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From

13th July *to* **18th July 2026**

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1. LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

Context

- Recently, the first-ever District Development Councils (DDCs) in Jammu and Kashmir completed their five-year tenure in February 2026. The absence of fresh elections has triggered a debate over democratic decentralization and the future relevance of the DDC model in the Union Territory.



What are District Development Councils (DDCs)?

- Origin & Authority:** The DDCs were established by the Ministry of Home Affairs by amending the **Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989** and its 1996 Rules. They replaced the erstwhile District Planning and Development Boards.
- Structure & Composition:**
 - Each district in J&K is divided into **14 constituencies**, meaning there are 14 directly elected members per council.
 - It creates a **three-tier rural governance structure**: Gram Panchayats (Halqa Panchayats), Block Development Councils (BDCs), and District Development Councils (DDCs).
 - Apart from elected members, the DDC includes local Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and Chairpersons of BDCs within the district.
- Administrative Head:** The **Additional District Development Commissioner (ADDC)** serves as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the DDC.
- Tenure:** 5 Years.

Key Constitutional Provisions

1. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (1992)

- 73rd C.A.A:** Focused on rural governance, this Act introduced **Part IX** (Articles 243-O) and the **Eleventh Schedule** (29 functions). Key features include a **mandatory three-tier structure** (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad) for states with over 2 million people, the establishment of Gram Sabhas, and mandatory five-year election cycles.
- 74th C.A.A:** This Act focuses on urban governance, adding **Part IXA** (Articles 243P-ZG) and the **Twelfth Schedule** (18 functions). It mandates three types of municipalities—Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils, and Municipal Corporations—along with Ward Committees for improved urban administration.

2. About District Planning Committee (DPC) — Article 243ZD

- Mandate: Article 243ZD** (introduced via the 74th Amendment) mandates that every state must constitute a DPC at the district level.
- Objective:** To consolidate developmental plans prepared by both rural Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), integrating them into a holistic draft district development plan.
- Composition Rule:** At least **four-fifths (80%)** of the DPC members must be elected by and from amongst the elected members of the district panchayat and urban municipalities. The

allocation must be proportional to the ratio between the rural and urban populations of that district.

DDCs vs. DPCs: Structural Divergence

Feature	District Planning Committee (DPC)	District Development Council (DDC)
Source of Power	Constituted under the Constitution of India (Article 243ZD).	Created through an Executive Order / Statutory Amendment to the J&K Panchayati Raj Act.
Core Function	Acts as a coordinating, bottom-up planning body that aggregates mandates generated from lower tiers.	Acts as a parallel administrative authority exercising direct executive and developmental powers.
Functional Direction	Strengthens democratic decentralization from the ground up.	Functions as a structure from above, often seen as competing with or bypassing traditional Zila Parishads.

Major Concerns & Pitfalls of the DDC Model

- **Bypassing Constitutional Institutions:** Critics argue that the DDC acts as a parallel structure that effectively bypasses traditional Zila Parishads and constitutional DPCs, potentially reinforcing bureaucratic control over local representation.
- **The Per-Capita Representation Imbalance:** Seats are uniformly allocated across districts without weightage to demographic variations.
Example: Srinagar (population ~12 lakh) and Kishtwar (population ~2.5 lakh) are both allocated exactly 14 DDC members, causing a stark skew in per-capita political voice.
- **Concentration of Power:** With the J&K State Assembly being absent or weakened over the last few years, key financial and executive functions have remained under the functional oversight of the Union administration via bureaucrats, rather than local legislative bodies.

Q. With reference to the District Development Councils (DDCs) in Jammu & Kashmir, consider the following statements:

1. DDCs constitute the district tier of the Panchayati Raj system in Jammu & Kashmir.
2. Every DDC consists of 14 directly elected members.
3. District Planning Committees are constitutional bodies under Article 243ZD.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (D) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** District Development Councils (DDCs) are the district-level (third tier) institutions of the Panchayati Raj system in Jammu & Kashmir.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Each DDC comprises 14 directly elected members, with one member elected from each territorial constituency in the district.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Article 243ZD of the Constitution provides for the District Planning Committee (DPC), which consolidates plans prepared by Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies.

1.2. ALL LADAKH DISTRICTS TO GET AUTONOMOUS HILL COUNCILS

Context

- Recently, the Ladakh administration announced the creation of **17 new tehsils** to strengthen grassroots governance in the Union Territory.
- With this reorganisation, all districts of Ladakh are expected to be brought under the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act**, amid ongoing discussions on constitutional safeguards and greater local autonomy.



Major Administrative Reforms

- District Expansion:** Ladakh recently expanded from **2 districts** (Leh and Kargil) to **7 districts**. The five newly notified districts are **Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar, and Drass**.
- Creation of Tehsils:** An additional 17 new tehsils have been approved, increasing the total number of tehsils in the Union Territory (UT) from 15 to 32.
- Alongside this, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has proposed a customized, "**sui generis**" (**unique**) **model** of governance under **Article 371** of the Constitution to protect Ladakh's land, jobs, and distinct cultural identity.
- New service-delivery divisions created:**
 - 4 divisions** — Public Health Engineering (PHE) & Flood Control Department
 - 5 divisions** — Public Works Department (PWD) & PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana)
- Universalizing AHDCs:** Earlier, **only Leh and Kargil** had Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs); now, all seven districts of Ladakh will have elected local self-governing bodies to strengthen governance, local administration, and the jurisdiction of the LAHDCs.

About the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC)

- Constituted under the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils Act, 1997**; councils were established in **Leh (1995)** and **Kargil (2003)**.
- Each council has **30 members—26 elected** and **4 nominated** members—with a tenure of **five years**.
- The council is headed by a **Chief Executive Councillor (CEC)**, who enjoys the **rank of a Cabinet Minister**.
- LAHDCs are **responsible for** local planning, agriculture, health, education, rural development, infrastructure, tourism, and environmental protection.

