



## **CURRENT AFFAIRS COMPENDIUM – June 2024**

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## National Current Affairs

### India's 1<sup>st</sup> City of Literature



**Recently:** Kerala's **Kozhikode** City was officially designated as a **UNESCO City of Literature** making it the first city in India to receive this title.

- In **October 2023**, Kozhikode had earned a place in the '**Literature**' category of the **UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)**.
  - **Prague** was the first city in the world to receive the tag in **2014**.
- **Gwalior** and **Kozhikode** from India are among the **55 new cities** which have joined the UCCN.
  - The new list was published on its website on **World Cities Day**, which falls on **October 31**.
  - **Gwalior** joined the list at the '**City of Music**'.

### **The celebratory Event:**

- State Local Self Government Department (LSGD) Minister, **M B Rajesh**, in an official event here announced the achievement of Kozhikode which earned the place in the 'Literature' category of the UCCN.
- As part of the event, Tourism Minister P A Mohammed Riyas unveiled the logo of the 'City of Literature' by UNESCO.
- The state government also announced that from the coming year, **June 23** will be celebrated as the '**City of Literature Day**' of Kozhikode.
- On this day, special awards will be announced in **six categories**:
  - Comprehensive Contribution
  - Women Writers,
  - Young Writers,
  - Children's Literature,
  - Translations from Malayalam to other languages and vice versa
- The awards will be presented during an annual cultural festival.
- Lyricist and musician **Kaithapram Damodaran Namboothiri** announced that **Anakkulam Cultural Centre** will henceforth be the '**City of Literature centre**'.
- The **Kozhikode Corporation's diamond jubilee award** was presented to writer **M.T. Vasudevan Nair** at his home by Mr. Rajesh, as he could not attend the event due to health issues.

### **What is UNESCO's Creative Cities Network?**

- It is a flagship city programme of UNESCO launched in **2004** to promote cooperation among cities which have recognized culture and creativity as strategic drivers of sustainable urban development.
- It now includes **350 cities** in over a hundred countries.
- The network represents **seven creative fields**, including **Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music.**
- The overall situation and activities within the Network is reported in the UCCN Membership Monitoring Reports, each for a **4-year period** for a particular city.

- Apart from Kozhikode, following cities have already been included in the list:
  - Jaipur- Craft and Folk Arts (2015)
  - Varanasi - Creative city of Music (2015)
  - Chennai - Creative city of Music (2017)
  - Mumbai - Film (2019)
  - Hyderabad - Gastronomy (2019)
  - Srinagar- Craft and Folk Arts (2021)
  - Gwalior- Music (2023)
- The objective of **Sustainable Development Goal 11** is related to sustainable cities and communities.
- It is projected that by **2050, 68%** of the global population will reside in urban areas.

### **Annual Conference of Network Cities:**

- An annual conference of mayors and other stakeholders of network cities, offers a unique occasion to strengthen ties between creative cities from across the world.
- '**Bringing Youth to the Table for the Next Decade**' is the theme of the 2024 conference.
- The 2022 conference was held in **Santos, Brazil**, and last year's conference was in **Istanbul**. The next conference will be held in **July 2024** in **Braga, Portugal**.
- The newly designated Creative Cities are invited to participate in the **2024 UCCN Annual Conference (July 1-5, 2024)**.

### **Kozhikode:**

- Kozhikode, also known in English as **Calicut**, is a city along the **Malabar Coast** in the state of Kerala in India.
- It is the second-largest metropolitan area in Kerala and the **19th-largest in India**.
- Kozhikode is classified as a **Tier 2 city** by the Government of India.
- The North Kerala city of Kozhikode is home to many prominent personalities of the state's literary and cultural world.



- The city, where several leading media houses are headquartered, has hundreds of publishing banners and several libraries enriching its literary tradition.
- The first Malayalam novel **Kundalatha** was born in Kozhikode in **1887**.
  - It was authored by **Appu Nedungadi**.
- The **Tali Temple** here, and its environs served as the centre of the former **Zamorin dynasty**.
- Kozhikode continues to be the hub of the ancient martial art form **Kalaripayattu** — touted as the mother of all martial arts.
- It is also home to the traditional Muslim art forms, **Mappilappattu and Duff Muttu**.

### **World Cities Day 2023:**

- With an aim to promote the international community's interest in global urbanization, every year World Cities Day is celebrated on **October 31**.
- This year (2024) the international day focuses on the **theme** of "**Youth leading climate and local action for cities**".
- "**Better City, Better Life**" has been the **general theme** of World Cities Day since its inception.

### **History:**

- In its resolution 68/239, the United Nations Organization established World Cities Day on **December 27, 2013**.
  - Therefore, on **October 31, 2014**, World Cities Day was celebrated for the **first time**.
- Later in **2014**, **UN-Habitat** launched **Urban October**. This annual programme emphasizes urban challenges.
- It was the **second United Nations Conference on Human Settlement** in **1976** that influenced the decision of the UNGA to establish World Cities Day.

### **UNESCO:**

- **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture.

- It was founded in **1945** as the successor to the **League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation**.
- The **first session** of the General Conference of UNESCO was held in **Paris** during November-December of **1946**.
- It is Headquartered in **Paris, France**.
- It has **194** (including US) **Members and 12 Associate Members** and is governed by the General Conference and the Executive Board.
- Three UNESCO member states are not UN members: **Cook Islands, Niue, and Palestine**.
- While two UN member states are not UNESCO members: **Israel and Liechtenstein**.
- **United States** officially **withdrew** from UNESCO in **2018, rejoined** the organization in **June 2023**.
- **Audrey Azoulay** is the current Director-General of UNESCO.

## The Teesta Treaty



Source- <https://images.app.goo.gl/ymZ93zckSNDyhig8A>

**Recently:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has expressed her resentment to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not including her state in the Centre's talks with the Bangladeshi government over the sharing of waters of the Teesta River.

- Following the meeting between PM Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina last week, Mamata wrote a letter to Modi.
- She expressed her "deep anguish over keeping the state out of the ongoing talks with Dhaka, over the Teesta water-sharing agreement, and renewal of the **Farakka Barrage Treaty**".

### **About the Teesta River:**

- A tributary of the **Brahmaputra**, the **414 km** long Teesta river originates from the **Tso Lhamo Lake** at an elevation of about **5,280 metres** in **north Sikkim**.
- The river travels for about **150 km in Sikkim** and **123 km in West Bengal**, before entering Bangladesh from **Mekhligunj** in Cooch Behar district.
- It flows another **140 km in Bangladesh** and joins the **Bay of Bengal**.
- Teesta is Bangladesh's **fourth largest** transboundary river after the **Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna** River Systems.
- Its floodplain covers an area of **2,750 square kilometres** in **Bangladesh**.
- But **83%** of the river's **catchment area** lies in **India** and the remaining **17%** is in **Bangladesh**, supporting 8.5% of its population and 14% of its crop production.
- Teesta is one of the main sources of irrigation for North Bengal, as well as the Rangpur region of Bangladesh, especially during the dry months.
- It's also one of the main sources of hydroelectric power for the mountainous state of Sikkim.

### **What is Teesta River Water Dispute?**

- Right from the Partition in **1947**, the erstwhile **East Pakistan** (now Bangladesh) had demanded **equitable distribution of Teesta water**, which has always been opposed by West Bengal and Sikkim.

- In 1951, East Pakistan and India signed **the 'India-East Pakistan Agreement on the Sharing of the Ganges Waters,'** which included the Teesta River.
  - The agreement provided for the equitable sharing of the river's waters.
- In **1972**, shortly after the liberation of Bangladesh, a **Joint River Commission (JRC)** was formed to verify the water-sharing options between the two neighbours.
- Undefined on the JRC's recommendations, it was decided in **1984** that **Bangladesh's share** would be **37.5%** and **India's share 42.5%**, with 20% of the total water of the Teesta left unallocated.
- In **1998**, Bangladesh launched the **Teesta barrage irrigation project** to supply water for three cropping seasons a year in Rangpur and started demanding more share of Teesta water.
- In **2011**, during the United Progressive Alliance-II government, India and Bangladesh were close to signing an agreement on the Teesta but Ms. Banerjee walked out of the deal, and since then, the agreement has been pending.
- The **Teesta Treaty** is a long-standing demand of Bangladesh for equitable distribution of Teesta water with India on the lines of the **Ganga Water Treaty of 1996**.

### **Reasons for Opposition:**

- In 2011, the West Bengal government commissioned a study on the Teesta issue under noted hydrologist **Kalyan Rudra**.
- The study concluded that any treaty that allocates more water to Bangladesh would dry out the state's northern parts and hurt its farmers.
- Currently, Teesta waters irrigate **9,22,000 hectares** of land in **North Bengal** and provide **67.60 MW of hydropower**, all of which would be hampered by Bangladesh's demand.
- In **2017**, the Chief Minister had also referred to an alternative proposal of sharing waters of the **Torsa River** which too flows from Sikkim via North Bengal into the **River Padma in Bangladesh**.
- She also proposed sharing the water of **Manshai, Sankosh and Dhansai** rivers but not Teesta.
- In all, **54** rivers flow between India and Bangladesh and the sharing of river waters has been a key bilateral issue.

### The Ganga Water Treaty:

- The treaty was signed to resolve the **Farakka dispute** that precedes the founding of Bangladesh.
- The **Farakka barrage** across the river Ganga was commissioned in **1975** to divert water from the Ganges to the **River Hooghly** to maintain the Calcutta port's navigability.
  - It is constructed on the **River Bhagirathi** around **10 kilometres** from the Bangladesh border.
- By the time of the start of its construction in **1962**, the barrage's potential adverse effects on then East Pakistan had become a contentious issue in the relations between India and Pakistan.
- In May **1975**, a Long March was led by the "**Red Maulana**", **Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani**, from Rajshahi in Bangladesh — near the Indian border — to the Farakka barrage in West Bengal.
  - It was to draw attention on the supposed desertification of large areas in Bangladesh allegedly caused by the substantial reduction of the flow of water as the result of the Farakka barrage.
- The **Ganga Water Treaty** was signed in **1996** with the main objective of determining the amount of water to be released by India.
- Essentially, under the treaty, the upper riparian state, India, and the lower riparian, Bangladesh, agreed to share the Ganges water at **Farakka**.
- There was also an earlier agreement between the two neighbours, signed in **1977 for five years**.
  - It was signed between the governments of **Morarji Desai** in India and **Major-General Ziaur Rahman** in Bangladesh.
- The second arrangement was signed on **December 12, 1996**, between the governments of **H D Deve Gowda** in India and **Sheikh Hasina** in Bangladesh.

### Provisions of the Treaty:

- The treaty, which will expire on **December 12, 2026**, entails a schedule of flows from the Farakka barrage from **January to May**, the dry season months.
- Under the treaty, India can withdraw up to **40,000 cusecs** of flow if the availability at Farakka **exceeds 75,000 cusecs**.
- However, if the availability falls **below 70,000 cusecs**, the flow is to be **divided equally** between the two countries.
- The treaty guarantees **35,000 cusecs** to Bangladesh if the flow is in the range of **70,000-75,000 cusecs**.
  - A cusec is a unit of flow, especially of water, which is equal to one cubic foot per second.

**Laws on sharing transboundary waters:**

- Sharing of waters of transboundary rivers have been mandated by international laws including **The Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers in 1966.**
- Three key UN instruments provide important guidance on how states should approach the beneficial exploitation of their transboundary water resources:
  - 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UNWC);
  - 1992 UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE TWC);
  - 2011 UN Resolution on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation.
- More than **400 treaties** and agreements now govern international cooperation on transboundary watercourses.
- **Article 253** of the Indian Constitution gives powers to the government to enter any transboundary river water-related treaty with a riparian state.

**Pen Pinter Prize to Arundhati Roy**

**Recently:** Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy was honoured with the prestigious **Pen Pinter Prize 2024** for her “unflinching and unswerving” writings.

- She is currently facing the threat of prosecution under the **Unlawful Activities Protection Act (UAPA)**, over historic comments on Kashmir 14 years ago.
- She was chosen by this year's judges - chair of English PEN **Ruth Borthwick**; actor and activist **Khalid Abdalla**; and writer and musician **Roger Robinson**.
- She will receive the award at a ceremony co-hosted by the **British Library** on **October 10**.
  - She will also deliver an address in the ceremony.

### **Who is Arundhati Roy?**

- **Suzanna Arundhati Roy** was born on **November 24, 1961** in **Shillong, Meghalaya, India**.
- Arundhati Roy is the first Indian to win the prestigious **Booker Prize in 1997** for her fiction '**The God of Small Things**'.
- Her second novel, '**The Ministry of Utmost Happiness**' was published in **2017**.
- She is also the author of **Capitalism: A Ghost Story and The Algebra of Infinite Justice**.
- Roy is also a **political activist** involved in **human rights and environmental causes**.
- In recognition of her outspoken advocacy of human rights, Roy was awarded:
  - The **Lannan Cultural Freedom Award in 2002**, the **Sydney Peace Prize in 2004**, and the **Sahitya Akademi Award from the Indian Academy of Letters in 2006**.
- She is currently being prosecuted for the speeches she delivered at a conference titled "**Azadi - The Only Way**", in **2010**.

### **What is a Pen Pinter Prize?**

- The **PEN (Poet, Playwright, Editors Essayist, Novelist) Pinter Prize** is an annual literary award launched in **2009** by English PEN.
- The award is conferred in the honour of the late Nobel Literature Prize-winning playwright **Harold Pinter**.
  - He had been a **Vice President of English PEN** and an active member of the **International PEN Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC)**.
  - He won the **Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005**
- The annual award is given to a writer who is a resident of the **United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, or the Commonwealth**.

- The award is given to "outstanding literary merit" writers who cast their "unflinching" gaze on the world.
- The award is given to writers in the **English language** who have produced outstanding literary work in plays, poetry, essays, or fiction.
- The prize will be shared with a "**Writer of Courage**", one who is active in defence of freedom of expression, often at great risk to their own safety and liberty.
- The co-winner will be selected and announced by **Arundhati Roy** from a shortlist of cases supported by English PEN.
  - It is announced during an award ceremony held at the British Library, on or around 10 October, the anniversary of Pinter's birth.
- Arundhati Roy joins a list of literary giants like **Salman Rushdie, Margret Atwood, Tom Stoppard, Carol Ann Duffy and Malorie Blackman**, who have previously won the prize.

## Indus Water Treaty



**Recently:** A Pakistani delegation arrived in Jammu on Sunday evening as part of **Neutral Expert proceedings** to inspect two hydroelectric power projects in Jammu and Kashmir under the Indus Water Treaty.

- This is the first visit by a Pakistani delegation to Jammu and Kashmir in more than **five years** under the dispute settlement mechanism of the **1960 Treaty**.



### What is Indus Water Treaty?

- In **1947**, the line of partition, aside from delineating geographical boundaries for India and Pakistan, also cut the Indus River system into two.
- Both the sides were dependent on water from the Indus River basin to keep their irrigation infrastructure functional and therefore, equitable distribution was needed.
- **Inter-dominion accord** was adopted in **1948**.
  - Under this, India would supply water to Pakistan in exchange for an annual payment made by the latter.
  - This agreement soon disintegrated as both the countries could not agree upon its common interpretations.
- Both the countries applied to the **World Bank** for funding of their respective irrigation projects on Indus and its tributaries.
- World Bank offered to mediate the conflict.
- Finally in **1960**, after nearly a decade of fact-finding, negotiation, proposals by the World Bank and amendments to them, an agreement was reached between the two countries, called the **Indus Water Treaty**.
- The treaty was signed by former Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru**, then President of Pakistan, **Ayub Khan** and the former Vice President of the World Bank, **W.A.B. Iliff**.

### Basic Provisions of the Indus Water Treaty

- The Indus River basin has **six** rivers- **Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej**.
- It originates from **Tibet** and flowing through the Himalayan ranges to enter Pakistan, ending in the south of Karachi.
- The treaty prescribed how water from the six rivers would be shared between India and Pakistan.
- It allocated the three **western rivers**—Indus, Chenab and Jhelum—to **Pakistan** for unrestricted use, barring certain non-consumptive, agricultural and domestic uses by India.
- The three **Eastern rivers**—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—were allocated to **India** for unrestricted usage.
- This meant that **80%** of the share of water or about **135 Million Acre Feet (MAF)** went to **Pakistan**, leaving the rest **33 MAF** or **20%** of water for use by India.
- It also required both the countries to establish a **Permanent Indus Commission** constituted by permanent commissioners on both sides.
- **Annexure C** of the IWT allows India certain agricultural uses of the waters of Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.
- **Annexure D** allows it to build 'run of the river' hydropower projects, meaning projects not requiring live storage of water.

- India is allowed to have a **minimum storage level** on the western rivers – meaning it can store up to **3.75 MAF** of water for conservation and flood storage purposes.
- The treaty also allows Pakistan to raise objections over such projects being built by India, if it does not find them to be compliant with the specifications.
- India has to share information on the project design or alterations made to it with Pakistan, which is required to respond with objections, if any, **within three months** of receipt.
- The treaty warrants the two sides to meet **once a year**, alternately in India and Pakistan.
  - The 2022 year's meeting scheduled to be held in **New Delhi** was cancelled in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The last meeting was held in **March 2023**.

### **Pakistan's Objections to India's Hydropower Projects:**

- Pakistan has objected to the building of the **Kishanganga (330 megawatts)** and **Ratle (850 megawatts)** hydroelectric plants by India, saying that it violates the provisions of the treaty.
- India insists on its right to build these projects and holds that their design is fully in compliance with the guidelines of the treaty.
- In **2015**, Pakistan requested the appointment of a **Neutral Expert** to examine its technical objections to India's Kishenganga and Ratle Hydro Electric Projects (HEPs).
- In **2016**, Pakistan unilaterally retracted this request and proposed that a **Court of Arbitration** adjudicate its objections.
- India, on the other hand, insisted that the issue should be resolved solely through '**Neutral Expert**' proceedings.
- After failed negotiations, the World Bank appointed a Neutral Expert and the chair of the Court of Arbitration in **October 2022**.
- Issuing a notice for modifying the Treaty, India warned that "such parallel consideration of the same issues is not covered under any provision of the IWT".
- In **July 2023**, the Court of Arbitration ruled that it was "competent to consider and determine the disputes set forth by Pakistan's request for arbitration".
- Pakistan filed its **first Memorial**, which listed its legal case with documents, under this process in March this year.

- A month later, the Court undertook a week-long visit to the **Neelum-Jhelum Hydro-Electric Plant** in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.
  - This was to familiarise the court with general aspects of the design and operation of run-of-river hydro-electric plants along the Indus system of rivers.
- While India refused to take part in the Court of Arbitration, it submitted a Memorial to the Neutral Expert in August 2023.
- Pakistan joined the second meeting of the parties held by Neutral Expert in Vienna in September last year which discussed matters related to the organisation of the site visit.
- The Jammu and Kashmir administration has appointed **25 "liaison officers"** to coordinate the visit of neutral experts along with delegations from India and Pakistan.

### **The current Visit:**

- The officials said the visiting experts, including Pakistanis, will inspect Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric power projects in **Chenab valley** during their stay in the Union Territory.
- The **MW Pakal Dul project** on river **Marusudar** was also visited by the delegation.
- A **three-member Pakistan** delegation inspected the **Pakal Dul and 48 MW Lower Kalnai hydroelectric power projects** under the provisions of the IWT for the last time in January 2019
- It is the first such visit since Jammu & Kashmir's special status was scrapped in **2019**.
- The delegates from India, Pakistan and neutral experts from the World Bank visited the National **Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)** headquarters in **Kishtwar**.
- The delegates stayed in Jammu & Kashmir till June 28.

### **Important Hydroelectric Projects objected by Pakistan:**

#### Kishenganga Hydro Electricity Project (KHEP)

- Kishenganga is a tributary of **Jhelum**. It originates in J&K and joins the river in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.
- The work for KHEP was started in **2007**.

- It proposed to build a dam on the Kishenganga, diverting its water for a **330 MW** hydropower plant in **Kashmir's Bandipora** and sending it back.
- The work for the project was supposed to be completed by **2016**, but before the construction started, Pakistan had raised objections regarding the **height of the dam**, fearing it would mean increased water storage for India.
  - India changed the height from **97m to 37m**.
- Pakistan reached **International Court of Arbitration at the Hague** in **2010** which gave green signal to India in **2013**.
- Pakistan approached the **World Bank** three years later in **2016** and again in **2018**, objecting to the design.
- It also tried to stop the construction of the dam in **2016** by firing shells near the dam site in 2016.
- The project was then **inaugurated in 2018**, despite continued protests from Pakistan.

#### Ratle Hydroelectric Project:

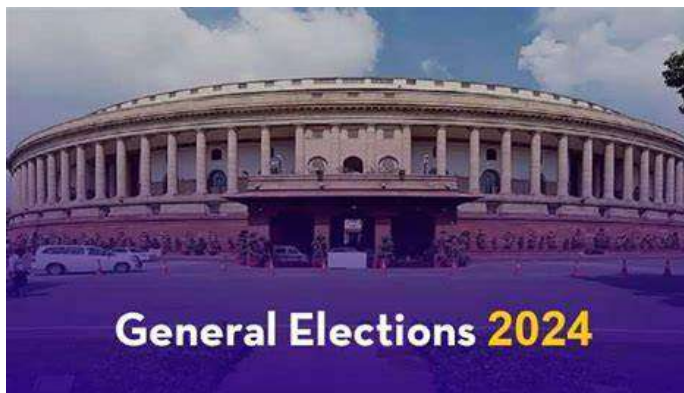
- It is **850-megawatt** project on the **Chenab** River.
- Islamabad has repeatedly raised concerns over its design, insisting that India would use the project's reservoir to create deliberate and artificial water shortage or cause flooding in Pakistan.
- Pakistan had earlier objected to the **Salal dam project** in **1970** and **Baglihar Hydropower project** in **1999**.
- In the 2022 meeting, Pakistan was expected to bring up its objections to three Indian Hydropower projects in the Chenab basin in Jammu and Kashmir- the **1000-Megawatt (MW) Pakal Dul project**, the **48 MW Lower Kalnai project** and the **624 MW Kiru project**.
- India is planning another multipurpose hydroelectric project on **Ujh river** in Jammu & Kashmir and another **Sutlej- Beas link project** in Punjab so as to better utilize the Indus Waters.

#### Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Power Project:

- Pakal Dul is a **1000MW hydroelectric project (HEP)** under construction in the village of **Drangdhuran**, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India.
- It is being constructed by **Chenab Valley Power Projects Ltd.** a joint venture company of NHPC Ltd (Govt of India Enterprise) and **JKSPDC (Govt of J&K Enterprise)**.

- Estimated to cost **Rs81.12bn (\$1.18bn)**, the Pakal Dul HEP project will be the biggest hydroelectric project in the state and the first storage project, upon completion.
- It is being constructed on **Marusadar River**, the largest tributary of the Chenab River.
  - On this river, **1000MW Pakal Dul Dam** and **800MW Bursar Hydroelectric Project** are under construction.
- The **foundation stone** for the construction of the project was laid in **May 2018**.
- The dam will divert water to the south using a **10 km long headrace tunnel**.
- Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project includes the construction of a **167m-tall, concrete-face rockfill dam** and **two circular head race tunnels**.
- The **Main Access Tunnel (MAT)** of the dam is expected to be **263m** long and **8m wide**.

## 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections



Source- <https://cherrijacenta.pages.dev/nvhzxtg-2024-elections-schedule-in-india-ldzdkfg/>

**Recently:** General elections were held in India from **19 April 2024 to 1 June 2024** to elect the **543** members of the **18th Lok Sabha**.

- In the legislative house of 543 seats, the incumbent **NDA alliance** secured majority with **293 seats**, which included **BJP party's 240 seats**.
- The opposition INDIA coalition got **234 seats**, including Congress party's **99 seats**.
- The elections were held in **seven phases** and the results were announced on 4 June 2024.

