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RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY & FESTIVALS

1

Attukal Pongala: the feast for millions

Context: The famed Pongala, which is said to be the largest congregation of women in the world in connection with the annual festival at **Attukal Bhagavathy Temple** in **Thiruvananthapuram** celebrated on February 27 this year.

Important facts about Attukal Pongala Festival

- Attukal Pongala is a 10-day religious festival celebrated at the Attukal Bhagavathy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram of Kerala.
- The festival is devoted to Attukal Devi or Attukalamma. It is a women-centric festival.
- The pongala preparation starts with the ritual called 'Aduppuvettu'.
- On the ninth day, there is a huge gathering of millions of women in the temple surroundings.
- These women prepare a divine food made of rice in earthen pots and offer it to the Attukal Amma (Goddess of the Temple).
- The offering is made by valiyachennellu, native organic. This variety is rich in iron content.
- This is the earliest Pongala festival in Kerala. The festival is marked as the largest annual gathering of women by the Guinness World Records.

Attukal Bhagavathy Temple

- The **Attukal Bhagavathy Temple** is a Hindu religious shrine, dedicated to **Goddess Bhadrakali (Kannaki)**, the main deity of the temple. There are two idols of the Goddess in the sanctum sanctorum.
- **Architecture:** The temple structure is a harmonious conglomeration of both Kerala and Tamil styles of architecture.
- **Sculptures:**
 - The beautifully carved figures of Mahishasuramardhini, Goddess Kali, Rajarajeswari, Sree Parvathy with Lord Paramasiva are depicted with other Gods.
 - The corridors walls also adorn the epic stories of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu viz., the "Desavathara".
 - On the southern Gopura, the puranic story of "Dakshayaga" is depicted in sculptures.

Some important famous festivals of Kerala

Onam - The National Festival of Kerala

- It is a harvest festival celebrated by Malayalis.
- The festival is celebrated to commemorate King Mahabali, whose spirit is said to visit Kerala at the time of Onam.
- The earliest known reference to Onam is found in Maturaikkaaci – a Sangam-era Tamil poem.
- Onam is celebrated by making **Pookkalam** (the flower rangolis). Other rituals are also performed which includes **Vallam Kali** (the boat races), **Pulikali** (the tiger dances), **Kummattikali** (mask dances), **Onathallu** (martial arts), among others.

Thiruvathira

- The Thiruvathira festival falls on the asterism Thiruvathira in the Malayalam month of Dhanu (December-January).
- The Ardra Darshan celebrated in Tamil Nadu corresponds to Thiruvathira of Kerala
- It is considered to be highly auspicious to worship Siva and the devotees go to the temple before sunrise for 'darshan'.

2 Anubhava Mandapa at Basavakalyan

Context: Karnataka CM laid the foundation stone of Anubhava Mantapa at Basavakalyan, which is considered to be the birthplace of **12th century** poet and social reformer **Basaveshwara**.

About

• The project

- The **₹500-crore project** is said to be completed within two years on a 7.5-acre area.
- The **New Anubhava Mantapa**, as envisaged now, will be a six-floor structure in the midst of the 7.5-acre plot and represent various principles of Basaveshwara's philosophy.
- It will showcase the **12th Century Anubhava Mantapa** (often referred to as the **"first Parliament of the world"**)
- established by him in **Basavakalyan** where philosophers and social reformers held debates.

Anubhava Mantapa

- Basavanna built Anubhava Mantapa. It was the first religious Parliament in the world.
- It was in Basavakalyan of present-day Bidar district. Today, physically it is not available. But the seed planted by Basaveshwara has grown as a huge and dense forest.

- The building will adopt the Kalyana Chalukya style of architecture.

Kalyan Chalukya Architecture: Basic Details

- The Chalukya temples show a transition from the Nagara to Dravida style and are built in an altogether new style called Karnatadravida.

- The pillars or ornated columns are considered to be amongst the most important features of these temples and even temples like “Mahadeva Temple” have the finest design and structure in Karnataka after Halebid.
- The Temple plan is generally star-shaped. Most temples have deities like Shiva and Nandi at the entrance of the shrine.
- Examples: Truketshwara Temple, Gadag, Temples of Lakkundi, Kasivisvesvara Temple, Mahadeva Temple, Itagi, Doddabasappa Temple, Dambal etc.

- **Structure:** The grand structure supported by 770 pillars will have an auditorium with a seating capacity of 770 people. It is believed that **770 Sharanas (followers of Basaveshwara)** led the Vachana reformist movement in the 12th Century.
- **Basement:** The basement is designed for a **DasohaBhavana (dining hall)** where around 1,500 people eat together.
- **Top:** its top, the structure would have a Linga placed on a large pedestal.
- The project also envisages state-of-the-art robotic system, open-air theatre, modern water conservation system, terrace garden, library, research centre, prayer hall, yoga centre and so on.

Who was Basaveshwara?

- Lord Basavanna or Lord Basaveshwara is known as the founder of the Lingayatparampara (tradition).

Lingayats (from the word ‘Linga’, which is the mark of the formless Shiva) are a group who follow **Shaivism** as a parampara (tradition).

- He was a philosopher and statesman. He lived in the 12th century CE.
- **Beliefs:** Basaveshwara believed in caste, creed, class, gender equality
- **Principles:** He popularized principles of ‘KayakaveKailasa’ and ‘Dasoha’
- Besides serving the people as a great reformer and a great mystic, he also served as the **Prime Minister of the Southern Kalachuri Empire** in South India.
- He originated a literary revolution by introducing **VachanaSahitya** (Lit. vachana = sayings, prose).

Basaveshwara statue in London

- In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a Basaveshwara statue on the bank of river **Thames in London, United Kingdom**.

3

Kavutheendal ceremony of the Meena Bharani festival

Context: For the first time in history, the kavutheendal ceremony of the **Meena Bharani festival** at **Sri Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple, Kodungalloor**, was observed with just one person.

About Sree Kurumba Bhagavathi temple:

- **Sree Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple**, popularly known as **Kodungalloor Bhagavathy Temple**, is one of the oldest temples in the State of Kerala.
- The ancient shrine is dedicated to the Goddess in her **Bhadrakali form**.

- The deity is known as **Sree Kurumba** and fondly called Kodungallur Amma or the mother of Kodungallur by her devotees.
 - ▶ The deity here represents the fierce form of the goddess who has eight arms with various attributes in each hand.
 - ▶ In one hand, she holds the head of a demon Daruka, another a bell, another a sword, next an anklet, among others.
- The temple history dates back from the **Chera period**. It is believed to be erected by Cheran Chenguttuvan the famous Chera king.
- It is also one of the first temples in Kerala which removed the restrictions of caste and religion, and permitted devotees belonging to lower strata of the caste hierarchy, access for 27 days when other temples barred their entry round the year.
- This was long before even the Temple Entry legislation became effective in Kerala.

Annual festivals

- The temple is famous for the annual festival usually falls in the Malayalam month of *Meenam* (March-April) every year.
- Kaavutheendal ('polluting' the temple) and Bharanipaatu are the two significant rituals held as part of the MeenaBharani festival.
- **Kavutheendal:**
 - The kavutheendal (polluting the temple) ritual is considered the largest congregation of oracles in the world.
 - It is a ritual based on the notions of purity/impurity inherent in Brahminical Hinduism.
 - According to popular narratives, Sri KurumbaBhagavathy is identified with Kannagi of *Silappathikaram* and also with the Kali-Darika story, part of Bhagavathy cult in Kerala.
- **Bharani festival:**
 - The Bharani festival celebrates the birth of Bhadrakali (Hindu Goddess) who as per legend was born from the third eye of Lord Shiva and was the one who went to finish off the demon Darika.
 - This is an extremely important festival, especially in Northern Kerala.

4 Global Basava Jayanti

Context: Global Basava Jayanthi – 2020 held digitally by connecting followers in India and abroad.

About:

- Basava Jayanthi is an annual event celebrated in the honour of the birth of Vishwa guru Basaveshwara or **Lord Basavanna**, the 12th century philosopher and social reformer and the founding saint of the **Lingayat faith**.

Quick facts about Basavanna:

- Basavanna was born in Karnataka's Ingaleswar, Bagewadi town, which is 20 km away from Hungundtaluk.
- He grew up in Kudalasangama and married Gangambikel, the daughter of Bijjala's (one of the famous Chalukya kings) prime minister.
- Some of the works credited to Basavanna include Vachana such as the Shat-sthala-vachana, Kala-jnana-vachana, Mantra-gopya, Ghatachakra-vachana and Raja-yoga-vachana.

- Basava advocated that every human being was equal, irrespective of caste and that all forms of manual labour were equally important.
- **In 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, inaugurated the statue of Basavanna along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.**
- Furthermore, Basavanna is the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms.
- He is also known as Bhaktibhandari (literally, the treasurer of devotion), or Basaveswara (Lord Basava).

- The festival is observed by people of the **Lingayat community** mostly in **Karnataka** and parts of **Maharashtra, Telangana** and **Andhra Pradesh** with much fanfare.
- The objective of the festival is to pass the message of '**VasudhaivaKutumbakam**' (**universal brotherhood**). His message found expression in the form of Vachanas that define a new way of looking at God and life.

Lingayat community:

- The Lingayat/Veerashaiva community, a politically dominant group in Karnataka, is devotee of Shiva.
- The Lingayats follow 12th-century saint-philosopher Basavanna who had rejected ritualistic worship and pre-eminence of the Vedas.
- The Veerashaivas sect of the community also worships Shiva idols and practices other Hindu customs.
- The Lingayats consider the Veershaivas to be part of Hinduism as they follow Hindu customs while the Veerashaivas think the community was an ancient religion established by Shiva and Basavanna was one of its saints.

Vira Saiva movement:

- Basavanna was a reformer. He became the leader of the ViraSaiva movement. He established a cult that is accepted today by many people.
- It developed a school of poor priests. It abolished the old priestly class and adopted the vernacular as the medium for inculcating the supreme truth into the people. It gave to women an important place in religious and social life.
- It prescribed one ideal of realisation for every individual, high or low.

5 The Miyas of Assam, and their char-chapori culture

Context: The proposal of Assam state government for "Miya museum" reflecting the "culture and heritage of the people living in char-chaporis" has stirred up a controversy in the State.

About

• Who are the Miyas?

- The 'Miya' community comprises descendants of Muslim migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to Assam.

- They came to be referred to as 'Miyas', often in a derogatory manner.
- The community migrated in several waves — starting with the British annexation of Assam in 1826, and continuing into Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War — and have resulted in changes in demographic composition of the region.
- Years of discontent among the indigenous people led to the **six-year-long (1979-85) anti-foreigner Assam Agitation** to weed out the "illegal immigrant", who was perceived as trying to take over jobs, language and culture of the indigenous population.

The Controversy

- The proposed museum reflecting the culture of 'Char-Chapori' people in the SrimantaSankaradevaKalakshetra premises in Guwahati has led to the controversy.
- The SrimantaSankaradevaKalakshetra - where the 'Char-Chapori' museum is proposed - is a cultural institution named after the saint scholar, social-religious reformer **Srimanta Sankaradeva** - a Vaishnavite, adding a religious clash to the controversy.
- Moreover, the complex was set up under **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord**, signed in 1985, to 'preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the people of Assam', after the bloody anti-foreigners agitation in Assam.

What are char-chaporis?

- 'Char' in Assamese means sandbar while 'chapori' is flood-prone riverbank. These areas are associated with migrant Muslims of Bengali origin who are viewed as 'Bangladeshis'.
- The Char-Chapori area denotes the riverine area of lower and central Assam which mainly comprises of Bengali Muslims.
- They are used interchangeably or with a hyphen. They keep changing shapes — a char can become a chapori, or vice versa, depending on the push and pull of the Brahmaputra.
- Prone to floods and erosion, these areas are marked by low development indices. 80% of the Char population lives below poverty line.
 - ▶ A **UNDP Assam Human Development report** (2014) describes the char areas as suffering from "**communication deficits, lack of adequate schooling facilities beyond primary, girl child marriage, poverty and illiteracy**".
- While Bengali-origin Muslims primarily occupy these islands, other communities such as Misings, Deoris, Kocharis, Nepalis also live here.
- In popular imagination, however, chars have become synonymous to the Bengali-speaking Muslims of dubious nationality.

