

27th Jan, 2025

1. India's 76th Republic Day Parade (2025)

Recent events of importance

- **Why in News:** India celebrated its 76th Republic Day on January 26, 2025, with a grand parade at Kartavya Path in New Delhi. The event showcased India's rich cultural diversity, military strength, and international ties.
- **Key-highlights of the Parade**

- **President Droupadi Murmu's Traditional Arrival:** For the first time since 1984, President Droupadi Murmu arrived at the Republic Day parade in a traditional black horse-drawn buggy.
 - The buggy, gold-plated and with the national emblem, was previously used until 1984 but was discontinued after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- **Cultural Tableaux Representing India's Diversity**
 - **UP Tableau – Kumbh Mela and Samudra Manthan:** Uttar Pradesh's tableau featured depictions of the ongoing Kumbh Mela and the legendary 'Samudra Manthan' (churning of the ocean) from Hindu mythology.
 - **Madhya Pradesh Tableau – Cheetah Revival:** Madhya Pradesh showcased its cheetah revival project, with cheetahs from the state's Kuno wildlife sanctuary being highlighted.
 - **Andhra Pradesh Tableau – Eco-Friendly Wooden Toys:** Andhra Pradesh's tableau focused on 'Etikoppaka Bommalu,' traditional eco-friendly wooden toys that represent the state's cultural heritage.
- **First Tri-Services Tableau:** Theme - 'Shashakt aur Surakshit Bharat': The first-ever Tri-services tableau highlighted India's military integration with the theme of a "strong and secure India."
 - **Key Features:** The tableau displayed the synergy between the Army, Navy, and Air Force, featuring elements like the Arjun Main Battle Tank, Tejas MKII fighter aircraft, Advanced Light Helicopter, INS Visakhapatnam destroyer, and a Remotely Piloted Aircraft.
 - **Joint Operations Room:** The tableau symbolized a coordinated operation between the three services, showcasing India's defense capabilities in land, air, and water.
- **First Indonesian Contingent at the Republic Day Parade**
 - **Indonesian Participation:** This year marked the first time Indonesia participated with a military contingent. A 352-member marching contingent and band from Indonesia took part in the parade, marking a historic moment.
 - **Foreign Contingents Tradition:** The tradition of inviting foreign contingents to the Republic Day parade started in 2016, and this year's Indonesian contingent followed this custom. Previously, foreign contingents from countries like France had also participated.
- **First Woman Officer's Salute:** Captain Dimple Singh Bhati became the first woman Army officer to present a salute to President Droupadi Murmu during the Republic Day parade.
 - She achieved this feat while standing on a 12-foot ladder mounted on a moving motorcycle, setting a world record.
 - Bhati's salute symbolized the courage, precision, and excellence of the Indian Army, particularly the Corps of Signals, also known as "The Dare Devils."

Republic Day parade taps into heritage, diversity, military might

President Droupadi Murmu leads the celebrations, with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto as special guest; tableaux celebrating 150 years of tribal activist Birsa Munda and 75 years of the enactment of Constitution were the key highlights

Samridhi Tewari
Sanyika Mahajan
NEW DELHI



Stately celebrations: President Droupadi Murmu arrives for the Republic Day parade with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Sunday; an aerial view of the marching contingents and Army tanks. (AN & AP/PT)

India showcased its military might and cultural diversity with a parade keeping special focus on the 75 years of the enactment of the Constitution and Jan Bhagadati (people's participation), at the Republic Day celebration here on a cold winter morning that continued into a bright sunny afternoon on Sunday. President Droupadi Murmu led the celebrations, with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto as the special guest. The theme for this year was "Svarim Bhaur: Viraat aur Vikas" (Golden India: heritage and development). The parade began at 10.30 a.m., with Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting the National War Memorial to pay tributes to the fallen heroes. The President and her Indonesian counterpart were escorted by the President's Bodyguard, the senior-most Regiment of the Army. While the invitees stood still, the National Flag was unfurled, followed by the playing of the National Anthem with a thunderous 21-gun salute using 105-mm light field guns, an indigenous weapon system. The Indonesian Army graced the event with a music band. Tableaux celebrating 150 years of tribal activist Birsa Munda and 75 years of the Constitution spotlighting the "Father of the Indian Constitution", Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, were the key highlights.