### **Lower House of Parliament:**

- The members of the Lok Sabha are elected through **General Elections**, held on the basis of **universal adult suffrage (Article 326; Part XV)**.
- As per **Article 81** of the Constitution of India, the Lok Sabha is composed of maximum **550 members** with **530** members representing the **states** and **20** members representing the **Union Territories**.
- Earlier, there were **552 maximum seats**. Of which, **two seats** were reserved for the **Anglo- Indians**, the members of which were **nominated by the President**.
  - After coming into effect of The **Constitution (One Hundred and Fourth Amendment) Act, 2019**, the provision of special representation of the Anglo Indians by nomination has not been extended further.
- **Maximum 84 seats** are reserved for the **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Maximum 47** seats are reserved for the **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.
- Lok Sabha's tenure is only for **five years**, after which it dissolves. But in case of any emergency, this period may be extended by Parliament.
- In December 2023, **Constitution (106<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act** was passed which reserves **one – third** of all seats **for women** in Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, including those reserved for SCs and STs.
- Each state is allotted with the number of seats in Lok Sabha in such manner that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is the same for all States.
- Each state is divided into **territorial constituencies** in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and number of seats allotted to it is, so far as practicable, the same throughout the State.
  - **Ladakh** is the largest constituency (area- wise).
  - **Chandni Chowk** is the smallest constituency (area- wise).

- **Malkajgiri** is the largest constituency (electors- wise).
- **Lakshadweep** is the smallest constituency (electors- wise)
- Lok Sabha's tenure is only for **five years**, after which it dissolves. But in case of any emergency, this period may be extended by Parliament.

### **Why do Lok Sabha have 543 seats?**

- At present, the strength of the Lok Sabha is **543**, of which **530 have been allocated to the states** and the rest to the Union Territories.
- This year's Lok Sabha election was the **second-longest** since **India's first election in 1951-52**.
- As stated earlier, **Article 81** mandates that the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a **state** would be such that the ratio between that number and the **population of the state** is, as far as possible, the same for all states.
- This is to ensure that every state is equally represented.
- However, this logic does not apply to small states whose population is not more than **60 lakh**.
  - So, at least one seat is allocated to every state even if it means that its **population-to-seat-ratio** is not enough to qualify it for that seat.
- As per **Clause 3 of Article 81**, population, for the purpose of allocation of seats, means “population as ascertained at the last **preceding census** of which the relevant figures have been published”.
  - In other words, the last published Census.
- But, by an amendment in **Clause 3 of Article 81** in **2003**, the population now means population as per the **1971 Census, until the first Census taken after 2026**.
- In the current 543 seats, out of the elective seats, **79 are reserved for SC** and **41 for ST**.

### **Major Changes in the Lok Sabha Seats:**

- Originally, **Article 81** provided that the Lok Sabha shall not have **more than 500 members**.
  - The first House constituted in **1952 had 497**.

- Since the Constitution provides for population as the basis of determining allocation of seats, the lower House's composition has also changed with each Census up to **1971**.
- A temporary freeze was imposed **in 1976 on 'Delimitation'** until **2001**.
  - Delimitation is the process of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and state Assembly seats to represent changes in the population.
- The first major change took place after the overall **reorganisation of states** in **1956**, which divided the country into **14 states and six Union Territories**.
- This meant subsequent changes in the boundaries of existing states and hence, a change in the allocation of seats to the states and Union Territories.
- So, with reorganisation, the government also amended the Constitution by which the maximum number of seats allocated to the states remained **500**, but an additional **20 seats** (also maximum limit) were added to represent the **six Union Territories**.
- So the second Lok Sabha elected in **1957 had 503 members**.
- Further down the years, the lower House's composition also changed when the state of **Haryana was carved out of Punjab** in **1966**.
- And also when the **Goa and Daman and Diu** were liberated in **1961** and merged with the Indian Union subsequently.

### When the seats were frozen, and why?

- The population-to-seat ratio, as mandated under Article 81, should be the same for all states.
- Although unintended, this implied that states that took little interest in population control could end up with a greater number of seats in Parliament.
- The **southern states** that promoted family planning faced the possibility of having their seats reduced.
- To allay these fears, the Constitution was amended during Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule in **1976** to **suspend delimitation until 2001 (41<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act)**.
- Despite the embargo, there have been a few occasions which have called for readjustment in the number of Parliament and Assembly seats allocated to a state.



- These include **statehood attained by Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in 1986**, the creation of a Legislative Assembly for the **NCT of Delhi**, and creation of new states such as **Uttarakhand**.
- Although the freeze on the number of seats in Lok Sabha and Assemblies should have been lifted after the Census of **2001**, another amendment postponed this until **2026 (84<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act)**.
- This was justified on the ground that a uniform population growth rate would be achieved throughout the country by 2026.
- So, the last delimitation exercise – started in **July 2002 and finished on May 31, 2008** – was conducted on the basis of the **2001 Census** and only readjusted boundaries of existing Lok Sabha and Assembly seats and reworked the number of seats reserved for SCs and STs.

### **Eligibility criteria for Lok Sabha election:**

- According to **Article 84** of the Indian constitution, to become a member of Lok Sabha, a candidate should have the following eligibility criteria:
  - The candidate should be a **citizen of India**.
  - The candidate should have at least **25 years** of age.
  - The candidate should **not hold an office of profit** under the Indian government or the government of any other state.
  - The candidate should **not be an unstable mind**.
  - The candidate should **not disobey party discipline**.
- Candidates who win the Lok Sabha elections are called '**Member of Parliament**' and hold their seats for **five years** or until the body is dissolved by the President on the advice of the council of ministers.

### **General Elections:**

- **Articles 324** through **Article 329** of **Part XV** of the Constitution cover election-related provisions.
- Elections are conducted according to the constitutional provisions, supplemented by laws made by Parliament.
- The major laws are:

- **Representation of People Act, 1950** – it deals with the Qualifications of voters, Preparation of electoral rolls, Delimitation of constituencies and Allocation of seats in Parliament and State Legislatures.
- **Representation of People Act 1951** – It deals with Administrative machinery, Election offenses, Election Disputes, By-elections and Registration of Political Parties.
- The **Constituent Assembly**, consisted of indirectly elected representatives and was set up for the purpose of drafting a constitution for India on **December 6<sup>th</sup> 1946**.
- It remained in being for almost **three years**, acting as the first parliament of India after independence in 1947.
- The Assembly was not elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage; also Muslims and Sikhs were given special representation as minorities.
- The **First General Elections** of independent India were held between 25<sup>th</sup> October 1951 and **21<sup>st</sup> February 1952**.
- Elections were held for **489 seats** and the Indian National Congress won **364 seats**.
- The Election Commission (EC) of India is the sole organization that has been given the authority under **Article 324** of the Indian Constitution to conduct elections in India.
- India has been divided into **geographical constituencies** with only **one member**. For both Parliamentary and Assembly elections, each constituency will have a single electoral roll, and no one will be included or excluded on the basis of religion, race, caste, or sex.
- The Constitution gives Parliament the authority to pass legislation governing the creation of electoral rolls, constituency delimitation, and other related procedures.
- In addition, the Constitution **forbids courts** from interfering in electoral processes. Any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the assignment of seats cannot be challenged in court.

### The System of Voting:

- The notion of a **universal adult franchise** is the cornerstone of democracy, as it ensures that every citizen has the **right to one vote**, with each vote having equal weight.
- In ***People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India***, the Supreme Court treated the right to vote to be carrying within it the constitutional right of freedom of expression.

- Every citizen over the **age of 18** has the right to vote, regardless of caste, religion, gender, educational attainment, socioeconomic standing, or other factors.
- Earlier the voting age was **21 years** which was **reduced to 18 years** by the **61 Constitutional Amendment, 1989**.
- Eligible voters can register on **January 1<sup>st</sup>, April 1<sup>st</sup>, July 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>** of the election year.
- The electoral roll will be updated every **three months** and eligible youngsters can register in the **qualifying quarter** in which they **turn 18 years old**.
- To ensure that no one is denied their fundamental right to vote for whatever reason, a list of all voters (qualified to vote) is compiled. The **Electoral Roll** or **Voters' List** is the official name for this list.
- The voters' list is distributed to voters in each constituency well in advance of the election for inspection and rectification. On election day, voters cast their ballots according to their names on the voter list.
- A **complete revision** of the voter's list takes place every **five years**.

### **Important Amendments related to Elections:**

- 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 1969 - Extended the reservation of seats for the **SCs and STs**, and **special representation for the Anglo-Indians** in the Lok Sabha for a further period of ten years (i.e., up to 1980).
- 31<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act 1972 - Increased the number of Lok Sabha seats from **525 to 545**.
- 41<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act, 1976 - Froze the seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies on the basis of **1971 census** till **2001**.
  - Raised the tenure of Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies from **5 to 6 years**.
- 44<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act, 1978- Restored the original term of the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies (i.e., **5 years**).
  - Omitted the provisions which took away the power of the court to decide the election disputes of the Lok Sabha Speaker.
- 61<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act, 1989- Reduced the voting age from **21 years to 18 years** for the Lok Sabha.
- 84<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act, 2001- Extended the ban on the readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha for another **25 years** (i.e., up to **2026**) with the same objective of encouraging population limiting measures.
- 91<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act, 2003- Inserted Article 75(1A) which states that the total number of ministers, including the **Prime Minister**, in the **Central Council of Ministers**, shall not exceed **15%** of the total strength of the Lok Sabha

**Model Code of Conduct:**

- It is a **set of guidelines** laid down by the Election Commission to govern the conduct of political parties and candidates in the run-up to an election.
- This is in line with **Art. 324 of the Constitution**, which gives the Election Commission the power to supervise elections to the Parliament and state legislatures.
- It comes into force the moment an **election is announced** and remains in force till the results are declared. This was laid down by the Supreme Court in the ***Union of India vs. Harbans Singh Jalal and Others Case***.
- It is intended to provide a level playing field for all political parties, to keep the campaign fair and healthy, avoid clashes and conflicts between parties, and ensure peace and order.
- Its main aim is to ensure that the ruling party, either at the Centre or in the states, **does not misuse its official position** to gain an unfair advantage in an election.

**The Speaker of Lok Sabha**

**Recently:** The President has appointed seven-time **MP Bhartruhari Mahtab** as the '**Speaker pro tem**' of the 18th Lok Sabha and later **Om Birla** was elected as the **full-time Speaker** on June 26<sup>th</sup>.

### The Pro-Tem speaker:

- **A seven-time BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab** was administered the oath as the **Pro-Tem Speaker** by **President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan**.
- Pro-tem Speaker is a **temporary post** in **Lok Sabha** and is given to a member who is among the **senior most MPs** in the House.
- The role of the pro-tem Speaker is to **administer the oath** to the new members of the House.
- **Article 94** of the Constitution states that the **Speaker of the Lok Sabha** shall not vacate his/her office until immediately before the first meeting of the Lok Sabha after its dissolution.
- This is to ensure that the office of the Speaker is never left vacant. Hence, **Om Birla** who was the Speaker of the **17th Lok Sabha** continues in that post till **June 24** when the first meeting of the **18th Lok Sabha** is scheduled.
- **Article 95(1)** provides that when the post of **Speaker and Deputy Speaker** is vacant, the **President** shall appoint a member of the Lok Sabha to perform the duties of the Speaker.
- This would be the situation when the first meeting of a new Lok Sabha commences.
- Hence, the President appoints '**Speaker pro tem**' under this provision till the full-time Speaker is elected.

### How are they elected?

- This term is not found in the Constitution or rules of Lok Sabha but is a conventional term which finds mention in the '**Handbook on the working of Ministry of Parliamentary affairs.**'
- Normally, **three other elected members of the Lok Sabha** are also appointed by the President for the MPs to take oath before them.

- According to the handbook, **the seniormost members** are generally chosen for the purpose, though there have been exceptions.
- As soon as the new government is formed, the **Legislative** Section of the Government of India prepares a list of the seniormost Lok Sabha members.
- It is then submitted to the **Minister of Parliamentary Affairs or the Prime Minister** for identifying an MP as Speaker pro-tem and **another three members for oath-taking**.
- After the approval of the Prime Minister, the consent of these Members is obtained by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, generally over the telephone.
- Following the approval of the President, the Ministry informs the Speaker pro-tem and other members about their appointments.
- Finally, the President administers the oath to the Speaker pro-tem in the **Rashtrapati Bhawan**.
- The other **three members** appointed by the President are administered the oath by the Speaker pro-tem in the Lok Sabha.
- The Speaker pro-tem then administers the oath/affirmation to the newly elected members with the help of the other three members.

### What is the controversy?

- **Congress** said that its leader **Kodikunnil Suresh**, elected for the first time in **1989**, is an **8-time MP**. Therefore, he is the senior-most member in the House.
- However, Mahtab, who was elected for the first time in **1998** from **Cuttack** and has been member ever since, is a **7-time MP**.
- The party alleged that the BJP surpassed the tradition and convention to appoint a 7-time MP as pro-tem Speaker over an 8-time MP.
- The Congress had taken objection to Mahtab's appointment, contending that the claim of eight-term member Suresh, a **Dalit leader**, was overlooked.

- The INDIA bloc said opposition leaders **Suresh, Baalu and Bandopadhyay** will not join the panel of chairpersons as a mark of protest.
- **Congress leader KC Venugopal** alleged that the saffron party has attempted to destroy parliamentary norms with its move.
- **Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju** explained the government's rationale, stating that while Mahtab has been an MP in Lok Sabha for seven consecutive terms, K Suresh, despite winning elections eight times, had lost polls in **1998 and 2004**.
  - This means that he is currently serving his **fourth straight term** in the House.
- Rijiju asserted that Mahtab has **seven uninterrupted terms** as the MP and was elected to the Lok Sabha in **1989, 1991, 1996, 1999, 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024**.
- Note - The first **pro-tem speaker** of the Loksabha was **Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar** appointed in **1952**.

### How are the Speaker and Deputy Speaker elected?

- **Article 93** of the Constitution states that the Lok Sabha shall choose **two members** to be its **Speaker and Deputy Speaker**. The election of the Speaker is held on a date fixed by the President.
- All the Speakers in independent India have been elected unopposed. The election of Deputy Speaker is held on a date fixed by the Speaker.
- A Lok Sabha Speaker is elected by a **simple majority**.
- This means more than **half of the members** present in the house have to vote for a particular candidate to become the Speaker of Lok Sabha. There are no criteria as such for a Speaker to be appointed.
- **G V Mavalankar** was the first speaker of the Lok Sabha. **Sumitra Mahajan and Om Birla**, both BJP leaders, were the Speakers in the last two Lok Sabhas – 2014- 2019 and 2019-2024.

### Powers of a Speaker:

- The Speaker is a crucial position in the Lok Sabha as he/she is responsible for running the House.
- The Speaker also decides the agenda for **parliamentary meetings** and allows **motions** such as adjournments, and no-confidence, to name a few.
- In case there is any dispute regarding the rules of the House, the Speaker interprets and applies these rules, which cannot be challenged. Hence, the Speaker's chair has to be **non-partisan**.
- Apart from the conduct of business, the Speakers perform **two important constitutional functions** –
  - In certifying a **Bill to be a Money Bill** (over which the Rajya Sabha has a limited role),
  - In deciding on disqualification under the **Tenth Schedule for defection**.
- In discharging these roles in the past, the Speakers have invariably favoured the ruling dispensation, something that should be avoided.
- The Lok Sabha rules provide the Speaker with the powers of **referral of Bills** introduced to **Standing Committees and suspension of members** for grave disorder up to a **maximum of five days**.
- Referral of Bills to committees have declined from **71% during 2009-14 to 16% during 2019-24**.
- With the return of a coalition government, it is expected that the Speaker would refer important Bills to Standing committees for scrutiny.
- There were also large-scale suspensions of Opposition MPs during the winter session of 2023.
- Such suspensions affect the robust functioning of Parliament and should be carried out with restraint.
- The role assumes even more significance since the Speaker is also an elected member of the Lok Sabha, representing a particular party.

### **Conventions:**

- In **Britain**, the Speaker once elected to his/her office, resigns from the political party to which he/she belonged.
- In subsequent elections to House of Commons, he/she seeks election not as a member of any political party but as '**The Speaker seeking re-election**'.
- This is to reflect his/her impartiality while presiding over the House.



- **Somnath Chatterjee**, who was the Speaker of the **14th Lok Sabha** acted independently by not resigning from the post despite his party's (**CPM**) **direction** after it had withdrawn support from the UPA government during a confidence vote in **2008**.
- While the Tenth Schedule allows a Speaker to resign from their political party on being elected to their office, it has never been done by any Speaker till date.
- Resignation from their political parties on being elected as Speaker could be a first step towards demonstrating independence.
- The **Deputy Speaker** is an important constitutional officer who steps in during the **vacancy or absence of the Speaker**.
- The convention of offering the post of Deputy Speaker to the Opposition started in the year **1991**.
- **MA Ayyangar** was the first Deputy Speaker.
- Thereafter, till the **16th Lok Sabha** this has been followed without a break. It was a travesty of the Constitution that no Deputy Speaker was elected in the **17th Lok Sabha**.

## Delhi Water Crisis



**Recently:** In the wake of the acute water shortage, the Delhi government on **May 31<sup>st</sup>**, approached the **Supreme Court** seeking urgent directions to **Haryana** and **Himachal Pradesh** to release more water into the **National Capital Territory (NCT)** region.

### **What happened?**

- Himachal Pradesh had promised to share its surplus water (**137 cusecs**) with Delhi, but the water will have to be transported through the **Wazirabad barrage** with the Haryana government's cooperation, which isn't being provided currently.
- Adding that the water levels in the **Sonia Vihar** and **Bhagirathi barrages**, the other **primary sources** for Delhi-NCR, are operating at **full capacity**, the government contended that an increase can only be considered at the Wazirabad barrage.
- However, despite requests to Haryana to release surplus water, there has been **no positive response**.
- And later on, even the Himachal Pradesh government went back on its statements, stating that water was already flowing in the Yamuna, and that it had made an incorrect statement of being able to spare Delhi 137 cusecs of water.
- The Supreme Court directed the **Upper Yamuna River Board (UTRB)** to convene an emergency meeting on **June 5**, bringing together all stakeholders to find solutions to the acute water shortage faced by the residents of Delhi.
- The court also scheduled a hearing on **June 6** to address the plea filed by the **Delhi government**, seeking additional water from neighbouring Haryana.
- The SC has now bowed out of the row, stating that it does not want to interfere with the proceedings of the UYRB.

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

- Delhi gets the **largest share** of water from the River Yamuna.
- The Yamuna, with a total length of **1376 km**, originates in **Yamunotri glacier** in the Himalayas.
- It travels through **Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi** before its confluence with the **Ganga**.
- The stretch of the river from its **origin to Okhla** in Delhi is called the "**Upper Yamuna**".

- In **1994**, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the **five basin States of the Yamuna**, including **Delhi and Haryana**, for sharing of water of upper Yamuna.
- The **75%** dependable notional virgin flow in the Yamuna river upto Okhla has been assessed as **11.70 Billion Cubic Metres (BCM)** and the **mean year availability** has been assessed as **13.00 BCM**.
- Considering their irrigation and consumptive drinking water requirements, the Basin States agree on the following allocation of the utilizable water resources of river Yamuna assessed on mean year availability:
  - Haryana - 5.730 BCM
  - Uttar Pradesh - 4.032 BCM
  - Rajasthan - 1.119 BCM
  - Himachal Pradesh - 0.378 BCM
  - Delhi - 0.724 BCM
- Pending construction of the storages in the upper reaches of the river, there shall be an **interim seasonal allocation** of the annual utilizable flow of river Yamuna.

<b>States</b>	<b>July - Oct</b>	<b>Nov - Feb</b>	<b>March - June</b>	<b>Annual</b>
Haryana	4.107	0.686	0.937	5.370
Uttar Pradesh	3.216	0.343	0.437	4.032
Rajasthan	0.963	0.070	0.086	1.119
Himachal Pradesh	0.190	0.108	0.080	0.378
Delhi	0.580	0.076	0.076	0.724

Total	9.056	1.652	1.652	11.983
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- The memorandum stated that when the availability of water is **less than the assessed quantity**, the drinking water allocation of **Delhi** has to be met first, while the balance will be distributed among the remaining states in proportion to their allocations.
- In **1995**, the **Centre formed the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB)** to **regulate allocation** of Yamuna water which flows through these States.
- It was also stated that this agreement may be reviewed after the year **2025**, if any of the basin States so demand.
- Delhi and Haryana have been at loggerheads over the allocation of Yamuna water — especially during summers — with Delhi complaining that it is getting less water from Haryana and the latter denying it most times.

### **Major Supreme Court Judgements on the issue:**

- On **March 31, 1995**, the SC passed an interim order acting on a plea, filed by one **Commodore S D Sinha**, which sought direction to Haryana to maintain a regular flow of water in the Yamuna River amid drinking water shortage in Delhi.
- The order said that Delhi which is in dire need of water is to be given its allocation of water with immediate effect.
- It directed all the parties to the MoU to assure that sufficient water, which is about **2 ½ times** of the seasonal allocation, is released from **Tajewala Head** so that Delhi gets **0.076 BCM**.
  - It is this quantity of water, Delhi has to get under the MoU, between **March to June**.
- The bench had also issued directions to **Haryana and Uttar Pradesh**, through their Chief Secretaries of the Irrigation Departments, to release the water for consumption of Delhi from Tajewala Head with effect from **April 6, 1995**.
- However, the court made it clear that its order was an “**interim measure** till the time the members of the **Board and the Review Committee**” were appointed and it became functional.
- In the aftermath of the 1995 ruling, **two contempt petitions** were filed before the SC, one by Delhi **Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking** and the other by **Commodore Sinha**, for wilful violation of the order dated March 31, 1995.
- These culminated in the **1996** ruling in ***Delhi Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking v. State of Haryana***.

- The pleas were disposed by a bench of **Justices Kuldeep Singh and BL Hansaria** on **February 29, 1996**
- The bench ruled that Delhi shall continue to get as much water for domestic use from Haryana through River Yamuna which can be consumed and filled in the two water reservoirs and treatment plants at **Wazirabad and Hyderpur.**
- It directed that both the Wazirabad and Hyderpur reservoirs shall remain **full to their capacity** from the water supplied by Haryana through River Yamuna.”
- The court also directed Haryana not to obstruct the supply of water to Delhi as directed by it, while adding that its order was independent of the MoU signed between the states.

### **The 2021 ruling:**

- When the water level in the Wazirabad pond, which supplies water to treatment plants in the city, dipped to **667 feet**, the **Delhi Jal Board (DJB)** filed a petition before the top court.
- The petition alleged willful disobedience of the 1996 ruling by the Haryana government.
- On **July 23, 2021**, a bench of **Justices L Nageswara Rao, A S Bopanna, and V Ramasubramanian dismissed** the batch of contempt pleas filed by the Delhi Jal Board, seeking action against the Haryana government.
- The bench states that the **1996 order was passed as “an interim measure** till the time the members of the Board and the Review Committee were appointed” and it became functional.
- The court said the Delhi government couldn’t resort to the same now owing to the **large-scale infrastructural developments** that have taken place since February 1996.
- For instance, the court noted that since the 1996 order, three additional water treatment plants have been set up at **Bawana, Dwarka, and Okhla.**

### **What are the reasons for the Water Crisis in Delhi?**

Pollution of Water Sources - **High ammonia levels** (more than 2.5 parts per million) in the Yamuna have long contributed to poor water supply in parts of Delhi.

- An increase in ammonia level often leads to a **50 per cent** decrease in production at **Wazirabad** and **Chandrawal** water treatment plants.
- Numerous drains and rivulets discharge toxic waste from small and medium industries into the Yamuna river, eventually affecting Delhi's clean water supply.

