian Air Force.

#### The Maha Vir Chakra (MVC):

- The Maha Vir Chakra (MVC) is **India's second-highest military decoration**, awarded for acts of gallantry in the presence of the enemy.
- It is conferred upon members of the armed forces, regardless of rank, for displaying exceptional bravery and courage in combat.
- The award was instituted on **26th January 1950**, with retroactive effect from 15th August 1947.
- The medal is **made of standard silver** and is circular in shape, with a five-pointed star and the state emblem in the center. The ribbon is half white and half orange, symbolizing purity and valor.
- **Brigadier Rajinder Singh** (Posthumous) was the first person to receive MVC. The award is often presented by the President of India during the Republic Day Parade or other significant military ceremonies.
- It stands as a **symbol of extraordinary valor and courage**, within the Indian military honors system.

#### Vir Chakra:

- The Vir Chakra is **India's third-highest military decoration**, awarded for acts of gallantry in the presence of the enemy, presented by the President of India.
- It is open to members of the armed forces, including officers, men, and women across all ranks.
- The award was instituted on **26th January 1950**, with retroactive effect from **15th August 1947** with the first recipients were honored for their bravery during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947.
- The medal is circular, made of silver, and features a five-pointed star with a chakra (wheel) in the center.
- The ribbon is **half blue and half orange** in color. As of 2023, over 1,300 individuals have been awarded the Vir Chakra.
- Many of these awards have been conferred posthumously, recognizing the ultimate sacrifice of the recipients.

**Gallantry Other than in the Face of the Enemy:****The Ashoka Chakra:**

- The Ashoka Chakra is India's **highest peacetime gallantry award**, given for valor, courageous action, or self-sacrifice away from the battlefield.
- It is open to both military personnel and civilians, and was first awarded in **1952**.
- The medal is circular and made of gold-gilded bronze, featuring the **Ashoka Chakra**, a wheel with 24 spokes, in the center. It is worn with a green and orange striped ribbon.
- As of 2023, **86 individuals** have been awarded the Ashoka Chakra, many of them posthumously.
- This award is usually presented by the President of India during the Republic Day Parade and is considered the peacetime equivalent of the Param Vir Chakra.

**The Kirti Chakra:**

- The Kirti Chakra is the **second-highest peacetime** gallantry award in India, recognizing acts of valor, courageous action, or self-sacrifice away from the battlefield, presented by the President.
- It was established in **1952** and can be awarded to military personnel as well as civilians.
- The medal is similar in design to the Ashoka Chakra but is made of silver and features the Ashoka Chakra emblem. It is worn with a green and white striped ribbon.
- It stands as a **mark of extraordinary bravery in peacetime conditions**.

**The Shaurya Chakra:**

- The Shaurya Chakra is India's **third-highest peacetime gallantry award**, given for valor, courageous action, or self-sacrifice away from the battlefield.
- Like the **Ashoka Chakra and Kirti Chakra**, it was first awarded in 1952 and is open to both military personnel and civilians.

- The medal is bronze, circular in shape, and features a lotus flower with the Ashoka Chakra emblem. It is worn with a green and yellow striped ribbon.
- Over 2,000 individuals have been awarded the **Shaurya Chakra** as of 2023, many of them recognized posthumously.
- This award is also typically presented by the **President of India** during major national ceremonies and is a significant honor for acts of bravery during peacetime.

### **Recent Conferment:**

- The President approved **103 gallantry awards**, including **nine posthumous**, to the Armed Forces and Central Armed Police Forces personnel.
- The Central government announced **1,037 medals for police**, fire, prison, home guard, and civil defence personnel of Central and state police forces on the eve of Independence Day.
- Out of **208 gallantry awards**, 52 have been awarded to the personnel deployed in Left-wing extremism areas, 31 in the Jammu and Kashmir region, and 17 to those from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- Recipients include officers recognized for exceptional dedication and bravery, with some receiving posthumous honors for their sacrifice.
- The list published **by the Union Home Ministry** includes **one President's Medal for Gallantry**, 213 Police Medals for Gallantry, 94 President's Police Medals for Distinguished Service, and 729 Police Medals for Meritorious Service.
- **The President's Medal for Gallantry** and Medal for Gallantry (GM) are awarded on the "ground of rare conspicuous act of gallantry and conspicuous act of gallantry respectively in saving life and property, or in preventing crime or arresting criminals".
- Several **Indian naval personnel** were awarded gallantry awards, including Capt Brijesh Nambiar, Capt Rajababu Sharma, and Cdr Anoop Kumar.

### **Recipients of the Kirti Chakra:**

- **Colonel Manpreet Singh (Posthumous)** - Awarded for leading an anti-terror operation in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir, where he lost his life.
- **Rifleman Ravi Kumar (Posthumous)** - Recognized for his bravery in the same operation as Colonel Singh.
- **Major Malla Rama Gopal Naidu** - Honored for his exceptional courage in military operations.
- **Deputy Superintendent Himayun Muzzammil Bhat (Posthumous)** was also recognized for his bravery during the counter-terrorism operation in Anantnag, where he was killed.
- **Four Kirti Chakras** were awarded this year, with three being posthumous recognitions.
- This year's awards included **18 Shaurya Chakras**, among other honors, reflecting the bravery and dedication of military and police personnel in the line of duty.

## **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index**



**Recently:** The UN General Assembly officially launched a new data-driven "**vulnerability**" index that would help small island states and developing nations gain access to low-interest financing.

- The "**Multidimensional Vulnerability Index**" (**MVI**) is set to act as a complement to GDP and other development metrics.

**What is “multidimensional vulnerability index”?**

- The **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)** is a quantitative tool developed by the **United Nations** to measure a country's vulnerability to shocks and lack of resilience across multiple dimensions of sustainable development.
- The MVI is intended to complement **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** and **Gross National Income per capita (GNI pc)** with a more nuanced assessment of vulnerability.
- The MVI emphasizes the need for understanding vulnerability beyond traditional economic metrics like GDP and GNI pc, especially given evolving global challenges.
- Members for MVI:
  - Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)
  - Republic of Cuba
  - European Union and its Member States
  - United States of America
  - Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
  - United Nations Resident Coordinators for SIDS and the Sustainable Development Network.

**Formation:**

- In **1992**, at the **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** called for a globally accepted vulnerability assessment.
- They argued that traditional measures like **Gross National Income (GNI)** per capita did not fully capture their vulnerabilities.
- In **1994**, the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of SIDS reiterated this call.
- This call was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in resolution 49/122.
- Between **1995 and 2003**, SIDS continued to advocate for the development of a **Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)**.
- In **2005**, the **Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the SIDS Programme of Action** highlighted international concern about SIDS' vulnerability.
- In **September 2014**, during the Third International Conference on SIDS, UN member states reaffirmed their commitment.
- They pledged to take urgent and concrete action to address SIDS' vulnerabilities.

