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# LawEx

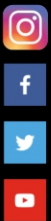
01-15 Feb, 2024

ISSUE - 24



## INTERIM BUDGET

2024-25



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## About Magazine

“LawEx” is a carefully curated set of Current Events designed specifically for CLAT aspirants. To take you one step closer to realizing your dream, “LawEx” provides a fortnightly overview of the most significant current events related to politics, economics, science and technology, & sports with a wide range of infographics to ensure a smoother learning experience and enhanced retention of information.

## Editor's Note

On 1 February 2024, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Interim Budget 2024-2025. Union Ministry of Home Affairs recently decided to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border to ensure the internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of India's North Eastern States. The Uttarakhand Assembly on 7 February 2024 passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill. India launched its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system in Sri Lanka and Mauritius on February 12, 2024. Keep reading for more updated information.

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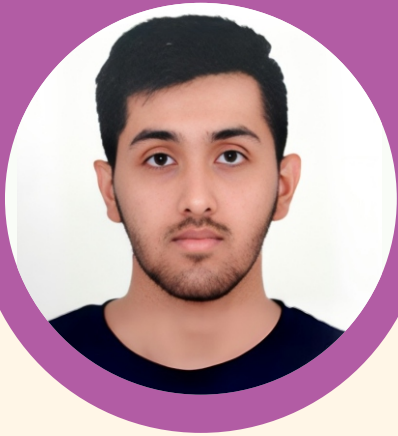
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## VAISHNAV BHATT

### Our Top Achiever

# AIR - 113th

## CLAT 2024

#### Q. Give us a brief intro about yourself, Vaishnav.

Ans. Hello, I'm Vaishnav and I secured AIR 113 in CLAT 2024. I completed my 10<sup>th</sup> standard in Delhi and have moved to Bangalore this year.

#### Q. When did you think about doing law?

Ans. I've had some very unpleasant experiences in life when I was staying in Delhi where my family and I had to suffer emotionally and financially and a major part of it was due to insufficient knowledge of the law and our rights. In this process I had to interact with some lawyers, and visit the court as well. These experiences made me want to pursue law as a profession as I found it interesting and also felt that having this knowledge would keep me safe and I would be able to help others as well who face similar situations due to insufficient knowledge.

#### Q. When did you seriously start preparing for CLAT?

Ans. I started my preparation in March 2023.

#### Q. What is the role of LawEx in your preparation?

Ans. LawEx helped me a lot with my preparation for CLAT. Their current affairs magazine and Maths YouTube videos are excellent and have been of great help. I also found their GK topic tests to be very useful.

#### Q. Do you think LawEx Lectures with sufficient reading and mock practice enough for CLAT?

Ans. I feel LawEx should increase the number of mock tests that they offer. Apart from this I think that they provide sufficient study material.

#### Q. What did you do for your subject-wise strategy?

Ans. My weak point was GK, so I gave it a bit more attention compared to the other subjects. For this I read The Hindu newspaper everyday for 1.5 hrs and focused on the editorial as that improved my vocabulary and helped improve my English as well. I allocated 4-5 hours for GK everyday. I gave 2 hours for legal reasoning. During this time I had not yet started giving mock tests. I watched LawEx's maths YouTube videos to improve my maths for around 30 minutes. A bulk of my preparation was focused on these 3 subjects. Apart from this I attempted around 60 mock tests, 20 of which were from LawEx and the rest I had to source from other test series.

#### Q. What was your highest and lowest score in mock tests?

Ans. My lowest score was 72 and my highest score was 96.25. On average my score was around 90 marks out of 120.

#### Q. How did you keep your confidence up when scoring low in mocks?

Ans. My performance in mocks was more or less pretty consistent throughout my preparation. So I did not face this issue.

#### Q. How to maintain mock scores?

Ans. In my opinion, analysing the mocks after attempting them is very important as it makes you understand what kind of mistakes you have made and helps you to improve upon them in the next mock. This will also make you understand your own weak points and which subject needs improvement. This will help you maintain and improve your score.

#### Q. How much GK is sufficient and how to revise it?

Ans. No amount of GK can be considered sufficient in my opinion. So I would suggest to find 2-3 sources which are of good quality like The Hindu newspaper and LawEx magazine which covers most of the topics which you need to know and for static GK you can purchase any book like A P Bharadwaj's Static GK book. I revised for GK by doing the topic tests multiple times.

#### Q. How many Mocks are sufficient for CLAT Preparation?

Ans. According to me at least 50 mock tests are required so that your speed along with accuracy improves and it doesn't make you feel anxious anymore as a calm mind will help you concentrate better and score more. Clat is a reading based exam and it can be quite draining especially in the last 30-35 minutes so practicing mocks is important here.

#### Q. What is your advice to CLAT Aspirants?

Ans. I would advise CLAT aspirants to give themselves at least one year for preparation and attempt 1-2 mock tests every week so that it doesn't drain you out. I made this mistake too by attempting around 60 mocks in 2 months. It is not feasible. CLAT is highly competitive and requires consistency and patience. As my English was at a decent level to begin with, I was somehow able to manage the stress. Also don't forget to take short breaks and have good sleep. Some books which I purchased for CLAT are A P Bharadwaj's Legal reasoning and A P Bharadwaj's static GK. Also practice 15-20 mocks on OMR printouts as well and try finishing your mocks in 115 minutes as this is the time you'll get in your actual examination. Best wishes to all of you.



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# **QUICK BOOSTERS**



## INTERIM BUDGET 2024-2025

### WHY IN NEWS?

- On 1 February 2024, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Interim Budget 2024-2025.
  - An Interim Budget is presented by a government that is going through a transition period or is in its last year in office ahead of general elections.
  - It serves as a provisional arrangement to meet the expenditure needs of the government for a short period until a new government can formulate and present a full-fledged budget.

### Key Highlights

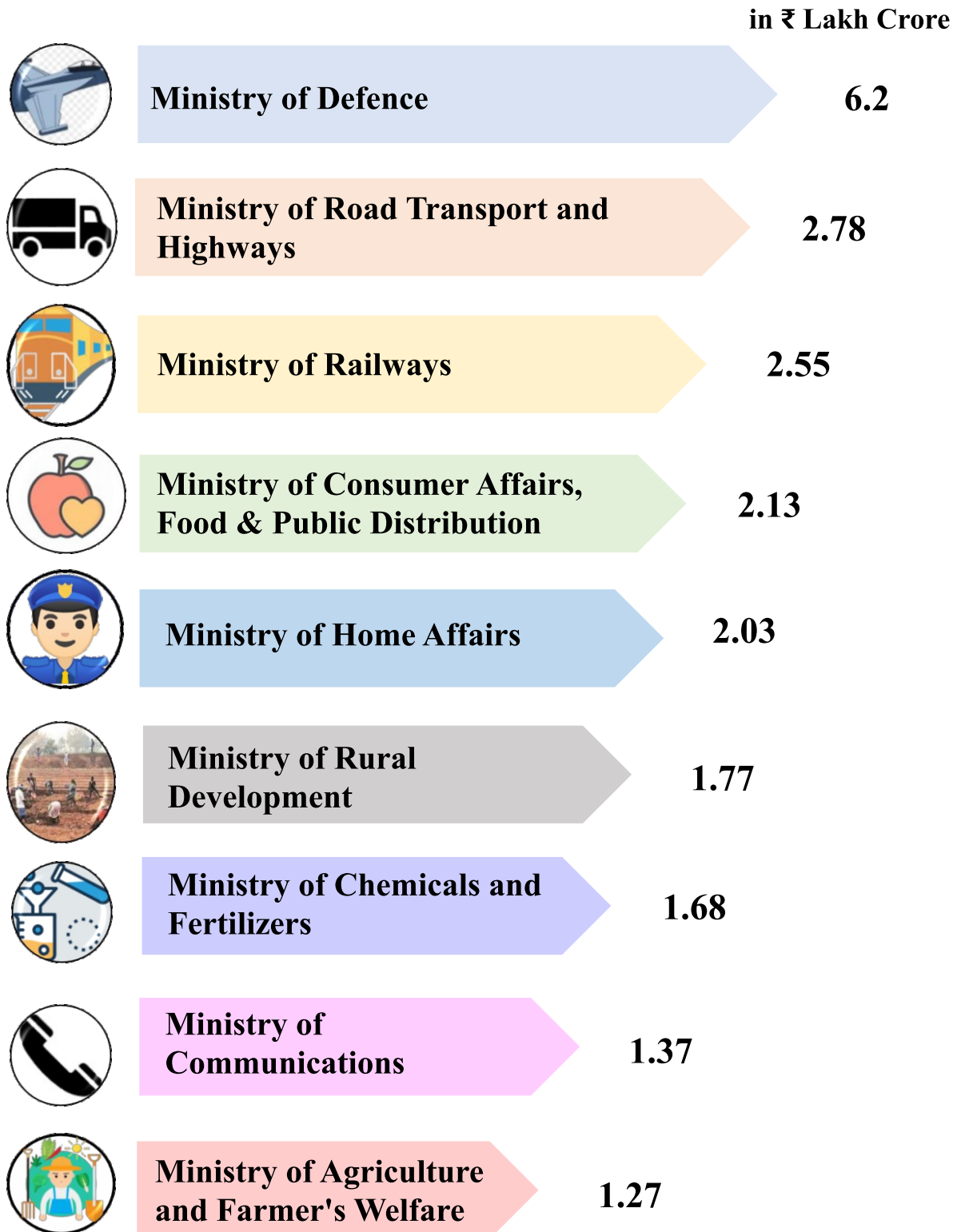
- Budget Estimates 2024-25** - Total receipts other than borrowings and the total expenditure are estimated at Rs.30.80 and Rs.47.66 lakh crore respectively.
  - Tax receipts are estimated at Rs.26.02 lakh crore.
- Capital expenditure (Infrastructure)** – The capital expenditure outlay was raised to Rs 11.1 lakh crore – Rs 11,11,111 crore (constituting 3.4% of the GDP) for FY25 from Rs 9.5 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.
  - Capital expenditure means the government's spending on durable assets like the construction of infrastructure.
- Fiscal deficit** - The fiscal deficit in 2024-25 is estimated to be 5.1 per cent of GDP, down from the revised estimates of 5.8% last fiscal year.
  - The fiscal deficit is the difference between the government's revenues and expenditures.
  - It is financed by money from various sources like market borrowings, small savings, dated securities and others.
  - The government has set a target of 4.5% fiscal deficit by 2025-26.
- Economic growth projections** - The GDP growth for FY 2023-24 real GDP growth is projected at 7.3%, aligning with the RBI's revised growth projection.
  - The International Monetary Fund upgraded India's growth projection to 6.3% for FY 2023-24.
  - It also anticipates India becoming the third-largest economy in 2027.
- Taxation** - The Budget maintains the existing rates for direct and indirect taxes, including import duties.
- Social Justice** - Prime Minister to focus on the upliftment of four major castes, that is, 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth) and 'Annadata'(Farmer).
  - 'Garib' (Poor) – The government assisted 25 crore people out of multi-dimensional poverty in the last 10 years.
  - DBT of Rs. 34 lakh crore using PM-Jan Dhan accounts led to savings of Rs. 2.7 lakh crore for the Government.
- PM-SVANidhi provided credit assistance to 78 lakh street vendors. 2.3 lakh have received credit for the third time.
- PM-JANMAN Yojana to aid the development of particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTG).
- PM-Vishwakarma Yojana provides end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople engaged in 18 trades.
- 'Annadata'(Farmer)** - PM-KISAN SAMMAN Yojana provided financial assistance to 11.8 crore farmers.
  - Under PM Fasal Bima Yojana, crop insurance is given to 4 crore farmers.
  - Electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) integrated 1361 mandis.
  - Encouraging the use of 'Nano DAP' for various crops across all agro-climatic zones.
  - Formulating policies to support dairy farmers and combat Foot and Mouth Disease.
  - Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has benefitted 38 lakh farmers and generated 10 lakh employment.
  - Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Yojana has assisted 2.4 lakh SHGs and 60000 individuals with credit linkages.
- 'Mahilayen' (Women)** - 30 crore Mudra Yojana loans given to women entrepreneurs.
  - Female enrolment in higher education has gone up by 28%.
  - In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43% of enrolment, one of the highest in the world.
  - Over 70% of houses under PM Awas Yojana are given to women from rural areas.
  - Assistance to 1 crore women through 83 lakh SHGs, fostering 'Lakhpati Didis.'
  - Healthcare coverage under the Ayushman Bharat scheme is to be extended to all ASHA workers, Anganwadi Workers and Helpers.