6

Tharu Tribe

Context: The Uttar Pradesh government has recently embarked upon a scheme to take the unique culture of its ethnic Tharu tribe across the world.

About the Scheme

- The Scheme is about connecting the Tharu villages in the districts of Balrampur, Bahraich, Lakhimpur, and Pilibhit bordering Nepal, with the homestay scheme of the UP Forest Department.
- The idea is to offer tourists an experience of living in the natural Tharu habitat, in traditional huts made of grass collected mainly from the forests.

- It will encourage villagers to acquaint them with aspects of safety and cleanliness, and with the rules of the forest.
- The intention is to put Tharu villages on the tourism map and to create jobs and bring economic independence to the tribal population.

Who are the Tharu people?

- The community belongs to the Terai lowlands, amid the Shivaliks or lower Himalayas.
- The Tharus live in both India and Nepal.
- In the Indian Terai, they live mostly in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar
- Most of them are forest dwellers and some practice agriculture.
- Members of the tribe survive on wheat, corn, and vegetables are grown close to their homes.
- A majority still lives off the forest.

Details on Tharu language, food, and culture

- They speak various dialects of Tharu, a language of the Indo-Aryan subgroup, and variants of Hindi, Urdu, and Awadhi.
- In central Nepal, they speak a variant of Bhojpuri, while in eastern Nepal, they speak a variant of Maithili.
- Tharus worship Lord Shiva as Mahadev.
- Most Tharutribals consume alcoholic beverages, and some eat beef.

7 Buddhist monastery discovered in Jharkhand

Context: The Archaeological Survey of India has unearthed a Buddhist monastery buried under a mound in a village situated in a hilly area of the Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand.

Key Findings

- The findings are made in Burhani village near Juljul Pahar of Sitagarhi Hills located around 12 km from district headquarters
- The monastery is believed to be at least 900 years old.
- It seems to be built during the Pala period.
- Following findings have been made:
 - ▶ Four statues of deity Tara in **Varad Mudra**
 - ▶ Varad Mudra is the gesture of hand showing dispensing of boons



Tara is known as a deity in **Hinduism** and a female **bodhisattva**—central figures who delay personal enlightenment in order to offer earthbound worshippers salvation—or Buddha in different Buddhist traditions.

- ▶ Six statues of the Buddha in **Bhumisparsa Mudra**

- Bhumisparsha Mudra is the gesture of hand showing five fingers of right hand towards the earth symbolising the Buddha's enlightenment.



Contribution of Pala dynasty to Support Buddhism

- The Pala dynasty ruled the regions of Bengal and Bihar for about 400 years, from the 8th century until the end of the 11th century.
- Gopala, the first Pala king, was a Buddhist.
- They used the revenue from the new tax collection methods to fund initiatives all across the region that would spread Buddhism.
- The Pala rulers followed an approach of religious tolerance, granting land for Hindu temples and allowing Hindu Brahmins to hold high official posts in the Pala court.

Monasteries

- Monastic complexes were created for the monks for meditation and residing purposes.

Three types of architecture:

Stupa

- The first was the stupa, a significant object in Buddhist art and architecture.
- On a very basic level, it is a burial mound for the Buddha.
- The original stupas contained the Buddha's ashes.
- Relics are objects associated with an esteemed person, including that person's bones (or ashes in the case of the Buddha), or things the person used or had worn.
- 6 Buddhist Stupas in India
 - Mahabodhi Stupa, Bodh Gaya
 - Sanchi Stupa, Madhya Pradesh.
 - Shanti Stupa, Leh.
 - Dhamekh Stupa, Sarnath.
 - Kesaria Stupa, Bihar.
 - Maha Stupa, Thotlakunda.

Vihara

- This is the Buddhist monastery that also contained a residence hall for the monks.

Chaitya

- This was an assembly hall that contained a stupa.
- The central hall of the chaitya was arranged to allow for the circumambulation of the stupa.
- Famous Chaityas and Viharas
 - Karle Chaitya. It is a complex of ancient Buddhist Indian rock-cut caves at Karli near Lonavala, Maharashtra.
 - Nasik Chaitya. There are 16 Viharas and one Chaitya situated in Nasik of Maharashtra.
 - Junnar Vihara.

8 Sanghakkali

Context: A young and enthusiastic team is trying to save Sangha Kali, a rare art form from extinction in Thrissur district of Kerala.

About Sanghakkali

- Sanghakkali is traditionally performed by the Namboodiris as a ritual.
- It is one among several rare art forms of Kerala that is fast vanishing.
- Sanghakkali was performed in Namboodiri homes during the 'shodasa kriyas'(16 rites) as well as in Shiva temples.

What are the processes involved?

- **Kottichakam pookal:** The ritual begins with **kottichakam pookal**, the traditional welcome extended to the team by the head of the family.
 - After a short invocation, **keli**, a traditional announcement by a percussion ensemble, is presented along the lines of Kathakali.
- **Pathram kotti aarkkal:** Next is **pathram kotti aarkkal**, literally meaning 'shouting along with drumming on a vessel'.
 - A vatta chembu (large circular copper vessel) is placed on the floor upside down and the performers strike it with their bare hands. Plantain leaves are placed on the base to avoid soot stains on the drummers' hands.
 - As the drumming continues, two artistes armed with long wooden ladles move in parallel lines on either side of the vessel in sync with the rhythm even as invocatory verses are sung.
- **Naalu padam:** The **naalu padam** (four lines), the segment staged next, was a mantra given to the Namboodiris by sage Jangama, enabling them to win a contest organised by Pallibhana Perumal, a ruler of Kerala who had embraced Buddhism. The mantra is believed to be the gist of the four Vedas.
- **Sadya:** This is followed by a sadya or feast, accompanied by the chanting of 'curry slokas' describing the various dishes.
 - Elements of humour are introduced by shouting out for delicacies that are not on the menu.
 - Feast over, the performers go to the pond to wash their hands and as they return, they sing the traditional vanchi pattu.
- **Paana:** Next is the paana, with meaningful slokas recited to a variety of rhythms such as adantha, mudiyadantha, tripuda etc., as the troupe sits on the stage.
 - At this time, Ithikkandappan, a jester, makes an entry. He symbolises Kaimal, the local ruler.
 - Flanked by torches and armed with sword and shield, he begins a wordy duel with the group of singers, in an effort to destroy the spiritual ambience.
- **Bali uzhichil:** To nullify the negative effect caused in this segment, the bali uzhichil, a dance by Parvati in the guise of a gypsy, is presented next.

Important North-East Festivals

Festival	State	Important facts
Hornbill Festival	Nagaland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named after Nagaland's most admired bird, the Hornbill Festival is celebrated in the first week of December every year. • It is also called the festival of festivals.

Torgya Festival	Arunachal Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Torgya festival is celebrated to ward off any evil forces or the occurrence of any natural disaster It is celebrated by the Torgya tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.
Losoong Festival	Sikkim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Losoong or Namsoong is the new year of the people of Sikkim. It is on the 18th day of the 10th month depending on the Tibetan lunar calendar. The Cham Dance is the major attraction of the Losoong. Monks dressed in their traditional attire, wearing masks can be seen dancing to the instrumental music being played. The festival is also celebrated in, Nepal and Bhutan.
Wangala Festival	Meghalaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a harvest festival that worships Misi Saljong, the sun god toward whom they express gratitude for blessing and offering them with a flourishing harvest. The Garos tribe, stated to be the second-largest tribal community of Meghalaya, celebrates the Wangala Festival in the second week of November every year. The festival is also known as the '100 Drums Festival' as the men beat around 100 drums to create a joyful and rhythmic sound that pleases the ears.
Nongkrem Dance Festival	Meghalaya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nongkrem Dance Festival is celebrated by the Khasi tribe at the picturesque Khasi hills of Meghalaya to thank the Goddess Ka Blei Synshar for a rich harvest, peace and harmony among the members of the tribe. The meaning of 'Nongkrem' also means the "goat killing ceremony".
Majuli Festival	Assam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Majuli Festival is celebrated on the world's largest river island. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majuli resides on one of the largest islands in the world known as Brahmaputra River. The festival is held for the Neo-Vishnavite culture and local artists of Assam to come ahead and present their art enriched in their culture.
Sangai Festival	Manipur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commenced from the year 2010, the Sangai Festival of Manipur derives its name from the antlered deer 'Sangai'. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The deer is the state animal of Manipur and is the only found there.

Ziro Festival	Arunachal Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year, the acclaimed UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Ziro valley of Arunachal Pradesh hosts the famous Ziro Music Festival. • It is hosted by the Apatani tribe.
Saga Dawa	Sikkim	Saga Dawa is one of the major Buddhist festivals in Sikkim and is celebrated in the Tibetan lunar month.
Ambubachi Mela	Assam	<p>Reckoned to be one of the major festivals in Northeast India, Ambubachi Mela is held in Guwahati, Assam. The festival is celebrated during the month of June in the Kamakhya Temple.</p> <p>Thousands of devotees from all over India and abroad throng the temple; thus this mela can rightly be called the 'Mahakumbh of the East'.</p>

ARCHITECTURE & SCULPTURE

1 Hampi stone chariot now gets protective ring

Context: The protected monument is facing the risk of being damaged by such objectionable behaviour of some **of the tourists**.

About Hampi stone chariot

- The chariot was built by King Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara Empire during the 16th
- The chariot is a shrine dedicated to Garuda, built inside the Vittala Temple Complex.
- The massive sculpture of Garuda, Lord Vishnu's escort once was seated atop the chariot but it is empty at the present date.
- It is internationally recognized as a world heritage site by the UNESCO.

Architectural features of the Chariot

- It is inspired by the Dravidian style of architecture.
- The chariot looks like one solid structure but in fact, has been built by slabs of granite.
- The base on which the chariot rests depicts beautiful mythical battle scenes in intricate details. There were sculptures of horses where presently elephants are seated.

2 PM Modi named Somnath Temple trust chairman

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is chosen as the new chairman of the **Somnath Temple trust** which manages the **Somnath Temple** at **Prabhas Patan town** in **Gujarat's Gir-Somnath district**, becoming the second PM to hold the post.

Somnath Temple

- The **Somnath temple** (also known as the DeoPatan) is located in Prabhas Patan on the western coast of Gujarat.
- It is believed to be the first among the twelve jyotirlingashrines of Shiva.

Temple Architecture

- The present temple is built in the Chaulukya style of temple architecture or "**Kailash Mahameru Prasad**" style.
- This style is sometimes called the Vesara style and **Chalukya style**.
- It reflects the skill of the Sompura Salats, one of Gujarat's master masons.

- The temple's sikhara, or main spire, is 15 metres in height, and it has an 8.2-metre tall flag pole at the top.
- The temple's entrance has gallery exhibits photos telling the tale of the ancient temple's ruins, renovations and excavations.
- The temple's architecture and is adorned with stone carvings & sculptures.
- The temple in its interior has a Garbha Griha with the Jyotirlingam enshrined in it, a Sabha Mandap or assembly hall and a Nritya mandap.
- The ceiling is made out of loadstone and is decked with exquisite water color paintings.

Chalukya or Vasara Style of Temple architecture

- The Vesara style (Western Chalukyas in the late 10th-century) contains elements of both Dravida and Nagara styles.
- They have Northern Indian Style of Shikhara and Mandap was designed in Southern Indian Style.
- Shikhara and Mandap are joint by the Antarala.
- These temples do not have ambulatory passageways around Sanctum Sanctorum.
- **Examples:** Ladhkan Temple at Aihole, DaddaBassapa Temple at Dambal.

3 Sculptors take center stage at Yadadri

Context: The Yadari Project which started in October 2016 for the renovation of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple at Yadagirigutta, renamed as Yadadri, has been completed.

- The new sculptors build all gopurams using only black stone and comply with Agama Sastra guidelines.

