

## 1. The Loss of UK's Iconic Sycamore Gap Tree: Significance and Impact

### Introduction

- A 300-year-old sycamore tree in England, known for its beauty and unique location, was recently felled by a teenage boy in an act of apparent vandalism.
- This incident has sparked an investigation and led to the arrest of the young perpetrator, though the motive remains unclear.

### The Sycamore's Unique Location

- Iconic Setting: The sycamore tree stood in a remarkable location, nestled in a dip between two hills at a gap in the Hadrian Wall, an ancient stone structure near the England-Scotland border in Northumberland, northern England.
- Geological Origins: These gaps, or channels, were formed thousands of years ago by meltwater flowing beneath ice sheets during ancient times.



Figure 1 Sycamore Gap Tree

### Cultural Significance

- Memorial Site: The tree's location held deep personal meaning for many, serving as a place where people scattered ashes, proposed, and enjoyed family picnics.
- Hollywood Fame: The sycamore was featured in the 1991 Hollywood film "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves," making it a cultural landmark.
- Loss to Region: Its demise is mourned as a cultural loss for Northumberland, known as the most photographed spot in the Northumberland National Park.

### The Sycamore Tree

- Characteristics: Sycamore trees can grow up to 35 meters tall, with leaves resembling those of maple trees.
- Origin: Native to central, eastern, and southern Europe, it was likely introduced to the UK by the Romans or during the Tudor era in the 1500s.

- **Prolific Growth:** Due to its high seed fertility, sycamore trees spread rapidly across the UK, often overshadowing native species.
- **Utility:** Sycamore wood is strong and suitable for carving, leading to its use in crafting decoratively carved wooden spoons known as "love spoons," often exchanged as romantic gestures.

### **UNESCO Heritage Site: The Hadrian Wall**

- **Part of Larger Heritage Site:** The Hadrian Wall is a segment of the UNESCO World Heritage Site called the 'Frontiers of the Roman Empire,' found in both the UK and Germany.
- **Historical Significance:** This Roman frontier served as a protective barrier encompassing the Mediterranean world, extending from the Atlantic Coast to the Black Sea and from central Scotland to the Sahara Desert's northern fringes.
- **Hadrian's Wall:** Spanning 118 km, this wall was constructed on Emperor Hadrian's orders around AD 122, marking the northernmost boundary of the Roman province of Britannia.
- **UNESCO Recognition:** The Hadrian Wall showcases ancient Rome's military organization, defensive strategies, and geopolitical tactics, making it a significant part of world heritage.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Miscellaneous

Source: The Indian Express

## **2. Announcement to Establish National Turmeric Board**

### **Introduction**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced the setting up of a National Turmeric Board, fulfilling a long-pending demand from the stakeholders in the sector.
- The announcement was made at the Global Turmeric Conference 2023 in Mumbai on September 27.

### **What will the Board do?**

- The activities of the Board are broadly would be aimed at (i) enhancement of production, productivity & quality; (ii) export promotion for achieving higher value returns for Indian turmeric and (iii) supporting development of Domestic market.
- The details about structure and functioning of the board are not yet public. However, it is expected that the board will function on lines of other existing boards such as coffee and tea boards.

