



1ST WEEK FEBRUARY 2023 CURRENT AFFAIRS



Table of Contents

.....	1
GS I : Indian heritage & Culture	1
CHARAIDEO MAIDAMS	1
1. Context.....	1
2. About Charaideo maidams	1
3. Location	1
4. Architecture.....	2
5. Importance of Charaideo	2
6. About Ahom Dynasty	2
GS I: Social reformer, important personality.....	3
SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE	3
1. Context.....	3
2. Key Points.....	3
3. Subhas Chandra Bose's early life.....	4
4. Bose's Disagreements with Gandhi	4
5. The rift within the Congress.....	5
5.1. Forward Bloc	5
6. A dramatic escape	6
7. The INA and World War II	6
7.1. Chalo Delhi campaign	7
NATHURAM GODSE.....	7
GS I : Indian heritage & Culture	11
RAMCHARITMANAS.....	11
1. Context.....	11
2. Ram Charitmanas	11
3. About Goswami Tulasidas	12
4. Past Controversies.....	13
GS II: Governance.....	13
INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY.....	13
1. Background	13

2. Republic Day: The context of the 1920s	14
2.1. The 1920s however were far from insignificant	14
2.2. Simon Commission	14
2.3. Motilal Nehru Commission	14
3. Internal disagreement with the Congress	15
5. Irwin Declaration	15
6. Declaration of Poorna Swaraj	16
7. Republic Day in Post-Independence India	16
GS II: International relations.....	17
UKRAINE	17
1. Context.....	17
2. Key points	17
3. About Ukraine's Area, demography, economy.....	17
4. Trade between India and Ukraine	19
5. The early history of Ukraine	19
6. Incorporation into Russia.....	20
6.1. The tsarist policy of Russification	20
6.2. Ukraine as part of the USSR	21
6.3. After the Soviet Collapse	21
GS II: Governance.....	22
MANUAL SCAVENGING	22
1. Context.....	22
2. What is Manual Scavenging?	22
3. Why Manual Scavenging is still prevalent in India?	22
4. Past Incidents.....	22
5. Constitutional Safeguards	23
6. Steps were taken by the government	24
GS II: Polity.....	24
PUISNE JUDGE	24
GS II: International relations.....	26
INDIA AT UNSC	26
1. Context.....	26
2. India at UNSC	26

3. Politics within UNSC	27
4. Issues before India	28
4.1. UN Reforms	28
4.2. Terrorism.....	28
4.3. The China Challenge	28
GS II: Governance.....	29
MISHTI SCHEME	29
1. Context.....	29
2. About MISHTI Scheme	29
3. Why Mangroves?.....	29
4. Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC)	30
5. The present stage of Mangroves.....	30
GS II: Polity.....	31
JUDICIAL MAJORITARIANISM.....	31
2. About Judicial Majoritarianism	31
3. Judicial Independence	31
5. Gaps in Understanding.....	32
GS II: Polity.....	32
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS	32
2.1. In Independent India	33
3. The government's role	34
4. What if President disagrees with the text of the speech	34
5. The Procedure and traditions	35
GS II: Governance.....	36
MGNREGS	36
1. Context.....	36
2. Key Points	36
3. Importance of MGNREGA to rural employment	36
4. During the Pandemic.....	37
.....	38
5. Centre's allocation for MGNREGS	38
6. Challenges to its implementation	39
7. Supreme Court Rulings.....	40

8. Concerns	40
GS II: Polity.....	41
NINTH SCHEDULE OF THE CONSTITUTION	41
1. Context	41
2. The Bills	41
2.1. The first Bill	41
2.2. The Second Bill	41
3. About Ninth Schedule	42
4.1. Previous instances-Tamil Nadu's case	42
5. Exemption from judicial scrutiny	43
5.1. The IR Coelho verdict	43
GS II: Polity.....	43
MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCE	43
1. Context	43
2. About mandatory minimum sentencing	44
2.1. Mohd Hashim vs State of UP and Others	44
3. Provision for a mandatory sentence	44
3.1. State of Madhya Pradesh vs Vikram Das	44
3.2. State of J & K vs Vinay Nanda	45
4. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983	45
4. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, of 2013	45
5. Arguments	45
6. National Crime Records Bureau Statistics	46
GS II: Governance.....	46
MARRIAGE LAWS FOR MINORS	46
1. Context	46
2. Key points	46
3. Supreme Court Ruling	47
4. Various Marriage laws in India	47
5. Assam Government decreed	48
5.1. Child Marriages in different states	48
6. Effects of early marriage	49
7. Provisions of the PCMA	49

GS II: Polity.....	50
POSTAL BALLOTS.....	50
1. Context.....	50
2. What are Postal Ballots?	50
3. How are voters using Postal Ballots?	51
4. Counting postal ballots.....	51
A PB paper will be rejected on the following grounds	51
5. Returning Officer	52
6. Counting Supervisors and Assistants.....	53
7. EC-appointed Observers.....	53
8. Candidates and Counting Agents.....	53
9. Security	53
GS II: International institutions.....	54
SWISS BANKS	54
1. Context.....	54
2. Key points	54
3. Centuries of secrecy.....	54
4. Safe and easy banking	55
5. Black Money	55
GS II: International Affairs	56
INDUS WATERS TREATY	56
1. Context.....	56
2. Key points	56
3. The dispute over the hydel projects	56
.....	58
4. Applications moved by Pakistan and India	58
5. Dispute redressal mechanism.....	59
6. India's notice and its implications.....	60
GS II: Governance.....	61
LIVING WILL.....	61
1. Context.....	61
2. What is Euthanasia?.....	61
3. Active and Passive Euthanasia.....	61

4. Euthanasia in India	62
5. Evolution of laws on Passive Euthanasia	62
6. Living will 2018 Guidelines	63
7. Living Will new guidelines	63
GS II: Governance.....	64
MINIMUM GOVERNMENT, MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE.....	64
1. Context.....	64
2. Key points	64
3. About Minimum interference and e-governance.....	64
4. Digital India	64
5. NeSDA	65
6. A push for privatisation	65
7. Arguments for and against.....	65
8. Framing the challenges.....	66
9. Concerns	66
GS II: Polity.....	67
NATIONAL VOTERS DAY.....	67
GS II: Polity.....	69
GOVERNOR'S POWER.....	69
1. Context.....	69
2. About Governor.....	70
3. Powers of Governor.....	70
4. Friction points between the States and Governor	71
5. Reasons for the friction between the Governor and the state governments	71
6. Reforms Suggested	72
GS II: Polity.....	72
PARAM VIR CHAKRA AWARDEES	72
1. Context.....	72
2. Key points	72
PARAM VIR CHAKRA AWARDEES 2023.....	74
GS II: Polity.....	83
CHARGESHEET.....	83
1. Context.....	83

2. What is a Charge Sheet?	83
3. What contains in a Charge sheet?	83
4. What is First Information Report(FIR)?	84
5. How is a Chargesheet different from an FIR?	84
6. Why is a chargesheet not a 'public document'?	85
GS III: Economy	85
NON-FUNGIBLE TOKEN (NFT)	85
1. Context	85
2. What are Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs)	86
3. Working of NFTs.....	86
4. How is an NFT different from Cryptocurrency?	87
5. What are the risks associated with buying NFTs?	87
GS III: Economy	88
PARIS CLUB	88
1. Context	88
2. About Paris Club	88
3. How has Paris Club been involved in debt agreements?	89
GS III: Economy	90
ANGEL TAX	90
1. Context	90
2. The Proposed Change	90
3. Start-ups Concerns	91
GS III: Economy	92
UPI FOR NRIs	92
1. Context	92
3. The discussion on MDR.....	93
4. Where does UPI stand now?	93
GS III: Economy	94
GREEN BONDS	94
1. Context	94
2. About Green Bonds	94
3. Importance	94
4. The benefits for investors	95

5. The Govt plan these bonds	95
5. The proceedings.....	95
GS III: Economy	96
LOAN-LOSS PROVISION	96
1. Context.....	96
2. About Loan-loss provision	96
3. The expected loss-based approach	96
Stage 1.....	97
Stage 2.....	97
Stage 3.....	97
4. Benefits	97
5. Problems	97
GS III: Science& technology	98
SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA.....	98
1. Context.....	98
2. Key Points	98
3. Nature of the disease.....	98
4. The Burden of disease	99
5. Prevention.....	99
GS III: Science& technology	100
ANIMAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE CLIMATE CHANGE	100
1. Context.....	100
2. Key points	100
3. Cows and other animals produce methane	100
4. Impact of Methane on Climate Change	101
5. Mitigation of methane emissions	101
6. New Zeland's genetic programme.....	102
GS III: Science & technology	102
ISRO LAUNCH VEHICLES.....	102
1. Context.....	102
2. Satellites and Launch Vehicles	102
3. Types of Launch Vehicles.....	103
4. ISRO's Launch Vehicles.....	103

4.1 The first launch vehicle developed by ISRO was simply called SLV, or satellite launch vehicle.	104
4.2 Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle or ASLV.	104
4.3 PSLVs (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles)	104
4.4 GSLVs (Geosynchronous satellite launch vehicles)	104
4.5 Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).....	105
4.6 Reusable Rockets	105
4.7 RLV-TD (Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator)	105
GS III: Science& technology	105
TRANS-FATS	105
1. Context	105
2. Key Highlights of the report.....	106
3. Trans-Fats.....	106
4. Effects of Trans-fats	106
5. Why are Trans fats used in India?	107
6. Government initiatives to eliminate Trans-fats	107
GS IV: Ethics	108
ABORTION Vs ETHICS.....	108
1. Background	108
2. The change in the abortion rate among women in the U.S.....	108
3. Rights Vs Ethics.....	108
5. Ethical approaches to abortion	109
6. Ethical dilemmas before policymakers	110

CHARAIDEO MAIDAMS

1. Context

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that the Central government has decided to put forth the name of Assam's Charaideo moidams burial sites for addition to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites list.

2. About Charaideo maidams

- Charaideo commonly known as 'Pyramids of Assam' was the original capital of the Ahom Kings.
- Charaideo remained the symbolic center of the Ahom Kingdom even though the capital of the kingdom moved many times.
- It was built by Chaolung Sukhapa the founder of the dynasty in about 1229 CE.



3. Location

- Located at the foothills of Nagaland, it's situated at a distance of around 30 KM from the historical Sivsagar town in Assam.
- It contains sacred burial grounds of Ahom kings and queens and is also the place of the ancestral Gods of the Ahoms.
- Some 42 tombs (Maidams) of Ahom kings and queens are present at Charaideo hillocks.

4. Architecture

It comprises a massive underground vault with one or more chambers having domical superstructure and covered by a heap of the earthen mound and externally it appears a hemispherical mound.

5. Importance of Charaideo

- The word Charaideo has been derived from these Tai Ahom words, Che-Rai-Doi. "Che" means city or town, "Rai" means "to shine" and "Doi" means hill. In short, Charaideo means, "a shining town situated on a hilltop."
- The nomination of the Charaideo Maidams has attained significance at a time when the country is celebrating the 400th birth anniversary of Lachit Barphukan, who was the legendary general from the Ahom Kingdom who fought the Mughals in 1671.
- There is currently no World Heritage Site in the category of cultural heritage in the northeast.
- The maidams is one of the 52 sites across the country seeking the World Heritage Site tag.
- Currently, the Maidams are managed by the Archaeological Survey of India and the State Department of Archaeology under the Ancient Monuments and Sites Remains Act 1958, and under the Assam Ancient Monuments and Records Act 1959.

6. About Ahom Dynasty

- The Ahom Dynasty, a late medieval kingdom, was established in Assam's Brahmaputra Valley in 1228. Chaolung Sukaphaa, the first King of the Ahom Kingdom, crossed the Patkai mountainous region to reach the Brahmaputra valley and laid the foundations of the Ahom Dynasty.
- Charaideo, more than 400 km east of Guwahati, was the first capital of the Ahom dynasty founded by Chao Lung Sukaphaa in 1253.
- The rule of this dynasty ended with the Burmese invasion of Assam and the subsequent annexation by the British East India Company following the

Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. The British emperor took charge of the state and thus began the colonial era of Assam.

GS I: Social reformer, important personality

SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

1. Context

The 126th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Parakram Diwas was celebrated across the country on Jan 23rd.

2. Key Points

- A 28- ft black granite statue of Subhas Chandra Bose was unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at India Gate on September 8.
- The statue is placed under the Grand Canopy of the monument and has been inaugurated along with the Kartavya Path, formerly known as Rajpath.



Image source: News18

3. Subhas Chandra Bose's early life

- He was born to an upper-class Bengali family in 1897 in Cuttack and he was the ninth child of Janakinath and Prabhavati Bose.
- A well-known lawyer, Janakinath sent his sons to an English-medium school which he considered essential for assimilating into English society.
- Prabhavati, on the other hand, was a devout Hindu and observed Bengali Hindu customs and pujas which all her children had to attend.
- In 1909, he moved to Ravenshaw Collegiate School, where he completed his secondary education.
- Here, he was taught Bengali and Sanskrit, as well as the Vedas and Upanishads.
- While he continued his European education throughout his life, he became less drawn to Anglicized ways than his family members during his schooling and according to historian Leonard Gordon, began to make his synthesis of the cultures of the West and India.

Influenced by the teachings of Ramakrishna and his disciple Swami Vivekananda, as well as the themes of Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his novel Ananda Math, Gordon notes that Subhas found what he was looking for: "**his Motherland's freedom and revival**" (in *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalist Leaders Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*).

- After school, he entered the Presidency College in Calcutta in 1913, where he studied philosophy.
- His earliest battle with British authority occurred while he was a student, against Professor of History E F Oaten, who had once in class spoken about **England's civilizing mission in India**.
- The students felt insulted by his remarks and their anger later boiled over after a run-in with the teacher, leading him to be beaten with sandals by Bose and his friends.
- Expelled for his actions, he resumed his studies at the Scottish Church College in Calcutta.

4. Bose's Disagreements with Gandhi

- Afterwards, Bose went to Cambridge University to prepare for the Indian **Civil Services (ICS)** exam in 1920.

- But later, determined to join the struggle for India's freedom, he abandoned the project and resigned from the ICS to join the Mahatma Gandhi-led national movement.
- After reaching Bombay, in 1921, he obtained an audience with Gandhi to get a better understanding of his plan of action.
- While he had great respect for the Mahatma, Bose left the meeting dissatisfied with the answers he received.
- About the ideological divide between the two leaders, historian Satadru Sen notes that while Gandhi was willing to wait a long time for Independence, Bose wanted immediate action, if not immediate results.
- Gandhi was anti-materialistic and hostile to modern technology, while Bose saw technology and mass production as essential to survival and dignity.
- Gandhi wanted a decentralized society and disliked the modern state; Bose wanted a strong central government and saw the modern state as the only solution to India's problems.
- Finally, Bose did not share Gandhi's dedication to non-violence.
- Despite tensions between the two, Bose was well aware of the significance of a leader like Gandhi.
- Bose was the first to call him the "**father of the nation**" during an address from the Azad Hind Radio from Singapore in July 1944.

5. The rift within the Congress

- Over the next two decades, Bose devoted his life to the nationalist movement, gaining considerable political influence and becoming one of the most powerful leaders in the Congress party.
- In 1938, he was elected Congress president in the Haripura session, where he tried to push for swaraj as a "**National Demand**" and opposed the idea of an Indian federation under British rule.
- He stood for re-election in 1939 and defeated Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the Gandhi-backed candidate.
- Sekhar Bandhopadhyay notes that Gandhi took this as a "**Personal defeat**" and 12 of the 15 members of the Working Committee resigned from their roles (in Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India).
- These included Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad.

5.1. Forward Bloc

- Bose tried to set up another working committee, but after being unable to do so, was forced to resign and was replaced by Prasad.

- Within a week, he proposed the creation of the "**Forward Bloc**" within the Congress Party, to bring the radical-left elements of the party together.
- According to historian Sugata Bose, his political aim was to convert the majority of the congress members towards his radical point of view and provide the Indian people with an alternative leadership that was based on "uncompromising anti-imperialism in the current phase of Indian politics and undiluted socialism once freedom was achieved (His majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire).

6. A dramatic escape

- Bose was arrested in 1940 before he could launch a campaign to remove the monument dedicated to the victims of the Black Hole of Calcutta, an incident when several European soldiers died while imprisoned in 1756.
- After going on a hunger strike, he was released from jail in December.
- Historian Ishita Banerjee-Dube writes that he soon began his escape from India, travelling by road, rail, air and foot in various disguises to avoid British surveillance.
- He entered Soviet-controlled Kabul via the northwest of India and finally reached Nazi Germany, where he remained for two years.
- He was assisted in the defeat of the British and Bose was allowed to start Azad Hind Radio and was provided with a few thousand Indian prisoners of war captured by Germany (from A History of Modern India).

Bose soon turned his focus to South East Asia, specifically Singapore, a British stronghold that had been taken over by Japan, which according to Ishita BanerjeeDube had shown increased interest in Indian independence from the British.

- However, leaving Europe at the peak of World war II was no easy task.
- In February 1943, he left Germany with his aide Abid Hasan in a submarine and travelled down the Atlantic Ocean, crossing the Cape of Good Hope in Africa before entering the Indian Ocean past Madagascar.
- Here, Bose and Hasan were taken on a small rubber boat provided by the Japanese, before taking them to Sumatra and finally arriving in Tokyo by air, marking the end of a gruelling and dangerous 90-day journey.

7. The INA and World War II

- The Indian National Army was formed in 1942, consisting of thousands of Indian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese and supported by Japanese troops.
- After he arrived in Singapore, Bose announced the formation of the provisional government of the Azad Hind in October 1943.
- Sugata Bose notes that the headquarters of the provisional government was moved to Rangoon in January 1944 and after fighting at the Arakan Front, the INA crossed the Indo-Burma border and marched towards Imphal and Kohima in March.

7.1. Chalo Delhi campaign

- The Chalo Delhi campaign ended at Imphal however, as the British and British Indian armies, along with American air support were able to defeat the Japanese forces and the INA and push them out of Kohima as well.
- In April-May 1945, Bose, along with the INA soldiers as well as women he had recruited for the Rani of Jhansi regiment was forced to retreat on foot to Thailand, while facing incessant enemy fire.
- After the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the war came to an end.
- After the Japanese surrendered on August 16, Bose left South East Asia on a Japanese plane and headed toward China.
- The plane, however, crashed, leaving Bose badly burned, but still alive, according to historian Satadru Sen.

NATHURAM GODSE

1. Context

Mahatma Gandhi was shot dead by Nathuram Godse on January 30, 1948. Godse entered a crowd of people as Gandhi headed for his evening prayers. He approached Gandhi on the pretext of touching his feet. He shot Gandhi instead, thrice, killing the Mahatma on the spot.

2.Convicts of Matma Assasination

2.1.Nathuram and Gopal Godse:

- The brothers were the sons of a village postmaster. Nathuram joined the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** at the age of 22 after his small cloth business failed. A few years later, he moved to Pune and became secretary of the local branch of the Hindu Mahasabha
- Nathuram became part of the civil disobedience movement in Hyderabad, where Hindus complained of being deprived of their rights by the government of the Nizam
- He was arrested for his participation in the protests and imprisoned for some time.
- It was during his stay in Pune that Nathuram met Apte, who was a school teacher. Together, Nathuram and Apte founded a Marathi daily newspaper called Agrani.
- Nathuram used the paper as a platform to voice his disagreements with Gandhi and his outreach to Indian Muslims
- He was warned several times by the government for writing incendiary articles
- Nathuram's younger brother, Gopal, worked with the Hindu Mahasabha for some time, but then joined the army as a member of the civilian personnel
- He was later appointed a storekeeper of the Motor Transport Spares Sub-Depot at Kirkee, a military station near Pune.
- Gopal was particularly inspired by Vinayak Savarkar and his demand for dividing India
- Although Nathuram urged him to not participate in the planning of Gandhi's murder, he decided to throw in his lot with the plan anyway

2.2.Narayan Apte:

Apte became a school teacher in Ahmedabad after finishing his BSc

A member of the Hindu Rashtra Dal, he went on to join the Indian Air Force in 1943 and was awarded a King's Commission

However, after the death of his younger brother, Apte had to resign from the force and return home

He agreed with Godse that peaceful methods would not be able to achieve much in the political arena, but he neither possessed Godse's religious fervour nor his ebullient enthusiasm

2.3.Vishnu Karkare:

Karkare had a difficult childhood. He was sent to an orphanage after his parents failed to take care of him due to a lack of money

oon, Karkare ran away and started to earn a living by working odd jobs. He later opened his own restaurant in Ahmedabad.

Karkare met Apte and became his close associate after he joined the Hindu Mahasabha

With Apte's support, he successfully contested the election to the Ahmednagar Municipal Committee

2.4.Madanlal Pahwa:

Pahwa was a troublemaker from an early age

He ran away from school to join the Royal Indian Navy but failed to pass the examination

Later, Pahwa joined the army, only to resign after a brief period of service.