Sri Lakshmi NarasimhaSwamy temple (Yadadri)

- It is a Hindu temple situated on a hillock in Yadagirigutta of Telangana.
- The temple is an abode of Narasimha, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Architecture

- The temple architecture is based on Dravidian Architecture.
- The architecture of the temple is based on Agama Shashtra.
- The temple is built entirely in stone.
- The three types of stones were being used for the temple-
- **Krishna Sila** (PurushaSilā) for presiding deities in the sanctum sanctorum
- **Sthri Sila** for deities of Goddesses
- **Napusaka Sila** for flooring and walls etc.

4 No records of chilla adjacent to Charminar: ASI

The Bhagyalakshmi Temple abutting the Charminar 'came into existence' after the merger of Hyderabad State with the Union of India, and there are no records of the chilla at the monument, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has stated responding to a Right to Information query.

The matter

- The Bhagyalakshmi temple too has been in the centre of a land dispute like the Ayodhya Ram temple.
- It was alleged that the temple was built and later encroached into Charminar property.

Key-observations made by ASI

- The Bhagyalakshmi Temple came into existence after taking over of Hyderabad by the Government of India adjacent to South Eastern minaret of the Charminar, a Centrally Protected Monument.
- No records are available in this office about the Chilla adjacent to Charminar.
- There have been a lot of questions in connection with the both the temple and the *chilla*.

“Protected monument” means an ancient monument which is declared to be of national importance by or under the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act)**.

What is chilla?

- **Chilla** is a spiritual practice of penance and solitude in Sufism known mostly in Indian and Persian
- In this ritual a mendicant or ascetic attempts to remain seated in a circle practicing meditation techniques without food for 40 days and nights.
- The word chillais derived from the Persian word chehel “forty”. Chilla is commonly performed in a solitary cell called a chilla-khana.

Quick facts about Charminar

- **Built by:** Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah in 1591
 - He was the founder of Hyderabad to commemorate the end of the plague in the city
- Each of the sides measure 20 meters while the minarets are located at a height of 48.7 meters from the ground level.
- Each side of Charminar opens into a plaza like structure where the giant arches overlook the major thoroughfares.
- It is a clear square structure that measures 31.95 mts. on each side while imposing arches span a distance of 11mts.
- It is these four (char) minarets (minar) that give the building, its name ‘Charminar’.
- Each minar stands on a lotus-leaf base, a special recurrent motif in Qutub Shahi buildings.
- There are 149 circular steps inside each minaret.
- The four clocks in four cardinal directions were added in the year 1889.

5

Odisha to give facelift to 11th century Lingaraj Temple

Context: The Odisha government announced to give a facelift to the 11th century Lingaraj Temple, akin to its pre-350-year structural status.

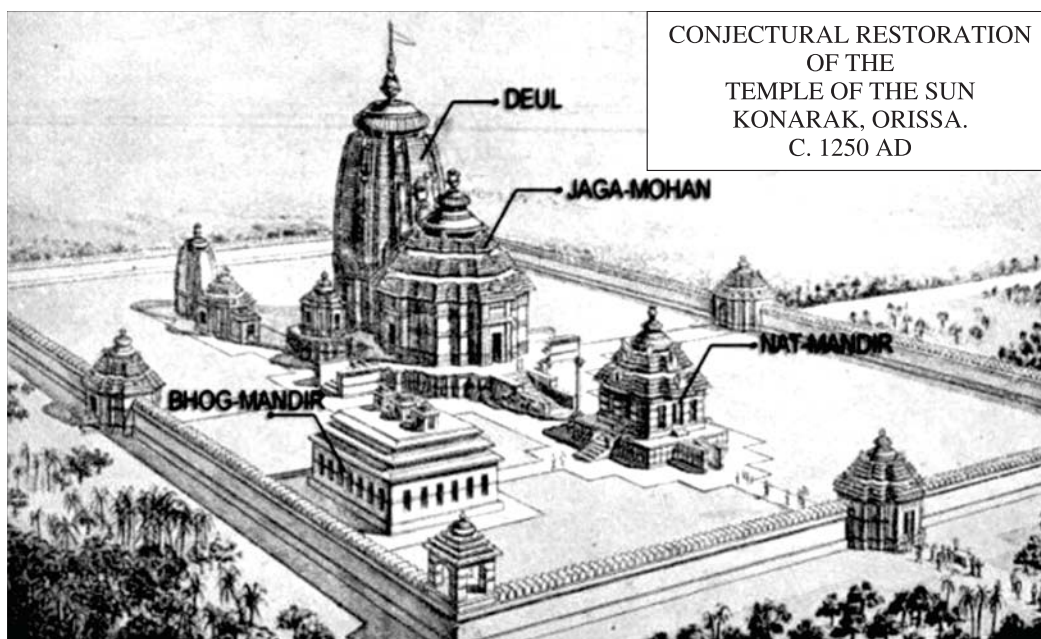
About

- Odisha’s Lingaraj temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, who is also known as ‘Lingaraj’.

- It is approximately 54.8 metres high and enshrines a huge statue of Lord Shiva which is 8 feet in diameter and is made of granite.
 - The deity is bathed everyday with milk, water and bhang (marijuana).
- It is believed that the temple's construction history dates back to the later half of 11th century.
- The temple comprises four parts namely the main temple-
 - the 'Garbh Griha'
 - the 'Bhoga Mandap'
 - the 'Yajna Shala'
 - the 'Natya Shala'
- Bindu sagar, the sacred pond near the temple, has a unique connection with Lord Lingaraj. It is the second most attractive place after the temple as religious scriptures say Bindusagar is the union of drops of water from various sacred rivers of India.
- Its main entry gate is called as the 'Simhadwara' or the 'Lions' Gate', situated on the eastern side of the temple. The outer walls of the temple are decorated with beautiful sculptures of beasts, birds, creepers, flowers, gods and goddesses.

Architecture

- The remarkable structure of the temple gives the tint of **Kalinga style of architecture**.
- The temple is believed to be built by the kings from the **Somavamsi dynasty**, with later additions from the **Ganga rulers**.



- It is built in the **Deula style** that has four components, each increasing in the height to its predecessor, namely-
 - vimana (structure containing the sanctum)
 - jagamohana (assembly hall)
 - natamandira (festival hall)
 - bhoga-mandapa (hall of offerings)
- The aesthetic sculptures look at their apex in this architectural exhibition. Erected in red sandstone, Lingraj Temple has the stone of the darkest shade.
- The huge temple complex covers the vast lands of Bhubaneswar in a stretch. The tall spire of the temple extends to the height of 55 meters and literally, dominates the skyline of Bhubaneswar.

- The spacious courtyard comprises 50 small shrines that are dedicated to several Gods of the Hindu pantheon.

Highlights of the redevelopment plan

- The plan has been made for the redevelopment of peripheral area of the 55-metre-tall temple, known as '**EkamravanKshetra**', in Bhubaneswar.
- The redevelopment will take place over 66 acres of land surrounding the temple.

6

Idol of Devi Annapurna to be returned by Canada

Context: PM Modi has announced that a very old idol of Devi Annapurna that was stolen from a temple in Kashi, Varanasi, about 100 years ago, is being returned by Canada.

About

- Annapurna or Annapoorna, from Sanskrit meaning the giver of food and nourishment) is the Hindu goddess of nourishment.
- She is an avatar (form) of Parvati, the wife of Shiva
- Located on the Dashashwamedh Road in VishwanathGali, near KashiVishwanath temple, the Annapurna Temple worships the Mahagauri form of Durga.

The story of Devi Annapurna

- As per the popular legend and holy writ, Hindu deity Shiva, negated the importance of food, citing it as a cosmic illusion.
- Hearing this, his spouse, Devi Parvati, the manifestation of Universal Shakti, got upset.
- In order to teach Lord Shiva that food is an integral part of life, she made herself invisible to his eyes, and with her vanished all sources of food and nourishment from the earth.
- Finally, Shiva realised the importance of food; holding a begging bowl in his hands, he begged for food as alms from his spouse Parvati, whose another form is Annapurna (the giver of food and nourishment).

Where is it now?

- The 18th-century idol of Goddess Annapurna was reportedly housed in Canada's MacKenzie Art Gallery all these years.
- This idol was stolen from a temple in Varanasi and smuggled out of the country around 100 years ago somewhere around 1913.

- Over the past few months, the United Kingdom has also returned a couple of ancient statues that belonged to India, such as a 10th century Lord Shiva idol and three ancient idols of Lord Rama, Lakshman, and Sita that had got stolen.

7

Citizenship of Buddha: Beyond India and Nepal war of words

There was war of words between India and Nepal over the origin of Gautama Buddha.

About

Who was Buddha?

- “Buddha” means “one who is awake.” Gautama Buddha was a contemporary of Mahavira. Gautama Buddha’s royal name was Siddhartha.
- He was the son of Suddhodhana, the Chief of Sakya clan of Kapilvastu in the Nepal Tarai area. He was born in 566 B.C. in the village of Lumbini a few miles from Kapilvastu.
- Facts suggest that a young Siddhartha Gautam left his father’s palace before settling at a site where he attained enlightenment. The place is now in present-day India, and is known as Bodh Gaya.
- He discovered four noble truths and the Eightfold Path to Nirvana, or ultimate bliss.
- **Noble Truths:** The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism:
 - existence is suffering
 - the cause of suffering is craving and attachment
 - suffering ceases at some point and turns to Nirvana (liberation or total bliss)
 - There is a path to Nirvana which is made up of eight steps, sometimes called the Eightfold Path.
 - The Eightfold Path to Nirvana is to be “right” in all these areas: concentration, views, speech, resolve, action, livelihood, effort, and mindfulness.
- **Major Schools:** There are two major schools of Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada or Hinayana. There is a third school, the Vajrayana, but it only has a small following.

India and Nepal

- India and Nepal enjoy shared history, culture and heritage. And, naturally, they share some irritants that raise their ugly heads once in a while.
- The relationship between the two countries has hit a low lately over territories on the north-western ridge of Nepal.
- Even though both Kathmandu and New Delhi have expressed their willingness to hold diplomatic dialogue to resolve the issue, talks have failed to materialise. Amid this, a controversy over Gautam Buddha certainly does not help.

Can India claim legitimacy?

- Despite the fact that it is host to a relatively small population of Buddhists, India can claim legitimacy in its promotion of Buddhist diplomacy for a number of reasons.
 - First, the Buddhist faith originated in India, therefore granting it singular historical legitimacy.
 - Second, India has numerous sites of importance to the Buddhist faith, such as Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Nalanda.
 - Third, India has nurtured an image of being a protector of the persecuted through the presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan parliament-in-exile in Dharamshala.
- Deepening ties with Asian nations on the basis of Buddhism could potentially feed into the government’s larger policy objectives, for example, the ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy, and the ‘Act East’ policy.

8

Ayodhya’s Ram Temple, a 3-Storey Structure with Nagara Style Architecture

Context: The Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be built in the Nagara style of architecture and on the lines of North Indian temple architecture. It will comprise three stories with pillars and domes. It will be double the size of the previous planned design.

About

• The Nagara or North Indian Temple Architecture:

- The Nagara style is mainly associated with the land between the Himalayas and Vindhyas.
- The basic plan of Nagara temple is square, with a number of graduated projections (rathakas) in the middle of each face which gives it a cruciform shape in the exterior.
- A temple tower or a conical or convex shikhara marks the elevation of the temples.
- The shikhara consists of several layers of carved courses usually crowned by an amalaka (notched ring stone).
- The two basic factors of the style- the cruciform plan and the curvilinear shikhara are visible in northern temples from the 6th century CE, in the late Gupta period.
- Earlier temples began with a single projection on each face and the plan came to be known as triratha. Later in the course of time, the number of projection was increased. The Dashavatara temple at Deogarh, UP, and the brick temple at Bhitargaon, UP are examples of early Nagara style of temples.

