

RESILIENCE LAW ACADEMY

SCO - 79, FIRST FLOOR, SECTOR 38-C

CHANDIGARH

JULY 2024



RESILIENCE LAW ACADEMY

LAW TIMES

**MONTHLY
CONSOLIDATION**

THREE NEW CRIMINAL LAWS

WHY IN NEWS?

- The three new criminal laws, that were passed by Parliament in 2023, came into effect on July 1, 2024.

Key Highlights

- The IPC and CrPC will run concurrently along with the new laws as several cases are still pending in courts and some crimes that took place before 1st July 2024 that are reported later will have to be registered under the IPC.
- The Home Ministry is testing “eSakshya”, a mobile app for police to record and upload crime scene evidence, various states have developed their own systems based on their capabilities.
 - The Delhi Police developed an “e-pramaan” application.
- There will be a trial in absentia of fugitive criminals.
- Summary trials now cover cases where the punishment is up to 3 years, aiming to resolve more than 40% of cases in session courts.

DID YOU KNOW?

- After the new criminal laws were enforced, the first FIR was filed at 12.10 am in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior in case of motorcycle theft, reported NDTV.
- The Delhi Police on July 1 lodged its first FIR under provisions of the BNS against a street vendor in the Kamala Market.
- The I&B ministry through the Press Information Bureau has held 17 'vartalap' (conversations) and workshops for the regional media in 20 state capitals.
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has made 23 functional modifications in the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) application to enhance tech compatibility, including the filing of FIRs.
- A mobile app web application called 'NCRB Compendium of Criminal Laws' was launched in March 2024.
- National Informatics Centre (NIC) has developed applications such as 'eSakshya', 'NyayShruti', and 'eSummon' to facilitate videography and photography of crime scenes, judicial hearings and delivery of court summons electronically.
- Changes have been made to CCTNS, 'e-Prison', 'e-Prosecution' and 'e-Forensic' Apps according to the new laws.
- Bar Council of India has mandated that the new laws be incorporated into the curricula of universities and Centres of Legal Education from the 2024-25 academic year.

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)

- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) will replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- A notable introduction is community service as a form of punishment under Section 4.
 - However, the exact nature of the community service to be performed remains unspecified.
- The BNS may also be amended soon by the Union government to incorporate a missing section on sexual crimes against men and transgender persons.
 - However, police officers were being asked to invoke other allied sections under the BNS, such as wrongful confinement and physical hurt, if they get such complaints until an amendment is brought to correct this anomaly.
- Sexual offences see stringent measures, with the law prescribing up to ten years of imprisonment and fines for those who engage in deceitful sexual intercourse by promising marriage without the intent to fulfil it.
 - The new law also addresses deceit, encompassing false promises related to employment, promotion, or marriage by concealing one's identity.
- Organised crime now faces comprehensive legal scrutiny, covering a broad spectrum of illegal activities.
 - These activities include kidnapping, robbery, vehicle theft, extortion, land grabbing, contract killing, economic offences, cyber crimes, and trafficking in persons, drugs, weapons, or illicit goods or services.

- Human trafficking for prostitution or ransom, conducted by individuals or groups acting in concert, as members of organised crime syndicates or on behalf of such syndicates, will face severe penalties.
- These crimes, executed through violence, threats, intimidation, coercion, or other unlawful means for direct or indirect material gain, will be met with stringent punishment.
- For acts threatening national security, the BNS defines a terrorist act as any activity that threatens the unity, integrity, sovereignty, or economic security of India with the intent to strike terror among people.
- The legislation also addresses the grave issue of mob lynching.
 - It states, “When a group of five or more persons acting in concert commits murder on the ground of race, caste or community, sex, place of birth, language, personal belief or any other similar ground, each member of such group shall be punished with death or with imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine.”

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)

- Replacing the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) introduces key changes in procedural law.
- One significant provision is for under-trial prisoners, allowing first-time offenders to get bail after serving one-third of their maximum sentence, except for life imprisonment or cases with multiple charges, making it harder for under-trials to qualify for mandatory bail.
- Forensic investigation is now mandatory for offences punishable by at least seven years of imprisonment, ensuring that forensic experts collect and record evidence at crime scenes.
 - If a state lacks a forensics facility, it shall use the facility in another state.
- It mandates specific timelines for various legal procedures, including-
 - Medical practitioners examining rape victims must submit their reports to the investigating officer within seven days.
 - Judgments must be delivered within 30 days of the completion of arguments, extendable up to 60 days.
 - Victims must be informed of the progress of the investigation within 90 days.
- Sessions courts are required to frame charges within 60 days from the first hearing on such charges.
- The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) establishes a hierarchy of courts for adjudicating criminal matters in India. These include:
 - Magistrate's courts: These subordinate courts handle the trial of most criminal cases.
 - Sessions courts: Presided over by a Sessions Judge, these courts hear appeals from Magistrate's Courts.
 - High courts: These courts have inherent jurisdiction to hear and decide criminal cases and appeals.
 - Supreme Court: The apex court hears appeals from high courts and also exercises its original jurisdiction in certain matters.
- The CrPC empowers state governments to designate any city or town with a population of over one million as a metropolitan area, thereby establishing Metropolitan Magistrates.
 - The new law omits this provision.
- The central government said that States are free to bring in their own amendments to some provisions of the BNSS.

Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA)

- The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), replacing the Evidence Act, introduces crucial updates, especially regarding electronic evidence. A
- The new law streamlines rules on electronic evidence and expands the scope of secondary evidence.
 - It requires detailed disclosure formats for electronic records, moving beyond mere affidavits.
- The definition of secondary evidence has been expanded, and the law plugs a loophole of the Evidence Act by accounting for written admissions as secondary evidence.

52nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIMLA AGREEMENT

WHY IN NEWS?

- The year 2024 marks the 52nd anniversary of the Simla Agreement which was signed by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on July 2, 1972, in the aftermath of the Indo-Pak war of 1971.

What is the Shimla Agreement?

- The Simla Agreement was a formal agreement to end the hostilities between the countries and lay down a comprehensive plan for peaceful relations.
- The Agreement states that-
 - The governments of both nations are resolved that the two countries put an end to the conflict and confrontation that have hitherto marred their relations.
 - The governments will work for the promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of durable peace in the sub-continent.
 - The countries are resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them.
 - The basic issues and causes of conflict which have bedevilled the relations between the two countries over the last twenty-five years shall be resolved by peaceful means.
- Indian and Pakistani forces shall be withdrawn to their side of the International Border.
- With regard to Jammu and Kashmir, it says that the Line of Control which came about as a result of the 17 December 1971 ceasefire shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognised position of either side.
- Both sides agreed to respect this line without prejudice to their respective claims and to refrain from altering its status unilaterally.
 - The agreement ends with the governments agreeing that their heads would meet again “at a mutually convenient time in the future.
 - In the meantime, representatives of both sides would meet to discuss further the modalities and arrangements for the establishment of a durable peace and normalisation of relations.
- This includes repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internees, a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir and the resumption of diplomatic relations.

India had Three Major Objectives at Shimla

- I. First, India desired a lasting bilateral resolution to the Jammu and Kashmir issue and constraining Pakistan from involving third parties in discussions about the future of Jammu and Kashmir.
- II. Second, India hoped for improved relations with Pakistan based upon the latter's acceptance of the clearly demonstrated post-Bangladesh balance of power in South Asia that hugely favoured India.
- III. Third, India wished to achieve both these objectives without pushing Pakistan to the wall and thereby encouraging the emergence of a military-dominated revanchist anti-India regime.

Present Situation

- The treaty was a blueprint for friendly relations between the two neighbouring countries.
- The agreement remains relevant today as the Kashmir issue and broader Indo-Pak relations continue to be a flashpoint in South Asian geopolitics.
- It also provides a legal framework for future discussions and negotiations between the two countries, despite its limitations and differing interpretations.
- The Agreement, however, did not have the desired effect as Indo-Pak relations continue to remain volatile.

PROJECT NEXUS

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has joined Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative to enable instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic Fast Payments Systems (FPSs).

What is Project Nexus?

- Project Nexus is conceptualised by the Innovation Hub of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS).
- It seeks to enhance cross-border payments by connecting multiple domestic instant payment systems (IPS) globally.
- It is the first BIS Innovation Hub project in the payments area to move towards live implementation.

Significance

- Project Nexus aims to streamline how IPS connect globally, eliminating the need for custom connections with each new country by centralising connections through a single platform.
- This single connection allows a fast payment system to reach all other countries on the network.
- According to BIS, connecting IPS can enable cross-border payments from sender to recipient within 60 seconds (in most cases).

Bank for International Settlements (BIS)

- Established in 1930, the BIS is owned by 63 central banks, representing countries from around the world that together account for about 95% of world GDP.
- Its head office is in Basel, Switzerland and it has two representative offices: in Hong Kong SAR and in Mexico City, as well as Innovation Hub Centres around the world.
- “Innovation BIS 2025”, is its medium-term strategy that leverages technology and new collaboration channels to serve the central banking community in the fast-changing world.
- The Basel Banking Accords are global rules set by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS), operating under the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in Basel, Switzerland, providing guidelines for best practices in banking.

Countries Joined the Platform

- The RBI has been collaborating bilaterally with various countries to link India's FPSs– Unified Payments Interface (UPI), with their respective FPSs for cross-border Person to Person (P2P) and Person to Merchant (P2M) payments. For example, Bhutan, the UAE, France, Sri Lanka and Mauritius.
- India's UPI and FPSs of four Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand will be interlinked through Project Nexus.
- While India and its partner countries can continue to benefit through such bilateral connectivity of FPS, a multilateral approach will provide further impetus to the RBI's efforts in expanding the international reach of Indian payment systems.
 - An agreement on this was signed by the BIS and the central banks of the founding countries i.e., Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), Bank of Thailand (BOT), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), and RBI on June 30, 2024, in Basel, Switzerland.
- Indonesia will also join the platform in future.



COMMEMORATIVE COIN ON THE BIRTH CENTENARY OF M KARUNANIDHI

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Union Ministry of Finance on July 12 issued a Rs 100 Commemorative coin on the occasion of the birth centenary of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) patriarch Kalaingar M Karunanidhi M Karunanidhi.

Key Features of the Coin

- The Rs 100 denomination coin issued will be composed of an alloy comprising 50 per cent silver, 40 per cent copper, 5 per cent nickel, and 5 per cent zinc.
- On its reverse side, a portrait of Karunanidhi is inscribed, with his signature below the image.
- “The Birth Centenary of Kalaingar M Karunanidhi” is inscribed in English on the coin's right periphery, with “1924-2024” written on the bottom.