He then returned to his home in Pakpattan (now in Pakistan)

After large-scale rioting broke out in the city, Pahwa was evacuated to Ferozepur, Punjab

In December 1947, he met Apte and Godse and began organising protests by groups of refugees, who believed that the government was not sympathetic to the Hindu victims of Partition.

3.Gun used by Godse

- The Beretta handgun that Godse used was an unusual weapon. Though considered to be supremely reliable, it was a rare weapon in India, as it was mostly used by Italy and other Axis Powers during World War II.
- The company traced its origins to 1526, when its eponymous founder started building gun barrels for the Venetian city state
- Notably, the Beretta M1934 was a compact and light gun but packed a strong cartridge for its size
- Made up of relatively few, easy-to-maintain parts, it was considered an extremely reliable side weapon
- Over a million M1934s were produced over the course of the war
- The complete history of the specific gun used to assassinate Mahatma Gandhi is hard to trace
- However, from various reports, some parts of its journey can be ascertained. Having the serial number 606824, the gun was manufactured in 1934 and issued to an Italian army officer either in 1934 or early 1935
- The officer carried it to Africa, during Italy's invasion of Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) under the orders of Fascist dictator **Benito Mussolini**.

4.Godse trial

- The trial began in May 1948 at a special court set up in Delhi's Red Fort. The monument had earlier been the venue for the trials of the last Mughal

emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar who was deported to Burma and, around nine decades later, of the members of the Indian National Army

- The trial took place before Special Judge Atma Charan, a senior member of the judicial branch of the Indian Civil Service
- The prosecution was led by CK Daphtary, then Advocate General of Bombay, who later became Solicitor General of India, and then the Attorney General for India.
- Godse along with other accused, including Narayan Apte and Vinayak Savarkar, were allowed to take the help of counsel of their choice
- In the book "
- 'Why They Killed Gandhi: Unmasking the Ideology and the Conspiracy', Ashok Kumar Pandey wrote, "the law took its course wherein he (Godse) was supplied with legal aid at government expense, and most of his demands during his stay in jail were fulfilled.
- Between June and November 1948, the special court heard 149 witnesses. The prosecution brought on record 404 documentary exhibits and 80 material exhibits
- The judgment was pronounced on February 10, 1949. Judge Atma Charan convicted Godse, Apte, and five others of the crime. Both Godse and Apte were sentenced to death. Savarkar was acquitted
- The judge also announced that the convicts could file an appeal against the order. Four days later, all of them filed their appeals in the Punjab High Court, which was then known as the East Punjab High Court, and located in Shimla
- Interestingly, instead of challenging the conviction, Godse's appeal objected to the court's finding that he wasn't the only one involved in Gandhi's murder and there was a larger conspiracy to kill him.
- The appeals were heard by a Bench that including Justice Khosla, Justice A N Bhandari, and Justice Achhru Ram. During the proceedings, Godse refused to be represented by a lawyer and asked to be allowed to argue his appeal himself. The court accepted his request
- The assassin didn't repent his crime and used the opportunity to "exhibit himself as a fearless patriot and a passionate protagonist of Hindu ideology"
- He had remained completely unrepentant of his atrocious crime, and whether out of a deep conviction in his beliefs or merely in order to make a last public apology, he had sought this opportunity of displaying his talents before he dissolved into oblivion-Justice Khosla
- The Bench gave its verdict on June 21, 1949. It confirmed the findings and sentences of the lower court except in the cases of Dattatraya Parchure and Shankar Kistayya, who were acquitted of all charges

- The convicts also filed a petition for special leave to appeal to the Privy Council, which was the highest court in India during British rule, and was replaced by the Supreme Court in 1950. However, the petition was rejected
- The hanging of Godse and Apte became inevitable after the Governor-General of India rejected their mercy petitions
- Godse's mercy petition was filed by his parents, not him. Both men were hanged on November 15, 1949, in Ambala jail

GS I : Indian heritage & Culture

RAMCHARITMANAS

1. Context

On January 11, Bihar Education Minister Chandra Shekhar said the Ramcharitmanas “spreads hatred in society”, and Goswami Tulasidas’s epic poem along with the Manusmriti and M S Golwalkar’s Bunch of Thoughts should be burned. Lower castes were denied education, and the Ramcharitmanas say that adham jaat me vidya paye, voi hu yaya ahi dudh paile’ - educated, lower-caste people, become as poisonous as a snake,” Education Minister Chandra Shekhar said at the convocation ceremony of Nalanda Open University. The main criticism of a chaupai in Sundar Kand said that Ramcharitmanas is a book that divides society. Misleading the students at Nalanda University, he said – Ramcharitmanas is a book that spreads hatred in society.

2. Ram Charitmanas

- The epic Ramcharitmanas was written in the Awadhi language by Great Rambhakt Sri Tulasidas Ji in the 16th century, where Goswami Tulasidas Ji adapted the original stories of Ramayana with new generations in view.
- The Ramcharitmanas is by no means a word-for-word copy of the Valmiki Ramayana or a condensed account of the latter. Sri Ramcharitmanas has elements from many other Ramayanas previously written in Sanskrit and different Indian dialects and stories from Puranas.
- Sri Tulasidas Ji calls the epic Ramcharitmanas and the story of Rama, which was stored in Shiva's mind (Manasa); later, he narrated the same to his consort, Devi Parvati. Sri Tulasidas claims to have received the story through his guru, Narharidas.

- Sri Tulasidas Ji was a naive child, and the story was stored in his mind (Manasa) for a long time before he wrote it as Ramcharitmanas. Therefore, the epic poem is also known as Tulsikrit Ramayana (The Ramayana composed by Tulasidas). The Ramcharitmanas is a masterpiece of vernacular literature.
- Sri Tulasidas Ji wrote the work in seven Kandas, and they are called Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindakanda, Sundar Kanda, Lanka Kanda, and Uttar Kanda.

3. About Goswami Tulasidas

- Tulsidas, a Brahmin whose original name was Ram Bola Dubey, is believed to have been born in Rajapur by the Yamuna in today's Banda district.
- He composed the Ramcharitmanas on the bank of the Ganga in Varanasi- he is said to have begun writing on Ram Navami day in 1574 and completed the poem over the next few years.
- Tulsidas lived in the time of Emperor Akbar, and some believe that he was in touch with Abdurrahim Khan-e-Khanan, the son of Akbar's commander Bairam Khan, and they possibly exchanged some poetic communication as well.
- In the seventh shloka of the first chapter (Baal Kand), Tulsidas declares, "Swantah sukhay Tulsī Raghunathgatha..."- that is, he has written the "story of Raghunath (Lord Ram) for his happiness".
- Tulsidas made the story of Lord Ram popular among the masses because he wrote in the regional dialect that most people understood. This earned him the ire of Sanskrit scholars of the time, and Tulsidas recorded his anguish in his Kavitawali.



4. Past Controversies

- While in the Ramcharitmanas, Lord Ram is maryada purushottam, the epitome of righteousness, his conduct has been criticized by leaders of anti-Brahmin movements like E V Ramasamy Periyar.
- One of the 22 pledges that Dr. B R Ambedkar administered to his followers while embracing Buddhism in October 1956 was: “I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna, who are believed to be the incarnation of God, nor shall I worship them.”
- Non-upper caste assertion in politics has sometimes been manifested in criticism of the Ramcharitmanas. Critics have used these parts of the poem to accuse Tulasidas of being against the non-upper castes and women, and a flagbearer of the idea of Brahminical superiority.

GS II: Governance

INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY

1. Background

- Since 1950, January 26 has marked the day India's Constitution came into effect.

- However, the Constitution was prepared way before the chosen date, adopted officially by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949.
- The history of the Indian freedom struggle during which the date held significance since 1930.
- On January 26, 1930, the historic "**Poorna Swaraj**" declaration was officially promulgated, beginning the final phase of India's freedom struggle where the goal would be complete independence from British rule.

2. Republic Day: The context of the 1920s

- The Non-Cooperation Movement ended unceremoniously in February 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident.
- Mahatma Gandhi, at the time, felt that the country was "**not yet ready**" for his non-violent methods of protest.
- Thus, the 1920s did not see further mobilisation at the scale that was seen during the Non-Cooperation Movement and the anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha.

2.1. The 1920s however were far from insignificant

From the rise of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad to the coming of age of a new generation of Indian National Congress (INC) leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Vallabhai Patel and C Rajagopalachari, in the 1920s laid the ground for the future course of India's freedom struggle.

2.2. Simon Commission

- Notably, in 1927, British Authorities appointed the Simon Commission a seven-man, all-European team under Sir John Simon to deliberate on political reforms in India.
- This sent a wave of outrage and discontentment across the country.
- For the first time since 1922, protests against the Simon Commission spread nationwide, with chants of "**Simon Go Back**" echoing across the country.

2.3. Motilal Nehru Commission

- In response, the INC appointed its commission under Motilal Nehru. The Nehru Report demanded that India be granted dominion status within the Empire.
- In the **Balfour Declaration of 1926**, dominions were defined as "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no

way subordinate to one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

- In 1926, countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand were granted dominion status.

3. Internal disagreement with the Congress

- Crucially, even within Congress, the Nehru Report did not enjoy universal support.
- Young leaders such as Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, Motilal's son, wanted India to break all ties with the British Empire.
- They argued that under dominion status, India would enjoy a certain level of autonomy, and the British Parliament and the Crown would still have the ability to meddle in Indian affairs.
- Importantly, for both Bose and Nehru, attaining dominion status would make India party to colonial exploitation elsewhere in the British Empire, mainly in Africa.
- With a far more radical worldview than their predecessors, Bose and Nehru looked at anticolonialism not only as a local political issue for India but through a more global lens.
- However, Gandhi was still very much for dominion status, arguing that it would be a welcome step in India's anti-colonial struggle. His views would soon change.

5. Irwin Declaration

- In 1929, Viceroy Irwin had vaguely announced that India would be granted dominion status in the future. Known as the Irwin Declaration, it was warmly welcomed by Indians but faced massive backlash back in Britain.
- The British population was still pro-Empire and India was seen as the Empire's Crown Jewel.
- Importantly, as the world economy went into a recession, India was arguably Britain's most valuable colony with its vast land, resources and population crucial for its economy.
- Thus, under pressure from back home, Irwin went back on his word.
- In a meeting with Gandhi, Muslim League's Muhammad Ali Jinnah and a few other leaders, he said that he could not promise India dominion status any time soon.

- This would be a turning point as Congress grew increasingly united on the issue.
- With the British unable to follow through on even reasonable reforms, Indians supported increasingly "radical" goals a fully independent republic being one of the first.

6. Declaration of Poorna Swaraj

- The Lahore Session of the INC convened in December 1929.
- On December 19, the historic "Poorna Swaraj" resolution was passed in the session.

Meaning "total self-rule/sovereignty," the resolution read, " The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually.

- Therefore India must sever the British connection and attain Poorna Swaraj or complete independence".
- This declaration of Independence was officially promulgated on January 26, 1930.
- The Congress urged Indians to come out and celebrate "Independence" on that day.
- The Indian tricolour was hoisted across the country by Congress party workers and patriotic songs were sung as the country reconfigured its strategy for Independence.
- The resolution also contained in it an affirmation of the Gandhian methods of nonviolent protest, which would start almost immediately after Poorna Swaraj Day was celebrated.
- Poorna Swaraj's declaration was a critical pivot point for India's freedom struggle.
- It is with this declaration that India's national movement "shifted from the language of charity to the language of justice."

7. Republic Day in Post-Independence India

- From 1930 till India finally won its independence in 1947, January 26 was celebrated as "Independence Day" or "Poorna Swaraj Day" with Indians reaffirming their commitment towards sovereignty on that day.

- However, India won independence from the British on August 15, exactly two years after the Japanese surrendered to the Allies to end World War II.
- As historian Ramchandra Guha wrote, "freedom finally came on a day that resonated with imperial pride rather than nationalist sentiment".
- Thus, when leaders had to decide on a day to promulgate India's new constitution, January 26, was thought to be ideal.
- Not only did this date already hold nationalist significance, the Constitution in many ways reflected the "**Poorna Swaraj**" declaration two decades back.
- While today's Republic Day celebrations are very different from what Poorna Swaraj Day looked like under British Raj, January 26 remains a solemn reminder of the journey India took to attain self-rule.

GS II: International relations

UKRAINE

1. Context

Three days before President Vladimir Putin described Russia's southwestern neighbour (Ukraine) as a bogus country with no history, identity or "stable traditions of real statehood".

2. Key points

- Modern Ukraine was "entirely and fully created by Russia, more specifically the Bolshevik, communist Russia.
- This process began practically immediately after the 1917 revolution and Lenin and his associates did it most sloppily about Russia by dividing and tearing from pieces of her historical territory.

3. About Ukraine's Area, demography, economy

Ukraine is in the east of Europe and is bound by Russia to its northeast, east and southeast and the Black Sea in the South.

In the southwest, west and North, Ukraine shares borders, in the clockwise direction, with Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Belarus.

- It is the largest country in Europe after Russia itself, with an area of 603, 550 sq km or about 6 per cent of the continent.
- Ukraine is, of course, dwarfed by Russia, which sprawls over almost 4 million sq km and 40 per cent of Europe.
- In July 2021, Ukraine's population was estimated at 43. 7 million.
- Of this, 77.8 per cent was of Ukrainian ethnicity and 17.3 per cent were Russian and Ukrainian Russian Speakers made up 67.5 per cent and 29.6 per cent of the population respectively.
- Russian speakers live mostly in the east, close to the border with Russia, where the Russian government, after encouraging and sustaining an armed insurgency for eight years, this week recognised two independent republics, signalling the inevitable war that followed.
- Ukraine is the poorest country in Europe in terms of gross domestic product and gross national income per capita.
- It has deposits of iron ore and coal and exports corn, sunflower oil, iron and iron products and wheat.



Image Source: Britannica

4. Trade between India and Ukraine

- India is Ukraine's largest export destination in the Asia Pacific region.
- The Country's major export to India is sunflower oil, followed by inorganic chemicals, iron and steel, plastics and chemicals.
- Ukraine's major import from India is pharmaceutical products.

5. The early history of Ukraine

- A millennium ago, what is Ukraine today lay at the heart of the Kyivan Rus' (Rus' land), a federation of the East Slavic, Baltic and Finnic peoples of eastern and northern Europe, with its capital in Kyiv.
- Modern Ukraine, Russia and Belarus all trace their cultural ancestry to the Kyivan Rus'.
- The Kyivan Rus' reached its greatest size and power in the 10th and 11th centuries.
- In 988 AD, the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Vladimir (Volodymyr) the Great, made Christianity the state religion.
- The peak of the Kyivan Rus' came under Yaroslav the Wise, who ruled from 1019-54.
- In the mid-13th century, the Kyivan Rus' weakened by the decline of trade as the Byzantine Empire collapsed and fell apart under the onslaught of the Mongol Golden Horde, who sacked Kyiv in 1240.
- After the Mongol khanate disintegrated in the early 15th century, however, large parts of the former Kyivan Rus' were incorporated into the multi-ethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
- By the Union of Lublin, Poland, in 1569, the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came together to form the **Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth**, which was among Europe's biggest countries at the time.
- The beginnings of the modern Ukrainian national identity can be traced back to about a century after this event.

6. Incorporation into Russia

- In 1648, Cossacks under Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky rose in revolt against the Poles took control of Kyiv and founded the Ukrainian state of Cossack Hetmanate in the area that is today's central Ukraine.
- After about a century, however, Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96) of Russia abolished the hetman and absorbed the entire ethnic Ukrainian territory into the Russian Empire.

6.1. The tsarist policy of Russification

- The Tsarist policy of Russification led to the suppression of ethnic identities and languages, including that of the Ukrainians.
- Within the Russian Empire though, many Ukrainians rose to positions of prosperity and importance and significant numbers migrated to settle in other parts of Russia.

- More than 3.5 million Ukrainians fought in World War I on the side of the Russian Empire, but a smaller number fought against the Tsar's army with the Austro-Hungarians.

6.2. Ukraine as part of the USSR

- The war led to the end of both the Tsarist and Ottoman empires.
- As a mainly communist-led Ukrainian national movement emerged, several small Ukrainian states sprang up.
- Months after the Bolsheviks took power in the October Revolution of 1917, an independent Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed, but civil war continued between various claimants to power, including Ukrainian factions, anarchists, Tsarists and Poland.
- In 1922, Ukraine became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

6.3. After the Soviet Collapse

- In 1991, the USSR was dissolved. Demands for independence had been growing in Ukraine for a couple of years previously and in 1990, over 3, 00, 000 Ukrainians created a human chain in support of freedom and the so-called Granite Revolution of students sought to prevent the signing of a new agreement with the USSR.
- On August 24, 1991, after the failure of the coup to remove President Mikhail Gorbachev and restore the communists to power, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the country's Act of Independence.
- Subsequently, Leonid Kravchuck, head of the parliament, was elected Ukraine's first President.

In December 1991, the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine formally dissolved the Soviet Union and formed the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**. However, Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, never ratified the accession, So Ukraine was legally never a member of the CIS.

MANUAL SCAVENGING

1. Context

Three laborers in Mumbai, allegedly hired for manual scavenging, died on Thursday afternoon after inhaling toxic fumes in a septic tank. The incident took place around 3.15 pm in a public toilet. Even though manual scavenging is banned in India, the practice is still prevalent in many parts of the country.

2. What is Manual Scavenging?

- Manual scavenging is the practice of removing human excreta by hand from sewers or septic tanks. India banned the practice under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (PEMSR).
- The Act bans the use of any individual for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of, or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta till its disposal.

In 2013, the definition of manual scavengers was also broadened to include people employed to clean septic tanks, ditches, or railway tracks.

- The Act recognizes manual scavenging as a “dehumanizing practice,” and cites a need to “correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the manual scavengers.”

3. Why Manual Scavenging is still prevalent in India?

- The lack of enforcement of the act and the exploitation of unskilled laborers are the reasons why the practice is still prevalent in India.
- The Mumbai civic body charges anywhere between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000 to clean septic tanks.
- The unskilled laborers are much cheaper to hire and contractors illegally employ them at a daily wage of Rs 300-500.

4. Past Incidents

- In January 2019, three labourers suffocated to death while cleaning a sewage treatment plant on Mira Road.
- On May 3, 2019, three labourers choked to death while cleaning a septic tank in a private society in Nalasopara, near Mumbai. On May 11, three men in their 20s were killed after they inhaled toxic fumes while cleaning a septic tank at a housing society in Thane.
- A BMC worker, who had entered a manhole at Nana Chowk in Mumbai died after inhaling toxic gases. And four other workers were hospitalized.
- In February 2017, three labourers died while cleaning a septic tank of a residential society in Mumbai's Malvani area. In Dombivali, a son and father died while cleaning a septic tank.

5. Constitutional Safeguards

Manual Scavenging violates a number of constitutional provisions as well.

5.1 Article 14: Equality before the law

The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Here, individuals are forced into such professions as they are unable to get any other job because of the stigma attached to this job and become unable to sustain their families.

5.2 Article 17: Abolition of untouchability

Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of Untouchability shall be an offense punishable in accordance with the law. According to Section 7A of the aforementioned Act, anyone who forces someone to engage in scavenging on the grounds of untouchability is considered to have enforced a disability resulting from untouchability, which is punished by imprisonment.

5.3 Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty

No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to a procedure established by law. Plenty of people lose lives during such unsanitary practices of scavenging and die because of suffocation, harmful gases released through sewers, and other inhumane reasons.

5.4 Article 23: Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labor

In addition to the provisions of the Constitution, India is a party to a number of international conventions and covenants that forbid the cruel practice of manual scavenging. These are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

6. Steps were taken by the government

- The government implemented the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, under which the definition has broadened and manual cleaning now goes beyond dry latrines and includes all forms of cleaning like handling in any manner, human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit and railway tracks as well.
- The government has implemented the Building and Maintenance of Insanitary Latrines Act of 2013 which banned the construction or maintenance of unsanitary toilets.
- Along with outlawing employing any person for manual scavenging. As compensation for historical injustice and indignity, the act also establishes a constitutional obligation to offer alternative employment opportunities and other forms of support to communities that rely on manual scavenging.
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge on World Toilet Day (19th November) in 2020 to challenge all states to create a mechanized system of sewer cleaning.

GS II: Polity

PUISNE JUDGE

1.Context

While recommending two names for appointment as judges of the Supreme Court, the Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud said in a statement on Tuesday (January 31) that the collegium had taken into “consideration the seniority of Chief Justices and senior puisne Judges...”

