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From

08th Jun to 13th Jun 2026

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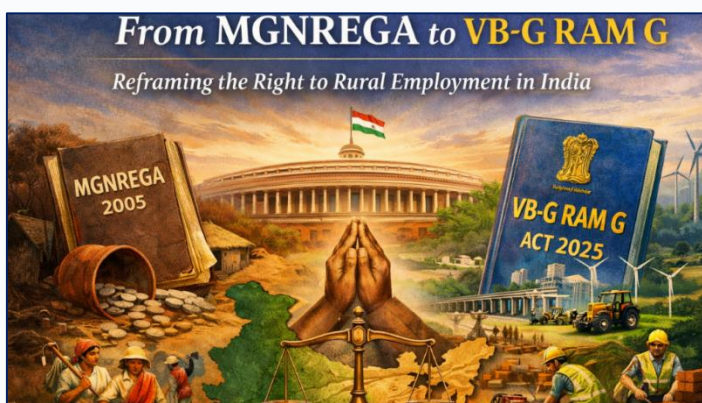
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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1. DECODING THE VB-GRAM G ACT 2025: A NEW PARADIGM IN RURAL EMPLOYMENT

Context:

- The Ministry of Rural Development has announced an interim allocation of ₹95,962 crores to implement the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-GRAM G) Act, 2025.



About the VB-GRAM G Act 2025

- The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-GRAM G) Act, 2025, is a major legislative measure that officially repeals and replaces the MGNREGA Act of 2005 to transition India's rural employment framework from basic manual labor to durable national asset creation.
- Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Rural Development.
- Core Objective:** Providing a statutory guarantee of wage employment while creating high-quality, durable infrastructure (specifically water security).

Key Provisions

- Employment Guarantee:** The Act **statutorily** mandates **125 days** of guaranteed wage employment per rural household annually.
- Funding Framework:** It establishes a **60:40 Centre-State cost-sharing model** for the wage bill, significantly increasing the fiscal responsibility of State governments.
- Wage Disbursement:** The framework stipulates a **weekly wage payment cycle** to improve financial liquidity for workers.
- Agricultural Alignment:** Public works can be officially **paused for up to 60 days** during peak agricultural seasons to ensure adequate farm labour availability.
- Technological Integration:** The implementation requires mandatory **biometric authentication** and **AI-enabled analytics** to ensure transparency and monitor fund utilization.

Key Departures from MGNREGA

Feature	MGNREGA (2005)	VB-GRAM G Act (2025)
Guaranteed Work Days	100 days per household annually	125 days per household annually
Unskilled Wage Funding	100% funded by the Central Government	60:40 cost-sharing (Centre : State)

Wage Payment Cycle	Maximum of 15 days	Weekly payments
Agricultural Seasonality	Continuous work available year-round	Provision to pause for up to 60 days during peak harvest seasons
Nature of Entitlement	Justiciable legal right to work	Schematic entitlement based on "Normative Allocation" (subject to budget caps)
Infrastructure Integration	Standalone local asset creation	Integrated with PM Gati Shakti via Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans
Technology Mandate	Basic MIS and Aadhaar-linked payments	Mandatory biometric authentication and AI-enabled analytics

Q. With respect to the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-GRAM G) Act, 2025, consider the following statements:

- I. It increases the guaranteed wage employment to 125 days per rural household annually.
- II. The Central Government provides 100 percent funding for the unskilled wage bill under this Act.
- III. It introduces a provision to temporarily suspend public works during peak agricultural seasons.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) I and III only
- (b) II only
- (c) I and II only
- (d) I, II, and III

Answer: A

- **Statement I is correct:** The VB-GRAM G Act **statutorily increases the guaranteed wage employment** from 100 days to **125 days per household** annually to enhance rural incomes.
- **Statement II is incorrect:** The legislation marks a structural shift by introducing a **60:40 Centre-State cost-sharing model** for the wage bill, explicitly replacing the previous 100 percent central funding framework for unskilled wages.
- **Statement III is correct:** The framework includes a mandate to **pause public works for up to 60 days** during peak agricultural seasons, specifically ensuring that **farmers have access to necessary agricultural labour** when demand is highest.

1.2. ARTICLE 142

Context:

- Recently, the Supreme Court utilized its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to overturn a 10-year POCSO prison sentence. The court observed that the couple fell in love while the victim was a minor and later married once she attained adulthood. Invoking Article 142 to ensure "complete justice" where existing statutory laws fell short, the court quashed the conviction to allow the couple to live peacefully as spouses.



What is Article 142 of the Indian Constitution?

Article 142 provides a unique, self-contained constitutional mechanism that empowers the Supreme Court of India to pass any decree or execute any order necessary for doing "complete justice" in any cause or matter pending before it.

Key Characteristics

- **Extraordinary Power:** It acts as an equitable, inherent safety valve that allows the apex court to transcend procedural gridlocks or legislative vacuums to rectify a manifest travesty of justice.
- **Enforceability:** Any decree passed or order made by the Supreme Court under this article is completely enforceable throughout the entire territory of India.
- **Supplementary Nature:** The provision complements existing laws rather than replacing them, enabling the court to provide a remedy when statutory laws are silent or insufficient.

Boundaries and Limitations of "Complete Justice"

While the phrase "complete justice" offers vast discretionary latitude, the Supreme Court has formulated explicit guidelines to ensure this power does not dilute the rule of law.

- **Fundamental Rights:** The Supreme Court cannot pass orders under Article 142 that directly violate the Fundamental Rights enshrined in Part III of the Constitution.
- **Express Statutory Provisions:** The court cannot completely ignore or override express, substantive statutory laws passed by the legislature; it fills gaps rather than replacing the legislative text.
- **Non-Precedential:** Specific orders passed under Article 142 are often tailored exclusively to the unique facts of a particular case and do not automatically serve as a binding legal precedent for lower courts.

Landmark Judgments

- **Union Carbide Corporation v. Union of India (1991):** The Supreme Court asserted that its power under Article 142 is independent of statutory limitations, allowing it to bypass specific legislative procedures to provide a quick financial settlement for the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy.
- **Supreme Court Bar Association v. Union of India (1998):** The court established that Article 142 cannot be used to replace existing substantive laws. It ruled that the power to punish an advocate for professional misconduct rests with the Bar Council, not the court's extraordinary powers.
- **Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan (2023):** A Constitution Bench ruled that the Supreme Court can use Article 142 to grant a divorce decree on the ground of an irretrievable breakdown of

marriage, bypassing the mandatory six-month cooling-off period required under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955.

High Courts vs. Supreme Court Jurisdiction

Parameter	Supreme Court (Article 142)	High Courts (Article 226)
Explicit Power	Holds explicit, distinct constitutional power to pass any order or decree to deliver "complete justice."	Does not possess an explicit constitutional mandate for "complete justice" equivalent to Article 142.
Inherent Jurisdiction	Possesses broad plenary powers that can bypass procedural laws when a legislative vacuum exists.	Possesses wide inherent powers to prevent abuse of the court's process, but operates within stricter statutory limits.
Geographical Reach	Orders are enforceable across the entire territory of India.	Orders are limited to its specific state or multi-state territorial jurisdiction.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the constitutional powers of the judiciary in India:

Statement I: Article 142 of the Constitution provides the Supreme Court with an extraordinary, plenary power to pass any decree or order to ensure "complete justice," which can be exercised to completely override express statutory prohibitions.

Statement II: The constitutional power to deliver "complete justice" under Article 142 is a unique, residuary jurisdiction explicitly granted to the Supreme Court of India, and an identical explicit provision does not exist for the High Courts under Article 226.

Select the correct answer using the options given below:

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation for Statement I
- (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is not the correct explanation for Statement I
- (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect
- (d) Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct

Correct Answer: D

- **STATEMENT I IS INCORRECT:** While Article 142 vests the Supreme Court with broad, extraordinary powers to deliver complete justice, this power is not unchecked. The Supreme Court has repeatedly clarified in landmark rulings (such as *Supreme Court Bar Association v. Union of India*) that Article 142 cannot be used to replace or completely ignore express, substantive statutory provisions passed by the legislature. It is meant to complement the law where there is a regulatory vacuum, not to run entirely counter to explicit statutory mandates.
- **STATEMENT II IS CORRECT:** The explicit power to issue decrees for "complete justice" is an exclusive, residuary jurisdiction granted solely to the Supreme Court under Article 142. Although High Courts possess broad writ jurisdictions and inherent powers under Article 226 to prevent the abuse of judicial processes, they do not have a parallel constitutional mandate to deliver "complete justice" that allows them to move beyond strict procedural rules in the same way.

1.3. AFSPA & ASSAM-NAGALAND ACCORD

Context:

- The Central Government, Assam, and Nagaland recently signed a historic tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to resume mineral and oil exploration in their disputed boundary areas, ending a three-decade deadlock.



- Concurrently, the Union Home Ministry announced plans to withdraw the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from the majority of the Northeast by next year, citing an 80% reduction in violence and the successful signing of 12 peace accords since 2019.

About Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958

- **Historical Origin:** Originated from the British-era Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance of 1942, promulgated to suppress the Quit India Movement.
- **Enactment (1958):** Enacted by the Indian Parliament to counter the Naga insurgency in undivided Assam and Manipur.
- **1972 Amendment:** Conferred the Central Government with the authority to unilaterally declare any region a "disturbed area" and impose AFSPA without requiring the consent of the respective State government.
- **Expansion:** Following the 1972 amendment, the Act was extended to Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Key Features of AFSPA, 1958

- **Declaration of Disturbed Areas (Section 3):** The Central Government, State Governor, or Union Territory Administrator can designate a region as a "disturbed area" through an Official Gazette notification.
- **Special Operational Powers (Section 4):** Empowers armed forces personnel to:
 - Use force, including lethal measures, against individuals violating the law.
 - Arrest suspects without a warrant based on reasonable suspicion.
 - Enter and search premises without a warrant.
 - Prohibit the assembly of five or more individuals to prevent unrest.
- **Legal Immunity (Section 6):** Shields armed forces personnel from prosecution and legal suits for actions taken under the Act, unless prior sanction is granted by the Central Government.
- **Periodic Review:** Mandates regular government assessment of the security situation to determine the continued necessity of the "disturbed area" classification.