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## Allocation for Specific Ministries



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## Allocation to Major Schemes (in ₹ crore)

### Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme



2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

### Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY



2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

### Production Linked Incentive Scheme



2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

### Modified Programme for Development of Semi-conductors and display manufacturing ecosystem



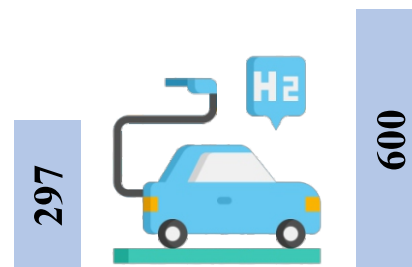
2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

### Solar Power (Grid)



2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

### National Green Hydrogen Mission



2023-24(BE)      2024-25(BE)

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9. **'Yuva' (Youth)** - Training of 1.4 crore youth under the Skill India Mission.
  - Fostering entrepreneurial aspirations with 43 crore loans sanctioned under PM Mudra Yojana.
  - PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) - Despite COVID challenges, the target of three crore houses under PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) will be achieved soon.
  - Two crore more houses to be taken up in the next five years.
10. **Rooftop solarization and muft bijli** - 1 crore households to obtain 300 units of free electricity every month through rooftop solarization.
  - Each household is expected to save Rs.15000 to Rs.18000 annually.
11. **R&D for catalyzing growth, employment and development** - A corpus of Rs.1 lakh crore is to be established with a fifty-year interest-free loan to provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates.
  - A new scheme is to be launched for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and expediting 'atmanirbharta'.
12. **Railways** - 3 major economic railway corridor programmes identified under the PM Gati Shakti to be implemented to improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost - energy, mineral and cement corridors; port connectivity corridors; and high traffic density corridors.
  - Forty thousand normal rail bogies are to be converted to Vande Bharat standards.
13. **Aviation Sector** – The number of airports in the country doubled to 149.
  - Five hundred and seventeen new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers.
  - Indian carriers have placed orders for over 1000 new aircraft.
14. **Green Energy** - Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 MT to be set up by 2030.
  - Phased mandatory blending of compressed biogas (CBG) in compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport and piped natural gas (PNG) for domestic purposes to be mandated.
15. **Tourism sector** - States are to be encouraged to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centres including their branding and marketing at a global scale.
  - Framework for rating of the tourist centres based on quality of facilities and services to be established.
16. **For state's capex** - The continuation of the fifty-year interest-free loan scheme for capital expenditure to states was announced.
  - A total outlay of Rs 1.3 lakh crore, with a provision of Rs 75,000 crore for fifty-year interest-free loans to support state-led reforms.

### Constitutional Provisions

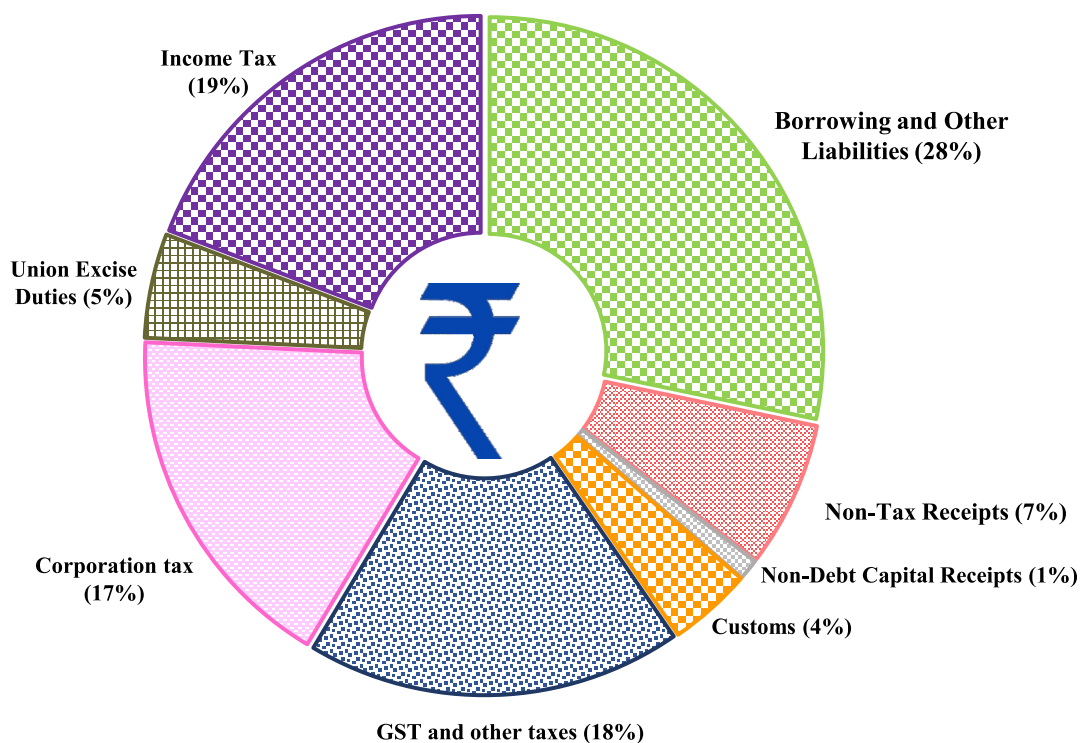
- As per Article 112 of the Indian Constitution, a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for a specific financial year— referred to as 'annual financial statement' — is laid before both Houses of Parliament.
- Article 116 of the Constitution allows the Lower House to make any grant in advance for the estimated expenditure for part of any financial year by voting and passing such legislation, i.e. vote on account.
  - The Lok Sabha is empowered to authorise the withdrawal of required funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for such expenditure.
- Article 266 (1) of the Constitution consolidates all revenues, loans, and loan repayments received by the Union Government into a single fund known as the Consolidated Fund of India.
  - Withdrawal needs parliament's permission (except for Charged Expenditures like Judges' salaries).
- Under Article 266 (2), it includes incoming money from provident fund, small savings, postal deposits etc.
  - The government acts similar to a banker transferring funds from here to there so parliament permission is not necessary.
- Contingency Fund of India is established under the Contingency Fund of India Act, 1950 and operates as an imprest in accordance with Article 267(1).
  - It serves the purpose of offering advances to the government for unforeseen expenditures during the fiscal year, pending authorization by Parliament.
  - Funds withdrawn from the Contingency Fund are replenished upon parliamentary approval through Supplementary Demands for Grants.

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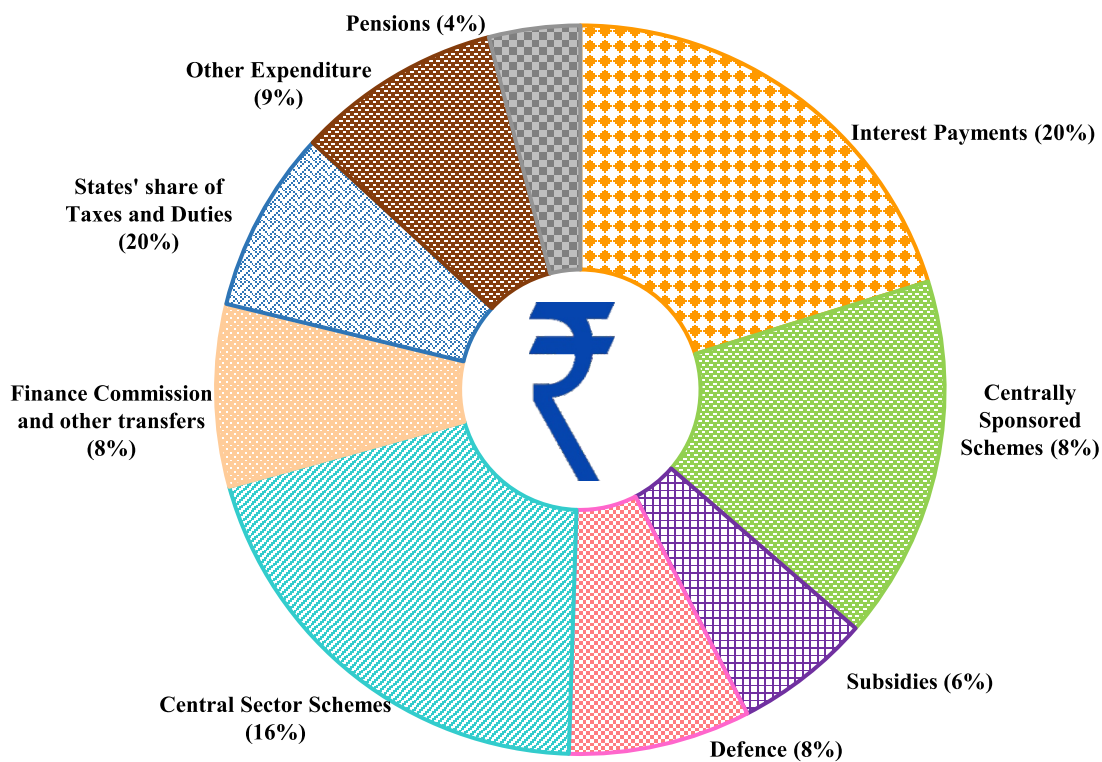




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## SUSPENSION OF FREE MOVEMENT REGIME WITH MYANMAR

### WHY IN NEWS?

- Union Ministry of Home Affairs recently decided to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border to ensure the internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure of India's North Eastern States.

### What is the FMR?

- The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to 16 km inside the other country without a visa.
- It was implemented in 2018 as part of the Narendra Modi government's Act East policy, at a time when diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar were on the upswing.
- In fact, the FMR was to be put in place in 2017 itself but was deferred due to the Rohingya refugee crisis that erupted that August.

### Scale of Migration

- Since the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, the ruling junta has launched a campaign of persecution against the Kuki-Chin people.
  - This has pushed large numbers of Myanmarese tribals across the country's western border into India, especially into Manipur and Mizoram, where they have sought shelter.
  - Mizoram, where a large section of the population has close ethnic and cultural ties with people across the border, has set up camps for more than 40,000 refugees, despite protests from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Manipur too has received a chunk of illegal migrants in the last few months.
  - A committee set up by the state government to identify such migrants in 2023 put their number at 2,187.
  - In September 2022, 5,500 illegal immigrants were caught in Moreh, and 4,300 were pushed back.

### Rationale behind Suspension

- The trigger for the rethink on the FMR was the conflict that broke out between the majority Meitei and the tribal Kuki-Zo communities in Manipur on May 3, 2023.
- Over the past decade, the Manipur government has been expressing concern over the "influx" of Myanmar nationals, a euphemism for Kuki-Chins, calling for an Assam-like National Register of Citizens to weed out the "illegal immigrants".
- In September 2023, Manipur Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh blamed the ethnic violence on the free movement of Myanmar nationals into India and urged the Ministry of Home Affairs to end the FMR, which had been suspended on April 1, 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- The suspension was extended after the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Recently, the government of India decided to construct a fence along the entire 1,643-kilometre border with Myanmar.
- The India-Myanmar border passes through the States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).
- India and Myanmar share an unfenced 1,643 km-long border and people on either side have familial and ethnic ties, which had initially prompted the arrangement.
- A 1968 government notification limited the free movement of people up to 40 km on either side of the border, which was further reduced to 16 km in 2004.
- The government in Myanmar (Myanmar's junta) has announced compulsory military service for all young men and women as the country's turmoil continues.
  - The army seized power from the civilian government in a coup in February 2021.

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## MARATHA MILITARY LANDSCAPES

### WHY IN NEWS?

- India nominated the 'Maratha Military Landscape' for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the 2024-25 cycle, with a total of 12 components included in this nomination.
- The 12 components of this nomination are— Salher Fort, Shivneri Fort, Lohgad, Khanderi Fort, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijay Durg, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, and Gingee fort in Tamil Nadu.

### About Maratha Military Landscapes

- The 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India' was developed between the 17th and 19th centuries.
- This extraordinary network of forts, varying in hierarchies, scales and typological features, is a result of integrating the landscape, terrain and physiographic characteristics distinctive to the Sahyadri mountain ranges, the Konkan Coast, Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats in the Indian Peninsula.
- The 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India' was included in the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2021.
- There are more than 390 forts in Maharashtra, out of which only 12 forts are selected under the 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India', and eight of these forts are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- The forts under ASI are Shivneri Fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg and Gingee Fort; whereas Salher Fort, Rajgad, Khanderi Fort and Pratapgarh.
- In the Maratha Military Landscapes of India, Salher Fort, Shivneri Fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad and Gingee Fort are hill forts, Pratapgad is a hill-forest fort, Panhala is a hill-plateau fort, Vijaydurg is coastal fort whereas Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg are island forts.
- The inception of the Maratha military ideology dates back to the 17th century during the reign of Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj by 1670 and continued through subsequent rules until Peshwa rule till 1818.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- At present, there are 42 World Heritage Sites in India, out of which 34 are cultural sites, 7 are natural sites and one is mixed sites.
- In Maharashtra, six sites have a UNESCO tag— five cultural and one natural.
  - These are Ajanta Caves (inscribed in 1983), Ellora Caves (1983), Elephanta Caves (1987), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018), and Western Ghats of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala is serial property in natural category (2012).



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## UGC'S DRAFT GUIDELINES ON DE-RESERVATION

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) recently removed from its website, the draft guidelines suggesting "de-reservation" of reserved posts if enough candidates from the SC, ST and OBC categories are not available, amid a controversy over the issue.
  - A controversy erupted over UGC's draft guidelines proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be "declared unreserved" if enough candidates from these categories are not available.
  - A chapter in the draft guidelines suggests that reserved posts could be dereserved in "exceptional cases", leading to a public outcry.

