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Weekly EXPECTED CURRENT AFFAIRS

for

IAS EXAMINATION



From

09th to 14th Mar 2026

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1. VB-G RAM G ACT, 2025

Context:

The Union Rural Development Ministry is currently in the process of framing rules and "objective parameters" for the implementation of the **Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)** or **VB-G RAM G Act, 2025**. This new legislation seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA).

The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025: Key Provisions

- **Employment Guarantee:** Increases guaranteed employment from **100 to 125 days** per rural household annually. Unemployment allowance after **15 days without work** remains.
- **Fund Sharing:** Scheme to function as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme**.
 - **60:40** Centre–State ratio (general states)
 - **90:10** (North-Eastern & Himalayan states) States will continue paying **unemployment allowance and delay compensation**.
- **Excess Expenditure:** Centre will set **state-wise normative allocations**. Any expenditure beyond this will be **borne by the State government**.
- **Pause During Agricultural Season:** States may declare up to **60 days annually** when MGNREGA works are paused during **peak sowing/harvesting periods**.
- **Planning Framework:** **Gram Panchayats** prepare work plans focusing on
 1. Water security
 2. Rural infrastructure
 3. Livelihood infrastructure
 4. Climate/extreme weather mitigation

Plans integrated with PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

- **Implementation & Monitoring:** Creation of **National and State Steering Committees** for oversight, planning, and coordination.
- **Use of Technology:** Biometric authentication, **geospatial planning**, **mobile dashboards**, and **weekly public disclosure systems** for transparency.



Implementing and Monitoring Authorities

- The Act establishes a clear institutional framework to ensure coordinated, accountable, and transparent implementation of the Mission across national, State, district, block, and village levels.
- **Central and State Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Councils** provide policy guidance, review implementation, and strengthen accountability.
- **Panchayati Raj Institutions** lead planning and execution, with Gram Panchayats implementing at least half of the works in terms of cost.
- **District Programme Coordinators and Programme Officers** manage planning, compliance, payments, and social audits.
- **Gram Sabhas** play a strengthened role in conducting social audits and ensuring transparency through access to all records.

What makes Viksit Bharat-G RAM G better than MGNREGA?	
MGNREGA	Viksit Bharat-G RAM G
100 days of wage employment per rural household	125 days of wage employment per rural household
Multiple and scattered categories of works with limited strategic focus	4 clearly defined priority areas focusing on water security, rural infrastructure, livelihoods and climate resilience
Center bears unskilled wage costs, states bear unemployment allowance	State cost-sharing for wages, 60:40 for most states, 90:10 for certain special-category regions
No explicit statutory "pause window"	States can notify up to 60 days in a FY when work will not be executed
Demand based funding with unpredictable allocations	Normative funding ensuring predictable budgeting while protecting the employment guarantee
Gram Panchayat planning is central	Integrates institutionalised convergence and infrastructure planning

Source: Ministry of Rural Development

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025:

- The Act seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 and increases the guaranteed days of employment from 100 to 125 days per rural household annually.
- Under the Act, the entire cost of wages for unskilled labour will be borne exclusively by the Central Government.
- The scheme will operate as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with a 60:40 Centre–State funding pattern for most states and 90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan states.
- Gram Sabhas play a strengthened role in conducting social audits and ensuring transparency through access to all records.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- I, III and IV only
- I and II only
- II, III and IV only
- I, II, III and IV

Answer: A

Explanation:

STATEMENT I IS CORRECT: The VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 aims to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 and increases employment guarantee from **100 to 125 days** per rural household.

STATEMENT II IS INCORRECT: Unlike MGNREGA's earlier wage-sharing model, the Act introduces a **shared funding pattern between Centre and States**, not full central funding.

STATEMENT III IS CORRECT: The scheme will function as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** with **60:40** funding for most states and **90:10** for **North-Eastern and Himalayan states**.

STATEMENT IV IS CORRECT: **Gram Panchayats must implement at least 50% of the works (by cost)**, ensuring strong decentralised implementation and local participation and **Gram Sabhas** play a strengthened role in conducting social audits and ensuring transparency through access to all records.

1.2. RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (RPWD) ACT, 2016

Context:

Recently, on March 9, 2026, the Supreme Court of India observed that if the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) distinguishes between "throwing" and "administering" acid, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 must also be updated to reflect this distinction. A Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant emphasized that the law must foresee and cover all forms of offences—including forced ingestion of corrosive substances—to ensure survivors are not excluded from the protective umbrella of disability welfare schemes and medical benefits.



Salient Features of the RPwD Act, 2016

1. Legislative Background

- The Act was enacted to give effect to the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, which India ratified in 2007.
- It replaced the erstwhile **Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995**.

2. Expanded Definition of Disability

- The Act increased the number of recognized disability categories from **7 to 21**.
- **Specified Disabilities include:** Blindness, Low-vision, Leprosy Cured persons, Hearing Impairment, Locomotor Disability, Dwarfism, Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Chronic Neurological conditions, Specific Learning Disabilities, Multiple Sclerosis, Speech and Language disability, Thalassemia, Haemophilia, Sickle Cell disease, Multiple Disabilities, Acid Attack victims, and Parkinson's disease.
- The Central Government retains the power to add more types of disabilities to this list.

3. Rights and Entitlements

- **Benchmark Disabilities:** Defined as persons with at least **40%** of a specified disability.
- **Education:** Every child with a benchmark disability between **6 and 18 years** has the right to free education in a neighborhood school or special school of their choice.

- **Employment Reservation:** The Act mandates a reservation of not less than **4%** in government establishments for persons with benchmark disabilities (an increase from 3% in the 1995 Act).
- **Higher Education:** A minimum of **5%** reservation is provided in government and government-aided higher educational institutions.

4. Accessibility Mandates

- The Act imposes a legal obligation on the "appropriate government" to ensure that all public buildings are made accessible within a prescribed timeframe.
- It covers accessibility in the physical environment, transportation, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystems.

5. Institutional Framework

- **Chief Commissioner and State Commissioners:** These offices act as regulatory bodies and grievance redressal agencies to monitor the implementation of the Act.
- **National and State Advisory Boards:** These serve as high-level policy-making bodies on disability matters.
- **District Level Committees:** Tasked with addressing local grievances and ensuring the delivery of services at the grassroots level.
- **Special Courts:** Designated in each district to ensure speedy trials for offenses committed against persons with disabilities.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016:

1. The Act increased the number of recognized disabilities from 7 to 21 and empowers the State Governments to add more categories as per regional requirements.
2. It mandates a 5% reservation in government jobs and a 4% reservation in higher educational institutions for persons with benchmark disabilities.
3. Every child with a benchmark disability has a statutory right to free education until the age of 18 years.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Solution: B

- **STATEMENT 1 INCORRECT:** While the Act increased categories from 7 to 21, the power to add more categories rests with the **Central Government**, not the State Governments.
- **STATEMENT 2 INCORRECT:** The Act mandates **4%** reservation in government jobs and **5%** reservation in higher educational institutions (the question interchanged these figures).
- **STATEMENT 3 CORRECT:** Section 31 of the Act specifically provides for the right to free education for children with benchmark disabilities between the ages of 6 and 18.

1.3. JAL JEEVAN MISSION (JJM)

Context

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved a significant extension of the **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)** up to **December 2028**, accompanied by an additional financial boost of **₹1.51 trillion** to accelerate rural tap water coverage. This decision marks the transition into **JJM 2.0**, which focuses on structural reforms, digital monitoring, and addressing regional implementation gaps. Simultaneously, the government launched the **Jal Mahotsav 2026** (March 8–22) to mark the formal handover of water assets to Gram Panchayats and reinforce community ownership.



Core Features of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

1. **Launch and Objective:** Launched on August 15, 2019, the mission originally aimed to provide **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC)** to all rural households by 2024, ensuring a supply of **55 litres per capita per day (lpcd)** of potable water.
2. **Nodal Ministry:** It is implemented by the **Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation** under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
3. **Nature of Scheme:** It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** that follows a community-managed and decentralized approach.
4. **Funding Pattern:**
 - a. **100%** for Union Territories without legislature.
 - b. **90:10** for North-Eastern and Himalayan States (e.g., Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand).
 - c. **50:50** for all other States.
5. **Targeted Priorities:** The mission prioritizes water quality-affected habitations (arsenic/fluoride), Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY) villages, and Aspirational Districts.

Recent Developments: JJM 2.0 and Extension

- **Revised Timeline:** The mission has been extended to **December 2028** to ensure 100% saturation in difficult terrains.
- **JJM 2.0 Reforms:** The updated phase emphasizes **service delivery** over mere infrastructure creation, linking fund releases to actual water delivery and digital verification via the **Sujal Gaon ID module**.
- **Sustainability Measures:** Mandatory elements now include **Greywater Management** (reusing used water), rainwater harvesting, and groundwater recharge in convergence with MGNREGS.
- **Digital Monitoring:** Assets are geo-tagged, and the mission uses a real-time **IoT-enabled dashboard** for tracking water quality and quantity.

Implementation Status (As of March 2026)

- **National Coverage:** India has crossed **81% rural tap water coverage**, increasing from just 16.7% (3.23 crore households) in 2019 to over **15.82 crore households** in March 2026.