Basic components of a temple:

- **Garbhagriha or Sanctum:** Earlier, it was just a small cubicle with a small entrance but as time passed, it grew into a large chamber. It houses the idol or image of the deity.
- **Mandapa:** The entrance to the temple and it features space for a large number of worshippers to gather at this place. It can be described as a hall which has a roof supported by a number of pillars.
- **Shikhar or Vimana:** It is a mountain-like spire which is generally seen in the temples that were constructed after fifth century AD. In North India style, it is called Shikhar while in South India it is called Vimana. Shikhar has a curved shape while Vimana has a pyramidal tower-like shape.
- **Antrala or vestibule:** The mandapa in front of garbhagriha is called as Antrala or vestibule.
- **Mahamandapa or Gudhamandapa:** The large hall in front of Antrala is called Mahamandapa or Gudhamandapa.
- **Ardhamandapa or half porch:** There is also a smaller mandapa in front of Mahamandapa which is called as Ardhamandapa or half porch. This is followed by Dwara or doorways.
- **Pradakshinapath:** The garbhagriha is surrounded by a corridor or circulatory path called Pradakshinapath.

Background

- The design was revamped after the Supreme Court in 2019 paved the way for the construction of a temple at a spot in Ayodhya where devotees believe Lord Ram was born.
- The court directed the Centre to allot an alternative five-acre plot for building a new mosque in Ayodhya.
- The mosque in Ayodhya was demolished in December 1992 by 'karsevaks' who claimed an ancient Ram temple had stood on the same site.

9

Mata Chintpurni temple

Context: With temples closed amid the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the Mata Chintpurni temple in Himachal Pradesh's Una started the facility of home delivery of 'Prasad' to its devotees through online request.

About the Temple

- According to Hindu mythology, **Chintpurni temple is one of the five Shakti Peeths in Himachal Pradesh** (HP) and 51 Shakti Peethas in India.
- The other four Shakti Peeths in HP are Jwalamukhi, Vajreshwari and Chamunda Devi temples in Kangra district, and Naina Devi temple in Bilaspur district.
- A huge number of devotees pay their obeisance at Chintpurni temple during fairs held thrice a year in the month of Chait (March-April), Sawan (July-August) and Asanj (September-October).

MUSIC, DANCE & DRAMA

1 Pulikali- A Tiger Dance of Kerela

The popular 'Pulikali' (dance of the tiger) of Kerala's Thrissur district which is part of Onam celebrations, was held online this time owing to the Covid-19 restrictions.

What is Pulikali?

- Pulikali is one of the folk dances performed on the 4th day of ONAM.
- Puli Kali is also known as Kaduvaakali.
- It is an Art form of Thrissur district of Kerala, India.
- The name Puli Kali literally means TIGER PLAY. In Malayalam language (mother tongue of Kerala) 'Puli' means Tiger and 'Kali' means Play.
- It could be to symbolize the mighty king Mahabali in the form of mighty animal – Tiger in the Pulikali dance form.



How it is celebrated?

- The artists enact themselves as tigers and leopards by painting their whole body with red, black and yellow colors and wear tiger masks.
- This folk art's main attraction is the fat bellied men dancing on a particular rhythm or tune.
- This dance was originated 200 years ago under the rule of King Ramavarma.
- They all assemble at Naduvilal in the Swaraj round of Thrissur which is the center of the city and offer a coconut to Lord Ganesha of the Vadakkunathan temple.
- Then they carry out processions on the streets and dance all day on the beats of instruments like 'thakil', 'udukku', 'chhenda' and many more.

Onam

- Onam is one such important harvest festival which celebrates the beginning of first day of Malayalam calendar (Kollavarsham).
- Onam is a carnival of folk dances, feasts, games for four to ten days.
- Onam is celebrated to welcome the spirit of King Mahabali who was a demon(asura) but during his reign it is said that Kerala was a prosperous and happy state.

2 The Chhau mask

Context: Chhau dance, with its martial origin and strenuous body movements, was once a strictly-guarded male domain. Now several all-women troupes are all the rage.

Chhau Art form

- The word 'Chhau' probably comes from chhauni (camp), and the art form was arguably invented to keep foot soldiers war-ready.
- The martial movements and mock fights subsequently took the shape of dance, becoming popular in the Chota Nagpur Plateau region.
- It is based on the stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas.
- The dance dramas celebrate the triumph of good over evil.
- States: The Chhau dance is mainly performed during festivals in the region of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, especially the spring festival of Chaitra Parva.
- In these pandemic times, Chhau has even been used to spread awareness about COVID-19.
- Chhau was included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in

Variants of Chhau:

- **Purulia Chhau:** It is practiced in West Bengal. In this men decked in dazzling costumes and masks. They would dance to the rhythm of dhol, dhamsa, madol, shehnai, and flute at night-long performances. It is during the spring festival of Gajan Parab, dedicated to Shiva.
- **Mayurbhanj Chhau:** It is practised in Odisha.
- **Seraikella Chhau:** It is practised in Jharkhand.

The most prominent difference among the three subgenres is regarding the use of masks. While, the Seraikella and Purulia subgenres of Chhau use masks during the dance, the Mayurbhanj Chhau uses none.

3 Thang-Ta

Context: Thang-Ta has recently got included in Khelo India Youth Games. It will be part of the **Khelo India Youth Games** to be held in Haryana next year.

What is Thang-Ta?

- This is the indigenous martial arts game of Manipur.
- The art developed from the war environment of the tiny state of Manipur in North-east India.
- Thang-Ta, which means 'sword and spear'.
- It has been practiced by the Meiteis in Manipur for thousands of years.
- It involves an elaborate system of physical movements, breathing methods, meditations, and rituals.
- Athletes need to have physical control and soft movements that are coordinated with the rhythm of breathing.

4 Gatka

Context: Recently this art form is included in the Khelo India Games.

What is Gatka?

- Gatka is the name of an Indian martial art.
- It is a style of stick-fighting, with wooden sticks intended to simulate swords.
- Gatka is a formalized Sikh martial art in the Indian state of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh.
- Gatka is focused primarily on weapons, especially swords and stick fighting.
- Gatka martial artists consider this ancient martial arts style as the "mother of all martial arts".
- The art form of Gatka can be practised either as a sport or a ritual; the sport form is played by 2 opponents wielding wooden staves called gatka.
- These sticks may be paired with a shield.



5

Jallikattu to be conducted in Tamil Nadu, but with restrictions

Context: The Tamil Nadu government has allowed conducting jallikattu across the State this Pongal season but with fresh restrictions in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is Jallikattu?

- Jallikattu is a disputed traditional event in which a bull is released into a crowd of people.
- Multiple human participants attempt to grab the large hump on the bull's back with both arms and hang on to it while the bull attempts to escape.
- Participants hold the hump for as long as possible, attempting to bring the bull to a stop.
- In some cases, participants must ride long enough to remove flags on the bull's horns.
- Jallikattu is typically practised in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day, which occurs annually in January.



Supreme Court's verdict over Jallikattu

- In 2014, the Supreme Court of India struck down the State law and banned jallikattu altogether.
- The Supreme Court noted that any flouting of the ban should result in penalties for cruelty to animals under The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- In January 2019, the Centre had issued a notification lifting the ban on Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu with certain restrictions, which was later stayed by SC.

About Pongal

- Pongal is also referred to as Thai Pongal is a multi-day Harvest festival observed by the Tamil community.

- It is observed at the start of the month Tai according to Tamil solar calendar, and this is typically about January 14.
- It is dedicated to the Sun god, the Surya, and corresponds to Makar Sankranti, the harvest festival under many regional names celebrated throughout India.
- The Four days of the Pongal festival are called Bhogi Pongal, Surya Pongal, Maattu Pongal and Kanum Pongal.

6 Tholpavakoothu, the traditional puppetry of Kerala

Context: Padma Shri awardee Ramachandra Pulavar's innovative ideas, such as cultural organisations, educational institutions and even puppet festivals across the world, have brought international recognition to **Tholpavakoothu, the traditional puppetry of Kerala.**

About Tholpavakoothu

- Tholpavakoothu is a form of **shadow puppetry**, which is practiced in Kerala
- It is performed using **leather puppets**.
- This is performed as a ritual **dedicated to Bhadrakali**.
- The art is performed in **Devi temples in specially built theatres** called koothumadam
- This art form is especially popular in the Palakkad, Thrissur and Malappuram districts of Kerala.

Characteristics

- The performance is accompanied by **the recitation of slokas** and the performers are required to learn over 3000 of these before they perform.
- A full Tholpavakoothu performance stages all the episodes of the **Kamba Ramayana**.
- The stage has a screen, a piece of white cloth, behind which the puppets are held.
- The lighting is provided by 21 lamps lit in **coconut halves or earthen lamps** placed behind the puppets, causing their shadows to fall on the screen.
- **Instruments used:** chenda, maddalam, ezhupara, ilathalam, conch and cherukuzhal.
- The lead puppeteer is called a **pulavar**.
- The puppets used in Tholpavakoothu used to be made out of **deer skin but are now typically made from goat skin**.
- The puppets are **painted in vegetable dyes**, as these dyes last long.

7 Kalyanasougandhikam' highlights the fine classicism of Kathakali

Context: 'Kalyanasougandhikam' brought alive the blend of elements unique to a Kathakali play.

What is 'Kalyanasougandhikam'?

- Kalyanasougandhikam is a story known for its unique blend of elements that highlight the classicism of Kathakali.
- It was penned by Kottayathu Thampuran in eighteenth century.
- Kalyanasougandhikam is a citation of dance from Kathakali which depicts Bhima's search for the rare flower Kalyanasougandhikam for his consort Panchali.

- The performance centred on the meeting between the two sons of Vayu — Hanuman and Bhima — when the latter goes in search of the divine flower sougandhikam.
- One of its features is richness of its Sanskrit-dense literature.
- It has the component of the slow and fast dances, twists in plots, and the vitality of background scores.
- It is accompanied with Carnatic music.

Kathakali

- Kathakali is a classical dance drama which originated in Kerala state of India.
- It dates back to 17th century and this art form is renowned for its elaborate makeup and costumes.
- It is one of the oldest theatre forms in the world.

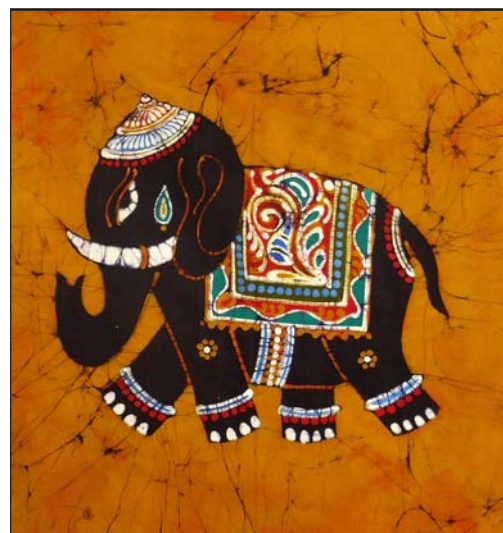
PAINTING, LITERATURE OTHER ART FORMS

1 Batik painting

World-renowned Batik artist Yasala Balaiah, passed away. He rose to international fame with his versatile Batik painting, which mostly depicted Telangana's rural culture.

About Batik painting

- Batik is a Javanese word meaning wax painting.
- It came to Shantiniketan and spread to many parts of India.
- The design in this painting is produced by a negative dyeing method.
- It is a resist technique because no dye can penetrate the parts of the fabric covered with wax.
- The wax is heated and the hot melted wax is applied on the fabric in the form of a design by using brush or any other such equipment.
- The waxed material is then dyed in any cold dye.
- In dyeing process, minute cracks occur in the wax, letting in tiny specks of dye. This fine veins of colour which are characteristics of batik.



What is the material used for painting?

- Cotton, Silk and Rayon are considered as best base materials for the painting.
- The bees wax and paraffin wax are used in equal quantities.
- The dyes for batik are called 'naphthol dyes'. They are also known as cold or ice dyes.

2 Monpa Handmade Paper Industry

Context: The 1000-year old heritage art – the Monpa Handmade Paper of Arunachal Pradesh – which was driven to the extinction, has come to life once again, with the committed efforts of Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

What is the Monpa Handmade Paper art?

- The art of making Monpa handmade paper originated over 1000 years ago.

