

Pramukh

इसलदकेइहा



MONTHLY

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Practice Questions (Prelims+Mains)

Preface

PRAMUKH SAMEEKSHA MAGAZINE compilation attempts to encapsulate crucial analysis published in **The Hindu and The Indian Express** (Also PIB) from **July 1 to July 31, 2026**, specifically tailored for aspirants preparing for UPSC and various State PSC examinations.

Each editorial is analyzed with a clear focus on the UPSC examination pattern, highlighting significant aspects such as **political, economic, social, environmental, and ethical dimensions**. Moreover, this analysis emphasizes how editorial insights can be practically leveraged to enrich answers for both **Prelims and Mains examinations**, aiding aspirants in building a **comprehensive, nuanced perspective**.

By systematically connecting current affairs with static syllabus topics, this compilation **aims to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and contemporary developments**. Aspirants will find these analyses instrumental in refining their critical thinking skills, enhancing their understanding of **national and global events**, and ultimately improving their performance in the examination hall.

We sincerely hope that this dedicated effort supports and empowers you on your journey towards **achieving excellence in your civil services preparation**.

Best Wishes,
BAPS Pramukh Academy

BAPS Pramukh Academy is not merely a UPSC coaching centre — it is a sacred institution born out of the divine vision of His Holiness **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** to create a spiritually rooted, **value-driven bureaucracy for Bharat**. Inspired by his profound belief that **“Nation-building is not about constructing structures, but about constructing character,”** the Academy prepares aspirants not only to succeed in India’s most prestigious civil services examinations, but to embody the **virtues of integrity, humility, empathy, and righteous leadership in public life**.

Nestled in **green, clean, and serene residential campuses**, the Academy offers a uniquely peaceful and disciplined environment that nurtures both academic excellence and moral growth. The residential facilities are thoughtfully designed to support focused preparation — with **well-equipped libraries, tech-enabled classrooms, guided study hours, nutritious meals, separate secure hostels for boys and girls, and dedicated spiritual spaces for reflection and meditation**. The ambience fosters deep concentration, self-discipline, and enabling aspirants to grow not just in **knowledge, but in character**.

In addition to its offline foundation, the Academy also runs the **‘Pramukh SAMPURN Programme’** — a fully online UPSC preparation initiative that brings the same **spirit of value-based learning to students across Bharat**. This programme ensures that aspirants from remote or **financially disadvantaged backgrounds can access high-quality, structured, and holistic civil services preparation from anywhere in the country**. Through live classes, recorded lectures, daily mentorship, practice tests, and value-enrichment sessions, the online initiative aims to democratize UPSC coaching while upholding the Academy’s commitment to **affordability, accessibility, and ethical guidance**.

Whether it is through **targeted offline batches for UPSC-CSE, GPSC (Class 1–2), and Class-3 Master programmes**, or through its online reach, **BAPS Pramukh Academy** remains steadfast in its mission: to produce not just officers, but officer-saints — servant-leaders who carry forward India’s administrative legacy with **wisdom, compassion, and unwavering moral strength**. True to **Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s** timeless words — **“Without character, even the most educated person is dangerous to society”** — every initiative at the Academy is a step toward building a **Viksit Bharat** through character-first leadership.

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The Indo-Pacific is Here to Stay, With or Without Washington

Source: The Indian Express Editorial

Author: C. Raja Mohan

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- India and its Neighbourhood Relations
- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings
- India's Foreign Policy
- International Relations

GS Paper III

- Maritime Security
- Strategic Affairs
- Supply Chain Resilience
- Economic Security

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific: The New Centre of Global Geopolitics

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the defining strategic geography of the 21st century, linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans into an interconnected economic and security space. While debates continue regarding the future role of the United States in the region, the Indo-Pacific's significance is increasingly being driven by structural realities such as Asia's economic rise, maritime trade routes, supply chain resilience, and the growing strategic competition among major powers. For India, the Indo-Pacific is not merely a foreign policy construct but a core component of its economic prosperity and national security.

Key Issues

1. **Uncertainty regarding U.S. strategic commitment**
 - Changes in U.S. domestic politics often generate concerns regarding American engagement in Asia.
 - **Example:** Debates over burden-sharing and military commitments under different U.S. administrations.
2. **Rise of China and regional balancing**
 - China's military modernisation and assertive maritime policies have altered regional power equations.
 - **Example:** Activities in the South China Sea and expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
3. **Maritime security challenges**
 - The Indo-Pacific contains some of the world's busiest sea lanes and critical chokepoints.
 - **Example:** Malacca Strait handles a significant portion of global trade and energy shipments.
4. **Supply chain vulnerabilities**
 - The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions exposed excessive dependence on concentrated manufacturing hubs.
 - **Example:** Semiconductor shortages and critical mineral supply disruptions.
5. **Competing regional architectures**
 - Different countries promote varying institutional visions for the Indo-Pacific order.
 - **Example:** Quad, ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP), IPEF, and BRI.

Global Practices

Japan	Pioneer of the Indo-Pacific concept. Promotes Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Strengthening maritime partnerships and infrastructure investments.
Australia	Diversifying supply chains and enhancing maritime capabilities.
European Union	Adopted its own Indo-Pacific Strategy focusing on connectivity and sustainability.

ASEAN	Supports an inclusive regional order through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
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Indian Committees / Policies / Initiatives

SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)	India's maritime vision for cooperative security and development in the Indian Ocean Region.
Act East Policy	Strengthens India's economic and strategic engagement with Southeast Asia.
Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)	Launched in 2019 to promote cooperation in: Maritime security Disaster risk reduction Marine ecology Capacity building
Quad Cooperation	Focus areas: Maritime Domain Awareness Emerging technologies Supply chain resilience Infrastructure development
National Maritime Security Coordinator Framework	Strengthens coordination among maritime agencies.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Maritime Capabilities**
 - Enhance naval modernisation, maritime surveillance, and coastal infrastructure.
- Diversify Supply Chains**
 - Reduce overdependence on single-country supply chains, particularly in semiconductors and critical minerals.
- Deepen Partnerships with Like-minded Countries**
 - Expand cooperation with Japan, Australia, ASEAN, France and Indian Ocean partners.
- Support ASEAN Centrality**
 - Maintain an inclusive and rules-based regional architecture.
- Preserve Strategic Autonomy**
 - India should continue issue-based partnerships without entering rigid military blocs.
- Expand Economic Engagement**
 - Increase trade connectivity and investment partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific has evolved from a diplomatic expression into an enduring geopolitical reality shaped by geography, trade, technology and strategic competition. Its future will be determined less by the choices of any single power and more by the collective actions of regional countries. For India, the objective should be to strengthen strategic autonomy while contributing to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific order.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Indo-Pacific:

1. The Quad consists of India, Japan, Australia and the United States.
2. India's SAGAR doctrine focuses on maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. ASEAN has proposed the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "The Indo-Pacific is no longer merely a strategic concept but an enduring geopolitical reality. Examine India's interests and policy options in the evolving Indo-Pacific order." (250 words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

New FCRA Rules Shrink Space for Civic Action

Source: The Hindu Editorial

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Civil Society and NGOs
- Governance and Accountability
- Fundamental Rights
- Government Policies and Interventions
- Transparency and Democratic Institutions

GS Paper III

- Internal Security
- Money Laundering and Foreign Funding Regulation

Essay Themes

- State and Civil Society
- Democracy and Accountability
- Governance and Public Participation

Introduction

Balancing National Security with Civic Participation

Civil society organisations play a critical role in strengthening democracy by delivering social services, advocating for vulnerable groups, promoting environmental protection, and improving governance outcomes. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) seeks to ensure that foreign funding does not adversely affect national interests or political sovereignty. However, the challenge for policymakers lies in maintaining an appropriate balance between regulatory oversight and preserving the autonomy and vibrancy of civic institutions that contribute to democratic development.

Key Issues

1. Expansion of Executive Discretion

- The amended rules provide wider powers to the executive in determining eligibility for receiving foreign contributions.
- **Example:** Broader grounds for suspension or cancellation of FCRA registrations.

2. Increased Compliance Burden

- Civil society organisations face additional procedural requirements involving registration, reporting and utilisation of funds.
- **Example:** Smaller grassroots organisations often lack administrative capacity to meet complex compliance standards.

3. Sector-Specific Restrictions

- The rules classify organisations under specific categories and geographic areas for enhanced scrutiny.
- **Example:** Organisations working in religious, advocacy or rights-based sectors may face greater regulatory examination.

4. Shrinking Operational Flexibility

- Restrictions on administrative expenditure and transfer of funds may affect programme implementation.
- **Example:** Smaller NGOs dependent on partnerships with larger organisations may face operational constraints.

5. Impact on Service Delivery

- Reduced access to foreign funding may affect sectors where non-governmental organisations supplement state capacity.

Examples:

- Healthcare services
- Education initiatives
- Environmental conservation
- Tribal welfare programmes

Global Practices

United Kingdom	Charities are regulated through the Charity Commission.Emphasis is placed on transparency and reporting rather than prior restrictions.
United States	Foreign funding disclosures exist but civil society enjoys substantial operational autonomy under constitutional protections.
Australia	The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme requires disclosure of foreign influence activities while preserving organisational functioning.
European Union	Most countries focus on transparency, beneficial ownership disclosure and financial reporting standards.
Global Lesson	Advanced democracies generally seek a balance between:National security concernsFinancial transparencyProtection of associational free

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)	Recommended:Greater citizen participation in governance.Strengthening partnerships between government and civil society organisations.
National Policy on the Voluntary Sector (2007)	Recognised NGOs as important partners in:Service deliverySocial mobilisationCommunity participation
Supreme Court Judgements on Freedom of Association	The judiciary has repeatedly recognised that freedom of association forms an important component of democratic participation under constitutional principles.
Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Standards	India's regulatory framework is increasingly aligned with international standards relating to:Anti-money launderingCounter-terror financing measures

Way Forward
1. Adopt Risk-Based Regulation

- Focus enhanced scrutiny on high-risk entities rather than applying uniform restrictions across the entire sector.

2. Improve Transparency Mechanisms

- Encourage:
- Public disclosure of funding sources
- Standardised reporting formats
- Independent audits

3. Strengthen Institutional Dialogue

- Establish regular consultation mechanisms between:
- Government agencies
- Civil society organisations
- Regulatory bodies

4. Build Compliance Capacity

- Provide technical support and digital tools for smaller organisations to comply with regulations.

5. Ensure Procedural Safeguards

- Introduce:
- Clear timelines
- Appeals mechanisms
- Transparent criteria for suspension or cancellation decisions

6. Balance Security and Democratic Values

- Regulatory frameworks should protect national interests without discouraging legitimate civic participation and social innovation.

Conclusion

A vibrant civil society is an essential pillar of democratic governance and inclusive development. While regulation of foreign funding is a legitimate sovereign function, the effectiveness of such regulation depends on transparency, proportionality and procedural fairness. The long-term objective should be to build a framework that protects national interests while preserving the capacity of civil society organisations to contribute constructively to India's development and democratic resilience.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA):**

1. The FCRA regulates acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by certain individuals and organisations in India.
2. The Ministry of Home Affairs administers the FCRA framework.
3. The original FCRA legislation was enacted in 1976.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Regulation of foreign funding is a legitimate sovereign function, but excessive restrictions may affect democratic participation." Discuss in the context of recent changes in India's FCRA framework. (250 words, 15 Marks)

The Right to a Fair Trial at the Crossroads

Source

The Hindu Editorial

Author: Gautam Bhatia

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Fundamental Rights
- Judiciary and Judicial Reforms
- Criminal Justice System
- Rule of Law and Constitutional Governance

GS Paper III

- Internal Security Laws
- Terrorism and Counter-terrorism Frameworks

Essay Themes

- Liberty versus Security
- Constitutional Morality
- Justice Delayed is Justice Denied

Introduction

Fair Trial as the Cornerstone of Constitutional Democracy

The right to a fair trial lies at the heart of India's constitutional order and forms an essential component of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21. While the State possesses legitimate powers to investigate and prosecute serious offences, prolonged incarceration without trial raises fundamental questions regarding due process, judicial accountability, and the balance between national security and individual freedoms. The increasing pendency of undertrial cases under stringent laws has brought this constitutional dilemma into sharper focus.

Key Issues

1. Prolonged Pre-Trial Detention

- Individuals often remain in custody for years before the commencement or completion of trial proceedings.
- **Example:** Several undertrials under special security laws have spent years in prison before adjudication of guilt or innocence.

2. Tension Between National Security and Civil Liberties

- Special laws designed to combat terrorism and organised crime often impose stricter bail conditions.
- **Example:** The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) contains stringent bail provisions under Section 43D(5).

3. Judicial Delays and Case Pendency

- Delays in investigation, framing of charges, witness examination and trial completion weaken the effectiveness of the justice system.
- **Example:** High pendency in trial courts contributes significantly to prolonged incarceration.

4. Bail Jurisprudence and Inconsistency

- Different courts sometimes adopt varying standards while deciding bail applications in similar circumstances.
- This creates uncertainty regarding the application of constitutional protections.

5. Presumption of Innocence Under Strain

- The criminal justice system is founded on the principle that an accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty.



- Long periods of imprisonment before conviction risk reversing this principle in practice.

Global Practices

United Kingdom	Strong judicial oversight over pre-trial detention. Courts periodically review the necessity of continued custody.
United States	Constitutional guarantee of a "speedy trial" under the Sixth Amendment. Bail decisions increasingly incorporate risk assessment mechanisms.
European Court of Human Rights	Recognises prolonged detention without trial as a violation of the right to liberty under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
Canada	The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees trial within a reasonable period.
Global Lesson	Democratic legal systems seek to balance public safety with procedural safeguards and timely justice delivery.

Indian Committees / Judicial Recommendations

Law Commission of India	Recommended speedy disposal of criminal cases, bail reforms, and reduction of undertrial populations.
Justice Malimath Committee (2003)	Recommended faster trials, improved witness protection, and greater judicial efficiency in criminal justice administration.
Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979)	Recognised the right to a speedy trial as an integral part of Article 21 of the Constitution.
K.A. Najeeb Case (2021)	The Supreme Court held that constitutional courts can grant bail where prolonged incarceration violates fundamental rights.
National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)	Works towards providing legal aid and reducing undertrial incarceration.

Way Forward

- Strengthen the Right to Speedy Trial**
 - Introduce institutional timelines for:
 - Investigation
 - Framing of charges
 - Trial completion
- Expand Judicial Capacity**
 - Increase:
 - Number of judges
 - Court infrastructure
 - Use of digital courts and e-proceedings
- Periodic Review of Undertrial Cases**
 - Establish mandatory judicial review of prolonged detentions under special laws.
- Reform Bail Jurisprudence**
 - Move towards a principle where:
- "Bail is the rule and jail is the exception"**
 - particularly where trials are unlikely to conclude within reasonable periods.
- Improve Investigation Efficiency**
 - Strengthen:

- Forensic capabilities
- Prosecutorial coordination
- Witness management systems

7. **Balance Security and Liberty**

- Counter-terrorism legislation should remain effective without undermining constitutional protections and due process guarantees.

Conclusion

The legitimacy of any criminal justice system rests not merely on punishing the guilty but equally on protecting the rights of the accused. National security and civil liberties need not be viewed as opposing objectives; rather, both derive their strength from the rule of law and constitutional safeguards. Ensuring timely trials and preventing indefinite incarceration will remain essential to preserving public confidence in India's democratic institutions and justice system.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The right to a speedy trial has been recognised by the Supreme Court as part of Article 21 of the Constitution.
2. Section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) contains stringent conditions for granting bail.
3. The presumption of innocence means that an accused person is considered guilty until acquitted by a court.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

Statement 3 is incorrect because criminal jurisprudence follows the principle that an accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "The right to a fair and speedy trial forms the foundation of constitutional liberty in India." Discuss the challenges posed by prolonged pre-trial detention and suggest reforms to strengthen India's criminal justice system. (250 words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Unwelcome Surge: The Buoyancy in GST Collections

Source: The Hindu Editorial

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper III

- Indian Economy and Growth
- Taxation and Fiscal Policy
- Inflation
- Goods and Services Tax (GST)
- Public Finance and Revenue Mobilisation

GS Paper II

- Fiscal Federalism
- Centre-State Financial Relations

Essay Themes

- Growth versus Inflation
- Taxation and Economic Development
- Fiscal Stability and Inclusive Growth

Introduction

When Higher Tax Collections May Not Signal Economic Strength

Strong tax collections are often viewed as indicators of robust economic activity and rising formalisation. However, an increase in indirect tax collections driven primarily by inflation rather than higher production or consumption can paint a misleading picture of economic health. Recent trends in GST revenues suggest that imported inflation, rising commodity prices, and higher input costs may be contributing significantly to revenue growth, warranting a closer examination of the underlying economic fundamentals.

Key Issues

1. Inflation-Driven Increase in GST Collections

- Higher prices automatically generate higher GST collections even if the volume of goods and services sold remains unchanged.
- **Example:** Rising crude oil prices increase transportation and logistics costs, thereby raising GST collections through higher final prices.

2. Imported Inflation

- India remains dependent on imports for several critical commodities, making domestic prices vulnerable to external shocks.
- **Examples:**
 - Crude oil imports
 - Fertiliser imports
 - Edible oil imports
 - Industrial raw materials

3. Divergence Between Revenue and Economic Activity

- Tax collections may grow faster than actual production and consumption levels.
- **Example:** Goods imports by value may rise due to higher prices while import volumes remain stagnant or decline.

4. Pressure on Consumers and Industry

- Inflation increases:
 - Household expenditure burdens.
 - Input costs for manufacturers.
 - Working capital requirements for businesses.

5. Risks to Consumption-Led Growth

- Persistent inflation reduces purchasing power and weakens discretionary consumption demand.

- This can eventually affect investment and employment generation.

Global Practices

United States	The Federal Reserve closely monitors the distinction between nominal growth and real growth. Policy decisions are increasingly based on inflation-adjusted indicators.
European Union	The European Central Bank relies heavily on core inflation indicators to assess underlying economic trends.
Japan	Japan's experience highlights the importance of balancing inflation management with growth stimulation.
OECD Economies	Most advanced economies evaluate real wage growth, real consumption growth, and volume-based trade indicators rather than relying solely on nominal tax collections.

Indian Committees / Policies / Recommendations

Kelkar Task Force on Fiscal Responsibility	Recommended broadening the tax base, improving tax efficiency, and enhancing fiscal transparency.
Fifteenth Finance Commission	Emphasised revenue stability, fiscal sustainability, and strengthening the GST architecture.
GST Council	Responsible for GST rate rationalisation, improving compliance mechanisms, and strengthening cooperative fiscal federalism.
RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)	Continuously monitors inflation trends and their implications for economic growth and monetary stability.

Way Forward

1. Focus on Real Economic Indicators

- Policymakers should complement tax data with:
- Industrial production
- Employment trends
- Consumption indicators
- Investment data

2. Reduce Import Dependence

- Promote:
- Domestic manufacturing
- Energy security
- Supply chain diversification
- under initiatives such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

3. Strengthen Inflation Management

- Maintain coordination between:
- Fiscal policy
- Monetary policy
- Supply-side interventions
- to moderate price pressures.

4. Continue GST Rationalisation

- Simplify GST rates and improve compliance to ensure revenue growth is driven by economic expansion rather than inflation.

5. Encourage Productivity Growth

- Invest in:
- Infrastructure
- Technology adoption
- Logistics efficiency
- Manufacturing competitiveness
- to sustain long-term growth.

6. Improve Data-Based Policymaking

- Use inflation-adjusted and volume-based indicators for more accurate assessment of economic performance.

Conclusion

Rising GST collections are an important sign of fiscal strength, but their interpretation requires careful analysis of the underlying drivers. Revenue growth rooted in inflationary pressures differs fundamentally from growth generated through higher productivity, investment, and consumption. For India's long-term economic stability, the objective should be to ensure that tax buoyancy reflects genuine economic expansion rather than merely higher prices.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Goods and Services Tax (GST):

1. GST is a destination-based indirect tax.
2. The GST Council is established under Article 279A of the Constitution.
3. Higher inflation can increase GST collections even without an increase in the volume of goods sold.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A) 1 and 2 only

B) 2 and 3 only

C) 1 and 3 only

D) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Rising GST collections do not necessarily indicate stronger economic fundamentals." Examine the relationship between inflation, tax buoyancy and economic growth in India. (250 words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes

The Right to Belong Beyond Official Documentation

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Suhrith Parthasarathy

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Constitution and Constitutionalism
- Fundamental Rights
- Citizenship Issues
- Election Commission of India
- Governance and Public Policy
- Vulnerable Sections and Inclusive Governance

Introduction

The article raises a fundamental constitutional question: can citizenship and democratic participation be determined solely through official documentation? The debate has gained significance amid electoral roll revisions, citizenship verification exercises, and growing dependence on documentary proof in governance. While documents facilitate administration, reducing citizenship to paperwork risks excluding genuine citizens who may lack formal records due to migration, displacement, poverty, or historical circumstances. The article argues that citizenship in India is ultimately a constitutional relationship between the individual and the Republic, rooted in dignity, equality, and democratic participation rather than merely administrative documentation or bureaucratic procedures.

Key Issues

1. Excessive Reliance on Documentary Proof

- Citizenship verification increasingly depends on official documents, creating exclusion risks for vulnerable populations.
- **Example:** Electoral roll revision exercises requiring documentary evidence in some states.

2. Citizenship versus Documentation

- Possession or absence of documents cannot conclusively establish citizenship status.
- **Example:** A passport establishes travel identity but does not independently determine citizenship legitimacy.

3. Vulnerability of Marginalised Communities

- Poor, migrant, tribal and displaced populations often lack adequate documentation.
- **Example:** Internal migrants frequently face difficulties in proving residence and eligibility for voter registration.

4. Constitutional Rights and Due Process

- Administrative procedures cannot override constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.
- **Example:** Articles 14 and 21 protect individuals against arbitrary state action.

5. Electoral Inclusion and Democratic Participation

- Incorrect deletions from voter rolls weaken democratic legitimacy and representation.
- **Example:** Concerns regarding electoral roll revisions and citizenship verification exercises.

Global Practices

Canada's Inclusive Citizenship Framework	Multiple forms of evidence are accepted for identity and citizenship verification.
United Kingdom's Administrative Appeals System	Citizens denied documentation have access to independent appellate mechanisms.
European Union Data Protection Standards	Verification systems emphasise proportionality and protection against exclusionary practices.
Australia's Citizenship Review Mechanism	Administrative decisions relating to citizenship are subject to judicial review.
United Nations Human Rights Framework	Citizenship determination must avoid statelessness and arbitrary deprivation of nationality.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)	Recommended balancing state capacity with protection of fundamental rights.
Law Commission of India	Emphasised due process and fairness in administrative decision-making.
Election Commission Recommendations	Suggested continuous updation and transparent management of electoral rolls.
Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)	Advocated citizen-centric governance and simplified procedures.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice	Recommended strengthening accessibility and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Adopt Multi-Source Verification**
 - Citizenship determination should rely on multiple evidentiary standards rather than single documents.
- Strengthen Appeals Mechanisms**
 - Independent and time-bound appellate procedures should protect citizens from wrongful exclusion.
- Improve Civil Registration Systems**
 - Universal birth registration and digitisation can reduce future documentation disputes.
- Protect Vulnerable Communities**
 - Special assistance mechanisms should support migrants, tribal communities and the poor.
- Ensure Constitutional Oversight**
 - Administrative actions involving citizenship must remain subject to judicial scrutiny.

Conclusion

Citizenship is not merely an administrative category but a constitutional relationship founded on dignity, equality and participation in the democratic process. While documentation remains important for governance, constitutional democracy requires that paperwork should support citizenship rather than define it. The State's responsibility is inclusion, not exclusion, in determining belonging within the Republic.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding citizenship in India:

1. Parliament derives its power to regulate citizenship from Article 11 of the Constitution.
2. Citizenship is included in the Union List under the Seventh Schedule.
3. The Constitution originally provided a detailed procedure for acquisition and termination of citizenship.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

The Constitution empowers Parliament under Article 11 to regulate citizenship matters. Citizenship is included in the Union List. However, the Constitution does not prescribe detailed procedures for acquisition or termination of citizenship; these are governed primarily by the Citizenship Act, 1955.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Citizenship in a constitutional democracy cannot be reduced to documentary proof alone." Discuss in the context of citizenship verification exercises and electoral governance in India. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Two Together: India and Japan Deepen Bilateral Cooperation Amid Global Uncertainty

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Editorial Board, The Hindu

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- India and its Neighbourhood Relations
- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings
- India-Japan Relations
- Indo-Pacific Strategy
- International Institutions and Agreements

GS Paper III

- Energy Security
- Maritime Security
- Supply Chain Resilience
- Critical Technologies and Economic Diplomacy

Introduction

India and Japan have emerged as key strategic partners in an increasingly uncertain Indo-Pacific geopolitical environment. Rising geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, technological competition, and maritime security challenges have pushed both nations to deepen cooperation beyond traditional trade and investment relations. The article highlights the growing convergence between India and Japan in areas such as energy security, maritime cooperation, regional connectivity, and strategic balancing in the Indo-Pacific. As middle powers committed to a rules-based international order, India and Japan are increasingly relying on bilateral mechanisms and minilateral partnerships to safeguard regional stability and economic resilience.

Key Issues

1. Weakening Multilateral Institutions

- Global institutions are increasingly unable to effectively manage geopolitical rivalries and economic disruptions.
- **Example:** Limited effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms in addressing Indo-Pacific security concerns.

2. Rising Geopolitical Competition in the Indo-Pacific

- Strategic rivalry among major powers is reshaping regional security architecture.
- **Example:** Intensifying competition between the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific.

3. Energy Security Vulnerabilities

- Dependence on maritime energy routes exposes economies to geopolitical shocks.
- **Example:** Risks to oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz and South China Sea.

4. Supply Chain Disruptions

- Critical industries are increasingly vulnerable to concentration of production networks.
- **Example:** Semiconductor supply chain disruptions during recent geopolitical tensions.

5. Maritime Security Challenges

- Sea lane security has become central to economic and strategic stability.
- **Example:** Concerns over freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Global Practices

Quad Cooperation Framework	Like-minded democracies coordinate on maritime security and supply chain resilience.
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European Union's Strategic Partnerships	The EU increasingly uses issue-based partnerships to address geopolitical challenges.
ASEAN Centrality Model	Regional stability is promoted through dialogue and consensus-based engagement.
AUKUS Security Partnership	Technology-sharing and defence cooperation strengthen regional deterrence capabilities.
G7 Supply Chain Initiatives	Advanced economies are diversifying supply chains to reduce strategic vulnerabilities.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)	Recommended strengthening India's Indo-Pacific strategy and maritime partnerships.
NITI Aayog Energy Security Reports	Emphasised diversification of energy sources and supply routes.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Recommended deeper strategic engagement with Indo-Pacific partners.
Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)	Highlighted the importance of resilient supply chains and technological cooperation.
National Maritime Security Coordinator Framework	Recommended integrated maritime domain awareness and coastal security mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Expand Strategic Economic Cooperation**
 - India and Japan should deepen collaboration in semiconductors, critical minerals and green technologies.
- Strengthen Maritime Domain Awareness**
 - Joint surveillance and information-sharing can enhance Indo-Pacific security architecture.
- Enhance Energy Security Cooperation**
 - Both countries should diversify energy sources and build strategic reserves.
- Promote Regional Connectivity Projects**
 - Accelerate initiatives such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor and quality infrastructure projects.
- Institutionalise Technology Partnerships**
 - Expand cooperation in AI, quantum technologies, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing.

Conclusion

The India-Japan partnership increasingly reflects the evolution of middle-power diplomacy in a fragmented global order. Their cooperation extends beyond economics into security, technology and energy resilience. As geopolitical uncertainty grows, sustained India-Japan collaboration will remain critical for preserving a stable, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India-Japan relations:

1. India and Japan are members of the Quad grouping.
2. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is a joint initiative of India and Japan.
3. Japan is a member of BRICS.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "India-Japan relations have evolved from economic cooperation to a comprehensive strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific." Examine the significance of this partnership in the emerging global order. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

India's Economic Prospects After the West Asian Crisis

Source: The Hindu

Writer:

- C. Rangarajan
- D.K. Srivastava

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper III

- Indian Economy and Planning
- Growth and Development
- Inflation
- External Sector
- Energy Security
- Fiscal Policy
- Current Account Deficit
- Agriculture and Food Security

Introduction

The recent de-escalation of tensions in West Asia has improved India's near-term macroeconomic outlook by stabilising global crude oil prices and reducing supply-side uncertainties. As one of the world's largest energy importers, India's economic performance remains closely linked to developments in the region. The article analyses how lower crude prices could positively influence inflation, fiscal balances, external sector stability and economic growth during 2026-27. However, it also cautions that geopolitical uncertainties, climate-related agricultural risks and India's continued dependence on imported energy require structural reforms to strengthen long-term economic resilience and sustainable growth.

Key Issues

1. India's High Dependence on Crude Oil Imports

- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement, making the economy vulnerable to global geopolitical disruptions.
- **Example:** West Asian conflict led to a sharp rise in global crude prices before the ceasefire.

2. Inflationary Pressures

- Energy prices directly influence wholesale and retail inflation through transport, manufacturing and input costs.
- **Example:** Higher crude prices increase CPI inflation via fuel and logistics costs.

3. Fiscal Management Challenges

- Fluctuating oil prices affect subsidy expenditure, excise revenues and fiscal deficit targets.
- **Example:** Lower crude prices improve fiscal space by reducing subsidy burdens.

4. External Sector Vulnerability

- Higher oil imports widen the current account deficit and increase pressure on the Indian Rupee.
- **Example:** Declining crude prices improve India's balance of payments position.

5. Agricultural Risks Beyond Oil Prices

- Weather shocks and fertiliser availability remain significant threats to food security and inflation.
- **Example:** Below-normal rainfall due to El Niño may affect Kharif production.

Global Practices

Japan's Strategic Petroleum Reserves	Maintains large emergency crude reserves to cushion supply disruptions.
European Union's Energy Diversification	Reduces dependence on a single region through diversified import sources and renewable energy.
Norway's Sovereign Wealth Model	Utilises energy revenues for long-term fiscal stability and economic resilience.
South Korea's Energy Security Strategy	Maintains diversified LNG and crude import sources alongside strategic reserves.
International Energy Agency (IEA) Best Practices	Encourages emergency oil stockpiles, demand management and diversified energy systems.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Kelkar Committee on Fiscal Responsibility	Recommended prudent fiscal management and sustainable public finances.
RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)	Focuses on maintaining inflation within the target band while supporting growth.
NITI Aayog Energy Policy Recommendations	Advocate diversification of energy sources and accelerated renewable energy adoption.
Fifteenth Finance Commission	Recommended strengthening fiscal sustainability and improving public expenditure efficiency.
Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)	Emphasised structural reforms, productivity enhancement and energy security for sustained growth.

Way Forward

- Diversify Energy Sources**
 - Accelerate renewable energy, nuclear power and green hydrogen to reduce import dependence.
- Build Strategic Petroleum Reserves**
 - Expand crude storage capacity to manage future geopolitical disruptions.
- Strengthen Domestic Refining**
 - Promote value-added petroleum exports and improve refining efficiency.
- Improve Agricultural Resilience**
 - Expand climate-resilient agriculture, irrigation and fertiliser security to reduce inflation risks.
- Maintain Fiscal Prudence**
 - Utilise lower oil prices to reduce deficits while investing in infrastructure and productive sectors.

Conclusion

The easing of the West Asian crisis offers India an opportunity to strengthen macroeconomic stability through lower inflation, improved fiscal balances and a healthier external sector. However, sustainable economic resilience will depend on reducing energy import dependence, enhancing agricultural productivity and accelerating structural reforms that prepare the economy for future geopolitical and climate-related shocks.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. A sustained fall in international crude oil prices generally helps reduce India's Current Account Deficit.
2. Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation is unaffected by changes in crude oil prices.
3. India imports more than 80% of its crude oil requirement.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B. 1 and 3 only

UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Q2. "India's macroeconomic stability remains closely linked to developments in global energy markets."
Discuss the impact of geopolitical developments in West Asia on India's growth, inflation, fiscal position and external sector. Suggest measures to strengthen India's long-term economic resilience.
(250 Words, 15 Marks)**

Student Notes 

India's Cooperative Sector Can Serve as a Worker-Centric Model of Development

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Editorial/Opinion

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Cooperative Federalism
- Ministry of Cooperation
- Inclusive Governance
- Rural Development

GS Paper III

- Indian Economy, Inclusive Growth, Agriculture,
- Cooperative Sector, Employment, MSMEs, Social Capital

Introduction

India's cooperative movement is undergoing a significant transformation with renewed policy emphasis under the Ministry of Cooperation. Traditionally associated with agriculture and rural credit, cooperatives are now being positioned as institutions capable of promoting inclusive growth, employment generation, and worker-centric development across sectors. The article argues that cooperative enterprises offer an alternative to purely profit-driven corporate models by combining economic efficiency with democratic ownership and social welfare. Strengthening cooperatives through institutional reforms, technological modernization, and professional governance can enhance rural livelihoods, improve market access, and contribute to equitable and sustainable economic development.

Key Issues

1. Limited Diversification of Cooperatives

- Most cooperatives remain concentrated in agriculture, with inadequate presence in manufacturing and services.
- **Example:** Dairy cooperatives have flourished, whereas service-sector cooperatives remain underdeveloped.

2. Governance and Professional Management Deficit

- Weak institutional capacity and political interference reduce operational efficiency.
- **Example:** Several cooperative banks have faced governance and financial management issues.

3. Inadequate Access to Technology and Markets

- Many cooperatives struggle to compete due to limited digital adoption and weak value-chain integration.
- **Example:** Small PACS often lack digital infrastructure for modern financial services.

4. Fragmented Cooperative Ecosystem

- Poor coordination among cooperative institutions limits economies of scale.
- **Example:** Weak integration between PACS, marketing cooperatives and processing units.

5. Balancing Commercial Viability with Social Objectives

- Cooperatives must remain financially sustainable while protecting members' welfare.
- **Example:** Dairy cooperatives successfully combine producer welfare with competitive market operations.

Global Practices

Mondragon Corporation (Spain)	Cooperative	World-renowned worker-owned cooperative combining democratic governance with global competitiveness.
Emilia-Romagna Model (Italy)	Cooperative	Strong cooperative ecosystem contributes significantly to regional employment and industrial growth.
Japanese Cooperatives (JA Group)	Agricultural	Provide integrated services including credit, marketing, insurance and extension support.
New Zealand Dairy Cooperative (Fonterra)	Cooperative	Farmer-owned cooperative with strong global market presence and value-added exports.
International Alliance (ICA) Principles	Cooperative	Promotes democratic governance, member participation, autonomy and sustainable development.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

- Vaidyanathan Committee (2004)**
 - Recommended financial restructuring and governance reforms of cooperative credit institutions.
- National Policy on Cooperatives (Draft)**
 - Advocates professional management, autonomy and competitiveness of cooperative enterprises.
- Ministry of Cooperation Reforms**
 - Promotes digitisation, multi-state cooperatives and strengthening of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS).
- NITI Aayog Recommendations**
 - Support technology adoption, value-chain integration and institutional strengthening of cooperatives.
- Reserve Bank of India (Urban Cooperative Banks Reforms)**
 - Recommended improved governance, capital adequacy and regulatory oversight.

Way Forward

- Modernise Cooperative Governance**
 - Introduce professional management, transparency and digital governance across cooperative institutions.
- Diversify Beyond Agriculture**
 - Expand cooperatives into manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, tourism and digital services.
- Strengthen Value Chains**
 - Integrate production, processing, storage, branding and marketing through cooperative networks.
- Promote Technology Adoption**
 - Digitise PACS and cooperative enterprises to improve efficiency and financial inclusion.
- Encourage Cooperative Federalism**
 - Strengthen Centre-State collaboration while preserving cooperative autonomy and democratic functioning.

Conclusion

India's cooperative sector has the potential to become a globally relevant model of inclusive and worker-centric development. By combining democratic ownership with economic efficiency, cooperatives can generate employment, strengthen rural economies and reduce inequality. Sustained institutional reforms, technological modernization and professional governance will determine whether this sector emerges as a major pillar of India's development journey.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding cooperatives in India:

1. The Ministry of Cooperation was established in 2021.
2. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) function as the grassroots institutions of the cooperative credit system.
3. The 97th Constitutional Amendment granted constitutional status to cooperative societies.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Cooperatives represent a viable alternative to purely profit-driven economic models in promoting inclusive and worker-centric development." Discuss the role of the cooperative sector in achieving equitable growth in India. Examine the challenges and suggest reforms to strengthen cooperative institutions. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Linking Women's Incomes and Healthcare

Source: The Hindu (Opinion Article)

Writer: Chirantan Chatterjee

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Health
- Women Empowerment
- Social Justice
- Human Resource Development
- Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections

GS Paper III

- Inclusive Growth
- Employment
- Labour Reforms
- Human Capital
- Sustainable Development

Introduction

India's demographic transition presents a unique opportunity to transform women's economic participation into improved health outcomes. While healthcare discussions often focus on expanding hospitals, insurance, and public expenditure, growing evidence suggests that women's income and economic agency significantly influence household health decisions. Higher female earnings improve nutrition, preventive healthcare, education, sanitation, and healthcare-seeking behaviour, thereby strengthening overall human development. The article argues that employment generation and women's economic empowerment should be viewed as complementary pillars of public health policy. Integrating labour market reforms with healthcare planning can create long-term improvements in human capital, productivity, and inclusive economic development.

Key Issues

1. Low Female Labour Force Participation

- India continues to witness relatively low workforce participation among women, limiting economic independence and household welfare.
- **Example:** Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) remains significantly below that of men despite recent improvements.

2. High Out-of-Pocket Health Expenditure

- Indian households continue to finance a large share of healthcare directly, increasing financial vulnerability.
- **Example:** Families often postpone treatment due to high medical expenses.

3. Women's Income Improves Household Health

- Higher female earnings result in greater spending on nutrition, preventive healthcare and children's education.
- **Example:** Studies show women allocate more household income toward health and education than men.

4. Health and Employment Are Interconnected

- Better employment opportunities improve healthcare access, while healthier women contribute more productively to the economy.
- **Example:** Formal employment provides maternity benefits, health insurance and financial security.

5. Gender Inequality in Economic Opportunities

- Persistent wage gaps and occupational segregation reduce women's economic agency.
- **Example:** Women remain underrepresented in formal sector employment and leadership positions.

Global Practices

Nordic Countries' Gender Equality Model	Equal employment opportunities and social protection have significantly improved women's health outcomes.
Bangladesh's Women's Employment Model	Growth of women-led employment in the garment sector improved maternal and child health indicators.
Brazil's Bolsa Família Programme	Conditional cash transfers linked women's financial empowerment with improved health and education outcomes.
Rwanda's Community Health System	Women's participation in community health programmes has strengthened healthcare delivery.
International Labour Organization (ILO) Standards	Promote equal pay, decent work, maternity protection and safe working conditions for women.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

High-Level Committee on the Status of Women in India (2015)	Recommended improving women's workforce participation and economic empowerment.
National Health Policy, 2017	Emphasised preventive healthcare, gender-sensitive health services and universal health coverage.
NITI Aayog Strategy for New India @75	Recommended increasing female labour force participation to accelerate inclusive growth.
Fifteenth Finance Commission	Recommended strengthening primary healthcare and improving health outcomes through greater public investment.
Economic Survey	Highlighted the importance of women's economic empowerment for achieving higher growth and better social indicators.

Way Forward

- Expand Women's Employment**
 - Promote formal employment, entrepreneurship and skill development to increase women's economic participation.
- Strengthen Social Protection**
 - Expand maternity benefits, childcare facilities and workplace health insurance.
- Improve Affordable Healthcare**
 - Reduce out-of-pocket expenditure through stronger public healthcare infrastructure and insurance coverage.
- Promote Gender-Responsive Budgeting**
 - Increase investments in women's health, education and livelihood programmes.
- Integrate Health with Labour Policies**
 - Design employment and healthcare policies as complementary components of human capital development.