Impact of climate change - According to the draft of the **Delhi State Action Plan on Climate Change** released in **June 2023**, the city is projected to incur economic losses of **Rs 2.75 trillion** by **2050** as a result of climate change impacts.

- Rising temperatures and erratic precipitation patterns pose significant challenges to the city's water supply.

Inefficient water management- Inefficient water management has also been a matter of intense politics in Delhi.

- Several neighborhoods in **South Delhi** will now receive water **only once daily instead of twice**, as part of a water **rationing strategy** announced by Water Minister **Atishi Marlena Singh**.
- This decision affects areas like Greater Kailash, Lajpat Nagar, Panchsheel Park, Hauz Khas, Chittaranjan Park, and nearby locations.

Interstate water disputes- Water disputes between **Haryana and Delhi** have centered around the allocation of water from the Yamuna River.

- Haryana alleges that Delhi is drawing more water than allocated under various agreements.

### **Upper Yamuna River Board:**

- Upper Yamuna River Board is a subordinate office under **Department of Water Resources, RD & GR, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India**.
- It was formed to regulate the allocation of Yamuna water which flows through these States according to the **1994 MoU** between the Yamuna basin states.
- The Board consists of a **Member, Central Water Commission** as part time **Chairman** and **one nominee** from each of the six parties to the MoU.

- These should not be below the rank of the Chief Engineer, a Chief Engineer from Central Electricity Authority and representatives of Central Ground Water Board and Central Pollution Control Board as part-time Members.
- The Board shall have a full time Member-Secretary who does not belong to beneficiary states.

### **Upstream Projects:**

- The government of India has included the three proposed storage projects in the upper reaches of Yamuna and its tributaries known as **Renukaji Dam, Kishau Dam and Lakhwar-Vyasi** Projects as National Projects.
- 90% of the cost of the irrigation and drinking water supply component of the project shall be provided by the Government of India.

#### Renukaji Dam project:

- It has been conceived as a storage project on **Giri River** in **Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh**.
- The Project envisages construction of a **148 m high** rock fill Dam across River **Giri at Dadahu** and a Powerhouse at toe of Dam to generate **40MW** of power.
- The project will provide **49800 ha m (0.498 BCM)** of live storage in its reservoir and a firm water supply to the tune of **23 cumecs** to Delhi.
- The project has been declared as **Project of National Importance** in **February, 2009**, as such the cost (excluding power component) shall be borne by Govt. of India (GoI) and beneficiary states in the ratio of **90:10**.
- An agreement for the construction of the project has been signed between the state of **Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, National Capital Territory of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana & Rajasthan** on **11-01-2019** wherein it was decided that NCT of Delhi shall bear cost of power.

#### Lakhwar multi-purpose project:

- The Lakhwar multi-purpose project is located on **river Yamuna** at Lohari in the Dehradun district of **Uttarakhand**.

- It is a concrete dam of **204 m in height** and of **481.5 M length** with a live water storage capacity of **330 MCM** and an underground powerhouse with an installed capacity of **300 MW (3X100 MW)**.
- This project would deliver irrigation benefit to **33,780 ha** of Culturable Command Area (CCA) and make available **78.83 MCM** of water for drinking & industrial use.
- In February **2009**, it was declared as **National Project**.
- The **agreement for the construction** of the project has been signed between the six basin states in the presence of Hon'ble Minister of Water Resources on **28.08.2018**.

#### Kishau Dam Project:

- Kishau Dam Project is a **multipurpose project** located on **river Tons** in District **Dehradun, Uttarakhand**, and **District Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh** about **45 Kms** upstream of Dakpathar.
- It is a gravity dam of **236 m in height** and **680 m in length** with a live water storage capacity of **1324 MCM**.
- This project would deliver irrigation benefit to **0.97 Lakh Ha** land and make available **617 MCM** of water for drinking/industrial use.
- The project has been declared as a **National Project in February 2008**. The Project is to be executed through **M/s. Kishau Corporation Ltd.**, a Joint Venture between **Govt. of HP and Govt. of Uttarakhand**.

#### Provision for water and resolution of disputes related to water:

- **Entry 17 of State List** deals with water i.e. water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.
- **Entry 56 of Union List** gives power to the Union Government for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys.
- **Article 262** of the Constitution provides that Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of disputes related to water.



- It also provides that, notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, Parliament may, by law provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint.
- **Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956**, provides for the constitution of **tribunals** by the central government for resolution of water disputes.

## Nalanda University



**Recently:** The Prime Minister on June 19 inaugurated the new campus of **Nalanda University**, an **international University**, close to the site of the ancient ruins of **Nalanda in Rajgir, Bihar**.

- The representatives of many countries were present during the inauguration.

### About Nalanda:

#### The Ancient University:

- The **Nalanda Mahavihara site** is in the **State of Bihar, in north-eastern India**.

- It comprises the archaeological remains of a **monastic and scholastic** institution dating from the **3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE**.
- It includes **stupas, shrines, viharas (residential and educational buildings)** and **important artworks in stucco, stone and metal**.
- Nalanda University, situated in the ancient kingdom of **Magadha** (modern-day Bihar), was established in the **5th century CE**.
- It was founded at Nalanda by the magnanimity of **Emperor Kumaragupta in 427 CE**.
- Renowned as the **world's first residential university**, it attracted scholars from across the globe, including China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia.
- The university's name was derived from "**Nalam**" (**lotus**) and "**da**" (**to give**), symbolising the **blossoming of knowledge**.
- However, Chinese traveller, **Hiuen Tsang**, who travelled to India during the reign of **King Harsha Vardhan in the 7th century** and visited Nalanda, attributed the name to **a Naga (snake)**, who lived in a nearby pond.
- Nalanda distinguished itself from the other centres of contemporary learning with a comprehensive curriculum that spanned a broad spectrum of subjects.
- The university's libraries were collectively known as **Dharmagunja (Mountain of Truth)**.
  - They comprised three main buildings: **Ratnasagara (Ocean of Jewels)**, **Ratnodadhi (Sea of Jewels)**, and **Ratnaranjaka (Jewel-adorned)**.
  - These repositories contained vast collections of manuscripts, texts, and palm-leaf scriptures, some of which were rare and priceless, brought in from various places the students and monks came in from.
  - It had **nine million handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts**, making it the world's richest repository of Buddhist knowledge.
- It was sustained by the conscientiousness of the learned monks and teachers, and flourished for **over 800 years** till the end in **12th century CE**.
- The university thrived under the patronage of the **Pala dynasty** during the **8th and 9th centuries CE**, achieving international acclaim.
- Subjects taught at Nalanda included medicine, **Ayurveda, Buddhism, mathematics, grammar, astronomy, and Indian philosophy**.

- The Nalanda University is believed to possess **2,000 teachers and 10,000 students**.
- Those scholars have left records about the ambience, architecture, and learning at Nalanda, as well as, about the profound knowledge of Nalanda teachers.
- The most detailed accounts have come from **Chinese scholars** and the best known of these is **Xuan Zang**, who carried back many hundred scriptures which were later translated into **Chinese**.
- Nalanda's lasting impact is primarily seen in its significant contributions to mathematics and astronomy.
- Interestingly, **Aryabhata**, the pioneer of Indian mathematics and the **inventor of zero** was among the esteemed educators at Nalanda during the **6th century CE**.
- Admission to the university was as tough as today's top colleges like IIT, IIM or Ivy League institutions.
- Students faced rigorous interviews and those who gained admission were mentored by a group of scholars, guided by esteemed **Buddhist masters** like **Dharmapala and Silabhadra**.
- **UNESCO** also designated the ruins of the ancient Nalanda University as a **World Heritage Site** on **January 9, 2009**.

### **The Destruction of Nalanda:**

- In the **1190s**, the institution fell victim to **arson by Bakhtiyar Khilji**, a **Turko-Afghan military general**.
- Bhaktiyar Khilji was the military general of **Qutub-ud-Din Aibak**.
- The devastating **fire raged for three months**, destroying what was arguably the **most valuable collection of Buddhist wisdom**.

### **What was the Reason for the destruction?**

- One of the leading beliefs is that when Bakhtiyar Khilji fell gravely ill, he received extensive treatment from his **Hakims**, but without success.
- Eventually, someone suggested seeking treatment from **Rahul Shribhadra ji**, the head of the **Ayurveda department at Nalanda University**.
  - However, Khilji was reluctant to be treated by any Indian Vaidya (doctor).

- He had greater trust in his officers and was not prepared to believe that an Indian doctor could be more skilled than them.
- After consulting numerous Hakims without success, Khilji eventually summoned Rahul Sribhadra for treatment.
- Khilji imposed a condition that no Indian medicine should be used and threatened to execute **Rahul Sribhadra** if he failed to cure him. Eventually, he agreed to Khilji's terms.
- A few days later, Rahul Sribhadra arrived before Khilji with a **Quran** and advised him to read a certain number of pages daily, assuring him that this would restore his health.
- Actually, Rahul Sribhadra had applied a **medicine paste on some pages of the Quran**. Khilji turned those pages with **spit** and thus gradually got cured, but after full recovery, he forgot the favours of the Hindustani Vaidya.
- Despite this cure, Khilji became envious that his Hakims had failed while an Indian Vaidya succeeded.
- This jealousy prompted him to contemplate eliminating the source of this knowledge, Nalanda University.
- Legend has it that the university's vast library, containing countless books, blazed for **three months**.
- Unsatisfied, Khilji further ordered the massacre of thousands of **religious leaders and Buddhist monks** associated with Nalanda.
- Eventually, he commanded the complete destruction of Nalanda itself.
- One another belief is that Bakhtiyar Khilji was searching for the **Quran** in the Nalanda University library and he could not find it.
- As a result, he was annoyed and lit the fire in the library and destroyed it.
- Some manuscripts that survived the destruction are now preserved in the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Yarlung Museum in Tibet**.
- After six centuries of obscurity, the university was **rediscovered in 1812 by Scottish surveyor Francis Buchanan-Hamilton**.
- Later, in **1861**, it was officially identified as an ancient university by **Sir Alexander Cunningham**.
- The new campus signifies the revival of one of the world's oldest universities, blending ancient wisdom with contemporary knowledge. The campus is merely **12 km** from the ruins of Nalanda.

### The Revival of Nalanda:

- In **March 2006**, while addressing a joint session of Bihar State Legislative Assembly, the former President of India, **Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** proposed the revival of the ancient Nalanda.
- It was re-iterated in the **East Asia Summit of 2009 in Thailand**.
- This vision gained momentum with the passing of the **Nalanda University Bill in 2010**.
- In **2013**, the master plan for the campus, proposed by renowned architect **B V Doshi's Vastu Shilpa Consultants**, was chosen after an international competition.
  - This led to its operational launch in **2014** from a **temporary location near Rajgir**.
- Nalanda University admitted its very first batch of **fifteen students in 2014**, to the School of **Historical Studies, and the School of Ecology and Environmental Studies**.
- Classes were held in the **Rajgir Convention Centre**, with Bihar government-operated **Hotel Tathagat** acting as temporary hostel premises for the students.
  - The faculty comprised **six teachers**.
- **Former president Pranab Mukherjee** laid the foundation stone for the permanent campus in **2016 at Pilkhi village, Rajgir**.
- Construction commenced in **2017** and **Amartya Sen** became the first chancellor of the university.
- Spread across **100 acres**, the new campus integrates eco-friendly architecture with **ancient Vaastu principles**, ensuring a **net-zero carbon footprint**.
- **By 2022, 90%** of the campus's construction was completed. **At** the time, the university boasted 800 students, including 150 international students from **31 countries**.

#### Key Features:

- Two blocks with **40 classrooms for nearly 1,900 students**.
- Two auditoriums with a combined seating capacity of over **300**.
- Hostels for up to **550 students**, alongside **197 academic housing units for faculty**.
- Amenities such as a **sports complex, medical centre, commercial centre, and faculty club**.
- Planned completion of a library with a capacity for **300,000 books and 3,000 users by September**.

- The university currently operates **six schools**, covering Buddhist studies, historical studies, ecology, sustainable development, languages, literature, and international relations.
- Additionally, it hosts **four centres** specializing in **Bay of Bengal Studies, Indo-Persian Studies, Conflict Resolution,** and a **Common Archival Resource Center.**
- It offers **137 scholarships** to international students.
  - These include scholarships sponsored/funded by **ASEAN-India Fund, BIMSTEC scholarships** and **Bhutan Scholarship by MEA.**
- It offers **Post Graduate and Doctoral research courses** and short-term certificate courses.
- The newly inaugurated campus, constructed at **Rs 1,749 crore**, houses **24 large buildings.**
- This international university, apart from India, has participation from **17 other nations.**
  - Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.
  - These countries have signed MoUs in support of the University.

## The Enemy Agents Ordinance Law



**Recently:** Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police (DGP) **R R Swain** said those found assisting militants in J&K should be tried by investigating agencies under the **Enemy Agents Ordinance of 2005**.

- The top cop's statement came in the wake of a series of terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir in recent times.
- Ten people, including **nine pilgrims**, returning from **Shiv Khori temple and a CRPF jawan** were killed and scores of others injured in **four terror incidents** between **June 9 and 12** in **Reasi, Doda, and Kathua districts**.
- **Two Pakistani terrorists** were also killed in one of the encounters in Kathua.

### **What is the Enemy Agents Ordinance:**

- The Enemy Agents Ordinance was originally promulgated by the **Dogra Maharaja** and was first issued in **1917**.
- It is referred to as an 'ordinance' since laws made during the Dogra rule were called **ordinances**.
- After Independence and the Partition of India, the ordinance was re-enacted as a law by the **Maharaja Hari Singh** in **1948**.
- This was done in exercise of his law-making powers conferred by **Section 5 of the Constitution Act of Kahmir, 1939/ Constitution Act (1939)**, which gave the then ruler of Jammu and Kashmir powers to make laws, issue proclamations, and promulgate ordinances.
- All such actions taken by the Maharaja pursuant to powers conferred under **Section 5** are considered duly enacted and promulgated laws.
- According to the ordinance, "whosoever is an enemy agent or, with an intent to aid the enemy, conspires with any other person to any act which is designed or likely to give assistance to the enemy or to impede the military or air operations of Indian forces or to endanger life or is guilty of incendiarism shall be punishable with death or rigorous imprisonment for life or with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to **10 years** and shall also be liable to **fine**".
- After the repeal of the Constitution Act on **17 November 1951**, the ordinance remained unaffected.
  - This was due to **clause (b) of Section 6, General Clauses Act** which provided blanket protection to laws previously made under any enactment that was subsequently repealed.
- Further, the constitution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir that came into effect in **1957** also gave protection to laws and enactments previously enacted under **section 157**.

- Afterwards, The **Enemy Agents Ordinance, 2005 (1948)** was promulgated under **Section 5 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution Act, 1996**.
- When **Article 370** of the Constitution was repealed in **2019**, the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act was passed.
- It listed out state laws that were to continue while several others were replaced and repealed with Indian laws.
  - Laws such as the **Enemy Agents Ordinance** and **Public Safety Act** remained, and the Ranbir Penal Code was replaced with the IPC.
- Other laws including The ST and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 or Forest Act, and The Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 were extended to J&K as well.

### **Definitions under the Act:**

- It describes "**enemy**" as "any person, directly or indirectly, participating or assisting in the campaign undertaken by raiders from outside in subverting the Government established by law in the [Union territory of J&K]".
- "**Enemy agent**", according to it, means a person, not operating as a member of an enemy armed force, who is employed by or works for or acts on instructions received from the enemy.
- Basically, It defines the enemy in the context of the 1947 tribal invasion of Kashmir.

### **Trials under the Act:**

- The trial under the Enemy Agents Ordinance is conducted by a **special judge** who is appointed by the "**government in consultation with the High Court**".
- Under the ordinance, the accused cannot engage a **lawyer** to defend herself unless **permitted by the court**.
- There is no provision for **appeal against the verdict**, and the decision of the special judge can only be reviewed "by a person chosen by the **Government from the judges of the High Court** and the decision of that person shall be final".
- The ordinance also bars any **disclosure or publication** of the case tried under it. The violation of this provision attracts an imprisonment of 2 years.

### **Has anyone been Tried under the Ordinance?**



- **Maqbool Bhat**, the founder of **Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front**, was charged under the Enemy Agents Ordinance.
- He was hanged in **Tihar Jail in 1984**.
- There are scores of Kashmiris who are or have been tried and sentenced under the Enemy Agents Ordinance.

### What does the Judiciary say?

- In the **1959 judgment** in the case of ***Rehman Shagoo and Ors vs State of Jammu and Kashmir***, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the ordinance even after the repeal of the Constitution Act under which the ordinance was originally promulgated.
- The ordinance was challenged in the **J&K High Court in 1948** on the grounds that it should have lapsed without ratification.
- The court ruled that it would remain in force until repealed since it has protection under **clause (b) of Section 6 of the 1977 Act and under Section 157 of the 1957 J&K constitution**.

### Major Rights of the detained?

- **Article 22**, Constitution of India 1950 -
  - **22(1)** - No person who is arrested shall be detained in custody without being informed, as soon as may be, of the grounds for such arrest nor shall he be denied the right to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice.\
  - **22(2)** Every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of **twenty-four hours** of such arrest excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place of arrest to the court of the magistrate.
- The entitlement to a fair, just, and expeditious trial is granted under **Articles 14 and 21**, as established in the case of ***Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar***.
- The right to legal aid is enshrined in **Article 39A** of the Indian Constitution, which states that the State shall provide free legal aid to ensure that opportunities for obtaining justice are not taken away from any citizen due to economic or other disabilities

## India's Post Office Act



**Recently:** The **Post Office Act 2023** ("Act, 2023" or "present Act"), which came into force in India.

- It had been passed in the **Rajya Sabha** last year, on December 4, and in the Lok Sabha on December 18.
- Repealing the **125-year-old Indian Post Office Act of 1898**, the Act contains provisions that allow the Centre to intercept, open, or detain any item, and deliver it to customs authorities.

### **Indian Post:**

- The mail or post is a system for physically transporting **postcards, letters, and parcels**.
- A postal service can be private or public, though many governments place restrictions on private systems.
- India Post, the postal service of India, has a network with tremendous reach within the country.
- The 'Post office' as it is colloquially called has branches from highest of the freezing mountains to hottest of deserts in the country.

- The postal services were introduced by the British during their rule in the subcontinent during colonial times.
- The **East India Company** started establishing post offices in India. The East India company opened its first post office in **1727**.
- **Warren Hastings** had taken initiative under East India Company to start the Postal Service in the country in **1766**, initially established under the name "**Company Mail**".
- It was later modified into a service under the Crown in **1854** by **Lord Dalhousie**.
- The functions of the post office have, till now, been governed by the colonial-era **Indian Post Office Act of 1898**.
- This means that the law has been governing postal services in India for **125 years now**.
- India Post operates under the **Department of Post within the Ministry of Communications**.
- It is Headquartered in **New Delhi**.
- With **1, 55,531 Post Offices**, the DoP has the most widely distributed postal network in the world.

### The new Act:

- The Indian Post Offices Act was primarily designed to govern working of post offices in the British India.
- The law mainly addressed regular services that primarily had to do with delivery of letters and similar functions.
- Postal services come under the **Union List** of the Constitution and the Indian Post Office Act, 1898 regulates the postal services offered by the **central government**.
- It grants the central government exclusive privilege over conveying of letters.
- Postal services are offered through **India Post**, a departmental undertaking.
- The act aims to consolidate and amend the law relating to Post Office in India which today provides many services.
- **Section 9** of the act grants the **Centre** the authority to empower any officer through notification to:
  - Intercept, open, or detain any item in the interest of **state security, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency, public safety, or contravention of other laws**.
  - Additionally, this provision permits postal officers to transfer postal items to customs authorities.
  - This occurs when there is suspicion that the items may contain prohibited substances or if duty is applicable to such items.
- This is similar to **Sections 19, 25, and 26 of the 1898 Act**.

- **Section 19(1)** of 1898 act prohibits individuals from sending via post any explosive, dangerous, filthy, noxious, or deleterious substance.
  - The restriction extends to sharp instruments that are not properly protected.
  - Furthermore, it includes a prohibition on sending living creatures that are either noxious or likely to injure postal articles or postal service officers during transmission.
- The government have the authority, as per **Sections 25 and 26** of the 1898 Act, to intercept prohibited or restricted articles during transmission by post.
- They can exercise this power to intercept any postal article for the public good in emergency situations or in the interest of public safety.
- The Law Commission in **1968**, while examining the 1898 Act, observed that the term **emergency** is not explicitly defined.
- **Section 10** of the 2023 act provides an **exemption** for the Post Office and its officers.
  - This exemption pertains to any liability related to **loss, mis-delivery, delay, or damage** during the course of any service provided by the Post Office.
  - The exemption, however, is subject to any prescribed liability as specified in the legislation.
- The 1898 Act too exempted the government from liability for any lapses in postal service, except where such liability was undertaken expressly.
- Moreover, the 2023 act removes all **penalties** and **offences** under the 1898 Act.
  - For example, offences committed by post office officials such as misconduct, fraud, and theft, among others, have been deleted entirely.
- If anyone refuses or neglects to pay the charges for availing a service provided by the Post Office, the corresponding amount shall be recoverable.
  - This recovery will be treated "as if it were an arrear of **land revenue due**" from them.
- The present act has removed **Section 4** of the 1898 Act, which allowed the Centre the exclusive privilege of conveying by post, from one place to another, all letters.
  - Effectively, this exclusivity was already lost by the 1980s, with the rise of private courier services.
- Neither the Post Office Act of **1898** nor the Indian Post Office Rules, **1933**, defined the term "**letter**" anywhere.
- In response, courier services circumvented the 1898 law by referring to their couriers as "documents" and "parcels" instead of "letters."

- The 2023 act, for the first time, regulates **private courier services** by bringing it under its ambit.
- While the government acknowledges its lack of exclusivity.
- It has also widened the ambit of the law in order to intercept and detain any postal article, as opposed to just letters.
- The post office will provide services which will be prescribed by the central government which may make rules.
- **Director General of Postal Services** will prepare regulations with respect to these services and may fix charges.
- Postage stamps will exclusively be issued by the **post office**.

### **Criticisms:**

- The Opposition expressed fears about the provision on unchecked powers of **interception** of any item by the post office authorities, including the conditions of such interception, i.e., (occurrence of any) 'emergency' which is not defined under the Act.
- Another point is that there are also no procedural safeguards in the Act to check arbitrary use by the authorities or any liability in case the power of interception is misused.
- This provision has raised concerns about potential privacy infringements.
- However, proponents argue that it is crucial for national security in a complex and diverse society.
- In **2017**, SC ruled that **Right to Privacy** is "intrinsic to life and personal liberty" and is inherently protected under **Article 21**.

### **Earlier attempts to change 1898 Act:**

- In **1986**, a Bill was passed with the objective of aligning the grounds for interception of articles transmitted through the post.
- This alignment was intended to be in accordance with the reasonable restrictions imposed on fundamental rights under the Constitution.
- The bill did not receive the assent of the President and was later withdrawn.
- A Bill was introduced and referred to a Standing Committee in **2002**.
- It included amendments to regulate private courier services under the Act.

- The Bill eventually lapsed.
- In **2006** and **2011**, draft Bills were released, which also proposed amendments to regulate private courier services under the Act.
  - However, the corresponding Bills were not introduced in Parliament.
- In **2017**, the Act was amended to delegate the power to decide tariffs to the central government which was earlier rested with Parliament.
- Recently, the **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023** removed all offences and penalties under the Act.