### About the Guidelines

- The University Grants Commission already has guidelines for implementing reservations, issued in 2006.
- About a year ago, the higher education regulator assigned a four-member committee the task of working on a new draft that would incorporate all updated government instructions.
  - The committee was led by HS Rana, the Director of the Institute of Public Administration in Bangalore.
  - Other members were Professor DK Verma, OP Shukla and GS Chauhan.
- It is organised into chapters covering the determination of quotas in faculty posts, the preparation of reservation rosters, de-reservation, verification of caste claims, and reservation in student admissions.
  - The chapter states that while there is a general ban on the de-reservation of reserved faculty vacancies in the case of direct recruitment, in exceptional circumstances, it can be done if a university can provide adequate justification.
  - In this context, direct recruitment means the process of appointing teachers by inviting applications after publicly advertising the posts.
- Dereservation means opening up faculty positions that were originally reserved for specific categories (SC, ST, OBC, EWS candidates) to applicants belonging to the general category if those positions remain vacant despite efforts to fill them.

### Why Controversial?

- In current academic practice, reserved faculty positions are not converted to recruit general candidates.
- While the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) permits de-reservation in exceptional circumstances exclusively for Group A posts, according to sources, this provision has not been put into effect in universities.
- Unfilled quota positions undergo re-advertisement, and universities organise special recruitment drives until suitable candidates are identified, without opening these positions to the general category.
- The draft UGC guidelines were seen to be paving the way for de-reservation in faculty positions in universities, which sparked an uproar.

### About UGC

- The UGC came into existence on 28 December 1953 and became a statutory organisation by an Act of Parliament in 1956, for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in university education.
- It operates under the Ministry of Education.
- Apart from providing grants to eligible universities and colleges, the Commission also advises the Central and State Governments on the measures that are necessary for the development of Higher Education.





## Constitutional Provisions Governing Reservation in India

- Part XVI deals with the reservation of SC and ST in Central and State legislatures.
- Article 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution enabled the State and Central Governments to reserve seats in government services for the members of the SC and ST.
- The Constitution was amended by the Constitution (77th Amendment) Act, 1995 and a new clause (4A) was inserted in Article 16 to enable the government to provide reservation in promotion.
- Later, clause (4A) was modified by the Constitution (85th Amendment) Act, 2001 to provide consequential seniority to SC and ST candidates promoted by giving reservation.
- Constitutional 81st Amendment Act, 2000 inserted Article 16 (4 B) which enables the state to fill the unfilled vacancies of a year which are reserved for SCs/STs in the succeeding year, thereby nullifying the ceiling of fifty per cent reservation on the total number of vacancies of that year.
- Articles 330 and 332 provide for specific representation through the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies respectively.
- Article 243D provides reservation of seats for SCs and STs in every Panchayat.
- Article 233T provides reservation of seats for SCs and STs in every Municipality.

# Under consideration



The Justice G Rohini Commission's report offers a major departure from the traditional way in which reservation policy is handled. It is divided into two parts

**1 How the OBC quota should be allocated**

**2 An updated list of all 2,633 OBC castes across India**

### 'Quantum of benefits'

The sub-categorisation is "on the basis of quantum of benefits enjoyed by different communities" as compared to social status and traditional occupation

**Set up in 2017:** The commission was created in October 2017 to, among other reasons, ensure the benefits of reservation were not restricted to a few dominant OBCs

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## UTTARAKHAND'S UNIFORM CIVIL CODE (UCC)

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The Uttarakhand Assembly on 7 February 2024 passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, which aims to replace the religious personal laws that govern marriage, relationships, and inheritance among other matters.

### Background

- In June 2022, the Uttarakhand government constituted an expert committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai to examine ways for the implementation of a UCC.
- The committee also included former Delhi High Court judge Justice Pramod Kohli, social worker Manu Gaur (who heads the Taxpayers Association of Bharat), retired IAS officer Shatrughan Singh, and Vice Chancellor of Doon University Surekha Dangwal as members.

### Key Features of the Bill

1. **Tribal communities exempted** - The tribal communities which comprise 2.9 per cent of Uttarakhand's population have been exempted from the application of the Bill.
  - Given their unique customary practices, tribal communities have been averse to a UCC from the very beginning.
2. **Registration of live-in relationships** - The Bill aims to regulate live-in relationships by imposing an obligation to register them.
  - A live-in relationship has been defined as a "relationship between a man and a woman who cohabit in a shared household through a relationship in the nature of marriage.
  - Notably, a woman is also eligible to claim maintenance in case she is "deserted" by her live-in partner.
3. **The concept of "illegitimate children"** - In a progressive move, the Bill abolishes the concept of "illegitimate children".
  - Existing personal laws especially those pertaining to inheritance and maintenance, discriminate against children born out of wedlock by deeming them illegitimate and not granting them rights at par with children born within wedlock.
  - The new law extends legal recognition to children born in void and voidable marriages, as well as children born in live-in relationships.
4. **Prohibition of bigamy or polygamy** - Section 4 of the Bill lists five conditions for marriage one of them being — "neither party has a spouse living at the time of the marriage", thus prohibiting bigamy or polygamy.
  - Other conditions include the minimum age for marriage which has remained the same, i.e. 18 years for women and 21 years for men.
5. **Registration of marriages** - Marriages that occur after the enactment of the Bill have to be compulsorily registered regardless of any other existing laws or customs.
  - The registration will have to be done within 60 days from the date of the marriage. It applies to marriages solemnised within the State or outside its territory, provided that at least one party to the marriage is a resident of the State.
6. **Divorce proceedings** – No marriage can be dissolved without a court order or else it can attract imprisonment up to 3 years.
  - Grounds for divorce include — adultery, cruelty, desertion, conversion to another religion, mental disorder, incurable venereal disease, renunciation of the world, absence for seven years, bigamy, and failure to comply with maintenance orders.
  - However, "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" has not been included as a ground for divorce despite being recognised in several Supreme Court judgments.
7. **Inheritance rights** - The Bill extends equal property rights for sons and daughters across all classes.
  - Illegitimate children, adopted children, and children born through surrogacy or through assisted reproductive technology are also considered to be at par with biological children.

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- A distinct feature of the Bill is that it abolishes the coparcenary system governing ancestral property under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956.
  - Four generations of Hindus hold ancestral property as coparceners. After a person's demise, his or her share in the coparcenary property forms a part of the property pool again.
  - Thus, under the new law, the same scheme of succession will now apply to both ancestral and self-acquired property for Hindus.
8. **Muslim personal law practices** - Existing Muslim personal law practices governing marriage and divorce such as nikah halala, iddat, and triple talaq have been criminalised without explicitly naming them.
9. **Queer relationships** - The Bill leaves out members of the LGBTQIA+ community from its ambit and applies only to heterosexual relationships.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Article 44 of the Indian Constitution, falling under the Directive Principles of State Policy, advocates for the establishment of a UCC.
- Article 162 of the Indian Constitution indicates that the executive power of a State extends to matters with respect to which the Legislature of the State has the power to make laws.
  - In view of the provisions of Entry 5 of the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule, the constitution of a Committee to introduce and implement a UCC per se cannot be challenged as ultra vires.
- Uttarakhand became the first state to clear the UCC Bill in independent India.
  - Although Goa is governed by a UCC (Portuguese Civil Code), the Assembly did not pass any law. The code was retained after its liberation in 1961.
- Following Uttarakhand's footsteps, two other BJP-ruled States — Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat — have appointed committees to initiate the formulation of a UCC.
- In its 1985 judgment in the **Shah Bano Begum case**, the Court observed that “it is a matter of regret that Article 44 has remained a dead letter” and called for its implementation.
  - Such a demand was reiterated in subsequent cases such as **Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India (1995)**, and **John Vallamattom v. Union of India (2003)** among others.
- In 2019, in its **Jose Paulo Coutinho v. Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira judgment**, the Court hailed Goa as a “shining example” where “the uniform civil code is applicable to all, regardless of religion except while protecting certain limited rights” and accordingly urged for its pan-India implementation.
- In August 2018, the 21st Law Commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan submitted a consultation paper on “Reforms of family law” wherein it observed that the “formulation of a Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage”.
- In 2022, the 22nd Law Commission headed by Justice (Retd) Rituraj Awasthi, issued a notification seeking opinions from various stakeholders, including the public and religious organisations, on the UCC.

### Diverse Civil Codes in India

In India, personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc., are rooted in religious scriptures and traditions.

- **Hindu Personal Law:** Based on ancient texts and customs, Hindu personal laws are regulated by acts like the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, ensuring equal rights for women in matters of inheritance.
- **Muslim Personal Law:** Governed by Shariah, the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, regulates marital, divorce, inheritance, and maintenance affairs among Muslims.
- **Other Religious Communities:** Christians, Parsis, and Jews follow the Indian Succession Act of 1925, which entails specific provisions for inheritance.







## RAMSAR SITES IN INDIA

### WHY IN NEWS?

- Union Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change announced that India has increased its tally of Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance) to 80 from the existing 75 on the eve of World Wetlands Day 2024.

### Newly Designated Ramsar Sites

1. **Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)** - It is a human-made village irrigation tank built centuries back and is spread over an area of 244.04 acres adjoining the Ankasamudra village.
  - Magadi Kere is also one of the largest wintering grounds for the Bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) in Southern India.
2. **Aghanashini Estuary (Karnataka)** - It is formed at the confluence of the Aghanashini River with the Arabian sea.
  - The wetland is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA) and also listed as a priority area for conservation in India.
3. **Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)** - It is a human-made wetland with an area of nearly 50 hectares which was constructed to store rainwater for irrigation purposes.
  - The brackish water of the Estuary provides diverse ecosystem services including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation and livelihood support.
  - The wetland also provides livelihoods by supporting fishing, agriculture, collection of edible bivalves and crabs, shrimp aquaculture, traditional fish farming in the estuarine rice fields (locally known as Gazni rice fields), bivalve shell collection and salt production.
  - Additionally, the mangroves bordering the estuary help to protect the shores against storms and cyclones.
4. **Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu)** – It is one of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu and is a significant source of groundwater recharge for the area.
  - Karaivetti has one of the largest congregations of waterbirds in the State of Tamil Nadu.
  - About 198 species of birds have been recorded here; some of the important visitors are the Bar-headed Goose, Pin-tailed duck, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Common Pochard, Eurasian Wigeon, Common teal and Cotton teal.
5. **The Longwood Shola Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu)** – It derives its name from the Tamil word, "Solai", which means a 'tropical rain forest'.
  - The 'Sholas' are found in the upper reaches of the Nilgiris, Anamalais, Palni hills, Kalakadu, Mundanthurai and Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu.
  - These forested wetlands serve as habitats for the globally endangered Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush (*Strophocinclla cachinnans*), Nilgiri Blue Robin (*Myiomela major*), and vulnerable Nilgiri Wood-pigeon (*Columba elphinstonii*).

### DID YOU KNOW?

- World Wetlands Day is observed on 2nd February every year worldwide to commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance on February 2, 1971.
- The theme of World Wetland Day, 2024 is 'Wetlands and Human Wellbeing' which underscores the critical role wetlands play in enhancing our lives.
- The Ramsar Convention, named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, was an international treaty for the conservation of wetlands.
- In India, it came into force on 1st February 1982, under which wetlands of international importance are declared as Ramsar sites.
- Tamil Nadu continues to have the maximum number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites) followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).
- Amrit Dharohar initiative was launched by the Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change in June 2023 to promote unique conservation values of the Ramsar Sites in the country.

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## ANTI-CHEATING BILL

### WHY IN NEWS?

- In an attempt to arrest cheating in government recruitment exams, the Parliament on February 9 cleared the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024.

#### Key Highlights

- The Bill aims to prevent “unfair means” in order to “bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examinations system”.
- Defines Unfair Means**
    - Section 3 of the Bill lists at least 15 actions that amount to using unfair means in public examinations for monetary or wrongful gain.
    - These acts include leakage of question paper or answer key or part thereof and taking possession of question paper or an Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) response sheet without authority, providing solutions to questions by any unauthorised person during a public examination.
    - The section also lists tampering with any document necessary for short-listing candidates or finalising the merit or rank of a candidate; tampering with the computer network or computer system; creation of fake websites and issuance of fake admit cards or offer letters to cheat or for monetary gain as illegal acts.
  - Defines Public Examinations**
    - Under Section 2(k), a “public examination” is defined as any examination conducted by a “public examination authority” listed in the Schedule of the Bill, or any “such other authority as may be notified by the Central Government”.
    - The schedule lists five public examination authorities, Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs), the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), the National Testing Agency (NTA).
    - Apart from these designated public examination authorities, all “Ministries or Departments of the Central Government and their attached and subordinate offices for recruitment of staff” will also come under the purview of the new law.
  - Punishment**
    - Section 9 of the Bill states that all offences shall be cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable — which means that an arrest can be made without a warrant and bail will not be a matter of right; rather, a magistrate will determine whether the accused is fit to be released on bail.
- A non-compoundable offence is one in which the case cannot be withdrawn by the complainant even when the complainant and the accused have reached a compromise, and a trial must necessarily follow.
  - Punishment for “any person or persons resorting to unfair means and offences” can be three to five years in prison, and a fine up to Rs 10 lakh.
  - Under Section 10(2), a service provider who is engaged to provide “support of any computer resource or any material, by whatever name it may be called” for the conduct of the examination can be fined up to Rs 1 crore, along with other penalties.
  - Under Section 11(1), those involved in organised crimes of cheating will face five to 10 years of imprisonment and a minimum fine of Rs 1 crore.

