



CURRENT AFFAIRS COMPENDIUM – JANUARY 2024

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1. India- Myanmar Free Movement Regime



Source- <https://www.sentinelassam.com/more-news/editorial/complexities-of-free-movement-regime-with-myanmar>

Recently: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 20th announced that the Centre has decided to fence the entire length of the **India-Myanmar border** in order to stop the free movement of people.

- Government sources cited by the media said that they also plan to equip the border with an **“advanced smart fencing system”** within **four-and-half years**.
- The two countries share a largely unfenced **1,643 km** border, which goes through the states of **Manipur (398km), Mizoram (510km), Nagaland (215km) and Arunachal Pradesh (520km)**.
- The **Border Road Organization** is fencing the strategic India- Myanmar Border, starting with a **10km stretch** in Manipur.
 - The next **80km** stretch in Manipur has been **identified** and the remaining 250km is in the planning stage.

- In late 2023, the government also announced its target of fencing the entire **4,096km** of **India- Bangladesh** Border by **March 2024**.

What is a Free Movement Regime (FMR)?

- The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to **16 km** inside the other country without a visa.
- It allows communities living along the border to travel to the other country for a period of up to **two weeks**.
- They require a border pass with **one-year validity**.
- The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in **1826** through the **Treaty of Yandabo**, without seeking the opinion of the people living in the region.
- The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without their consent.
- People in the region have strong ethnic and familial ties across the border.
- The regime facilitated **people- to- people contact** and was supposed to provide **impetus to local trade and business**.

Formation:

- Burma (Myanmar) was a part of the British India colony but in **1937** Burma was split off from India and became a **separate colony**.
- India gained independence in 1947 while Burma gained independence in 1948.
- In **1950s**, Government allowed Indian and Burmese citizens to enter either side without passport or visa up to **40 km**.
 - Burmese could stay for **72 hours** in India, while Indians could stay for only **24 hours** in Myanmar.
- In **1968**, India tightened FMR with a **new permit system**. The permit was to be issued by either side for their citizens for the temporary entry.
 - The rise of insurgency in Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland then had sparked concerns over the FMR in India.
- In **2004**, India limited the FMR distance to **16 km from 40 km**.
 - In addition, instead of allowing people to cross from multiple points, **only three places** were allowed to be used as the gateways - **Pangsau in Arunachal Pradesh, Moreh in Manipur, and Zokhawthar in Mizoram**.

- In **2018**, India and Myanmar signed the Agreement on **Land Border Crossing**.
 - The agreement facilitated the regulation and harmonisation of already existing free movement rights for people ordinarily residing in the border areas of both countries.

Need for Border Protection:

Migration:

- The illegal migration of tribal **Kuki-Chin people** into India from Myanmar is one of the key issues in the ongoing Manipur conflict.
- Since the military coup in Myanmar on **February 1, 2021**, the ruling junta has launched a campaign of persecution against the Kuki-Chin peoples.
- This has pushed large number of Myanmar's tribals across the country's western border into India, especially into Manipur and Mizoram, where they have sought shelter.
- While the refugees have been assisted by the local communities in Mizoram and Nagaland, the Manipur government and civil society groups in the state's Imphal valley have registered their protest against the continuing influx of Myanmar's citizens.

Trafficking:

- Many insurgent groups have built camps in *Sagaing Division, Kachin State, and Chin State (in Myanmar)*.
- They took shelter there, obtained arms, trained cadres, and engaged in illegal activities such as smuggling drugs and selling weapons to raise funds.
- This is possible because of the porous borders and frequent misuse of FMR.
- Data from the Manipur Chief Minister's Office show that 500 cases were registered and 625 individuals were arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in Manipur in 2022.

Earlier Attempts:

- In March **2003**, fencing work began along the India- Myanmar Border due to increasing migration, cross- border insurgency, smuggling, drug trafficking, etc.
- In **2004**, fencing work in the **state of Manipur** along the border was **stalled** due to protests raised by the local Kuki and Naga communities.
- According to them, a huge stretch of land would become Myanmar's territory and foster unrest among people living on both sides of the border.
- In **Manipur, less than 6 km** of the border is fenced.
- As the crisis in Myanmar escalated and the influx of refugees increased, India **suspended the FMR in September 2022**.
- Given the interests of the local population, however, neither the complete removal of the FMR nor full fencing of the border may be desirable.

Myanmar:

- Myanmar (**formerly Burma**) is a **Southeast Asian nation** of more than **100 ethnic groups**.
- The name Burma was changed in **1989**.
- It borders with **India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand**.
- The capital of Myanmar is **Naypyidaw** and the current leader of the country is **Min Aung Hlaing**.
- Myanmar was long considered a pariah state while under the rule of a military junta from **1962 to 2011**.
- A gradual liberalisation began in **2010**, leading to free elections in **2015**.
- The installation of a government led by veteran opposition leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** followed the next year in **2016**.
- But a **2017** army operation in **Rakhine state** drove more than half a million **Muslim Rohingyas** to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh and India.
- This was confirmed when **Aung San Suu Kyi** and her government were overthrown in a coup in **February 2021**.
- Myanmar is geopolitically significant to India as it stands at the **center of the India-Southeast Asia geography**.
- Myanmar is the **only Southeast Asian country** that shares a land border with northeastern India.

2. Mandatory ABPS under MGNREGS



Source- The New Indian Express

Recently: From January 1st 2024, all wages under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** scheme must be paid through an **Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS)**, which requires workers' Aadhaar details to be seeded to their job cards.

- The **first order** to enforce ABPS was issued on **January 30, 2023**, followed by extensions till February 1, March 31, June 30, August 31, and finally December 31.
- The decision has left over **1.78 crore** of 14.32 crore active workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), ineligible to seek jobs.

What is MGNREGA?

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005** or MGNREGA is an Indian social welfare measure that aims to guarantee the '**right to work**'.
- It was earlier known as the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** or **NREGA**.
- This act was passed on 23 August 2005 and was implemented in **February 2006** through the launch of the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)** under the UPA government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
- The act was first **proposed in 1991** by then Prime Minister **P.V. Narasimha Rao**.
- It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing **at least 100 days** of wage employment in a financial year to **at least one member** of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- **Women** are guaranteed **one third** of the jobs made available under the MGNREGA.
- Employment is to be provided **within 5 km of an applicant's residence**, and minimum wages are to be paid.
- If work is not provided within **15 days** of applying, applicants are entitled to an **unemployment allowance**. Thus, employment under MGNREGA is a **legal entitlement**.
- The registration process involves an application to the **Gram Panchayat** and issue of **job cards**.
- **Ministry of Rural Development** is the nodal agency for MGNREGS.
- The statute was praised by the government as "the largest and most ambitious social security and public works program in the world".
- In 2009 the World Bank had chided the act along with others for hurting development through policy restrictions on internal movement.
- However, in its **World Development Report 2014**, the World Bank termed it as a "**stellar example of rural development**".

Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS):

- It is a **2017 scheme** that utilizes the unique **12-digit Aadhaar number** as a financial address for beneficiaries.
- To be paid under ABPS, a worker's Aadhaar details must be seeded to workers' job card.
- Aadhaar details must be **linked with their bank account** and Aadhaar must be mapped with the **National Payments Corporation of India (NCPI)** database.

- NPCI is an initiative of **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** and **Indian Banks' Association (IBA)** that was founded in **2008**.
- It is registered under **Section 8** of the **Companies Act 2013** and is headquartered in **Mumbai, Maharashtra**.
- ABPS makes it possible to verify the authenticity of the beneficiaries, ensuring that only eligible individuals receive payments.
- By integrating Aadhaar, the system can identify cases where individuals have multiple job cards in different locations or under different names, preventing duplicate claims.
- Conditions that can lead to deletion of Job Cards:
 - Fake job card (incorrect job card)
 - Duplicate job card
 - Household not willing to work
 - Family shifted from gram panchayat permanently
 - Single person on job card and that person is expired
- Of the **25.25 crore** registered workers under the flagship rural jobs scheme, **14.35 crore** are categorised as **active workers**.
 - A worker is considered active if he/she has worked for even **one day in the past three years** under the MGNREGS.
 - Till **December 27**, **12.7%** of these active workers are still **not eligible for ABPS**.
- According to information available on the MGNREGS portal, **Nagaland (20.6 percent)**, **Meghalaya (21.5 percent)** and **Assam (48.1 percent)** have less than 50 percent of active workers eligible for ABPS payments.
- **Kerala** is the only state where **100 percent active workers** are eligible for ABPS payment.
- **Andhra Pradesh (99.1 percent)**, **Tamil Nadu (97.9 percent)**, **Himachal Pradesh (96.5 percent)**, **Tripura (94.5 percent)** and **Karnataka (94.5 percent)** are other states where over 95 percent workers are eligible for ABPS payment.

Criticism:

- Facing pressure from the Union government to have 100% ABPS-eligible job cards, **States have deleted a number of cards** which were not eligible for Aadhaar payments.

- This includes cases where there were discrepancies between the two documents, the Aadhaar and the job card, such as different spellings of workers' names.
- According to LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists, **7.6 crore workers** have been deleted from the system over the **last 21 months**.
- Against this, the Union Government claims that since, **April 2022**, about **2.85 crore** job cards have been deleted by following the due process by the states.
- Compelling the use of ABPS with more than one-third of the total MNREGA registered workers rendered ineligible will inevitably lead to the **denial of the right to work**.
- This stands in direct **contravention to the aim of the Act** passed by the Parliament.

Constitutional Provisions:

- The Act aims to follow the Directive Principles of State Policy enunciated in **Article 41** under **Part IV** of the Constitution of India.
 - Article 41 directs the State to **secure to all citizens the right to work**.
- **Article 40** mandates the State to **organise village panchayats** and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.
 - Conferring the primary responsibility of implementation **on Gram Panchayats**, the act further enforces the process of decentralization initiated by **73rd Amendment** to the Constitution in **1992**.
- The act also embodies the rights conferred under **Article 21** of the Constitution of India that guarantees the **right to live with dignity** to every citizen of India.
 - The act imparts dignity to the rural people through an assurance of livelihood security.
- **Article 16(1)** of the Constitution of India guarantees **equality of opportunity** in matters of public employment.
 - This is again enforced by the act through generation of 47% of the total person-days by women and 51% of the total person-days by SCs/STs.
- **Article 16(4)** allows the state to **make special provisions for the reservation of appointments** or posts in favour of backward or vulnerable classes.
 - This is observed through the guarantee of **one third** of the jobs made available under the MGNREGA, to **women**.

3. Padma Awards 2024



Source- <https://education.sakshi.com/en/current-affairs/awards/full-list-padma-award-winners-2024-148282>

Recently: The Central Government announced the full list of the Padma Awardees for the year 2024 on the **eve of Republic Day**.

- President has approved conferment of **132 Padma Awards** including **2 duo cases**.
- The list comprises **5 Padma Vibhushan**, **17 Padma Bhushan** and **110 Padma Shri Awards**.
- **30** of the awardees are **women** and the list also includes **8 persons** from the category of **Foreigners / NRI / PIO / OCI** and **9 Posthumous awardees**.
- **Former Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, actors Chiranjeevi and Vyjayanthimala Bali, and Bharatanatyam dancer Padma Subrahmanyam** will be conferred with **Padma Vibhushan**, the country's second highest civilian award.
 - Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International, will be conferred with the award posthumously.
- **M. Fathima Beevi**, the first female judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court of India is conferred with **Padma Bhushan** posthumously.
- **Young Liu, chairman of Taiwan's Foxconn Group**, has also been conferred with a **Padma Bhushan**.

- **Actor Mithun Chakraborty; singer Usha Uthup, Hindi music director Pyarelal Sharma (of Laxmikant-Pyarelal duo); and senior journalist Kundan Vyas** have been also conferred with **Padma Bhushan** this year.
- Tennis star Rohan Bopanna, veteran squash player Joshna Chinappa, hockey player Harbinder Singh, Mallakhamb practitioner Uday Deshpande, archer Purima Mahtao, para badminton coach Gaurav Khanna and para swimmer Satendra Singh Lohia were chosen for the Padma Shri honour.

Padma Vibhushan Awardees:

SN	Name	Field	State/Region/Country
1	Ms. Vyjayantimala Bali	Art	Tamil Nadu
2	Shri Konidela Chiranjeevi	Art	Andhra Pradesh
3	Shri M Venkaiah Naidu	Public Affairs	Andhra Pradesh
4	Shri Bindeshwar Pathak (Posthumous)	Social Work	Bihar
5	Ms. Padma Subrahmanyam	Art	Tamil Nadu

The list of Padma Bhushan and Padma Shree Awardees can be accessed from pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1999790

What are Padma Awards?

- The Padma Awards are one of the **highest civilian honours** of India announced annually on the **eve of Republic Day**.

- The Government of India instituted two civilian awards- **Bharat Ratna & Padma Vibhushan** in **1954**.
- The latter had three classes namely **Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg and Tisra Varg**.
- These were subsequently renamed as **Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri** vide Presidential Notification issued on **January 8, 1955**.
- The Padma Awards are announced every year since 1954 on the occasion of Republic Day except for brief interruption(s) during the years **1978 and 1979 and 1993 to 1997**.
- The award is given in **three categories**, namely,
 - Padma Vibhushan- For exceptional and distinguished service;
 - Padma Bhushan- For distinguished service of a high order; and
 - Padma Shri- For distinguished service.
- The awards are presented by the **President** of India usually in the month of **March/April** every year.
- The awardees are presented a **Sanad (certificate)** signed by the President and a **medallion**.
- The recipients are also given a small replica of the medallion, which they can wear during any ceremonial/State functions etc.
- The names of the awardees are published in the **Gazette of India** on the day of the presentation ceremony.
- The total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should **not be more than 120**.

Eligibility and Selection Criteria:

- **All persons** without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards.
- However, **Government servants** including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are **not eligible** for these Awards.
- The award seeks to recognize works of distinction and is given for distinguished and exceptional achievements/service in all fields of activities/disciplines.
- The award is **normally not conferred posthumously**.
 - However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously.
- A higher category of Padma award can be conferred on a person only where a period of **at least five years** has elapsed since conferment of the earlier Padma award.

- However, in highly deserving cases, a relaxation can be made by the Awards Committee.

Padma Awards Committee:

- All nominations received for Padma Awards are placed before the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the **Prime Minister** every year.
- The Padma Awards Committee is **headed by** the **Cabinet Secretary** and includes **Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons** as members.
- The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

Bharat Ratna:

- Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award of the country that was instituted in **1954** along with the Padma Awards.
- It is awarded in recognition of **exceptional service/performance of the highest order** in any field of human endeavour.
- The recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made **by the Prime Minister to the President** of India.
 - **No formal recommendations** for Bharat Ratna are necessary.
- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a **maximum of three** in a particular year.
- The **provision to confer this award posthumously** was not there in the original statute and was added in **1966**.
- The award was restricted to accomplishments in certain fields but its ambit was expanded in **2011** to include human **endeavours in any field**.
- The **first Bharat Ratna** was awarded to **Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Sir CV Raman and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari** in **1954**.
- In January 2024, Former Chief Minister of **Bihar Kapoori Thakur** became the **49th Bharat Ratna Awardee**.
 - He also became the **17th person** to receive the award posthumously.
- **Sachin Tendulkar** became the **1st sportsman** and youngest Bharat Ratna Awardee in **2014**.
- **Subhash Chandra Bose** was conferred the award posthumously in **1992** but his family declined the award.

4. Minority Status of Aligarh Muslim University



Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/aligarh-muslim-univeristy-minority-status-supreme-court-centre/>

Recently: A **seven-judge Bench** of the Supreme Court (SC) led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud is currently hearing the **57-year-long** dispute over the minority character of the **Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)**.

- The seven- judge bench comprised **Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Surya Kant, J B Pardiwala, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Sharma.**

What is Minority Status?

- **Article 30(1)** in **Part III** of the Constitution empowers all religious and linguistic minorities with a fundamental right **to establish and administer educational institutions** of their choice.
- In the case of ***Re, Kerala Education Bill vs. Unknown (1958)***, the court held that Article 30 provides the right to minorities to establish educational institutions of their choice for two purposes:

- To conserve their religion, culture, and language,
- To provide education to their children according to their choice in their own language.
- **Article 30(2)** ensures that the State maintains '**equality of treatment**' in **granting aid** to all educational institutions, irrespective of their minority status.
- Notably, these institutions enjoy **exemptions from** the implementation of **SC, ST, and OBC reservations** in both admissions and employment.
- Additionally, they can **reserve up to 50% of seats** for students from their community.
- They can also exercise greater control over employees compared to other institutions.
- In the **T.M.A Pai Foundation (2002)** case, the SC clarified that a 'minority' is to be determined by the concerned State's demography, not the national population.

Background:

Formation:

- AMU was founded by **Syed Ahmed Khan**, a judge, and educationist, as the **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College** in **1877**.
- In **1920**, the institution gained **University status** through an Act of the Indian Legislative Council, the **Aligarh Muslim University Act, 1920**.
 - This transition elevated the MOA College to become **Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)**.

The 1951 Amendment:

- The AMU Act was **first amended** in 1951.
- The **Section 23** of the 1920 Act stated that **governing body members** of AMU must contain **people from the Islamic faith**.
 - This provision was later **removed** in the 1951 AMU Act following suggestions from a **22-member** select committee.
 - This committee included some renowned names such as freedom fighter Deshbandhu Gupta, former minister Syama Prasad Mukherjee, BR Ambedkar, and former president Zakir Hussain, who was also vice-chancellor of AMU.

- The 1920 Act said that the **Governor General of India** would be the **head of the University**.
 - But in 1951, they changed it to replace '**Lord Rector**' with '**Visitor,**' and this Visitor would be the **President of India**.

The 1965 Amendment:

- In 1965, the Aligarh Muslim University Act was amended yet again.
- It gave the **President** of India the power to **appoint the governing body members** of the varsity, thus bringing it under the central government.

The Dispute:

- The alterations in the AMU's structure faced a legal challenge in the Supreme Court.
- The legal dispute began in **1967** when the SC in ***S. Azeez Basha versus Union of India (UOI)***, reviewed the 1951 and 1965 amendments.
 - The petitioners argued primarily on the grounds that Muslims established AMU and, therefore, had the **right to manage** it.
 - However, a **five-judge SC bench upheld the amendments**, reasoning that AMU was neither established nor administered by the Muslim minority.
 - The court emphasized, AMU was **established through a central Act** to ensure the government's recognition of its degrees.
 - So, while the Act may have been passed as a result of the efforts of the Muslim minority, it does not imply that the University, under the 1920 Act, was established by the Muslim minority.
- The SC ruling triggered **nationwide protests** from Muslims.
 - In response to this, an **amendment** was introduced in the AMU Act in **1981**.
 - The amendment **explicitly affirmed the minority status** of AMU.
 - The amendment introduced **Section 2(I) and Subsection 5(2)(c)**, which stated that the university was "an educational institution of their choice established by the Muslims of India" and "subsequently incorporated" as the AMU.

- In **2005**, the AMU implemented a reservation policy, reserving **50%** of seats in postgraduate medical courses for **Muslim candidates**.
 - This was challenged in the **Allahabad High Court**, which, in the same year, overturned the reservation and **nullified** the 1981 amendment Act.
 - The court reasoned that the AMU could not maintain an exclusive reservation because, according to the S. Azeez judgement, it did not qualify as a minority institution.
- Subsequently, in **2006**, a set of **eight petitions**, including one from the Union government, contested the High Court's decision before the Supreme Court.
- In **2016**, the NDA government informed the SC that it was withdrawing the appeal filed by the government.
 - It reasoned that "as the executive government at the Centre, we can't be seen as setting up a minority institution in a secular state".
- On **February 12, 2019**, a **three-judge** Bench presided by the then CJI Ranjan Gogoi **referred the matter to a seven-judge Bench** leaving it sub-judice till now.