2.About Puisne judge

- According to the dictionary, the word puisne has French origins, which means “later born” or younger. It is pronounced /'pju:ni/, like “puny”, the English word that means small or undersized
- Puisne is almost always used in the context of judges, and essentially denotes seniority of rank
- The term puisne judge is used in common law countries to refer to judges who are ranked lower in seniority, i.e., any judge other than the Chief Justice of that court
- Common law is the body of law that is created by judges through their written opinions, rather than through statutes or constitutions (statutory law)
- Common law, which is used interchangeably with ‘case law’, is based on judicial precedent. The United Kingdom (UK) and the Commonwealth countries, including India, are common law countries

3. Puisne judge in other countries

- In the UK, puisne judges are judges other than those holding distinct titles
- The Supreme Court of Judicature Act, 1877 defined a “puisne judge” as any judge of the High Court besides the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice of England, and the Master of the Rolls
- In India, all judges have the same judicial powers. As the seniormost judge of a court, the Chief Justice has an additional administrative role
- In India, there is a reference to a puisne judge only while considering the order of seniority for appointments, elevations to High Courts, etc., but it does not have a bearing on the exercise of a judge’s judicial power

4. Collegium about Puisne judge

- Supreme Court collegium recommended Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Aravind Kumar, the current Chief Justices of the Allahabad and Gujarat High Courts respectively, for appointment as judges of the Supreme Court
- While giving reasons for its recommendation, the collegium said that the decision was made taking “into consideration the seniority of Chief Justices and senior puisne Judges in their respective parent High Courts as well as the overall seniority of the High Court Judges”
- This was done because seniority is one of the several criteria that are considered while making appointments to the higher judiciary
- In the Third Judges Case ruling in 1998, one of the two cases that led to the evolution of the collegium system, the Supreme Court clarified that “The Chief Justice of India must make a recommendation to appoint a Judge of

the Supreme Court and to transfer a Chief Justice or puisne Judge of a High Court in consultation with the four seniormost puisne Judges of the Supreme Court.

GS II: International relations

INDIA AT UNSC

1. Context

At a time when the US is going through a chaotic transition in leadership, China is hoping to become the pre-eminent global power and Pakistan is trying to rake up Kashmir and the human rights situation in India, India entered the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member this month. It will stay on the council for two years.

2. India at UNSC

- India has served in the UN Security Council seven times previously.
- In 1950-51, India as President of the UNSC presided over the adoption of resolutions calling for the cessation of hostilities during the Korean War and assistance to The Republic of Korea.
- In 1967-68, India co-sponsored Resolution 238 extending the mandate of the UN mission in Cyprus.
- In 1972-73, India pushed strongly for the admission of Bangladesh into the UN. The resolution was not adopted because of a veto by a permanent member.
- In 1977-78, India was a strong voice for Africa in the UNSC and spoke against apartheid. Then External Affairs Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke at UNSC for Namibia's independence in 1978.
- In 1984-85, India was a leading voice in the UNSC for the resolution of conflicts in the Middle East, especially Palestine and Lebanon.
- In 1991-92, PM P V Narasimha Rao participated in the first-ever summit-level meeting of the UNSC and Spoke on its role in the maintenance of peace and security.
- In 2011-2012, India was a strong vice for developing world, peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and Africa.
- The first statement on Syria was during India's Presidency at the UNSC.

During the 2011-12 term, India chaired the UNSC 1373 Committee concerning Counter-Terrorism, the 1556 Working Group concerning threat to international peace and security by terrorist acts and Security Council 751/1907 Committee concerning Somalia and Eritrea.

- India played an active role in discussions on all issues related to international peace and security, including several new challenges which the UNSC was called upon to deal with Afghanistan, Cote d'Ivoire, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
- Given the threat posed to international trade and security by piracy off the coast of Somalia, India promoted international cooperation against the pirates.
- At India's initiative, the Security Council mandated international cooperation for the release of hostages taken by pirates as well as for the prosecution of those taking hostages and those aiding and abetting these acts.
- India also worked to enhance international cooperation in counter-terrorism, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-state actors, and strengthen UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

3. Politics within UNSC

- The seven previous terms have given Indian diplomats the experience of how diplomacy is conducted in a multilateral setting.
- The five permanent members would like the non-permanent members to be cooperative and not stand in the way of major resolutions.
- This was the time when the Gulf War erupted and India voted in favour of the US-sponsored resolution in April 1991.
- India's vote was dictated by pragmatic considerations.
- The Americans had made it clear to India, in Washington as well as in New Delhi, that failure to support the resolution would make it very difficult for them to help India in the World Bank and the IMF.
- India was going through a severe balance of payments crisis and needed funds from these organisations.
- Also, India needed the US on its side, if and when the Kashmir issue came up.
- Twenty years later, when India again became a non-permanent member of the UNSC was stronger economically but still had to negotiate politics within the Council.
- Practitioners are acutely conscious that only diplomacy's outward packaging is couched in a commitment to a higher moral purpose.

- The shameless pursuit of narrowly defined interests is most often the motivation and seldom raises eyebrows in the world of multilateral diplomacy.

4. Issues before India

4.1. UN Reforms

- New Delhi has said it is essential that the Security Council is expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories.
- It says India is eminently suited for Permanent UNSC membership by any objective criteria, such as population, territorial size, GDP, economic potential, civilisational legacy, cultural diversity, political system and past and ongoing contributions to UN activities, especially to UN peacekeeping operations.

4.2. Terrorism

- The International effort against terrorism is a key priority for India in the UN.
- To provide a comprehensive legal framework to combat terrorism, India took the initiative to pilot a draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) in 1996.
- A text of the Convention is being negotiated in the 6th Committee of the UN General Assembly.
- India worked closely with its partners in the UNSC to ensure the listing of Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar under the UNSC's 1267 Sanctions Committee (May 2019) concerning al-Qaida and ISIS and associated individuals and entities, which was pending since 2009.

4.3. The China Challenge

- India is entering the UNSC at a time when Beijing is asserting itself on the global stage much more vigorously than ever.
- It heads at least six UN organisations and has challenged global rules.
- China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific as well as the India-China border has been visible in all of 2020 and New Delhi will have to think on its feet to counter Beijing.
- At Pakistan's behest, China has tried to raise the issue of Kashmir at the UNSC but has not found much support.

- There is some discussion among the strategic community in New Delhi on raising the issues of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tibet at the UNSC.
- India will weigh the pros and cons with partners on what steps to take in this direction.

But, the polarising politics inside India gives a window of opportunity to its rivals and opens up to the possibility of criticism, especially on human rights issues.

GS II: Governance

MISHTI SCHEME

1. Context

In the Union Budget 2023-24 presented on Wednesday (February 1), Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a new MISHTI scheme.

2. About MISHTI Scheme

Building on India's success in afforestation, the 'Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes', MISHTI, will be taken up for mangrove plantation along the coastline and on salt pan lands, wherever feasible, through convergence between MGNREGS, CAMPA Fund, and other sources".

3. Why Mangroves?

- Mangroves have been the focus of conservationists for years and it is difficult to overstate their importance in the global climate context. Mangrove forests consisting of trees and scrub that live in intertidal water in coastal areas host diverse marine life.
- They also support a rich food web, with molluscs and algae-filled substrate acting as a breeding ground for small fish, mud crabs, and shrimps, thus providing a livelihood to local artisan fishers.
- Equally importantly, they act as effective carbon stores, holding up to four times the amount of carbon as other forested ecosystems.
- Mangrove forests capture vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and their preservation can both aid in the removal of carbon

from the atmosphere and prevent the release of the same upon their destruction.

4. Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC)

- At the 27th session of the Conference of Parties (COP27), this year's UN climate summit, the Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC) was launched with India as a partner. The move, in line with India's goal to increase its carbon sink, will see New Delhi collaborating with Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and other countries to preserve and restore the mangrove forests in the region.
- Attending the event in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, the Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav said that India is home to one of the largest remaining areas of mangroves in the world the Sundarbans and has years of expertise in the restoration of mangrove cover that can be used to aid global measures in this direction.
- An initiative led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Indonesia, the Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC) includes India, Sri Lanka, Australia, Japan, and Spain.
- It seeks to educate and spread awareness worldwide on the role of mangroves in curbing global warming and its potential as a solution for climate change.
- The Inter-governmental alliance works on a voluntary basis which means that there are no real checks and balances to hold members accountable.
- Instead, the parties will decide their own commitments and deadlines regarding the planting and restoration of mangroves.
- The members will also share expertise and support each other in researching, managing, and protecting coastal areas.

5. The present stage of Mangroves

- South Asia houses some of the most extensive areas of mangroves globally, while Indonesia hosts one-fifth of the overall amount.
- India holds around 3 percent of South Asia's mangrove population. Besides the Sundarbans in West Bengal, the Andaman region, the Kachchh and Jamnagar areas in Gujarat have substantial mangrove cover.
- However, infrastructure projects, industrial expansion and the building of roads and railways, and natural processes -shifting coastlines, coastal erosion, and storms have resulted in a significant decrease in mangrove habitats.

- Between 2010 and 2020, around 600 sq km of mangroves were lost of which more than 62 percent was due to direct human impacts, the Global Mangrove Alliance said in its 2022 report.

GS II: Polity

JUDICIAL MAJORITARIANISM

1. Context

As the recent majority judgment of the Supreme Court on demonetization comes under criticism, the minority judgment by J. Nagarathna is being hailed for its challenge to the RBI's institutional acquiescence to the Central government. This questions our blind acceptance of numerical majorities in judicial decision-making.

2. About Judicial Majoritarianism

- As opposed to standard matters heard by Division Benches consisting of two judges, numerical majorities are of particular importance to cases that involve a substantial interpretation of constitutional provisions.
- In such cases, Constitutional Benches, consisting of five or more judges, are set up in consonance with Article 145 (3) of the Constitution. Such Benches usually consist of five, seven, nine, 11, or even 13 judges.
- This is done to facilitate decision-making by ensuring numerical majorities in judicial outcomes. The requirement for a majority consensus "flows from Article 145(5) of the Constitution which states that no judgment in such cases can be delivered except with the concurrence of a majority of the judges but that judges are free to deliver dissenting judgments or opinions.

3. Judicial Independence

All judges on a particular Bench give their rulings on the same set of arguments and written submissions. In light of the same, any differences in judicial decisions can be attributed to a difference in either the methodology adopted and the logic applied by the judges, or, as prospected by legal realists such as Jerome Frank, upon their own 'judicial hunches' which may be an outcome of their subjective experiences, outlook, and biases. In such circumstances, the majority may fall into either methodological fallacies and errors or be limited by their 'judicial hunch' respectively.

4. Meritious Dissents

- Our Constitutional history is replete with such meritorious dissents. The dissenting opinion of Justice H.R. Khanna in *A.D.M. Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* (1976) upholding the right to life and personal liberty even during situations of constitutional exceptionalism is a prime example.
- Another example is the dissenting opinion of Justice Subba Rao in the **Kharak Singh v. State of U.P. (1962)** case upholding the right to privacy which received the judicial stamp of approval in the *K.S. Puttaswamy v. UOI* (2017) case.
- Moreover, the rate of dissent itself is subject to influences. To exemplify, Yogesh Pratap Singh, Afroz Alam, and, Akash Chandra Jauhari (2016) found that the rate of judicial dissent at the height of the Emergency in 1976 was a mere 1.27% as opposed to 10.52% in 1980.
- The study also found that the rate of dissent where the Chief Justice was a part of the Bench was lower than in those cases where the Chief Justice was not on the Bench. Such situations call into question the efficiency and desirability of head-counting procedures for a judicial determination on questions of national and constitutional importance.

5. Gaps in Understanding

The absence of a critical discourse on judicial majoritarianism represents one of the most fundamental gaps in our knowledge regarding the functioning of our Supreme Court.

As pending Constitutional Bench matters are listed for hearing, we must respect the arguments of judicial majoritarianism based on which these cases are to be decided.

GS II: Polity

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

1. Context

Ahead of the Union Budget, President Droupadi Murmu addressed the joint sitting of Parliament for the first time after assuming the position in July 2022.

In her speech, she lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, saying that it "**Respects honesty**" and is "**stable, fearless and decisive and works to fulfil big dreams**".

2. History

- In the United Kingdom, the tradition of the monarch addressing the Parliament began in the 16th century.
- In the United States, President George Washington addressed Congress for the first time in 1790.
- In India, the practice of the President addressing Parliament was established after the promulgation of the Government of India Act in 1919.
- This law gave the Governor-General the right of addressing the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State.
- The law did not have a provision for a joint address but the Governor-General did address the Assembly and the Council together on multiple occasions.

2.1. In Independent India

- Between 1947 and 1950, there was no address to the Constituent Assembly (Legislative).
- After the Constitution came into force, President Rajendra Prasad addressed members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the first time on January 31, 1950.
- The Constitution gives the President and the Governor the power to address a sitting of the legislature.

Article 87 provides two special occasions on which the President addresses a joint sitting.

The first is to address the opening session of a new legislature after a general election.

The second is to address the first sitting of Parliament each year.

- A session of a new or continuing legislature can not begin without fulfilling this requirement.
- When the Constitution came into force, the President was required to address each session of Parliament.
- So during the provisional Parliament in 1950, President Prasad gave an address before every session.

- **In 1951, the First Amendment to the Constitution changed this and made the President's address an annual affair.**

3. The government's role

- There is no set format for the President's or Governor's speech.
- The Constitution states that the President shall "**inform Parliament of the cause of the summons**".
- During the making of the Constitution, **Prof K T Shah** wanted the President's address to be more specific.
- He suggested that the language be changed to specify that the President shall inform Parliament "**on other particular issues of policy he deems suitable for such address**".

His proposal took inspiration from the US Constitution, according to which the President shall from time to time give to Congress information on the State of the Union and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient. But the Constituent Assembly did not accept Prof Shah's amendment.

- The address of the President follows a general structure in which it highlights the government's accomplishments from the previous year and sets the broad governance agenda for the coming year.
- The President's speech is essentially the viewpoint of the government and is also written by it.
- Usually, in December, the Prime Minister's office asks the various ministries to start sending in their inputs for the speech.
- The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs sends a message, asking ministries to give information about any legislative proposals that need to be included in the President's address.
- All this information is collated and shaped into a speech, which is then delivered to the President.
- The President's address serves as a platform for the government to make policy and legislative announcements.

4. What if President disagrees with the text of the speech

- The President or Governor cannot refuse to perform the constitutional duty of delivering an address to the legislature.

- But there can be situations when they deviate from the text of the speech prepared by the government.
- So far, there have been no instances of a President doing so.
- But there have been occasions when a Governor skipped or changed a portion of the address to the Assembly.
- Most recently, **Tamil Nadu's Governor** R N Ravi made changes to the prepared speech he read out in the Assembly.
- According to Chief Minister MK Stalin had to step in and move a resolution, which demanded that only the original speech given to the Governor be put in records.
- In 2020, **Kerala Governor** Arif Mohammad Khan, during his address to the Assembly stopped before reading out his speech's paragraph 18, which related to the Kerala government's opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Bill.
- Before this, in 1969, **West Bengal's Governor** Dharma Vira skipped two paragraphs of the speech written by the United Front government, which was at the time led by Chief Minister Ajoy Kumar Mukherjee with Jyoti Basu as the Deputy CM.
- The skipped portions were related to the dismissal of the first United Front government by the Congress-ruled central government.

5. The Procedure and traditions

- After the President's address, the two Houses move a motion to thank the President for her speech.
- This is an occasion for MPs in the two Houses to have a broad debate on governance in the country.
- The issues raised by MPs are then addressed by the Prime Minister, who also replies to the motion of thanks.
- The motion is then put to vote and MPs can express their disagreement by moving amendments to the motion.

Opposition MPs have been successful in getting amendments passed to the motion of thanks in Rajya Sabha on five occasions, including in 1980, 1989, 2001, 2015 and 2016.

However, they have been less successful in the Lok Sabha.

For instance, MPs of the lower house, in 2018, tabled 845 amendments of which 375 were moved and negated.

- The President's address is seen as one of the most solemn occasions in the Parliamentary calendar.
- It is the only time in the year when the whole Parliament comes together.
- The address is an event, associated with ceremony and protocol and the Lok Sabha Secretariat makes extensive arrangements for it.
- Earlier, it used to get 150 yards of red baize cloth from the President's house for the ceremonial procession.
- An officer of Lok Sabha would also be instructed to remind the ADC to the President to bring the water and tumbler from Rashtrapati Bhawan for the President's use.
- The President arrives at Parliament House escorted by the Presidential Guards and is received by the Presiding officers of the two Houses, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and the Secretaries-General of the two Houses.
- He is then escorted to the Central Hall where he delivers his address to the assembled MPs of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

GS II: Governance

MGNREGS

1. Context

The Economic Survey 2022-23 presented on January 31, a day ahead of the Budget, showed that ₹6.49 crores of households demanded work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

2. Key Points

- Of these, ₹6.48 crore households were offered employment by the government and ₹5.7 crores availed of it.
- The Survey credited the scheme as having a positive impact on income per household, agricultural productivity and production-related expenditure.
- It added that this helped with "Income diversification and infusing resilience into rural livelihoods.

3. Importance of MGNREGA to rural employment

- The MGNREGA was passed in 2005 and aimed at enhancing the livelihood security of households in rural areas.

- Under it, the MGNREGS is a demand-driven scheme that guarantees 100 days of unskilled work per year for every rural household that wants it, covering all districts in the country except those with a 100 per cent urban population.
- There are currently ₹15.51 crores of active workers enrolled under the scheme.

The types of projects undertaken for employment generation under MGNREGA include those related to water conservation, land development, construction, agriculture and allied works.

Under the scheme, if work is not provided within 15 days from when it is demanded, the worker has to be given a daily unemployment allowance.

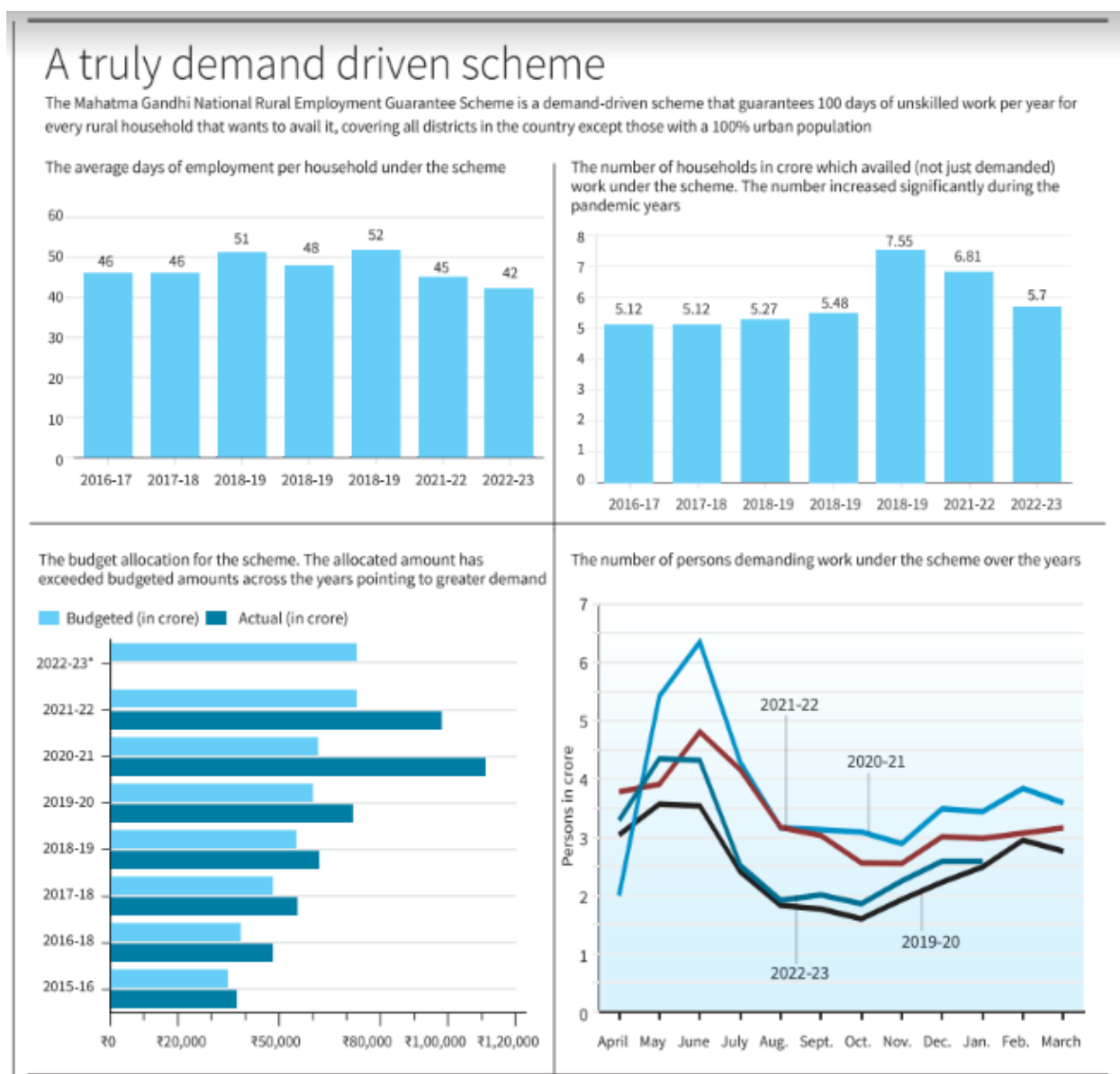
- Additionally, the wages of unskilled workers also have to be paid within 15 days and in case of a delay, the Centre has to compensate them.
- Beyond being a form of insurance or safety net for the country's poorest rural households, the scheme proved to be beneficial not just for rural workers but migrant labourers as well, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic which saw large-scale reverse migration.