Administrative Structure of Ladakh

- Ladakh became a Union Territory on **31 October 2019** under the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019**.
- Executive Head:** The Lieutenant Governor (LG) administers the UT on behalf of the President of India.
- Judicial Jurisdiction:** Falls under the jurisdiction of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

- **Parliamentary Representation:** Ladakh constitutes one single Lok Sabha constituency.
- Various groups in Ladakh have demanded **Sixth Schedule status, statehood, a separate Public Service Commission, job reservations for locals, and constitutional safeguards for land and culture.**

LAHDC vs Sixth Schedule

Feature	LAHDC (Ladakh)	Sixth Schedule Councils (e.g., Assam, Meghalaya)
Legal basis	Statutory (state/UT Act)	Constitutional (Article 244(2) & 275(1))
Legislative power	Very limited/advisory	Can make laws on land, forest, village admin, inheritance, marriage, social customs
Judicial power	None	Can set up village/district councils courts for tribal disputes
Financial autonomy	Limited	Greater — controls royalty, taxation on land/forest produce in some cases
Amendment protection	Can be altered by ordinary legislation	Requires constitutional amendment

About Article 371

- Article 371 is part of **Part XXI of the Constitution** and provides special provisions for certain states to address their unique social, cultural, and administrative needs.
- It empowers **the President** to assign special responsibilities to Governors in matters such as regional development, law and order, and equitable distribution of resources.
- **Articles 371A to 371J** grant special provisions to states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, and Telangana.

Q. With reference to the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), consider the following statements:

1. The LAHDCs in Leh and Kargil were established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. Ladakh became a Union Territory following the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.
3. The Sixth Schedule currently applies to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Incorrect:** The LAHDCs are statutory bodies established under the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act, 1995**, not under the Sixth Schedule.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Ladakh became a Union Territory in 2019 under the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019**.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** The Sixth Schedule applies to **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram**.

1.3. INDIA-AUSTRALIA NUCLEAR FUEL SUPPLY DEAL TAKES SHAPE

Context

- Australia and India have completed all the necessary formalities for Australia to export uranium to India for **civilian nuclear power**.
- Australia and India have completed all formalities for civilian uranium exports. The fuel is strictly restricted to peaceful energy generation—excluding weapons use—under mandatory IAEA monitoring.



Key Points of the India–Australia Uranium Supplies Agreement

- **Strategic Sourcing:** Secures a stable uranium supply from Australia, which possesses over 25% of global reserves.
- **NPT Exemption:** India remains a rare exception to Australia's strict Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) requirement, granted due to India's clean non-proliferation record.
- **IAEA Safeguards:** Mandates the separation of civilian and military nuclear facilities to facilitate regular international inspections under the 2008 IAEA agreement.
- **Peaceful Use Guarantee:** Builds on the 2015 bilateral pact through a new administrative arrangement to ensure imported uranium is strictly utilized for peaceful energy generation.
- **NSG Waiver Facilitation:** The partnership is fundamentally enabled by the special 2008 trade waiver granted to India by the 48-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

India's Nuclear Power Sector (Current Status).

India holds roughly **25% of the world's thorium reserves** — among the largest in the world — mostly found in monazite sands along the coasts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh.

Power Generation

- **Total installed power capacity:** ~520 GW (Jan 2026).
- **Largest sources:** Thermal > Renewables > Hydropower > Nuclear.
- **Nuclear power remains one of India's smallest electricity sources**, but plays a vital role in providing **clean, reliable 24×7 baseload power**.
- **24 operational reactors** with a combined capacity of **8.78 GW** across **7 sites**.
- Contributes **about 3.1%** of India's electricity generation.
- Produced **56,681 million units (MU)** of electricity in **2024–25**.
- Most reactors are **Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** operated by **NPCIL** under the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)**.

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme

- **Objective:** To achieve long-term energy self-sufficiency by systematically leveraging India's vast domestic thorium reserves through a sequential process.
- **Stage 1 (Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors):** Operates using natural or enriched uranium as the primary fuel.

- **Stage 2 (Fast Breeder Reactors):** Utilizes plutonium (extracted from Stage 1) alongside uranium-238 to breed more fissile material than the reactor consumes.
- **Stage 3 (Thorium-Based Reactors):** Powered by uranium-233 (bred from thorium introduced in Stage 2) to fully harness the nation's thorium resources.

Nuclear Expansion Targets & Policy Reforms

- **Capacity Goals:** Aims to scale capacity to 22.48 GW by 2031–32 and 100 GW by 2047 under the Nuclear Energy Mission.
- **Stage 2 Transition:** The 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam achieved its first criticality in April 2026, marking India's entry into the second stage of its nuclear programme.
- **Legislative Amendments:** Proposes revisions to the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.
- **Private Sector Integration:** Seeks to boost private sector participation through the proposed legislative amendments and the introduction of the SHANTI Act

Why SHANTI ACT matters for this specific uranium deal?

- The **2026 Administrative Arrangements** allow **private Australian companies** to sell uranium to **eligible private Indian companies and joint ventures**.
- The **SHANTI Act** allows **private companies** to participate in India's civilian nuclear sector. Without it, only **DAE/NPCIL** could import uranium.
- **In simple terms:** The **SHANTI Act creates private buyers in India**, while the **Australia agreement provides the uranium supply**, strengthening India–Australia civil nuclear cooperation.

Q. With reference to India's nuclear energy sector and recent civil nuclear developments, consider the following statements:

1. The SHANTI Act permits private Indian companies and joint ventures to participate in the civilian nuclear sector, enabling them to import uranium alongside public entities like DAE and NPCIL.
2. Thorium is a directly fissile material capable of sustaining an independent nuclear chain reaction, eliminating India's reliance on imported uranium for its long-term nuclear ambitions.
3. The first criticality of the 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam marks India's transition into the second stage of its three-stage nuclear programme.

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: (c)

Explanation

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Historically, only the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) were permitted to import uranium. The SHANTI Act opens up the civilian nuclear sector to private companies, which, combined with the 2026

Administrative Arrangements, allows private Australian companies to sell uranium directly to eligible private Indian companies and joint ventures.

- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Thorium is *not* directly fissile and cannot sustain a nuclear chain reaction on its own, unlike uranium-235. It must first be converted into a usable fuel (uranium-233) inside a reactor using plutonium or enriched uranium as a trigger. Therefore, imported uranium remains vital to "kickstart" the process required to eventually tap into India's thorium reserves.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** India's three-stage nuclear programme progresses from Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (Stage 1) to Fast Breeder Reactors (Stage 2). The 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam achieving first criticality serves as the primary milestone marking India's entry and transition into the second stage.

1.4. GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES SEAFARER-FIRST DASHBOARD

Context

- **Recently,** the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) launched the Seafarer-FiRST initiative with a real-time dashboard to protect Indian seafarers in high-risk maritime regions, including the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman.