Recent Development:

- The apex court is addressing two issues:
 - The criteria for determining the minority status of an educational institution
 - Whether an institution established under a statute can enjoy such status.
- The bench said that it would examine whether the "**denominational character**" of the institution got lost when it was designated as a university under the 1920 AMU Act.
- The apex court also observed the mere fact that it was accorded the status of a university does not amount to surrender of its minority status.
- While the petitioners argue that AMU is entitled to the minority status, the UOI is now endorsing the S. Azeez Basha verdict.
- The centre argued that AMU cannot be a university of any particular religion as it has been declared an institution of national importance.
- The petitioners argued that the Basha judgment denied minority status to AMU just because it agreed for government recognition of its degrees through the AMU Act and received financial aid from government.

5. World Braille Day 2024



Source- <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/14531478-world-braille-day-on-4th-of-january-with-text-by-alphabet-for-means-of-communication-in-flat-cartoon-hand-drawn-templates-illustration>

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

- It is observed every year to honour the birth anniversary of **Louis Braille**, the inventor of the **Braille writing system for blind** and visually impaired individuals.
- The primary objective of recognising World Braille Day is to promote Braille literacy and raise awareness among people about its importance.

What is Braille?

- As per the United Nations, Braille is a tactile representation of alphabetic and numerical symbols that uses **six dots** to represent **each letter, number, and even musical, mathematical, and scientific symbols**.
- It is named after its inventor **Louis Braille** from **19th century France**.
- It is utilised by blind and partially sighted people to read the same books and periodicals as those printed in a visual font.

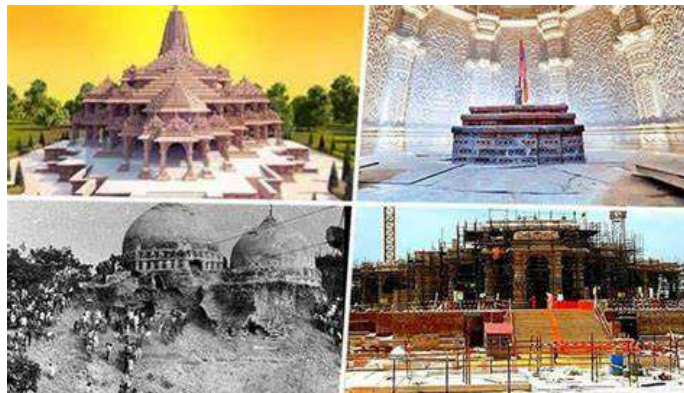
Theme for 2024:

- The theme for World Braille Day 2024 is “**Empowering Through Inclusion and Diversity**”.
- It underscores the commitment to creating a world where individuals with visual impairments are not only recognized but fully included in all aspects of society.

History:

- **Louis Braille**, who was from **France**, became blind when he was a kid.
- He lost his eyes in a car accident, and that changed his life.
- When he was **10 years old**, he went to a **special school for blind kids** in France.
- There, he came up with the idea of using **raised dots** to make a special code for reading with your fingertips. This code is known as **Braille**.
- Braille worked hard to create a system using **six dots in each group**.
- This made it possible for a blind person to feel the dots with their fingers and quickly move from one group to the next.
- In **2018**, the **United Nations** decided that **January 4** should be World Braille Day to honor Louis Braille.
- The first **official celebration** happened the **next year**, and now it's recognized all around the world.
- Before Braille's system was developed, blind and visually impaired people used the **Hauy system**, which was a **Latin system** designed on **thick paper or leather**.
 - However, this method only allowed people to **read and not write**.

6. Ayodhya Ram Mandir Dispute



Source- <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/India/gearing-up-for-ayodhya-ram-mandirs-inauguration-a-timeline-of-events-from-1528-to-2024/ar-AA1mRuuX>

Recently: The Ayodhya Ram Mandir that had been disputed for almost **500 years** was inaugurated on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

- The Ayodhya land dispute is a political, historical and socio-religious debate in India that has been on for decades.

The Dispute:

- The dispute is focused on a plot of land in **Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh**.
- It is regarded among the Hindus to be the **birthplace** of the Hindu deity **Ram**.
- According to some beliefs, it was originally the site of a **Hindu temple that was demolished** to construct a mosque known as **Babri Masjid**.
- For their part, Muslims claim that the land was titled to them and **Mir Baqi** built the mosque on it in **1528** on orders of the first Mughal emperor, **Babur**.
- The modification/demolition of the temple has stood as a topic of controversy.

- By some accounts, some Muslims in **1949** saw an **idol of Ram** being placed inside what was then a mosque.
- Both Hindu and Muslim sides claimed ownership of the site and that led to an eventual lockdown of the area by the government.
- In **1959**, **Nirmohi Akhara** filed a suit seeking possession of the site and claimed to be the custodians of the disputed land.
- Following this, the **Sunni Central Board of Waqf** also filed a suit claiming ownership of the site on **December 18, 1961**.
- Later, some **Hindu kar sevaks** on **December 6, 1992**, demolished **Babri masjid**, an action that triggered **communal riots** all over India, killing at least **2,000 people**.
- Over the years, the matter has been brought up by both groups in various courts of the country.
- **10 days** after the Mosque was demolished, the PM formed a committee led by retired High Court Justice **M. S. Liberhan**.
 - It was to look into circumstances leading to the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the communal riots.
- **Narsimha Rao Government** issued an ordinance acquiring **67.7 acres of land (Site and adjoining areas)**.
- Later it was passed as a law – **Acquisition of Certain Areas at Ayodhya Act, 1993** to facilitate the acquisition of land by the Central government.
- In **2002**, The **Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court** begin hearing Ayodhya Title Dispute.
- On **September 30, 2010**, the Allahabad High Court ruled that the disputed **2.77-acre land in Ayodhya** should be divided into **three parts**.
- The parts will be among the **Hindus, Muslims** and the **Nirmohi Akhara**.
- The petitioners moved the **Supreme Court** and the apex court **stayed the HC verdict**.
- In **2016**, the court started a fresh hearing of the case.
- In **2017**, the SC said that the matter was sensitive and suggested for the case to be settled out of court.
 - It asked stakeholders to hold talks and find an amicable solution. However, no solution was achieved.
- In **2018**, the Supreme Court set up a **five-judge Constitution Bench** to hear the land dispute case.

The final Order:

- On **November 9, 2019**, a Supreme Court Bench, led by Chief **Justice Ranjan Gogoi**, unanimously ruled on the matter.
- The decision stipulated that the disputed land be allocated to the **Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas** for the construction of a temple.

- Simultaneously, the **Muslim side** was directed to be compensated with **five acres** of land at a **prominent site in Ayodhya** for the construction of a mosque.
- In **2020**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Ayodhya to lay the foundation stone (a **40 kg silver brick**) for the construction of the Ram Mandir at the **Ram Janmbhoomi site**.

What led to the demolition of Babri Masjid?

- While the **first police complaint** in the Ayodhya dispute dates back to **1858**, and the **first cases** were filed in **1885**.
- The main thrust to the Ram Mandir movement came in **1989**.
 - The **Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)** conducted a '**shilanyas**'—foundation stone-laying—at the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site.
 - As communal tensions rose, the Union government urged VHP to conduct it outside the dispute side but the VHP defied the government.
- In **1990**, **LK Advani** began his **rath yatra**, which was the most significant milestone in the Ram Mandir movement.
- The Rath Yatra also led to communal violence in Gujarat, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh.
- Advani was arrested in October **1990** in Bihar's **Samastipur** at the orders of the then-Chief Minister **Lalu Prasad Yadav**.
- Advani was on his way to Ayodhya for **kar seva** when he was arrested.
- In **1992**, thousands of **right-wing Hindu kar sevaks** climbed the Babri Masjid and demolished it.

Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP):

- Vishva Hindu Parishad is an Indian right-wing Hindu organisation based on Hindu nationalism.
- The VHP was founded in **1964** by **M. S. Golwalkar** and **S. S. Apte** in collaboration with **Swami Chinmayananda**.
- Its stated objective is "to organise, consolidate the Hindu society and to serve and protect the Hindu Dharma".

7. Inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya



Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the '*Pran Pratishtha*' rituals in Ayodhya's Ram Mandir on **January 22nd** as the temple was inaugurated, marking the homecoming of Lord Ram after **500 years**.

- The temple trust, **Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra**, had an invitee list of over **7,000 people**.
- This list included **politicians, Bollywood celebrities, cricketers, industrialists, and more**.
- **Swami Vigyananand**, the founder and global chairman of the **World Hindu Foundation**, had announced that approximately **100 dignitaries** from **55 countries** had been invited.
- The main rituals were performed by **Lakshmi Kant Dixit**, a priest from **Varanasi**, on the day of the ceremony.
- The temple town celebrated the **Amrit Mahotsav** from **January 14 to January 22**.
- On this occasion, **Central Government** had announced **half day holiday** on January 22.
- States such as Odisha, Tripura, Assam along with other states also announced half day.

Pran Pratishtha:

- The term '**pran**' signifies **life**, while '**pratishtha**' translates to **establishment**.
- The term 'Pran Pratishtha' translates to '**establishing the life force**,' symbolizing the spiritual awakening of the deity's image.
- The 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony is a deeply significant Hindu ritual marking the **consecration of the temple's deity**.
- Pran pratishtha is the act which transforms **an idol into a deity**, giving it the capacity to accept prayers and grant boons.
- For this, the statue has to go through various stages.
 - The number of steps involved will depend on the scale of the ceremony.
 - The steps performed during the Pran Pratishtha of Shri Ram Lalla's idol, included **Shoba Yatra, Adhivas, Ritual Bath and Opening of Eyes**.

Why January 22 was chosen for the inauguration?

- January 22 is the **Dwadashi date of Shukla Paksha of Pausha month** in the Hindu calendar.
- According to mythology, it is the same day when **Lord Vishnu** took the form of a **tortoise** to help Amrit Manthan (Ocean Churning).
- Other than this, the date falls in the **Mrigashira Nakshatra** constituting three **auspicious yogas**, Sarvartha Siddhi Yoga, Amrit Siddhi Yoga and Ravi Yoga.

The Ram Mandir:

- The Ram Temple is among the most expensive religious projects in India in recent years, with an estimated cost of **₹1,800 crore**.
- Following closely is the **Vishv Umiya Dham** in Gujarat, valued at **₹1,000 crore**.
- If we consider the most-expensive public monuments constructed in recent years, Ram Mandir ranks **second** after the **Statue of Unity**.
- The Centre announced the creation of the **Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust in February 2020**.
- It tasked with constructing and managing the temple in Ayodhya.

- Since its establishment, the trust has collected about **₹3,500 crore in donations**.
- The much-awaited complex covers an expansive **70 acres**, featuring the main temple on **2.7 acres**.
- The temple is designed with **three floors** and **12 gates**.
- The construction and design are handled by **Larsen & Toubro and Tata Consulting Engineers**, with technical assistance from **the Indian Institute of Technology**.
- The **three-storied temple** is built in the traditional **Nagar style** with each wall measuring **20 feet**.
- No iron is used in the construction of the temple anywhere.
- It has a **length (east-west) of 380 feet**, a **width of 250 feet**, and a **height of 161 feet**. The complex has a total of **392 pillars** and **44 doors**.
- Entry into the temple is from the east through the **Singh Dwar**.
- The main entrance to the temple will be the **Lion Gate** or the '**Singh Dwar**', which is constructed using the **Rajasthani sand pink stone** in the Nagar style.
- At the four corners of the complex, there are **four temples** – dedicated to **Surya Dev, Devi Bhagwati, Ganesh Bhagwan** and **Bhagwan Shiv**.
- In the **northern arm**, there is a **Mandir of Maa Annapurna** and in the **southern arm**, there is a **Mandir of Hanuman ji**.
- The construction of the Ram Temple began in **2020** after PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone on **August 5**.
- There are **five Mandaps or halls**, and their names are **Nritya Mandap, Rang Mandap, Sabha Mandap, Prarthna and Kirtan Mandaps**.

The Design:

- The **temple** is designed by chief **architect Chandrakant Bhai Sompura**, following **Vastu Shastra principles**.
- Sompura comes from a long line of temple architects and is the **15th generation** of the family hailing from **Ahmedabad**.
- Sompura belongs to a family of temple architects who have designed **over 200 such structures** around the country.
- The original design for Ram Mandir was developed in **1988** by the Sompura family.
- However, in **2020**, the old design was modified by him and his team consisting of his sons **Ashish and Nikhil**.
- In 2020, Sompura told Outlook India that he was contacted by the then **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) chief, the late Ashok Singhal** through the Birla family.

The idol of Ram Lalla:

- The Ram Temple has a **51-inch idol** of Ram Lalla, depicting the deity as a **five-year-old boy**, in its sanctum sanctorum.
- The idol was carved from a **three-billion-year-old black stone** by Mysuru-brd sculptor **Arun Yogiraj**.
- The idol was chosen from among **three commissioned murtis** for its embodiment of child-like innocence blended with divinity and royalty.
- However, there were **two other Ram Lalla idols** that were also in the race for the coveted spot, but will now be placed elsewhere in the temple complex.
- One of them is a **white marble idol, sculpted by Satyanarayan Pandey from Rajasthan**.
 - It shows Ram Lalla holding a **golden bow and arrow**, surrounded by an arch that depicts following incarnations of Lord Vishnu: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Krishna, Buddha, Kalki, etc.
- The other one is a **black stone idol**, carved by **Ganesh Bhatt from Karnataka**.
 - It features Ram Lalla with **Lord Surya** on the crown, **Surya chakra**, and a **lion on the idol**.
 - **Ganesh Dutt's** sculpture was carved out of **Krishna Shila** or **black schist** which was sourced from Hegadadevana Kote.
- The temple trust has assured that both Bhatt's and Pandey's creations will be enshrined within the temple precinct.

8. Exercise Khanjar



Source- https://www.reddit.com/r/MilitaryPorn/comments/xpp4rs/indian_army_kyrgyz_army_special_forces_during/

Recently: The **11th edition** of Exercise KHANJAR has commenced at the Special Forces Training School in **Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh**.

- The exercise is scheduled to be conducted from **22nd January to 3rd February 2024**.
- It is a Joint Special Forces Exercise between **Indian and Kyrgyzstan**.
- The **13- day exercise** focuses on combating terrorism and extremism.

Aim:

- Aim of the exercise is to exchange experiences and best practices in Counter Terrorism and Special Forces Operations in Built-up Area and Mountainous Terrain under **Chapter VII of United Nations Charter**.
- The exercise will emphasise on developing Special Forces skills, advanced techniques of insertion and extraction.
- The exercise will provide an opportunity for both the sides of fortify defence ties while addressing common concerns of international terrorism and extremism.

Contingents:

- The Indian Army contingent comprising **20 personnel** is being represented by troops from **The Parachute Regiment (Special Forces)**
- The Kyrgyzstan contingent comprising **20 personnel** is represented by **Scorpion Brigade**.

India- Kyrgyzstan Relations:

- Kyrgyzstan is a **landlocked country** in **Central Asia**.
- **Bishkek** is the capital and largest city of the country.
- It is bordered by **Kazakhstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the west, Tajikistan to the south, and China to the east and southeast**
- Historically, India has had close contacts with Central Asia, especially countries which were part of the ancient Silk Route, including Kyrgyz Republic.
- During the Soviet era, India and the then Kyrgyz Republic had limited political, economic and cultural contacts.
- After the **independence** of Kyrgyz Republic on **31 August, 1991**, India was among the first to establish **diplomatic relations** on **18 March 1992**
- The **Resident Mission** of India was set up on **23 May 1994**.
- Kyrgyz Republic supported India in securing full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2017.
- It also supports India's bid for permanent seat at UNSC.

9. Supreme Court's Diamond Jubilee



Source- <https://evemoir.blogspot.com/2021/06/supreme-court-inside-india-supreme.html>

Recently: The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Diamond Jubilee celebration** of the Supreme Court of India on **28 January** at the Supreme Court auditorium in **Delhi**.

- He also launched citizen-centric information and technology initiatives that include:
 - Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR)
 - Digital Courts 2.0
 - A new website of the Supreme Court (in bilingual format - **English** and **Hindi**)

Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR):

- It will make Supreme Court judgments available to the citizens of the country free of cost and in **electronic format**.
- Digital SCR features include **all 519 volumes** of SC reports since **1950**, covering **36,308 cases**, available in digital format.
- This format will be bookmarked, user-friendly, and accessible with open access.

Digital Courts 2.0:

- **Digital Courts 2.0** application is a recent initiative under the **e-Courts project**.
- It is to make court records available to the Judges of the district courts in the electronic form.
- This is coupled with use of **artificial intelligence (AI)** for transcribing speech to text on a real time basis.

History of Courts in India:**Pre- Independence:**

- The promulgation of **Regulating Act of 1773** by **England** paved the way for establishment of the **Supreme Court of Judicature at Calcutta**.
- It was established as a **Court of Record**, with full power & authority.
- It was established to handle crimes and legal actions in **Bengal, Bihar** and **Orissa** and also had jurisdiction over **British servants** residing outside these regions.
- Later the Supreme Courts at **Madras** and **Bombay** was established by **King George – III** in **1800** and **1823** respectively.
- Then the **India High Courts Act 1861** was enacted to create High Courts for various provinces.
 - It abolished Supreme Courts at **Calcutta, Madras**, and **Bombay**, along with the **Sadar Adalats** in Presidency towns.
 - These High Courts had the distinction of being the highest Courts for all cases till the creation of **Federal Court of India**.
- The **federal court of India** was created under the **Government of India Act 1935**.
- The Federal Court had jurisdiction to solve disputes between **provinces and federal states** and hear appeal against Judgements from High Courts.

Post Independence:

- After India attained independence in **1947**, the Constitution of India came into being on **26 January 1950**.
- The Supreme Court of India also came into existence and its first sitting was held on **28 January 1950**.

- The inauguration took place in the **Chamber of Princes** in the **Parliament building**.
- The Supreme Court commenced its sittings in a part of the old Parliament building, now called **Samvidhan Sadan**.
 - This building served as the home of the Federal Court of India for **12 years**, from **1937 to 1950**, preceding the establishment of the Supreme Court.
 - The Parliament House was the home of the Supreme Court for years until the court acquired its present building in **1958**.
- In formative years, the Apex Court met from 10 to 12 in the morning and then 2 to 4 in the afternoon for **28 days in a year**.
 - Today, it has enormous task and meeting for **190 days in a year**.
- The proceedings of the Supreme Court are conducted in **English** only.
- **Supreme Court Rules, 1966** and **Supreme Court Rules 2013** are framed under **Article 145** of the Constitution to regulate the practice and procedure of the Supreme Court.

Building of the Supreme Court:

- The main block of Supreme Court building was built on **triangular plot** of **17 Acres**.
- The building was designed by Chief architect **Ganesh Bhikaji Deolalikar**.
 - He was succeeded by **Shridher Krishna Joglekar**.
- The foundation stone of the Supreme Court Building was laid by the first President of India, **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** on **29th October 1954**.
- The court shifter from the old parliament building to the present premises in **1958**.
- There were two extensions one in **1979** and another in **1994**.
- In **1979**, two new wings – **the East wing** and the **West wing** – were added to the complex.
- Currently in all, there are **19 Courtrooms** in the various wings of the building.