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2. Geo-tagging of chinar trees in J&K GS 3 (Environment)

• Why in News:

- The Jammu & Kashmir government has launched the **"Tree Aadhaar"** mission to conserve the region's declining chinar trees.
- The initiative includes conducting a census of chinar trees and assigning each tree a unique identity to monitor and protect them effectively.

Geo-tagged digital identity helps Kashmir's chinar trees stand tall

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Facing destruction due to rapid urbanisation and infrastructure projects, a geo-tagged digital identity on the lines of the Aadhaar card has been introduced this week to monitor the health of every chinar tree in the Kashmir Valley.

The J&K Forest Research Institute's (JKFRI) 'Digital Tree Aadhaar' initiative gives a unique number to each tree. The chinar at Lal Chowk is CGJK010088. Metal cards with barcodes provide information such as the tree's location, height, and health.

Around 10,000 trees are being metal card-tagged as of now. It will help in the management of trees, and tourists will get to know how old a tree is



Unique number: Workers install QR code-based GIS plates on chinar trees for conservation at Nishat Garden, Srinagar. FILE PHOTO

by scanning the barcodes," Syed Tariq, project coordinator at the JKFRI, said.

Dipping numbers

The JKFRI began a chinar census in the Union Territory in 2021. According to data from the JKFRI, Kashmir was home to around 40,000 chinar trees but the numbers are falling

steadily. The widening of highways has also taken a toll on many trees.

"The aim of the JKFRI is to establish a detailed database of chinar trees using the Geographic Information System (GIS)-based, quick response (QR) code-enabled surveys," Mr. Tariq said. Around 28,560 chinar trees have been geo-tagged

across the region, with fresh plantations covered in recent years.

More to be covered Chinars grow in Jammu's Chenab Valley, and in the Pir Panjal Valley. They too will be covered under the digital initiative.

Ganderbal district has the highest number of chinar trees, including the world's third-largest chinar, with a girth of 74 feet. "We will record the top 20 chinars of Kashmir, with girth between 60 ft. to 74 ft.," Dr. Tariq said.

Kashmir is home to chinar groves. Geo-tagging has rescued the trees from illegal felling. The 'majestic chinar' or *Platanus orientalis* (oriental plane) grows to a height of 30 metres with a girth of 10-15 metres at ground level.

• About Chinar Tree (Oriental plane tree)

○ Characteristics:

- Maple-like tree with a vast canopy.
- Found in cool climates with sufficient water, mainly in the Eastern Himalayas.
- Grows up to 30 metres tall with a girth of 10-15 metres.
- Takes 30-50 years to mature and 150 years to reach full size.

○ Origin of the Name 'Chinar'

- Coined by the Mughals, possibly by Emperor Jahangir.
- Derived from the Persian phrase "Che naar ast" meaning "What flame is that?" – inspired by the crimson red leaves in autumn.

○ Mughal Influence on Chinar Plantations

- **Role:** Mughals expanded chinar plantations in Kashmir and parts of Jammu's Chenab region
- **Symbol:** Considered a "royal tree."

○ Notable Contributions by Jahangir:

- Created **Naseem Bagh** on Dal Lake's banks with over 1,100 chinar trees.
- Planted chinars on a small Dal Lake island, now known as **Chaar Chinari** (Four Chinars).

• Importance of Chinar in Kashmir

○ State Tree

- The chinar is the "state tree" of Jammu & Kashmir (now a Union Territory).

○ Tourist Attraction

- The chinar becomes a major attraction in autumn when its leaves turn crimson red and golden.