4. During the Pandemic

- During the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, when the scheme was ramped up and given its highest-ever budget of ₹1.11 lakh crores, it provided a critical lifeline for a record ₹11 crores workers.
- Studies gave empirical evidence that wages earned under MGNREGA helped compensate somewhere between 20 to 80 per cent of the income loss incurred because of the lockdown.
- This is reflected in the fact that the demand for work under MGNREGA spiked to record-high levels during the pandemic years.
- About ₹8.55 crores households demanded MGNREGA work in 2020-21, followed by ₹8.05 crores in 2021-22, compared to a total of ₹6.16 crores households asking for work in the pre-pandemic year 2019-20.

While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in the Lok Sabha during the Winter Session in December 2022 that the demand for jobs under MGNREGA has been declining in the recent past, the new economic survey data revealed that as of January 24 this year, ₹6.49 crores households had already demanded work under the scheme with two more months till the financial year ends.

- Notably, this demand side figure is still larger than pre-pandemic levels, which indicates that despite the lifting of pandemic curbs and changes in migration trends, rural households are still demanding work under the scheme.
- Besides, the pandemic-induced demand surge notwithstanding, the Ministry of Rural Development informed Parliament in August last year work that demanded under MGNREGS has doubled in the last seven years, that is, ₹3.07 crores households demanded work in May 2022 compared to ₹1.64 in the same month in 2015.



5. Centre's allocation for MGNREGS

- Budgetary allocations to the flagship scheme have increased successively since 2013 from ₹32, 992 crores in the 2013-14 Union budget to ₹73, 000 crores in 2021-22.
- In recent years, the actual expenditure on the scheme has successively been higher than the amount allocated to it at the budget stage.
- For instance, in 2021-22, while ₹73, 000 crores was allocated to MGNREGS, supplementary allocations made later pushed up the revised estimates to ₹98, 000 crores, as funds had run out in the middle of the year.
- Even so, the Central government once again allocated ₹73, 000 crores (25 per cent lower than the previous year's revised estimate) for the scheme in budget 2022-23, then seeking an additional ₹45, 000 crores as supplementary grants in the Winter Session in December.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development last year questioned the rationale behind the Centre's budgetary allocations to MGNREGA.
- Pointing out that despite the total expenditure on the scheme in 2020-21 being around ₹1, 11, 170.86 crores, the panel found it "Perplexing" that the budget estimate (BE) for 2021-22 was just ₹73, 000 crores.
- It also flagged the substantial hike in allocation at the revised estimates stage to augment the initial sum each year.
- Advocacy group NREGA Sangharsh Morcha noted that "every year, about 80-90 per cent of the budget gets exhausted within the first six months, leading to a slowdown of work on the ground and a delay in wage payments to workers.

6. Challenges to its implementation

- While the scheme guarantees 100 days of employment per household per year, an analysis by PRS Legislative Research shows that since 2016-17, on average, less than 10 per cent of the households completed 100 days of wage employment.
- Besides, the average days of employment provided per household under the MGNREGS fell to a five-year low this financial year.
- As of January 20 this year, the average days of employment provided per household is just 42 days, while it was 50 days in 2021-22, and 52 days in 2018-19.
- While a full 100 days of employment has not been provided per year, the Parliament Committee and activist groups have strongly recommended an increase in the number of guaranteed days of work per household from 100

to 150 so that rural populations have a safety net for a longer period in the year.

- If the government intends to provide legally guaranteed 100 days of work per household for at least those that worked in the scheme in the current financial year, that minimum budget for it in the upcoming financial year 2023-24 should be at least ₹2.72 lakh crores.
- Another issue that continues to hamper the scheme's proper implementation is the delay in wage payments.
- As per data released by the Centre, it owed ₹4, 700 crores in MGNREGA wages to 18 states as of December 14, 2022, when just three months remained before the financial year ended.

7. Supreme Court Rulings

- In 2016, the Supreme Court of India directed the government to ensure that wages were paid on time, calling the act of making workers wait for wages for months equal to "forced labour".
- Additionally, as of December 14, the government also owed ₹5, 450 crores worth of material costs (for MGNREGA Projects) to 19 States.

8. Concerns

- Furthermore, the delay in material costs, has a domino impact on the MNREGA work, since a delay in payment breaks the supply chain.
- Because of the prolonged delays in payments, vendors are reluctant to supply materials for any new work.
- Another concern pointed out by a panel of the Rural Development Ministry is that the Minimum wage rate under MGNREGS is fixed by the Centre based on the Consumer Price Index-Agricultural Labourers.
- It noted that the type of work done by agricultural labourers and MGNREGS workers was different, suggesting that minimum wage be decided vis-a-vis the Consumer Price Index-Rural, which it said was more recent and provided for higher expenditure on education and medical care.
- Fake job cards, widespread corruption, late uploading of muster rolls and inconsistent payment of unemployment allowance are some of the other issues hampering the implementation of MGNREGA, the Parliamentary Committee pointed out last year.

NINTH SCHEDULE OF THE CONSTITUTION

1. Context

The Jharkhand Assembly on November 11 cleared two Bills, one increasing reservation in vacant government posts and services in the state to 77 per cent and the second to use land records with 1932 as the cut-off year to determine domicile status of the definition of local residents.

However, the Bill came with a caveat Chief Minister Hemant Soren said they would into force only after the Centre carries out amendments to include these in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution.

2. The Bills

2.1. The first Bill

Jharkhand Reservation of Vacancies in Post and Services (Amendment) Bill, 2022, raised reservations to 77 per cent.

1. Within the reserved category, the Scheduled Castes will get a quota of 12 per cent, up from 10 per cent.
2. 27 Per cent for OBCs, up from 14 per cent.
3. 28 per cent for Scheduled Tribes, a 2 per cent increase and
4. 10 per cent for Economically Weaker Sections.

2.2. The Second Bill

Jharkhand Definition of Local Persons and for Extending the Consequential, Social, Cultural and Other Benefits to Such Local Persons Bill, 2022 is aimed at granting local residents "certain rights, benefits and preferential treatment" over their land.

1. In their stake in the local development of rivers, lakes and fisheries.
2. In local traditional and cultural and commercial enterprises
3. In rights over agricultural indebtedness or availing agricultural loans
4. In the maintenance and protection of land records
For their social security

5. In Employment in the Private and Public sectors and
6. For trade and commerce in the state.

3. About Ninth Schedule

- The Ninth Schedule contains a list of central and state laws which cannot be challenged by courts.
- Currently, 284 such laws are shielded from judicial review.
- Most of the laws protected under the Schedule concern agriculture/ land issues.
- The Schedule became a part of the Constitution in 1951 when the document was amended for the first time.
- It was created by the new Article 31B, which along with 31A was brought in by the government to protect laws related to agrarian reform and for abolishing the Zamindari system.
- While A. 31A extends protection to classes of laws A.
- 31B shields specific laws or enactments.

Article 31B reads: "Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions contained in article 31A, none of the Acts and Regulations specified in the Ninth Schedule nor any of the provisions thereof shall be deemed to be void or ever to have become void, on the ground, that such Act, Regulation or provision is inconsistent with or takes away or abridges any of the rights conferred by, any provisions of this Part and notwithstanding any judgment, decree or order of any court or Tribunal to the contrary, each of the said Acts and Regulations shall, subject to the power of any competent Legislature to repeal or amend it, continue in force".

- The First Amendment added 13 laws to the Schedule.
- Subsequent amendments in 1955, 1964, 1971, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1984, 1990, 1994 and 1999 have taken the number of protected laws to 284.

4. The need to include in Ninth Schedule

- The 77 per cent reservation breaches the 50 per cent ceiling set by the Supreme Court in the landmark 1992 **Sawhney v Union of India** verdict.
- However, piling legislation in the Ninth Schedule shields it from judicial scrutiny.

4.1. Previous instances-Tamil Nadu's case

- The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 1993, reserves 69 per cent of the seats in colleges and jobs in the state government.
- When it ran into legal obstacles in the 1990s after the SC verdict, the then Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, along with other leaders of various parties, led a delegation to New Delhi to meet the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao.
- The Reservation provision was then included in the Ninth Schedule.

5. Exemption from judicial scrutiny

- While the Ninth Schedule provides the law with a "safe harbour" from judicial review, the protection is not blanket.
- When the Tamil Nadu law was challenged in 2007 (**I R Coelho v State of Tamil Nadu**), the Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous nine-judge verdict that while laws placed under Ninth Schedule cannot be challenged on the grounds of violation of fundamental rights, they can be challenged on the ground of violating the basic structure of the Constitution.

The Court clarified that the laws cannot escape the "basic structure" test if inserted into the Ninth Schedule after 1973, as it was in 1973 that the basic structure test was evolved in the Kesavananda Bharati case as the ultimate test to examine the constitutional validity of laws.

5.1. The IR Coelho verdict

- A law that abrogates or abridges rights guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution may violate the basic structure doctrine or it may not.
- If the former is the consequence of the law, whether by amendment of any Article of Part III or by an insertion in the Ninth Schedule such law will have to be invalidated in the exercise of judicial review power of the Court.

GS II: Polity

MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCE

1. Context

On Monday, a CJI Chandrachud-led bench of the Supreme Court decided to examine a petition challenging the constitutional validity of Section 376 DB of the Indian Penal Code.

This section describes the punishment for gang rape of a minor under 12 years of age, to the extent that it prescribes a "**minimum mandatory sentence**" of life imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's life and even death.

2. About mandatory minimum sentencing

2.1. Mohd Hashim vs State of UP and Others

- The concept of mandatory minimum sentencing refers to "a sentence which must be imposed without leaving any discretion to the court. It means a quantum of punishment which cannot be reduced below the period fixed," the Apex court held in its 2016 ruling.
- Essentially, this predetermines the minimum punishment or sentence for certain offences which are considered to be more serious than others, to ensure justice and not let the perpetrator of such an offence go unpunished.
- No matter what the unique, individual circumstances of the offender or the offence might be, the court must mandatorily award this minimum period of sentencing for the offences which prescribe it.

3. Provision for a mandatory sentence

- A concept that comes primarily from the Canadian and American legal systems.
- In India, such sentences are prescribed for all sexual offences under the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act except for the offence of sexual harassment.
- Under Section 8 of the POCSO Act, a punishment of 305 years has been prescribed for offences under Section 7 which deals with offences of sexual assault against children.
- However, imposing the minimum punishment in such cases is mandatory.

3.1. State of Madhya Pradesh vs Vikram Das

The Supreme Court reiterated in its 2019 ruling, "When the legislature has prescribed a minimum sentence without discretion, the same cannot be reduced by the courts. In such cases, imposition of minimum sentence, be it imprisonment or fine, is mandatory and leaves no discretion to the court".

3.2. State of J & K vs Vinay Nanda

The Court said that even if it were to consider the mitigating circumstances, it cannot shy away from giving the minimum sentence as prescribed in the statute.

4. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983

However, it was first in the year 1983, following nationwide protests in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1978 ruling acquitting two policemen for the rape of a 16-year-old Adivasi girl in "Tukaram And Ors v. State of Maharashtra" that the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983 was passed.

The 1983 amendment was the first instance of "mandatory minimum punishment" being prescribed, with seven years for general rapes and ten years for aggravated cases which could include rapes of minors below 12 years and pregnant women, while the maximum punishment or life imprisonment for both was stipulated as 14 years.

4. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, of 2013

Years later, in 2012, following the brutal gangrape and death of a medical student in Delhi, the demand for more stringent rape laws with stricter punishments gained widespread momentum.

This resulted in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, of 2013, which expanded the definition of "rape" beyond penetration to include the insertion of objects, anal sex and oral sex.

The 2013 reforms also updated the definition of "life imprisonment to mean the entire remainder of the convict's life and introduced a minimum sentence of 20 years for gang rape.

Following this, even the death penalty could be meted out to those repeatedly indulging in such offences.

5. Arguments

- The proponents of minimum mandatory sentencing say that it limits the scope for judicial discretion and arbitrariness, thereby enhancing the cause of justice.
- It is also believed that it acts as a deterrent for serious or harsh offences by ensuring that the perpetrator does not go unpunished.

- On the other hand, critics say that this leads to overcrowding of prisons and is unfair as the convict's mitigating circumstances, such as if they are a first-time offender or the sole breadwinner in the family, are often overlooked.
- Moreover, such provisions can often have unintended consequences as judges might feel the prescribed punishment to be excessively stringent in such cases and acquit the accused altogether.
- Such a situation was witnessed in the 2021 ruling of the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court in the case of "**Satish S/o Bandu Ragde vs State of Maharashtra**", where the court acquitted a man accused of sexually assaulting a 12-year-old girl under the POCSO.
- Instead, the court convicted him under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code (Outraging the Modesty of a Woman), for which minimum punishment is one year, on account of the allegations lacking adequate "seriousness".

6. National Crime Records Bureau Statistics

- According to the official statistics issued by the National Crime Records Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2016, there has been no significant increase in convictions despite an increase in reported cases.
- A possible factor could be that judges still have enormous discretion in such cases and the higher degree of stringency attached to the punishment could tilt the balance in favour of a reduction or even, the acquittal of those convicted.

GS II: Governance

MARRIAGE LAWS FOR MINORS

1. Context

Earlier this month, the Supreme Court announced that it would examine whether minor girls, as young as 15 years, can marry based on custom or personal law when such marriages are considered an offence in statutory law.

2. Key points

- The legal age for marriage is 18 years for women and 21 years for men.
- Marriage below this age is considered to be child marriage and hence an offence.

- In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife who is below 18 years, is rape, reading down Exception 2 to Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code which allowed the husband of a girl child between 15 and 18 years of age to have non-consensual sex with her.

3. Supreme Court Ruling

- On January 13, the Supreme Court said it would examine whether girls as young as 15 years old can enter into wedlock if their personal law allows it.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud issued a formal notice on a petition filed by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) against a recent order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court that said a girl, on attaining puberty or the age of 15 years and above, could be married based on Muslim personal law, irrespective of the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

- The Supreme Court said the High Court order would not act as a judicial precedent for other courts.
- The NCPCR argued that when girls as young as 14 and 15 are being married off, a plea of personal law and custom cannot be used when the POCSO Act and the Indian Penal Code make such marriages an offence.
- The Supreme Court has also appealed to Parliament to lower the age of consent under the POCSO Act and the IPC which set it at 18 years, thus criminalising all adolescent consensual sexual activity.
- Last December, the government told Parliament that it does not plan to do that yet.

4. Various Marriage laws in India

- The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 has sought to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, to increase the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years.
- In December 2021, it was referred to a parliamentary standing committee for further deliberations and it has already got three extensions to submit its report, the last being in October 2022.
- Last December, the Supreme Court asked the government to respond to another petition filed by the National Commission for Women (NCW) to

make the minimum age of marriage for Muslim women on par with persons belonging to other faiths.

- The NCW, like the NCPCR, had raised the question of whether personal law could override statutory provisions of the POSCO Act and other laws.

The NCW petition stated that under the Indian Christian Marriage Act, of 1872, the Paris Marriage and Divorce Act, of 1936, the Special Marriage Act, of 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, of 1955, the Minimum age of marriage for a man is 21 years and for women, it is 18 years.

However, under the Muslim Personal law in India, persons who have attained puberty are eligible to get married i.e. on attaining the age of 15 years, while they are still minor.

5. Assam Government decreed

- The Assam Cabinet recently announced that men who marry minor girls would be booked under stringent laws prescribing imprisonment from two years to life.
- Citing the National Family Health Survey-5 report, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said an average of 31.8 per cent of girls in Assam get married at the "prohibited age" and 11.7 per cent become mothers before adulthood.
- The national average is 23.3 per cent and 6.8 per cent respectively.

5.1. Child Marriages in different states

- An analysis of Child Marriage in India based on Census 2011 by Young Lives, India and NCPCR in June 2017 identified 70 districts spread across 13 States including Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal where the prevalence of child marriage is high.
- According to activists and health workers, targeted interventions including awareness campaigns on reproductive health and provisions of the law are being carried out to prevent and reduce child marriage and though NFHS-5 data show improvement, there is a lot of ground left to be covered.
- In Jharkhand, according to NFHS-5 (2021), 32.2 per cent of women married before they turned 18 compared to 37.9 per cent in 2016 (NFHS 4)
- In West Bengal, 41.6 per cent of women got married before they turned 18 (NFHS-5) and the percentage was the same in NFHS-4

- Madhya Pradesh has seen a reduction in child marriage (from 32.4 per cent in NFHS-4 to 23.1 per cent in NFHS-5), though the infant mortality rate is high at 41.3 per 1000 live births.

6. Effects of early marriage

- The Young Lives, India-NCPCR study pointed out that girls who got married before turning into adults lacked reproductive choices and were denied a host of other rights, including education, autonomy and often a lack of livelihood.
- With 59 per cent of Indian girls in the 15-19 group suffering from anaemia it stood at 54 per cent in NFHS-4 early child-bearing could result in poor maternal and child health and poor nutritional status.
- Health experts tie maternal health to another crucial factor in education.
- The National percentage of women with 10 or more years of schooling is 41 per cent (NFHS-5) compared to 35.7 per cent in NFHS-4, The data varies from State to State.
- In West Bengal, according to NFHS-5, 32.9 Per cent of women have finished 10 or more years of schooling.
- In two villages of Birbhum district in West Bengal that the anthropologist Mukulika Banerjee has studied since 1998, she observed that while girls continued to be married off early for a variety of reasons, those that had completed school seemed to be making the radical decision to have only one child.
- They said they would prefer to raise one child with care and were able to help them with homework, provide better nutrition and so on.

7. Provisions of the PCMA

- Women's rights activists point out that parents often use the PCMA to punish their daughters who marry against their wishes or elope to evade forced marriages, domestic abuse and lack of educational possibilities.
- Hence, within a patriarchal setting, it is more likely that the change in the age limit will increase parents' authority over young adults.
- A 2008 Law Commission report on family law reform recommended a uniform age of marriage for boys and girls at 18 years and not 21.
- It held that since 18 is the age at which a citizen can vote, they should be allowed to marry at that age too.

POSTAL BALLOTS

1. Context

For a country like India where each constituency can have lakhs of voters, counting votes is a complex process that requires both pace and precision. As Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh wait for the results of their Assembly elections, we take a look at who are the individuals present in the counting rooms and the roles they play in the process. When the votes for an election are being counted, you must have often heard that postal ballots are counted first.

2. What are Postal Ballots?

- A restricted set of voters can exercise postal voting. Through this facility, a voter can cast her vote remotely by recording her preference on an official ballot paper and sending it back to the election officer before counting.
- Members of the armed forces like the Army, Navy, and Air Force, members of the armed police force of a state (serving outside the state), government employees posted outside India, and their spouses are entitled to vote only by post.
- In other words, they can't vote in person. Voters under preventive detention can also vote only by post.
- Special voters such as the President of India, Vice President, Governors, Union Cabinet ministers, Speaker of the House, and government officers on poll duty have the option to vote by post. But they have to apply through a prescribed form to avail of this facility.
- There is also a facility for absentee voters to vote through PBs. These voters are those who are unable to physically cast their vote due to their service conditions.
- For instance, railway employees who are posted outside their home state are counted as absentee voters.
- In 2020, the Election Commission (EC) introduced the facility of PBs for senior citizens, people with disabilities (PwD), and those under Covid-19 quarantine.

- In the Gujarat elections this year, 8.6 lakh senior citizens and PwDs registered to vote, according to reports from the Gujarat Election Commission Office.

3. How are voters using Postal Ballots?

- The Returning Officer (RO) is supposed to print ballot papers within 24 hours of the last date of nomination withdrawal and dispatch them within a day, to ensure that voters have enough time to receive the ballots, cast their vote, and return the ballots to the RO on time.
- The voters are supposed to mark their preference such that “the intention of the voter to vote for a particular candidate is clear beyond any reasonable doubt.”
- Unclear or improper marking can lead to the PB getting rejected.
- Alongside the ballot, the envelope containing the PB also contains a declaration by the voter in Form 13-A which must be appropriately filled in for the vote to count with attestation from an official that marks the eligibility of the voter to avail of this facility.