#### Need

- The decision to impose strict punishment on cheating has been introduced after many instances were found where question paper leaks and organised cheating have adversely affected a large number of students.
- In many other instances, organised groups and mafia elements deploy solver gangs, indulge in impersonation methods and in paper leaks.
- The Bill primarily aims to deter such kinds of nefarious elements.



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## LADAKH DEMAND STATEHOOD

### WHY IN NEWS?

- Ladakh witnessed a widespread shutdown as thousands participated in marches, advocating for statehood and constitutional protections under the sixth schedule for the Union Territory.
- The socio-political organisations spearheading the movement are seeking protections for the UT previously enshrined under Articles 370 and 35A.

### Key Demands

- Apex Body Leh (ABL) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the two socio-political organisations spearheading the movement, are pursuing four main demands:
  1. **Restoration of statehood with a legislature.**
    - Earlier, Ladakh would send four members to the J&K Assembly and two members to the State's legislative council.
  2. **Safeguards under the Sixth Schedule** of the Constitution and Article 371 of the Constitution of India on the lines of Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim and other northeastern States.
  3. **Ladakh also demands exclusive rights over recruitment.**
    - It has put forth a proposal to the Centre to have the Ladakh Public Service Commission for the recruitment of gazetted jobs.
    - It also demanded that both hill councils should have the power to recruit lower-rung staff for the region.
  4. **The creation of separate Parliamentary constituencies** for the two parts of the region — Leh and Kargil.

### Current Status of Ladakh

- Ladakh was a part of the Kashmir division of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir.
  - It was carved out as one of the Union Territories, the other being J&K, out of the State on August 5, 2019, as the Centre ended the special constitutional position of the region provided to it under Article 370.
- However, unlike the UT of J&K, Ladakh does not have a legislature.
- But it has two elected hill councils, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Kargil (LAHDC) and LAHDC-Leh.
  - They run micro governance issues of the region with a population of 2.74 lakh (2011 census).
- Ladakh is a Muslim-majority UT, with the Leh district dominated by Buddhists and Kargil by Shia Muslims.
  - The region witnessed a divided reaction to the Centre's moves to abrogate Article 370 and 35A, provisions that granted exclusive rights to locals over land, jobs and natural resources.
  - Leh for many decades, supported the demand for UT status. However, Kargil, after the events of 2019, has been insisting on reunification with Kashmir.

### Centre's Stand

- In the wake of street protests held by people in Ladakh, the Centre in 2022 formed a committee under Minister of State G. Kishan Reddy to engage with the members of the LAB and KDA.
  - The Centre had assured the people it would find “an appropriate solution to the issues related to language, culture and conservation of land in Ladakh.” However, it has failed to arrive at a solution.
- After a fresh bout of protests in 2023, another high-powered committee, with Minister of State Nityanand Rai at its head, was empowered to engage with the stakeholders of Ladakh.
  - The 17-member committee included the Ladakh Lieutenant Governor and members from the KDA and LAB.
- In 2024, these bodies submitted a written memorandum to pave the way for more structured talks between New Delhi and Ladakh over the list of demands.





## About Sixth Schedule

- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration of the tribal areas in the four northeastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Sixth Schedule under Article 244 provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions — Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) — that have some legislative, judicial, and administrative autonomy within a state.
  - In cases where different Scheduled Tribes inhabit an autonomous district, the Governor has the authority to divide the district into Autonomous Regions.
  - The Governor is vested with the power to organise, reorganise, and alter the boundaries or names of autonomous districts.
- For each autonomous district, a District Council is to be constituted, comprising a maximum of 30 members.
  - Of these, no more than 4 members are nominated by the Governor, while the remainder are elected through adult suffrage.
  - Likewise, a separate Regional Council is established for each area designated as an autonomous region.

## CALL OF CHANGE FROM NORTH

*Wangchuk isn't the only one demanding change. It has united disparate sections in Leh, Kargil*

➤ Sparsely populated Ladakh has a total area of 59,146 sq. km, greater than Himachal Pradesh or Punjab

➤ Over 90 per cent of its population comprises indigenous tribes

➤ UT status for Ladakh was a long-pending demand, but after the abrogation of Article 370, people feel the need for a legislature



➤ Leh and Kargil districts have united to press for a set of demands: full-fledged statehood, safeguards under Sixth Schedule, job reservation for youth, establishment of Public Service Commission and one more Lok Sabha constituency

➤ There is growing concern about ecological damage, with reports that glaciers are melting due to commercial activity

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## NEW WATER ACT

### WHY IN NEWS?

- Parliament has passed the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 with the Lok Sabha approving it on 8 February 2024.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

### What is the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974?

- The Act, 1974 was the first piece of legislation in independent India that identified the need to have an institutional structure to address contamination of water bodies.
  - This led to the creation, in September 1974, of the Central Pollution Control Boards (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) which were charged with monitoring and preventing public water resources from getting contaminated by sewage and industrial effluents.
- This Act made it mandatory for industrial units to get permission from their respective State boards before setting up factories and submitting themselves to checks on whether their manufacturing and other processes were complying with prescribed norms.
- While the CPCB is empowered to conduct checks and provide guidance on technical standards to be adhered to, the SPCB files cases and is expected to enforce compliance.
- Violating the provisions of the Water Act can mean industries being shut down; monetary fines as well as imprisonment of up to six years.

### Key Amendments

- The amended version of the Act will currently apply to Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan and the Union territories.
  - The original Act, passed in 1974, is applicable in 25 States.
- The most important change is that it removes the provisions of imprisonment for several violations, deemed “minor”, and replaces them with fines, to the tune of Rs 10,000 extending up to Rs 15 lakh.
- The amendments give the Centre greater authority to override SPCB in some instances.
  - As per the original Act, the SPCB's permission is needed to establish any industry or treatment plant.
  - In the amendment, the Bill specifies that the Centre, “... in consultation with the CPCB, may exempt certain categories of industrial plants from obtaining such consent....”
  - However, operating or establishing an industrial unit without SPCB consent can still land you in jail for six years along with a fine.
- The Bill also adds that the Centre may issue guidelines for the grant, refusal, or cancellation of consent granted by the SPCB.
  - Under the Act, establishing and operating an industry without obtaining such consent from the SPCB is punishable with imprisonment up to six years and a fine. The Bill retains this.
- The amended Act also empowers the Centre to frame rules to select the chairpersons of SPCBs and frame guidelines that States can follow on matters relating to the grant, refusal or cancellation of consent by any State board for establishing industries and new operating processes.



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## DID YOU KNOW?

- Water is a State subject, and the Centre cannot directly pass legislative laws influencing water management.
  - However, the Centre can create legislation, if two or more States demand it, and this can be made applicable by States over their territories if they adopt the legislation in their Assemblies.
- The CPCB was constituted in September 1974 and functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- India extracts the most groundwater in the world, more than the 2nd and 3rd largest extractors (China and the United States) together.
  - However, only 8% of the extracted groundwater in India is used for drinking, 80% goes to irrigation and the remaining 12% goes to industrial uses.
- According to the World Bank, India has 18% of the world's population but only has enough water resources for 4% of its people.
- The theme of World Water Week (from 20th to 24th August 2023) was "Seeds of Change: Innovative Solutions for a Water-Wise World."
- Jal Jeevan Mission was launched in 2019 to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.
- World Water Day, held on 22 March every year since 1993, is an annual United Nations Observance focusing on the importance of freshwater.



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## PREAMBLE TO THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The Supreme Court recently questioned whether the Preamble of the Constitution could be amended while keeping the date of adoption, November 26, 1949, intact.
  - A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta posed the question to former Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy and lawyer Vishnu Shankar Jain, who have sought deletion of the words "Socialist" and "Secular" from the Preamble of the Constitution.

#### Petitioners' Argument

- The two terms were inserted into the preamble as part of the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution in 1976 during the Emergency imposed by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
  - The petitioners have argued that these words were never intended to be in the Constitution and that such insertion is "beyond the amending power of the Parliament under Article 368."
- Similar petitions have been filed earlier too and given rise to debates around the preamble and the role it plays in the Constitution.

#### Supreme Court on Preamble

- One of the controversies about the Preamble is as to whether it is a part of the Constitution or not.
- In the Berubari Union case (1960), the Supreme Court said that the Preamble shows the general purposes behind the several provisions in the Constitution, and is thus a key to the minds of the makers of the Constitution.
  - Despite this recognition of the significance of the Preamble, the Supreme Court specifically opined that the Preamble is not a part of the Constitution.
- In the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), the Supreme Court rejected the earlier opinion and held that the Preamble is a part of the Constitution.
  - It observed that the Constitution should be read and interpreted in the light of the grand and noble vision expressed in the Preamble.
- In S R Bommai vs Union of India Case (1994) the Supreme Court again held that the Preamble is an integral part of the Constitution.
- In the LIC of India case (1995) also, the Supreme Court again held that the Preamble is an integral part of the Constitution.

#### What is the purpose of the Preamble?

- A preamble serves as an introduction to a document and contains its basic principles and goals.
- The Preamble to the Indian Constitution is based on the 'Objectives Resolution', drafted and moved by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1946, and it was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1947.
- The Preamble of the Indian Constitution mentioned Social Justice, Economic Justice, and Political Justice.
  - Whereas the word Religious Justice is not mentioned in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.
- The Preamble of the Indian Constitution reveals the source of the authority of the Constitution. It states that the Constitution derives its authority from the people of India.
- The exact Constitutional status of the Indian Republic on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950 was a sovereign, democratic, and republic.
- The Preamble has been amended only once so far, in 1976, by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, which has added three new words—Socialist, Secular, and Integrity—to the Preamble.
  - It also changed "unity of the nation" to "unity and integrity of the nation".
- Now, the Constitutional status of the Indian Republic is sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, and republic.



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## Amenability of the Preamble

- The question of whether the Preamble can be amended under Article 368 of the Constitution arose for the first time in the historic Kesavananda Bharati case (1973).
  - It was urged that the Preamble cannot be amended as it is not a part of the Constitution.
  - The petitioner contended that the amending power in Article 368 cannot be used to destroy or damage the basic elements or the fundamental features of the Constitution, which are enshrined in the Preamble.
- The Supreme Court, however, held that the Preamble is a part of the Constitution.
  - The Court stated that the opinion tendered by it in the Berubari Union (1960) in this regard was wrong, and held that the Preamble can be amended, subject to the condition that no amendment is done to the 'basic features'.
  - Through the Berubari case, the Court stated that the 'Preamble is the key to open the mind of the makers' but it can not be considered as part of the Constitution. Therefore it is not enforceable in a court of law.
- In other words, the Court held that the basic elements or the fundamental features of the Constitution as contained in the Preamble cannot be altered by an amendment under Article 368.



On India's

**75<sup>th</sup> Republic Day**

Let's look at

## The Original Preamble to India's Constitution

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## WORLD RESTORATION FLAGSHIP

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The United Nations named seven initiatives from across Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean and Southeast Asia as the intergovernmental organisation's World Restoration Flagships.

#### Seven World Restoration Flagships

- These projects revolve around the revival and preservation of ecosystems at the tipping point of outright degradation caused by wildfires, drought, deforestation and pollution.
1. **The Restoring Mediterranean Forests Initiative** involves the countries of Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Türkiye.
    - It consists of a novel approach said to have protected and restored natural habitats and vulnerable ecosystems.
    - It is also said to have led to around two million hectares of forests restored across the region since 2017.
    - Along with this, over eight million hectares are planned for restoration by 2030.
  2. **The Living Indus Initiative** received approval from the Pakistan parliament in the wake of the devastating 2022 climate change-induced floods.
    - Its official launch took place at the 27th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Sharm el-Sheikh.
    - The initiative aims to restore 25 million hectares of the river basin by 2030, encompassing 30 per cent of Pakistan's surface area through the implementation of 25 high-impact interventions for policymakers, practitioners and civil society.
    - It designates the Indus River as a living entity with rights — a measure taken to protect rivers elsewhere as well.
    - It involves Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, India, New Zealand, Peru and Sri Lanka.
  3. **The Acción Andina Social Movement** led by the Peruvian conservation non-profit ECOAN aims to protect and restore a forest area of one million hectares.
    - About 25,000 people from remote Andean communities are engaged in the process of restoring 5,000 hectares and protecting more than 11,000 hectares of Andean forests.
      - Andean forests are a type of tropical and subtropical forest that grow along the slopes of the Andes mountains in South America.
  - It also works to secure land titles for local communities, protecting the forest from future mining, timber exploitation and other drivers of degradation.
  4. **The Sri Lanka Mangrove Regeneration Initiative** is a science-driven programme co-led by local communities.
    - It focuses on the restoration of natural balance in the ecosystem.
    - Since its launch in 2015, efforts have led to 500 hectares of restored mangroves.
  5. **The Terai Arc Landscape Initiative** aimed to restore the forests of critical corridors of the Terai Arc Landscape in collaboration with local communities working as citizen scientists, among others.
    - The Terai Arc Landscape spans an 810 km stretch between the river Yamuna in the west and the river Bhagmati in the east.
    - It comprises the Shivalik hills, the adjoining Bhabhar areas, and the Terai floodplains, covering parts of the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and the low-lying hills of Nepal.
    - Measures like the restoration of 66,800 hectares of Nepal's forests, among others, were said to improve the livelihoods of about 500,000 households in the country.
    - It also supported the tiger population in the landscape shared by India and Nepal, which increased today to 1,174.
  6. **Regreening Africa's Agriculture** is expected to benefit over 6,00,000 households.
    - It continues to increase carbon storage, boost crop and grass yields, make soil more resilient (by preventing floods) and treat it with fixed nitrogen that acts as a natural fertiliser.
  7. **Growing Forests in Africa's Drylands Initiative** aims to expand from 41,000 restored hectares today to 229,000 hectares by 2030.
    - With the involvement of African farmers, tens of millions of trees are planted under the project every year.