Operational Utility & Security Role of AFSPA

- Provides operational flexibility and legal immunity to security forces for swift counter-insurgency actions.
- Instrumental in securing porous borders and curbing transnational organized crime, such as drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle.
- Aids in restoring political stability in severely disturbed regions, enabling the resumption of civilian administration.

Key Challenges & Criticisms

- **Prolonged Enforcement:** Imposed continuously in states like Nagaland since 1958, leading to civilian alienation.
- **Human Rights Concerns:** Faces severe criticism over allegations of extrajudicial killings and disproportionate use of force.

Supreme Court Interventions

- **Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India (1997):** Upheld the constitutional validity of AFSPA. However, the Court mandated that 'disturbed area' declarations must have a limited timeframe and undergo mandatory periodic reviews every **six months**.
- **2016 Judgement (Extrajudicial Killings):** The Court ruled that AFSPA does not grant absolute immunity ("no license to kill"). It ordered investigations into alleged fake encounters in Manipur, emphasizing that security forces are subject to human rights accountability.

Q. With respect to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) and its current status, consider the following statements:

- I. The Act empowers armed forces personnel to arrest individuals without a warrant on the basis of reasonable suspicion in a designated disturbed area.
- II. Any prosecution or legal suit against security personnel for actions taken under AFSPA requires the prior sanction of the respective State Government.
- III. Owing to a significant reduction in insurgent activities, the Act has been completely repealed from the states of Tripura and Meghalaya.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only I and II
- (b) Only I and III
- (c) Only II and III
- (d) I, II and III

Answer: B

- **Statement I is correct:** Under the special operational powers of AFSPA, armed forces are legally empowered to **arrest suspects without a warrant** and search premises to maintain public order in a disturbed area.
- **Statement II is incorrect:** The Act provides strict legal immunity to security forces. No prosecution or legal proceedings can be initiated against them without the **prior sanction of the Central Government**, not the State Government.
- **Statement III is correct:** Due to a continuous decline in violence and the signing of successful peace accords, AFSPA has been **completely withdrawn from Tripura (2015) and Meghalaya (2018)**. Additionally, its operational footprint has been partially reduced across Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur in recent years.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. UN MILITARY GENDER ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Context:

- Prime Minister of India recently, congratulated **Major Abhilasha Barak** on being conferred the prestigious **2025 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award**.



- Major Barak was formally presented with the honor by UN Secretary-General António

Guterres at the United Nations Headquarters in New York during a ceremony marking the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

1. Profile of the Awardee

- **The Trailblazer:** Major Abhilasha Barak is widely recognized as the **first woman combat helicopter pilot** of the Indian Army, breaking new ground in military aviation after being commissioned into the Army Air Defence Corps in 2018.
- **UN Peacekeeping Role:** She was deployed with the **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)** as the *Engagement Team Commander* and *Gender Focal Point* with the Indian Battalion in Sector East, southern Lebanon.
- **Key Contributions:** She conducted 539 gender-focused field activities (the highest in the mission) and led all-women patrols during periods of heightened tension. She also introduced the **Lebanon Gender Initiative**—an artificial intelligence-driven platform designed to enable confidential reporting of gender-based violence and access to helplines.

2. About the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award

- **Establishment:** Created in **2016** by the Office of Military Affairs within the UN Department for Peace Operations (DPO).
- **Objective:** It recognizes the dedication and effort of an individual military peacekeeper (male or female) who has best integrated a gender perspective into peacekeeping activities.
- **Core Pillars:** The award promotes the implementation of **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)** on *Women, Peace, and Security*.

3. About UNSCR 1325

- Passed in 2000, **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** is a landmark international framework that addresses how women are inordinately impacted by conflict. The resolution forms the foundation of the UN's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and is built upon **four core pillars**: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Relief & Recovery.

4. India's Track Record with the Award

India is historically one of the largest troop and police-contributing countries to UN Peacekeeping missions. Major Barak is the **third Indian recipient** of this elite award:

1. **Major Suman Gawani (2019):** Served with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

2. **Major Radhika Sen (2023):** Served with the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

3. **Major Abhilasha Barak (2025):** Served with UNIFIL in Lebanon.

5. About UNIFIL

- **Establishment:** Originally created by the UN Security Council in **1978** to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.
- **The Blue Line:** Following the 2006 war, UNIFIL's mandate was enhanced to monitor the cessation of hostilities and support the Lebanese Armed Forces along the **Blue Line** (the border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel).
- **India's Presence:** India is one of the top troop contributors to UNIFIL, maintaining hundreds of personnel to secure peace in the highly volatile West Asian theatre.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award:

1. The award was established in 2016 by the Office of Military Affairs under the UN Department for Peace Operations.
2. It recognizes military peacekeepers who effectively integrate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations.
3. The award promotes the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

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

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The **UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award** was established in **2016** by the **Office of Military Affairs** within the United Nations Department of Peace Operations.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** The award recognizes military peacekeepers who have successfully integrated a **gender perspective** into peacekeeping activities.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** The award supports the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on **Women, Peace and Security (WPS)**.

2.2. GLOBAL NUCLEAR GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

Context:

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook 2026 highlights India's ongoing nuclear arsenal expansion, its shift in strategic focus, and its consistent position as one of the world's top military spenders and arms importers.



India's Nuclear Arsenal & Strategic Shift

- **Arsenal Expansion:** India's nuclear stockpile expanded to approximately 190 warheads by early 2026, an increase from 180 warheads in 2025.
- **Strategic Reorientation:** The nuclear modernisation programme is increasingly prioritizing the development of longer-range weapons capable of reaching targets across China, while concurrently maintaining its deterrence posture against Pakistan.

Where does India Stand in Global Defence Economics?

- **Military Expenditure (2025):** India ranks as the **fifth-largest** military spender globally (\$92.1 billion). The top four spenders are the United States, China, Russia, and Germany.
- **Arms Imports (2021-25):** India is the **second-largest** importer of major arms globally, accounting for 8.2% of global imports.
- **Top 5 Importers:** Ukraine holds the top spot, followed by India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Pakistan. Together, they account for 35% of all global arms transfers.

What is the Global Nuclear Landscape?

- **Nuclear-Armed States:** There are exactly **nine** countries possessing nuclear weapons: the US, Russia, the UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel.
- **Modernisation:** All nine states are actively expanding and modernising their nuclear delivery systems, reinforcing nuclear weapons as primary instruments of national power.

About SIPRI

- **Core Mandate:** SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control, and disarmament.
- **Data Source:** The institute's rigorous assessments, data sets, and policy recommendations are based exclusively on open sources.
- **Global Authority:** It serves as an authoritative and widely cited reference for policymakers, diplomats, scholars, and journalists regarding international security dynamics.

Global Nuclear Governance Architecture

1. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

- **The Nuclear Matrix:** The NPT separates states into Nuclear-Weapon States (NWS)—defined strictly as those that manufactured and exploded a nuclear device before January 1, 1967 (the US, Russia, UK, France, and China)—and Non-Nuclear-Weapon States (NNWS).
- **Non-Signatory Realities:** India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea possess functional nuclear stockpiles completely outside the NPT framework.

2. Bilateral Arms Control Disruption: Expiry of New START

- **Strategic Cap Removal:** The New START Treaty was the primary bilateral mechanism regulating and limiting the deployed strategic nuclear weapons of the United States and Russia.
- **February 2026 Expiry:** The treaty officially expired in February 2026 without any successor agreement or replacement framework being negotiated. This legal vacuum eliminates formal limits on strategic deployments, directly correlating with the global modernization trends reported by SIPRI.

3. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

- Entering into force in 2021, the TPNW acts as a legally binding multilateral instrument that completely prohibits the possession, development, and deployment of nuclear weapons.

4. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

- Established in 1957 in Vienna, the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** is an autonomous UN nuclear watchdog operating under the mandate “**Atoms for Peace and Development.**” It enforces global **non-proliferation safeguards**, sets **nuclear safety standards**, and promotes **peaceful nuclear applications** in healthcare and energy. India, a founding member, subjects only its civilian reactors utilizing imported uranium to IAEA oversight.

Q. With respect to the global military and nuclear landscape, consider the following statements:

- I. India was the world's largest importer of major arms during the 2021-25 period.
- II. The integration of cyberoperations into active military conflict was observed for the first time between India and Pakistan during Operation Sindoor.
- III. There are exactly nine globally recognized nuclear-armed states that are currently modernising their arsenals.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: B

- **Statement I is incorrect:** During the 2021-25 period, India remained the **second-largest** importer of major arms, accounting for 8.2% of global imports, closely following Ukraine.
- **Statement II is correct:** During the May 2025 military crisis known as Operation Sindoor, India and Pakistan integrated cyberoperations into an active military conflict for the first time, highlighting the evolving nature of warfare.
- **Statement III is correct:** There are nine nuclear-armed states globally—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel—all of which are actively modernising their nuclear arsenals.

2.3. KHARG ISLAND

Context

- Recently, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a pause on planned military bombings against Iran, signaling a potential diplomatic deal after hours of intense escalation where he threatened to strike the country "very hard" and explicitly seize **Kharg Island** and its vital energy infrastructure.
- This critical geopolitical standoff directly highlights Kharg Island's status as a primary strategic target and a global economic flashpoint.