Conclusion

Women's economic empowerment and public health are mutually reinforcing pillars of inclusive development. Improving female incomes not only strengthens household welfare but also enhances nutrition, education and healthcare outcomes across generations. India's demographic dividend can be fully realised only by integrating gender-inclusive employment policies with accessible, affordable and quality healthcare systems.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. The National Health Policy, 2017 aims to achieve Universal Health Coverage.
2. Higher female labour force participation can positively influence household expenditure on health and education.
3. Out-of-pocket expenditure refers to healthcare spending made directly by households at the point of service.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

Q2. "Women's economic empowerment is not only a driver of inclusive growth but also a critical determinant of public health outcomes." Discuss the interrelationship between women's income, healthcare access and human capital development in India. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

SIR in Manipur is a Pathway to Exclusion

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Gautam Mukhopadhyaya

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Election Commission of India (ECI)
- Constitutional Bodies
- Citizenship and Electoral Reforms
- Governance and Public Policy
- Fundamental Rights
- Federalism and Internal Security

GS Paper III

- Internal Security
- Border Management
- Social Cohesion
- Conflict-Affected Regions

Introduction

The implementation of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in conflict-affected Manipur has generated significant constitutional and administrative debate. Electoral roll purification is essential to preserve democratic integrity; however, such exercises must balance administrative efficiency with the constitutional principles of inclusion, equality and due process. In states affected by ethnic conflict, displacement and documentation gaps, stringent verification mechanisms may inadvertently disenfranchise genuine citizens and deepen social divisions. The article argues that electoral reforms should strengthen democratic participation rather than create barriers to it, particularly in regions where identity, citizenship and internal security remain highly sensitive governance issues.

Key Issues

1. Risk of Disenfranchisement

- Strict documentation requirements may exclude genuine voters lacking adequate records.
- **Example:** Internally displaced persons in Manipur may find it difficult to produce residency documents.

2. Ethnic Polarisation

- Electoral verification in conflict-prone regions may aggravate existing ethnic tensions.
- **Example:** Continuing mistrust between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities.

3. Displacement and Documentation Loss

- Violence has displaced thousands, leading to the destruction or loss of identity documents.
- **Example:** Many relief camp residents reportedly lost official records during ethnic violence.

4. Administrative Challenges in Conflict Zones

- Conducting large-scale electoral verification amid instability affects transparency and public confidence.
- **Example:** Difficult access to remote and violence-affected areas during revision exercises.

5. Democratic Inclusion versus Electoral Integrity

- Ensuring clean electoral rolls must not undermine universal adult franchise and constitutional rights.
- **Example:** Balancing prevention of illegal voting with protection of eligible citizens.

Global Practices

Canada's Independent Electoral Administration

Electoral roll updates are supported by multiple government databases with robust appeal mechanisms.



Australia's Continuous Electoral Roll Revision	Regular enrolment updates reduce the need for large-scale verification exercises.
United Kingdom's Individual Electoral Registration	Provides verification alongside opportunities for correction and appeals before deletion.
OSCE Election Standards	Recommend transparency, stakeholder consultation and independent grievance redressal during voter registration.
UN Electoral Assistance Guidelines	Stress inclusiveness, non-discrimination and protection of voting rights in conflict-affected societies.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Law Commission of India (255th Report on Electoral Reforms)	Recommended improving electoral roll accuracy while safeguarding citizens' voting rights.
Election Commission of India	Advocates continuous updation of electoral rolls, transparency and accessible grievance redressal.
National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)	Recommended strengthening democratic institutions while protecting constitutional rights.
Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)	Suggested citizen-centric governance, procedural fairness and accountability in public administration.
Goswami Committee on Electoral Reforms (1990)	Recommended improving electoral integrity through transparent and credible electoral processes.

Way Forward

- Ensure Inclusive Verification**
 - Adopt flexible, multi-source documentation standards for conflict-affected and displaced populations.
- Strengthen Appeal Mechanisms**
 - Provide accessible, time-bound and independent grievance redressal before deleting names from electoral rolls.
- Build Community Confidence**
 - Conduct extensive voter awareness campaigns with participation from civil society and local representatives.
- Protect Displaced Citizens**
 - Establish special verification procedures for internally displaced persons residing in relief camps.
- Enhance Institutional Transparency**
 - Publish clear guidelines, verification criteria and periodic review reports to improve public trust.

Conclusion

Electoral integrity and democratic inclusion are complementary, not competing, constitutional objectives. In conflict-affected regions such as Manipur, electoral reforms must be implemented with sensitivity, transparency and due process. A balanced approach that protects both the purity of electoral rolls and the voting rights of genuine citizens is essential for strengthening democracy, social cohesion and constitutional governance.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding electoral rolls in India:

1. The Election Commission of India prepares and periodically revises electoral rolls under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
2. Universal Adult Suffrage is guaranteed under Article 326 of the Constitution.
3. The Election Commission can arbitrarily remove any voter's name from the electoral roll without providing an opportunity for correction.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Electoral roll revision exercises must balance electoral integrity with the constitutional principles of inclusion, equality and due process." Discuss in the context of conflict-affected regions such as Manipur. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes

Building a Durable India–Australia Partnership

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Shruti Randale

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- India and its Neighbourhood & Bilateral Relations
- International Relations
- India–Australia Relations
- Indo-Pacific Strategy
- Regional and Global Groupings

GS Paper III

- Maritime Security
- Critical Minerals
- Defence Cooperation
- Trade and Investment
- Emerging Technologies

Introduction

India and Australia have emerged as indispensable strategic partners in the evolving Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape. Shared concerns over maritime security, resilient supply chains, critical minerals, emerging technologies, and regional stability have transformed the relationship from a primarily economic partnership into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Australia reflects the growing convergence between the two democracies amid intensifying geopolitical competition and economic uncertainty. The article argues that while strategic alignment has deepened significantly, sustaining the partnership will require institutional cooperation, stronger economic integration, enhanced people-to-people ties, and long-term policy continuity beyond changing geopolitical circumstances.

Key Issues

1. Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific

- India and Australia increasingly share common interests in maintaining a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- **Example:** Both countries actively participate in the **Quad** to promote regional security and resilience.

2. Maritime and Defence Cooperation

- Growing defence collaboration has strengthened interoperability and maritime domain awareness.
- **Example:** **AUSINDEX Naval Exercise** and cooperation under the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)**.

3. Trade Below Potential

- Despite the **Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)**, bilateral trade and investments remain below their potential.
- **Example:** Limited participation of Indian MSMEs in the Australian market.

4. Critical Minerals and Supply Chain Security

- Diversification of critical mineral supply chains has become a strategic priority.
- **Example:** Cooperation on lithium and rare earth minerals for clean energy technologies.

5. Limited People-to-People Connectivity

- Migration, education and skilled workforce mobility require stronger institutional support.
- **Example:** Expansion of education partnerships and the **Mobility Arrangement for Talented Early-professionals Scheme (MATES)**.

Global Practices



Australia–Japan Special Strategic Partnership	Demonstrates how middle powers can deepen defence, technology and economic cooperation.
European Union Single Market	Institutional economic integration has strengthened trade, investment and labour mobility.
U.S.–Japan Technology Partnership	Long-term collaboration in semiconductors, AI and defence innovation.
ASEAN Regional Cooperation	Consensus-based regional engagement promotes stability and economic integration.
Five Eyes Intelligence Partnership	Illustrates the value of trusted intelligence-sharing for national security cooperation.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)	Recommended strengthening India's Indo-Pacific engagement and maritime partnerships.
NITI Aayog	Advocated diversification of critical mineral supply chains and strategic resource security.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Recommended expanding strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.
Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)	Highlighted the importance of resilient global supply chains and investment partnerships.
National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) Framework	Recommended integrated maritime security and enhanced regional cooperation.

Way Forward

- 1. Deepen Defence Cooperation**
 - Expand joint military exercises, logistics support and defence technology collaboration.
- 2. Strengthen Economic Integration**
 - Accelerate implementation of ECTA and negotiate a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
- 3. Secure Critical Mineral Supply Chains**
 - Develop long-term partnerships in mining, processing and advanced manufacturing.
- 4. Expand Technology Collaboration**
 - Promote cooperation in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, quantum technologies and clean energy.
- 5. Enhance People-to-People Links**
 - Increase educational exchanges, skilled migration pathways and research partnerships.

Conclusion

India and Australia today share one of the Indo-Pacific's most promising strategic partnerships. While geopolitical convergence has accelerated cooperation, long-term success will depend on institutionalising defence, trade, technology and societal linkages. A durable partnership based on mutual trust, economic complementarities and shared democratic values will strengthen regional stability and India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India–Australia relations:

1. India and Australia are members of the Quad grouping.
2. The Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) between India and Australia came into force in 2022.
3. Australia is a member of ASEAN.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "India–Australia relations have evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership driven by shared interests in the Indo-Pacific." Discuss the strategic, economic and technological dimensions of this partnership. Also examine the challenges in realising its full potential. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

A Perfect Storm: Lessons from the Wayanad Landslide

Source: The Hindu

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper III

- Disaster Management
- Environment & Ecology
- Climate Change
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Sustainable Development

GS Paper II

- Governance
- Environmental Regulation
- Institutional Accountability

Introduction

The Wayanad landslide highlights the growing convergence of climate change, ecological degradation, and inadequate governance in disaster-prone regions. Triggered by extreme rainfall and exacerbated by fragile terrain, the tragedy raises serious concerns over environmental clearances, infrastructure development in ecologically sensitive areas, and disaster preparedness. The article argues that disasters are increasingly becoming the outcome of both natural hazards and human interventions, where weak environmental regulation and insufficient risk assessment amplify vulnerabilities. It underlines the need for integrating climate resilience, scientific planning, and ecological conservation into development policies to ensure that infrastructure growth does not come at the cost of human lives and environmental sustainability.

Key Issues

1. Climate Change Intensifying Extreme Rainfall

- Changing climate patterns have increased the frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events, making landslide-prone regions more vulnerable.
- **Example:** The 2024 Wayanad landslides followed exceptionally heavy rainfall in Kerala's Western Ghats.

2. Infrastructure Development in Ecologically Sensitive Areas

- Large infrastructure projects in fragile ecosystems often increase disaster risks when environmental safeguards are inadequate.
- **Example:** Construction activities near the Chooralmala township raised concerns regarding slope stability and ecological disturbance.

3. Weak Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- Environmental assessments often underestimate cumulative ecological risks and disaster vulnerability.
- **Example:** Concerns over inadequate assessment of quarrying, hill cutting, and construction impacts in Wayanad.

4. Inadequate Disaster Risk Reduction

- Disaster management remains largely reactive rather than preventive, despite recurring warnings from experts.
- **Example:** Earlier landslides in Wayanad (2018, 2019) indicated growing geological instability.

5. Institutional Coordination Deficit

- Fragmented coordination among environmental authorities, local governments, and disaster management agencies delays preventive action.

- **Example:** Multiple agencies were involved, yet comprehensive mitigation measures remained insufficient.

Global Practices

Japan's Landslide Early Warning System	Uses real-time rainfall monitoring, hazard mapping and community evacuation protocols.
Switzerland's Mountain Risk Management	Strict land-use planning restricts construction in geologically unstable zones.
New Zealand's Nature-based Disaster Management	Integrates ecosystem restoration with infrastructure planning to reduce disaster risks.
European Union Floods Directive	Requires member countries to prepare scientific flood-risk assessments and management plans.
Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030)	Emphasises prevention, resilience, risk governance and "Build Back Better" principles.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Madhav Gadgil Committee (Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel)	Recommended stringent protection of Ecologically Sensitive Zones and restrictions on environmentally harmful activities.
Kasturirangan Committee	Suggested balanced conservation with sustainable development in the Western Ghats.
National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)	Recommends multi-hazard risk mapping, early warning systems and community-based disaster preparedness.
Fifteenth Finance Commission	Recommended dedicated funding for disaster mitigation and climate-resilient infrastructure.
National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)	Advocates climate adaptation, ecosystem conservation and resilient development planning.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Environmental Impact Assessment**
 - Adopt cumulative ecological assessments incorporating climate risks, geological vulnerability and disaster resilience before project approvals.
- Expand Hazard Mapping**
 - Prepare high-resolution landslide susceptibility maps using GIS, LiDAR and satellite-based monitoring.
- Promote Nature-based Solutions**
 - Restore forests, wetlands and natural drainage systems to reduce slope instability and flood risks.
- Improve Institutional Coordination**
 - Integrate disaster management authorities, environmental regulators and local governments through unified planning mechanisms.
- Build Climate-resilient Infrastructure**
 - Ensure all infrastructure projects comply with climate adaptation standards and disaster-resilient engineering practices.

Conclusion

The Wayanad tragedy demonstrates that disasters today are increasingly shaped by the interaction of climate change and unsustainable development. Protecting ecologically fragile landscapes requires science-based

planning, rigorous environmental governance and proactive disaster risk reduction. Sustainable development must integrate ecological resilience with infrastructure planning to safeguard both lives and livelihoods.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is a legally binding international treaty.
2. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) functions under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
3. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel is popularly known as the Gadgil Committee.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only B. 1 and 2 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 2 and 3 only**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

Q2. "Recent disasters in India demonstrate that climate change and ecological degradation are increasingly interconnected." Discuss this statement in the context of the Wayanad landslide. Suggest measures for strengthening climate-resilient disaster governance in India. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

A Perfect Storm: Lessons from the Wayanad Landslide

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Student Notes 

Price of Water is Not About Economics, but Justice

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Gurudas Nulkar

(Director, Centre for Sustainable Development, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Governance
- Water Governance
- Social Justice
- Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)
- Public Service Delivery

GS Paper III

- Water Resources
- Sustainable Development
- Environmental Conservation
- Urban Infrastructure
- Climate Change & Resource Management

Introduction

India is among the world's most water-stressed nations despite possessing significant freshwater resources. Rapid urbanisation, population growth, climate change and inefficient water management have widened the gap between water demand and supply. The article argues that water pricing should not merely be viewed as an economic instrument but as a question of equity, sustainability and social justice. Current urban water tariffs often fail to reflect the true cost of water extraction, treatment, distribution and wastewater management, resulting in inefficient consumption, financial stress on Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and unequal access to safe drinking water. A transparent and equitable pricing framework is therefore essential.

Key Issues

1. Water Tariffs Do Not Reflect the True Cost

- Urban water charges are often much lower than the actual cost of extraction, treatment, storage and distribution, creating financial stress for utilities.
- **Example:** Most ULBs recover only a fraction of operational and maintenance costs.

2. Inefficient Water Use and Resource Wastage

- Artificially low water prices encourage excessive consumption and discourage investments in water recycling and conservation.
- **Example:** Freshwater is often cheaper than treated greywater, reducing incentives for wastewater reuse.

3. Financial Weakness of Urban Local Bodies

- Poor cost recovery limits the capacity of municipal bodies to upgrade infrastructure and improve service quality.
- **Example:** Many cities experience high non-revenue water (NRW) due to leakages and outdated pipelines.

4. Inequitable Access to Safe Drinking Water

- Low-income households frequently purchase expensive bottled water or tanker water due to unreliable municipal supply.
- **Example:** Informal settlements often pay more per litre than households connected to piped water networks.

5. Lack of Transparency in Water Accounting

- Hidden subsidies and inadequate accounting of water production costs weaken accountability and informed policymaking.

- **Example:** Many utilities do not disclose the full cost of water extraction, treatment and distribution.

Global Practices

Singapore – Full-Cost Water Pricing	Singapore prices water to reflect its actual economic value while encouraging conservation through progressive tariffs and widespread water recycling.
Israel – Advanced Water Reuse	Israel treats and reuses over 80% of wastewater for agriculture, supported by scientific pricing and efficient regulation.
Australia – Basin-Level Water Governance	The Murray-Darling Basin employs integrated water allocation, market mechanisms and sustainable resource management.
Denmark – Demand Management	High but transparent water tariffs have significantly reduced household water consumption while ensuring reliable services.
Netherlands – Water Boards	Independent regional water authorities finance flood protection and water management through transparent user-based charges.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Mihir Shah Committee (Committee on Restructuring CWC & CGWB)	Recommended integrated water resources management and basin-level planning.
NITI Aayog – Composite Water Management Index	Advocated efficient pricing, groundwater conservation and performance-based water governance.
National Water Policy, 2012	Recommended treating water as an economic good while ensuring equitable access for basic human needs.
Fifteenth Finance Commission	Recommended strengthening urban local bodies through improved financial sustainability and service delivery reforms.
Jal Jeevan Mission Framework	Emphasises sustainable water supply, source sustainability, community participation and efficient water management.

Way Forward

- 1. Introduce Transparent Cost-Based Pricing**
 - Water tariffs should gradually reflect actual supply costs while protecting basic household consumption through targeted subsidies.
- 2. Strengthen Urban Water Utilities**
 - Improve operational efficiency, reduce leakages and modernise water distribution infrastructure using digital monitoring technologies.
- 3. Promote Wastewater Recycling**
 - Encourage reuse of treated wastewater for industrial, agricultural and non-potable urban purposes through appropriate pricing incentives.
- 4. Protect Vulnerable Households**
 - Adopt lifeline tariffs and direct benefit support to ensure affordable access to safe drinking water for economically weaker sections.
- 5. Improve Water Governance**
 - Establish transparent water accounting, regular tariff reviews and citizen participation to enhance accountability and sustainable resource management.

Conclusion

Water governance must balance economic efficiency with social equity. Sustainable pricing should ensure financial viability of utilities while protecting universal access to safe drinking water. Transparent tariffs, efficient infrastructure, wastewater reuse and targeted support for vulnerable households will enable India to manage its growing water stress without compromising the principle that water is a fundamental public resource.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding water governance in India:

1. The National Water Policy, 2012 recognises water as an economic good while ensuring equity in access.
2. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs) to all rural households.
3. The Composite Water Management Index is published by the Central Water Commission.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

(Statement 3 is incorrect; the Composite Water Management Index is published by NITI Aayog.)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q2. "Water pricing is not merely an economic instrument but a tool for ensuring equity, sustainability and efficient governance." Discuss in the context of India's urban water management challenges. Suggest reforms for achieving sustainable and inclusive water governance. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Is the Undocumented Migrant Counted?

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Abhishek Shaw

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Governance
- Citizenship Issues
- Census and Population
- Migration
- Federalism
- Internal Security (Border Management)

GS Paper I

- Population and Associated Issues
- Human Geography
- Demographic Trends

Introduction

The issue of undocumented migration, particularly from Bangladesh, has remained a sensitive political and policy debate in India. Public discourse often cites large estimates of illegal migrants, raising concerns over demographic change, border security and resource distribution. However, the article argues that official Census data and demographic evidence do not support claims of a massive surge in undocumented Bangladeshi migrants between 1991 and 2011. It highlights the importance of relying on scientific demographic analysis rather than unverified estimates. The debate underscores the need to balance national security, humanitarian considerations, constitutional values and evidence-based policymaking while addressing migration challenges.

Key Issues

1. Absence of Reliable Estimates

- There is no official nationwide database accurately estimating undocumented migrants, leading to conflicting claims and policy uncertainty.
- **Example:** Public estimates often range into millions without Census validation.

2. Politicisation of Migration

- Migration has increasingly become a political issue, often influencing electoral narratives rather than evidence-based policymaking.
- **Example:** Illegal migration is frequently debated during elections in border States like Assam and West Bengal.

3. Challenges in Census Enumeration

- The Census records place of birth but does not directly identify undocumented migrants, making precise estimation difficult.
- **Example:** Individuals born abroad may include both legal and undocumented residents.

4. Border Management and National Security

- Porous borders raise legitimate concerns regarding illegal migration, trafficking and cross-border crimes.
- **Example:** India-Bangladesh border remains vulnerable despite enhanced fencing and surveillance.

5. Demographic Misinterpretation

- Population changes are influenced by fertility, mortality and internal migration, not solely international migration.
- **Example:** Census data indicates declining growth in Bangladesh-born population after 2001.

Global Practices

United States	Uses periodic demographic estimation models and border surveillance rather than relying solely on census counts.
Canada	Maintains comprehensive immigration databases integrated with population registers for evidence-based policymaking.
European Union	Employs coordinated border management through Frontex while ensuring refugee protection under international law.
Australia	Combines biometric immigration systems, visa tracking and strong border enforcement to monitor migration.
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Promotes data-driven migration governance through standardized migration statistics and evidence-based policy frameworks.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee (Data Protection)	Recommended strengthening data governance and secure management of personal demographic information.
National Register of Citizens (NRC) Process	Recommended verification of citizenship through documentary evidence under legal safeguards.
National Population Register (NPR) Framework	Aims to create a comprehensive database of usual residents for administrative purposes.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs	Has repeatedly recommended strengthening border infrastructure and integrated border management.
Border Management Task Force (Madhav Godbole Committee)	Recommended modern surveillance systems, fencing and improved coordination among border security agencies.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Evidence-Based Policymaking**
 - Migration policies should rely on credible demographic data rather than politically driven estimates.
- Improve Border Management**
 - Deploy advanced surveillance technologies, smart fencing and coordinated border patrolling to prevent illegal migration.
- Modernise Population Databases**
 - Integrate Census, NPR and digital administrative records while ensuring privacy and legal safeguards.
- Enhance India–Bangladesh Cooperation**
 - Strengthen bilateral mechanisms on border management, legal migration and information sharing.
- Balance Security with Human Rights**
 - Ensure migration enforcement complies with constitutional principles, due process and international humanitarian obligations.

Conclusion

Undocumented migration is both a governance and national security issue that demands objective assessment rather than political rhetoric. Reliable demographic data, robust border management, transparent administrative systems and cooperative regional diplomacy are essential for addressing migration challenges. Evidence-based policymaking will strengthen both national security and public trust while upholding constitutional values.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. The Indian Census directly identifies undocumented migrants separately from legal residents.
2. The National Population Register (NPR) records information about the usual residents of India.
3. Border Security Force (BSF) is the primary force responsible for guarding the India–Bangladesh border.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A. 2 and 3 only*(Statement 1 is incorrect because the Census does not separately identify undocumented migrants.)***UPSC Mains Practice Question**

Q2. "Illegal migration is a complex issue involving national security, demographic management, constitutional values and humanitarian concerns." Discuss in the context of India–Bangladesh migration. Suggest measures for evidence-based and balanced migration governance. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Reclaiming Footpaths, Taking Cities Back from Cars

Source: The Hindu (Opinion Article)

Writer: Chandrakant Lahariya

(Practising Specialist in Preventive and Social Medicine)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Urban Governance
- Local Government (Urban Local Bodies)
- Public Health
- Citizen-Centric Governance

GS Paper III

- Sustainable Urban Development
- Urban Infrastructure
- Road Safety
- Smart Cities
- Sustainable Mobility

GS Paper I

- Urbanisation and Urban Problems

Introduction

Rapid urbanisation in India has prioritized motorized transport over pedestrians, resulting in shrinking public spaces and unsafe walking environments. The article argues that walkable cities are not merely an urban planning objective but a public health, governance and constitutional imperative. The Supreme Court's 2026 judgment recognizing safe footpaths as an integral component of the Right to Life has renewed attention on pedestrian-centric infrastructure. Safe, accessible and continuous footpaths improve public health, reduce pollution, promote social inclusion and enhance road safety. Reclaiming urban spaces for pedestrians requires integrating transport planning with health, environmental sustainability and inclusive urban governance.

Key Issues

1. Pedestrian Infrastructure Remains Neglected

- Urban planning has historically prioritised vehicles over pedestrians, resulting in broken, encroached and inaccessible footpaths.
- **Example:** Many Indian cities lack continuous footpaths despite increasing urban population.

2. Public Health Consequences

- Poor walkability discourages physical activity, contributing to obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.
- **Example:** WHO recommends regular walking to reduce non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

3. Rising Road Safety Concerns

- Pedestrians remain among the most vulnerable road users due to inadequate walking infrastructure.
- **Example:** NCRB data consistently records thousands of pedestrian fatalities annually.

4. Weak Urban Governance

- Footpath construction and maintenance receive limited policy attention despite being a core municipal responsibility.
- **Example:** Encroachments and poor maintenance reduce pedestrian accessibility.

5. Lack of Inclusive Urban Design



- Urban infrastructure often excludes children, senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
- **Example:** Absence of ramps, tactile paving and universal accessibility features.

Global Practices

Copenhagen (Denmark)	Prioritises pedestrians and cyclists through extensive car-free zones and integrated active mobility planning.
Netherlands	Implements Complete Streets with dedicated pedestrian and cycling infrastructure across cities.
Singapore	Adopts barrier-free accessibility standards and integrated pedestrian networks linked to public transport.
Barcelona (Spain) – Superblocks Model	Reduces vehicular traffic while reclaiming streets for walking, recreation and community spaces.
WHO Healthy Cities Initiative	Encourages urban planning that promotes walking, public health and environmental sustainability.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

National Urban Transport Policy (2006)	Recommended prioritising people over vehicles through integrated and sustainable urban mobility.
Smart Cities Mission	Promotes pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, complete streets and public space redevelopment.
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)	Advocates Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and Non-Motorised Transport (NMT).
Indian Roads Congress (IRC:103 Guidelines)	Provides standards for planning and designing pedestrian facilities and footpaths.
NITI Aayog	Recommended integrated urban planning that promotes sustainable mobility and climate-resilient cities.

Way Forward

Adopt Complete Streets Policy	Design roads that equally accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and motor vehicles.
Ensure Universal Accessibility	Provide ramps, tactile paving, adequate lighting and barrier-free footpaths for all users.
Strengthen Urban Local Bodies	Allocate dedicated funding and accountability mechanisms for pedestrian infrastructure maintenance.
Integrate Health into Urban Planning	Recognise walkability as a public health intervention while preparing city development plans.
Strictly Prevent Encroachments	Implement regular audits, enforce anti-encroachment measures and ensure uninterrupted pedestrian pathways.

Conclusion

Pedestrian-friendly cities are fundamental to sustainable urban development, public health and constitutional governance. Reclaiming footpaths requires shifting from vehicle-centric planning to people-centric mobility. By investing in safe, accessible and inclusive walking infrastructure, India can improve road safety,

environmental sustainability and quality of urban life while fulfilling the constitutional promise of dignity and equal access to public spaces.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. The National Urban Transport Policy (2006) advocates moving people rather than vehicles as the primary objective of urban transport.
2. The Smart Cities Mission promotes Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) infrastructure.
3. The Indian Roads Congress issues technical guidelines for pedestrian infrastructure.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

"Walkable cities are essential for achieving sustainable urbanisation, public health and inclusive governance." Discuss the importance of pedestrian-centric urban planning in India. Suggest policy measures for creating safe and accessible cities. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Allowing Dissent: Using Criminal Law to Protect Reputation of Rulers is Condemnable

Source: The Hindu (Editorial)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Indian Constitution
- Fundamental Rights
- Freedom of Speech and Expression
- Criminal Justice System
- Governance & Rule of Law

GS Paper IV

- Public Ethics
- Constitutional Morality
- Accountability in Public Office

Introduction

Freedom of speech and peaceful criticism form the cornerstone of every constitutional democracy. The article examines the increasing use of criminal defamation, police action and other penal provisions against individuals for criticising elected governments or public officials. It argues that criminal law should not become a tool for suppressing dissent or shielding political authority from public scrutiny. While reputation deserves legal protection, excessive criminalisation of criticism risks undermining democratic accountability, constitutional freedoms and the rule of law. The article highlights the need to balance individual reputation with the fundamental right to free expression guaranteed under the Constitution.

Key Issues

1. Criminalisation of Political Dissent

- Frequent use of criminal provisions against critics discourages democratic participation and public debate.
- **Example:** Police action against citizens for social media posts critical of political leaders.

2. Chilling Effect on Free Speech

- Fear of arrest or prosecution discourages citizens, journalists and activists from expressing legitimate opinions.
- **Example:** Individuals avoiding criticism due to possible criminal complaints.

3. Misuse of Defamation Laws

- Criminal defamation is increasingly invoked to protect political reputation instead of addressing genuine reputational harm.
- **Example:** Filing criminal defamation cases against political opponents or commentators.

4. Weak Institutional Safeguards

- Investigative agencies may be perceived as instruments of political pressure when criminal law is used disproportionately.
- **Example:** Police registering multiple FIRs for similar expressions of opinion.

5. Threat to Democratic Accountability

- A healthy democracy requires governments to remain open to criticism and public scrutiny.
- **Example:** Public debate on governance issues may weaken if criticism is criminalised.

Global Practices

United Kingdom	Criminal defamation has been abolished, with disputes primarily addressed through civil remedies.
United States	Strong constitutional protection for political speech under the First Amendment limits restrictions on criticism of public officials.
European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)	Has consistently held that public officials should tolerate a higher degree of criticism than private individuals.
South Africa	Constitutional jurisprudence strongly protects political expression and democratic participation.
United Nations Human Rights Committee	Encourages States to decriminalise defamation and adopt proportionate civil remedies consistent with freedom of expression.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Law Commission of India (267th Report)	Recommended reviewing criminal defamation provisions to ensure compatibility with constitutional free speech.
Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)	Emphasised transparency, accountability and citizen participation as essential pillars of democratic governance.
National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)	Advocates protection of civil liberties, freedom of expression and due process.
Supreme Court Judgments	Cases such as Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015) emphasised that restrictions on free speech must satisfy constitutional standards.
Constitution of India	Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(2) establish both the right to free speech and the reasonable restrictions applicable to it.

Way Forward

- 1. Prevent Misuse of Criminal Law**
 - Ensure criminal provisions are invoked only in exceptional cases involving genuine public interest.
- 2. Strengthen Judicial Oversight**
 - Introduce stricter judicial scrutiny before registering criminal cases involving speech and expression.
- 3. Encourage Civil Remedies**
 - Promote civil defamation mechanisms as the primary means of protecting reputation.
- 4. Improve Police Accountability**
 - Issue clear guidelines to prevent arbitrary arrests in matters involving political expression.
- 5. Protect Democratic Dialogue**
 - Strengthen constitutional safeguards that encourage informed criticism, public participation and institutional accountability.

Conclusion

Democracy flourishes when citizens can question authority without fear of arbitrary criminal action. While protecting individual reputation remains important, constitutional governance demands that restrictions on free speech remain narrowly tailored and proportionate. Preserving space for peaceful dissent strengthens democratic accountability, public trust and the rule of law.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding freedom of speech in India:



1. Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression.
2. Defamation is one of the reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).
3. The Supreme Court in **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)** struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

"Freedom of speech is the foundation of constitutional democracy, yet it must coexist with reasonable restrictions." Discuss the constitutional position of free speech in India. Examine the concerns arising from the increasing use of criminal law against political dissent.

(250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

Canada–India Defence Collaboration for a Secure Future

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Chris Cooter

(High Commissioner of Canada to India)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- India and its Neighbourhood & Bilateral Relations
- India–Canada Relations
- International Relations
- Strategic Partnerships

GS Paper III

- Defence & Internal Security
- Defence Technology
- Critical Minerals
- Defence Manufacturing (Atmanirbhar Bharat)

Introduction

India and Canada are entering a new phase in their bilateral relationship, driven by evolving geopolitical realities, technological advancements and shared security interests. The article argues that defence cooperation can become a cornerstone of rebuilding trust between the two democracies after recent diplomatic challenges. As global security increasingly depends on emerging technologies, resilient supply chains and access to critical minerals, both countries possess complementary strengths. Canada's technological capabilities and resource wealth, combined with India's growing defence manufacturing ecosystem, create opportunities for long-term strategic collaboration. Such cooperation can strengthen Indo-Pacific stability, promote defence innovation and contribute to a secure, rules-based international order.

Key Issues

1. Changing Global Security Landscape

- Emerging technologies, cyber threats and geopolitical competition are transforming defence priorities, requiring stronger strategic partnerships.
- **Example:** Growing importance of artificial intelligence, drones and autonomous weapon systems in modern warfare.

2. Need to Rebuild India–Canada Relations

- Recent diplomatic tensions affected bilateral engagement, making defence cooperation a confidence-building measure.
- **Example:** Renewed high-level interactions following the G7 Summit and bilateral engagements.

3. Defence Technology Gap

- India seeks advanced defence technologies to strengthen indigenous manufacturing and reduce import dependence.
- **Example:** Collaboration in aerospace, drones and satellite technologies.

4. Critical Minerals Security

- Reliable access to lithium, rare earth elements and uranium has become vital for defence and advanced manufacturing.

- **Example:** Canada's abundant reserves of critical minerals complement India's industrial requirements.

5. Indo-Pacific Strategic Stability

- Both countries support a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific to ensure maritime security and resilient supply chains.
- **Example:** Increasing participation in Indo-Pacific security dialogues and multilateral naval cooperation.

Global Practices

AUKUS Partnership	Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States collaborate on advanced defence technologies and Indo-Pacific security.
NATO Defence Industrial Cooperation	Member countries jointly develop defence technologies, standardisation and military interoperability.
Japan–Australia Security Partnership	Expanding cooperation in defence technology, intelligence sharing and maritime security.
U.S.–India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)	Promotes collaboration in semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and defence innovation.
European Union Critical Raw Materials Strategy	Diversifies supply chains to reduce dependence on limited sources of strategic minerals.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence	Promotes indigenous defence production, technology transfer and private sector participation.
Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020	Prioritises domestic manufacturing, innovation and procurement under the 'Buy Indian' framework.
National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)	Strengthens India's access to strategic minerals through domestic exploration and international partnerships.
Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX)	Encourages start-ups and MSMEs to develop advanced defence technologies.
National Security Strategy (Proposed)	Experts have recommended a comprehensive national security framework integrating defence, technology and economic resilience.

Way Forward

1. Institutionalise Defence Dialogue

- Establish regular ministerial and military-level consultations to build strategic trust and long-term cooperation.

2. Expand Defence Technology Partnerships

- Promote joint research, co-development and co-production in artificial intelligence, drones and space technologies.

3. Strengthen Critical Mineral Supply Chains

- Develop long-term agreements for exploration, processing and secure supply of strategic minerals.

4. Enhance Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- Increase naval exercises, maritime domain awareness and interoperability under a rules-based regional framework.

5. Promote Industrial Collaboration

- Facilitate partnerships between defence industries, start-ups and research institutions to strengthen innovation ecosystems.

Conclusion

India and Canada possess complementary strategic, technological and economic strengths that can transform defence cooperation into a long-term partnership. By expanding collaboration in critical minerals, defence innovation and Indo-Pacific security, both democracies can strengthen mutual trust while contributing to regional stability, resilient supply chains and a secure rules-based international order.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020 prioritises indigenous defence procurement.
2. The Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) initiative promotes defence innovation through start-ups and MSMEs.
3. The National Critical Mineral Mission aims to strengthen India's access to strategic minerals.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q4. "Emerging technologies, critical minerals and resilient supply chains are redefining international defence partnerships." Discuss this statement in the context of India–Canada defence cooperation. Examine its significance for India's strategic autonomy and Indo-Pacific vision. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 📝

Do Not Surrender to China, Do Not Depend on the U.S.

Source: The Hindu

Writer: Shashi Tharoor

(Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha; Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- India and Bilateral Relations
- India–China Relations
- India–U.S. Relations
- Foreign Policy
- Strategic Autonomy

GS Paper III

- Internal Security
- Border Management
- Critical Supply Chains
- Economic Security
- Defence and Strategic Affairs

Introduction

India's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by intensifying U.S.-China strategic rivalry, requiring New Delhi to carefully balance security, economic growth and strategic autonomy. The article argues that India must avoid two strategic extremes—excessive economic dependence on China and overreliance on the United States for security. While China continues to challenge India's territorial integrity and use economic leverage as a strategic tool, the United States remains an important but interest-driven partner whose policies can change with domestic political priorities. The article advocates strengthening India's comprehensive national power through economic resilience, diversified partnerships, military capability and an independent foreign policy rooted in strategic autonomy.

Key Issues

1. Persistent Security Challenge from China

- China continues to challenge India's territorial integrity through border incursions and strategic pressure.
- **Example:** Galwan Valley clash (2020), continued military deployments along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

2. Economic Dependence on China

- India remains heavily dependent on Chinese imports in critical sectors despite geopolitical tensions.
- **Example:** Dependence on APIs, electronics, solar equipment and rare earth supply chains.

3. Uncertainty in U.S. Foreign Policy

- Changes in U.S. domestic politics often influence its external commitments and trade policies.
- **Example:** Tariff measures and shifting strategic priorities under different U.S. administrations.

4. Strategic Autonomy Under Pressure

- India faces growing pressure to align with competing geopolitical blocs amid great-power rivalry.
- **Example:** India's balanced engagement with the Quad, BRICS and SCO.

5. Need for Domestic Capacity Building

- Long-term national security depends upon indigenous manufacturing, technology and defence capabilities.
- **Example:** Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives in defence production and semiconductor manufacturing.

Global Practices

Vietnam's Strategic Balancing	Vietnam maintains economic engagement with China while expanding security cooperation with multiple partners.
ASEAN Centrality	ASEAN countries pursue strategic autonomy through diversified partnerships instead of bloc politics.
European Union's De-risking Strategy	The EU seeks to reduce dependence on China without complete economic decoupling.
Japan's Supply Chain Diversification	Japan incentivises industries to relocate production and diversify supply chains beyond China.
South Korea's Multi-Alignment	South Korea balances economic ties with China while maintaining strategic cooperation with the United States.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)	Recommended strengthening strategic autonomy through enhanced military preparedness and economic resilience.
National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)	Focuses on securing strategic mineral supply chains to reduce import dependence.
Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), 2020	Promotes indigenous defence production and technology development under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
NITI Aayog	Recommended strengthening domestic manufacturing, logistics and resilient global supply chains.
Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs	Has emphasised diversified diplomatic partnerships and strengthening India's global strategic engagement.

Way Forward

- 1. Reduce Strategic Dependence**
 - Diversify imports, strengthen domestic manufacturing and build resilient supply chains in critical sectors.
- 2. Enhance Border Infrastructure**
 - Accelerate infrastructure, surveillance and military modernisation along the Line of Actual Control.
- 3. Expand Multi-Alignment**
 - Deepen engagement with Quad, BRICS, ASEAN, Europe and the Global South while preserving strategic autonomy.
- 4. Invest in Emerging Technologies**
 - Strengthen semiconductor manufacturing, artificial intelligence, cyber security and defence innovation ecosystems.
- 5. Build Comprehensive National Power**
 - Integrate economic growth, technological capability, military strength and diplomatic influence into national strategy.

Conclusion

India's long-term strategic interests require an independent foreign policy anchored in national capability rather than dependence on any major power. Reducing vulnerabilities to China while maintaining productive relations with the United States demands economic resilience, military preparedness and diversified global partnerships. Strategic autonomy will remain the cornerstone of India's rise as a leading global power.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. The **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** is the de facto border between India and China.
2. The **Quad** comprises India, Australia, Japan and the United States.
3. India is a member of both **BRICS** and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

Q2. "India's strategic autonomy in the 21st century depends not only on balancing major powers but also on strengthening its comprehensive national power." Discuss in the context of India–China–U.S. relations. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes 

The Youth Have Risen Against Authoritarianism

Source: The Hindu

Writer: C. Aryama Sundaram

(Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India)

UPSC Subject Relevance

GS Paper II

- Indian Constitution
- Fundamental Rights
- Democracy and Governance
- Accountability of Executive
- Role of Citizens

GS Paper IV

- Ethics in Public Administration
- Constitutional Morality
- Leadership & Accountability
- Public Service Values

Essay

- Youth and Democracy
- Constitutional Governance
- Citizen Participation

Introduction

The article reflects on the growing role of India's youth in defending democratic values, constitutional accountability and responsible governance. Using the nationwide protests following the NEET-UG examination controversy as a backdrop, it argues that young citizens have demonstrated increasing awareness of transparency, fairness and institutional responsibility. The author contends that democracy thrives when governments remain accountable to citizens and when public institutions function with integrity. Rather than viewing youth participation as a challenge to authority, the article presents it as an essential democratic force capable of strengthening constitutional governance, protecting civil liberties and reinforcing the principle that sovereign power ultimately resides with the people.