### About UN World Restoration Flagships

- The campaign aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.
- The flagships serve as a part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, led by the two agencies - the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- The award conferred makes the flagships eligible for technical and financial support from the organisation.
- The UN General Assembly has declared 2021–2030 as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

### India's Restoration Initiatives

- Sundarbans Mangrove Restoration
- National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)
- National Mission for a Green India (GIM)
- Western Ghats Forest Landscape Restoration
- Green Wall
- National Afforestation Programme (NAP)
- National Biodiversity Action Plan

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## UPI PAYMENT SERVICES LAUNCHED IN SRI LANKA AND MAURITIUS

### WHY IN NEWS?

- India launched its Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system in Sri Lanka and Mauritius on February 12, 2024.
- India's RuPay card services were also launched in Mauritius.

#### Global Status of UPI

- As of February 2024, seven countries - Sri Lanka, Mauritius, France, UAE, Singapore, Bhutan, and Nepal - officially support the UPI payment system.
- Bhutan was one of the first countries to adopt UPI payments outside India back in 2021 in collaboration with the Royal Monetary Authority (RMA) of Bhutan.
  - Besides, Bhutan is also one of the first countries to adopt and issue RuPay bank cards.
- France is one of the first countries in the European region to access UPI payments, that too at the iconic Eiffel Tower in collaboration with Lyra.
- UAE being the third-largest trade partner of India, recently announced a partnership with the government of India regarding the adoption of UPI payments in the country just a few days ago in collaboration with Mashreq, a major bank in UAE.
- Sri Lanka and Mauritius are the latest islands to adopt India's UPI payment system on February 12, helping Indian tourists to send and receive money in these countries.

#### What is UPI?

- UPI is a mobile-first payment system developed in India by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- It makes it easy to send and receive by just scanning a QR code or using a user's phone number.
- Unlike most digital payment systems, the amount gets directly debited to the linked bank account.
- UPI can be used on BHIM, a first-party app. It can also be accessed via third-party platforms such as Google Pay, Amazon Pay, PhonePe, BharatPe, and a lot more.
- Most banks that officially operate in India support UPI payment, and unlike a credit or debit card payment, there is no charge involved in UPI payment.
- To prevent fraudulent activities, NPCI has thought of various features like how the account is directly linked to the phone number, and if the SIM card is removed, UPI ceases to work, and at times, one might also face downtime due to service issues.
  - To solve that, NPCI came up with **UPI Lite**, which does not require a PIN or Internet to make transactions.
  - However, there is a limit of Rs 500 per transaction and Rs 4,000 limit per day.

### Digital Public Infrastructure of India

- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to a set of shared digital building blocks, such as applications, systems, and platforms, powered by interoperable open standards or specifications.
- 'India Stack' is the collective name of a set of commonly used DPIs in India.
- It consists of three different layers—
  - unique identity (Aadhaar),
  - complimentary payments systems (Unified Payments Interface, Aadhaar Payments Bridge, Aadhaar Enabled Payment Service), and
  - data exchange (DigiLocker and Account Aggregator).
- Together they enable online, paperless, cashless, and privacy-respecting digital access to a variety of public and private services.
- India signed MoUs with several countries like Papua New Guinea, Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname and Antigua and Barbuda on sharing India Stack at no cost and with open-source access.
- The Prime Minister of India announced the launch of two India-led initiatives - the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository and a Social Impact Fund aimed at promoting the development of Social Impact Fund to advance DPI in November 2023.

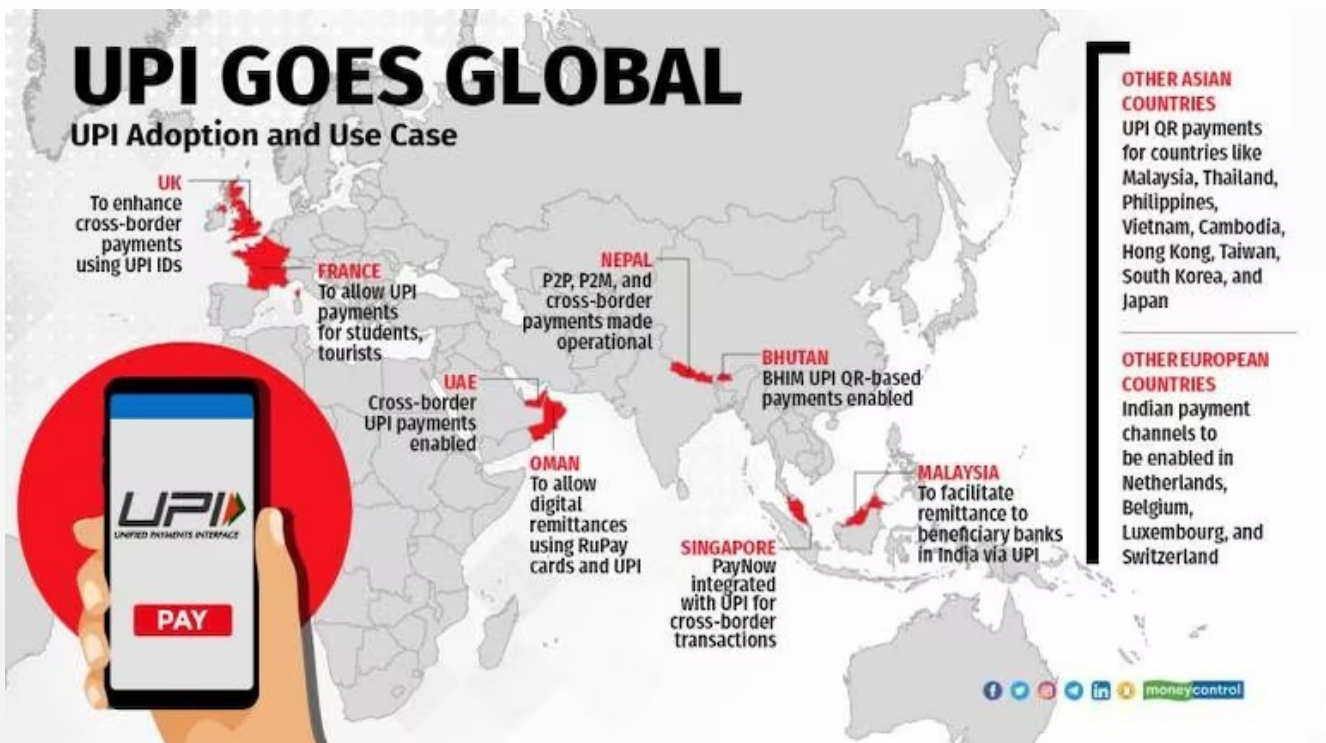
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## What is RuPay?

- A product of the NCPI, RuPay is India's indigenous payment network.
- The name, derived from the words 'rupee' and 'payment', indicates that it is India's own initiative for card payments.
  - It is the country's answer to international payment networks.
- It is a domestic card payment network that can be used at automated teller machines (ATMs), point of sale (POS) devices, and e-commerce websites across India.
- After Nepal, Bhutan, Singapore and UAE, the RuPay card is now available in Africa through Mauritius, the first non-Asian country to issue it.
  - The use of RuPay technology will allow banks in Mauritius to issue RuPay cards locally through the Mauritius Central Automated Switch (MauCAS) card network.





## SUPREME COURT STRIKES DOWN ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The Supreme Court (SC) of India on 15 February 2024 struck down the scheme terming it 'unconstitutional' and noted that electoral bonds are violative of right to information, Article 19(1)(a).

#### Key Takeaways from the Verdict

- In its verdict, the Supreme Court said the scheme violated the right to information of citizens, impacting free speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
  - Transparency in political funding cannot be achieved by granting absolute exemptions. It can lead to quid pro quo.
- The court ordered the issuing bank State Bank of India (SBI) to forthwith stop the issue of electoral bonds.
  - The Bank has been asked to furnish the details of donations through electoral bonds and the details of the political parties which received the contributions to the Election Commission by March 6, 2024.
  - Further, the election body has been directed to make all information received from the SBI, public via its website, by March 13, 2024.
- Electoral bonds which are not encashed by political parties shall be returned and refunded to purchasers. The bank has to refund the purchasing party after the uncashed bonds are returned.
- The Court also quashed amendments made to the Income Tax Act and the Representation of People Act, which had made the donations anonymous.
- In a major observation, the SC said the electoral scheme would aid the political party that was in power.
- It also held that the scheme could not be justified by claiming that it would help arrest the inflow of black money in politics.
- The judgement also said the amendment to the Companies Act, allowing blanket corporate political funding, was "unconstitutional".
  - The CJI said it violated the right to information of citizens about possible quid pro quo. Before the amendment to the Companies Act in 2017, loss-making firms in India were not allowed to contribute.
- The Chief Justice also rejected the argument of the Centre that due to the expressed anonymity of the bonds, political parties do not know the identity of the donors.
  - He pointed out that such de jure anonymity of the contributors does not translate to de facto anonymity since there are sufficient gaps in the scheme to enable political parties to know the particulars of the contributions made to them.

- The SC applied the **proportionality test** to examine whether the scheme violated the right to information of the voters and the transparency of the electoral process.
- The test was formally laid down as the best practice in the 2017 seven-judge Bench K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017 ruling, which recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right.
- The Constitution protects fundamental rights outlined in Part III, including the right to free speech (Article 19(1)).
  - A law passed by Parliament cannot interfere with Part III of the Constitution which lists out the inviolable fundamental rights.
  - The only interference with Article 19(1) — which guarantees the fundamental right to free speech — permissible is to the extent that the “reasonable restrictions” listed in Article 19(2) are not flouted.
  - These restrictions can be in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with the Foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
  - The test to decide whether an action is a reasonable restriction is the proportionality test.
- The proportionality test serves as a crucial judicial standard to evaluate the balance between state action and individual fundamental rights.
- Upheld in the Aadhaar Act ruling of 2018, the proportionality test ensures that state actions do not disproportionately infringe upon fundamental rights while pursuing legitimate government interests.

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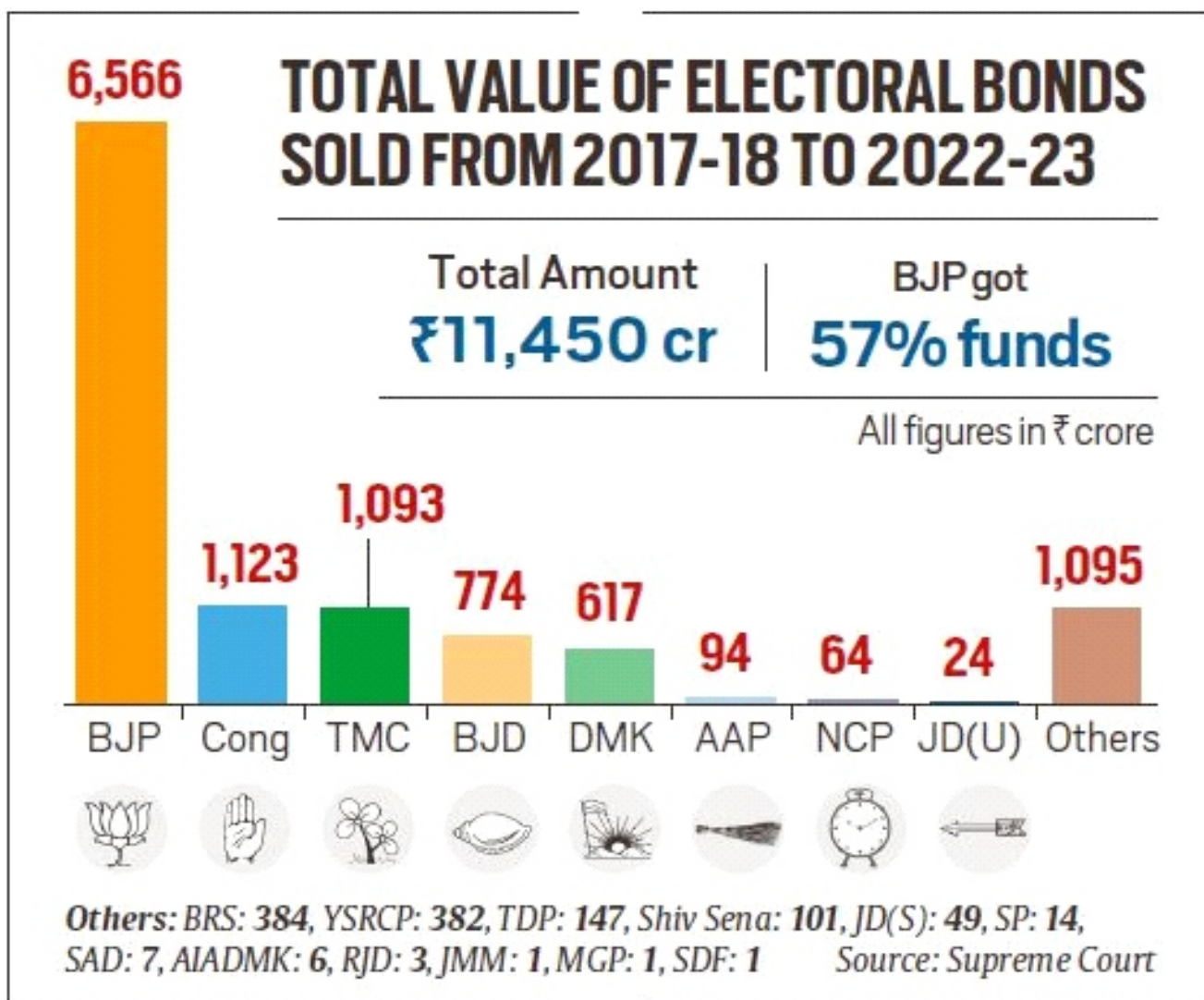