Seafarer-FiRST Dashboard – Key Features

- **Developed by:** Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)**.
- **Objective:** To ensure the safety, welfare, and real-time monitoring of Indian seafarers operating in high-risk maritime zones.
- **Coverage:** Tracks Indian seafarers on **both Indian-flagged and foreign-flagged vessels**, particularly in the **Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman**.
- **Real Time Monitoring:** Provides vessel-by-vessel tracking of:
 - Vessel location
 - Ownership details
 - Cargo information
 - Crew strength and welfare
 - Threat perception
 - Intended voyage and next port of call
 - Availability of food, fuel, medicines, and communication facilities
- **Institutional Coordination:** Operated round the clock by **MoPSW** in coordination with the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Indian Navy, DG Shipping**, and Indian diplomatic missions.
- **Family Support:** Dedicated liaison officers serve as single points of contact for seafarers' families, assisting with welfare, repatriation, and legal or contractual issues.
- **Compliance Mechanism:** Ship owners, managers, and recruitment/placement agencies must submit regular compliance reports ensuring that no Indian seafarer sails without adequate safety information and protective measures.

Key Concepts

Who is a Seafarer?

- A person employed or engaged to work on a **merchant ship**, including:
 - Navigating officers
 - Marine engineers
 - Deck and engine crew (ratings)
 - Catering staff
 - Technical personnel

Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping)

- **Established:** 1949
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)
- **Headquarters:** Mumbai
- India's principal maritime administration responsible for:
 - Merchant shipping regulation
 - Ship registration
 - Seafarer certification and welfare
 - Maritime safety and training
 - Implementation of the **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**
 - Prevention of marine pollution

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the recently launched 'Seafarer-First' initiative:

1. It is a comprehensive response launched by the Ministry of External Affairs to track Indian citizens stranded in land-locked conflict zones.
2. The real-time operational dashboard under this initiative tracks Indian seafarers only if they are aboard vessels flying the Indian national flag.
3. The tracking scope explicitly covers high-risk maritime zones including the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: B) 3 only

Statement I is *Incorrect*:

- Launched by the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)**, not the Ministry of External Affairs.
- It tracks **Indian seafarers in high-risk maritime zones**, not citizens in land-locked conflict areas.

Statement II is *Incorrect*:

- The dashboard tracks Indian seafarers **irrespective of the vessel's flag** (Indian or foreign-flagged).
- The word "**only**" makes the statement incorrect.

Statement III is Correct

- The initiative covers **high-risk maritime regions** such as the **Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Oman** for real-time monitoring of Indian seafarers.

1.5. DELHI HC: FREEDOM OF PRESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARE BOTH IMPORTANT

Context

- The **Delhi High Court**, while granting bail on **16 July 2026** to two accused in an assault case against freelance YouTube reporters, observed that anyone with a **mobile phone and microphone** claiming to be a "reporter" without training or accreditation raises accountability concerns.



About the Case

- Justice Girish Kathpalia** granted bail to two accused in an assault case involving reporters recording an unauthorised place of worship in **Seemapuri, Delhi**.

Key Features of the Observation

Incident Background

- Reporters were filming an unauthorised place of worship when agitated local residents, including the accused, dragged them into a bus and assaulted them.

Court's Findings

- The court noted the reporters were **not associated with any accredited news organisation**.
- Held that the assault, prosecution's claim of an "attack on freedom of the press," remains a **"grey area"** given the reporters' unaccredited status.

Call for Regulatory Framework

- Justice Kathpalia observed that with the **rapid proliferation of social media and digital platforms**, a significant section of media has become largely **unregulated and unorganised**.
- Called on the **legislature** to consider an appropriate regulatory framework balancing **press freedom** with **professional accountability, ethical standards, and rule of law**.

Strategic/Constitutional Significance

- Reinforces the debate on media accreditation versus press freedom under India's constitutional scheme.
- Press freedom relies entirely on Article 19(1)(a), which is why the Delhi High Court considers rights for unaccredited reporters a "grey area."

About Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution

- Guarantees all citizens the **fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression**, from which **freedom of the press** is judicially derived (not separately enumerated).
- Subject to **reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2)** -sovereignty/integrity of India, security of the State, public order, decency/morality, contempt of court, defamation, and incitement to an offence.

- Press freedom in India has **no separate statutory accreditation requirement** to claim constitutional protection, though bodies like the **Press Council of India (1966)** oversee professional/ethical standards for accredited journalists.
- Landmark cases: ***Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras (1950)*** and ***Sakal Papers v. Union of India (1962)*** established press freedom as implicit in Article 19(1)(a).

Q. With reference to freedom of the press in India, consider the following statements:

- Freedom of the press is separately and explicitly enumerated as a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a).
- Restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, including press freedom, can be imposed only on grounds specified under Article 19(2).
- The Press Council of India was established to oversee professional and ethical standards of accredited journalists.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) II and III only

Explanation:

- **Statement I is Incorrect:** Freedom of the press is **not explicitly enumerated**; it is judicially read into **Article 19(1)(a)**'s freedom of speech and expression.
- **Statement II is Correct:** Restrictions apply **only on grounds under Article 19(2)**.
- **Statement III is Correct:** The **Press Council of India (1966)** oversees professional and ethical journalistic standards.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. INDIA HOSTS OPERATION SOUTHERN READINESS 26.2 IN KOCHI

Context

The Indian Navy will host **Operation Southern Readiness 26-2** at the **Southern Naval Command, Kochi**, from **20–23 July 2026**.

About Operation Southern Readiness 26-2

- A **four-day multinational maritime security training engagement** conducted under the **Indian Navy-led CTF 154** in partnership with the **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)**.



Key Features of Operation Southern Readiness 26.2

Command Structure

- Conducted under the aegis of the Navy-led **Combined Task Force 154 (CTF 154)**, which is CMF's dedicated **Training Task Force**.
- India assumed command of CTF 154 in February 2026 - the **first time** an Indian Navy officer has led this multinational training task force.

Participating Nations

- Around **25 countries** are taking part, including **Australia, Canada, Thailand, the UAE, Oman, Djibouti, Seychelles, the United States, and the United Kingdom**.

Training Components

- Combines **classroom instruction, simulation-based modules, and practical exercises**.
- **Key subject areas:** maritime law, maritime domain awareness and information sharing, counter-narcotics operations, force protection, asymmetric threats, and maritime uncrewed systems.
- Includes **hands-on training** in damage control and firefighting.

Strategic Significance

- Underscores the Indian Navy's **growing role in regional capacity building** through its association with the CMF.
- Reflects deepening maritime cooperation and interoperability with **CMF partner nations**.

What is the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)?

- CMF is a **multinational naval partnership**, currently comprising **47 member nations**, that works to promote security, stability, and prosperity across **~3.2 million square miles** of international waters.
- **Established in 2001–02**, initially with 12 member nations, under the leadership of the **U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT)**.
- **Headquartered in Manama, Bahrain**.
- Its focus areas include **counter-piracy, counter-narcotics, counter-smuggling**, and upholding the **International Rules-Based Order (IRBO)** at sea.