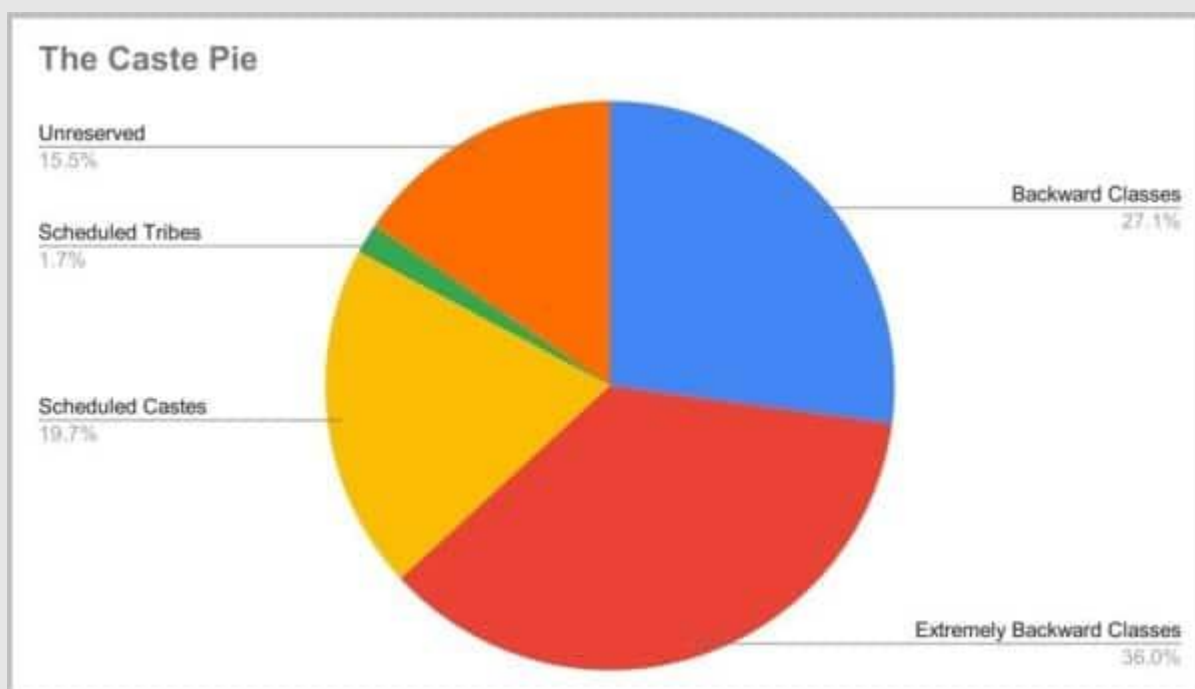
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: PIB

## **3. Bihar Caste Census Data: Key Insights**

## Population Breakdown

- OBCs and EBCs: More than 63% of Bihar's population comprises Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs).
- Total Population: Bihar's current population is 13,07,25,310, with OBCs making up 27% (3,54,63,936) and EBCs 36% (4,70,80,514) of the total.
- Forward Castes: The "forward" castes or "General" category constitute only 15.5% of the population.



## Scheduled Castes and Tribes

- Scheduled Castes (SCs): Approximately 20% (2.6 crore) of Bihar's population falls under the SC category.
- Scheduled Tribes (STs): STs make up just 1.6% (22 lakh) of the population.

## Expected Data

- Consistent Belief: The data align with the long-standing belief that OBCs form a larger portion of the population than their 27% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions.
- Historical Context: The Mandal Commission in 1980 estimated the OBC population across India to be 52%, supporting the OBCs' claim of unequal access to government jobs.

## Political Significance

- **Nitish Kumar's Strategy:** Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has strategically utilized the caste census to strengthen his political stance in Bihar and potentially play a key role in national opposition to the BJP. Nitish may use the census data to advocate for "social justice" and "development with justice" in his political campaigns.

- **Mandal 3.0:** The caste survey is expected to become a central element of Nitish's political narrative, setting it against the BJP's "Hindutva" or "kamandal" politics.

### Support Across Parties

- **Bipartisan Support:** The caste census initiative received backing from all political parties in Bihar, including the BJP.
- **Demand for Nationwide Census:** In 2021, state parties, including the Bihar BJP unit, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to demand a nationwide caste survey.
- **Implementation Process:** After unanimous agreement among nine parties, Bihar allocated Rs 500 crore from its contingency fund and employed its resources for the caste census.

### Survey Timeline

- **Phases:** The census was conducted in two phases, with the first phase counting households from January 7 to January 21.
- **Halts and Court Intervention:** The second phase, gathering data on castes, religions, and economic backgrounds, commenced on April 15 but faced a halt due to legal challenges.
- **High Court Decision:** On August 1, the High Court deemed the survey "perfectly valid," allowing it to resume on August 25.
- **Data Release:** The findings of the survey have now been made public, providing valuable insights into Bihar's caste demographics.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express