### What is the Electoral Bond Scheme?

- Introduced by the Centre in 2018, EBS allowed individuals and corporations to anonymously fund political parties by purchasing electoral bonds from the SBI.
- SBI is the sole entity authorized to issue and remit electoral bonds in its 29 authorised bank branches.
- Any citizen or company could buy these bonds in denominations of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore and donate it to a political party.
- Electoral Bonds are a bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note and an interest-free banking instrument, which can only be purchased by a citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Political parties mobilised Rs 16,518 crore in 30 phases of the electoral bond scheme since 2018.
- According to records, around 94 per cent of the bonds had a face value of Rs 1 crore in most of the 30 phases, indicating that corporates and high net-worth individuals could have been principal donors.
- According to SBI, donors gave Rs 1,056.73 crore in 2018, Rs 5,071.99 crore in 2019, Rs 363.96 crore in 2020, Rs 1,502.29 crore in 2021, Rs 3,703 crore in 2022 and Rs 4,818 crore in 2023.
- Political parties mobilised Rs 570.05 crore through electoral bonds in the 30th phase in January, the last phase.



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## THE PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK DEBACLE

### WHY IN NEWS?

- In a major blow to fintech services provider Paytm, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred its payments bank subsidiary, Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from obtaining further deposits and top-ups in its accounts or wallets from February 29.
  - PPBL was barred from onboarding new customers back in March 2022.
- The latest move was after an audit report had revealed “persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns in the bank”.

#### Key Highlights

- The RBI has disallowed the Paytm subsidiary from accepting further deposits, top-ups or credit transactions into its operated wallet or accounts from February 29.
  - This also applies to its prepaid instruments for FASTags and National Common Mobility Cards (NCMC) cards. Present customers would, however, be allowed to use their existing balances to avail of the services.
- Further, PPBL has been prohibited from carrying out any banking services (in the nature of services like AEPS, IMPS etc), bill payments and UPI.
- It has also been directed to “terminate at the earliest”, or before February 29, nodal accounts of its parent company and Paytm Payments Services.
  - Nodal accounts are a type of bank account opened by businesses (financial intermediaries) and are used for holding money from participating banks — from the consumer's side, and ultimately remitting to the specific merchant.
- The regulator also asked the subsidiary to settle all pipeline and nodal accounts transactions by March 29. No further transactions shall be permitted thereafter.

#### About Paytm Payments Bank Ltd

- PPBL is an associate of One97 Communications Limited (OCL).
- One97 Communications holds 49% of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL.
- PPBL commenced operations as a payments bank with effect from May 23, 2017.
- The bank offered digital banking, including savings accounts, current accounts, fixed deposits with partner banks, and balance in wallets, UPI, and FASTag, among other services.

#### What are Payments Banks?

- In September 2013, the Reserve Bank of India constituted a committee headed by Dr Nachiket Mor to study 'Comprehensive financial services for small businesses and low-income households'.
  - The objective of the committee was to propose measures for achieving financial inclusion and increased access to financial services.
- The committee submitted its report to RBI in January 2014. One of the key suggestions of the committee was to introduce specialised banks or 'payments banks' to cater to the lower income groups and small businesses so that by January 1, 2016, each Indian resident could have a global bank account.
- A payments bank is like any other bank but operates on a smaller scale without involving any credit risk.
  - In simple words, it can carry out most banking operations but can't advance loans or issue credit cards.
- It can accept demand deposits (up to Rs 2 lakh), offer remittance services, mobile payments/ transfers/ purchases and other banking services like ATM/debit cards, net banking and third-party fund transfers.

### Action Over the Years

**2018** RBI bars Paytm Payments Bank from taking on new customers

This was due to issues with KYC process; ban was lifted in **2019**

**2022** On-boarding banned again after Paytm could not right its wrongs

**THIS IS AFTER ANOTHER SYSTEM AUDIT FOUND CONTINUED VIOLATIONS**

**2024** RBI asks the bank to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instrument, wallet or Fastag after Feb 29





## 2024 GRAMMY AWARDS

### WHY IN NEWS?

- The Recording Academy, which conducts the Grammy Awards, officially revealed the winners in the 66th Grammy Awards ceremony, which took place in Los Angeles on 4 February 2024.

#### India's Performance

- India created history at the Grammys 2024 and won three Grammy Awards.
- Shakti, a fusion music group comprising tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and singer Shankar Mahadevan, has won the 2024 Grammy Award for Best Global Music Album for "This Moment".
  - Shakti's third studio album, "This Moment," was released on 23rd June 2023, marking their return after 46 years under the same name.
  - The group also features guitarist John McLaughlin, percussionist V Selvaganesh and violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan.
- 'As We Speak', a track that was the brainchild of Zakir Hussain, Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and Rakesh Chaurasia bagged a Grammy for the 'Best Contemporary Instrumental Album' category.
- Renowned tabla player and composer Ustad Zakir Hussain also received the award for the song 'Pashto', which features American musicians Bela Fleck and Edgar Meyer, in the category of 'Best Global Music Performance'.

#### About Grammy Awards

- Grammy Award (originally named Gramophone Award) is a series of awards presented annually in the United States (US) by the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (NARAS), commonly called the Recording Academy) or the Latin Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (LARAS), (LARAS only for recordings in Spanish/Portuguese languages).
- This annual event to recognize musical achievements was started in 1959 to respect the performers for the year 1958.
- The honorees receive a golden statuette of a gramophone.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- Taylor Swift made history as the first performer to win 'Album of the Year' four times with the 'Album of the Year' win for the 'Midnights' in the Grammy Awards 2024.
  - Swift's win not only secured her fourth Album of the Year award, making her the first performer to achieve this feat but also cemented her status alongside Adele as the only woman to win in this category more than once.
  - Swift previously won Album of the Year three times for her albums "Fearless" in 2010 — she surpassed Alanis Morissette as the category's youngest victor at 20 years old — "1989" in 2015 and "Folklore" in 2021.
- Tanvi Shah became India's first woman to win the prestigious Grammy Award in 2010.
  - Tanvi Shah won her Grammy for her performance in the song "Jai Hoe" from the movie "Slumdog Millionaire."
- Thetakudi Harihara Vinayakram, fondly known as Vikku, is known for his mastery of the ghatam.
  - He became the first Carnatic musician to win a Grammy with his performance in 'Vlanet Drum' in 1991.
- Ustad Zakir Hussain became the first Indian musician to win three trophies in one event (2024 Awards).
- Pt. Ravi Shankar was the first Indian musician to win a Grammy in 1968.
  - He was also honoured with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, posthumously.
- At the 66th Grammy Awards, PM Modi has been nominated for 'Abundance in Millets' in the Best Global Music Performance category.
  - 'Abundance in Millets' is a song created by US-based musicians Falguni and Gaurav Shah and co-written by PM Modi.

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**CONTEMPORARY EVENTS OF  
SIGNIFICANCE FROM INDIA  
AND THE WORLD**

**QUICK FACTS**

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1. The **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)** celebrated its **48th Raising Day** on **February 1, 2024**, commemorating its remarkable journey from a modest beginning in 1977 to becoming a formidable force in maritime security. With 152 ships and 78 aircraft in its arsenal, the ICG is on track to achieve its targeted force levels of 200 surface platforms and 100 aircraft by 2030. Under the motto "Vayam Rakshamah" (We Protect), the ICG has saved over 11,554 lives since its inception, including 200 lives in the year 2023.
2. The Government of **Karnataka**, in collaboration with the All India Game Developers Forum (**AIGDF**), launched a **Digital Detox Initiative**, with special emphasis on gaming and social media. Digital Detox Centers will be established across Karnataka, offering personalized guidance, counselling, and practical tools to manage screen time effectively.
3. The Indian Navy commissioned its latest survey vessel, **INS Sandhayak**, at the Naval Dockyard in Vizag. INS Sandhayak is the first in a series of four Survey Vessel (Large) ships being constructed at Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata. INS Sandhayak is re-incarnated in its present avatar from erstwhile Sandhayak - the Indian Navy's oldest Hydrographic Survey Vessel that was decommissioned in 2021.
4. The **Indian Air Force** conducted the demonstration exercise **Vayu Shakti 2024** on 17 February 2024 at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range, near Jaisalmer. The exercise showcased the IAF's offensive and defensive capabilities across the day and night. A total of 121 aircraft participated in the exercise, including indigenous aircraft Tejas and helicopters Prachand, and Dhruv. Internationally renowned aircraft like Rafale, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi-30 MKI, and Jaguar also showcased their strength. Advanced helicopters like Chinook, Apache, and Mi-17 were also in action.
5. **India's woman robot astronaut Vyommitra** will fly into space ahead of the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) ambitious **Gaganyaan mission**, the country's first manned space flight carrying Indian astronauts. Vyommitra is a name derived from two Sanskrit words - vyoma, meaning space, and mitra, meaning friend. The Gaganyaan project envisages a demonstration of human space capabilities by launching a crew of astronauts into an orbit of 400 km and then bringing back the astronauts safely to Earth.
6. **India Energy Week 2024** was held from 6th to 9th February in **Goa**. It is India's largest and only all-encompassing energy exhibition and conference, bringing together the entire energy value chain, and will catalyse India's energy transition goals.
7. A green propulsion system, developed under the **Technology Development Fund (TDF) scheme** of the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), has successfully demonstrated in-orbit functionality on a payload launched by the PSLV C-58 mission. The TDF is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Defence executed by DRDO under the 'Make in India' initiative for funding innovation in defence and aerospace, especially to start-ups and MSMEs.
8. The **Supreme Court of India (SC)** celebrated its **Diamond Jubilee Celebration (75th anniversary)** at the Supreme Court Auditorium in Delhi. It also coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution. On 28 January 1950, two days after India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic, the Supreme Court came into being.
9. The **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)**, the country's largest national school board, is planning significant changes to the academic framework of Classes 9, 10, 11, and 12 as part of its plan to **implement creditisation**, recommended by the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP). The CBSE proposed that Class 10 and 12 students study more subjects, especially more native Indian languages. Creditisation aims to establish academic equivalence between vocational and general education, facilitating mobility between the two education systems, as proposed by the NEP 2020.
10. The **Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (Kufos)** will be part of an advanced **NASA- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) Phase II research project** on forest biomass and carbon monitoring using radar data. The collaboration comes after the successful completion of the first phase of the NISAR programme. The second phase of the research project involves the use of advanced radar imaging which provides a detailed view of Earth made available through the NISAR, which is designed to observe and measure some of the planet's most complex processes.
11. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) extended the ban against the **Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) for another five years**. The organisation was declared an "unlawful association," under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for the first time in 2001.





12. Scientists at the **CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL)** have successfully tested an unmanned aerial vehicle, called **High Altitude Pseudo-Satellite (HAPS)** at Challakere, Karnataka. HAPS are like drones, except that they are expected to be in the stratosphere – well above where commercial planes fly – and can be powered enough by solar cells and a battery system to be able to hover for days on end. A fully working HAPS can be used for a variety of applications, from surveillance to beaming 5G waves.
13. Violence erupted in the city of **Haldwani in Uttarakhand's** Nainital district on February 8, after the administration conducted a demolition drive at the site of a mosque and madrasa allegedly on **Nazool land**. Nazool land is owned by the government but most often not directly administered as state property. The state generally allots such land to any entity on lease for a fixed period, generally between 15 and 99 years.
14. In a significant step towards digital empowerment, the Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj inaugurated the pilot project titled '**Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat**' on 13 February 2024 at Paprou Gram Panchayat under Barauni Block of Begusarai District in Bihar to extend **PM-WANI (Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface)** Service in Gram Panchayats.
15. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami unveiled a **life-size statue of General Bipin Rawat**, the nation's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), at TonsBridge School in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.
16. **Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)** report and portal was launched by **NITI Aayog**. This multi-institutional effort led by NITI Aayog utilized remote sensing and GIS to assess agroforestry suitability across all districts in India.
17. The government of India launched the "**Science for Women-A Technology & Innovation (SWATI)**" Portal, aimed at creating a single online portal representing Indian Women and Girls in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Medicine).
18. The **Odisha government** has declared the **Gupteswar forest** in Koraput district as **its fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS)**. The forest is adjacent to the Gupteswar Shiva temple in the Dhondrakhol reserve forest under the Jeypore forest division. Earlier, the State government had declared Mandasaru in Kandhamal district, Mahendragiri in Gajapati, and Gandhamardan in Bargarh and Bolangir districts as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.
19. **Justice Ritu Bahri** recently took oath as the **first woman Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court**. Governor Lieutenant General Gurmeet Singh (Retd) administered the oath of office to Justice Bahri at the Raj Bhavan.
20. **Tamil superstar Vijay** has announced the name of his **new political party Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam**. Vijay will contest the 2026 Assembly Elections in Tamil Nadu when the current term of the MK Stalin-led DMK party ends. The Tamil movie superstar is fondly called by his fans as Thalapathy, meaning General or Commander.