○ Cultural and Artistic Significance:

- Chinar motifs are commonly seen in local **papier mache, embroidery, hand-woven carpets, and walnut wood carvings.**
- The tree holds a special place in the art, literature, and craft traditions of Kashmir.

○ Religious Significance:

- Chinar trees are found near many **Muslim and Hindu shrines** in the region

○ Oldest Chinar Tree:

- The **oldest surviving chinar** (around 700 years old) is located in **Chattergam village** in Budgam, central Kashmir, and was planted by a **Sufi saint.**

• Chinar Conservation Project Overview

○ Government Permission for Tree Cutting:

- Cutting a chinar tree requires government approval, even on private property. Despite this, illegal cutting still occurs.

○ Project Goals:

- The initiative aims to track the status of each chinar tree across the Kashmir valley and Chenab region.

○ Census and Tree Aadhaar:

- A census of chinar trees has been conducted district-wise. Each tree has been assigned a unique **Tree Aadhaar** and geo-tagged for identification and monitoring.

- **Current Status:**
 - As of now, **28,560 chinar trees** have been enumerated and geo-tagged, out of an estimated total of **32,000 to 33,000**
- **Challenges:**
 - Some trees are inaccessible, such as those located near **security installations** or **no-go areas**.
- **QR Code Implementation:**
 - A **metallic QR code** is being placed on chinar trees. Scanning the code provides information on **25 parameters** including:
 - Longitude and latitude
 - Age, height, and girth
 - Number of branches and tree health
 - Canopy size and eco-threats faced by the tree.

3. Genocide and the world's averted gaze GS 2 (International Relations)

- **Why in News:** On January 27, 2025, the world marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of **Auschwitz-Birkenau by Soviet soldiers in 1945**. This day not only commemorates the lives lost in the Holocaust but also renews the global pledge to prevent future genocides. The ongoing suffering in Gaza, and the International Criminal Court's investigation into potential genocide, brings the need for this pledge into sharp focus once again.

• **The Holocaust and the Beginning of "Never Again"**

- **Liberation of Auschwitz:** On January 27, 1945, Soviet forces liberated Auschwitz, uncovering the remains of approximately 1.1 million victims, primarily Jews. The Nazis had destroyed their records, but the horrors of the Holocaust remain a significant moment in human history.
- **Post-War Pledge of "Never Again":** The phrase "Never Again" was coined after the Holocaust, symbolizing a global commitment to preventing future genocides. The 1948 Genocide Convention recognized genocide as a crime and called for measures to prevent it, acknowledging its lasting stain on human history.
- **Worsening of the Refugee Crisis:** Despite the knowledge of Nazi atrocities, the international community failed to take decisive action in the years leading up to and during the Holocaust. Many Jewish refugees faced bureaucratic obstacles, xenophobia, and restrictive immigration policies, which compounded their suffering.

• **Post-War Genocides and the International Response**

- **Cambodia (1975-1979):** The Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia killed over two million people through execution, starvation, and forced labor. International response was minimal, heavily influenced by Cold War politics, with both China and the West supporting factions that were part of the conflict.
- **Rwanda Genocide (1994):** The Rwanda genocide saw the mass murder of up to 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus within 100 days. Despite warnings, the UN peacekeepers were unable to stop the killings, highlighting the failure of the international community to intervene in a timely manner.
- **Bosnia and Darfur Genocides:** In 1995, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men were executed in Srebrenica despite it being a UN safe zone. Similarly, the Darfur genocide (2003-2005) led to 200,000 deaths, but the international response was weak and delayed in both cases, illustrating the recurring failure of global governance mechanisms.

Genocide and the world's averted gaze

Eighty years ago, on January 27, 1945, Soviet soldiers stumbled upon the Jewish city of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Inside they found 4,000 emaciated prisoners, along with 4,000 pairs of shoes, piles of spectacles, and mounds of cooling utensils. This was all that remained of the approximately 1.1 million people, mainly European Jews, who were killed at Auschwitz. As the retreating Nazis destroyed their meticulous records along with much evidence of the brutally efficient killing operation, a precise figure is not available. This year, on the anniversary of the liberation, the few remaining survivors and world leaders have been invited to remember the dead and to renew the international community's pledge of never again allowing genocide to take place.