- Operates through **Combined Task Forces (CTFs)** - e.g., CTF 150 (maritime security), CTF 151 (counter-piracy), CTF 152 (Gulf maritime security), CTF 153 (Red Sea security), and CTF 154 (training).
- India** joined CMF as an **associate member in 2022**.

Q. With reference to the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), consider the following statements:

- It is a multinational naval partnership headquartered in Manama, Bahrain.
- Combined Task Force 154 (CTF 154) is CMF's dedicated task force for counter-piracy operations.
- India joined the CMF as an associate member.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) I and III only

Explanation:

- Statement I is Correct:** CMF is a multinational maritime partnership headquartered in **Manama, Bahrain**.
- Statement II is Incorrect:** CTF 154 is CMF's dedicated **Training Task Force**; counter-piracy operations are handled by **CTF 151**.
- Statement III is Correct:** India joined CMF as an **associate member in 2022**.

2.2. IAF TO PARTICIPATE IN EXERCISE PITCH BLACK 2026

Context:

- The **Indian Air Force (IAF)** is participating in **Exercise Pitch Black 2026**, a major multinational air combat exercise hosted by Australia.

Core Facts About Exercise Pitch Black

- Type:** A premier, large-scale **multinational biennial air combat warfare exercise**.
- Host Country:** Conducted and hosted by the **Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)**.
- Origin:** First conducted in **1983** as a small-scale bilateral exercise between regional forces, it has grown into one of the Indo-Pacific region's largest training events.
- Operational Base:** Centered primarily around northern Australian bases including **Darwin, Tindal, and Amberley**.
- Key Objective:** To simulate complex, realistic aerial warfare and coalition operations, thereby enhancing strategic interoperability and force integration among partner nations.



Key Highlights of the 2026 Edition

- Scale & Participation:** Features **20 nations** (including the host Australia and India), involving more than 100 aircraft and 2,500+ military personnel.
- Participating Nations Include:** India, Australia, USA, France, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Germany, UK, and others.

- **India's Component:** The IAF has deployed **4 Rafael multirole fighter jets**, **2 C-17 Globe master III strategic transport aircraft**, and over 120 Air Warriors.
- **Notable Debuts:** The 2026 edition marks the first-ever participation of Japan's **F-35 Lightning II** stealth fighters and Indonesia's **T-50I Golden Eagle** aircraft in this framework.

Strategic Significance for India

- **Indo-Pacific Synergy:** Aligns with India's vision of a *Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific*, strengthening collective security ties with key regional partners like Australia (a fellow **QUAD** member).
- **Interoperability:** Allows the IAF to exercise joint tactical planning and large-force engagements alongside advanced global air platforms.
- **Deepening Bilateral Ties:** Operates under the umbrella of the India-Australia **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, mirroring increased defence coordination across domains.

India–Australia Defence Cooperation

- India and Australia are **Comprehensive Strategic Partners** (since **2020**).
- Defence cooperation has expanded through:
 - **Exercise AUSINDEX** (Naval Exercise).
 - **Exercise Malabar** (Quad Naval Exercise).
 - **Exercise Pitch Black** (Air Exercise).
- Both countries cooperate under the **Quad** framework to promote a **free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.

Q. With reference to 'Exercise Pitch Black 2026', consider the following statements:

1. It is a biennial multinational air combat warfare exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
2. The Indian Armed Forces participate in this exercise through its naval component under the Malabar framework.
3. The 2026 edition marks the first-ever operational inclusion of stealth platforms such as the Japan Air Self-Defence Force's F-35 Lightning II fighters in this exercise.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A) Only one statement
- B) Only two statements
- C) All three statements
- D) None of the statements

Correct Answer: B (Only two statements)

- **Statement 1 is CORRECT:** Exercise Pitch Black is a premier, large-scale **multinational biennial air combat warfare exercise** hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). It was first conducted in 1983 and takes place primarily across northern Australian bases like Darwin, Tindal, and Amberley.

- **Statement 2 is INCORRECT:** India participates in Exercise Pitch Black through the **Indian Air Force (IAF)**, not the Indian Navy. For the 2026 edition, the IAF deployed multirole Rafael fighter aircraft and C-17 Globe master III strategic transport aircraft. Furthermore, it is a standalone multilateral exercise and is independent of the Malabar naval framework.
- **Statement 3 is CORRECT:** The 2026 edition features several notable operational debuts, including the first-ever participation of the Japan Air Self-Defence Force's fifth-generation **F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters** and Indonesia's T-50I Golden Eagle aircraft.

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3.1. INDIA BANS IMPORT OF GOODS MADE USING FORCED LABOUR

Context

- **Recently**, India amended the **Foreign Trade Policy (FTP), 2023** to ban the import of goods produced wholly or partly using **forced labour**. The move comes amid a **U.S. Section 301 investigation** and a proposed **12.5% tariff** on Indian exports over the absence of such a prohibition.



Key Highlights of the Amendment

- **The Prohibition:** A new Paragraph 2.20B has been inserted into the FTP 2023, stating: *"The import of goods produced or manufactured, wholly or in part, through the use of forced labour is prohibited"*.
- **Implementation Timeline:** The provisions will take effect **30 days** from their publication in the Official Gazette (issued on July 13, 2026).
- **Enquiry & Enforcement Mechanism:** The Central Government can notify specific prohibited goods based on enquiries conducted by the **Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)**. The detailed inquiry procedures will be governed by the **Handbook of Procedures, 2023**.
- **Formal Definition:** The amendment adopted the definition of **"Forced Labour"** from the **ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)**.

Background & International Context

- **USTR Section 301 Probe:** The US proposed tariffs on countries, including **India**, over alleged inadequate enforcement against imports made with **forced labour**.
- **Regulatory Shift:** Moves from relying only on domestic labour laws to a **trade-based import ban**, aligning India's **FTP** with global supply-chain standards.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 29

- **About**
 - **Established:** 1919.
 - Became the **first specialised agency of the United Nations** in 1946.
 - **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
 - Has a **unique tripartite structure** comprising **governments, employers, and workers**.
- **Important Conventions**
 - **Convention No. 29 (Forced Labour Convention, 1930):** Calls for the suppression of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms.
 - **Convention No. 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957):** Abolishes the use of forced labour in specified circumstances.
 - **India has ratified both Convention No. 29 and Convention No. 105.**

Q. Consider the following statements regarding trade and labor standards in India:

1. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Finance.
2. India has ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).
3. Article 23 of the Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits *begar* and other forms of forced labour.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Correct Answer: B (2 and 3 only)

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** The DGFT is an **attached office** (not statutory) under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** (not the Ministry of Finance).
- **Statement 2 is correct:** India is a signatory to and has ratified the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Article 23 of the Constitution of India prohibits traffic in human beings, *begar*, and other similar forms of forced labour as a Fundamental Right.