- Muthuvel Karunanidhi (June 3, 1924-August 7, 2018) was a writer and politician, who served as the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister for a period of almost two decades, over five terms, between 1969 and 2011.
- He is popularly called Kalaingar, or “the artist”.
- One of the tallest leaders of the Dravidian movement, Karunanidhi headed the DMK, which is currently in power in Tamil Nadu under his son Stalin, for decades.

What are Commemorative Coins?

- As the name suggests, commemorative or ceremonial coins are issued to commemorate a certain event, celebrate a certain person, or further a certain message.
- They have a distinctive design, which references the occasion for which they were issued, and are often of a different (generally, larger) denomination, than regular coins.
- Commemorative coins are often issued in very small quantities, and kept by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as uncirculated collectors' items.
- Sometimes, however, they can also be meant for mass circulation. This depends on the Centre's intention behind issuing a certain coin.
- Commemorative coins generate publicity about a certain theme or issue which the government wants to stress on.
 - For instance, in 1974, the Indira Gandhi government introduced a coin with the theme and legend 'Family Planning', reflecting her government's concerted population control push.
- They are also used as tools of remembrance.
 - For instance, the very first commemorative coins in India were issued in 1964, after the death of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.
 - Similarly, in 1969, the government launched a coin series celebrating Mahatma Gandhi's birth centenary.
- Commemorative coins have been issued in honour of many Indian luminaries, including Rabindranath Tagore, B R Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, Jayprakash Narayan, and Indira Gandhi.
 - In 2017, the government issued commemorative coins in honour of the deceased former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and legendary actor M G Ramachandran, and the late Carnatic music maestro M S Subbalakshmi.
- Some coins institutions (like the State Bank of India or Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board), or occasions (like the 75th anniversary of Indian Independence) rather than individuals.

Who Issues Commemorative Coins?

- The sole authority to print or mint any Indian currency lies with the Reserve Bank of India, which works under the Union Finance Ministry.
- Thus, it is the Union Finance Ministry which ultimately decides whether to issue a commemorative coin or not.
- However, state governments, government-run cultural institutions, or even private organisations can request the government to issue commemorative coins.
- For instance, in Subbalakshmi's case, the request was made by the Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha.
- For the Karunanidhi commemorative coins, the request came from the Tamil Nadu government last year.

PROJECT 25

WHY IN NEWS?

- Donald Trump, the official Republican candidate for the 2024 United States (US) Presidential polls, recently came under fire for a controversial policy roadmap called 'Project 2025', penned by some of his allies and ex-employees of his administration.

What is Project 25?

- The initiative, which was first commissioned in 2023, is spearheaded by The Heritage Foundation – an influential right-wing think tank which has been guiding conservative policies since the Reagan Administration.
- In its latest 'Mandate for Leadership', it claims that the Trump Administration followed almost two-thirds of its goals within its first year.
- It is published by Project 2025, which is a broad coalition of conservative organisations that have come together to ensure a successful administration begins in January 2025.
- Project 2025 has also set up a personnel database which will help the future president make administrative appointments, a training programme to develop future conservative leaders, and a 180-day playbook, which presents a blueprint for the first six months of the next presidency.

Controversy Behind It

- The project has alarmed not just Donald Trump's opposers, but several legal experts, bureaucrats, law enforcement agents and some Republicans because it takes some extreme positions, such as-
 - It advocates expanding the president's powers and concentrating decision-making authority in the White House.
 - Conversely, it argues for drastically reducing the power and cutting the funding, of various federal administrative departments.
 - Among its notable recommendations is to “disband” the Department of Education.
 - Project 2025 calls for the reclassification of tens of thousands of federal workers — possibly the most dramatic change in the federal workforce since the 1880s.
 - The policy document calls for a “biblically based” definition of marriage and family, which it clarifies means “heterosexual, intact marriage”.
- It also pushes a number of anti-LGBTQ+ positions, such as rescinding federal anti-discrimination protections “on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, transgender status, and sex characteristics”.
- On reproductive rights, Project 2025 advocates the prosecution of people who send abortion pills through the mail, the cancellation of the Food and Drug Authority's two-decade-old approval of mifepristone, one of the two drugs used in medication abortion, and the federal tracking of abortion-seekers using “every available tool”.
- Overhaul of foreign policy regarding Mexico, Russia, China, Iran, and Korea; make immigration and visa policies more stringent.
- Place the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under the supervision of a politically-appointed leader like the Assistant Attorney General, and dismantle Homeland Security.

Donald Trump and Project 25

- At least 140 former Trump administration officials, including six former cabinet secretaries and four ambassadors nominated by Trump, are involved in the project.
- Several lawyers, who aided Trump during his bid to overturn the 2020 election and his impeachment trial, such as Jay Sekulow, Cleta Mitchell and John Eastman, are advising the project.
- The project is the brainchild of The Heritage Foundation, led by Kevin Roberts.
- The foundation is closely associated with Donald Trump— the former president has spoken at several events hosted by the think tank and Kevin Roberts has publicly backed Trump, claiming to have spoken to the ex-president multiple times.
- However, Donald Trump maintains that he has no idea who is behind Project 2025.

NASA'S CHAPEA PROJECT

WHY IN NEWS?

- As part of NASA's Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog program (CHAPEA), the crew left the red-planet-like atmosphere recently. The crew spent over a year experiencing a Mars-like habitat.

About the First CHAPEA Mission

- The first CHAPEA Mission, focused on nutrition, was the first of three planned simulations to understand the challenges Mars poses for space explorers.
- It aims to understand the effects of the Mars atmosphere on the health of humans and the other challenges that they might face.
- The data will also help NASA prepare for long-term presence on the Moon as part of its Artemis programme, seen as another step towards an expedition to Mars.
- The mission comprised 1,700 square feet (157 square meters) of 3D-printed habitat space that was set up at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

- The four volunteers included Kelly Haston, the team leader and a research scientist; Anca Selariu, a US Navy microbiologist; Ross Brockwell, a structural engineer; and Nathan Jones, an emergency medicine physician.
- The crew entered the simulated space on June 25, 2023, and emerged after 378 days. They were put through several scenarios that astronauts could expect on Mars, including conducting spacewalks in suits (called "Marswalks"), growing vegetables, and facing stressors such as communication delays with mission control on Earth, limited resources and prolonged isolation.

- The next two are planned for 2025 and 2026. NASA hopes to send astronauts to Mars by the 2030s.

Habitat like on Mars

- The temperature on Mars ranges between 20 degrees Celsius and -153 degrees Celsius.
 - The planet has a rocky surface with canyons, volcanoes, dry lake beds, and craters, all covered in red dust.
- Winds can create dust storms, with tiny ones resembling tornadoes and large ones occasionally enveloping the entire planet. They are visible from Earth using telescopes.
- It has about one-third the gravity of Earth and the atmosphere is much thinner than Earth's, containing more than 95% carbon dioxide and less than 1% oxygen.
 - Mars's thin atmosphere also makes it difficult to slow down a spacecraft for a safe and precise landing.
- The planet turns on its axis more slowly than Earth, and being farther from the Sun, takes longer to revolve around the Sun. A day on Mars is 24.6 hours and a year is 687 Earth days long.
- The biggest challenge is the long duration of a Mars mission because even a one-way trip would take six to nine months.
- Given the distance, communications from and to Earth could have as much as a 20-minute lag, which would be too long in case of real-time help during emergencies.
- Other challenges include logistics for life support, and maintaining supplies and crew health.



ISRO'S PLANS TO VENTURE INTO PLANETARY DEFENCE

WHY IN NEWS?

- At an international workshop on Asteroid Day 2024, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman S Somanath said that ISRO is looking to study asteroid Apophis when it is 32,000 km away from Earth in 2029 to prepare for planetary defence efforts.

Asteroid Day is observed every year by the space community on June 30 on account of a huge air blast from an asteroid flattening 2,200 sq km of forest in Siberia, Russia, on June 30, 1908.

Asteroids are hypothesized to have caused the extinction of dinosaurs.

About Apophis

- Apophis, discovered in 2004, is a near-Earth object (NEO) and was identified as one of the most hazardous asteroids that could impact Earth.
- There are billions of comets and asteroids in our solar system. The vast majority never approach Earth. When a comet or asteroid's orbit brings it close to Earth, it is classified as NEO.
- When Apophis was discovered in 2004, scientists thought there was a 2.7% chance of a collision with Earth — the highest probability of any large asteroid hitting Earth in the recent past.
- Initial observations showed that if not in 2029, Apophis could hit Earth in 2036 or 2068.
- Given the asteroid's size — it measures about 450 m at its widest — a collision with Earth could cause large-scale damage.
- Some scientists compared the potential impact to the event that wiped out dinosaurs and most other extant life some 66 million years ago.

What is Planetary Defence?

- Planetary defence refers to efforts and strategies aimed at protecting Earth from potential impacts by NEOs such as asteroids and comets.
- It involves multiple strategies including detection, tracking, impact assessment, deflection, etc.
- In 2016, NASA established the Planetary Defense Coordination Office (PDCO) to manage the agency's ongoing mission of finding, tracking, and better understanding asteroids and comets that could pose an impact hazard to Earth.