Key Issues

1. Declining Political Accountability

- Governments often fail to accept responsibility for administrative failures, weakening public trust in democratic institutions.
- **Example:** Public outrage following alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination process.

2. Rise of Youth-led Democratic Participation

- Young citizens are increasingly demanding transparency, fairness and institutional reforms through peaceful democratic means.
- **Example:** Student protests seeking accountability in examination administration.

3. Threat of Authoritarian Tendencies

- Concentration of power and suppression of criticism can weaken democratic institutions and constitutional checks.
- **Example:** Concerns over intolerance of dissent in public discourse.

4. Importance of Institutional Integrity

- Independent institutions are essential for ensuring fairness, public confidence and constitutional governance.
- **Example:** Need for transparent examination systems and impartial investigations.

5. Unity Beyond Social Divisions

- Collective civic action across religion, caste and region strengthens democratic participation and national integration.
- **Example:** Students from diverse backgrounds united over examination-related concerns.

Global Practices

Finland	Promotes civic education to encourage informed youth participation in democratic processes.
Germany	Institutionalises youth participation through student councils and structured civic engagement programmes.
New Zealand	Maintains transparent public institutions with high levels of citizen participation and accountability.
South Korea	Youth-led democratic movements have significantly contributed to institutional reforms and political accountability.
OECD Good Governance Principles	Emphasise transparency, accountability, citizen participation and responsive public institutions.

Indian Committees / Recommendations

Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)	Recommended transparency, citizen-centric governance and accountability in public administration.
National Education Policy (NEP), 2020	Promotes ethical values, constitutional principles and responsible citizenship among students.
Election Commission of India (ECI)	Encourages youth participation through voter awareness and democratic engagement initiatives.
National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)	Advocates protection of civil liberties, constitutional rights and democratic freedoms.
Punchhi Commission on Centre–State Relations	Emphasised constitutional morality, cooperative governance and institutional balance in democratic functioning.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Institutional Accountability

- Ensure transparent investigations and timely corrective action in cases involving public institutions.

2. Encourage Civic Education

- Promote constitutional values, democratic participation and responsible citizenship through educational institutions.

3. Protect Freedom of Expression

- Safeguard peaceful democratic participation while ensuring public order and constitutional balance.

4. Reform Public Institutions

- Adopt technology-driven, transparent and accountable systems in examinations and public administration.

5. Foster Youth Leadership

- Create institutional platforms for constructive youth participation in governance and policymaking.

Conclusion

India's democratic strength lies in active, informed and responsible citizen participation. Youth engagement in demanding transparency and accountability reflects the vitality of constitutional democracy rather than a challenge to it. Strengthening institutions, protecting democratic freedoms and encouraging constructive civic participation will ensure that governance remains accountable to the people and consistent with constitutional values.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.
2. Article 19(1)(b) guarantees the right to assemble peacefully and without arms.
3. The Preamble to the Constitution declares India to be a democratic republic.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D. 1, 2 and 3**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

Q2. "Youth participation is indispensable for strengthening constitutional democracy and ensuring accountable governance." Discuss in the context of recent citizen-led movements in India. (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Student Notes

Prelims

Prime Minister pays tribute to brave warriors on Hul Divas

Source: PIB Delhi (30 June 2026)

Key News

1. Prime Minister paid tribute to the brave warriors of the **Santhal Hul (1855-56)** on the occasion of **Hul Divas**.
2. He remembered the sacrifices of **Sidhu Murmu, Kanhu Murmu, Chand Murmu, Bhairav Murmu, Phulo Murmu, and Jhano Murmu**.
3. The movement was one of the earliest and largest tribal uprisings against British colonial rule in India.
4. Hul Divas commemorates the courage, resistance, and contribution of tribal communities to India's freedom struggle.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. **Santhal Rebellion (Hul): 1855–56.**
2. Led by:
 - **Sidhu Murmu**
 - **Kanhu Murmu**
 - **Chand Murmu**
 - **Bhairav Murmu**
 - **Phulo Murmu**
 - **Jhano Murmu**
3. Started from **Bhognadih village** in present-day **Sahibganj district, Jharkhand**.
4. Revolt was directed against:
 - British administration
 - Zamindars
 - Moneylenders (Mahajans)
5. Nearly **50,000 Santhals** participated in the uprising.

Static Information

Santhal Hul (1855–56)

1. One of the most significant **tribal uprisings in colonial India**.

2. Occurred in the **Damin-i-Koh region** of present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal.
3. The term "**Hul**" means **revolution or movement** in the Santhali language.
4. Resulted in the enactment of the **Santhal Parganas Tenancy arrangements** and administrative reforms by the British.

Important Tribal Revolts in India

Revolt	Region	Period
Santhal Rebellion	Jharkhand-Bengal	1855-56
Kol Uprising	Chotanagpur	1831-32
Munda Ulgulan	Jharkhand	1899-1900
Bhil Revolt	Western India	Various phases
Ramosi Revolt	Maharashtra	1820s

Constitutional Link

1. **Article 244:** Administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas.
2. **Fifth Schedule:** Scheduled Areas administration.
3. **PESA Act, 1996:** Self-governance in Scheduled Areas.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Santhal Rebellion:

1. It began in present-day Jharkhand in 1855.
2. The rebellion was led by Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu.
3. The revolt was primarily directed against the French colonial administration.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

India & Malaysia Review Bilateral Military Cooperation during 12th SCMC Meeting

Source: PIB Delhi (1 July 2026)

Key News

1. India and Malaysia held the **12th Sub Committee Meeting on Military Cooperation (SCMC)** in New Delhi.
2. Both countries reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral defence cooperation and expressed satisfaction over growing military ties.
3. The meeting reaffirmed the shared commitment to **peace, security and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific**.
4. Discussions covered military exchanges, joint exercises, training, maritime cooperation and capacity building initiatives.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. The meeting was co-chaired by:
 - **India:** Joint Secretary, Ministry of Defence.
 - **Malaysia:** Assistant Chief of Staff (Force Development & Training), Malaysian Armed Forces.
2. Conducted under the framework of the **India-Malaysia Enhanced Strategic Partnership**.
3. Both sides agreed to:
 - Expand military-to-military exchanges.
 - Increase participation in professional military courses.
 - Enhance cooperation in maritime security.
4. India and Malaysia exchanged views on:
 - Regional security developments.
 - Indo-Pacific stability.
 - Freedom of navigation.
5. Meeting held ahead of the **India-Malaysia Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM)**.

Static Information

India-Malaysia Defence Relations

1. Defence cooperation institutionalised through:
 - **Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation (1993).**

2. **SCMC** serves as the principal military consultation mechanism.
3. Both countries cooperate in:
 - Maritime security
 - Counter-terrorism
 - Defence training
 - Capacity building

Indo-Pacific and Freedom of Navigation

1. Freedom of Navigation is a principle under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982**.
2. India supports:
 - Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-Pacific.
3. India's Indo-Pacific vision is based on:
 - **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).**

ASEAN and India

1. Malaysia is a member of **ASEAN**.
2. India follows the **Act East Policy** to deepen engagement with Southeast Asia.
3. Defence cooperation is an important pillar of India-ASEAN relations.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Malaysia is a member of ASEAN.
2. Freedom of Navigation in international waters is governed by UNCLOS, 1982.
3. SAGAR is India's initiative for maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 and 3 only

Answer: C) 1, 2 and 3

Padma Vibhushan Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia inaugurates photo gallery honouring legendary musicians

Source: PIB Delhi (1 July 2026)



Key News

1. Legendary flautist **Padma Vibhushan Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia** inaugurated a photo gallery dedicated to India's iconic musicians at **Akashvani Bhavan, New Delhi**.
2. The initiative marks the **90th anniversary of All India Radio (Akashvani)** in 2027.
3. The gallery celebrates Akashvani's contribution to preserving and promoting India's rich musical heritage.
4. Portraits of distinguished classical, folk and instrumental musicians were unveiled in the first phase.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. Initiative launched as part of **Akashvani's 90-year celebrations (2027)**.
2. Venue: **Akashvani Bhavan, New Delhi**.
3. Gallery includes portraits of **20 distinguished music legends**.
4. Featured artists include:
 - **M.S. Subbulakshmi**
 - **Pandit Bhimsen Joshi**
 - **Lata Mangeshkar**
 - **Ustad Bismillah Khan**
 - **Pandit Ravi Shankar**
 - **Ustad Zakir Hussain**
 - **Pandit Jasraj**
 - **Girija Devi**
 - **Harivallabh Bhayani**
 - **Ustad Ali Akbar Khan**
5. Akashvani played a major role in documenting and popularising Indian classical music nationwide.

Static Information

All India Radio (AIR) / Akashvani

1. Established in **1936** as **All India Radio**.
2. The term "**Akashvani**" was coined by **Mysore poet M.V. Gopalaswamy**.
3. AIR functions under **Prasar Bharati**, India's public service broadcaster.

4. **Prasar Bharati** was established under the **Prasar Bharati Act, 1990** and became operational in **1997**.

Indian Classical Music Traditions

India has two major traditions:

1. **Hindustani Classical Music** (North India)
2. **Carnatic Classical Music** (South India)

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. Indian cultural traditions such as **Durga Puja**, **Garba**, and **Kumbh Mela** are inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. **Prasar Bharati** is a statutory autonomous body established by an Act of Parliament.
2. All India Radio functions under **Prasar Bharati**.
3. **Hindustani** and **Carnatic** are the two major traditions of Indian classical music.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

UPI Goes Live in Greece: India Expands Digital Payments Footprint in Europe

Source: PIB Delhi (30 June 2026)

Key News

1. India's **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** services were formally launched in **Greece** through a partnership between **NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL)** and **Eurobank**.

2. The launch was witnessed by **Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal** during his visit to Greece.
3. The move marks another milestone in the internationalisation of India's digital public infrastructure.
4. Both countries agreed to deepen cooperation in trade, investment, fintech and business partnerships.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. UPI services launched through partnership between:
 - **NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL)**
 - **Eurobank, Greece**
2. Event attended by:
 - **Piyush Goyal**, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry.
3. UPI's international expansion reflects India's growing leadership in **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**.
4. Discussions focused on:
 - Trade
 - Investment
 - Innovation
 - Business cooperation
5. Minister participated in:
 - **India-Greece Business Council Meeting**
 - **Business Forum at Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)**.
6. Sectoral roundtables covered:
 - Energy
 - Ports
 - Logistics
 - Shipping
 - Tourism
 - Defence
 - Food Processing
 - Agriculture

Static Information (Authentic UPSC Notes)

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

1. Developed by the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)**.
2. Launched in **2016** by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** and NPCI.
3. Enables:
 - Instant real-time bank-to-bank transfers.
 - Interoperable digital payments using mobile devices.
4. Operates on the **Immediate Payment Service (IMPS)** infrastructure.

NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL)

1. International arm of NPCI established in **2020**.
2. Responsible for global expansion of:
 - UPI
 - RuPay
 - Other Indian payment systems.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

India's DPI ecosystem is often referred to as the **India Stack**, comprising:

1. Aadhaar
2. UPI
3. DigiLocker
4. e-KYC
5. Account Aggregator Framework

Countries with UPI Acceptance

UPI has expanded to countries including:

1. Singapore
2. UAE
3. France
4. Sri Lanka
5. Mauritius
6. Nepal
7. Bhutan
8. Greece

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding UPI:

1. UPI was developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
2. UPI transactions operate on the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) infrastructure.

3. NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) is responsible for international expansion of UPI.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

eSARAS: Expanding Markets, Empowering Rural Women

Source: PIB Delhi (1 July 2026)

Key News

- The Government highlighted the growing role of **eSARAS**, a digital marketplace connecting rural women entrepreneurs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with national and global consumers.
- Developed under the **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**, the platform promotes women-led rural enterprises.
- eSARAS has evolved from a marketing portal into a comprehensive digital commerce ecosystem integrated with modern e-commerce infrastructure.
- The initiative supports the government's vision of **women-led development and rural entrepreneurship**.

Major Key Data / Facts

- Developed by the **Ministry of Rural Development** under **DAY-NRLM**.
- Exclusively markets products made by **women SHGs and producer groups**.
- Product categories include:
 - Home décor and lifestyle
 - Apparel and accessories
 - Food products
 - Handicrafts
 - Personal care products

- 8.99 lakh SHGs** registered under **NRLM** ecosystem.
- Over **1,400+ products** listed on the platform.
- Integrated with **ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce)**.
- Platform serves buyers through **11+ e-commerce channels**.
- Supports a digital ecosystem involving:
 - Mobile app
 - Fulfilment centres
 - Logistics integration

Static Information

DAY-NRLM

- Launched in **2011** under the Ministry of Rural Development.
- Aims to reduce rural poverty through:
 - Self-employment
 - Financial inclusion
 - Women's collectivisation
- Organises rural poor households into **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

- Usually consist of **10–20 women members**.
- Promote:
 - Savings
 - Credit access
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Livelihood diversification

Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

- Initiative of the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)**.
- Designed to democratize digital commerce by creating an open interoperable network.
- Launched in **2022**.

Lakhpati Didi Initiative

- Government initiative aimed at enabling SHG women to earn **₹1 lakh or more annually** through sustainable livelihoods.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding eSARAS:

1. It is a digital marketplace exclusively for products made by women Self-Help Groups.
2. It operates under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission.
3. It has been integrated with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D) 1, 2 and 3

Week-long Celebrations Mark Five Years of the Ministry of Cooperation

Source: PIB Delhi (30 June 2026)

Key News

- The **Ministry of Cooperation** has launched week-long nationwide celebrations marking **five years of its establishment**.
- Celebrations are being held from **29 June to 6 July 2026** under the theme "**Sahakar Se Samridhi**" (**Prosperity through Cooperation**).
- Various stakeholders including cooperative banks, PACS, federations and state cooperative institutions are participating.
- The celebrations will conclude with a national event at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, on 6 July 2026**.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. Ministry of Cooperation was established on **6 July 2021**.
2. Theme of celebrations:
 - **Sahakar Se Samridhi**.
3. Participants include:
 - States and UTs
 - National cooperative federations

- Cooperative banks
 - District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs)
 - Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs)
 - Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)
4. Major sectors covered:
 - Agriculture
 - Dairy
 - Fisheries
 - Storage
 - Food processing
 - Rural finance
 5. Activities include:
 - Cooperative exhibitions
 - Seminars and workshops
 - Youth engagement programmes
 - Product exhibitions
 - Awareness campaigns

Static Information

Ministry of Cooperation

1. Established on **6 July 2021**.
2. Objective:
 - Realise the vision of "**Sahakar Se Samridhi**".
 - Strengthen India's cooperative movement.
3. Administrative Ministry:
 - Government of India.

97th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2011

1. Granted constitutional status to cooperative societies.
2. Introduced:
 - **Article 43B** (Directive Principle)
 - **Part IXB** of the Constitution.

Article 43B

Promotes:

1. Voluntary formation of cooperative societies.
2. Democratic functioning.
3. Professional management.
4. Autonomous operation.

Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)

1. Grassroots cooperative credit institutions.
2. Provide:
 - Short-term agricultural credit.

- Input supply.
- Storage and marketing support.
- 3. Considered the backbone of rural cooperative credit.

Major Cooperative Institutions in India

1. **IFFCO**
2. **KRIBHCO**
3. **NAFED**
4. **AMUL**

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the cooperative sector in India:

1. Article 43B of the Constitution promotes voluntary formation and democratic functioning of cooperative societies.
2. The Ministry of Cooperation was established in 2021.
3. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) primarily provide long-term industrial credit.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. Statement 1: Correct.
2. Statement 2: Correct.
3. Statement 3: Incorrect. PACS mainly provide short-term and medium-term agricultural credit.

India and Mali Hold Inaugural India–Mali Forum to Promote Exports and Deepen Economic Engagement

Source: PIB Delhi

Key News

1. India and Mali organised the **first India–Mali Forum for Promotion of Exports** to strengthen bilateral trade and investment ties.
2. Bilateral trade crossed **US\$326 million in FY 2025-26**, registering a growth of nearly **55%** over the previous year.
3. Both countries identified sectors such as **cotton, mining, energy, pharmaceuticals and social infrastructure** for deeper cooperation.
4. Mali announced plans to organise an **Investment Forum in December 2026** to attract Indian investors.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. Bilateral trade between India and Mali reached **US\$326 million in FY 2025-26**.
2. Trade witnessed approximately **55% year-on-year growth**.
3. Priority sectors identified:
 - Cotton and textiles
 - Mining and minerals
 - Energy sector
 - Pharmaceuticals
 - Social infrastructure
4. The forum involved participation from:
 - Government agencies
 - Export promotion councils
 - Industry representatives
5. Mali invited Indian companies to explore opportunities in:
 - Mining value chains
 - Renewable energy
 - Infrastructure projects
6. Mali will host an **Investment Forum in December 2026**.

Static Information**Mali: Country Profile**

1. Located in **West Africa**.
2. Capital: **Bamako**.
3. Landlocked country bordered by:
 - Algeria
 - Niger
 - Burkina Faso

- Côte d'Ivoire
 - Guinea
 - Senegal
 - Mauritania.
4. Major river:
- **Niger River**, the principal river of West Africa.

Economic Importance of Mali

1. One of Africa's largest producers of:
 - **Gold** (major export commodity).
2. Significant reserves of:
 - Lithium
 - Uranium
 - Phosphates.
3. Cotton is a major agricultural export.

India–Africa Economic Engagement

1. India engages Africa through:
 - India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)
 - Lines of Credit via EXIM Bank
 - Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme.
2. Africa is important for:
 - Energy security
 - Critical minerals
 - Market diversification.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Mali:

1. Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa.
2. The Niger River flows through Mali.
3. Mali shares a border with the Atlantic Ocean.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. Statement 1: Correct.

2. Statement 2: Correct.
3. Statement 3: Incorrect; Mali is a landlocked country.

International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

Why in News?

Recently, a report by the **International Renewable Energy Agency** highlighted that renewable energy projects commissioned in 2025 helped avoid an estimated **\$840 billion in fossil fuel costs globally**, underlining the growing economic benefits of clean energy.

About International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

1. **IRENA** is an **intergovernmental organization** established in **2009** to support countries in their transition towards a sustainable energy future.
2. It serves as the principal global platform for international cooperation on renewable energy.
3. The agency acts as:
 - A centre of excellence for renewable energy
 - A repository of policy, technology, and financial knowledge
 - A facilitator of international collaboration in clean energy

Objectives and Mandate

1. Promote the widespread adoption of renewable energy technologies.
2. Support member countries in achieving energy security and sustainable development.
3. Facilitate international cooperation in renewable energy deployment.
4. Provide policy advice, capacity building, and technical assistance.

Membership

1. IRENA currently has **170 members**, including **169 countries and the European Union**.
2. **India** is one of the founding members of IRENA.

Headquarters

1. Located in **Abu Dhabi**.

Governance Structure**Assembly**

1. The highest decision-making body of IRENA.
2. Comprises one representative from each member state.

Council

1. Consists of **21 elected member states**.
2. Members are elected for a **two-year term**.
3. Responsible for implementing decisions of the Assembly.

Secretariat

1. Headed by the **Director-General**.
2. Provides administrative, technical, and operational support to the Assembly and Council.

Special Status

1. IRENA enjoys **official observer status** at the **United Nations**.

Significance

1. Accelerates the global energy transition.
2. Supports climate change mitigation efforts.
3. Promotes investment in renewable energy technologies.
4. Helps countries achieve their commitments under the **Paris Agreement**.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA):

1. It is an intergovernmental organization established in 2009.
2. Its headquarters is located in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
3. India is one of the founding members of IRENA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** IRENA was established in 2009 as an intergovernmental organization.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** Its headquarters is located in Abu Dhabi, UAE.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** India is among the founding members of IRENA.

INS Trikand**Why in News?**

Recently, the **INS Trikand** successfully thwarted a piracy attempt in the **Gulf of Aden** after pirates approached a merchant vessel, highlighting the Indian Navy's role in securing international maritime trade routes.

About INS Trikand

1. INS Trikand is a **frontline guided missile frigate** of the **Indian Navy**.
2. It is the **third and final ship** of the second batch of **Talwar-class stealth frigates** acquired by India.
3. The vessel was constructed at the **Yantar Shipyard** in Russia.
4. It was commissioned into the Indian Navy on **29 June 2013** at **Kaliningrad**.
5. INS Trikand serves under the **Western Fleet** of the Indian Navy and operates under the **Western Naval Command**, headquartered at **Mumbai**.

Key Features of INS Trikand

1. Length: Approximately **125 metres**.
2. Displacement: Around **4,035 tonnes**.
3. Crew Strength: Around **180 personnel**, including officers.
4. Propulsion:
 - Powered by **four gas turbines**.
 - Capable of speeds exceeding **30 knots**.

Weapons and Combat Systems

1. Equipped with:

- **BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles**
 - Advanced surface-to-air missile systems
 - Upgraded **190M medium-range naval gun**
 - Anti-submarine weapons including torpedoes and rocket launchers
 - Electronic warfare systems
2. Features a **Combat Management System (CMS)** and **Trebovaniye-M** integrated combat suite for coordinating anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine operations.

Aviation Capability

1. Can operate an embarked **Kamov Ka-31** helicopter.
2. The helicopter enhances:
 - Airborne surveillance
 - Reconnaissance
 - Early warning capability

Significance

1. Plays a key role in safeguarding India's maritime interests.
2. Supports anti-piracy and maritime security operations in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. Enhances India's blue-water naval capabilities and strategic reach.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding INS Trikanth:

1. It is a Talwar-class guided missile frigate of the Indian Navy.
2. It is equipped with BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.
3. It operates under the Eastern Naval Command headquartered in Visakhapatnam.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** INS Trikanth is a Talwar-class guided missile frigate of the Indian Navy.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The ship is equipped with BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** INS Trikanth operates under the **Western Naval Command**, headquartered in Mumbai, not the Eastern Naval Command.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Why in News?

Recently, the Secretary-General of the **International Maritime Organization** announced plans to facilitate the evacuation of ships and thousands of stranded seafarers in the Persian Gulf amid tensions arising from the conflict in West Asia.

About International Maritime Organization (IMO)

1. The **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** is a specialized agency of the **United Nations** responsible for improving the safety, security, and environmental performance of international shipping.
2. It serves as the global standard-setting authority for international maritime transport.
3. The organization develops and maintains a comprehensive regulatory framework for the shipping industry.

Historical Background

1. Established in **1948** as the **Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO)**.
2. Became a specialized UN agency in **1959**.
3. Renamed the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** in **1982**.

Objectives

1. Enhance maritime safety and security.
2. Prevent marine pollution from ships.
3. Promote efficient and sustainable shipping.

4. Develop globally accepted maritime regulations and standards.

Governance Structure**Assembly**

1. Highest governing body of the IMO.
2. Comprises representatives of all member states.
3. Meets once every two years.
4. Responsible for:
 - Approving the work programme
 - Adopting the budget
 - Electing the Council

Council

1. Executive organ of the IMO.
2. Consists of **40 elected member states**.
3. Supervises the organization's work between Assembly sessions.

Committees

1. Five major policy-making committees oversee:
 - Maritime safety
 - Marine environment protection
 - Legal affairs
 - Technical cooperation
 - Facilitation of international shipping

Membership and Headquarters

1. **Members:** 176 Member States.
2. **India** has been a member since **1959**.
3. **Headquarters:** London

Funding

1. Funded primarily through contributions from member states.
2. Additional resources may come from voluntary contributions and other approved activities.

Significance

1. Ensures uniform global maritime standards.
2. Facilitates safe and efficient international trade.
3. Plays a crucial role in marine environmental protection.
4. Supports sustainable development of the global shipping industry.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ**Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the International Maritime Organization (IMO):**

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
2. Its headquarters is located in London.
3. It is responsible for setting global standards for the safety and environmental performance of international shipping.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3**Explanation:**

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** IMO is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** Its headquarters is located in London, United Kingdom.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** IMO is the global standard-setting authority for the safety, security, and environmental performance of international shipping.

Medical Innovations Patent Mitra Platform**Why in News?**

Recently, the **National Medical Commission** directed all medical colleges and institutions to utilize the **Medical Innovations Patent Mitra Platform** developed by the **Indian Council of Medical Research** to promote innovation, patent protection, and commercialization of healthcare technologies.

About Medical Innovations Patent Mitra Platform

1. **Medical Innovations Patent Mitra (I2I Connect)** is an initiative aimed at supporting

patent filing and technology transfer for innovative biomedical research.

2. It provides **fully government-funded support** for strategic and high-quality patent applications.
3. The platform seeks to strengthen India's healthcare innovation ecosystem by facilitating the transition of research into market-ready products and technologies.
4. It enables researchers and innovators to protect their **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)** and convert scientific discoveries into healthcare solutions with societal impact.

Launch and Collaboration

1. The platform was launched by the **Indian Council of Medical Research**.
2. It was developed under the guidance of **NITI Aayog**.
3. It has been implemented in partnership with the **Department of Pharmaceuticals**.
4. It also receives support from the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade**.

Key Objectives

1. Support patent protection for healthcare and biomedical innovations.
2. Facilitate technology transfer from laboratories to industries.
3. Accelerate commercialization of indigenous medical products and technologies.
4. Promote collaboration among:
 - Scientists
 - Medical researchers
 - Startups
 - Industry partners
5. Improve access to affordable and innovative healthcare solutions.

Significance

1. Encourages a culture of innovation and intellectual property creation in medical institutions.
2. Strengthens India's biomedical research ecosystem.

3. Supports the development of indigenous healthcare technologies under the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
4. Bridges the gap between research institutions and industry.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Medical Innovations Patent Mitra Platform:

1. It was launched by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
2. The platform provides government-funded support for patent filing and technology transfer.
3. It was developed under the guidance of NITI Aayog.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The platform was launched by ICMR.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It provides fully government-funded support for patent filing and technology transfer.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The initiative was launched under the guidance of NITI Aayog with support from DoP and DPIIT.

Rutile

Why in News?

Recently, researchers at **Indian Institute of Technology Delhi** studying a family of minerals known as **rutile oxides** discovered significant differences in the behavior of metals and insulators that could not be fully explained by an established

mathematical model, opening new avenues in materials science research.

About Rutile

1. **Rutile** is a mineral primarily composed of **Titanium Dioxide (TiO₂)**.
2. It is the **most common and stable natural form of titanium dioxide**.
3. Rutile is one of the three major titanium-bearing minerals, the other two being:
 - Ilmenite
 - Leucosene
4. It generally occurs as **red to reddish-brown, hard, and lustrous crystals** with a metallic appearance.
5. Natural rutile may contain impurities such as:
 - Iron
 - Niobium
 - Tantalum
6. The mineral was first described in **1803** by **Abraham Gottlob Werner**.

Occurrence

1. Rutile occurs in:
 - Igneous rocks
 - Metamorphic rocks
 - Sedimentary rocks
2. Due to its high specific gravity, it becomes concentrated in **heavy mineral sands** through river and wave action.
3. Large quantities of rutile are mined from these coastal and offshore placer deposits.

Major Producers

Major rutile-producing countries include:

1. **Australia**
2. **India**
3. **South Africa**
4. **Ukraine**
5. **Sierra Leone**

Rutile Deposits in India

India possesses significant rutile reserves in the coastal sands of:

1. **Kerala**

2. **Tamil Nadu**
3. **Odisha**
4. **Andhra Pradesh**

Uses of Rutile

1. Used as a **white pigment** in:
 - Paints
 - Plastics
 - Ceramics
 - Paper and coatings
2. Provides excellent brightness, opacity, and durability.
3. Used in the manufacture of:
 - Porcelain
 - Glass
 - Steel and copper alloys
4. Serves as an important source of **Titanium metal**, widely used in:
 - Aerospace industry
 - Automotive sector
 - Electronics
 - Medical devices
5. Transparent rutile crystals are also used as **gemstones and collector's minerals**.

Significance

1. Rutile is one of the most important industrial minerals for titanium production.
2. It plays a crucial role in advanced manufacturing and high-technology industries.
3. Research on rutile oxides is important for understanding the electronic properties of materials.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Rutile:

1. Rutile is primarily composed of Titanium Dioxide (TiO₂).
2. It is one of the major ore minerals of titanium.
3. Rutile occurs only in sedimentary rocks.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Rutile is composed mainly of Titanium Dioxide (TiO_2).
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is one of the principal titanium-bearing minerals along with ilmenite and leucoxene.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Rutile occurs in **igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rocks**, not only in sedimentary rocks.

Modified UDAN Scheme

Why in News?

Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated the new terminal building at **Jodhpur Airport** and launched the **Modified UDAN Scheme**, aimed at expanding regional air connectivity and strengthening aviation infrastructure across India.

About Modified UDAN Scheme

1. The Modified UDAN Scheme has been launched with an outlay of **₹28,840 crore** over the next **10 years** to accelerate aviation-led regional development.
2. It focuses on expanding air connectivity to underserved and remote regions of the country.

Key Features of Modified UDAN Scheme

1. Development of **100 new aerodromes** from existing unserved airstrips with an investment of over **₹12,000 crore**.
2. Provision of more than **₹2,500 crore** for **Operations and Maintenance (O&M)** support to ensure the sustainability of newly operational regional airports.

3. Allocation of **₹3,661 crore** for the construction of **200 modern helipads**.
4. Continued **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** support of **₹10,043 crore** for airlines operating on regional routes.
5. Encourages the deployment of indigenous aircraft and helicopters such as:
 - **HAL Dhruv**
 - **Dornier Do 228**
6. Special emphasis on improving connectivity in remote, hilly, and underserved regions.

About UDAN Scheme

1. **UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik)** is a **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS)** launched in **October 2016** by the Government of India.
2. It aims to make air travel affordable and improve connectivity to underserved and unserved airports.

Objectives

1. Improve connectivity among Tier-II and Tier-III cities.
2. Make air travel affordable for ordinary citizens.
3. Promote balanced regional development.
4. Enhance utilization of underused airport infrastructure.
5. Revive airports without scheduled commercial flights.

Core Mission

The scheme has two major goals:

1. Make air travel affordable on short regional routes where rail travel takes around **10–18 hours**.
2. Revive unserved and underserved airports by introducing scheduled air services.
3. The first UDAN flight was launched on **27 April 2017**, connecting **Shimla** and **Delhi**.

Key Features

1. Airlines are selected through a **competitive bidding process**.
2. **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** is provided to airlines operating on less profitable routes.

3. The **Airports Authority of India** waives airport charges for UDAN routes.
4. State governments provide:
 - Security services
 - Electricity supply
 - Fire-fighting services
5. Around **50% of seats** are offered at a capped fare of approximately **₹2,500 per hour of flight**.
6. Focus areas include:
 - Remote regions
 - Hilly areas
 - Island territories

Funding Mechanism

1. Initially funded through the **Regional Connectivity Scheme levy** imposed on flights operating on major routes.
2. The levy subsidizes airlines operating on regional sectors.
3. The scheme is implemented by the **Airports Authority of India** under the **Ministry of Civil Aviation**.

Phase-wise Evolution

UDAN 1.0 (2017)

1. 128 routes awarded.
2. First flight operated between Delhi and Shimla.

UDAN 2.0 (2018)

1. Expanded coverage to:
 - North-East India
 - Hill states
 - Island regions
2. Introduced helicopter routes.

UDAN 3.0 (2018-19)

1. Focus on tourism routes.
2. Introduced seaplane services and limited international connectivity.

UDAN 4.0 (2020)

1. Expanded to remote areas and water aerodromes.
2. Allowed longer route lengths.

UDAN 5.0 and Beyond

1. Increased permissible stage length for regional routes.
2. Relaxed viability period norms.
3. Introduced sub-schemes such as:
 - Krishi UDAN
 - Seaplane initiatives
 - Helicopter connectivity programmes

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the UDAN Scheme:

1. It was launched in 2016 as a Regional Connectivity Scheme.
2. Viability Gap Funding is provided to airlines operating on regional routes.
3. The Airports Authority of India acts as the implementing agency for the scheme.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** UDAN was launched in October 2016 as a Regional Connectivity Scheme.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** VGF support is provided to improve the viability of regional routes.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The Airports Authority of India implements the scheme on behalf of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

ISRO Conducts Test of Key Component for Gaganyaan Mission

Source: The Hindu

[Key News](#)

1. ISRO successfully conducted the first ground test of the **SOLVE (Sub-Orbital Launch Vehicle for Experiments)** solid motor at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota**.
2. The platform will be used for **Integrated Parachute Test (IPT)** missions under the **Gaganyaan programme**.
3. The tests aim to validate the crew module's parachute deployment system during descent and splashdown.
4. The successful test marks another milestone towards India's first human spaceflight mission.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. **SOLVE** stands for **Sub-Orbital Launch Vehicle for Experiments**.
2. Developed specifically for **Gaganyaan parachute qualification tests**.
3. Derived from the **PSLV Strap-on Motor** with modifications.
4. Incorporates:
 - Slow-burning propellant
 - Straight nozzle with secondary injection thrust vector control.
5. Test missions will carry the crew module to an altitude of **10–17 km** before separation.
6. Parachutes will reduce the crew module's velocity before **sea splashdown**.
7. Ground test conducted at **Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota**.
8. ISRO recently completed:
 - **Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-02)**
 - Preparatory activities for **Mission MITHRA**.

Static Information

Gaganyaan Mission

1. India's first **human spaceflight mission**.
2. Implemented by **ISRO**.
3. Objective: Demonstrate capability to send Indian astronauts into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** and safely return them.
4. Planned crew size: **Three astronauts**.

5. Mission duration: Approximately **3 days in orbit**.
6. Human-rated launch vehicle: **HLVM3 (Human-rated LVM3)**.

Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC)

1. Located at **Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh**.
2. India's primary spaceport.
3. Situated between **Pulicat Lake** and the **Bay of Bengal**.

Indian Human Spaceflight Programme Components

1. Crew Module
2. Service Module
3. Crew Escape System
4. Environmental Control and Life Support System (ECLSS)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Gaganyaan Mission:

1. Gaganyaan aims to place Indian astronauts in Low Earth Orbit.
2. The mission uses the human-rated version of LVM3 launch vehicle.
3. Satish Dhawan Space Centre is located in Karnataka.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

Prime Minister visits UNESCO World Heritage Prambanan Temple Complex in Indonesia

What is in News?

1. Narendra Modi visited the **Prambanan Temple Compounds**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, during his visit to Indonesia.
2. He was received by senior Indonesian leaders and was briefed on the temple's history, architecture, and conservation efforts.
3. The visit highlighted the centuries-old **civilizational and cultural links between India and Indonesia**.
4. It also reaffirmed cooperation in preserving shared cultural heritage and promoting tourism.

Importance

India–Indonesia Cultural Relations

1. Reinforces ancient civilizational ties rooted in Hindu-Buddhist traditions.
2. Promotes cultural diplomacy under India's **Act East Policy**.

UNESCO World Heritage

1. Highlights the importance of protecting globally significant cultural monuments.

Soft Power Diplomacy

1. Cultural heritage strengthens people-to-people relations and bilateral cooperation.

Historical Maritime Links

1. Reflects centuries of interaction through trade, religion, and cultural exchange across the Indian Ocean.

Tourism & Heritage Conservation

1. Encourages collaboration in heritage management and sustainable tourism.

About Prambanan Temple Compounds



Feature	Details
Location	Yogyakarta, Indonesia
UNESCO Status	World Heritage Site (1991)
Religion	Hindu
Built	9th Century CE
Main Deities	Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma
Largest Hindu Temple	Largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia

Additional UPSC Facts

Prambanan Temple

1. Built during the **Mataram Kingdom**.
2. Dedicated primarily to **Lord Shiva**.
3. Famous for its **Ramayana and Bhagavata relief panels**.
4. Represents the spread of **Indian culture and Hindu architecture** in Southeast Asia.

India–Indonesia Relations

1. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
2. Cooperation in:
 - Maritime security
 - Indo-Pacific
 - Trade & investment
 - Culture and tourism
 - Defence cooperation

MCQ

Q1. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Prambanan Temple Complex is located in:

- (a) Thailand
- (b) Cambodia
- (c) Indonesia
- (d) Vietnam

Correct Answer: (c) Indonesia

India hosts 13th ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Joint Committee Meeting

What is in News?

1. India hosted the **13th ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Joint Committee**

(JC) Meeting in New Delhi from 6–10 July 2026.

- The meeting reviewed the progress of the **AITIGA Review** and directed the early finalization of pending negotiation chapters.
- Discussions were held on **Customs Procedures & Trade Facilitation, Rules of Origin, and National Treatment & Market Access**.
- ASEAN remains one of India's largest trading partners, with **bilateral trade reaching about USD 128 billion during 2025–26**.

Importance

Strengthening India–ASEAN Economic Relations

- AITIGA review aims to make the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) more balanced, transparent, and mutually beneficial.

Trade Facilitation

- Focus on simplifying customs procedures, reducing trade barriers, and improving market access.

Act East Policy

- Reinforces India's economic and strategic engagement with Southeast Asia under the **Act East Policy**.

Regional Supply Chains

- Enhances integration into regional and global value chains, boosting exports and investment.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- Stronger India–ASEAN economic ties contribute to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

About ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)



Feature	Details
Agreement	ASEAN–India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)
Signed	2009
Came into Force	2010
Objective	Liberalize trade in goods between India and ASEAN
Current Review	To modernize the agreement and address implementation issues

Additional UPSC Facts

ASEAN

- Established:** 1967 (Bangkok Declaration)
- Headquarters:** Jakarta, Indonesia
- Members (10):**
 - Indonesia
 - Malaysia
 - Singapore
 - Thailand
 - Philippines
 - Brunei
 - Vietnam
 - Laos
 - Cambodia
 - Myanmar

Key Areas under AITIGA Review

- Customs Procedures & Trade Facilitation
- Rules of Origin
- Market Access
- National Treatment
- Non-Tariff Barriers

India–ASEAN Relations

- ASEAN is one of India's largest trading partners.
- Cooperation extends to:
 - Trade & Investment
 - Connectivity
 - Maritime Security
 - Digital Economy
 - Blue Economy
 - Supply Chain Resilience

MCQ**Q2. The headquarters of ASEAN is located in:**

- (a) Bangkok, Thailand
- (b) Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- (c) Jakarta, Indonesia
- (d) Singapore

Answer: (c) Jakarta, Indonesia**Indiahandmade****Why in News?**

Recently, **Indiahandmade**, the Government of India's dedicated online marketplace for handloom and handicraft products, has emerged as an important platform for helping traditional artisans and weavers access the digital economy and reach customers across the country.

About Indiahandmade

1. **Indiahandmade** is a **government-backed digital marketplace** dedicated to promoting India's handloom and handicraft products.
2. It was developed by the **Digital India Corporation** under the **Ministry of Textiles**.
3. The platform was launched in **2023**.
4. It aims to connect Indian artisans and handloom weavers directly with consumers through an online marketplace.
5. The initiative seeks to promote the financial and social empowerment of artisans by expanding their market access.

Key Features

1. Enables **direct sales** from artisans and weavers to consumers, reducing dependence on intermediaries.
2. Provides digital tools and enhanced online visibility to help artisans participate in e-commerce.
3. Offers a wide range of handmade products, including:
 - Apparel
 - Home décor
 - Furnishings
 - Paintings

- Furniture
- Religious items
- Stationery
- Musical instruments
- Jewellery
- Bags
- Footwear

4. Features dedicated sections for:
 - **Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged Products**
 - **One District One Product (ODOP)** products
5. Buyers receive:
 - Free shipping
 - Secure payment options
 - Purchase protection
 - Customer support
6. Provides a **guided onboarding process** for artisans and weavers joining the platform.
7. Artisans without **GST registration** can register using an **Enrolment ID**, allowing them to sell products within their respective states.
8. Showcases stories of artisan enterprises that preserve India's traditional crafts through digital commerce.

Significance

1. Promotes India's rich handloom and handicraft heritage.
2. Enhances income opportunities for artisans and weavers.
3. Encourages digital inclusion in the traditional craft sector.
4. Supports initiatives such as **Vocal for Local**, **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, and rural entrepreneurship.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ**Q3. Consider the following statements regarding Indiahandmade:**

1. It is a government-backed digital marketplace for handloom and handicraft products.

2. It was developed by the Digital India Corporation under the Ministry of Textiles.
3. The platform exclusively allows sellers with GST registration to register and sell products.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Indiahandmade is a government-backed digital marketplace for artisans and weavers.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It was developed by the Digital India Corporation under the Ministry of Textiles.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Artisans **without GST registration** can also register using an **Enrolment ID**, although they are permitted to sell only within their own state.

Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) Organisation

Why in News?

Recently, the **Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) [CLC(C)] Organisation** highlighted its continued efforts to promote labour welfare and industrial harmony through awareness programmes, effective grievance redressal, and timely conciliation of industrial disputes across the country.

About Chief Labour Commissioner (Central)

1. The **Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) Organisation**, also known as the **Central Industrial Relations Machinery (CIRM)**, is the apex agency responsible for maintaining harmonious industrial relations in

establishments under the **Central Government**.

2. It functions under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment**.
3. **Headquarters: New Delhi**

Historical Background

1. The organisation was established in **April 1945** following the recommendations of the **Royal Commission on Labour in India**.
2. It was formed by merging:
 - Conciliation Officer (Railways)
 - Supervisor of Railway Labour
 - Labour Welfare Advisor
3. Initially, it was entrusted with:
 - Prevention and settlement of industrial disputes
 - Enforcement of labour laws
 - Promotion of workers' welfare in Central Government establishments
4. The organisation started with:
 - One Chief Labour Commissioner at New Delhi
 - Three Regional Labour Commissioners
 - Eight Conciliation Officers
 - Eighteen Labour Inspectors
5. Over time, its network expanded with regional offices established across the country.

Functions

1. Prevention and settlement of **industrial disputes** through conciliation and mediation.
2. Enforcement of **Central labour laws** and related rules.
3. Performs **quasi-judicial functions** under various labour legislations.
4. Verification of **trade union membership**.
5. Handles labour grievances and promotes industrial peace.
6. Undertakes various labour welfare and advisory functions.

Significance

1. Promotes harmonious industrial relations between employers and workers.

2. Facilitates peaceful resolution of labour disputes.
3. Ensures effective implementation of labour laws in the Central sphere.
4. Strengthens labour welfare and industrial productivity.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) Organisation:

1. It functions under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
2. It is also known as the Central Industrial Relations Machinery (CIRM).
3. One of its primary functions is the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes through conciliation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The CLC(C) functions under the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is popularly known as the **Central Industrial Relations Machinery (CIRM)**.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** Conciliation and settlement of industrial disputes are among its core functions.

Antariksh Venture Capital Fund

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister announced that India's dedicated **Antariksh Venture Capital Fund** for the space sector has made steady progress, with investments in selected space startups

expected to begin from the **first quarter of FY 2027**.

About Antariksh Venture Capital Fund

1. The **Antariksh Venture Capital Fund** is a **close-ended fund** registered with the **Securities and Exchange Board of India** as a **Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)**.
2. It is India's dedicated venture capital fund focused exclusively on the **space sector**.
3. **Key Investor:** **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre**, under the **Department of Space (DoS)**.
4. The fund is **sponsored by SIDBI Venture Capital Limited**.

Investment Objective

1. Provide growth capital to Indian space startups at various stages of development.
2. Support the commercialization of indigenous space technologies.
3. Help companies scale their operations.
4. Strengthen India's private space ecosystem and contribute to national space ambitions.
5. Invest exclusively in **Indian space-sector companies** with a **Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 4 or above**.

About IN-SPACE

1. **Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACE)** is an autonomous agency under the **Department of Space**.
2. It was established following India's **space sector reforms** to promote private sector participation.
3. It serves as the **single-window nodal agency** for facilitating and regulating activities of private space companies.

Functions

1. Promote, authorize, and supervise space activities undertaken by **Non-Governmental Entities (NGEs)**.
2. Facilitate the development of:

- Launch vehicles
 - Satellites
 - Space-based applications and services
3. Enable access to **ISRO** infrastructure and facilities.
 4. Encourage the establishment of new space infrastructure by private entities.
 5. Act as the interface between **Indian Space Research Organisation** and private companies.
 6. Ensure efficient utilization of India's space resources.

Organizational Structure

IN-SPACe functions through three directorates:

1. Promotion Directorate (PD)
2. Technical Directorate (TD)
3. Programme Management and Authorization Directorate (PMAD)

Significance

1. Encourages private investment in India's space sector.
2. Promotes innovation and commercialization of indigenous space technologies.
3. Strengthens India's startup ecosystem in space technology.
4. Supports India's vision of becoming a global space economy.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Antariksh Venture Capital Fund:

1. It is registered with SEBI as a Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF).
2. It is sponsored by SIDBI Venture Capital Limited.
3. The fund invests exclusively in Indian companies operating in the space sector.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The fund is registered with SEBI as a **Category II AIF**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is sponsored by **SIDBI Venture Capital Limited (SVCL)**.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The fund is dedicated to investing exclusively in **Indian space-sector companies** with a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 4 or above.

Masala Bonds

Why in News?

Recently, the **Enforcement Directorate** issued notices to the **Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board** in connection with the **Masala Bond** investigation, bringing renewed attention to this overseas rupee-denominated borrowing instrument.

About Masala Bonds

1. **Masala Bonds** are **Indian Rupee-denominated bonds issued outside India** by Indian entities to raise funds from foreign investors.
2. They are debt instruments through which issuers borrow in **Indian Rupees**, while the investment is made overseas.
3. Since the bonds are denominated in rupees, the **exchange rate risk is borne by the investor**, not the issuer.
4. Both **government bodies** and **private entities** are eligible to issue Masala Bonds.

Historical Background

1. The first Masala Bond was issued in **October 2013** by the **International Finance Corporation**, a member of the **World Bank Group**, under its **US\$2 billion Offshore Rupee Programme**.

Key Features



1. Denominated in **Indian Rupees (INR)**.
2. Issued in overseas financial markets.
3. Currency depreciation risk is borne by foreign investors.
4. Generally offers relatively higher interest rates to compensate investors for exchange rate risk.
5. Helps Indian borrowers access global capital without taking foreign exchange risk.

Eligible Investors

The following entities outside India can invest in Masala Bonds:

1. Individuals
2. Institutional investors
3. Financial institutions
4. Multilateral and regional financial institutions of which India is a member
5. Residents of countries that are members of the **Financial Action Task Force**.
6. Investors from jurisdictions compliant with the **International Organization of Securities Commissions** standards.

Maturity Period

1. Bonds up to **US\$50 million**:
➤ Minimum maturity of **3 years**
2. Bonds exceeding **US\$50 million**:
➤ Minimum maturity of **5 years**

Permitted Uses of Funds

Funds raised through Masala Bonds can be used for:

1. Affordable housing projects
2. Infrastructure development
3. Refinancing of Rupee-denominated loans
4. Corporate working capital requirements

Restricted Uses

The proceeds **cannot generally be used** for:

1. Purchase of land
2. Investment in the stock market
3. Real estate activities (except where specifically permitted by the Government)

Significance

1. Diversifies funding sources for Indian entities.
2. Promotes international use of the Indian Rupee.
3. Reduces foreign exchange risk for Indian borrowers.
4. Facilitates infrastructure financing and long-term capital mobilization.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding Masala Bonds:

1. Masala Bonds are Indian Rupee-denominated bonds issued outside India.
2. The exchange rate risk is borne by the investor.
3. The proceeds from Masala Bonds can generally be used to purchase land.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Masala Bonds are rupee-denominated bonds issued in overseas markets.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The currency risk is borne by the foreign investor, not the issuer.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The proceeds generally **cannot be used** for purchasing land or speculative real estate activities without specific government approval.

National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML)

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways reviewed the progress of major infrastructure projects being implemented by the

National Highways Logistics Management Limited, highlighting its role in strengthening India's transport logistics and highway infrastructure.

About National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML)

1. **National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML)** is a **100% wholly owned company** of the **National Highways Authority of India**.
2. It was formerly known as **Cochin Port Road Company Limited**.
3. The company functions under the guidance of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways**.
4. NHLML has been established to develop modern logistics infrastructure, improve transport efficiency, and promote asset monetization.

Key Objectives

1. Improve India's transport and logistics ecosystem.
2. Enhance multimodal connectivity.
3. Develop world-class highway infrastructure.
4. Promote sustainable and technology-driven transport solutions.
5. Support economic growth through efficient logistics networks.

Major Areas of Work

NHLML is implementing several flagship infrastructure projects, including:

1. Development of **35 Multimodal Logistics Parks (MMLPs)**.
2. Construction of **ropeway projects** under the **Parvatmala Programme**.
3. Deployment of **Optical Fibre Cable (OFC)** networks along National Highways.
4. Development of **Wayside Amenities (WSAs)** for travellers.
5. Construction of **port connectivity roads**.
6. Development of **warehousing and logistics zones**.

7. Upgradation of **passenger transport terminal infrastructure**.
8. **Solarization of National Highways**.
9. Development of other allied transport and logistics infrastructure.

Significance

1. Reduces logistics costs and improves supply-chain efficiency.
2. Promotes multimodal transport integration.
3. Enhances connectivity between highways, ports, railways, and airports.
4. Encourages sustainable infrastructure through renewable energy initiatives.
5. Supports the vision of **PM Gati Shakti** and **National Logistics Policy**.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding the National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML):

1. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).
2. It is responsible for developing Multimodal Logistics Parks (MMLPs) and Wayside Amenities.
3. It functions under the Ministry of Railways.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** NHLML is a 100% owned company of NHAI.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It develops MMLPs, Wayside Amenities, ropeways, port connectivity roads, and other logistics infrastructure.

3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** NHLML functions under the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)**, not the Ministry of Railways.

Global Passport Index (GPI)

Why in News?

Recently, **India** slipped one position to **125th** in the **Global Passport Index (GPI) 2026**, reflecting a marginal decline in its overall passport ranking.

About Global Passport Index (GPI)

1. The **Global Passport Index (GPI)** is a comprehensive passport ranking that evaluates passports based on **international mobility** as well as the opportunities they provide for **living, working, and investing** abroad.
2. Unlike traditional passport rankings, it assesses passports on multiple socio-economic parameters rather than visa-free travel alone.
3. It is published annually by **Global Citizen Solutions**.

Assessment Criteria

The Global Passport Index evaluates passports under **three major categories**:

1. **Enhanced Mobility (50%)**
 - Visa-free and visa-on-arrival access
 - Ease of international travel
2. **Investment (25%)**
 - Investment opportunities
 - Business environment
 - Economic attractiveness
3. **Quality of Living (25%)**
 - Human development
 - Healthcare
 - Education
 - Environmental quality
 - Overall quality of life
4. The rankings are based on **14 separate indicators**.

Data Sources

The index uses quantitative data from reputed international organizations, including:

1. **World Bank**
2. **World Economic Forum**
3. **Sustainable Development Solutions Network** (Sustainable Development Report)

Key Highlights of GPI 2026

The highest-ranked passports in the **Global Passport Index 2026** are:

1. **Sweden**
2. **Switzerland**
3. **Finland**
4. **Germany**
5. **Denmark**
6. **Netherlands**

Significance

1. Provides a broader assessment of passport strength beyond visa-free access.
2. Helps individuals evaluate opportunities for global mobility, investment, and quality of life.
3. Serves as a useful reference for policymakers, investors, and global citizens.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q8. Consider the following statements regarding the Global Passport Index (GPI):

1. It is published by Global Citizen Solutions.
2. The index evaluates passports based only on visa-free travel.
3. The index includes parameters related to investment opportunities and quality of living.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The Global Passport Index is published by **Global Citizen Solutions (GCS)**.
2. **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The index goes beyond visa-free travel and also considers investment opportunities and quality of living.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** Investment (25%) and Quality of Living (25%) are two of the three major assessment categories.

Nigeria

Why in News?

Recently, **Nigeria's** competition regulator announced an investigation into major technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) companies over allegations of **unlawful exploitation of news content** and **unfair market practices**.

About Nigeria

1. Nigeria is located on the **western coast of Africa**.
2. It is popularly known as the "**Giant of Africa**" due to its large population and economic significance.
3. **Capital: Abuja**
4. It has a coastline along the **Gulf of Guinea**.

Boundaries

Nigeria shares land borders with:

1. **Niger** (North)
2. **Chad** (Northeast)
3. **Cameroon** (East)
4. **Benin** (West)

Geographical Features

Climate

1. Nigeria has a **diverse climate**, ranging from **arid conditions in the north** to **humid equatorial conditions in the south**.

Drainage Basins

The major drainage basins are:

1. Niger–Benue Basin

2. Lake Chad Basin
3. Gulf of Guinea Basin

Major Rivers

1. **Niger River** – the country's principal river.
2. **Benue River** – the largest tributary of the Niger River.

Major Mountain Range

1. **Cameroonian Highlands**

Natural Resources

Nigeria possesses abundant natural resources, including:

1. Petroleum
2. Natural Gas
3. Coal
4. Tin
5. Limestone

Significance

1. Africa's most populous country.
2. One of the world's leading crude oil producers.
3. Plays an important role in the economy and politics of West Africa.
4. A key member of the **Economic Community of West African States**.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q9. Consider the following statements regarding Nigeria:

1. Nigeria has a coastline along the Gulf of Guinea.
2. The Niger River and its largest tributary, the Benue River, are the country's principal rivers.
3. Nigeria shares its western border with Cameroon.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Nigeria has a coastline on the Gulf of Guinea.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The Niger River and the Benue River are the country's principal river system.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Nigeria shares its **western border with Benin**, while **Cameroon lies to its east**.

Integrated Textile Parks (ITADCs)

Union Minister for Textiles **Giriraj Singh** recently reviewed initiatives to strengthen India's textile ecosystem. He highlighted the role of **Integrated Textile and Apparel Development Centres (ITADCs)** as **one-stop growth hubs** for textile entrepreneurs and MSMEs. The Ministry also noted that over **10,000 textile units** have been supported under the **Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (ATUFS)** with subsidies exceeding **₹3,000 crore**, leveraging investments of more than **₹53,000 crore**.



About Integrated Textile and Apparel Development Centres (ITADCs)

Integrated Textile and Apparel Development Centres are integrated industrial hubs developed to promote the growth of India's textile and apparel sector.

They provide **world-class infrastructure** and common facilities to support textile manufacturing, MSMEs, startups, and entrepreneurs.

Objectives

1. Develop globally competitive textile infrastructure.
2. Promote investment in the textile and apparel sector.

3. Support MSMEs and textile startups.
4. Generate employment across the textile value chain.
5. Enhance India's textile exports.

Key Features

Plug-and-Play Infrastructure

1. Ready-to-use industrial sheds.
2. Common production facilities.
3. Warehousing and logistics support.

Common Facilities

1. Testing laboratories.
2. Design and product development centres.
3. Skill development and training facilities.
4. Quality certification support.

Business Support

1. Market linkages.
2. Technology adoption.
3. Assistance for export promotion.

Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (ATUFS)

Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme is a flagship scheme aimed at encouraging modernization of India's textile industry.

Objectives

1. Promote technology upgradation.
2. Improve productivity and quality.
3. Increase competitiveness of Indian textiles.
4. Encourage investment in modern machinery.

Key Achievements

1. **10,000+ textile units supported.**
2. **Subsidies exceeding ₹3,000 crore.**
3. **Investments leveraged worth over ₹53,000 crore.**

Significance of ITADCs

1. Strengthen India's textile manufacturing ecosystem.
2. Promote the **Make in India** initiative.
3. Enhance export competitiveness.
4. Create large-scale employment opportunities.
5. Support sustainable and value-added textile production.

Related Government Initiatives

1. PM MITRA Parks Scheme
2. National Technical Textiles Mission
3. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Textiles
4. ATUFS

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (ATUFS):

1. ATUFS aims to promote technology upgradation and modernization in the textile sector.
2. The scheme is implemented by the Ministry of Textiles.
3. ATUFS provides financial support for adopting modern machinery and improving competitiveness.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1 only

Correct Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation

1. **Statement 1:** Correct. ATUFS promotes modernization and technology upgradation.
2. **Statement 2:** Correct. It is implemented by the **Ministry of Textiles**.
3. **Statement 3:** Correct. The scheme provides capital support for modern machinery to improve productivity and competitiveness.

UPSC Quick Facts

Feature	Details
ITADCs	Integrated Textile & Apparel Development Centres
Ministry	Ministry of Textiles
Objective	Infrastructure development for textile manufacturing & MSMEs

ATUFS	Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme
Key Achievement	10,000+ units supported
Subsidy Provided	₹3,000+ crore
Investment Leveraged	₹53,000+ crore

Source: PIB.

ULLAS Programme

Why in News?

Recently, **Uttarakhand** became the **sixth fully literate state** in the country under the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** and the **ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) Programme**.

About ULLAS Programme

1. **ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society)** is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** aligned with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.
2. It aims to empower **adults aged 15 years and above** who missed formal schooling.
3. The programme promotes **lifelong learning** by providing foundational literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.
4. It is implemented through **volunteerism**, encouraging community participation and social responsibility.

Objectives

1. Provide **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** to adult learners.
2. Improve reading, writing, and numeracy skills.
3. Equip learners with critical life skills.
4. Promote lifelong learning and inclusive education.
5. Encourage digital and regional language learning.

Key Features

1. Covers adults aged **15 years and above**.
2. Learning content is available through:

➤ **DIKSHA Portal**

- ULLAS Mobile App
- 3. Encourages access to educational resources in **regional languages**.
- 4. Uses the **Online Teaching, Learning and Assessment System (OTLAS)** for teaching and assessment.

Implementation

1. **Implementation Period: 2022–2027**
2. **Target:** Provide **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)** to **5 crore learners**, with a target of **1 crore learners annually**.

Components of ULLAS

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN)

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Basic numeracy skills

Critical Life Skills

1. Financial literacy
2. Digital literacy
3. Legal literacy
4. Healthcare awareness
5. Childcare and education
6. Family welfare

Basic Education

1. Provides educational equivalency for learners who missed formal schooling.

Vocational Skills

1. Promotes skill development to improve employability and local livelihood opportunities.

Continuing Education

1. Offers learning opportunities in:
 - Arts
 - Science
 - Technology
 - Culture
 - Sports
 - Recreation
 - Other subjects of local relevance

Significance

1. Supports the vision of universal adult literacy under **NEP 2020**.
2. Promotes inclusive and lifelong learning.

3. Enhances employability and socio-economic empowerment.
4. Strengthens community participation through volunteer-driven education.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the ULLAS Programme:

1. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
2. It targets adults aged 15 years and above who missed formal schooling.
3. The programme aims to provide Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) to 5 crore learners during 2022–2027.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** ULLAS is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme aligned with **NEP 2020**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It focuses on adults aged **15 years and above** who could not access formal education.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The programme targets **5 crore learners** over the **2022–2027** implementation period using the **OTLAS** platform.

Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

Why in News?

Recently, the Government highlighted the progress of the **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)**, which is expanding access to modern farm machinery for **small and marginal farmers**,

women, and disadvantaged groups across the country.

About Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

1. The **Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)** was launched in **2014–15**.
2. It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** implemented under the **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)**.
3. It is implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.
4. The scheme aims to "**reach the unreached**" by extending the benefits of farm mechanization to underserved sections of the farming community.
5. Beneficiaries include:
 - Small and marginal farmers
 - Women farmers
 - Scheduled Castes (SCs)
 - Scheduled Tribes (STs)
 - Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)
 - Self-Help Groups (SHGs)
 - Rural entrepreneurs

Objectives

1. Promote inclusive and efficient farm mechanization.
2. Improve access to modern agricultural machinery.
3. Reduce drudgery in farming operations.
4. Increase agricultural productivity and efficiency.
5. Enhance mechanization in regions with low farm power availability.

Key Features

Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs)

1. Supports the establishment of **Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs)**.
2. CHCs provide farm machinery and equipment on a rental basis, making mechanization affordable for small farmers.

Hi-tech Agricultural Equipment

1. Promotes the establishment of hubs for **hi-tech and high-value agricultural machinery**.
2. Supports the distribution of modern farm equipment.

Focus Areas

1. Targets regions with:
 - Low farm mechanization
 - Small and fragmented landholdings
 - High capital investment constraints

Quality Assurance

1. Supports **performance testing and certification** of agricultural machinery.
2. Promotes awareness through **Information, Education and Communication (IEC)** activities to encourage adoption of modern technologies.

Significance

1. Makes farm mechanization accessible to small and marginal farmers.
2. Reduces dependence on manual labour.
3. Improves agricultural productivity and profitability.
4. Promotes inclusive agricultural growth and rural entrepreneurship.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM):

1. It was launched in 2014–15 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).
2. The scheme promotes the establishment of Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) to provide farm machinery on a rental basis.
3. It is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** SMAM was launched in **2014–15** as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under **RKVY**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It supports **Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs)** that provide farm machinery to farmers on a rental basis.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The scheme is implemented by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare**.

Hummus Trail

Why in News?

Recently, the **Hind Rajab Foundation** filed a war crimes complaint against an Israeli soldier who was reportedly traced in India's popular **Hummus Trail** destinations, bringing renewed attention to this well-known travel route.

About Hummus Trail

1. The **Hummus Trail** is an informal term used to describe the network of destinations in India that are especially popular among **Israeli tourists**, particularly after completing their mandatory military service.
2. Every year, around **80,000 Israelis** visit India, many of them young veterans.
3. The journey, known in Israel as **Tiul Gadol (The Big Trip)**, often lasts **six months to one year**.
4. It is generally financed using the discharge bonus received after military service.

Major Destinations

The Hummus Trail extends from northern to southern India and includes:

Northern India

1. **Leh**
2. **Kasol** (popularly called *Mini Israel*)
3. **Bhagsu**
4. **Dharamkot**
5. **Tosh**

6. Kullu

7. Remote villages such as:

- **Kalga**
- **Pulga**
- **Tulga**

Central and Western India

1. **Mathura**
2. **Vrindavan**
3. **Pushkar**

Southern India

1. **South Goa**
2. **Gokarna**
3. **Vattakanal** near Kodaikanal

Characteristics

1. Areas along the trail often feature:
 - Hebrew-language signboards
 - Israeli cafés and restaurants
 - Hostels and businesses catering to Israeli tourists
 - Shops offering Israeli cuisine and products
2. The trail reflects strong cultural and tourism links between India and Israeli travellers.

Concerns

1. Some studies have reported concerns such as:
 - Drug abuse and narcotics trafficking in certain tourist hubs.
 - Illegal rave parties in some destinations.
 - Mental health challenges among some former military personnel travelling the route.
2. Mental health professionals from Israel have reportedly provided support services to some visiting veterans.

Significance

1. Contributes to tourism and local economies in several Indian destinations.
2. Strengthens people-to-people interactions between India and Israel.
3. Highlights the need for responsible tourism and effective regulation in popular tourist regions.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ



Q4. With reference to the "Hummus Trail", consider the following statements:

1. It refers to a popular travel circuit in India frequently visited by Israeli tourists after military service.
2. Kasol in Himachal Pradesh is popularly known as "Mini Israel."
3. The trail includes destinations such as Leh, Pushkar, Gokarna, and Vattakanal.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The Hummus Trail is an informal travel route popular among Israeli tourists after compulsory military service.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** Kasol is widely known as "Mini Israel" because of its popularity among Israeli visitors.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The trail includes destinations such as **Leh, Pushkar, Gokarna, and Vattakanal**, among several others.

Astra Mk-1 Missile

Why in News?

Recently, **India** and **Indonesia** reached a significant milestone in their strategic defence cooperation by signing a deal for the supply of **Astra Mk-1** beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles.

About Astra Mk-1

1. **Astra Mk-1** is an **indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)**.
2. It has been developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation**.
3. The missile is designed for use by both the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** and the **Indian Navy**.

4. It is capable of engaging enemy aircraft beyond the pilot's visual range.

Key Features

1. **Type:** Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)
2. **Range:** Approximately **80–110 km**
3. **Maximum Altitude:** Up to **20 km**
4. **Speed:** Around **Mach 4.5**
5. Powered by a **single-pulse smokeless solid-fuel rocket motor**.

Guidance System

Astra Mk-1 is equipped with:

1. Inertial Navigation System (INS)
2. Mid-course guidance updates
3. Active radar homing seeker for terminal guidance

Platforms

The missile is being integrated with:

1. **Sukhoi Su-30MKI**
2. Planned integration with:
 - **HAL Tejas Mk-1**
 - **Dassault Rafale**

Astra Mk-2

1. **Astra Mk-2** is the improved version of the missile.
2. It is expected to have an **enhanced range of around 200 km**, providing greater stand-off engagement capability.

Significance

1. Strengthens India's indigenous defence manufacturing capabilities.
2. Enhances the air combat capability of the Indian Armed Forces.
3. Supports the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative in defence.
4. Boosts India's defence exports and strategic partnerships.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Astra Mk-1 missile:



1. It is an indigenous Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) developed by DRDO.
2. It uses active radar homing guidance in the terminal phase.
3. It is currently designed only for the Indian Navy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Astra Mk-1 is an indigenous BVRAAM developed by DRDO.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It uses **active radar homing** during the terminal phase along with inertial guidance and mid-course updates.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Astra Mk-1 is intended for **both the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy**, not exclusively for the Navy.

Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH)

Why in News?

Recently, former Afghanistan fast bowler **Shapoor Zadran** passed away at the age of 38 after battling **Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH)**, a rare and life-threatening immune system disorder.

About Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH)

1. **Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH)** is a rare but severe disorder in which the **immune system becomes excessively overactive.**

2. Instead of protecting the body against infections, the immune system attacks the body's own healthy tissues and organs.
3. This uncontrolled immune response leads to widespread inflammation and can damage organs such as:
 - Liver
 - Spleen
 - Bone marrow
 - Brain
4. If left untreated, HLH can become **life-threatening.**

Types of HLH

Primary (Familial) HLH

1. Caused by **inherited genetic mutations.**
2. Usually develops during **infancy or early childhood**, though it may occur later.
3. If both parents are carriers:
 - **25%** chance the child will have HLH.
 - **50%** chance the child will be a carrier.
 - **25%** chance the child will neither have the disease nor be a carrier.

Secondary (Acquired) HLH

1. Develops due to conditions that abnormally activate the immune system.

Common triggers include:

1. Viral infections such as:
 - **Epstein-Barr virus**
 - **Cytomegalovirus**
2. Bacterial, fungal, or parasitic infections
3. Autoimmune diseases such as:
 - Lupus
 - Rheumatoid arthritis
4. Blood cancers such as:
 - Lymphoma
 - Leukemia
5. Weakened immune system caused by diseases or medications

Symptoms

Common symptoms include:

1. Persistent high fever
2. Extreme fatigue and weakness
3. Enlarged liver and spleen

4. Swollen lymph nodes
5. Skin rash
6. Easy bruising or bleeding
7. Pale skin due to anemia
8. Low blood cell counts
9. Jaundice
10. Confusion, seizures, or other neurological symptoms in severe cases

Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause and severity of the disease and may include:

1. Chemotherapy
2. Immunotherapy
3. Corticosteroids
4. Antibiotics
5. Antiviral medications
6. Treatment of the underlying trigger
7. **Bone marrow (stem cell) transplantation** may be required in some patients with primary HLH.

Significance

1. HLH is a medical emergency requiring early diagnosis and prompt treatment.
2. Timely intervention can significantly improve survival and reduce organ damage.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH):

1. It is a rare disorder in which the immune system becomes excessively overactive.
2. HLH may be inherited or triggered by infections, autoimmune diseases, or certain cancers.
3. HLH affects only the lungs and does not involve other organs.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** HLH is caused by an overactive immune system that attacks healthy tissues.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** HLH can be inherited (primary) or acquired due to infections, autoimmune disorders, or cancers.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** HLH can affect multiple organs, including the **liver, spleen, bone marrow, brain,** and others.

TribeX Platform

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** launched the **TribeX Platform**, a first-of-its-kind digital learning initiative to preserve, promote, and disseminate India's tribal arts, culture, languages, and traditional knowledge.

About TribeX Platform

1. **TribeX** is India's first dedicated **digital learning platform** focused on tribal heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, and skill development.
2. It has been launched by the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**.
3. The platform aims to preserve tribal traditions while creating learning and livelihood opportunities through digital education.

Key Features

Digital Learning Platform

1. Provides a comprehensive digital learning ecosystem.
2. Offers:
 - Free certificate courses
 - **UGC-recognized Postgraduate Diploma** programmes
3. Covers subjects such as:
 - Tribal languages
 - Tribal art forms
 - Handicrafts

- Traditional knowledge
- Indigenous skills

Digital Repository

1. Functions as a national repository for:
 - Tribal languages
 - Oral traditions
 - Performing arts
 - Cultural practices
 - Indigenous knowledge systems
2. Helps preserve tribal heritage for future generations.

Courses

1. Currently offers **20 free certificate courses** in areas such as:
 - Tribal paintings
 - Handicrafts
 - Handloom
 - Artefacts
 - Traditional musical instruments

Learning Management System (LMS)

1. Integrates a robust **Learning Management System (LMS)**.
2. Includes a **Repository Management System** for:
 - Digital learning
 - Knowledge management
 - Progress tracking

Heritage Archive

1. Hosts **more than 5,000 multimedia resources**, including:
 - Audio recordings
 - Videos
 - Literature
2. Documents:
 - Tribal festivals
 - Oral traditions
 - Socio-cultural practices
 - Indigenous heritage from across India

Significance

1. Preserves India's rich tribal heritage and indigenous knowledge.
2. Promotes digital access to tribal education and culture.

3. Encourages skill development and livelihood opportunities.
4. Strengthens research and documentation of tribal communities.
5. Supports inclusive cultural preservation through technology.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding the TribeX Platform:

1. It is a digital learning platform launched by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
2. It offers free certificate courses and UGC-recognized postgraduate diploma programmes related to tribal knowledge and culture.
3. The platform also serves as a digital repository for tribal languages and oral traditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** TribeX has been launched by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It offers free certificate courses as well as UGC-recognized postgraduate diploma programmes.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The platform functions as a digital repository preserving tribal languages, oral traditions, cultural practices, and indigenous knowledge systems.

Third India–Australia Annual Summit Joint Statement

Why in News?



Recently, the Prime Ministers of **India** and **Australia** released the **Third India–Australia Annual Summit Joint Statement**, reaffirming their commitment to deepen the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** and expand cooperation across defence, trade, technology, education, energy, and critical minerals.

Key Highlights of the Joint Statement

Defence and Maritime Cooperation

1. Reaffirmed commitment to strengthening the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)**.
2. Agreed to deepen defence and security cooperation.
3. Emphasised maritime security and a **free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.
4. Committed to enhancing defence exercises, interoperability, and information sharing.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

1. Reviewed progress under the **Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)**.
2. Reaffirmed commitment to conclude the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**.
3. Agreed to expand bilateral trade and investment.

Critical Minerals

1. Strengthened cooperation in:
 - Critical minerals
 - Processing and supply chains
 - Clean energy technologies
2. Encouraged investment and research partnerships in strategic minerals.

Clean Energy and Climate

1. Expanded collaboration in:
 - Renewable energy
 - Green hydrogen
 - Low-carbon technologies
 - Climate resilience
2. Reiterated commitment to achieving net-zero goals.

Science, Technology and Innovation

1. Promoted cooperation in:
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Quantum technologies
- Space technology
- Cybersecurity
- Digital public infrastructure

2. Encouraged research collaboration between academic institutions and industries.

Education and Skills

1. Strengthened partnerships in:
 - Higher education
 - Student mobility
 - Research collaboration
 - Skill development
2. Promoted greater people-to-people exchanges.

Regional and Global Cooperation

1. Reaffirmed support for ASEAN centrality and the **East Asia Summit**.
2. Agreed to work together in regional forums such as:
 - **Quad**
 - **G20**
 - **Indian Ocean Rim Association**
3. Emphasised respect for international law and freedom of navigation.

Significance

1. Strengthens India–Australia strategic partnership.
2. Enhances defence and maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
3. Diversifies critical mineral supply chains.
4. Expands collaboration in trade, technology, education, and clean energy.
5. Supports a stable, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q8. Consider the following statements regarding the India–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP):

1. It promotes cooperation in defence, trade, technology, and critical minerals.

2. India and Australia cooperate through the Quad framework for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

3. The Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) is a bilateral trade agreement between India and Australia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The CSP covers defence, trade, technology, energy, education, and critical minerals.

2. **Statement 2 is correct:** Both countries work together through the **Quad** to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

3. **Statement 3 is correct:** ECTA is the bilateral trade agreement between India and Australia that aims to boost trade and investment.

DPIIT amends Footwear Quality Control Orders to boost ease of doing business and domestic manufacturing

What is in News?

1. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has amended two **Footwear Quality Control Orders (QCOs)** to improve ease of doing business and strengthen India's footwear manufacturing ecosystem.
2. The amendments extend the **legacy stock clearance deadline to 31 July 2027**.
3. Manufacturers are now permitted to **import up to 4,500 footwear samples annually for Research & Development (R&D)** and other non-commercial purposes.

4. The changes aim to promote innovation while ensuring that only **BIS-certified** footwear products are sold in the Indian market.

Importance

Ease of Doing Business

1. Reduces compliance burden by extending the timeline for disposal of legacy stock.

Boost to Domestic Manufacturing

1. Supports India's footwear industry under the **Make in India** initiative.

Encouraging Innovation

1. Allows manufacturers to import footwear samples for product design, testing, benchmarking, and R&D.

Quality Assurance

1. Ensures that only footwear complying with **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** quality norms is commercially sold.

Global Competitiveness

1. Aligns with the vision of "**Zero Defect, Zero Effect**" manufacturing to improve India's export competitiveness.

About Footwear Quality Control Orders (QCOs)

Feature	Details
Implementing Department	DPIIT
Objective	Ensure quality standards in footwear products
Quality Standard	Mandatory BIS Certification
Legacy Stock Deadline	Extended till 31 July 2027
R&D Import Limit	Up to 4,500 footwear samples per year

Additional UPSC Facts

Quality Control Orders (QCOs)

1. Issued under the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, 2016**.
2. Make compliance with Indian Standards mandatory for specified products.
3. Aim to:

- Protect consumers
- Improve product quality
- Prevent sub-standard imports
- Enhance export competitiveness

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

1. **National Standards Body of India**
2. Established under the **BIS Act, 2016** (replacing the 1986 Act)
3. Functions under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**

MCQ

Q9. Quality Control Orders (QCOs) in India are primarily intended to:

- (a) Regulate export duties on manufactured goods
- (b) Mandate compliance with prescribed quality standards for specified products
- (c) Provide subsidies to manufacturers
- (d) Control retail prices of consumer goods

Correct Answer: (b) Mandate compliance with prescribed quality standards for specified products

Pratapgad Fort

Why in the News?

Recently, the **Maharashtra Government** sanctioned **₹1 crore** for the first phase of constructing a memorial to **Veer Jivaji Mahale** at the foothills of **Pratapgad Fort**.

About Pratapgad Fort

1. **Pratapgad Fort** (also known as **Pratapgarh Fort**) is a historic hill fort located in **Satara District**.
2. It is situated at an altitude of about **1,080 metres** above sea level.
3. The fort is built on a spur overlooking the route between the villages of **Par** and **Kineshwar**.

Historical Background

1. The fort was commissioned by **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj**.

2. Its construction was supervised by **Moropant Pingle** to safeguard the **Nira** and **Koyna** river valleys and protect the **Par Pass**.
3. Construction was completed in **1656**.
4. The fort is famous for the **Battle of Pratapgad**, fought on **10 November 1659** between **Shivaji Maharaj** and **Afzal Khan**, commander of the **Bijapur Sultanate**.
5. The victory marked the rise of **Shivaji Maharaj** as a powerful ruler in the **Deccan** and accelerated the decline of the **Bijapur Sultanate**.
6. After the battle, **Afzal Buruj (Afzal Tower)** was built outside the fort as a lookout point.
7. It is believed that **Afzal Khan's head** was buried beneath **Afzal Buruj**, while his tomb is located to its northwest.
8. In **1818**, the fort came under British control following the **Third Anglo-Maratha War**.

Architectural Features

Upper Fort

1. Built on the hilltop.
2. Roughly square in shape, about **180 metres** on each side.
3. It houses several important structures, including the **Mahadev Temple**.

Lower Fort

1. Located on the southeastern side.
2. Protected by **10–12 metre high** towers and strong defensive walls.
3. Measures approximately **320 metres** in length and **110 metres** in width.
4. Houses the famous **Bhavani Temple**, where, according to tradition, **Shivaji Maharaj** received the divine sword (**Bhavani Talwar**).

Shivaji Statue

1. A **17-foot-tall bronze statue** of **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** was unveiled by **Jawaharlal Nehru** on **30 November 1957**.

Significance

1. One of the most important forts associated with the **Maratha Empire**.

2. Symbolizes Shivaji Maharaj's military leadership and strategic brilliance.
3. A major historical, cultural, and tourism landmark in Maharashtra.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Pratapgad Fort:

1. It is located in the Satara district of Maharashtra.
2. The Battle of Pratapgad (1659) was fought between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Afzal Khan.
3. The Bhavani Temple is situated in the upper fort.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Pratapgad Fort is located in **Satara district, Maharashtra**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The historic **Battle of Pratapgad** was fought in **1659** between **Shivaji Maharaj** and **Afzal Khan**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The **Bhavani Temple** is located in the **lower fort**, while the **Mahadev Temple** is situated in the upper fort.

Samriddh Gram

Why in the News?

Recently, the **Department of Telecommunications's Samriddh Gram** initiative won the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Prizes 2026** under **Action Line C6 – Enabling Environment** for its contribution to rural digital transformation.

About Samriddh Gram

1. **Samriddh Gram** is the flagship **rural digital transformation initiative** of the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**.
2. It is built on the **BharatNet** network.
3. The initiative follows a **phygital (physical + digital)** service delivery model.
4. It aims to transform rural India by integrating physical infrastructure with digital services for inclusive development.

Objective

1. Empower rural citizens through seamless access to government and digital services.
2. Improve digital inclusion and last-mile service delivery.
3. Promote socio-economic development using robust telecom infrastructure.

Samriddhi Kendras

1. The initiative establishes **Samriddhi Kendras** as **one-stop village-level service centres**.
2. These centres integrate:
 - Reliable telecom connectivity
 - Digital platforms
 - Assisted physical service delivery

Key Services

Education & Skilling

1. Smart classrooms
2. AR/VR-enabled learning
3. Digital skill development aligned with government initiatives

Agriculture

1. IoT-based soil testing
2. Drone-assisted farming
3. Smart irrigation systems

Healthcare

1. Teleconsultation services
2. Health ATMs
3. Emergency healthcare support

e-Governance

1. Access to government services
2. Documentation assistance
3. Grievance redressal

E-Commerce



1. Integration with the **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)**
2. Support for local entrepreneurs and digital marketplaces

Financial Inclusion

1. Digital banking services
2. Digital payments

Connectivity

1. Strengthened **BharatNet Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH)** connectivity
2. Village Area Networks
3. Public Wi-Fi hotspots

Significance

1. Accelerates digital transformation in rural India.
2. Strengthens digital infrastructure and last-mile connectivity.
3. Improves access to education, healthcare, governance, and financial services.
4. Promotes rural entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth.
5. Supports the vision of **Digital India** and inclusive rural development.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the Samriddh Gram initiative:

1. It is a flagship rural digital transformation initiative of the Department of Telecommunications.
2. The initiative is built on the BharatNet network.
3. Samriddhi Kendras provide integrated services including education, healthcare, e-governance, and digital banking.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Samriddh Gram is the flagship rural digital transformation initiative of the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The initiative is built on the **BharatNet** broadband network.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** **Samriddhi Kendras** provide integrated services in education, healthcare, agriculture, e-governance, e-commerce, financial inclusion, and digital connectivity.

Cyanobacteria

Why in the News?

Recently, researchers discovered that **cyanobacteria** can be used to **remove lead from contaminated water**, highlighting their potential in eco-friendly water purification and bioremediation.

About Cyanobacteria

1. **Cyanobacteria**, commonly known as **blue-green algae**, are microscopic photosynthetic organisms found naturally in aquatic environments.
2. They represent some of the **oldest known life forms on Earth**, with fossil records dating back **more than 3.5 billion years**.
3. They played a crucial role in oxygenating Earth's atmosphere through photosynthesis.