### **Interception under central Acts:**

- On December 24, the **Telecommunications Bill, 2023** received the President's assent. It replaced two Central acts namely:
  - The **Indian Telegraph Act, 1885**
  - The **Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933.**
- The Telecommunication Act has a provision, i.e., **section 20(2)**, on interception of messages.
- This is similar to **section 5(2) of the Telegraph Act of 1885.**
- The exception between them is that the contents of **section 7(2)(b) of the Act of 1885**, which empower the central government to notify rules on the **precautions** to be taken for preventing the improper interception or disclosure of messages, are now included in **section 20(2)**.
- This is significant because though the 1885 Act provided for making rules, the **relevant rule (section 419A)** was notified only in March 2007.
- **Section 69(1)** of the **Information and Technology (IT) Act, 2000** also provides for the interception of any information through any computer source.
- However, it does not require the occurrence of '**any public emergency**' or any demand in '**the interest of public safety**' as provided for in the **Telegraph Act or the Telecommunication Act.**
- Thus, the scope of interception under the IT Act is wider.

- The interception of phones under the **Telegraph Act** continued without any procedural safeguards in place till the SC of India, in ***PUCL vs UoI (1996)***, laid down the procedure and safeguards to check arbitrariness and a misuse of powers by authorities.
  - The Court held that telephonic conversations are often of an intimate and confidential character and, since phone tapping is an infringement of the right to freedom of speech and expression under **Article 19** of the Constitution, it is permissible only if it comes within the grounds of restrictions under **Article 19(2)**.

## International Current Affairs

### 70 years of 'Panchsheel'



Source- <https://images.app.goo.gl/3Qh3r3PXyfJ5sZmXA>

**Recently:** China held commemorative events to mark the 70th anniversary of the **Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence** — a foreign policy concept that was first articulated in an agreement with **India** in **1954**.

- The ceremony in Beijing was chaired by **Prime Minister Li Qiang**. President Xi Jinping delivered the keynote address.
- The event has been given a forward-looking focus, with the theme of **“From the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”**.

### **What is the Five Principle Foreign Policy?**

- Known as **‘Panchsheel’** in India, the five principles of peaceful co-existence were a key aspect of **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s** vision of the world and the relations between nations and neighbours.
- The word Panchsheel traces its origin to the **Buddhist** concept of **Pañcaśīla**.
  - It describes the five moral vows of Buddhism: Abstinence from Murder, Theft, Sexual Misconduct, Lying, and Intoxicants.
- The preamble of the **Panchsheel Treaty** lay down five guiding principles:
  - Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty
  - Mutual non-aggression
  - Mutual non-interference
  - Equality and mutual benefit
  - Peaceful co-existence.
- The agreement aimed to enhance trade and cooperation between the two countries, establishing each country’s trade centres in major cities of the other, and laid out a framework for trade.

### **History:**

- India attained Independence from the British in **1947** after several decades of nationalist struggle.
- Two years later, the Chinese communists emerged victorious in the civil war, and **Mao Zedong** pronounced the **People’s Republic of China**.
- Nehru was keen to establish good relations with China based on trust and mutual respect, and the Chinese appeared to reciprocate, at least initially.



- China **occupied Tibet in 1950** which the Tibetan people referred as “cultural genocide”.
- Until, **1951, Dalai Lama’s Government** was the sole ruler of Tibet.
- The invasion led to the 1951 **Seventeen Point Agreement**, which officially incorporated Tibet into the People’s Republic of China.
- In **1954**, while inaugurating bilateral talks between India and China over Tibet, **Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai** proposed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which was favoured by Nehru.
- The Panchsheel Agreement, formally known as the **Agreement on Trade and Intercourse with Tibet Region**, was signed on **April 29, 1954**, by **N Raghavan**, the Indian Ambassador to China, and *Zhang Han-Fu*, China’s Foreign Minister.
- India for the first time recognised Tibet as the **Tibet Region of China**.

### The Non-Alignment Movement:

- A year after the Sino-Indian Agreement, the Five Principles would feature prominently at the **first African-Asian Conference** in **Bandung, Indonesia**.
- **Twenty-nine countries of Asia and Africa** took part in the **Bandung Conference of April 1955**, and signed a **10-point declaration** that co-opted the Five Principles or Panchsheel.
- The Bandung Conference would serve as the precursor to the Non-Aligned Movement.
- The **Non-Alignment Movement** is of a grouping of nations that consciously chose to not align themselves with either of the two global power blocs led by the **United States** and the **Soviet Union**.
- NAM was founded with the signing of the **Brioni (Brijuni) Declaration** on **July 19, 1956**, by **Nehru**, Egypt’s President *Gamal Abdel Nasser*, and Prime Minister **Josip Broz Tito** of Yugoslavia.
  - The Brioni Islands are in the northern Adriatic Sea, and now a part of Croatia.
- The **first NAM Summit in Belgrade** accepted Panchsheel as the “principled core” of the grouping.
- It is currently a forum of **120 developing countries**.
  - All African countries except **Western Sahara** and **South Sudan** are members of NAM.
  - Among European countries, **Azerbaijan** and **Belarus** are members of NAM.
- NAM does not have a permanent secretariat or a formal hierarchy.
- NAM meets **every three years** at the NAM Summit Conference of Heads of State.

- At the Summit, a **chair** is chosen, which is a post held for **three years**.
- **20 countries** hold **observer status** in the grouping including **China**.
- **Uganda** is the **current chair** of NAM.

### **China's current foreign policy and relations with India:**

- Tibetans' discontent with Chinese rule culminated in a failed uprising in **1959**, which led to the exile of the **14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso**, and many Tibetans to India.
- The Dalai Lama established a government-in-exile in **Dharamsala, India**.
- Despite this, India tried to maintain its bilateral relations with China.
- Panchsheel was visualised as an agreement that promoted peaceful coexistence between India and China, but its heart was ripped out by the **India-China War of 1962** and the relations between the two countries are struggling ever since.
- China's stupendous economic growth over the past three decades has been accompanied, especially under President Xi, with an increasingly aggressive foreign policy.

### **The violation of the Panchsheel Principles by China:**

- A quick analysis will reveal that China had started breaking or broken each of the five principles of coexistence as it pursued and continues to pursue a hegemonistic approach towards India and other of its neighbours.
- China has made claims over territories in the **South China Sea**, and has repeatedly engineered hostile situations with much smaller neighbours to its east and south-east.
- Mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty have been repeatedly violated and China continues to occupy large part of Indian territory and some even acquired in **Aksai Chin**.
- **China's Belt and Road Initiative (2013)** and its major tributary in China **Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** is yet another testament to the aggressive intent for violating even the status quo and territorial integrity of India.
- Since the summer of 2020, Indian and Chinese forces have been locked in a standoff along the **LAC in Ladakh**, and repeated meetings at multiple levels have failed to achieve a substantive breakthrough.

## World Bank's paper on Panchayati Raj Institutions



**Recently:** The World Bank released a working paper titled “**Two Hundred and Fifty-Thousand Democracies — A Review of Village Government in India**”.

- The paper reviews key findings from empirical studies done in the past on various aspects of the functioning of **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**.
- Authors of the paper:
  - **Vijayendra Rao**, lead economist in the Development Research Group at the World Bank.
  - **Siddharth George**, from the National University of Singapore.
  - **M.R. Sharan**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Maryland.

### Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India:

Ancient History:

- The word panchayat derived from the word **pancha panchasvanusthitah**, has references to the existence of Grama Sanghas or rural communities.
- The earliest reference to panchayat is derived from the word Pancha, that refers to an **institution of the five** (pancha panchasvanusthitah) is found in the **Shanti-Parva** of **Mahabharata**.
- **Kautilya's Arthashastra**, a treatise on governance that dates back to around **200 BCE**, describes a decentralised system of government where villages were ruled by village headmen who were called by various names *gramika, gramakuta or adhyaksha*.
- In Ramayana of Valmiki, there are references to the **Ganapada** (village federation) which was perhaps a kind of federation of village republics.
- The **Rig Veda**, a Vedic text which is over 3,000 years old, refers to three types of institutions - **Vidhata, Sabha, and Samiti**, which were all assemblies of adults who gather to voice their views and participate in decision making.
- In the **Mouryan period**, the village was the basic unit of administration.
  - Villagers used to organize works of public utility and recreation, settle disputes, and act as trustees for the property of minors.
- The village council appeared to have evolved into regular bodies in the **Gupta period**.
  - They were known as **Panchamandalas** in central India and **Gramajanapadas** in Bihar.
  - These bodies negotiated with the government for concessions and settlement of disputes.
- The inscription of **Chola dynasty** shows the construction and functions of the village assembly and their executive committees.

Medieval History:

- During the medieval and Mughal periods, village bodies were the pivot of administration.
- In the Mughal period, particularly in the regime of **Sher Shah**, the villages were governed by their own panchayats.
- Each panchayat comprised of village elders who looked after the interest of the people and administered justice and imposed punishment on defaulters.
- The headman of the village, a semi government official, acted as a coordinator between the village panchayat and the higher administrative hierarchy.

- The village panchayat exercised powers of local **taxation, administrative control, justice and punishment.**

#### Modern History (British Rule):

- With the emergence of the British Raj in India, panchayats ceased to play a role that it once played.
- But, local self-government as a representative institution was the creation of the British.
- It was **Lord Mayo**, the then viceroy of India (1869 to 1872), who felt the need to decentralize powers in order to bring about administrative efficiency.
- In **1870**, the concept of elected representatives in the urban municipalities was introduced.
- The **Bengal Chowkidar Act of 1870**, empowered district magistrates to set up panchayats of nominated members in the villages to collect taxes to pay the chowkidars or watchmen engaged by them.
- The **Ripon Resolution of 1882** is considered to be the *Magna Carta* of local democracy in India.
  - This resolution proposed the establishment of rural local boards where **2/3rd** of whose membership was composed of elected representatives.
  - **Lord Ripon** brought in the concept of self-government in urban municipalities.
  - He is treated as the **founding father of urban local government.**
- **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919**, transferred the subject of local government to the domain of provinces.
  - The reform also recommended that as far as possible there should be complete popular control in local bodies and the largest possible **independence** for them.
- After the enactment of the **Government of India Act, 1935**, with the popularly elected government in the provinces, almost all provincial administrations felt duty bound to enact legislations for further democratization of local self-government institutions, including village panchayats.

#### Post Independence:

- The discussions within the Constituent Assembly regarding Panchayats were characterized by two opposing views.

- The several Gandhians within the Assembly advocated for the constitutional enshrinement of the Panchayati Raj system, thereby mandating it.
- In stark contrast, Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee of India's constitution, vehemently opposed this idea and the devolution of powers to village governments because of the fear of discrimination.
- After a lot of debate and discussion, the Constituent Assembly incorporated a provision concerning Panchayati Raj into the Directive Principles of State Policy under **Article 40**.
- Article 40 states that, "The State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."
- The initial momentum for Panchayats was provided by the **Five Year Plans**, which recognized the importance of citizen engagement for achieving their developmental objectives.
- In a separate initiative, the **Community Development Movement**, launched in **1952**, further bolstered the role of Panchayats.
  - Several Panchayats were grouped under a **Community Development Block (CDB)**, overseen by a **Block Development Officer (BDO)**.

#### The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:

- The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, established in **1957** to evaluate the Community Development Projects, suggested the establishment of a democratic decentralised local government which came to be known as the **Panchayati Raj**.
- It recommended a **three-tier** Panchayati Raj system: **Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad**.
- Directly elected representatives to constitute the gram panchayat and indirectly elected representatives to constitute the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

#### The Ashok Mehta Committee:

- According to the Ashok Mehta Committee Report of **1978**, the initial period of ascendancy following the implementation of the **Balwant Rai Mehta recommendations (1959-64)** was quickly succeeded by a phase of stagnation (1964-69) and then a decline (1969-71).
- The Ashok Mehta Committee subsequently recommended granting **constitutional status to Panchayats** to bolster their effectiveness and sustainability.

- He recommended that the three-tier system should be replaced with a **two-tier system**: Zila Parishad (district level) and the Mandal Panchayat (a group of villages).

#### GV Rao Committee:

- The committee was appointed by the planning commission in **1985**.
- It recognised that development was not seen at the grassroot level due to bureaucratisation.
- **Zila Parishad** to be the most important body in the scheme of democratic decentralisation.
- The district and the lower levels of the Panchayati Raj system to be assigned with specific planning, implementation and monitoring of the rural developmental programmes.
- Post of **District Development Commissioner** to be created. He will be the chief executive officer of the Zila Parishad.

#### L M Singhvi Committee & Panchayati Raj:

- The committee was appointed by the Government of India in **1986**.
- The committee recommended that the Panchayati Raj systems should be **constitutionally recognised**.
- It also recommended constitutional provisions to recognise **free and fair elections** for the Panchayati Raj systems.
- It recommended that village panchayats should have more finances for their activities.

#### 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment:

- The Act added **Part IX (Article 243 to Article 243 O)** to the Constitution, "The Panchayats" and also added the **Eleventh Schedule** which consists of the **29 functional items** of the panchayats.
- Part IX of the constitution stipulates that in states or Union Territories with more than **20 lac inhabitants** there are three levels of PRIs:
  - The **gram panchayat** at village level
  - The **panchayat samiti** (block samiti, mandal parishad) at block level, and
  - The **zilla panchayat** (district council) at the district level.

- Members are elected directly and elections at all levels take place every **five years**.
- By federal law, the Panchayats must include members of **Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** in the same proportion as in the general population.
- At least **one-third** of all seats and chairperson posts must be reserved for **women**.
- Not less than **one-third** of the total number of offices for chairperson at all levels of the panchayat to be reserved for women.
- Currently, the Panchayati Raj system exists in all states except **Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram**, and in all Union Territories except **Delhi**.
  - It does not apply to the **hill areas of Manipur** and **Darjeeling district of West Bengal** for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists.
- The provisions of Part IX are not applicable to the **Fifth Schedule** areas.
- The Parliament can extend this Part to such areas with modifications and exceptions as it may specify.
- Under these provisions, **Parliament enacted Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act**, popularly known as PESA Act or the extension act.
- The state finance commission reviews the financial position of the panchayats and provides recommendations for the necessary steps to be taken to supplement resources to the panchayat.

### **Findings and Recommendations of the Paper:**

- The paper has called for granting **greater authority to Panchayats** while **strengthening local fiscal capacity** to offset what it identified as “recentralisation”
- The working paper highlighted “inefficiencies”, saying Gram Panchayat (GP) council members spend excessive time at Block Development offices and District Collectorates, acting as intermediaries rather than empowered decision-makers.
  - Enhanced fiscal capacity and broader decision-making authority are deemed essential for improving governance.
- **Empowering ward members (WMs)** within village councils, who currently lack financial resources and act merely as rubber stamps, is another recommendation.
- The working paper suggests that improved tax collection can be achieved through filling bill collector vacancies, digitizing property records, and granting GPs more freedom to levy their own taxes and cesses.



- To strengthen local self-governance, the paper says, the ability of panchayats to **self-finance** their activities is important.
- Strengthening Gram Sabhas by increasing their frequency and expanding their powers in village planning and beneficiary selection is also recommended.
- **Improving administrative data quality** and ensuring its public availability in accessible formats is another key recommendation.

### **2024 Blue Planet Prize**



**Recently:** Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and Robert Costanza were named as the awardees of the **33<sup>rd</sup>** Blue Planet Prize.

- The prize will be given away on **October 23** in **Tokyo, Japan**.
- A series of related events and commemorative lectures will take place in both Tokyo and Kyoto.

#### **What is Blue Planet Prize?**

- The **Blue Planet Prize** recognises outstanding efforts in scientific research or applications of science that contribute to solving global environmental problems.

- The prize was created by the **Asahi Glass Foundation** in **1992**, the year of the **Rio Earth Summit**, and since then the foundation has awarded the prize to two winners every year.
  - **Takuya Shimamura** is the current chairman of the Asahi Glass Foundation.
- With a **\$500,000** prize, the Blue Planet Prize honours people and organizations for their dedication to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

### **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES):**

- The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an intergovernmental organization established to improve the interface between science and policy on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- In **2010** a resolution by the **65th session** of the **United Nations General Assembly** urged the **United Nations Environment Programme** to convene a plenary meeting to establish the **IPBES**.
- Subsequently, states at their plenary meeting in **April 2012** adopted a resolution that established IPBES.
- It was established by **94 governments** and currently has more than **145 member states**.
- The governing body of IPBES usually meets **once a year**.
- It is considered as the leading global authority on the state of knowledge and science about biodiversity, ecosystem services and nature's contributions to people.
- Their landmark Reports facilitate better science-informed policy and action across scales, sectors, and knowledge systems.

### **Professor Robert Costanza:**

- Robert Costanza is an **Ecological Economics at the Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London**.
- He was born on **September 14, 1950**, in the **United States**.
- In a groundbreaking **1997** paper, Professor Costanza and colleagues demonstrated, for the first time, that the ecosystem services provided by nature to humans far exceed the economic value of the world's GDP at that time.
- This work brought global attention to the previously understated importance of ecosystem services.

## Kavli Prize



**Recently:** The winners of the **2024 Kavli Prize** (not to be confused with the Kavli Medal) were announced.

- **Eight winners** were awarded for their contributions to **astrophysics, neuroscience, and nanoscience**.
- The Kavli Prize is a distinguished award honouring remarkable achievements in **astrophysics, neuroscience, and nanoscience**.

### Fred Kavli:

- The Kavli Prize is awarded in honour of **Norwegian-American businessman and philanthropist Fred Kavli (1927-2013)**.
- Born in **Erejsford, Norway**, Kavli moved to **California** in **1956** after getting an **engineering degree**.
- In the **US**, he began working for a company which built high-tech sensors for missiles, becoming its chief engineer within a year.

- In **1958**, he started his own enterprise, founding **Kavlico**.
- Today, the company is a leading manufacturer of **pressure sensors** and related systems, which are used **in all kinds of industries**, from aviation to home appliances.
- **Kavlico's pressure transducers** (devices which convert pressure into an electric signal) are known for their **high accuracy, stability, and reliability**.
- In **2000**, Kavli sold his company for **\$ 340 million**, and established the **Kavli Foundation**.
- Kavli Foundation was formed with the aim to support wide-ranging basic research to improve the quality of life for people worldwide.
- The foundation runs **20 institutes** which specialise in astrophysics, neuroscience, nanoscience, and theoretical physics.

### What is Kalvi Prize?

- Established in **2005**, The Kavli Prize is a partnership among **The Kavli Foundation, The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research**.
- The inaugural prize was announced in **2008**, and awarded to **seven scientists**.
- Till date, **73 scientists from 19 countries** have been honoured with the **biennial award**. **Ten of them** have gone on to win the Nobel Prize.
- In fact, the **Kavli Prize** was designed to be like the **Nobel** in the fields of **astrophysics, neuroscience, and nanoscience**. But it is more far-reaching in its outlook.
- As per the will of **Alfred Nobel**, the Nobel Prize is only awarded for achievements made "**during the preceding year**". But the Kavli Prize does not operate under such a restriction.
- The prize comprises a **\$1 million cash prize (per field), a scroll, and a medal, 7 cm in diameter**.
- The award ceremony is more flamboyant than the one for the Nobel, with a **red carpet rolled** out for invitees.
- Along with the **US-based Kavli Foundation**, the prize is given in partnership with the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

**Prize Committees:**

- The **Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters** appoints **three Kavli Prize Selection Committees** based on nominations from leading international academies and similar scientific organizations.
- Nominations for the committees are provided by:
  - The Chinese Academy of Sciences
  - The French Academy of Sciences
  - The Max Planck Society (Germany)
  - The National Academy of Sciences (US)
  - The Royal Society (UK)
- **Three independent selection committees** review entries to present a unanimous recommendation to **The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters**.
- Each prize committee consists of **five members** who serve **two terms (two prize cycles)**, except the **chairs** who serve **three terms (three prize cycles)**.
- The committee members are a mix of gender and ethnicity, and The Norwegian Academy prioritizes for the **five-member committees** to have a balance between male and female scientists internationally.

**2024 Awardees:**

- All eight scientists awarded the Kavli Prize this year are professors at **leading American universities**.
- The award ceremony this year is scheduled to take place on **September 3, at the Oslo Concert Hall**.
- The **Norwegian Royal Family** will be handing out the prizes.

**Astrophysics:**

- It is a science that employs the methods and principles of physics and chemistry in the study of astronomical objects and phenomena.
- This year's prize for astrophysics has been awarded to **David Charbonneau of Harvard University**, and **Sara Seager of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology**.
- The duo have been recognised for discoveries of **exoplanets**, and the characterisation of their atmosphere.
  - An exoplanet is any planet beyond **our solar system**.

#### Nanophysics:

- Nanotechnology is the manipulation of matter with at least one dimension sized from **1 to 100 nanometers**.
- **Robert Langer of MIT, Armand Paul Alivisatos of the University of Chicago**, and **Chad Mirkin of Northwestern University** were given the prize for nanoscience.
- **Alivisatos** devised **semiconductor crystals or "quantum dots"** which could be used as **multi-colour fluorescent probes in bio-imaging**.
- Langer was recognised for his breakthrough idea of **nano-engineering** a material for the controlled release of **therapeutic bio-molecules**.
- This innovation could help the development of controlled drug delivery systems to treat diseases like aggressive brain cancer, prostate cancer, and schizophrenia.
- Today these are used for diagnostic imaging of patients, and helping research in fundamental medicine and biology.
- Mirkin introduced the concept of **spherical nucleic acid (SNA)**, a new class of **nucleic acids** that are densely functionalised and oriented spherically around a nanoparticle core.
- Nucleic acids are large biomolecules that are crucial in all cells and viruses.
- SNAs have wide-ranging use in areas like **intracellular detection, gene regulation and immunotherapy**.

#### Neuroscience:

- Neuroscience, also known as **Neural Science**, is the study of how **the nervous system** develops, its structure, and what it does.
- Neuroscientists focus on the brain and its impact on behaviour and cognitive functions.
- The prize in neuroscience has been awarded to **Nancy Kanwisher of MIT, Winrich Freiwald of Rockefeller University**, and **Doris Tsao of the University of California at Berkeley**.
- The trio have been awarded for their collective effort over decades to map the linkage **between facial recognition and the brain**.
- Kinwisher identified the exact **brain's centre for face processing**.
- Tsao and Freiwald took this knowledge forward using functional imaging and recording from individual brain cells to map out the neural **architecture of the human brain**.

### The Kalvi Medal:

- The **Royal Society Kavli Medal** is presented **every year** to recognize exceptional accomplishments in science and engineering within the fields of environment or energy.
- It is intended for scientists who are in the early stages of their careers, having completed no more than **15 years of research** since earning their **PhD**.
- The Kavli medal and lecture is open to **UK/Commonwealth/Irish Republic citizens** or those who have been residents for **three or more years**.
- The medal is of **bronze gilt** and is accompanied by a gift of **£1,000**. The awardee is invited to present a public lecture about their research at the Royal Society.
- The recipient is selected by the **Council of the Royal Society** based on the recommendation of the **Joint Physical and Biological Sciences Awards Committee**.
- Nominations remain valid for **five years**; after this period, re-nomination is not allowed until **one year** has passed since the initial nomination expired.

## Julian Assange



**Recently:** Julian Assange has arrived in his homeland **Australia** after walking free from an **American court** following a deal with US authorities.

- His website **WikiLeaks**, which made public several classified United States government documents over the years, said in a post on X: "JULIAN ASSANGE IS FREE".
- Dozens of media from around the world attended the hearing, with more gathered outside the courtroom to cover the proceedings.

### Who is Jullian Assange?

- Assange was born in **Townsville, Australia**, in **July 1971**, to parents who were involved in theatre and travelled frequently.
- In his teens, Assange gained a reputation as a **sophisticated computer programmer** and in **1995** he was arrested and pleaded guilty to hacking.