- **100% Certified States/UTs:** Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Gujarat, Telangana, and UTs like Puducherry and A&N Islands have reported full coverage.
- **Community Ownership:** Over **1.8 lakh villages** are now "Har Ghar Jal" certified, meaning every household and public institution (Schools/Anganwadis) has a functional tap.

Significant Impacts

- **Health:** According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, the mission has the potential to prevent **4 lakh diarrheal deaths** and save **14 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs)**.
- **Gender Empowerment:** **SBI Research** reports that the mission has freed roughly **9 crore women** from the daily drudgery of fetching water, translating to a saving of **5.5 crore hours daily**.
- **Child Health:** Research by Nobel Laureate **Michael Kremer** indicates that safe water access through JJM can reduce under-5 child mortality by nearly **30%**.

1. Consider the following statements regarding the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) 2.0 and its recent updates:

1. The mission has been extended to December 2028 with a primary focus on shifting from infrastructure creation to verified service delivery.
2. The funding pattern for Himalayan and North-Eastern states under the mission is 100% centrally funded.
3. It mandates that at least 50% of the members of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (Pani Samiti) must be women.
4. The mission targets a supply of 55 litres per capita per day (lpcd) of potable water to every rural household.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) Only one
- (B) Only two
- (C) Only three
- (D) All four

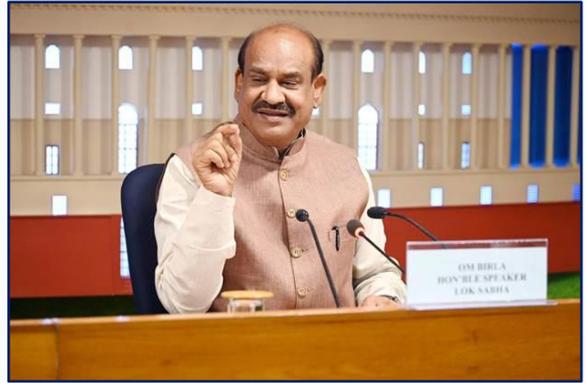
Correct Answer: C (Only three)

- **STATEMENT 1 IS CORRECT:** The Union Cabinet recently extended the mission to December 2028 and introduced JJM 2.0, which prioritizes actual water service delivery over pipeline construction.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS INCORRECT:** For Himalayan and North-Eastern States, the fund-sharing pattern is **90:10** (Centre:State), not 100%. Only Union Territories without legislature receive 100% central funding.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS CORRECT:** To ensure gender-responsive water governance, the mission guidelines mandate that at least **50% of Pani Samiti members** must be women.
- **STATEMENT 4 IS CORRECT:** The core service level benchmark of the mission remains the provision of **55 lpcd** of safe drinking water through Functional Household Tap Connections.

1.4. SPEAKER OF THE LOK SABHA

Context

Recently, the Lok Sabha witnessed a high-stakes debate as the Opposition moved a resolution for the removal of Speaker **Om Birla** under **Article 94(c)** of the Constitution, alleging partisan conduct and procedural irregularities during the Budget Session. This development marks only the fourth time in independent India's history that such a motion has reached the floor of the House. Simultaneously, the



Supreme Court has recently tightened its stance on the Speaker's role as a tribunal, warning that "indecision" in disqualification cases cannot be used as a shield to bypass the Anti-Defection Law.

Constitutional Provisions and Election

1. **Constitutional Basis: Article 93** mandates the Lok Sabha to choose two members of the House to be Speaker and Deputy Speaker as soon as may be.
2. **Election:** The Speaker is elected by a **simple majority** of the members present and voting. The date of the election is fixed by the **President**.
3. **Tenure:** The Speaker holds office from the date of election until immediately before the first meeting of the next Lok Sabha. They do not vacate office upon the dissolution of the House (**Article 94**).
4. **Resignation:** The Speaker submits their resignation in writing to the **Deputy Speaker** (and vice-versa).

Powers and Functions of the Speaker

- **Final Interpreter:** The Speaker is the final interpreter of the provisions of the Constitution of India, the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Lok Sabha, and parliamentary precedents within the House.
- **Money Bills:** Under **Article 110(3)**, the Speaker's decision on whether a bill is a Money Bill is final and cannot be questioned in any court, although the Supreme Court (Aadhaar Case) clarified that "colorable" exercises of this power are subject to judicial review.
- **Joint Sitting:** The Speaker presides over a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament (**Article 108**).
- **Casting Vote:** The Speaker does not vote in the first instance but exercises a **casting vote** in case of a tie to resolve a deadlock (**Article 100**).

Administrative and Supervisory Powers

- **Head of Secretariat:** The Speaker is the ultimate head of the **Lok Sabha Secretariat** and exercises total control over the Parliament Estate, including security and infrastructure.
- **Committee Appointments:** The Speaker appoints the Chairpersons of all **Parliamentary Committees** of the Lok Sabha and supervises their functioning.
- **Ex-Officio Chairman:** The Speaker personally chairs three critical committees:
 - **Business Advisory Committee (BAC):** Regulates the House timetable and agenda.

- **Rules Committee:** Considers matters of procedure and conduct of business.
- **General Purposes Committee:** Deals with matters not falling under other committees.

Quasi-Judicial Role: The Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law)

1. **Adjudicating Authority:** The Speaker decides on the disqualification of members on grounds of defection.
2. **Kihoto Hollohan Case (1992):** The Supreme Court ruled that while acting under the Tenth Schedule, the Speaker functions as a **Tribunal**. Therefore, their decisions are subject to **judicial review** on grounds of mala fides, perversity, or violation of constitutional mandate.
3. **Keisham Meghachandra Singh Case (2020):** The Supreme Court recommended that Speakers should decide disqualification petitions within a **reasonable period**, suggesting a limit of **three months**.
4. **Current Status:** In recent rulings (2025-26), the Court has emphasized that the Speaker cannot sit on petitions indefinitely, as this defeats the very purpose of the Anti-Defection Law.

Procedure for Removal

- **Article 94(c):** The Speaker can be removed by a resolution passed by a **majority of all the then members** of the Lok Sabha (known as an **Effective Majority**).
- **Notice Period:** At least **14 days' notice** must be given before moving such a resolution.
- **Admissibility:** At least **50 members** must support the leave to move the motion in the House.
- **Special Condition (Article 96):** When a resolution for removal is under consideration, the Speaker **cannot preside** over the sitting. However, they have the right to speak, participate in proceedings, and **vote in the first instance**, but they cannot vote in the case of a tie.

Q. With reference to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, consider the following statements:

1. A resolution for the removal of the Speaker requires a majority of the total membership of the House, including vacancies.
2. While a resolution for their removal is under consideration, the Speaker can vote in the first instance but cannot exercise a casting vote.
3. The Supreme Court in the *Kihoto Hollohan* case held that the Speaker's decision under the Tenth Schedule is final and exempt from judicial review to maintain parliamentary autonomy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A) Only one
- B) Only two
- C) Only three
- D) None

Solution: Correct Answer: A (Only one)

- **STATEMENT 1 IS INCORRECT:** Article 94(c) specifies a "majority of all the **then** members," which is an **Effective Majority** (Total Strength – Vacancies). A majority of the total membership (Absolute Majority) is not required.

- **STATEMENT 2 IS CORRECT:** Under **Article 96**, the Speaker can participate and vote as an ordinary member (first instance) but loses the power of a casting vote since they are not presiding.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS INCORRECT:** While the Tenth Schedule originally aimed to make the Speaker's decision final, the Supreme Court in *Kihoto Hollohan* (1992) struck down that specific clause, holding that the Speaker acts as a **Tribunal** and is subject to judicial review.

1.5. THE RIGHT TO DIE WITH DIGNITY

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India delivered a historic judgment on March 11, 2026, permitting the withdrawal of life support for a 32-year-old man who had been in a **Persistent Vegetative State (PVS)** for nearly 13 years. In this ruling, the Court emphasized that the state's interest in preserving life must become **subservient to an individual's dignity** when medical interventions become futile and invasive.



Significantly, the Bench directed that the term "passive euthanasia" should be replaced with **"Withdrawing or Withholding of Medical Treatment"** to reflect a more compassionate and medically accurate approach. This marks the first time since the 2018 *Common Cause* judgment that the apex court has directly authorized the cessation of clinically assisted nutrition and hydration (CANH) in such a specific case.

1. Evolution of the Right to Die in India

The legal journey has shifted from total prohibition to a nuanced recognition of dignity:

- **P. Rathinam v. Union of India (1994):** The SC initially held that the "Right to Life" under Article 21 includes the "Right to Die," effectively striking down Section 309 of the IPC (Attempt to Suicide).
- **Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996):** A Constitution Bench **overruled** Rathinam, stating that Article 21 is a "Right to Life" and does not include the "Right to Die." However, it hinted that a **dignified death** is part of a dignified life.
- **Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011):** The SC permitted **Passive Euthanasia** under strict judicial monitoring for the first time, distinguishing it from Active Euthanasia.
- **Common Cause v. Union of India (2018):** A 5-judge bench declared the **Right to Die with Dignity** as a Fundamental Right under Article 21. It legalized **Living Wills**.