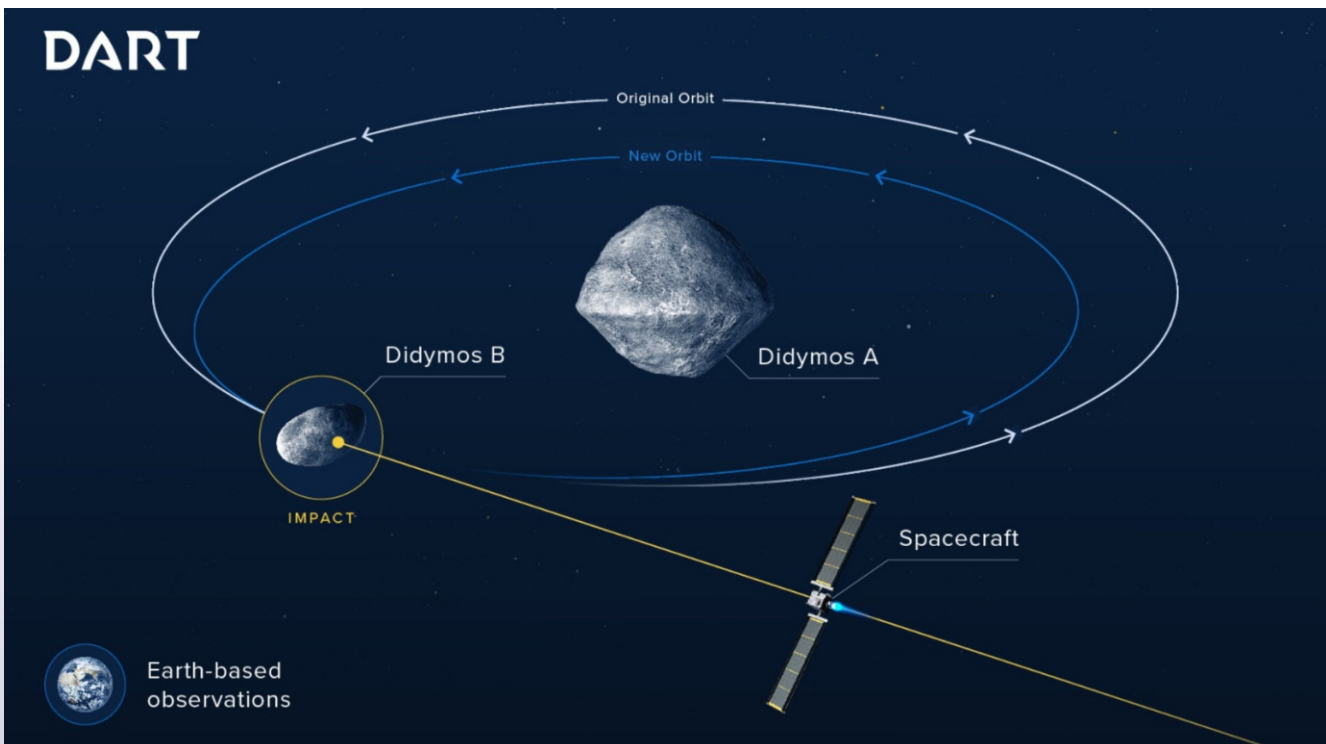
Global Planetary Defence Efforts

- NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) was the world's first planetary defence technology demonstration that validated one technique of asteroid deflection using a kinetic impactor spacecraft.
 - Launched November 24, 2022, DART travelled for over 10 months before intentionally colliding with the asteroid Moonlet Dimorphos, a small celestial object just 530 feet (160 meters) in diameter.
 - Dimorphos orbits a larger 2,560-foot (780-meter) asteroid called Didymos and is part of the Didymos binary asteroid system.
 - Neither Didymos nor Dimorphos poses an impact threat to Earth before or after DART's kinetic impact demonstration.
- Near-Earth Object Surveyor (NEO Surveyor), an infrared space telescope, is designed to help advance NASA's planetary defence efforts. It will be launched in 2027.
 - NEO Surveyor is designed to discover and characterize most of the potentially hazardous asteroids and comets that come within 30 million miles of Earth's orbit.
 - After launch, NEO Surveyor will carry out a five-year baseline survey to find at least two-thirds of the near-Earth objects larger than 140 meters (460 feet).
- The NEOWISE mission uses a space telescope to hunt for asteroids and comets, including those that could pose a threat to Earth.
- Launched in December 2009 as the Wide-Field Infrared Survey Explorer (WISE), the space telescope was originally designed to survey the sky in infrared, detecting asteroids, stars and some of the faintest galaxies in space.
 - It did so successfully until completing its primary mission in February 2011.

- Observations resumed in December 2013, when the telescope was taken out of hibernation and repurposed for the NEOWISE project as an instrument to study NEOs, as well as more distant asteroids and comets.
- After successfully completing its mission to gather a sample of asteroid Bennu, NASA's OSIRIS-REx (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, and Security-Regolith Explorer) was sent to study Apophis and renamed OSIRIS-APEX (OSIRIS-APophis Explorer).
- International Asteroid Warning Network was established in 2013 to create an international group of organizations involved in detecting, tracking, and characterizing NEOs.
- Additionally, NASA has already redirected one of its spacecraft, one that previously studied the asteroid Bennu, to track Apophis.
 - This spacecraft will go within a distance of 4,000 km of Apophis in April 2029, and then trail the asteroid for 18 months, collecting data and analysing its surface.

India's Future in Planetary Defence

- ISRO wanted to be part of the worldwide planetary defence programme in collaboration with other agencies.
- ISRO's intention to join such an endeavour displays its growing confidence in taking on newer challenges, and contributing proactively to global space objectives.
- As a major spacefaring nation with the capability to carry out complex missions of taking a spacecraft from one place to another, India will one day be in a position to handle an asteroid mission, land on an asteroid, and possibly carry out a planetary defence action to protect Earth.



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S VISIT TO AUSTRIA

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Prime Minister of India recently paid an official visit to Austria, this was the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Austria since June 1983, when Indira Gandhi travelled to the country.

In June 1955, PM Jawaharlal Nehru paid a State visit to Austria, roughly one month after it had gained full independence through the conclusion of the State Treaty. Nehru's was the first State visit of a foreign leader to newly independent Austria.

Key Highlights of the Visit

- India and Austria emphasised the shared values of democracy, freedom, international peace and security, and a rules-based international order with the United Nations (UN) Charter at its core.
- Both countries reinforced their commitment to a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific in accordance with the international law of the sea as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- Both countries also exchanged in-depth assessments of recent developments in Europe as well as West Asia/Middle East.
- Concerning the war in Ukraine, both countries supported any collective effort to facilitate a peaceful resolution consistent with international law and the UN Charter.
- Both countries welcomed the launch of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) and Austria's interest in engaging with this initiative.
- Recognizing their commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), both countries pledged to collaborate on renewable energy, with a specific focus on Austria's Hydrogen Strategy and India's Green Hydrogen Mission.
 - They noted the European Union's (EU's) target for climate neutrality by 2050, Austria's goal for 2040, and India's aim for net zero emissions by 2070.
- Initiatives such as the Start-Up Bridge and exchanges under Austria's Global Incubator Network and India's Start-Up India were highlighted as crucial for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.
- India reiterated its support for Austria's UNSC candidature for the term 2027-28, while Austria expressed its support for India's candidature for the period 2028-29.
- India invited Austria to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA), highlighting collaboration in renewable energy and sustainable development.

India-Austria Relationship

- Diplomatic relations between India and Austria were established on November 10, 1949 — the year 2024 marks its 75th anniversary.
- The year after Indira's visit in 1983, Austria's Chancellor Fred Sinowatz came to India on a reciprocal visit.
- President K R Narayanan went to Austria on a State Visit in November 1999; Austria's President Dr Heinz Fischer came in February 2005, and President Pratibha Patil visited Austria in October 2011.
- India played a significant role in Austria's negotiations with the Soviet Union for independence in 1955.

- Vienna was under Nazi occupation during World War II.
- After the end of the war, it was divided into four sectors by the US, the UK, France, and the Soviet Union, supervised by the Allied Commission.
 - The Allies occupied Austria for a decade after the war ended.
- In 1955, the four occupying powers signed the Austrian State Treaty with the Austrian government to establish Austria as an independent state.
- The Soviet Union demanded that Austria, which is located strategically between capitalist western Europe and the communist bloc in the east of the continent, maintain neutrality on the model of Switzerland, with the four powers pledging to the integrity and inviolability of Austrian territory.
- The 1955 treaty, which was ratified by all countries, thus bound Austria to neutrality.
- The constitution of Austria prohibits entering into military alliances, and the establishment of foreign military bases on Austrian territory.

- The Indo-Austrian Joint Economic Commission (JEC) was established in 1983 to provide a forum for bilateral interaction between the governmental Ministries and Chambers of Commerce and Industry.
 - In 2022, bilateral trade between India and Austria reached \$2.84 billion, marking a 14.97% rise from 2021 (\$2.47 billion).
- The Indo-Austrian cultural relationship dates back to the 16th century when Balthasar Springer travelled from Tyrol to India in 1505.
 - The teaching of Sanskrit at Vienna University started in 1845 and a high point was reached in 1880 with the foundation of an independent chair for Indology.
- Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Laureate, visited Vienna in 1921 and 1926, fostering significant cultural and intellectual exchanges through his lectures on topics like "The Religion of the Forest," emphasising nature, union, and compassion.

Why Austria Matters?

- Austria offers tremendous opportunities for bilateral collaboration in infrastructure, renewable energy, e-commerce, fintech, enterprise tech, consumer services, and media and entertainment.
- Both countries have taken balanced positions in the Russia-Ukraine war.
 - Even though Austria supported the EU's sanctions against Russia, on April 11, 2022, Chancellor Nehammer became the first European leader to visit President Putin to discuss the end of the war.
 - Austria has publicly criticised Russian actions in Ukraine, but commercial ties between the two countries remain largely intact, and it continues to import gas from Russia.



22nd INDIA – RUSSIA ANNUAL SUMMIT

WHY IN NEWS?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Russia recently at the invitation of President of Russia Vladimir Putin for the 22nd India – Russia Annual Summit.

Key Highlights

- The annual summit between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two countries.
- The last summit was held on December 6, 2021, in New Delhi. President Vladimir Putin had visited India to attend the summit.
- During the visit, President Vladimir Putin conferred Russia's highest civilian honour the “Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle” on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his distinguished contribution to the development of a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia and friendly ties between the peoples of the two countries.
 - The award for the PM was announced in 2019.

- The award is given to prominent government and public figures, military leaders, and outstanding representatives of science, culture, art, and various sectors of the economy for exceptional services to Russia.
 - It can also be awarded to heads of foreign states for outstanding services to the Russian Federation.
- Its name comes from Saint Andrew, who is believed to be one of the apostles or 12 original followers of Jesus.
- Saint Andrew is regarded as the patron saint of Russia and Scotland.
 - The 'X' symbol on the flag of Scotland comes from the saint's symbol, called the 'Saltire'. It is believed that he was crucified on a cross of a similar shape.
- Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725) established the Order of Saint Andrew in 1698.
- The chain of the Order consists of 17 alternating links and features a gilded image of the State Emblem of the Russian Federation, a double-headed eagle.
- It also includes a badge, a star, and a light blue silk moire ribbon. For those recognised for distinction in combat, the badge and star are adorned with swords.
- The order was abolished in 1918 following the Russian Revolution, which overthrew the Tsarist regime.
- It was re-established in 1998 by an Executive Order of the President of Russia.
- Foreign leaders who have been honoured in the past include Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2017, and the former President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

- India and Russia have agreed to increase bilateral trade to over USD 100 billion by 2030.
 - As per figures of the Department of Commerce, in FY 2023-24, bilateral trade has reached an all-time high of USD 65.70 billion.
- To deepen trade and economic cooperation, the leaders instructed concerned agencies to prepare a programme for the development of promising areas of Russian-Indian economic cooperation till 2030 (Programme-2030).
 - The India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) will oversee its implementation, with working groups and concerned agencies monitoring and supporting the programme.
 - IRIGC-TEC is the apex G2G forum for bilateral economic cooperation, chaired by the External Affairs Minister of India and the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin has accepted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's request to discharge those wishing to return to India.
- Both countries also focused on developing stable and efficient transport corridors in Eurasia, including the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- A trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) -- comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia -- was also discussed.
- India expressed full support for Russia's BRICS Chairship in 2024 under the theme "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security."
- India also looked forward to Russia's joining the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA).