- He was fined, but avoided prison on condition he did not reoffend. He later authored a book named **“Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet.”**
- In his late 20s, he went to **Melbourne University** to study **mathematics and physics**.
- Assange as a whistleblower launched a website named **“WikiLeaks” in 2006**, creating a web-based **“dead letter drop”** for **would-be leakers**.
- Wikileaks publishes large datasets of **“censored** or otherwise restricted official materials **involving war, spying and corruption.”**
- The website first grabbed global attention in **2010** when it published a cache of around **half a million US-sensitive military files on Iraq and Afghanistan**.
- This included a classified video from **2007** that showed an **Apache helicopter** firing indiscriminately, killing a **dozen people**, including **two Reuters correspondents in Baghdad, Iraq**.
- Around 250,000 secret diplomatic cables from U.S. embassies were also released.
- It released more than **90,000 classified** U.S. military documents on the war in **Afghanistan**, and about **400,000** secret U.S. files on the **Iraq war**.
- The two leaks represented the largest security breaches of their kind in U.S. military history.
- The leaks angered and embarrassed U.S. politicians and military officials, who said the unauthorised dissemination put lives at risk.

### What happens after the leak?

- The leaks caused ripples across the globe, with the **U.S. government** launching an inquiry into the leaks.
- In **September 2010**, Mr. Assange fled to **Britain** after an investigation was launched into **alleged sex crimes** by him, based on the accusations of **two Swedish WikiLeaks volunteers**.
- The **Swedish authorities** issued an arrest warrant for Mr Assange, accusing him of having **raped one woman and molested another**.
- The British police arrested him **two months later**. The WikiLeaks founder, however, denied the charges and claimed that the case was a pretext to **extradite him** to the **U.S.**

- He subsequently filed multiple pleas against extradition to Sweden but relief evaded him.
- In **June 2012**, shortly after the **UK Supreme Court** rejected his final challenge against extradition to Sweden, Mr. Assange went to the **Ecuadorean embassy in London** seeking **asylum**.
- In **2016**, ahead of the U.S. presidential election, the spotlight was back on the website after it released thousands of emails belonging to **John Podesta**, the aide of **Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton**.
  - As per prosecutors, **Russian intelligence operatives** had stolen the emails and used the anti-secrecy website to improve **Donald Trump's chances of victory**.
- While the Swedish prosecutors dropped their investigation in **2017**, the British police maintained that Mr. Assange would be arrested.
- In **October 2018**, Assange was given a set of house rules by the Ecuadorean embassy, the same month it was revealed he was launching legal action against the government of **Ecuador** - accusing it of violating his "**fundamental rights and freedoms**".
- In **November 2018**, It was revealed that the US Justice Department secretly filed charges against Assange.
- The new Trump govt charged him in a **conspiracy**.
- As pressure mounted, the Ecuadorian government revoked his asylum in **2019**. Assange remained in the **Ecuadorean embassy** for **seven years (2012-2019)**.
- The Metropolitan Police enter the embassy - with the Ecuadorean government's permission - and detain Assange for "failing to surrender to the court" over a warrant issued in **2012**.
- Mr. Assange was arrested and jailed for **50 weeks** for breaching **bail conditions** in **London's high-security Belmarsh Prison**.
- Later in 2019 itself, A federal grand jury in the US indicted Assange on **17 new alleged violations** of the **Espionage Act, 1917** bringing the total number of felony charges against him to **18**.
- **In May 2019**, Sweden reopened the sexual assault investigation and the US revealed its charges against Assange. He also began fighting extradition in the **UK courts**.
- **In November 2019**, Swedish prosecutors again discontinued their rape investigation.
- Assange completed his 50-week sentence in **September 2019** but remained in Belmarsh maximum security prison pending **extradition hearings**. During his time in the prison, he married Stella Moris in **2022**.

- In **2021**, a British judge ruled Assange should not be extradited, saying his mental health problems meant he would be at risk of suicide.
- The US authorities won an appeal in **December 2021**, after they offered to allow Assange to serve any sentence in **Australia** if convicted.
- In **June 2022**, Britain approved his extradition to the US but his case continues to be tied up in appeals.
- In **February 2024**, Assange's legal team sought permission for a final appeal, arguing the case was politically motivated, an assault on freedom of speech and journalism, and that Assange could potentially face the death penalty if convicted.
- In **May 2024**, The High Court ruled Assange can bring a new appeal against extradition to the US.
- In June 2024, Assange signed a plea agreement with the US and the High Court granted him bail.
- Between all this, **ex-army Chelsea Manning**, who had accessed the U.S. Department of Defense and uploaded classified files onto a WikiLeaks Dropbox, spent seven years in prison from **2010 until 2017**.
  - Then **President Barack Obama** commuted the remainder of her **35-year sentence**.
  - A trans woman, Manning said in **2013** that she had a female gender identity since childhood and wanted to be known as Chelsea Manning
  - Manning was posted in **Iraq** and helped leak documents to WikiLeaks.

### What is the new deal?

- Now, under a plea agreement with US, he plead guilty in a US court of **Mariana Islands** to a **single criminal count** of **conspiring** to obtain and disclose classified US national defence documents.
- The judge approved his plea, sentenced him to the **five years** he had already spent in the U.K. fighting extradition, pronouncing him a **"free man"** and return to his native **Australia**.
- He is due to be sentenced to **62 months** of time already served.

### Sapian Islands:

- The **tropical Pacific island of Saipan** hosted the final act of Julian Assange's 14-year legal odyssey.
- Saipan is the **capital** of the **Northern Mariana Islands (NMI)**, a US commonwealth in the **western Pacific** which begins roughly **70 km (44 miles) north of Guam** and stretches across **14 islands**.
- Like territories such as **Guam or Puerto Rico**, the Northern Mariana Islands are part of the US without the full **status of a state**.
- After being a colony of **Spain, Germany and then Japan**, the United States took control of the island in **World War Two**.
- After decades under US control, residents in **1975** voted to join the **United States** as a territory.
- The territory has a permanent delegate in the US House of Representative, although they cannot vote.
- Its roughly **51,000 residents** are **US citizens** but cannot vote in **presidential elections**. Crucially, some, like Saipan, also host **US district courts**.
- US prosecutors said Assange wanted to go to a court **close** to his home of **Australia** but not on the continental United States.
- Saipan has the advantage of being relatively close to Assange's home of Australia, roughly **3,000 km (1,800 miles) south**.

#### **Indian major laws to protect government secret information:**

- The **Official Secrets Act of 1923** establishes the guidelines for addressing espionage, sedition, and other threats to national security.
- **Rule 11 of the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964**, governs how government employees communicate official information.
- **Section 8(1) of the Right to Information Act, 2005**, exempts the disclosure of information that could harm India's sovereignty and integrity.

## French Open



**Recently:** World No. 1 Iga Swiatek took her tally of French Open titles to four as she beat Jasmine Paolini 6-2, 6-1 in the final at Roland Garros, Paris

- **Royal Spanish Tennis Federation (RFET)** said that **Rafael Nadal** and recent **French Open winner Carlos Alcaraz** will be teaming up to **play doubles in the Paris Olympics**.
- Nadal already has a **gold medal from the Olympics** held in **Beijing** in **2008**.
- This will be **Alcaraz's debut** at the event as he returns to **Roland Garros**, where he was previously crowned **French Open champion**.

### What is a Grand Slam?

- A tennis player achieves the "**Grand Slam**", also called **majors**, only after he or she wins **all four major championships** in **the same calendar season**.
- The four major championships include the
  - Australian Open (mid-January)

- French Open (Later May – Early June)
- Wimbledon (June-July)
- U.S. Open (August-September)
- The term “Grand Slam” is often **colloquially** used to describe the four major tournaments themselves or winning all four over the course of several years.
- The history of the Grand Slams stretches back to the late **19th century**.
- **Wimbledon**, the oldest, began in **1877**, followed by **the US Open (1881)**, **the French Open (1891)**, and **the Australian Open (1905)**.
- Each Grand Slam is organized by a different National Tennis Association:
  - Tennis Australia
  - French Tennis Federation
  - All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club (Wimbledon),
  - United States Tennis Association.
- The **Men's International Professional Tennis Council**, the men's professional tennis world's governing body at the time, maintained that a "Grand Slam" did not have to be won in the same year.
- The International Tennis Federation (ITF) started offering a **USD 1 million bonus** to any singles player who won the four majors consecutively in **1982**.
- The representatives of the four Grand Slam events at Wimbledon reportedly approved this revision made by the Council and the ITF.
- There are no teams in Grand Slam singles competitions.
  - Players compete individually to win the championship title.
- Doubles competitions, however, do involve teams of **two players**.
  - These teams can be **same-sex (men's or women's doubles)** or **mixed (one man and one woman)**.
- ITF World Tennis Tour consists of **Women's, Men's**, and **junior tournaments** along with them, Masters Tour, Wheelchair Tennis, and Beach Tennis are also inclusive.
- The surfaces on which the Grand Slams are played vary, adding another layer of challenge.

- The **Australian Open and US Open are played on hard courts**, the **French Open on clay**, and the prestigious **Wimbledon on grass**.
- Last year, Novak Djokovic became the first person to win 24 Grand Slams.

### What is French Open:

- The French Open, also known as **Roland-Garros**, is a **major tennis** tournament held over two weeks at the **Stade Roland Garros in Paris, France**, beginning in **late May each year**.
  - Tennis is a **racket sport** that can be played individually against a single opponent (**singles**) or between **two teams of two players** each (**doubles**).
- Roland-Garros is one of the **four Grand Slam tournaments in tennis**.

### History:

- The story begins in **1891**, with the creation of the "**French Clay-Court Championships**".
- The tournament was reserved for players who were members of French clubs, and was held at venues alternating between the Stade Français, the Parc de Saint-Cloud and the Racing Club de France's Croix-Catelan grounds.
- The hero of that particular era was **Max Decugis**, who won no fewer than **eight times between 1903 and 1914**.
- The first big change came in **1925**, when the event was **opened up to players from abroad**, and the "**French Open**" was born.
- In the women's, **Suzanne Lenglen won six times between 1920 and 1926** and became the **first genuine star** of the sport in the process.
- On the men's side, **Henri Cochet, René Lacoste, Jean Borotra** and **Jacques Brugnon** – the famous **Musketeers** – **racked up 10 singles titles between 1922 and 1932**.

- The highlight however was their **Davis Cup win in 1927**, which brought about the building of a stadium dedicated to their title defence.
- This arena would be named after **Roland Garros, a pioneer of aviation** who was **killed in 1918 combat during the Great War**.
- After a hiatus due to the **Second World War**, it was the English-speaking world which took over tennis.
- When the sport became **professional** in **1968**, the tournament took on added importance allowing both amateurs and professionals to compete.
- The stadium underwent its first expansion in **1979**, with an increase from **five to 10 courts**.
- Further extensions (in **1986** and then **1992–94**) saw it increase to its current size of **8.5 hectares and 20 courts**, including **three show courts, Philippe-Chatrier, Suzanne-Lenglen and Simonne-Mathieu**.

#### Trophies:

- Awarded to the winners since **1953**, these trophies have evolved with the prestige of the tournament.
- True works of art, these modern trophies are designed by **La Maison Mellerio**, the famous **Parisian** jewelers since **the 17th century**.
- The two of the most iconic trophies in the event are:
  - The **Coupe des Mousquetaires (Musketeers' Trophy)** for **men**
  - The **Coupe Suzanne-Lenglen (Suzanne Lenglen Trophy)** for **women**.
- The **Musketeers' cup** has been awarded to the winner of the **men's singles event** since **1981**.
- It pays tribute to the **four Musketeers** of French tennis: **Jean Borotra, Jacques Brugnon, Henri Cochet** and **René Lacoste**.
  - A **silver bowl bordered with vine leaves** around the top and decorated with **two swan-shaped handles**, the trophy is mounted on a marble base in which is inscribed the names of the **winners since 1891**.
- The **Suzanne-Lenglen cup** has been awarded to the **women's singles** champion since **1979** and bears the name of an emblematic French champion.
  - **Suzanne Lenglen (1899-1938)** won Roland-Garros **six times**. Her modern style, elegance and flair were what inspired the Musketeers.



- The trophy is almost identical, minus a few details, to the cup offered at the time by the **City of Nice to Suzanne Lenglen**, and which is housed in the **National Sports Museum**.
- The **Jacques-Brugnon cup** is awarded to the winners of the **men's doubles event**.
  - Created in **1989**, this trophy is designed with appliques and its base is decorated with repetitive ornaments in relief, otherwise known as **fluting**.
- The **Simonne-Mathieu cup** is awarded to the **women's doubles champions**.
  - Created in **1990**, this round trophy is adorned with two small handles in the form of swans and decorated with leaf mouldings.
- The **Marcel Bernard cup** has been presented to the Roland-Garros **mixed doubles champions since 1990**.
  - The trophy is oval and features turned and inserted mouldings, a carved frieze and two handles, while the base features two turned mouldings.
  - It pays tribute to **Marcel Bernard (1914-1994)**, the highlight of whose career was victory at **Roland-Garros in 1946**. He was also the president of the French tennis federation from 1968 to 1973.

### Why is the tournament named after Roland Garros?

- The French Open stadium may not be named after a tennis champion, but Roland Garros certainly deserves his place in the history books.
- In **1913**, he became the **first person to fly across the Mediterranean**.
- During World War I, he was a pioneer of **air warfare**, shooting down four enemy planes with the help of his own invention: wedge-shaped steel plates attached to the propeller blades, allowing for a forward-firing machine gun.
- In **1918**, Garros managed to escape and to make his way back to Paris. His health had seriously deteriorated, but he decided to rejoin the Army.
- On **October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1918**, he was shot down and killed near **Vouziers, Ardennes**, a month before the end of the war and one day before his 30th birthday.

- At the end of **1927**, after the **famous Four Musketeers** had won the Davis Cup for the first time, both directors from **the Racing Club and the Stade Francais** made an offer to buy a piece of land at the **Porte d’Auteuil, in the west of Paris**.
- They wanted to build a **10,000-seat arena for the first Davis Cup Challenge Round** in **France** and as a venue for the French Championships.
- They even used personal funds for the loan, which **Emile Lesieur of Stade Français** approved on one condition: the venue had to be named after fellow member **Roland Garros**, who had died nearly 10 years earlier.
- The venue became so associated with the French Championships that the tournament itself became known as Roland-Garros.

### **French Open 2024 Winners:**

- **Carlos Alcaraz from Spain** lifted his maiden French Open title after defeating **Alexander Zverev** in a four-hour, 19-minute match in front of a packed **Phillipe Chatrier**.
- The **21-year-old** outlasted the German **6-3, 2-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2** in the final to win his **third career major** and eclipse his idol Rafael Nadal to become the **youngest man to collect a major on three surfaces**.
  - Nadal was one and a half years older at the time of his achievement back in **2009**.
- While the win made him the **eighth Spaniard** to claim a title on **Parisian clay**, Alcaraz also improved his record to **3-0 in Slam finals**, having earlier won the **2022 US Open and Wimbledon last year**.
- Alcaraz took home a cheque of **€2,400,000 (INR 2.16 crore)**, **4.35 per cent** more than Novak Djokovic received when he lifted the trophy last year.
- Meanwhile, runner-up **Alexander Zverev** earned **€1,200,000 (INR 1.08 crore)**, a **4.35 per cent** increase over what Casper Ruud had deposited in his account.
- In the **women’s singles final**, **Iga Swiatek** continued her relentless dominance on clay as she won her fourth French Open title and **fifth Grand Slam** by trouncing **Jasmine Paolini**.

- The **23-year-old Polish superstar** clinched her **fourth French Open title**, solidifying her status as a true clay-court maestro.
- Swiatek becomes the **third woman** to win **three French Open titles** in a row in the Open era -- **joining Monica Seles (1990-92) and Justine Henin (2005-07)**.
- In the **Men's Doubles** category, **Marcelo Arevalo** and **Mate Pavic** were the winners, defeating **Simone Bolelli** and **Andrea Vavassori**, the runners-up.
- In the **Women's Doubles** category, **Coco Gauff** and **Katerina Siniakova** took the title, with **Sara Errani** and **Jasmine Paolini** as the runners-up.
- In the **Mixed Doubles** category, **Laura Siegemund** and **Edouard Roger-Vasselin** emerged victorious, with **Desirae Krawczyk** and **Neal Skupski** finishing as the runners-up.

#### **Who has won the most French Open titles?**

- Men's singles in open era -
  - Rafael Nadal – 14
  - Bjorn Borg – 6
  - Mats Wilander, Ivan Lendl, Gustavo Kuerten, Novak Djokovic – 3
- Women's singles in open era -
  - Chris Evert – 7
  - Steffi Graf – 6
  - Justine Henin – 4

#### **India:**

- **After five years** an Indian featured in the **Singles event** of the French Open.
- **Sumit Nagal**, who went down to Russia's Karen Khachanov in the first round, was the **first Indian** after **Prajesh Gunneswaran (2019)** to participate in the Men's Singles of the Roland Garros.

- However, he was knocked out and could not make it till the end.
- **Rohan Bopanna** also featured in the tournament in the men's **doubles and mixed doubles category**.
- He was partner with his **Aussie partner Matthew Ebden** in the tournament. The duo were seeded second in the competition and are among the favourites to win the title.
- **Yuki Bhambri** was also in action at the Roland Garros. The 31-year-old Indian was paired with **France's Albano Olivetti in the men's doubles**.

### Indians who won Grand Slams:

- So far, **Sania Mirza, Rohan Bopanna, Leander Paes** and **Mahesh Bhupati**, are the only **four Indian tennis players** to have won a Grand Slam in their careers.
  - The quartet accumulated a collective tally of **33 Grand Slam titles**.
- With **18 Grand Slam titles, Leander Paes** is India's most successful tennis player and is regarded as one of the best doubles players of all time.
- **Mahesh Bhupati** was the first Indian to win a Grand Slam who won the **1997 French Open** mixed doubles with **Japan's Rika Hiraki**.
- While **Sania Mirza** is the **only Indian woman** to win a Grand Slam in **2009 Australian Open** in the **mixed doubles category** with **Mahesh Bhupati**.
- India's last Grand Slam came through **Rohan Bopanna at the Australian Open 2024**.

## Ukraine Peace Summit



**Recently:** A **two-day Summit on Peace in Ukraine** at the **Bürgenstock resort** in **Switzerland** ended with participants hoping for an end to the war between Moscow and Kyiv.

- About **100 delegations** from countries and international organisations attended the **Switzerland-hosted Summit on Peace in Ukraine** from **June 15-16**.
- The summit concluded with dozens of countries throwing their support to Ukraine's "territorial integrity" and calling for talks among all parties to find a lasting solution to the conflict.
- **Eighty countries** and **four organizations** supported the final joint communiqué from the **Path to Peace Summit**, aimed at ending the Russia-Ukraine war that began in **February 2022**.

### Background of this summit:

- Switzerland has taken the initiative at the request of **Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy**, who visited **Bern** in **January 2024**.
- Switzerland had earlier hosted a **Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC)** at **Lugano** in **July 2022**, and a **National Security Advisors Meeting** in **Davos** in **2024**.
- Zelenskyy has sought country’s support on a **10-point “peace formula”**.
  - The formula calls for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, release of prisoners, restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, and guarantees on nuclear safety, food and energy security.
  - Russia rejected this plan, but was more supportive of a **12-point plan** suggested by **China** in **February 2023**.

### **About the Communique:**

- The declaration focused on the **three agendas** of **nuclear safety, global food security** and **humanitarian issues**.
- The declaration emphasised that:
  - All prisoners of war must be released by complete exchange.
  - All deported and unlawfully displaced Ukrainian children, and all other Ukrainian civilians who were unlawfully detained, must be returned to Ukraine.
- All nuclear installations, including the **Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant**, should be safe according to **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** principles and under IAEA supervision.
  - The power plant, Europe’s largest, has been at the centre of Russia-Ukraine battles since the early days of the war, sparking concerns about the potential for a nuclear accident.
- It also asked for the free flow of Ukrainian agricultural products.
- **India** was a notable voice among those who did not sign the document.
- **Shri Pavan Kapoor, Secretary(West), Ministry of External Affairs**, represented India at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine.
- Besides India, **Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico and UAE** were among countries participating at the summit on peace for Ukraine but did not sign a final communique

- Current **G-20 chair Brazil** was in the room only as an **observer**.
- U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, representing the US reiterated America's full backing for Ukraine and announced **\$1.5 billion** in **new U.S. assistance** for an array of projects such as energy infrastructure and civilian security.

### **Reasons for Setbacks:**

- The elephant in the room though remained **Russia's absence with Mr. Putin** not invited by host Switzerland, leading to questions about the effectiveness of the Path to Peace Summit.
- It is important to note that Switzerland, unlike **China, India** or the **United States**, is also a signatory to **the Rome Statute, 1998** and upholds decisions of the **International Criminal Court in the Hague**, which has indicted **Mr. Putin for alleged war crimes**.
- Mr. Putin's presence on Swiss soil could have paved the path for his arrest.
- **China**, which backs Russia, joined scores of countries that sat out the event.
- Beijing has said any peace process would require the participation of Russia and Ukraine, and has floated its own ideas for peace.

### **Swiss history of mediation:**

- Neutrality is a foundational principle of Switzerland's policy.
- Since the **19th century**, it has traditionally served as the protecting power, overseeing the interests of both the **Kingdom of Bavaria and the Grand Duchy of Baden** during the **Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71**.
- It acted as the protecting power during the two World Wars, and held nearly **200 protective power** mandates during WWII.
- Switzerland represented **India's interests in Pakistan and Pakistan's in India** between **1971 and 1976**.
- Over the last two decades, Switzerland has been the protecting power between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the US and Iran, Russia and Georgia, and other pairs of mutually hostile governments.
- The country also has a history of hosting negotiations or mediating in conflicts.

- It hosted talks between the government in **Colombo** and the **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam** in **2006**, and took initiatives for peace in **Nepal**, and the **Middle East**.
- In a **2012 paper**, it is mentioned that since **2000**, **Switzerland** has been engaged in approximately **20 peace** processes in **15 countries** and regions.
- During the Russia-Ukraine war, however, Switzerland has leaned towards **Ukraine**, and has joined the Western sanctions regime against Russia.

## US Abortion Pills



**Recently:** The U.S. Supreme Court rejected a bid by anti-abortion groups and doctors to restrict access to the abortion pill.

- This handed a victory to **President Joe Biden's administration** in its efforts to preserve broad access to the drug.
- In a **9-0 ruling**, the justices overturned a lower court's decision last year to limit access to the drug **mifepristone**, used in more than **half of abortions in the country**.



**The law of Abortion in the US:**

- The SC, which has a **6-3 conservative majority**, in **2022** in the case of **Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization** overturned its **1973 Roe v. Wade** precedent.

*Roe v. Wade:*

- **Roe v. Wade** had legalized abortion nationwide and made **abortion a constitutional right**.
- The judgement prompted **14 states** to enact measures **banning or sharply restricting the procedure**.
- The case is sometimes referred to simply as "**Roe**", the listed name of the **22-year-old plaintiff, Norma McCorvey**.
- 'Wade' was the defendant **Henry Wade**, the **Dallas County (Texas) district attorney at the time**.
- Roe struck down laws that made abortion illegal in several states, and ruled that abortion would be allowed up to the point of **foetal viability**, that is, the time after which a foetus can survive outside the womb.
- Foetal viability was around **28 weeks (7 months)** at the time of the Roe judgment; experts now agree that advances in medicine have brought the threshold down to **23 or 24 weeks (6 months)**.
- Newer studies show this could be further pegged at **22 weeks**. An average pregnancy lasts **about 40 weeks (9 months)**.
- Foetal viability is often seen as the point at which the rights of the woman can be separated from the rights of the unborn foetus.
- Following 1973 judgment, there was a right to abortion in the **first three months (trimester)** of pregnancy; some limitations were placed in the **second trimester**.
- In the **third trimester**, states could restrict or ban abortions as the foetus neared the point where it could live outside the womb.
- The exceptions for cases includes in which the life and health of the mother were endangered.

*Planned Parenthood vs Casey:*

- In the **1992 Planned Parenthood vs Casey case**, the **SCOTUS** (Supreme Court of the United States) rejected the 'trimester' system.