3.2. INDIA AND THE U.K. OPERATIONALIZE THEIR 'GOLD STANDARD' TRADE DEAL

Context

- The landmark **India–U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** and the accompanying **Double Contribution Convention (DCC)** have officially come into force.
- Described as a “gold standard” trade pact, the agreement seeks to deepen economic cooperation, enhance market access, and strengthen strategic ties between the two countries.



India–U.K. CETA: Key Features

A. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)

Unlike conventional trade agreements focused solely on goods, CETA features **30 comprehensive chapters**.

- **Beyond Tariffs:** Covers digital trade, government procurement, MSMEs, innovation, labor, environment, and gender.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers:** Resolves regulatory friction points such as **Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)** and **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)** to prevent unjustified trade restrictions.

B. Double Contribution Convention (DCC)

- Termed a “game changer” for India's services sector and skilled workforce.
- **Core Objective:** Serves as a social security agreement **to avoid dual taxation** contributions for temporary Indian professionals in the U.K.

- Currently, Indian employees/employers contribute ~25% of salary to the U.K.'s National Insurance system — treated as a **sunk cost** since employees can't draw benefits.
- **Exemption Rule:** Indian employees on temporary assignments in the U.K. are **exempt** from making local National Insurance contributions for up to **5 years**, provided they continue paying social security in India.

Key Tariff Provisions

U.K. side:

- Immediate elimination of tariffs on **96.8% of tariff lines**, covering **97.7% of trade value**.
- Additional **2% of tariff lines** (1.8% of trade value) reduced to nil/near-nil via **quota-based access**
- **Total coverage:** 98.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of trade value

India side:

- Immediate elimination of tariffs on **30.3% of trade value**
- **47% more** trade value to see tariffs phased out over time
- **12.1%** of trade value to get **reduced, quota-based tariffs**

Protected Sectors (Excluded from Concessions)

- The deal protects India's **sensitive sectors** such as dairy, cereals, pulses, vegetables, gold and jewellery, smartphones, and critical polymers.

What are Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures?

- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS)** measures are regulations adopted by countries to protect human, animal, and plant life and health from risks arising from pests, diseases, contaminants, toxins, and food additives.
- These measures are **governed by the WTO Agreement** on the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), which came into force in 1995.
- International Standard-Setting Bodies under SPS:
 - Food Safety: Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)
 - Animal Health: World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)
 - Plant Health: International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

What are Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)?

- Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) refer to technical regulations, product standards, testing procedures, and certification requirements imposed by countries to ensure quality, safety, and environmental protection.
- The WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) came into force in 1995.

Q. With reference to the India–U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), consider the following statements:

1. The United Kingdom has agreed to eliminate tariffs on 99.6% of Indian exports by value under the agreement.
2. The Double Contribution Convention (DCC) exempts Indian professionals temporarily working in the U.K. from social-security contributions for up to three years.

3. India has agreed to remove tariffs on all agricultural products imported from the U.K. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The U.K. will eliminate tariffs on **99.6% of Indian exports by value**, covering almost the entire trade basket.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Under the **Double Contribution Convention (DCC)**, Indian professionals temporarily working in the U.K. are exempted from making social-security contributions for up to **three years**.
- **Statement 3 is Incorrect:** India has retained tariff protection for sensitive sectors, including certain agricultural products such as dairy, apples, edible oils, and oats.

3.3. RBI ISSUES DATA GOVERNANCE GUIDANCE FRAMEWORK FOR BANKS

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently issued a draft document titled '**Guidance on Regulatory Expectations for Data Governance**' for banks and other Regulated Entities (REs).



Objective

The framework aims to strengthen data governance across the banking system, improving data quality, accountability, risk management, and security while ensuring strict compliance with the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**.

Key Pillars of the Data Governance Framework (DGF)

- **Mandatory Establishment:** All Regulated Entities (REs) are directed to establish a comprehensive DGF that aligns seamlessly with their overall risk management framework.
- **Proportionate Application:** The framework must be customized and proportionate to the size, complexity, business model, and technology infrastructure of each specific bank.
- **Core Components:** It spans the entire data lifecycle, specifically addressing:
 - Organizational structure and accountability
 - Clear data policies and processes
 - Advanced technological systems
 - Robust internal audit mechanisms
- **Periodic Review:** RBI mandates that banks must review this framework **annually** or more frequently if operational requirements dictate.

Significance

1. Managing the "3Vs" of Data

- **Volume, Variety, and Velocity:** Rapid banking digitalization makes data a critical asset.
- **Core Goal:** Managing these three aspects ensures data stays accurate, secure, consistent, and useful across systems.

2. Risk Mitigation

- **Beyond IT:** Poor data management impacts the entire bank, not just the tech team.
- **Systemic Safety:** Strong governance prevents wider financial, operational, compliance, and reputational risks.

Data Governance Framework (DGF) vs DPDP Act, 2023

Feature	RBI Data Governance Framework (DGF)	Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023
Nature	Sector-specific regulatory guidance (Draft).	Umbrella central legislation passed by Parliament.
Primary Focus	Institutional data management, data lifecycle quality, risk management, and operational security in banking.	Protection of personal data of digital citizens (Digital Nagriks) and processing obligations.
Applicability	Restricted to RBI-regulated entities (Banks, NBFCs, etc.).	Broadly applicable to all data fiduciaries processing personal data within or linked to India.
Core Regulator	Reserve Bank of India (RBI).	Data Protection Board of India (DPBI).

Q. With reference to the 'Guidance on Regulatory Expectations for Data Governance' recently issued by the RBI, consider the following statements:

1. The framework mandates a uniform, identical data governance structure for all Regulated Entities irrespective of their size or business model.
2. It aims to harmonize data management practices in banks with the provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023.
3. Regulated Entities are required to review their established Data Governance Framework at least once every three years.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 only

Explanation:

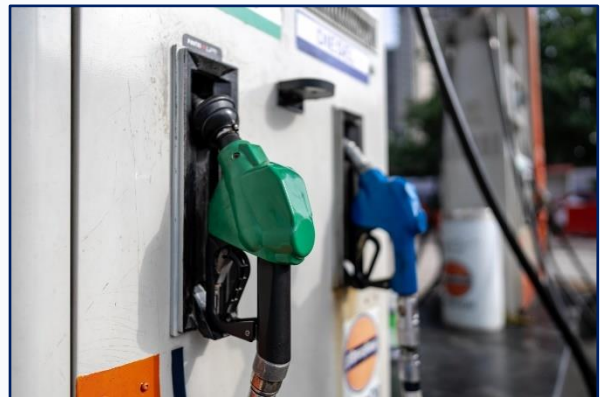
- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** The framework explicitly states that it needs to be *proportionate* to the size, complexity, business model, and technology infrastructure of each bank, rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all uniform structure.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** One of the core objectives of the guidance is ensuring compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, alongside other applicable laws.

- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The RBI has mandated that banks must review the framework *annually* (every year) or more frequently whenever required, not every three years.

3.4. INDIA'S WINDFALL TAX REGIME

Context

- The Central Government has revised the **Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED)** on petroleum exports for the fortnight beginning 16 July. The duty on **diesel** and **ATF** exports has been increased, while the duty on **petrol** exports has been reduced.
- The revision is based on changes in **global crude oil prices** and gross refining margins (GRMs) to tax extraordinary profits and ensure domestic fuel availability.



What is Windfall Tax?

- A **Windfall Tax** is an **additional tax imposed on companies** that earn sudden and extraordinary ("supernormal") profits due to external market conditions rather than improvements in efficiency or productivity.
- In India, this tax is collected through the **Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED)**.

Example:

If global crude oil prices surge because of a war or supply disruption, oil companies may earn unusually high profits without making any additional investment. The government taxes a portion of these unexpected gains through **Windfall Tax (SAED)**.

How Do Companies Earn Windfall Gains?

- Windfall gains arise when oil companies earn unexpected profits due to external factors, such as geopolitical conflicts, supply chain disruptions, rising global crude oil prices, or higher Gross Refining Margins (GRMs).
- These profits are market-driven and result from favourable global conditions rather than improvements in a company's efficiency or productivity.

Windfall Tax in India

- India introduced the Windfall Tax in July 2022 after global crude oil prices surged following the Russia–Ukraine conflict. It was imposed on domestic crude oil production and the exports of diesel, ATF, and petrol.
- The tax is levied through the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED), with rates reviewed every fortnight based on global crude oil prices and refining margins.

Impact on Oil Companies

- **Lower Profits:** Reduce windfall gains of refiners.
- **Weaker Exports:** Higher duties reduce export competitiveness.
- **Investment Concerns:** Frequent tax revisions create policy uncertainty.

Impact on the Economy

- **Higher Revenue:** Boosts government finances.

- **Controls Inflation:** Ensures domestic fuel availability.
- **Energy Security:** Strengthens fuel supply during global disruptions.

Q. With reference to the Windfall Tax (Special Additional Excise Duty - SAED) in India, consider the following statements:

1. Windfall Tax is imposed to tax extraordinary profits arising mainly due to external market conditions.
2. In India, Windfall Tax is implemented through the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).
3. SAED is generally reviewed every fortnight.
4. At present, SAED is also imposed on domestic crude oil production.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Windfall Tax targets extraordinary profits arising from external market conditions.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** In India, it is levied through the Special Additional Excise Duty (**SAED**).
- **Statement 3 is correct:** SAED rates are reviewed every fortnight.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** SAED is no longer levied on domestic crude oil production; it currently applies only to petroleum product exports.

3.5. CORE INDUSTRIES INDEX SET TO GET AN UPGRADE

Context

- The **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** will release an updated **Index of Core Industries (ICI)** on **20 July 2026**, with a new **base year of 2022-23** and recalibrated industries and weightages.



About the Index of Core Industries (ICI)

- Measures the **combined and individual growth** of **eight core industries** that have a bearing on the overall **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**.

Key Features of the Revision

Base Year Change

- Replaces the existing **ICI series** based on **base year 2011-12**.

Release Scope

- The **20 July 2026** release will include the **provisional ICI for June 2026**, along with the **back series from April 2023 to May 2026**.

Methodology

- Weights for the **2022-23 ICI series** are derived from the weights of the **2022-23 IIP series**, released by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**.

Strategic Significance

- Reflects periodic **base-year revisions** to keep industrial output measurement aligned with the **current economic structure**.

What is the Index of Industrial Production (IIP)?

- A composite indicator measuring **short-term industrial growth** across **mining, manufacturing, and electricity** sectors.
- Released monthly by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, under **MoSPI**.
- Classified by **use-based category**: primary goods, capital goods, intermediate goods, infrastructure/construction goods, consumer durables, and consumer non-durables.
- Eight Core Industries** (44.87% weight in current IIP): Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement, Electricity.

Q. With reference to the Index of Core Industries (ICI), consider the following statements:

- It measures the combined and individual performance of eight core industries.
- It is released by the National Statistical Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- Its weights are derived from the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) series.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) I and III only

Explanation:

- Statement I is Correct:** ICI tracks **eight core industries'** combined and individual growth.
- Statement II is Incorrect:** ICI is released by the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, not MoSPI/NSO (which release the IIP).
- Statement III is Correct:** ICI weights are derived from the **IIP series** weights.

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ENVIRONMENT & GEOGRAPHY

4.1. INDIAN GREY HORNBILL BREEDS SUCCESSFULLY IN GIR FOUR YEARS AFTER REINTRODUCTION

Context

- The **Indian Grey Hornbill** has recorded **four consecutive years of successful breeding** in **Gir Forest, Gujarat**, after being reintroduced in **2021**.
- The species had disappeared from Gir during the **1950s–1960s**, making this a significant conservation success.



Recent Conservation Success in Gir Forest

- **Reintroduction:** The Indian Grey Hornbill, locally extinct from Gir since the 1950s–60s, was reintroduced in 2021. A total of 40 birds were released in two phases (28 in 2021–22 and 12 in 2023).
- **Monitoring & Outcome:** 11 male hornbills were satellite-tagged to track movement, habitat use, and breeding. The species has now recorded four consecutive years of successful breeding, indicating a self-sustaining population.

About Indian Grey Hornbill

- Scientific Name: *Ocyceros birostris*
- **IUCN Status:** Least Concern (LC)
- **Habitat:** Open forests, wooded farmlands, and urban parks across the Indian subcontinent.
- **Diet:** Mainly fruits, insects, and small reptiles.

Ecological Importance

- A long-distance seed disperser that promotes forest regeneration.
- Helps maintain forest biodiversity and ecosystem health.