Habitat

Cyanobacteria occur in a wide range of aquatic environments, including:

1. Freshwater
2. Brackish water
3. Marine water

Characteristics

Autotrophic Nature

1. Cyanobacteria are **autotrophs**, producing their own food through **photosynthesis** using sunlight.

2. They are among the **most primitive prokaryotic organisms** and lack a true nucleus and membrane-bound organelles.

Reproduction

1. They reproduce **asexually**, mainly through **transverse binary fission**.

Growth Pattern

1. Some species are **solitary**, while others form **colonies**.
2. Certain cyanobacteria produce **toxins** that can be harmful to humans and animals.

Cyanobacterial Blooms

1. Under **warm, nutrient-rich, and slow-moving water conditions**, cyanobacteria multiply rapidly and form **harmful algal blooms (HABs)**.
2. Excess nutrients from:
- Fertilizer runoff
 - Sewage
 - Septic tank leakage
 - promote bloom formation.
3. These blooms may reduce water quality and release toxins affecting aquatic life and human health.

Significance

1. Contribute significantly to **oxygen production** through photosynthesis.
2. Help in **nitrogen fixation**, improving soil fertility in some ecosystems.
3. Have emerging applications in:
- Bioremediation
 - Wastewater treatment
 - Removal of heavy metals such as lead
 - Biofuel and biotechnology research

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding Cyanobacteria:

1. Cyanobacteria are photosynthetic prokaryotic organisms.
2. They reproduce mainly through transverse binary fission.

3. Cyanobacterial blooms commonly occur in cold, nutrient-poor waters.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Cyanobacteria are photosynthetic **prokaryotes** capable of producing their own food.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** They reproduce asexually, primarily by **transverse binary fission**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Cyanobacterial blooms usually develop in **warm, slow-moving, nutrient-rich waters**, not in cold, nutrient-poor environments.

Financial Intelligence Unit–India (FIU-IND)

Why in the News?

Recently, FIU-IND earned global acclaim by achieving the Runner-up position for the Best Egmont Case Award (BECA) 2026 following its successful probe into an expansive cyber fraud operation.

About Financial Intelligence Unit–India (FIU-IND)

1. FIU-IND was formed in 2004 by the Union Government.
2. It serves as the national central agency tasked with the receipt, analysis, and communication of data concerning suspect financial activities.
3. The unit operates under the administrative umbrella of the Department of Revenue.
4. As an independent body, it provides direct reports to the Economic Intelligence Council, which is led by the Finance Minister.

Functions of FIU-IND



Collection of Information

1. The agency gathers various financial reports from designated entities, such as:
2. Cash Transaction Reports (CTRs)
3. Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs)
4. Non-Profit Organisation Transaction Reports (NTRs)
5. Cross-Border Wire Transfer Reports (CBWTRs)
6. Data on the acquisition or transfer of fixed assets (IPRs)

Analysis of Information

1. It scrutinizes transaction data to identify trends tied to:
2. Money laundering
3. Terrorist financing
4. Fiscal scams and other crimes
5. Sharing of Information
6. Disseminates gathered intelligence to:
7. Enforcement and intelligence bodies
8. Regulatory and foreign counterpart units

Central Repository

1. Functions as a national database for all financial intelligence submitted by reporting entities.

Coordination

1. Works to bolster domestic and global partnerships to combat money laundering and related offenses.
2. Research and Analysis
3. Conducts studies on evolving methodologies and typologies in the realm of financial crime.

Significance

1. Operates as the primary nodal point for India's financial intelligence network.
2. Vital in the national strategy against terror funding and laundering activities.
3. Drives synergy between various domestic and international oversight bodies.
4. Underpins financial security and the broader interests of national safety.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. Regarding the Financial Intelligence Unit–India (FIU-IND), consider these statements:

1. The agency was first established in 2004.
2. It operates under the Ministry of Finance's Department of Revenue.
3. A key duty involves the analysis and dissemination of suspicious transaction intelligence.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. Statement 1 is correct: The Government of India founded FIU-IND in 2004.
2. Statement 2 is correct: It is positioned within the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance.
3. Statement 3 is correct: Its fundamental mission is the handling and sharing of intelligence linked to money laundering and terror financing.

Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary

Why in News?

Recently, researchers discovered a **new disease-causing fungal genus named *Hyalokamalamyces*** during a study on plant diseases in the **Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary**.

About Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary

1. Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary is located in **Chandauli District**.
2. It covers an area of approximately **78 sq. km**.
3. The sanctuary lies on the **Naugarh** and **Vijaigarh** hillocks along the northern slopes of the **Kaimur Range**.

4. It derives its name from the **Chandraprabha River**, which means "**The Luminescence of Moon.**"
5. The Chandraprabha River is a tributary of the **Karmnasa River**, which ultimately joins the **Ganga River**.

Historical Background

1. During the early 18th century, the region served as a hunting reserve for the rulers of **Varanasi**.
2. It was declared a **Wildlife Sanctuary in 1957**.
3. In **1958**, **Asiatic Lion** was introduced into the sanctuary.
4. The lion population increased from **3 to 11** by **1969**, but the animals disappeared by the following year.

Geology

1. The sanctuary mainly consists of **limestone and sandstone** formations.
2. These rocks possess high thermal mass, helping regulate temperature fluctuations within the ecosystem.

Vegetation

1. Predominantly **tropical deciduous forests** interspersed with grasslands.

Flora

Important plant species include:

1. Tendu
2. Mahua
3. Sal
4. Palash
5. Neem
6. Semal
7. Gooseberry
8. Blueberry

Medicinal Plants

The sanctuary is also rich in medicinal plants such as:

1. Musli
2. Ashwagandha
3. Sarpagandha
4. Chirata
5. Chitawar

Fauna

Mammals

1. **Indian Leopard**
2. **Sloth Bear**
3. **Chinkara**
4. **Spotted Deer**
5. **Striped Hyena**
6. Fox
7. Jackal

Birds

The sanctuary is home to numerous bird species, including:

1. **Indian Peafowl**
2. Red Junglefowl
3. Quail
4. Partridge
5. Eagle
6. Vulture
7. Common Myna
8. Parakeet
9. Cuckoo
10. Barn Owl
11. Bulbul

Significance

1. One of the important protected areas in eastern Uttar Pradesh.
2. Supports rich biodiversity and medicinal plant diversity.
3. Important site for ecological, botanical, and wildlife research.
4. Historically significant as the first attempted reintroduction site for Asiatic Lions in Uttar Pradesh.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary:

1. It is located in Chandauli district of Uttar Pradesh.
2. It lies on the northern slopes of the Kaimur Range.

3. It was the first wildlife sanctuary in India where successful long-term reintroduction of Asiatic Lions was achieved.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Chandauli district, Uttar Pradesh.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It lies on the northern slopes of the Kaimur Range.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Although Asiatic Lions were introduced in 1958, the reintroduction was **not successful in the long term**, as the lions disappeared by 1970.

Global Liveability Index

Why in News?

Recently, the **Global Liveability Index 2026** was released, with **New Delhi** ranked **120th** among **173 cities** worldwide.

About Global Liveability Index

1. The **Global Liveability Index** is published annually by the **Economist Intelligence Unit**.
2. It assesses how suitable cities are for living by evaluating **everyday living conditions**, rather than economic performance or tourism potential.
3. **Coverage:** Evaluates **173 cities** across the world.
4. The rankings are based on **30 indicators**.

Assessment Parameters

The index evaluates cities under **five categories**:

1. **Stability – 25%**
2. **Healthcare – 20%**

3. **Culture & Environment – 25%**
4. **Education – 10%**
5. **Infrastructure – 20%**

Scoring

1. Cities are assigned a score on a **scale of 1 to 100**, with higher scores indicating better liveability.

Key Highlights of Global Liveability Index 2026

1. The **global average liveability score** remained unchanged at **76.1 out of 100**.
2. **Healthcare** recorded the **highest year-on-year improvement**, increasing by an average of **0.74 points**.

Top Ranked Cities

1. **Copenhagen**
2. **Vienna**
3. **Melbourne**

India's Performance

1. **New Delhi – 120th**
2. **Mumbai – 121st**
3. **Chennai – 123rd**
4. **Bengaluru – 127th**

Significance

1. Provides a global benchmark for assessing urban quality of life.
2. Helps governments identify areas requiring improvement in urban planning and public services.
3. Assists businesses and international organizations in evaluating cities for investment and expatriate assignments.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding the Global Liveability Index:

1. It is published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).
2. The index evaluates cities based on parameters including stability, healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

3. The Global Liveability Index ranks countries based on their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The Global Liveability Index is published by the **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It assesses cities using five categories—**stability, healthcare, culture & environment, education, and infrastructure**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The index measures **urban liveability**, not countries' GDP or overall economic performance.

Manas Tiger Reserve

Why in News?

Recently, a study found that **14 invasive plant species** have contributed to the loss of **over 43% of the grassland cover** in the **Manas Tiger Reserve** over the past three decades, posing a serious threat to its biodiversity.

About Manas Tiger Reserve

1. **Manas Tiger Reserve** is located in the state of **Assam**.
2. It lies along the foothills of the Himalayas and is one of India's most important protected areas.

Boundaries

1. **North:** Bordered by **Royal Manas National Park**, separated by the **Manas River** and its tributaries:
 - Beki River
 - Hakua River

2. **West:** Separated from **Buxa Tiger Reserve** by the **Sankosh River**.

International Recognition

Manas Tiger Reserve has the unique distinction of being:

1. **UNESCO World Heritage Site**
2. **Elephant Reserve**
3. **Biosphere Reserve**
4. **Important Bird Area (IBA)**

Vegetation

The reserve comprises:

1. Scrub forests
2. Semi-evergreen forests
3. Mixed deciduous forests
4. Extensive grasslands
5. Riparian vegetation

Flora

Major vegetation includes:

1. **Sal (*Shorea robusta*)**
2. Alluvial savannah woodlands
3. Riparian forests
4. Khair–Sisoo forests

Fauna

Manas Tiger Reserve is an important habitat for several endangered species, including:

1. **Bengal Tiger**
2. **Indian Rhinoceros**
3. **Swamp Deer**
4. **Pygmy Hog**
5. **Bengal Florican**

Significance

1. One of India's premier tiger habitats.
2. Supports globally threatened grassland species.
3. A biodiversity hotspot of the Eastern Himalayas.
4. Plays a vital role in transboundary conservation between India and Bhutan.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding Manas Tiger Reserve:

1. It is located in Assam and shares its northern boundary with Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park.
2. It is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an Elephant Reserve, and a Biosphere Reserve.
3. The reserve is separated from Buxa Tiger Reserve by the Manas River.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Manas Tiger Reserve is located in **Assam** and shares its northern boundary with **Royal Manas National Park (Bhutan)**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site, Elephant Reserve, Biosphere Reserve, and Important Bird Area**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** It is separated from **Buxa Tiger Reserve** by the **Sankosh River**, while the **Manas River** forms the northern boundary with Bhutan.

India's Merchandise & Services Exports

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Commerce & Industry** released India's **trade data for June 2026**, showing a **17.37% growth** in cumulative exports (merchandise and services) during **April–June 2026–27**, reflecting strong performance in engineering goods, chemicals, electronics, and rice exports.

Key Highlights

1. **Total cumulative exports (Merchandise + Services)** during **April–June 2026–27** are

estimated at **US\$ 232.73 billion**, compared to **US\$ 208.98 billion** in the corresponding period of 2025–26.

2. This represents an overall export growth of **17.37%**.
3. **Merchandise exports** during **April–June 2026–27** reached **US\$ 129.32 billion**, compared to **US\$ 111.57 billion** in April–June 2025–26, registering a growth of **15.92%**.
4. **Non-petroleum exports** during **April–June 2026–27** increased to **US\$ 106.30 billion**, compared to **US\$ 94.54 billion** in the previous year, recording a growth of **12.44%**.

Major Export Drivers

The sectors registering notable export growth include:

1. Engineering Goods
2. Gems & Jewellery
3. Organic & Inorganic Chemicals
4. Electronic Goods
5. Rice

Sector-wise Growth

1. **Gems & Jewellery:** Increased by **34.64%** (US\$ 1.79 billion to US\$ 2.41 billion).
2. **Engineering Goods:** Increased by **20.74%** (US\$ 9.51 billion to US\$ 11.48 billion).
3. **Organic & Inorganic Chemicals:** Increased by **19.42%** (US\$ 2.32 billion to US\$ 2.77 billion).
4. **Electronic Goods:** Increased by **18.93%** (US\$ 4.14 billion to US\$ 4.93 billion).
5. **Rice:** Increased by **16.48%** (US\$ 0.86 billion to US\$ 1.00 billion).

Significance

1. Reflects the resilience of India's export sector despite global uncertainties.
2. Indicates strong growth in high-value manufacturing and technology exports.
3. Supports India's objective of expanding global trade and strengthening foreign exchange earnings.

4. Demonstrates the increasing contribution of engineering products, electronics, and chemicals to India's export basket.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding India's merchandise exports:

1. Non-petroleum exports are a subset of merchandise exports.
2. Engineering goods are among India's major export sectors.
3. Services exports are included while calculating merchandise exports.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Non-petroleum exports form a part of total merchandise exports.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** Engineering goods are one of India's leading export categories.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Merchandise exports cover only physical goods, whereas services exports are calculated separately and combined only for total exports.

Hyperkeratosis

Why in News?

Recently, experts reported that feeding sweets to monkeys at **Galtaji Temple** is contributing to **hyperkeratosis**, a skin disorder observed among the monkeys.

About Hyperkeratosis

1. **Hyperkeratosis** is a condition in which the outer layer of the skin becomes abnormally

thick due to excessive production of **keratin**, a protective skin protein.

2. It can affect various parts of the body, including the:
 - Hands
 - Feet
 - Mouth
 - Nose
 - Skin
3. The condition may be **inherited** or **acquired** later in life.

Types of Hyperkeratosis

Non-pressure-related Hyperkeratosis

1. Caused mainly by **genetic factors**.

Pressure-related Hyperkeratosis

1. Develops due to repeated **pressure, friction, irritation, or inflammation** of the skin.

Causes and Risk Factors

Hyperkeratosis may result from:

1. Allergies
2. Autoimmune diseases
3. Chronic skin inflammation (dermatitis)
4. Skin infections, including **Human Papillomavirus**
5. Genetic disorders
6. Certain medications (including chemotherapy)
7. Repeated pressure or rubbing
8. Psoriatic arthritis
9. Exposure to chemicals
10. Excessive sun exposure
11. Vitamin A deficiency

Common Forms

1. Actinic keratosis
2. Calluses
3. Corns
4. Eczema
5. Epidermolytic hyperkeratosis
6. Lichen planus
7. Plantar warts
8. Psoriasis
9. Warts

Symptoms



Symptoms vary depending on the underlying cause but commonly include:

1. Thickened skin
2. Dryness and scaling
3. Darkened or discoloured skin
4. Itching or pain in the affected area

Treatment

Treatment depends on the type and cause of hyperkeratosis and may include:

1. Moisturizers and keratolytic creams
2. Treatment of underlying infections or inflammatory disorders
3. Reducing pressure or friction on the affected area
4. Vitamin supplementation where deficiency exists
5. Medical procedures for severe or persistent lesions

Significance

1. Hyperkeratosis is generally manageable if diagnosed early.
2. Proper nutrition, skin care, and treatment of underlying causes help prevent complications.
3. Monitoring wildlife health is important where dietary changes caused by human activities contribute to such conditions.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Hyperkeratosis:

1. Hyperkeratosis is caused by excessive production of keratin, resulting in thickening of the skin.
2. It may occur due to genetic factors or repeated pressure and friction on the skin.
3. Hyperkeratosis affects only the palms and soles of the feet.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** Hyperkeratosis results from **excess keratin production**, causing thickened skin.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It may be **genetic** or develop due to **pressure, friction, inflammation, or irritation**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Hyperkeratosis can affect **many parts of the body**, including the hands, feet, mouth, nose, and other skin areas—not just the palms and soles.

Weave the Future 4.0 Exhibition

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Minister of Textiles visited the **"Weave the Future 4.0" Exhibition**, highlighting India's rich handloom and handicraft traditions and promoting sustainable practices such as upcycling, recycling, and circular design.

About Weave the Future 4.0

1. **Weave the Future 4.0** is an exhibition showcasing sustainable innovations in India's textile and craft sector.
2. It brings together **over 100 brands, artisans, designers, makers, recyclers, thrift collectives, and innovators**.
3. The exhibition focuses on:
 - Upcycling
 - Recycling
 - Repair
 - Circular design
 - Sustainable fashion and textiles

Key Features

1. Promotes **traditional Indian handloom and handicraft heritage** through modern sustainable practices.
2. Encourages the use of eco-friendly materials and circular economy principles.

3. Provides a platform for artisans, designers, startups, and social enterprises.
4. Showcases innovative products made from recycled and upcycled materials.
5. Supports responsible production and sustainable consumption.

Major Objectives

1. Preserve India's traditional textile and craft heritage.
2. Promote sustainability in the textile and fashion industry.
3. Encourage innovation in circular design and resource efficiency.
4. Create market opportunities for artisans and rural entrepreneurs.
5. Raise awareness about environmentally responsible production.

Significance

1. Strengthens the vision of **sustainable and circular textile manufacturing**.
2. Supports artisans by connecting traditional crafts with modern markets.
3. Promotes eco-friendly entrepreneurship and green livelihoods.
4. Contributes to India's sustainable development and circular economy goals.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the "Weave the Future 4.0" Exhibition:

1. It promotes sustainable practices such as upcycling, recycling, and circular design.
2. It showcases India's traditional handloom and handicraft heritage.
3. It is aimed at promoting sustainable innovation in the textile sector.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The exhibition promotes **upcycling, recycling, repair, and circular design**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It highlights **India's rich handloom and handicraft traditions**.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The exhibition encourages **sustainable innovation and circular economy practices** in the textile and craft sectors.

Trial Index of Services Production (ISP)

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** released the **first sub-sectoral Trial Index of Services Production (ISP)** with **Base Year 2024–25**, providing a high-frequency indicator to measure the performance of India's services sector.

About Trial Index of Services Production (ISP)

1. The **Index of Services Production (ISP)** is a **monthly indicator** developed by **MoSPI** to measure the growth and performance of the services sector.
2. It complements the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** by providing a similar high-frequency measure for services.
3. **Base Year: 2024–25**
4. The index covers **19 major service sub-sectors** classified under the **National Industrial Classification (NIC), 2025**.
5. It is compiled using administrative records and other reliable data sources.

Objectives

1. Measure short-term movements in the services sector.
2. Provide timely inputs for economic policy formulation.

3. Improve monitoring of economic activity.
4. Strengthen national accounts estimation.

Key Highlights

1. The **overall ISP increased by 4.1% in April 2025 over April 2024.**
2. Among the major sub-sectors:
 - **Wholesale Trade** recorded strong growth.
 - **Retail Trade** showed significant improvement.
 - **Accommodation & Food Services** registered robust expansion.
 - **Administrative & Support Services** recorded one of the highest growth rates.
3. The index covers important sectors such as:
 - Wholesale & Retail Trade
 - Transport
 - Warehousing
 - Information & Communication
 - Financial Services
 - Real Estate
 - Professional Services
 - Administrative & Support Services

Significance

1. Provides a reliable high-frequency indicator for the services sector.
2. Improves economic monitoring alongside the IIP.
3. Helps policymakers assess sectoral performance and design appropriate interventions.
4. Supports better estimation of GDP and overall economic activity.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Index of Services Production (ISP):

1. It is released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
2. It is a monthly indicator that measures the performance of the services sector.

3. The Trial ISP has been released with **Base Year 2024–25.**

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The **Index of Services Production (ISP)** is released by **MoSPI**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is a **monthly indicator** that tracks the performance of the services sector.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The **Trial ISP** has been introduced with **Base Year 2024–25**.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)



Why in News?

Recently, a **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** survey found that while most young Indians still aspire to have children, **economic pressures and gender inequality** are leading many to delay parenthood.

About United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

1. The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** is a **UN development agency** established in **1967**.

2. It works to improve **sexual and reproductive health**, promote **gender equality**, and support sustainable population policies worldwide.
3. It was originally known as the **United Nations Fund for Population Activities**.
4. In **1987**, it was officially renamed the **United Nations Population Fund**, while retaining the abbreviation **UNFPA**.
5. **Headquarters: New York City**

Functions of UNFPA

Reproductive Health

1. Promotes family planning.
2. Supports safe motherhood programmes.
3. Prevents and treats sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Population and Development

1. Assists countries in addressing population-related challenges.
2. Supports research and policy formulation on demographic trends.

Gender Equality

1. Promotes women's empowerment.
2. Works to reduce gender inequality, including disparities in education and healthcare.

Statistical Support

1. Provides **technical and financial assistance** for:
 - Population censuses
 - Demographic surveys
 - Data collection and analysis
2. It **does not directly conduct primary statistical surveys**.

Funding

1. UNFPA is **entirely financed through voluntary contributions** from:
 - Governments
 - Intergovernmental organizations
 - Private sector
 - Foundations
 - Individuals
2. It **does not receive funding from the UN regular budget**.

Governance

1. UNFPA receives overall policy guidance from:

- **United Nations General Assembly**
- **United Nations Economic and Social Council**

Significance

1. Supports countries in achieving better reproductive health outcomes.
2. Promotes evidence-based population policies.
3. Strengthens demographic data systems for informed policymaking.
4. Contributes to the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly those related to health and gender equality.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

1. UNFPA was established in 1967.
2. It is funded entirely through voluntary contributions.
3. UNFPA directly conducts population censuses in member countries.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** UNFPA was established in **1967**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is financed entirely through **voluntary contributions** and not from the UN regular budget.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** UNFPA **does not directly conduct population censuses**; it provides **technical and financial support** to countries for such statistical activities.

Jodhpuri Mojari





Why in News?

Recently, the **Jodhpuri Mojari**, a nearly **200-year-old traditional footwear craft** from Rajasthan, was awarded the **Geographical Indication (GI) Tag**, providing official recognition and enhancing its global identity.

About Jodhpuri Mojari

1. **Jodhpuri Mojari** is a traditional **handcrafted leather footwear** originating from **Jodhpur**.
2. It is primarily crafted by members of the **Jinagar community**.
3. The community has been associated with leather craftsmanship for nearly **250 years**.
4. Traditionally, they produced:
 - **Jeen** (saddles)
 - **Myaan** (leather sheaths for swords and daggers)
 - for royal armies.
5. Over time, the craft evolved into the iconic **Jodhpuri Mojari**, once patronized by the royal families of Rajasthan.

Key Features

1. Completely **handmade** using traditional techniques.
2. Made from leather of:
 - Camel
 - Goat
 - Cow
 - Buffalo
3. Designed to be:
 - Lightweight and airy
 - Comfortable for walking long distances
 - Durable and flexible

- Easy to remove before entering homes and temples
4. Suitable for Rajasthan's **hot and arid climate**.
 5. Worn by both **men and women**.

Geographical Indication (GI) Tag

1. A **Geographical Indication (GI)** is a sign used for products that originate from a specific geographical region and possess qualities, characteristics, or a reputation attributable to that place of origin.
2. GI tags are granted to:
 - Agricultural products
 - Food products
 - Handicrafts
 - Industrial products
 - Wines and spirits

Legal Framework

1. GI registration in India is governed by the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**.
2. The Act provides legal protection against unauthorized use of registered geographical indications.

Validity

1. A GI registration is valid for **10 years**.
2. It can be **renewed indefinitely** for successive periods of 10 years.

Significance

1. Protects traditional knowledge and craftsmanship.
2. Prevents misuse and imitation of authentic regional products.
3. Enhances market value and export potential.
4. Promotes rural livelihoods and preserves cultural heritage.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding Geographical Indications (GI) in India:

1. A GI tag identifies products whose quality or reputation is linked to a specific geographical origin.

2. The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act was enacted in 1999.

3. A registered GI tag is valid for 10 years and can be renewed.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** GI tags identify products whose qualities or reputation are linked to their geographical origin.

2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** provides the legal framework for GI registration in India.

3. **Statement 3 is correct:** A GI registration is valid for **10 years** and may be **renewed** for subsequent 10-year periods.

SwaYaan Initiative

Why in News?

Recently, the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology** and the **Drone Federation India** launched the **National Innovation Challenge for Drone Research (NIDAR)** under the **SwaYaan Initiative** to promote innovation and research in drone technologies.

About SwaYaan Initiative

1. **SwaYaan** is a national initiative launched by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** in **2022**.
2. It aims to develop and strengthen India's **Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)/Drone ecosystem**.

3. The initiative supports the Government of India's vision of making **India a global drone hub by 2030**.

Objectives

1. Build a strong indigenous drone ecosystem.
2. Promote innovation, research, and skill development in drone technologies.
3. Encourage participation from students, researchers, faculty, and industry.
4. Develop a skilled workforce for the emerging drone sector.

Key Features

1. Organizes over **1,500 academic, research, non-formal learning, and knowledge-sharing activities**.
2. Open to:
 - Undergraduate students
 - Faculty members
 - Researchers
 - Open learners
3. Focuses on strengthening technical capabilities in the drone sector.

Implementation

1. Implemented through a network of **30 premier academic and R&D institutions**, including:
 - **Indian Institutes of Technology**
 - **Indian Institute of Science**
 - **National Institutes of Technology**
 - **IIITs**
 - **IIITDM**
 - **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing**
 - **National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology**

Industry Participation

The initiative is supported by industry bodies and skill councils such as:

1. **Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry**
2. **Electronics Sector Skills Council of India**
3. **Telecom Sector Skill Council**
4. **Drone Federation India (DFI)**

5. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited

Five Key Work Themes

The project focuses on five specialized domains:

1. Drone Electronics
2. Guidance, Navigation and Control (GNC) Algorithms & Simulation
3. Aeromechanics
4. Drone Applications
5. Allied Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Technologies

Significance

1. Promotes indigenous drone technology development.
2. Strengthens India's research and innovation ecosystem.
3. Supports the **Make in India** and **Digital India** initiatives.
4. Contributes to achieving the vision of making India a global drone hub by **2030**.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding the SwaYaan Initiative:

1. It was launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) in 2022.
2. It aims to strengthen India's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)/Drone ecosystem.
3. The initiative focuses on five technical themes, including Drone Electronics and Aeromechanics.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** SwaYaan was launched by **MeitY** in **2022**.

2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It aims to develop and strengthen India's **UAS/Drone ecosystem**.

3. **Statement 3 is correct:** The initiative focuses on **five key technical themes**, including **Drone Electronics, GNC Algorithms & Simulation, Aeromechanics, Drone Applications, and Allied UAS Technologies**.

Indian Giant Flying Squirrel



Why in News?

Recently, the **Indian Giant Flying Squirrel** was sighted in the forests of **Ramnagar** for the first time in nearly **12 years**, indicating the continued ecological importance of the region.

About Indian Giant Flying Squirrel

1. The **Indian Giant Flying Squirrel** (*Petaurista philippensis*) is one of the largest species of flying squirrels.
2. It is also known as the **Large Brown Flying Squirrel** or **Common Giant Flying Squirrel**.
3. It belongs to the **Sciuridae** family, which includes squirrels.
4. **Scientific Name:** *Petaurista philippensis*

Habitat and Distribution

1. It is found across **South Asia, Southeast Asia, and southern & central China**.
2. In India, its distribution is mainly concentrated in:
 - The Himalayan region
 - Northeast India
 - Forested regions extending southwards

3. It inhabits:
- Dry deciduous forests
 - Evergreen forests
 - High-elevation forests
 - Plantations

Key Features

1. One of the **largest flying squirrels** in the world.
2. **Body length:** Approximately **30–45 cm**.
3. **Tail length:** Up to **60 cm**.
4. Possesses a **patagium** (a skin membrane stretched between the forelimbs and hindlimbs), enabling it to **glide** from tree to tree.
5. Fur is generally **black to greyish-brown**, with a grizzled appearance.
6. Has:
 - Hairy blackish-grey tail
 - Black feet
 - Pale pink nose with black whiskers (vibrissae)

Behaviour

1. **Nocturnal** in nature.
2. **Arboreal**, spending most of its life in the forest canopy.
3. Glides between trees to escape predators and search for food.

Conservation Status

1. **IUCN Red List: Least Concern (LC)**

Significance

1. An important indicator of healthy forest ecosystems.
2. Plays a role in seed dispersal and maintaining forest biodiversity.
3. Conservation of its habitat also protects several other arboreal species.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q8. Consider the following statements regarding the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel:

1. It belongs to the family **Sciuridae**.
2. It is capable of gliding using a skin membrane called the **patagium**.

3. It is listed as **Endangered** under the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The Indian Giant Flying Squirrel belongs to the **Sciuridae** family.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It glides between trees using the **patagium**, a membrane stretched between its forelimbs and hindlimbs.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** It is currently classified as **Least Concern (LC)** on the **IUCN Red List**, not Endangered.

All Ladakh Districts to Get Autonomous Hill Councils



Source: The Hindu (Peerzada Ashiq)

Why in News?

The Ladakh administration has announced the creation of **17 new tehsils** and confirmed that **all seven districts of Ladakh will now have Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs)** to strengthen grassroots governance, improve service delivery, and support constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory.

Key Facts for UPSC Prelims

1. **17 new tehsils** have been created in Ladakh, increasing the total number of tehsils from **15 to 32**.
2. **Five new districts**—Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar, and Drass—will receive their own **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs)**.
3. With this move, **all seven districts** of Ladakh will have autonomous hill councils.
4. The objective is to improve:
 - Grassroots governance
 - Public service delivery
 - Administrative accessibility
 - Inclusive development
5. The administration is also holding discussions on **constitutional safeguards** for Ladakh, including protection of **land rights, jobs, culture, and identity**.
6. There are ongoing discussions regarding a **customised governance framework** suitable for Ladakh.

UPSC Polity Angle

Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC)

1. LAHDC is a **local self-governance institution** created to provide greater autonomy in the hill areas of Ladakh.
2. Established under the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act, 1995**.
3. Presently, councils exist in **Leh (1995)** and **Kargil (2003)**; now all districts will have councils.
4. Functions include:
 - Local planning
 - Rural development
 - Agriculture
 - Health
 - Education
 - Tourism
 - Infrastructure
5. They function under the **Union Territory Administration**.

Autonomous Councils in India (Important Prelims Fact)

Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) & 275(1))

1. Applicable only to:
 - Assam
 - Meghalaya
 - Tripura
 - Mizoram
2. Provides **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** with legislative, judicial, and financial powers for tribal areas.

Difference between LAHDC and Sixth Schedule Councils

LAHDC	Sixth Schedule ADC
Created by State/UT legislation	Constitutional status under Sixth Schedule
Limited administrative autonomy	Legislative, judicial & financial autonomy
Applicable only in Ladakh	Applicable in four northeastern states

Constitutional Provisions Related to Ladakh

1. **Article 239** – Administration of Union Territories.
2. **Article 239A** – Legislature/Council of Ministers for certain UTs (not applicable to Ladakh).
3. **Article 240** – Power of the President to make regulations for certain UTs (not applicable to Ladakh).
4. **Article 244 & Sixth Schedule** – Tribal autonomous councils in Northeast (Ladakh is **not** covered).

UPSC Prelims MCQ

Q9. Consider the following statements regarding the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC):

1. LAHDCs are constitutional bodies established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act was enacted in 1995.

3. The Sixth Schedule currently applies to Ladakh.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only B. 2 only
C. 1 and 3 only D. 2 and 3 only

Answer: B

Explanation:

1. Statement 1: Incorrect – LAHDCs are statutory bodies, not Sixth Schedule institutions.
2. Statement 2: Correct – LAHDC Act, 1995.
3. Statement 3: Incorrect – Sixth Schedule does not apply to Ladakh.

UPSC Mains Practice Question (GS Paper II)
"Grassroots democratic institutions play a vital role in addressing regional aspirations in geographically sensitive areas." In the light of the expansion of Autonomous Hill Development Councils in Ladakh, discuss the significance of decentralised governance while examining the demand for constitutional safeguards in the Union Territory. (250 words)

India-U.K. Trade Deal Enters into Force

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Double Contribution Convention (DCC) have officially come into effect. Termed a "gold standard" pact by India's Commerce Secretary, Rajesh Agrawal, this agreement marks a historic shift in bilateral economic architecture between two major world economies.

Key Highlights of the Agreement:

1. **U.K. Tariff Commitments:** Under CETA, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on **96.8% of its tariff lines**, covering **97.7% of its trade value** with India.
2. **India Tariff Commitments:** India will immediately eliminate tariffs on **30.3% of its**

trade value, while another **47%** will see tariffs eliminated in a phased manner.

3. **Protection of Sensitive Sectors:** To safeguard domestic producers, India has completely protected sensitive sectors from tariff cuts. These include **dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.**

Trade Agreements & Concepts

1. **What is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?** An FTA is a pact between two or more nations to reduce or eliminate barriers to imports and exports among them, allowing goods and services to be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, or subsidies.

2. **Types of Economic Frameworks:**

- **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** Partners give preferential access to certain products by reducing duties on an agreed "positive list" of goods.
- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A deeper agreement where duties are eliminated on a bulk of trade items based on a "negative list" (everything is duty-free except what is explicitly excluded).
- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** Covers a holistic gamut including goods, services, investments, intellectual property rights, and regulatory frameworks.

3. **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Trade barriers that restrict imports or exports through mechanisms other than simple tariffs. Prominent examples mentioned in the article include:

- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures:** Regulations to protect human, animal, or plant life from pests, diseases, or contaminants.
- **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT):** Technical regulations, standards, and

testing procedures that could create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. Under the agreement, India will immediately eliminate tariffs on more than 90% of its tariff lines.
2. Sectors such as dairy, smartphones, and gold and jewellery have been kept protected by India from tariff concessions.
3. The Double Contribution Convention (DCC) prevents dual taxation on social security contributions for Indian workers in the U.K. for a maximum period of 5 years.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** India is immediately eliminating tariffs on **30.3%** of its trade value, not 90%. It is the U.K. that is immediately eliminating tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** India has protected sensitive domestic sectors like dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The DCC explicitly exempts Indian employees and employers from making dual social security contributions in the U.K. for **5 years** if they are paying them in India.

Reversal of the Proposed Strait of Hormuz Transit Fee

US President Donald Trump has officially reversed his short-lived plan to levy a **20% reimbursement fee** on commercial vessels transiting the highly strategic Strait of Hormuz. The abrupt policy backtrack occurred just a single day after the initial proposal was announced, following widespread pushback and skepticism from maritime, economic, and legal experts.

Key Highlights of the Development:

1. **The Original Idea:** President Trump originally declared that the US would step up as "**THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT**". Under this mantle, he proposed a mandatory 20% surcharge on all cargo moving through the corridor to fund and offset American maritime security operations in the volatile region.
2. **The Substitute Policy:** The proposed transit fee has now been entirely discarded. In its place, the US administration announced that it would secure **Trade and Investment Deals** with various Middle Eastern Gulf nations instead.
3. **Critical Practical Flaws:** Experts flagged immense implementation issues, pointing out a major calculation ambiguity. It was completely unclear whether the 20% toll applied to the total value of the cargo itself, the operational expenses incurred by the US military, or a different metric altogether.

Global Maritime Chokepoints

1. **What is a Strait?** A strait is a naturally formed, narrow, typically navigable waterway that connects two larger bodies of water.
2. **The Strait of Hormuz:**



- **Geography:** It connects the **Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman** and the Arabian Sea. It is bounded by Iran to the north and Oman (the Musandam enclave) and the United Arab Emirates to the south.
- **Strategic Importance:** It is widely considered the world's most critical energy chokepoint. Approximately **one-fifth (20%)** of the world's total petroleum and liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumption passes through this narrow channel daily.
- 3. **International Law & Transit Passage:** Under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, ships enjoy the right of **transit passage** through straits used for international navigation. Bordering coastal nations cannot unilaterally impose arbitrary tolls or commercial transit tariffs on foreign vessels simply for passing through.
- 4. **International Maritime Organization (IMO):** A specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for regulating global shipping, ensuring maritime safety, and preventing marine pollution.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the strategic Strait of Hormuz and international maritime law:

1. The Strait of Hormuz geographically connects the Persian Gulf directly with the Red Sea.
2. Under international conventions regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), coastal nations have the legal authority to impose mandatory transit tolls on foreign commercial vessels passing through international straits.
3. Approximately 20% of the world's total oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply transits through the Strait of Hormuz.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 3 only
- B) 1 and 2 only
- C) 2 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the **Gulf of Oman** and the Arabian Sea (not the Red Sea). The Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal are associated with the Red Sea.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** Under international maritime frameworks like UNCLOS, there is **no legal basis** for nations to impose mandatory tolls or tariffs on vessels simply exercising their right of transit passage through international straits. Coastal states can only charge for specific direct services rendered, such as pilotage or towing.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The Strait of Hormuz is a vital global chokepoint through which roughly one-fifth (20%) of the world's total oil and LNG supply flows daily.

WPI Inflation Climbs to 9.87% in June 2026

India's **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)** inflation experienced a steady acceleration, rising to **9.87% in June 2026** from 9.68% recorded in May. The index is calculated based on the revised **2022-23** base year.

Key Drivers and Highlights:

1. **Food & Weather Stress:** Wholesale food inflation surged significantly to **5.49% in June** from 3.60% in May. This spike was primarily driven by lower-than-expected agricultural output linked to a **rainfall deficit from the El Niño impact**.
2. **Non-Food and Mineral Surge:** Price pressures intensified in non-food articles, with inflation touching **11.07%**, while minerals registered an inflation rate of **9.45%** during the month.
3. **Major Drivers:** According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the primary catalysts accelerating wholesale costs included **Mineral Oils (Petroleum Products), Food Articles, Basic Metals, and Chemical & Chemical Products**.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

1. **Definition:** WPI measures the average change over time in the prices of goods traded in the wholesale market (at the first stage of transaction/bulk sale) before they reach retail consumers.
2. **Releasing Agency:** WPI data is compiled and released monthly by the **Office of the Economic Adviser**, under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
3. **Key Components of WPI (Weightage Hierarchy):**
 - **Manufactured Products:** Holds the highest weightage (~64.2%).
 - **Primary Articles:** Includes food articles, non-food articles, and minerals (~22.6%).
 - **Fuel & Power:** Covers electricity, mineral oils, coal, etc. (~13.2%).

4. **WPI vs. CPI:** Unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), WPI does **not** include the services sector (e.g., healthcare, education, transport services). Additionally, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) utilizes CPI (retail inflation), rather than WPI, as its main anchor for deciding monetary policy rates.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q3. With reference to the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) in India, consider the following statements:

1. Manufactured products carry the highest weightage among the three major commodity groups in the WPI basket.
2. The index tracks price shifts across both goods and services to capture wholesale transactions.
3. WPI data is officially monitored and published on a monthly basis by the Ministry of Finance.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 only
B) 1 and 2 only
C) 2 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):**
In the WPI commodity basket, Manufactured Products carry the largest weightage (approx. 64.2%), followed by Primary Articles and Fuel & Power.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** Unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), WPI strictly measures the changes in the price of **goods** traded in wholesale markets. It does not factor in services.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):** WPI data is calculated and

released by the *Office of the Economic Adviser*, which falls under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, not the Ministry of Finance.

Discovery of *Colobus congoensis* in the DRC

A team of researchers has confirmed the landmark discovery of a previously unknown species of African monkey, scientifically named *Colobus congoensis*. Found in the deep rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this represents one of the most significant primate breakthroughs in decades.



Key Highlights of the Discovery:

- The Location:** The new species was discovered in the specific rainforest pocket nestled between the **Lomami and Congo (Lualaba) rivers** in the east-central region of the DRC.
- Historical Rarity:** Locally referred to as the "**Likweli**", this animal is only the **fifth** new monkey species to be identified across the entire African continent in the past 75 years.
- Conservation Alert:** Due to its highly restricted geographic range, small estimated population size, and intense regional pressures from hunting and deforestation, scientists have recommended classifying *Colobus congoensis* as **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.