- However, it retained Roe’s “essential holding,” which established women’s constitutional right to abortions until the foetus was viable to live outside the womb.
- Since many people identify pregnancy only after the sixth week, pre-viability timelines leave women with very little time and opportunity to make a decision to abort.

### **Recent Developments:**

- The U.S. joined **three other countries** — **El Salvador, Nicaragua and Poland** — that have rolled back abortion rights since **1994**, according to the **Center for Reproductive Rights**.
- **Twenty-one** states ban abortion or restrict the procedure earlier in pregnancy than the standard set by Roe v. Wade.
- **France** is the only country to explicitly guarantee abortion as a **constitutional right**.
- In **2018**, the Republican-majority state of **Mississippi** banned most abortions after **15 weeks** sooner than was allowed by Roe — throwing a direct challenge to the 1973 judgment.
  - The then last remaining abortion clinic in the state, **Jackson Women’s Health Organisation**, which provided abortion services up to **16 weeks of pregnancy**, challenged the law.
  - In **November** that year, **US District Judge Carlton Reeves** struck it down, ruling that it “unequivocally” violated the constitutional rights of women.
  - It reached the Supreme Court in December 2021.
  - And in **2022**, The SCOTUS finally overturned the judgement of Roe v. Wade and upheld the abortion law.
- On **March 19, 2019**, then-Republican **Governor Phil Bryant** signed the so-called “**heartbeat**” **abortion law**, an even more restrictive measure.
  - The law banned most abortions once foetal cardiac activity could be detected — which is about **six weeks**.
  - The law made no exceptions for pregnancies caused by rape or incest.
  - This law too was blocked by a district judge, and in **February 2020**, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans agreed with the decision.

**The Current Case:**

- In **2022**, **four** pro-life medical associations, as well as several individual doctors, sued the **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** in the US District Court for the **Northern District of Texas**.
- The petitioners had challenged the FDA's approval of **mifepristone** and the changes the federal agency made in the pill's conditions of use.
  - Mifepristone is part of the two-drug regimen used for medical abortion.
- The modification broadened mifepristone's distribution through **mail and telemedicine (the provision of remote clinical services)**.
- In **April 2023**, federal **judge Matthew J Kacsmaryk** held that the FDA's approval of the drug should be suspended, removing mifepristone from the market.
- Subsequently, an appeals court in **New Orleans** overturned this ruling partially to the extent that it invalidated the FDA's approval of the pill.
- It also imposed restrictions on the pill's distribution, including prohibiting sending the medication by mail or being prescribed by telemedicine.
- However, the Supreme Court put the appeals court's ruling on hold and agreed to hear the case.
- To reject the petition by the anti-abortion groups and individual doctors, the Supreme Court cited the "**personal stake requirement**" laid down in one of its **1982 judgments**.
  - The personal stake requirement basically means that the party seeking relief has to have a "personal stake in the outcome of the controversy."
  - The appellant should show that they have suffered or been threatened with **some distinct and palpable injury**.
  - There must also be some causal connection between the appellant's asserted injury and the defendant's challenged action.
- The SC found that the doctors and medical associations trying to challenge the FDA's regulation failed to show an actual injury because the plaintiffs didn't include people actually involved with the pill, like doctors prescribing mifepristone or pregnant women who took it.
- In a unanimous ruling — authored by **Justice Brett M Kavanaugh** — the court held that as the petitioners lacked a direct stake in the dispute, they could not sue the FDA.

- The verdict has preserved access to mifepristone in the US for now. The court, however, has kept the doors open to other attempts to limit the availability of the drug.

### **What is mifepristone?**

- Mifepristone is part of the **two-drug regimen** used for medical abortion.
- A patient first takes **mifepristone** to induce an abortion and then **misoprostol** to empty the uterus.
- While mifepristone blocks **progesterone** — a hormone that supports menstruation and maintaining a pregnancy — misoprostol triggers **uterine contractions**, causing the body to expel the pregnancy as in a miscarriage.
- The regimen was approved for use up to **10 weeks of pregnancy** by the FDA in **2000**.
- Since then, more than six million people have used mifepristone for abortion. Currently, the pill is used in about **two-thirds of abortions in the US**.
- The Food and Drug Administration had taken steps in **2016 and 2021** to ease how the pill is prescribed and distributed.

### **Food and Drug Administration (FDA):**

- The United States Food and Drug Administration is a federal agency of the **Department of Health and Human Services** headquartered in **Maryland, US**.
- Its mission is to make sure that foods, medicines, and other products important to your health are safe and work well.
- It was founded on **30 June 1906** by **Theodore Roosevelt, Harvey Washington Wiley** and is currently headed by **Robert Califf, Commissioner**.

### **India's law on abortion:**

- **Section 312** of the **Indian Penal Code, 1860**, criminalizes **voluntarily** causing **miscarriage**, even when the miscarriage is with the pregnant **woman's consent**.
- However, an exception is made when the miscarriage is caused to save the **woman's life**.

- This means that the woman herself, or anyone else including a medical practitioner, could be prosecuted for an abortion.
- In **1971, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (MTP Act)** was introduced to “liberalise” access to abortion.
  - The latest amendment to the act was in **2021**.
- Previously, the MTP Act only applied to married women which was expanded in **2021** to include **unmarried women** as well.
- The Act allows termination of pregnancy in **three stages** –
  - Up to **20 weeks**, it's permitted with **one doctor's advice**.
  - Between **20-24 weeks**, it's allowed exceptionally based on **two registered medical practitioners'** recommendations for specific categories.
  - After **24 weeks**, a **medical board** in approved facilities decides on termination, considering substantial **foetal abnormality**.
- Specific categories of exceptions are listed in **Section 3B** of the **MTP Act rules, 2003**.
- Exceptional cases such as **rape involving minors, pregnancies involving women with disabilities, and changes in a woman's marital status during pregnancy**.
  - In these exceptional cases, the court has allowed abortion beyond usual limits.
- The Act mandates that abortion should be performed exclusively by doctors with specialization in **gynaecology** or **obstetrics**.
- The Act maintains the confidentiality of women seeking abortion.
- The breach of confidentiality will lead to **Fine and/or imprisonment of 1 year** which was earlier a fine up to **Rs. 1000**.
- The act states that a gestation period is the period of time between conception and birth.

## Economy

### E – Rupee



Source- <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vectors/gold-colored-vectors>

**Recently:** Usage of **India's digital currency, the e-rupee**, has slumped to just a **tenth of the peak hit in December**.

- This reflects the struggles several countries have experienced in trying to generate public support for digital currencies.
- By December last year, the pilot had achieved its target of **1 million retail transactions per day**, which has declined to **1,00,000 transactions per day now**.

### **What is E- Rupee?**

- On **December 1, 2022**, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** launched the **Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) — digital rupee or e-rupee (₹₹)**.
- Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) can be categorized into **two main types:**

- **Retail CBDCs:** These are designed for general public use in everyday transactions, akin to the way physical cash is used currently.
- **Wholesale CBDCs:** These are intended for use by financial institutions for interbank settlements and other wholesale transactions, enhancing efficiency and security in large-scale financial operations.
- **CBDCs vs. Cryptocurrencies:** CBDCs are digital versions of traditional currency **issued and regulated by a central bank**, while **cryptocurrencies are decentralized and not government-backed**.
- **Fiat Currency:** CBDCs are similar to fiat currencies, like the rupee or dollar, as they can be exchanged **one-to-one with traditional money**.
- Although the idea of CBDCs was inspired by **Bitcoin**, they are distinct from decentralized virtual currencies and cryptocurrencies.
- The digital fiat currency or CBDC can be transacted using wallets backed by **blockchain**.
- Fiat currency is a **government-issued currency** that is **not backed by a commodity** such as gold.
- It gives central banks greater **control over the economy** because they can control how much money is printed.
- The RBI had set a target for banks to increase daily transactions to at least **1 million by late 2023** to test the scalability of the system.
- However, the efforts to boost transaction volumes have now ceased.
- The pilots of the E- Rupee started in **4 cities** and **4 banks** which were **Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru** and **Bhubaneswar** along with banks of **State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Yes Bank** and **IDFC First Bank**.
- These have now been expanded to **13 banks** and **26 locations**.
- The increased use of CBDC could be explored for many other financial activities to push the **informal economy** into the **formal zone**.
- Currently, the RBI does not have immediate plans to expand the pilot extensively.
- The focus remains on refining the technology and exploring potential use cases for the digital currency, according to the source.

### How to issue and acquire E- Rupee?

- The RBI issues **electronic tokens** of digital rupee, which are equivalent in denomination to physical currency.

- The central bank then distributes these tokens to commercial banks and authorized financial institutions for circulation in the economy.
- The transactions involving e-rupee are recorded and verified on a **secure ledger system**.
- Users can acquire digital rupee through various methods facilitated by authorised financial entities.
  - Authorised financial institutions provide digital wallets that serve as secure digital storage for digital rupee.
- Similar to withdrawing physical cash, users can withdraw digital rupee tokens from their digital wallets through authorized channels.
- The cash can be converted into digital rupee using platforms equipped with **upi (unified payments interface) gateways**, facilitating seamless integration with existing payment systems.
- Users can easily load digital rupee into their wallets directly through their linked registered bank accounts.
- If users prefer to use another UPI-enabled account, they can select their preferred UPI app from a list available on their phone.
- After selecting the app, users need to enter their UPI pin to authorize the transaction.
- The specified amount is debited from their bank account linked to the selected UPI app, and the corresponding digital rupee tokens are successfully loaded into their wallet, explains **Bank of Baroda**, which is a registered bank for digital rupee with the RBI.
- Users have the flexibility to redeem or unload their digital rupee tokens back into their linked bank account.
- The tokens are unloaded from their wallet, and the equivalent amount is credited back to their linked bank account seamlessly.

### **Unified Payment Interface (UPI):**

- It is a real-time payment system that helps in the instant and quick transfer of funds between two bank accounts. The transfer of funds is done through a single mobile application.
- UPI is operated by **the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**.
- NPCI launched UPI with **21 member banks** in **2016**
- The value of transactions made using the UPI crossed **USD100** billion in a month for the first time in **October 2021**.
- NPCI is under the **Reserve Bank of India**.



- UPI is an existing digital payment system that operates using traditional fiat currencies, while CBDC represents a potential evolution of currency itself, with the central bank directly issuing and managing digital currency.
- Integrating **UPI with CBDC systems** could further advance the digitalization of financial transactions and payments.

### **Global scenario of digital currency:**

- **Bahamas** has been the **first economy** to launch its nationwide **CBDC — Sand Dollar in 2020**.
- **Nigeria** is another country to have roll out **eNaira in 2020**.
- **China** became the **world's first major economy** to pilot a digital currency **e-CNY in April 2020**.
- As per the Atlantic Council, **19** of the G20 countries are now in advanced stages of development of CBDCs and **11** countries have introduced a digital currency.
- Globally, among **86 central banks** surveyed by the **Bank of International Settlements**, a **third** are running a pilot for a central bank digital currency (CBDC).
- Even those that have been launched, like in the **Caribbean by the Bahamas and Jamaica**, have had only limited success, the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City said in a April note.

### **Reserve Bank of India:**

- It was established on **April 1, 1935** under **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**.
- The Central Office of the Reserve Bank was initially established in **Calcutta** but was permanently moved to **Mumbai** in **1937**.
- Nationalized in **1949**, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India's **Finance Ministry**.

- RBI is India's central bank and regulatory body responsible for regulation of the Indian banking system.
- Monetary Policy: Formulating and implementing monetary policies to control inflation and stabilize the economy.
- The Reserve Bank's affairs are governed by **a central board of directors**.
- The board is appointed by the Government of India in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act. The directors are appointed/nominated for a period of **four years**.
- **Shaktikanta Das** (born 26 February 1957) is serving as the current & **25th governor of the Reserve Bank of India** (RBI).

### **53<sup>rd</sup> GST Council Meet**



**Recently:** Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** chaired the **53<sup>rd</sup>** Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting on June 22 at **Bharat Mandapam** in **New Delhi**.

- The meeting took place after a gap of **eight months**. The **52<sup>nd</sup> GST Council meeting** took place on **October 7, 2023**.
- The meeting saw the participation of Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, Chief Ministers of Goa and Meghalaya, Deputy Chief Ministers of Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha.
- Finance ministers from various states and Union Territories (with legislatures), and senior officials from both union and state governments were also present.

### What is the outcome of the meeting?

#### GST rates on various products:

- **All milk cans** (of steel, iron and aluminium), irrespective of their use, will attract **12%** GST.
- A **12%** GST rate was also recommended for all types of **carton boxes and cases** made from both corrugated and non-corrugated paper or paperboard. There was an **18% GST** on these cartons, earlier.
- A uniform GST rate of **12 per cent** was recommended for **solar cookers**, whether single or dual energy sources.
- All types of **sprinklers**, including fire and water sprinklers, will also attract a uniform GST rate of **12 per cent**.

#### GST Exemptions:

- GST Council proposed the exemption for specific **services offered by Indian Railways** to the general public, and for intra-railway transactions.
  - The sale of platform tickets and services such as retiring rooms, waiting rooms, cloakroom facilities, and battery-operated car services are now exempt from GST.
- The GST Council has exempted services by way of **hostel accommodation** outside educational institutions to the tune **₹20,000** per person per month.
  - It is meant for students or working class and exemption can be availed only if the stay is up to **90 days**.
- The GST Council has now recommended amendment in **sub-section (1)** of **Section 9** of the **CGST Act, 2017** for not levying GST on **Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA)** used for manufacture of alcoholic liquor for human consumption.
  - This recommendation was made by the GST council in its 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

#### Monetary Limits for Filing Appeals:

- The GST Council has fixed a monetary limit for filing appeals by the tax department before the appellate authorities to reduce government litigations.

- It has recommended a monetary limit of **₹20 lakh** for the **GST Appellate Tribunal**, **₹1 crore** for the **High Court** and **₹2 crore** for the **Supreme Court** for filing of appeals by departments before these legal forums.
- The maximum amount for **pre-deposit** for filing an appeal before the appellate authority is recommended to be reduced from **₹25 crore CGST** and **₹25 crore SGST** to **₹20 crore CGST** and **₹20 crore SGST**.

#### Interest penalties on demand notices:

- The GST Council today recommended waiving interest penalties on demand notices issued under **Section 73** of the **GST Act** for fiscal years **2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20**.
- Taxpayers who pay the full tax amount demanded in the notice by **March 31, 2025**, will benefit from this waiver.

#### **What are Demand Notices?**

- The general method of determination of the tax liability is self-assessment which is based on the understanding and interpretation of the taxpayer.
- Such understanding may not necessarily coincide with that of the department.
- Due to such differences, there may be non-payment of tax or short payment of tax.
- The department cannot unilaterally seek payment of tax without ascertaining reasons for non-payment as short payment.
- **Sub-section (1) of Section 73** casts the duty on the department to issue **show cause notice** when it appears that tax has not been paid or short paid or erroneously refunded or Input Tax Credit (ITC) has been wrongly availed or utilized.
- The proper officer is required to issue the show-cause notice **3 months** before the expiry of **3 years** from the due date for filing of annual return for the year to which the amount relates.
- If the taxpayer pays all their dues within **30 days** from the date of the notice, then the penalty will not be applicable.
- However, if the taxpayer delays in payment of dues and pays after expiry of 30 days from the date of notice then he would be liable to pay an amount higher of Rs. 10000 or 10% of demanded tax.

ITR deadline extended for small taxpayers:

- In a move to assist small taxpayers, the GST Council extended the deadline for furnishing returns from **April 30 to June 30** for the fiscal year **2024-25** and subsequent years.

On the inclusion of Petrol and Diesel in the ambit of GST:

- FM Sitharaman reiterated the central government's intent to bring petrol and diesel under the GST framework.
- She highlighted that the groundwork for this inclusion was laid years ago and emphasized that the decision now lies with state governments.

**What is Goods and Services Tax (GST)?**

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a value-added tax levied on most goods and services sold for domestic consumption.
- The GST was first introduced in the **122<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment** in **2014**.
- The GST Act was enacted with the **101<sup>st</sup> (Amendment), 2016** and came into force in **2017**.
- It is a dual GST with the Centre and the States simultaneously levying tax on a common base.
  - **Article 246A** of the constitution provides that states have the power to levy GST.
- In order to address the complex system in India, the Government introduced **3 types of GST**:
  - **Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST)**: The CGST covers Central Excise Duty, Excise Dute, Services Tax, Central Sales Tax and Additional Excise Duties Countervailing Duty (CVD).
  - **States Goods and Services Tax (SGST)**: The SGST covers Luxury Tax, State Sales Tax, Entry Tax, Entertainment Tax and Levies on Lottery.
  - **Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST)**: It is charged when there is movement of goods from one state to another state.
- The GST rates in India are divided into four slabs- **8%, 12%, 18% and 28%**.
  - The schedule or list of items that would fall under these multiple slabs is **worked out by the GST Council**.

- The GST Act was **amended in August 2023** and **Clauses 80(A) and 80(B)** were inserted in **section 2** of the act **defining Online Gaming and Online Money Gaming** and a **28% tax** was levied on the total bet value in **online gaming, casinos and horse racing** through the insertion of provisions in **Schedule III** of the act.

#### GST Council:

- **Article 279A** of the constitution provides that a GST council, chaired by the **Finance Minister**, shall be established by the President to administer and govern GST.
- The **centre has 1/3<sup>rd</sup> voting power** in the council and the **state has 2/3<sup>rd</sup> voting power**.
- The decisions in a GST council are taken by the assent **of three-fourths** of the majority.
- Membership: The Union Finance Minister is the chairperson of the council.
  - The **Union Minister of State (Finance)** is a member of the Centre and each state can nominate a minister in charge of finance or taxation or any other minister as a member.
  - Under **Article 279A(3)**, the Members of the Goods and Services Tax Council shall choose one member amongst themselves to be the **Vice-Chairperson** of the Council.
  - Currently, the council has **33 members**, out of which 2 are from centre and 31 are from the 28 states and 3 union territories in India.
- Under **Article 279A (4)**, the Council makes **recommendations** to the Union and the States on important issues related to GST.

## **RBI's SAARC Currency Swap Framework**



Source- <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/which-countries-are-members-of-saarc.html>

**Recently:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on June 27 said that it, with the concurrence of the Government of India, has decided to put in place a revised Framework on Currency Swap Arrangements for SAARC countries for the period - **2024 to 2027**.

- The SAARC Currency Swap Facility came into operation on **November 15, 2012**, with an objective to provide a backstop line of funding for short-term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or balance of payment crises of the SAARC countries till longer term arrangements are made.

**What is Currency Swap?**

- A **currency swap** between the two countries is an **agreement or contract to exchange currencies** with predetermined terms and conditions.
- Central banks and Governments engage in currency swaps with foreign counterparts to meet short term foreign exchange liquidity requirements or to ensure adequate foreign currency to avoid **Balance of Payments (BOP) crisis** till longer arrangements can be made.

**Balance of Payment Crisis:**

- Balance of Payment (BOP) is a systematic record of all economic transactions between the residents of a country and the rest of the world.
- Balance of Payments Crisis can be caused by the country's foreign exchange reserves falling to a level where the Government could no longer service its external debt.

**Provisions of the new Framework:**

- Under this new framework, the RBI will enter into bilateral swap agreements with the central banks of SAARC countries that wish to use the swap facility.
- The revised framework for **2024-2027** introduces a new **INR Swap Window**, which includes various concessions for swap support in **Indian Rupees**.
- The total amount available under this facility is **Rs 250 billion**.



- This move aims to enhance financial cooperation among SAARC countries by providing them with easier access to Indian Rupees.
- In addition to the INR Swap Window, the RBI will also continue to offer swap arrangements in **US Dollars** and **Euros** through a separate US Dollar/Euro Swap Window.
- The overall amount available under this facility is **USD 2 billion**. This ensures that SAARC countries have access to multiple currencies for their short-term financial needs.
- The Currency Swap Facility is available to all SAARC member countries, provided they **sign the bilateral swap agreements** with the RBI.
- This framework is designed to strengthen economic ties and provide financial stability within the SAARC region, helping member countries manage their foreign exchange needs more effectively.

#### **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC):**

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and geopolitical organization established in **1985** to promote regional cooperation and development in South Asia.
- The member countries of SAARC include **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka**.
- SAARC was founded on **December 8, 1985**, in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**, when the **seven founding members** signed the SAARC Charter.
  - Seven Founding Nations- **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka**.
- **Afghanistan** became the **newest member** of SAARC at the **13th annual summit in 2005**.
- There are nine observers of SAARC - Australia, China, The European Union, Iran, Japan, The Republic of Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, and The United States of America.
- SAARC maintains permanent diplomatic relations at the United Nations as an observer and has developed links with multilateral entities, including the European Union.
- Its secretariat is based in **Kathmandu, Nepal**

## Report & Indices

### 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom



**Recently:** Washington, D.C. – **The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** released its 2023 Annual Report.

- The report provides recommendations to improve the promotion of freedom of religion or belief abroad.

#### **About the Report:**

- The US Department of State submitted the report to Congress in compliance with **section 102(b)** of the **International Religious Freedom Act of 1998**, as amended.
  - Section 102(b) directs the Ambassador at Large to assist the Secretary of State in preparing those portions of the Human Rights Reports that relate to freedom of religion and freedom from religious discrimination.
- This report covers the period between **January 1 and December 31, 2023**.

- U.S. embassies prepare the initial drafts of country chapters based on information from government officials, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, academics, media, and others.

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

#### Global Findings:

- The report counts **61 countries** where the citizens faced severe violations of religious freedom.
- **The Red category**, which denotes the **existence of persecution**, includes **28 countries** which are home to 4.03 billion people who altogether make up more than half (51.6 per cent) of the world's population.
  - Of these 28 countries, **13 are in Africa** where in many regions the situation deteriorated sharply.
- **The Orange category**, which denotes the **existence of discrimination**, includes **33 countries**, home to almost 853 million people.
  - The situation worsened in 13 of these countries.
- **The "under observation" classification** includes countries where newly emerging factors of concern have been observed which have the potential to cause a fundamental breakdown in freedom of religion.
- During the period under review, intense persecution became more acute and concentrated, and impunity grew.
  - This persecution included extreme violations of **Article 18** of the **UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
- In **36 countries** or 18% of the countries, perpetrators are rarely or never prosecuted by the justice system.
- These perpetrators **Ethnoreligious Nationalists** in **4 countries**, **Islamic extremists** in **21 countries** and **Authoritarian governments** in **49 countries**.
- Since 2021, in as many as **40 countries**, people have been killed or abducted for their faith.
- Since 2021, in as many as **34 countries**, places of worship and religious properties have been attacked or damaged.
- In **47 of the categorized countries**, the situation of religious freedom worsened during the period of review.
- According to the report, **Africa is the most violent continent**, due to Jihadist activity spreading.
  - **13 out of 54** African countries suffer from **extreme forms of persecution** and **8 out of 54** countries suffer from **discrimination**.

- **12 countries** are **under observation** and 9 of these countries are suffering from Islamist extremists from border regions.

### **India:**

- Human rights experts say India has seen a rise in attacks on minorities under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who recently won a third term, and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

### **Financial Restrictions of Religious Organizations:**

- One of the areas in which governmental and administrative restrictions on the freedom of religious institutions have become significantly more severe in recent years is **foreign funding** for religious groups, specifically the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation Act (FCRA))**.
- With increasing frequency since 2014, Indian authorities have frozen the bank accounts of different organisations, using the 2010 FCRA to prevent them from accessing funding to carry out their operations.
- Many opponents believe that the current government has used the 2010 FCRA selectively to target non-governmental organisations affiliated to **minority religious communities**.
- In 2020, the central government used the FCRA to further extend its control over civil society groups.
  - Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) revoked the foreign currency licences of four Protestant organisations and one Catholic institute, the Don Bosco Tribal Development Society.

