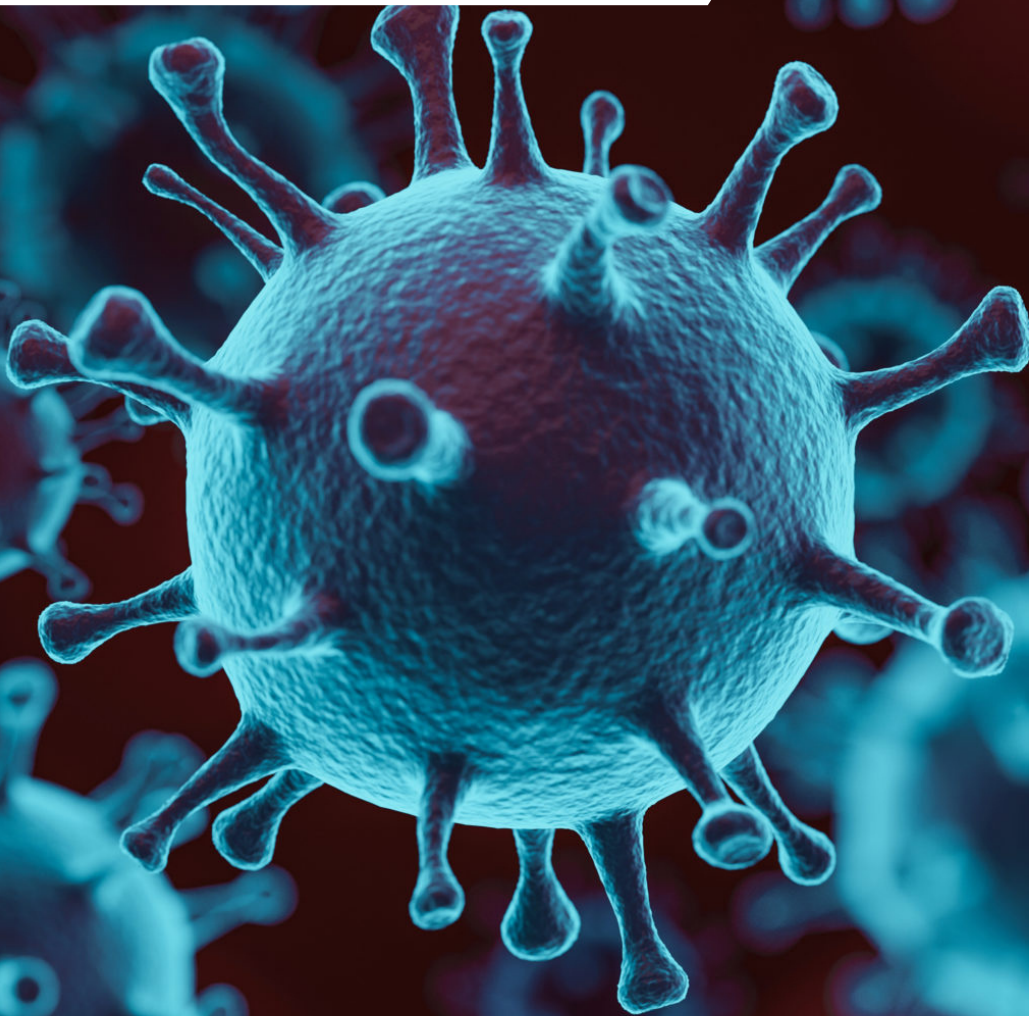


# PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

**SPECIAL ISSUE JANUARY WEEK 4**



# Special Issue

## January (Week 4)

### Contents

All about The Houthi Movement .....	2
All about the recent Bombay HC verdict on sexual assault.....	4
History & precedent of President's address in Parliament .....	6
Viruses, their variants, and vaccines .....	7
All about the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute .....	9
Red Fort and Delhi — symbols and narratives of power down the ages .....	10



## **All about The Houthi Movement**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to 'Believing Youth', a Zaydi revivalist group founded by Hussein al-Houthi and his father Badr al-Din in the 1990s*