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## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

# **QUICK FACTS**



1. The military regimes in **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger** announced recently their immediate withdrawal from the West African bloc **ECOWAS**. Struggling with jihadist violence and poverty, the regimes have had tense ties with ECOWAS since coups took place in Niger in July 2023, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Mali in 2020. All three were suspended from ECOWAS with Niger and Mali facing heavy sanctions. ECOWAS is a regional grouping aimed at promoting economic integration and shared development of the West African sub-region. It was established in May 1975 by 15 West African countries in Lagos, Nigeria.
2. The **US State Department** has approved a potential sale of **31 armed MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones**, missiles and supporting equipment to India for an estimated USD 4 billion. Out of the 31 MQ-9B Predator drones, the Navy will get 15 SeaGuardian drones, while the Army and the Indian Air Force will get eight each of the land version – SkyGuardian. The MQ-9B SkyGuardian is a remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS), created to assist in gathering intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) around the globe.
3. The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** awarded its **first-ever certificates validating** progress in eliminating industrially produced trans fatty acids (TFAs) to five countries- **Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand**. WHO's ambitious target to fully eliminate industrially-produced TFAs from the global food supply by the end of 2023 was not met. However, it proposes a revised new target for the virtual elimination of iTFA globally by 2025.
4. Elon Musk's brain-computer interface company, **Neuralink**, achieved a major milestone -- its **first successful human implantation**. The device is roughly the size of a large coin, specifically designed for implantation in the skull for brain-computer interface. Neuralink has obtained approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) under the "investigational device exemption."
5. **Blue Spring State Park, Florida, USA** reported a gathering of nearly **1,000 manatees (sea cows)**. Experts weigh in on this "very unusual" phenomenon. Manatees dwell in zones such as the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Amazon, and East and West Africa. Manatees are Vulnerable as per the Red Data Book of IUCN.
6. **World Cancer Day**, observed globally on **February 4** each year, aims to raise awareness about cancer, its prevention, and the importance of early detection. The theme for the 2022-2024 period is "**Close the Care Gap: Everyone Deserves Access To Cancer Care**," highlighting the need for global collaboration in the fight against cancer. The sub-theme, "Together, we challenge those in power," emphasises accountability from leaders to allocate essential resources for eradicating cancer. The history of World Cancer Day dates back to the World Summit Against Cancer in Paris in 1999, where the concept was proposed. The Charter of Paris Against Cancer was signed on February 4, 2000, during the follow-up World Summit, officially marking the first observance of World Cancer Day.
7. **Cameroon** in central Africa adopted the **Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing**, an international agreement that aims to ensure that the benefits of using genetic resources and traditional knowledge are shared in a fair and equitable way. The Nagoya Protocol is an offshoot of the Convention on Biological Diversity that addresses fair and equitable benefit sharing in the context of biodiversity access.
8. On February 6, 2024, the **European Union (EU)** introduced via the European Commission its new proposed **2040 climate goal**. It laid out a net emissions reduction target of 90 per cent by 2040 compared to the 1990 baseline levels. EU's previous goal set in September 2020 aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 55% below 1990 levels by 2030, which was later enshrined in the EU Climate Law along with a commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.
9. **Microsoft** has detected covert, targeted malicious activity by the Chinese state-sponsored group **Volt Typhoon**, aimed at post-compromise credential access & network system discovery, targeting US critical infrastructure. Volt Typhoon affects various sectors including communications, manufacturing, utilities, transportation, construction, maritime, government, IT, and education.
10. Recently, **Chess World No 1 Magnus Carlsen** faced off against **world champion Ding Liren** across the chess board in a new, innovative tournament, called **Freestyle Chess**. Freestyle chess goes by multiple names: Fischer Random Chess, Chess 9LX, and Chess 960 (960 is the number of possible starting positions on the board when you shuffle your pieces on the last ranks of the board).
11. The **first council meeting of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF)** took place in **Washington DC, United States**, on February 8-9, 2024. The delegates set down rules for the implementation of GBFF, which was proposed during the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP15) of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022. Delegates

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- approved the Resource Allocation Policy and the Project Cycle Policy, which will help the council allocate donor funds when they are available.
12. The **7th Indian Ocean Conference was held in Australia's Perth** with the theme "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean." The Indian Ocean Conference is a flagship consultative forum for countries in the Indian Ocean Region, organized annually by the Ministry of External Affairs, in association with the India Foundation.
  13. **World Pulses Day** is celebrated every year on **February 10**, highlighting the importance and nutritional value of pulses. Pulses comprise dry peas, beans, lentils, lupins, and chickpeas which contain proteins, minerals and vitamins in high quantities. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2013 to declare 2016 as the International Year of Pulses. Later in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly declared February 10 as World Pulses Day.
  14. **Iran** on February 6, 2024, announced the initiation of a **15-day visa-free policy for Indian tourists** visiting the country. Under the new order, Indian citizens would be allowed to enter Iran with ordinary passports once every six months and with a maximum stay of 15 days which will not be extended. Iran has become the latest country in the past few months to give visa-free access to Indian tourists. **Vietnam, Thailand, and Sri Lanka** have also eased visa rules for Indian tourists.
  15. The **International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** is observed annually on **6 February**. The theme of 2024 is "**Her Voice. Her Future**". In 2012, the UN General Assembly designated February 6th as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, with the aim to amplify and direct the efforts on the elimination of this practice.

## MQ-9B


Predator Drones



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**Fuel Capacity: 2,721 kg**

**Payload Capacity: 2,177 kg across 9 hardpoints (8 wing, 1 centerline)**



**Crew:**  
Two pilots in ground control stations

**Weapons**  
Laser guided missiles  
Anti-tank missiles  
Anti-ship missiles

**Missions**

- Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief
- Search and Rescue
- Law Enforcement
- Border Enforcement
- Defensive Counter Air
- Airborne Early Warning

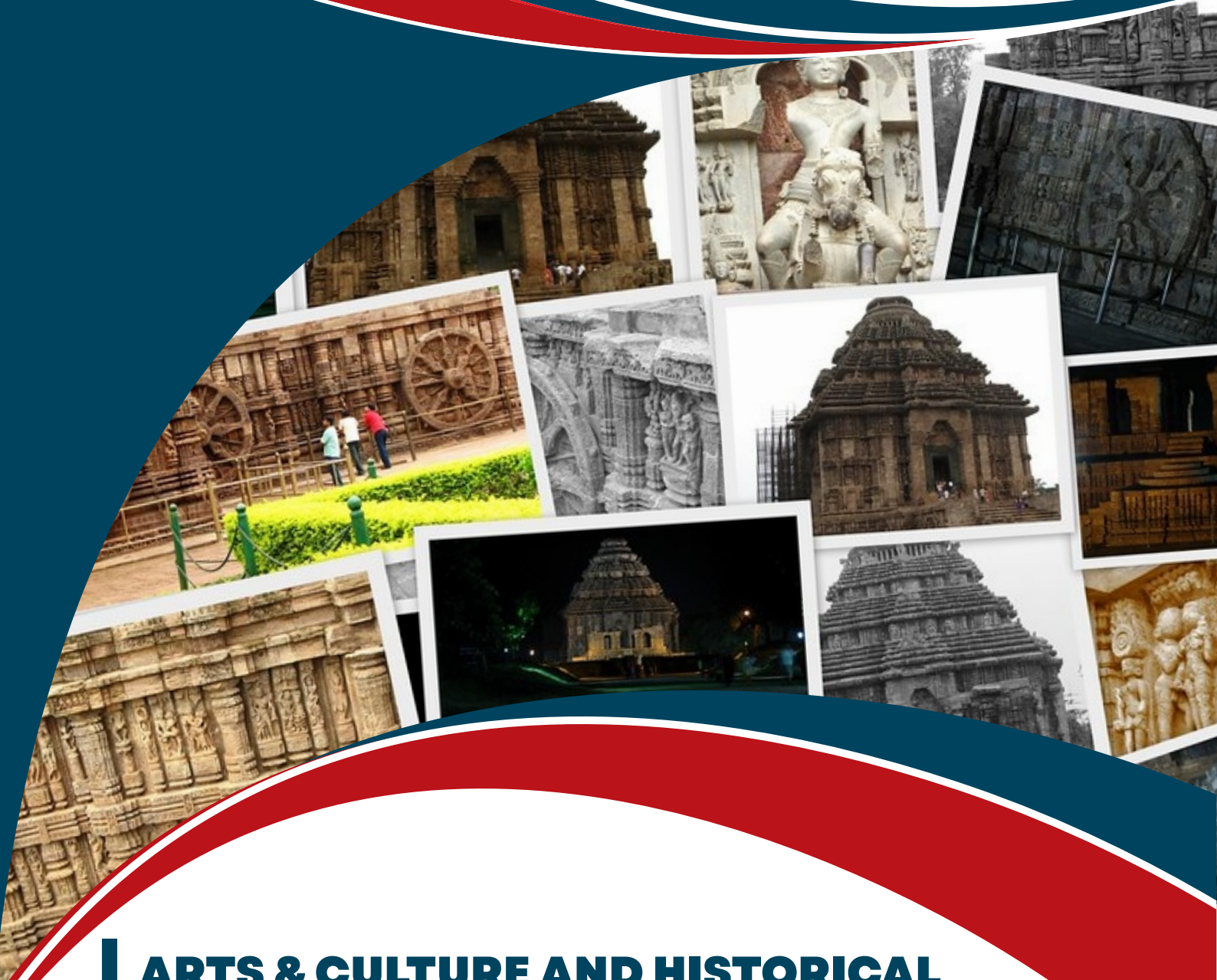
**Missions**

- Electronic Warfare
- Anti-Surface Warfare
- Anti-Submarine Warfare
- Airborne Mine Counter Measures
- Long-Range Strategic ISR
- Over-the-Horizon Targeting

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## **ARTS & CULTURE AND HISTORICAL EVENTS OF CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE**

### **QUICK FACTS**



1. As part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) initiative, students immersed themselves in sustainable living during the **Auroville Exposure Tour**. Auroville is located in the Viluppuram district of Tamil Nadu (some parts are in Puducherry). It was founded by Mirra Alfassa in 1968 to implement Sri Aurobindo's vision of new forms of individual and collective life. It was officially endorsed by UNESCO in 1966.
2. In a bid to preserve **Manipur's** rich cultural heritage, a concerted effort is underway to revive the **ancient Subika painting style** in Manipur, which is on the brink of extinction. The Subika painting style is intricately linked to the Meitei community's cultural history through its six surviving manuscripts — Subika, Subika Achouba, Subika Laishaba, Subika Choudit, Subika Cheithil and Thengrakhel Subika. Unfortunately, awareness about this unique art form has dwindled over the years, leading to its near extinction. Among these manuscripts, Subika Laishaba represents a direct and authentic continuation of the Meitei cultural tradition depicted through visual images.
3. The Prime Minister of India inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of **Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana (Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor)** in **Assam**. It has been sanctioned under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region (PM-DevINE) scheme. Kamakhya temple is dedicated to different forms of Mother Shakti, namely Sundari, Tripura, Tara, Bhuvaneshvari, Bagalamukhi and Chinnamasta. Ambubachi Mela is one of the major festivals of this temple. The festival is held every year to commemorate the yearly menstruation of Goddess Kamakhya.
4. The **Assam government's** attempt to revive traditional practices of **buffalo and bulbul (songbird) fighting** during Magh Bihu has come up against a legal challenge by People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in the Gauhati High Court, which admitted petitions by PETA India seeking a ban on both. These fights are part of the folk culture associated with the Assamese winter harvest festival of Magh Bihu, which takes place in January, at the same time as harvest festivals in other parts of the country such as Makar Sankranti, Pongal and Lohri.
5. The President of India paid floral tributes to **Dr Zakir Hussain, former President of India** on his **birth anniversary** at Rashtrapati Bhavan on **February 8, 2023**. Dr. Zakir Husain (08 Feb 1897- 03 May 1969) was an Indian statesman, and the first Muslim to hold the position of President of India in 1967. He was also appointed governor of Bihar state in 1957 and was elected vice-president of India in 1962.
6. The Prime Minister of India extended his wishes to the nation on the **200<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati**. Prime Minister has called Swami Dayanand a sage with national consciousness. The first Arya Samaj Unit was formally set up by Swami Dayanand Saraswati at Mumbai in 1875 and later the headquarters of the Samaj were established at Lahore. He gave the slogan "Back to the Vedas".
7. The **National Film Awards** announced the changes in the name of awards as per the recommendations of a committee set up by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. The 'Indira Gandhi Award for Best Debut Film of a Director' will now be called '**Best Debut Film of a Director**'. Moreover, the 'Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration' has become the '**Best Feature Film Promoting National, Social and Environmental Values**'.