Overview of Kharg Island

- **The Body of Water:** Kharg Island is a low-lying, continental island situated in the northern zone of the **Persian Gulf**.
- **Proximity to Mainland:** It is located approximately 25 kilometers (16 miles) off the southwestern coast of the Iranian mainland and falls under the administrative jurisdiction of the coastal **Bushehr Province**.
- **Distance from Chokepoints:** The island is located about 660 kilometers northwest of the **Strait of Hormuz**, which serves as the most critical maritime oil transit chokepoint globally.
- **Physical Characteristics:** Unlike many low sandy islands in the region, Kharg Island is primarily a **coral and limestone outcrop** that features unique deep-water approaches along its coast, rendering it naturally suitable for large marine vessels. It is also one of the few islands in the Persian Gulf possessing its own natural freshwater supply.

Economic and Infrastructure Significance

- **The Backbone of Iranian Exports:** Kharg Island operates as the principal maritime terminal for Iran, historically handling **up to 90% of the country's crude oil exports**.
- **Storage and Logistics:** The island hosts a massive concentration of interconnected infrastructure, including specialized marine terminals, extensive pipeline networks linked directly to major inland oilfields (such as Aghajari), and storage facilities capable of holding up to 30 million barrels of crude oil.
- **Deep-Water Terminals:** The deep coastal waters allow the island to accommodate **Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs)**, which are essential for long-distance international energy trade, particularly shipments heading toward major Asian markets like China.

Historical and Archaeological Background

- **Ancient Maritime Trade:** Because of its position along historic maritime corridors connecting India, Persia, and Mesopotamia, the island served as a critical trading post long before the discovery of fossil fuels.
- **Colonial Control:** The island was historically occupied and fortified by European colonial powers, including the Portuguese Empire during the 16th and 17th centuries, and subsequently the Dutch East India Company in the 18th century.

- **Cultural Heritage:** The island preserves several protected archaeological sites, including a 7th-century Christian monastery complex, ancient tombs, and a historic **Achaemenid cuneiform inscription** dating between 550 BCE and 330 BCE.

Implications for Global Security and India

1. Geopolitical Vulnerability

- **Single Point of Failure:** Because Iran's oil export capacities are heavily centralized on this single island, it presents a critical economic vulnerability during periods of military conflict.
- **Regional Escalation:** Any direct kinetic intervention or prolonged blockade of Kharg Island increases the risk of broader retaliatory measures across the Strait of Hormuz, threatening international merchant shipping and subsea data cables.

2. Impact on Indian Interests

- **Energy Security and Price Volatility:** Although India has diversified its crude imports, any severe disruptions in the Persian Gulf inevitably trigger global crude price shocks, driving up India's import bills, fiscal deficit, and domestic inflation.
- **Safety of Indian Seafarers:** A substantial portion of the commercial vessels operating within the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman employ Indian nationals, making regional military strikes a direct threat to the safety and security of Indian citizens working abroad.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Kharg Island, which was recently in the news:

STATEMENT I: Kharg Island is a highly strategic continental island located in the northern portion of the Persian Gulf and serves as Iran's primary oil export hub.

STATEMENT II: The island is situated directly within the narrowest corridor of the Strait of Hormuz, making it a natural chokepoint controlled entirely by the Bushehr Province.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation for Statement I
- (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is not the correct explanation for Statement I
- (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect
- (d) Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct

Correct Answer: C

- **STATEMENT I IS CORRECT:** Kharg Island is a critical coral and limestone outcrop situated in the northern end of the Persian Gulf, approximately 25 kilometers off the southwestern mainland of Iran. It handles up to 90% of Iran's crude shipments, confirming its status as the nation's primary oil export hub.
- **STATEMENT II IS INCORRECT:** While the island is administratively governed by Iran's Bushehr Province, it is **not** situated directly inside the Strait of Hormuz. Instead, it lies approximately 660 kilometers northwest of the Strait of Hormuz. Therefore, it does not form the physical, narrow chokepoint corridor itself, though its economic output relies on the freedom of navigation through the strait.

2.4. STRAIT OF HORMUZ SECURITY INITIATIVE & INDO-FRENCH MARITIME COOPERATION

Context

- Ahead of Prime Minister of India's bilateral talks with French President at the G7 Summit, France has proposed a broader multinational maritime security partnership with India. This



initiative aims to ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation in the geopolitically sensitive **Strait of Hormuz** amid rising regional tensions in West Asia.

Key Bilateral & Multilateral Highlights

- **Proposed Participants:** The West Asia-focused initiative, discussed on the margins of the G7 Summit, is expected to involve **India, the United States, France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.**
- **Core Agenda of India-France Talks:** Defense cooperation, maritime security, military hardware acquisition, and geopolitical developments in West Asia.

Connected Initiatives

- **Operation Sankalp:** India's own independent maritime security operation launched by the Indian Navy in 2019 in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to ensure the safety of Indian flagged merchant vessels following security incidents in the region.
- **EMASOH (European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz):** It is a **French-led maritime monitoring mission** with the goal to protect maritime flows through the Strait of Hormuz. It is headquartered at the French naval base in Abu Dhabi and comprises a diplomacy track (EMASoH) and a military track (AGENOR).
- **Naval Exercise - VARUNA 2025:** Exercise Varuna has evolved into a cornerstone of the India-France strategic partnership, enhancing cooperation in anti-submarine warfare, air defence, and surface combat operations.

About the Group of Seven (G7)

- **What is it?** The G7 is an **informal bloc** of industrialized, advanced economies that meet annually to discuss global economic governance, international security, and energy policy.
- **Origin:** Began in 1975 as the G6 (France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US) in response to economic crises and the oil shock of the 1970s.
 - Canada joined in 1976, creating the G7.

- Russia joined in 1997, forming the G8.
- Russia's membership was suspended in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea, and the group returned to the G7 format.
- **Institutional Setup:** Crucially, the **G7 does not have a permanent secretariat**, a legal charter, or a formal treaty.

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
2. Operation Sankalp is a multinational maritime mission led by France to secure shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz.
3. European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz was established with the objective of ensuring freedom of navigation and monitoring maritime activity in the Strait of Hormuz.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: A

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The Strait of Hormuz is a strategic chokepoint linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** **Operation Sankalp** is an **Indian Navy** operation, not a French-led multinational mission.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** EMASOH was established to safeguard maritime flows and enhance maritime situational awareness in the Strait of Hormuz.

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3.1. DARK PATTERNS: INDIAN ONLINE BUYERS LOSING UP TO 28,000 CR

Context:

- A report titled '**Dark Patterns in India's Online Marketplaces**', published by the market research firm Datum Intelligence, highlights that deceptive User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) designs—collectively known as "**dark patterns**"—are costing Indian consumers between **₹25,000 crore and ₹28,000 crore annually**.
- The report states that nearly 88% of India's 304 million online shoppers are affected by these practices, losing roughly ₹78–₹87 per month to hidden charges, subscription traps, and forced add-ons.



1. What are Dark Patterns?

- Dark patterns are manipulative and deceptive digital design strategies used in websites and applications to trick users into doing things they did not originally intend or want to do (e.g., buying unwanted insurance, signing up for hidden subscriptions, or sharing personal data). These practices distort consumer choice and subvert consumer autonomy.

2. Common Types of Dark Patterns

- **Drip Pricing:** A pricing practice where only part of a product's cost is disclosed initially, while additional mandatory charges are revealed later during the purchase process.
- **False Urgency:** Misleading the user by creating a false sense of scarcity or limited time (e.g., fake countdown timers or showing fake limited stock like "*Only 2 items left!*") to force an immediate purchase.
- **Basket Sneaking:** Automatically adding additional items (such as a charity donation, delivery insurance, or an accessory) to the user's shopping cart at the checkout stage without their explicit consent.
- **Forced Action:** Compelling a user to take an extra action, such as sharing personal contacts or location details, to access a service that was advertised as free or unrelated.
- **Confirm Shaming:** It is a dark pattern that uses guilt-inducing or manipulative language to pressure users into making a particular choice, usually accepting an offer or service.
- **For example:** When a website asks you to subscribe to a newsletter, the decline button may say: "No thanks, I don't want to save money." "No, I prefer paying full price."
 - Such wording pressures users into accepting the offer rather than making a neutral choice.
- **Subscription Traps:** Intentionally making the process of cancelling a subscription or deleting an account excessively complex, long, or hidden.

- **Bait and Switch:** Advertising a specific product or service at a highly attractive price, but when the user attempts to purchase, replacing it with a different, more expensive alternative.

Regulatory Framework in India

I. Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)

- **Statutory Status:** The CCPA is a statutory body established under the **Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 2019**.
- **Administrative Ministry:** It operates under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution**.
- **Mandate:** It is empowered to regulate matters relating to the violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and false or misleading advertisements.

II. Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023

- Issued by the CCPA under Section 18 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- **Applicability:** These guidelines apply to **all digital platforms** systematically offering goods or services in India, including advertisers and sellers.
- **Legal Classification:** Engaging in dark patterns is legally classified as an **"Unfair Trade Practice"** and a violation of consumer rights under the CPA, 2019.
- **Interlinkage with Data Protection:** Dark patterns that force users to give up data also violate the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, which mandates that user consent must be unconditional, explicit, and unambiguous.

Q. With reference to Dark Patterns, consider the following statements:

1. They are digital design strategies that manipulate users into making unintended choices.
2. They strengthen consumer autonomy by simplifying decision-making.
3. They may involve hidden subscriptions or unwanted purchases.

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

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** Dark patterns are manipulative digital design strategies that trick users into making choices they did not intend.
- **Statement 2 is Incorrect:** Dark patterns **undermine**, rather than strengthen, consumer autonomy and informed decision-making.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Examples include hidden subscriptions, unwanted purchases, basket sneaking, and subscription traps.