2. Active vs. Passive Euthanasia

Feature	Active Euthanasia	Passive Euthanasia (Withdrawal of Treatment)
Action	A positive act to end life (e.g., lethal injection).	Withholding or withdrawing life-support.
Legal Status	Illegal in India (treated as murder/culpable homicide).	Legal in India under specific SC guidelines.
Outcome	Intentional termination of life.	Allowing the natural course of death to occur.

3. Advance Medical Directives (Living Wills)

A "Living Will" is a document where a person specifies in advance that they should not be kept on artificial life support if they reach a terminal or irreversible medical state.

- **Execution:** Can be signed in the presence of two witnesses and attested by a **Notary or Gazetted Officer** (simplified in 2023 from the earlier requirement of a Judicial Magistrate).
- **Revocation:** An individual has the right to withdraw or change the directive at any time while they are competent.
- **National Health Digital Record:** In 2023, the SC directed that these documents be integrated into digital health records for easy access by hospitals.

4. Procedural Safeguards

The procedure involves two tiers of medical experts to prevent misuse:

1. **Primary Medical Board:** Consists of three doctors (including the treating physician and two specialists with 5 years of experience). They must give an opinion within **48 hours**.
2. **Secondary Medical Board:** Consists of three experts (one nominated by the District Medical Officer). They also have a **48-hour** window to confirm the primary board's finding.
3. **Communication:** The hospital must intimate the **Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC)** about the decision before implementation.

Q. With reference to the 'Right to Die with Dignity' in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court has recognized the Right to Die with Dignity as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution.
2. Active euthanasia, involving the administration of lethal substances to end a terminal patient's life, is legally permitted under the Common Cause (2018) guidelines.
3. A Living Will must be countersigned by a Judicial Magistrate of First Class to be considered legally valid in India.
4. According to recent 2026 judicial directions, Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) is considered a form of medical treatment that can be withdrawn.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Solution:

Answer: (b) Only two

- **STATEMENT 1 IS CORRECT:** In *Common Cause v. Union of India (2018)*, the SC held that the right to a dignified life includes the right to a dignified death.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS INCORRECT:** Active euthanasia remains **strictly illegal** in India and is prosecuted as a criminal offense.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS INCORRECT:** In 2023, the SC modified the guidelines; a Living Will now only needs attestation by a **Notary or Gazetted Officer**, not a Judicial Magistrate.

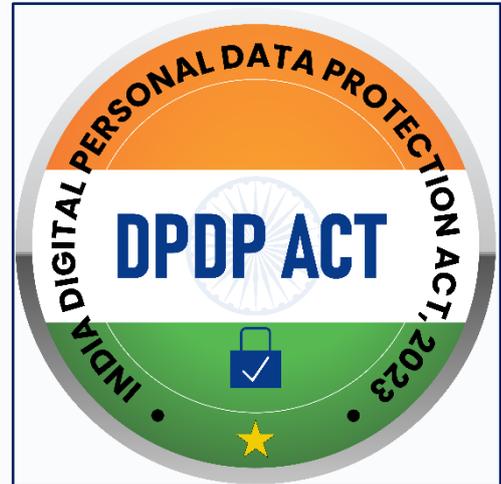
- **STATEMENT 4 IS CORRECT:** In the March 2026 Harish Rana case, the SC clarified that CANH (feeding tubes) is indeed a "medical treatment" and can be withdrawn if it is in the patient's best interest.

1.6. DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION (DPDP) ACT

Context

Recently, the Supreme Court of India issued a formal notice to the Union Government in response to a petition challenging the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** and the **DPDP Rules, 2025**.

The court is specifically examining whether the Act's broad exemptions for state agencies and the amendment to Section 8(1)(j) of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act** create a "compensation vacuum" for citizens and unconstitutionally restrict the public's right to know.



1. Applicability and Scope

- **Digital Focus:** The Act applies to the processing of personal data that is collected in **digital form** or collected offline and later **digitized**.
- **Territorial Jurisdiction:** It applies to data processing within India. It also has **extraterritorial jurisdiction** if the processing is in connection with offering goods or services to Data Principals in India.
- **Exclusions:** It does not apply to personal data processed by an individual for **personal or domestic purposes** or data made publicly available by the Data Principal themselves.

2. Key Definitions

- **Data Principal:** The individual to whom the personal data relates. For children (under 18) or persons with disabilities, this includes their parents or lawful guardians.
- **Data Fiduciary:** The entity (individual, company, or State) that determines the **purpose and means** of data processing.
- **Data Processor:** Any entity that processes data on behalf of a Data Fiduciary.
- **Consent Manager:** A registered entity that provides a single, interoperable platform for individuals to manage, review, and withdraw their consent.

3. Seven Core Principles of DPDP Act

The Act is built on a "SARAL" (Simple, Accessible, Rational & Actionable Law) framework based on:

1. **Consented & Lawful Use:** Data must be processed with explicit consent for lawful purposes.
2. **Purpose Limitation:** Use of data is restricted only to the purpose specified at the time of consent.
3. **Data Minimization:** Only the minimum necessary data should be collected.
4. **Accuracy:** Ensuring data is correct and updated.

5. **Storage Limitation:** Data should be deleted once the purpose is fulfilled.
6. **Security Safeguards:** Reasonable measures to prevent data breaches.
7. **Accountability:** Fiduciaries are responsible for compliance.

4. Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDF)

The Central Government can notify certain fiduciaries as **SDFs** based on factors like the volume of data processed and risk to national sovereignty. SDFs have additional obligations:

- Appointing a **Data Protection Officer (DPO)** based in India.
- Appointing an **independent data auditor**.
- Conducting **Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA)**.

5. Rights and Duties of Data Principals

- **Rights:** Right to access information, right to correction/erasure, right to grievance redressal, and the **Right to Nominate** (to exercise rights in case of death or incapacity).
- **Duties:** Data Principals must not furnish false information, suppress material facts, or file frivolous complaints. Violation of duties can lead to a penalty of up to **Rs 10,000**.

6. The Data Protection Board of India (DPBI)

- **Nature:** A quasi-judicial, digital-first body established to adjudicate breaches and complaints.
- **Powers:** It can summon witnesses, inspect documents, and impose financial penalties.
- **Appeals:** Decisions of the DPBI can be appealed before the **Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)**.

7. Penalties and Exemptions

- **Penalties:** Can range up to **Rs 250 crore** for failing to prevent a data breach. There is **no provision for criminal jail terms**; penalties are purely financial.
- **State Exemptions:** The Government can exempt its instrumentalities from the Act in the interest of **sovereignty, security of the state, or public order**.
- **RTI Amendment:** The Act amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act to prohibit the disclosure of all "personal information," removing the previous "public interest" exception.

Q. With reference to the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, consider the following statements:

1. The Act applies to both digital personal data and non-digital data that remains in physical paper-based records.
2. Under the Act, a Data Principal has the right to nominate any individual to exercise their data rights in the event of their death or incapacity.
3. The Data Protection Board of India is empowered to provide compensation to individuals whose data privacy has been violated by a Data Fiduciary.
4. The Act removes the "public interest" override previously available under the RTI Act for disclosing personal information of public officials.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one

- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Solution: Answer: (b)

- **STATEMENT 1 IS INCORRECT:** The Act applies specifically to **digital personal data** (collected online or digitized later). It does not apply to non-digital data that remains in physical/analog form.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS CORRECT:** The Act introduces the **Right to Nominate**, allowing a Data Principal to name someone to manage their data rights in case of death or incapacity.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS INCORRECT:** While the Board can impose heavy penalties (up to Rs 250 crore), these fines are credited to the **Consolidated Fund of India**. The Act does **not** provide a mechanism for direct compensation or restitution to the individual victim.
- **STATEMENT 4 IS CORRECT:** The DPDP Act amended the RTI Act to create a **blanket exemption** for personal information, effectively deleting the provision where such info could be disclosed if it served a larger public interest.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC)

Context:

Recently, India co-sponsored a significant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on **March 11, 2026**, which condemned "egregious" attacks against GCC member nations and Jordan, while simultaneously demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and threats to international navigation in the **Strait of Hormuz**.

This diplomatic move follows the formal launch of negotiations for a comprehensive **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** in February 2026, aimed at deepening economic integration and securing energy supply chains amidst rising regional instability.



1. Overview and Establishment

- **What it is:** A regional, intergovernmental, political, and economic union.
- **Established:** May 25, 1981, through the Charter of the Cooperation Council.
- **Headquarters:** Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- **Genesis:** Formed in the aftermath of the **Iranian Revolution (1979)** and the **Iran-Iraq War** to ensure collective security and economic stability among Arab monarchies.

2. Member States

The GCC consists of six Arab nations bordering the Persian Gulf:

1. **Saudi Arabia** (Absolute Monarchy)
2. **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** (Federal Monarchy)
3. **Qatar** (Constitutional Monarchy)
4. **Kuwait** (Constitutional Monarchy)
5. **Oman** (Absolute Monarchy)
6. **Bahrain** (Constitutional Monarchy)

Note: Iraq and Iran are **not** members of the GCC, despite bordering the Persian Gulf.