HIGH SEAS TREATY

WHY IN NEWS?

- India has decided to sign and ratify the High Seas Treaty, a global agreement for the conservation and protection of biodiversity in the oceans.

What is the High Sea Treaty?

- The High Seas Treaty, also known as the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ), was negotiated in March 2023.
- It is formally called the Agreement on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.
- The High Seas Treaty has often been compared with the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change in its significance and potential impact.
- The treaty deals only with oceans that are outside the national jurisdiction of any country.

- Typically, national jurisdictions extend up to 200 nautical miles (370 km) from the coastline, an area that is called an exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
- Areas outside of the EEZ of every country are known as high seas or international waters.
- They constitute about 64%, roughly two-thirds, of the total ocean area and are considered global commons.
- They belong to no one and everyone enjoys equal rights for navigation, overflight, economic activities, scientific research, or laying of infrastructure like undersea cables.

- The United Nations General Assembly has been negotiating the treaty under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) since 2017.
- The treaty was adopted on 19 June 2023, by consensus, and signed on 20 September.
- Till June 2024, 91 countries have signed the treaty so far, with 8 of them having ratified it.
- It will become legally binding 120 days after 60 countries ratify it.
- Once adopted, it became the third agreement to be approved after UNCLOS, after the 1994 and 1995 treaties, which resulted in the establishment of the International Seabed Authority and the Fish Stocks Agreement.

- The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) came into force much before the High Seas Treaty, on 16 November 1994.
- It establishes national jurisdictional lines and regulates human activity in the ocean, forcing countries to protect and preserve the marine environment.
- It defines the rights and duties of nations regarding activities in the oceans and also addresses issues such as sovereignty, passage rights, and rights of exclusive economic usage.
 - Demarcations of territorial waters and EEZs are a result of UNCLOS.
- While UNCLOS provides a broad framework for maritime environmental protection, it does not address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) in a comprehensive way.
 - It lacks explicit requirements for high-seas management.

Key Objectives of the Treaty

- The High Seas Treaty will be critical to achieving the objectives of the '30x30' project, which aims to safeguard 30 per cent of marine habitats by 2030 for which it plans to establish several new mechanisms.
- Firstly, it will designate Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other area-based tools for protecting sensitive biodiverse ecosystems, which countries have long argued on how to manage.
- Secondly, it will create new regulations for environmental impact evaluation of commercial activity in the high seas.
 - Nations and their companies must assess and publicly report potential harm to marine ecosystems and organisms before launching profitable ventures in the open ocean.
- Thirdly, the treaty allows the equitable distribution of marine genetic resources.
 - Wealthy countries have often advocated for intellectual property rights for biotech companies that sequenced genetic information from high-seas creatures to maximise profits.
- In contrast, developing countries have argued for benefit-sharing of discoveries claiming these resources as humanity's common heritage.
- The treaty aims to bridge the North-South divide to negotiate a benefit-sharing deal.
- Wealthy nations are to share scientific information and technologies, allowing poorer countries to access marine resources and fully participate in the blue economy.
- Lastly, it aims at capacity building and the transfer of marine technology.
 - It encourages exchanging information, building awareness, and strengthening infrastructural, financial, and institutional frameworks, making the treaty "future-proof".

They make up nearly **2/3**
of the world's ocean ...



They represent **95%** of
Earth's occupied habitat



But less than **1%** of the
high seas are protected



UN HIGH SEAS TREATY

INDIA'S DEEP DRILL MISSION

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences has started the task of scientific deep drilling of the earth's crust to a depth of 6 km in the Koyna-Warna region of Maharashtra with the help of a specialised institute named Borehole Geophysics Research Laboratory (BGRL) in Karad, Maharashtra.

Why Koyna–Warna Region?

- The Koyna-Warna region has been experiencing recurrent earthquakes since the 'Shivaji Sagar Lake', or the 'Koyna Dam' was impounded in 1962.
- This phenomenon, where human activity (filling the reservoir) triggers earthquakes, is called 'Reservoir-Induced Seismicity (RIS)'.
- The Koyna-Warna region sits on a geological fault line, making it inherently prone to earthquakes.
- However, the triggered events here differ from those along plate boundaries.
- There are no other significant sources of seismic activity within a 50 km radius of the Koyna Dam. This isolation makes Koyna an ideal location for focused research.
- Scientists aim to directly study the earth's composition and stress at the source of these triggered earthquakes through deep drilling.
- BGRL's pilot borehole — to a depth of 3 km in Koyna — is complete, and the Ministry of Earth Sciences is committed to completing the task of reaching a depth of 6 km.
- The BGRL is a specialised institute under the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India mandated to execute India's sole scientific deep-drilling programme.

Significance

- More than 20 research groups nationwide are already studying the Koyna samples.
- For example, one group is examining the gouge from fault zones — the rock dust generated by friction — to understand the frictional properties of rocks in quake-prone regions.
- Another is characterising the microbes on these rocks to understand life forms that thrive in dark, hot, and nutrient-poor environments. Their findings could potentially yield new molecules and clues to improve industrial processes.
- Members of the international geological research community have also been requesting access to core samples for collaborative projects in emerging fields such as carbon capture and storage in the deep Deccan traps, which could help mitigate climate change.
- In sum, the Koyna exercise is establishing a firm footing in scientific deep-drilling for India.
- Its lessons will inform future deep-drilling experiments as well as expand academic knowledge in multiple ways.

What is Scientific Deep–drilling?

- Scientific deep drilling is the enterprise of strategically digging boreholes to observe and analyse deeper parts of the earth's crust.
- It offers opportunities and access to study earthquakes and expands our understanding of the planet's history, rock types, energy resources, life forms, climate change patterns, the evolution of life, and more.
 - The powerful earthquakes at the boundaries of tectonic plates, which measure more than 7.5 on the Richter scale, are almost certainly associated with a severe loss of infrastructure and life.
 - In the ocean, these geological events trigger tsunamis.
- This is why scientific deep drilling is an indispensable tool for progress in the earth sciences.
- Aside from earthquakes, this is because many surface phenomena — the composition of water and air, their availability, and the resulting interactions with climate-affected phenomena — are linked to what happens inside the earth's crust.

Deep Drilling Projects in the World

- Countries like the US, Russia, and Germany conducted such scientific projects in the 1990s.
- In the 1960s, the US attempted to drill the world's deepest hole to retrieve samples from the boundary between Earth's crust and mantle, known as the Moho Discontinuity.
- Kola Superdeep Borehole is the world's deepest man-made hole in Russia started in the 1970s, reaching a depth of 12,262 metres.
- China is drilling a new 10,000-metre deep hole into the Earth with the hope of finding a gas reserve in its southern west Sichuan province.
- The Integrated Ocean Drilling Project (IODP) is an international initiative using ocean research platforms to study Earth's history and processes via seafloor samples.

Why is India drilling a 6-km deep hole in Maharashtra?

The Borehole Geophysics Research Laboratory (BGRL) in Karad, Maharashtra, is a specialised institute mandated to execute India's scientific deep-drilling programme. Under BGRL, the aim is to drill the earth's crust and conduct scientific observations to help expand our understanding of reservoir-triggered earthquakes in the Koyna-Warna region



DEEP DIVE: At the deep drilling site in Koyna region, Maharashtra, the towering drilling rig is seen surrounded by associated equipment, an onsite mud logging unit, gas analysis lab, and a geological studies lab. MOES-BGRL

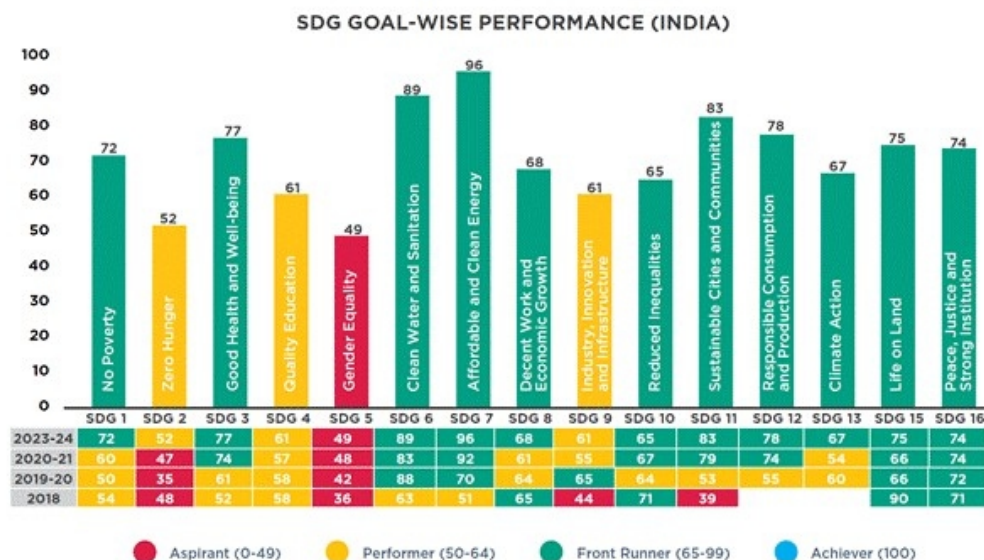
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) INDIA INDEX FOR 2023-24

WHY IN NEWS?

- The National Institution for Transforming India Aayog (NITI Aayog) released the “4th edition of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) India Index for 2023-24”, showing significant progress in sustainable development across States and Union Territories (UTs) of India.