3.2. HDFC BANK HIKES LENDING RATE BY UP TO 10 BASIS POINTS

Context:

- India's largest private sector lender, HDFC Bank, hiked its **Marginal Cost of Funds-Based Lending Rate (MCLR)** by up to 10 basis points across various tenors. This rate hike directly increases the Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs) for existing borrowers whose floating-rate retail and corporate loans are linked to the bank's internal benchmarks.



Core Economic Concept: Understanding MCLR

1. What is MCLR?

- It is the **minimum interest rate** below which a bank cannot ordinarily lend money (except in certain cases permitted by the Reserve Bank of India). It was introduced by the RBI in **April 2016** to ensure faster transmission of policy rate changes to borrowers.
- Example:**
- If a bank's **1-year MCLR is 8.5%**, a home loan may be offered at: 8.5% + spread (e.g., 0.5%) = 9.0%.

2. How Does an MCLR Hike Affect Borrowers?

- When MCLR rises, the interest rate on linked floating-rate loans also increases.
- As a result:
 - EMIs may increase**, or
 - Loan tenure may extend** (depending on the bank's policy).

3. Why was it introduced?

- To replace the **Base Rate System**.
- To make lending rates more transparent.
- To ensure RBI policy rate changes are reflected more quickly in loan interest rates.

4. How is MCLR Calculated?

- Unlike older systems that relied on average costs, MCLR is calculated based on the **incremental (marginal) cost** of raising new funds. It comprises four critical components:
- MCLR = Marginal Cost of Funds + Negative Carry on CRR + Operating Costs + Tenor Premium
- Marginal Cost of Funds (90% weightage):** The interest rate the bank pays to raise fresh deposits or borrowings (e.g., current deposit rates, repo borrowings), alongside its return on net worth.
- Negative Carry on CRR (Cash Reserve Ratio):** Banks do not earn any interest on the cash they keep locked with the RBI as CRR. The cost of these locked, zero-earning funds is factored in here.
- Operating Costs:** The operational expenses of running the bank (salaries, branches, infrastructure).
- Tenor Premium:** The additional risk premium charged based on the length of the loan commitment (e.g., a 2-year loan carries a higher tenor premium than an overnight loan).

5. The Evolution of Lending Rate Frameworks in India

To evaluate monetary transmission, the RBI has progressively changed benchmarks. For Prelims, understand this chronological evolution:

- Prime Lending Rate (PLR) / Benchmark PLR (BPLR):** High degree of bank discretion; banks frequently lent to AAA-rated corporates below the officially declared BPLR, hiding true pricing from retail consumers.

2. **Base Rate (2010):** Introduced a minimum floor rate below which banks could not lend. Calculated using the *average cost of funds*. It failed to transmit RBI rate cuts quickly because older, expensive long-term deposits kept the average cost high.
3. **MCLR (2016):** Shifted the formula to *marginal (incremental) cost of funds*. While better than the Base Rate, it still suffered from a **transmission lag** because banks delayed updating their internal deposit rates or reset periods were long (typically 6 to 12 months).
4. **External Benchmark Lending Rate - EBLR (October 1, 2019):** To eliminate bank discretion entirely, the RBI mandated that all **new floating-rate retail loans** (home, auto) and **MSME loans** must be linked to an **external market benchmark** rather than internal calculations.

6. Key Differences: MCLR vs. EBLR

Feature	Marginal Cost of Funds-Based Lending Rate (MCLR)	External Benchmark Lending Rate (EBLR)
Type of Benchmark	Internal (calculated uniquely by each bank based on its own financial health).	External (linked to public, market-determined or RBI-determined rates).
Reset Frequency	Typically once every 6 to 12 months .	Mandatory reset at least once every 3 months .
Policy Transmission	Slow & lagged. Banks take months to pass on RBI repo rate cuts.	Immediate & dynamic. A change in the repo rate triggers an automatic shift in loan rates.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Marginal Cost of Funds-Based Lending Rate (MCLR):

1. MCLR was introduced by the Reserve Bank of India in 2016 to improve the transmission of monetary policy.
2. MCLR is calculated based on the average cost of funds raised by banks.
3. The cost associated with maintaining the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) is a component of MCLR.
4. Under the External Benchmark Lending Rate (EBLR) system, floating-rate retail loans are linked to an external benchmark such as the RBI's repo rate.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: A

- **Statement 1 is correct:** MCLR was introduced in April 2016 to improve monetary policy transmission.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** MCLR is based on the **marginal (incremental)** cost of funds, not the average cost.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Negative carry on CRR is a component of MCLR.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** EBLR links loans to external benchmarks such as the RBI repo rate, enabling faster policy transmission.

3.3. INDIAN RESERVOIRS CAN HOST 102 GW FLOATING SOLAR CAPACITY

Context:

- The **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)**, an autonomous institute under the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**, has released the first comprehensive national assessment report titled "**Solar PV Potential of India (Floating Solar)**".
- The report highlights that India's reservoirs have the potential to host approximately **102 Gigawatts (GW)** of floating solar capacity, offering a major solution to the sector's biggest constraint: land acquisition.



Key Findings of the Report

1. Total Estimated Capacity & Geographic Distribution

- **Total Potential:** 102.18 GW across India's inland water bodies.
- **Top Contributing States:** Five states account for the bulk of this potential:
 1. **Maharashtra** (16.28 GW)
 2. **Madhya Pradesh** (14.89 GW)
 3. **Karnataka** (13.69 GW)
 4. **Odisha** (12.81 GW)
 5. **Telangana** (10.72 GW)

2. Flagship Projects

- **Omkareshwar Floating Solar Park:** Located on the **River Narmada** in the Khandwa district of **Madhya Pradesh**.
- **Status:** It is currently India's flagship floating solar project with a capacity of **278 MW**, with plans to scale it up to **600 MW**.

3. Methodology & Criteria Used

To calculate the total feasible area, NISE filtered India's inland water bodies using six distinct criteria:

- **Type & Size:** Lakes and reservoirs larger than **10 hectares**.
- **Water Availability:** Water must be present for at least **11 months/year**.
- **Depth:** Water depth must be between **3 to 30 meters**.
- **Logistics:** Proximity within **10 km** of existing roads and substations.
- **Self-Imposed Ecological Cap:** The calculation restricts solar panel coverage to a maximum of **20% of any reservoir's surface area** to minimize ecological impact.
 - **Example Case Study:** At Odisha's **Hirakud reservoir**, these filters whittled down 499 sq. km. of total water surface to 99.5 sq. km. of usable surface area.

Comparative Analysis: Floating Solar vs. Ground-Mounted Solar

- **Land Use Efficiency:** Ground-mounted systems need **3–4 times more area per megawatt (MW)** than the panels themselves occupy. Floating solar bypasses this issue entirely, mitigating land acquisition conflicts with agriculture and habitation.

- **Cost Factor:** Floating solar units cost about **25% more upfront** than ground-mounted counterparts (based on a 2021 U.S. National Renewable Energy Laboratory benchmark).

Global Scenario

- Globally, floating solar reached about **9.6 GW** by 2024.
- **Asia** dominates the sector, holding almost **90%** of the global share.
- **Key Global Examples:**
 - **China:** Leads with mega-installations, including a 120 MW plant on a fish farm in **Poyang Lake**.
 - **Singapore:** Features a 1 MW Tengeh Reservoir test-bed that provides vital performance data.
 - **Netherlands:** Accounts for about 3/4th of Europe's capacity, built largely on quarry lakes.

India's Solar Surge

- The solar sector has expanded at an unprecedented pace over the past decade, growing from just 3 GW in 2014 to **150.26 GW in March 2026**.
- According to the IRENA Renewable Energy Statistics 2025, India stands **3rd in solar energy**, 4th in wind energy, and 4th globally in total installed renewable energy capacity.

Related Concepts for Prelims

1. Agri-photovoltaics (Agri-PV)

- **Definition:** The practice of co-developing the same area of land for both solar photovoltaic power and agriculture.
- **Mechanism:** Solar panels are mounted on elevated structures sheltering farm beds below, allowing crops to grow underneath while generating electricity.

Q. With reference to the recent NISE report "*Solar PV Potential of India (Floating Solar)*", consider the following statements:

1. India's inland water bodies have the potential to host more than **100 GW** of floating solar capacity.
2. Maharashtra has been identified as the state with the **highest floating solar potential** in India.
3. The NISE assessment permits solar panel coverage of up to **50% of a reservoir's surface area**.
4. Floating solar projects help overcome the challenge of land acquisition associated with ground-mounted solar projects.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

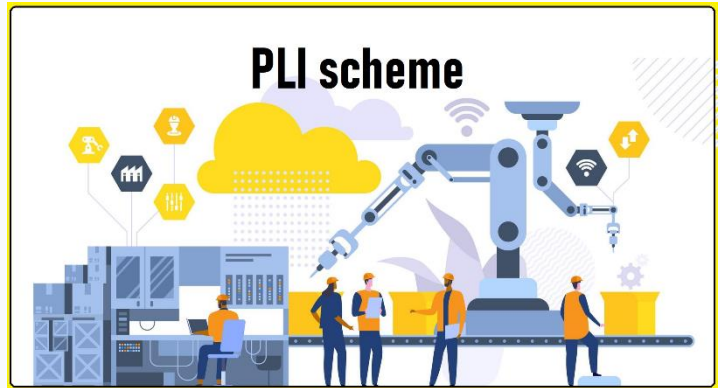
Answer: B

- **Statement 1 is correct:** NISE estimates a floating solar potential of **102.18 GW**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** **Maharashtra (16.28 GW)** has the highest estimated potential.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** NISE imposed an ecological cap of **20%**, not 50%, of reservoir surface coverage.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Floating solar avoids major land acquisition issues faced by ground-mounted solar installations.