- The **SAMOA Pathway**, adopted later, called on the United Nations to develop appropriate indices.
- Following **2014**, international agencies, including the **World Bank**, set up dedicated offices for small states, special funds were created to address the specific needs of SIDS and amplified their representation in international discussions.
- In **June and August 2020, Belize**, as Chair of the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**, wrote to the UN Secretary-General.
- Belize stressed the urgent need to advance work on an MVI, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on SIDS.
- In **February 2022**, following a nomination period among member States, the PGA appointed a **12-member High Level Panel**.
- On **17 March 2022**, the President of **the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid**, launched the work of the **High-Level Panel on the development of a MVI**.
- In current scenario, The Secretary-General acknowledged the ongoing work on developing an MVI, including the recent efforts by the UN Resident Coordinator's Offices in SIDS to create a composite index.
  - He emphasized that this work will be crucial in redefining eligibility for financing sustainable development in SIDS.

#### High level panel of MVI:

- The Panel began its work in **March 2022** with a focus on reviewing relevant literature and ongoing efforts related to a multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI).
- The Panel is tasked with providing recommendations to Member States on the development of a clear and coherent MVI.
- Co-chaired by **Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Gaston Browne** and former **Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg**.
- In a systematic approach to consultation and outreach, it gathered inputs from a diverse pool of stakeholders, including potential user groups, academics, and Member States.
- The MVI should be based on the principles highlighted in **paragraphs 80-83 of A/76/211**, including its framework structure, indicators, and a methodology for weighting and aggregating indicators.
- The selected indicators should clearly differentiate between structural and non-structural factors, as well as between factors of exposure to shocks and factors of resilience.

- The Panel should make evidence-based recommendations on the most appropriate governance arrangements for the MVI.

### **Key Principles Guiding MVI Index Construction:**

- Multidimensionality - Indicators should be drawn from all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental, social) to ensure equity and broad acceptance.
- Universality - The index should be designed to capture the vulnerabilities of all developing States well, so as to ensure credibility and comparability.
- Exogeneity - The index needs to clearly distinguish between exogenous and inherited factors to ensure compatibility with current performance-based allocation models.
- Availability - The index needs to employ available, recognized, comparable and reliable data, while approximations and imputations may be necessary to avoid inaction.
- Readability - The index's design needs to be clear and easily understood, avoiding redundancy.
- In addition corresponding measures of resilience should be employed to determine "net vulnerability" over time, such that measures of vulnerabilities are balanced by resilience, thus eliminating the need for perpetual support.

### **Methodology:**

- The **Multidimensional Structural Vulnerability Index (MSVI)** is made to assess the structural vulnerability of **180 countries**, including **33 SIDS**.
- The Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) is a new benchmark for measuring structural vulnerability and resilience in sustainable development.
- The MVI has two levels:
  - Universal Assessment
  - Country-Specific profiles
- The universal level offers a quantitative assessment of vulnerability and resilience for all developing countries using a common methodology.



- Vulnerability and Resilience Country Profiles (VRCPs) provide detailed, tailored assessments of each country's specific vulnerabilities and resilience factors.
- VRCPs, prepared by individual countries, help direct support to address specific vulnerabilities and enhance resilience.
- The MVI assesses vulnerability in three critical dimensions:
  - Education,
  - Health and Disaster,
  - Living Standards.
- The **three dimensions are measured by 12 indicators**.
- By combining the deprivations encountered by each household in each of these **12 indicators**, the MVI presents a picture of vulnerability.

### **Observations by the panel:**

- Countries with high structural vulnerability typically exhibit low structural resilience, indicating a strong correlation between these two factors.
- The MVI scores show no correlation with income levels, making the MVI a valuable tool that complements Gross National Income (GNI) by providing insights that GNI alone cannot capture.
- The MVI is designed to be equitable for small countries, with **70% of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** scoring above the median, demonstrating that it does not discriminate against these nations.
- A majority of countries are categorized as **moderately vulnerable** based on their MVI scores, reflecting widespread challenges but not extreme vulnerability.
- Due to the prevalence of moderate vulnerability across most countries, establishing a definitive vulnerability threshold or cutoff, akin to income-based cutoffs used for allocating development aid, proves to be difficult.

## **Economy, Finance & Technology**

### **Arrest of Telegram's CEO**



**Recently:** Pavel Durov, the Russian-born billionaire founder and owner of the **Telegram** messaging app, was arrested at **Le Bourget airport** outside **Paris**, shortly after landing on a private jet and placed in custody for alleged offenses related to the messaging app.

- Durov was detained in France as part of a judicial inquiry opened last month involving **12 alleged** criminal violations
- The arrest warrant was issued in connection to an investigation for organized crime, drug trafficking, fraud, and the distribution of pornographic images of minors on the platform.
- The app is accused of failure to comply with the content moderation requirements.
- "Telegram abides by EU laws, including the Digital Services Act — its moderation is within industry standards and constantly improving," Telegram said in a statement on the arrest.

**About Pavel Durov:**

- Pavel Durov was **born in Russia** and now **lives in Dubai**, where Telegram is based.
- Durov is a citizen of **France, Russia, the** Caribbean island nation of **St. Kitts and Nevis**, and the **United Arab Emirates**.
- Durov founded social network **VKontakte, or VK**, in **2006**, which was also referred to as Russia's version of Facebook.
- He co - founded **Telegram** in **2013** with his elder brother **Nikolai Valeryevich** Durov, marketing it as an uncensored and neutral platform, accessible to people from all walks of life and views.
  - The app was **banned in Russia** in **2018**, after a previous refusal by him to hand over user data. The ban was **reversed in 2021**.
- He subsequently left VK after a dispute with Kremlin-linked owners on the network's management.
  - Durov had reportedly refused to cooperate with authorities on blocking late Russian opposition leader **Alexei Navalny**'s page on the platform.
- After stepping down from VK, Durov emigrated from Russia in **2014**.
- He obtained citizenship of the Caribbean island archipelago **of St. Kitts and Nevis** after making a **\$250,000 donation** to its sugar industry.
- Durov was granted **French citizenship** in **August 2021**.
- Durov is estimated to have a net worth of about **\$15.5 billion**, according to Forbes, making him the world's **121st wealthiest person**.

**Europe's Digital Services Act:**

- It is an EU regulation **adopted in 2022** that addresses illegal content, transparent advertising and disinformation.
  - It officially came into effect in **August 2023**.
- It updates the **Electronic Commerce Directive 2000** in EU law, and was proposed alongside the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)**.
- Digital Services Act (DSA) is a new set of rules that aims to make the online world safer and more transparent for users in the European Union.

- It applies to online platforms that offer goods, services, or content to EU citizens, such as social media, e-commerce, or cloud services.
- The DSA requires online platforms to take measures to **prevent and remove illegal or harmful content**, such as hate speech, terrorism, child abuse – or those that promote illegal goods.
- It also protects children from being exposed to excessive or inappropriate ads by imposing restrictions on ad targeting.
- Furthermore, it mandates online platforms to disclose how their algorithms operate and influence the content they display.
- The DSA has stricter rules for **very large online platforms**, which are those that reach more than **10% of the EU population** (about 45 million users) **per month**.
  - These platforms have to share data with researchers and authorities, cooperate with crisis response requirements, and undergo external and independent audits.