### **Restrictions on Beef Consumption:**

- Because of the traditional veneration of cows by **Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists**, there is widespread social aversion for beef consumption and the slaughter of cows.
- Cow protection has been an important and sometimes controversial political issue for centuries, and currently around **two-thirds** of Indian states have laws that regulate, circumscribe, or prohibit cow slaughter.
  - **Supreme Court of India** has upheld the constitutionality of these laws.

- Advocacy for legal prohibitions against cow slaughter has been a special feature of social and political groups promoting Hinduism such as RSS and BJP.

#### Anti- Conversion Laws:

- Another concrete way the BJP facilitates social restrictions of religious freedom is through anti-conversion legislation.
- Several states have passed **Freedom of Religion Acts** (or, as their critics call them, “anti-conversion laws”).
- These are state-level statutes designed to regulate religious conversions allegedly accomplished through forcible and fraudulent means.
- **Odisha was the first state** in India to enact a Freedom of Religion Act (**1967**), followed by:
  - Madhya Pradesh (1968),
  - Arunachal Pradesh (1978, though it has yet to frame its rules),
  - Chhattisgarh (2000),
  - Tamil Nadu (2002, repealed two years later),
  - Gujarat (2003),
  - Rajasthan (2006, not yet signed into law by the state governor),
  - Himachal Pradesh (2006, repealed in 2019 but replaced by a new law soon after),
  - Jharkhand (2017),
  - Uttarakhand (2018).
- In **August 2019**, the **Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 2019** was unanimously approved by the state’s legislative assembly.
  - It proposed stringent punishments – up to **seven years** in jail compared to the three years under the existing law.
- **Haryana and Karnataka** also passed anti- conversion laws in **2022**.
- The prejudicial intent of these laws is made evident by the fact that they have never been used to investigate or prosecute Hindus, even in situations when members of the majority have been accused of offering explicit financial inducements for conversion to Hinduism.

Anti- Muslim Laws:

- Muslims in India have been increasingly at risk since the Hindu nationalist leader, Narendra Modi, won a resounding re-election in **April-May 2019**.
- Within five months, India's BJP-dominated central government took two significant steps concerning the rights of India's Muslim-minority community.
- In **August 2019**, it stripped India's Muslim-majority-state, **Jammu and Kashmir**, of its special autonomy embodied by **Article 370** of the constitution and jailed dozens of its political and civil society leaders, without cause or trial.
- In **December 2019**, the Parliament of India passed a **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)** that expressly excluded Muslims from a select group of neighbouring countries from applying for refugee and citizenship status on grounds of religious persecution.

**United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):**

- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is a U.S. federal government commission created by the **International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998**.
- USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- It is headquartered in **Washington DC**.
- **Stephen Schneck** is the current chair of USCIRF.
- International Declarations for the Protection of Religious Freedom:
  - Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
  - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976
  - Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 1981.

**Provisions of the Indian Constitution for Religious Freedom:**

- **Article 25-** Freedom of Conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.

- **Article 26-** Freedom to manage religious affairs.
- **Article 27-** Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion.
- **Article 28-** Freedom for attendance of religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.
- **Article 30-** Right of minorities, including religious minorities, to establish and administer their own educational institutions.

### **Some Landmark Judgements regarding religious Freedom:**

- Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala, 1987- The case involves three students who refused to sing the national anthem of India on religious grounds who were expelled from the school.
  - The Supreme Court held that the action of the school authorities in expelling the three students was arbitrary and violative of the Fundamental Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion.
  - The Court observed that the students' right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion extends to not only the holding of their beliefs but also to the act of expressing or practising their beliefs.
- The Ahmedabad St. Xaviers College vs State of Gujarat, 1974- In this case, St. Xavier's College challenged state legislation encroaching upon the right of minority educational institutions to autonomy.
  - The petitioner challenged certain provisions of **Gujarat University Act, 1972**, to be violative of the autonomy of the educational institutions.
  - Supreme Court rightly pointed out that "the whole object of conferring the right on the minorities under **Article 30** is to ensure that there will be equality between the majority and the minority. If the minorities do not have such special protection, they will be denied equality."

## Global Liveability Index 2024



**Recently:** The **Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU)** released the Global Liveability Index 2024.

### About the Index:

- The EIU, a sister organization to **The Economist**, ranked **173 cities** across the globe this year.
- The concept of liveability is simple: it assesses which locations around the world provide the best or the worst living conditions.
- Every city is assigned a rating of relative comfort for over **30 qualitative and quantitative factors** across **five** broad categories:
  - Health Care (weight: 20% of total)
  - Culture and Environment (weight: 25% of total)
  - Stability (weight: 25% of total)
  - Infrastructure (weight: 20% of total)
  - Education (weight: 10% of total)
- Each factor in a city is rated as **acceptable, tolerable, uncomfortable, undesirable or intolerable**.



- The scores are compiled and weighted to provide a score of **1-100**, where **1** is considered **intolerable** and **100** is considered **ideal**.
- The liveability rating is provided both as an **overall score** and as a score for each category.
- To provide points of reference, the score is also given for each category **relative to New York** and an overall position in the ranking of **173 cities** is provided.

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

- For the **third year** in a row, **Vienna (Austria)** is named as the **world's most liveable city** in EIU's Liveability Index for 2024.
  - The city received perfect scores of 100 for stability, healthcare, education and infrastructure, but has room for improvement in culture and environment.
- Just behind the Austrian capital, **Denmark's Copenhagen** retained its **second-place** position, while **Switzerland's Zurich** moved up from sixth place to **third** on the list.
- **Australia's Melbourne** fell from third to **fourth place**, while **Canadian city Calgary** tied for **fifth place** with **Swiss city Geneva**.
- **Canada's Vancouver** and **Australia's Sydney** were in joint **seventh place**, and **Japan's Osaka** and **New Zealand's Auckland** rounded out the top 10 in joint **ninth place**.
- The bottom of the liveability rankings is dominated by cities from **Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East** and **North Africa (MENA)**.
- **Damascus (Syria)** is still rated as the **least comfortable city** in the world to live in.
  - Its score is just **30.7 out of 100** in the latest survey, with scores for stability and healthcare particularly poor.
- **Western Europe** remains the **best-performing region** for liveability, coming top in four categories, while **second-placed North America** is best for education.
  - The 30 western European cities in this year's ranking reported an impressive average score of **92 out of 100**.
  - However, the region's overall score has slipped since last year, owing to a deterioration in the stability category.
- **Third-placed Asia-Pacific** has seen only a marginal improvement, while **fourth-placed Eastern Europe** saw the biggest jump on the back of improvements in healthcare and education.

- The **biggest improvement** since last year has been in the island city of **Hong Kong**.
  - Its ranking has jumped from **61st to 50th**, on the back of improvements in its scores for stability and healthcare.
- Other Asian cities, including **Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City and Bangalore**, saw their healthcare or education indicators improve this year, pushing them up the rankings.
- **Tel Aviv (Israel)** has seen the **biggest fall** down in the rankings this year, tumbling from **92nd to 112th** as its scores for stability, culture and environment, and infrastructure deteriorated.
  - This points to the damage inflicted by the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, and the subsequent war against Hamas in Gaza.
- Overall, the **average score** across the 173 cities in the survey has increased to **76.1 out of 100**, but the improvement is only marginal.

### **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU):**

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) is the research and analysis division of the Economist Group, providing forecasting and advisory services through research and analysis.
- It was **founded in 1946** and is Headquartered in **London, England**.
- The EIU has its main offices in four cities—**London, New York, Hong Kong and Dubai**.
- **Global Liveability Index, Democracy Index and Government Broadband Index** are some of the indexes released by the EIU.

## Environment Performance Index 2024



Source- <https://thomasinewrhoda.pages.dev/gacloir-environmental-performance-index-2024-jmfcvrg/>

**Recently:** The **World Economic Forum** released the **2024 edition** of the Environment Performance Index.

### What is Environment Performance Index (EPI)?

- The EPI is a global ranking system that evaluates the **environmental health and sustainability of nations**.
- Initially launched in **2002** as the **Environmental Sustainability Index**, the EPI is updated **every two years** i.e. a **biennial report**.
- It was developed by the **World Economic Forum** in partnership with the **Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy** and the **Columbia University Centre for International Earth Science Information Network**.
- The 2024 EPI provides a data-driven summary of the state of sustainability around the world.
- The EPI scores **180 countries** on their progress toward **three policy objectives**:
  - Mitigating Climate Change,
  - Improving Environmental Health,
  - Protecting Ecosystem Vitality.

- It uses **58 performance** indicators across **11 environmental issues** to do this.
- The 2024 Environmental Performance Index is made possible by the support of the **McCall MacBain Foundation**.
  - It was founded in **2007** by **John and Marcy McCall MacBain**.
  - It improves the welfare of humanity through educational scholarships and by investing in evidence-based strategies to address climate change, preserve the natural environment, and improve health outcomes.
- Environmental Performance Index is a **registered trademark** of **Yale University**.
- The EPI offers a scorecard to help countries assess how close they are to established environmental policy targets.

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

#### Global:

- **Estonia** leads this year's rankings with a score of **75.3** and a **40%** drop in GHG emissions over the last decade, largely attributed to replacing dirty oil shale power plants with cleaner energy sources.
- The **four countries** that perform worse than India in the 2024 index are **Myanmar, Laos, Pakistan and Vietnam**.
- **Vietnam** is at the bottom (**180<sup>th</sup> rank**) with an overall score of **24.5**.
- Major countries like the **USA (ranked 34<sup>th</sup>), China, and Russia** have either not cut their emissions at all or have seen them rise.
- Although all nations must play a role in mitigating climate change, China, the United States, and India are pivotal.
- Each of these emission giants lags its regional peers:
  - **India** ranks **4th out of 8 countries in Southern Asia**,
  - **China** is **15th among 25** in the **Asia-Pacific**,
  - **The United States** is **18th out of 22 in the Global West**.
- Countries in **Southern Asia and Africa** suffer from the worst air pollution in the world.
- At the bottom of the 2024 EPI Air Quality ranking, **India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal** are the epicentre of **the global air pollution crisis**.

- India suffers predominantly from dirty residential energy use, which contributes **20 to 50 percent of PM2.5 pollution** in the country.

### India:

- India ranks **176th out of 180 countries** in the 2024 index with a overall score of **27.6**, showcasing significant challenges in mitigating climate change and promoting environmental health.
- It is a marginal improvement from the **EPI 2022** that put the world’s most populous country at the bottom (**180th position**) of the chart.
- Scientists who prepared the index, however, noted that India made certain improvements in environmental performances, but its position still remains close to the bottom, possibly due to better performances from other countries.
- India’s score in the 3 objectives:

<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Score</u>
1. Ecosystem Vitality	170	30.5
2. Environmental health	177	13.3
3. Climate Change	133	35.0

- In the above mentioned three objectives, India does not rank among the bottom ten countries only in **climate change**.
- India’s performance lags in several indicators mainly because of its heavy dependence on **coal**, which contributes to not only greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but also high air pollution levels.
- In **air quality**, India ranks **177th**, above Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal only, and in **projected emissions** by **2025**, it ranks **172nd**.
- In **South Asia**, which, as a region, ranks the lowest on the EPI, India is the **biggest emitter of transboundary pollution**, which affects **Bangladeshi residents**, the report found.

- The EPI also ranks India **178<sup>th</sup>** in **carbon monoxide exposure**, above **China and Micronesia only**, but the report clarifies this could be because of the unavailability of data.
  - India, China and Turkey have restricted access to **95% of their submissions** to the **World Database of Protected Areas**, so the EPI could not accurately assess their performance in this category.
- The report said that India secured a better rank (**133**) in climate change, mainly because it has made advancements in investing in **renewable energy** and its goal towards transition to **net-zero emissions by 2070**.
- The report, however, said, "India will require an additional **\$160 billion per year** in climate change mitigation investments to achieve its goals."
- Categories like **solid waste management, forests, and agriculture** are where India performed relatively better.

### **India's major goals and efforts:**

- India is currently the **world's third-largest GHG emitter**, with total emissions growing **32 percent over the past decade**.
- This increase results from the country's rapid economic growth and industrialization, which has spurred an escalating demand for energy.
- The Indian government aspires to generate **half of its electricity** from renewable sources and reduce carbon intensity by **45 percent** from **2005 levels by 2030**, on its way to reach **net zero emissions by 2070**.
- India's **Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission**, launched in **2014**, has significantly improved access to toilets and reduced open defecation.
  - This initiative has led to more than **a 50 percent reduction** in the rate of **disability-adjusted life years** lost due to unsafe sanitation over the last decade of available data.
- Additionally, the burden of disease from unsafe water exposure halved between **2012 and 2021**.
- The **Jal Jeevan Mission**, launched in **2019**, aims to provide clean drinking water to all Indian households by **2024**.
- Despite these achievements, **3.25 percent** of all deaths in India in 2021 were still linked to unsafe drinking water.

## Global Gender Gap Index



Source- <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2016>

**Recently:** The World Economic Forum released the 2024 edition of the Global Gender Gap Index.

### **What is the Global Gender Gap Index?**

- Global Gender Gap Index was introduced by the **World Economic Forum** in **2006** to benchmark progress towards gender parity.
- It compares countries' gender gaps across **four dimensions** –
  - Economic Participation and Opportunity,
  - Educational Attainment,
  - Health and Survival,
  - Political Empowerment.
- The index contains total **14 indicators**.
- The level of progress toward gender parity (the parity score) for each indicator is calculated as the ratio of the **value of each indicator for women to the value for men**.

- The gender gap is the distance from full parity. A parity score of **1** indicates **full parity**.
- For a country to be included, it must report with the last **10 year's data** for **a minimum 12 of the 14 indicators that comprise the index**.
- This year, the **18th edition** the report benchmarks gender parity across **146 economies**, providing a basis for the analysis of gender parity developments across **two-thirds of the world's economies**.
- This year **Guyana** makes a return to the index in 2024, while **Sudan and Uzbekistan** are included for the **first time**.
- Among the 146 countries included this year are a set of **101 countries** that have been covered in all editions since the inaugural one in 2006.

### **Rankings:**

#### Global:

- **Iceland (93.5%)** secured the **top rank** as the **most gender-equal country** globally, with **Finland and Norway** following closely behind.
- European economies occupy **7 spots** out of the global top 10.
- Iceland also continues to be the only economy to have closed over **90% of its gender gap**. Out of the remaining nine economies in the top 10, eight have closed over **80% of their gap**.
- **Pakistan** is at the bottom of the regional rankings and is placed **145th** globally, just ahead of **Sudan**, which holds the **last position among 146 countries**.
- The global gender gap score in 2024 for all 146 countries included in this edition stands at **68.5%** closed.
- Compared to the constant sample of 143 countries included in last year's edition, the global gender gap has been closed by a further **+1 percentage point**, from **68.5% to 68.6%**.
- Furthermore, when considering the **101 countries** covered **continuously from 2006 to 2024**, the gap has also improved **+1 points and reached 68.6%**.
- Among the 146 economies covered in the 2024 index, the Health and Survival gender gap has closed by **96%**, the Educational Attainment gap by **94.9%**, the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap by **60.5%**, and the Political Empowerment gap by **22.5%**.
- Since 2006, subindexes have shifted at different paces, based on the constant sample of **101 countries**.



- Overall, the most significant shift occurs in **Political Empowerment**, where parity has jumped a total of **8.3 percentage points to 22.8% over the past 18 editions**.
- In Economic Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment, parity has gained **4.8 and 4.2 percentage points** respectively.
- **Health and Survival** is the only subindex where there has been a moderate decline from **2006 (-0.2 points)**.
- At the current pace it will take the world another **134 years or five generations** to close the existing gender gap.
- With the evolving pace of each individual subindex affecting their respective timelines to parity, results from this year have extended the wait for parity in
  - Educational Attainment to **20 years** (+4 years from 2023)
  - Political Empowerment to **169 years** (+7 years from 2023)
  - Economic Participation and Opportunity to **152 years** (-17 years from 2023).
  - The time to close the Health and Survival gender gap remains undefined.

#### Regional Ranking:

- **Europe** leads the 2024 regional gender gap rankings, having closed **75% of its gap in 2024**, with an overall improvement of **+6.2 percentage points since 2006**.
  - However, while **21 out of the 40** economies in the region have closed over **75% of their gender gap**, the distance between the top and bottom rank indicates broad intraregional disparities.
  - Iceland, the highest-ranking, leads by **29 percentage points** over **Türkiye**, which sits at the bottom.
- Ranked **second**, **Northern America** reports a gender parity score of **74.8%**. Compared to other regions, however, the region has closed its regional gender gap by **+4.3 percentage points** since **2006**.
  - Despite leading in the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex, its economic parity score has declined slightly **to 76.3%**.
- In **third place** is **Latin America and the Caribbean**, with a gender parity score of **74.2%**.
  - The region has made the biggest leap since 2006, reducing its overall gap by **8.3 percentage points**.
- **Eastern Asia and the Pacific** ranks **fourth**, with an overall gender parity score of **69.2%**.

- While there's been a positive shift of **+3.1 percentage** points overall since 2006, only **New Zealand and the Philippines** have made the **global top 10** since then.
- **Central Asia** ranks **fifth out of eight regions** with a score of **69.1%**. Despite a slight regression in the parity score, there has been an overall improvement of **+2.3 percentage points** since 2006.
  - Notably, all **seven economies in Central Asia** have achieved parity levels equal to or higher than **67%**, with Armenia (72.1%), Georgia (71.6%), and Kazakhstan (71%) leading the region.
- In sixth place is **Sub-Saharan Africa**, with a gender parity score of **68.4%**. The region has advanced by an overall **+5.6 percentage** points since 2006.
- In 2024, **Southern Asia ranks seventh**, with a gender parity score of **63.7%**, showing a modest **+3.9 percentage-point** improvement since **2006**.
- **Middle East and North Africa** ranks last among all regions, with a gender parity score of **61.7%**.
  - Despite this result, the region has seen an overall positive trajectory since 2006, advancing its gender gap score by **+3.9 percentage points**.

### India:

- Gender Gap index to **129th place**. In 2023, **India** ranks was **127th** on the global index.
- Within **South Asia**, **India** was ranked **fifth after Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan**, while **Pakistan** was ranked last.
- India's overall gender gap closure stands at **64.1 per cent** in 2024, a slight decline from **64.2 per cent last year**.
- India showed the **best gender parity** in terms of enrolment in **secondary education**, while it scored well on **political empowerment** of women at **65th rank globally**.
- With regard to parity in the number of years with **female/male heads of state for the last 50 years**, India was ranked **10th**.
- India figured among the economies with **the lowest levels of economic parity**. All of them registered less than **30% gender parity** in estimated earned income.
- India's decline of two places, mainly happened due to small declines in 'Educational Attainment' and 'Political Empowerment,' while 'Economic Participation' and 'Opportunity' scores slightly improved.

- The WEF said India's economic parity score has trended upwards for the **past four years**.
- In the **Political Empowerment subindex**, India scored within the **top-10** on the head-of-state indicator (**40.7%**), but its scores **for women's representation at the federal level**, in **Ministerial positions (6.9%)** and in **Parliament (17.2%)**, remain relatively low.

#### India's rank in 4 dimensions:

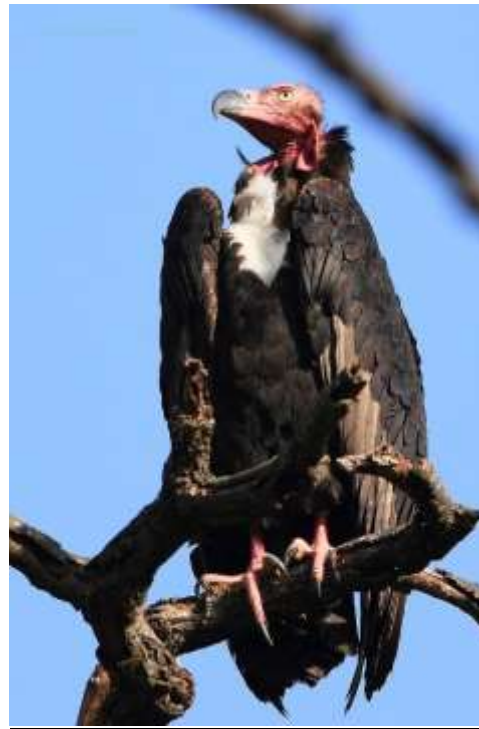
- **Economic participation and opportunity** - This time, India ranked among the lowest in the world with a score of **39.8%** and retained **its 142nd rank**.
- **Health and survival** - In this, India has retained its **142nd rank**.
  - Interestingly, in the past 50 years, the average number of maternity leave days has increased from **63 to 107**, and paternity leave days have increased from **less than a day to nine**.
- **Political Empowerment** - The country fell six points to the **65th position** this year.
- **Educational Attainment** - India ranked **112th** on this dimension compared to **26th last year**.

#### World Economic Forum:

- The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** is an international non-governmental and lobbying organization for multinational companies.
- The foundation is mostly funded by its **1,000 member companies**, typically global enterprises with more than **USD5 billion in turnover**.
- It was 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**.
- The current **Executive Chairman** and **President is Børge Brende**.
- WEF regularly publishes globally recognized reports, including the **Global Competitiveness Report, Energy Transition Index, Global Risk Report, Global Travel and Tourism Report**.

## Space, Defence & Environment

### World's first Centre for Asian King Vulture



**Recently:** World's first conservation and breeding centre for Asian king vulture in **Maharajganj** is ready to be inaugurated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister **Yogi Adityanath**.

### About the centre:

- The centre is named **Jatayu Conservation and Breeding Centre**, where 24x7 monitoring of the vultures is being done.
- Spread over **1.5 hectares** in the **Gorakhpur Forest Division**, it is a state-of-the-art centre, worth around **Rs 15 crore**, with multiple aviaries (cage for birds) for vultures.
- These aviaries include breeding and holding aviaries, nursery aviaries for juveniles, hospital and recovery aviaries for those needing medical help.
- Then, there is also a food processing centre, where food for vultures will be checked and prepared before being fed to them.
- There is also an incubation centre to rear eggs artificially to ensure **100% results** are other features.
- The birds at the centre are fed **twice a week** and each has a diet of around **three kilos** of meat at a time.
- The objective behind setting up the centre is to breed king vultures in captivity and release them in the wild to maintain a sustainable population of the species.
- It is a **15-year project** which aims to raise at least **40 vultures**.
- The infrastructure creation started in **2021**. The **first phase** of the centre was meant to have complete infrastructure in place.
- The **second phase** is about breeding of vultures.
- The centre will have a total **10 vultures** for breeding. The breeding adults will be added gradually.
- The forest department has partnered with **Bombay Natural History Society** for technical guidance.
- In **Uttar Pradesh**, the red-headed vultures are **rarely seen**. In 2023, they were **spotted in Chitrakoot**.
  - The **first vulture** brought to this centre was on **30 December 2022**.

### What are Asian King Vultures?

- The **red-headed vulture** (*Sarcogyps calvus*), also known as the **Asian king vulture**, **Indian black vulture** or **Pondicherry vulture**, is an Old World vulture mainly found in the Indian subcontinent.
- It is a medium-sized vulture of **76 to 86 cm** in length, weighing **3.5–6.3 kg** and having a wingspan of about **1.99–2.6 m**.
- It has a prominent naked head: **deep-red to orange** in the adult, **paler red** in the juvenile.

- It has a black body with pale grey band at the base of the flight feathers.
- These vultures make **one partner in their entire life** and lay **one egg in a year**. Hence, their monitoring is our highest priority.
- In **2004**, the species was uplisted to '**near threatened**' from '**least concern**' by the IUCN.
- In **2007**, it was uplisted to '**critically endangered**' in the **IUCN Red List**.
- Asian king vultures are endangered due to a **loss of their habitats** and the **excessive use of diclofenac**.
  - Diclofenac is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, in domestic animals, which becomes poisonous for vultures.