Strength of the Supreme court:

- The original Constitution of 1950 envisaged a Supreme Court with a **Chief Justice and 7 puisne judges**.
- It left it to Parliament to increase this number.
- In the early years, all the judges of the Supreme Court sat together to hear the cases presented before them.

- As the work of the Court increased, Parliament increased the number of Judges from **8 (7+1) in 1950** to:
 - **11 in 1956**
 - **14 in 1960**
 - **18 in 1978**
 - **26 in 1986**
 - **31 in 2009**
 - **34 in 2019** (current strength, 33+1).
- Recently, **Justice Prasanna Bhalachandra Varale** took the oath of office as judge of the Supreme Court replacing **Retired Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul**, raising the **Dalit representation** on the Bench to **three**.
- With this oath, The Supreme court gains its full strength which is **34 judges**.

Constitutional Provisions:

- The Indian constitution includes a provision for the establishment of the Supreme Court, outlined in **Part V (The Union)** and **Chapter 6 (The Union Judiciary)**.
- **Articles 124 to 147** within **Part V** of the Constitution address the organisation, independence, jurisdiction, powers and procedures of the Supreme Court.
- **Article 124(1)** states that there shall be a **Supreme Court of India** constituting of a Chief Justice of India (CJI) and other judges.
- **Article 129** states that the Supreme Court shall be a **court of record** and shall have all the powers of such a court including the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- **Article 130** designates the **Seat of the Supreme Court**, stating it shall be in **Delhi** or any other place appointed by the Chief Justice of India with the President's approval.
- **Article 141** provides that law declared by Supreme Court to be binding on all courts.
- The Supreme Court has **Writ Jurisdiction (Article 32)**, **Original Jurisdiction (Article 131)**, **Appellate Jurisdiction (Articles 132, 133, 134)** and **Advisory Jurisdiction (Article 143)**.

10. Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas/ NRI Day 2024



Source- <https://www.news9live.com/knowledge/pravasi-bharatiya-divas-history-significance-and-all-you-need-to-know-145725>

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas was observed on **January 9th**.

- It is observed every year to mark the contribution of the **Overseas Indian community** to the development of India.
- On this day in **1915, Mahatma Gandhi**, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from **South Africa**.
- He played an important role in the freedom struggle of India and also changed the lives of Indians forever.

History:

- Since **2003, Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas conventions** have been held every year.
- It provides an ideal platform for the government to interact with the diaspora community who reside in several parts of the world.
- Its format has been **revised** since **2015**, on the **100th anniversary** of Mahatma Gandhi's return to India, to celebrate the PBD **once every two years**.

- It mandates to hold **theme-based PBD Conferences** during the intervening period with participation from overseas diaspora experts, policymakers, and stakeholders.
- The PBD Convention is the **flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs**.

Theme:

- The theme of the PBD 2023 will be continued this year, "**Diaspora: Reliable Partners for India's Progress in Amrit Kaal**".
- This is because the revised 2015 format suggests the PBD celebration once every two years.

Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA):

- It is the **highest honour** conferred on overseas Indians.
- This award is conferred by the **President of India** as a part of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Conventions which were organised in 2003.

11. Ladakh's memorandum to the Government



Recently: In January this year, Ladakh's **two key socio-political conglomerates**, the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)** and **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)**, submitted a memorandum to the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** as part of its ongoing dialogue with the Centre over a series of fresh demands from the region.

- These demands include extending the **territorial control of Ladakh up to Gilgit-Baltistan** in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- The parities have also demanded **special status for Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule** of the Indian Constitution.
- The Leh Apex Body (LAB), represents several Buddhist religious and political parties while Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), represents Muslim religious groups and local parties.
- In 2023, centre formed a **high-powered committee**, with Minister of State **Nityanand Rai** at its head. It was empowered to engage with the stakeholders of Ladakh.
 - The **17-member committee** included the Ladakh Lieutenant Governor and members from the KDA and LAB.

- In 2024, these bodies submitted a written memorandum to pave the way for more structured talks between New Delhi and Ladakh over the list of demands.

Current Status of Ladakh:

- Ladakh, spread over **59,146 square kilometres**, was a part of the Kashmir division of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir.
- It was carved out as one of the Union Territories, the other being J&K, out of the State on **August 5, 2019**, as the Centre ended the special status of the region under **Article 370**.
- Ladakh is a **Muslim-majority UT**, with the **Leh district** dominated by **Buddhists** and **Kargil** by **Shia Muslims**.
- The region witnessed a divided reaction to the Centre's moves to abrogate **Article 370 and 35A**, provisions that granted exclusive rights to locals over land, jobs and natural resources.
 - **Leh** for many decades, **supported the demand for UT status** because it felt neglected by the erstwhile state government, which was dominated by politicians from Kashmir and Jammu.
 - However, **Kargil**, after the events of 2019, has been **insisting on reunification with Kashmir**.
- There was much enthusiasm initially, mostly in Leh, after the August 5, 2019 decisions.
- The enthusiasm waned as it was understood that while the UT of J&K would have a legislature, the UT of Ladakh would not.
 - It is governed by two elected hill councils, the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Kargil (LAHDC)** and **LAHDC-Leh**.
- Earlier, Ladakh would send **four members to the J&K Assembly** and **two members to the State's legislative council**.
- The administration of the region is now completely in the hands of bureaucrats.
- Also, the changed domicile policy in Jammu and Kashmir has raised fears in the region about its own land, employment, demography, and cultural identity.

What are the recent demands?

- In a fresh memorandum submitted to the Union Home Ministry this month, the LAH and KDA have given details of the reasons for seeking **Statehood** and **special status under the Sixth Schedule** for the region.
- The demands included extending the territorial control of Ladakh up to **Gilgit-Baltistan** in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
 - Prior to **1947**, the Ladakh district also comprised the Gilgit-Baltistan area, which is now under the occupation of Pakistan.
 - It also demanded the reservation of seats for Gilgit-Baltistan once a legislature is granted to the region.
- The region also demands a **full- fledged legislature**.
- The memorandum also highlighted Ladakh's ecologically fragile and sensitive areas.
- Ladakh also demands **exclusive rights over recruitment**.
 - It has put forth a proposal to the Centre to have the **Ladakh Public Service Commission** for the recruitment of gazetted jobs.
 - It also demands that the twin hill councils should have the power to recruit lower rung staff for the region.
 - The Ladakh resident certificate should be the only basis for applying for these jobs in the region.

What is the Sixth Schedule?

- The sixth schedule deals with the administration of the tribal areas in the **four northeastern states** of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**.
- The provisions of the sixth schedule are provided under **Articles 244(2)** and **Article 275(1)** of the Constitution.
- The schedule provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions — **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** — that have some **legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy** within a state.
- The **Governor** is empowered to increase or decrease the areas or change the names of the autonomous districts.
- The acts of Parliament or the state legislature do not apply to autonomous districts and autonomous regions or apply with specified modifications and exceptions.
- There is a district council for each autonomous district.
 - It has **30 members- four are nominated** by the Governor and **26 are elected** using the adult franchise.
 - The members have a **5-year term**.

- The **Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam** is an exception with more than **40 members** and the right to make laws on 39 issues.
- The Councils have also been endowed with wide civil and criminal judicial powers, for example establishing village courts etc.
- However, the jurisdiction of these councils is subject to the jurisdiction of the concerned High Court.

Can Ladakh be included under the Sixth Schedule?

- Neither of the two hill councils in Leh and Kargil are included in the sixth schedule.
 - Their powers are limited to collection of some local taxes such as parking fees and allotment and use of land vested by the Centre.
- In September 2019, the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** recommended the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule.
 - This recommendation was made considering that that the new **UT was predominantly tribal (more than 97%)**.
 - The commission noted that the people from other parts of the country had been restricted from purchasing or acquiring land there, and its distinct cultural heritage needed preservation.
- Notably, **no region outside the Northeast** has been included in the Sixth Schedule.
- The Constitution is very clear, Sixth Schedule is for the Northeast. For tribal areas in the rest of the country, there is the **Fifth Schedule**
 - Therefore, Ladakh's inclusion in the sixth schedule will be difficult.
- However, it remains the prerogative of the government — it can, if it so decides, bring a Bill to amend the Constitution for this purpose.

12. NITI Aayog's discussion paper on Multidimensional Poverty



Source- PIB

Recently: The NITI Aayog released a **discussion paper** on January 15th, on the findings of their Multidimensional Poverty Index.

- The paper, '**Multidimensional Poverty in India since 2005-06**', attempts to study the decline of poverty rates and the number of multidimensionally poor people in India across various periods.
- The discussion paper was released by **Prof Ramesh Chand**, Member, NITI Aayog in presence of **Shri B. V. R. Subrahmanyam**, CEO NITI Aayog.
- Oxford Policy and **Human Development Initiative (OPHI)** and **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** have provided technical inputs for this paper.

What is Multidimensional Poverty Index?

- This report presents a compact update on the state of multidimensional poverty in the world.
- It compiles data from **110** developing countries covering **6.1 billion** people, accounting for **92 percent** of the population in developing countries.

- It was launched in **2010** and is released by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** and the **Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)**.
- The Global MPI uses **three** standard **dimensions: Health, Education and Standard of Living** and **ten** indicators.
- A person is **multidimensionally poor** if she/he is deprived in one third or more (means **33% or more**) of the weighted indicators (out of the ten indicators).
- Those who are deprived in **one half** or more of the weighted indicators are considered living in **extreme multidimensional poverty**.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 1** is concerned with ending poverty in all forms everywhere.

India's National Multidimensional Poverty Index:

- **NITI Aayog** is the nodal agency for India's National Multidimensional Poverty Index.
- The **first edition** of the index was released in **2021**.
- NITI Aayog constituted an **inter-ministerial MPI Coordination Committee (MPICC)** including Ministries and departments pertaining to areas such as health, education, nutrition, rural development, drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and urban development, among others.
 - It also included experts from the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** and technical partners – OPHI and UNDP.
- The national MPI model retains the **ten indicators** of the global MPI model.
- It also **adds two** indicators, viz., **Maternal Health** and **Bank Accounts** in line with national priorities.
- India's national MPI has **three** equally weighted dimensions – **Health, Education, and Standard of living** – which are represented by **12 indicators**."
- The **2023 edition** released in July 2023 was prepared based on the latest **National Family Health Survey of 2019-21**.

Findings of the Discussion Paper:

- The paper claims that **24.82 crore** individuals in India **moved out** of multidimensional poverty over the past **nine years**.
- The multidimensional poverty in India declined from **29.17 per cent in 2013-14 to 11.28 per cent in 2022-23**.
- **Uttar Pradesh** registered the **largest decline** in the number of poor with **5.94 crore** people escaping multidimensional poverty during the last nine years.
 - It is followed by **Bihar** at 3.77 crore, **Madhya Pradesh** at 2.30 crore and **Rajasthan** at 1.87 crore.
- The pace of decline in poverty headcount ratio using exponential method was much faster between **2015-16 to 2019-21** (**10.66 per cent** annual rate of decline), compared to period **2005-06 to 2015-16** (**7.69 per cent** annual rate of decline).
- All **12 indicators** of the National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) have recorded **significant improvement** during the entire study period.

Government Initiatives:

- Findings of NITI Aayog's Paper give credit for this achievement to significant initiatives of the government to address all dimensions of the poverty between 2013-14 to 2022-23.
- As a result, India is likely to achieve its SDG target of halving multidimensional poverty well before 2030.
- Initiatives like **Poshan Abhiyan** and **Anemia Mukh Bharat** have significantly enhanced access to **healthcare facilities**.
- One of the world's largest food security programs, **the Targeted Public Distribution System** under the **National Food Security Act** covers **81.35 crore** beneficiaries, providing **food grains** to rural and urban populations.
- Recent decisions, such as **extending free food** grain distribution under Pradhan Mantri **Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** for another **five years**, exemplify Government's commitment.
- Programmes like clean cooking fuel distribution through **Ujjwala Yojana**, improved electricity coverage via **Saubhagya**, and transformative campaigns like **Swachh Bharat Mission** and **Jal Jeevan Mission** have collectively elevated living conditions and overall well-being of people.
- Additionally, flagship programs like **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** and **PM Awas Yojana** have played pivotal roles in financial inclusion.

Criticism:

- The paper seems to be intended to **provide talking points to the ruling BJP's campaigners** in the coming Lok Sabha elections, as NITI Aayog had released the National Multidimensional Poverty Index, just seven months ago.
- The paper claims a faster annual reduction in poverty at 10.66% during 2015-16 and 2019-21 than during the previous 10-year period (7.79%) when the Congress-led government was in power.
- But the estimates of poverty reduction claimed in the discussion paper do not square with other indicators of well-being and the scale of the government's measures to relieve distress.
- The projections seem unconvincing as the country has faced major health and economic shocks because of the **COVID-19 pandemic**.
- Though, there has been an improvement in many of the indicators included in the MPI over the last 20 years but it is doubtful if it is sufficient to claim not only that poverty has declined but that it has done so at a faster pace during the two terms of the present government.

13. Declaration of Tehreek- e- Hurriyat as an Unlawful Association under UAPA



Recently: The Centre declared **Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Jammu and Kashmir (TeH)**, as an 'unlawful association' for **five years** under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.

- The decision comes as a result of the organization's involvement in prohibited activities aimed at the **separation of Jammu and Kashmir from India** and the establishment of Islamic rule.
- The Union Home Ministry on January 11 also stated that **States** could also **seize funds and confiscate properties** associated with the two organisations within their jurisdictions.
 - The organization being **Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction)**, that has also been recently declared as an 'Unlawful Association' under UAPA.
- The centre has declared that all powers exercisable by it under **Section 7** and **Section 8** of the Act shall be exercised also by the State governments and the Union Territory administration" in relation to the two unlawful associations.
 - **Section 7** of the UAPA pertains to "power to prohibit the use of funds of an unlawful association".
 - **Section 8** gives "power to notify places used for the purpose of an unlawful association".

Background:All Indian Hurriyat Conference:

- The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) was formed on **July 31, 1993**, as a political platform of the **separatist movement**.
- It was an extension of the conglomerate of parties that had come together to contest Assembly polls against a **National Conference-Congress alliance** in **1987**.
 - The election was widely alleged to have been rigged.
- At a time when militancy was at its peak, this conglomerate represented the political face of the militant movement, and claimed to “represent the wishes and aspirations of the people”.
- It had brought together two separate, but strong ideologies:
 - Those who sought J&K’s independence from both India and Pakistan.
 - Those who wanted J&K to become part of Pakistan

Formation:

- After his father’s assassination, **19- year-old, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq** became the chairman of the **J&K Awami Action Committee (J&KAAC)** and the **head priest of Kashmir**.
- On **27 December 1992**, he called a meeting of religious, social and political organisations at Mirwaiz Manzil.
 - The meeting was aimed to lay the foundation of a broad alliance of Kashmiri parties to oppose Indian rule in J&K.
- On **31 July 1993**, the **All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC)** was born with **Mirwaiz Umar Farooq** as its first **chairman**.

Executive Council:

- The APHC executive council had **seven members from seven executive parties**:
 - Syed Ali Shah Geelani of Jamat-e-Islami
 - Mirwaiz Umar Farooq of Awami Action Committee
 - Sheikh Abdul Aziz of People’s League

- Moulvi Abbas Ansari of Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen
- Prof Abdul Gani Bhat of Muslim Conference
- Yasin Malik of JKLF
- Abdul Gani Lone of People's Conference.
- Of these leaders, **Sheikh Aziz** was **killed in** police firing near Sheri in Baramulla in August **2008**.
- **Abdul Gani Lone** was **killed** by militants **in May 2002**.

Working Committee:

- The Hurriyat also had a **21-member** working committee.
- This included the seven members of the executive council, plus two members from each of the seven parties.

General Council:

- There was also a general council, with more than **23 members**, including traders' bodies, employee unions, and social organisations.
- The membership of the executive council couldn't be increased as per the APHC constitution, but the general council **could accommodate more members**.
- The Hurriyat had **observer status** at the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**.
 - OIC is an organization that safeguards and protects the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.

The split of Hurriyat:

- Because the Hurriyat was such a mixed bag of ideologies and personalities, infighting was a near permanent feature.
- In **September 2003**, the Hurriyat split on the questions of its future strategies, the role of militancy in the separatist movement, and dialogue.

- The group was divided in two factions:
 - Syed Ali Shah Geelani Faction- The faction led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani was adamant that the talks with New Delhi could only proceed if the Centre accepts that J&K was in dispute.
 - Mirwaiz Faction- The faction led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq wanted talks with New Delhi.
- The Mirwaiz group also entered into a dialogue directly with New Delhi during Prime Minister **Atal Bihari Vajpayee's** tenure.
 - It also held talks with the then Deputy PM, **L K Advani**, in **2004**.
- At that time, the Mirwaiz faction was favoured by both India and Pakistan, which gave it the central role in Kashmir.
- On **7 September 2003**, the **Geelani faction was removed** by the then Hurriyat **Chairman Abbas Ansari** and **Masarat Alam** was named as the **interim chief**.
- They also suspended the seven-member executive council, and set up a five-member committee to review the Hurriyat constitution.
- Geelani also **left the Jamaat-e-Islami**, and formed his own party, the **Tehreek-e-Hurriyat Jammu and Kashmir**, in August **2004**.
- The organisation drew most of its cadre from the Jamat as a large number of key leaders sided with Geelani during the split.
- The **Mirwaiz faction split** in **2014**, when **four of its leaders left**. These were:
 - Democratic Freedom Party president Shabir Ahmad Shah
 - National Front chairman Nayeem Ahmad Khan
 - Mahaz-e-Azadi chief Mohammad Azam Inqlabi
 - Islamic Political Party chief Mohammad Yousuf Naqash

Sayed Ali Shah Geelani:

- The octogenarian Geelani is the most prominent public face of the separatist struggle in Kashmir.
- Geelani was a **primary school teacher** employed by the J&K education department when he became a member of **Jamat-e-Islami** in **1959**.
- Thirteen years later, he contested the **1972 Assembly elections** from his home constituency **Sopore**, and **won**.
- He was **re-elected** to the Assembly in **1977** as a Jamat-e-Islami candidate.

- In **1987**, Geelani was instrumental in bringing together the Jamat-e-Islami and several other social and religious outfits in the Muslim United Front, which fought the elections.
- After the armed resistance began in **1989**, Geelani **resigned from the Assembly** and took a lead role in separatist politics.
- When the Hurriyat was formed, he became its member, and later its chairman.
- He broke away from Hurriyat and Jamat-e-Islami and formed his own organization, **Tehreek-e-Hurriyat in 2004**.
- A heart patient who lives on a pacemaker and a malignant kidney, Geelani started to **re-emerge as an important leader in 2008**, when he launched an agitation opposing the transfer of government land to the Amarnath shrine board.
 - The agitation was repeated in **2010**.
- Geelani's strength is seen in his successful mix of a "consistent and uncompromising political stance on Kashmir" and organised street resistance.
- Religion is an important part of Geelani's worldview and politics. He enjoyed substantial influence over the militant movement.
- Geelani **died on 1st September 2021** at his Hyderpora residence due to his prolonged illness.