- The fine-textured handmade paper, which is called Mon Shugu in the local dialect, is integral to the vibrant culture of the local tribes in Tawang.
- The paper has great historic and religious significance as it is the paper used for writing Buddhist scriptures and hymns in monasteries.
- The Monpa handmade paper, will be made from the bark of a local tree called Shugu Sheng, which has medicinal values too
- Gradually the art became an integral part of local custom and culture in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Once produced in every household in Tawang, this handmade paper was a major source of livelihood for the locals.

What efforts were put to bring it back to life?

- The handmade paper industry almost disappeared in the last 100 years which prompting KVIC to plan revival of this ancient art.
- KVIC commissioned a Monpa handmade paper making unit in Tawang which not only aims at reviving the art but also engaging the local youths with this art professionally and earn.
- KVIC will provide marketing support and explore markets for the locally manufactured handmade paper.

3

Gond art in the street culture of Singapore

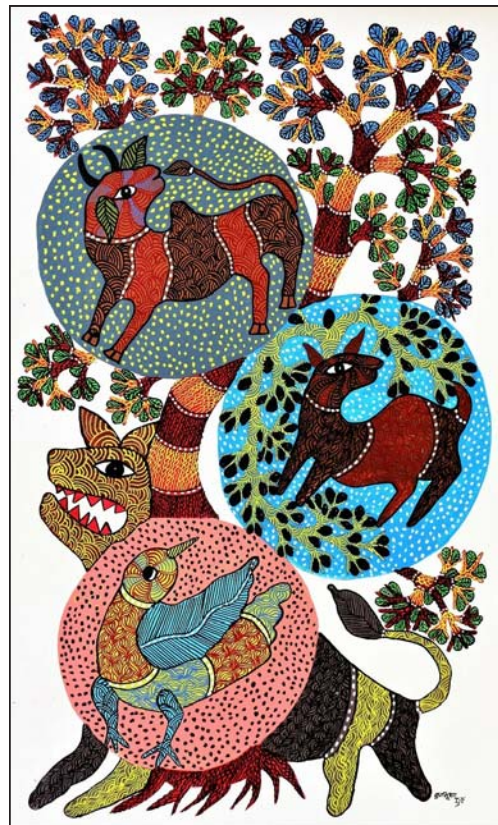
Context: Recently, the creation ‘Dancing in Unison’ was unveiled in Little India in Singapore. The project brings India’s **Gond art** to the street culture of Singapore.

The Project

- One of Singapore’s tallest murals – the recently-unveiled ‘Dancing in Unison’ – borrows from the iconic imagery of both India’s Gond art and Singapore’s contemporary art.
- It was created by **Indian Gond artist Bhajju Shyam** and **Singaporean artist Sam Lo** for Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and **St+art India Foundation (St+art)**, the collaborative artwork in Little India, Singapore.

Gond Art

- Gond paintings are a form of painting from folk and tribal art that is practiced by one of the largest tribes in India with whom it shares its name.
- **States:** Gond paintings are considered to be from predominantly from Madhya Pradesh, it is also quite common in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhatisgarh and Odisha.
- Gond art has become so predominant that the Government of India has stepped in to preserve their art form for future generations to enjoy.
- Pardhan Gonds who traditionally served as priests are popularly considered the most prominent and well renowned for their artistic skills, in painting and even music and performing arts.



Features of Art

- **Subjects of Art:** Trees, animals, birds and other environmental representation are probably the most recognizable subject matter in their visual art practice. From mythological tales and oral histories to traditional songs, natural surroundings, important events, and rituals are depicted in the art.
- **Base of Art:** It is a common belief in the Gond community that a good image can earn good luck. This belief is visible in the houses of the community. Brightly painted walls, windows and even floors, replete with traditional icons and motifs are a common sight. Canvas or a cloth, or even chart paper along with basic paint is all that is required to start making a Gond painting.
- **Line and dot technique:** The artists first zero-in on a single theme or a simple subject and then begin the process of painting. One of the most noticeable and easily recognizable features of Gond painting is the line and dot technique used to create entire paintings.
- **Material used:** A mix of natural colours is used from earthen materials such as wooden coal, tree sap, red soil, sem leaves and even cow dung.

Gond Tribe

- The Gonds are said to be the largest tribal, or Adivasi Community in India.
- The community's roots can be traced back to the pre-Aryan age.
- Belonging largely to Deccan India, the Gond community has settled in regions spanning across northern Andhra Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and western Orissa.
- The 2001 census the figure was nearly 11 million.
- They speak the Gondi language which belongs to Dravidian language family.

4

Significance of world's oldest cave painting discovered in Indonesia

Context: A team of archaeologists has discovered what may be the world's oldest known cave painting dating back to more than 45,000 years.

About

• Key features of the painting

- The cave painting depicts a wild boar endemic to the Sulawesi island of Indonesia, where the painting was found.
- It dates back to more than 45,000 years.
- The painting was made using **red ochre pigment**.
- These pigs have been hunted by humans for tens of thousands of years and are the most commonly depicted animal in the ice age rock art of the island.
- The painting was found in the **Leang Tedongnge cave**.
 - ▶ The cave is situated in a remote valley surrounded by limestone cliffs, and is only accessible during the dry season because of flooding during the wet season.



The Sulawesi island

- **Sulawesi** is also known as **Celebes**.
- It is one of the four Greater Sunda Islands which are recognized as Borneo, Java, Sulawesi and Sumatra.
- It is governed by Indonesia.
- The central Indonesian island is situated between Asia and Australia and has a long history of human occupation.
- It occupies an area of over 174,000 sq. km.

Dating method

- Archaeologists used a method called **U-series isotope analysis**, which uses calcium carbonate deposits that form naturally on the cave wall surface to determine its age.
- They used a calcium carbonate deposit, also referred to as “cave popcorn” that had formed on the rear foot of one of the pig figures.

What is the significance of the cave painting?

- It shows the oldest evidence for the presence of hominins beyond the southeastern limits of the Ice Age Asian continent.
- It depicts the food habit of Hominins which includes the boars as food.
- The painting is a form of creative thinking and artistic expression at that time.

Hominins

- Hominins include modern humans, extinct human species and our immediate ancestors.
- Homo sapiens are the first modern humans who evolved from their hominid predecessors between 200,000-300,000 years ago.
- It is estimated that these modern humans started migrating outside of Africa some 70,000-100,000 years ago.

HISTORICAL EVENTS

1 Chauri Chaura Centenary Celebrations

Context: 4th February 2021 marked the 100th year celebration of Chauri Chaura at Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

About Chauri Chaura Incident

- The '**Chauri Chaura**' incident is a landmark event in the country's fight for independence.
- The **incident** took place on 4 February 1922 at Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district of the United Province (modern Uttar Pradesh) in British India.
- During this a large group of protesters participating in the **Non-cooperation movement**, clashed with police who opened fire.
- In retaliation the demonstrators attacked and set fire to a police station, killing all of its occupants.
- The incident led to the death of three civilians and 22 policemen.
- Mahatma Gandhi, who was strictly against violence, halted the non-co-operation movement on the national level on 12 February 1922, as a direct result of this incident.

Significance of Chauri Chaura Incident

- It showed the firm faith of Mahatma Gandhi in mass mobilization through the means of non-violence principles.
- He objected any type of violent activities and did not hesitate to call off even a national level initiation for his principals.

2 The Jallianwala massacre

Context: On April 13, 1919, hundreds of unarmed men, women and children were gunned down by British troops at Jallianwala Bagh. The events of Jallianwala Bagh 101 years ago, today reflect a shameful act in British-Indian history.

About:

- The massacre was the most barbaric act by British colonialists against a rising mass movement for independence and civil rights.
- Defiant speeches were made against British rulers prior to the incident.
- Then-acting military commander for Amritsar, Colonel Reginald Dyer, wanted to crush the rebellion, hence he ordered the killing of innocent protesters.

- Dyer marched a force of 90 Gurkha and Indian soldiers into the enclosure and, without warning, they opened fire for about 10 to 15 minutes on the panicking crowd trapped in the enclosure.
- According to an official figure, 379 were killed and some 1,200 wounded, though other estimates suggest much higher casualties.

What led to the massacre?

- After World War I, the British, who controlled a vast empire in India, agreed to give Indians limited self-government due to India's substantial contribution to the war effort.
- These reforms, named the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms after the secretary of state for India and the viceroy of India, promised to lead to more substantial self-government over time.
- However, around the same time the British had passed the draconian Rowlatt Acts, which allowed certain political cases to be tried without trial. And the trial was also to be conducted without juries. The acts were designed to ruthlessly suppress all forms of political dissent.
- The Rowlatt Acts were designed to replace the constraints on political activity that had been embodied in colonial rules, known as the Defense of India Rules, which had been in force during World War I.
- Not surprisingly, there were widespread public protests, led by the noted Indian nationalist leader, Mahatma Gandhi.
- In the immediate aftermath of the World War I, pressure for Indian independence mounted.
- Early in April 1919 news of the arrest of Indian nationalist leaders in the Sikh holy city of Amritsar sparked riots in which a mob went on the rampage, killing several Europeans, leaving an English female missionary for dead, and looting numerous banks and public buildings.
- British and Indian troops under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer were sent to restore order and Dyer banned all public meetings which, he announced, would be dispersed by force if necessary.
- Despite this, thousands gathered in protest in a walled enclosure called the Jallianwala Bagh, near the city's Golden Temple, sacred to Sikhs.

Aftermath:

- The news of the massacre provoked fierce disapproval. Speaking in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill condemned 'an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation'.
- A committee under Lord Hunter, a Scottish judge, was appointed to report on what had happened.
- Dyer appeared before it to defend himself, but its conclusions were damning; he was strongly censured and forced to resign from the Indian Army.
- Opinion was divided between those who agreed with the Hunter Committee's verdict and those who thought that Dyer had acted effectively to prevent another Indian Mutiny.
- The episode soured relations between British and Indian politicians for years, but it helped to gather recruits to Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violent resistance to British rule.

Important Information:

- Dyer's actions were praised by the governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, and he was made an honorary Sikh by the elders of the Golden Temple. Excused from growing a beard, he did promise to cut his smoking by one cigarette a year.
- Dyer died in England in 1927. Sir Michael O'Dwyer was assassinated in London in 1940 by a Sikh revolutionary, Udham Singh, who had been injured at Amritsar. He was duly hanged.
- Gandhi condemned his action as senseless, but in some quarters in India he was praised as a heroic martyr.

3 Remembering Peshawar's Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre

Context: It's been 90 years of Peshawar's Qissa Khwani Bazaar massacre. The massacre was perpetrated by British soldiers against non-violent protesters of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement on April 23, 1930.

About:

- The Khudai Khidmatgar was a non-violent movement against British occupation of the Indian subcontinent led by **Abdul Ghaffar Khan**. He was a Pashtun freedom fighter, in the North-West Frontier Province.
- Over time, the movement acquired a more political colour, leading to the British taking notice of its growing prominence in the region.

Following the arrest of Khan and other leaders in **1929**, the movement formally joined the **Indian National Congress** after they failed to receive support from the **All-India Muslim League**.

Members of the Khudai Khidmatgar were organised and the men stood out because of the bright red shirts they wore as uniforms, while the women wore black garments.

QissaKhwani Bazaar massacre:

- **Abdul Ghaffar Khan** and other leaders of the Khudai Khidmatgar were arrested on **April 23, 1930** by British police after he gave a speech at a gathering in the town of **Utmanzai** in the North-West Frontier Province.
- A respected leader well-known for his non-violent ways, Khan's arrest spurred protests in neighbouring towns, including Peshawar.
- Protests spilled into the QissaKhwani Bazaar in Peshawar on the day of Khan's arrest. British soldiers entered the market area to disperse crowds that had refused to leave.
- In response, British army vehicles drove into the crowds, killing several protesters and bystanders.
- British soldiers then opened fire on unarmed protestors, killing even more people.

What happened after the massacre?