Key Highlights

- As per the latest Index, the composite score for India improved from 57 in 2018 (Baseline report) to 66 in 2020-21 to further to 71 in 2023-24.
- Scores for States range from 57 to 79 in 2023-24, marking a substantial improvement from the year 2018 range of 42 to 69.
- As per the report, India has made significant progress in Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 13 (Climate Action) and 15 (Life on Land).
- Goal 13 (Climate Action) records the highest increase in score from 54 in 2020-21 to 67 in 2023-24 followed by Goal 1 (No Poverty) from 60 to 72.
- Since 2018, India has witnessed substantial progress in several key SDGs.
- Significant progress has been made in Goals 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).
- The scores for States now range from 57 to 79, while UTs score between 65 and 77.
- This represents an improvement over the 2020-21 scores, where the range was 52 to 75 for States and 62 to 79 for UTs.
- This year, 32 States and UTs in the front-runner category with 10 new entrants-Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu.
- The SDG India Index 2023-24 demonstrates the increase in composite scores across all States, with improvements ranging from 1 to 8 points.
- Leading the way in terms of score improvement are Assam, Manipur, Punjab, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir, each achieving a positive change of 8 points since the 2020-21 edition.
- Kerala and Uttarakhand emerged as the best-performing states, each scoring 79 points.
- The lowest performer is Bihar (57), followed by Jharkhand (62) and Nagaland (63).
- Among the UTs, Chandigarh topped the Index, followed by Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Puducherry, Andaman Nicobar Islands and Delhi.
- Between 2018 and 2023-2024, the fastest moving States are Uttar Pradesh (increase in score by 25), followed by J&K (21), Uttarakhand (19), Sikkim (18), Haryana (17), Assam, Tripura and Punjab (16 each), Madhya Pradesh and Odisha (15 each).



Key Interventions Facilitating SDG Progress

- Over 4 crore houses were constructed under the PM Awas Yojana (PMAY).
- 11 crore toilets and 2.23 lakh community sanitary complexes were constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- 10 crore LPG connections distributed under PM Ujjwala Yojana.
- Tap water connections in over 14.9 crore households under Jal Jeevan Mission.
- Over 30 crore beneficiaries under the Ayushman Bharat -Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- Coverage of over 80 crore people under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
- Access to 150,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs which offer primary medical care and provide affordable generic medicines.
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of Rs 34 lakh crore made through PM-Jan Dhan accounts.
- The Skill India Mission has led to over 1.4 crore youth being trained and upskilled and has reskilled 54 lakh youth.
- PM Mudra Yojana sanctioned 43 crore loans aggregating to ₹22.5 lakh crore for the entrepreneurial aspirations of the youth besides Funds of Funds.
- Saubhagya Scheme: 100% household electrification.
- Emphasis on renewable energy resulted in an increase in solar power capacity from 2.82 GW to 73.32 GW in the past decade.
- Between 2017 and 2023, India has added around 100 GW of installed electric capacity, of which around 80% is attributed to non-fossil fuel-based resource.
- Improvement in digital infrastructure with reduced internet data costs by 97% which has in turn positively affected and fostered financial inclusion

About SDG India Index

- The SDG India Index, launched in 2018, is a principal tool developed by NITI Aayog to measure and track India's progress towards the SDGs set by the United Nations.
- SDG India Index 2023-24 measures and tracks the national progress of all States and UTs on 113 indicators aligned to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's National Indicator Framework (NIF).
- The SDG India Index computes goal-wise scores on the 16 SDGs for each State and UT.
- These scores range from zero to 100.
 - If a state or UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies that it has achieved the targets.
 - State/UTs are categorised based on their SDG India Index score as follows: Aspirant: 0–49, Performer: 50–64, Front-Runner: 65–99, and Achiever: 100.

India's Performance on UN Sustainable Development Goals



Source: Sustainability Development Report 2023

MUSLIM WOMEN'S RIGHT TO MAINTENANCE

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Supreme Court in the case of Mohd Abdul Samad v. the State of Telangana, 2024, ruled that a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973.

Background

- Petitioner Mohd Abdul Samad challenged a 2017 family court order directing him to pay maintenance of Rs 20,000 per month to his former wife under Section 125 CrPC.
- The petitioner argued that the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, should override the secular law of Section 125 CrPC.
- The petitioner claimed that the 1986 Act, being a special law, provided more comprehensive maintenance provisions and should therefore take precedence over the general provisions of Section 125 CrPC.
- The petitioner argued that Sections 3 and 4 of the 1986 Act, with a non-obstante clause, empower First Class Magistrates to decide matters of Maher (mandatory gift that the husband gives to his wife at the wedding) and subsistence allowances.
- He insisted that family courts lack jurisdiction as the Act mandates Magistrates to handle these issues. The petitioner emphasised the wife's failure to submit an affidavit opting for CrPC provisions over the 1986 Act, as required by Section 5.
- It was argued that the 1986 Act implicitly repealed Section 125 CrPC for Muslim women due to its specific provisions, thus barring them from seeking relief under Section 125 CrPC.

Law on Maintenance

- The law governing maintenance for destitute wives, children, and parents has been codified under Section 125 of the CrPC.
 - It stipulates that if any person “having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain” his wife, then a magistrate of the first class may, upon proof of such neglect or refusal, order such a person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his wife at a monthly rate as the magistrate thinks fit.
 - The explanation to this provision clarifies that a “wife” includes a woman who has been divorced by, or has obtained a divorce from, her husband and has not remarried.
 - It does not specify anything about the woman's religion. Many States have made region-specific amendments to the section to allow a ceiling on the maintenance amount the court can order.
- The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, on the other hand, is a religion-specific law that provides for a procedure for a Muslim woman to claim maintenance during divorce.
 - It was enacted to essentially nullify the Supreme Court's 1985 decision in the case of Shabana Bano vs Imran Khan Case, 2009.
 - In the Shah Bano case, the SC reiterated that divorced Muslim women could claim maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC, even beyond the iddat period, as long as they do not remarry.
 - This affirmed the principle that the CrPC provision applies irrespective of religion.
- Section 3 of the 1986 Act guarantees the payment of maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman by her former husband only during the period of iddat — a period, usually of three months, which a woman must observe after the death of her husband or a divorce before she can remarry.
 - Such an amount shall be equal to the amount of mahr or dowry given to her at the time of her marriage or anytime after that.
 - After the completion of the iddat period, a woman can approach a first-class magistrate for maintenance in case she has not remarried and is not in a position to take care of herself financially.

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in the Danial Latifi vs Union Of India (2001) case upheld the constitutional validity of the 1986 Act by extending the right of a Muslim woman to get maintenance till she re-marries.
- It, however, reduced the period of maintenance to the completion of iddat.
- In 2019, Justice Ahsan Amanullah of the Patna High Court set aside a family court order rejecting a Muslim woman's plea for maintenance by underscoring that she has the option to avail of maintenance both under the CrPC and the 1986 Act.
- If she chose the CrPC, she could not be said to be debarred from seeking maintenance on account of being a divorced Muslim lady, the order added.

Supreme Court's Observation

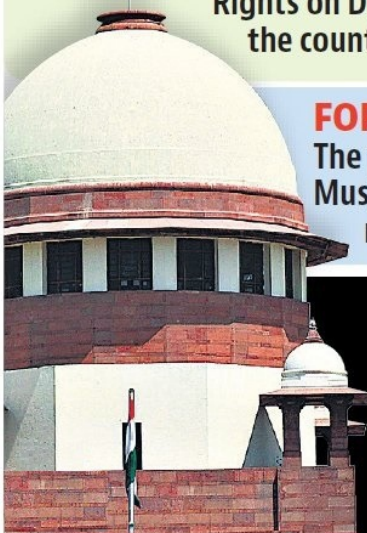
- A two-judge Bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and George Masih reiterated that a Muslim woman is entitled to seek maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPC — a secular legislation — even if they were divorced under religious personal law.
- The SC's judgement reaffirms the rights of divorced Muslim women to claim maintenance under Section 125 CrPC, ensuring legal parity and safeguarding constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination.
- The SC observed that Section 3 of the 1986 Act, starting with a non-obstante clause, does not restrict the application of Section 125 CrPC, but rather provides an additional remedy.
- Advocating for a harmonious and purposive interpretation of the seemingly conflicting statutes, the Court said that the choice lies with the Muslim woman to apply for maintenance either under Section 125 of the CrPC or the 1986 Act.
- Justice Nagarathna further clarified that Muslim women who have been divorced through illegal methods such as triple talaq are also entitled to maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC.
- The practice was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2017 and later criminalised under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019.

What the top court said

GENDER EQUALITY
Discrimination against Muslim women in matters of alimony under secular laws will be regressive, it said



PERSONAL LAW DOESN'T SUPERSEDE
Rejects argument that CrPc Section 125 provisions don't apply due to there being a personal law for Muslims and that the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, will prevail over the country's secular law




FORTIFYING WOMEN'S RIGHTS
The 1986 Act does not bar Muslim women from seeking maintenance under the CrPc



SHAH BANO ALLUSION

Philosophy laid down in Shah Bano verdict lives through. In that case, the apex court ruled that Muslim women were entitled to maintenance under CrPc Section 125, which was later countered by the Rajiv Gandhi govt through the 1986 Act



“There cannot be disparity in receiving maintenance on the basis of the law under which a woman is married or divorced. The same cannot be a basis for discriminating a divorced woman entitled to maintenance...”
— **JUSTICE BV NAGARATHNA, SC JUDGE, IN HER ORDER**

CRITERIA FOR CLASSICAL LANGUAGE

WHY IN NEWS?

- The Central government has decided to tweak the criteria for giving classical status to any language following the recommendations of the Linguistics Expert Committee of the Union Culture Ministry.

Key Points

- The Linguistics Expert Committee submitted its report on 10 October 2023.
- The Linguistics Expert Committee comprises representatives of the Union Ministries of Home, and Culture and four to five linguistic experts at any given time.
 - It is chaired by the president of the Sahitya Akademi.
- The new set of criteria will be officially notified by a gazette notification after it is approved by the Union Cabinet.
- The classical language status for certain languages, chiefly Marathi, which are under the consideration of the government, might have to wait till the new criteria are notified.

- In 2014, then Maharashtra Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan had constituted a committee comprising Marathi experts under the chairmanship of Prof. Ranganath Pathare and the report was submitted to the Centre. The Pathare committee had concluded that Marathi fulfils all the parameters to be recognised as a classical language.
- The Shiv Sena-BJP government also formed a “persuasion” committee, led by former diplomat Dnyaneshwar Muley, four months ago.
- The mandate of this committee is to liaise and pursue the matter with the Central government officials and give feedback to the State government.

- There have been demands from other language groups to classify their languages as classical languages. For example Bengali, Tulu etc.
- According to National Education Policy-2020 works of literature of Pali, Persian, and Prakrit shall also be preserved.