### **Background**

- In 2004, Hussein was killed by Yemeni troops, but the group he founded, called Houthis, after its leader, continued to the battle against the government
- In 2014, three years after President Saleh resigned amid protests, the Houthis reached Sana'a, and by early 2015, they took over the city
- After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, when anti-Americanism was at its peak in the Muslim world, several Islamist organisations had tried to mobilise supporters riding the public sentiments. For the Houthis in northern Yemen, it was a tipping point.
- What started as a religious revivalist movement aimed at restoring the fading glory of the Zaydi sect of Islam, the Houthis, under the leadership of Hussein al-Houthi, were turning political. When the second intifada broke out in the Palestinian territories in 2000, the Houthis staged solidarity protests. They mobilised supporters against the U.S.'s war on Afghanistan in 2001. After the Iraq war, they adopted a new slogan, "Death to America, death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam".
- Not many had foreseen back then that this tiny group of tribesmen from the Marran Mountains of the northern province Sa'dah would grow into the most powerful rebel war machine in Yemen and, within little over a decade, capture the capital Sana'a and establish their rule over much of the country.
- For the past six years, the Houthis have been controlling Sana'a, while attempts to dislodge them, including a Saudi-led military intervention, failed to meet their goals. The success story of the Houthis is also the story of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our times. The Saudi military intervention, the Houthi resistance and a separatist movement in the south have collectively turned Yemen into a humanitarian catastrophe.
- And then, there is Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, exploiting the lawlessness and expanding its operations. Making matters worse, the administration of Donald Trump in the U.S. designated the Houthis a 'terrorist organisation' in its final days in office. This is expected to make providing aid to the Houthi-held territories and finding an eventual political solution to the crisis difficult. The ball is now in U.S. President Joe Biden's court.

### **The origins**

- The roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to "Believing Youth" (Muntada al-Shahabal-Mu'min), a Zaydi revivalist group founded by Hussein al-Houthi and his father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, in the early 1990s. Badr al-Din was an influential Zaydi cleric in northern Yemen.
- Inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the rise of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, Badr al-Din and his sons started building vast social and religious networks among the Zaydis of Yemen, who make up roughly one-third of the Sunni-majority country population. The Zaydis are named after Zayd Bin Ali, the great grandson of Imam Ali. Zayd Bin Ali had led a revolt against the Umayyad Caliphate in the eighth century. He was killed, but his martyrdom led to the rise of the Zaydi sect.
- For centuries, the Zaydis were a powerful sect within Yemen. In the 16th century, they established an imamate and in the 17th, they ousted the Ottomans from Yemen. The imamate went into decline and got fractured in the 19th century, faced with challenges from repeated attacks from the Ottomans and the rising influence of Wahhabism in Arabia.



- After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Zaydis, once again, consolidated power in northern Yemen and established the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. This lasted till 1962 when the Egypt-backed republicans overthrew the monarchy.
- When Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Hussein launched Believing Youth, the plan was to reorganise the Zaydi minority. But when the movement turned political and started attacking the “corrupt” regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh and his support for the U.S.’s war on terror, it became a thorn on Saleh’s side.
- They called themselves Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), mobilised tribesmen in the north against the government and chanted the “Death to America” slogans. In 2004, Saleh’s government issued an arrest warrant against Hussein al-Houthi. He resisted the arrest, starting an insurgency. In September, the government troops attacked the rebels and killed Hussein.
- Since then, the government launched multiple military campaigns in Sa’dah, the Zaydi stronghold, to end the resistance, which was locally called the Houthis movement, after their “martyred” leader. But the government’s heavy hand backfired. It only strengthened the Houthis, who, by 2010 when a ceasefire was reached, had captured Sa’dah from the government troops.

### March to Sana’a

- When protests broke out in Yemen in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring protests, the Houthis backed the agitation. President Saleh, a Zaydi who was in power for 33 years, resigned in November, handing the reins to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Saudi-backed Sunni.
- Yemen, under the tutelage of the Saudis and the Emiratis, started a national dialogue to resolve internal differences. The Houthis were part of the dialogue. But they fell out with the transition government of Mr. Hadi, claiming that the proposed federal solution, which sought to divide the Zaydi-dominated north into two land-locked provinces, was intended to weaken the movement. They soon got back to insurgency.
- Saleh, who was sidelined by the interim government and its backers, joined hands with his former rivals and launched a joint military operation. By January 2015, the Houthi-Saleh alliance had captured Sana’a and much of northern Yemen, including the vital Red Sea coast. (Later the Houthis turned against Saleh and the latter was killed in December 2017).
- The rapid rise of the Houthis in Yemen set off alarm bells in Riyadh which saw them as Iranian proxies. Saudi Arabia, under the new, young Defence Minister, Mohammed Bin Salman, started a military campaign in March 2015, hoping for a quick victory against the Houthis.
- But the Houthis had dug in, refusing to leave despite Saudi Arabia’s aerial blitzkrieg. With no effective allies on the ground and no way-out plan, the Saudi-led campaign lost its steam over the years. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia accuse Iran of backing the Houthis. In Saudi Arabia, both the Houthis and Iran found a common foe.
- In the past six years, the Houthis have launched multiple attacks on Saudi cities from northern Yemen in retaliation for Saudi air strikes. In 2019, the Houthis claimed the attack on two Saudi oil installations that knocked out, briefly, half of the kingdom’s oil output.
- The Houthis have established a government in the north. The Supreme Political Council, headed by its President, Mahdi al-Mashat, is the executive branch of their rule. Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, Hussein’s brother, leads the movement. There are serious allegations against both the Saudis and the Houthis in the war.
- While the Saudi bombings caused a large number of civilian deaths, the Houthis were accused, by rights groups and governments, of preventing aid, deploying forces in densely populated areas and using excessive force against civilians and peaceful protesters.
- The conflict appears to have entered a stalemate. Yemen, often dubbed the poorest Arab country, is now divided into three parts — the Houthi-controlled northern territories, the Southern Transition Council-controlled areas in the south (which has the backing of the UAE) and the rest held by the internationally recognised government of President Hadi.