4. Counting postal ballots

- According to EC rules, All PBs received by the RO up to the hour fixed for the commencement of counting must be counted.
- Thus even if one’s PB arrives at the office of the RO on the morning of counting, it can still be counted as long as it reaches before the commencement of counting itself.
- Each counting table receives not more than 500 ballots in each round with up to four tables dedicated to calculating just PBs.
- On a counting table, an Assistant Returning Officer (ARO), one counting supervisor, two counting assistants, and a micro-observer are present. Persons involved in postal ballot counting are specifically trained in all aspects of postal ballot voting. Each table also has one counting agent representing each candidate.

A PB paper will be rejected on the following grounds

- If no vote is recorded thereon;
- If votes are given on it in favor of more than one candidate;
- If it is a spurious ballot paper;

- If it has been so damaged or mutilated that its identity as the genuine ballot paper cannot be established;
- If it is not returned in the appropriate cover/envelope that was sent to the voter by the RO.
- If the mark indicating the vote is made in such a way that it is doubtful to make out the candidate to whom the vote has been given; or.
- If it bears any mark or writing by which the voter can be identified.

5. Returning Officer

The Returning Officer (RO) for each constituency by the Election Commission. during the duration of the election, the RO is the highest authority in the constituency having a wide range of powers to peacefully and impartially conduct elections.

Concerning counting of votes, the duties of RO have:

- To designate the counting centers and get them approved by the Commission well in advance;
To send notice to the candidates about the place, date, and time of counting of votes;
 - To send notice to the candidates about the place, date, and time of counting of votes;
 - To appoint and train counting staff;
 - To count the votes and declare the result.
- ROs themselves do not count all votes but verify the counting at multiple stages and announce the results.
 - They are the final authority in the matter of vote counting in an election. Assist the RO, the EC also appoints Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) to assist the RO in carrying out all the duties.
 - In the case of multiple counting centers in a constituency, each center will be under the supervision of one ARO. The number of AROs appointed can vary, depending on the requirement of the constituency.
 - Generally, the District Magistrate is the ex-officio RO in Lok Sabha elections while the sub-Divisional Magistrate is the RO in state assembly elections.

6. Counting Supervisors and Assistants

- A counting room will have multiple counting tables with each counting a set number of postal ballots/EVMs on a round-to-round basis.
- On each table, there is a counting supervisor and up to two assistants who do the actual counting. They should be gazetted officers and appointed by the RO.
- They receive specific training about the tasks they are expected to undertake. For instance, for those counting postal ballots, the training is different from that received for counting EVM votes.

7. EC-appointed Observers

- The Election Commission appoints observers at each counting room, who are supposed to record the proceedings and file a report.
- They are generally employees of the government of India and are tasked with the duty to oversee the overall functioning of the election apparatus.
- Micro-observers are appointed for each table where votes are counted. Observers are also supposed to randomly verify votes counted for some EVMs in each round of counting.
- Overall, they are the eyes and ears of the Election Commission on the ground and are there to ensure that all procedures are being followed.

8. Candidates and Counting Agents

- Candidates who were on the ballot are also allowed in the counting room along with their representatives. All parties and candidates send counting agents to ensure that votes are counted fairly and according to procedures and lodge complaints if any.
- These counting agents are bound by a certain code prescribed in the Handbook for counting agents and must follow the EC's instructions to not disrupt the counting process.

9. Security

While armed forces are typically not supposed to enter counting rooms, they are in charge of maintaining multiple layers of security, both at the counting room as well as the path through which EVMs are brought to the counting rooms from their strong rooms (where they are stored after polling). The security forces, including CRPF and local police, are under the authority of the RO of the constituency.

SWISS BANKS

1. Context

A Whistleblower has leaked information on more than \$100 billion held in 30, 000 accounts of Zurich-headquartered Credit Suisse, one of the world's most iconic banks a lot of which is suspected to be dirty money of human rights abuses, fraudsters and businesspersons who have been put under international sanctions.

2. Key points

- The database was given to the German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung, which shared it with the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and 46 other news publications including The New York Times, The Guardian and Le Monde.
- The investigation refocused attention on Swiss banks and their famous, century-old culture of secrecy which is under pressure as countries around the world try to get their super-rich to pay legitimate taxes on their wealth.

3. Centuries of secrecy

- Since at least the beginning of the 18th century, Geneva had become a favoured destination of French royalty and other European elites seeking discreet havens to stash their wealth and in 1713, Swiss government authorities announced laws prohibiting bankers from giving out information about their customers.
- Thus began a powerful culture of silence and secrecy that went on to become the defining feature of Swiss banking.
- In 1934, Switzerland passed the Federal Act on Banks and Savings Banks, commonly known as the Banking Law of 1934 or the Swiss Banking Act.
- The best-known part of the law, Article 47, made it a crime to reveal details or information about customers to almost anyone including the government without their consent and in the absence of a criminal complaint.
- Violators can get five years in prison; Article 47 lies at the heart of some of the most stringent banking secrecy laws anywhere.

As wealth became easily mobile across international borders, the safety and stability of Swiss banks, located in a peaceful, politically neutral country

committed to discretion, presented an irresistible attraction for the super-rich and others who did not want to answer questions about sources of their wealth.

- Depictions in films created popular images of long tunnels leading to underground vaults and bank officials with an unwavering reputation for client confidentiality.

4. Safe and easy banking

- Swiss bank accounts are attractive to depositors because they combine low levels of risk with very high levels of privacy.
- The Swiss economy is extremely stable and the banks are run at very high levels of professionalism. Almost any adult in the world can open an account in a Swiss bank.
- Opening an account is not difficult and requires not much more than basic KYC, including proof of identity such as a passport.
- A minimum balance is required, which varies with the type of account and from bank to bank.
- The patronage of international clients is critical to Swiss banks and the Swiss economy as a whole.
- The Guardian reported that almost half of the 7.9 trillion Swiss francs (\$8.59 trillion) of assets under management in Switzerland belong to foreign clients.
- The banking industry contributes a tenth of Switzerland's GDP and a similar share of the Country's jobs.
- There are more than 240 banks in the country but Credit Suisse and UBS control about 50 per cent of all banking assets.

5. Black Money

- Black money allegedly stashed away by Indians in Swiss banks is a political issue in India and parties and political functionaries have often made promises to bring it back.
- Swiss authorities have maintained that they cooperate with the Indian government to fight tax evasion and fraud.
- The two countries have had a system of automatic exchange of information in tax matters since 2018, under which detailed financial information on all Indian residents with accounts in Swiss financial institutions was provided for the first time to Indian authorities in September 2019.

INDUS WATERS TREATY

1. Context

New Delhi has issued a notice to Islamabad seeking modification of the more than six-decade-old Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) that governs the sharing of waters of six rivers in the Indus system between the two countries.

2. Key points

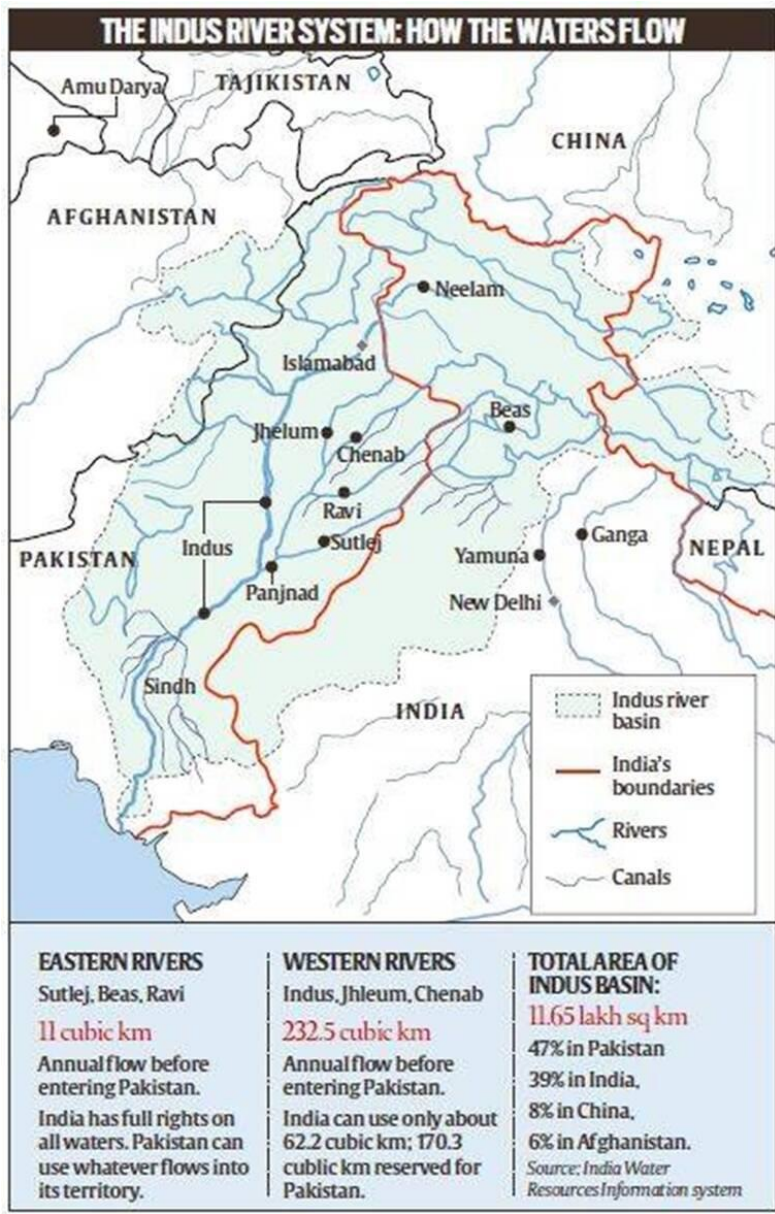
- New Delhi said the notice follows Pakistan's continued "intransigence" in implementing the treaty, by raising repeated objections to the construction of hydel projects on the Indian side.
- The notice sent on January 25 through the Commissioner for Indus Waters, gives Pakistan 90 days to consider entering into intergovernmental negotiations to rectify the material breach of the treaty.
- This process would also update the IWT to incorporate the lessons learned over the last 62 years.
- The notice has invoked Article XII (3) of the treaty which says: The provisions of this Treaty may from time to time be modified by a duly ratified treaty concluded for that purpose between the two Governments.
- India was initiating the process to make changes to the 1960 treaty.

3. The dispute over the hydel projects

- The notice appears to be a fallout of a longstanding dispute over two hydroelectric power projects that India is constructing one on the Kishanganga river, a tributary of Jhelum and the other on the Chenab.
- Pakistan has raised objections to these projects and dispute resolution mechanisms under the Treaty have been invoked multiple times. But a full resolution has not been reached.
- In 2015, Pakistan asked that a Neutral Expert should be appointed to examine its technical objections to the Kishanganga and Ratle HEPs.
- But the following year, Pakistan unilaterally retracted this request and proposed that a Court of Arbitration should adjudicate its objections.
- In August 2016, Pakistan approached the World Bank, which brokered the 1960 Treaty, seeking the constitution of a Court of Arbitration under the relevant dispute redressal provisions of the Treaty.

Instead of responding to Pakistan's request for a Court of Arbitration, India moved a separate application asking for the appointment of a Neutral Expert, which is a lower level of dispute resolution provided in the Treaty.

- India argued that Pakistan's request for a Court of Arbitration violated the graded mechanism of dispute resolution in the Treaty.
- In between, a significant event happened that had consequences for the Treaty.
- A Pakistan-backed terror attack on Uri in September 2016 prompted calls within India to walk out of the Indus Waters Treaty, which allows a significantly bigger share of the six river glasses of water to Pakistan.
- The Prime Minister had famously said that blood and water could not flow together and India has suspended routine bi-annual talks between the Indus Commissioners of the two countries.



4. Applications moved by Pakistan and India

- The World Bank, the third party to the Treaty and the acknowledged arbiter of disputes were, meanwhile faced with a unique situation of having received two separate requests for the same dispute.
- New Delhi feels that the World Bank is just a facilitator and has a limited role.
- On December 12, 2016, the World Bank announced a "pause" in the separate processes initiated by India and Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty to allow the two countries to consider alternative ways to resolve their disagreements.

- The regular meetings of Indus Waters Commissioners resumed in 2017 and India tried to use these to find mutually agreeable solutions between 2017 and 2022.
- Pakistan refused to discuss these issues at these meetings.
- At Pakistan's continued insistence, the World Bank, in March last year, initiated actions on the requests of both India and Pakistan.

On March 31, 2022, the World Bank decided to resume the process of appointing a Neutral Expert and a Chairman for the Court of Arbitration.

In October last year, the Bank named Michel Lino as the Neutral Expert and Prof. Sean Murphy as Chairman of the Court of Arbitration.

- They will carry out their duties in their capacity as subject matter experts and independently of any other appointments they may currently hold.
- On October 19, 2022, the Ministry of External Affairs said, " We have noted the World Bank's announcement to concurrently appoint a Neutral Expert and a Chair of the Court of Arbitration in the ongoing matter related to the Kishanganga and Ratle projects".
- Recognising the World Bank's admission in its announcement that "carrying out two processes concurrently poses practical and legal challenges".
- India would assess the matter that "India believes that the implementation of the Indus Water Treaty must be in the letter and spirit of the Treaty".
- Such parallel consideration of the same issues is not provided for in any provisions of the Treaty and India has been repeatedly citing the possibility of the two processes delivering contradictory rulings, which could lead to an unprecedented and legally untenable situation, which is unforeseen in Treaty provisions.

5. Dispute redressal mechanism

- The dispute redressal mechanism provided under Article IX of the IWT is graded.
- It's a 3-level mechanism.
- So, whenever India plans to start a project, under the Indus Water Treaty, it has to inform Pakistan that it is planning to build a project.
- Pakistan might oppose it and ask for more details. That would mean there is a question and in case there is a question, that question has to be clarified between the two sides at the level of the Indus Commissioners.
- If that difference is not resolved by them, then the level is raised. The question then becomes a difference.

- That difference is to be resolved by another set mechanism, which is the Neutral Expert.
- It is at this stage that the World Bank comes into the picture.
- In case the Neutral Expert says that they are not able to resolve the difference or that the issue needs an interpretation of the Treaty, then that difference becomes a dispute.
It then goes to the third stage the Court of Arbitration.
- To Sum up, it's a very graded and sequential mechanism first Commissioner, then the Neutral Expert and only then the Court of Arbitration.

6. India's notice and its implications

- While the immediate provocation for the modification is to address the issue of two parallel mechanisms, at this point, the implications of India's notice for modifying the treaty are not very clear.
- Article XII (3) of the Treaty that India has invoked is not a dispute redressal mechanism.
- It is in effect, a provision to amend the Treaty.
- However, an amendment or modification can happen only through a "duly ratified Treaty concluded for that purpose between the two governments".
- Pakistan is under no obligation to agree to India's proposal.
- As of now, it is not clear what happens if Pakistan does not respond to India's notice within 90 days.

The next provision in the Treaty, Article XII (4), provides for the termination of the Treaty through a similar process " a duly ratified Treaty concluded for that the purpose between the two governments".

- India has not spelt out exactly what it wants to be modified in the Treaty.
- But over the last few years, especially since the Uri attack, there has been a growing demand in India to use the Indus Waters Treaty as a strategic tool, considering that India has the natural advantage of being the upper riparian state.
- India has not fully utilized its rights over the waters of the three east-flowing rivers Ravi, Beas and Sutlej over which India has full control under the Treaty.
It has also not adequately utilized the limited rights over the three west-flowing rivers Indus, Chenab and Jhelum which are meant for Pakistan.
- Following the Uri attack, India established a high-level task force to exploit the full potential of the Indus Waters Treaty.

- Accordingly, India has been working to start several big and small hydroelectric projects that had either been stalled or were in the planning stages.

GS II: Governance

LIVING WILL

1. Context

A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Justice K M Joseph agreed to significantly ease the procedure for passive euthanasia in the country by altering the existing guidelines for ‘living wills’, as laid down in its 2018 judgment in Common Cause vs. Union of India & Anr, which allowed passive euthanasia.

2. What is Euthanasia?

Euthanasia refers to the practice of intentionally ending a life to relieve pain and suffering. With Greek roots, the word translates into ‘good death’ or ‘easy death’ and is also known as ‘mercy killing’. It is associated with people with a terminal illness or who have suffered irreversible incapacitation and are undergoing incurable pain.

The right to die or end one’s life is not a novel aspect of modern society. Instances of active euthanasia are found in the Greek civilization. Debates about the justifiability of euthanasia on moral, religious, and practical grounds, however, have been intrinsic to discussions on the theme.

3. Active and Passive Euthanasia

- Active euthanasia involves an active intervention to end a person’s life with substances or external force, such as administering a lethal injection.
- Passive euthanasia refers to withdrawing life support or treatment that is essential to keep a terminally ill person alive.
- Passive euthanasia was legalized in India by the Supreme Court in 2018, contingent upon the person having a ‘living will’ or a written document

specifying what actions should be taken if the person cannot make their own medical decisions in the future.

- If a person does not have a living will, family members can make a plea before the High Court to seek permission for passive euthanasia.

4. Euthanasia in India

- The present law on euthanasia in India is a result of the landmark Supreme Court judgment in the Common Cause v. Union of India, 2018 case which legalized passive euthanasia and stated that the same was not an offense under IPC as it neither at par with murder nor with an attempt to suicide.
- The SC used religious texts and scriptures and references from schools of jurisprudence to indicate the moral sanction for ending the life of the terminally ill.
- It held that the 'right to die' is a part of Article 21 of the Constitution, and a person has a right to live with dignity until his death. The judgment permitted the execution of a Living Will or advanced medical directives by declaring that a Living Will is a part of the right to live with dignity.
- The Apex Court also introduced guidelines to be followed while performing euthanasia and a set of procedures involved in executing a Living Will.
- A Living Will is a document containing a person's wishes in case s/he becomes incapacitated. It must be executed by a patient who is of sound mind and capable of understanding its consequences.

5. Evolution of laws on Passive Euthanasia

- The first judgment to deal with the issue of euthanasia was the Maruti Shripati Dubal v. State of Maharashtra case, 1986 where the Bombay High Court declared that the rights have both negative and positive aspects. The right to life under Article 21 could therefore also be interpreted as the right not to live a forced life.
- In the P Rathinam v Union of India, 1994, the Supreme Court held that criminal penalties for suicide violate the constitutional right to life by amounting to a double punishment and it rendered Section 309 of the IPC unconstitutional.
- The above judgment was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1996 in Gian Kaur v. the State of Punjab, which pronounced the judgment that both active and passive euthanasia and assisted suicide is unlawful in India and that the right to life did not include the right to die.

- The landmark judgment in 2011 in the Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India was a major milestone wherein the SC held that passive euthanasia is legally valid in the country under exceptional circumstances, which allowed withdrawal of life support to patients in a persistent vegetative state (PVS).

6. Living will 2018 Guidelines

- As per 2018 guidelines, a living will be required to be signed by an executor (the individual seeking euthanasia) in the presence of two attesting witnesses, preferably independent, and to be further countersigned by a Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC).
- The treating physician was required to constitute a board comprising three expert medical practitioners from specific but varied fields of medicine, with at least 20 years of experience, who would decide whether to carry out the living will or not.
- If the medical board granted permission, the will had to be forwarded to the District Collector for his approval.
- The Collector was to then form another medical board of three expert doctors, including the Chief District Medical Officer.
- Only if this second board agreed with the hospital board's findings would the decision be forwarded to the JMFC, who would then visit the patient and examine whether to accord approval.

7. Living Will new guidelines

- Instead of the hospital and Collector forming the two medical boards, both boards will now be formed by the hospital.
- The requirement of 20 years of experience for doctors has been relaxed to five years. The requirement for the Magistrate's approval has been replaced by an intimation to the Magistrate. The medical board must communicate its decision within 48 hours; the earlier guidelines specified no time limit.
- According to the 2018 Judgement, only a judicial magistrate could attest or countersign a living will, which would remain with the district court.
- In the apex court's new judgment, this power has been given to a notary or a gazetted officer and the document will now be in the national health records accessible by hospitals.
- The 2018 Judgement made no mention of any stipulated time within which a decision had to be made.

- Now, a secondary board must immediately be constituted by the hospital and the primary/secondary board must decide within 48 hours on the withdrawal of further treatment.

GS II: Governance

MINIMUM GOVERNMENT, MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE

1. Context

Recently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, reiterated the idea, saying the Modi government's schemes had been successful because of the minimum government, maximum governance formula.

2. Key points

The government ensured the maxim reached the "**grassroots**" in four ways:

1. The decentralisation of development.
2. The policy of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas aur Sabka Prayaas.
3. The idea of continuous performance improvement is based on competition.
4. The idea of improving implementation through the use of technology.