Present Criteria

- The current criteria evolved by the government to determine the declaration of a language as a classical language are–
 - it should have high antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1,500-2,000 years,
 - a body of ancient literature or texts that is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers, and
 - the literary tradition should be original and not borrowed from another speech community.
- Another criterion is that the said language and literature should be distinct from its modern format; there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Benefits

- Once a language is notified a classical language, the Education Ministry provides certain benefits to promote it, which include two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in the said languages.
- Apart from this, a centre of excellence for studies in the classical language is set up, and the University Grants Commission is requested to create a certain number of Professional Chairs in Central universities for the languages that get the classical tag.

Classical Languages

- India has six classical languages as of now – Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu (2008), Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013) and Odia (2014). It was in 2014 that the government last granted the special tag.
- In 2004, the Government of India decided to create a new category of languages called “classical languages”.
- In 2006, it laid down the criteria for conferring classical language status.
- All the Classical Languages are listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

- The Eighth Schedule lists the official languages of India.
- Part XVII of the Indian Constitution deals with the official language in Articles 343 to 351.
- Its provisions are divided into four heads—Language of the Union, Regional languages, Language of the judiciary and texts of laws and Special directives.
- At present, the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution specifies 22 languages (originally 14 languages).
- These are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri (Dongri), Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Mathili (Maithili), Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.
- Sindhi was added by the 21st Amendment Act of 1967; Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were added by the 71st Amendment Act of 1992; and Bodo, Dongri, Maithili and Santhali were added by the 92nd Amendment Act of 2003.

Classical Language	Date of Notification
Tamil	12.10.2004
Sanskrit	25.11.2005
Kannada	31.10.2008
Telugu	31.10.2008
Malayalam	08.08.2013
Odia	11.03.2014

தமிழ்
 बांग्ला
 गुजराती
 मराठी
 हिन्दी
 असमीया
 ଓଡ଼ିଆ
 తెలుగు
 ಕನ್ನಡ
 ਪੰਜਾਬੀ

SCO SUMMIT 2024

WHY IN NEWS?

- The 24th summit of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit was held on July 3-4, 2024 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Key Highlights

- The summit is a culmination of Kazakhstan's chairmanship at the SCO, which it took over from India in July 2023.
 - China will assume the SCO chairmanship for the next term, and Qingdao will be appointed the SCO's tourism and cultural capital for 2024-2025.
- The summit adopted the Astana Declaration and approved 25 strategic documents covering energy, security, trade, finance, and information security.
 - The Council of Heads of State – Members of the SCO also adopted the SCO Development Strategy until 2035, outlining collective contributions in light of Belarus gaining membership status.
 - Belarus has become the 10th member state of the SCO.
- Key resolutions included the cooperation programs to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism for 2025-2027, the Anti-Drug Strategy for the next five years, and its corresponding Action Program.
- Strategies for energy cooperation until 2030 and the Economic Development Strategy's Action Plan until 2030 were also approved.
- Additionally, resolutions encompassed the Association of Investors, programs for developing cooperation in protected areas and eco-tourism, and mechanisms for financing SCO project activities.
- Further, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the SCO Secretariat and the Central Asian Regional Information Coordination Center to combat illicit drug trafficking.
- The summit also saw the adoption of an interaction plan among member states on international information security issues.
- The member states additionally signed statements affirming principles of good neighbourliness, trust, and partnership, ensuring the safety of drinking water and sanitation, and promoting effective waste management.
- They also formalized an agreement on environmental protection cooperation among SCO governments.

India and SCO

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the SCO summit and delivered remarks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which he reiterated that priority must naturally be given to combating terrorism saying that if left unchecked, it can become a major threat to regional and global peace.
- S Jaishankar also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from SCO members China, Tajikistan, Russia, and the newest member Belarus.
- On one level, SCO membership allows India to participate in a forum which enhances its scope of cooperation with Central Asian countries, which have not had particularly close relations with India since their formation in 1991.
 - It also matters for maintaining communication with major actors in the region on common security issues.
- However, the relevance of the organisation comes into question given the difficulty in managing ties among the partners.
 - India shares tense relationships with China and Pakistan at present.
 - Last year, when the summit was to be held under India's presidency as part of the rotation, it decided to hold a virtual summit instead.
 - The New Delhi Declaration issued at the end of the leaders' summit saw India refuse to sign off on a paragraph supporting the BRI.
 - India's opposition to the BRI comes from its constituent China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is proposed to pass through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
 - India sees it as a violation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

About SCO

- The SCO was established in Shanghai on June 15, 2001, by six founding nations - Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- Its origins lie in the “Shanghai Five”, formed in 1996 and consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- Before the inclusion of Belarus, it had nine members: India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- The Samarkand SCO summit in 2022 initiated the process of elevating Belarus's status within the organization to that of a member state.
- There are two observer states – Afghanistan and Mongolia, and 14 dialogue partners, including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye.
- The SCO represents 40% of the world's population, and member countries contribute approximately over \$23 trillion to global GDP.

Belarus to Join So-Called “Anti-NATO” SCO

Member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, by year of accession



In addition to official member states, the SCO has one observer state and **14** dialogue partners

1. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has established a **26-member committee, chaired by Biswantah Goldar**, to oversee the revision of the base year for national accounts, aiming to align key economic indices with current economic trends. Currently, key economic measures like the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), Wholesale Price Index (WPI), and National Income are anchored to FY12, previously benchmarked to FY05. The Consumer Price Index (CPI), a widely tracked price benchmark, uses 2012 as its base year. Base years serve as pivotal reference points for tracking economic variables and assessing the comparative performance of indicators across different periods.
2. **India** ended their ICC tournament trophy drought with a nerve-jangling win over South Africa in the **T20 World Cup 2024** final at Bridgetown, Barbados, thus claiming their sixth ICC trophy. This was India's first ICC trophy in ten years after winning the Champions Trophy under the leadership of MS Dhoni in 2013. India won the first men's Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa, defeating Pakistan in the final led by MS Dhoni. India became the first team to win a T20 World Cup by being unbeaten through the tournament. Post World Cup win, three Indian players namely, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Ravindra Jadeja have announced their retirement from T20 internationals. Jasprit Bumrah and Virat Kohli won the Player of the Tournament and Player of the Match trophy, respectively.
3. Deputy National Security Adviser (NSA) **Rajinder Khanna** has been appointed as the **additional NSA**. This is the first time the additional NSA post has been filled, a position that has always existed but remained vacant until now. Additionally, Intelligence Bureau special director T.V. Ravichandran has been appointed as deputy NSA. The NSA acts as secretary of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), which is one of the Three-tier Structures of the National Security Council (NSC).
4. **NITI Aayog** launched the '**Sampoornata Abhiyan**' today witnessing significant participation from citizens across the country. The launch events were organised across all the 112 Aspirational Districts and 500 Aspirational Blocks. This comprehensive three-month campaign, running from 4th July to 30th September 2024, aims to achieve 100% saturation of 12 key social sector indicators across all Aspirational Districts and Blocks.
5. **NITI Aayog** has formed **dedicated multi-sectoral committees** to prepare a policy design and create a roadmap for achieving its goal of becoming a **net-zero economy by 2070**. In 2021, India joined a select group of nations that set a target year for becoming a net-zero carbon economy. At COP26 in Glasgow, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined a five-pronged 'Panchamitra' climate action target for India and committed to a net-zero target by 2070, joining nations like the US, the UK, and China.
6. The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** on July 3 **extended the deadline** for the "**Smart Cities Mission**" till **March 2025**, allowing cities to complete ongoing projects, which account for around 10% of the total projects. This is the second time that the mission deadline, which was earlier June 2024, has been extended. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, launched in June 2015 to transform 100 cities to provide the necessary core infrastructure and clean and sustainable environment to enable a decent quality of life for their citizens through the application of "Smart Solutions".
7. The **central government** constituted **eight Cabinet Committees**. It includes the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, Cabinet Committee on Accommodation, Economic Affairs, Parliamentary Affairs, Political Affairs, Security, Investment and Growth and Skill Employment and Livelihood. A Cabinet Committee is a subset of the Union Cabinet, consisting of selected Union Ministers. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet includes Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.
8. Indian private firm L&T, along with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), has completed the initial internal trials of the **indigenous light tank called 'Zorawar'**, rolled out in less than 24 months from the date of sanction. The tank has been developed for the Army's Project Zorawar — the induction of indigenous light tanks for quicker deployment and movement in high-altitude areas. The Army is looking at procuring about 350 light tanks with a maximum weight of 25 tonnes — with a margin of 10 per cent — with the same firepower as its regular tanks.
9. The Appointment Committee of the Cabinet appointed officiating chairperson **Dr BN Gangadhar** as the head of the National Medical Commission (NMC) while appointing **Dr Sanjay Behari** as president of the Medical

Assessment and Rating Board. **Dr Anil D'Cruz**, Director for oncology of Apollo Hospital, Mumbai has been appointed as a whole-time member of the PG Medical Education Board. **Dr Rajendra Achyut Badwe**, Professor Emeritus, Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai has been appointed a part-time member of the UG Medical Education Board.