3.4. THE PRODUCTION LINKED INCENTIVE (PLI) SCHEME

Context

- Recently, the Union government approved 22 new applicants under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for textiles. This latest round of approvals is expected to bring in a total investment of ₹2,339.14 crore, generate a projected turnover of ₹15,561.34 crore in notified products, and create 36,217 employment opportunities across the textile value chain.



Core Framework and Operational Mechanics

The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is a performance-linked fiscal policy designed to expand domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependencies, and boost exports. Launched in 2020, it replaces traditional input subsidies with output-based financial rewards.

- Incentive Basis:** Cash incentives are calculated directly as a percentage (ranging from 4% to 6% on average) of a company's **incremental sales over a fixed base year**.
- Eligibility Thresholds:** To qualify for yearly disbursements, companies must meet a mandatory minimum target of fresh capital investment and achieve an annual increase in turnover.
- Tenure:** Financial support is structured to run for a period of five to six years per sector, with incentive rates tapering off in the final years to promote self-reliance.

The 14 Strategic Sectors

The program runs across fourteen targeted manufacturing segments, each managed by its respective nodal ministry:

1. Mobile Manufacturing & Electronics Components
2. Critical API / Drug Intermediates & Key Starting Materials
3. Medical Devices Manufacturing
4. Electronic and Technology Products
5. Pharmaceutical Drugs
6. Telecom and Networking Products
7. Food Products Processing
8. White Goods (Air Conditioners & LEDs)
9. High-Efficiency Solar PV Modules
10. Automobiles and Auto Components
11. Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage
12. Specialty Steel Alloys
13. Textiles (Man-Made Fiber Fabrics and Technical Textiles)
14. IT Hardware (Laptops, Servers, and Tablets)

Policy Modifications (Up to 2026)

- **Relaxed Entry Barriers:** To increase MSME participation, the government slashed investment minimums in lagging sectors like Textiles (dropping from ₹300 crore to ₹150 crore in higher-tier applications) and reduced mandatory sales growth targets from 25% to 10%.
- **Upstream Subsidies:** New allocations explicitly prioritize raw component manufacturing (such as printed circuit boards and sensors) over simple downstream final assembly.
- **Realized Impact:** By 2026, the cumulative scheme has drawn over ₹3.2 lakh crore in private investment, driving substantial export growth in smartphones and pharmaceutical categories.

Core Challenges

- **Uneven Progress:** Electronics and pharma sectors show rapid progress, whereas capital-heavy sectors like specialty steel and advanced battery storage face structural project delays.
- **Low Local Value Addition:** While final assembly lines have scaled quickly, companies remain heavily reliant on imported raw components, limiting deeper domestic integration.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme operational in India:

Statement I: Financial incentives under the scheme are disbursed as a percentage of a company's total gross annual revenue, irrespective of its past production baselines.

Statement II: The policy framework covers sectors such as Advanced Chemistry Cell batteries, specialty steel, and technical textiles to drive structural import substitution.

Select the correct answer using the options given below:

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation for Statement I
- (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is not the correct explanation for Statement I
- (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect
- (d) Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct

Correct Answer: D

- **STATEMENT I IS INCORRECT:** Incentives are not calculated on total gross annual revenue. They are given strictly as a percentage of a firm's **incremental sales over a designated base year**. Firms must hit minimum fresh capital investment thresholds and clear distinct yearly sales targets to receive payouts.
- **STATEMENT II IS CORRECT:** The PLI scheme actively targets fourteen critical industrial segments—including advanced chemistry cell batteries, high-grade specialty steel alloys, and technical textiles—specifically to build deep manufacturing capabilities and advance structural import substitution.

3.5. DECODING RETAIL INFLATION & PRICE INDICES

Context:

Retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), rose to a 16-month high of 3.9% in May, driven by a surge in food prices (particularly cereals). Published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), this brings the headline inflation just shy of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) median target of 4%.



I. Core Concepts of Price Fluctuation

- **Inflation:** A sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services, leading to a gradual loss of purchasing power.
- **Deflation:** The exact opposite of inflation; a general decline in prices resulting in increased purchasing power.
- **Core Inflation:** Calculated by excluding highly volatile components, specifically **food, fuel, and electricity prices**, from headline inflation.

II. Types of Inflation (Based on Rate)

- **Creeping (Mild/Low):** Gradual price rise (< 3% annually). Considered manageable and healthy for economic stimulation.
- **Walking (Trotting):** Moderate pace (3% to 10% annually). Can lead to economic overheating if left unchecked.
- **Galloping (Hopping/Running):** Rapid price increase (10% to 50% annually). Severely disrupts macroeconomic stability.
- **Hyperinflation:** Extreme and uncontrollable surge (> 50% monthly), leading to the collapse of the currency's value.

III. Types of Inflation (Based on Cause)

- **Demand-Pull:** Occurs when excess money supply causes aggregate demand to outpace the economy's production capacity ("too much money chasing too few goods").
- **Cost-Push:** Driven by an increase in input costs (e.g., raw materials, labour) which producers pass on to consumers.
- **Built-in (Wage-Price Spiral):** Driven by adaptive expectations; workers demand higher wages to counter expected inflation, prompting businesses to raise prices further.
- **Structural Inflation:** Caused by systemic economic bottlenecks, rigid supply chains, or monopolistic practices.

IV. Key Inflation Measuring Indices

Feature	Wholesale Price Index (WPI)	Consumer Price Index (CPI)
Measures	Price changes in the wholesale market (goods traded between businesses).	Cost of a typical basket of goods and services consumed by retail buyers.
Coverage	Excludes services.	Includes services (housing, education, etc.).
Publishing Agency	Office of Economic Adviser (DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce & Industry).	Central Statistics Office (CSO), MoSPI.
Base Year	2022-23	2024

- **Producer Price Index (PPI):** Measures price changes from the perspective of the producer/manufacturer, capturing shifts in input costs before they hit retail.
- **GDP Deflator:** The most comprehensive measure of inflation. It covers **all domestically produced goods and services**.
Advantage: It does not rely on a fixed base year or a static basket of goods like the CPI or WPI.

V. Inflation Targeting & Mitigation Framework

Monetary Policy (RBI)

- **Inflation Target:** The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is mandated to maintain retail inflation at **4% with a tolerance band of +/- 2%** (i.e., 2% to 6%).
- **Tools:** Adjusting benchmark policy rates (Repo Rate), Open Market Operations (selling government securities to absorb excess liquidity), and qualitative controls (e.g., raising loan margins for specific commodities).

Fiscal & Administrative Policy (Government)

- **Fiscal Restraint:** Cutting public expenditure and adjusting direct or indirect taxes to cool down aggregate demand.
- **Supply-Side Interventions:** Releasing buffer stocks, restricting exports, or subsidizing essential commodities (food, fuel) to stabilize immediate price shocks.

Q. With respect to the measurement of inflation in India, consider the following statements:

- I. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) comprehensively tracks price changes for both goods and services traded in the wholesale market.
- II. The GDP Deflator measures price level changes across the entire economy without relying on a static basket of goods.
- III. Core inflation is determined by excluding highly volatile components such as food, fuel, and electricity prices from headline inflation.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only I and II
- (b) Only II and III
- (c) Only I and III
- (d) I, II and III

Answer: B

- **Statement I is incorrect:** The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) measures price changes strictly in the wholesale market for goods traded between businesses and **excludes services** from its calculation.
- **Statement II is correct:** The **GDP Deflator** is the most comprehensive measure of inflation as it covers all domestically produced goods and services, calculating price level changes without relying on a fixed base year or a static basket of goods.
- **Statement III is correct:** **Core inflation** provides a stable measure of underlying inflation trends by deliberately **excluding highly volatile components**, specifically food, fuel, and electricity prices, from the overall headline inflation figures.

ENVIRONMENT & GEOGRAPHY

4.1. THE ECOLOGICAL REVIVAL OF MANAS: ASSAM'S FIRST GRASS NURSERY INITIATIVE

Context:

- Assam's Manas National Park recently established its first grass nursery, financially backed by the State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). This initiative aims to ecologically restore the park, which has lost over 60% of its critical grasslands over the past 35 years.



About Grass Nursery Initiative

- Objective:** To restore the damaged grassland ecosystem for animals that depend on it.
- Implementing Agency:** Executed by the Assam Environment and Forest Department and Manas Park Authorities.
- Funding:** Financially supported by the State CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority).

Geographical and Hydrological Profile

- Location:** Geographically anchored at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas in Western Assam.
- Transboundary Link:** Shares a contiguous northern border with Bhutan's Royal Manas National Park.
- River System:** The **Manas River** flows directly through the park, sustaining its ecosystem.
- Topography:** Forms a crucial ecological junction between the Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai and Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests.

Institutional Conservation Status

- Multiple Designations:** It uniquely holds six concurrent tags: National Park, the core zone of a Tiger Reserve, the core zone of an Elephant Reserve, a national Biosphere Reserve, an Important Bird Area (IBA), and a **UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site** (designated in 1985).

Flora and Fauna (Biodiversity)

- Rare & Endemic Fauna:** Serves as a vital refuge for highly endangered species including the **pygmy hog**, **hispid hare**, **golden langur**, red panda, wild buffalo, and the Gangetic dolphin.
- Avian Species:** Home to globally threatened birds like the **Bengal florican** and various species of hornbills.
- Vegetation:** Contains four major vegetation types, with the **Hoolong** tree being the dominant plant species across its alluvial grasslands and deciduous forests.

Socio-Cultural Link

- Indigenous Inhabitants:** The **Bodo** tribe is the primary indigenous community living in and around the park's boundaries.