- All sides are trying to maximise their interests with attempts to find a political solution reaching nowhere. In the meantime, Yemen's suffering is mounting.

## **All about the recent Bombay HC verdict on sexual assault**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Bombay High Court has acquitted a man of sexual assault charges under the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for groping a child, and instead convicted him under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for a lesser offence. Justice Pushpa V Ganediwala said the allegation was not serious enough for the greater punishment prescribed under the law. The ruling, which drew criticism for its restricted interpretation of the offence, spotlights the concept of mandatory minimum sentencing in legislation, including POCSO.*

### **What was this case about?**

- The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court reversed the decision of a sessions court which had convicted 39-year-old Bandu Ragde under Section 8 of the POCSO Act, and sentenced him to three years in jail. Section 8 prescribes the punishment for the offence of sexual assault defined in Section 7 of the Act.
- The convict was accused of luring the 12-year old prosecutrix to his house on the pretext of giving her a guava, and pressing her breast and attempting to remove her salwar.
- The High Court upheld the conviction under sections that carry a lesser minimum sentence of one year under the Indian Penal Code, including outraging the modesty of a woman.

### **Why did the High Court acquit the man of charges under the POSCO Act?**

- The court reasoned that since the offence under POCSO carried a higher punishment, a conviction would require a higher standard of proof, and allegations that were more serious.
- Section 7 of the Act says "Whoever, with sexual intent touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of the child or makes the child touch the vagina, penis, anus or breast of such person or any other person or does any other act with sexual intent..."
- The court said that since the convict groped the prosecutrix over her clothes, this indirect contact would not constitute sexual assault.

### **Is such a reading of the law unusual?**

- Such restrictive reading is not uncommon, especially in POCSO cases.
- In *State v Bijender* (2014), a Delhi court acquitted a man under the POCSO Act and instead convicted him of IPC offences. A seven-year-old girl had testified that the convict took her into the bathroom by force, slapped her, and tore her jeans. The Special Court held that the act of tearing the clothes of the victim did not constitute physical contact even if sexual intent was present.
- This was despite the recognition of "any other act with sexual intent which involves physical contact without penetration" to be sexual assault under Section 7 of POCSO. The judge reasoned that since the accused did not touch the vagina, anus or breasts of the child, the latter part of the section could not be invoked. The court restrictively interpreted the lack of physical contact with sexual organs to mean that there was no physical contact.

### **What is a mandatory minimum sentence?**

- Section 8 of the POCSO Act carries a sentence of rigorous imprisonment of three to five years. However, imposing the minimum sentence is mandatory. Where a statute has prescribed a minimum



sentence, courts do not have the discretion to pass lighter sentences irrespective of any specific circumstances that the case or the convict might present.

- Minimum sentences have been prescribed for all sexual offences under the POCSO Act barring the offence of sexual harassment. In a 2001 ruling, the Supreme Court held that where the mandate of the law is clear and unambiguous, the court has no option but to pass the sentence upon conviction as provided under the statute. “The mitigating circumstances in a case, if established, would authorise the court to pass such sentence of imprisonment or fine which may be deemed to be reasonable but not less than the minimum prescribed under an enactment,” the court said in *State of J&K v Vinay Nanda*.

### **Why do some legislation prescribe a mandatory minimum sentence?**

- A mandatory sentence is prescribed to underline the seriousness of the offence, and is often claimed to act as a deterrent to crime. In 2013, criminal law reforms introduced in the aftermath of the 2012 Delhi gangrape prescribed mandatory minimum sentences for criminal use of force and outraging the modesty of a woman, among other charges.
- Mandatory minimum sentences are also prescribed in some cases to remove the scope for arbitrariness by judges using their discretion. For example, the punishment for a crime under IPC Section 124A (Sedition) is “imprisonment for life, to which fine may be added, or...imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or...fine”, which leaves room for vast discretion with judges.