### **Issues with Telegram:**

- Telegram is an app that allows for one-on-one conversations, group chats and large “channels” that let people broadcast messages to subscribers.
- Unlike rivals such as Meta’s WhatsApp, Telegram’s group chats allow as many as **200,000 people**, compared to a maximum of **1,024 for WhatsApp**.
  - Experts have raised concerns that misinformation spreads easily in group chats of that size.
- The platform is known for having a more relaxed approach to content moderation compared to other major social platforms.
- As such, Telegram has courted criticisms, financial penalties, and service restrictions from numerous governments due to concerns it lacks sufficient content moderation tools to detect and remove illegal and harmful content.
- Notably, users are only required to provide a **phone number** to register for a Telegram — not a name, date of birth or any other identifiable information.
  - This has made it prone to scammers, who set up fake profiles and exploit them to convince people to hand over their personal or financial information.
- Telegram also offers users the ability to hold **end-to-end encrypted** conversations through its “secret chats” feature — much like WhatsApp and Apple’s iMessage.
  - It means no one but the sender and recipient can view messages, and is of major concern for governments scrutinizing the app.

- The platform has also gained a reputation for being used by fraud gangs, drug dealers, and even designated terrorist organizations, which have previously used the service to claim responsibility for attacks.

### **Apple's new CFO**



**Recently:** Tech major Apple has announced the appointment of Indian-origin executive **Kevan Parekh** as its new **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)**, effective **January 1, 2025**.

- Parekh will succeed **Luca Maestri**, a company veteran who has served as CFO since **2014**.
- Maestri will transition from his role at the end of this year but will continue to lead Apple's corporate services teams.
- Parekh's appointment comes at a critical time for Apple, as the company prepares for the launch of its **iPhone 16** series.

### **Who is Kevan Parekh?**

- Kevan Parekh is an Indian-origin electrical engineer who has previously worked in leadership positions at **Thomson Reuters** and **General Motors**.
- Parekh has a **bachelor's of science degree in electrical engineering** from the **University of Michigan** and an **MBA degree** from the **University of Chicago Booth School of Business**.

- Before Apple, Parekh worked at **Thomson Reuters** for over **four years** and at **General Motors** as the **Director of Business Development** at New York's Treasurer's Office, for over **five years**.
- Parekh has been with Apple for more than **11 years** now, having joined the tech giant in **June 2013** after his four-year stint at Thomson Reuters.
- He started his Apple career as the **head of financial support** of some of Apple's business divisions.
- He has been working as **Vice President in the Finance and Product Marketing team** at Apple in **Cupertino**.
- Parekh will become part of Apple's executive team as its CFO and report to **CEO Tim Cook**.

### **About Apple:**

- Apple Inc. is an American multinational corporation and technology company headquartered in **Cupertino, California**, in Silicon Valley.
- It is best known for its consumer electronics, software, and services.
- Apple Computer Company was founded on **April 1, 1976**, by **Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne** as a partnership.
- The company's first product is the **Apple I**, a computer designed and hand-built entirely by **Wozniak**.
- The company was **incorporated** by Wozniak and Steve Jobs in **1977**.
- Its second computer, the **Apple II**, became a best seller as one of **the first mass-produced microcomputers**.
- Apple introduced the **Lisa** in **1983** and the **Macintosh** in **1984**, as some of the **first computers** to use a **graphical user interface** and a **mouse**.
- By **1985**, the company's internal problems included the high cost of its products and power struggles between executives.
- That year **Jobs left Apple** to form **NeXT, Inc.**, and Wozniak withdrew to other ventures.
- In **1997**, Apple was weeks away from bankruptcy. To resolve its failed operating system strategy and entice Jobs's return, it bought **NeXT**.
- Over the next decade, Jobs guided Apple back to profitability through several tactics including introducing the **iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad** to critical acclaim, launching the **"Think different" campaign**.
- Jobs **resigned** in **2011** for health reasons, and **died two months later**. He was succeeded as CEO by **Tim Cook**.

- Apple became the first publicly traded U.S. company to be valued at over **\$1 trillion** in August **2018**, **\$2 trillion** in August **2020**, and at **\$3 trillion** in **January 2022**.
- As of **June 2024**, it was valued at just over **\$3.2 trillion**.

### **Indians holding top positions in Global Tech Giants:**

#### **Sundar Pichai:**

- The CEO of the world's leading tech company **Google**, Sundar Pichai was born on **July 12, 1972** in **Chennai**.
- He joined Google in **2004**.
- In **2015**, he was appointed the **CEO of Google**.
- Following this, he was made **CEO of Alphabet Inc.** in **2019**.

#### **Satya Nadella:**

- Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was born in Hyderabad in **1967** and was appointed to his current position in **2014**.

#### **Neil Mohan:**

- Neil Mohan who is of Indian origin and has done his schooling from **Lucknow**, is the CEO of **YouTube**, the world's largest video sharing platform.

#### **Shantanu Narayan:**

- Shantanu Narayan, who was born in a Telugu-speaking family in **Hyderabad**, is the CEO of **Adobe Inc.**

#### **Ajay Banga:**

- Indian-American entrepreneur Ajay Banga is the President of the **World Bank**.
- Born on **November 10, 1959** in **Pune**, Banga has earlier been the CEO of **Mastercard**.

Arvind Krishna:

- Arvind Krishna is the CEO of **IBM** and is associated with the company since **1990**.
- He took over the responsibility of **CEO in IBM** from **2020**.
- Born in **1962** in the West Godavari district of **Andhra Pradesh**, Krishna studied at **IIT Kanpur**.

Nilesh Arora:

- Indian-origin Nilesch Arora is the CEO of cybersecurity giant **Palo Alto Networks**.
- Arora who has been leading the company since **2018** was born on **February 9, 1968** in **Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad**.
- He has studied from **IIT BHU**.

Sanjay Malhotra:

- Born on **27 June 1958** in **Kanpur**, Sanjay Malhotra is the CEO of the American semiconductor chip making company **Micron**.
- He holds an engineering degree from **BITS Pilani**.

## **Unified Lending Interface (ULI)**





**Recently:** The technology platform for providing “frictionless credit” launched by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** last year as a pilot project will be introduced nationwide soon, said Reserve Banks of India Governor, **Shaktikanta Das**.

- Similar to Unified Payment Interface (UPI), which has revolutionised the retail payment system in the country, ULI is expected transform the lending landscape.

### What is Uniform Lending Interface (ULI)?

- ULI is a digital platform designed to **streamline and enhance** the lending process.
- It is intended to address the substantial unfulfilled demand for credit across various sectors, focusing on agricultural borrowers and medium, small, and micro enterprises (MSMEs).
- It will facilitate a **seamless and consent-based** flow of digital information, including land records from multiple states, to lenders.
- By simplifying and **expediting the loan application and approval process**, the ULI aims to provide a more efficient and accessible credit system for these critical sectors.
- The platform is expected to reduce the **turnaround time (TAT)** for processing and approving loans while simplifying the process for both lenders and borrowers.

- ULI architecture has common and standardised **APIs (Application Programming Interface)**, designed for a 'plug and play' approach to ensure digital access to information from diverse sources.