- The British ramped up the crackdown on KhudaiKhidmatgar leaders and members following the QissaKhwani Bazaar massacre.
- In response, the movement began involving young women in its struggle against the British, a decision in line with tactics adopted by revolutionaries across the undivided India.
- Women were able to move undetected with more ease than men.
- According to accounts by KhudaiKhidmatgar activists, the British subjected members of the movement to harassment, abuse and coercive tactics adopted elsewhere in the subcontinent. This included physical violence and religious persecution.
- Following the recruitment of women in the movement, the British also engaged in violence, brutality and abuse of women members.
- British also adopted their tactic of sowing divisions on religious grounds in the North-West Frontier Province as well, in an attempt to weaken the KhudaiKhidmatgar.
- In a move that surprised the British government, in August 1931, the KhudaiKhidmatgar aligned themselves with the Congress party, forcing the British to reduce the violence they were perpetrated on the movement.
- The KhudaiKhidmatgar opposed Partition, a stance that many interpreted as the movement not being in favour of the creation of the independent nation of Pakistan.

Post 1947, the Khudai Khidmatgar slowly found their political influence decreasing to such an extent that the movement and the massacre 90 years ago in the Qissa Khwani Bazaar has been wiped out from collective memory.

PERSONALITIES

1 Thiruvalluvar

Context: 15th January is celebrated as Thiruvalluvar Day.

About the Day

- It is celebrated on the fourth day of Pongal celebrations.
- The day is observed as a mark of respect for his contribution to the literary field and honoured for the teachings it showers on readers.
- Womenfolk leave food on banana leaves or turmeric plants for the birds to feed. Food is offered in different colours to attract birds.

Who is Thiruvalluvar?

- Thiruvalluvar is commonly known as 'Valluvar' and expected to live during the 2nd Century CE.
- He was a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher.
- He is best known as the author of Thirukkural, a collection of couplets on ethics, political and economy and love.
- The text is considered an exceptional and widely cherished work of the Tamil literature.
- Little is known about the life of Tiruvalluvar except that he is believed to have lived in Mylapore (now part of Chennai, Tamil Nadu) with his wife, Vasuki.
- He was probably a Jain ascetic of humble origins who worked as a weaver.
- Both Buddhists and Shaivites, however, claim him as their own, and he is especially revered by those of low caste.

2 125th anniversary celebrations of 'Prabuddha Bharata'

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the 125th anniversary celebrations of 'Prabuddha Bharata', a monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order.

About 'Prabuddha Bharata'

- The journal 'Prabuddha Bharata' has been an important medium for spreading the message of India's ancient spiritual wisdom.

- **Started by:** Swami Vivekananda
- **Year:** 1896
- Its publication was started from Chennai, in April 1899, the place of publication of the Journal was shifted to Advaita Ashrama and it has been continuously published from there since then.
- Some of the greatest personalities have left their imprint on the pages of 'Prabuddha Bharata' through their writings on Indian culture, spirituality, philosophy, history, psychology, art, and other social issues.
- Luminaries like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sister Nivedita, Sri Aurobindo, Former President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, among others, have contributed to the Journal over the years.

3 Pagri Sambhal Diwas

Context: As part of the ongoing farmers' protest, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) celebrated February 23 as 'Pagri Sambhal Diwas'.

What was Pagri Sambhal movement?

- Pagri Sambhaal Jatta was a successful farm agitation that forced the British government to repeal three laws related to agriculture back in 1907.
- The three farm-related acts at the centre of the storm in 1907 were the
 - ▶ Punjab Land Alienation Act 1900
 - ▶ Punjab Land Colonisation Act 1906
 - ▶ Doab Bari Act
- The movement was led by Ajit Singh (Shaheed Bhagat Singh's uncle Ajit Singh), Kishan Singh (Bhagat Singh's father) and Ghasita Ram to spark a revolution against the British.
- The movement later became popularly known as the Pagdi Sambhal Jattamovement after Banke Dayal's poem by the same name was read out at a rally in 1907.

Important facts on Ajit Singh

- Ajit Singh was born on 23 January 1881 at Khatkadhkalan village. In those days this village was part of Jalandhar district but now falls in Nawan Shahar district.
- In 1903, when the Viceroy Lord Curzon invited all kings and princes to declare their allegiance to the Raj, Ajit Singh and Kishan Singh came to Delhi, clandestinely met many of these kings and tried to mobilise them to build up another revolt on the lines of 1857.
- In 1906, Ajit Singh participated in the important session of the Congress held at Calcutta, to seek out and forge links with patriots who wished to go beyond the Congress' methods of petitioning the British rulers.
- In Italy, he created Azad Hind Lashkar of 11,000 army men and met Netaji Subhas Bose in Italy.
- In Switzerland, he interacted with Lala Hardy and Champak Raman Pillai. He also met Lenin, Trotsky and Mussolini.

4

Inscription on Vijayanagar king's death discovered

Context: The first-ever epigraphical reference to the date of death of **Vijayanagar king Krishnadevaraya** has been discovered at **Honnenahalli** in Tumakuru district of Karnataka.

What did the inscription tells?

- Krishnadevaraya, one of the greatest emperors of India who ruled from the South, died on October 17, 1529, and incidentally this day was marked by a lunar eclipse.

About Krishnadeva Raya

- Krishnadevaraya was born to Nagala Devi and Tuluva Narasa Nayaka.
- The Tulava dynasty was founded by Krishnadevaraya's father and Krishnadevaraya was the third ruler in this dynasty.
- Tulavas were staunch Vaishnavites.
- Krishnadevaraya is also known as Andhra Bhoja and Kannada Rajya Ramana in honor of his victories and conquests of lands in the Krishna-Tungabhadra basin
- He built the Vithalaswamy temple and the Hazar Rama Temple in the Hoysala style of architecture.
- He took active steps to promote agriculture by building dams and irrigation canals.
- He set up a system of provincial government with himself as the absolute head and with trusted aides as governors of smaller provinces.
- He had 8 Telugu scholars and poets in his court, collectively called **Ashtadiggajas**

Vijayanagara Empire

- Recently Vijayanagar became 31st district of Karnataka
- It is located in Raichur Doab between Tungabhadra and Krishna
- It had 4 dynasties: Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu
- Hampi (once its capital) is world famous UNESCO World Heritage Site

5

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 100th death anniversary

Context: One of the firebrand freedom fighters and the strongest proponent of 'purna swaraj' or 'total self-rule', Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's 100th death anniversary was observed on August 1, 2020.

About

- BalGangadharTilak was a scholar, a writer, mathematician and a philosopher. He was given the title, 'Lokmanya', which means 'beloved leader' by his followers.
- LokmanyaTilak received his education at the Deccan College in Pune and he earned his Bachelor's degree in 1876, in mathematics and Sanskrit. Later he also studied law at the University of Bombay.
- He founded the Deccan Education Society in 1884 with an aim to educate common people in English.
- LokmanyaTilak founded and edited two newspapers - Kesari in Marathi and The Mahratta in English. He used his pen as a weapon to criticise the colonial rulers.
- BalGangadharTilak tirelessly contributed to help the country break free from the British rule.

- Part of the Lal-Bal-Pal (LalaLajpatRai, BalGangadharTilak and Bipin Chandra Pal) troika, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was called 'father of the Indian unrest' by British colonial rulers.
- He was imprisoned a number of times including a long stint at Mandalay in Myanmar. During his years in prison, he spent his time reading and writing. He wrote the famous 'Gita Rahasya' - an analysis of the Karma Yoga which finds its source in The Bhagavad Gita.
- While Jawaharlal Nehru called him the 'father of Indian revolution', Mahatma Gandhi described Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak as 'the maker of modern India'.

Poorna Swaraj

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak, often referred to as the 'father of the Indian unrest', was one of the first revolutionists who not only raised their voice against the British Raj in India but also channelised the patriotism and anguish of the general public towards the unsettling oppression, tyranny and injustice inflicted on Indians under the colonial rule, to the attainment of **poorna swaraj** (complete independence).
- On 26 January 1930, the Indian National Congress, in an electrifying resolution, declared Purna Swaraj - complete freedom from the British Raj.
- The Indian National Congress met in Lahore in December 1929. In December 1929, after Jawaharlal Nehru was elected the party president, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution for 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence from the British.
- One option before the Congress was to demand Dominion Status, under which India would have still remained at least nominally under British rule.
- The Congress rejected this option, and instead asked for PoornaSwaraj, which means Full Independence.

6 Sree Narayana Guru

Context: 164th birth anniversary of the father of Kerala's renaissance SreeNarayana Guru observed on 2nd September.

About

Who was Sree Narayana Guru?

- SreeNarayana Guru was born in 1864 in Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram.
- SreeNarayana Guru was a **social reformer** from Kerala who led a reform movement against casteism and promoted new values of spiritual freedom and social equality.
- He led a reform movement against the injustice in the caste-ridden society of Kerala in order to promote spiritual enlightenment and social equality.
- He laid great emphasis on the idea of 'one caste, one religion and one god.'

Key-contributions

- Sree Narayana Guru learned Sanskrit and poetry, drama & literary criticism, and logical rhetoric. The knowledge gained earned him the respect of many and he was then known as "NanuAsan".
- In 1904 the Guru gave up his life of a wanderer and decided to settle down in a place to continue his spiritual practices. He chose Sivagiri at Varkala, twenty miles north of Thiruvananthapuram.
- He started a Sanskrit school in Varkala and poor boys and orphans were given free education regardless of their caste. Temples were built at different places – **Thrissur, Kannur, Anchuthengu, Tellicherry, Calicut, and Mangalore.**
- It was in the year 1912 he built the **Sharada Devi Temple** at **Sivagiri.**
- In 1913, he founded the **Advaita Ashram** at **Aluva.** This was an important event in his spiritual quest.

- ▶ This Ashram was dedicated to a great principle – **OmSahodaryamSarvatra** (all men are equal in the eyes of God).
- ▶ This became the motto of the new Ashram.
- Between 1918 and 1923 he visited Sri Lanka many times.
- In 1921, a Conference of Universal Brotherhood was held at Aluva.
- Again in 1924, a conference of all religions was held there. The Guru stressed the need for a Brahma Vidyalaya for a comparative study of different religious faiths.

7 Chaolung Sukapha

Context: Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal ordered the state police to arrest Kolkata-based political commentator Garga Chatterjee for making allegedly derogatory remarks by calling the founder of the medieval Ahom dynasty a Chinese invader.

About Chaolung Sukapha

- Sukapha was a **13th-century** ruler who founded the **Ahom kingdom** that ruled Assam for six centuries. Contemporary scholars trace his roots to **Burma**.
- He reached Brahmaputra valley in Assam from upper Burma with around 9,000 followers.
- In his authoritative book on Assam history — *A History of Assam*, Sir Edward Gait wrote that Sukapha is said to have left a place called **Maulung** in AD 1215 with eight nobles and 9,000 men, women and children — mostly men. He had with him two elephants, and 300 horses.
- Gait wrote that in 1235, Sukapha and his people settled in **Charaideo** in upper Assam after wandering about for years, defeating those who protested his advance, and temporarily staying at different locations.
- It was in Charaideo that Sukapha established his first small principality, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.
- Assam celebrates “**Asom Divas**” to commemorate Sukapha and his rule, on **December 2** every year.

Learning about Ahoms

- Historically, they are believed to be from beyond the **Patkaimountains**, with their forefathers forming group of states in and around Yunnan province and Upper Burma.
- The name ‘Assam’ comes from the word ‘Asama’ or invincible which is a local name for the Ahoms.
- The Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley included most of the present day Assam.
- They ruled for 600 years between 13th and 19th century CE, before being ousted by Britishers in 1826.
- Located around 400 kms from Assam’s capital Guwahati, is the town of Charaideo. This was the first capital of the Ahom dynasty.

Issue

- GargaChatterjee, who describes himself as a Bengali nationalist and federalist, indirectly targeted Ahom community as well as greater Assamese society with blatant accusation of being Chinese invaders

Chatterjee made the comments after tensions surged between India and China after a violent face-off.

- ▶ Twenty Indian soldiers were martyred in the violent face-off at Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh.
- ▶ This was the first instance of casualties on the Line of Actual Control since 1975.

Context: The Department of Archaeology, Heritage and Museums conducted field research work at Keshavapura in Araga Gram Panchayat (GP) of Tirthahallitaluk to explore definitive archaeological evidences due to speculations regarding the birthplace of **PurandaraDasa**.

Who was Purandara Dasa?