A stain in human history
As the Genocide Convention of 1948 recognises, the crime of genocide – acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group – has stained human history down the ages. The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, said on December 8, 2024, on the international day to commemorate victims of genocide, 'Genocide always has multiple clear warning signs. The Soviet soldiers who liberated Auschwitz heard and they were wholly unprepared for what they found. However, while the industrial scale of the killing that would eventually claim six million Jewish lives, in addition to tens of thousands of Roma, Sinti, and other people deemed inferior or political opponents, was not known to its entirety, the Allies were not entirely unaware. On assuming power in 1933, the Nazis codified the persecution of Jews in hundreds of laws, culminating in the 'Nuremberg Laws' of 1935 that took away German citizenship from Jews and others considered 'non-Aryan'. Yet, when those Jews who could overcome restrictive German emigration laws tried to leave land 1944, when Germany forbade Jewish emigration, they encountered bureaucratic obstacles, xenophobia and antisemitism.

Following the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the United States tightened already restrictive immigration quotas. The United Kingdom refused to accept Jewish refugees fleeing out of the Auschwitz and introduced a visa system. Neither made provisions for refugees. After 1938, Britain also restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine, then a British mandate. Some Jews moved to neighbouring European countries, only to be caught in Hitler's net as German tanks rolled over Europe. France, Belgium and the Netherlands were particularly assiduous in following Nazi orders to round up Jews for concentration camps.

The reality of 'never again'
The Allies responded to the growing refugee problem by gathering at Evian in July 1938, apart from sympathetic nations, the 32 delegates offered little else. By the time the U.K. and the United States met at the Bermuda Conference of April 1941, reports of mass Jewish killings were unambiguous. The World Jewish Congress had submitted a report outlining Hitler's plans that Jews, after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated. Disgraced Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, said in December 1942, 'The mass extermination of Jews in German-occupied Poland'. Escapes from the concentration camps brought their own harrowing stories. The evidence for genocide was mounting, but the Allies would not, or could not, look too clearly. 'Never again', they declared in 1945. And yet, between 1933 and 1939, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia are estimated to have killed over two million people by execution, starvation, disease and exhumation as they sought to recreate Cambodian society in some communist ideal. As refugees fled to neighbouring countries and a new regime was installed in Phnom Penh after Vietnam's invasion, the international community's responses were conditioned by Cold War calculations. China and the West supported the fleeing Khmer Rouge while Vietnam and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) supported the newly installed communist government.

Never again. And yet, in Rwanda, in 1994, between 800,000 to 100,000 people, mostly minority Tutsis with some moderate Hutus, were murdered over 100 days while UN peacekeepers watched helplessly. In July 1995, 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were herded from a UN compound in Srebrenica – a place declared a safe zone (it is incapable that safe zones were also created to prevent refugees fleeing out of the former Yugoslavia) – and executed, as part of a careful campaign of ethnic cleansing. The Dutch UN commander requested reinforcements from both the UN and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which never arrived. It was the culmination of those years of inaction by Europe and America on how to respond. This year is the 80th anniversary of the liberation (July 1945).

Never again. Less than a decade later, violence broke out in Darfur, Sudan. Approximately 200,000 people were killed in 2003-05 in what the International Criminal Court (ICC) and some states have recognised as genocide. The violence in Sudan continues and there are renewed fears of genocide occurring now while the international community's attention is focused on Ukraine and Gaza.