About Gir Forest

Gir Forest, located in **Gujarat**, comprises the **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary** and is the **only natural habitat of the Asiatic Lion** (*Panthera leo persica*). It is a biodiversity hotspot supporting species such as the Leopard, Striped Hyena, Golden Jackal, Marsh Crocodile, and over 300 species of birds.



Species Reintroduction in India: Other Examples

- **Cheetah** reintroduction in **Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh)**.
- **Gharial** reintroduction in selected river systems.
- **Indian Rhino** conservation and translocation under **Indian Rhino Vision (IRV)**.

Conclusion

The successful revival of the Indian Grey Hornbill in Gir highlights the importance of **species reintroduction, scientific monitoring, and habitat conservation**, making it a significant topic for UPSC Prelims in Environment and Ecology.

Q. With reference to the Indian Grey Hornbill, consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Grey Hornbill is endemic to the Indian subcontinent.
2. It plays an important ecological role as a long-distance seed disperser.
3. It is currently classified as Endangered under the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation

- **Statement 1:** Correct. The Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) is native to the Indian subcontinent.
- **Statement 2:** Correct. It is an important **seed disperser**, contributing to forest regeneration.
- **Statement 3:** Incorrect. The species is listed as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List.

4.2. RESTORED MANSBAL LAKE ATTRACTS MIGRATORY BIRDS

Context

- **Recently, Manasbal Lake** in Jammu & Kashmir's Ganderbal district witnessed the return of migratory birds following **ecological restoration measures**, signalling the revival of its biodiversity and ecological health.



Geographical & Physical Features of Mansbal Lake

- **Location:** Ganderbal District, Jammu & Kashmir.
- **Deepest Freshwater Lake:** It is recognized as the deepest freshwater lake in the country, reaching a maximum depth of **43 feet (approx. 13 meters)**.
- **Dimensions:** The lake measures roughly 3.5 km in length and 1.5 km in breadth.
- **Hydrology & Mixing Type:** Classified as a **warm monomictic lake**, it undergoes thermal stratification from March to November and circulates completely once a year. It lacks major surface inlet channels and is primarily sustained by internal springs and precipitation.
- **Drainage:** The surplus water drains out into the **Jhelum River** via an outlet channel.

Historical & Cultural Footprint:

- It features the ruins of **Jharokha Bagh**, a 17th-century Mughal garden built by Empress Nur Jahan.
- An ancient Hindu temple dating back to the 8th–9th century (Avantivarman era) was unearthed on its shores during restoration.

Avian Diversity & Ecological Recovery

- Often called the **"Supreme Gem of all Kashmir Lakes"** or **"Bird's Paradise,"** the lake serves as a critical natural staging ground for aquatic birds.
- **Diverse Inhabitants:** It hosts more than 46 species of birds across 23 families.
- **Key Migratory Species:**

- Horned Grebe
- Long-Eared Owl
- White-Headed Duck
- Mallard
- Golden Eagle
- Eurasian Hoopoe, Lesser Pied Kingfisher, and Grey-Backed Shrike.

Threats & Mitigation Framework

- The lake has historically suffered from extensive **eutrophication** driven by excessive aquatic weeds (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), agricultural runoff, and waste accumulation, which severely impeded water circulation.

Restoration Measures

- **De-weeding & Dredging:** Managed by the **Wular-Manasbal Development Authority (WMDA)**, massive clearing initiatives removed over 7,202 cubic meters of surface weeds and dredged an area of 70,000 square feet to restore depth and flow channels.
- **Water Budgeting:** Spearheaded by the **J&K Water Resources Regulatory Authority** to scientifically monitor carrying capacity, water drawls, and maintain the ecosystem's baseline ecological health.
- **Waste Management:** Adoption of a three-pronged purification approach including a dedicated sewage treatment plant (STP) and an integrated solid waste management facility.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Manasbal Lake:

1. It is recognized as the deepest freshwater lake in India.
 2. It is classified as a dimictic lake, meaning its water completely mixes twice a year due to seasonal temperature shifts.
 3. The lake does not have any major surface inlet streams and is primarily fed by internal springs.
- 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. 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Manasbal Lake is recognized as the deepest natural freshwater lake in India, reaching a depth of approximately 43 feet (13 meters).
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** It is a *warm monomictic lake*, not dimictic. Warm monomictic lakes undergo thermal stratification for most of the year (March to November) and circulate/mix completely only *once* a year during the winter.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** The hydrology of Manasbal Lake is unique because it lacks any major perennial surface inlet channels; its main source of water inflow comes from internal underwater springs and precipitation.

5.1. HELIUM: STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE, APPLICATIONS, AND GEOPOLITICS

Context

- China has temporarily suspended helium exports amid fears of global supply disruptions caused by escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Despite producing only 1.6% of global helium and importing over 80% of its own requirements, China's ban is seen as a strategic measure to safeguard its domestic semiconductor (chip manufacturing) and medical sectors amidst global supply strains and tit-for-tat geopolitical moves with the U.S.



Why is Helium Considered a Strategic Resource?

Helium is considered a strategic resource due to its critical role in advanced technologies and national security.

- **Semiconductor Industry:** Used for cooling silicon wafers and preventing contamination during chip manufacturing.
- **Medical Sector:** Liquid helium cools superconducting magnets in MRI machines and other cryogenic equipment.
- **Space and Defence:** Essential for rocket propulsion systems, satellites, and missile technologies.
- **Scientific Research:** Used in particle accelerators, quantum computing, and low-temperature experiments.
- **Electronics and Fibre Optics:** Important for manufacturing fibre-optic cables and high-performance electronic devices.

What is Helium?

- Helium (He) is the **second-lightest element** and the second most abundant element in the universe after hydrogen.
- It is a noble gas (Group 18) with atomic number 2.
- It is chemically inert, colourless, odourless, and non-toxic.
- Helium has **the lowest boiling point** among all elements (-268.9°C).
- It remains liquid only at extremely low temperatures.
- Due to its **non-reactive nature**, helium is classified as an **inert gas**.

How is Helium Produced?

- Helium is a non-renewable natural resource and it is primarily extracted from natural gas fields.
- It is produced naturally through the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium deep within the Earth's crust.
- Over millions of years, helium accumulates in natural gas reservoirs.
- It is commercially extracted only when natural gas contains at least 0.3% helium.
- Helium is separated from natural gas **using cryogenic distillation**, exploiting its unique boiling point.
- Commercial helium is typically purified to **99.997% purity**.

Why Is Helium Difficult to Store and Transport?