10. A team of archaeologists unearthed the **world's oldest known ostrich nest** while investigating the Prakasam site for fossils. The nest has a width of 9-10 feet, and was once home to 9-11 eggs, although it was capable of holding 30-40 eggs at a time. The discovery of a 41,000-year-old ostrich nest by a team of archaeologists in **Prakasam, Andhra Pradesh** could provide key information about the extinction of megafauna in the Indian subcontinent.
11. NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship platform and credit bure have collaborated to launch **SEHER**, a comprehensive credit education program designed to enhance financial literacy and business skills among women entrepreneurs. This initiative is expected to enable women to access the financial tools necessary for business growth and job creation.
12. **Global Energy Independence Day**, celebrated globally on **10th July every year**, marks a pivotal moment for countries striving to achieve energy self-sufficiency and sustainability. The theme for the year 2024, "Energy Transition Now: Embrace the Future," encapsulates the urgency and importance of adopting sustainable energy practices. With climate change accelerating and the demand for energy increasing, this day serves as a reminder of the critical need for innovation and commitment to sustainable energy.
13. **India** aims to more than **double its number of airports to 300 by 2047**, driven by an expected eightfold surge in passenger traffic, according to a draft plan by the Airports Authority of India (AAI). This expansion will involve upgrading existing airstrips into fully operational airports and constructing new ones from the ground up. Currently, India has 138 operational airports.
14. The **Financial Inclusion Index (FI-Index)**, which captures the extent of financial inclusion across the country, stood at 64.2 in March 2024 from 60.1 in March 2023. The index captures information on various aspects of financial inclusion in a single value ranging between 0 and 100, where 0 represents complete financial exclusion and 100 indicates full financial inclusion. The FI-Index comprises three broad parameters Access (having a weight of 35 per cent in the index), Usage (weight 45 per cent), and Quality (weight 20 per cent) with each of these consisting of various dimensions, which are computed based on a number of indicators. The Index is responsive to ease of access, availability and usage of services, and quality of services, comprising in all 97 indicators.
15. **IIT Madras Centre of Excellence in Sports Science and Analytics (CESSA)** unveiled plans to make India a global chess powerhouse using technology-driven tools. The initiative is aimed at enhancing fan engagement, providing solutions for federations to flag cheating and chess training programmes to further grow the sports at the grassroots level. As part of this, IIT Madras CESSA plans to launch five new courses in sports on NPTEL in the coming months.
16. **The Philippines** has been chosen to host the board of the **"Loss and Damage" fund** created by U.N. talks, marking another step towards providing financial help for countries to recover and rebuild from the impact of global warming. An archipelago of more than 7,600 islands, the Philippines, which also has a seat on the fund's board, is frequently hit by typhoons and other climate-change-induced disasters.
17. In a recent study by InterNations, **Vietnam** has got the top spot as **the most affordable country for expatriates** for the fourth consecutive year out of 53 destinations due to its low cost of living, financial stability, and overall quality of life, making it an attractive destination for individuals looking to relocate abroad. Meanwhile, India secured the 6th position in the top 10 expat destinations list. Southeast Asia emerged prominently in the rankings, with Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines joining Vietnam among the top 10 countries.
18. Former Director General of the Indian Council of Medical Research and World Health Organisation's Chief Scientist **Dr. Soumya Swaminathan** has been appointed as the **Principal Adviser** at the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) **for the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP)**. She will be serving in MoHFW on a pro bono basis.

19. **Gagan Narang**, four-time Olympian and 2012 Olympic Games men's 10m Air Rifle bronze medalist, has been chosen to replace MC Mary Kom as the **Chef-de-Mission of the Indian contingent to compete in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games** beginning on July 26. Mary Kom, a bronze medalist in the 2012 Olympics announced that she would be stepping down from the role 'owing to personal reasons', in April 2024.
20. **Rajasthan** became the **first State in the country** to adopt an **action plan for road safety for the next 10 years**. The action plan, to be accompanied by a government policy, will be aimed at reducing road accidents in the State by 50% till 2030. The action plan is being formulated by the Transport Department's road safety cell. The action plan will be implemented in three stages. The first stage from 2025 to 2027, the second from 2027 to 2030 and the third from 2030 to 2033 will lay emphasis on different aspects of the speed limit, safe distance, traffic signals, use of road barriers, pedestrian safety, use of seatbelts, helmets, and vehicle insurance.
21. The **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)** released draft rules to operationalise the **Digital Bharat Nidhi**, in a fresh attempt by the central government at increasing telecom connectivity in rural areas. Digital Bharat Nidhi would replace the erstwhile Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), which is a pool of funds generated by a 5 per cent Universal Service Levy charged upon all the telecom fund operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR).
22. An **India-Russia joint venture** that was set up to produce the **AK-203 assault rifles** has completed its first phase with the delivery of 35,000 sets to the Indian Army and the facility at **Amethi** is now fully equipped to produce the rifles in large numbers. The Korwa Ordnance Factory began production after its 2019 inauguration and a ₹5,124 crore technology transfer.
23. **Viswanathan Anand** turned the clock back in style to win the **Leon Masters Chess Tournament in Spain**. This was his 10th title in the event, the first one dating back to 1996; the last one came in 2016. In the final, the 54-year-old Anand defeated Jaime Santos Latasa of Spain 3-1.
24. **India** has become the **first country in the world to prepare a comprehensive checklist of its entire fauna**, covering 104,561 species. India also launched the Fauna of India Checklist Portal on the occasion of the 109th Foundation Day of the ZSI in Kolkata. India is a global leader in biodiversity conservation, highlighting that the country's tradition, ethos, and values respect nature and promote biodiversity conservation.





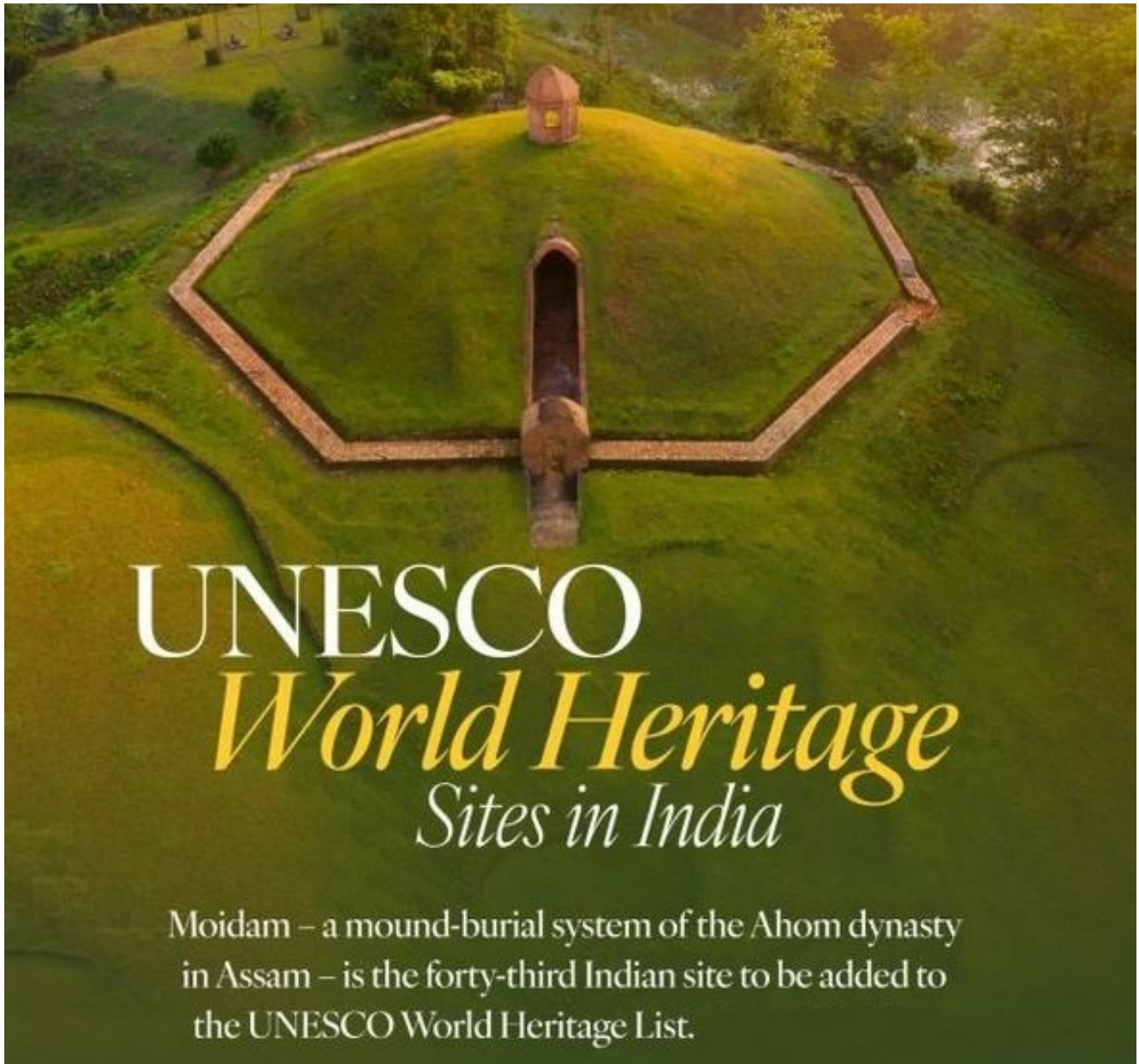
QUICK FACTS

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

1. The wild **poliovirus** is beginning to reappear in big cities in **Afghanistan and Pakistan**, due to vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, conflict, poverty, and limited access to these isolated regions. As a result, the World Health Organization's Global Polio Eradication Initiative is set to miss its deadline of eradicating polio by the end of **2026**. The two vaccines namely Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) and Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) have helped in nearly eradicating polio from the world.
2. The **United States (US) Independence Day**, celebrated annually on **July 4th**, is a significant national holiday in the United States that commemorates the country's declaration of independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776. The year 2024 marks the 278th anniversary of the founding of the US. The American colonies gained independence on July 4, 1776, but the process began two days earlier, on July 2, 1776, when the Continental Congress voted to declare independence. 12 of the 13 colonies officially decided to sever their political ties with Great Britain, and Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin pronounced the colonies free and independent states.
3. **World Zoonoses Day** is celebrated in honour of Louis Pasteur, who administered the first successful rabies vaccine, a zoonotic disease, on **July 6, 1885**. This day is dedicated to raising awareness about zoonoses—diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans—and promoting preventive and control measures. Zoonoses are infectious diseases that can transfer between animals and humans, such as rabies, anthrax, influenza (H1N1 and H5N1), Nipah, Covid-19, brucellosis, and tuberculosis. These diseases are caused by various pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi.
4. Archaeologists unearthed the buried ruins of a **possible 4,000-year-old ceremonial** temple in **northern Peru**. The hidden structure also contained human skeletons, hinting at their potential use in religious offerings. The remains were discovered in the desert district of Zana, in the South American country's Lambayeque region. Notably, Northern Peru boasts a rich history, evident in the ruins of ceremonial complexes dating back thousands of years including, the Sacred City of Caral which is about 5,000 years old, while southern Peru's Ica region hosts the Nazca lines, mysterious geoglyphs carved into the desert more than 1,500 years ago. However, the newly discovered temple sheds light on northern Peru's ancient past, while the crown jewel of Peruvian archaeology lies south in the Cusco region.
5. The **16th edition** of the **Joint Military Exercise 'Nomadic Elephant'** between armies of India and Mongolia was conducted in Meghalaya's Umroi from July 3-16. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability between both Armies in conducting semi-conventional operations in semi-urban/ mountainous terrain under the UN mandate. Exercise 'Nomadic Elephant' is an annual training event with Mongolia which is conducted alternatively in Mongolia and India. The 15th edition of the Joint Military Exercise 'Nomadic Elephant' was conducted in Mongolia's Ulaanbaatar.
6. During the **12th edition of the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC)** meeting between **India and the UAE** held in Abu Dhabi, both countries discussed the regional security situation, including maritime security, and underscored the need to "enhance collaboration" to tackle security challenges and a wide range of opportunities for collaboration to further strengthen defence and security cooperation.
7. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) issued a stark warning, stating that a staggering **90 per cent of the planet's land surface could be degraded by 2050**. This alarming prediction highlights a major threat to global biodiversity and human life. UNESCO states that according to the World Atlas of Desertification, 75% of soils are already degraded, directly affecting 3.2 billion people.
8. **World Population Day** is celebrated annually on **July 11**. The theme of 2024 is "Leave No One Behind, Count Everyone." The global population is expected to continue increasing steadily, with projections indicating it may reach around 9.7 billion by 2050 and possibly peak at nearly 10.4 billion in the mid-2080s. India's population was estimated to be 1.4286 billion, slightly surpassing China's population, making India the most populous country in the world, according to the UNFPA's 2023 State of the World Population Report.
9. **Europe's latest rocket, the Ariane 6**, completed its maiden flight, delivering satellites into orbit and restoring the continent's autonomous access to space. The Ariane 6 rocket, selected by the ESA in 2014, is capable of placing satellites in geostationary orbit 36,000 kilometres above Earth, as well as deploying satellite constellations at lower altitudes.