### **What is Unified Payment Interface (UPI)?**

- Unified Payments Interface or UPI is a real-time payment system launched in India in **April 2016** by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**.
- It is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a **single mobile application** (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- It helps in **immediate money transfer** through mobile device round the clock.
- While initial participants on the UPI platform were banks, non-bank third-party app providers and use of QR (quick-response) codes have all combined in popularising UPI.
- On **16 August 2018, UPI 2.0** was launched, which enabled users to link their overdraft accounts to a UPI handle
  - Users were also able to pre-authorise transactions by issuing a mandate for a specific merchant.
  - An AutoPay facility for recurring payments was also added.
- UPI, processed nearly **Rs 81 lakh crore** transactions in the April-July period **this year**, surpassing world's leading digital payments platforms.
- This transaction number converts to a **37% increase** on a year-over-year (YoY) basis.

## **Space, Environment & Defence**

### **Exercise Mitra Shakti**



**Recently:** The **10th edition** of the exercise 'Mitra Shakti' between the militaries of **India and Sri Lanka** was conducted from **August 12th to 25th 2024** at the **Army Training School** at **Maduru Oya** in **Sri Lanka**.

#### **About the Exercise:**

- Joint Exercise MITRA SHAKTI is an **annual training event** conducted alternatively in India and Sri Lanka.
- **Last edition** was conducted in **Pune in Nov 2023**.

- Aim of the Joint 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.
- The exercise focuses on operations in the semi-urban environment.
- Joint annual maritime exercise of Indian and Sri Lanka is called **Exercise SLINEX**.

**Contingent:**

- Indian contingent comprising of **106 personnel** was represented by a **Battalion of Rajputana Rifles** along with personnel from other arms and services.
- The Sri Lankan contingent was represented by personnel from **Gajaba Regiment** of Sri Lankan Army.

**How was the exercise conducted?**

- Based on the success of previous editions of 'Mitra Shakti', the exercise was recently upgraded from a combined arms concept to **bi-service level engagement**.
- Tactical drills rehearsed 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, among others.

## **Exercise Udara Shakti 2024**



**Recently:** After successful participation in Exercise Udara Shakti 2024 at **Malaysia**, the Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent returned to India, on **10 Aug 24**.

- The joint air exercise was conducted in collaboration with the **Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF)** from **05 to 09 August 2024** at **Kuantan, Malaysia**.

### **Key Features of the Exercise:**

- The primary aim was to enhance interoperability and cooperation between the two air forces by sharing knowledge and learning from each other's experiences.
- The IAF deployed **Su-30MKI fighter jets**, while the RMAF fielded **Su-30MKM fighters**, both of which are similar in design.

### **SU-30 Planes in Exercise:**

- In Exercise Udara Shakti 2024, the Indian Air Force and the Malaysian Royal Air Force deployed **seven Sukhoi-30 (SU-30)** fighter planes in their service.
- Both countries have bought the Sukhoi-30 fighter plane from **Russia**.

- The majority of the Sukhoi -30 planes with the Indian Air Force have been produced within India by the public-sector company **Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)** under license from Russia.
- Along with Russia, the Indian Air Force is one of the largest operators of Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jets.
- The Indian variant of the Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet is called the **Su-30MKI** (Modernizirovanny Kommercheskiy Indijskiy, meaning “Modernised Commercial for India.”)

#### How was the Exercise conducted?

- The exercise involved **joint aerial maneuvers** to test and improve combat readiness and coordination.
- Both the countries shared technical knowledge and best practices related to the maintenance and operation of the **Su-30 aircraft**.
- A unique feature of the exercise, the **HOP (Hands-On Program)** allowed pilots to exchange roles, with Indian pilots flying Malaysian Su-30MKM jets and vice versa.

#### India Malaysia Relations:

- The ties of the countries date back to the colonial era. Both countries were part of the British Empire, which influenced their administrative and legal systems.
- Diplomatic relations were established soon after India's independence in **1947** and Malaysia's in **1957**.
- Both the countries became **strategic partners** in **2010** focusing on defense, trade, and cultural exchange.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement** signed in **2011** to boost trade and investment.
- As of 2023, **bilateral trade** between India and Malaysia stands at approximately **USD 19.4 billion**.
- Other than Udara Shakti, both the countries conduct the joint military exercise '**Harimau Shakti**'.

## **Delhi Airport's Net Zero Carbon Emission Tag**



**Recently:** The **Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL)** announced that the **Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA)** has become the **first airport** in India to successfully achieve **Net Zero Carbon Emission** Airport status (**Level 5 certification**) under the **Airport Council International's (ACI) Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA)** program.

- DIAL had an initial goal to become a "**Net Zero Carbon Emission Airport**" by **2030**, which is achieved much earlier due to its leadership in sustainability and carbon management.
  - Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) is a joint venture formed as a consortium between **GMR Airports Limited (64%)**, **Airport Authority of India (AAI)** and **Fraport AG Frankfurt Airport Services Worldwide (10%)**.
- It has demonstrated significant progress in reducing its **Scope 1 and 2 CO2 emissions** by **90 per cent** by achieving Level 5 certification.
- It is committed to achieving net zero in **Scope 3** emissions by **2050**.
- DIAL has achieved **carbon-neutral status** in **2016** and **Level 4+ transition accreditation** in **2020**.

### **What is Scope 1,2 and 3 Carbon Emission?**

- The three scopes are a way of categorising the different kinds of emissions a company creates in its own operations and in its wider 'value chain' (its suppliers and customers).
- It's not clear why they're called 'scopes' rather than 'groups' or 'types' but the name comes from the **Greenhouse Gas Protocol**, which is the world's most widely used greenhouse gas accounting standard.
- **Scope 1** covers emissions from sources that an organisation **owns or controls directly**.
  - For example, from burning fuel in our fleet of vehicles.
- **Scope 2** are emissions that a company causes **indirectly** and come from where the energy it purchases and uses is produced.
  - For example, the emissions caused when generating the electricity that we use in our buildings would fall into this category.
- **Scope 3** encompasses emissions that are not produced by the company itself and are not the result of activities from assets owned or controlled by them, but by those that **it's indirectly responsible for** up and down its value chain.
  - Scope 3 emissions include all sources not within the scope 1 and 2 boundaries.
  - For example, when companies buy, use and dispose of products from suppliers.

### **What is Airport Carbon Accreditation?**

- Airport Carbon Accreditation is the only institutionally-endorsed, global carbon management certification programme for airports.
- It independently assesses and recognises the efforts of airports to manage and reduce their carbon emissions through **7 levels** of certification:
  - Mapping
  - Reduction
  - Optimisation
  - Neutrality
  - Transformation
  - Transition
  - Level 5



- It is a programme for airports of all sizes, extending beyond hubs and regional airports with scheduled passenger traffic, to include general aviation and freight-focused airports.
- It is owned and governed by **ACI EUROPE** in close cooperation with **four ACI regions** and with support of **ACI World**.
- The programme is administered by **WSP**, the environmental consultancy tasked with enforcing the strict criteria of accreditation and safeguarding the independent character of the programme's framework.

