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.

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

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. ANI & PIB/PTI

  - **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 Visakhapatnamdestroyer, 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."**

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.
- **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.

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 CG-JK010088. 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 JKRFI 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.

- o **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**
- o **Challenges:**
  - ▪ Some trees are inaccessible, such as those located near **security installations** or **no-go areas**.
- o **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"**
  - o **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.
  - o **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.
  - o **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**
  - o **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.
  - o **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.
  - o **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.

- **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: D**espite 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.
  - **I**ntroduction 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: T**rump'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.

o **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)**
  o The British established **India's first universities in 1857 (Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras),** appointing Governors as their Chancellors to keep control over university affairs.
  o **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.
  o **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**
  o **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.
  o **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.
  o **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**
  o **Lack of Accountability:** Governors have significant power in university governance but no direct accountability to the elected State governments.
  o **Delays and Administrative Issues:** Governors' power often results in delays, particularly in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and other university positions, causing administrative paralysis.
  o **Political Interference:** Instead of protecting universities from politics, Governors sometimes bring political influence into university affairs, undermining autonomy.

- **Comparisons with the President's Role**
  o **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.
  o **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.