### **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN):**

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an international organization working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
- IUCN was established on 5 October **1948**, in **Fontainebleau, France** and evolved into the world's largest and most diverse environmental network.
- The initiative to set up the new organisation came from **UNESCO** and especially from its first Director General, the British biologist **Julian Huxley**.
- It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than **1,400 Member organisations** and the input of some **15,000 experts**.
- It was initially called the **International Union for the Protection of Nature** and was **renamed** as International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources **in 1956**.
- **IUCN's Red List**, established in **1964**, has evolved to become the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species.
- The list divides species into **nine categories**- Extinct, Extinct in the wild (EW), Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened, Least Concerned (LC), Data Insufficient (DI) and Not Evaluated (NE).
- It is headquartered in **Gland, Switzerland**.
- **Dr Grethal Aguilar** is the Director General of IUCN.
- **Craig Hilton-Taylor** is the head of the Red List.

## Red Flag Drill



**Recently:** The **Indian Air Force** joined a **16-day multi-nation mega military exercise in Alaska** in the **US**.

- The IAF deployed **Rafale fighter jets** for the '**Red Flag Alaska**' exercise from **May 30 to June 14**.
- Approximately 3100 service members flew, maintained and supported more than **100 aircraft** during the exercise, the US's Pacific Air Forces said.

### What is the Red Flag Drill?

- Red Flag-Alaska is designed to provide realistic training in a simulated combat environment, according to the **USAF (United States Air Force) Armed forces**.
- The primary flight operations are to be held over the **Joint Pacific Alaska range** complex and aircraft based at **Eielson Air Force Base** and **joint base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska**.
- This was **the second edition of Red Flag this year**; the exercise is hosted four times a year by the USAF.

- Originally named **COPE THUNDER**, it was moved to **Eielson AFB from Clark Air Base, Philippines**, in **1992** after the eruption of **Mount Pinatubo** on **June 15, 1991**, forced the curtailment of operations.
- **COPE THUNDER** was re-designated **RED FLAG-Alaska** in **2006**.
- Initiated in **1976**, **COPE THUNDER** was devised as a way to give aircrews their first taste of warfare and quickly grew into PACAF's "premier simulated combat airpower employment exercise."
- RED FLAG-Alaska participants are organized into "**Red**" **defensive forces** and "**Blue**" **offensive forces**.
- "**White**" **forces** represent the neutral **controlling agency**.
- The defensive force includes ground-control intercept and surface air defense forces to simulate threats posed by potentially hostile nations.
- These forces generally employ defensive counter-air tactics directed by ground-control intercept sites.
- Range threat emitters -- electronic devices which send out signals simulating anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile launches -- provide valuable surface-to-air training and are operated by a civilian contractor as directed by **353rd Combat Training Squadron technicians**.
- The offensive force includes the full spectrum of U.S. and allied tactical and support units.
- Because the defensive and offensive forces meet in a simulated hostile, non-cooperative training environment, the job of controlling the mock war and ensuring safety falls to the White neutral force.

### **Participants:**

- For this, the IAF has deployed **eight Rafale fighters, three C-17 transport aircraft** and **two IL-78 mid-air refuelling aircraft**, officials confirmed.
- India has taken part in Ex Red Flag in the past which even saw the deployment of **Russian SU-30MKI fighter jets**.
- The Red Flag drill included participation from air forces worldwide, such as the **Republic of Singapore Air Force, the UK's Royal Air Force, the Royal Netherlands Air Force, the German Luftwaffe, and the US Air Force**.
- In these exercises, Indian Rafale jets collaborated closely with **F-16 and F-15 aircraft** from various nations.
- Undertaking Indian's return journey, the contingent was planned to split enroute along with their mutual support elements and participate in exercise with **Air Force elements of Greece and Egypt**, before landing back in India on 24 Jun.



- Enriched with the Red Flag exercise experience, the IAF keenly looks forward to hosting the participating contingents from other countries during **Ex-Tarang Shakti-2024**, which is the **first ever Indian multinational air exercise** to be held later this year.

### **Rafale Jets:**

- The Rafale is a **twin-jet fighter aircraft** able to operate from both an **aircraft carrier and a shore base**.
- The fully versatile Rafale is able to carry out all combat aviation missions: air superiority and air defence, close air support, in-depth strikes, reconnaissance, anti-ship strikes and nuclear deterrence.
- The Rafale entered service with the **French Navy in 2004** and with the **French Air Force in 2006**. Rafale is one of the most seasoned fighters in the world.
- It has been **combat-proven** since **2007**. The export success of the Rafale has been vindicated.
- The biggest feature of Rafale is **Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile**. The range of this is more than **150 kilometres**.
- **6 laser-guided bombs** can also be fitted with **three types of deadly missiles** in Rafale.
- The **state-of-the-art 4.5 Generation Rafale** jet can reach almost double the speed of sound, with a top speed of **1.8 Mach**.
- With its multi-role capabilities, including electronic warfare, air defence, ground support and in-depth strikes, the Rafale lends air superiority to the Indian Air Force.

### **Exercise Maitree**



**Recently:** The **13th edition** of Exercise Maitree is set to take place from **July 1 to 15, 2024**, in **Tak Province, Thailand**, marking the continuation of military cooperation between **India and Thailand**.

- This year's drill is special because it starts up again after a break caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **What is Exercise Maitree?**

- Exercise MAITREE aims to enhance military cooperation between India and Thailand.
- The exercise began in **2006** as the **Thai-Indian Cooperation Field Exercise (TICAFE)**.
- In **2013**, it was changed its name to **Maitree**, which means "**friendship**" in Hindi.
- India and Thailand take turns hosting the event every year.
- It focuses on joint counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in jungle and urban settings, aligning with **Chapter VII** of the United Nations Charter.

### **Contingents:**

- The Indian Army's **76-member contingent** is primarily from the **LADAKH SCOUTS**, alongside personnel from other units.
- Similarly, the **Royal Thailand Army** contingent also consists of **76 personnel**, mainly from the **1st Battalion, 14 Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division**.

**How is the exercise being conducted?**

- Tactical drills during the exercise will cover a range of operations.
- These include creating a Joint Operation Centre, setting up an Intelligence and Surveillance Centre, deploying drones and counter-drone systems, securing landing sites, and conducting small team insertion and extraction.
- Additionally, special heliborne operations, cordon and search operations, room intervention drills, and the demolition of illegal structures will be practiced.

## China France SVOM



**Recently:** A satellite jointly developed by China and France was launched into orbit aboard a **Chinese Long March 2-C rocket** from the **Xichang Satellite Launch Center** in **Sichuan province** on June 22.

- It is the most powerful satellite yet for studying **gamma-ray bursts (GRBs)**.
- It is the **first astronomy satellite** jointly developed by **China and France**.
  - In **2018**, the two countries had together developed and launched an oceanographic satellite.
- The mission holds significance because space cooperation at this level between the West and China is fairly uncommon, especially since the United States banned all collaboration between US space agency NASA and Beijing in **2011**.

### What are Gamma Rays bursts:

- Gamma-ray bursts generally occur after the **explosion of huge stars** – those more than **20 times as big as the sun** – or the fusion of compact stars.
- These are bursts of highly energetic gamma rays, which last from **less than a second to several minutes**.
- There are two types of GRBs, **short GRBs and long GRBs**.
- Short GRBs are a result of the collision of either **two neutron stars** or a **neutron star and a black hole**, resulting in a **black hole**.
  - They last for **less than two seconds**.
  - Sometimes, short GRBs are followed by **kilonovas** — blasts of electromagnetic radiation (or light) that are produced by the radioactive decay of chemical elements.
  - Their decay can lead to the generation of heavier elements like **gold, silver, and platinum**.
- **Long GRBs** are produced due to the explosive deaths of massive stars. These can last for **two seconds or longer**.
- Scientists observe GRBs as they carry information pertaining to violent events such as the end of life of massive stars, the formation of black holes in distant galaxies, and how they shape the universe.
- The most distant bursts identified to date were produced just **630 million years after the Big Bang** – when the universe was in its infancy.
- The main challenge is however that gamma-ray bursts are **extremely brief**, leaving scientists in a race against time to gather information.

### About the Satellite:

- **SVOM (Space Variable Objects Monitor)** is a joint mission of the **China National Space Administration (CNSA)** and **CNES**.
- It is set to send aloft a satellite to observe gamma-ray bursts (GRBs) from a **625-km** Earth orbit with an orbital period of **96 minutes**.
  - The light from these bursts have travelled billions of light years to reach Earth.
- The SVOM satellite will be carrying **four instruments**, two of which were designed and built in **France**:
  - **ECLAIRs**, a wide-field X-ray and gamma-ray camera
  - **MXT**, a Microchannel X-ray Telescope

- The **Gamma-Ray Burst Monitor (GRB)**, built by the **Chinese**, will measure the **spectrum of GRBs**.
- The **Visible Telescope (VT)**, also developed by the **Chinese**, will detect and **observe visible emissions** produced immediately after a GRB.
- Alerts will be relayed to the ground in **less than one minute** whenever a burst is detected, indicating the location of the GRB in the celestial vault to cue large ground telescopes.
- **China** will be responsible for the **mission, launch, satellite and operations**, and will share responsibility with France for the design and construction of the instruments and ground segment.
- The French contribution is being developed in partnership with research laboratories at the **IRFU research institute at CEA**, the **French atomic energy and alternative energies commission**, and at **INSU**, the national institute of universe science, and **IN2P3**, the national institute of nuclear and particle physics, both attached to the national scientific research centre CNRS.

#### Objectives:

- The primary objective of SVOM is to look for GRBs across the universe.
- Once found, the satellite will measure and study their electromagnetic radiation properties.
- It will also use the bursts to **unlock mysteries regarding the evolution of the universe**, and gravitational waves.
  - Scientists have observed that both gravitational waves and GRBs originate from the collision of neutron stars.

## ISRO's SSLV Launch



**Recently:** **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)** and **Space Machines Company** of **Australia** have signed a Dedicated Launch Service Agreement, marking a significant milestone in space collaboration between India and Australia.

- The agreement, announced at the **India Space Congress 2024 in Delhi**, paves the way for the launch of Space Machines Company's **second Optimus spacecraft** in **2026**.
- The first Optimus spacecraft was launched in **March 2024** from the US state of **California** aboard a **SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket**.

### About the Mission:

- This mission, named Space **MAITRI** (Mission for Australia India's Technology, Research and Innovation), marks a significant milestone in the strategic partnership between **Australia and India** in the space domain
- Weighing **450kg**, Optimus will be the largest Australia-designed spacecraft so far.
- The spacecraft will be launched on ISRO's **Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)**.
- The mission focuses on **debris management and sustainability**, aligning with both nations' core values and objectives in promoting responsible space operations.

- This will be the **first dedicated commercial launch** for SSLV.
- The **first commercial launch** was **Janus**, a 10-kilogramme nanosatellite on board the SSLV-D2 mission.

### **Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV):**

- The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) is the **lightest satellite** of, **110-ton mass**, developed by ISRO.
- The launch vehicle has **three stages** and is capable of carrying satellites up to approximately **500 kg to low earth orbit** or **300 kg** (660 lb) to **Sun-synchronous orbit**.
  - the tried and tested **PSLV** can launch satellites weighing in the range of **1000 kg**.
- It is a rocket that can be assembled within **72 hours** by a team of **just 5-6 people** and it costs at least one-tenth of those currently in use.
  - Usually, it takes **70 days** to integrate a launch vehicle currently.
- The entire job will be done in a very short time and the cost will be only around **Rs 30 crore**.
- SSLV is made keeping low cost, low turnaround time in mind with launch-on-demand flexibility under minimal infrastructure requirements.
- ISRO Chairman **S Somanath** himself is credited with the design and development of the SSLV during his time as director of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram since 2018.
- The maiden flight **SSLV-D1** was conducted on **7 August 2022**, from the First Launch Pad, but **failed to orbit**.
- A second flight **SSLV D2** was conducted on **10 February 2023** that successfully **delivered payloads to orbit**.

### **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL):**

- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) is a **Public Sector Undertaking (PSU)** of the Government of India and under the **Department of Space**.
- NSIL is responsible for producing, assembling and integrating the launch vehicle with the help of an industry consortium.
- It was established on **6 March 2019** under the administrative control of the **Department of Space (DoS)** and the **Company Act 2013**.



- The main objective of NSIL is to scale up private sector participation in Indian space programmes.
- It is headquartered in **Bengaluru**.
- **Director Radhakrishnan Durairaj** is the current Chairman & Managing Director of NSIL.

## Important Days

### World Environment Day 2024



Source- <https://www.aimsindia.com/blog/world-environment-day-protect-our-environment-and-protect-our-health/>

**Recently:** The **2024 edition** of the World Environment Day was observed on **June 5<sup>th</sup>**.

- It is a significant international event dedicated to raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting sustainable practices.
- The Kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** will host the 2024 Environment Day celebration this year.

**Theme:**

- The theme for this year is “**Our Land, Our Future, We Are Generation Restoration,**”.
- It revolves around land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience, emphasising the importance of these issues in achieving sustainable development.

**History:**

- World Environment Day was established in **1972** by the United Nations General Assembly on the day on which the **United Nations Environment Programme** was established.
- The first was a meeting held in **Stockholm, Sweden** in **1972** where it was debated and discussed.
- The World Environment Day is observed every year since **1973** on **June 5<sup>th</sup>**.

**United Nations Environment Programme:**

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is responsible for coordinating responses to environmental issues within the United Nations system.
- It was the idea of Canadian diplomat **Maurice Strong** who became its first director.
- The **1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment** held in **Stockholm**, resulted in a **Declaration on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration)** and the establishment of an environmental management body, which was later named the **United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)**.
- It is Headquartered in **Nairobi, Kenya**.
- **Inger Andersen** is the current Director General of United Nations Environment Programme.
- It established the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** in **1988** in collaboration with the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**.
- It contributed in establishment of the **Montreal Protocol** in **1987** and the **Global Environment Facility** in **1991**.

## World Food Safety Day



Source- [https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/world-food-safety-day?deliveryName=FCP\\_12\\_DM29549](https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/world-food-safety-day?deliveryName=FCP_12_DM29549)

**Recently:** The annual World Food Safety Day was observed on **7<sup>th</sup> June 2024**.

- World Food Safety Day is marked annually to raise awareness about the importance of safe food practices and to highlight the global need for safe food.
- This international day is a collaborative effort between **the World Health Organization (WHO)** and the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** of the United Nations.

### **What is Food Safety?**

- Food safety is the absence of safe, acceptable levels of hazards in food that may harm the health of consumers.
- Food-borne hazards can be chemical or physical in nature and are often invisible to the plain eye.
- As per an estimation, nearly 600 million people fall ill and 420,000 die after eating food contaminated by viruses, bacteria, parasites, or chemical substances every year.

- Low- and middle-income economies lose around US\$ 110 billion in productivity associated with disability, illness, and premature death of the workers.

### **Theme:**

- The theme for the celebration of World Food Safety Day this year is "**Food Safety: Prepare for the Unexpected.**"
- This year's theme underlines the importance of being prepared for food safety incidents, no matter how mild or severe they can be.

### **History:**

- The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **World Health Organization (WHO)** were given instructions by the **United Nations** to educate people about the significance of food safety worldwide.
- Food Security Day was celebrated collaboratively in **2016** by WHO and FAO.
- The idea was supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) at its **40th session** in July of next year.
- World Food Safety Day was formally established by the **United Nations General Assembly** in **2018** through a resolution **proposed by** the Kingdom of the **Netherlands** and was **co-sponsored by** a total of **44 countries**.
- The day was officially designated to be observed annually on **June 7th**.
- The first observance of World Food Safety Day took place on **June 7, 2019**, with the theme "**Food Safety, Everyone's Business.**"
- To recognize the significance of food security, the World Health Assembly passed Resolution WHA 73.5 on **August 3, 2020**.

### **Food and Agricultural Organization:**

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.
- It was founded on 16 October **1945** at **Quebec City, Canada**.

- **October 16th** is observed as the **World Food Day** every year to mark the foundation of Food and Agriculture Organization.
- It comprises **195 members**, including 194 countries and the **European Union**.
- It is headquartered in **Rome, Italy**.
- **Qu Dongyu** is the current Director General of the FAO.

### **World Health Organization:**

- World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations' specialized agency for Health was founded in **1948**.
- It is an inter-governmental organization and works in collaboration with its member states usually through the Ministries of Health.
- There are **194 Member States**, 150 country offices, six regional offices.
- It began functioning on **April 7, 1948** – a date now being celebrated every year as **World Health Day**.
- It is Headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- Current Director- **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**.

## World Day against Child Labour 2024



Source- <https://www.studyiq.com/articles/world-day-against-child-labour/>

**Recently:** The **2024 edition** of the World Day against Child Labour was observed on **June 12<sup>th</sup>**.

- It is a crucial reminder of the millions of children worldwide who are forced into work, often at the expense of their education and well-being.

### What is Child Labour?

- Child labour is defined as any work that is inappropriate for a child's age, physical, or mental capacity, and its far-reaching consequences can have devastating effects on their development and future.
- In India, the Constitution explicitly prohibits children **under the age of 14 (Article 24)** of the Indian Constitution) from working in mines, factories, or hazardous occupations.
- Similarly, the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** defines a child as anyone below the age of **18** who should not be involved in hazardous work.
- These laws are in place to protect children from the exploitation that comes with child labour.

**Theme:**

- The day was celebrated this year under the theme, “**Let’s Act on Our Commitments: End Child Labour.**”
- It emphasizes the need for collective action to eradicate child labour and protect children from exploitation.

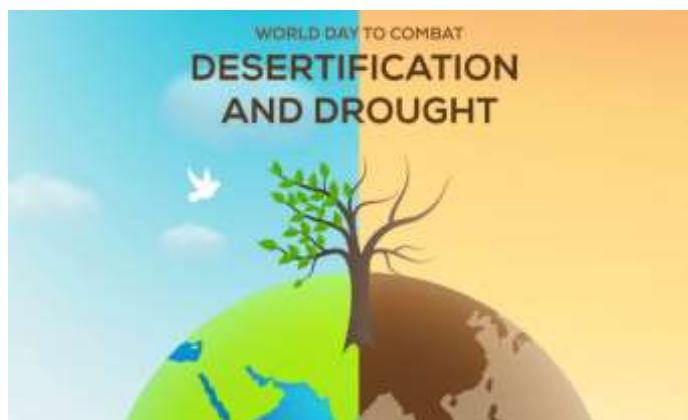
**History:**

- The International Labor Organization (ILO) celebrated the first World Day Against Child Labor on **June 12, 2002**, at its headquarters in **Geneva**, which had been established the day before.
- The purpose of World Day Against Child Labor is to promote and broaden the global call to end child labour.
- A National Policy on Child Employment, which focuses on the rehabilitation of children and adolescents who have been exposed to employment has been implemented by the Indian central government since **1987**.

**International Labour Organization:**

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards.
- Founded in **October 1919** by the **Treaty of Versailles** under the **League of Nations**, it is one of the first and **oldest specialised agencies** of the UN.
- It became the first affiliated **specialized agency** of the United Nations in **1946**.
- It received a **Nobel Peace Prize** in **1969**.
- The ILO has **187 member states**: 186 out of 193 UN member states plus the **Cook Islands**.
- Its **Governing Body** meets **thrice a year** and the **International Labour Conference** which sets international labour standards meets **annually**.
- It is Headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- **Gilbert Hougbo** is the current Director General of International Labour Organization.

## **World Desertification Day 2024**



Source- <http://www.risingkashmir.in/world-day-to-combat-desertification-and-drought-her-land-her-rights-a17aab80-36b5-49f8-b18d-643336135a6d>

**Recently:** The 2024 edition of the **World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought** was observed on **June 17<sup>th</sup>**.

### **What is desertification?**

- It is the process by which natural or human causes reduce the biological productivity of drylands (arid and semiarid lands).
- It can be a result of climate change, deforestation, overgrazing, poverty, political instability, unsustainable irrigation practices, or combinations of these factors.
- Africa is the continent most affected by desertification, and one of the most obvious natural borders on the landmass is the southern edge of the Sahara desert.

### **Theme:**

- This year, the theme is **“United for Land. Our Legacy. Our Future.”**
- It highlights the importance of collaborative action to preserve our planet’s vital land resources for future generations.

### **History:**



- In the early 1990s, world leaders gathered at the **Rio Earth Summit** to address the pressing issues of desertification, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.
- In response, the United Nations created the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in **1994**.
- The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought was established in **1994** to celebrate this.
- This day was observed in **1995** for the first time.

### **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):**

- Desertification, along with climate change and the loss of biodiversity were identified as the greatest challenges to sustainable development during the **1992 Rio Earth Summit**.
- The UNCCD was established in **1994** to protect and restore our land and ensure a safer, just, and more sustainable future. It came into force in **1996**.
- It is the **only legally binding framework** set up to address desertification and the effects of drought.
- There are **197 Parties** to the Convention, including **196 country Parties** and the **European Union**.
- India became a member in 1994 and ratified it in 1996.
- The country parties are required to submit the reports **every 2 years** against the achievements of the UNCCD Operational Objectives.
- The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** is the nodal Ministry in the Government of India for the UNCCD.
- Desertification Cell is the nodal point within the Ministry to co-ordinate all issues pertaining to the Convention.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 15 promotes** “sustainable use of territorial ecosystem, sustainable management of forests, combating desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

### **Bonn Challenge:**

- It is a global effort to bring **150 million hectares** of the world’s deforested and degraded land into restoration by **2020**, and **350 million hectares** by **2030**.

- It was launched by the Government of **Germany** and **IUCN**.
- At the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (**COP**) **2015** in **Paris**, India also joined the voluntary Bonn Challenge pledge to bring into restoration, 21 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by the year **2030**.
- The target has now been revised to restore **26 million** hectares of degraded and deforested land by **2030**.

## International Yoga Day



**Recently:** The **10<sup>th</sup> edition** of the **International Yoga Day** was observed on **21<sup>st</sup> June 2024**.

- It is a day dedicated to raising awareness about the numerous benefits of practising yoga and promoting its holistic approach to health and well-being.

### What is yoga?

- It is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines which originated in ancient India.
- There is a wide variety of schools of yoga, practices, and goals in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and traditional and modern yoga is practiced worldwide.

- Yoga-like practices were first mentioned in the ancient Hindu text known as **Rigveda**.
- Yoga is also referred to in a number of Upanishads.
- The first known appearance of the word "yoga" with the same meaning as the modern term is in the **Katha Upanishad** which was probably composed between the **fifth and third centuries BCE**.
- The term "yoga" in the Western world often denotes a modern form of Hatha yoga and a posture-based physical fitness, stress-relief and relaxation technique, consisting largely of asanas
  - This differs from traditional yoga, which focuses on meditation and release from worldly attachments.

### **Theme:**

- This year, the theme of Yoga Day is **"Yoga for Self and Society."**
- This subject emphasises the double benefits of yoga practice: enhancing personal well-being and improving society at large.
- The theme recognises that inner serenity and self-care are the cornerstones of a happy and healthy existence.

### **History:**

- The history of International Yoga Day dates back to **September 2014** when India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, proposed the idea during his address to the **United Nations General Assembly**.
- He emphasised the importance of yoga as a holistic approach to health and well-being and suggested that **June 21** should be declared as International Yoga Day.
- His proposal received overwhelming support from the UN member states, leading to the adoption of **June 21** as International Yoga Day by the United Nations General Assembly on **December 2014**.

### **Significance:**

- It provides a platform for individuals from many cultures and communities to unite in their appreciation and practice of yoga.

- This day offers a chance to spread awareness of the mental, physical, and spiritual benefits of yoga through a range of programmes.
- Yoga is beneficial for physical, mental, and emotional well-being.