#### History:

- In **June 2008**, the Annual Assembly of ACI EUROPE adopted a landmark resolution on Climate Change in which its member airports committed to reduce carbon emissions from their operations.
  - They had an ultimate goal of becoming carbon neutral.
- One year later, at the **2009 Annual Assembly**, ACI EUROPE launched **Airport Carbon Accreditation**, allowing the assessment and recognition of participating airports' efforts to manage and reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- In the first year of its tenure, **17** of the most advanced airports in terms of environmental management joined the initiative.
- The **first region** to join ACI EUROPE's initiative was **Asia-Pacific** in **November 2011**.
- Airport Carbon Accreditation has been further extended to airports in the **African region** in **June 2013**.
- In **September 2014**, Airport Carbon Accreditation took off in **North America**.
- The programme has reached its current global span in **November 2014** with its extension to airports in **Latin America and the Caribbean**.

#### Working:

- Airports can participate in the programme at one of the **four** main progressively stringent levels of accreditation:
  - Mapping;
  - Reduction;
  - Optimisation;
  - Transformation

- In addition, airports at level 3 and 4 can choose to offset their residual emissions, thereby achieving **level 3+ (Neutrality)** and 4+ (Transition) respectively.
- In **2020**, Level 4 (Transformation) and 4+ (Transition) have been added to the programme to align it with the objectives of the Paris Agreement to limit the increase of global average temperature to **2°C** above pre-industrial levels and aim to not exceed **1.5°C**.
- Expanding on its remarkable history and acknowledging the necessity for constant enhancement, the Airport Carbon Accreditation programme has introduced **Level 5**, the **highest achievement** within the programme.
- Airports can now validate their efforts in maintaining a Net Zero carbon balance for **Scopes 1 and 2** while also addressing **Scope 3 emissions**.

#### ACI Europe:

- ACI EUROPE is the European region of **Airports Council International (ACI)**, the only worldwide professional association of airport operators.
- Based in Brussels, Belgium, ACI EUROPE represents over **500 airports in 46 European countries**.
- Their members facilitate over **90%** of commercial air traffic in Europe.
- In response to the Climate Emergency, in **June 2019** ACI EUROPE's members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by **2050**.

#### **Initiatives taken by the Delhi Airport Authorities:**

##### Renewable Energy:

- DIAL has installed a **7.84 MW** solar power plant within the airport's airside area and sources additional renewable-based electricity through open access.
- The airport currently operates entirely on renewable energy, eliminating approximately **200,000 tonnes** of CO<sub>2</sub> annually.

##### Water Management:

- With over **350 rainwater harvesting systems** and a zero liquid discharge sewage treatment plant, Delhi Airport is on track to achieve water-positive status.

#### Operational Efficiency:

- The **Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) system** has enhanced air traffic flow and reduced fuel consumption and emissions, contributing to overall operational efficiency.

#### Electric Vehicles and TaxiBots:

- DIAL has adopted electric vehicles and TaxiBots, significantly reducing fuel consumption and emissions during aircraft taxiing operations.

#### Elevated Eastern Cross Taxi Way:

- The newly operational Eastern Cross Taxi Way has reduced taxiing time, improved efficiency, and cut CO2 emissions by approximately **55,000 tonnes** annually.

#### Energy Management System:

- DIAL is the **first airport globally** to adopt and certify an **ISO 50001:2018 Energy Management System**, leading to reduced fuel and electricity consumption over the years.

## **Exercise Freedom Shield 24**



**Recently:** This year's edition of the joint **South Korea (Republic of Korea – ROK)** and the **U.S.** annual **Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise**, was conducted from **August 19 to August 29**.

- The exercise came as North Korea races to advance its nuclear and missile programmes and tries to launch reconnaissance satellites.
- About **19,000** South Korean military personnel participated in the drills, which was held alongside civil defense and evacuation drills.
- The U.S. stations around **28,500 troops** in the ROK.
- The UFS 24 exercise also comes after US and Allies, including the **ROK, Japan and Australia**, wrapped up the annual **Pacific Dragon 24 exercises**, which also saw the firing of the ship-launched Standard Missile-series.

### **About the Exercise:**

- This annual exercise aims to build understanding between **Combined Forces Command, United States Forces, the United Nations Command, and ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)**, ensuring their ability to fortify the combined defense posture and enhance Alliance response capabilities against a spectrum of security threats.
- Conducted in the spirit of the **Oct. 1, 1953, ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty** and in support of **the Armistice Agreement**, FS24 underscores the enduring military partnership between the ROK and the U.S.
- It reinforces the role of the Alliance as a linchpin for regional peace and security, reaffirming the unwavering commitment of the U.S. to defend the ROK.

### **Features of the Exercise:**

- An interesting feature of the exercise is the practice of **ACE (Agile Combat Employment)** operations by **the 8<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Fighter Wings** of the U.S. Air Force as well as the **ROKAF (Republic of Korea Air Force) units**.
- The air combat component witnessed what has been defined as the largest ever number of sorties planned, reportedly **2,000**, around the clock.
- The **US' 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing** based at **Kunsan Air Base** and **51<sup>st</sup> FW at Osan Air Base** announced their integration into the exercise
- The ROKAF reportedly participated with the **11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wings**, which are equipped with **F-15K, FA-50 and KF-16** jets.
- This year's drill, for the first time, includes government response training for a hypothetical North Korean nuclear attack.
- The ROK and the U.S. Air Forces undertook 120 hours of continuous day and night sorties for **5 days** for multi-domain missions.
- The drills incorporated realistic threats spanning across all domains, focusing on North Korea's missile threats, GPS jamming, cyberattacks, and other recent incidents.

## **ISRO's SSLV Launch** **Polaris Dawn Mission**



**Recently:** SpaceX's highly anticipated Polaris Dawn mission, which aims to send the **first-ever commercial crew to perform a spacewalk**, seems to have run into another delay, with no new launch date announced so far.

- The mission was originally scheduled to launch from **NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida** on **August 26**, but the mission was postponed by SpaceX for an additional day to allow for further **preflight inspections**.
- The launch was delayed again on **August 27** due to **unfavourable conditions** for both launch and return.
- SpaceX then aimed for an **August 28** launch, but the mission was yet again deferred to **August 30** amid concerns over splashdown weather at the mission's conclusion.
- SpaceX announced on the morning of August 30 on X that they will provide an update once teams determine the next suitable opportunity for the launch and return of the Polaris Dawn mission.

### **About the Mission:**

- SpaceX's Polaris Dawn mission is aimed to launch **American billionaire Jared Isaacman** and **three others** on a **five-day flight** to attempt the world's first private spacewalk.
- The mission is the first of **three Polaris Program** spaceflights with SpaceX, and the **second personally financed by Isaacman**.
- The mission's **Dragon Resilience capsule** is planned to reach a peak altitude of **870 miles (1,400 kilometers)**, surpassing any crewed mission in more than fifty years, since the Apollo era.
- Isaacman has not disclosed the exact amount invested in this mission, but it is known that he spent approximately **\$200 million** for the SpaceX **Inspiration4 mission** in **September 2021**, the first all-civilian orbital mission.