10. **Germany** will phase out **components made by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE** from its 5G wireless network over the next five years. The decision taken by Germany could further strain the ties between the two nations. Germany's decision comes after the US, UK, Australia and Japan effectively banned the company from building their 5G networks amid fears that Beijing could use Chinese tech companies to spy on their citizens.
11. The **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)**, a regional security grouping, officially welcomed **Bangladesh as its fifth member state**. The announcement came during the 8th Deputy National Security Adviser (DNSA) level meeting, hosted virtually by Mauritius. The existing members – India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and the Maldives – warmly received Bangladesh into the fold, while Seychelles participated as an observer state. The CSC was established in 2020, when India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives agreed to expand the scope of their trilateral meeting on maritime cooperation. Mauritius joined the conclave at the fifth meeting of the grouping in Male in March 2022.
12. **Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece** have signed a pact to facilitate rapid movement of troops and weapons across their borders, enhancing **NATO's readiness on the eastern flank** amid heightened tensions following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This agreement, part of NATO and EU efforts to streamline military mobility, aims to create efficient road and rail supply lines for swift troop deployment during emergencies. Additionally, plans include connecting ports in the Aegean and Black seas, and establishing a joint special operations command center for coordinating NATO forces in the Black Sea region.
13. **India** has emerged as the **fifth-biggest location for GenAI invention**, with domestic inventors having filed 1350 patents globally on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), according to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). The list was led by China which filed over 38,000 GenAI patents, far outpacing inventors in the US (6,276 inventions), the Republic of Korea (4,155), Japan (3,409), and India.
14. The **James Webb Space Telescope** has captured a breathtaking image of a distant quasar, a super bright object powered by a black hole. A cosmic phenomenon called gravitational lensing has transformed the quasar's light into a stunning "**Einstein ring**." The quasar, known as RX J1131-1231, resides an incredible 6 billion light-years from Earth.
15. **Elisa de Anda Madrazo** of Mexico began her **two-year term as the president of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** on July 1, 2024. She succeeded T. Raja Kumar of Singapore. Until June 2023, she held the position of FATF vice-president for three years. Madrazo has over a decade of experience in leadership positions in the anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) sector. She currently serves as Director General in Mexico's Ministry of Finance and Public Credit.
16. Reformist candidate **Masoud Pezeshkian** won **Iran's Presidential** election, defeating hard-liner **Saeed Jalili** with over 53.3% of the vote from more than 30 million ballots counted. The snap election followed the tragic death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May.
17. The Labour Party, led by the lawyer-turned-politician **Keir Starmer**, has won a landslide in the U.K. elections, bringing an end to the 14-year rule of the Conservatives. Keir Starmer will become **Britain's next Prime Minister**. The 61-year-old, named after Labour's founding father Keir Hardie, is the centre-left opposition party's most working-class leader in decades.
18. The **13th edition** of the joint military exercise **Maitree 2024** between the **Indian Army and the Royal Thailand Army** culminated with a grand closing ceremony at Tak Province, Thailand. The joint training activities during Maitree 2024 encompassed a wide range of tactical activities including weapon training, day and night firing, rappelling, jungle survival techniques, navigation training, communication exercises, combat first aid and casualty evacuation drills among others.
19. **India** is among the 25 countries participating in the **third UN-led conference on Afghanistan in Doha**. It was organized to find ways to improve the lives of the Afghan people in the Taliban-ruled country. The meeting was significant as it was the first time that the Taliban were attending the talks. However, the UN has denied that the latest round of talks in Doha are meant to pave the way for international recognition for the Taliban.

20. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **46th Session of the World Heritage Committee** at Bharat Mandapam on July 21, 2024. This historic event marks the first time India is hosting the World Heritage Committee Meeting, which will conclude on July 31, 2024. The committee is responsible for managing all matters related to World Heritage and deciding on sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage list. One of the highlights of this session is the nomination of Northeast India's historic Moidam – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty – for inclusion in UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List. This nomination is particularly significant as it would be the first heritage site from Northeast India to receive such recognition.



UNESCO

World Heritage

Sites in India

Moidam – a mound-burial system of the Ahom dynasty in Assam – is the forty-third Indian site to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.



QUICK FACTS

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

1. In his first speech as Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi invoked the **abhaya mudra**, the gesture of the raised open palm that is commonly understood as conveying reassurance and freedom from fear. He portrayed the government as a regime based on fear and stressed that the culture of fear is alien to the Hindu religion and Indian civilisation. In Sanskrit, the term mudra could mean a seal, mark, sign, or currency, but in the Buddhist context, it refers to “hand and arm gestures made during the course of ritual practice or depicted in images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, tantric deities, and other Buddhist images.”
2. Every year, India observes **Swami Vivekananda's death anniversary on July 4**. Born on January 12, 1863, he was one of India's greatest spiritual leaders and intellectuals. Born as Narendranath Datta, he was the chief disciple of the Indian mystic Ramakrishna. The credit for introducing yoga and Vedanta to the West goes to him. Vivekananda is considered the father of modern Indian nationalism and is also credited with raising interfaith awareness and bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion in the late nineteenth century. The world got to know Vivekananda after his popular speech at the World Parliament of Religions, Chicago, on September 11, 1893, when he said, “Sisters and Brothers of America”.
3. **June 30** marks the **169th anniversary of the Santhal Hul**, one of the earliest peasant uprisings against the British. Santhal Hul of 1855 was a revolt against imperialism led by four brothers, Sidho, Kanho, Chand, and Bhairav Murmu, along with sisters Phulo and Jhano. The Santhals also fought against the upper castes, zamindars, darogas, and moneylenders, described by the umbrella term 'diku', in an attempt to safeguard the economic, cultural, and religious aspects of their lives.
4. The Tibetan community in exile celebrated the **89th birthday of the 14th Dalai Lama** on 7 July 2024. The Dalai Lama belongs to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the largest and most influential tradition in Tibet. There have been only 14 Dalai Lamas in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, and the first and second Dalai Lamas were given the title posthumously. The 14th and current Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso.
5. Researchers have determined that the **world's oldest known figurative cave painting** dates back 51,200 years by using a new dating technique, according to a recent study. Located in the **Leang Karampuang cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi**, the painting in red pigment shows a pig with its mouth partially open and three part-human, part-animal stick figures, or therianthrope.
6. Recently, PM Narendra Modi greeted the people on the auspicious occasion of **Jagannath Rath Yatra and Ashadhi Bij**, the Kutchi New Year. The CM of Gujarat performed the 'Pahind Vidhi,' the symbolic cleaning of the path for Jagannath's chariot for the Rath Yatra.
7. **Ratna Bhandar**, the revered treasury of the **12th century Jagannath temple in Puri**, was reopened on Sunday after 46 years for an inventory of valuables and the repair of its structure, officials said. Among the 11 people present when the treasury was reopened were former Orissa HC judge, Biswanath Rath, Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Arabinda Padhee, ASI Superintendent DB Gadanayak and a representative of Puri's titular king 'Gajapati Maharaja.' Also among them were four servitors, Patjoshi Mohapatra, Bhandar Mekap, Chadhaukarana and Deulikaran, who took care of the rituals.
8. **Captain Avhilash Rawat** and his crew of an oil tanker have been named among the winners of the **International Maritime Organisation (IMO) 2024 Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea** for their “extraordinary courage” shown in a Red Sea rescue mission. Captain Brijesh Nambiar and the crew of the Indian Navy ship INS Visakhapatnam have been conferred a Letter of Commendation for their support to the oil tanker when in distress. Captain Rawat and his crew were nominated for the award by Marshall Island.
9. The century-old auspicious festival of **Kharchi Puja** is celebrated with pomp every year by the people of **Tripura**. Also known as the Festival of 14 Gods, Kharchi Puja falls on the eighth day of the new moon in July or August. During the week-long festival, people worship Chaturdasa Devata, the ancestral deity of the Tripuri people. Kharchi Puja is observed annually on the Shukla Ashtami day, which falls on the eighth day of the lunar month of Ashadha. This year, Kharchi Puja began on July 14.

- 10. Noted **Tamil writer Sivashankari**, who has created a wealth of literature in Tamil, has been selected for **Dr. C. Narayana Reddy National Literary Award**. A recipient of the Saraswati Samman Award, Ms. Sivashankari received the 'Vishwambhara' award during Dr. C. Narayana Reddy's 93rd birth anniversary celebrations at Ravindra Bharati in Hyderabad on July 29. The Chennai-based writer has penned 36 novels, 48 mini-novels (navalikas), 150 stories, 15 travelogues, seven volumes of essays, four research papers and two biographies in Tamil.
- 11. The **Spice Awards 2024** instituted by ICAR- (Indian Institute of Spices Research – IISR) was presented at the function, where Prof. Prasad Krishna presented the Spice Awards to **Sopna Kallingal** from Thrissur and **Diya Foundation**, Kamrup, Assam. Diya Foundation was recognized by the award committee for their efforts in promoting spice farming among small and marginal farmers of the North Eastern Region while Mrs Sopna Kallingal was selected considering her initiatives in enterprise diversification and integrated crop management strategies promoting spice-based cropping system.