3. Organizational Structure

- **Supreme Council:** The highest authority, consisting of the Heads of State. The presidency rotates **annually in alphabetical order**.
- **Ministerial Council:** Comprises Foreign Ministers; they meet every three months to formulate policies and coordinate implementation.
- **Secretariat General:** The administrative arm based in Riyadh, headed by a Secretary-General (currently Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi).

4. Economic and Strategic Significance

- **Energy Powerhouse:** GCC countries collectively control nearly **33% of the world's proven oil reserves** and 20% of global natural gas reserves.
- **Economic Integration:** The bloc established a **Customs Union** in 2003 and a **Common Market** in 2008, allowing for the free movement of capital and labor among citizens.

- **Security:** The **Peninsula Shield Force** serves as the joint military intervention arm of the GCC.

5. India-GCC Relations (2025-26 Data)

- **Trade:** The GCC is India's **largest trading partner bloc**. Bilateral trade reached approximately **\$178.56 billion** in FY 2024-25.
- **Energy Security:** India imports roughly **35% of its oil** and **70% of its gas** requirements from the GCC region.
- **Remittances & Diaspora:** Nearly **10 million Indians** live in GCC countries, contributing the largest share of India's inward foreign remittances (approx. 30%).
- **FTA Negotiations (2026):** India and GCC signed the **Terms of Reference (ToR)** in February 2026 to conclude a broad-based FTA covering goods, services, and digital trade.

Q. With reference to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), consider the following statements:

1. It was established primarily as a response to the regional instability caused by the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War.
2. The Supreme Council of the GCC consists of Foreign Ministers who meet quarterly to decide on the bloc's overall policy.
3. India has recently signed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the GCC as a collective bloc, replacing all bilateral trade agreements with individual member states.
4. All member states of the GCC share a coastline with both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Solution: Answer: (a)

- **STATEMENT 1 IS CORRECT:** The GCC was indeed formed in 1981 to provide a collective security and economic framework following the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS INCORRECT:** The Supreme Council consists of **Heads of State** (not Foreign Ministers) and meets annually. The Ministerial Council consists of Foreign Ministers and meets quarterly.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS INCORRECT:** As of early 2026, India has launched **negotiations** and signed the "Terms of Reference" for a bloc-wide FTA, but it has not yet replaced individual agreements like the CEPA with the UAE.
- **STATEMENT 4 IS INCORRECT:** While all members border the Persian Gulf, only **Saudi Arabia** has a coastline on both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Countries like Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE do not border the Red Sea.

3.1. OPEN MARKET OPERATIONS (OMO)

Context

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a substantial liquidity injection plan involving the purchase of Government of India securities worth **₹1 lakh crore** through Open Market Operations (OMO). This decision, involves two separate auction tranches of ₹50,000 crore each, scheduled for **March 9 and March 13, 2026**. The move is



strategically timed to counteract expected liquidity tightening in the banking system due to significant cash outflows from mid-month **advance tax payments** and Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections.

1. What is OMO?

Open Market Operations are one of the **quantitative (general)** monetary policy tools used by the central bank (RBI) to regulate the money supply in the economy. It involves the **outright purchase or sale** of government securities (G-Secs) and Treasury Bills in the open market.

2. Mechanism of OMO

The RBI manages liquidity by interacting with the secondary market:

- **OMO Purchase (Liquidity Injection):** When the RBI buys G-Secs from the market, it pays the commercial banks/financial institutions in cash. This increases the **reserves of the banks**, leading to a higher money supply and potentially lower interest rates.
- **OMO Sale (Liquidity Absorption):** When the RBI sells G-Secs, it takes cash out of the banking system. This reduces the **loanable funds** available with banks, thereby decreasing the money supply and controlling inflationary pressures.

3. Impact on Bond Yields

There is an **inverse relationship** between the price of a bond and its yield:

- During an **OMO Purchase**, the demand for bonds increases, which pushes the bond prices up. As bond prices rise, the **bond yield falls**.
- During an **OMO Sale**, the supply of bonds in the market increases, causing bond prices to fall and **bond yields to rise**.

4. Comparison with Other Tools

Feature	OMO	Repo Rate (LAF)
Duration	Generally for durable or long-term liquidity.	Used for short-term (overnight to 14 days) liquidity.
Nature	Outright buying and selling; ownership changes.	Repurchase agreement; securities act as collateral.
Flexibility	RBI can choose specific securities to buy/sell.	Uniformly applicable to all eligible participants.

5. Key Participants and Platform

- **Platform:** OMOs are conducted electronically on the **E-Kuber system**, which is the Core Banking Solution (CBS) platform of the RBI.
- **Participants:** Commercial banks, primary dealers, and other designated financial institutions.

Q. With reference to the Indian economy, consider the following statements regarding Open Market Operations (OMOs):

1. When the Reserve Bank of India conducts an OMO purchase, it leads to an increase in the yields of the underlying government securities.
2. OMOs are primarily used by the RBI to manage short-term, overnight liquidity mismatches in the banking system.
3. The RBI uses the E-Kuber platform to conduct OMO auctions through a multi-security price method.

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

Solution: (c) 3 only

- **STATEMENT 1 IS INCORRECT:** In an OMO purchase, the RBI increases the demand for bonds, which leads to an increase in bond prices. Because bond prices and yields are inversely related, an OMO purchase causes bond yields to **decrease**, not increase.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS INCORRECT:** OMOs are generally used for managing **durable (long-term)** liquidity. Short-term or overnight liquidity mismatches are managed through the **Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF)**, such as Repo and Reverse Repo operations.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS CORRECT:** The RBI conducts OMOs electronically on its **E-Kuber** platform. For the March 2026 operations, it specifically utilized a multi-security auction format to manage specific tranches of G-Secs.

3.2. INDIA'S LPG DEPENDENCE AND RECENT CRISIS

Context:

Recently, India has been grappling with a nationwide **LPG supply crisis** primarily triggered by the escalating **Iran-Israel conflict** in West Asia, which has disrupted maritime traffic through the **Strait of Hormuz**. On March 11, 2026, the Government of India invoked the **Essential Commodities Act** to prioritize LPG supply for domestic



households over commercial and industrial consumers. Furthermore, Union Ministers have confirmed that domestic LPG production has been ramped up by **25%** as an emergency measure to mitigate the shortfall caused by the effective halt of shipments from key suppliers like Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

1. Basics of LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas)

- **Composition:** LPG is a flammable mixture of hydrocarbon gases, primarily consisting of **Propane (C₃H₈)** and **Butane (C₄H₁₀)**. It may also contain small amounts of propylene and butylene.
- **Properties:** It is **colorless and odorless** in its natural state; however, a powerful odorant called **Ethyl Mercaptan** is added to help detect leaks.
 - LPG is **heavier than air**, meaning it tends to settle in low-lying areas (like basements) if a leak occurs, posing an explosion risk.
 - It has a **high calorific value**, making it highly efficient for cooking.
- **Production:** It is obtained as a by-product during **Petroleum Refining** (crude oil processing) and from **Natural Gas** fractionation.
- **Storage:** It is stored as a liquid under moderate pressure to reduce its volume (approx. 250 times), allowing for easier transportation in cylinders.

2. India's LPG Dependence

- **Import Reliance:** India is the world's third-largest consumer of LPG. Approximately **60-65%** of India's total LPG requirement is met through imports.
- **Regional Concentration:** Nearly **90% of India's LPG imports** originate from the West Asian region (Middle East), specifically from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait.
- **Vulnerability (Strait of Hormuz):** A significant portion of these imports passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Any regional instability here directly threatens India's energy security, as seen in the 2026 crisis.
- **Storage Capacity:** India's strategic LPG storage capacity is relatively low compared to crude oil, typically lasting for only about **10-15 days** of national consumption.

3. The 2026 LPG Crisis & Government Response

- **Cause:** Maritime disruptions in the Persian Gulf due to regional warfare have blocked the primary supply route for Indian gas tankers.
- **Emergency Measures:**
 - **Essential Commodities Act (ECA):** Invoked to prevent hoarding and ensure that available stocks are diverted strictly to "Domestic Use" (households).
 - **Production Hike:** Refineries have been ordered to maximize LPG output and divert chemical streams (like propane/butane used in plastics) into the fuel pool.
 - **Refill Restrictions:** The minimum gap between booking two domestic refills has been temporarily increased (from 21 to 25 days) to manage inventory.
 - **DAC Expansion:** The **Delivery Authentication Code (DAC)** system (OTP-based delivery) is being scaled to 90% coverage to prevent black marketing.

4. Major Government Schemes

- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** Launched in 2016 to provide clean cooking fuel to BPL households. By 2026, **Ujjwala 3.0** is active, focusing on migrant families and providing additional subsidies (currently ₹300 per cylinder for up to 12 refills).
- **PAHAL (DBTL):** The world's largest cash transfer program, ensuring LPG subsidies are credited directly to the beneficiary's bank account via **Direct Benefit Transfer**.