### **Major Objectives of the Mission:**

#### Reaching new Heights:

- Upon launch, Polaris Dawn's initial orbit will carry it to **750 miles (1,200 km)** at its highest (apogee) and **120 miles (200 km)** at its lowest (perigee).
- After validating Resilience's health, the ship's *Draco thrusters* will then raise the apogee to **870 miles (1,400 km)** — a new world record.
- Polaris Dawn will retain this apogee for **10 hours** on the **first day**, then lower it to **435 miles (700 km)** until mission's end.
- Polaris Dawn will attempt to reach the highest Earth orbit since the **1972 Apollo programme**, targeting an altitude of **700km**.
- This is almost **twice** as high as the **ISS** and **115 miles (185 km)** above the **Hubble Space Telescope's** orbital perch.
- Three times higher than the ISS, it will be the highest EVA ever in Earth orbit, smashing an altitude record **of 850 miles (1,370 km)** set by **Gemini 11** astronauts **Charles "Pete" Conrad** and **Richard "Dick" Gordon** in **September 1966**.

#### First commercial spacewalk:

- The mission will mark the first-ever commercial spacewalk, with the crew using SpaceX-designed **extravehicular activity (EVA) suits**.

- These advanced suits are designed to offer enhanced mobility, improved helmet displays, and advanced thermal management, representing a key step towards developing suits for future long-duration missions.

#### Scientific Experiments:

- During the mission, the astronauts will conduct experiments aimed at advancing our understanding of space travel and its impact on human health.
- The crew will conduct nearly **40 experiments**, a lot of which will focus on understanding the effects of long-duration spaceflight on human health.
- Key studies will explore radiation exposure and **Spaceflight sociated Neuro-Ocular Syndrome (SANS)**, a known risk to astronauts.
- They will investigate **mysterious flashes of light**, astronauts report when their eyes are closed, thought to be caused by **cosmic radiation**, and explore radiation effects on plant growth.
- The crew will investigate the **changes in eye shape** and vision some astronauts experience, possibly due to fluid shifts toward the head in microgravity, using 3D ultrasound scans and **"smart" contact lenses** with tiny sensors.
- They will collect **biological samples and test tools** for avoiding bone and muscle loss, as well as trial a new anti-nausea medication.
- And they will attempt to understand the **brain's role** in learning and remembering the space environment for repeat trips.
- Crew members will also evaluate how future deep-space travellers might diagnose and treat themselves with off-the-shelf commercial equipment and test the viability of CPR in space.

#### Starlink laser-based communications:

- The crew will also test Starlink's **laser-based satellite communications** in orbit.
- This technology aims to improve communication speed and quality, laying the foundation for future missions to destinations like the Moon and Mars.
- The mission which comprises over **6,000 satellites** aimed at improving space communication speeds.



Philanthropic Goals:

- The mission also aims to raise funds for **St. Jude Children's Research Hospital**.
- The crew is carrying a silver bar for use in future Olympic medals and four white **ceramic watches** donated **by Swiss luxury watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen** to be auctioned for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

Crew Members:Jared Isaacman:

- Jared Isaacman, the **mission commander**, is set to lead his four-member team through this historic expedition, which will include the first-ever spacewalk performed by private citizens.
- Commander **Jared "Rook" Isaacman** founded the **Shift4 payments** firm as a teenager.
- An accomplished aviator, in **2009** he circumnavigated the globe in **61 hours**.
- And in **2021**, Isaacman commanded Inspiration4, the first all-civilian spaceflight, whose crew featured the first astronaut with a prosthesis and raised **\$250 million** for **St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital**.

Scott Poteet:

- **Pilot Scott "Kidd" Poteet**, a retired Air Force fighter pilot and combat veteran, graduated from Air Force Weapons School and as a Thunderbird flew with Britain's famed Red Arrows.
- Poteet previously served as **Inspiration4 mission director**.

Sarah Gillis:

- Sarah Gills is **the mission specialist** and **lead space operations engineer** at **SpaceX**.
- Gillis first interned at SpaceX and later, as a space operations engineer, helped train astronauts for flight aboard the **Dragon capsule** — including the Inspiration4 crew.
- She will fly to the highest altitude ever attained by a woman.

Anna Menon:

- Menon is the **mission specialist and medical officer**, also a **lead space operations engineer** at SpaceX.
- She was a former **International Space Station (ISS) biomedical flight controller** before joining SpaceX as a mission director.
- She will also fly to the highest altitude ever attained by a woman.
- They will more than double the **358 miles (576 km)** reached by astronauts **Kathy Thornton, Nancy Currie, and Megan McArthur** across **three Hubble Space Telescope repair flights** between **1993 and 2009**.

How will the mission work?

- During the Polaris Dawn mission, the spacecraft will reach its **highest altitude** on the **first day**, briefly entering the **Van Allen radiation belt**.
  - With high concentrations of electrons and energetic protons, the Van Allen belts are **harmful to humans** if exposed for prolonged periods.
  - The crew's expected radiation dosage over just **five days** in this environment is equivalent to **three months** aboard the ISS.
  - The crew will use **radiation monitors and badges** to log their received doses.
- On the **third day** of the mission, the crew will utilize their advanced **EVA spacesuits**—featuring heads-up displays, helmet cameras, and enhanced joint mobility systems—for their historic spacewalk.
- To begin the spacewalk, Isaacman will scale a ladder (nicknamed the **skywalker**) mounted in Resilience's docking port and open the motor-driven hatch, exposing the entire crew to vacuum.
- That will break a record for the **greatest number of humans simultaneously exposed to space**.
  - This dates to **May 1992**, when **Pierre Thuot, Rick Hieb, and Tom Akers** made the first (and only) **three-man EVA** during space shuttle **Endeavour's STS-49 mission**.
- Each astronaut will spend **15 to 20 minutes** outside the spacecraft, **435 miles** above Earth's surface.
- On **day four**, the crew will use Starlink to connect with ground-based doctors for a **telemedicine test**.
- After **five days**, Resilience will **splash down** off the coast of Florida.

## **Sunita Williams' extended space venture**



**Recently:** Nasa has announced significant changes to its upcoming **SpaceX Crew-9 mission** to the **International Space Station (ISS)** in order to bring back the two astronauts **Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore** who have stayed in space longer than the initially planned duration of their mission.

### **What is the change?**

- The mission, now scheduled for September 24, 2024 launch, will see a reduced crew of **two astronauts** instead of the originally planned four.
- **Nasa astronaut Nick Hague** will command the mission, joined by **Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov** as mission specialist.
- The most notable change affects astronauts **Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore**, who were launched to the ISS in June aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft.

- Instead of returning with Crew-9 as initially planned, Williams will now remain on the station until **February 2025**, when they will return to Earth with Hague and Gorbunov.
- Previously announced crew members **Zena Cardman and Stephanie Wilson** will not fly on this mission but remain eligible for future assignments.
- Both astronauts expressed their support for their colleagues and commitment to the mission's success.