- Q.** With respect to Manas National Park consider the following statements:
- I. It is situated at the ecological junction of the Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai and Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests.
 - II. It holds the dual conservation status of a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site and the core zone of a Tiger Reserve.
 - III. The indigenous Bodo community resides in and around the boundaries of this protected area.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: C

- **Statement I is correct:** The park possesses rich biodiversity specifically due to its unique geographical location at the junction of the **Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai** and **Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests**.
- **Statement II is correct:** Manas uniquely holds six major designations simultaneously, which critically includes its status as a **UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site** and the core zone of the **Manas Tiger Reserve**.
- **Statement III is correct:** Indigenous communities, predominantly the **Bodo** tribe, inhabit the regions in and around the fringes of the park and share a deep historical association with the landscape.

4.2. DOZENS OF NEW SPECIES DISCOVERED ON ANGOLA'S LISIMA PLATEAU

Context:

- A landmark biodiversity expedition known as the **Cassai Life Atlas** survey, organized by the conservation group **The Wilderness Project**, has uncovered over 70 new species unknown to science on the remote **Lisima plateau** in eastern Angola.
- This region is considered one of Africa's last great "biodiversity blank spots," historically isolated due to rugged terrain and a 27-year civil war.



1. Major Species Discoveries

- **Fluorescent Crowned Crab Spider (*Smodicinus sp. nov.*):** A major highlight of the expedition; this newly identified arachnid **fluoresces a vibrant blue under ultraviolet (UV) light**. While the exact evolutionary purpose is still under study, bio-fluorescence in arachnids typically aids in communication, camouflage, or predator avoidance.
- **Ladybird Orb-Web Spider (*Paraplectana sp. nov.*):** A new blood-orange-hued spider that utilizes **Batesian mimicry**, copying the distinct coloration of toxic ladybird beetles to trick predators into thinking it is bitter or toxic.

- **Armoured Predatory Cricket:** A fierce-looking insect featuring hardened external body plating. As an evolutionary defense mechanism, it can squirt a noxious defensive fluid onto threats.
- **Other Taxa:** The expedition documented 8 new species of dragonflies/damselflies, 3 new grasshoppers, and roughly 60 new species of butterflies and moths.

Bio-fluorescence vs. Bioluminescence

- **Bio-fluorescence:** The organism absorbs external light (like invisible UV rays) and re-emits it instantly as a different, visible color (e.g., this Crowned Crab Spider glowing blue). It requires an external light source to be seen.
- **Bioluminescence:** The organism generates its own light internally through a chemical reaction (e.g., fireflies, certain deep-sea fish) using the enzyme luciferase. It does not require an external light source.

2. Geographical Significance: The Lisima Plateau

- **Location:** Located in the eastern highlands of **Angola** (South-Western Africa).
- **The "Water Tower" of Africa:** The Lisima plateau acts as a critical hydrological hub. Its unique sandy terrain absorbs rainfall and releases some of the clearest freshwater on the continent, feeding **four major African river systems**:
 1. **Congo River** (Africa's deepest and second-longest river)
 2. **Zambezi River** (Famous for Victoria Falls, flowing into the Indian Ocean)
 3. **Okavango River** (Feeds the famous inland Okavango Delta in Botswana)
 4. **Cuanza River** (Key domestic river generating significant hydroelectric power for Angola)
- **Ramsar Status:** Highlighting its ecological weight, the *Lisima Lya Mwono* area officially gained designation as a **Ramsar Wetland of International Importance**.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Lisima Plateau of Angola:

1. It is known as Africa's "Water Tower" because it feeds several major river systems.
2. The plateau contributes water to the Congo, Zambezi, Okavango, and Cuanza river systems.
3. The Lisima Lya Mwono area has been designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

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

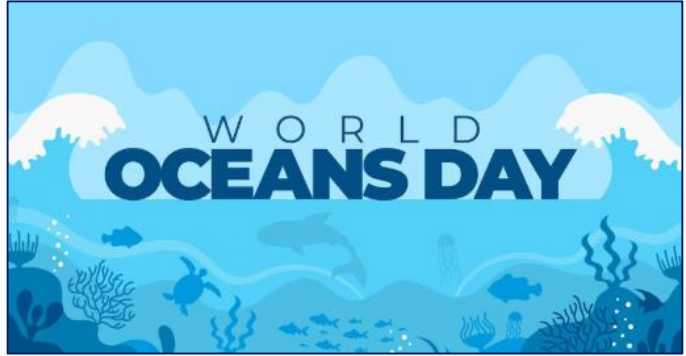
Statement 1 is Correct: The Lisima Plateau is called Africa's "**Water Tower**" because it stores rainfall and supplies freshwater to multiple river basins.

- **Statement 2 is Correct:** It feeds the **Congo, Zambezi, Okavango, and Cuanza** river systems.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** The **Lisima Lya Mwono** region has been recognized as a **Ramsar Wetland of International Importance**.

4.3. WORLD OCEANS DAY 2026

Context:

- Recently, World Oceans Day was celebrated on June 8, 2026. The official theme for World Oceans Day 2026 is “Reimagine: Beyond the World We Know, a New Relationship with Our Ocean,” with the action theme focused on “Strong Marine Protected Areas for Our Blue Planet.”



- This year's observance holds massive geopolitical and environmental significance because it marks a critical transition period following the historic ratification of the **BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction)**, also known as the **High Seas Treaty**.

1. About the History of World Oceans Day

- **Origin:** The concept was first proposed by Canada at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
- **UN Recognition:** The UN General Assembly officially designated it through a resolution in 2008, and the first official UN celebration took place on June 8, 2009.
- **Nodal Agency:** It is coordinated by the **Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS)** under the Office of Legal Affairs of the UN.

2. Exam-Oriented Key Facts

- **The Carbon Sink:** The ocean holds **60 times more carbon** than the atmosphere and absorbs almost **30% of carbon dioxide (CO₂)** emissions from human activities.
- **Oxygen Production:** Marine organisms—primarily **phytoplankton, kelp, and algal plankton**—produce at least **50% of the world's oxygen** through photosynthesis.
- **The Triple Planetary Crisis:** Oceans are the primary victims of climate change,
- Witnessing **Ocean Acidification** (driven by excess CO₂ absorption lowering pH), **Marine Heatwaves** (causing catastrophic coral bleaching), and **Deoxygenation** (creating hypoxic "dead zones").

3. Major International Conservation Agreements

Treaty / Framework	Core Mandates
UNCLOS (1982)	Known as the "Constitution of the Seas." It divides marine areas into 5 zones: Internal Waters, Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles), Contiguous Zone (24 nm), Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nm), and the High Seas.
BBNJ / High Seas Treaty	An international agreement under UNCLOS. It sets up a legal framework to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the

	High Seas (which cover nearly half the planet's surface but were previously largely unregulated).
The 30x30 Target	Part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the CBD. It aims to designate 30% of the world's land and ocean as protected areas by the year 2030.
International Maritime Organization (IMO) Conventions	Regulate marine pollution from ships through treaties such as MARPOL and the Ballast Water Management Convention.
UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Initiatives	Promotes international cooperation in ocean research, monitoring, and sustainable ocean management.
SDG 14: Life Below Water	Explicitly targets the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding World Oceans Day:

1. The idea of World Oceans Day was first proposed at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
2. The United Nations officially recognized World Oceans Day in 2008.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

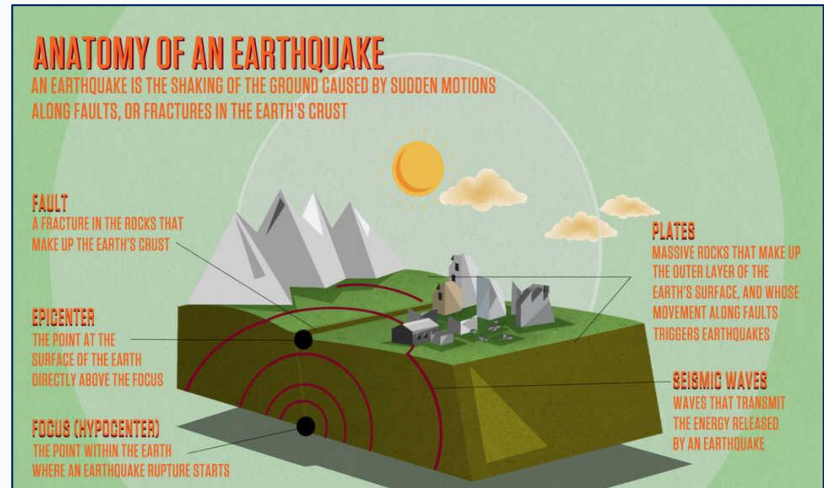
Answer: C

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The concept of **World Oceans Day** was first proposed by **Canada at the Earth Summit (UNCED)** held in Rio de Janeiro in **1992**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The United Nations General Assembly officially recognized World Oceans Day in **2008**, and the first official UN observance took place on **8 June 2009**.

4.4. THE PHILIPPINES QUAKE AND FUNDAMENTALS OF EARTHQUAKES

Context:

- A 7.8-magnitude earthquake recently struck the southern Philippines (south of General Santos), killing at least 35 people and triggering widespread tsunami warnings.
- The offshore quake was followed by a series of powerful aftershocks, the largest measuring magnitude 6.5. The event underscores the region's intense vulnerability to seismic and tectonic activities.



Fundamentals of Earthquakes

- **Definition:** An earthquake is the shaking of the earth's surface caused by seismic waves generated from a sudden release of energy in the earth's crust (shallow-focus) or upper mantle (intermediate and deep-focus).
- **Measurement:** A seismograph (or seismometer) detects and records these seismic waves.
- **Focus and Epicentre:**
 - **Focus (Hypocentre):** The exact point of energy release within the earth.
 - **Epicentre:** The point on the surface directly above the focus, which is the first to experience the earthquake waves.
 - **Isoseismic Line:** A line connecting all points on the surface where the earthquake intensity is identical.
- **Foreshocks, Aftershocks, and Swarms:**
 - **Foreshock:** A mild earthquake preceding the main violent shock.
 - **Aftershocks:** Lesser-size earthquakes that usually follow a major or moderate shallow-focus earthquake.
 - **Swarms:** Large numbers of small earthquakes occurring in a region for months without a major main shock; often associated with volcanic activity and magma movement.