3. About Minimum interference and e-governance

- Essentially, "**minimum government, maximum governance**" refers to reducing government intervention in the common man's day-to-day activities and empowering the people to ensure their own as well as the country's growth and development.
- While there are several aspects to achieving "**minimum government**", it broadly includes making government processes easier by reducing red-tapism and corruption and encouraging e-governance.
- The government had eased the common man's life by abolishing around 1,600 obsolete laws, doing away with interviews for government jobs and encouraging the digitization of facilities like the RTI.

4. Digital India

- A significant step by the government to push for a "Digital India" and encourage citizen participation was the "MyGov" platform, launched in August 2014.
- This is a citizen-centric platform to empower people to connect with the Government and contribute towards good governance.
- It also seeks expert advice from the people, thoughts and ideas on various topics that concern India.
- Citizens can join the discussion to share, debate and add value.
- The MyGov platform in 2021 claimed to have become the "world's largest citizen engagement platform with over 1.9 crore registered users.

5. NeSDA

- In 2019, the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances launched the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) initiative to measure the success of e-Governance services.
- In its last report, which was published in 2021, the NeSDA said that 74 per cent of respondents of a nationwide survey had expressed satisfaction with e-services.
- The delivery of e-services on integrated or centralized portals over independent departments was driving "**higher citizen satisfaction**".

6. A push for privatisation

- "Minimum government, maximum governance" also means lesser public undertakings and a push for privatisation.
- The government had made over Rs 4.04 lakh crore ever since it came to power in 2014 through disinvestments.
- In the financial year 2023, it raised over Rs 31, 000 crore in disinvestments, according to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management.
- This, however, falls much short of the full-year budget target of Rs 65, 000 crores.

7. Arguments for and against

- The idea of a smaller, smarter, more efficient government comprising clever people with better skills will be better than an over-weaning bureaucracy.
- Maximum governance also allows the intellectual force of the country to leverage the government.
- We need the government to do the minimum for stakeholders within a sector to regulate each other effectively.

- The responsibilities of a well-governed, well-functioning society should not reside with the government, they should reside right across the society.
- The citizens of any society have to keep fighting and acting to be a good society for any polity to work.

8. Framing the challenges

- The role of the government in framing the challenges that face a society the identity of a nation, the aspirations, and their government cannot be minimum government because the government is the only body which can speak with one clear voice.
- Occasionally, in many small governments, where there have been attempts to roll back governments, the governments have also rolled back from that, which is problematic.
- It's particularly problematic in a country with many potential cleavages and where that framing is so important.

9. Concerns

- The basic principles that make an institution have the energy it does have been completely eroded.
- So the private sector works in areas where the profit motive is effective... Civil society works where there's voluntary persuasion... we persuade each other.
- The state works where something is backed by democratic legitimacy and coercion.
- Inserting the principle of coercion in areas where voluntary persuasion should work.
- Minimum government is going to mean CSIR will do slum redevelopment in Bombay designed to fail.
- The confusion of roles where in a sense the motivation underlying every institution that makes it the institution that it is, that gives its distinctiveness, when you blur that to a point, it completely actually erodes the professional identity of all those institutions.
- So, now the companies that are beginning to behave like bureaucracies and government, on the other hand being transactional and profit-minded.

NATIONAL VOTERS DAY

1.Context

Election Commission of India is celebrating **13th National Voters' Day** on 25th January 2023.

Hon'ble President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu will be the Chief Guest at the national function being organized in New Delhi by the Election Commission of India. **Union Minister for Law and Justice, Shri Kiren Rijju** will grace the function as Guest of Honour.

2.Theme of 2023 NVD

The theme for this year's NVD, '**Nothing Like Voting, I Vote for Sure**' is dedicated to voters which conveys individual's feeling and aspiration towards participation in the electoral process through power of their vote. The logo is designed to showcase festivity and inclusivity of the electoral process. Ashoka Chakra in the background represents the largest democracy of the world, whereas the inked finger represents participation of each and every voter of the country. The tick mark in the logo stands for informed decision making by the voter.



Image Source: [pib](#)

3.Importance of the day

India is the biggest democracy in the world. The diverse identity of the voters, wide variety in their expectations and aspirations, as well as the large number of political parties and organisations truly makes every election a festival in the country

Every year, India celebrates the National Voters Day on January 25 to encourage each and every vote in the country to participate in the electoral process. The idea of marking this day is not very old, tracing its origin to 2011

People's voting choices determine who comes to power at the local, regional, or national level. This means that votes have the power to choose which people, ideology, and policies will determine the course of the nation in the next few years. Voting, thus, is prominent in determining the course of people's lives

People's beliefs, needs, and aspirations differ from generation to generation. It is crucial that the upcoming generation, which would have a significant role to play in the nation's socio-cultural and economic sphere, shows up to vote and feels included in the process of nation-building

4.History

The country marked its first-ever National Voters Day in 2011. The idea behind the celebration was to encourage more young voters to take part in the electoral process.

The Union government back then, under the leadership of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, approved a proposal of the law ministry to this end

The need for doing something to highlight the importance of voting was felt when Ambika Soni, then-information and broadcasting minister, pointed out that new voters (people who recently turned 18) were showing less interest in getting registered in the electoral rolls

To address this issue, the Election Commission of India (ECI) decided to launch a nationwide effort to identify all eligible voters who reach the age of 18 on January 1 annually. Such voters would be enrolled and given the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) on January 25 every year

5.Quotes from Prominent people

There is no such thing as a vote that doesn't matter. It all matters. -**Barack Obama**

The vote is the most powerful non-violent tool we have. - **John Lewis**

As long as we have not votes, we must be disorderly. - **Christabel Pankhurst**

Someone struggled for your right to vote. Use it. - **Susan B Anthony**

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education. - **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

GS II: Polity

GOVERNOR'S POWER

1. Context

In recent years, the bitterness between states and Governors has been largely about the selection of the party to form a government, the deadline for providing a majority, sitting on Bills, and passing negative remarks on the state administration. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee blocked Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Twitter.

2. About Governor

- Part VI of the Constitution deals with the states and lists out the role and responsibility of the Governor of states.
- Article 153 provides for a Governor of every state and is the constitutional head of the state.
- The executive power of the State shall be vested in the Governor and shall be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him in accordance with this Constitution (Article 154).
- Governor performs the same duties as of President, but as the executive head of a State; the work remains the same as of the office of the President of India.
- A Governor is a nominated head and not an elected representative.
- Dual Role of the Governor as head and representative
 - Constitutional head of state; and
 - Link between Union and State governments.
- His dual role makes him a key functionary in the Indian Constitutional system.

3. Powers of Governor

- Under Article 161 the Governor has the following powers –the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites, or remissions of punishment; the power to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.
- The Governor makes all executive decisions on behalf of the state government (Article 166(1)).
- The Governor appoints the Chief Minister and other cabinet members. They serve at the pleasure of the Governor (Article 164).
- He may create rules for the efficient execution of a state government's work and its distribution among the ministers. (Article 166(3))
- He appoints the state's advocate general and determines his tenure and conditions of service.

- He has the authority to recommend to the President the declaration of a state of constitutional emergency.
- He may request from the Chief Minister any information about the administration of the state's affairs, as well as legislative suggestions (Article 167).
- The governor appoints the state election commissioner and establishes his term of office and working conditions (Article 243K).

4. Friction points between the States and Governor

- In recent years, these have been largely about the selection of the party to form a government, the deadline for proving the majority, sitting on Bills, and passing negative remarks on the state administration.
- Kerala's government was dismissed based on a report by the Governor. Several state governments have been dismissed since then, including 63 through President's Rule orders issued by Governors between 1971 and 1990.
- Kerala Governor in 2020 turned down a request to summon a special sitting of the Assembly to debate the three central farm laws.
- In 2018 J&K Governor dissolved the Assembly amid indications that various parties were coming together to form the government. This paved the way for the Centre to later bifurcate the state into two Union territories, by considering the Governor as the government.
- In 2019 Maharashtra Governor quietly invited the BJP leader and administered his oath as CM. This government lasted just 80 hours. Six months later, the governor refused to nominate CM to the Legislative Council.
- Following the Karnataka polls in 2018, Governor Vajubhai Vala invited the BJP to form the government and gave B S Yeddyurappa 15 days to prove the majority. Challenged by Congress and JDS in the Supreme Court, it was reduced to three days.

5. Reasons for the friction between the Governor and the state governments

- There is no provision for impeaching the Governor, who is appointed by the President on the Centre's advice. While the Governor has a 5-year tenure, he can remain in office only until the pleasure of the President.
- There are no guidelines for the exercise of the Governor's powers, including for appointing a CM or dissolving the Assembly. There is no limit set for how long a Governor can withhold assent to a Bill.

- According to the Constitutional expert, although the Constituent Assembly envisaged the governor to be apolitical. But the truth is, politicians, become Governors and then resign to fight elections.
- The CM is answerable to the people. But the Governor is answerable to no one except the Centre. This is the fundamental defect in the Constitution.

6. Reforms Suggested

Several Panels, the Administrative Reforms Commission of 1968 and the Sarkaria Commission of 1988 have recommended reforms such as

- selection of the Governor through a panel comprising the PM, the Home Minister, the Lok Sabha Speaker, and the CM.
- Apart from fixing his tenure for five years
- Recommendations have also been made for a provision to impeach the Governor by the Assembly.

GS II: Polity

PARAM VIR CHAKRA AWARDEES

1. Context

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday named the 21 largest unnamed islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands after India's 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees.

2. Key points

- The ceremony was organised on the occasion of Parakram Diwas, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary.
- Giving due respect to the real-life heroes of the country has always been accorded the highest priority by the Prime Minister.
- Going ahead with this spirit, it has now been decided to name the 21 largest unnamed islands of the island group after 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees.
- Previously, Ross Island was renamed Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Dweep by the Prime Minister during his visit to the Island in 2018.
- Neil Island and Havelock Island were also renamed Shaheed Dweep and Swaraj Dweep.

3. About Param vir Chakra Award

Instituted on 26 Jan 1950, to recognize the most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice in the presence of the enemy

Medal: Circular in shape, made of bronze, one and three eighth inches in diameter and on obverse, four replicas of "**Indra's Vajra**" with the State Emblem (including the motto), embossed in the centre. On its reverse, it shall have embossed Param Vir Chakra both in Hindi and English with two lotus flowers between Hindi and English. The fitting will be swivel mounting

Ribbon: Plain purple coloured ribbon.

Bar: If any recipient of the Chakra again performs such an act of bravery, as makes him or her eligible to receive the Chakra, such further act of bravery shall be recorded by a Bar to be attached to the riband by which the Chakra is suspended. For every Bar awarded, a replica of the "**Indra's Vajra**" in miniature shall be added to the riband when worn alone.

Personnel Eligible: The following categories of personnel shall be eligible for the Chakra :-

- Officers, men and women of all ranks of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, of any of the Reserve Forces, of the Territorial Army, Militia and of any other lawfully constituted Armed Forces.
- Matrons, Sisters, Nurses and the staff of the Nursing Services and other Services pertaining to Hospitals and Nursing and Civilians of either sex serving regularly or temporarily under the orders, directions or supervision of any of the above-mentioned Forces.

Conditions of Eligibility: The Chakra is awarded for most conspicuous bravery or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self sacrifice, in the presence of the

enemy, whether on land, at sea, or in the air. The decoration may be awarded posthumously.

Monetary Allowance: Rs. 3000/- and each bar to the decoration will carry the same amount of monetary allowance as admissible to the original award with effect from 01.01.1996.

PARAM VIR CHAKRA AWARDEES 2023

Recipients of the Param Vir Chakra	Profiles
Major Somnath Sharma	In the Battle of Badgam that took place on November 3, 1947, Major Sharma led the solitary company of the 4th Battalion, Kumaon Regiment, and tried to defend the Srinagar airport against Pakistani raiders, who heavily outnumbered the Indian troops at the post. Sharma along with one junior commissioned officer and 20 others lost their lives. He became the first-ever recipient of the PVC.
Subedar and Hony Captain (then Lance Naik) Karam Singh	On October 13, 1948, Singh thwarted the Pakistani army from occupying the Tithwal sector in Jammu and Kashmir during the first Indo-Pakistani war . Despite being injured in the heavy shelling from the Pakistan side, he didn't leave the ground and not only fought valiantly but also freed two Indian jawans from captivity.

<p>Second Lieutenant Rama Raghoba Rane</p>	<p>Played an instrumental role in helping Indian forces occupy Rajouri, Jammu and Kashmir, as the Pakistan Army shelled the area on April 8, 1948. Rane ducked under India's Stuart tank and began crawling with it. "He synchronized himself with the movements of the dangerous tank wheels and navigated the tank through the minefield and directed its movement by a rope tied to the tank driver, thus, securing a safe lane for the advancing Indian tanks".</p>
<p>Naik Jadunath Singh</p>	<p>On February 6, 1948, the Pakistan military attacked Singh, who was a post commander at Tain Dhar near Naushera in Jammu and Kashmir, and his post. Despite being severely injured and losing several of his men, he attacked the enemy with a Sten Gun and warded them off. However, Singh lost his life during the battle and was awarded the PVC posthumously.</p>

<p>Company Havildar Major Piru Singh</p>	<p>Part of a company tasked to capture a Pakistani post at Tithwal in Jammu and Kashmir, Singh died while carrying out the operation on July 18, 1948. Records show that during the mission, Singh and other Indian troops came under a barrage of medium machine gun (MMG) firings and grenade attacks. Even after all of his comrades were killed, the Company Havildar Major managed to destroy “the enemy position before breathing his last.”</p>
<p>Captain GS Salaria</p>	<p>Successfully defended the UN Headquarters at Elizabethville (now known as Lubumbashi) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On December 5, 1961, his Gorkha Company was supposed to remove a roadblock established by the Katangese troops but they met with a strong enemy opposition. Salaria and his men fought courageously and managed to kill around 40 of the enemy troops, forcing them to flee the spot. The Captain sustained severe injuries on his neck and died soon after.</p>

<p>Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) Dhan Singh Thapa</p>	<p>Commander of a forward post in Ladakh during the Sino-Indian war, Thapa and his men were attacked by the Chinese troops, who substantially outnumbered them, on October 20, 1962. In their first two attempts, the Chinese failed to overrun the Indian forces and it was only when they charged for the third time with the help of tanks that they took hold off on the post. Major Dhan Singh Thapa killed several enemy soldiers in hand-to-hand combat before he was finally overpowered.</p>
<p>Subedar Joginder Singh</p>	<p>Died on October 23, 1962, while defending his post in Bumla, Arunachal Pradesh, against the Chinese military. Despite losing most of his men, Singh, who was the commander of the platoon posted there, didn't evacuate and held his position. Subedar Joginder himself manned an LMG (light machine gun) and shot down several enemy troops.</p>

<p>Major Shaitan Singh</p>	<p>Put up a brave fight on November 18, 1962, against the Chinese attack while he was commanding his platoon at Rezang La in Jammu and Kashmir, located at a height of about 17,000 feet. Singh incurred grievous injuries yet continued to move from one platoon post to another while motivating his men and helping them fight the enemy. When he was asked to evacuate, Singh refused to go and fought till the end.</p>
<p>Company Quartermaster Havildar Abdul Hamid</p>	<p>Is best remembered for commanding a jeep-mounted RCL Gun Detachment and destroying two of Pakistan's tanks during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Hamid didn't stop attacking the enemy even when they spotted his jeep and he helped his detachment to destroy seven more Pakistani tanks before sustaining fatal injuries.</p>
<p>Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore</p>	<p>On September 11, 1965, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore's Regiment was attacked in the Sialkot Sector. However, his regiment held its ground and gallantly attacked Phillora. Despite being wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore refused to be evacuated and led his Regiment to capture Wazirwali, Jassoran and Butur-Dograndi. Inspired by his leadership, his team destroyed 60 Pakistan tanks.</p>

Lance Naik Albert Ekka

On December 4, 1971, during the **battle of Gargasagar**, Lance Naik Ekka noticed an enemy LMG inflicting heavy casualties on his company.

With complete disregard for his safety, he charged the enemy bunker, bayoneted two enemy soldiers and silenced the LMG. Suddenly another MMG opened up from a building.

Despite being mortally injured, he crawled forward and lobbed a grenade, killing one soldier.

The MMG was finally silenced after Lance Naik Ekka entered the building and took down the gunner in hand-to-hand combat.

Major Hoshiar Singh

On December 15, 1971, Major Hoshiar Singh's company was ordered to capture the enemy locality of Jarpal.

During the assault, his company came under intense shelling.

Undeterred, he led the charge and captured the objective after a fierce hand-to-hand fight.

He then successfully motivated his troops to repulse wave after wave of enemy counterattacks, despite being heavily wounded, even manning a machine gun post just by himself after the enemy fire had taken down its operators.

His leadership and bravery helped the Indian Army to keep control of the objective and eventually win the War.

<p>Second Lt Arun Khetarpal</p>	<p>On December 16, 1971, Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal voluntarily moved to reinforce the ‘B’ Squadron at Shakargarh sector, Punjab, on receiving an urgent call for reinforcements. En route, his tanks came under heavy fire from enemy strong points which he destroyed to reach the ‘B’ Squadron. What followed was a fierce tank battle destroying ten enemy tanks Khetarpal himself took out four. Despite being badly injured, he refused to pull back, shooting down one more enemy tank, before succumbing to a second enemy shell.</p>
<p>Flying Officer Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon</p>	<p>On December 14, 1971, Srinagar airfield was bombed by two Pakistani Sabre aircraft. Despite the immense risk to his own life, Flying Officer Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon took off on his Gnat fighter, which was seriously disadvantaged over the Pakistani Sabres in low altitude, from the damaged runway and engaged with the enemy. He brought down one aircraft and seriously damaged another. By this time four more Pakistani Sabre aircraft had arrived. Heavily outnumbered, Flying Officer Sekhon’s aircraft was shot down, killing him in the crash. To date, he remains the only PVC awardee from the Indian Air Force.</p>

<p>Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran</p>	<p>On November 25, 1987, while returning from a search operation in Sri Lanka, Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran's team was ambushed. Showing presence of mind, he quickly organised his forces, outflanking the militants. When shot in the chest, Major Parameswaran snatched back the rifle from the militant, shooting him dead. Gravely wounded, he continued to give orders and inspired his command till he breathed his last. His action not only saved his team but also helped eliminate five militants and retrieve a big cache of weapons and ammunition.</p>
<p>Naib Subedar Bana Singh</p>	<p>On June 26, 1987, Naib Subedar Bana Singh volunteered for a task force to clear Quaid Post, held by Pak Army in the Siachen Glacier, at an altitude of 21,000 feet. Siachen's extreme climate with intense blizzards, the temperature of nearly – 50 degrees celsius and a shortage of oxygen were the biggest threat to survival. Scaling a 457 m high ice wall amidst zero visibility, Naib Subedar Singh and his team charged Pakistani positions, killing the enemy with grenades and bayonets.</p>
<p>Captain Vikram Batra</p>	<p>On July 7, 1999, his company was tasked to capture a feature on Point 4875 in Ladakh. In a fierce hand-to-hand fight, he killed five enemy soldiers.</p>

	<p>Despite sustaining grave injuries, he led his men from the front in the face of heavy enemy fire, before attaining martyrdom. Inspired by his courageous act, his troops annihilated the enemy and captured Point 4875.</p> <p>Captain Batra's catchphrase "Yeh Dil Maange More" has become an enduring symbol of the courage of the Indian Army.</p>
Lt Manoj Kumar Pandey	<p>On July 3, 1999, his company came under heavy enemy fire.</p> <p>According to his PVC citation, he fearlessly assaulted the enemy, killing four enemy troops and destroying two bunkers.</p> <p>Although bleeding profusely, he continued to lead his men clearing bunker after bunker, often taking on the enemy in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Leading his men to successfully capture their objective, he made the ultimate sacrifice for the nation.</p>
Subedar Major (then Rifleman) Sanjay Kumar	<p>On July 4, 1999, with complete disregard for his safety, Rifleman Kumar charged at the enemy firing at his team from well-entrenched positions.</p> <p>In the subsequent physical combat, he sustained grave injuries but killed 3 enemy soldiers in one position before attacking the next.</p> <p>His surprising attack made the enemy flee and enabled the Indian Army to capture the previously occupied Flat Top point.</p>
Subedar Major and Hony Captain Yogesh Singh Yadav (retired)	<p>On July 3/4, 1999, his team came under intense firing from the enemy camped in strong points on top of Tiger Hill.</p> <p>Yadav crawled to the enemy position in</p>

	an attempt to silence it, killing four enemy combatants in close combat despite suffering grave injuries himself. His gallantry inspired the rest of his team to capture the Tiger Hill Top, a major objective for the Indian Army.
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GS II: Polity

CHARGESHEET

1. Context

The Supreme Court on Friday held that chargesheets are not 'Public documents' and enabling their free public access violates the provisions of the Criminal Code of Procedure as it compromises the rights of the accused, victim, and the investigation agencies.