### **About the Starliner Mission:**

- The mission, a part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program, is the **first crewed flight** for the Starliner spacecraft.
- The mission aimed to test the **end-to-end capabilities** of the spacecraft's system, including launch, docking and return to Earth in the western United States.
- The astronauts lifted off on June 5, aboard Boeing's **Starliner spacecraft** on a **United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket** from the **Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral, Florida**.
- The crew docked at the **orbiting laboratory**, where they were planned to stay for about a **week** and begin its return journey towards earth on June 26.
- NASA extended Sunita Williams' and her colleague Butch Wilmore's stay at the ISS got extended after the space agency decided to return the Starliner spacecraft back to Earth uncrewed due to technical problems.
- The Boeing website describes the **CST-100 Starliner** as a "space capsule that will take people to and from low-Earth orbit."
  - Low Earth Orbit refers to Earth-centered orbits with an altitude of **2,000 km or less**.
- Starliner's spacecraft was developed in collaboration with **NASA's Commercial Crew Program**.
- It can accommodate up to **seven passengers** or a mix of crew and cargo for LEO missions. It is also reusable up to **10 times** with **a six-month turnaround time**.
- Its significance also lies in the fact that NASA stopped its Space Shuttle Program in **2011** and needed private players to step in.
  - Back in **2012**, SpaceX's **Dragon spacecraft** became the first commercial spacecraft to deliver cargo to and from the ISS.
  - In **2020**, it became the first to take humans to space and bring them back.

**Reason for Delay:**

- The spacecraft was supposed to reach the ISS and dock and stay latched onto it for **eight days**.
- This would allow the astronauts to work on the ISS, where multiple countries' astronauts carry out research and experiments.
- Then, it would un-dock and fly the astronauts back to Earth. The mission was mainly aimed at proving the spacecraft's ability to take the crew and bring them back.
- The delay in launch was linked to issues detected in a spacecraft valve responsible for regulating the **flow of oxidisers**.
  - On spacecraft, oxidisers are chemicals that help rockets during lift-off and in changing the rocket's path by aiding combustion.
- Since its **June 5 liftoff**, the capsule has had five helium leaks, five maneuvering thrusters go dead and a propellant valve fail to close completely, prompting the crew in space and mission managers in Houston to spend more time than expected pursuing fixes mid-mission
- The spacecraft can remain docked for up to **45 days**.
- Beyond that, the ISS has supplies and other materials that can last for several months. Therefore, there is no immediate danger to the two astronauts.
- Further, the spacecraft can be brought to Earth in case of an emergency, but the space agency is looking to understand the nature of the problem first in the interest of the next such mission.

**Who is Sunita Williams?**

- Known for her record-breaking accomplishments, Sunita Williams was born in **Euclid, Ohio**, to Mumbai Indian-American neuroanatomist **Deepak Pandya** and Slovene-American **Ursuline Bonnie (Zalokar) Pandya**.
- She received her commission as an Ensign in the **United States Navy** from the United States Naval Academy in May **1987**.
- She was selected as an **astronaut** by the US space agency, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in June **1998**.
- Williams has spent a total of **322 days in space** over the course of her two missions.

**Her Previous two Space Missions:**

- Sunita Williams is a veteran of two space missions — **Expeditions 14/15 and 32/33.**

**Expedition 14/15:**

- This mission lasted from **December 9, 2006 till June 22, 2007.**
- As a member of the Expedition 14 crew, Williams served as the **flight engineer.**
- She concluded her tour of duty as a member of the Expedition 15 crew returning to Earth with the **STS-117 crew** to land at **Edwards Air Force Base, California.**
- While on board, Williams established a world record for female astronauts with **four spacewalks, totalling 29 hours and 17 minutes.**
- Her record was later broken by **Astronaut Peggy Whitson** in **2008** with a total of **five spacewalks.**

**Expedition 32/33:**

- Williams was also part of a long-duration mission as **flight engineer** for **Expedition 32** and **International Space Station commander** for **Expedition 33.**
- She was launched from the **Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan**, along with **Russian Soyuz commander Yuri Malenchenko** and **Flight Engineer Akihiko Hoshide** of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency on **July 14, 2012.**
- Williams spent **four months** conducting **research and exploration** aboard the orbiting laboratory.
- She landed in Kazakhstan on **November 18, 2012**, after spending **127 days in space.**
- During their expedition, Williams and Hoshide performed **three spacewalks** to replace a component that relays power from the space station's solar arrays to its systems, and repair an **ammonia leak** on a station radiator.
- With **50 hours and 40 minutes**, Williams once again held the record for total cumulative spacewalk time by a female astronaut, which was later broken by **Whitson** who did **10 spacewalks.**

**Awards:**

- Among her many awards and honours, Ms Williams, a retired US Navy Captain, has been awarded the:
  - Defense Superior Service Medal – Twice,
  - The Legion of Merit,
  - The Navy Commendation Medal – Twice,
  - The Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal,
  - The Humanitarian Service Medal, among others.

### **Other Extended Space Visits:**

#### Sergei Krikalev:

- There's one famous case of Russian cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev, who had logged over **800 days** aboard the **International Space Station, Mir space station, Soyuz spacecraft, and the space shuttle**.
- Krikalev had launched on **Soyuz TM-12** in **May 1991**. He returned to Earth in **March 1992**.
- His return was delayed and he stayed on the **MIR space station** board for **311 consecutive days, twice** as long as the mission had originally called for.
- During that time, the Soviet Union collapsed and a new Russia was born. For this, Krikalev is sometimes called '**the last Soviet citizen**'.
- As per the European Space Agency, in July 1991, Krikalev had agreed to stay on Mir as **flight engineer** for the next crew, scheduled to arrive in October because the next two planned flights had been reduced to one.

#### Frank Rubio:

- Rubio's mission is the **longest single spaceflight** by a US astronaut in history.
- He spent **371 days** in space aboard the International Space Station in a "record-breaking mission".
- He had launched aboard **Roscosmos Soyuz MS-22** on **September 21, 2022** alongside **Roscosmos cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin**.
- He was scheduled to take the same spacecraft back to Earth in **March 2023**.

- However, had to catch a ride on a different Soyuz in **September 2023**.
- Rubio's mission was delayed because of a coolant leak in his Soyuz spacecraft.

## **Important Days**

### **National Handloom Day 2024**

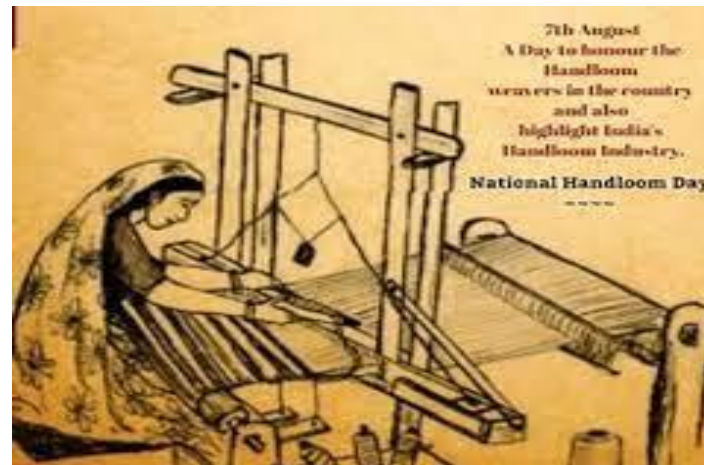


Image Credit- VajiRam IAS

**Recently:** The **9<sup>th</sup>** edition **National Handloom Day** was observed on **7<sup>th</sup> August 2024**.

- The day honours the handloom weavers and their significant role in the country's economy and culture.