### **What are the criticisms of mandatory sentencing?**

- Studies have shown that mandatory sentencing in laws lead to fewer convictions, because when judges perceive that the punishment for the offence is harsh, they might prefer to acquit the accused instead.
- After conviction, a separate hearing is conducted to award sentence, in which aspects such as the accused being a first-time offender with potential for reformation or being the sole breadwinner of the family, or the accused's age and social background, or the seriousness of the offence, etc., are considered. The absence of the opportunity to consider such factors, and instead prescribe a mandatory sentence, pushes judges in some cases towards acquitting the accused.
- A 2016 report on the ‘Study on the Working of Special Courts under the POCSO Act in Delhi’ by the Centre for Child Law at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, has highlighted the reluctance of courts in convicting under sections that carry a mandatory minimum sentence.
- The study noted: “Some within the legal fraternity were of the view that minimum sentences under the POCSO Act are very high. As an example, one respondent shared that the minimum punishment for sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault is high. “Should a 21 year-old be imprisoned for three years for forcibly kissing a girl? He will become a criminal in jail. No point in packing our jail with adolescents.” Another respondent was of the view that probation should be used in cases of statutory rape where the accused is between 18-22 years. One respondent also felt that the Act should provide sentencing discretion to judges.”
- In his 2016 book *Discretion, Discrimination and the Rule of Law: Reforming Rape Sentencing in India*, Mrinal Satish, professor of Law at NLSIU, argued that when mandatory sentencing regimes are put in place to remove judicial discretion, the discretion merely shifts within the system to the police, but is not removed.

### **Way Forward**

- Legal experts have argued that mandatory sentences are counterproductive to the aim of reducing crime or acting as a deterrent.
- Instead of harsher punishment, they recommend judicial reform that makes the sentencing process more accountable and transparent.
- This would include holding transparent proceedings for sentencing, recording specific reasons for punishment in rulings, etc.



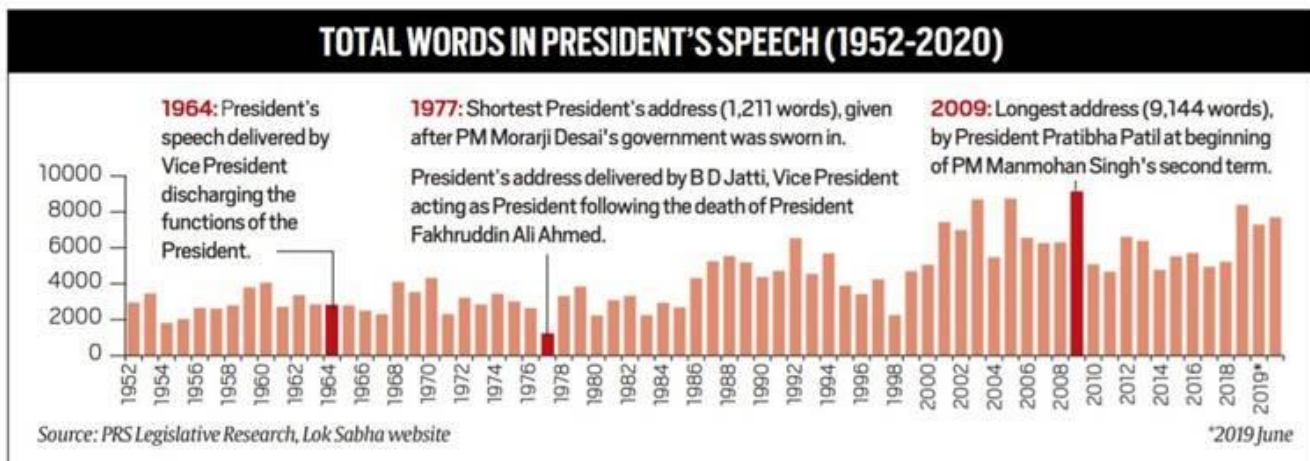
## History & precedent of President's address in Parliament

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** The first Parliament session of 2021 began with President Ram Nath Kovind addressing members of both Houses of Parliament. If he does not stand for re-election, it will be his second-last address to Parliament. In his speech, there will be an indication of the government's plans and focus areas for the year ahead. While his address will mark the beginning of the session, it will not constitute a joint sitting of the two Houses.