- Purandara Dasa was a saint who belonged to Haridasa tradition.
- Prior to his initiation to **Haridasa tradition**, PurandaraDasa was a rich merchant and was called as **Srinivasa Nayaka**.
- He became the student of ShriVyasathirtha, the prominent madhwa guru and also the rajaguru of Vijayanagara kingdom.
- There, SrinivasaNayaka became PurandaraDasa. The word 'Dasa' means servant of god.
- He started writing his kritis with the ankithanaama/pen name '**Purandara Vittala**'.
- Referring to this, the proponents of the theory that PuranadaraDasa was born in Malnad point out at that 'Nayaka' title was attributed to locally influential people, including wealthy merchants in Malnad during the Vijayanagar rule.

Contribution to music:

- Purandara Dasa Pitamaha is the father of Carnatic Music, saint, philosopher and teacher.
- He was instrumental in structuring the basic lessons in Carnatic classical music.
- These were organised into *Saralivarases, Jantiswaras, Alankaras, Lakshanageetas, Prabandhas, Ugabhogas, Daatuvarase, Geetams, Sooladis and Kritis*.
- He introduced the raga **Maayamalavagowla** as the basic scale for music instruction and fashioned series of graded lessons. This is the structure that is still used in practise. All the lessons in Riyaz are structured that way as well.
- PurandaraDasa is said to have composed 475,000 songs in both Kannada and Sanskrit.
- There are 84 ragas which he identified including the ones such as Kalyani, Varali, Todi, Bhairavi, and Saveri which are popular today.
- Sri Thyagaraja was greatly influenced by him and offered homage to him in his Prahalada Bhakthi Vijayam.
- His work was completed by Thyagaraja, two centuries later.

Social reform:

- Dasaru was also one of the social reformers in 14th Century.
- He simplified worship for the common people who could not understand Sanskrit, the language which was much prevalent for religious purposes.
- Most of his kritis do speak on reforming the society which has elusive barriers in terms of caste, religion and the immense lust of conquering kingdoms/wars.
- Made music accessible to all the classical music form which was only restricted to the durbar halls of the kings was made accessible to the common man who earlier had barriers of language and status.
- This, along with structuring the music and putting a foundation to Carnatic Music was his biggest contribution.
- For all his works, his own guru ShriVyasathirtha appreciated him and said "Dasarendare Purandaradasarayya" meaning "Among the devotees of Hari, PurandaraDasa is the greatest".

Purandharagad or Malnad?

- As 'PurandaraVithala' was the pen name of his compositions, it was widely believed that the mystic poet was born in **Purandharagad**, Maharashtra.
- However, many in Malnad claimed that he hailed from this region.
- According to historians, Araga in Malnad was a buzzing commercial centre during the Vijayanagar rule, the period to which the poet belonged to.
- Referring to the names of the places in the vicinity of Keshavapura — Varthepura, Vithalanagundi, Dasanagadde, it was argued that these places were inhabited by merchant community influenced by Vaishnava tradition to which PurandaraDasa belonged.
- Many words that figured in PurandaraDasa's compositions were used by people in Malnad then in their day-to-day life.

MISCELLANEOUS

1 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention 2021

Context: The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention has been inaugurated on 9 January.

What is the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention 2021?

- The 16th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, was organized on 9th January 2021.
- The theme of 16th PBD Convention 2021 is “Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat”.
- Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are conferred to selected Indian diaspora members to recognize their achievements and honour their contributions to various fields, both in India and abroad.
- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention is the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs.
- It provides an important platform to engage and connect with the overseas Indians.

What is Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas?

- The Youth PBD was celebrated virtually on the theme “Bringing together Young Achievers from India and Indian Diaspora” on 8 January 2021.
- It was anchored by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

Why Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated?

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated once in every two years.
- It is celebrated to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.
- The decision to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was taken in accordance with recommendations of the High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora set up by government of India under the chairmanship of L. M. Singhvi.
- The day was chosen to mark the return of **Mahatma Gandhi** from South Africa to India in 1915.

2 INTACH Madurai launches replicas of a Pandya coin as souvenirs

Context: To promote understanding and learning of ancient Tamil life, culture and people INTACH Madurai launches replicas of a Pandya coin as souvenirs.

What is the significance associated with the release of coin?

- Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Madurai is trying to generate academic interest in the significance of ancient Tamil coinage among the people.
- Antiquated coins contain a lot of history and are a means to understand how civilisations flourished in the past.

Important features of Pandyan Coins

- The coins of the Pandyan Kingdom were mostly copper coins and were struck with a die.
- The silver and gold coins were also found in the Pandyan Kingdom.
- The coins of Pandyas were basically square.
- The coins were with five distinct images on one side, often an image of an elephant on that side and a stylised fish on the other.
- The animals inscribed on coins includes Elephant, Garuda, Bull, Fish
- These rectangular coins of the early Pandyan also featured the Nandi bull and contain Chakrams.
- Upon the revival of the Kingdom in the 7th-10th centuries, the predominant image was one or two fish, and the Pandyan bull.
- The inscription on the silver and gold coins is in Sanskrit and Tamil-Brahmi, and most of their copper coins have Tamil legends.

Pandya dynasty

- The **Pandya dynasty**, also known as the **Pandya of Madurai**, was a dynasty of south India, one of the three ethnically Tamil lineages, the other two being the Chola and the Chera.
- The Pandyas are mentioned by Asoka in the third century B.C. as one of the rulers of the south and were still actively ruling the southern extreme in the 17th century A.D.
- The Pandyas ruled extensive territories, at times including the large portions of present-day south India and Sri Lanka.
- Madurai was capital of the pandya kingdom.
- Religiously the ancient Pandyas were Jains with a strong influence of the Dravidian religion. Aruhakkadavul was the major God.
- The later day Pandyas after 600 AD were Hindus who proudly claimed to descend from Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.
- Rock cut and structural temples were a significant part of the Pandya architecture.
- The vimana and mandapa are some of the features of the Pandya temples.
- Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai and Nellaiappar Temple in Tirunelveli were built during the reign of the Pandyas.

3

Siddi community

Context: **Shantharam Budna Siddi**, one of the five newly nominated MLCs by Karnataka's BJP government, is from the Siddi community — a small group of the community believed to be descendants of the Bantu people from Southeast Africa. Shantharam is the **first from the community to be nominated for a legislative body in the country.**

About Siddhi Community

- The Siddis are an **ethnic group who descended from the Bantu-speaking people of South-East Africa** and were brought to India by Portuguese merchants 400 years ago.

- They are included in the list of **Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Karnataka**.
- **Karnataka, Gujarat and Hyderabad** are the main population centres of the Siddi community in India.
- In Karnataka **two Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**. These are
 - Jenu Kuruba
 - Koraga

4

Karnataka government to develop Nandi Hills as an international tourist destination

Context: Nandi hills, a popular hill station in the Chikkaballapur district of will be developed as an international tourist destination.

About Nandi Hills

- **Nandi Hills is** an ancient hill fortress built by **Ganga Dynasty**.
- Cholas were established **Yoga Nandeeshwara Temple** in Nandhi hills during the 11th Century.
- **Yoga Nandeeshwara Temple is** a Hindu temple in Nandi Hills, Karnataka.
- It is dedicated to Lord Shiva.
- It reflects Dravida and Chola Architecture.
- Raja Rajendra Chola and KulotungaChola's names are scripted on the walls.
- The **first-ever SAARC** summit hosted by India was held at Nandi Hills in

Significance

- Nandi hills follow all the criteria to be developed as an International Tourist Destination.
- This can enhance its chances to be ranked higher in the World Tourism ranking.

World Tourism rankings

- The **World Tourism rankings** are compiled by the United Nations World Tourism Organization.
- In the publication, UN regions and subregions are ranked.
- They are ranked by the number of international visitor arrivals, by the revenue generated by inbound tourism, and by the expenditures of outbound travelers.
- In 2019 rank, France was chosen as the most visiting nation.

Some Indian government initiatives to promote tourism

- **PRASAD scheme**
 - The 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASAD) are launched by the Ministry of Tourism in the year 2014-15.
 - It was initiated with the objective of integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations.
- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**
 - Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme (Central Sector Scheme)– for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country in 2014-15.

- **15 thematic circuits have** been identified under the Swadesh Darshan for development namely:
- **Buddha Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Desert Circuit, Eco Circuit, Heritage Circuit, North-east Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Sufi Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Tirthankar Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Tribal Circuit**

What is a Tourist Circuit?

- Tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are not in the same town, village, or city and not separated by a long-distance as well.
- Tourist circuits should have well-defined entry and exit points.
- Theme-based Tourist Circuits are circuits around specific themes such as religion, culture, ethnicity, niche, etc.
- A theme-based circuit can be confined to a state or can also be a regional circuit covering more than one state or Union territory.

5

Aesthetic Dhokra Decorative Pieces Added to the Tribes India Collection

Context: Exquisite Dhokra products from different tribes of India were among the main items added in its 7th edition of "From Our Home to your Home" campaign on Tribes India.

What are the Dhokra Products?

- Dhokra is a form of ancient bell metal craft practiced by the Ojha metal smiths living in states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal and Telangana.
- However, the style and also the workmanship of this artisan community varies in different states.
- Dhokra is a non-ferrous metal casting style.
- It uses the lost-wax technique.
- This style of metal casting has been in vogue in all parts of India for centuries.
- The dhokra products reflect the simplicity and motifs of tribal and folk life.

What is about From Our Home to your Home campaign?

- It focuses on sourcing new, natural, attractive as well as immunity-boosting tribal products and bringing them to the customer.

What is the lost wax technique?

- There are two process of lost wax casting.
- The first one is Solid casting which is the method followed in the South and hollow casting, practiced in other states.
- The hollow casting method makes use of clay core method, treated as the traditional method.

- In this process, firstly the hollow casting is used for making a clay core that would define the way the object is created.
- The core is further filled with bee's wax and resin etc. This wax is further shaped while finer details are made with proper embellishments.
- The wax is replaced next by molten brass, gold, bronze or silver which is left for hardening inside the mould.
- The mould is subsequently chipped away for retrieving the object inside.
- Finally it is polished and the finished product is put on display.

6 Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan

Context: The Ministry of Tourism took a review meeting of the "Adopt a Heritage: ApniDharohar, ApniPehchaan" project.

About

What is Adopt a Heritage Scheme?

- The 'Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan' scheme is an initiative of the **Ministry of Tourism**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Culture** and the **Archaeological Survey of India**.
- It was launched in September 2017 on World Tourism Day.
- Under it, the government invites entities, including public sector companies, private sector firms as well as individuals, to develop selected monuments and heritage and tourist sites across India.
- **Aim:** The project aims to encourage companies from the public sector, private sector, trusts, NGOs, individuals, and other stakeholders to become '**Monument Mitras**'.
 - The Monument Mitras are selected by the 'oversight and vision committee,' co-chaired by the Tourism Secretary and the Culture Secretary, on the basis of the bidder's 'vision' for development of all amenities at the heritage site.

- In the year 2019, India's rank in Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index of World Economic Forum has moved to **34th** position from **65th** rank in 2013.
- Foreign Tourist Arrivals also registered a growth of 3.2 per cent last year.

7 How '3 prior pandemics' triggered massive societal shifts?

Context: Pandemics can alter a society's fundamental worldview, upend core economic structures and sway power struggles among nations

Three previous plagues

Before March of 2020, few probably thought disease could be a significant driver of human history. Three previous plagues could yield some clues about the way COVID-19 might bend the arc of history.

Sickness spurs the rise of the Christian West

- ▶ **Where:** Roman Empire
- ▶ **When:** A.D. 165 to A.D. 262
- ▶ **Impact:** It's been estimated that the combined pandemics' (Antonine plague, and its twin, the Cyprian plague) mortality rate was anywhere from one-quarter to one-third of the empire's population.
- ▶ While staggering, the number of deaths tells only part of the story. This also triggered a profound transformation in the religious culture of the Roman Empire.
- ▶ On the eve of the Antonine plague, the empire was pagan. The vast majority of the population worshipped multiple gods and spirits and believed that rivers, trees, fields and buildings each had their own spirit.
- ▶ Christianity, a monotheistic religion that had little in common with paganism, had only 40,000 adherents, no more than 0.07% of the empire's population.
- ▶ Yet within a generation of the end of the Cyprian plague, Christianity had become the dominant religion in the empire.