Q. With reference to Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and India's energy sector, consider the following statements:

1. LPG is lighter than air, which allows it to dissipate quickly in the atmosphere in case of a leak.
2. Ethyl Mercaptan is a chemical naturally found in LPG that provides its characteristic pungent smell.
3. India currently imports more than half of its total annual LPG consumption.
4. The Government has recently invoked the Essential Commodities Act to prioritize commercial LPG supply over domestic households.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Solution:

Answer: (a) Only one

- **STATEMENT 1 IS INCORRECT:** LPG is **heavier than air**. In case of a leak, it settles on the floor or in low-lying areas, which is why it is dangerous.
- **STATEMENT 2 IS INCORRECT:** Ethyl Mercaptan is **added artificially** to LPG for safety; it is not naturally present in the gas.
- **STATEMENT 3 IS CORRECT:** India imports approximately **60% to 65%** of its LPG requirements, making it highly dependent on external sources.
- **STATEMENT 4 IS INCORRECT:** The government prioritized **domestic (household) supply** over commercial supply to ensure food security for families during the crisis.

3.3. ECONOMIC STABILISATION FUND (ESF)

Context

Recently, the Union Finance Minister announced the creation of a **₹1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund (ESF)** as part of the second batch of supplementary demands for grants in the Lok Sabha. This move comes in response to intensifying global headwinds, particularly the volatility in energy prices and supply chain disruptions caused by the ongoing West Asia conflict.



The fund is designed to provide the Indian government with the necessary **fiscal headroom** to absorb external macroeconomic shocks without compromising the fiscal deficit target, which remains at **4.4% of GDP** for the financial year 2025-26.

Core Concept of the Economic Stabilisation Fund

An Economic Stabilisation Fund is a dedicated financial reserve established by a government to protect the domestic economy from external shocks and revenue volatility. Unlike developmental funds, its primary purpose is **stabilisation** rather than long-term infrastructure investment.

- **Buffer Mechanism:** It acts as a "rainy-day fund" that accumulates surpluses during periods of high growth or stable prices and is deployed during economic downturns or price spikes.
- **Counter-Cyclical Fiscal Policy:** By providing a cushion, the government can avoid drastic cuts in social spending or capital expenditure when revenue is hit by global crises.
- **Targeting Volatility:** In the Indian context, the fund is specifically aimed at mitigating the impact of high crude oil prices (which recently touched \$100/barrel) and ensuring the stability of the rupee.

Key Features and Significance

1. **Fiscal Headroom:** The fund allows the government to meet additional spending requirements (such as fuel or fertilizer subsidies) without breaching the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM)** targets.
2. **Absorption of External Shocks:** It targets "black swan" events, such as the disruption of the **Strait of Hormuz**, which is critical for India's LPG and crude oil imports.
3. **Inflation Control:** By absorbing the cost of global price hikes, the fund helps prevent the pass-through of high energy costs to the domestic consumer, thereby anchoring inflation expectations.
4. **Sovereign Resilience:** It functions similarly to a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) but with a specific mandate for macroeconomic stability rather than purely commercial returns.

Comparison: ESF vs. NIIF

Feature	Economic Stabilisation Fund (ESF)	National Investment & Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)
Primary Goal	Macroeconomic stability and shock absorption.	Catalyzing investment in infrastructure.
Nature	Counter-cyclical and precautionary.	Pro-growth and developmental.
Usage	Deployed during crises (e.g., oil price spikes).	Invested in greenfield and brownfield projects.
Funding	Budgetary allocations / Supplementary grants.	Anchored by Govt (49%) + International Investors.

Q. With reference to the recently announced 'Economic Stabilisation Fund' (ESF), consider the following statements:

1. The primary objective of the fund is to provide long-term equity capital for start-ups in the deep-tech sector.
2. The fund is intended to act as a buffer against external shocks such as global crude oil price volatility.
3. The allocation for this fund was made through the mechanism of Supplementary Demands for Grants.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A) Only one

- B) Only two
- C) All three
- D) None

Solution:

Correct Answer: B (Only two)

- **STATEMENT 1 INCORRECT:** The primary objective of the ESF is macroeconomic stabilisation and shock absorption, not providing equity capital to start-ups (which is the mandate of other specialized funds like the RDI Fund or NIIF).
- **STATEMENT 2 CORRECT:** The Finance Ministry has explicitly stated that the fund will act as a buffer to allow India to respond to global headwinds and shocks arising from unforeseen challenges.
- **STATEMENT 3 CORRECT:** The ₹1 lakh crore allocation for the ESF was sought by the government through the second batch of supplementary demands for grants in the Lok Sabha in March 2026.

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4.1. PROJECT CHEETAH & KUNO-GANDHI SAGAR CORRIDOR

Context

Recently, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) observed that two India-born cheetah cubs, KP2 and KP3, travelled from the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh to the Baran district in Rajasthan. This movement, spanning nearly 70 km, has been termed as "natural territorial behaviour" by officials, reinforcing the urgent need for the proposed **17,000-sq. km Kuno-Gandhi Sagar inter-state wildlife corridor** to facilitate safe animal dispersal across state boundaries.



1. Project Cheetah: Overview

- **Objective:** To reintroduce cheetahs in India after they were declared extinct in the country in **1952** (the only large carnivore to go extinct in independent India).
- **Status:** It is the world's first intercontinental large wild carnivore translocation project.
- **Source Populations:** Cheetahs have been brought from **Namibia** (2022), **South Africa** (2023), and most recently from **Botswana** (February 2026).
- **Nodal Agency:** The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) implements the project in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and State Forest Departments.

2. Natural Territorial Behaviour of Cheetahs

(a) Social Structure and Territoriality

Unlike most other big cats, cheetahs exhibit a unique social system where the territoriality of males and females differs significantly.

- **Male Coalitions:** Adult males are often social and form "coalitions," typically consisting of two to three brothers from the same litter. These coalitions are highly territorial.
- **Solitary Females:** Female cheetahs are generally solitary, except when they are accompanied by their dependent cubs. They do not defend territories in the traditional sense but instead occupy vast "home ranges."

(b) Home Range vs. Territory

- **Males:** Territorial males defend relatively small areas (often 15 to 30 sq. miles) that are rich in prey and cover. They marking these areas with urine and feces to warn off rivals. Coalitions can hold territories for longer periods and defend them more effectively than solitary males.
- **Females:** Their home ranges are much larger than male territories, sometimes exceeding 800 sq. km in prey-scarce environments. A single female's range often overlaps with the territories of several different male coalitions, which maximizes her mating opportunities.

(c) Long-Distance Dispersal

- **Exploratory Nature:** Cheetahs are known for "long-distance dispersal," where young adults move far from their natal (birth) areas to find unoccupied habitats or mates.

- **Landscape Connectivity:** In the context of India, this behavior means cheetahs will naturally venture out of the 748 sq. km Kuno National Park. The **Project Cheetah Action Plan** explicitly anticipates this movement, emphasizing that cheetahs require large, interconnected landscapes rather than small, isolated pockets of forest.

3. The Kuno-Gandhi Sagar Inter-State Corridor

- **Geography:** Spans approximately **17,000 sq. km** across Madhya Pradesh (8 districts) and Rajasthan (7 districts).
- **Key Components:**
 - **Kuno National Park (MP):** The primary release site.
 - **Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (MP):** Identified as the second home for cheetahs to reduce density pressure at Kuno.
 - **Wildlife Corridor:** Links Kuno and Gandhi Sagar with Rajasthan's **Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve** and various conservation reserves in Baran and Kota districts.
- **Strategic Rationale:** Cheetahs are known for "long-distance dispersal." A connected landscape prevents "island populations" and ensures genetic health through natural movement.

4. National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- **Type: Statutory Body** under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Origin:** Established in 2005 under the provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** (amended in 2006).
- **Composition:** Chaired by the Union Minister of Environment; includes experts and Members of Parliament.
- **Function:** While primarily for Tigers, it oversees "Project Cheetah" and "Project Lion" to ensure standardized conservation protocols and inter-state coordination.

5. Comparative Analysis: African vs. Asiatic Cheetah

Feature	African Cheetah (<i>Acinonyx jubatus jubatus</i>)	Asiatic Cheetah (<i>Acinonyx jubatus venaticus</i>)
IUCN Status	Vulnerable	Critically Endangered
Distribution	Around 7,000 left in Africa (Namibia, South Africa, etc.).	Only in Iran (less than 50 individuals).
Size	Slightly larger with a sturdier build.	Smaller and more slender; often has a thicker coat.
Reintroduction	Currently being introduced in India.	Native subspecies of India, now extinct here.

Q. With reference to the 'Project Cheetah' in India, consider the following statements:

1. The project involves the reintroduction of the Asiatic Cheetah, which is currently found only in Iran.

2. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is the statutory body responsible for the implementation of the project.
3. The proposed Kuno-Gandhi Sagar wildlife corridor is an inter-state initiative involving Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

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)

- **STATEMENT 1 INCORRECT:** The project involves the translocation of the **African Cheetah**, not the Asiatic Cheetah. The Asiatic Cheetah is too few in number (Critically Endangered in Iran) to be spared for translocation.
- **STATEMENT 2 CORRECT:** The NTCA is indeed the statutory body (under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972) that oversees the implementation and funding of the project.
- **STATEMENT 3 INCORRECT:** While the article mentions future possibilities for UP (Jhansi/Lalitpur), the *current* 17,000-sq. km corridor strategically links **Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan** only. UP is not part of the active corridor being monitored for this specific dispersal.