2. What is a Charge Sheet?

- A chargesheet defined under section 173 CrPC, is the final report prepared by a police officer or investigative agencies after completing their investigation of a case.
- After preparing the chargesheet, the officer-in-charge of the police station forwards it to the Magistrate, who is empowered to take notice of the offenses mentioned in it.
- The charge sheet is nothing but a final report of the police officer under s. 173(2) of the CrPC,” the apex court held in its 1991 ruling in K Veeraswami vs UOI & Ors.
- A chargesheet must be filed against the accused within a prescribed period of 60-90 days, otherwise, the arrest is illegal and the accused is entitled to bail.

3. What contains in a Charge sheet?

- The charge sheet should contain details of names, the nature of the information, and offenses. Whether the accused is under arrest, in custody, or has been released, whether any action was taken against him, are all important questions that the chargesheet answers.

- Further, when the chargesheet relates to offenses for which there is sufficient evidence against the accused, the officer forwards it to the Magistrate, complete with all documents. This forms the basis for the prosecution's case and the charges to be framed.

4. What is First Information Report(FIR)?

- F.I.R. means any information recorded by an on-duty officer given by an aggrieved person or any other person either in writing or made orally about the commission of a Cognizable Offence.
- Based on the information provided F.I.R. can be registered by the Judicial Magistrate by giving direction to the concerned jurisdictional area of the Police Station.
- **Zero F.I.R.:** With the help of zero F.I.R., a complaint can be lodged at any police station irrespective of the jurisdiction of the Police Station. It is an amendment that came after Nirbhaya Rape Case.

5. How is a Chargesheet different from an FIR?

- The term 'chargesheet' has been expressly defined under Section 173 of the CrPC but 'First Information Report' or FIR, has not been defined in either the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or the CrPC.
- Instead, it finds a place under the police regulations/ rules under Section 154 of CrPC, which deals with 'Information in Cognizable Cases'.
- While the chargesheet is the final report filed towards the end of an investigation, an FIR is filed at the 'first' instance' that the police are informed of a cognizable offense or offense for which one can be arrested without a warrant; such as rape, murder, kidnapping.
- Further, an FIR does not decide a person's guilt but a chargesheet is complete with evidence and is often used during the trial to prove the offenses the accused is charged with.
- After filing an FIR, the investigation takes place. Only if the police have sufficient evidence can the case be forwarded to the Magistrate, otherwise, the accused is released from custody under Section 169 of the CrPC.
- Finally, the FIR should be filed at the first instance of receiving the knowledge of the occurrence of a cognizable offense.
- According to Section 154 (3) of the CrPC, if any person is aggrieved by the refusal of authorities to file an FIR, they can send the complaint to the Superintendent of Police, who will either investigate himself or direct it to their subordinate.

- A chargesheet is filed by the police or law-enforcement/ investigative agency only after they have gathered sufficient evidence against the accused in respect of the offenses mentioned in the FIR, otherwise, a ‘cancellation report’ or ‘untraced report’ can be filed when due to lack of evidence.

6. Why is a chargesheet not a ‘public document’?

- According to the Court, a chargesheet cannot be made publicly available as it’s not a ‘public document’ under Sections 74 and 76 of the Evidence Act, of 1872.
- **Section 74:** It defines public documents as those which form the acts or records of sovereign authority, official bodies, tribunals, and of public offices either legislative, judicial, or executive in any part of India, Commonwealth, or a foreign country. It also includes public records “kept in any State of private documents”.
- Documents mentioned in this section are only public documents, and certified copies of them must be provided by the public authority having custody of them.
- Copy of chargesheets along with necessary public documents cannot be said to be public documents under this section.
- **Section 76:** Any public officer having custody of such documents must provide a copy upon demand and payment of a legal fee, along with a certificate of attestation that states the date, seal, name, and designation of the officer.
- As per Section 75 of the Evidence Act, all documents other than those listed under Section 74 are private documents.
- The Supreme Court in the Youth Bar Association of India vs Union of India case (2016) directed all police stations in the country to publish copies of FIRs online within 24 hours of registration, except in cases where offenses were sensitive.
- Only FIRs were covered by this ruling, and chargesheets were not included.

GS III: Economy

NON-FUNGIBLE TOKEN (NFT)

1. Context

Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) have, thanks to their ability to assign value to everything from art to music to a simple selfie, taken the world by storm. The sales of NFTs surged \$25 billion in 2021 as the crypto asset exploded in popularity, fuelled by the rising interest of celebrities and tech evangelists, according to market data tracker DappRadar data analytics. However, some experts believe NFTs are a bubble that might pop.

2. What are Non-fungible Tokens (NFTs)

- Anything that can be converted into a digital form can be an NFT. Everything from your drawings, photos, videos, GIFs, music, in-game items, selfies, and even a tweet can be turned into an NFT, which can then be traded online using cryptocurrency.
- But what makes NFTs unique from other digital forms is that it is backed by Blockchain technology.
- For the uninitiated, Blockchain is a distributed ledger where all transactions are recorded. It is like your bank passbook, except all your transactions are transparent and can be seen by anyone, and cannot be changed or modified once recorded.
- NFTs are gaining massive popularity now because they are becoming an increasingly popular way to showcase and sell your digital artwork.
- Billions of dollars have been spent on NFTs since its inception which dates back to 2015, and Terra Nulius was the first NFT on Ethereum Blockchain, although this project was merely an idea that only allowed to customize of a short message which was then recorded on Blockchain.
- Then came Curio Cards, CryptoPunks, and CryptoCats in 2017, before NFTs slowly moved into public awareness, then expanded into mainstream adoption in early 2021.

3. Working of NFTs

- NFT works on blockchain as it gives users complete ownership of a digital asset. For instance, if you are a sketch artist, and if you convert your digital asset to an NFT, what you get is proof of ownership, powered by Blockchain.
- In simple words, when you list your NFT on a marketplace, you pay something called a gas fee (Transaction fee) for using the Blockchain, following which your digital art is then recorded on Blockchain, mentioning that you (your address) own the particular NFT.

- This gives you full ownership which can not be edited or modified by anyone, including the marketplace owner.
- An NFT is thus created, or as crypto enthusiasts say it is "minted", to get exclusive ownership rights. NFTs can have only one owner at a time.
- Apart from exclusive ownership, NFT owners can also digitally sign their artwork and store specific information in their NFT's metadata. This will be only viewable to the individual who bought the NFT.

4. How is an NFT different from Cryptocurrency?

- NFTs and cryptocurrencies are very different from each other. While both are built on Blockchain, that is where the similarity ends.
- Cryptocurrency is a currency and is fungible, meaning that it is interchangeable.
- For instance, if you hold one crypto token, say one Ethereum, the next Ethereum that you hold will also be of the same value. But NFTs are non-fungible, which means the value of one NFT is not equal to another.
- Every art is different from others, making it non-fungible, and unique.

5. What are the risks associated with buying NFTs?

- The emergence of fake marketplaces.
- Unverified sellers often impersonate real artists and sell copies of their artworks for half prices.
- Sharing potential phishing links during the sale to drain the participant's crypto wallets.
- Hacking the NFT collections.
- Fees and gas money can result in artists losing money.
- Technology issues like non-attachment of a purchased item to the NFT, global chip shortage, etc.
- Ownership issues like losing the login credential might result in permanent loss of owned works
- Validation of transactions requires crypto mining, which requires high-powered computers that run at a very high capacity, affecting the environment.

PARIS CLUB

1. Context

The Paris Club, an informal group of creditor nations, will provide financial assurances to the International Monetary Fund on Sri Lanka's debt, Reuters has reported quoting two unnamed sources. An assurance from the Paris Club, as well as other bilateral creditors, is one of the conditions that Sri Lanka has to fulfill for the IMF to begin disbursing a \$2.9 bn bailout package to the beleaguered nation that all but collapsed last year under a severe economic crisis.

2. About Paris Club

- The Paris Club is a group of mostly western creditor countries that grew from a 1956 meeting in which Argentina agreed to meet its public creditors in Paris.
- Their objective is to find sustainable debt-relief solutions for countries that are unable to repay their bilateral loans.
- It describes itself as a forum where official creditors meet to solve payment difficulties faced by debtor countries.
- All 22 are members of the group called Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- Other creditor nations are allowed to participate in negotiation meetings on a case-by-case basis if they meet certain conditions.
- The members meet in Paris once a month except for February and August.
- Each meeting includes a one-day 'Tour horizon, during which creditors talk about the external debt situation of debtor nations or issues regarding how those countries are managing their debts.
- The Paris Club invites debtor nations to a meeting with its creditors after it has concluded an appropriate program with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) that shows that the country cannot meet its external debt obligations, and therefore requires a new payment arrangement with its foreign creditors.
- Representatives of the World Bank, the IMF, and other international institutions, plus the relevant regional development bank, may also attend the meeting as observers.

- The debtor country's representative is usually its Minister of Finance, who heads a team comprising officials from his or her ministry and the central bank.
- The members are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

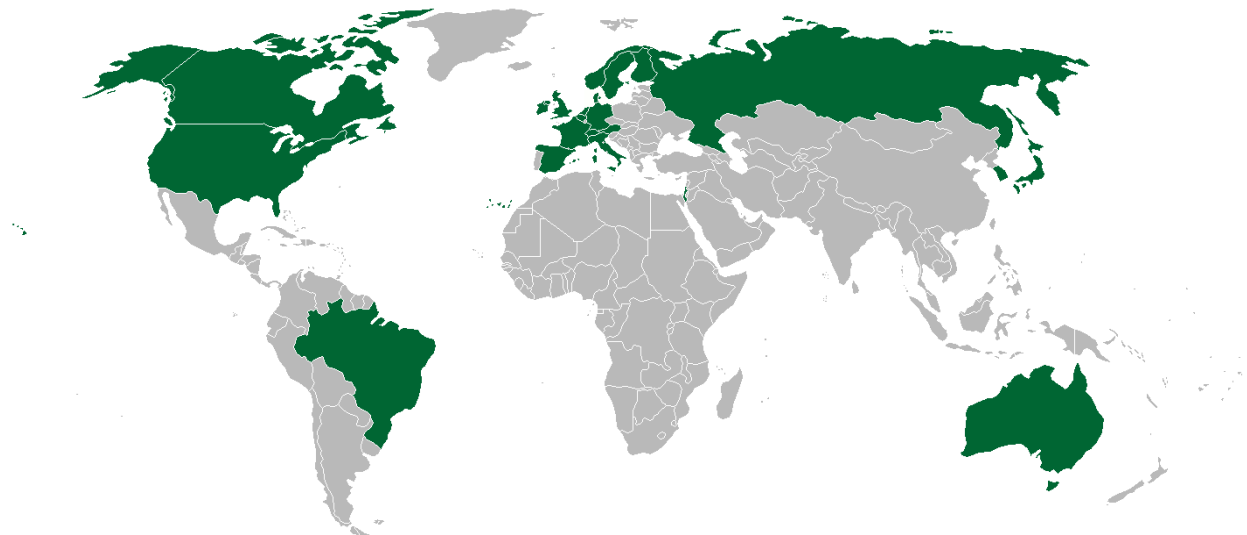


Image Source: Wikimedia

3. How has Paris Club been involved in debt agreements?

- According to the information on its website, since its beginning, the Paris Club has reached 478 agreements with 102 different debtors countries. Since 1956, the debt treated in the framework of the Paris Club agreement amounts to \$ 614 billion.
- It operated on the principles of consensus and solidarity. Any agreement reached with the debtor country will apply equally to all its Paris Club creditors.
- A debtor country that signs an agreement with its Paris Club creditors, should not then accept from its non-Paris Club commercial and bilateral creditors such terms of treatment of its debt that are less favorable to the debtor than those agreed with the Paris Club.
- The Paris group countries dominated bilateral lending in the last century, but their importance has reduced over the last two decades or so with the emergence of China as the world's biggest bilateral lender.

- In Sri Lanka's case, for instance, China, Japan, and India are the largest bilateral creditors. Sri Lanka's debt to China is 52 percent of its bilateral debt, 19.5 percent to Japan, and 12 percent to India. With Japan a member of the Paris Club, Sri Lanka needed assurances from China and India as well.

4. How has the Paris Club role over a time

- The Paris group countries dominated bilateral lending in the last century, but their importance has receded over the last two decades or so with the emergence of China as the world's biggest bilateral lender
- In Sri Lanka's case, for instance, China, Japan and India are the largest bilateral creditors
- Sri Lanka's debt to China is 52 per cent of its bilateral debt, 19.5 per cent to Japan, and 12 per cent to India
- With Japan, a member of the Paris Club, Sri Lanka needed assurances from China and India as well
- The Paris Club had tried to get both countries on board a centralised effort, but Delhi launched its own bilateral negotiations with Colombo
- The reported readiness by the Paris Club comes against this background. That still leaves China, whose Exim Bank offered a two-year moratorium on its loans soon after the Indian announcement

GS III: Economy

ANGEL TAX

1. Context

A recently proposed detail has Indian start-ups worried. These new-age firms, that offer their shares to foreign investors, may have to pay "**angel tax**", which was earlier only supposed to be paid for investments raised by resident Indian investors, as per a motion made in the Finance Bill, 2023.

The move could adversely impact financing available to the start-ups, which have already been reeling under a funding winter since 2022, industry insiders are speculating.

2. The Proposed Change

- The Finance Bill, 2023, has proposed to amend Section 56(2) VII B of the Income Tax Act.

- The provision states that when an unlisted company, such as a start-up, receive equity investment from a resident for the issue of shares that exceeds the face value of such shares, it will be counted as income for the start-up and be subject to income tax under the head "**Income from other Sources**" for the relevant financial year.
- However, with the latest amendment, the government has proposed to also include foreign investors in the ambit, meaning that when a start-up raises funding from a foreign investor, that too will now be counted as income and be taxable.

For instance, if the fair market value of a start-up share is Rs 10 apiece and in a subsequent funding round they offer it to an investor for Rs 20, then the difference of Rs 10 would be taxed as income.

- Section 56 (2) VII B of the Income Tax Act, colloquially known as the "**angel tax**" was first introduced in 2012 to deter the generation and use of unaccounted money through the subscription of shares of the closely held company at a value that is higher than the fair market value of the firm's shares.

3. Start-ups Concerns

- The change comes as the funding for India's startups dropped by 33 per cent to \$24 billion in 2022 as compared to the previous year, according to a PwC India report released in January.
- Foreign investors are a key source of funding for start-ups and have played a big role in increasing the valuation.

For instance, Tiger Global, one of the most prolific foreign investors in India has invested in over a third of the start-ups that have turned unicorns with a valuation of at least \$1 billion.

- Non-resident investors were never under the scope of this tax. This could compel more startups to flip overseas, as foreign investors may not want to deal with additional tax liability through their investment in the startup.
- The reintroduction is completely counter-intuitive to the entire move of reverse-flipping. This will accelerate flipping overseas.

UPI FOR NRIs

1. Context

On January 10, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) paved the way for international (phone) numbers to be able to transact using UPI.

A day later, the Union Cabinet approved an incentive scheme for the promotion of Rupay debit Cards and low-value BHIM-UPI transactions (Person-to-merchant) in FY 2022-23.

The Scheme has an outlay of ₹2, 600 crores.

2. About International numbers

- In a nutshell, non-resident accounts such as non-resident external accounts (NRE) and non-resident ordinary accounts (NRO), having international numbers, will now be allowed into the UPI payment system.
- The NPCI had allowed UPI transactions to and from NRO/NRE accounts linked to Indian numbers back in October 2018.
- NRE accounts are those used by non-residents to transfer earnings from foreign soil to India while NRO accounts are used to manage income earned in India by non-residents.
- These incomes could be rent, interest and pension, among other things.

At present, users from ten countries will be able to avail of the facility in Singapore, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Oman, Qatar, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the U.K.

- The development would allow NRIs to use the payment method for making utility bill payments for their families (or themselves) in India, make purchases from e-commerce or online platforms and make payments to physical merchants who accept UPI QR-based payments when they travel to India.
- Addressing the infrastructural and technological changes required to support such payments.

- Currently, all the internal systems as well as ecosystem players such as banks, NPCI, etc only understand India-based mobile numbers for UPI transactions.
- With this enablement, a significant number of systems will need to start understanding the same.

3. The discussion on MDR

- The Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) is the charge recovered by the acquirer from the final recipient of the payment, that is, the merchant.
- It is collected by the acquirer to compensate the varied service providers and intermediaries in the payment system.
- Presently, there is no MDR charge levied for RuPay-based debit card and UPI transactions.
- Stakeholders are hence concerned over cost recovery for the services they provide.
- In August 2022, the Finance Ministry tweeted that it was not planning to levy any charges for UPI services, adding, "The concerns of the service providers for cost recovery have to be met through other means".
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and varied stakeholders expressed concerns about the potential adverse impact of the zero MDR regime on the growth of the digital payments ecosystem.
- The NPCI requested the incentivisation of BHIM-UPI and RuPay debit card transactions to create a "cost-effective value proposition for ecosystem stakeholders, increase merchant acceptance footprints and faster migration from cash payments to digital payments.

4. Where does UPI stand now?

- As of the latest available data, 6779.6 million transactions worth about ₹10.95 lakh crore have been facilitated using UPI.
- In the previous calendar year, excluding one month of fall (between January and February), UPI transactions have been on an upward trajectory.
- As per the DigiDhan dashboard maintained by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, BHIM-UPI accounted for 52 per cent of all digital payments in FY 2021-22. At present, it stands at 59.74 per cent.

GREEN BONDS

1. Context

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will auction maiden sovereign green bonds (SGrBs) worth Rs8, 000 crores on Wednesday.

This is part of the Rs 16, 000 crore Sovereign Green Bond auction that the RBI will conduct in the current financial year.

The second green bond auction will be conducted on February 9.

2. About Green Bonds

- Green bonds are bonds issued by any sovereign entity, inter-governmental groups or alliances and corporates with the aim that the proceeds of the bonds are utilised for projects classified as environmentally sustainable.
- The framework for the sovereign green bond was issued by the Government on November 9, 2022.
- The RBI is auctioning two green bonds with tenures of 5 and 10 years, worth Rs 4, 000 crores each.
- The two bonds to be auctioned today are New GOI SGrB 2028 and New GOI SGrB 2033.

3. Importance

- Over the last few years, Green Bonds have emerged as an important financial instrument to deal with the threats of climate change and related challenges.
- According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a World Bank Group institution, climate change threatens communities and economies and it poses risks to agriculture, food and water supplies.
- A lot of financing is needed to address these challenges.
- It's critical to connect environmental projects with capital markets and investors and channel capital towards sustainable development and Green Bonds are a way to make that connection.

4. The benefits for investors

- Green Bonds offer investors a platform to engage in good practices, influencing the business strategy of bond issuers.
- They provide a means to hedge against climate change risks while achieving at least similar, if not better, returns on their investment.
- In this way, the growth in Green Bonds and Green finance also indirectly work to disincentivise high carbon-emitting projects as per the IFC.

5. The Govt plan these bonds

- In August last year, the Government said it stands committed to reducing Emissions.
- The intensity of GDP by 45 per cent from the 2005 level by 2030, achieving about 50 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by the same year.
- In line with the commitment to significantly reduced the carbon intensity of the economy, the Union Budget 2022-23 announced to issue of Sovereign Green Bonds.
- The country's climate actions have so far been largely financed by domestic resources and it is now targeting the generation of additional global financial resources.
- The issuance of the Sovereign Green Bonds will help the Indian government in tapping the requisite finance from potential investors for deployment in public sector projects aimed at reducing the carbon intensity of the economy.

5. The proceedings

The government will use the proceeds raised from SGrBs to finance or refinance expenditure (in parts or whole) for various green projects, including renewable energy, clean transportation, energy efficiency, climate change adaptation, sustainable water and waste management, pollution and prevention control and green buildings.

In renewable energy, investments will be made in solar, wind, biomass and hydropower energy projects.

LOAN-LOSS PROVISION

1. Context

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday (January 16) published a discussion paper on "**loan loss provision**", proposing a framework for adopting an expected loss (EL)- based approach for provisioning by banks in case of loan defaults. The RBI's proposal is based on the premise that the present "**incurred loss**" based approach for the provision by banks is inadequate and there is a need to shift to the "**expected credit loss**" regime to avoid any systemic issues.

2. About Loan-loss provision

- The RBI defines a loan loss provision as an expense that banks set aside for defaulted loans.
- Banks set aside a portion of the expected loan repayments from all loans in their portfolio to cover the losses either completely or partially.
- In the event of a loss, instead of taking a loss in its cash flows, the bank can use its loan loss reserves to cover the loss.
- Since the bank does not expect all loans to become impaired, there is usually enough in the loan loss reserves to cover the full loss for any one or a small number of loans when needed.
- An increase in the balance of reserves is called a loan loss provision.
- The level of loan loss provision is determined based on the level expected to protect the safety and soundness of the bank.

3. The expected loss-based approach

Under this practice, a bank is required to estimate expected credit losses based on forward-looking estimations, rather than wait for credit losses to be incurred before making corresponding loss provisions.