Primate Biogeography & IUCN Status

- The Genus *Colobus*:** Colobus monkeys are old-world primates native to the African continent. The word "colobus" originates from a Greek word meaning "docked" or "mutilated," referring to the fact that unlike most other monkeys, they have a severely reduced or virtually absent thumb—an adaptation that helps them swing smoothly through the forest canopy.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Biodiversity:** The DRC contains the majority of the Congo Basin rainforest, which is the second-largest tropical rainforest block in the world (after the Amazon Basin). It is a global biodiversity hotspot and home to other famous endemic primates such as the **Bonobo** (pygmy chimpanzee) and the **Grauer's gorilla**.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the newly discovered primate species, *Colobus congoensis*:

- It represents only the fifth new monkey species identified across Africa in the past three quarters of a century.
- It was discovered in the rainforest region bordered by the Lomami and Congo rivers.
- Because of its expansive population and wide geographic distribution across Central Africa, researchers have suggested listing it as 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

- Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** The text explicitly states that *Colobus congoensis* (locally called the Likweli) is

only the fifth new monkey species identified in Africa over the last 75 years.

2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** Its habitat was tracked down specifically to the east-central rainforest ecosystem between the Lomami and Congo (Lualaba) rivers in the DRC.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):** Quite the opposite—due to a restricted range, small population, and heavy pressures from hunting and habitat degradation, researchers have actively recommended that it be classified as **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.

International Scientific Expedition to Greenland (GIANT Project)

An international team of around 80 scientists and crew members has officially set sail for Greenland on a critical six-week maritime expedition. Traveling aboard the UK's advanced polar research vessel, *RRS Sir David Attenborough*, the researchers aim to evaluate how rapidly melting fjord glaciers are influencing global ocean currents.

Key Highlights of the Expedition:

1. **The Mission:** The fieldwork is part of an ambitious 5-year project called **GIANT (Greenland Ice sheet to AtlaNtic Tipping points)**. It is a massive international collaboration of 17 partners led by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS).
2. **The Climate Threat:** Climate scientists are deeply concerned that the massive influx of fresh, cold meltwater from Greenland's glaciers could put a "cap" on the **North Atlantic Subpolar Gyre**. This disruption could severely slow down the **Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)**—the planet's vital oceanic conveyor belt.

Greenland & Ocean Currents

1. **Basic Geography:** Greenland is the **world's largest non-continent island**, positioned in the North Atlantic Ocean between North America and Europe. Geographically, it is part of the North American continent, but politically and historically, it is an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark.
2. **The AMOC (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation):**
 - It is a large system of ocean currents that acts as a global engine, circulating warm, salty water from the tropics northward toward Europe.
 - Once the water reaches the north, it cools, increases in density, and sinks near Greenland, before flowing back south through the deep ocean.
3. **The "Freshwater" Danger:** Fresh water is less dense than salty water. When Greenland's glaciers melt rapidly, the resulting freshwater stays at the surface and does not sink easily. This acts like a brake on the entire global conveyor belt.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q5. With reference to Greenland and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), consider the following statements:

1. Geographically, Greenland is considered part of the European continent, while politically it is an autonomous province of Denmark.
2. The AMOC relies on the sinking of warm, fresh water near the polar regions to drive its global conveyor belt mechanism.
3. The GIANT project is a multi-nation scientific expedition aimed at studying how glacial meltwater affects North Atlantic ocean current stability.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A) 3 only

B) 1 and 2 only

C) 1 and 3 only

D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

- 1. Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** While Greenland is politically tied to Europe (as an autonomous province of Denmark), it is *geographically* considered part of the North American continent.
- 2. Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** The AMOC conveyor belt relies on the sinking of **cold, salty water** (not fresh water) in the North Atlantic. Cold, salty water is heavy and sinks, whereas fresh water from melting glaciers is lighter, remains on the surface, and stalls the sinking process.
- 3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The GIANT (Greenland Ice sheet to AtlaNtic Tipping points) project is a multi-partner international scientific collaboration specifically studying glacier-ocean interactions and AMOC tipping points.

Successful Revival of the Indian Grey Hornbill in Gir Forests

More than **60 years after vanishing** from Gujarat's Gir landscape (disappearing between the 1950s and 1960s), the **Indian Grey Hornbill** has recorded a major recovery. A newly published study in the international peer-reviewed journal *Birds* confirms **four consecutive years of successful breeding** following its reintroduction in 2021.

Key Highlights of the Conservation Programme:

- 1. The Translocation Project:** To restore the population, the Gujarat Forest Department released **40 Indian Grey Hornbills** in two phases. Twenty-eight birds were released between 2021 and 2022, followed by another 12 birds in 2023. The birds were translocated

from healthy populations in Gujarat's **Aravalli forests**.

- 2. High-Tech Tracking:** Eleven male hornbills were fitted with **satellite transmitters**, helping scientists monitor their exact movements, nesting, and behavioral adaptation.
- 3. Ecological Importance:** The species plays a critical role as a **long-distance seed disperser**. By eating fruits and transporting seeds of fruit-bearing trees over large areas, they act as natural forest regenerators.

Hornbills & Gir National Park

- 1. Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrocus birostris*):**
 - It is a medium-sized hornbill native to the Indian subcontinent.
 - **Conservation Status:** Classified as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List. In India, it is heavily protected under **Schedule II** of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
 - **Anatomy:** Famous for their heavy, curved bills topped by a structure called a **casque**.
- 2. Nesting Habits:** Hornbills are famous for a unique nesting ritual where the female walls herself inside a tree hollow during the egg-laying and incubation period, leaving only a narrow slit through which the male feeds her. For nesting in Gir, they heavily prefer mature, old-growth trees with wide trunks like *Sterculia urens* (Ghalo/Ghost tree) and *Terminalia belirica* (Baheda).
- 3. Gir National Park:** Located in Gujarat, it is globally renowned as the **only natural habitat of the Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*)**. Its dominant vegetation consists of dry mixed deciduous forests and teak forests.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q6. With reference to the Indian Grey Hornbill and its recent reintroduction programme in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Grey Hornbill is currently classified as 'Critically Endangered' on

the IUCN Red List due to widespread habitat loss.

2. The species plays a vital ecological role as a long-distance seed disperser, contributing significantly to forest regeneration.
3. In a pioneering project, the species was reintroduced into Gujarat's Gir forests by translocating birds from the Aravalli forests.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Indian Grey Hornbill is actually classified as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List because it is still relatively widespread across the Indian subcontinent, even adapting well to rural orchards and urban parks.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** Hornbills are often dubbed "farmers of the forest". Their ability to digest fruit pulp and excrete seeds undamaged across long distances makes them vital for natural forest canopy expansion.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The species had gone locally extinct in the Gir landscape during the mid-20th century. To reverse this, the Gujarat Forest Department translocated 40 birds from the healthy populations residing in the Aravalli hills to Gir starting in 2021.

Water Levels Surge in Gandak River Due to Nepal Rains

Heavy and continuous rainfall in the upper catchment areas of Nepal has led to a significant

and continuous rise in the water levels of the **Gandak River** in Bihar. The surge has put low-lying districts along the river basin on high alert for potential flood-like situations.

The Gandak River

1. **Introduction & Mythology:** The Gandak is one of the major rivers of North India and a significant **left-bank tributary of the Ganga River**. It finds honorable mention in the ancient Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*.
2. **Origin & Course:**
 - **Source:** It originates at an altitude of 7,620 meters above mean sea level to the north of **Dhaulagiri Mountain in Tibet** near the Nepal border.
 - **Formation:** The river is formed by the confluence of two major Himalayan rivers: the **Kali** and the **Trisuli**.
 - **Regional Names:** From its confluence point down to the Indian border, it is locally referred to as the '**Kali Gandaki**' and '**Narayani**' in Nepal.
3. **Entry into India & Path:**
 - It enters the Indian plains near **Valmikinagar in Bihar** and briefly borders **Uttar Pradesh**, carving a small stretch of the state boundary.
 - The precise entry point along the Indo-Nepal border is famously known as **Triveni**.
 - In India, it flows primarily through Bihar—covering districts like West Champaran, East Champaran, Gopalganj, and Saran—before finally **joining the Ganga River opposite Patna**, near Hajipur in the Vaishali district.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q7. With reference to the Gandak River, consider the following statements:

1. It is a major right-bank tributary of the Ganga River that originates south of the Vindhya range.

2. Before entering India at Triveni, the river is known as the 'Narayani' or 'Kali Gandaki' in Nepal.
3. Due to steep slopes and loose soil in its upper catchment, it carries high silt deposits, leading to a frequently shifting river course.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Gandak River is a **left-bank** tributary of the Ganga River, not a right-bank tributary. Furthermore, it originates in the high Himalayas north of Dhaulagiri Mountain near the Tibet-Nepal border, not south of the Vindhya range.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** In Nepal, the river is formed by the union of the Kali and Trisuli rivers and is widely known as the 'Kali Gandaki' and 'Narayani' before crossing into India at Triveni.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The upper catchment area has fragile, loose soil and steep terrain. As a result, the river transports immense volumes of silt down to the Indian plains, which frequently blocks its channels and forces it to continuously shift its course.

Water Inflows Decline in Krishna River Basin

A prolonged **week-long dry spell** affecting the Western Ghats regions of Karnataka and Maharashtra has drastically diminished water inflows into the **Krishna River** and its main tributaries. The drop in water levels has sparked

early concerns regarding agricultural irrigation and water reservoirs across the dependent peninsular states.

The Krishna River

1. **Introduction:** Also known historically as **Krishnaveni**, the Krishna River is one of the most vital rivers flowing through south-central India.
2. **Size and Scale:** It stands as **India's fourth-largest river** in terms of water inflows and drainage basin area, positioned right after the Ganga, Godavari, and Brahmaputra. The river flows over a total path extending approximately **1,400 km**.
3. **River Course:**
 - **Origin:** The river originates in western Maharashtra within the **Western Ghats** range, near the hill station of **Mahabaleshwar**, very close to the Arabian Sea coast.
 - **Flow Journey:** It moves eastward across the peninsula, cutting through four Indian states: **Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh**.
 - **Mouth:** It finally empties into the **Bay of Bengal** at **Hamaladevi** in Andhra Pradesh on the east coast.
4. **Basin and Boundaries:** The Krishna River Basin encompasses an area of nearly 258,948 sq. km., accounting for roughly **8 percent of India's total geographical area**. The basin boundaries are:
 - **North:** The Balaghat range.
 - **South & East:** The Eastern Ghats.
 - **West:** The Western Ghats.
5. **Tributaries:** The major principal tributaries feeding the river system include the **Ghataprabha, Malaprabha, Bhima, Tungabhadra, and Musi** (on which Hyderabad stands).

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q8. With reference to the Krishna River system in India, consider the following statements:

1. Geographically, it is the second-largest river basin in India after the Ganga.
2. It originates near Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats and empties into the Arabian Sea.
3. The Tungabhadra and the Bhima are major tributaries of the Krishna River, and the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam is constructed across it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 3 only
B) 1 and 2 only
C) 2 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Krishna River is India's **fourth-largest river** by water inflows and basin area, trailing behind the Ganga, Godavari, and Brahmaputra.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** While the Krishna River does originate near Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats, it flows eastwards across the peninsula and empties into the **Bay of Bengal** (at Hamasaladeevi), not the Arabian Sea.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The Bhima and Tungabhadra are indeed principal tributaries of the Krishna. Furthermore, the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam (one of the largest masonry dams in the world) is built across the Krishna River on the border of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Ravidassia Community Renews Call for Separate Religion Status

Members of the **Ravidassia community** recently convened in Punjab to reiterate their longstanding

demand for the inclusion of a separate "Ravidassia religion" category in the official Indian Census.

Key Features of the Ravidassia Community:

1. **Identity:** The Ravidassias are a **Dalit community** that follows a distinct spiritual path rooted in the philosophies of the mystic saint, Shri Guru Ravidas.
2. **Geographical Distribution:** They are heavily concentrated in the **Doaba region of Punjab**, which includes districts such as Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahr, and Jalandhar.
3. **Holy Book:** The community recognizes the **Amrit Bani of Guru Ravidas** as its primary holy book. This text contains 200 hymns composed by Guru Ravidas.
4. **Sacred Site:** **Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi** (Uttar Pradesh), the birthplace of the saint, serves as the most important pilgrimage location for the Ravidassia tradition.

Guru Ravidas & The Bhakti Movement

1. **Who was Guru Ravidas?** Guru Ravidas (1377–1527 C.E.) was a highly revered saint, philosopher, and social reformer who contributed profoundly to the medieval **Bhakti Movement** in Northern India. He is also historically known as Raidas, Rohidas, and Ruhidas.
2. **Lineage & Contemporaries:** He is traditionally regarded as a disciple of the prominent Bhakti saint **Ramananda** and is believed to have been a contemporary of the famous mystic poet **Kabir**.
3. **Philosophical Teachings:**
 - **Social Equality:** The foundation of his philosophy was the strict **rejection of the caste system**, untouchability, and gender biases, advocating instead for universal human rights and dignity.
 - **The Concept of Begampura (or Beghumpura):** He envisioned a utopian, casteless, and classless society called 'Begampura'—which literally translates to

a "city without sorrow"—where there is no fear, poverty, or discrimination.

- **Nirguna Bhakti:** Ideologically, he abandoned the *Saguna* (worship of God with physical forms/idols) and intensely focused on the *Nirguna* form of the supreme being (worship of an abstract, formless omnipresent God).

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q9. With reference to the medieval Bhakti saint Guru Ravidas and the Ravidassia community, consider the following statements:

1. Guru Ravidas belonged to the Saguna school of Bhakti, which emphasized idol worship and ritualistic devotion to physical forms of deities.
2. The concept of 'Begampura', envisioned by Guru Ravidas, refers to an ideal city or society free from sorrow, fear, and caste discrimination.
3. The Ravidassia community is heavily concentrated in the Doaba region of Punjab and considers Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi as a sacred pilgrimage site.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** Guru Ravidas explicitly abandoned *Saguna* forms of devotion and focused on the *Nirguna* form, which views the supreme being as abstract, formless, and without attributes.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** 'Begampura' (literally meaning a city without sorrow or grief) was his

philosophical blueprint for an egalitarian society where no one faces suffering, poverty, or caste discrimination.

3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The community is predominantly located in Punjab's Doaba region (districts like Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, etc.) and tracks its main spiritual pilgrimage to Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

Exempted Coal Plants Fueling Delhi's Sulphur Dioxide Surge

A new report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) has revealed that a staggering **81% of sulphur dioxide (\$SO_2\$) emissions** from coal-fired power plants within a 300-km radius of Delhi-NCR originate from facilities that the government explicitly exempted from environmental mandates.

Key Highlights of the Report:

1. **The Regulatory Loophole:** Following policy revisions, coal plants were split into categories. **Category C plants** (which are located outside immediate urban zones and make up roughly 78% of India's total coal fleet) were entirely **exempted from the mandatory installation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)** pollution control systems.
2. **Unchecked Emissions:** Out of the 154 kilotonnes of \$SO_2\$ emitted annually by the studied units near Delhi, **90% comes from plants operating completely without FGD systems**, with Category C plants driving the bulk of it.

Sulphur Dioxide

1. **Properties:** Sulphur Dioxide is an **inorganic, heavy, and colourless gas** distinguished by a sharp, suffocating, and **pungent odour**. It dissolves in water with immense ease and liquifies readily under pressure.

2. Primary Sources:

- **Anthropogenic (Man-made):** The dominant global source is the **burning of fossil fuels**, primarily coal and oil at thermal power stations, alongside industrial operations like copper/metal smelting and petroleum refining.
- **Natural Occurrence:** It is primarily spewed into the atmosphere via **volcanic eruptions** and geothermal hot springs.

3. **Environmental & Health Impacts:** It acts as a powerful irritant to human lungs, severely worsening chronic respiratory issues like asthma and bronchitis. In the atmosphere, it reacts with water vapour and oxygen to form **acid rain**, which degrades soil quality, aquatic ecosystems, and forests.

4. **What is Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)?** FGD is a chemical technology deployed at fossil-fuel power stations. It uses an alkaline absorbent (typically limestone or lime) to capture up to **95% of sulfur dioxide emissions** from exhaust gases before they exit the chimney, turning the pollutant into usable gypsum for the construction sector.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q10. With reference to Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2) pollution and mitigation technologies, consider the following statements:

1. In the atmosphere, SO_2 reacts with other compounds to form acidic aerosols, making it a major precursor to fine particulate matter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$) pollution.
2. Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) systems utilize alkaline absorbents like limestone to chemically strip sulphur dioxide from industrial exhaust gases.
3. Because SO_2 is a heavy gas, its environmental impact is strictly

localized within a 10-kilometre radius from its industrial point source.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

1. Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):

Once emitted into the air, SO_2 undergoes chemical oxidation to form acidic sulfate aerosols, which serve as a primary component in the formation of dangerous secondary fine particulate matter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$).

2. Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):

FGD technology passes industrial flue gas through an alkaline chemical slurry (like lime or limestone), which binds with the SO_2 and prevents it from escaping into the open atmosphere.

3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):

Although SO_2 is a dense gas, atmospheric dynamics allow it to travel **hundreds of kilometres** away from its original point source before settling or converting into secondary pollutants, giving it a vast regional and transboundary impact.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve Emerges as a Major Hotspot for Reptiles

The **Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)**, located in the West Champaran district of Bihar, is rapidly emerging as one of the state's richest and most significant habitats for reptiles. Recent wildlife documentation confirms that its forests are home to more than **45 distinct species of snakes**, underscoring the reserve's dense and thriving biodiversity.

Key Highlights of the Feature:



1. **Rich Diversity:** Out of the 45+ documented snake species, researchers point out that only eight species are highly venomous (including the King Cobra, Common Krait, and Russell's Viper), while the vast majority are non-venomous or mildly venomous.
2. **Ecological Guardians:** Wildlife experts emphasize that these reptiles play an irreplaceable role as a natural pest control mechanism, checking rodent populations and maintaining the delicate ecological equilibrium of the Terai landscape.
3. **Unique Discoveries:** The region serves as a crucial hub for herpetological research, boasting unique sightings such as the long-snouted vine snake, which is currently recorded only within VTR in the region.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)

1. **Location & Exclusivity:** VTR is situated along the **India-Nepal border** in the northernmost part of the West Champaran district. It is exceptionally significant as it is **the only tiger reserve in the state of Bihar**.
2. **Composition:** The reserve encompasses both the **Valmiki National Park** and the **Valmiki Wildlife Sanctuary**.
3. **Biogeographic Zone:** It represents the **easternmost limit of the Himalayan Terai forests** in India. Located within the Gangetic Plains bio-geographic zone, its terrain features a unique geomorphic combination of **Bhabar** (rocky boulders and porous ground) and **Terai** (marshy, water-logged lowlands) tracts.
4. **Boundaries & Drainage:**
 - It is bounded by Nepal's **Royal Chitwan National Park** to the north.
 - The **Gandak River** forms its natural western boundary. Other prominent rivers crisscrossing the reserve include the Pandai, Manor, Harha, Masan, and Bhapsa.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q11. With reference to the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR), which was recently in the news

for its reptile diversity, consider the following statements:

1. It is the sole tiger reserve located in the state of Bihar.
2. Geographically, it represents the westernmost limit of the Himalayan Terai eco-region in India.
3. The reserve is bounded by the River Gandak on its western flank and shares a border with Nepal's Chitwan National Park to the north.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: C) 1 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** Valmiki Tiger Reserve is famously recognized as the only protected area designated as a tiger reserve in Bihar.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** The reserve marks the **easternmost** limit of the Himalayan Terai forests in India, not the westernmost.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The terrain is geographically bounded by Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park in the north and features the Gandak River tracing its entire western boundary.

Two New Solitary Bee Species Discovered in Arunachal Pradesh

Researchers have discovered two previously unknown species of solitary bees in the northeastern state of **Arunachal Pradesh**. The newly identified insects have been named *Elaphropoda triangulata* and *Habropoda adi*.

Key Highlights of the Discovery:

1. **The Nomenclature Explained:**

- *Elaphropoda triangulata* gets its name from the distinctive **triangle-shaped markings** found on its abdomen.
 - *Habropoda adi* is named in honor of the **Adi indigenous community** of Arunachal Pradesh, who inhabit the specific region where the specimens were gathered.
2. **Classification and Habitat:** Both species belong to the bee subfamily **Anthophorinae**, a group composed largely of **ground-nesting solitary bees**.
3. **How They Were Captured:** The researchers collected these bees using **Malaise traps**. This is a passive sampling technique designed to capture flying insects continuously over long stretches of time. It is incredibly efficient at detecting low-density or elusive species that standard hand-netting methods often miss.

Solitary Bees & Insect Sampling

1. **What are Solitary Bees?** Unlike honeybees or bumblebees, solitary bees **do not live in social colonies**, have no queen, and do not make honey. Instead, every individual female acts as a fertile queen who constructs and provisions her **own individual nest alone**, usually tunneling into soil, wood, or hollow stems.
2. **Ecological Importance:** Solitary bees are incredibly efficient and **vital pollinators**. Because they do not have specialized "pollen baskets" like honeybees, they lose a lot more pollen as they move from flower to flower, inadvertently making them highly effective at fertilizing wild plants and agricultural crops.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

- Q12. Consider the following statements regarding the recently discovered bee species, *Elaphropoda triangulata* and *Habropoda adi*:**
1. Unlike social honeybees, these species are solitary bees that nest individually and do not form large colonies.

2. The species belong to a subfamily of bees known mostly for nesting in high-altitude tree canopies.
3. Malaise traps, which were used to collect these bees, are a form of passive sampling effective at capturing flying insects over extended periods.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: C) 1 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** The text confirms that both are solitary bees, meaning they do not live in colonial structures or hives and usually nest completely alone.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** These bees belong to the subfamily Anthophorinae, which consists predominantly of **ground-nesting** solitary bees, not canopy-nesting bees.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** A Malaise trap is a passive, tent-like sampling method designed to capture flying insects over extended timelines, making it ideal for documenting elusive, low-density populations.

E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI) –

The **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)** has launched the **E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI)**, the country's **first national platform** dedicated to strengthening India's digital commerce ecosystem through collaboration among industry, government, and other stakeholders.

About E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI)

1. The **E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI)** is a **first-of-its-kind national platform** for



promoting the growth of India's digital commerce ecosystem.

2. It was launched by the **Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)**.
3. The council aims to bring together:
 - Policymakers
 - E-commerce marketplaces
 - Retailers and brands
 - MSMEs
 - Logistics providers
 - Payment solution companies
 - Technology firms
 - Start-ups
 - Exporters
 - Industry experts and academic institutions

Key Focus Areas

ECCI will work on:

1. Product and service e-commerce
2. Cross-border trade
3. Logistics and supply chain
4. Digital payments
5. MSME enablement
6. Consumer trust and protection
7. Artificial Intelligence (AI)
8. Mobility and travel technology
9. Policy advocacy and industry research

Objectives

1. Promote collaboration between government and industry.
2. Support policy formulation for digital commerce.
3. Strengthen India's e-commerce ecosystem.
4. Enhance innovation, research, and consumer confidence.
5. Facilitate the growth of MSMEs through digital commerce.

About IMAI

1. **Established:** 2004
2. It is a **not-for-profit industry body** registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
3. Represents over **500 member organizations**, including:

- Digital platforms
- Technology companies
- Start-ups
- Multinational corporations

Major Functions

1. Promotes the growth of India's digital economy.
2. Represents industry interests before the Government.
3. Conducts policy advocacy and research.
4. Encourages innovation, digital inclusion, and consumer trust.
5. Supports sectors such as:
 - Digital payments
 - FinTech
 - E-commerce
 - EdTech
 - HealthTech
 - AgriTech
 - AI, ML, AR/VR, and IoT

Significance

1. Provides a unified platform for India's **USD 120 billion digital commerce ecosystem**.
2. Strengthens the digital economy and e-commerce governance.
3. Supports MSMEs in accessing national and global digital markets.
4. Promotes innovation, consumer protection, and trusted digital trade.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q1. The E-Commerce Council of India (ECCI), recently launched, has been established by:

- (a) Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- (b) NITI Aayog
- (c) Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)
- (d) National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM)

Answer: (c) Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)

VISHWAS 2026 – In News

The **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** has launched **VISHWAS 2026**, a **one-time dispute resolution scheme** to facilitate the speedy and amicable settlement of disputes related to **EPF damages and penalties**, while encouraging voluntary compliance.

About VISHWAS 2026

1. **VISHWAS 2026** is a **one-time dispute resolution initiative** launched by the **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)**.
2. **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Labour & Employment.**
3. The scheme aims to resolve **pending disputes relating to EPF damages and penalties** through a **transparent, fully digital, and time-bound process**.
4. **Effective from: 29 June 2026.**
5. **Duration: Six months** from the date of notification.

Objectives

1. Promote **voluntary compliance** with EPF provisions.
2. Reduce long-pending litigation.
3. Ensure faster resolution of disputes.
4. Protect employees' social security interests.

Coverage

The scheme covers:

1. Cases where **penalty or damages are under challenge before courts or tribunals**.
2. Final orders where **recovery is pending or only partially completed**, including **Recovery Certificate (RRC)** cases.
3. Cases where **notices have been issued but final orders are yet to be passed**.
4. Cases where **penalty or damage notices are yet to be issued**.

Exclusions

The scheme does **not** apply to:

1. Cases where damages or penalties have already been **fully recovered**.
2. Cases involving **fraud, misappropriation, or deliberate falsification of records**.
3. Cases where the **statutory interest has not been fully deposited**.

Application Process

1. Eligible employers can apply through the **EPFO Employer Portal**.
2. Applications can be submitted using:
 - **Digital Signature Certificate (DSC)**, or
 - **e-Sign**.
3. Applicants must undertake **not to pursue any further appeal** after settlement under the scheme.

Benefits

For Employers

1. Settlement of legacy EPF disputes at **substantially reduced penalty and damage rates** (for eligible historical defaults before **14 June 2024**).
2. Lower financial burden.
3. Faster closure of pending litigation.

For Employees

1. Quicker resolution of long-pending EPF cases.
2. Improved compliance by employers.
3. Better protection of provident fund benefits.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q2. VISHWAS 2026, recently launched by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), is primarily aimed at:

- (a) Providing pension benefits to unorganised workers
- (b) Facilitating one-time settlement of disputes relating to EPF damages and penalties
- (c) Offering financial assistance to MSMEs for employee welfare
- (d) Promoting skill development among industrial workers

Answer: (b) Facilitating one-time settlement of disputes relating to EPF damages and penalties

Manasbal Lake

Why in News?

Recently, **Manasbal Lake** in **Jammu & Kashmir** has shown signs of **ecological recovery** with the return of migratory birds, indicating improving wetland health.

About Manasbal Lake

1. **Location:** It is situated in the **Ganderbal district** of **Jammu and Kashmir**, in the **Jhelum Valley**.
2. It lies at an altitude of about **1,585–1,600 metres** above sea level.
3. It is regarded as the **deepest freshwater lake in India**, with a maximum depth of about **13 metres (43 ft)**.
4. The lake derives its name from **Lake Manasarovar**.

Geographical Features

1. **Surroundings:**
 - Bounded by the **Baladar Mountains**.
 - The **Karewa Plateau** lies to the north.
 - **Ahtung Hills** to the south are known for limestone extraction.
2. **Water Source:**
 - Fed primarily by **precipitation** and **more than 1,200 springs**.
 - The outflow is regulated into the **Jhelum River**.

Physical Characteristics

1. It is a **monomictic lake**, meaning it mixes its water column **once every year**.
2. It exhibits **thermal stratification** from **March to November**.
3. The **thermocline** occurs at around **9 metres** depth.
4. Surface water temperature ranges from approximately **6°C in winter** to **27.5°C in summer**.

Historical Significance

1. The **Mughal Garden Jaroka Bagh**, built by **Nur Jahan**, overlooks the lake.
2. Nearby are the ruins of a **17th-century fort** and an **ancient temple (800–900 AD)**.

Biodiversity

Flora

1. Rich in **macrophytes**:
 - Emergent
 - Submerged
 - Floating vegetation
2. Supports abundant **phytoplankton**, forming the base of the aquatic food chain.

Fauna

1. Supports:
 - Zooplankton
 - Benthic organisms
 - Important fish species such as:
 - ✓ *Schizothorax niger*
 - ✓ *Schizothorax esocinus*
 - ✓ *Cyprinus carpio*
 - ✓ *Neomacheilus latius*
2. The lake is an important habitat for **migratory birds** and supports local fisheries.

Significance

1. One of Kashmir's most important freshwater wetlands.
2. Supports fisheries, biodiversity, and migratory bird populations.
3. Serves as an indicator of wetland ecosystem health.
4. Plays an important role in maintaining the ecological balance of the Jhelum basin.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding Manasbal Lake:

1. It is located in the Ganderbal district of Jammu & Kashmir.
2. It is regarded as the deepest freshwater lake in India.

3. The lake is primarily fed by glaciers originating from the Himalayas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is correct: Manasbal Lake** is located in **Ganderbal district, Jammu & Kashmir**.
- Statement 2 is correct:** It is widely regarded as the **deepest freshwater lake in India**, with a depth of about **13 metres**.
- Statement 3 is incorrect:** The lake is **primarily fed by precipitation and more than 1,200 natural springs**, with its outflow regulated into the **Jhelum River**, rather than being glacier-fed.

Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)

Why in News?

Recently, the **Prime Minister of India** virtually inaugurated **75 redeveloped railway stations across 20 States** under the **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)**.

About Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)

- The **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS)** was launched in **2022** by the **Ministry of Railways**.
- It aims at the **development, modernization, and upgradation of railway stations** across the **Indian Railways** network.
- The scheme envisages **long-term, phased redevelopment** of railway stations based on station-specific requirements.
- It adopts a **Master Planning** approach for sustainable station redevelopment.
- The objective is to make railway stations **cleaner, more accessible, passenger-friendly, and multimodal transport hubs**.

Objectives

- Modernize railway stations with world-class passenger amenities.
- Improve accessibility and passenger convenience.
- Promote multimodal transport integration.
- Enhance station aesthetics and environmental sustainability.
- Boost local economic activities through station redevelopment.

Key Features

Master Planning

- Redevelopment is based on **station-specific master plans** with a long-term vision.
- Implementation is carried out in phases according to passenger demand and local needs.

Passenger Amenities

The scheme provides:

- Improved entry and exit points
- Modern waiting halls
- Better toilet facilities
- Upgraded platforms
- Platform roofing
- Escalators and lifts
- Free Wi-Fi wherever required

Multimodal Connectivity

- Integrates railway stations with other modes of transport for seamless passenger movement.

Local Economy Promotion

- Encourages the sale of local products through the **One Station One Product (OSOP) Scheme**.
- Promotes regional crafts and indigenous products.

Green and Sustainable Development

- Focus on greener station infrastructure.
- Improved landscaping and beautification.
- Better accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Significance

- Enhances passenger experience and comfort.
- Promotes regional economic development.

3. Strengthens railway infrastructure under the vision of **modern Indian Railways**.
4. Supports sustainable urban mobility and integrated transport planning.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS):

1. It was launched in 2022 to modernize and redevelop railway stations across the Indian Railways network.
2. The scheme follows a station-specific Master Planning approach for long-term redevelopment.
3. Promotion of local products through the **One Station One Product (OSOP)** initiative is one of its features.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme** was launched in **2022** to redevelop and modernize railway stations across India.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** The scheme adopts a **Master Planning** approach tailored to the long-term needs of individual stations.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** It promotes **local products** through the **One Station One Product (OSOP)** initiative, supporting local artisans and regional economies.

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)

Why in News?

Recently, **BIMSTEC** security chiefs pledged **joint action against terrorism** and endorsed **maritime**

law enforcement principles, reinforcing regional cooperation on security and stability.

About BIMSTEC

1. **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** is a regional organization comprising countries located in and around the **Bay of Bengal**.
2. It was established through the **Bangkok Declaration on 6 June 1997**.
3. It serves as a bridge between **South Asia** and **Southeast Asia**, promoting regional integration.

Members

BIMSTEC consists of **7 member countries**:

1. **South Asia (5):**
 - Bangladesh
 - Bhutan
 - India
 - Nepal
 - Sri Lanka
2. **Southeast Asia (2):**
 - Myanmar
 - Thailand

Historical Evolution

1. **1997:** Established as **BIST-EC** (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation).
2. **1998:** Renamed **BIMST-EC** after the inclusion of **Myanmar**.
3. **2004:** Became **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** after the inclusion of **Bhutan** and **Nepal**.

Objectives

1. Promote technical and economic cooperation among member countries.
2. Enhance regional connectivity and integration.
3. Strengthen trade, investment, and sustainable development.

4. Improve cooperation in security, disaster management, and maritime affairs.

Working Mechanism

1. **Summit:** Held once every 2 years.
2. **Ministerial Meeting:** Held annually.
3. **Senior Officials' Meeting:** Held twice a year.

Priority Sectors

1. BIMSTEC has identified **14 priority sectors**, with each member country leading specific sectors.
2. **India leads:**
 - Transport & Communication
 - Tourism
 - Environment & Disaster Management
 - Counter-Terrorism & Transnational Crime

Secretariat

1. **Headquarters:** BIMSTEC Secretariat
2. **Location:** Dhaka, Bangladesh

Significance

1. Acts as a vital bridge between **South Asia and Southeast Asia**.
2. Promotes India's **Neighbourhood First, Act East Policy**, and **Indo-Pacific Vision**.
3. Strengthens regional cooperation in trade, connectivity, maritime security, disaster management, and counter-terrorism.
4. Reduces dependence on other regional groupings by providing an alternative platform for Bay of Bengal cooperation.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding BIMSTEC:

1. BIMSTEC was established through the **Bangkok Declaration** in 1997.
2. It connects countries from both South Asia and Southeast Asia.
3. The BIMSTEC Secretariat is located in **Kathmandu, Nepal**.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** BIMSTEC was established through the **Bangkok Declaration** on 6 June 1997.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It links **five South Asian** countries with **two Southeast Asian** countries, making it an important regional grouping around the Bay of Bengal.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The **BIMSTEC Secretariat** is located in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**, not Kathmandu, Nepal.

Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)

Why in News?

Recently, the **Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)** advised shipowners to avoid deploying Indian seafarers on vessels undertaking voyages through the **Strait of Hormuz** until further orders due to the prevailing security situation.

About Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)

1. The **Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)** is the **apex maritime authority** of the Government of India.
2. It was established in **September 1949**.
3. It functions as an **attached office** under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**.
4. It deals with executive matters relating to **merchant shipping**.
5. **Headquarters:** Mumbai

Functions of DGMA

Shipping Policy Implementation

1. Implements national shipping policies and maritime legislation.
2. Ensures compliance with national and international maritime regulations.

Maritime Education and Training

1. Promotes maritime education and skill development.
2. Coordinates training activities in line with international standards, including those of the **International Maritime Organization**.

Survey and Certification

1. Conducts registration, inspection, survey, and certification of merchant vessels.
2. Examines and certifies Merchant Navy officers.

Licensing of Seafarers

1. Issues competency certificates and other statutory certifications to merchant navy personnel.
2. Ensures Indian seafarers are trained and qualified for service onboard ships.

Protection of Seafarers

1. Safeguards the rights, welfare, and safety of Indian seafarers.
2. Issues advisories and guidelines during maritime emergencies.

Ship Inspection

1. Inspects Indian-flagged ships and foreign vessels operating in Indian waters and ports.
2. Ensures compliance with international maritime conventions and safety standards.

Significance

1. Acts as India's principal maritime regulatory authority.
2. Enhances maritime safety, security, and environmental protection.
3. Facilitates implementation of international maritime conventions.
4. Protects the interests and welfare of Indian seafarers.
5. Supports the growth of India's shipping and maritime sector.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA):

1. It is the apex maritime authority of the Government of India functioning under

the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

2. It is responsible for the registration, survey, inspection, and certification of merchant vessels.
3. Its headquarters is located in Chennai.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The **DGMA** is the apex maritime authority functioning under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It is responsible for **registration, survey, inspection, certification of merchant vessels, and certification of Merchant Navy officers**.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The **headquarters of DGMA is located in Mumbai**, not Chennai.

Aral Sea

Why in News?

Recently, a study found that the **drying of the Aral Sea** has released **over 200 teragrams of carbon** from exposed lake-bed sediments, turning a long-term carbon reservoir into a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

About Aral Sea

1. The **Aral Sea** is a **saline lake** in **Central Asia**, located between **Kazakhstan** (north) and **Uzbekistan** (south).
2. It was once the **fourth-largest inland water body** in the world and one of the largest saline lakes.
3. It lies to the **east of the Caspian Sea**.
4. Today, only fragmented remnants of the lake remain due to decades of shrinkage.

Formation

1. The **Aral Sea Depression** was formed towards the end of the **Neogene Period** (about **23–2.6 million years ago**).
2. The lake was primarily fed by two glacier-fed rivers:
 - **Syr Darya**
 - **Amu Darya**

Climate

1. Lies in the **arid desert-continental climatic region** of Central Asia.
2. Experiences:
 - Hot summers
 - Cold winters
 - Large diurnal temperature variations
 - Low rainfall

Why Did the Aral Sea Shrink?

1. Originally covered about **68,000 sq. km.**
2. Beginning in the **1960s**, the **Soviet Union** diverted the waters of the **Amu Darya** and **Syr Darya** rivers to irrigate cotton-growing regions.
3. This drastically reduced river inflow into the lake.
4. By the **1980s**, the Aral Sea had lost nearly **80% of its water volume**.
5. Consequences included:
 - Collapse of fisheries
 - Increased salinity
 - Formation of the **Aralkum Desert**
 - Severe ecological degradation
6. Today, the Aral Sea is on the verge of complete disappearance.

Environmental Significance

1. Considered one of the world's **greatest human-induced environmental disasters**.
2. Dry lakebed releases:
 - Carbon emissions
 - Toxic dust
 - Salt particles
3. Contributes to:
 - Climate change
 - Soil degradation
 - Public health problems
 - Loss of biodiversity

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding the Aral Sea:

1. It is a saline lake located between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
2. It was primarily fed by the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers.
3. The shrinking of the Aral Sea is mainly attributed to tectonic uplift blocking its river inflows.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1 is correct:** The **Aral Sea** is a **saline lake** situated between **Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**.
2. **Statement 2 is correct:** It was mainly fed by the **Amu Darya** and **Syr Darya** rivers.
3. **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The principal cause of its shrinkage was the **diversion of river waters for irrigation by the Soviet Union from the 1960s onward**, not tectonic uplift.

Prime Minister Pays Tribute to Mangal Pandey on His Birth Anniversary

Source: PIB (Press Information Bureau) | Prime Minister's Office (PMO)

Key News

1. The Prime Minister paid tribute to **Mangal Pandey** on his birth anniversary, remembering his extraordinary contribution to India's freedom struggle.
2. Mangal Pandey is regarded as one of the earliest revolutionaries whose actions became the immediate spark for the **Revolt of 1857**.



3. His defiance against the British East India Company inspired widespread resistance across northern and central India.
4. The tribute highlights his enduring legacy in India's struggle against colonial rule and his place among the pioneers of the freedom movement.

Major Key Data / Facts

1. **Birth:** 19 July 1827, Nagwa village, Ballia district (present-day Uttar Pradesh).
2. **Military Unit:** 34th Bengal Native Infantry, Bengal Army of the East India Company.
3. **Place of Execution:** Barrackpore (present-day West Bengal), **8 April 1857**.
4. **Legacy:** Commemorated through a **Government of India postage stamp (1984)** and several memorials across India.

Static Introduction:

Mangal Pandey and the Revolt of 1857

Who was Mangal Pandey?

1. Mangal Pandey was a sepoy in the **34th Bengal Native Infantry** of the British East India Company's Bengal Army. He is widely regarded as one of the earliest revolutionaries whose actions at **Barrackpore on 29 March 1857** became the immediate catalyst for the **Revolt of 1857**, often referred to as India's **First War of Independence**.

The Revolt of 1857

What was the Revolt of 1857?

1. The Revolt of 1857 was the first large-scale armed uprising against British rule in India. It began as a military mutiny but soon transformed into a broad-based political and social movement in many parts of northern and central India.