Causes of Earthquakes

- **Fault Zones:** The sudden release of stress along a fault rupture (crack) in the earth's crust, due to intense temperature and pressure changes, is the immediate cause of shallowest earthquakes.
- **Plate Tectonics:** Slipping of land along convergent, divergent, and transform boundaries.
 - **Convergent Boundaries (Reverse Faults):** Associated with the most powerful "megathrust" earthquakes (magnitude 8 or more) occurring at subduction zones.
 - **Transform Boundaries (Strike-Slip Faults):** Can produce major earthquakes up to magnitude 8 (e.g., the San Andreas Fault).
 - **Divergent Boundaries (Normal Faults):** Generally, produce earthquakes of less than magnitude 7.
- **Volcanic Activity:** Movement of magma and tectonic faults in volcanic regions release elastic strain energy, causing quakes that can warn of imminent eruptions.
- **Human-Induced Earthquakes:** Minor earthquakes and tremors caused by human activities such as mining, petroleum extraction, and nuclear tests.

- **Reservoir-Induced Seismicity:** The immense pressure and water percolation from large artificial lakes alter stress along faults, potentially triggering quakes (e.g., the 1967 Koynanagar earthquake).

Classification Based on Depth of Focus

Earthquakes are classified into three zones within the 0 – 700 km depth range:

- **Shallow-Focus (Crustal) Earthquakes (0 – 70 km):** Constitute the great majority of earthquakes and release 70-85% of total earthquake energy. Though often of lower magnitude, they can cause relatively greater surface damage because the energy is concentrated over a smaller area.
- **Intermediate-Focus Earthquakes (70 – 300 km):** Release about 12-15% of total earthquake energy.
- **Deep-Focus (Intraplate) Earthquakes (300 – 700 km):** Occur within deeper subduction zones. They often have larger magnitudes (6 to 8) but cause less surface destruction as their energy dissipates over a wider area. They commonly occur in patterns called Benioff zones.

Global Distribution of Earthquakes

- **Circum-Pacific Belt (Pacific Ring of Fire):** The most critical earthquake belt, coinciding with tectonic plate margins around the Pacific Ocean (affecting Japan, New Zealand, the western coasts of the Americas, etc.). It accounts for roughly 68% of all earthquakes.
- **Alpine Belt (Mid-World Mountain Belt):** Extending from the Mediterranean Sea across the Alpine-Caucasus ranges to the Himalayas, accounting for about 15% of total earthquake energy.
- **Oceanic Ridges and Rift Valleys:** Striking connected belts of seismic activity occur along oceanic ridges and the rift valleys of East Africa.

Q. With respect to earthquakes, consider the following statements:

- I. Shallow-focus earthquakes generally cause less surface damage compared to deep-focus earthquakes due to their overall lower magnitudes.
- II. Megathrust earthquakes of magnitude 8 or more typically occur at convergent boundaries along subduction zones.
- III. The Circum-Pacific Belt accounts for the majority of all global earthquakes.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one (b) Only two
(c) All three (d) None

Answer: B

- **Statement I is incorrect:** Though comparatively of lower magnitude, **shallow-focus earthquakes can cause relatively greater damage at the surface** because the **whole energy is directed towards a small area** compared to their deep-focus counterparts, where the energy dissipates over a wider area.
- **Statement II is correct:** **Reverse faults at convergent boundaries** are associated with the most powerful **megathrust earthquakes**, including almost all of those of **magnitude 8 or more**, which occur at **subduction zones** where one tectonic plate is forced underneath another.
- **Statement III is correct:** The **Circum-Pacific Belt**, popularly dubbed the "Pacific Ring of Fire," is the most important earthquake belt and accounts for about **68 per cent of all earthquakes** globally.

4.5. THE ZOJILA TUNNEL AND BORDER PREPAREDNESS

Context

- Recently, the strategically important Zojila Tunnel achieved its final excavation breakthrough. Built by Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd., this major milestone brings India closer to establishing an all-weather road link to the border regions, ensuring year-round connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh.



1. About the Zojila Tunnel

- Geographic Alignment:** The tunnel spans **13.14 km** (main tunnel length is approx. 13.15 km) under the treacherous **Zoji La Pass** on National Highway 1 (NH-1). It directly connects the **Ganderbal district (Sonamarg/Baltal) of Kashmir** with the **Dras/Kargil district (Minimarg) of Ladakh**.
- Key Dimensions:** It is a **horseshoe-shaped, single-tube, two-lane bi-directional road tunnel** constructed at an extreme altitude of approximately **11,578 feet** above sea level. This makes it one of the longest high-altitude, single-tube bi-directional road tunnels globally.
- Engineering Standard:** Built using the **New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM)** to successfully mitigate the challenges of volatile seismic activity (**Seismic Zone IV**) and unstable, fragile Himalayan rock formations.
- Core Significance:**
 - All-Weather Connectivity:** Historically, the Zoji La Pass remains completely choked by heavy snowfall and avalanches for 3 to 6 months in winter, severing Ladakh's land link with the rest of India. The tunnel eliminates this seasonal isolation.
 - Drastic Time Reduction:** It slashes the treacherous commute time across the pass from **3 hours down to just 15–20 minutes**.

2. Strategic Implication: The Line of Actual Control (LAC)

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the effective, non-demarcated border that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory (primarily across Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh).

- Year-Round Logistics:** Eliminates the need for massive winter stockpiling of rations, fuel, and ammunition in Ladakh.
- Rapid Military Deployment:** Ensures all-weather movement of troops, tanks, heavy equipment, and supplies to forward areas along the LAC.
- Enhanced National Security:** Strengthens India's preparedness against threats from both Pakistan and China by maintaining uninterrupted military mobility.

3. Other Strategic Tunnels and Passes in the Region

To secure border logistics, India has created a vast web of high-altitude bypass networks:

Infrastructure	State / UT
Z-Morh Tunnel	Jammu & Kashmir
Atal Tunnel	Himachal Pradesh
Sela Tunnel	Arunachal Pradesh
Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Tunnel	Jammu & Kashmir
Banihal-Qazigund Road Tunnel	Jammu & Kashmir

Q. Consider the following pairs:

Tunnel	State / UT
1. Atal Tunnel	Himachal Pradesh
2. Sela Tunnel	Arunachal Pradesh
3. Z-Morh Tunnel	Jammu & Kashmir
4. Banihal-Qazigund Road Tunnel	Uttarakhand

How many pairs given above are correctly matched?

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

Answer: C

The **Banihal-Qazigund Road Tunnel** is located in **Jammu and Kashmir**, not Uttarakhand. Therefore, **3 pairs are correctly matched.**

4.6. PARAQUAT TOXICITY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Context:

- Recently, Telangana became the 3rd Indian state (after Kerala & Odisha) to ban paraquat — on March 31, 2026 via a 60-day state-wide ban.
- Telangana Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution (March 30, 2026) urging the Central govt to impose a permanent nationwide ban.



Paraquat — What Is It?

- **Chemical name:** N,N'-dimethyl-4,4'-bipyridinium dichloride (Paraquat Dichloride 24% SL)
- **Type:** Contact herbicide — world's most widely used non-selective weed killer
- **Use in India:** Widely used to kill weeds in paddy, tea, cotton, and plantation crops
- **Status in India:** Registered as 'deemed to be registered' under Insecticides Act, 1968 — never underwent mandatory safety evaluation
- **Global status:** Banned in 78 countries including EU, UK, Switzerland, South Korea, Vietnam, USA

Health Hazards — Key Facts

- **Lethality:** Kills 72.7–100% of those who consume it; NO specific antidote exists
- **Routes of exposure:** Ingestion, inhalation, and skin absorption — all toxic
- **Organs affected:** Lungs (fibrosis), kidneys, liver, heart; causes multi-organ failure
- **Long-term risk:** Linked to Parkinson's disease from occupational exposure
- **Other risks:** Birth defects, developmental and learning disorders
- **Suicide tool:** Easy availability makes it the most common agent in farmer suicides

Regulatory Framework

Law / Body	Key Provision
Insecticides Act, 1968	Governs registration, manufacture, sale & use of pesticides; allows state to ban for 60 days (Section 27) + 30-day extension
CIBRC	Central Insecticides Board & Registration Committee — apex body for pesticide registration
Pesticide Management Bill, 2025	Proposed replacement for 1968 Act; pending in Parliament; digital traceability, stricter penalties, state powers for 1-year bans

International Conventions on Hazardous Chemicals

- **Rotterdam Convention:** An international treaty governing the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade. Inclusion under this convention does not mean an outright ban, but mandates trade transparency.
- **Stockholm Convention:** A global treaty focused on protecting human health and the environment from Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).
- **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework:** Sets global targets for 2030, including the active reduction of pesticide-related environmental risks. High Total Applied Toxicity (TAT) presents compliance challenges for signatory nations like India.

Q. With reference to the regulation of agrochemicals in India, consider the following statements:

1. Under the Insecticides Act, 1968, state governments have the statutory power to permanently ban any hazardous pesticide within their territory.
2. Paraquat is a non-selective contact herbicide that has no specific medical antidote available globally.
3. The Rotterdam Convention mandates an immediate worldwide prohibition on any pesticide added to its hazardous list.