In Gaza
Then there is Gaza. As world leaders gather at Auschwitz on January 27 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of its liberation, Gaza will attempt returning to the rubble of their homes. Some will be sitting through the debris to locate the remains of family still buried underneath, part of the 10,000 estimated to be missing. The International Court of Justice is examining whether Israel is guilty of genocide under a case brought by South Africa. The ICC has issued arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the former Israel Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Gaza in response to Hamas' October 7, 2023 attacks. There are arrest warrants for Hamas leaders too. And, yet, America's and western Europe's responses was to criticise the ICC, expressing outrage that there should be any semblance of equivalence in the arrest warrants for the leaders of Hamas and Israel. In some perception of international norms, there seems to be an acceptance of a hierarchy of suffering. Arms have continued to flow to Israel, even as the death toll in Gaza crosses 45,000, mostly women and children. The UN estimates that 92% of all homes have been destroyed, health care infrastructure and 48% of schools destroyed, and entire populations forcibly displaced multiple times. All this happened while Gaza was under siege, the foreign press was barred from entering, and the world appeared to be looking away.

Israel has a right to defend itself, and Hamas' actions in October 2023 are completely indefensible. Yet, when does self-defence cross over into genocide? Where is that line? Arguably, that line is where we avert our gaze.

• The Gaza Crisis and the Question of Genocide

- **Ongoing Conflict in Gaza (2023):** As of 2023, violence in Gaza has raised the question of whether Israel's actions in response to Hamas attacks amount to genocide. With more than 47,000 deaths, primarily women and children, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure, international concerns about potential genocide are growing.
- **ICC Investigation into Israel and Hamas:** The International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened investigations into whether Israeli actions in Gaza and Hamas' attacks may constitute genocide. Arrest warrants have been issued for leaders of both sides, but international responses, particularly from Western countries, have been defensive of Israel's self-defense rights.
- **Global Inaction and Selective Responses:** Despite the mounting evidence of atrocities, many in the international community have failed to intervene effectively in Gaza. The West, particularly the U.S. and Europe, has continued to supply arms to Israel, further complicating the international response to the crisis.

4. An enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific GS 2 (International Relations)

- **Why in News:** The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States marks a significant moment for global geopolitics, with the Indo-Pacific region being central to his foreign policy. His renewed focus on strengthening defense, economic, and technological cooperation with key Quad partners—India, Japan, and Australia—signals a more assertive U.S. posture in the Indo-Pacific. This approach aims to counter China's growing influence while ensuring regional stability.

• U.S. Shift to Indo-Pacific Framework

- **Recalibration of Geopolitical Focus:** Under Trump's leadership, the U.S. replaced the term 'Asia-Pacific' with 'Indo-Pacific,' expanding the strategic narrative to include the Indian Ocean region, focusing on securing sea lanes and countering China's maritime influence.
- **Structural Changes in U.S. Defense:** The U.S. renamed the Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, restructuring defense units to prioritize Indo-Pacific allies, signaling a stronger operational focus on this region.
- **Quad Revival and Institutionalization:** Trump pushed to institutionalize the Quad (India, Japan, Australia, U.S.), elevating it to the ministerial level, marking a significant move to deepen cooperation in maritime security, supply chains, and technological standards.

• Biden Administration's Continuity and Expansion

- **Strategic Continuity Under Biden:** Despite a change in leadership, the Biden administration inherited and maintained the Indo-Pacific strategy, reinforcing its centrality in U.S. foreign policy.
- **Expansion of Quad Agenda:** Biden expanded the Quad's focus to include vaccines, climate change, and infrastructure development, complementing the strategic and security dimensions established by Trump.
- **Introduction of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework:** Biden launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in 2022 to complement the strategic engagement, ensuring economic collaboration alongside defense and technological cooperation in the region.

• Prospects of Trump's Second Term

- **Bipartisan Consensus on Indo-Pacific:** There is a bipartisan consensus on the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, ensuring continuity in U.S. engagement and support for key regional alliances like the Quad.
- **Assertive Stance on China:** Trump's second term is expected to see a more assertive U.S. approach towards China, strengthening regional security frameworks and relying on Indo-Pacific allies to share the burden.

An enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States marks a significant moment for global geopolitics, with the Indo-Pacific region being central to his foreign policy. His renewed focus on strengthening defense, economic, and technological cooperation with key Quad partners—India, Japan, and Australia—signals a more assertive U.S. posture in the Indo-Pacific. This approach aims to counter China's growing influence while ensuring regional stability.

Under the new Trump administration, the Indo-Pacific is likely to retain prominence but with a sharper focus on hard power dynamics. Trump could take a more assertive stance against China, his reliance on India, Japan, and Australia to share the burden of regional security would be reinforced. The new administration's first major foreign policy initiative was a reshaping of the Quad from a loose grouping to a more formalized security arrangement. The U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, characterized China as the most formidable adversary the U.S. has faced, stating that the challenges posed by the Quad's revival under Mr. Trump have intensified. This was the administration's first significant engagement with foreign leaders. All four members reaffirmed Washington's commitment to maritime security and economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region while also asserting the scope for this year's Quad summit in 2023. President Mr. Trump also met with the three Quad foreign ministers separately with India being the first bilateral meeting. A joint statement released after the meeting emphasized the importance of international law, peace, stability, and maritime security for regional prosperity and the role of the Quad in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific. A joint statement released after the meeting emphasized the importance of international law, peace, stability, and maritime security for regional prosperity and the role of the Quad in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

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- **Focus on Hard Power and Rules-Based Order:** While focusing on hard power dynamics, Trump is likely to bolster security frameworks that protect the rules-based order, enhancing regional maritime, economic, and technological security.

5. The Role of the Governor as Chancellor of State Universities **GS 2 (Governance)**

- **Why in News:** The role of the **Governor as Chancellor of State universities** has been a topic of debate in India. While it's often thought to protect universities from political influence, this role is actually a colonial legacy that has led to several challenges in modern India.

● **Colonial Legacy of the Chancellor Role (Background)**

- The British established **India's first universities in 1857 (Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras)**, appointing Governors as their Chancellors to keep control over university affairs.
- **Powers of the Chancellor:** As Chancellor, the Governor had powers like appointing Vice-Chancellors, nominating members to university bodies, and overseeing university decisions. These powers were meant to limit university autonomy.
- **Post-Independence:** After independence, India inherited this system. Although it was designed to ensure academic freedom in practice, it led to political interference, especially as Governors were appointed based on political loyalty.

● **Political Role of Governors**

- **From Ceremonial to Political:** From 1947 to 1967, Governors were largely ceremonial, with the real power lying with Chief Ministers. However, after 1967, Governors started playing more active, often politically motivated, roles, especially when States had opposition governments.
- **Political Appointments:** Governors often came from political backgrounds, which led to conflicts between the Centre and State governments. This politicisation undermined the credibility of the office.
- **Conflicting Roles:** The Governor's dual role — as both a constitutional figure (under Article 163) and a statutory authority (Chancellor of universities) — allowed them to act independently, often bypassing State governments, especially in Opposition-ruled States.

● **Problems Arising from the Governor as Chancellor**

- **Lack of Accountability:** Governors have significant power in university governance but no direct accountability to the elected State governments.
- **Delays and Administrative Issues:** Governors' power often results in delays, particularly in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and other university positions, causing administrative paralysis.
- **Political Interference:** Instead of protecting universities from politics, Governors sometimes bring political influence into university affairs, undermining autonomy.

● **Comparisons with the President's Role**

- **President as Visitor of Central Universities:** The President of India acts as the Visitor for Central universities. Unlike Governors, the President works with the Ministry of Education, ensuring more transparency and oversight.
- **Governor vs. President:** The key difference is that the President's role involves consultation and legislative oversight, while the Governor has unilateral powers in State universities, often bypassing State governments.

Should Governors head State universities?

The Governor's role as Chancellor of State universities has become a controversial topic, especially in states where the Governor is appointed by the President on the advice of the Union Government.