### History & precedent

- In the United Kingdom, the history of the monarch addressing the Parliament goes back to the 16th century. In the United States, President George Washington addressed Congress for the first time in 1790. In India, the practice of the President addressing Parliament can be traced back to the Government of India Act of 1919.
- This law gave the Governor-General the right of addressing the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State. The law did not have a provision for a joint address but the Governor-General did address the Assembly and the Council together on multiple occasions. There was no address by him to the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) from 1947 to 1950. And after the Constitution came into force, President Rajendra Prasad addressed members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the first time on January 31, 1950.
- The Constitution gives the President the power to address either House or a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament. Article 87 provides two special occasions on which the President addresses a joint sitting. The first is to address the opening session of a new legislature after a general election. The second is to address the first sitting of Parliament each year.
- A session of a new or continuing legislature cannot begin without fulfilling this requirement. When the Constitution came into force, the President was required to address each session of Parliament. So during the provisional Parliament in 1950, President Prasad gave an address before every session. The First Amendment to the Constitution in 1951 changed this position and made the President's address once a year.



### By the govt, about the govt

- There is no set format for the President's speech. The Constitution states that the President shall "inform Parliament of the cause of the summons". During the making of the Constitution, Prof K T Shah wanted the President's address to be more specific. He suggested that the language be changed to specify that the President shall inform Parliament "on the general state of the Union including financial proposals, and other particular issues of policy he deems suitable for such address". His amendment was inspired by the US Constitution, according to which the President "shall from time to time give to the Congress



information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient”.

- But Prof Shah’s amendment was rejected by the Constituent Assembly. The address of the President follows a general structure in which it highlights the government’s accomplishments from the previous year and sets the broad governance agenda for the coming year.
- The speech that the President reads is the viewpoint of the government and is written by it. Usually, in December, the Prime Minister’s Office asks the various ministries to start sending in their inputs for the speech. A message also goes out from the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs asking ministries to send information about any legislative proposals that need to be included in the President’s address. All this information is aggregated and shaped into a speech, which is then sent to the President. The government uses the President’s address to make policy and legislative announcements.
- For example, in 1985 President Giani Zail Singh announced that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s government intended to introduce a new national education policy and the anti-defection law. In 1996, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s 13-day government announced its intention of giving statehood to Uttaranchal and Varnanchal (Jharkhand) and 33 per cent reservation to women in legislatures.
- During his second stint in 1999, Prime Minister Vajpayee’s government mooted the idea of a fixed term for Lok Sabha and state Vidhan Sabhas. After the devastating tsunami of 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s government used the President’s Address to announce the creation of a national law for disaster management. And in 2015, President Pranab Mukherjee voiced the Narendra Modi government’s plan to expedite financial sector reforms and its endeavour for the smooth conduct of legislative business and enactment of progressive laws in Parliament.

### Procedure & tradition

- In the days following the President’s address, a motion is moved in the two Houses thanking the President for his address. This is an occasion for MPs in the two Houses to have a broad debate on governance in the country. The Prime Minister replies to the motion of thanks in both Houses, and responds to the issues raised by MPs. The motion is then put to vote and MPs can express their disagreement by moving amendments to the motion.
- Opposition MPs have been successful in getting amendments passed to the motion of thanks in Rajya Sabha on five occasions (1980, 1989, 2001, 2015, 2016). They have been less successful in Lok Sabha. For example in 2018, Lok Sabha MPs tabled 845 amendments of which 375 were moved and negated.
- The President’s address is one of the most solemn occasions in the Parliamentary calendar. It is the only occasion in the year when the entire Parliament, i.e. the President, Lok Sabha, and Rajya Sabha come together. The event is associated with ceremony and protocol. The Lok Sabha Secretariat prepares extensively for this annual event.
- In the past, it used to get 150 yards of red baize cloth from the President’s house for the ceremonial procession. An officer of Lok Sabha would also be instructed to remind the ADC to the President to bring the water and tumbler from Rashtrapati Bhawan for the President’s use.
- The President arrives at Parliament House escorted by the Presidential Guards and is received by the presiding officers of the two Houses, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, and the Secretaries-General of the two Houses. He is then escorted to the Central Hall where he delivers his address to the assembled MPs of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

### **Viruses, their variants, and vaccines**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** SARS-CoV-2 variants have emerged independently in several countries, and research published over the past week indicates that the virus is changing more quickly than was once believed — and that it may continue to develop towards evading currently available vaccines. We deconstruct the science, summarise the breaking research, evaluate the concerns, and suggest a prescription for India.