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:

- It is a national security and anti-terrorism law that was passed in **1967**.
- It is an upgraded version of the **TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act, 1987)** and **POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002)** which lapsed and was repealed in **1995 and 2004 respectively**.
- The **National Integration Council** appointed a Committee on **National Integration and Regionalisation** to look into the aspect of putting **reasonable restrictions** in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Pursuant to the acceptance of recommendations of the committee, the **Constitution (Sixteenth Amendment) Act, 1963** was enacted.
- The act gave Parliament the authority to set **reasonable restrictions** on the-
 - Freedom of speech and expression;
 - Right to assemble peaceably and without arms; and
 - Right to form associations or unions

- Afterward, the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967** was created to prevent organizations in India from engaging in **unlawful activities**.
- Due to heinous nature of terrorism, UAPA provides special procedures to decide cases with respect to terrorism.
- The **National Investigation Agency** is the central law enforcement agency tasked to deal with instances of terrorism in India.
- According to **Section 2(1)(o)** of UAPA, 'Unlawful Activity' is defined as any action by an individual or association, intended to bring about '**secession or cession**' of a part of the territory of India from the Union of India.
- The act empowers central government to deem an activity as unlawful.
- It is applicable to both **Indian and foreign nationals** and holds authority even if the crime is committed on a foreign land.
- Under the UAPA, the investigating agency has to finish the investigation in maximum **180 days (including a 90 days extension)** after the arrests.
- The **2004 amendment**, added "**terrorist act**" to the list of offences to ban organisations for terrorist activities.
- The act was **amended again** after the 26/11 attack in Mumbai in **2008**.
 - The amendment introduced **stringent conditions** to be applicable **for grant of bail** to the accused.
- The act was also amended in **2012**.
- The most recent amendment has been done in **2019**, expanding the ambit of the act.
 - It allowed the government to designate an **individual as a terrorist without trial**.
 - Earlier, government could designate only "**Organizations**" as terrorist.
- In a ruling passed on **1 February 2021**, the Supreme Court of India ruled that bail could be granted to accused if the right to speedy trial was violated.
 - The benefit of default bail shall be available to the accused person for the offences committed under the Act for where the investigation has not concluded within **90 days** of arrest.
 - If the prosecution files an application for the extension of the investigation period, an order cannot be passed on such an application without the giving an opportunity of being heard to the accused.
- In another significant judgement in **2023**, the Supreme Court ruled that "membership of an unlawful organisation" constituted an offence under UAPA.

Why is the act called 'Draconian'?

- The **definition of "terrorism" is indefinite** and comprehensive as it covers almost every kind of violent act.
- **Section 43A and 43B** of the act empowers the police to **search, seize and arrest** any person involved in unlawful activities without a warrant.
- **Section 43D** empowers the police to detain the accused in police custody for **30 days** and in **judicial custody** for a period of **180 days without a chargesheet**.
- Under the **Section 43 D**, The police can be granted the custody of the accused in judicial custody, just by filing an affidavit in the court.stating the reasons for doing so.

14. The Bilkis Bano Judgement



Source- <https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/bilkis-bano-judgement-shows-how-remorseless-convicts-scammed-the-court>

Recently: On **8th January 2024**, a landmark judgment was delivered in the Bilkis Bano gangrape case by a Supreme Court bench headed by **Justice BV Nagarathana**.

- The decision reversed the **Gujarat government's choice** to **remit** the life sentences of **11 convicts** in the case.
- The bench was hearing a group of petitions challenging the Gujarat government's decision to grant **remission** to the convicted men.
 - These individuals were released on **August 15, 2022**, coinciding with 75 years of India's independence.

Who is Bilkis Bano and What happened with her?

- Violence had broken out in Gujarat in the aftermath of the **Sabarmati Express train burning** incident at **Godhra** on **February 27, 2002** amidst an already communally charged atmosphere.
- **Fifty-nine people** were charred to death after a mob torched one of the coaches returning from **Ayodhya to Ahmedabad** with a large number of 'kar sevaks' of the **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)**.

- A **21-year-old** and **5- months Pregnant** Bilkis Bano was fleeing to a village in a truck with **her 3-year-old daughter, Saleha**, and **14** other family members.
- But before they could reach their destination, **a mob of 20-30 people** attacked them.
- The men snatched the three-year-old from Bilkis, and smashed her head to the ground.
- With her **daughter dead**, three men, all from her village and people she knew, took turns to **rape a pregnant Bilkis**.
- In the mayhem around her, the 14 members of her family were raped, molested, and hacked to death by the mob.
- Taking her for dead, the assailants left her naked and unconscious. However, Bilkis Bano lived to retell the horror.

The trial of the perpetrators:

- After she regained consciousness, she borrowed clothes from an Adivasi woman, and met a Home Guard who took her to the **Limkheda police station**.
- The state machinery reportedly worked against her as she tried to get the local police to file her complaint.
- She registered a complaint with **Head Constable Somabhai Gori** who, according to the CBI, “suppressed material facts and wrote a distorted and truncated version” of her complaint.
- Bilkis Bano approached the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** and moved to the **Supreme Court**.
- In **December 2003**, the SC ordered a **CBI probe** into the case.
- A month later, all accused were arrested and the trial began.
- In August **2004**, the **trial was moved to Mumbai** at the instance of the SC after Bilkis Bano told the court that her family was living in the shadow of **danger and uncertainty**.
- Four years later (**2008**), the trial court found **13 of the 20 accused guilty**.
 - Of them, **11 were awarded life sentences** for their heinous crimes.
 - **Seven** others were **acquitted** for want of evidence.
 - A **three-year sentence** of imprisonment was awarded **to the cop** who had initially refused to file Bilkis Bano’s complaint.
- In **May 2017**, the **Bombay High Court upheld the conviction** and life imprisonment of all 11 and quashed the acquittal of seven others.

- The SC later ordered the Gujarat government to pay Bilkis Bano a compensation of **Rs 50 lakh** along with a job and accommodation.

How were the convicts remitted?

- In **early 2022**, one of the convicts, **Radheshyam Bhagwandas Shah**, moved the **Supreme Court** after his remission plea in the **Gujarat HC** was **dismissed** on the grounds that the application **should have been filed in Maharashtra** where the trial had concluded.
- The convict sought the direction to the Gujarat government to consider his plea for premature release under the **old remission policy of the Gujarat** government.
 - He cited a **1992 circular** that was quoted in a **2012 Gujarat HC order**.
 - It pertained to “the early release of the life convicts who on and after **18.12.1978** have served out **14 clear years** imprisonment”.
 - He urged the SC to admit his plea since he had undergone a sentence of more than **15 years** without remission.
- The SC **admitted the plea** and ruled that it was the **Gujarat government that was competent** to examine the remission plea since the **crime had occurred there**.
- ***State of Haryana vs. Jagdish, 2010***- The apex court settled that the application for grant of pre-mature release will have to be considered based on the policy which stood on the **date of conviction**.
 - But the Gujarat government did not adhere to the **2014 policy of remission** which is currently in force but applied the **1992 policy** to release the convicts.
- Following this, the Gujarat government formed a committee, which was headed by the **Godhra Collector**.
 - The committee also included BJP legislators **C.K. Raolji** and **Suman Chauhan**, former BJP Godhra municipal councillor **Murli Mulchandani**, and BJP women wing member **Snehaben Bhatia**.
- The panel “unanimously” **decided in favour of remission** of those convicted and forwarded its recommendations to the State Home Department.
- On **August 15, 2022**, the 11 walked out of the Godhra sub-jail where they were serving their sentence.

The current judgement:

- In its recent order, the Supreme Court held that the **Gujarat government was not competent** to release the convicts in 2022.
- The court further stated that allowing them to remain outside jail would amount to validating "**invalid orders.**"
- The SC observed that the **appropriate government authorized** to issue such orders was **Maharashtra**, where the trial in the Bilkis Bano case occurred.
- The top court held as '**nullity**' its **May 13, 2022 order** of another bench asking Gujarat govt to consider remission plea of convicts.

What is Remission?

- The **Prison Act of 1894** defines remission as the system of "rules for the time being in force regulating the award of marks to, and the consequent shortening of sentences of, prisoners in jail."
 - In a nutshell, it is shortening of a sentence without changing its character.
- As per law, there are **three kinds** of remissions — constitutional, statutory and those earned in accordance with jail manuals.

Laws Governing Remission in India:

- **Article 72-** Empowers the President to grant remission.
- **Article 161-** Empowers the Governor of a state to grant remission.
- **Section 432 of CrPC-** Empowers the 'appropriate government' to suspend or remit the sentence of a prisoner.
- **Section 433A of CrPC-** States that prisoner shall not be released before 14 years of undergoing sentence in the case of two kinds of life convicts:
 - Those found guilty of an offence punishable with death.
 - Those whose death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment under Section 433.
- **Section 435 of CrPC-** States that in certain cases, the States have to act in consultation with the Central government.
 - These include cases investigated by the Delhi Special Police Establishment, or by any agency that has investigated an offence under a Central Act other than the CrPC.

- ***D. Krishna Kumar vs State of Telangana, 2021***- The High Court state that whenever an application is made for the suspension or remission of a sentence, the “appropriate government may **require the presiding judge of the court** by which the conviction was confirmed, **to state his opinion** as to whether the application should be granted or refused, together with his reasons for such opinion’.
- ***State of Haryana vs Mahender Singh, 2000***: The Supreme Court held that remission is not a right but a state discretion.

15. World Hindi Day 2024



Source- <https://www.sketchbubble.com/en/presentation-world-ngo-day.html>

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the **World Hindi Day** was observed on **January 10th**.

- The World Hindi Day or the **Vishwa Hindi Diwas** was founded to commemorate the date in **1949** when Hindi was **first spoken in the United Nations General Assembly**.

Hindi:

- Hindi is an **Indo-European language** and is said to be a descendant of the **Sanskrit language**.
- Hindi is the **third most spoken language** in the world after **Mandarin Chinese and English**.
- It has almost **600 million speakers** worldwide.
- In India, **43.63 percent** of people speak Hindi, making it the most common language, according to the **2011 census**.
- **430 million** people speak Hindi as their **first language** globally.
- It is mostly spoken in **North India** and is one of India's **two official languages**, along with **English**.
- It officially became the language of the **Republic of India** in **1949**.
- It's crucial to know that the Indian constitution doesn't say any language is the national language – **Hindi and 21 others** are considered official languages under the **8th Schedule** of the Indian Constitution.

Theme for World Hindi Day 2024:

- The focus of the 2024 World Hindi Day conference revolves around the theme "**Hindi – Bridging Traditional Knowledge and Artificial Intelligence.**"

History:

- The commemoration of World Hindi Day dates back to **1949** when Hindi was officially recognized as the **official language of India** at the **UNGA** for the first time.
- The first-ever **World Hindi Conference**, inaugurated by the then-prime minister **Indira Gandhi**, was held in **Maharashtra's Nagpur** in **1975** to commemorate the accomplishment.
- On **January 10, 1975**, the first **World Hindi Conference** officially began.
 - It took place in **Nagpur** from **January 10 to January 12, 1975**.
- Along with **100 delegates** from about **30 countries**, **Seewoosagar Ramgoolam**, the then-prime minister of **Mauritius**, also attended the conference as the conference's **chief guest**.
- Later in **2006**, former Prime Minister **Dr Manmohan Singh** announced that every year, **January 10** will be observed as World Hindi Day.
- This was also the **first year** that the Ministry of External Affairs began hosting grand celebrations of the day abroad.

16. GSAT- 20



Source- X/@SpaceX

Recently: **NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL)**, the ISRO's commercial arm, announced its plans to launch communication satellite **GSAT-20** onboard Elon Musk-owned **SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket**.

- This will be India's **first partnership** with a venture led by billionaire **Elon Musk** who also wants to expand his other businesses in the country.
- Musk, who is the chief executive of SpaceX and Tesla, is keen to bring his **Starlink satellite** broadband to India.

What is GSAT- 20?

- The GSAT-20 satellite is strategically designed to cater to India's escalating needs in broadband, in-flight and maritime communications (IFMC), and cellular backhaul services.
- Renamed **GSAT-N2**, this satellite will feature **Ka-Ka band high throughput satellite (HTS)** capacity.
- It is equipped with **32 beams** for pan-India coverage, extending to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.
- NSIL disclosed that a significant portion of the HTS capacity on the GSAT-20 satellite has already been secured by Indian service providers.
- GSAT-20, weighing **4,700 kg**, offers HTS capacity of nearly **48Gbps**.
- The satellite has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote/unconnected regions.
- It is planned to be launched in the **second quarter of 2024**.

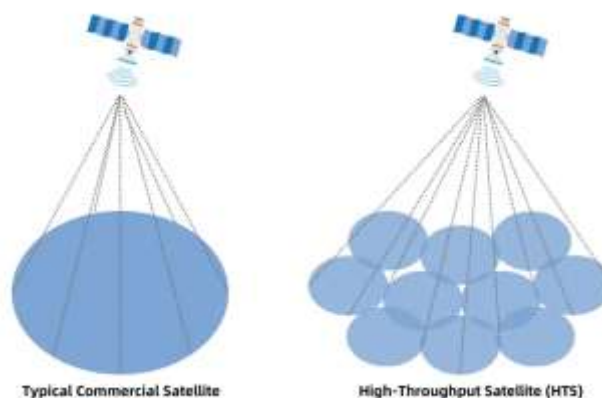
Why did ISRO opt for SpaceX's Falcon- rocket?

- Due to the **payload requirements**, ISRO opted to utilise SpaceX's Falcon-9.
- India's **GSLV-Mk3** heavy satellite launch rocket lacks the capability to accommodate the 4,700 kg GSAT-20 in **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)**.
- NSIL emphasised that the launch is executed under a contract between NSIL and SpaceX.

What are High Throughput Satellites (HTS)?

- High Throughput Satellites (HTS), are **advanced spacecraft** designed to provide significantly higher data transmission capacity compared to traditional satellites.
- HTS satellites can be divided into **Geostationary Orbit (GEO) and Non-Geostationary Orbit (NGSO)** according to their different orbits.
- At present, the HTS satellites applied in the orbit, are mostly **GEO**.
- HTS operating in **Ka-band frequencies** are capable of offering data rates of **more than 100 Gbps**, immensely surpassing the capabilities of traditional satellites (10 Gbps).

- They support diverse applications like broadband internet, cellular backhaul, government/military communication, and in-flight connectivity.
- **Traditional satellites** typically use a **single wide-beam** to cover a **large geographical area**, which can lead to limited capacity and poor signal quality.
 - While **HTS satellites** use **multiple narrow spot beams**, which allows them to focus their power and bandwidth on smaller, more targeted areas.
 - This improves overall signal quality and capacity, especially in areas with high demand of network services.



Source- [https://www.iplook.com/info/what-are-high-throughput-satellites-hts-i00331i1.html#:~:text=HTS%20operate%20in%20Ka-band,\(1%20Gbit%2Fs\)](https://www.iplook.com/info/what-are-high-throughput-satellites-hts-i00331i1.html#:~:text=HTS%20operate%20in%20Ka-band,(1%20Gbit%2Fs))

Falcon- 9 Rocket:

- Falcon 9 is a **reusable, two-stage rocket** designed and manufactured by **SpaceX** for the reliable and safe transport of people and payloads into Earth orbit and beyond.

- It can also be used as an expendable **heavy-lift launch vehicle**, being capable of deploying payloads of **up to 8,300 kg** into **GTO**.
- The **first Falcon 9 launch** was on **4 June 2010**.
- The first Falcon 9 commercial resupply mission to the **International Space Station (ISS)** launched on **8 October 2012**.
- It is the **only U.S. rocket** certified for **transporting humans** to the **ISS**.
- In **2022**, it became the U.S. rocket with the **most launches in history** and with the **best safety record**, having suffered just one flight failure.
- Falcon 9 is the **world's first orbital class reusable rocket**.
- Reusability allows SpaceX to re-fly the most expensive parts of the rocket, which in turn drives down the cost of space access.
- This marks a departure from ISRO's historical reliance on **French company Arianespace** for launching heavier satellites.

NewSpace India Limited (NSIL):

- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) was incorporated on **6 March 2019** under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- It is a wholly owned **Government of India company**, under the administrative control of **Department of Space (DOS)**.
- NSIL is the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the primary responsibility of enabling Indian industries to take up high technology space related activities.
- It is the **nodal agency** for carrying out **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)** production through Indian industry under consortium route.
- The manufacturing of **Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)** is also the responsibility of NSIL.
- It is headquartered in **Bengaluru**.
- **D. Radhakrishnan** is the current chairman of NSIL.
- As part of Space Sector reforms announced by Govt. of India during June 2020, NSIL was mandated to build, launch, own and operate satellites in "**Demand-driven mode**".
 - As part of this, NSIL successfully undertook its 1st Demand-driven satellite mission, **GSAT-24** during **June 2022**.
 - In this, the capacity on-board the satellite was fully secured by **M/s TataPlay**.

- GSAT-24 mission was **fully funded by NSIL**. Presently, NSIL owns and operates **11 communication satellites** in orbit.

17. Genetically Modified Crops



Source- <https://www.isaaa.org/kc/cropbiotechupdate/article/default.asp?ID=19840>

Recently: Seeking approval for environmental release of GM mustard, the Centre told Supreme Court that production of genetically modified crops was the need of the hour to ensure food security.

- A bench of justices **BV Nagarathna and Sanjay Karol** reserved its decision against a bunch of petitions challenging the decision of the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** that cleared open air release of GM mustard crop- **DMH-11**.

- The petitions are filed by **NGO Gene Campaign, Research Foundation for Science Technology, and activist Aruna Rodrigues**.
 - It also sought the Court's intervention to further strengthen the regulatory framework for assessing risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- The Centre had last year sowed GM mustard crop– DMH-11 at **eight designated sites** of the **Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR)** before it was released into the environment.

What are Genetically Modified Crops?

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

- By **2010, 29 countries** had planted commercialised genetically modified crops and a further **31 countries** had granted regulatory approval for transgenic crops to be imported.

Pros:

- Food supplies become predictable.
- Nutritional content can be improved.
- It creates foods that are more appealing to eat as colours and shape can be changed.
- Genetically modified foods are easier to transport due to longer shelf life.
- Herbicides and pesticides are used less often due to genetic resistance.

Cons:

- GMO crops may cause antibiotic resistance.
- Farmers growing genetically modified foods have a greater legal liability as the crops and seeds that produce GMO crops are patented
- Genes migrate to different plant species creating unforeseen complications to future crop growth where even the benefits of genetically modified foods may not outweigh the problems that they cause.
- Independent research is not allowed as 50% of the seed producers that have created the GMO foods market prohibit any independent research on the final crops as an effort to protect their profits.
- The assembly of genes imposes high risks to the disruption of ecosystem and biodiversity as it influences the natural process of gene flow and hence the natural selection.

GM Crops in India:

- Presently, India has permitted only one GM crop – **Bt cotton** for commercial cultivation.
- Bt- Cotton for **insect resistance** has been released for commercial cultivation in India during **2002** by GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee).
- Cultivation and production of Bt cotton has grown exponentially since then and India has become **second largest producer of cotton** and **leading exporter** within the world.
- The GEAC cleared **Bt brinjal** for commercialization in October **2009**.

- But following concerns raised by some farmers, anti-GM activists and scientists, the govt of India officially announced **moratorium on Bt. Brinjal** on **9 February 2010**.
- The GEAC in **2014**, gave approval for limited experimental field trials of GM **rice, brinjal, mustard, cotton and chickpea** for the sole purpose of generating biosafety data.

Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11 (DMH- 11):

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

Hybridisation:

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

Production of DMH-11:

- The hybrid mustard DMH-11 was **first bred in 2002** by the scientists at **Delhi University's Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP)**, containing **two alien genes** isolated from a soil bacterium called ***Bacillus amyloliquefaciens***.
- The **first gene ('barnase')** codes for a protein that **impairs pollen production** and renders the plant into which it is incorporated male-sterile.
- This plant is then crossed with a fertile parental line containing, in turn, the **second 'barstar'** gene that blocks the action of the barnase gene.
- The resultant **F1 progeny** is both **high-yielding** and also capable of producing seed/ grain, thanks to the barstar gene in the second fertile line.

- This system was used to develop DMH-11 by crossing a popular Indian mustard variety '**Varuna**' (the barnase line) with **an East European 'Early Heera-2' mutant (barstar)**.
- DMH-11 is claimed to have shown an **average 28% yield increase** over Varuna in contained field trials carried out by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- GEAC has also recommended the environmental release of DMH-11's parental lines (carrying the barnase and barstar genes) for them to be used to develop new hybrids.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee:

- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is a **statutory body** that functions under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- It was earlier known as the **Genetic Engineering Approval Committee**.
- As per **Rules, 1989**, it is responsible for appraisal of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production.
- The committee is also responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment.
- The Rules of 1989 also define **five competent authorities** for handling various aspects of the rules:
 - Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBSC)
 - Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM)
 - Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC)
 - State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC)
 - District Level Committee (DLC)
- GEAC is **chaired** by the **Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC** and **co-chaired** by a **representative from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT)**.
- Presently, it has **24 members** and meets **every month** to review its working.
- **Shri Naresh Pal Gangwar** is the current chairperson of GEAC.

18. Oxfam's Inequality Report 2024



Source- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GO794U7Kvx8>

Recently: Oxfam International released the latest edition of its **annual inequality report**.

- The report, titled "**Inequality Inc.,**" was released the same day as the start of the annual **World Economic Forum** in **Davos, Switzerland**.

Findings of the report:

- The report claims that fortunes of **five richest men** have shot up by **114 percent** since **2020**.
 - The world's five richest men have **more than doubled** their fortunes from **\$405 billion to \$869 billion** since 2020 —at a rate of **\$14 million per hour**.
 - According to Forbes' data, world's five richest men rank as-
 - Tesla CEO Elon Musk
 - Bernard Arnault and his family, who own luxury goods group LVMH
 - Amazon founder Jeff Bezos
 - Oracle founder Larry Ellison
 - Investor Warren Buffett

- Nearly **five billion people** have been made poorer since 2020.
- If current trends continue, the world will have its **first trillionaire** within a **decade** but poverty won't be eradicated for another **229 years**.
- **Seven out of ten** of the world's biggest corporations have a **billionaire as CEO** or principal shareholder.
 - These corporations are worth **\$10.2 trillion**, equivalent to more than the combined GDPs of all countries in Africa and Latin America.
- Billionaires are **\$3.3 trillion richer than in 2020**, and their wealth has grown three times faster than the rate of inflation.
- Despite representing just **21 percent of the global population**, **rich countries** in the Global North own **69 percent of global wealth** and are home to **74 percent** of the **world's billionaire wealth**.
- The world's **richest 1 percent** own **43 percent** of all global **financial assets**.
 - In the **Middle East**, the richest 1 percent own **48 percent** of financial wealth.
 - In **Asia**, the richest 1 percent own **50 percent** of the wealth.
 - In **Europe**, the richest 1 percent own **47 percent** of the wealth.
- At the same time, this richest 1 percent globally emit as much carbon pollution as the poorest **two-thirds** of humanity.
- Oxfam estimates that only **0.4 percent** of over **1,600** of the world's largest and most influential companies are publicly committed to paying their workers a living wage.
- The report also said that globally, **men own \$105 trillion more than women** — a difference in wealth equivalent to more than four times the size of the U.S. economy.
- It would take **1,200 years** for a woman working in the health and social sector to earn what the average CEO in the biggest 100 Fortune companies earns in a year.
- The market concentration is part of the study of Oxfam. Here are some findings related to this:
 - **Ten** giant global 'Big Pharma' firms merge from **60 companies** over **two decades**.
 - **Two global companies** control over **40 percent** of the global **seed market** compared with **ten companies** owning 40 percent of the global seed market **25 years ago**.
 - **Four firms** control **62 percent** of the world's **pesticide market**
 - **Three-quarters** of global **advertisement spending** pays **Meta, Alphabet and Amazon**.
 - More than **90 percent** of **online search** is done via **Google**.

- The wages of nearly **800 million workers** have failed to keep up with inflation and they have lost **\$1.5 trillion** over the last **two years**, equivalent to nearly a month (25 days) of lost wages for each worker.

Methods suggested to reduce income inequality:

Revitalizing the state-

- Governments should ensure **universal provision of healthcare and education**, and explore publicly-delivered goods and public options in sectors from energy to transportation.

Reining in corporate power, including by breaking up monopolies and democratizing patent rules-

- This also means legislating for living wages, capping CEO pay, and new taxes on the super-rich and corporations, including permanent wealth and excess profit taxes.
- Oxfam estimates that a wealth tax on the world's millionaires and billionaires could generate **\$1.8 trillion a year**.

Reinventing business-

- Competitive and profitable businesses don't have to be shackled by shareholder greed.
- Democratically-owned businesses better equalize the proceeds of business.

Oxfam International:

- Oxfam International was founded in **1942** and is Headquartered in **Nairobi, Kenya**.
- It is a British-founded confederation of **21 independent charitable organizations** focusing on the alleviation of global poverty.
- **Oxfam India** was established in **September 1st 2024** under **Section 8** of the **Indian Companies Act, 2013**.
- **Amitabh Behar**, current CEO of Oxfam India as the **Interim Executive Director of Oxfam International** on May 1st 2023 for a **12- months** tenure.

19. World Economic Forum 2024



Source- <https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/world-economic-forum-2024-davos-kicks-off>

Recently: The **54th edition** of the World Economic Forum annual meet was held in **Davos, Switzerland** from **January 15 to 19, 2024**.

- The meeting observed the gathering of more than **2800 leaders, including 60 heads of state and government officials.**
- The Indian delegation included **three union ministers, three chief ministers, and over a hundred CEOs in attendance.**
 - Union Ministers-
 - **Smriti Irani-** Minister for women & child development and minister for minority affairs.
 - **Ashwini Vaishnaw-** Minister for railways, communications, electronics & information technology
 - **Hardeep Singh Puri-** Minister for housing & urban affairs and minister for petroleum and natural gas.
 - Chief Ministers: Eknath Shinde (Maharashtra), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), and Siddaramaiah (Karnataka) form a significant part of the Indian delegation.

Takeaways:

Middle East:

- Gaza dominated the agenda of the World Economic Forum (WEF), but leaders failed to produce clear details on any practical pathway to Palestinian statehood, or a ceasefire between Israel and Gaza's Palestinian militant group Hamas.
- The head of the Palestine Investment Fund estimated at least **\$15 billion** would be needed to rebuild houses in Gaza alone.
- Arab states said they would not fund reconstruction unless there was a lasting peace.

Red Sea:

- Attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group on ships in the Red Sea would drive the cost of goods from Asia to Europe much higher, logistics giant DP World said.
- CEOs at Davos said they were gaming out alternative supply routes.
- Yemen's vice president and Iran's foreign minister said the attacks would not stop until Israel ended the war in Gaza.

China:

- Premier Li Qiang told Davos China's economy was open for business and highlighted its potential for foreign investment.
- Investors remained cautious amid sluggish post-pandemic recovery and tensions with the United States.

Artificial Intelligence:

- Talk of AI rippled through Davos meeting rooms and panels, its promise touted on signs and its security risks invoked by China's premier.
- While conversations included how to regulate the burgeoning technology and how to apply it to scientific discovery, the question of how to monetize it persisted.
- Misinformation and disinformation are listed as the most severe risks over the next two years.

Economy:

- Heads of global banks warned of inflationary pressures from increased shipping costs and the possibility of oil price rises.

- Bank executives fear the market is mispricing interest rate cuts, and that geopolitical risks could cause volatility.

Energy:

- The number of energy executives in Davos was smaller than in years past.
- Oil bosses from Shell, Total Energies and Aramco met on the sidelines to discuss how to help decarbonise industries they supply

Ukraine:

- Talks with more than **80 national security advisers** from around the world led to Switzerland offering to host peace talks.
- Zelenskiy also met with **Wall Street's Jamie Dimon** and other bank leaders to seek financing for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Gender:

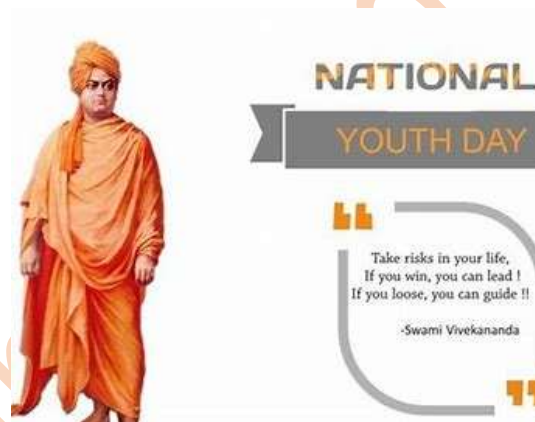
- The WEF said that around **28% of the total of 3,000 participants**, including 350 heads of state and government and ministers, who gathered in Davos this year were women.
- This year marked a significant milestone in the 54-year history of the Annual Meeting, as WEF welcomed **more than 800 women** to Davos — the highest number in our records.

World Economic Forum:

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) is an international non-governmental and lobbying organisation for multinational companies.
- The foundation is mostly funded by its **1,000 member companies**, typically global enterprises with more than US\$5 billion in turnover.
- Founded on 24 January **1971** by German engineer **Klaus Schwab**.
- The WEF is mostly known for its annual meeting at the end of January in **Davos**.
- It is based in **Cologny**, Canton of Geneva, **Switzerland**.
- Executive Chairman- **Klaus Schwab**
- President- **Børge Brende**
- Major reports published by the organization:

- Energy Transition Index
- Global Competitiveness Report
- Global IT Report
- Global Gender Gap Report
- Global Travel and Tourism Report

20. National Youth Day 2024



Source- <https://www.news18.com/lifestyle/national-youth-day-2024-wishes-quotes-by-swami-vivekananda-and-10-interesting-facts-8736521.html>

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the **National Youth Day** or **Rashtriya Yuva Diva** was observed on **January 12th**.

- The day is celebrated on the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda**.
- The day creates awareness and provides knowledge about the rights of people in India.
- The main objective behind the celebration is to make a better future for the country by motivating the youth and spreading the ideas of the Swami Vivekananda.

Who was Swami Vivekananda?

- Swami Vivekananda, **the great philosopher, thinker and the greatest patron of the youth** in India, was born on **January 12, 1863** in **Kolkata** (then Calcutta).
- He was the **chief disciple** of **19th century** mystic and **yogi Ramakrishna Paramhansa** who founded the **Ramakrishna Math**.
 - Ramkrishna Math is a monastic order based on his guru's teachings in Kolkata
 - It is a worldwide spiritual movement known as the **Ramakrishna Mission** based on the ancient Hindu philosophy of **Vedanta**.
- Vivekananda is credited with contributing to a **revival of modern Hinduism** and inspiring nationalist consciousness during colonial rule.
- He is best known for his famous **1893 speech** where he introduced Hinduism to the Western world in **Chicago**.
- Swami Vivekananda **died** on **July 4, 1902** but his writings and teachings had an impact on many of India's nationalist leaders, who were fighting against the colonial rule.

History:

- The decision to celebrate Vivekananda's birthday as National Youth Day was taken in **1984**, and it was **first** marked on January 12, 1985.
- Since then, the day has been celebrated as National Youth Day all over the country.
- On **13 January 2022**, the **National Youth Summit** was organized to bring diverse cultures of India and integrate them into a united thread of '**Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat**', through an immersive and interactive approach.

Theme for 2024:

- The theme for National Youth Day is "**Arise, Awake and Realise the power you hold**".

21. The ICJ Ruling against Israel



Source- <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/news/world/sa-vs-israel-icj-hears-how-israel-has-genocidal-intent-and-how-widespread-genocidal-utterances-are-b9e141a8-1440-47e9-921a-ce001aad78a4>

Recently: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered in the case of alleged **genocide by Israel**.

- The ICJ's interim verdict came on the eve of **International Holocaust Remembrance Day**.
 - The international Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed on **27 January** since **2006**.
- It was ruling on the **nine provisional measures** requested by **South Africa** in its genocide claim against Israel.
- By an overwhelming majority, the court's **17-judge panel** voted in favor of **six emergency measures**.
 - A majority of **15 out of 17 judges** voted in favour of imposing the so-called provisional measures.
 - **Judge Julia Sebutinde of Uganda** was the only one to vote **against** all six measures adopted by the court.
 - **Israel's judge Aharon Barak**, a Holocaust survivor and former president of the country's Supreme Court, voted in **favour of two** of the emergency measure.
 - The court's panel ordinarily comprises **15 judges**, but was expanded in this case by additional judges from **South Africa** and **Israel**.

The Case:

- **South Africa** brought the case to the court on 29 December 2023.
- The case is officially known as ***Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)***.
- South Africa's submission alleges that Israel has committed, and is committing, **genocide against Palestinians** in the Gaza Strip, in violation of the **Genocide Convention**.
 - It also placed the charges on Israel's conduct towards Palestinians, including **75-year apartheid, 56-year occupation, and 16-year blockade of the Strip**.
- South Africa has filed the case under **Article 9** which allows for disputes between parties to be submitted to the ICJ.
- **Israel** appeared before the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** to determine the course of the brutal war in **Gaza**.
- Both the countries have signed the **UN Genocide Convention**, created in **1948** as a response to the **Holocaust**.
- South Africa argued that hostilities against Palestinians had begun **before Hamas's actions on October 7**.
- In an **84-page submission** to the ICJ, South Africa urged judges to order Israel to "**immediately suspend** its military operations" in Gaza.
- South Africa asserted that Israel did not supply essential aid to the Gaza Strip during the recent **three-month war** with Hamas.
 - The essential aid includes food, water, medicine, fuel, and shelter.

The order:

- The court ordered that Israel must "**take all measures within its power**" to prevent all acts within the scope of **Article 2** the **Genocide Convention**.
- **Article 2** defines "**genocide**" as "acts committed with intent to destroy, wholly or partly, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group".
- The court did not agree to South Africa's request for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.
- However, it directed Israel to allow the entry of basic services and **humanitarian assistance** into the Palestinian enclave.

- **Judge Joan E. Donoghue** of **US**, ICJ's current **President**, ordered Israel to report to the court **within a month** on the steps taken to ensure compliance.
- Israel was also ordered to **preserve evidence** related to allegations of genocide.
 - It ordered that the access to such evidence should not be denied to fact-finding missions, international mandates, and other international bodies.

What happens now?

- Israel is required to submit a report to the court on the steps it has taken to comply with the orders **within one month** of the ruling.
- The court will examine in detail the merits of the case, a process which could take years.
- While the ICJ's decisions are final and without appeal, the court has **no way to enforce them**.
- Whether Israel will choose to abide by the ruling is debatable since the court does not have any enforcement powers.
- For instance, in **March 2022**, the ICJ ordered **Russia** to halt its offensive in Ukraine.
 - Although the order was legally binding, Moscow decided to ignore it, resulting in the continuation of hostilities.

United Nations Genocide Convention:

- The Genocide Convention is an international legal instrument that, for the first time, codified the crime of genocide.
- Genocide Convention is known as the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**.
- The Genocide Convention was adopted by the **UN General Assembly** on **December 9, 1948**.
- It has been in effect since **January 12, 1951**.
- The Convention defines genocide as **five acts**:
 - Killing members of a group;
 - Causing serious bodily or mental harm;
 - Inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction;
 - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group; and
 - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

- There are, therefore, **two elements** that need to be satisfied to call it the crime of Genocide: The **Physical Acts**; and the **Specific Intent** “to destroy, in whole or in part” a specific group.
- The Genocide Convention has been ratified or acceded to by **153 States** (as of **April 2022**, with **Zambia**).
- Other **41 United Nations Member States** have yet to do so.
 - From those, **18 are from Africa, 17 from Asia and 6 from America.**
- **Israel** signed the genocide convention in the year of **1949**.
- **South Africa** signed the convention in **1998**.
- **India** also signed the convention in **1949**.
- International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime is celebrated on **December 9th**.
- In **2022, Ukraine** filed a case against **Russia** for commission of Genocide.
- In **2019**, the **Gambia** filed a case against **Myanmar** with respect to the Rohingya for commission of Genocide.
 - The Myanmar case was the **first time** a state sought the court's jurisdiction to address genocidal acts against another state's citizens.

International Court of Justice:

- The International Court of Justice, also called the **World Court**, is one of the **six principal organs** of the United Nations (UN).
- It settles disputes between states in accordance with international law and gives advisory opinions on international legal issues.
- It was established in **1945** after the Second World War, replacing the **Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ)**, which was established in **1920** by the **League of Nations**.
- It is the only UN principal organ **not situated in New York** as it is Headquartered in **The Hague, Netherlands**.
- All the **193 member** states of the UN are automatically parties to the Court. Those nations that are not members of the UN may become parties to the Court's statute with the help of the **Article 93 procedure**.
- The **ICJ consists of a panel of 15 judges** elected by the UN General Assembly and Security Council for **nine-year terms**.

- Its official working languages are **English and French**.
- **Dalveer Bhandari** is presently the Indian judge at the ICJ.
- There have been **four Indian judges** in ICJ till now.
- **Nagendra Singh** was the first Indian judge at ICJ and also the President of ICJ (1985-1988).
- **John Donoghue** is the current President of ICJ.
- The '**advisory opinion**' of the ICJ is **not legally binding** as an ICJ judgment.
 - However, its clarification of international environmental laws would make the process more streamlined.

22. Exercise Desert Cyclone



SOURCE- PIB

Recently: In a mark of rising strategic ties between India and the United Arab Emirates, the militaries of both countries began their **first joint military exercise 'Desert Cyclone'**.

- The exercise was conducted in **Mahajan, Rajasthan** from **2nd to 15th January 2024**.

Aim:

- The aim of the Exercise is to enhance interoperability **in Sub-conventional Operations** including **Fighting in Built-Up Area (FIBUA)** in desert/ semi desert terrain under **Chapter VII** of the **United Nations Charter on Peace Keeping Operations**.
- The Exercise will enhance cooperation and interoperability between both the sides during Peace Keeping Operations.

Contingents:

- The **Indian Army** contingent comprised **45 personnel** and was represented mainly by a Battalion from the **Mechanised Infantry Regiment**.
- The **UAE Land Forces contingent** comprised **45 personnel** and was represented by troops from the **Zayed First Brigade**.

What did the Exercise include?

- Drills planned to be rehearsed during Exercise 'DESERT CYCLONE' included Establishment of a **Joint Surveillance Centre, Cordon and Search Operation, Domination of Built-Up Area and Heliborne Operations**.
- The Exercise will also foster collaborative partnership and help in sharing best practices between the two sides.

India- UAE Relations:

- The UAE and India enjoyed close and friendly ties based on historic and cultural ties.
- The UAE federation was **created in 1971** and India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established **diplomatic relations** in **1972**.
- While the **UAE opened its Embassy** in India in **1972**, **Indian Embassy** in UAE was opened in **1973**.