Major Causes of the Revolt

Political Causes

1. Doctrine of Lapse introduced by **Lord Dalhousie**.
2. Annexation of Awadh (1856).

3. Expansionist policies of the East India Company.

Economic Causes

1. Heavy land revenue demands.
2. Decline of traditional industries.
3. Exploitation of peasants and artisans.

Military Causes

1. Discrimination against Indian soldiers.
2. Low salaries and limited promotion opportunities.
3. General dissatisfaction within the Bengal Army.

Immediate Cause

1. Introduction of the **Enfield P-53 rifle** cartridges allegedly greased with **cow and pig fat**, offending the religious beliefs of both Hindu and Muslim soldiers.

Major Centres of the Revolt

Centre	Leader
Delhi	Bahadur Shah II
Kanpur	Nana Sahib
Jhansi	Rani Lakshmibai
Lucknow	Begum Hazrat Mahal
Bareilly	Khan Bahadur Khan
Arrah	Kunwar Singh
Faizabad	Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah

Important Consequences of the Revolt

Administrative Changes

1. End of East India Company rule.
2. Power transferred directly to the British Crown through the **Government of India Act, 1858**.

Political Changes

1. Office of the **Secretary of State for India** created.
2. Governor-General also became the **Viceroy of India**.

Military Reforms

1. Reorganisation of the Indian Army.
2. Increased proportion of British soldiers.
3. Policy of divide and rule intensified.

Government of India Act, 1858

Key Features

1. Abolished the East India Company's rule.

- Established direct Crown rule in India.
- Created the office of Secretary of State for India.
- Established the India Council in London.
- Marked the beginning of the **British Raj (1858–1947)**.

Historiographical Perspectives

Historian	View
V.D. Savarkar	First War of Independence
R.C. Majumdar	Primarily a sepoy mutiny with limited national character
S.N. Sen	A broad-based uprising with regional variations

UPSC Value Addition

Important Personalities Associated with the Revolt

Personality	Region
Bahadur Shah II	Delhi
Rani Lakshmibai	Jhansi
Tantia Tope	Central India
Nana Sahib	Kanpur
Begum Hazrat Mahal	Lucknow
Kunwar Singh	Bihar
Mangal Pandey	Barrackpore

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q8. Consider the following statements regarding Mangal Pandey and the Revolt of 1857:

- Mangal Pandey served in the **34th Bengal Native Infantry** of the East India Company.
- The immediate trigger for the Revolt of 1857 was the controversy surrounding the Enfield rifle cartridges.
- The Government of India Act, 1858 abolished the rule of the East India Company and transferred authority to the British Crown.
- The Doctrine of Lapse was introduced after the Revolt of 1857.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only (b) 1 and 4 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Explanation

- Statement 1 – Correct**
Mangal Pandey was a sepoy in the **34th Bengal Native Infantry**.
- Statement 2 – Correct**
The Enfield rifle cartridge controversy was the immediate trigger for the Revolt of 1857.
- Statement 3 – Correct**
The **Government of India Act, 1858** ended Company rule and transferred administration to the British Crown.
- Statement 4 – Incorrect**
The **Doctrine of Lapse** was introduced by **Lord Dalhousie** before the Revolt of 1857.

Possible UPSC Mains Question

Q9. "The actions of Mangal Pandey became the immediate spark for the Revolt of 1857, but the uprising was rooted in deeper political, economic and military grievances." Discuss. (250 words)

Centre grants environmental clearance to 1,000 MW Naying Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh

What is in News?

- The Central Government has granted **environmental clearance** to the **1,000 MW Naying Hydroelectric Project** in **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The project will be developed on the **Siyom (Yomgo) River** in **West Siang district**.
- It is a **run-of-the-river hydropower project** and will be implemented by **North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)**.

- The project is expected to strengthen renewable energy generation and improve power availability in Northeast India.

Importance

1. Renewable Energy Development

- Enhances India's hydropower capacity and supports the transition to clean energy.

2. Strategic Importance of Northeast

- Promotes infrastructure development in Arunachal Pradesh, a strategically important border state.

3. Energy Security

- Increases domestic electricity generation and reduces dependence on fossil fuels.

4. Run-of-the-River Technology

- Generates electricity with relatively lower reservoir storage and reduced submergence compared to large storage dams.

5. Regional Development

- Expected to improve connectivity, employment, and economic growth in the Northeast.

About Naying Hydroelectric Project

Feature	Details
Project Capacity	1,000 MW
Location	West Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh
River	Siyom (Yomgo) River
Project Type	Run-of-the-River Hydroelectric Project
Implementing Agency	North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)
Powerhouse	Underground
Turbines	4 × 250 MW
Expected Annual Generation	≈ 4,966.77 Million Units (MU)

Additional UPSC Facts

Siyom River

- Right-bank tributary** of the **Brahmaputra River**.
- Flows through **West Siang district** of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Approximately **170 km** long.
- Moulung National Park is located on its eastern bank.

North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)

- Established in **1976**.
- A **Miniratna Category-I, Schedule 'A' CPSE**.
- Functions under the **Ministry of Power**.
- Develops hydro, thermal, and renewable energy projects, mainly in Northeast India.

Run-of-the-River Project

- Utilizes the natural flow of a river with **minimal water storage**.
- Generally has **lower environmental and social impacts** than large reservoir-based dams.
- Suitable for mountainous regions with steep river gradients.

MCQ

Q10. The Naying Hydroelectric Project, recently in news, is proposed on which river?

- Subansiri River
- Dibang River
- Siyom (Yomgo) River
- Kameng River

Correct Answer: (c) Siyom (Yomgo) River

SMILE Scheme: Progress in Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in Begging

Source: PIB (Press Information Bureau)

WHAT IS NEWS?

Under the SMILE (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) scheme, over 10,200 individuals engaged in begging have been successfully rehabilitated across 216 cities in

India as part of the vision for a "Bhiksha Vritti Mukta Bharat" (Begging-Free India).

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

- **Nodal Ministry & Scheme Type:** SMILE is an umbrella Central Sector Scheme fully funded and implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **Sub-Schemes:** It comprises two dedicated sub-schemes:
 - Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons.
 - Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehab.

Okinotori Island & Maritime Sovereign Claims

Source: PIB

WHAT IS NEWS?

Japanese authorities reported that a Chinese naval destroyer, along with Russian military vessels, conducted live-fire naval drills near Okinotori Island. Japan raised concerns as the exercise occurred within its claimed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), whereas China rejected the protest, asserting that the feature is legally a "rock" and cannot generate an EEZ under international law.

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Geographical Nature & Location:** Okinotori (also called Parece Vela) is a remote, uninhabited tropical atoll located in the Philippine Sea (Pacific Ocean), approximately 1,700 km south of Tokyo. It is Japan's southernmost territory and its only landmass south of the Tropic of Cancer.
2. **Geomorphology:** The feature is an atoll situated on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge. At high tide, only two natural rocky outcrops remain exposed above sea level.

3. **Administrative Jurisdiction:** Administratively, Okinotori falls under the Ogasawara Islands governance system (Tokyo Metropolis).
4. **Strategic Position:** Positioned roughly halfway between Taiwan and Guam (US territory), it holds crucial strategic importance along maritime trade routes and Pacific naval choke points.
5. **Maritime Dispute:** Japan claims a 200-nautical-mile EEZ surrounding the feature and has invested heavily in concrete structures and titanium nets to prevent erosion. However, nations including China and South Korea contest this EEZ, classifying Okinotori as a "rock" under UNCLOS.

STATIC CONCEPT

- Maritime Zones under UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)
- **Baseline:** The low-water line along the coast from which maritime limits are measured.
- **Territorial Sea:** Extends up to 12 nautical miles (nmi) from the baseline; the coastal state exercises full sovereignty over airspace, water, seabed, and subsoil.
- **Contiguous Zone:** Extends up to 24 nmi; allows states to exercise control necessary to prevent/punish infringements of customs, fiscal, immigration, or sanitary laws.
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** Extends up to 200 nmi from the baseline; the coastal state has sovereign rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing natural resources (living and non-living) in the water column and seabed.
- **Continental Shelf:** Natural prolongation of land territory up to 200 nmi (or up to 350 nmi under specific geological conditions).
- **UNCLOS Article 121:** Regime of Islands vs. Rocks
- **Island (Article 121, Para 1):** A naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide. Islands generate a

Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, EEZ, and Continental Shelf.

- **Rocks (Article 121, Para 3):** Rocks that cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no Exclusive Economic Zone or Continental Shelf. (Note: They still generate a 12 nmi Territorial Sea).

UPSC PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q1. With reference to Okinotori Island, consider the following statements:

1. It is an inhabited coral atoll located in the South China Sea.
2. It represents the southernmost territorial claim of Japan.
3. It lies on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because Okinotori is uninhabited and located in the Philippine Sea (Pacific Ocean), not the South China Sea. Statements 2 and 3 are correct as it is Japan's southernmost territory and sits on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge.

Sagarmala Project and Modernization of Ports: Enhancing Multimodal Connectivity and Port Efficiency

SOURCE: Press Information Bureau (PIB) | Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

WHAT IS NEWS?

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) released an update on the progress of the Sagarmala Scheme. Cargo handling capacity across Major and non-major ports in India

expanded significantly from approximately 1,400 MTPA in 2013–14 to 2,818 MTPA by March 2026 due to targeted port modernization, capital dredging, and last-mile connectivity initiatives.

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Project Progress:** Under the Sagarmala initiative, 79 projects costing ₹5,374.5 crore have been completed, while 54 projects valued at ₹4,538.2 crore are currently under implementation across its core operational pillars.
2. **Five Pillars of Sagarmala:** The scheme provides central financial assistance structured around 5 strategic pillars:
 - Port Modernization
 - Port Connectivity
 - Port-led Industrialization
 - Development of Coastal Community
3. Coastal Shipping and Inland Water Transport (IWT)
4. One Nation One Port Process (ONOP): Streamlined digital port processes have been introduced nationwide to improve operational efficiency and reduce turnaround time for shipping vessels.
5. Comprehensive Port Connectivity Plan (CPCP): Prepared by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in 2022 to systematically identify, assess, and address road and rail infrastructure gaps linking operational ports with internal economic hubs.
6. Inter-Ministerial Implementation Split: Under the joint port connectivity pipeline, projects located within port limits are executed by respective Port Authorities, while projects outside port limits are implemented by the Ministry of Railways, MoRTH, or State Governments.

STATIC CONCEPT

Sagarmala Programme



1. **Type of Scheme:** Central Sector Scheme directly under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW).
2. **Objective:** To lower overall logistics costs for domestic and export-import cargo through port-led development, capacity expansion, and seamless integration with hinterland transport networks.
3. **Governance Architecture:** Approved by the Union Cabinet in 2015, coordinated via the National Sagarmala Apex Committee (NSAC) chaired by the Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

Indian Maritime Regulatory Framework

1. Major Ports vs. Non-Major Ports:

Major Ports (12 state-owned): Under the administrative control of the Central Government (MoPSW) and governed by the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021.

Non-Major Ports (~200+): Under the administrative and regulatory domain of respective State Maritime Boards or State Governments.

PM GatiShakti Synergy: The Comprehensive Port Connectivity Plan (CPCP) functions as an integral pillar under the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan to facilitate multimodal logistics integration.

UPSC PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q2. With reference to the Sagarmala Programme, consider the following statements:

1. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme where capital expenditure is shared equally between the Centre and coastal States.
2. The installation and maintenance of connectivity infrastructure outside port limits fall under the jurisdiction of the respective Port Authorities.
3. The 'One Nation One Port Process' (ONOP) initiative seeks to standardize

port operations to lower ship turnaround time.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 3 only

Explanation:

Statement 1 is incorrect: Sagarmala is a Central Sector Scheme, not a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Statement 2 is incorrect: Connectivity projects within port limits are handled by Port Authorities, whereas projects outside/beyond port limits are executed by MoR, MoRTH, or State Governments.

Statement 3 is correct: The ONOP initiative aims to standardize and streamline administrative processes across Indian ports to reduce vessel turnaround times.

Tribute to Revolutionary Freedom Fighter Batukeshwar Dutt

Source: PIB

WHAT IS NEWS?

The union home minister and Defence Minister paid tribute to revolutionary and freedom fighter Batukeshwar Dutt on his death anniversary (July 20).

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Early Life & Ideology:** Born on November 18, 1910, in Bengal's Burdwan district, Batukeshwar Dutt (also known as B.K. Dutt) joined the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in Kanpur, where he learned bomb-making and became a close associate of Bhagat Singh.
2. **Central Assembly Bombing (April 8, 1929):** Along with Bhagat Singh, he threw low-

intensity, non-lethal bombs inside the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi to protest against the passage of the repressive Public Safety Bill and Trade Disputes Bill.

3. **Revolutionary Courtship:** During the incident, they threw pamphlets with the message "if the deaf are to hear, the sound has to be very loud", chanted slogans like "Inquilab Zindabad!", and voluntarily courted arrest instead of fleeing.
4. **Historic Hunger Strike:** Defended by lawyer M. Asaf Ali, both were sentenced to life imprisonment. In prison (including the Cellular Jail in Andaman), Dutt and Bhagat Singh led a historic hunger strike demanding rights and humane treatment for Indian political prisoners.
5. **Later Life & Legacy:** After his release, he actively participated in the Quit India Movement (1942), resulting in another four years of imprisonment. He passed away on July 20, 1965, and was cremated at the Hussainiwala National Martyrs Memorial in Punjab alongside Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru.

STATIC CONCEPT

1. Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)
2. **Origin:** Founded initially as the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in 1924 by Ram Prasad Bismil, Sachindra Nath Sanyal, and Yogesh Chandra Chatterjee.
3. **Re-organization:** Under the leadership of Chandrashekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, and Sukhdev, it was re-organized as the HSRA at Feroz Shah Kotla, Delhi, in September 1928, adopting Socialism as its official goal.
4. **Objective:** To overthrow British rule through armed revolution and establish a Federal Republic of the United States of India based on socialist principles.
5. Central Legislative Assembly Bombing Case (1929)

Repressive Legislation Opposed:

1. **Public Safety Bill:** Aimed at empowering the colonial government to deport non-Indian communists and suspected revolutionaries without trial.
2. **Trade Disputes Bill:** Restricted the right of trade unions to organize strikes in public utilities and essential services.
3. **Objective:** The goal was not to kill or injure anyone, but to create a high-impact political statement ("to make the deaf hear") and draw national attention to the anti-people bills.

UPSC PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding Batukeshwar Dutt:

1. He was a prominent member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).
2. He along with Bhagat Singh threw low-intensity bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly against the passage of the Public Safety Bill and Trade Disputes Bill.
3. He was executed along with Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev in the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Statements 1 and 2 are correct. Statement 3 is incorrect because Batukeshwar Dutt was sentenced to life imprisonment (transportation to Andamans) and was not executed; only Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru were executed on March 23, 1931, in the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Okinotori Island & Maritime Sovereign Claims

Source: PIB

WHAT IS NEWS?

Japanese authorities reported that a Chinese naval destroyer, along with Russian military vessels, conducted live-fire naval drills near Okinotori Island. Japan raised concerns as the exercise occurred within its claimed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), whereas China rejected the protest, asserting that the feature is legally a "rock" and cannot generate an EEZ under international law.

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Geographical Nature & Location:** Okinotori (also called Parece Vela) is a remote, uninhabited tropical atoll located in the Philippine Sea (Pacific Ocean), approximately 1,700 km south of Tokyo. It is Japan's southernmost territory and its only landmass south of the Tropic of Cancer.
2. **Geomorphology:** The feature is an atoll situated on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge. At high tide, only two natural rocky outcrops remain exposed above sea level.
3. **Administrative Jurisdiction:** Administratively, Okinotori falls under the Ogasawara Islands governance system (Tokyo Metropolis).
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STATIC CONCEPT

1. Maritime Zones under UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)
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3. **Territorial Sea:** Extends up to 12 nautical miles (nmi) from the baseline; the coastal state exercises full sovereignty over airspace, water, seabed, and subsoil.
4. **Contiguous Zone:** Extends up to 24 nmi; allows states to exercise control necessary to prevent/punish infringements of customs, fiscal, immigration, or sanitary laws.
5. **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** Extends up to 200 nmi from the baseline; the coastal state has sovereign rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing natural resources (living and non-living) in the water column and seabed.
6. **Continental Shelf:** Natural prolongation of land territory up to 200 nmi (or up to 350 nmi under specific geological conditions).
7. **UNCLOS Article 121:** Regime of Islands vs. Rocks
8. **Island (Article 121, Para 1):** A naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide. Islands generate a Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, EEZ, and Continental Shelf.
9. **Rocks (Article 121, Para 3):** Rocks that cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no Exclusive Economic Zone or Continental Shelf. (Note: They still generate a 12 nmi Territorial Sea).

UPSC PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q4. With reference to Okinotori Island, consider the following statements:

1. It is an inhabited coral atoll located in the South China Sea.
2. It represents the southernmost territorial claim of Japan.
3. It lies on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because Okinotori is uninhabited and located in the Philippine Sea (Pacific Ocean), not the South China Sea. Statements 2 and 3 are correct as it is Japan's southernmost territory and sits on the underwater Palau-Kyushu Ridge.

State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2026 Report

Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2026 report is produced jointly by the **FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO**.

WHAT IS THE NEWS?

The 2026 edition of the SOFI report has been released, serving as the UN system's flagship assessment of global hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. The report tracks global and regional progress toward **Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2)**. While global food security and nutrition showed modest improvement in 2025, progress remains uneven and insufficient to meet the 2030 targets.

KEY FACTS IN THE NEWS

- Global Hunger Levels:** An estimated **7.8% of the global population** faced hunger in 2025.
- Food Insecurity:** Approximately **2.1 billion people** worldwide experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2025.
- India's Undernourishment Trend:** The share of undernourished Indians has more than halved over the past two decades, dropping from **21.1% in 2004–06 to 9.8% in 2023–25**.

- Rising Costs:** In India, the cost of a healthy diet has risen by nearly **48% since 2017**, reaching PPP \$4.11 per person per day in 2025.
- Affordability Crisis:** About **520.1 million people** (35.5% of India's population) could not afford a healthy diet in 2025.

STATIC CONCEPT: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 (SDG 2)

SDG 2, also known as "**Zero Hunger**," is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015.

- Objective:** To end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.
- Scope:** It addresses the complex inter-linkages between food security, nutrition, rural transformation, and sustainable agricultural practices.
- Key Indicators:** It is tracked through indicators such as the Prevalence of Undernourishment and the Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity (based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale).



UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q1. With reference to the 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report, consider the following statements:

- It is an annual flagship report released exclusively by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- It tracks global progress toward the targets set under Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).

3. The report indicates that the cost of a healthy diet has remained stable globally since 2017.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 only B) 2 only
C) 1 and 3 only D) 2 and 3 only

Answer: B) 2 only

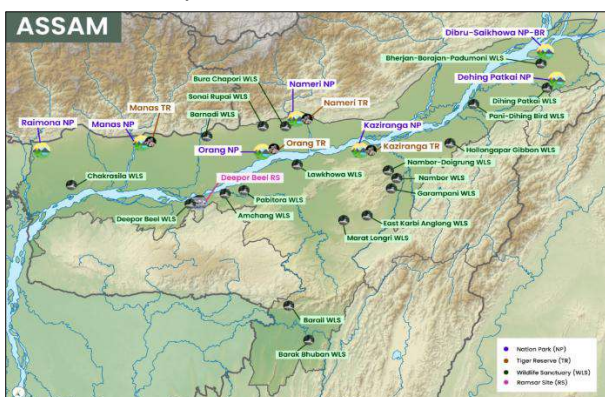
Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because the report is produced jointly by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, not by the FAO alone. Statement 2 is correct as it monitors progress toward SDG 2. Statement 3 is incorrect because the report highlights the rising cost of healthy diets, with the cost in India alone having risen nearly 48% since 2017.

Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary: Return of the Dhole

Source: PIB

WHAT IS THE NEWS?

Camera-trap evidence has recently confirmed the return of the **Dhole** (Asiatic wild dog) to the **Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary**. This discovery highlights the ecological importance of this sanctuary, which serves as a critical habitat on the eastern Himalayan foothills.



KEY FACTS IN NEWS

- Location:** The sanctuary is situated in the **Udalguri** and **Baksa districts** of Assam.

- Transboundary Significance:** It is located on the eastern Himalayan foothills and shares the **Indo-Bhutan international transboundary landscape**.
- River Boundaries:** The sanctuary is named after the **Bornadi River**, which flows along its western border, while the **Nalapara River** (originating in Bhutan) marks its eastern edge.
- Establishment:** It was established in **1980** primarily to provide protection to the **Hispid Hare** (*Caprolagus hispidus*) and the **Pygmy Hog** (*Porcula salvania*).
- Climate & Vegetation:** The area experiences a **subtropical monsoon climate** and is covered by tropical semi-evergreen, moist, and dry deciduous forests.

STATIC CONCEPT: DHOLE (*Cuon alpinus*)

The Dhole, also known as the Asiatic wild dog, is a highly social carnivore and an apex predator in the ecosystems it inhabits.

- Conservation Status:** It is listed as '**Endangered**' on the IUCN Red List.
- Ecological Role:** As a top predator, the Dhole plays a vital role in maintaining the health and balance of forest ecosystems by regulating herbivore populations.
- Threats:** Habitat fragmentation, depletion of prey species, and diseases transmitted from domestic dogs are primary threats to their survival.
- Habitats:** They are found in a variety of environments, ranging from tropical forests to alpine steppes, but they require large, connected forest patches to thrive.

UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q2. With reference to the Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary, consider the following statements:

- It is located at the tri-junction of the borders of India, Bhutan, and China.

2. The sanctuary was specifically established to protect the Hispid Hare and the Pygmy Hog.
3. The Bornadi River flows along the eastern boundary of the sanctuary.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 only
C) 2 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B) 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the Udalguri and Baksa districts of Assam, sharing an international border with Bhutan, but not China.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** It was established in 1980 primarily for the conservation of the endangered Hispid Hare and Pygmy Hog.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The Bornadi River flows on the **western** border, while the Nalapara River flows along the eastern edge.

The Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP)

It is a sub-scheme of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), aimed at fostering economic growth and reducing poverty in rural areas. By June 2026, the programme had provided support to 4.32 lakh rural enterprises across India.

Overview and Objectives

1. **Launch Year:** 2016.
2. **Primary Objective:** To stimulate economic growth and reduce poverty and unemployment in villages by assisting in the establishment and support of rural enterprises.

3. **Focus Area:** It specifically supports non-farm enterprises.

Key Features

1. **Target Beneficiaries:** The programme supports Self Help Groups (SHGs) and their family members, with a strong focus on women, marginalized communities, and individuals with limited educational attainment.
2. **Types of Support Provided:**
 - Financial assistance and institutional support.
 - Business management training and soft skill development.
 - Business development services.
 - Facilitation of banking linkages and convergence with other government schemes.
3. **Operational Approach:** A key feature is the use of community-based decision-making for funding and supporting local enterprises.

Implementation Structure

The programme is implemented through the State Rural Livelihoods Missions (SRLMs). Its operational hierarchy includes:

1. **Block Level:** Coordination is handled by Block Resource Centres–Enterprise Promotion (BRC-EPs).
2. **Technical Support:** Trained Community Resource Persons–Enterprise Promotion (CRP-EPs) provide technical assistance to the Block Resource Centres regarding enterprise promotion.

Spain

In NEWS:

Unprecedented forest fires recently necessitated the evacuation of over 1,66,000 people across France and Spain, with major outbreaks occurring near Madrid and Bordeaux.



Static Geographical Overview: Spain

- Location:** Situated on the Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe.
- Borders:**
 - **Land Borders:** Shares borders with Portugal (west), France and Andorra (northeast), and the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar (south).
 - **Maritime Borders:** Bounded by the Mediterranean Sea (southeast and east), the Bay of Biscay (north), and the Atlantic Ocean (northwest and southwest).
- Capital:** Madrid.
- Key Topography:**
 - **Mountain Ranges:** The Pyrenees Mountains act as a natural barrier between Spain and France.
 - **Plateaus:** The Meseta Central is a vast interior plateau that dominates central Spain.
 - **Desert Feature:** The Tabernas Desert, located in Andalusia, is recognized as the only true desert in mainland Europe.
- Important Rivers:**
 - **Ebro River:** Flows into the Mediterranean.
 - **Tagus River:** A river system shared with Portugal.

- Natural Resources:** Spain is rich in minerals, including copper, fluorspar, gypsum, iron ore, kaolin, lead, magnesite, mercury, pyrites, sepiolite, tungsten, uranium, and zinc.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q3. With reference to the geography of Spain, consider the following statements:

- The Pyrenees Mountains form a natural land border between Spain and Portugal.
- The Tabernas Desert is the only true desert found in mainland Europe.
- The Tagus River is a major waterway shared between Spain and France.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 only C) 2 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B) 2 only

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is incorrect:** The Pyrenees Mountains form a natural barrier between Spain and France, not Portugal.
- Statement 2 is correct:** The Tabernas Desert in Andalusia is recognized as the only true desert in mainland Europe.
- Statement 3 is incorrect:** The Tagus River is shared with Portugal, not France.

Chenab River (Geographical & Strategic Significance)

Contextual News

Recent reports regarding flooding in the Chenab River were clarified by the Indian government as being driven by heavy monsoon rainfall in the Jammu and adjoining catchment areas, rather than external factors.

Static Knowledge: Geography & Hydro-Politics

- Origin:** Formed by the confluence of two streams—the **Chandra** and the **Bhaga**—in the Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh.

In its upper reaches, the river is known as the **Chandrabhaga**.

2. **Course:** It traverses through Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Upon receiving the Jhelum River near Trimmu, the Chenab eventually empties into the Sutlej River (which then joins the Indus).
3. **River System:** It is a major tributary of the Indus River system.
4. **Hydro-Politics:** The water distribution of the Chenab is governed by the **Indus Waters Treaty (1960)**, which allocates the water rights between India and Pakistan.
5. **Infrastructure (Key Dams):** Several critical hydroelectric projects are situated on the river, including the **Salal** (rockfill), **Baglihar**, and **Dul Hasti** (often referred to as 'Dul') projects.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q4. With reference to the Chenab River, consider the following statements:

1. It is formed by the confluence of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers in the Zaskar Range.
2. Under the Indus Waters Treaty, it is one of the "Eastern Rivers" allocated exclusively to India.

3. The Salal and Baglihar hydroelectric projects are located on this river.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer & Explanation:

Correct Answer: C

1. **Statement 1 is incorrect:** The Chenab is formed in the Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh, not the Zaskar Range.
2. **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Under the Indus Waters Treaty, the three "Western Rivers" (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab) are allocated to Pakistan for unrestricted use, subject to certain conditions for Indian use (like hydropower). The "Eastern Rivers" (Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej) are allocated to India.
3. **Statement 3 is correct:** Both Salal and Baglihar are major hydroelectric projects situated on the Chenab.

Student Notes

Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary (Odisha)

Current Context

A recent incident involving a suspected leopard attack on a local farmer in the Balasore district has brought the Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary into the spotlight. Such incidents often highlight the ongoing challenges of **human-wildlife conflict** in buffer zones of protected areas.



Static Knowledge: Geography & Ecology

- Location:** Situated in the **Balasore district** of Odisha.
- Geographical Context:** It is spread across the Chota Nagpur Plateau region. While often associated with the Eastern Ghats, it forms a crucial ecological corridor.
- Connectivity:** The sanctuary is physically linked to **Similipal National Park** through the **Sukhupada and Nato** hill ranges. This connectivity is vital for the movement of large mammals, particularly elephants, as part of the **Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve**.
- Topography & Climate:** The region is characterized by complex terrain, including rolling hills, valleys, and plateaus that create diverse microclimates.
- Flora & Fauna:**
 - **Vegetation:** Primarily **mixed deciduous forest**, dominated by Sal (*Shorea robusta*) and various bamboo species.

- **Wildlife:** Home to elephants, leopards, deer, bison, and the Malabar giant squirrel.
- **Avifauna:** Includes species such as the white-rumped shama, hornbills, peafowl, and parrots.

6. **Cultural & Historical Significance:**

- **Tribal Communities:** Local tribes, notably the **Santhal and Munda**, have a deep-rooted spiritual connection to the forest.
- **Heritage:** The area contains ancient rock shelters featuring prehistoric **petroglyphs**.

UPSC Prelims Practice MCQ

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary:

- It is a vital part of the Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadgarh landscape, forming a corridor for elephant migration.
- The sanctuary is geographically situated within the Eastern Ghats and receives heavy influence from the monsoon.
- It contains unique prehistoric sites such as rock shelters with petroglyphs.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2, and 3

Answer & Explanation:

Correct Answer: D (1, 2, and 3 are correct).

- Statement 1 is correct:** Kuldiha is indeed linked to Similipal and Hadgarh, serving as a critical habitat and corridor for elephants within the Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve.
- Statement 2 is correct:** The sanctuary is located in the Eastern Ghats region, and its deciduous forests are heavily influenced by the tropical climate of Odisha.
- Statement 3 is correct:** The sanctuary is noted for its ancient rock shelters and

petroglyphs, which are significant archaeological markers.

Current Affairs: Kheybar Shekan Missile

What is the News?

The **Kheybar Shekan** (also spelled Kheibar Shekan) has recently garnered international attention due to its deployment in complex military operations. Developed by Iran, it is a medium-range ballistic missile that represents a significant advancement in Iran's domestic missile technology.

Key Facts in News

- Origin & Classification:** It is a domestically manufactured, **solid-fuel medium-range ballistic missile** (MRBM) operated by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).
- Naming Significance:** The name "Kheybar Shekan" translates to "**Breaker of Khaybar**," referencing the historic Battle of Khaybar in 628 A.D.
- Range & Speed:** It possesses a reported operational range of approximately **1,450 km**. Its high velocity—reaching roughly **Mach 12** outside the atmosphere—makes it exceptionally difficult for conventional air defense systems to intercept.
- Technical Edge:** It is powered by a locally developed '**Arond**' engine integrated within the fuel tank to reduce length. Its design uses **Maneuverable Reentry Vehicle (MaRV) technology**, allowing it to alter its trajectory during the terminal phase to evade defense systems.
- Rapid Deployment:** Being solid-fueled, it can be stored easily and is ready for launch from a mobile platform in **less than 15 minutes**.

Static Concept: Ballistic vs. Cruise Missiles

Feature	Ballistic Missile	Cruise Missile
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Flight Path	Follows a parabolic, "ballistic" arc; significant portion spent outside the atmosphere.	Flies within the Earth's atmosphere throughout its flight.
Propulsion	Powered only during the initial boost phase; coasts for the remainder.	Powered throughout the entire duration of flight (like an aircraft).
Guidance	Primarily guided during launch; terminal phase may involve maneuverability.	Guided continuously; capable of adjusting flight path to avoid obstacles.
Analogy	Like a "cannonball" thrown in an arc.	Like a "pilotless miniature aircraft".

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding the 'Kheybar Shekan' missile:

- It is a cruise missile that uses air-breathing propulsion to fly at low altitudes.
- It uses solid fuel, which facilitates faster launch preparation and easier storage.
- The missile features maneuverable warheads designed to evade interception by air defense systems.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B

(Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because Kheybar Shekan is a ballistic missile, not a cruise missile. Statements 2 and 3 are correct regarding its solid-fuel nature and MaRV capabilities.)

Undavalli Caves

What is the News?

The historic **Undavalli Caves** in Andhra Pradesh's Guntur district recently hosted the two-day "Telugu Mahotsavam," an event organized by the Andhra Pradesh State Creativity and Culture Society to celebrate Telugu language, literature, performing arts, and heritage.



Key Facts in News

1. **Location:** The caves are situated on a hillside overlooking the Krishna River in Undavalli village, Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh.
2. **Historical Context:** These are ancient rock-cut monuments, primarily associated with the **Vishnukundina dynasty** (420–620 CE).
3. **Architectural Evolution:** Originally believed to have functioned as a Buddhist or Jain monastic complex, the site was later converted into Hindu temples, with major shrines dedicated to the Hindu Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva).
4. **Prominent Feature:** The largest four-storeyed cave houses a massive **reclining statue of Lord Vishnu** (Anantashayana Vishnu), which is carved out of a single block of sandstone/rock inside the hillside.
5. **Construction Style:** The caves are excavated from solid sandstone and are recognized as

one of the finest examples of early rock-cut architecture in India, showing influences from both Gupta and Chalukyan styles.

Static Concept: Rock-Cut Architecture in India

Rock-cut architecture involves the creation of structures, buildings, and sculptures by excavating solid, naturally occurring rock.

1. **Process:** Unlike structural architecture where materials are assembled, rock-cut builders remove stone from a natural hill, gradually carving rooms and pillars inward. This requires precise planning, as mistakes in the rock cannot be easily rectified.
2. **Evolution:**
 - **Early Phase:** The earliest examples in India are the **Barabar and Nagarjuni caves** in Bihar (3rd Century BCE), attributed to the Mauryan period (Ashoka and Dasharatha).
 - **Buddhist/Jain Influence:** Early caves largely served as Viharas (monasteries) and Chaityas (prayer halls) for Buddhist and Jain monks.
 - **Transition:** Over time, the style became more sophisticated, moving from simple cells to complex pillared halls and monolithic shrines (like those at Ellora and Mahabalipuram), eventually co-existing with free-standing structural temples.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q7. With reference to the Undavalli Caves, consider the following statements:

1. These caves were primarily built by the Gupta dynasty as Hindu temples.
2. The architecture represents a transition from Buddhist/Jain monastic use to Hindu temple worship.
3. The main feature of the largest cave is a reclining statue of Lord Vishnu carved from a single block of rock.

Which of the statements given above are correct? A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B (Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because while the caves show Gupta artistic influence, they are primarily associated with the patronage of the Vishnukundina kings. Statements 2 and 3 are correct as they accurately describe the site's religious evolution and its iconic reclining Vishnu sculpture.)

United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)

What is the News?

India's External Affairs Minister recently addressed the inaugural session of an international conference held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the **United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)**.

Key Facts in News

1. **Establishment & Status:** UNCITRAL is a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly established in 1966.
2. **Core Mandate:** It serves as the core legal body within the UN system dedicated to the progressive harmonization and unification of international trade law.
3. **Membership Structure:** The Commission consists of 70 member states, which are elected by the General Assembly for six-year terms; half of the members' terms expire every three years.
4. **Regional Representation:** Membership is divided into five regional groups: African States, Asian States, Eastern European States, Latin American and Caribbean States, and Western European and Other States.
5. **India's Role:** India is a founding member of this organization.
6. **Headquarters:** While headquartered in New York, the Commission holds its annual sessions alternatively in Vienna.

Static Concept: Harmonization and Unification of Trade Law

In the context of international commerce, differences in national legal systems can create significant barriers to trade. Organizations like UNCITRAL work to reduce these obstacles through:

1. **Harmonization:** This refers to the process of modifying national laws to make them consistent with one another, reducing conflict without necessarily making them identical.
2. **Unification:** This involves the creation of a single, uniform set of legal rules that are adopted by multiple countries to govern specific types of international transactions (e.g., the UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration).
3. **Significance:** By creating modern, fair, and harmonized rules, these efforts facilitate international trade and investment, providing legal certainty and predictability for cross-border commercial transactions.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q8. Consider the following statements regarding the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL):

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations, similar to the World Trade Organization (WTO).
2. It serves as the primary legal body within the UN system for the unification of international trade law.
3. India is a founding member of the Commission.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B (Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because UNCITRAL is a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, not a specialized agency like the WTO. Statements 2 and 3 are correct as per the provided information.)

Strengthening India-Tanzania Bilateral Relations

Source: Press Information Bureau (PIB)

WHAT IS NEWS?

India and Tanzania recently held **Foreign Office Consultations** on July 22, 2026, in Dar es Salaam, to review and strengthen their bilateral ties. This follows a series of high-level engagements throughout 2026, including the 5th India-Tanzania Joint Trade Committee (JTC) meeting in April and the 4th Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting in February.



KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Growing Economic Ties:** Bilateral merchandise trade reached **USD 9.02 billion** in 2025–26, showing consistent growth from USD 8.64 billion in the previous fiscal year.
2. **Development Partnership:** India is supporting water infrastructure projects in Tanzania through **Lines of Credit exceeding USD 1.1 billion**, which are expected to benefit over 6 million people.
3. **Strategic Education Initiative:** The **IIT Madras Zanzibar** campus was highlighted as a growing

regional hub for higher education in science and technology.

4. **Defence Cooperation:** The two nations are deepening ties under a **five-year roadmap for defence cooperation**, exploring new domains like Cyber, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Electronic Warfare (EW), and military medicine.
5. **Digital Integration:** Discussions focused on exporting **India Stack** (digital public infrastructure) to Tanzania, including potential collaboration in real-time payments and Digilocker.

STATIC CONCEPT: GEOGRAPHY OF TANZANIA

1. **Location:** An East African country situated just south of the Equator.
2. **Key Water Bodies:** Tanzania shares borders with **Lake Victoria** (the world's second-largest freshwater lake) in the north, **Lake Tanganyika** in the west, and **Lake Nyasa** in the southwest.
3. **Highest Point:** **Mount Kilimanjaro**, the highest peak in Africa, is located in Tanzania.
4. **Islands:** Tanzania's territory includes the islands of **Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia** off its eastern Indian Ocean coast.

UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q9. Consider the following statements regarding Tanzania:

1. Tanzania is a landlocked country that does not share any maritime boundary with the Indian Ocean.
2. Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa, is located within the territory of Tanzania.
3. Lake Victoria, the second-largest freshwater lake in the world, is shared by Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya.

Which of the statements given above are correct? A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: B Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect because Tanzania has an extensive

eastern coastline along the Indian Ocean.
Statements 2 and 3 are correct.

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and India's Indo-Pacific Engagement

Source: DD News, Ministry of External Affairs/General News

WHAT IS NEWS?

Recently, the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting was held in Manila, Philippines (July 2026). External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar participated in the meeting, emphasizing the ARF's importance as a platform for discussing political and security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, particularly amidst current geopolitical complexities.

KEY FACTS IN NEWS

1. **Focus on 'Zero Tolerance' for Terrorism:** EAM Jaishankar reiterated India's "zero tolerance" approach to terrorism, stating that such acts must have clear consequences and calling for efforts to choke the financial networks that fuel them.
2. **Maritime Security & Connectivity:** The meetings highlighted India's proactive role in the Indo-Pacific, including its contributions through the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative to combat piracy and narcotics smuggling.
3. **Disaster Resilience & Tech:** India continues to advocate for a human-centric approach to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deeper cooperation on cybercrime, while showcasing its leadership in the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).
4. **ASEAN-India Synergy:** The year 2026 has been designated the "ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation," focusing on deepening strategic partnerships, connectivity, and the blue economy.

STATIC CONCEPT: ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF)

1. **Establishment:** The ARF was established in **1994** as a dedicated security dialogue platform for the Indo-Pacific.
2. **Objectives:** Its primary goals are to foster constructive dialogue on regional security issues and contribute to **confidence-building** and **preventive diplomacy**.
3. **Decision-Making:** The forum operates strictly on a **consensus-based** model, ensuring that all 27 members have a voice in shaping regional security norms.
4. **Structure:** It consists of 27 members, including the 10 ASEAN states, India, the US, China, Russia, Japan, and the EU.
5. **Chairmanship:** The ARF Ministerial Meeting is chaired annually by the **ASEAN Chair** of that year.

UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q10. With reference to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), consider the following statements:

1. The ARF is a security-dialogue and confidence-building forum established in the 1990s.
2. The forum functions based on a majoritarian voting system for all its policy decisions.
3. The ARF Ministerial Meeting is chaired by the ASEAN Chair of that year.

Which of the statements given above are correct? A) 1 and 2 only B) 2 and 3 only C) 1 and 3 only D) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: C Explanation: Statement 2 is incorrect because the ARF functions on a **consensus-based** decision-making process, not a majoritarian voting system. Statements 1 and 3 are correct.

DPIIT amends Footwear Quality Control Orders to boost ease of doing business and domestic manufacturing



What is in News?

1. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has amended two **Footwear Quality Control Orders (QCOs)** to improve ease of doing business and strengthen India's footwear manufacturing ecosystem.
2. The amendments extend the **legacy stock clearance deadline to 31 July 2027**.
3. Manufacturers are now permitted to **import up to 4,500 footwear samples annually** for **Research & Development (R&D)** and other non-commercial purposes.
4. The changes aim to promote innovation while ensuring that only **BIS-certified** footwear products are sold in the Indian market.

Importance

Ease of Doing Business

1. Reduces compliance burden by extending the timeline for disposal of legacy stock.

Boost to Domestic Manufacturing

1. Supports India's footwear industry under the **Make in India** initiative.

Encouraging Innovation

1. Allows manufacturers to import footwear samples for product design, testing, benchmarking, and R&D.

Quality Assurance

1. Ensures that only footwear complying with **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** quality norms is commercially sold.

Global Competitiveness

1. Aligns with the vision of "**Zero Defect, Zero Effect**" manufacturing to improve India's export competitiveness.

About Footwear Quality Control Orders (QCOs)

Feature	Details
Implementing Department	DPIIT
Objective	Ensure quality standards in footwear products
Quality Standard	Mandatory BIS Certification

Legacy Stock	Extended till 31 July 2027
R&D Import Limit	Up to 4,500 footwear samples per year

Additional UPSC Facts

Quality Control Orders (QCOs)

1. Issued under the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, 2016**.
2. Make compliance with Indian Standards mandatory for specified products.
3. Aim to:
 - Protect consumers
 - Improve product quality
 - Prevent sub-standard imports
 - Enhance export competitiveness

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

1. **National Standards Body of India**
2. Established under the **BIS Act, 2016** (replacing the 1986 Act)
3. Functions under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**

MCQ

Q1. Quality Control Orders (QCOs) in India are primarily intended to:

- (a) Regulate export duties on manufactured goods
- (b) Mandate compliance with prescribed quality standards for specified products
- (c) Provide subsidies to manufacturers
- (d) Control retail prices of consumer goods

Correct Answer: (b) Mandate compliance with prescribed quality standards for specified products

Centre grants environmental clearance to 1,000 MW Naying Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh

What is in News?

1. The Central Government has granted **environmental clearance** to the **1,000 MW**



Naying Hydroelectric Project in Arunachal Pradesh.

- The project will be developed on the **Siyom (Yomgo) River** in **West Siang district**.
- It is a **run-of-the-river hydropower project** and will be implemented by **North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)**.
- The project is expected to strengthen renewable energy generation and improve power availability in Northeast India.

Importance

Renewable Energy Development

- Enhances India's hydropower capacity and supports the transition to clean energy.

Strategic Importance of Northeast

- Promotes infrastructure development in Arunachal Pradesh, a strategically important border state.

Energy Security

- Increases domestic electricity generation and reduces dependence on fossil fuels.

Run-of-the-River Technology

- Generates electricity with relatively lower reservoir storage and reduced submergence compared to large storage dams.

Regional Development

- Expected to improve connectivity, employment, and economic growth in the Northeast.

About Naying Hydroelectric Project

Feature	Details
Project Capacity	1,000 MW
Location	West Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh
River	Siyom (Yomgo) River
Project Type	Run-of-the-River Hydroelectric Project
Implementing Agency	North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)
Powerhouse	Underground
Turbines	4 × 250 MW

Expected Annual Generation	≈ 4,966.77 Million Units (MU)
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Additional UPSC Facts

Siyom River

- Right-bank tributary** of the **Brahmaputra River**.
- Flows through **West Siang district** of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Approximately **170 km** long.
- Moulou National Park is located on its eastern bank.

North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO)

- Established in **1976**.
- A **Miniratna Category-I, Schedule 'A' CPSE**.
- Functions under the **Ministry of Power**.
- Develops hydro, thermal, and renewable energy projects, mainly in Northeast India.

Run-of-the-River Project

- Utilizes the natural flow of a river with **minimal water storage**.
- Generally has **lower environmental and social impacts** than large reservoir-based dams.
- Suitable for mountainous regions with steep river gradients.

MCQ

Q2. The Naying Hydroelectric Project, recently in news, is proposed on which river?

- Subansiri River
- Dibang River
- Siyom (Yomgo) River
- Kameng River

Correct Answer: (c) Siyom (Yomgo) River

Centre issues advisory to Indian seafarers over security risks in the Black Sea

What is in News?

- The Ministry of External Affairs has issued an advisory urging Indian seafarers to carefully assess security risks before accepting jobs on

commercial ships operating in and around the Black Sea.

- The advisory comes amid increasing drone, missile, and maritime attacks linked to the ongoing Russia–Ukraine conflict.
- The government has advised seafarers to verify employment terms, security arrangements, evacuation plans, and insurance coverage before accepting assignments.



Importance

Maritime Security

- Highlights the growing security challenges in international shipping routes due to armed conflicts.

Safety of Indian Citizens Abroad

- Demonstrates India's efforts to protect Indian nationals working in high-risk overseas regions.

Global Trade

- The Black Sea is a major corridor for the transport of grain, crude oil, fertilizers, and other commodities.
- Disruptions can affect global supply chains and food security.

Russia–Ukraine Conflict

- The conflict continues to impact maritime navigation, insurance costs, and commercial shipping.

Consular Protection

- Reflects the role of the Ministry of External Affairs in issuing travel and employment advisories for Indians abroad.

About the Black Sea

Feature	Details
Location	Between Europe and Asia
Connected to	Via Bosporus Strait → Sea of Marmara → Dardanelles Strait
Major Coastal Countries	Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia
Importance	Global shipping, grain exports, energy transport, strategic military region

Additional UPSC Facts

Key Features of the Black Sea

- Nearly landlocked inland sea connected to the Mediterranean through the Turkish Straits.
- Receives major rivers such as:
 - Danube
 - Dnieper
 - Dniester
 - Don (via the Sea of Azov)

Strategic Importance

- Critical for:
 - Global food security
 - Energy exports
 - Naval operations
 - International maritime trade

Role of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

- Issues travel and employment advisories.
- Provides consular assistance and evacuation support during international crises.

MCQ

Q3. The Black Sea is connected to the Mediterranean Sea through which sequence of waterways?

- Suez Canal → Red Sea → Gulf of Aden
- Bosporus Strait → Sea of Marmara → Dardanelles Strait
- Strait of Hormuz → Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman
- Bering Strait → Arctic Ocean → Atlantic Ocean

Correct Answer: (b) Bosporus Strait → Sea of Marmara → Dardanelles Strait

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Strategic Importance

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 - Global food security
 - Energy exports
 - Naval operations
 - International maritime trade

Role of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

1. Issues travel and employment advisories.
2. Provides consular assistance and evacuation support during international crises.

MCQ

Q4. The Black Sea is connected to the Mediterranean Sea through which sequence of waterways?

- (a) Suez Canal → Red Sea → Gulf of Aden
- (b) Bosphorus Strait → Sea of Marmara → Dardanelles Strait
- (c) Strait of Hormuz → Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman
- (d) Bering Strait → Arctic Ocean → Atlantic Ocean

Correct Answer: (b) Bosphorus Strait → Sea of Marmara → Dardanelles Strait

Government constitutes high-powered task force under Nandan Nilekani to reform examination system

What is in News?

1. The Central Government has constituted a **high-powered task force** under the chairmanship of Nandan Nilekani to recommend reforms for India's examination system.
2. The committee aims to make examinations **leak-proof, transparent, technology-driven, and more secure** following concerns over recent examination paper leaks, including the NEET-UG controversy.
3. The task force includes eminent experts such as former ISRO Chairman **S. Somanath**, IIT Madras Director **V. Kamakoti**, and other education and technology specialists.
4. It will recommend measures to strengthen the functioning of the **National Testing Agency (NTA)** and improve examination governance.

Importance

Examination Reforms

1. Aims to improve transparency, credibility, and fairness in national-level competitive examinations.

Technology-Driven Governance

1. Recommends the use of advanced digital technologies, AI, cybersecurity, and data analytics to prevent paper leaks and malpractice.

Strengthening NTA

1. Focuses on improving institutional capacity, examination processes, and accountability.

Good Governance

1. Promotes transparency, efficiency, and public trust in recruitment and admission examinations.

Education Sector Reform

1. Supports implementation of quality education reforms in line with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.

About the National Testing Agency (NTA)

Feature	Details
Established	2017
Operational Since	2018
Parent Ministry	Ministry of Education
Nature	Autonomous testing organization
Major Exams Conducted	NEET-UG, JEE Main, CUET, UGC-NET and other national-level entrance exams

Additional UPSC Facts

National Testing Agency (NTA)

1. Established to conduct **transparent, efficient, and standardized** entrance examinations.
2. Promotes **computer-based testing (CBT)** to improve fairness and efficiency.
3. Functions under the **Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education**.

National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

1. Emphasizes:
 - Technology-enabled education
 - Transparent assessment systems
 - Competency-based learning
 - Digital governance in education

MCQ

Q1. The National Testing Agency (NTA), recently in news, functions under the:

- (a) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
- (b) Ministry of Education
- (c) Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
- (d) University Grants Commission

Correct Answer: (b) Ministry of Education

India-U.K. Trade Deal Enters into Force



The **India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** and the **Double Contribution Convention (DCC)** have officially come into effect. Termed a "gold standard" pact by India's Commerce Secretary, Rajesh Agrawal, this agreement marks a historic shift in bilateral economic architecture between two major world economies.

Key Highlights of the Agreement:

1. **U.K. Tariff Commitments:** Under CETA, the U.K. will immediately eliminate tariffs on **96.8% of its tariff lines**, covering **97.7% of its trade value** with India.
2. **India Tariff Commitments:** India will immediately eliminate tariffs on **30.3% of its trade value**, while another **47%** will see tariffs eliminated in a phased manner.
3. **Protection of Sensitive Sectors:** To safeguard domestic producers, India has completely protected sensitive sectors from tariff cuts. These include **dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers**.

Trade Agreements & Concepts

1. **What is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?** An FTA is a pact between two or more nations to reduce or eliminate barriers to imports and exports among them, allowing goods and services to be bought and sold across international borders with little or no government tariffs, quotas, or subsidies.
2. **Types of Economic Frameworks:**
 - **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** Partners give preferential access to certain products by reducing duties on an agreed "positive list" of goods.
 - **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** A deeper agreement where duties are eliminated on a bulk of trade items based on a "negative list" (everything is duty-free except what is explicitly excluded).

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):** Covers a holistic gamut including goods, services, investments, intellectual property rights, and regulatory frameworks.

3. **Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** Trade barriers that restrict imports or exports through mechanisms other than simple tariffs. Prominent examples mentioned in the article include:

- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures:** Regulations to protect human, animal, or plant life from pests, diseases, or contaminants.
- **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT):** Technical regulations, standards, and testing procedures that could create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q1. consider the following statements:

1. Under the agreement, India will immediately eliminate tariffs on more than 90% of its tariff lines.
2. Sectors such as dairy, smartphones, and gold and jewellery have been kept protected by India from tariff concessions.
3. The Double Contribution Convention (DCC) prevents dual taxation on social security contributions for Indian workers in the U.K. for a maximum period of 5 years.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** India is immediately eliminating tariffs on **30.3%** of its trade

value, not 90%. It is the U.K. that is immediately eliminating tariffs on 96.8% of its tariff lines.

2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** India has protected sensitive domestic sectors like dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The DCC explicitly exempts Indian employees and employers from making dual social security contributions in the U.K. for **5 years** if they are paying them in India.

Reversal of the Proposed Strait of Hormuz Transit Fee

US President Donald Trump has officially reversed his short-lived plan to levy a **20% reimbursement fee** on commercial vessels transiting the highly strategic Strait of Hormuz. The abrupt policy backtrack occurred just a single day after the initial proposal was announced, following widespread pushback and skepticism from maritime, economic, and legal experts.

Key Highlights of the Development:

1. **The Original Idea:** President Trump originally declared that the US would step up as "**THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT**". Under this mantle, he proposed a mandatory 20% surcharge on all cargo moving through the corridor to fund and offset American maritime security operations in the volatile region.
2. **The Substitute Policy:** The proposed transit fee has now been entirely discarded. In its place, the US administration announced that it would secure **Trade and Investment Deals** with various Middle Eastern Gulf nations instead.
3. **Critical Practical Flaws:** Experts flagged immense implementation issues, pointing out a major calculation ambiguity. It was completely unclear whether the 20% toll applied to the total value of the cargo itself, the

operational expenses incurred by the US military, or a different metric altogether.

Global Maritime Chokepoints

1. **What is a Strait?** A strait is a naturally formed, narrow, typically navigable waterway that connects two larger bodies of water.
2. **The Strait of Hormuz:**



- **Geography:** It connects the **Persian Gulf** with the **Gulf of Oman** and the Arabian Sea. It is bounded by Iran to the north and Oman (the Musandam exclave) and the United Arab Emirates to the south.
- **Strategic Importance:** It is widely considered the world's most critical energy chokepoint. Approximately **one-fifth (20%)** of the world's total petroleum and liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumption passes through this narrow channel daily.
- 3. **International Law & Transit Passage:** Under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, ships enjoy the right of **transit passage** through straits used for international navigation. Bordering coastal nations cannot unilaterally impose arbitrary tolls or commercial transit tariffs on foreign vessels simply for passing through.
- 4. **International Maritime Organization (IMO):** A specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for regulating global shipping, ensuring maritime safety, and preventing marine pollution.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the strategic Strait of Hormuz and international maritime law:

1. The Strait of Hormuz geographically connects the Persian Gulf directly with the Red Sea.
2. Under international conventions regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), coastal nations have the legal authority to impose mandatory transit tolls on foreign commercial vessels passing through international straits.
3. Approximately 20% of the world's total oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply transits through the Strait of Hormuz.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 3 only
B) 1 and 2 only
C) 2 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the **Gulf of Oman** and the Arabian Sea (not the Red Sea). The Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal are associated with the Red Sea.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** Under international maritime frameworks like UNCLOS, there is **no legal basis** for nations to impose mandatory tolls or tariffs on vessels simply exercising their right of transit passage through international straits. Coastal states can only charge for specific direct services rendered, such as pilotage or towing.

3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):

The Strait of Hormuz is a vital global chokepoint through which roughly one-fifth (20%) of the world's total oil and LNG supply flows daily.

WPI Inflation Climbs to 9.87% in June 2026

India's **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)** inflation experienced a steady acceleration, rising to **9.87% in June 2026** from 9.68% recorded in May. The index is calculated based on the revised **2022-23 base year**.

Key Drivers and Highlights:

1. **Food & Weather Stress:** Wholesale food inflation surged significantly to **5.49% in June** from 3.60% in May. This spike was primarily driven by lower-than-expected agricultural output linked to a **rainfall deficit from the El Niño impact**.
2. **Non-Food and Mineral Surge:** Price pressures intensified in non-food articles, with inflation touching **11.07%**, while minerals registered an inflation rate of **9.45%** during the month.
3. **Major Drivers:** According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the primary catalysts accelerating wholesale costs included **Mineral Oils (Petroleum Products), Food Articles, Basic Metals, and Chemical & Chemical Products**.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

1. **Definition:** WPI measures the average change over time in the prices of goods traded in the wholesale market (at the first stage of transaction/bulk sale) before they reach retail consumers.
2. **Releasing Agency:** WPI data is compiled and released monthly by the **Office of the Economic Adviser**, under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
3. **Key Components of WPI (Weightage Hierarchy):**

- **Manufactured Products:** Holds the highest weightage (~64.2%).
 - **Primary Articles:** Includes food articles, non-food articles, and minerals (~22.6%).
 - **Fuel & Power:** Covers electricity, mineral oils, coal, etc. (~13.2%).
4. **WPI vs. CPI:** Unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), WPI does **not** include the services sector (e.g., healthcare, education, transport services). Additionally, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) utilizes CPI (retail inflation), rather than WPI, as its main anchor for deciding monetary policy rates.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q3. With reference to the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) in India, consider the following statements:

1. Manufactured products carry the highest weightage among the three major commodity groups in the WPI basket.
2. The index tracks price shifts across both goods and services to capture wholesale transactions.
3. WPI data is officially monitored and published on a monthly basis by the Ministry of Finance.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 1 only
- B) 1 and 2 only
- C) 2 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** In the WPI commodity basket, Manufactured Products carry the largest weightage (approx. 64.2%), followed by Primary Articles and Fuel & Power.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** Unlike the Consumer Price

Index (CPI), WPI strictly measures the changes in the price of **goods** traded in wholesale markets. It does not factor in services.

3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):** WPI data is calculated and released by the *Office of the Economic Adviser*, which falls under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, not the Ministry of Finance.

Discovery of *Colobus congoensis* in the DRC

A team of researchers has confirmed the landmark discovery of a previously unknown species of African monkey, scientifically named ***Colobus congoensis***. Found in the deep rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this represents one of the most significant primate breakthroughs in decades.



Key Highlights of the Discovery:

1. **The Location:** The new species was discovered in the specific rainforest pocket nestled between the **Lomami and Congo (Lualaba) rivers** in the east-central region of the DRC.
2. **Historical Rarity:** Locally referred to as the "**Likweli**", this animal is only the **fifth** new monkey species to be identified across the entire African continent in the past 75 years.

3. **Conservation Alert:** Due to its highly restricted geographic range, small estimated population size, and intense regional pressures from hunting and deforestation, scientists have recommended classifying *Colobus congoensis* as **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.

Primate Biogeography & IUCN Status

1. **The Genus *Colobus*:** Colobus monkeys are old-world primates native to the African continent. The word "colobus" originates from a Greek word meaning "docked" or "mutilated," referring to the fact that unlike most other monkeys, they have a severely reduced or virtually absent thumb—an adaptation that helps them swing smoothly through the forest canopy.
2. **The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Biodiversity:** The DRC contains the majority of the Congo Basin rainforest, which is the second-largest tropical rainforest block in the world (after the Amazon Basin). It is a global biodiversity hotspot and home to other famous endemic primates such as the **Bonobo** (pygmy chimpanzee) and the **Grauer's gorilla**.

Multiple Choice Question

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the newly discovered primate species, *Colobus congoensis*:

1. It represents only the fifth new monkey species identified across Africa in the past three quarters of a century.

2. It was discovered in the rainforest region bordered by the Lomami and Congo rivers.
3. Because of its expansive population and wide geographic distribution across Central Africa, researchers have suggested listing it as 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** The text explicitly states that *Colobus congoensis* (locally called the Likweli) is only the fifth new monkey species identified in Africa over the last 75 years.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** Its habitat was tracked down specifically to the east-central rainforest ecosystem between the Lomami and Congo (Lualaba) rivers in the DRC.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):** Quite the opposite—due to a restricted range, small population, and heavy pressures from hunting and habitat degradation, researchers have actively recommended that it be classified as **Endangered** on the IUCN Red List.

Student Notes

International Scientific Expedition to Greenland (GIANT Project)

An international team of around 80 scientists and crew members has officially set sail for Greenland on a critical six-week maritime expedition. Traveling aboard the UK's advanced polar research vessel, **RRS Sir David Attenborough**, the researchers aim to evaluate how rapidly melting fjord glaciers are influencing global ocean currents.

Key Highlights of the Expedition:

1. **The Mission:** The fieldwork is part of an ambitious 5-year project called **GIANT (Greenland Ice sheet to AtlaNtic Tipping points)**. It is a massive international collaboration of 17 partners led by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS).
2. **The Climate Threat:** Climate scientists are deeply concerned that the massive influx of fresh, cold meltwater from Greenland's glaciers could put a "cap" on the **North Atlantic Subpolar Gyre**. This disruption could severely slow down the **Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)**—the planet's vital oceanic conveyor belt.

Greenland & Ocean Currents

1. **Basic Geography:** Greenland is the **world's largest non-continent island**, positioned in the North Atlantic Ocean between North America and Europe. Geographically, it is part of the North American continent, but politically and historically, it is an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark.
2. **The AMOC (Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation):**
 - It is a large system of ocean currents that acts as a global engine, circulating warm, salty water from the tropics northward toward Europe.
 - Once the water reaches the north, it cools, increases in density, and sinks near

Greenland, before flowing back south through the deep ocean.

3. **The "Freshwater" Danger:** Fresh water is less dense than salty water. When Greenland's glaciers melt rapidly, the resulting freshwater stays at the surface and does not sink easily. This acts like a brake on the entire global conveyor belt.

Multiple Choice Question

Q5. With reference to Greenland and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), consider the following statements:

1. Geographically, Greenland is considered part of the European continent, while politically it is an autonomous province of Denmark.
2. The AMOC relies on the sinking of warm, fresh water near the polar regions to drive its global conveyor belt mechanism.
3. The GIANT project is a multi-nation scientific expedition aimed at studying how glacial meltwater affects North Atlantic ocean current stability.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 3 only
B) 1 and 2 only
C) 1 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** While Greenland is politically tied to Europe (as an autonomous province of Denmark), it is *geographically* considered part of the North American continent.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** The AMOC conveyor belt relies on the sinking of **cold, salty water** (not fresh water) in the North Atlantic.

Cold, salty water is heavy and sinks, whereas fresh water from melting glaciers is lighter, remains on the surface, and stalls the sinking process.

3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The GIANT (Greenland Ice sheet to Atlantic Tipping points) project is a multi-partner international scientific collaboration specifically studying glacier-ocean interactions and AMOC tipping points.

Successful Revival of the Indian Grey Hornbill in Gir Forests

More than **60 years** after vanishing from Gujarat's Gir landscape (disappearing between the 1950s and 1960s), the **Indian Grey Hornbill** has recorded a major recovery. A newly published study in the international peer-reviewed journal *Birds* confirms **four consecutive years of successful breeding** following its reintroduction in 2021.

Key Highlights of the Conservation Programme:

1. **The Translocation Project:** To restore the population, the Gujarat Forest Department released **40 Indian Grey Hornbills** in two phases. Twenty-eight birds were released between 2021 and 2022, followed by another 12 birds in 2023. The birds were translocated from healthy populations in Gujarat's **Aravalli forests**.
2. **High-Tech Tracking:** Eleven male hornbills were fitted with **satellite transmitters**, helping scientists monitor their exact movements, nesting, and behavioral adaptation.
3. **Ecological Importance:** The species plays a critical role as a **long-distance seed disperser**. By eating fruits and transporting seeds of fruit-bearing trees over large areas, they act as natural forest regenerators.

Hornbills & Gir National Park

1. **Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*):**

- It is a medium-sized hornbill native to the Indian subcontinent.
 - **Conservation Status:** Classified as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List. In India, it is heavily protected under **Schedule II** of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
 - **Anatomy:** Famous for their heavy, curved bills topped by a structure called a **casque**.
2. **Nesting Habits:** Hornbills are famous for a unique nesting ritual where the female walls herself inside a tree hollow during the egg-laying and incubation period, leaving only a narrow slit through which the male feeds her. For nesting in Gir, they heavily prefer mature, old-growth trees with wide trunks like *Sterculia urens* (Ghalo/Ghost tree) and *Terminalia belirica* (Baheda).
 3. **Gir National Park:** Located in Gujarat, it is globally renowned as the **only natural habitat of the Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*)**. Its dominant vegetation consists of dry mixed deciduous forests and teak forests.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q6. With reference to the Indian Grey Hornbill and its recent reintroduction programme in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Grey Hornbill is currently classified as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List due to widespread habitat loss.
2. The species plays a vital ecological role as a long-distance seed disperser, contributing significantly to forest regeneration.
3. In a pioneering project, the species was reintroduced into Gujarat's Gir forests by translocating birds from the Aravalli forests.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
B) 2 and 3 only

C) 1 and 3 only

D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** The Indian Grey Hornbill is actually classified as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List because it is still relatively widespread across the Indian subcontinent, even adapting well to rural orchards and urban parks.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** Hornbills are often dubbed "farmers of the forest". Their ability to digest fruit pulp and excrete seeds undamaged across long distances makes them vital for natural forest canopy expansion.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The species had gone locally extinct in the Gir landscape during the mid-20th century. To reverse this, the Gujarat Forest Department translocated 40 birds from the healthy populations residing in the Aravalli hills to Gir starting in 2021.

Water Levels Surge in Gandak River Due to Nepal Rains

Heavy and continuous rainfall in the upper catchment areas of Nepal has led to a significant and continuous rise in the water levels of the **Gandak River** in Bihar. The surge has put low-lying districts along the river basin on high alert for potential flood-like situations.

The Gandak River

1. **Introduction & Mythology:** The Gandak is one of the major rivers of North India and a significant **left-bank tributary of the Ganga River**. It finds honorable mention in the ancient Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*.
2. **Origin & Course:**
 - **Source:** It originates at an altitude of 7,620 meters above mean sea level to the north

of **Dhaulagiri Mountain in Tibet** near the Nepal border.

- **Formation:** The river is formed by the confluence of two major Himalayan rivers: the **Kali** and the **Trisuli**.
 - **Regional Names:** From its confluence point down to the Indian border, it is locally referred to as the '**Kali Gandaki**' and '**Narayani**' in Nepal.
3. **Entry into India & Path:**
 - It enters the Indian plains near **Valmikinagar in Bihar** and briefly borders **Uttar Pradesh**, carving a small stretch of the state boundary.
 - The precise entry point along the Indo-Nepal border is famously known as **Triveni**.
 - In India, it flows primarily through Bihar—covering districts like West Champaran, East Champaran, Gopalganj, and Saran—before finally **joining the Ganga River opposite Patna**, near Hajipur in the Vaishali district.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q7. With reference to the Gandak River, consider the following statements:

1. It is a major right-bank tributary of the Ganga River that originates south of the Vindhya range.
2. Before entering India at Triveni, the river is known as the '**Narayani**' or '**Kali Gandaki**' in Nepal.
3. Due to steep slopes and loose soil in its upper catchment, it carries high silt deposits, leading to a frequently shifting river course.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. Explanation for Statement 1

(Incorrect): The Gandak River is a **left-bank** tributary of the Ganga River, not a right-bank tributary. Furthermore, it originates in the high Himalayas north of Dhaulagiri Mountain near the Tibet-Nepal border, not south of the Vindhya range.

2. Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):

In Nepal, the river is formed by the union of the Kali and Trisuli rivers and is widely known as the 'Kali Gandaki' and 'Narayani' before crossing into India at Triveni.

3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):

The upper catchment area has fragile, loose soil and steep terrain. As a result, the river transports immense volumes of silt down to the Indian plains, which frequently blocks its channels and forces it to continuously shift its course.

Water Inflows Decline in Krishna River Basin

A prolonged **week-long dry spell** affecting the Western Ghats regions of Karnataka and Maharashtra has drastically diminished water inflows into the **Krishna River** and its main tributaries. The drop in water levels has sparked early concerns regarding agricultural irrigation and water reservoirs across the dependent peninsular states.

The Krishna River

- 1. Introduction:** Also known historically as **Krishnaveni**, the Krishna River is one of the most vital rivers flowing through south-central India.
- 2. Size and Scale:** It stands as **India's fourth-largest river** in terms of water inflows and drainage basin area, positioned right after the Ganga, Godavari, and Brahmaputra. The river flows over a total path extending approximately **1,400 km**.

3. River Course:

- **Origin:** The river originates in western Maharashtra within the **Western Ghats** range, near the hill station of **Mahabaleshwar**, very close to the Arabian Sea coast.
- **Flow Journey:** It moves eastward across the peninsula, cutting through four Indian states: **Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh**.
- **Mouth:** It finally empties into the **Bay of Bengal** at **Hamasaladeevi** in Andhra Pradesh on the east coast.

- 4. Basin and Boundaries:** The Krishna River Basin encompasses an area of nearly 258,948 sq. km., accounting for roughly **8 percent of India's total geographical area**. The basin boundaries are:

- **North:** The Balaghat range.
- **South & East:** The Eastern Ghats.
- **West:** The Western Ghats.

- 5. Tributaries:** The major principal tributaries feeding the river system include the **Ghataprabha, Malaprabha, Bhima, Tungabhadra, and Musi** (on which Hyderabad stands).

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q8. With reference to the Krishna River system in India, consider the following statements:

1. Geographically, it is the second-largest river basin in India after the Ganga.
2. It originates near Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats and empties into the Arabian Sea.
3. The Tungabhadra and the Bhima are major tributaries of the Krishna River, and the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam is constructed across it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) 3 only
- B) 1 and 2 only

C) 2 and 3 only

D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 3 only

1. Explanation for Statement 1

(Incorrect): The Krishna River is India's **fourth-largest river** by water inflows and basin area, trailing behind the Ganga, Godavari, and Brahmaputra.

2. Explanation for Statement 2

(Incorrect): While the Krishna River does originate near Mahabaleshwar in the Western Ghats, it flows eastwards across the peninsula and empties into the **Bay of Bengal** (at Hamasaladevi), not the Arabian Sea.

3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):

The Bhima and Tungabhadra are indeed principal tributaries of the Krishna. Furthermore, the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam (one of the largest masonry dams in the world) is built across the Krishna River on the border of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Ravidassia Community Renews Call for Separate Religion Status

Members of the **Ravidassia community** recently convened in Punjab to reiterate their longstanding demand for the inclusion of a separate "Ravidassia religion" category in the official Indian Census.

Key Features of the Ravidassia Community:

- Identity:** The Ravidassias are a **Dalit community** that follows a distinct spiritual path rooted in the philosophies of the mystic saint, Shri Guru Ravidas.
- Geographical Distribution:** They are heavily concentrated in the **Doaba region of Punjab**, which includes districts such as Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahr, and Jalandhar.
- Holy Book:** The community recognizes the **Amrit Bani of Guru Ravidas** as its primary holy book. This text contains 200 hymns composed by Guru Ravidas.

- Sacred Site: Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi** (Uttar Pradesh), the birthplace of the saint, serves as the most important pilgrimage location for the Ravidassia tradition.

Guru Ravidas & The Bhakti Movement

- Who was Guru Ravidas?** Guru Ravidas (1377–1527 C.E.) was a highly revered saint, philosopher, and social reformer who contributed profoundly to the medieval **Bhakti Movement** in Northern India. He is also historically known as Raidas, Rohidas, and Ruhidas.
- Lineage & Contemporaries:** He is traditionally regarded as a disciple of the prominent Bhakti saint **Ramananda** and is believed to have been a contemporary of the famous mystic poet **Kabir**.
- Philosophical Teachings:**
 - **Social Equality:** The foundation of his philosophy was the strict **rejection of the caste system**, untouchability, and gender biases, advocating instead for universal human rights and dignity.
 - **The Concept of Begampura (or Beghumpura):** He envisioned a utopian, casteless, and classless society called 'Begampura'—which literally translates to a "**city without sorrow**"—where there is no fear, poverty, or discrimination.
 - **Nirguna Bhakti:** Ideologically, he abandoned the *Saguna* (worship of God with physical forms/idols) and intensely focused on the **Nirguna** form of the supreme being (worship of an abstract, formless omnipresent God).

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q9. With reference to the medieval Bhakti saint Guru Ravidas and the Ravidassia community, consider the following statements:

- Guru Ravidas belonged to the Saguna school of Bhakti, which emphasized idol

worship and ritualistic devotion to physical forms of deities.

2. The concept of 'Begampura', envisioned by Guru Ravidas, refers to an ideal city or society free from sorrow, fear, and caste discrimination.
3. The Ravidassia community is heavily concentrated in the Doaba region of Punjab and considers Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi as a sacred pilgrimage site.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: B) 2 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Incorrect):** Guru Ravidas explicitly

abandoned *Saguna* forms of devotion and focused on the *Nirguna* form, which views the supreme being as abstract, formless, and without attributes.

2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** 'Begampura' (literally meaning a city without sorrow or grief) was his philosophical blueprint for an egalitarian society where no one faces suffering, poverty, or caste discrimination.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The community is predominantly located in Punjab's Doaba region (districts like Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, etc.) and tracks its main spiritual pilgrimage to Seer Goverdhanpur in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

Student Notes

Exempted Coal Plants Fueling Delhi's Sulphur Dioxide Surge

A new report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) has revealed that a staggering **81% of sulphur dioxide (SO_2) emissions** from coal-fired power plants within a 300-km radius of Delhi-NCR originate from facilities that the government explicitly exempted from environmental mandates.

Key Highlights of the Report:

1. **The Regulatory Loophole:** Following policy revisions, coal plants were split into categories. **Category C plants** (which are located outside immediate urban zones and make up roughly 78% of India's total coal fleet) were entirely **exempted from the mandatory installation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)** pollution control systems.
2. **Unchecked Emissions:** Out of the 154 kilotonnes of SO_2 emitted annually by the studied units near Delhi, **90% comes from plants operating completely without FGD systems**, with Category C plants driving the bulk of it.

Sulphur Dioxide

1. **Properties:** Sulphur Dioxide is an **inorganic, heavy, and colourless gas** distinguished by a sharp, suffocating, and **pungent odour**. It dissolves in water with immense ease and liquifies readily under pressure.
2. **Primary Sources:**
 - **Anthropogenic (Man-made):** The dominant global source is the **burning of fossil fuels**, primarily coal and oil at thermal power stations, alongside industrial operations like copper/metal smelting and petroleum refining.
 - **Natural Occurrence:** It is primarily spewed into the atmosphere via **volcanic eruptions** and geothermal hot springs.

3. **Environmental & Health Impacts:** It acts as a powerful irritant to human lungs, severely worsening chronic respiratory issues like asthma and bronchitis. In the atmosphere, it reacts with water vapour and oxygen to form **acid rain**, which degrades soil quality, aquatic ecosystems, and forests.
4. **What is Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD)?** FGD is a chemical technology deployed at fossil-fuel power stations. It uses an alkaline absorbent (typically limestone or lime) to capture up to **95% of sulfur dioxide emissions** from exhaust gases before they exit the chimney, turning the pollutant into usable gypsum for the construction sector.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q10. With reference to Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2) pollution and mitigation technologies, consider the following statements:

1. In the atmosphere, SO_2 reacts with other compounds to form acidic aerosols, making it a major precursor to fine particulate matter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$) pollution.
2. Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) systems utilize alkaline absorbents like limestone to chemically strip sulphur dioxide from industrial exhaust gases.
3. Because SO_2 is a heavy gas, its environmental impact is strictly localized within a 10-kilometre radius from its industrial point source.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
B) 2 and 3 only
C) 1 and 3 only
D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: A) 1 and 2 only

- 1. Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):**
Once emitted into the air, SO_2

undergoes chemical oxidation to form acidic sulfate aerosols, which serve as a primary component in the formation of dangerous secondary fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$).

2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Correct):** FGD technology passes industrial flue gas through an alkaline chemical slurry (like lime or limestone), which binds with the SO_2 and prevents it from escaping into the open atmosphere.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Incorrect):** Although SO_2 is a dense gas, atmospheric dynamics allow it to travel **hundreds of kilometres** away from its original point source before settling or converting into secondary pollutants, giving it a vast regional and transboundary impact.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve Emerges as a Major Hotspot for Reptiles

The **Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)**, located in the West Champaran district of Bihar, is rapidly emerging as one of the state's richest and most significant habitats for reptiles. Recent wildlife documentation confirms that its forests are home to more than **45 distinct species of snakes**, underscoring the reserve's dense and thriving biodiversity.

Key Highlights of the Feature:

1. **Rich Diversity:** Out of the 45+ documented snake species, researchers point out that only eight species are highly venomous (including the King Cobra, Common Krait, and Russell's Viper), while the vast majority are non-venomous or mildly venomous.
2. **Ecological Guardians:** Wildlife experts emphasize that these reptiles play an irreplaceable role as a natural pest control mechanism, checking rodent populations and maintaining the delicate ecological equilibrium of the Terai landscape.

3. **Unique Discoveries:** The region serves as a crucial hub for herpetological research, boasting unique sightings such as the long-snouted vine snake, which is currently recorded only within VTR in the region.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR)

1. **Location & Exclusivity:** VTR is situated along the **India-Nepal border** in the northernmost part of the West Champaran district. It is exceptionally significant as it is **the only tiger reserve in the state of Bihar**.
2. **Composition:** The reserve encompasses both the **Valmiki National Park** and the **Valmiki Wildlife Sanctuary**.
3. **Biogeographic Zone:** It represents the **easternmost limit of the Himalayan Terai forests** in India. Located within the Gangetic Plains bio-geographic zone, its terrain features a unique geomorphic combination of **Bhabar** (rocky boulders and porous ground) and **Terai** (marshy, water-logged lowlands) tracts.
4. **Boundaries & Drainage:**
 - It is bounded by Nepal's **Royal Chitwan National Park** to the north.
 - The **Gandak River** forms its natural western boundary. Other prominent rivers crisscrossing the reserve include the Pandai, Manor, Harha, Masan, and Bhapsa.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q11. With reference to the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR), which was recently in the news for its reptile diversity, consider the following statements:

1. It is the sole tiger reserve located in the state of Bihar.
2. Geographically, it represents the westernmost limit of the Himalayan Terai eco-region in India.
3. The reserve is bounded by the River Gandak on its western flank and shares a border with Nepal's Chitwan National Park to the north.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only
- D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: C) 1 and 3 only

1. **Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):** Valmiki Tiger Reserve is famously recognized as the only protected area designated as a tiger reserve in Bihar.
2. **Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect):** The reserve marks the **easternmost** limit of the Himalayan Terai forests in India, not the westernmost.
3. **Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):** The terrain is geographically bounded by Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park in the north and features the Gandak River tracing its entire western boundary.

Two New Solitary Bee Species Discovered in Arunachal Pradesh

Researchers have discovered two previously unknown species of solitary bees in the northeastern state of **Arunachal Pradesh**. The newly identified insects have been named *Elaphropoda triangulata* and *Habropoda adi*.

Key Highlights of the Discovery:

1. **The Nomenclature Explained:**
 - *Elaphropoda triangulata* gets its name from the distinctive **triangle-shaped markings** found on its abdomen.
 - *Habropoda adi* is named in honor of the **Adi indigenous community** of Arunachal Pradesh, who inhabit the specific region where the specimens were gathered.
2. **Classification and Habitat:** Both species belong to the bee subfamily **Anthophorinae**, a group composed largely of **ground-nesting solitary bees**.

3. **How They Were Captured:** The researchers collected these bees using **Malaise traps**. This is a passive sampling technique designed to capture flying insects continuously over long stretches of time. It is incredibly efficient at detecting low-density or elusive species that standard hand-netting methods often miss.

Solitary Bees & Insect Sampling

1. **What are Solitary Bees?** Unlike honeybees or bumblebees, solitary bees **do not live in social colonies**, have no queen, and do not make honey. Instead, every individual female acts as a fertile queen who constructs and provisions her **own individual nest alone**, usually tunneling into soil, wood, or hollow stems.
2. **Ecological Importance:** Solitary bees are incredibly efficient and **vital pollinators**. Because they do not have specialized "pollen baskets" like honeybees, they lose a lot more pollen as they move from flower to flower, inadvertently making them highly effective at fertilizing wild plants and agricultural crops.

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)

Q12. Consider the following statements regarding the recently discovered bee species, *Elaphropoda triangulata* and *Habropoda adi*:

1. Unlike social honeybees, these species are solitary bees that nest individually and do not form large colonies.
2. The species belong to a subfamily of bees known mostly for nesting in high-altitude tree canopies.
3. Malaise traps, which were used to collect these bees, are a form of passive sampling effective at capturing flying insects over extended periods.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) 1 and 2 only
- B) 2 and 3 only
- C) 1 and 3 only

D) 1, 2, and 3

Correct Answer: C) 1 and 3 only

1. Explanation for Statement 1 (Correct):

The text confirms that both are solitary bees, meaning they do not live in colonial structures or hives and usually nest completely alone.

2. Explanation for Statement 2 (Incorrect): These bees belong to the subfamily Anthophorinae, which

consists predominantly of **ground-nesting** solitary bees, not canopy-nesting bees.

3. Explanation for Statement 3 (Correct):

A Malaise trap is a passive, tent-like sampling method designed to capture flying insects over extended timelines, making it ideal for documenting elusive, low-density populations.

Student Notes

જાણ IAS, IPS, જેવી પદવી ઝાંઝા કરી સાચા રાષ્ટ્ર સેવક
બને અને સમાજ તથા દેશની સેવા કરે.

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