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

Correct Answer: B

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Under Section 27 of the Insecticides Act, 1968, state governments can only impose a *temporary ban* lasting up to 60 days. Permanent or nationwide prohibitions can only be enacted by the Central Government.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Paraquat is a highly toxic, non-selective herbicide with no known specific clinical antidote.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Inclusion of a chemical under the Rotterdam Convention does not automatically ban it; rather, it mandates the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure for international trade.

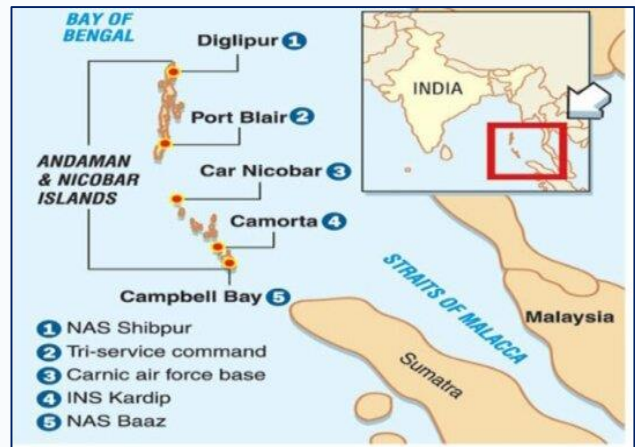
5.1. INS BAAZ AND THE GREAT NICOBAR AIRPORT PROJECT

Context:

The government plans to build a new ₹13,000 crore dual-use airport at Galathea Bay in Great Nicobar, citing environmental limits on expanding the existing INS Baaz runway. However, this new project is facing criticism because clearing large areas of protected forest will severely impact the local ecology and the habitat of the vulnerable Shompen tribe.

About INS Baaz

- **Status & Commissioning:** Commissioned in July 2012, it is the southernmost air station of the Indian Armed Forces.
- **Geographical Location:** Situated at Campbell Bay on Great Nicobar Island (the largest and southernmost island of the Union Territory). It is located in close proximity to Indira Point.
- **International Proximity:** Located less than 250 km by sea from Banda Aceh, Indonesia.
- **Strategic Utility:** Operates under the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) to build Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) via airborne surveillance using aircraft and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).
- **Geopolitics:** Often described as India's "window into East and Southeast Asia," ensuring maritime security across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.



Geographical Significance: The Great Channel

- **Location:** Situated at six degrees north of the equator, earning it the popular name 'Six Degree Channel'.
- **Demarcation:** Acts as the critical maritime boundary separating Great Nicobar Island (India) and Aceh Province (Indonesia).

Institutional Setup: Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)

- **Establishment & Uniqueness:** Created in 2001, it holds the distinction of being the **first and only tri-service command** of the Indian Armed Forces.
- **Headquarters:** Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- **Primary Objective:** Safeguards India's strategic interests in the critical choke point of the **Strait of Malacca** and Southeast Asia.
- **Operational Role:** Provides vital logistical and administrative support for Indian naval ships deployed in the East Asia and Pacific Ocean regions.

Q. With respect to the strategic geography and military infrastructure of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, consider the following statements:

- I. INS Baaz is the southernmost air station of the Indian Armed Forces located at Campbell Bay.
- II. The Six Degree Channel acts as the maritime boundary separating Great Nicobar Island and the Aceh Province of Indonesia.
- III. The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) is a dedicated naval-only command established to safeguard India's interests in Southeast Asia.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only I and II
- (b) Only II and III
- (c) Only I and III
- (d) I, II and III

Answer: A

- **Statement I is correct:** INS Baaz is commissioned as the southernmost air station of the Indian Armed Forces and is strategically located at Campbell Bay on Great Nicobar Island.
- **Statement II is correct:** The Great Channel, popularly known as the Six Degree Channel, is the critical maritime boundary that separates Great Nicobar Island of India and the Aceh Province of Indonesia.
- **Statement III is incorrect:** The Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), created in 2001, is the first and only tri-service command of the Indian Armed Forces, not a dedicated naval-only command.

5.2. PROJECT KUSHA AND INDIA'S EVOLVING AIR DEFENCE ARCHITECTURE

Context:

- Recently, the Defence Minister inaugurated the Advanced Weapon System Complex at DRDL, part of the Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Missile Complex in Hyderabad. He described the indigenous Project Kusha air defence programme as a major “game changer” for strengthening India’s security and defence capabilities.



Key Highlights: Project Kusha

- **Type of System:** It is an indigenous, **long-range air defence missile system**.
- **Developing Agency:** Being developed completely by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- **Core Function:** Designed to provide a comprehensive, protective umbrella/shield against a wide array of aerial threats.
- **Operational Track Record:** The Defence Minister asserted that the system's operational importance and effectiveness have already been successfully demonstrated during **Operation Sindoor**.

Broader Air Defence Frameworks & Initiatives

1. "Mission Sudarshan Chakra"

- **Origin:** Announced by the Prime Minister during Independence Day in 2025.
- **Objective:** An ambitious initiative aimed at establishing a **multi-layered missile defence shield** across India by 2035.
- **Scope:** It is designed to safeguard three critical pillars:
 1. Military assets.
 2. Critical infrastructure.
 3. Civilian establishments across the country.
- **Key Feature:** Built to offer robust protection while minimizing inconvenience to citizens, along with possessing the capability to deliver a decisive retaliatory response when necessary.

2. Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS)

- The system is being developed as a key component of Mission Sudarshan Chakra, India's proposed multi-layered national air defence shield.
- **Components of the mission include:**
 - QRSAM — Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile
 - VSHORAD — Very Short Range Air Defence System
 - Directed Energy Weapons (DEW) / Laser-based systems

India's Multi-Layered Air Defence Architecture

Layer	System / Assets
Layer 1 (Very Short)	Counter-drone systems MANPADS VSHORAD
Layer 2–3 (Short-Medium)	Point air defence QRSAM MR-SAM (Barak-8) Akash
Layer 4 (Long-Range)	S-400 Triumf (Future) Project Kusha (150–350 km)

Q. With reference to India's defence capabilities mentioned in recent news, consider the following statements:

1. Project Kusha is a short-range, quick-reaction surface-to-air missile system developed jointly by India and Israel.
2. "Mission Sudarshan Chakra" is aimed at establishing a multi-layered nationwide missile defence shield to protect both military and civilian assets.
3. The Advanced Weapon System Complex at DRDL was recently inaugurated in Hyderabad.

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

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** According to image_08dd8b.png, Project Kusha is an *indigenous, long-range* air defence missile system being developed by the DRDO, not a short-range joint venture.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Mission Sudarshan Chakra aims to create a multi-layered missile defence shield protecting military assets, critical infrastructure, and civilian establishments.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** The Defence Minister inaugurated the Advanced Weapon System Complex at DRDO's DRDL facility in Hyderabad.

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HISTORY & CULTURE

6.1. BIRSA MUNDA & THE ULGULAN

Context:

- Recently, June 9 marked the death anniversary of Birsa Munda, a charismatic tribal leader, freedom fighter, and folk hero who spearheaded an anti-colonial and anti-feudal movement in the Chotanagpur Plateau region during the late 19th century.



1. Core Background & Influences

- The Preceding Movement:** The **Sardari Larai** (or Sardar movement) of the late 19th century preceded Birsa's uprising. It heavily influenced the political and agitational climate in the Chotanagpur region, fighting against the destruction of tribal land systems.
- The Enemy (Dikus):** The rebellion targeted the British colonial authorities, Christian missionaries, and the *dikus*—**outsiders** consisting of landlords (*zamindars*), moneylenders, and traders who exploited the indigenous population.

2. The Uprising: Ulgulan

- The Term "Ulgulan":** The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the 20th century is popularly known as the **Ulgulan**, which translates to the "**Great Tumult**".
- Famous Slogan:** Birsa Munda gave the iconic slogan calling for the end of British rule:
"Abua raj ete jana, maharani raj tundu jana" > (Let the kingdom of the queen be ended and our kingdom be established).

3. Socio-Religious Reforms

- New Faith Community:** Birsa Munda rejected Christian missionary activities and traditional superstitious tribal practices. He advocated for a return to their **original roots and monotheism**, giving rise to a distinct faith community known as **Birsait**.
- Principles:** Followers of the Birsait sect worshipped **one God (Singhbonga, a tribal deity)**, clean living, and strictly prohibited cow slaughter, sacrifices, and alcohol consumption.

4. Capture, Death, and Literary Records

- Cause of Death:** Birsa Munda was captured by the British and died in **Ranchi Jail** on **June 9, 1900**. The official cause of death recorded by the British authorities was **cholera**, though historical debates surround the true nature of his sudden demise.
- Ethnographic Records:** The famous, definitive photograph of Birsa Munda (arms crossed, wearing a turban) was reproduced in the pioneering ethnographic work titled ***The Mundas and Their Country*** (1912) by the renowned anthropologist **Sarat Chandra Roy**.

5. Aftermath and Legacy

- **Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNT), 1908:** The ultimate legal outcome of the Ulgulan. The British administration passed this act to protect tribal lands, legally banning the **forced labor (*beth-begari*)** system and prohibiting the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals (*dikus*).
- **Janjatiya Gaurav Divas:** In recognition of his massive contribution to the Indian freedom struggle, his birth anniversary (**November 15**) is celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas (Tribal Pride Day) in India.

Q. In the context of tribal movements during colonial India, the term "Dikus" referred to:

- (a) Tribal chiefs appointed by the British
- (b) Christian missionaries working among tribes
- (c) Outsiders such as landlords, moneylenders, and traders exploiting tribal communities
- (d) Armed tribal volunteers

Correct Answer: C

In many tribal movements of colonial India, especially the movement led by Birsa Munda, the term "**Diku**" was used to refer to **outsiders who entered tribal areas and exploited tribal communities**.

These included:

- Landlords (zamindars)
- Moneylenders
- Traders
- Contractors
- Government officials

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