- On **16 August 2015**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi began a **two-day visit** to the UAE, the **first state visit** by an Indian Prime Minister to the country in **34 years**.
- In **2018**, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between India and the UAE on **Technical Cooperation in the Rail Sector**.
- India was the **first country** with which the UAE had inked the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** in **2022**.
- An agreement was also signed in July 2023 for supply of up to **1.2 Million Metric Tonne Per Annum (MMTPA) of LNG** for a period of **14 years** starting from **2026**.
- There are around **3.5 million** Indians working in the UAE, the largest anywhere outside the country.
- Indians also make up the **largest ethnic group** in the UAE, making up roughly **38%** of UAE's total residents.

Defence Cooperation:

- Defense cooperation between India and UAE has seen growth since **2003** when the Chief of Staff of the UAE armed forces visited India.
- The subsequent exchanges resulted in the initiation of the **Desert Eagle bilateral exercises** involving the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the UAE Air Force (UAE-AF).
- Additionally, the inaugural **joint naval exercise, Gulf Star-1**, held in 2018, established a foundation for maritime security cooperation between the two nations.

23. Central Committee on equal distribution of benefits to SCs



Source- <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/the-mirage-of-equal-benefits-for-all-scs-has-insulated-law-from-reality/cid/1792092>

Recently: In a move to address existing disparities within the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, the Central government has formed a **high-level panel** to **examine administrative measures aimed at safeguarding the interests of the most disadvantaged groups within the SCs.**

- The committee will work out a method for the equitable distribution of benefits, schemes and initiatives to the most backward among over 1,200 SC communities across the country.
- Meanwhile, a **seven-judge Constitution Bench** of the Supreme Court is expected to soon start hearing the matter of **whether sub-categorisation of SCs and STs** is at all permissible.

What led to the move?

- This committee's formation is the result of a **meeting** chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in **December, 2023.**
- The meeting was held weeks after promising to consider the demand for **sub-categorisation of SCs** as raised by the **Madiga community** in **Telangana** in the run-up to the Assembly elections there last year.

- Like the Madiga community, SC communities in several States have said that they have been routinely **crowded out of benefits meant for SCs by dominant and relatively forward communities** in their category.
- Commissions formed by State and Union governments have also supported the argument that several SC communities often miss out on benefits.
- As a result, multiple States like **Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu have** tried to bring in reservation laws at the State level in a bid to sub-categorise SCs.
 - All of these matters are held up in the court.
- The Constitution needs to be amended in order to achieve the subcategorization of the SC.
- **National Commissions for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** had opposed the move to amend the Constitution.
 - It argued that just setting aside a quota within the quota would not be enough and that making sure existing schemes and benefits reach them on priority basis was more urgent.
- However, even the NCST and NCSC had in **2005** maintained that nothing in the Constitution's **Articles 341 and 342** explicitly prevented Parliament from sub-categorising SCs and STs.

Madiga Community:

- The Madiga community is a **Telugu caste**, mainly living in the southern states of **Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka**.
- It constitutes at least **50%** of the **SC population in Telangana**.
- The SCs comprise around **15%** of the **total population in Telangana** (2011 Census).
- As per the 2011 census, the Madiga community in the **undivided Andhra Pradesh** (before the creation of Telangana in 2014) constituted more than **48 per cent** of the SC population.
- The demand of the Madigas was raised as early as **1994**, which led to the Union government seeking legal options to do the same in **2005**.
- With an aim to implement internal reservation within the SCs, the **Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS)** was established in **July 1994** in **Andhra Pradesh**, under the leadership of Manda Krishna Madiga and others.
- The MPRS held several protests, and mass rallies to publicise the demand for sub-classification within SC.

- For decades, the Madiga community has said that despite their numbers, they are crowded out of government benefits meant for SCs.
 - This includes reservation by the **Mala community** — another SC — which is dominant and relatively forward.

The Central Committee:

- The high-level committee of secretaries formed by the centre will be chaired by the **Cabinet Secretary**.
- The Committee will consist of Secretaries from various Ministries and Departments:
 - Ministry of Home Affairs
 - Ministry of Law & Justice
 - Ministry of Tribal Affairs
 - Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
 - Department of Personnel and Training
- While it has **not been given a specific deadline**, the committee has been asked to present its findings at the earliest.
- The panel will look into ways in which benefits of other government schemes and initiatives can be focused towards these SC communities.
 - This will include designing of special initiatives and schemes
- The panel will have to figure out on what basis SC communities are going to be shortlisted for special attention.
- It will find out the extent to which special initiatives need to be designed for each of them, and then find a way to deliver them.

Scheduled Caste:

- Scheduled castes are **sub-communities** within the framework of the **Hindu caste system** who have historically faced **deprivation, oppression, and extreme social isolation in India** on account of their perceived '**low status.**'

- The Hindu four-tier caste system, or varna system, forced these communities into work that predominantly involved **sanitation, disposal of animal carcasses, cleaning of excreta, and other tasks that involved contact with “unclean” materials.**
- The **2011 Census** places the number of scheduled castes in India at **16.6 percent** of the total population
- **Article 341(1)** of the Indian Constitution empowers the **President to notify** the communities under the **Scheduled Caste.**
- Only marginalised Hindu communities can be deemed Scheduled Castes in India, according to **The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.**
- The framers of the constitution have included various provisions in it in order to bring the oppressed classes at par with the rest of the country.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 15(1): **Prohibits discriminate** against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- Article 15(4): Allows the state to **make special provision** for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 16(4): Allows the state to make special provisions for reservation of appointments or posts in favour of backward classes that are not adequately represented in the service.
 - The Supreme Court has clarified in *Mohan Kumar Singhania v. UOI*, 1992, that Article 16(4) is based on the discretion of the state and **does not confer any Fundamental Right** on the citizens to claim reservation.
- Article 17: **Abolishes untouchability** protecting backward classes especially SCs that were historically considered untouchables.
- Article 46: It is DPSP that lays down that the state shall promote **educational and economic interests of SCs and STs.**
- Article 330: Promises **reservation** for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the **Lok Sabha.**
- Article 338: Establishes the **National Commission for the Scheduled Castes.**
- Article 243D: Provides for **reservation** for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in **Panchayat.**
- Article 243T: Provides **reservation** of seats to SCs and STs in **Municipalities.**

- Article 340: Empowers the President to **appoint a commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes**, the difficulties they face, and make recommendations on steps to be taken to improve their condition.

National Commission of Scheduled Castes:

- The National Commission for Scheduled Castes is an **Indian constitutional body** under the jurisdiction of **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India**.
- **Article 338** of the Indian constitution deals with **National Commission for Scheduled Castes**.
- The **first Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** was set up in August **1978** with **Bhola Paswan Shastri** as chairman and other four members.
- Following the **89th Amendment Act, 2003** the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was **bifurcated** to form:
 - National Commission for SC (Article 338)
 - National Commission for ST (Article 338A)
- The commission, which consists of a **Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and 3 other members**, are appointed by the **President** by warrant under his hand and seal.
- The tenure of the Chairperson is for **3 years**.
- The **Chairman** of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes has the status of a **cabinet minister** and the **vice chairman** has the rank of a **minister of state**.
- The Commission presents an **annual report to the President** regarding the working of safeguards for SCs.
 - The recommendations of NCSC are **non-binding** in nature.
- **Special courts** are set up by the NCSC to perform key monitoring activities, helping speed the offenses under the Civil Rights Act and the Atrocities Act.
- **Shri Vijay Sampla** is the current chairperson of NCSC.

24. Swachha Sarvekshan Awards 2023



एक कदम स्वच्छता की ओर

Source- <https://zeevector.com/swachh-bharat-logo-png-vector/>

Recently: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has launched Swachh Survekshan 2024 and the awards were distributed in a ceremony on **January 11 in New Delhi.**

- For the **seventh year** in a row, **Indore** has been ranked as the cleanest city in India under **Swachh Survekshan Awards 2024.**
- Indore has shared the title of cleanest city with **Surat, Gujarat.**

Swachh Survekshan Awards:

- Swachh Survekshan, conducted since **2016**, is the world's largest urban sanitation and cleanliness survey.
- It is conducted annually by **Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry (MoHUA)** with the **Quality Council of India** as its implementation partner.
 - The union minister to MoHUA is **Hardeep Singh Puri.**
- It began as part of the **Swachh Bharat Mission** which was launched in **2014.**
- The methodology for measuring cleanliness rests on **two main criteria:**

Citizen Feedback and Field Assessment.

- The subject of sanitation falls under **State Governments**.
 - They are responsible for entering updated data on the **Swachh Bharat Mission Management Information System (MIS)**.

Swachh Survekshan 2023:

- The Swachh Survekshan awards 2023 were given away by **President Droupadi Murmu** in **New Delhi**.
- **13 awardees** received felicitations under categories of Clean Cities, Cleanest Cantonment, Safai Mitra Suraksha, Ganga Towns and Best Performing State.
- In the category of cities with a population of less than **1 lakh**, **Sasvad, Patan** and **Lonavala** secured the top three spots.
- **Mhow Cantonment Board** in **Madhya Pradesh** was adjudged the **Cleanest Cantonment Board**.
- **Varanasi** and **Prayagraj** won the top two awards amongst the **Cleanest Ganga Towns**.
- **Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh** and **Chhattisgarh** won the top three awards for **Best Performing State**.
- **Chandigarh** walked away with the award for the **Best Safaimitra Surakshit Sheher (Cities safest for sanitation workers)**.
- **20 zonal awards** were bestowed upon medium and small cities.
- The award ceremony of the year was convened in the presence of over 3000 guests.

25. Indian Army Day 2024

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the India Army Day was observed on **January 15th**.

- This special day remembers the appointment of **General K. M. Cariappa** as the **first Indian Commander-in-Chief** in **1949**.
- In 2024 nation celebrates the **76th anniversary of the Indian Army Day**.
- It's a day to thank our soldier's sacrifices for peace and protection.

Theme for 2024:

- The theme for Indian Army Day 2024 is "**In Service of the Nation.**"
- This theme highlights the core values of the Army, emphasising the unwavering dedication, commitment, and professionalism of our soldiers.
- It echoes the **Indian Army's motto, "Service Before Self,"** underscoring the priority placed on the safety and security of the nation.

History:

- Indian Army Day celebrated on **January 15th**, holds significance because on this day in **1949**, **General K. M. Cariappa** known as '**Kipper**' became the **first Indian Commander-in-Chief** of the Indian Army.
- He took over the charge from **General Sir Francis Roy Bucher**.
- This marked a historic moment as Cariappa became the first-ever Indian to lead the Army, **ending the era of British-serving chiefs** with General Bucher as the last one.

About K.M. Karippa:

- Popularly known as 'Kipper,' Field Marshal KM Cariappa earned his **King's Commission** in **1919**.
- He was among the initial batch of Indian cadets at the **Royal Military College** in **Sandhurst, UK**.
- Notably, he was the first Indian to attend the Staff College in Quetta and later went on to become the **first Indian to command a Battalion**.
- In **1942**, Cariappa established the **7th Rajput Machine Gun Battalion**, eventually recognised as the 17 Rajput.

- His significant contributions to the military led to the conferment of the **Field Marshal rank** in **1986**.
- **Field Marshal Cariappa, passed away at the age of 94 in 1993**, leaving behind a legacy of leadership and service to the nation.

26. The Red Sea Crisis



Source- <https://edubaba.in/red-sea-definition-map-facts-for-exam/>

Recently: The **Houthi rebels in Yemen** have significantly stepped-up attacks on commercial shipping vessels travelling through the lower Red Sea since mid-November in response to Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

- On some occasions, Houthis have boarded or sought to board merchant tankers. They have also targeted cargo ships with drones and missiles.
- Many shipping groups have halted or rerouted traffic.

What is the Red Sea Crisis?

- The Red Sea Crisis began on **19 October 2023** when Yemen's **Houthi Movement** initiated a **series of attacks**, targeting Southern Israel and the **ships in the Red Sea**.
- During the **Israel– Hamas war**, the Houthi movement in Yemen, aligned with **Hamas**, launched attacks targeting Israel.
- They employed missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), some of which were intercepted by Israel over the Red Sea using the Arrow missile defense system.
- Yemen's Houthi rebel group has targeted vessels passing through **the strait of Bab al-Mandab**, a **20 mile (32km)** wide channel that splits **north-east Africa** from **Yemen** on the Arabian Peninsula.
- They claim to be targeting **vessels with connections to Israel** following the start of the war in the Gaza Strip.
 - But the threat to trade has grown as vessels flagged to other countries with no connection to Israel have been attacked.
- Damage has been minimal in most cases, but in mid-November, one tanker, the Galaxy Leader, was successfully **hijacked**.
- They've used everything from heavily armed hijackers to missiles and drones.
- On December 2023, Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saree claimed they will not stop until the Gaza Strip is supplied with "food and medicine".

Who are Houthis?

- The Houthi movement is a **Shiite militant organization** which controls **northern Yemen** and is supported and funded by **Iran**.
 - They are aligned with and supplied by Iran, but are politically independent.
- Formally known as the **Ansar Allah (Partisans of God)**, the group emerged in the **1990s** and takes its name from the movement's late founder, **Hussein al-Houthi**.
 - The current leader is his brother, **Abdul Malik al-Houthi**.
- In the early **2000s**, the Houthis fought a series of rebellions against Yemen's long-time authoritarian president, **Ali Abdullah Saleh**.
 - This was done in an attempt to win greater autonomy for the group's homeland in the north of Yemen.

- During the **2011 Arab Spring**, a popular uprising forced President Saleh to hand over power to his deputy, **Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi**.
- In **2015**, the rebels seized large parts of western Yemen and **forced Mr Hadi to flee abroad**.
- Neighbouring **Saudi Arabia** feared the Houthis would take over Yemen and make it a satellite of its **rival, Iran**.
 - It formed a **coalition of Arab countries** that intervened in the war.
 - Years of air strikes and ground fighting have **not dislodged** the Houthis from most of the territory they seized.
 - Saudi Arabia is now trying to make a **peace deal** with the Houthis, and a **UN-brokered truce** has been in effect since **April 2022**.
- The current escalation could also imperil peace talks between the rebel group and the Saudis.
- While other Muslim countries and groups have chosen not to try to help Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis declared war on Israel at the end of October.
- Initially, the Houthis launched long-range ballistic missiles at Israel, but these were ineffective and some were intercepted by the US and the Saudis.
- From **mid-November**, however, the group switched tactics to focus on attacking commercial shipping, starting with the seizure of the Galaxy Leader.

Red Sea and its Significance:

- The Red Sea is a seawater inlet of **the Indian Ocean**, lying between **Africa and Asia**.
- To its **north** lie the **Sinai Peninsula, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Gulf of Suez** (leading to the Suez Canal).
- At its **southern end** is a narrow strait of water – about **20 miles wide** – between **Djibouti and Yemen: the Bab el-Mandeb strait**, the area that the Houthi rebels in Yemen have been targeting.
- The Red Sea is one of the **world's most densely packed** shipping channels and the most significant waterway connecting Europe to Asia and east Africa.
- About **12% of global trade** passes through the Red Sea, including **30% of global container traffic**.
- Billions of dollars of traded goods and supplies pass through the Red Sea every year.
 - This means that delays there can affect petrol prices, the availability of electronics and other aspects of global trade.

Global Impact:

- Prominent shipping companies including **Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, and MSC** have decided **not to use the Red Sea**.
 - **Seven out of the 10** biggest shipping companies by market share have suspended operations in the Red Sea.
- **95%** of the vessels have rerouted around the **Cape of Good Hope, on the southern tip of Africa**.
 - This adds around **3,500 nautical miles** (4,000 miles/6,500km) and **10-12 days** sailing time to each trip.
 - This requires **extra fuel** of around **\$1m** and additional **carbon emissions**.
 - In this case, there aren't really any alternatives given the huge volumes of cargo involved that cannot be carried through rail or air transport.
 - The **harsh weather conditions** sometimes encountered by vessels navigating Africa's southern tip mean that this option is not without risk itself.
- The crisis is causing **widespread economic impacts**, pushing up prices of goods and delaying deliveries of high-value products by weeks or perhaps even longer.
- **Insurance risk premiums** for sailing through high-risk areas are also rising.
 - This risk premium paid by shipping companies was just **0.07%** of the value of a ship at the start of **December**, but has risen to **about 0.5% to 0.7%** in recent days.
- The crisis has also led to the **increase in oil and fossil fuel prices** for the consumers due to supply chain disruptions.
- The US had assembled a coalition of countries who agreed to carry out patrols in the southern Red Sea to try to safeguard vessels against attacks.
 - The coalition, called **Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)**, includes the **UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain**.
 - The leading regional Arab powers – **Egypt and Saudi Arabia** – are absent.

Impact on India:

- The commerce ministry had called an **inter-ministerial meeting** on Jan 17 where officials from **five ministries**.
 - These ministries involved ministries of, **External affairs, Defense, Shipping, Finance and Commerce**.

- India is heavily reliant on the Red Sea route through the **Suez Canal** for its trade with **Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East**.
- These regions accounted for about **50 percent** of India's **exports of 18 trillion rupees (\$217bn)** and about **30 percent of imports of 17 trillion rupees (\$205bn)** in the year ended **March 2023**.
- The crisis could cost the country more than **\$30bn in exports** for the fiscal year ending March.

Supply Chain with Europe:

- The Red Sea shipping crisis could impact India's exports to Europe the most as about **80 per cent** of the outbound shipments to Europe takes place through the Red Sea region.
- India's goods exports to the European Union (EU) have already slowed due to weakening demand in the backdrop of the **Russia-Ukraine war**.
- The EU contributes to over **15 per cent** of India's total goods exports.

Demand of Basmati:

- Demand for India's Basmati, the long-grain aromatic rice, from traditional buyers in the **Middle East, the US and Europe** has dropped as it has become costly.
- Exporting Basmati from India has become a challenge for shippers as **freight costs have shot up** as high as **five times** with an increase in insurance premiums, shortage of containers and longer transit time
- India, the **world's biggest rice exporter**, ships over 4.5 million tonnes of basmati rice out of the country annually.
- About **35 percent** of about 7.5 million tonnes of production is shipped to Europe, North America, North Africa and the Middle East through the Red Sea.

Other Products:

- Chaos in the Red Sea is disrupting shipments of produce from **tea to spices and grapes to buffalo meats** from India, resulting in losses to exporters.
- Similarly, imports of fertilisers, **sunflower oil, machinery components and electronic goods** to India are getting delayed.
- This has raised the risk of higher costs to consumers.

- Tea exports are also bearing huge losses as **logistic costs** have gone up by at least **60 percent** and transit time doubled
- **Freight costs** have **risen three times** and shipments are getting delayed for about two to three weeks.

27. Gallantry Awards 2024



Source- <https://gknow.in/president-droupadi-murmu-confers-37-gallantry-awards/>

Recently: On the eve of the **75th Republic Day**, President of India **Droupadi Murmu** announced **80 gallantry awards** for Armed forces and security personnel, including **six Kirti Chakra** and **16 Shaurya Chakra**.

- **Two** of the 16 Shaurya Chakras are **posthumous**.
- The awards include **53 Sena Medals**, including **seven posthumous**, **one Nao Sena Medal (Gallantry)** and **four Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry)**.
- The President also approved **311 defence decorations** for Armed Forces and other personnel. The include:
 - 31 Param Vishisht Seva Medals
 - Four Uttam Yudh Seva Medals
 - Two Bar to Ati Vishisht Seva Medals
 - 59 Ati Vishisht Seva Medals
 - 10 Yudh Seva Medals

- 130 Vishisht Seva Medals
- President Murmu has approved **84 Mentioned-in-Despatches** to the Armed Forces personnel, including 10 posthumous.
- President has also approved the President's **Tatrakshak Medal** to **six Indian Coast Guard personnel**.