The plague of Justinian and the fall of Rome

- **Where:** Roman Empire
- **When:** A.D. 542 – A.D. 755
- **Impact:** During its two centuries of recurrence, it killed an estimated 25% to 50% of the population – anywhere from 25 million to 100 million people.
- This massive loss of lives crippled the economy, triggering a financial crisis that exhausted the state's coffers and hobbled the empire's once mighty military.
- In the east, Rome's principal geopolitical rival, **Sassanid Persia**, was also devastated by the plague and was therefore in no position to exploit the Roman Empire's weakness.
- But the forces of the **Islamic Rashidun Caliphate in Arabia** – which had long been contained by the Romans and Sasanians – were largely unaffected by the plague.
- Caliph Abu Bakr didn't let the opportunity go to waste. Seizing the moment, his forces swiftly conquered the entire Sasanian Empire while stripping the weakened Roman Empire of its territories in the Levant, the Caucasus, Egypt and North Africa.
- Pre-pandemic, the Mediterranean world had been relatively unified by commerce, politics, religion and culture.
- What emerged was a fractured trio of civilizations jockeying for power and influence:
 - ▶ an Islamic one in the eastern and southern Mediterranean basin
 - ▶ a Greek one in the northeastern Mediterranean
 - ▶ a European one between the western Mediterranean and the North Sea.
- This last civilization – what we now call medieval Europe – was defined by a new, distinctive economic system.
- Before the plague, the European economy had been based on slavery.
- After the plague, the significantly diminished supply of slaves forced landowners to begin granting plots to nominally "free" laborers – serfs who worked the lord's fields and, in return, received military protection and certain legal rights from the lord.
- The seeds of feudalism were planted.

The Black Death of the middle Ages

- **Where:** Europe
- **When:** 1347

- **Impact:** It subsequently killed between one-third and one-half of the total European population of 80 million people.
- But it killed more than people. By the time the pandemic had burned out by the early 1350s, a distinctly modern world emerged – one defined by free labor, technological innovation and a growing middle class.
- Before the **Yersinia pestis bacterium** arrived in 1347, Western Europe was a feudal society that was overpopulated.
- Labor was cheap, serfs had little bargaining power, social mobility was stymied and there was little incentive to increase productivity.
- But the loss of so much life shook up an ossified society.
- Labor shortages gave peasants more bargaining power. In the agrarian economy, they also encouraged the widespread adoption of new and existing technologies – the iron plow, the three-field crop rotation system and fertilization with manure, all of which significantly increased productivity.
- Beyond the countryside, it resulted in the invention of time and labor-saving devices such as the printing press, water pumps for draining mines and gunpowder weapons.
- In turn, freedom from feudal obligations and a desire to move up the social ladder encouraged many peasants to move to towns and engage in crafts and trades.
- The more successful ones became wealthier and constituted a new middle class.
- They could now afford more of the luxury goods that could be obtained only from beyond Europe's frontiers, and this stimulated both long-distance trade and the more efficient three-masted ships needed to engage in that trade.
- The new middle class's increasing wealth also stimulated patronage of the arts, science, literature and philosophy.
- The result was an explosion of cultural and intellectual creativity – what we now call the **Renaissance**.

8 National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Context: The Ministry of Culture has launched the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India.

Intangible Cultural Heritage Sites in India:

- India houses a repository of unique Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) traditions, 13 of which have also been recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Intangible Cultural Heritage is a UNESCO program initiated in 2001 to recognise and protect various cultures and practices.

These cultural vehicles are called “Human Treasures” by the UN. UNESCO divides the list into three different categories:

- The representative list comprises cultural “practices and expressions that help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance.”
- The safeguarding list is composed of cultural elements that are threatened and in need of urgent measures to keep them alive.
- The best practice list is comprised of the best examples by communities and governments of the protection and recognition of intangible cultural heritage.

Archaeological Survey of India:

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI.
- Besides it regulate all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958**.
- It also regulates **Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972**.

9**International Day for Monuments and Sites**

Context: The International Day for Monuments and Sites or World Heritage Day is observed every year on April 18 to promote cultural heritage.

What is World Heritage Day?

- World Heritage Day, every year is observed on April 18, to conserve the human heritage and appreciate the efforts of all organizations that work for the preservation of this heritage.
- **Theme:** Every Year ICOMOS proposes a theme for celebrating the 'World Heritage Day'. The theme for World Heritage Day for the year 2020 is **'Shared Culture', 'Shared heritage' and 'Shared responsibility'**, which is important as an expression for global unity with current world wide health crisis.

World Heritage Sites in India:

- UNESCO World Heritage Convention which was established in 1972, recognised various sites of cultural and natural importance around the world.
- After the latest addition to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list, India has now 38 World Heritage Sites, and that makes India with the 6th largest number of World Heritage Sites in the world.
- There are 30 cultural sites, 7 natural sites and 1 mixed as recognised by UNESCO.

Cultural World Heritage Site					
	Site	State		Site	State
1.	Taj Mahal	Agra	16.	Capitol Complex	Chandigarh, Punjab
2.	Khajuraho	Madhya Pradesh	17.	The Historic City of Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad
3.	Hampi	Karnataka	18.	The Pink City - Jaipur	Jaipur
4.	Ajanta Caves	Maharashtra	19.	The Victorian and Art Deco Ensemble of Mumbai	Mumbai
5.	Ellora Caves	Maharashtra	20.	Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka	Madhya Pradesh

6.	Bodh Gaya	Bihar	21.	Churches and Convents of Goa	Goa
7.	Sun Temple, Konark	Odisha	22.	Hill Forts of Rajasthan	
8.	Red Fort Complex	Delhi	23.	Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park	Gujarat
9.	Sanchi	Madhya Pradesh	24.	QutubMinar and its Monuments	New Delhi
10.	Chola Temples	Tamil Nadu	25.	Mountain Railways of India	
11.	Group of Monuments at Mahabalipuram	Tamil Nadu	26.	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus),	Maharashtra
12.	Humayun's Tomb	New Delhi	27.	Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University),	Bihar
13.	Jantar Mantar	Jaipur, Rajasthan	28.	Elephanta Caves,	Maharashtra
14.	Agra Fort	Uttar Pradesh	29.	Group of Monuments at Pattadakal	Karnataka
15.	Fatehpur Sikri	Uttar Pradesh	30.	Rani Ki Vav	Patan, Gujarat

Natural World Heritage Sites					
	Site	State		Site	State
1.	Kaziranga Wild Life Sanctuary	Assam	5.	Manas Wild Life Sanctuary	Assam
2.	Sundarbans National Park	West Bengal	6.	Keoladeo National Park	Rajasthan
3.	Great Himalayan National Park	Himachal Pradesh	7.	Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks	
4.	Kanchenjunga National Park	Sikkim	8.	Western Ghats	Uttara khand

Cultural and Natural Mixed World Heritage Site	
Khangchendzonga National Park	Sikkim

India's nomination for 2020 World Heritage List

Context: Government of India has submitted two nomination dossiers namely '**Dholavira: A Harappan City**' and '**Monuments and Forts of Deccan Sultanate**' for inclusion in the World Heritage List for the year 2020.

About:

Dholavira:

- The city of Dholavira located in Khadir island of the Rann of Kutch belonged to matured Harappan phase.
- Dholavira is one of the five largest Harappan sites in the world and the most prominent archaeological site in India belonging to Indus Valley Civilization.
- Dholavira was known for the excellent water storage system and town planning. The inhabitants of Dholavira were master water conservationists.
- No significant rivers were flowing by, just two rivulets — Mansar and Manhar. Nine reservoirs were built around the city to store water. The city itself is divided into three parts — the Citadel, the Middletown and the Lower Town.

Monuments of the Deccan Sultanate

- The 'Monuments of the Deccan Sultanate' is a serial property comprising of four components constitute the most representative, most authentic and best-conserved examples of **Deccani Sultanate** monuments in India.
- The series demonstrates the exemplary convergence of national and international styles of Islamic architecture and their intersections with the prevalent Hindu architecture of the period southern Indian in present-day **Karnataka** and **Andhra Pradesh**.
 - **Bahmani Monuments** at Gulbarga, Karnataka
 - **Bahmani and BaridShahi Monuments** at Bidar, Karnataka
 - **AdilShahi Monuments** at Bijapur, Karnataka
 - **QutbShahi Monuments** at Hyderabad Andhra Pradesh

What is UNESCO's World Heritage List?

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972.

The world heritage list aims to recruit the world community in identifying cultural and natural properties of "outstanding universal value."

The Convention:

The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage developed from the merging of two separate movements: the first focusing on the preservation of cultural sites, and the other dealing with the conservation of nature.

The Convention defines the kind of natural or cultural sites which can be considered for inscription on the World Heritage List.

India ratified the Convention in 1977.

11

Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior, Orchha on UNESCO World Heritage Cities List

Context: Gwalior and Orchha in Madhya Pradesh have been included in the list of UNESCO's world heritage cities under its urban landscape city programme.

About

Gwalior

- Gwalior was established in the 9th century and ruled by **GurjarPratiharaRajvansh, Tomar, BaghelKachvaho and Scindias**.
- The memorabilia left by them are found in abundance in memorials, forts and palaces in the area.
- Gwalior is known for its palaces and temples, including the intricately carved SasBahuKaMandir temple.
- The Gwalior Fort occupies a sandstone plateau overlooking the city and is accessed via a winding road lined with sacred Jain statues.
- Within the forts, high walls are the **15th-century GujarMahal Palace**, now an archaeological museum.

Orchha

- Orchha is popular for its temples and palaces and was the capital of the **Bundela kingdom** in the 16th century.
- The famous spots in the town are Raj Mahal, JehangirMahal, Ramraja Temple, Rai Praveen Mahal, and Laxminarayan Mandir.
- After inclusion in the World Heritage City list, chemical treatment of historic spots like Mansingh Palace, GujriMahal and Sahastrabahu Temple will be done so that art inscribed on them will become more visible.

'Historic Urban Landscape' based planning by UNESCO

- UNESCO defines HUL as an integrated approach towards managing heritage resources found within dynamic and evolving environments.
- HUL acknowledges the interconnections within a city, which occur between the built and natural environments, the tangible and intangible values, as well as within the cultural and social practices of a community.
- The approach considers these factors as key pillars towards sustainable urban heritage management and the development of the city.

Which Indian cities are under HUL?

- Gwalior and Orchha are among the few cities of India selected for the ambitious project.
- Before this, Varanasi, Ajmer-Pushkar and Hyderabad were included among the pilot cities for HUL recommendation based planning in the year 2015.

12

Singapore's beloved street hawker culture, now a UNESCO 'Intangible Heritage'

Context: One of Singapore's most popular attractions, its vibrant street hawker culture, was designated an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO.

Street hawking in Singapore

- Singapore's street hawkers are an indelible part of the city-state's local life. It is one of most popular late-night street food destinations in the city.
- The hawker centres are representative of Singapore's multiculturalism, with stalls selling cheap, delicious food of Chinese, Malay, Indian origins, among others.
- The Covid-19 pandemic, which has left much of the global food and hospitality industry in tatters, also hit Singapore's street vendors hard.

What are some of the other cultures enlisted from across the world?

- It includes practices such as yoga from India, reggae music from Jamaica, Finland's sauna culture and Turkey's endangered whistled language.

What is UNESCO intangible cultural heritage?

The UNESCO intangible cultural heritage includes

- Traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals, festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

S.No.	ICH Element	Year of Inscription
1.	Tradition of Vedic chanting	2008
2.	Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana	2008
3.	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre	2008
4.	Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India	2009
5.	Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala	2010
6.	Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan	2010
7.	Chhau dance	2010
8.	Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India	2012
9.	Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur	2013
10.	Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India	2014
11.	Yoga	2016

12.	Nawrouz, Novruz, Nowrouz, Nowrouz, Nawrouz, Nauryz, Nooruz, Nowruz, Navruz, Nevruz, Nowruz, Navruz	2016
13.	KumbhMela	2017