### Why do viruses mutate?

- Like all life, viruses carry a genetic code in the form of nucleic acids — either DNA or RNA. When cells multiply, the DNA within them replicates as well, to make copies for the new cells. During replication, random errors are introduced into the new DNA, much like spelling errors when we write. Just as we can spell-check, our cells carry enzymes to ‘proofread’ and correct these mistakes to maintain the fidelity of our genetic material.
- While the errors in DNA virus genomes can be corrected by the error-correcting function of cells in which they replicate, there are no enzymes in cells to correct RNA errors. Therefore, RNA viruses accumulate more genetic changes (mutations) than DNA viruses.
- Evolution requires not just mutations, but also selection. While most mutations are deleterious to the virus, if some allow a selective advantage — say better infectivity, transmission, or escape from immunity — then the new viruses out-compete the older ones in a population.
- The mutations can be synonymous (silent) or non-synonymous (non-silent); the latter also changes an amino acid (protein building block) at that position in the coded protein.

### How much has SARS-CoV2 mutated?

- Coronaviruses have an RNA genome with two unique features. At 30,000 nucleotides (nucleic acid units) they have the largest genome among RNA viruses. This allows coronaviruses to produce an enzyme that can correct RNA replication errors.
- Consequently, coronaviruses have rather stable genomes, changing about a thousand times slower than influenza viruses, which too are RNA viruses that cause respiratory illness. In a January 21, 2021 preprint on bioRxiv, researchers from ACTREC, Navi Mumbai, analysed over 200,000 SARS-CoV-2 genomes to find 6.6 non-silent and 5 silent mutations per sample. They found 13 mutations hotspots that change in at least 40,000 or more samples. From 3,361 Indian Covid-19 patient samples, the researchers found comparable rates of 5.2 non-silent and 4.4 silent mutations per sample.
- A mutation called D614G emerged in late January 2020 to change the amino acid at position 614 in the virus’ Spike protein from aspartate (D) to glycine (G). Because this variant infected and replicated better and produced ‘fitter’ viruses, it now accounts for over 99 per cent of the virus circulating globally. Other mutations are now emerging in this background.
- Viruses with mutations within the receptor-binding domain (RBD) of the Spike protein have the most potential to evade antibodies that develop as a result of natural infection or vaccination. The RBD binds the cellular receptor allowing the virus to infect cells, and anti-RBD antibodies neutralise the virus. Such mutations were recently found in variant viruses that emerged in the UK, South Africa and Brazil.
- As of January 26, about 29,000 infections are attributed to UK variants from 63 countries, many due to local transmission. These viruses carry 17 non-silent mutations, eight in the Spike protein.
- The South African variant includes 668 viruses reported from 26 countries, with local transmission mainly in southern Africa and the UK. These viruses carry nine non-silent mutations, six in the Spike protein.
- The Brazil variant includes 30 viruses from eight countries, transmitting locally only in Brazil. These viruses carry 16 non-silent mutations, 11 in the Spike protein.
- Three key RBD mutations — K417N/T, E484K, and N501Y — are found in variants that emerged in South Africa and Brazil. The UK variant has the N501Y mutation, but has another called P681H outside the RBD, which too increases infectivity.

### How are vaccines tested for effectiveness against emerging variants?

- Indirect tests are done in laboratories to assess if an emerging variant might escape antibodies developed after a natural infection or vaccination.
- Serum (the blood components that contain antibodies) from recovered patients or vaccinated people, and antibodies known to neutralise the original virus, are tested to determine whether the variant viruses



evade antibodies. Serial dilutions of the serum or antibodies are separately mixed with a fixed amount of the original and variant viruses, and the mixture is added to cells in culture. After a period of incubation, cells are washed and stained. Cells infected and killed by viruses multiplying within them appear as clear zones (plaques) on a dark background.

- The effectiveness of a serum or antibody is expressed as an inhibitory concentration (IC) or plaque reduction neutralisation titer (PRNT) value. The IC<sub>50</sub> or PRNT<sub>50</sub> value is the reciprocal dilution of serum or antibody that neutralises 50 per cent viruses in the sample.
- Since infectious viruses require containment facilities (called biosafety level 3; BSL3), these assays are sometimes done with pseudoviruses. These are constructed to carry the SARS-CoV-2 Spike protein on another virus background, and contain reporters that are easily visualised (e.g., green fluorescent protein) or quantified (e.g., luciferase).

### Can new vaccines be developed to fight variants?

- The evidence at this time, though of concern, does not indicate that current vaccines are failing. But this has to be watched carefully, and all efforts made to limit transmission between people, which drives mutations and the emergence of variants. Both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech have agreed that their vaccines offered reduced protection against the South African variant. The two companies are reported to be working on developing fresh vaccines to cover these variants. (The New York Times, January 25)
- Should new vaccines be needed, the mRNA platform offers the best chance of speedy development.
- These vaccines were the first to receive emergency use approval, and have already been administered to millions of people globally. Would regulators require fresh human clinical trials for each variant vaccine built on an already approved platform? This would be critical to the speed at which vaccines against emerging variants can be deployed.