Gallantry Awards:

- The first formal gallantry award was instituted by **Lord William Bentinck** in **1834** as the **Order of Merit**, later renamed the **Indian Order of Merit** in **1902**.
- **Post-independence**, first three gallantry awards namely **Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra and Vir Chakra** were instituted by the Government of India on 26th January, **1950**.
 - These were deemed to have effect from the 15th August, 1947.
 - These are **war- time** Gallantry Awards.
- Thereafter, **three peace- time gallantry awards** were instituted by the Government of India on **4th January, 1952**. These included:
 - Ashoka Chakra Class-I
 - Ashoka Chakra Class-II
 - Ashoka Chakra Class-III
- These awards were renamed as **Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Shaurya Chakra** respectively in **January, 1967**.
- These gallantry awards are announced **twice in a year**- first on the occasion of the **Republic Day** and then on the occasion of the **Independence Day**.
- Order of precedence: Param Vir Chakra, the Ashoka Chakra, the Mahavir Chakra, the Kirti Chakra, the Vir Chakra and the Shaurya Chakra.

Param Vir Chakra:

- It is the **highest military decoration**, awarded for displaying **distinguished act of valour during wartime**.

- Param Vir Chakra translates as the "Wheel of the Ultimate Brave", and the award is granted for "**most conspicuous bravery in the presence of the enemy**".
- The medal, inspired from **sage Dadhichi**, was designed by **Mrs. Savitri Khanolkar**.
- The medal is cast in **bronze**. In the centre, on a raised circle, is the state emblem, surrounded by four replicas of Indra's Vajra, flanked by the sword of Shivaji.
- The decoration is suspended from a straight swiveling suspension bar, and is held by a **32 mm purple ribbon**.
- **Somnath Sharma** was the first recipient of Param Vir Chakra.



Source- National War Memorial

Maha Vir Chakra:

- It is the **second highest military decoration** in India, after the Param Vir Chakra.
- It is awarded for acts of **conspicuous gallantry in the presence of the enemy, whether on land, at sea or in the air**.
- It replaced the British **Distinguished Service Order (DSO)**. The medal may be awarded **posthumously**.
- The medal is circular in shape and is made of **standard silver**, and is embossed on the obverse a five pointed heraldic star with the points of the star just touching the rim.
- The State emblem (including motto) is embossed in the centre-piece which is dorned.

- The star is polished and the centre piece is in gold gilt.
- The ribbon is of a **half-white and half-orange colour**.
- **Brigadier Rajendra Singh** was the first recipient of Maha Vir Chakra. He was awarded posthumously.



Source- <http://indiannavy.nic.in/node/398>

Vir Chakra:

- Vir Chakra is **third in precedence** in wartime gallantry awards
- It is presented for **acts of gallantry on the battlefield, on land or in the air or at sea**.
- It replaced **the British Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), Military Cross (MC) and Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)**.
- The award is circular in shape and of **standard silver**, one and three eighths inches in diameter, and shall have embossed on the obverse a five-pointed heraldic star with the points of the star just touching the rim.
- The star shall have in the centre a Chakra and within the Chakra shall be a domed centre piece bearing the gilded State Emblem.
- The ribbon is of **half blue and half orange** in colour.



Source- <http://indiannavy.nic.in/node/723>

Ashoka Chakra:

- It is the **peacetime decoration**, awarded to recognize the **most conspicuous bravery or some act of daring or pre-eminent act of valor or self-sacrifice otherwise than in the face of the enemy.**
- The medal is circular in shape, one and three eighth inches in diameter with rims on both sides and will be of gold-gilt.
- On the obverse, it shall have embossed a replica of **Ashoka's Chakra** in the centre surrounded by a lotus wreath.
- On its reverse shall be embossed the words "Ashoka Chakra" both in Hindi and English, the two versions being separated by two lotus flowers.
- The ribbon is **green in colour**, divided into two equal segments by an orange vertical line.
- The decoration may be awarded **posthumously.**
- **Havildar Bachittar Singh and Naik Narbahadur Thapa** were the first recipients of Kirti Chakra.



Source- <https://irshadgul.com/republic-day-2023-what-is-the-significance-of-gallantry-awards-including-ashok-chakra-and-paramvir-chakra-know-who-gets-this-honor-republic-day-2023-what-is-significance-of-all-gallantry-awards-i/>

Kirti Chakra:

- The Kirti Chakra is an Indian military decoration awarded for **valour, courageous action or self-sacrifice away from the field of battle.**
- It may be awarded to civilians as well as military personnel, including **posthumous** awards.
- The medal is circular in shape and is made of standard silver, one and three eighths inches in diameter.
- On the obverse of the medal shall be embossed a replica of Ashoka Chakra in the centre, surrounded by a lotus wreath.
- On its reverse shall be embossed the words KIRTI CHAKRA both in Hindi and in English the versions being separated by two lotus flowers.
- The ribbon is **green** in colour, divided into three equal parts by two orange vertical lines.



Source- <http://indiannavy.nic.in/node/717>

Shaurya Chakra:

- It is the peacetime equivalent of Mahavir Chakra and is awarded for **gallantry, otherwise than in the face of the enemy.**
- The medal is circular in shape and of **bronze**, one and three-eighth inches in diameter.
- On the obverse of the medal shall have embossed a replica of Ashoka Chakra in the centre, surrounded by a lotus wreath.
- On its reverse shall be embossed the words "SHAURYA CHAKRA" both in Hindi and English, the two versions being separated by two lotus flowers.
- It is suspended through a **green** colour ribbon that divided into four equal parts by three vertical lines.
- It may be awarded **posthumously.**



Source- <https://indianairforce.nic.in/shaurya-chakra/>

Other Awards:

- **Sena Medal, Nao Sena Medal, and Vayusena Medal:** It is awarded for devotion to duty or courage as part of military operations to members of the Indian army, navy, and air force respectively.
- **Sarvottam Yudh Seva Medal:** Recognizes the distinguished service of the most exceptional order during war/conflict/hostilities. Instituted in 1980.
- **Uttam Yudh Seva Medal:** Recognizes the distinguished service of an exceptional order during war/conflict/hostilities. It was instituted in 1980.
- **Yuddh Seva Medal:** Recognizes distinguished service of a high order during war/conflict/hostilities. Instituted in 1980.
- **Param Vishisht Seva Medal:** Recognizes the distinguished service of the most exceptional order. Instituted in 1960 as VSM Class-I.
- **Ati Vishisht Seva Medal:** Recognizes distinguished Service of an exceptional order. Instituted in 1960 as VSM Class-II
- **Vishisht Seva Medal:** Recognizes the distinguished service of a high order. Instituted in 1960 as VSM Class-III
- **Mention in Dispatches:** Recognizes distinguished and meritorious service in operational areas and combat zones that are not of a sufficiently high order to warrant the grant of gallantry awards.

28. Lakshadweep Project



Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **KLI-SOFC project in Kavaratti, Lakshadweep.**

- KLI-SOFC stands for **Kochi-Lakshadweep Islands Submarine Optical Fiber Connection.**
- The projects were launched at a function attended by hundreds of islanders including women and children.
- The Prime Minister also inaugurated the **Low Temperature Thermal Desalination (LTTD) plant at Kadmat.**
 - The LTTD plant will produce **1.5 lakh litres of clean drinking** water every day.
- Additionally, he dedicated to the nation the **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC)** in all households on the **Agatti** and **Minicoy** islands.
- Other projects launched by Modi include the solar power plant at **Kavaratti.**
 - The solar plant is the **first battery-backed solar power project** in Lakshadweep.
- He also laid the foundation stone for the renovation of the primary **healthcare** facility in **Kalpeni.**
- He initiated the construction of **five model Anganwadi centres (Nand Ghars).**

- These centers are located in the five islands of **Androth, Chetlat, Kadmat, Agatti, and Minicoy.**

Kochi-Lakshadweep Islands Submarine Optical Fiber Connection (KLI-SOFC) -

- For the first time since independence, Lakshadweep will be connected through **Submarine Optic Fibre Cable.**
- A submarine cable system consists of a communication cable laid on the seabed between **cable landing stations (CLS).**
 - These cable landing stations are situated on the land to carry telecommunication signals across stretches of the ocean.
 - Submarine cable systems generally use **optical fibre** cables to carry international traffic.
 - They offer highly **secure, reliable and very high capacity telecommunication links** between countries across the world.
 - However, a typical multi-terabit, trans-oceanic submarine cable system costs several hundred million dollars to construct.
- Earlier, the only means of communication with the Islands was through **Satellite medium.**
 - The satellite medium had limited bandwidth capacity and was not able to meet the growing bandwidth demand.
- The project among others valued at over **Rs 1,150 crore**, spans diverse sectors such as technology, energy, water resources, healthcare, and education.
- The **Department of Telecommunications (DOT)** took action and **conceptualized** the Kochi-Lakshadweep Submarine OFC Project (KLI project).
- In the project submarine cable connectivity from **Mainland (Kochi, Kerala)** to **eleven Lakshadweep Islands.**
- The islands are namely, Kavaratti, Agatti, Amini, Kadmat, Chetlet, Kalpeni, Minicoy, Androth, Kiltan, Bangaram and Bitra has been extended.
- The project is funded by **Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF), Department of Telecommunication.**
 - USOF is set to be renamed as **Digital Bharat Nidhi** after the **Telecommunications Act, 2023** is notified.
- **Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL)** was the Project Executing Agency.
- The work was awarded to a **Japanese firm, M/s NEC Corporation India Pvt Ltd** through Global Open Tendering process.
- **Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL)** was appointed as the technical consultant of the project.

- The total link distance of the project is **1,868 kilometres** and total cost of project was **Rs 1072 crore plus taxes**.

Other such projects:

- In **August 2020**, PM Modi launched the **2,300-kilometre-long submarine Optical Fibre Cable (OFC)** connecting **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** to the **mainland**.
- In **2020**, Facebook (now **Meta**) announced that its subsea cable project **2Africa**.
 - It is building in partnership with several telecom companies, will become the longest subsea cable system ever deployed.
 - The 2Africa consortium announced the addition of a new segment called the **2Africa PEARLS branch**.
 - This branch extends to the **Arabian Gulf, India, and Pakistan**.
 - This extension brings the total length of the 2Africa cable system to over **45,000 kilometres**.

Lakshadweep:

- Lakshadweep, the group of **36 islands** is known for its exotic and sun-kissed beaches and lush green landscape.
- The name Lakshadweep in **Malayalam** and **Sanskrit** means '**a hundred thousand islands**'.
- **India's smallest Union Territory Lakshadweep** is an archipelago consisting of **36 islands** with an area of **32 sq km**.
- It is a uni-district Union Territory and is comprised of **12 atolls, three reefs, five submerged banks** and **ten inhabited islands**.
- The capital is **Kavaratti** and it is also the principal town of the UT.
- All Islands are **220 to 440 km** away from the coastal city of **Kochi** in **Kerala**, in the emerald **Arabian Sea**.

History:

- The earliest testament to the history of Lakshadweep is the **Vaylur inscription** that refers to **Narasimha Varman II's** conquest of these islands.
- During the **11th century**, this archipelago was ruled by the last **Chola kings** and then the **kings of Cannanore**.
- Later, the **Portuguese** ruled in Lakshadweep, followed by **the Chirakkal Hindu rulers** after the **16th century**.
- Subsequently, the region came under the rule of the **Arakkal Muslims**, then **Tipu Sultan**, and finally, the **British**.
- Earlier, there were followers of the **Hindu and Buddhist** religions here.

- Now, more than **96 per cent** of the population here follows **Islam**.
- What really makes Lakshadweep's Islamic society unique is the tradition of **matriliny**.
 - Matriliny is where descent and property is traced through the mother's line.
- After independence in 1947, it was merged into the **Madras Presidency of India** on the basis of language in **1956**.
- Then in the same year (**1956**), Lakshadweep was given the status of a **Union Territory**.
- Earlier it was known as **Laccadive, Minicoy, and Amindivi**.
- The name of this region was changed to **Lakshadweep** in **1973**.

29. India- Maldives Row



Source- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/trending/pm-modi-s-lakshadweep-trip-prompts-netizens-to-add-it-to-their-travel-bucket-list-101704375718197.html>

Recently: Maldives has been facing a boycott from, India, one of its biggest sources of tourism income.

- The boycott emerged due to three Maldivian officials mocking India's PM Narendra Modi, leading to calls from Indian citizens and celebrities.

- The calls urged people to opt for domestic beaches instead of the sun-kissed getaway.

What is the issue?

- It all began on **January 4** when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited **Lakshadweep** and **posted pictures** of the beautiful island during the inauguration of the Lakshadweep projects.
- Modi's praise for Lakshadweep's beauty prompted speculation about a strategic effort to **shift tourism focus from the Maldives**.
- **Three Maldives officials** expressed criticism, labeling him as a "**clown**," "**terrorist**," and a "**puppet of Israel**,"
 - The three ministers were **Maryam Shiuna**, **Malsha Shareef** and **Mahzoom Majid**.
 - They are the three Deputy Ministers in the **Ministry of Youth Affairs of Maldives**.
- The Maldives government moved quickly to distance itself from their comments, **suspending the three officials**.
- The Maldives government acknowledged "**derogatory**" social media comments, emphasizing they are "personal opinions."
- On January 8, **High Commissioner of Maldives Ibrahim Shaheeb** was summoned to the **Ministry of External Affairs** in regard to the row.
- Soon thereafter the **Indian High Commissioner to Male, Munu Mahawar** was met by Maldivian authorities indicating that this could be a tit-for-tat move from Maldives.
- Prominent Maldivians, including former Foreign Minister and former President of the UN General Assembly **Abdulla Shahid** condemned the comments.

Maldives:

- The Maldives, officially the Republic of Maldives, is an archipelagic state and country in South Asia, situated in the **Indian Ocean**.
- It lies southwest of Sri Lanka and India, about **750 kilometres** from the Asian continent's mainland
- Capital: **Malé**
- Currency: **Maldivian Rufiyaa**
- Official language: **Dhivehi**
- **India** and **Russia** send the largest number of visitors to the Maldives with Indians in 2023 accounting for **11.2 per cent** of the total tourist arrivals.

- Tourism accounts for almost **one-third of its economy**, according to the World Bank.
- Maldives is targeting **2 million arrivals for 2024**.

India and Maldives Historical Relations:

- India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial links steeped in antiquity.
- India was among the first to recognize Maldives after its independence in **1965** and to establish diplomatic relations with the country.
- In **December 1976**, India and the Maldives signed a **maritime boundary treaty** to agree on maritime boundaries.
 - Treaty explicitly places Minicoy on the Indian side of the boundary.
- In **1981**, India and Maldives signed a **comprehensive trade agreement**.
- Maldives opened a **full-fledged High Commission** in New Delhi in **November 2004**.
- Both nations are founding members of the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**, the **South Asian Economic Union** and signatories to the **South Asia Free Trade Agreement**.
- India's prompt assistance through **Operation Cactus** during the **1988 coup attempt**, led to development of trust and long-term and friendly bilateral relations with the Maldives.
- India was the first to assist Maldives during the **2004 Tsunami** as well as the **water crisis in Malé** in Dec **2014**.
- In **November 2022**, India bolstered its partnership with Maldives by granting a financial aid of **US\$100 million**.
- In **May 2023**, India provided a **Fast Patrol vessel** and a **Landing Craft Assault ship** to the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF).
- India and Maldives have signed a **security cooperation pact** which also covers counterterrorism and extremism cooperation.
 - The pact includes a **\$50 million** credit line from India for enhancing maritime capacity.
- India is assisting in the development of a coast guard base in the **Uthuru Thilafalhu atoll**.
- India is overseeing the significant **Greater Male Connectivity Project in Maldives**.
 - The Male connectivity projects will be built under India's **\$100 million grant** and **\$400 million line of Credit**.
 - The construction project will involve building a **6.74 km long bridge** and causeway link.
 - This infrastructure will connect the capital Male with the adjoining islands of **Villingli, Gulhifalhu, and Thilafushi**.

- Discussions on the GMCP were initiated during the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaisankar to Male in September **2019**.

India and Maldives Current Relations:

- Relations have been tense since **President Mohamed Muizzu** came to power in **November, 2023**.
- He won the election on an '**India Out**' campaign which started in **2020**, contributing to the strained atmosphere.
- He was an unlikely candidate for the presidency after serving as construction minister in the government of his **pro- China** mentor **Abdulla Yameen**.
 - During former strongman **Yameen's term** as President from **2013 to 2018**, New Delhi-Male relations deteriorated drastically.
- Yameen is serving an **11-year-old prison** sentence in corruption charges which makes him ineligible for contesting elections.
 - Therefore, Muizzu tapped to lead the party as his proxy in an election.
- Muizzu has displayed a **close alignment with China** since assuming office just over a month ago.
 - Soon after taking the top position, he had also called for the **removal of Indian military personnel** from the Maldives.
- The former **Ibrahim Solih administration (2018 to 2023)** has opted for an 'India first' foreign policy.

30. Withdrawal of Sahel States from ECOWAS



Source- <https://www.blackagendareport.com/end-french-project-africas-sahel>

Recently: Three neighbouring countries in the restive Sahel region jointly announced their immediate withdrawal from the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**.

- The three countries, **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** blamed the regional bloc's "**deviation from its founding ideals**" for their exit.
- They claim that ECOWAS has strayed from its original goals of "economic development, social progress and cultural integration" and is now being "manipulated by foreign forces."

What is the issue?

- The three **founding members** of ECOWAS have had tense ties with it since coups took place in **Niger last July, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Mali in 2020**.
- All three were **suspended from ECOWAS** with **Niger and Mali** facing **heavy sanctions** as the bloc tried to push for the early return of civilian governments with elections.
- They accused the grouping of failing to help them tackle the jihadists who swept into Mali from **2012** and then on to Burkina and Niger.
- The three countries have distanced themselves from former **colonial power France**, strengthened ties to **Russia**.

- In September last year, they formed a mutual defence pact called **The Alliance of Sahel States**.
- It is still unclear when the withdrawal will come into effect and what it will mean for the freedom of movement and goods to the three landlocked nations, who rely on ports in their ECOWAS neighbours for imports and exports.

What is ECOWAS?

- The **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** is a regional political and economic union of **fifteen countries** located in **West Africa**.
- It aims to achieve economic integration, free movement of people and goods, and regional cooperation across sectors.
- It was established in **1975** through the **Treaty of Lagos**.
 - A revised version of the treaty was agreed and signed on **24 July 1993** in **Cotonou**, the largest city in **Benin**.
- It's Headquarter is in **Abuja, Nigeria**.
- The **15 countries** are - Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.
- Upon its **foundation**, ECOWAS had **15 member states: eight French-speaking, five English-speaking, and two Portuguese-speaking**.
- All current members joined the community as founding members in May 1975, except **Cape Verde** which joined in **1977**.
- Since **2020**, **six African countries** have undergone nine coups and coup attempts.
- ECOWAS also serves as a **peacekeeping force** in the region, with member states occasionally sending **joint military forces** to intervene in the bloc's member countries at times of political instability and unrest.
- **Mauritania** was one of the founding members of ECOWAS in 1975 and decided to **withdraw in December 2000**.
 - Mauritania signed a **new associate-membership** agreement in **August 2017**.
- **Mali and Guinea** were suspended from the grouping in **2021**, while **Burkina Faso and Niger** were suspended in **2022 and 2023** respectively.