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**TEST ZONE**



## PASSAGE - 1

'Maratha Military Landscapes' representing extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers will be India's nomination for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the 2024-25 cycle, the Culture Ministry said on January 29.

The twelve components of this nomination are— Salher Fort, Shivneri Fort, Lohgad, Khanderi Fort, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala Fort, Vijay Durg, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, and Gingee fort in Tamil Nadu, it said in a statement. These components, distributed across diverse geographical and physiographic regions, showcase the strategic military powers of the Maratha rule, officials said.

The 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India', which developed between 17th and 19th centuries, "represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers", the statement said. This will be India's nomination for inclusion into the UNESCO World

Heritage List for the year 2024-25, it added. The 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India' was included in the Tentative List of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2021, it said.

There are more than 390 forts in Maharashtra, out of which only 12 forts are selected under the 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India', and eight of these forts are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

The forts under ASI are Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala fort, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg and Gingee fort; whereas Salher fort, Rajgad, Khanderi fort and Pratapgarh are protected by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, government of Maharashtra, the statement said.

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from: "'Maratha Military Landscapes' to be India's nomination for UNESCO tag for 2024-25", The Hindu]

**Q.1** At present, there are 42 World Heritage Sites in India, out of which \_\_\_\_\_ sites are present in Maharashtra.

**A** Four

**B** Five

**C** Six

**D** Seven

**Q.2** Presently, India has the sixth-largest number of UNESCO Heritage Sites in the world. Which country topped the list with the most number of sites?

**A** Spain

**B** Germany

**C** China

**D** Italy

**Q.3** The International Day for Monuments and Sites, also known as World Heritage Day, is observed every year on –

**A** 18 April

**B** 15 May

**C** 18 June

**D** 15 September

**Q.4** At present, there are 42 World Heritage Sites in India. Which of the following sites is India's 42nd on the UNESCO list?

**A** Santiniketan

**B** Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysala

**C** Dholavira

**D** Ramappa Temple

**Q.5** Two UN member states - Israel and Liechtenstein- are not UNESCO members. On the other hand, three UNESCO member states - Cook Islands, Niue, and \_\_\_\_\_ - are not UN members.

**A** Angola

**B** Cabo Verde

**C** Palestine

**D** Eswatini

Q.1 (C) Q.2 (D) Q.3 (A) Q.4 (B) Q.5 (C)

Answers

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## PASSAGE - 2

The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Tuesday removed from its website, the draft guidelines suggesting "de-reservation" of reserved posts if enough candidates from the SC, ST and OBC categories are not available, amid a controversy over the issue. The commission chairman, M Jagadesh Kumar, however, said "the guidelines have been removed from the website as the time period for stakeholders to submit their feedback is over".

A controversy erupted on Sunday over UGC's draft guidelines proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be "declared unreserved" if enough candidates from these categories are not available, with the Congress terming it a conspiracy to do away with quota in higher education institutions.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan clarified that not a single post will be de-reserved and there is no scope for ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar also made it clear that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is "going to be no such de-reservation".

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from: "UGC removes 'de-reservation' draft guidelines from website amid backlash", The Economic Times]

**Q.1** The University Grants Commission (UGC) came into existence on 28 December 1953 and became a statutory Organization of the Government of India by an Act of Parliament in –

**A** 1953

**C** 1955

**B** 1954

**D** 1956

**Q.2** The Indian Constitution contains several provisions for reservation. \_\_\_\_\_ deals with SC and ST reservations in Central and State legislatures.

**A** Part XI

**C** Part XV

**B** Part XVI

**D** Part XIV

**Q.3** Who among the following headed the UGC's committee which was formed to formulate new draft guidelines for implementing reservations in higher education, considering the changes and new government instructions since the 2006 guidelines?

**A** DK Verma

**C** HS Rana

**B** OP Shukla

**D** GS Chauhan

**Q.4** Which of the following Amendment Acts provided 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for the "economically weaker sections" in the unreserved category?

**A** The Constitutional (102nd Amendment) Act of 2018

**C** The Constitutional (104th Amendment) Act of 2019

**B** The Constitutional (103rd Amendment) Act of 2019

**D** The Constitutional (105th Amendment) Act of 2021

**Q.5** Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras opened its first-ever overseas campus in –

**A** Zanzibar

**C** Kuala Lumpur

**B** Abu Dhabi

**D** Doha

Q.1 (D) Q.2 (B) Q.3 (C) Q.4 (B) Q.5 (A)

Answers

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## PASSAGE - 3

Five more Indian wetlands have been added to the global list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, taking the total number of such highly recognised waterlogged ecosystems in the country to 80, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on January 31.

Of the five wetlands added to the Ramsar list, Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve, Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve, and Aghanashini Estuary are in Karnataka and Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary and Longwood Shola Reserve Forest are in Tamil Nadu. The aim of the Ramsar list is "to develop and maintain an international network of wetlands, which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life, through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits".

Mr. Yadav said the emphasis Prime Minister Narendra Modi has put on environmental protection and conservation has led to a paradigm shift in how India treats its wetlands. "This reflects in the Amrit Dharohar initiative envisioned by PM Modi," he said.

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, on the Caspian Sea, where the treaty was signed on February 2, 1971.

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from: "Five more Indian wetlands added to Ramsar list", The Hindu]

Q.1 India added five more Ramsar sites to its portfolio and became the \_\_\_\_\_ largest country in the world in terms of number of Ramsar sites.

- A** Second
- B** Third

- C** Fourth
- D** Fifth

Q.2 To commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971, World Wetlands Day is observed every year on –

- A** 2 February
- B** 5 February

- C** 8 February
- D** 3 February

Q.3 What is the theme of the World Wetlands Day 2024?

- A** Wetland Restoration
- B** Wetlands Action for People and Nature

- C** Wetlands and Water
- D** Wetlands and Human Wellbeing

Q.4 In India, the Ramsar Convention came into force in \_\_\_\_\_, under which wetlands of international importance are declared as Ramsar sites.

- A** 1982
- B** 1981

- C** 1975
- D** 1972

Q.5 Which of the following Indian states has the maximum number of Ramsar Sites?

- A** Uttar Pradesh
- B** Sikkim

- C** Tamil Nadu
- D** Odisha

Q.1 (C) Q.2 (A) Q.3 (D) Q.4 (A) Q.5 (C)  
Answers

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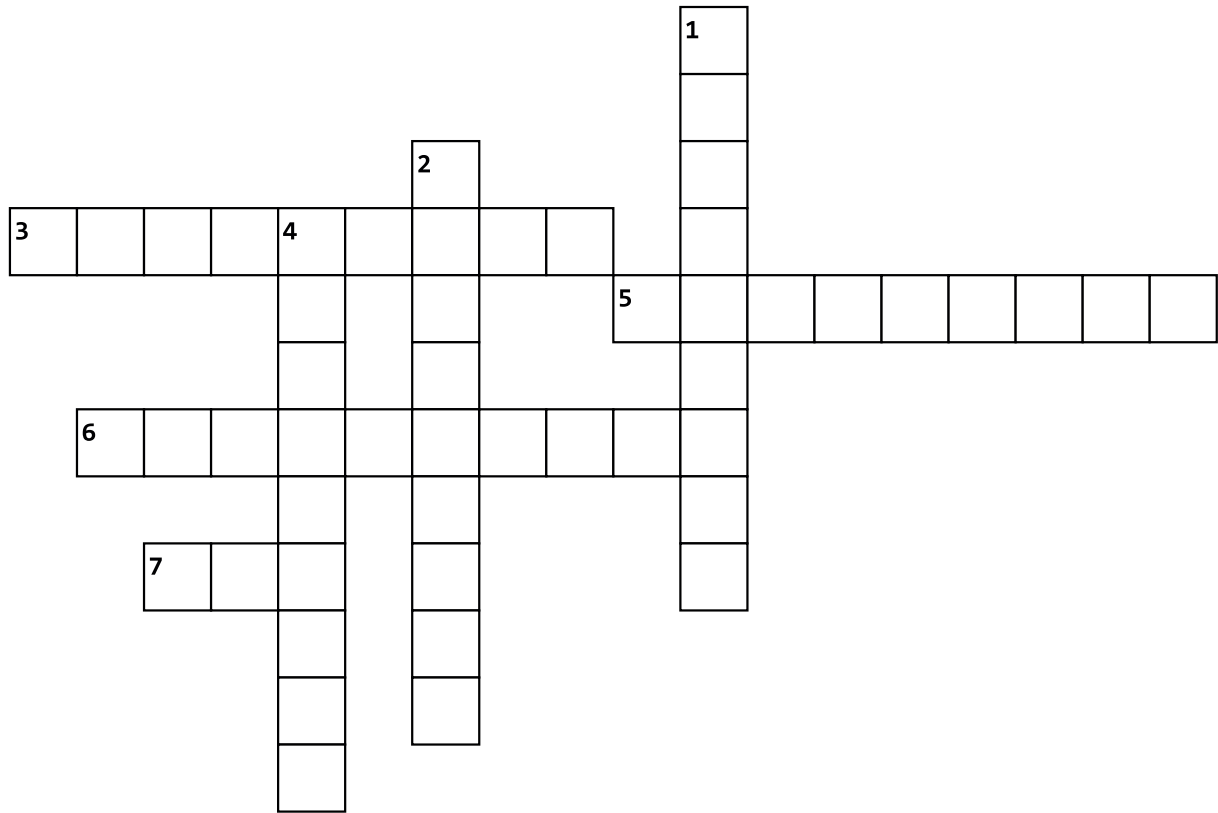
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# **CROSSWORD CORNER**



## CROSSWORD - 1



### Across

3. Raising Day of Indian Coast Guard (ICG)
5. launched a Digital Detox Initiative
6. Indian Air Force conducted the demonstration exercise
7. Place where India Energy Week 2024 was held

### Down

1. Elon Musk's brain-computer interface company
2. Latest survey vessel launched by the Indian Navy
4. First woman Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court

### Answers

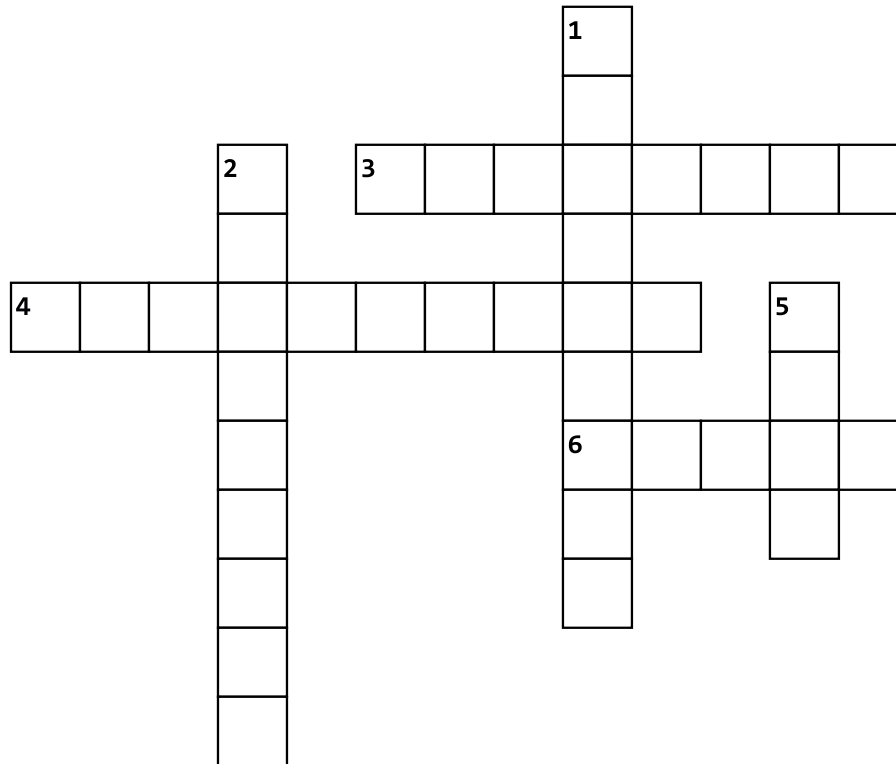
4	Ritubahri
3	1 February
2	Sandhayak
1	Neuralink
7	Goa
6	Vayushakti
5	Karnataka

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## CROSSWORD - 2



### Across

- 3. Country adopted the Nagoya Protocol recently
- 4. World Pulses Day
- 6. Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana

### Down

- 1. World Cancer Day
- 2. International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation
- 5. Permit a 15-day visa-free policy for Indian tourists

### Answers

6	Assam	3	Cameroon
5	Iran	2	6February
4	10February	1	4February

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