As per the proposed framework, banks will need to classify financial assets (primarily loans, including irrevocable loan commitments and investments classified as held-to-maturity or available-for-sale) into one of three categories Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3 depending upon the assessed credit losses on them, at the time of initial recognition as well as on each subsequent reporting date and make necessary provisions.

Stage 1

- These assets are financial assets that have not had a significant increase in credit risk since initial recognition or that have low credit risk at the reporting date.
- For these assets, 12-month expected credit losses are recognised and interest revenue is calculated on the gross carrying amount of the asset.

Stage 2

- These are financial instruments that have had a significant increase in credit risk since initial recognition, but there is no objective evidence of impairment.
- For these assets, lifetime expected credit losses are recognised, but interest revenue is still calculated on the gross carrying amount of the asset.

Stage 3

- These assets include financial assets that have objective evidence of impairment at the reporting date.
- For these assets, lifetime expected credit loss is recognised and interest revenue is calculated on the net carrying amount.

4. Benefits

- The forward-looking expected credit losses approach will further enhance the resilience of the banking system in line with globally accepted norms.
- It is likely to result in excess provisions as compared to a shortfall in provisions as seen in the incurred loss approach.

5. Problems

- The incurred loss approach requires banks to provide for losses that have already occurred or have been incurred.
- The delay in recognising expected losses under an "incurred loss" approach was found to exacerbate the downswing during the financial crisis of 2007-09.
- Faced with a systemic increase in defaults, the delay in recognising loan losses resulted in banks having to make higher levels of provisions which ate into the capital maintained precisely at a time when banks needed to shore up their capital.

- This affected banks' resilience and posed systemic risks.
- Further, the delays in recognising loan losses overstated the income generated by the banks which, coupled with dividend payouts, impacted their capital base because of reduced internal accruals which too, affected the resilience of banks.

GS III: Science & technology

SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA

1. Context

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget, declared Sickle cell Anaemia as a national mission.

2. Key Points

- Way back in 2019, Prof Sudam Laxman Kate, emeritus scientist with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Former Deputy Director of the Tribal Health Research project, at B.J. Medical College, Pune, was crusading to help tribals suffering from Sickle Cell Anaemia.
- He has done pioneering research in Sickle Cell Disease, especially among tribal populations of India.
- He was the first scientist to find Sickle Cell disorder in the tribes of north Maharashtra in 1972. Diseases of the Poor often get neglected in discussions on health.
- He set up two centres dedicated to Sickle Cell anaemia in northern Maharashtra and a community health care centre in 1998 called "**Sickle cell Dawakhana**" in the remote Satpuda, under the aegis of Maharashtra Arogya Mandal Hadapsar, Pune.

3. Nature of the disease

- It is an inherited genetic disease where a point mutation in haemoglobin makes it abnormal and prone to structural change.
- This causes the red blood cells to take an abnormal "**sickle**" shape, which obstructs blood flow.

- This can lead to severe haemolysis and persistent anaemia and affects the functioning of other organs in the later stages.
- **Common symptoms are anaemia, jaundice and liver and spleen enlargement.**
- In severe cases, patients have debilitating orthopaedic conditions called avascular necrosis of the femur.
- The disease can be very severe and reduces the quality of life. Patients have very painful conditions called "**crisis**".
- There is no complete cure. The only way to help the patient is by providing symptomatic treatment and pain management. Improve nutritional status.
- **Hydroxyurea drug** has been shown to reduce morbidity.
- Currently, Sudham Kate Research Foundation is conducting a clinical trial of this drug on patients in collaboration with ICMR to see its efficacy in Indian Sickle Cell patients.

4. The Burden of disease

- The disease burden from Sickle Cell anaemia in India is prevalent in tribal populations, especially in Maharashtra.

The disease burden figures may exceed 14 lacks across India, but with intensified screening, the numbers are likely to increase Tribes like Pawara, Bhil, Madia, Gond and Pardhan from Maharashtra have a very high prevalence.

- Approximately more than three lakh patients in the tribal areas are affected and it is most prevalent in the central India belt covering states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and parts of Bengal.
- There are pockets in the South, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and parts of Telangana.

5. Prevention

- There is a lack of screening awareness and inadequate screening centres/ facilities in tribal and rural areas. Also, failure to access primary healthcare is a concern.
- It is a genetic disease and the only prevention lies in a timely diagnosis through cost-effective and large-scale screening camps along with marriage counselling.
- Prenatal diagnosis can also play an important role.

6. The way forward

- Resource utilisation and implementation of projects at the grassroots level and collaboration between government and NGOs are the keys.
- Treating more than patients over the years in remote inaccessible tribal areas is the main challenge was the lack of adequate medical laboratory infrastructure.
- The development of point-of-care indigenous, low-cost, simple and minimally invasive diagnostic tests for hemoglobinopathies could be performed at the homes of these remote tribal populations.

GS III: Science & technology

ANIMAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE CLIMATE CHANGE

1. Context

Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates has invested in an Australian Climate technology start-up that aims to curtail the methane emissions of cow burps, according to a report in the BBC.

2. Key points

- The start-up, Rumin8, has received funding worth \$12 million from Breakthrough Energy Ventures, which Gates created in 2015.
- Amazon Chief executive Jeff Bezos and Chinese entrepreneur and Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma have also backed the Breakthrough fund.
- Rumin8 is developing a variety of dietary supplements to feed to cows in a bid to reduce the amount of methane they emit into the atmosphere.
- The supplement includes red seaweed, which is believed to drastically cut methane output in cows.

3. Cows and other animals produce methane

- Ruminant species are hooved grazing or browsing herbivores that chew the cud.
- Ruminants such as cows, sheep, goats and buffaloes have a special type of digestive system that allows them to break down and digest food that non-ruminant species would be unable to digest.

- Stomachs of ruminant animals have four compartments, one of which, the rumen, helps them to store partially digested food and let it ferment.
- This partially digested and fermented food is regurgitated by the animals who chew through it again and finish the digestive process.
- However, as grass and other vegetation ferments in the rumen, it generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas.
- Ruminant animals such as cows and sheep release this methane mainly through burping.
- Given the very large numbers of cattle and sheep on farms in dairy-producing countries, these emissions add up to a significant volume.
- It is estimated that the ruminant digestive system is responsible for 27 per cent of all methane emissions from human activity.

4. Impact of Methane on Climate Change

- Methane is one of the main drivers of climate change, responsible for 30 per cent of the warming since preindustrial times, second only to carbon dioxide.
- Over 20 years, methane is 80 times more potent at warming than carbon dioxide, according to a United Nations Environment Programme report.
- It is also the primary contributor to the formation of ground-level ozone, a colourless and highly irritating gas that forms just above the Earth's surface.
- According to a 2022 report, exposure to ground-level ozone could contribute to 1 million premature deaths yearly.
- Several studies have shown that the amount of methane in the atmosphere has dramatically shot up in recent years.
- In 2022, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said that the atmospheric levels of methane jumped 17 parts per billion in 2021, beating the previous record set in 2020.
- While carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for much longer than methane, methane is roughly 25 times more powerful at trapping heat in the atmosphere and has an important short-term influence on the rate of climate change.

5. Mitigation of methane emissions

- Rumin8 is not the first to find a dietary solution to curb methane emissions from ruminant species.
- Scientists have been working on it for quite some time now, as they are looking to make these animals more sustainable and less gassy.

- A 2021 study, published in the journal PLUS ONE, found that adding seaweed to a cow the feed can reduce methane formation in their guts by more than 80 per cent.
- Apart from this, researchers are also trying to find gene-modifying techniques to curtail methane emissions in these animals.

6. New Zeland's genetic programme

- Last year, scientists in New Zealand announced they had started the world's first genetic programme to address the challenge of climate change by breeding sheep that emit lower amounts of methane.
- New Zealand is also one of the first nations to come up with policy-related solutions to this problem.
- In October 2022, it proposed taxing the greenhouse gases that farm animals produce from burping and urinating.
- Then Prime Minister had said that the money raised from taxes would be used to "finance new technologies, research and incentive payments for farmers".

GS III: Science & technology

ISRO LAUNCH VEHICLES

1. Context

Satellites, or payloads as they are often called, sit inside the rocket and are ejected once they reach their intended orbit in space. Most satellites have small propulsion systems and carry small amounts of fuel, because they encounter very little drag, or force, in outer space. Here we look at ISRO's launch vehicles.

2. Satellites and Launch Vehicles

- Satellites don't go into space on their own. They have to be carried there by launch vehicles, or rockets, like the PSLV. The rockets have powerful propulsion systems that generate the huge amount of energy required to lift heavy objects like satellites into space, overcoming the gravitational pull of the earth.

- Both rockets and satellites are spacecraft, which is a generic term used for any object that is sent into space.
- Satellites carry one or more instruments that do the scientific work for which they are sent into space. Their operational life sometimes extends up to decades.
- But rockets, or launch vehicles, become useless after the launch. Their only job is to take the satellites to their intended orbits.
- Rockets have several detachable energy-providing parts. They burn different kinds of fuels to power the rocket.
- Once their fuel is exhausted, they detach from the rocket and fall off, often burning off in the atmosphere due to air friction, and getting destroyed.
- Only a small part of the original rocket goes to the intended destination of the satellite. Once the satellite is finally ejected, this last part of the rocket either becomes part of space debris or once again burns off after falling into the atmosphere.

3. Types of Launch Vehicles

- There are several kinds of rockets that are used. The difference is mainly in the power that they can generate, the weight they can carry, and the distance they can travel into space, all of which are related.
- It all comes down to the energy that is generated, which is a function of how efficient the engine and the fuel is. Several satellites need to be deposited only in the lower earth orbits, which start from about 180 km from the earth's surface and extend up to 2,000 km.
- Most of the earth-observation satellites, communication satellites, and even the International Space Station, a full-fledged laboratory in space that hosts astronauts, function in this space.
- PSLV is not the only launch vehicle of ISRO. But there are other satellites that need to go much deeper in space.
- Geostationary satellites, for example, have to be deposited in orbits that are about 36,000 km from the earth's surface.
- The planetary exploration missions also need their rockets to leave them much deeper in space. For such space missions, much more powerful rockets are used.

4. ISRO's Launch Vehicles

ISRO currently uses two launch vehicles – PSLV and GLSV (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle), but there are lots of different variants of these. PSLV is

the most reliable rocket used by ISRO till date, with 52 of its 54 flights being successful. GSLV is a much more powerful rocket, meant to carry heavier satellites much deeper into space. Till date, GSLV rockets have carried out 18 missions, of which four failed.

4.1 The first launch vehicle developed by ISRO was simply called SLV, or satellite launch vehicle.

Satellite Launch Vehicle-3 (SLV-3) was India's first experimental satellite launch vehicle, which was an all-solid, four-stage vehicle weighing 17 tonnes with a height of 22m and capable of placing 40 kg class payloads in Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

4.2 Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle or ASLV.

These two could carry small satellites, weighing up to 150 kg, to the lower earth orbits. ASLV operated till the early 1990s before PSLV came on the scene.

4.3 PSLVs (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles)

- Its first launch was in 1994, and it has been ISRO's main rocket ever since. Today's PSLV, however, is vastly improved and several times more powerful than the ones used in the 1990s.
- Presently, it has three Variants: PSLV - CA (Core Alone), PSLV-G, and PSLV - XL.
- PSLV is the most reliable rocket used by ISRO till date, with 52 of its 54 flights being successful.
- The vehicle successfully launched two spacecraft – Chandrayaan-1 in 2008 and Mars Orbiter Spacecraft in 2013 – that later traveled to Moon and Mars respectively.

4.4 GSLVs (Geosynchronous satellite launch vehicles)

- GSLV carried the Chandrayaan-2 mission and is slated to take the Gaganyaan manned space mission as well.
- Its Mk-III version can carry satellites weighing up to 4,000 kg to the geosynchronous transfer orbit, close to 36,000 km from the earth's surface.
- It can take 10,000-kg satellites to the lower earth orbits. Mk-III versions have made ISRO entirely self-sufficient in launching its satellites.

- Before this, it used to depend on the European Ariane launch vehicle to take its heavier satellites into space.

4.5 Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)

- ISRO has also developed a launch vehicle specifically for small and micro-satellites. It is called Small Satellite Launch Vehicle, or SSLV, and is targeted at rising global demand for the launch of such satellites.
- SSLV is meant to offer cost-effective launch services for satellites up to 500 kg. The inaugural SSLV launch is slated for next month. It is supposed to carry an indigenous earth observation satellite EOS-03 into space.

4.6 Reusable Rockets

- The future rockets are meant to be reusable. Only a small part of the rocket would be destroyed during the mission. The bulk of it would re-enter the earth's atmosphere and land very much like an airplane and can be used in future missions.
- Reusable rockets would cut down on costs and energy, and also reduce space debris, which is becoming a serious problem because of the large number of launches.
- Fully-reusable rockets are still to be developed, but partially-reusable launch vehicles are already in use.

4.7 RLV-TD (Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator)

- ISRO has also developed a reusable rocket, called RLV-TD (Reusable Launch Vehicle Technology Demonstrator) which had a successful test flight in 2016.
- The configuration of RLV-TD is similar to that of an aircraft and combines the complexity of both launch vehicles and aircraft.

GS III: Science & technology

TRANS-FATS

1. Context

Five billion people globally are exposed to harmful trans fat, increasing their heart disease and death risk, according to a new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

2. Key Highlights of the report

- According to WHO, the consumption of trans fats, which can be found in packaged foods, baked goods, cooking oils, and spreads, is responsible for up to half a million premature deaths from heart disease every year.
- 43 countries have now implemented best practice policies for tackling trans-fat in food, with 2.8 billion people protected globally.
- Many countries in America and Europe have phased the substance out with bans on partially hydrogenated oils. However, no low-income countries have yet adopted such measures.
- Currently, 9 of the 16 countries with the highest estimated proportion of coronary heart disease deaths caused by trans-fat intake do not have a best-practice policy.
- They are Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran (Islamic bloc), Nepal, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea.

3. Trans-Fats

- Trans fatty acids (TFAs) or Trans fats are the most harmful type of fats that can have much more adverse effects on our body than any other dietary constituent.
- These fats are largely produced artificially but a small amount also occurs naturally. Thus in our diet, these may be present as Artificial TFAs and/ or Natural TFAs.
- Artificial TFAs are formed when hydrogen is made to reach the oil to produce fats resembling pure ghee/butter.
- In our diet, the major source of artificial TFAs is partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVO)/ vanaspati/ margarine while the natural TFAs are present in meats and dairy products, though in small amounts.

4. Effects of Trans-fats

- Trans fat has no known benefit but is associated with huge health risks that can burden health systems.
- Trans fat intake is accountable for up to 5,00,000 early deaths from coronary heart disease annually.

- Consumption of trans fats raises the level of bad LDL- Cholesterol, an accepted biomarker of cardiovascular diseases. It has been seen that diets high in trans fat can increase the risk of heart disease by 21 percent and deaths by 28 percent.
- The negative health effects of trans fats can put a strain on healthcare systems, as the treatment and management of the conditions they contribute to can be costly.
- Due to the lack of effective regulations to limit the use of trans fat in food, it becomes harder for consumers to avoid them in their diet.
- Trans fats have been linked to weight gain, and obesity and are considered a major contributor to the obesity epidemic.

5. Why are Trans fats used in India?

- Trans fats are cheaper than other types of fats and oils, making them an attractive option for food manufacturers and restaurateurs looking to cut costs.
- It can help increase the shelf life of foods, making them a popular choice for packaged foods and baked goods that need to have a longer shelf life.
- These have a high smoke point, which makes them suitable for deep frying and other high-heat cooking methods like pastries and fried foods more flavourful and crispier.
- Many people in India may not be aware of the negative health effects of trans fats and therefore may not make an effort to avoid them in their diet.
- India has not implemented strict regulations on the use of trans fats in food, unlike some other countries, which may make it easier for food manufacturers to use them.

6. Government initiatives to eliminate Trans-fats

- In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) called for the elimination of industrially produced trans fats by 2023 and released a guide called 'REPLACE' to help countries frame policies.
- Recognizing the health hazards associated with the consumption of industrial trans fats, the Food Safety and Standards Authority(FSSAI) employed two-pronged strategies to eliminate trans fat from the diet in a phased manner by 2022.
- On the supply side, FSSAI has notified several crucial regulations to regulate trans fat in industrial products, encouraging the edible oil industry and food business operators to eliminate trans fat from their products.

- India's FSSAI imposed a cap of 10% on trans fats in oils and fats in 2011 which was revised to 5% in 2015.
- The Trans Fat-free logo was launched by FSSAI in 2019 which allows food sector establishments such as manufacturers and restaurants which produce foods with less than 0.2g/100g trans fat to use this “Trans-fat free” logo on their products and at their outlets as well.

GS IV: Ethics

ABORTION Vs ETHICS

1. Background

In 1973, in a historic judgment in the Roe Vs Wade case, the US Supreme Court made abortion legal everywhere in the country.

Now, that decision has been overturned by the Supreme Court, paving the way for states to outlaw abortions.

2. The change in the abortion rate among women in the U.S.

- According to the Guttmacher Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there was a slight rise in the number of abortions in the latter part of the 2010s despite the general trend showing a decline since 1981 when the abortion rate was 29.3 per 1, 000 women aged 15 to 44.
- According to the Guttmacher Institute, there were 13.5 abortions for every 1, 000 women aged 15 to 44 in 2017 and it rose to 14.4 in 2020.
- It rose from 11.2 in 2017 to 11.4 in 2019, according to the CDC.

3. Rights Vs Ethics

- From an ethical standpoint, the debate over pregnancy termination is between a woman's right over her body and the foetus's right to life.
- Judith Jarvis Thomson, an American philosopher advocated for the supremacy of a woman's right over her body as a premise of freedom.
- She argued that one cannot force a woman to bear a child in her womb and give birth to a child if she does not want to do so for various reasons.
- Thomson said that the timing of the abortion is a key difference.
- She emphasised that for those who support abortion, the foetus is not a live human being during the period of conception or in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.

According to feminist and psychologist Carol Gilligan, when deciding to terminate a pregnancy voluntarily, a woman faces a true "**moral dilemma**" or "**moral conflict**," because such a decision frequently takes into account human relationships, the possibility of not hurting others and responsibility towards others.

4. Pro-life versus pro-choice dilemma

- According to "**The Ethical Dilemma of Abortion**" by the Journal of Student Research at Indiana University East, the Pro-life versus pro-choice dilemma is one of the longest-debated issues in the United States today, causing ethical tensions.
- This complex quandary continues to perplex biomedical ethicists because it is intertwined with normative assessment, politics, law, medicine, religion and ethics.

The pro-life or anti-abortion argument is based on three principles: the Human Rights Principle, the Mens Rea Principle and the Harm Principle.

- According to **the Mens Rea Principle**, "**the agent's intentions should be given weight**".
- Thus, abortion violates this principle because the agent intentionally kills another and the pregnancy is terminated deliberately and knowingly.
- Abortion violates the Harm Principle, which states that "**no one should inflict serious harm on other people.**"
- Abortions, according to the absolutist pro-choice position are ethically justifiable and as a result, should be performed as long as the procedure is safe.
- The pro-choice argument states that the woman should be free to make her own decisions.
- As an individual and these decisions are considered self-regarding because the foetus is only a potential person, not the "**other**" as the pro-life argument holds.

5. Ethical approaches to abortion

Bioethics contends that ethical approaches to abortion frequently invoke four principles.

1. Respect for patients' autonomy
 2. Nonmaleficence (not harm)
 3. Beneficence (Beneficial care) and
 4. Justice
- The Code of Medical Ethics of the American Medical Association recognises a patient's right to "**receive information and ask questions about recommended treatments**" to "**make well-considered decisions about care**".
 - Respect for autonomy is enshrined in laws governing informed consent, which protects patients' right to be informed about their medical options and to make an informed voluntary decision.
 - Respect for autonomy, according to some bioethicists, lends firm support to the right to choose abortion, arguing that if a pregnant person wishes to end their pregnancy, the state should not interfere.
 - One interpretation of this view holds that the principle of autonomy means that a person owns their body and should be free to decide what happens in and to it.

6. Ethical dilemmas before policymakers

- The US Supreme Court decision has opened Pandora's box for policymakers.
- It will result in unsafe abortions, harming women's health and increasing maternal mortality.
- Another major question is how a policy will be framed in exceptional cases such as sexual assault and congenital anomalies discovered late in the pregnancy.
- According to experts, prohibiting or restricting abortion services does not eliminate the need for abortion.
- Instead of limiting abortion rates, restricting abortion access raises the risk of unsafe procedures and creates the risk of enacting criminal laws that require people to report or be prosecuted for suspected abortions.
- These dangers disproportionately affect people who are poor or face systemic discrimination.
- It is critical at this point for policymakers to be clear and leave no room for doubt.