4.2. GLOBAL WARMING ACCELERATION & AEROSOLS

Context

Recently, a study published in *Geophysical Research Letters* (March 2026) by researchers from the University of Potsdam confirmed that global warming has entered a phase of **significant acceleration since 2015**. By stripping away natural "noise" such as volcanic eruptions and solar cycles, the study revealed that the warming rate has jumped from 0.2°C per decade to approximately **0.35°C per decade**, largely attributed to the "unmasking" effect of reduced aerosol pollution.



1. The Warming Trend: From Steady to Accelerated

- **The Baseline:** From the 1970s until 2015, the Earth warmed at a relatively steady rate of **0.2°C per decade**.
- **The Shift:** Since 2015, the rate has increased by nearly **75%**, reaching an estimated **0.35°C per decade**.
- **Statistical Significance:** Researchers used "piecewise linear models" to identify 2015 as a "change point," confirming with **98% confidence** that this is not a result of natural variability (like El Niño) but a structural shift in the climate system.

2. The Role of Aerosols: The "Double-Edged Sword"

Aerosols are minute solid particles or liquid droplets suspended in the atmosphere. They influence the climate in two primary ways:

Feature	Cooling Aerosols (Reflective)	Warming Aerosols (Absorptive)
Examples	Sulphates, Nitrates, Sea salt, Mineral dust.	Black Carbon (Soot), Brown Carbon.
Mechanism	Reflect incoming solar radiation back into space (Increase Albedo).	Absorb solar energy and radiate heat; decrease albedo when settling on ice.
Source	Volcanic eruptions, Coal/Fossil fuel combustion.	Biomass burning, Diesel engines, Cookstoves.
Cloud Impact	Act as Cloud Condensation Nuclei (CCN), making clouds brighter and longer-lasting (Cooling).	Can dissipate clouds by heating the surrounding air.

3. The "Aerosol Unmasking" Effect

- **The "Faustian Bargain":** For decades, sulphate pollution from industrial activities acted as a "parasol," masking roughly **0.4°C to 0.5°C** of the warming caused by Greenhouse Gases (GHGs).
- **Cleaning the Air:** As nations (notably China and India) implement stricter air quality standards and shift away from coal, the concentration of these reflective aerosols drops.
- **Consequence:** Removing the "cooling mask" allows the full force of accumulated GHGs to be felt, leading to a sudden spike in temperatures.

4. Implications for the Paris Agreement

- **1.5°C Threshold:** The Paris Agreement aims to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- **Revised Timeline:** At the current accelerated rate, the 1.5°C limit is projected to be breached **by 2030**, much earlier than previous IPCC estimates of the mid-2030s.
- **Net-Zero Urgency:** The findings suggest that "Net-Zero" targets for 2050 or 2070 may need to be advanced to prevent irreversible tipping points.

Q. With reference to 'Atmospheric Aerosols' and their impact on Global Warming, consider the following statements:

1. Most aerosols, such as sulphates and nitrates, have a net cooling effect on the Earth by increasing the planet's albedo.
2. Black carbon is a short-lived climate pollutant that contributes to warming by absorbing solar radiation.
3. Reducing industrial aerosol pollution leads to a decrease in the rate of global warming because it removes harmful pollutants from the atmosphere.

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)

- **STATEMENT 1 CORRECT:** Sulphate and nitrate aerosols are reflective in nature. They scatter incoming sunlight and act as cloud condensation nuclei, which increases Earth's reflectivity (albedo), thereby cooling the surface.
- **STATEMENT 2 CORRECT:** Black carbon (soot) is a warming agent. Unlike sulphates, it absorbs solar energy. It is considered a "Short-Lived Climate Pollutant" (SLCP) because it remains in the atmosphere for only days to weeks.
- **STATEMENT 3 INCORRECT:** Reducing industrial aerosol pollution actually **accelerates** global warming. This is because these pollutants were previously "masking" or offsetting some of the warming caused by greenhouse gases. Removing them allows the full warming effect of CO₂ and Methane to take place (the "Unmasking Effect").

4.3. SAND MINING

Context

Recently, the Supreme Court of India intervened to protect the National Chambal Sanctuary from **illegal sand mining**. The Court directed a **three-member committee** to monitor and control illegal mining activities in the river system.

The action followed a report submitted by the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** highlighting that **unchecked sand extraction in the Chambal River basin is damaging the habitat of several endangered aquatic and riverbank species**.

1. About National Chambal Sanctuary

- **Location:** The sanctuary is located along the **Chambal River** and spreads across **three states**:

SAND MINING
Preserving National Chambal Sanctuary

Context
Recently, the Supreme Court stepped in to protect the National Chambal Sanctuary from illegal sand mining. The National Green Tribunal's report highlighted unchecked sand extraction damaging the habitat of endangered species.

1. About National Chambal Sanctuary

- **Location:** The sanctuary is located along the Chambal River and spreads across three states:
 - Madhya Pradesh
 - Rajasthan
 - Uttar Pradesh
- **Type:**
 - Riverine wildlife sanctuary.
- **Major Species Protected:**
 - ✓ Gharial
 - ✓ Gangetic dolphin
 - ✓ Indian skimmer
 - ✓ Mugger crocodile
 - ✓ Several migratory birds and turtles.

2. Sand Mining: Legal and Regulatory Framework

- **Classification:** Under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act).
- **Regulatory Authority:** States have the power to grant leases and prevent illegal mining.
- **National Guidelines:**
 - ✓ Sustainable Sand Mining Management Guidelines (2016) and Enforcement & Monitoring Guidelines (2020)
 - ✓ Drones and Surveillance Guidelines (2020)

3. Ecological and Hydrological Impacts of Sand Mining

- ✓ **River Morphometry: Incision**
 - Deepens "river channel" thatier.
- ✓ **Groundwater Depletion**
 - Faster runoff lowers table.
- ✓ **Coastal erosion**
 - Shoreline erosion.
- ✓ **Biodiversity Loss**
 - Destroys the Habitat.

4. Alternatives to Natural Sand

- **M-Sand (Manufactured Sand)**
 - Produced from hard granite rocks.
 - Reduces load on riverbeds.
- **Industrial By-products:**
 - Use of Fly Ash (from thermal plants) and Copper Slag as partial replacements in construction.

- Madhya Pradesh
- Rajasthan
- Uttar Pradesh
- **Type: Riverine wildlife sanctuary**
- **Major Species Protected:** The sanctuary is famous for protecting:
 - Gharial
 - Gangetic Dolphin
 - Indian Skimmer
 - Mugger Crocodile
 - Several migratory birds and turtles.

2. Sand Mining: Legal and Regulatory Framework

- **Classification:** Under the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act)**, sand is classified as a "**Minor Mineral.**"
- **Regulatory Authority:** The administrative and legislative power to frame rules for "Minor Minerals" entirely belongs to the **State Governments** (not the Central Government).
 - State governments have the power to grant leases and prevent illegal mining.
- **National Guidelines:** The **Sustainable Sand Mining Management Guidelines (2016)** and the **Enforcement & Monitoring Guidelines (2020)** issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) emphasize the use of **drones and night-vision surveillance** to track illegal activities.
- Further, Ministry of Mines, through Indian Bureau of Mines, has developed the Mining Surveillance System (MSS), in coordination with Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG), Gandhinagar and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY), to use space technology for curbing illegal mining activity in the country.

3. Ecological and Hydrological Impacts of sand mining

- **River Morphometry:** Excessive mining causes **riverbed incision** (deepening), which can lower the water table of the surrounding floodplains, affecting agriculture and drinking water.
- **Groundwater Depletion:** Sand acts as a "sponge" that recharges groundwater. Removing it leads to faster runoff and reduced seepage.
- **Coastal Erosion:** Sand mining in estuarine and coastal areas destroys natural barriers against **storm surges** and leads to **saline water intrusion** into freshwater aquifers.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** It destroys the breeding grounds of sensitive species like the **Gharial** (Critically Endangered) and various species of river turtles.

4. Alternatives to Natural Sand

- **M-Sand (Manufactured Sand):** Produced by crushing hard granite rocks. It is ecologically superior as it reduces the load on riverbeds.

- **Industrial By-products:** Use of **Fly Ash** (from thermal plants) and **Copper Slag** as partial replacements in construction.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the National Chambal Sanctuary:

1. It is spread across three states.
2. It is primarily created to conserve the Gharial.
3. It is located on the Yamuna River.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: A

Explanation:

Based on the geographical and ecological facts regarding the National Chambal Sanctuary, here is the evaluation of the statements:

Correct Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The National Chambal Sanctuary (also known as the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary) is a tri-state protected area. It is spread across **Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** It was set up in 1979 specifically to protect the **Gharial** (*Gavialis gangeticus*), which is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. It also protects the Red-crowned roof turtle and the Endangered **Ganges River Dolphin**.
- **Statement 3 is Incorrect:** The sanctuary is located on the **Chambal River**, not the Yamuna River. While the Chambal River is a major tributary of the Yamuna, the sanctuary itself is situated along the pristine stretch of the Chambal.