Mali:

- Mali is a **locked country** which is **eighth-largest** in Africa.
- The sovereign state of Mali consists of **19 regions**; its borders on the north reach deep into the middle of the **Sahara Desert**.
- Mali fell under the control of **France** during the Scramble for Africa in the late **19th century**.
- By **1905**, most of the area was under firm French control as a part of **French Sudan**.
- On 24 November **1958**, French Sudan (which changed its name to the **Sudanese Republic**) became an **autonomous republic** within the French Community.
- In **1959**, it formed **Mali Federation** with **Senegal**.
- The Mali Federation gained **independence from France** on 20 June **1960**.
- **Senegal withdrew** from the federation in August 1960, which allowed the Sudanese Republic to become the **independent Republic of Mali** on **22 September 1960**.
- Mali faced **two coups** within a year in **August 2020 and May 2021**. The first ousted President **Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta**, and the second removed the transitional government's leadership.
- The current head of the state of Mali is **Assimi Goita** who assumed power after the military coup.
- The military government in Mali had pledged to hold **elections in February**, but that has now been pushed back to an **unknown date**.
- The military government in Mali adopted a **new constitution in July 2023** that enhances the powers of the president.
- **Bamako** is the capital of Mali.

Burkina Faso:

- It is a **landlocked country** in **West Africa**.
- It is bounded by Niger to the east, Mali to the north and west, and Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast to the south.
- Burkina Faso, previously known as **Upper Volta**, was once part of **French West Africa** since **1896 until 1960**.
- In **1890**, it was **colonised by the French** who rewrote the borders, according to these present borders.
- Upper Volta became **independent in 1960**.
- In **1984**, the country changed its name to **Burkina Faso**, which means "**land of honest men**".

- In **January 2022**, A military coup ousted **President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré**, citing insecurity and governance concerns.
- Burkina Faso has set elections for this summer, but authorities there say the fight against the insurgents remains the top priority.
- Capital of the country is **Ouagadougou**.

Niger:

- It is the **largest country** in the **west Africa**. It is a vast, arid country twice the size of France.
- Having a population of about 25 million, the largely-**agrarian country** is one of the **poorest in the world** and has ranked low on the Human Development Index over the decades.
- It is vulnerable to the **extreme weather** effects of climate change which threatens food security.
- Niger, however, also has gold mining reserves and **5-7%** of the global production of uranium.
- It was a French colony until **1960**, like many of its neighbours.
- It faced a long period of instability post-independence and was rocked by **four military coups** in **1974, 1996, 1999 and 2010**.
- **Niamey** is the capital of Niger.
- In **July 2023**, A military coup toppled **President Mohamed Bazoum's** pro-western regime, leading to international condemnation and calls for a return to democracy.
- The leader of the coup **General Abdour Ahamane Tchiani**, declared himself the new leader of the troubled West African country.
- Niger's military leaders have said they want up to **three years** for a transition back to civilian rule.

31. Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana



Source- <https://www.iasgyan.in/daily-current-affairs/pradhan-mantri-suryodaya-yojana>

Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on **January 22** announced the '**Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana**', a government scheme under which **one crore households** will get rooftop solar power systems.

- Reports indicate that the installation of rooftop solar plants has already commenced in states such as **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh**.
- However, there seems to be a lack of widespread enthusiasm among the public, despite the potential benefits.

About the Scheme:

- Essentially, it is a scheme that will involve **installing solar power systems at rooftops** for residential consumers.
 - Rooftop solar panels are the **photovoltaic panels** installed on the roof of a building which is connected to main power supply unit.
 - Thus, it reduces the consumption of the grid-connected electricity and saves electricity cost for the consumer.

- Under this scheme, the central government is providing a substantial **40% subsidy** on the installation of solar panels with a **3-kilowatt capacity**.
- For those opting for a larger capacity of **10 kilowatts**, a still considerable **20% subsidy** is being offered.
- Research suggests that more than **640 gigawatts** of rooftop solar plants could be installed in homes, showcasing the significant scale of this initiative.
- The Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana will help the **poor and BPL citizens** with the **electricity bill** and other light-related issues.
- To get the advantage of the scheme, the applicants need to apply for the scheme from the official website.
- Rules and guidelines for the citizens to get the benefit of Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana are as follows:
 - Applicants must be permanent citizens of India.
 - Applicant's annual income should not exceed **Rs 1 or 1.5 lakh**.
 - One must have all the original documents.
 - Applicants should not be involved in government service.
- Citizens will be provided the solar system lights in their homes through which they will get **24-hour electricity** facility.
- This isn't the first scheme for promoting the installation of rooftop solar power systems.
 - A **rooftop Solar Programme** was launched by the government in **2014**.
 - The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana seems to be a new attempt to help reach the target of **40 GW** rooftop solar capacity.

Rooftop Solar Programme:

- Launched in **2014**, It was aimed to achieve a cumulative installed capacity of **40,000 megawatts (MW)** or 40 gigawatts (GW) by **2022**.
- However, this target couldn't be achieved. As a result, the government extended the deadline from **2022 to 2026** and is currently in the **2nd phase**.
- Owing to the scheme, the country's rooftop solar has increased from 1.8 GW as of March 2019 to 10.4 GW as of November 2023.

India's current Solar Capacity:

- According to the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's** website, **solar power installed capacity** in India has reached around **73.31 GW** as of **December 2023**.
- Meanwhile, **rooftop solar installed capacity** is around **11.08 GW** as of **December 2023**.
- In terms of total **solar capacity**, **Rajasthan** is at the **top** with **18.7 GW**.
 - Gujarat is at the second position with 10.5 GW.
- When it comes to **rooftop solar capacity**, **Gujarat tops** the list with **2.8 GW**, followed by **Maharashtra by 1.7 GW**.
- Notably, solar power has a major share in the country's **current renewable energy capacity**, which stands at around **180 GW**.
- India is expected to witness the largest energy demand growth of any country or region in the world over the **next 30 years**, according to the latest World Energy Outlook by the International Energy Agency (IEA).
 - To meet this demand, the country would need a reliable source of energy and it can't be just coal plants.
- Although India has doubled down on its coal production in recent years, it also aims to reach **500 GW** of renewable energy capacity by **2030**.

32. Demise of S. Venkitaramanan



Source- Businessline

Recently: Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) S. Venkitaramanan (92), passed away at a private hospital in **Chennai** on the morning of **November 18** due to **age related issues**.

- He is survived by **two daughters** including a **former Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, Girija Vaidyanathan**.

Who was S. Venkitaramanan?

- S. Venkitaramanan Born on **January 28, 1931** in the town of **Nagercoil in Padmanathapuram division** of the princely-state of **Travancore**, into a Tamil Iyer family.
- Venkitaramanan obtained a **post-graduate degree in physics** from the University College Thiruvananthapuram.
- He joined the **Indian Administrative Service (IAS)** in **1953**.
- He also received a post-graduate degree in management from the Carnegie Mellon University in the U.S. in 1968.
- He served as **Finance Secretary** in the Ministry of Finance for a period of four years from **1985 to 1989** when **Rajiv Gandhi** was the Prime Minister of the country.
 - As a finance secretary, he advised the Rajiv Gandhi government to consider loans from multilateral agencies like the **International Monetary Fund** to tide over the worsening economic situation.
- Venkitaramanan became the **18th RBI Governor** in December **1990** when a **balance of payment crisis** was brewing in India.
- Through decisive measures, he successfully navigated the country through this crisis.
- He held the position from **December 1990 to December 1992**.

The Balance of Payment Crisis:

- The **1991** Indian economic crisis was an economic crisis in India resulting from a **balance of payments deficit** due to excess reliance on **imports** and other external factors.
- India's economic problems started worsening in **1985** as imports swelled, leaving the country in deficit.
- The crisis had been precipitated by a slowing of inward remittances and a rise in the price of oil following the **invasion of Kuwait** by Saddam Hussain.
- The current account of the balance of payments was subjected to a double whammy, a **reduction of receipts** and a **rise in the value of imports**.
- The import cover afforded by India's reserves plummeted to a historic low of three weeks at the peak of the crisis.
- There was speculation that India would **default** on its external payment obligations.
- It was at that moment that the RBI led by Mr. Venkitaramanan played a sterling role
- The RBI pledged its **gold** to international banks for a hard currency loan.

- In **April 1991**, the Government raised **\$200.0 million** from the **Union Bank of Switzerland** through a sale (with a repurchase option) of **20 tonnes of gold**.
- Again, in **July 1991**, India shipped **47 tonnes of gold** to the **Bank of England** to raise another **\$405.0 million**.
- This action **helped the country repay** its international donors and creditors, though it was not sufficient to completely absolve the country of the crisis
- The act of pledging the country's gold, which involved transporting it overseas, had been mocked by some in India.
 - It only reveals an ignorance of the world.
 - A country builds reserves in anticipation of using it on a rainy day.
- Default would have **narrowed India's access to the global loan markets** to finance its imports were its export earnings to fall short in the future.
- For the RBI to have used its gold to stave off a default was an act of courage. and imagination. Indeed, it was the **smartest economic management**.

33. Turkish approval to Sweden's NATO bid



Source- <https://www.cnb.com/video/2022/06/08/sweden-and-finland-want-to-join-nato-heres-how-that-would-work.html>

Recently: The Turkish parliament voted to approve **Sweden's NATO membership** bid, bringing the Nordic country one step closer to joining the military alliance.

- The Turkish legislators ratified Sweden's accession protocol by **287 votes in favour** of Sweden's accession and **55 against** it. **Four others abstained** from voting.
- For a new country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), **all the members have to approve it.**
 - **Turkey and Hungary** were the only NATO countries opposing Sweden's entry for almost the past **two years.**
 - Hungary now remains the only NATO country to not have Sweden's accession.

What led to Sweden's bid at joining NATO?

- Sweden has stayed out of military alliances for more than **200 years** and long ruled out seeking NATO membership.
- But after **Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine** in February 2022, it ditched its longstanding policy of non-alignment and decided to apply to join the alliance together with neighbouring **Finland.**
 - Earlier, non-alignment was seen as the best way to avoid creating tensions with Russia, their powerful neighbour in the **Baltic Sea region.**
 - But the Russian aggression caused a dramatic shift in both countries.
 - Political parties in both Finland and Sweden decided they needed the **security guarantees** that only come with full membership in the U.S.-led alliance.
- Both Sweden and Finland had already developed strong ties with NATO after the end of the Cold War.
- In **May 2022**, Sweden and Finland **applied for NATO membership.**
- **Finland joined NATO** in April 2023 as its **31st member** – doubling the alliance's border with Russia – but Sweden's bid was mired in challenges.
 - Simultaneously, it extended NATO's commitment to collective defence to a country sharing an **830-mile border with Russia.**

Why was Turkey opposing Sweden's bid?

- Turkey had accused Sweden of going soft on groups it sees as terrorists, such as the **Kurdish militant outfit** the **Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)**.
- Established in **1978**, the PKK, also known as **Kongra-Gel**, is a militant **Marxist-Leninist Kurdish separatist group**.
- Its primary objective is to create a unified, **independent Kurdistan**.
- **Kurdistan** is a roughly defined geo-cultural region in West Asia wherein the Kurds form a prominent majority population
- Kurdistan generally comprises the following **four regions**:
 - Southeastern **Turkey** (Northern Kurdistan)
 - Northern **Iraq** (Southern Kurdistan)
 - Northwestern **Iran** (Eastern Kurdistan)
 - Northern **Syria** (Western Kurdistan)
- Another obstacle was Sweden's approval of a small **Quran-burning demonstration** outside a mosque in its capital, **Stockholm**.
 - It coincided with the Muslim holiday of **Eid-al-Adha**, one of the most significant in the Islamic calendar.
 - Turkey's Foreign Minister **Hakan Fidan** condemned the decision.

Change of Stance:

- When Turkish legislators approved Sweden's bid, Sweden informed that it had **tightened its anti-terrorism laws**.
- Additionally, Sweden has expressed support for **Turkey's EU membership bid**.
- Erdogan had also linked Turkey's support to Sweden with the **US** agreeing to sell **40 F-16 fighter jets** to Ankara, Turkey.

Impact:

- The inclusion of Sweden would leave the **Baltic Sea** surrounded by **NATO countries**, strengthening the alliance in the strategically important region.
- The Baltic Sea is **Russia's maritime point** of access to the city of St. Petersburg and the Kaliningrad enclave.
- Sweden's armed forces, though sharply downsized since the Cold War, are widely seen as a potential boost to NATO's collective defense in the region.

- The Swedes have a modern air force and navy and have committed to increase **defense spending** to reach NATO's target of **2% of gross domestic product**.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization:

- It is a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the **Washington Treaty**) of April, **1949**, by Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.
- It is headquartered in **Brussels, Belgium**.
- It was **31 member states** currently with **12 original members** that are Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- **Turkey** joined the alliance in **1952**.
- France is the only country that withdrew from the military command (**1966**). It joined back in **2009**.
- NATO has since **2014** been led by **Jens Stoltenberg**, a former prime minister of **Norway**.
- The treaty of Washington has **14 articles** by which all NATO members must abide.
- **Article 5** of the NATO treaty is a key provision that states that an attack on one member is an attack on all members.
 - This provision has only been invoked once, after the **9/11 terrorist attacks** in the United States.
- After the Soviet Union's collapse in the **early 1990s**, the alliance took on a wider role.
- Although the alliance does not directly provide military aid to Ukraine, NATO countries have sent around \$10bn worth equipment.
 - All NATO member states discuss military aid to Ukraine at monthly meetings in **Ramstein, Germany**.

34. Atal Setu



Source- <https://fpaglobal.co.in/locations/atal-setu-illumination/>

Recently: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu** in **Maharashtra** on December 12.

- Built at a cost of about **₹17,840 crore**, Atal Setu is the **longest bridge** and also the **longest sea bridge** in the country.
- Earlier, **Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Bridge** was the **longest bridge** in India, spanning over the **River Brahmaputra in Assam**.
 - The **9.15 km** long river bridge held this distinction.
 - The bridge was inaugurated on **26 May 2017** by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The Prime Minister thanked the government of Japan and also remembered late **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** during the inauguration of **Atal Setu**.
 - He stated that both had vowed to complete the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link project.

About:

- The bridge is the **21.8 km Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL)** which is officially known as the **Atal Setu Nhava Sheva Sea Link**.
- The bridge that was first conceptualised **six decades ago** will cut the travel time between **Sewri** and **Chirle** to under **20 minutes**.
- The MTHL is a **twin-carriageway six-lane bridge** over the **Thane Creek** in the **Arabian Sea**.
- It connects **Sewri** in **Mumbai** to **Chirle** in **Raigad district** on the mainland.
- The MTHL includes a **16.5 km sea link** and viaducts on land at either end with a cumulative length of **5.5 km**.
- **MTHL project is divided into 4 Packages:**
 - Package -1 is from Sewri 0.00 km to 10.380 km in sea
 - Package- 2 is from Sewri 10.380 km to 18.189 km in sea
 - Package-3 is from Sewri 18.187 km to 21.80 km on land
 - Package-4 Intelligent Transport System on MTHL Bridge
- MTHL Atal Setu has been constructed at the cost of more than **Rs 17,840 crores**.
- The foundation stone of the bridge was laid by the Prime Minister in **December 2016**.
- It will also improve connectivity between **Mumbai Port & Jawaharlal Nehru Port**.
- The MTHL, follows the **Open Road Tolling (ORT) technology** that is being used for the **first time** in India.
 - It is currently in use in international cities like **Singapore**.
 - It is system which allows toll collection without requiring vehicles to stop or slow down, enhancing efficiency.
- The modern bridge technology includes: **Reverse circulation drilling (RCD) piling** and **Orthotropic steel deck (OSD)** bridge girders.
- It is more cost-effective compared to Cable Stay or Suspension bridges.

History:

- The idea of a bay crossing connecting Mumbai to the mainland was first floated in **1963**.
- It was floated by the American construction consultancy firm **Wilbur Smith Associates**.
- In **1965**, two architects, **Charles Correa** and **Pravina Mehta**, and **Shirish Patel**, an engineer, wrote a paper proposing the idea of a New Bombay, east of the existing one.

- However, no follow-up action was initiated at that time.
- The plan was revived in the late 90s, and the first tenders were floated in **2006**.
- In February **2008**, **Reliance Infrastructure**, led by **Anil Ambani**, secured the bid to construct in **nine years and 11 months** using a public-private partnership (PPP) model.
- Months later, however, **Ambani withdrew** from the project.
- Subsequently, multiple unsuccessful bidding processes followed.
- The nodal agency was changed from the **Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC)** to the **Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)**.
- The project finally got moving after MMRDA entered into an agreement with **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**.
- JICA agreed to fund **80 per cent** of the project cost, with the rest being borne by the state and central governments.
- The deal and tendering were finally completed in December **2017**, and work commenced in **early 2018**.

Other Projects:

- The PM laid the foundation stone for a **9.2 km underground road tunnel** connecting **Eastern Freeway's Orange Gate to Marine Drive in Mumbai**.
- **Phase 1** of the **Surya regional bulk drinking water project**, was dedicated by the PM, benefiting around 14 lakh people in **Palghar** and **Thane** districts of **Maharashtra**.
- **Railway projects** worth about Rs 2000 crores were inaugurated.
 - It includes 'Phase 2 of **Uran-Kharkopar railway line**,' a new suburban station '**Digha Gaon**,' 6th Line between Khar Road & Goregaon railway station.
- He also inaugurated the '**Bharat Ratnam**' (Mega Common Facilitation Centre) for the Gems and Jewellery sector at **Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone**.
- The Prime Minister also launched the **Namo Mahila Shashaktikaran Abhiyaan**.
 - The program aimed to empower women in Maharashtra through skill development, entrepreneurship exposure.

35. National Voters Day 2024



Source- Jagran

Recently: The **2024 edition** of the **National Voters** Day was observed on **January 25th**.

- It marks a significant occasion to encourage active participation in the democratic process.
- This day holds immense importance, reminding citizens of their fundamental right to vote and its crucial role in shaping the nation's future.

Theme for 2024:

- The theme for the year 2024 National Voters' is '**Nothing Like Voting, I Vote for Sure**'.
- It is dedicated to voters and conveys individuals' feelings and aspirations toward participation in the electoral process through the power of their vote.

History:

- **25th January** is the foundation day of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** which came into existence in **1950**.
- This day was first celebrated in **2011** to encourage young voters to take part in the electoral process.
- 2024 marks **the 61st anniversary** of the National Voters Day.
- The **eligibility age** of the voter was **21 years** but in **1988** it was lowered to **18 years**. The **Sixty-First Amendment Act of 1998** lowered the voter's eligibility age in India.

Election Commission of India (ECI):

- The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body given in **Article 324, Part XV** of the Constitution.
 - There are just five **Articles (324-329)** in **Part XV** of the Constitution, that deal with the elections.
- It was established by the Constitution of India to conduct and regulate elections in the country.
- The election commission currently consists of **3-members** – **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) + 2 Election commissioners (EC)**.
- The **Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991** requires that the EC and CEC must hold the post for a period of **six years**.
- For almost **four decades** of the republic, until **1989**, the Election Commission was a **single-member body**, with only a CEC.
- The first CEC was **Shri Sukumar Sen**.
- The Election Commission was expanded in **1993**.
- The current CEC is **Shri Rajiv Kumar**.
- The 2 other members are **Shri Anup Chandra Pandey and Shri Arun Goel**.