### All about the Maharashtra-Karnataka border dispute

(Source: [Indian Express](https://www.indianexpress.com) )

**Context:** Earlier this week, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Sharad Pawar released a book published by the state government, titled 'Maharashtra-Karnataka Seemavad: Sangharsh Aani Sankalp' (Maharashtra-Karnataka Boundary Dispute: Struggle and Pledge). The book is a collection of articles, news, and other material on the demand that Marathi-speaking areas in Karnataka should be integrated into Maharashtra. The matter has been in the Supreme Court since 2004.

### The dispute

- This long smouldering inter-state dispute resurfaces from time to time, rather like the issue around the demand for the renaming of Aurangabad. Maharashtra has staked claim to over 7,000 sq km area along its border with Karnataka, comprising 814 villages in the districts of Belagavi (Belgaum), Uttara Kannada, Bidar, and Gulbarga, and the towns of Belagavi, Karwar, and Nippani. All these areas are predominantly Marathi-speaking, and Maharashtra wants them to be merged with the state.
- The genesis of the dispute lies in the reorganisation of states along linguistic and administrative lines in 1956.
- The erstwhile Bombay Presidency, a multilingual province, included the present-day Karnataka districts of Vijayapura, Belagavi, Dharwad, and Uttara Kannada. In 1948, the Belgaum municipality requested that the district, having a predominantly Marathi-speaking population, be incorporated into the proposed Maharashtra state.
- However, The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 made Belgaum and 10 talukas of Bombay State a part of the then Mysore State (which was renamed Karnataka in 1973). While demarcating borders, the Reorganisation of States Commission sought to include talukas with a Kannada-speaking population of



more than 50 per cent in Mysore. But the opponents of the region's inclusion in Mysore have maintained that in 1956, Marathi-speakers outnumbered Kannada-speakers in those areas.

- Political parties in Maharashtra are united on the merger of the border areas with the state. The dispute features in every election manifesto of the Congress, NCP, Shiv Sena, and BJP. Over the last six decades, every Governor's address (which outlines the state government's policies and programmes) to the joint session of the Maharashtra Assembly and Council has mentioned the border dispute to loud applause from members across parties.

### Recent incidents

- This is not the first time that this matter has arisen in the last 13 months of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition government.
- Bus services between Kolhapur (Maharashtra) and Belgaum (Karnataka) had to be suspended for a few days following tensions that flared on both sides of the border after Chief Minister Thackeray referred to the contentious areas as "Karnataka-occupied Maharashtra" in the Assembly.
- He also named two senior ministers, Eknath Shinde and Chhagan Bhujbal, to a co-ordination committee to oversee the expeditious resolution of the case in favour of Maharashtra in the Supreme Court.
- Late last year, the Maharashtra government asked all ministers to wear black bands on November 1, which is celebrated in Karnataka as Rajyotsava or state Formation Day, to express support for Marathi-speaking people in Karnataka.
- Thackeray reiterated his commitment to redrawing Maharashtra's borders to include areas that now lie in Karnataka on January 17, which is observed in Maharashtra as Martyrs' Day, while paying tributes to those who died in the 1956 border struggle to join Maharashtra.

### The Mahajan Commission

- The BJP government in Karnataka has accused Maharashtra of seeking to incite violence on the border dispute, and Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa has vowed he would "not part with an inch of land". The Mahajan Commission had "long ago settled the dispute", Yediyurappa said, condemning Maharashtra.
- The Mahajan Commission was set up by the Government of India in October 1966 to look into the border dispute. In its report submitted in August 1967, the Commission, led by former Chief Justice of India Mehr Chand Mahajan, recommended that 264 villages should be transferred to Maharashtra, and that Belgaum and 247 villages should remain with Karnataka.
- Maharashtra rejected the report, calling it biased and illogical, while Karnataka welcomed it. Despite demands from Karnataka, the Centre never implemented the recommendations of the report.
- Earlier this week, Sharad Pawar said the report was "100 per cent against Maharashtra".

### **Red Fort and Delhi — symbols and narratives of power down the ages**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** Newsfeeds on Republic Day were dominated by scenes of protests on the ramparts of the Red Fort. The climax of what newspapers referred to as the "storming", "breach", or "raid", was the raising of the Nishan Sahib on the pole normally reserved for the hoisting of the national flag by the Prime Minister on Independence Day. Many symbols came together in these images — a massive anti-government protest, a site intimately connected to an annual national event, and the pennant of a religious community. To unravel some of these strands of meaning, one must go back in history, to a time centuries before the Red Fort was even constructed.