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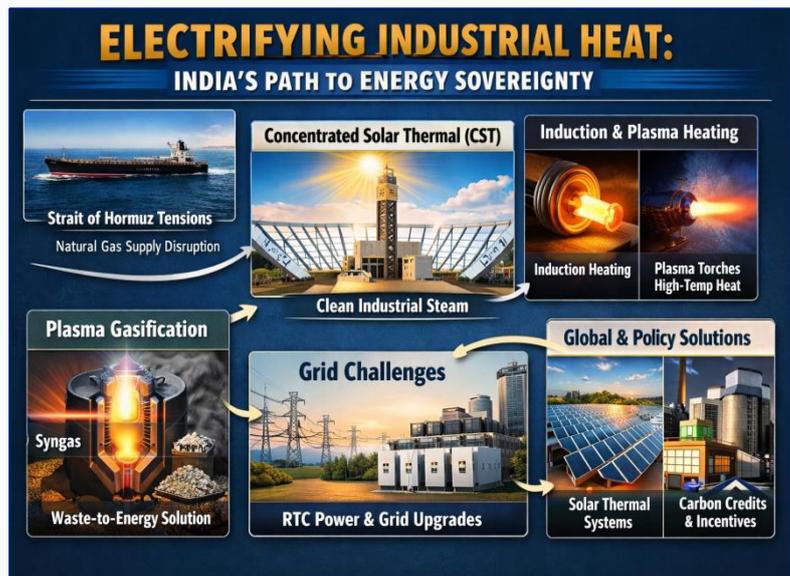
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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.1. THE QUEST FOR THERMAL INDEPENDENCE

Context:

India is facing a "geopolitical ultimatum" due to the volatility in the **Strait of Hormuz** (a critical artery for India's natural gas imports). As the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas slashes gas allocations to non-priority industrial sectors (like ceramics and textiles), India must transition from burning hydrocarbons to **Electrification of Industrial Heat** and **Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST)** to achieve "sovereignty of heat."



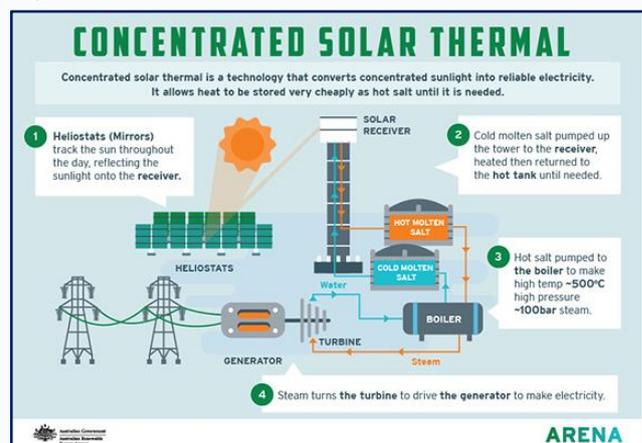
1. Key Technologies for Industrial Decarbonization

A. Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST)

- **Mechanism:** Uses precisely controlled mirrors to concentrate sunlight onto a receiver to heat fluids (water or molten salt) up to **400 °C**.
- **Utility:** Ideal for textile processes (scouring/bleaching) requiring steam between **100 °C and 180 °C**.
- **Other Applications:** Primarily used for high-temperature industrial process heat (heating, cooling, drying) and utility-scale electricity generation via steam turbines.
- **Advantage:** Unlike solar PV, CST systems can efficiently store heat in molten salt or other materials, enabling electricity production at night.
- **India's Potential:** Estimated at **15 GW** by the MNRE.

B. Induction and Plasma Heating

- **Induction Heating:** Uses electromagnetic fields to generate heat directly inside the material (e.g., metal). Efficiency rates can exceed **90%** because there is no intermediary substance (like air or steam) to lose heat.
- **How it Works:**
 - A high-frequency **Alternating Current (AC)** is passed through a copper coil.
 - This creates a rapidly fluctuating **magnetic field** around and inside the coil.
 - When a conductive workpiece (like a steel rod) is placed inside this field, **Eddy Currents** are induced within the material.



- The material's internal resistance to these currents generates heat instantly (Joule heating).
- **Key Physics Concept: Skin Effect.** At high frequencies, the current tends to flow on the surface of the material. By adjusting the frequency, engineers can control whether they want to heat just the "skin" (surface hardening) or the entire core of the metal.
- **Industrial Use:** Melting metals, brazing, and surface hardening in automotive and aerospace manufacturing.
- **Plasma Torches:** Used in high-temperature industries. Instead of a solid workpiece, the induction coil surrounds a gas stream (e.g., argon, oxygen), creating a high-frequency electrodeless discharge that ionizes the gas into plasma.
- **How it Works:**
 - An electric arc is struck between two electrodes.
 - A gas (like Argon, Nitrogen, or even compressed air) is passed through this arc.
 - The intense energy strips electrons from the gas atoms, creating **Plasma**—a soup of ions and electrons.
 - This plasma "torch" can reach temperatures of **5,000°C to 10,000°C** or more.
- **Industrial Use:** Plasma cutting, specialized waste-to-energy (plasma gasification), and high-end metallurgy.
- Plasma gasification is a high-temperature waste treatment process that uses plasma torches (**about 3,000°C–10,000°C**) to break down waste into elemental components. It converts organic waste into **syngas (mainly carbon monoxide and hydrogen)** and transforms inorganic materials into **inert vitrified slag**, providing a sustainable alternative to landfills.

2. Infrastructure & Grid Challenges

The transition to electric heat poses significant engineering challenges for India's power sector:

- **Grid Collapse Risk:** Shifting the 25% of India's energy consumption currently served by gas pipes to electric wires could overwhelm the current grid.
- **Baseload Requirement:** Most factories operate 24/7, necessitating **Round-the-Clock (RTC)** renewable power, battery storage, and **Pumped Hydro Storage**.
- **Last-Mile Constraints:** Local grids in industrial clusters (like Ludhiana) have aging high-voltage substations. DISCOM reports suggest 25–33% of distribution transformers are already critically loaded during peak hours.

3. Global Policy Lessons & Hybrid Models

- **Oman (Project 'Miraah'):** One of the world's largest CST plants integrated with gas-fired operations. Solar generates steam during the day (reducing gas use by 80%), while gas boilers remain on standby for nighttime.
- **Spain (Solatom):** Use of **plug-and-play solar thermal units** (pre-assembled, containerized mirrors) that can be installed on factory roofs or parking lots.
- **Denmark:** Reformed energy markets to support '**Heat Purchase Agreements**', where an external provider maintains the system and the factory pays a fixed rate for the heat.

4. Policy Recommendations for India

- **National Thermal Policy:** Necessary to survive the LPG/Natural Gas crisis.
- **Incentive Parity:** Extend **Production-Linked Incentives (PLI)** to CST mirror manufacturers (currently focused on PV cells).
- **Carbon Market Reform:** Allow factories to sell "avoided emissions" through the **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme** to offset the high capital cost of electric/plasma kilns.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding plasma gasification:

- It converts organic waste into syngas mainly consisting of carbon monoxide and hydrogen.
- It produces vitrified slag from inorganic materials.
- It operates at relatively low temperatures below 500°C.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- I and II only
- II and III only
- I only
- I, II and III

Answer: A

Explanation:

Statement I is Correct: Plasma gasification uses a plasma torch to break down matter at the molecular level. This converts **organic waste** (like plastics and biomass) into **Syngas** (Synthetic Gas). Syngas is primarily a mixture of **Carbon Monoxide** and **Hydrogen**, which can be used to generate electricity or as a chemical feedstock.

Statement II is Correct: Unlike traditional incineration, this process does not produce ash. Instead, **inorganic materials** (like glass, metals, and soil) are melted into a molten state. When cooled, they form a **vitrified slag**—a glass-like, non-leachable solid that is safe for use in construction materials.

Statement III is Incorrect: This is the defining feature of the technology. Plasma gasification operates at **extremely high temperatures**, typically ranging from **4,000°C to 10,000°C** (and sometimes higher). This is significantly hotter than standard incineration (which usually stays around 800°C–1,200°C). Operating below 500°C would not be sufficient to ionize gas into the plasma state.

5.2. WHO PANDEMIC AGREEMENT

Context:

- **Recently**, India joined a coalition of developing nations, known as the "Group for Equity," to demand a legally enforceable benefit-sharing system during the ongoing negotiations for the **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)** system in Geneva.
- These crucial talks aim to finalize the "rule book" or the Annex of the **WHO Pandemic Agreement**, which was formally adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2025.



Key Features of the Pandemic Agreement

The Pandemic Agreement is a historic, legally binding international treaty designed to prevent a repeat of the inequities witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Legal Basis:** It is negotiated under **Article 19** of the WHO Constitution. It is only the second such treaty in WHO history, following the 2003 Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).
- **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) System:** This is the "soul" of the agreement. It mandates that countries rapidly share information on pathogens with pandemic potential. In exchange, manufacturers using this data must provide **20% of their real-time production** of pandemic products (10% as a donation and 10% at affordable prices) to the WHO for equitable distribution.
- **The "One Health" Approach:** The agreement recognizes that 75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. It promotes an integrated framework that links human, animal, and environmental health to detect spillovers early.
- **Sovereignty Safeguards:** Critically, the treaty explicitly states that it **cannot** empower the WHO to mandate national lockdowns, compulsory vaccinations, or travel bans. Each member state retains full sovereign rights over its domestic public health policies.
- **Institutional Framework:** * **Global Supply Chain and Logistics (GSCL) Network:** To ensure the fair movement of medical countermeasures.
 - **Coordinating Financial Mechanism:** To assist developing countries in building laboratory and surveillance capacities.