- This occasion highlights the significance of the handloom industry in our past and provides more power to those who are employed in it.
- As most of the weavers (70%) in this field are women, this day presents a crucial opportunity to express our appreciation and support towards them.
- The day was celebrated with the participation of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on August 7th at **Bharat Mandapam** in **Pragati Maidan, Delhi**.

### **Theme:**

- The theme designated for National Handloom Day in 2024 is **"Weaving Sustainable Futures"**.
- This theme underscores the importance of sustainable fashion and eco-friendly choices.

### **History:**

- The origins of National Handloom Day can be traced back to the **Swadeshi Movement of 1905**.
  - This movement was aimed at boycotting British goods in favour of Indian-made products, and handloom textiles were one of the key products that were promoted during this time.
  - In a poignant gesture at **Princess Park near India Gate**, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru hoisted the **khadi-made Indian flag**, symbolizing the nation's journey toward freedom "at the stroke of midnight hour."
  - With its inception on August 7, the Swadeshi Movement lent its significance to the designation of National Handloom Day.
- The Government of India officially designated August 7 as National Handloom Day in **2015**.

### **Significance:**

- National Handloom Day is a day to commemorate the centuries-old tradition of handloom weaving in India.
- It is an occasion to acknowledge the significant contribution of handloom weavers to the Indian economy, as they provide employment to millions of people.
- It aims to promote sustainable fashion, as handloom textiles are produced using natural fibres and traditional techniques that have a minimal environmental impact.

## **World Tribal Day 2024**



**Recently:** The 2024 edition of the **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples** also known as World Tribal Day was observed on **August 09**.

- The day offers a chance to spread awareness of the difficulties and problems that indigenous populations confront, such as land rights, cultural preservation, prejudice, marginalisation, and social and economic inequities.

### **What is a tribe?**

- A tribe is a group of people who share a common religion, history, language, or culture. Each tribe is unique and often will have its own practices, many of which differ from other tribes.

- They represent **5,000 distinct civilizations** and an estimated **476 million people** living across **90 countries** that speak the vast majority of the world's estimated **7,000 languages**.

### **Theme for the world Tribal Day 2024:**

- The theme of World Tribal Day in 2024 is ***"Protecting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial Contact."***
- It highlights the need for their survival is crucial to the protection of our planet, while also protecting cultural and linguistic diversity.

### **History:**

- United Nations decided to observe **August 09** as The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in **1994**.
- It marks the inaugural meeting of Geneva-based Working Group on **Indigenous Populations of the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights** in **1982**.

### **Tribal Population in India:**

- As per the **2011 census**, **10.42 crore** Indians are notified as '**Scheduled Tribes**' (ST), which constitute **8.6%** of countries total population.
- **Bhil** is the largest tribe in India constituting **38%** of the Scheduled Tribal population.
- Other major tribes include: Gond, Munda, Santhals, Toto and warli.
- As per the 2011 census, **Madhya Pradesh** is the state with highest tribal population in India.
- STs form the largest ration of the overall population in **Mizoram and Lakshadweep**.

### **Constitutional Provisions for the Scheduled Tribes:**

- **Article 23**- Prohibits traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour has a special significance for Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 15(4)**- Provides for reservation in educational institutions for the Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4)**- Provides for reservation in Posts and services for the Scheduled Tribes.

- STs are given **7.5% reservation** in jobs and educational institutions.
- **Article 243D-** provides reservation of Seats for Scheduled Tribes in Panchayats.
- **Article 330-** Provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People (Lok Sabha).
  - The Lok Sabha reserved **47 seats** for the Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 332-** Provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in Legislative Assemblies of the States.
- **Article 342-** Provides for the recognition of the STs by the President.
- **Article 46-** It is Directive Principle of State Policy that provides that the State shall promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **5<sup>th</sup> Schedule-** It deals with the administration and control of the Scheduled Areas as well as of STs residing in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- **6<sup>th</sup> Schedule-** It describes the establishment of autonomous district councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

## **World Humanitarian Day 2024**



**Recently:** The 2024 edition of the World Humanitarian Day was observed on **August 19<sup>th</sup>**.

- The day recognizes, and aims to raise awareness of, the work of humanitarians around the world.
- It honours efforts of aid workers who selflessly help those in need.

**Theme:**

- The theme of the 2024 World Humanitarian Day global campaign is **#ActForHumanity**.
- As the UN explains, the campaign aims to “mobilize our collective efforts to ensure the protection of humanitarians and civilians and to demand accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and other international norms.

**History:**

- World Humanitarian Day takes place on the 19 August every year to mark the anniversary of the **2003 bomb attack** on the UN headquarters at **Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq**.
  - It also killed the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, **Sergio Vieira de Mello**.
- The **UN General Assembly** designated **August 19** as World Humanitarian Day in **2008**.

**National Space Day 2024**

**Recently:** India observed the first National Space Day **August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2024**.

- It marks the successful landing of the **Vikram Lander** from the **Chandrayaan-3** mission which was a follow-up to **Chandrayaan-2** and aimed to demonstrate the ability to safely land and roam on the lunar surface.

- Celebrations for National Space Day took place at **Bharat Mandapam** in **New Delhi**, with events streamed live on ISRO's official website and YouTube channel.
- **April 12<sup>th</sup>** is observed as the **International Space Day** commemorating the date in **1961** when **Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin** carried out the **first ever human space flight**, opening the way for space exploration for the benefit of all humanity.

#### **Theme for the first edition:**

- The theme for National Space Day 2024 is **"Touching Lives while Touching the Moon: India's Space Saga,"**.
- It highlights the broader impact of space exploration on society and emphasising how advancements in space technology can enhance the quality of life on Earth.

#### **Establishment:**

- The Indian government officially designated August 23 as National Space Day in recognition of this significant accomplishment, reflecting India's expanding capabilities in space exploration.

#### **Chandrayaan – 3:**

- It is India's third lunar mission which was launched from the country's only spaceport **Sriharikota** on **July 13** at 2.30 pm
- It was launched onboard **Launch Vehicle Mark-III (LVM3)**.
- The landing site for the integrated **Vikram lander** and **Pragyan rover** remained the same as Chandrayaan 2 near the south pole of the moon at **70 degrees latitude**.
- It became the first mission to soft land near the southern pole of the moon after making a successful landing on August 23rd, 2023.
- The point where the Chandrayaan-3 lander touched down on the lunar surface has been named **Shiv Shakti**.
- The spot where Chandrayaan- 2 crashed in 2019 is to be named as **Tiranga**.
- The site where the Moon Impact Probe crash landed during Chandrayaan- 1 has been named as **Jawahar Sthal or Jawahar Point**.

- Previously, only the **United States, China and the former Soviet Union** have completed soft landings on the lunar surface.
- Chandrayaan-3's landing site is also closer to the moon's south pole than any other spacecraft in history, making India, the **first nation ever to land on the lunar south pole.**
- **The south pole region** is considered an area of key scientific and strategic interest for spacefaring nations, as scientists believe the region to be home to water ice deposits.
  - The water, frozen in shadowy craters, could be converted into rocket fuel or even drinking water for future crewed missions.