### **'Capital of Hindustan'**



- Before the 13th century, Delhi — or ‘Dilli’ — was, politically speaking, a moderately significant town. It was for long the capital of the modestly sized kingdom of the Rajput Tomar dynasty. By the mid 12th century it was conquered by the Rajput Chauhans who, however, ruled from Ajmer.
- It was the conquest by Ghurid Turks in the late 12th century that put Delhi on the map as a centre of power.
- As the capital of the Sultanate, Delhi gradually developed an aura of power — in the popular imagination, it came to be associated with a dominant power in the subcontinent.
- Babur, having defeated Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526, headed for Delhi, which he described as “the capital of all Hindustan”, even though the Lodis had ruled from Agra for the previous two decades.

### **Seat of Mughal power**

- During the first century or so of Mughal rule, Agra was the capital for longer than Delhi. Still, the Mughals continued to be seen as rulers of Delhi. A Sanskrit inscription from 1607 refers to Akbar as “Dillishvara”, the lord of Delhi, though he had ruled from Delhi for a very short time.
- In a Persian inscription dated 1621 on the Salimgarh Bridge adjoining the Red Fort, Jahangir, who never reigned from Delhi, was described as “Shahanshah e Dehli”, the emperor of Delhi.
- It was only in the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58) that the Mughal connection to Delhi was given concrete form, with the founding of the city of Shahjahanabad and the inauguration of its palace citadel, the Red Fort, in 1648. From that date to the end of Mughal rule in 1857, Delhi would be the formal capital of the Mughal empire.
- There was another important feature of the Delhi of these two centuries. From the 13th century, the capital had been located at a number of different sites – Mehrauli, Kilugarhi, Siri, Tughlaqabad, Jahanpanah, Firozabad, and Dinpanah. Now it came to be settled permanently in Shahjahanabad, with the emperor’s seat being in the Red Fort.

### **Coveted political prize**

- The significance of Delhi and the Red Fort was thrown into sharp relief by political developments in the 18th century, once the Mughal empire started on the long road to decline. Erstwhile Mughal provinces such as Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad broke away, and new forces like the Sikhs and the Marathas arose.
- Not only did the Mughal territories shrink, the Mughal emperor became increasingly ineffectual even within them. Yet, such was his symbolic significance as the source of legitimate sovereign authority that many of these new states, including a newcomer, the East India Company, continued to rule in his name, and to issue coins in his name until well into the 19th century.
- The control over the emperor and of Delhi was, therefore, a prize worth fighting for. Safdar Jang, the Nawab of Awadh, fought a civil war in an attempt to keep his position as Prime Minister of the Mughal emperor. The Sikhs had their ambitions, and came up to the walls of the city in 1783 before retreating.
- The Marathas met with greater success the following year, when Mahadji Sindhia became the power behind the throne. Finally, the East India Company defeated the Maratha forces in 1803, and went on to control Delhi and the emperor for the next 54 years.
- In the popular imagination, legitimate rule was associated with the Mughal emperor to the extent that when the country broke out in revolt in 1857, the mutinous soldiers made their way to Delhi, seeking his leadership.
- When the revolt in Delhi had been crushed, the British army occupied the Red Fort and the officers drank to their Queen’s health in the Diwan-e-Khas, where the Mughal emperors had held court. It was in this same hall that Bahadur Shah was put on trial, convicted, and exiled.
- Nearly ninety years later, in 1945-46, the memory of that trial foreshadowed another historic trial in the fort — that of the personnel of the Indian National Army, which generated an immense wave of nationalist sentiment in the run-up to Independence.



### Symbol of the nation

- With the coming of Independence, it was necessary that the site of the Red Fort, over which the British colonial government had sought to inscribe its power and might, be symbolically reclaimed for the Indian people. It was for this reason, that after the first hoisting of the national flag at India Gate on August 15, 1947, the next day, the Prime Minister hoisted it on the ramparts of the Red Fort — this was to then become India's lasting Independence Day tradition.
- In the context of a site marked by power and authority, and acts of challenging and reclaiming that authority, what is the significance of a group of predominantly Sikh farmers raising the flag of the Khalsa? History books tell us that when the Sikhs made an incursion to Delhi in 1783, they turned away from the walls, not entering the city. The incident is remembered very differently in Sikh hagiographies.
- Sikh legend says that the armed Sikhs occupied the Red Fort and unfurled the Nishan Sahib, demonstrating their victory over the Mughal throne. This account, itself contested, has fuelled more recent events such as the celebration of an annual Fateh Divas at the Red Fort since 2014, supposedly marking the anniversary of the events of 1783.
- The similarities between Fateh Divas and the events of January 26 may be deceptive. While one celebrated a victory over an empire that was seen by the Sikhs as oppressive, the other was clearly a challenge to the authority that controls the site today.