India's Stand and Concerns

India has emerged as a leading voice for the **Global South** in these negotiations, focusing on three primary pillars:

1. **Equity over Charity:** India opposes the "voluntary" nature of benefit-sharing, demanding that pharmaceutical companies be legally bound to share technology and products.
2. **Access to Raw Materials:** India has highlighted that sharing pathogen data is meaningless if developing nations cannot access the raw materials needed to manufacture vaccines locally.
3. **Traditional Medicine:** India successfully advocated for the inclusion of holistic health and traditional medicine systems within the broader pandemic preparedness framework.

Q. With reference to the 'WHO Pandemic Agreement' and the 'PABS System', consider the following statements:

1. The Pandemic Agreement is the first-ever legally binding instrument negotiated under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution.
2. Under the PABS system, pharmaceutical manufacturers are required to reserve a specific percentage of their production for the WHO during a pandemic emergency.
3. The Agreement grants the WHO the authority to mandate national lockdowns and travel restrictions in member states during a declared Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC).

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A) Only one
- B) Only two
- C) All three
- D) None

Solution: Correct Answer: A (Only one)

- **STATEMENT 1 INCORRECT:** While it is a legally binding instrument under Article 19, it is the **second** such treaty. The first was the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) adopted in 2003.
- **STATEMENT 2 CORRECT:** The PABS system includes a provision where manufacturers are expected to provide 20% of their real-time production of vaccines and therapeutics to the WHO (10% as donation, 10% at affordable prices).
- **STATEMENT 3 INCORRECT:** The Agreement explicitly protects **national sovereignty**. It states that the WHO has no power to override domestic laws or mandate lockdowns, vaccinations, or travel bans.

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MISCELLANEOUS

6.1. 11TH EDITION OF EXERCISE LAMITIYE-2026

Context:

The 11th edition of the joint military exercise between India and Seychelles is currently being conducted at the **Seychelles Defence Academy** from **March 9 to 20, 2026**. This edition is a major milestone as it is the **first-ever Tri-Service edition**, involving the Army, Navy, and Air Force from the Indian side.

1. Core Characteristics of 'LAMITIYE'

- **Etymology:** The word 'LAMITIYE' translates to "**Friendship**" in the **Creole** language (the local language of Seychelles).
- **Frequency:** It is a **biennial** training event (held every two years).
- **History:** The exercise has been conducted in Seychelles since **2001**.
- **Objective:** To enhance synergy and interoperability in **Sub-conventional Operations** in a **Semi-Urban environment** under the United Nations (UN) Charter for Peacekeeping Operations.

2. Participants & Assets (2026 Edition)

- **Indian Army:** Personnel from the **ASSAM Regiment** (Southern Command).
- **Indian Navy:** Deployment of the stealth frigate **INS Trikand**.
- **Indian Air Force:** Deployment of a **C-130J Super Hercules** transport aircraft.
- **Host Nation:** Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF).

3. Key Operational Focus Areas

- **Tactical Drills:** Neutralization of threats in semi-urban settings, close-quarter battle (CQB), and room intervention drills.
- **Specialized Scenarios:** Hijacked bus scenarios and hostage situation response tactics.
- **Technology Showcase:** Exploitation of new-generation equipment, including discussions on **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in disaster management and tactical combat.
- **Maritime Component:** The Seychelles Coast Guard and Special Forces demonstrate **VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure)** procedures.
- **HADR:** Sessions on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, specifically the role of helicopters in casualty evacuation and reconnaissance.

11th Edition of Exercise LAMITIYE-2026
India-Seychelles Tri-Service Joint Military Exercise

1. Core Characteristics of 'LAMITIYE'

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4. India's Major Military Exercises (2026)

Exercise Name	Partner Nation(s)	Type	Edition / Venue (2026)	Strategic Significance &
LAMITIYE-2026	Seychelles	Tri-Service (Army, Navy, Air Force)	11th Edition / Seychelles Defence Academy	11th Edition, marks the 25th anniversary of the exercise. Focuses on Sub-conventional Operations, Maritime Security, Counter Terrorism, and Disaster Relief.
MILAN 2026	Multilateral (50+ Nations)	Naval	Visakhapatnam, India	Focuses on Maritime Security, Counter Terrorism, and Disaster Relief.
DHARM4 GUARDIAN	Japan	Army	India (Foreign Training Nodes)	Focuses on Counter Terrorism, Disaster Relief, and Maritime Security.
DUSTLIK-2026	Uzbekistan (Former-Soviet Military Exercises)	Army	Termez, Uzbekistan / India	Focuses on Counter Terrorism, Disaster Relief, and Maritime Security.
SAMPRITI 2026	Bangladesh (Annual bilateral exercise)	Army	Alternating (India/Bangladesh)	Focuses on Counter Terrorism, Disaster Relief, and Maritime Security.

4. India's Major Military Exercises (2026)

Exercise Name	Partner Nation(s)	Type	Edition / Venue (2026)	Strategic Significance & Key Focus
LAMITIYE-2026	Seychelles	Tri-Service (Army, Navy, Air Force)	11th Edition / Seychelles Defence Academy	First-ever Tri-Service edition. Focuses on sub-conventional operations, semi-urban warfare, and maritime security under India's SAGAR vision.
MILAN 2026	Multilateral (50+ Nations)	Naval	Visakhapatnam, India	India's largest multilateral naval exercise. Projects India as a " Preferred Security Partner " in the Indo-Pacific and enhances collective maritime domain awareness.
DHARMA GUARDIAN	Japan	Army	India (Foreign Training Nodes)	Strengthens the India-Japan Special Strategic Partnership . Focuses on urban combat and disaster relief (HADR) in the context of the QUAD framework.
DUSTLIK 2026	Uzbekistan	Army	Termez, Uzbekistan / India	Focuses on counter-terrorism in mountainous and rural terrains. Key to India's " Connect Central Asia " policy.
SAMPRITI 2026	Bangladesh	Army	Alternating (India/Bangladesh)	Enhances synergy for UN Peacekeeping missions and border security. Central to the " Neighbourhood First " policy.

Q. In the context of Exercise LAMITIYE-2026, the Indian Army's participation was represented by which of the following regiments?

- (a) Gorkha Rifles
- (b) Rajputana Rifles
- (c) Assam Regiment
- (d) Madras Regiment

Answer: C

Explanation:

Assam Regiment: In 2026, the Indian Army's participation was led by the **Assam Regiment**. They were selected due to their specialized training in rugged terrain and sub-conventional warfare (counter-insurgency/terrorism), which is the primary focus of the urban-combat drills in Seychelles.

6.2. SHINE

Context:

The Indian Railways has strengthened its workplace safety framework by launching a technology-driven grievance mechanism. This initiative, aligned with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, aims to provide a secure environment for women employees. It modernizes the implementation of the 1997 Vishakha guidelines through digital integration.

About SHINE: Sexual Harassment Incident Notification for Empowerment

- **Launch Occasion:** The app became operational on **International Women's Day** (8th March).
- **System Integration:** SHINE is integrated with the **Human Resources Management System (HRMS)** and the 'Employee Self Service' system.
- **Confidentiality:** The platform is designed to maintain strict **confidentiality** while addressing issues effectively with relevant authorities.



Expanded Scope and Inclusive Protection

- **Direct Beneficiaries:** Primarily designed for women employees of the Indian Railways to lodge complaints about sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Third-Party Reporting:** In a significant move for inclusivity, the app allows for reporting incidents on behalf of **outsiders (visitors), contractual staff, students**, and others who may lack direct access to the application.
- **Complementary Mechanism:** It does not replace, but rather complements, existing **internal complaints committees** mandated by government directives.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding SHINE (Sexual Harassment Incident Notification for Empowerment):

- SHINE is a digital grievance platform launched by Indian Railways to address workplace sexual harassment complaints in line with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- The platform replaces the Internal Complaints Committees mandated under the 2013 Act and restricts complaints only to permanent railway employees.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) I only

- (b) II only
- (c) Both I and II
- (d) Neither I nor II

Answer: A

Explanation:

STATEMENT I IS CORRECT: SHINE (Sexual Harassment Incident Notification for Empowerment) is a digital grievance mechanism launched by Indian Railways. It strengthens workplace safety for women and aligns with the provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 by enabling technology-based complaint reporting.

STATEMENT II IS INCORRECT: The SHINE platform **does not replace Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs)** mandated under the 2013 Act. Instead, it **complements the existing mechanism**. Moreover, the system is **not restricted only to permanent railway employees**; it also allows **reporting incidents involving visitors, contractual staff, students, and other outsiders** through third-party reporting.

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