- Helium liquefies at extremely low temperatures.
- It must be stored in highly specialised cryogenic containers.
- The gas can be stored in underground salt caverns, which reduce leaks significantly.
- The gas can easily leak because helium atoms are extremely small.
- During transportation, some helium evaporates continuously.
- Building helium storage infrastructure requires huge investments.
- Helium **can only be transported in vacuum-jacketed stainless steel vessels** — which are manufactured by relatively few companies worldwide, including several Chinese ones.

Major Global Producers

- **United States:** The largest producer, meeting **43%** of the global supply.
- **Qatar:** Meets **33%** of global demand, acting as a major supplier to Asian markets.
- **Other Key Producers:** Russia, Canada, and Algeria.

Q. With reference to Helium, consider the following statements:

1. Helium is produced naturally through the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium within the Earth's crust.
2. Helium is commercially extracted mainly from natural gas reservoirs.
3. Helium has the highest boiling point among all elements.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** Helium is formed naturally through the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium deep inside the Earth's crust.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Helium is primarily extracted from natural gas fields containing commercially viable concentrations.
- **Statement 3 is Incorrect:** Helium has the **lowest boiling point** among all elements (-268.9°C).

5.2. DRONE-BASED TRANSPORT OF TB SAMPLES

Context

- A study under Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s **i-DRONE initiative**, conducted by AIIMS Bibinagar in Telangana, found that drones can efficiently transport TB sputum samples and improve healthcare access by bridging the last-mile gap in remote areas.



Key Highlights of the Study

- **Dramatic Cost Reduction:** The average out-of-pocket expenditure for patients (which includes medical expenses, travel, food, and wage loss for patients and attendants) plummeted from ₹9,451 to just ₹91 (or ₹90.9).
- **Turnaround Time Slashed:** The total time required for diagnosis was reduced significantly from 15 days to just 5 days.
- **Improved Reporting Efficiency:** Before the intervention, over 92% of patients had to wait more than two days to receive their test results. With the introduction of the drone phase, **76.3% of patients received their results the next day**, and only 16.3% experienced delays beyond two days.
- **Operational Workflow:** Suspected TB patients in remote villages (located 10 km to 30 km from the nearest diagnostic facility) only need to visit their local **Primary Health Centre (PHC)** or subcentre.

About the i-DRONE Initiative

- **Full Form: Drone Response and Outreach in North East (i-DRONE).**
- **Nodal Agency:** Formulated and driven by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).**
- **Evolution:** Originally conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver vaccines to geographically isolated and challenging terrains (initially rolled out in Manipur, Nagaland, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands).
- **Expanded Horizon:** The platform has since scaled up across the country to transport:
 - Blood bags and blood-related products under specific low-temperature controls.
 - Essential medications to high-altitude and sub-zero temperature zones (e.g., Himachal Pradesh).
 - **Ophthalmic biomaterials** like human corneas and amniotic membrane grafts for time-sensitive transplant surgeries.
 - **Sputum samples and DOTS medications** supporting the **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)**

About Tuberculosis (TB)

- **Causative Agent:** Tuberculosis is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and primarily affects the lungs.
- **Transmission:** It spreads through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks.
- **Vaccine:** The **BCG vaccine** protects against severe forms of TB, especially in children.
- **National Goal:** India aims to eliminate TB by **2025** under the **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP).**

Q. With reference to the i-DRONE initiative and Tuberculosis (TB), consider the following statements:

1. The i-DRONE initiative was originally launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver vaccines in geographically challenging regions.
2. Under the initiative, drones are used only for transporting sputum samples related to tuberculosis.
3. Tuberculosis is caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and spreads through the air.

4. India aims to eliminate tuberculosis by 2025 under the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP). 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) 1, 3 and 4 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The **i-DRONE (Drone Response and Outreach in North East)** initiative was conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver vaccines to geographically isolated regions such as Manipur, Nagaland, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- **Statement 2 is Incorrect:** The initiative has expanded beyond TB sample transportation to include blood bags, medicines, ophthalmic biomaterials, and other healthcare supplies.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Tuberculosis is caused by the bacterium **Mycobacterium tuberculosis** and spreads through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or speaks.
- **Statement 4 is Correct:** India has set the target of eliminating TB by **2025** under the **National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP)**.

5.3. ISRO SUCCESSFULLY TESTS KEY CREW MODULE SYSTEMS FOR GAGANYAAN MISSION

Context

- Recently, the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** successfully conducted three major qualification tests of the **Gaganyaan Crew Module**, validating critical crew safety, separation, and recovery systems.

About Gaganyaan Mission

- **Gaganyaan is India's first indigenous human spaceflight mission**, being implemented by the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**.
- **Objective:** To demonstrate India's capability to send **three astronauts** to **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** (about **400 km**) for **up to three days** and safely return them to Earth.
- The mission will be launched aboard the **Human-rated LVM3** launch vehicle.
- It represents a major step towards **India's indigenous human spaceflight capability** and future space exploration missions.



Key Qualification Tests of Gaganyaan Mission

1. Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS)

- The **Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS)** ensures that the Crew Module returns to an upright position after **sea splashdown**.
- It uses a **stored cold-gas inflation system** to automatically inflate flotation bags and restore the capsule if it lands upside down.

- The system is crucial for **astronaut safety and post-landing recovery operations**.

2. Crew Module Umbilical System (CSU-2)

- The **Crew Module Umbilical-2 (CSU-2)** connects the **Crew Module (CM)** and the **Service Module (SM)** by transmitting **power, data and communication**.
- The qualification test successfully demonstrated the **clean separation** of the Crew Module from the Service Module before atmospheric re-entry.
- It also validated the **structural integrity** of the separation mechanism.

3. Apex Cover Separation Test

- The **Apex Cover** protects the **parachute system** during launch and orbital flight.
- The successful test validated its **safe separation** before parachute deployment.
- This ensures the proper deployment of parachutes for **controlled deceleration and safe splashdown** of the Crew Module.

Significance of the Tests

- They **strengthen astronaut safety** during **re-entry, splashdown, and recovery**.
- They validate **critical crew separation, recovery, and parachute deployment systems**.
- They mark another important step in advancing **India's indigenous human spaceflight capability** and future missions, including the **Bharatiya Antariksh Station**.

Conclusion

The successful qualification of the **Crew Module Uprighting System, Crew Module Umbilical System, and Apex Cover Separation System** marks a significant milestone in the **Gaganyaan Mission**. These tests reinforce India's readiness for safe human spaceflight and reflect the growing maturity of its indigenous space technology.

Q. With reference to the Gaganyaan Mission, consider the following statements:

1. Gaganyaan is India's first indigenous human spaceflight mission, aimed at sending astronauts to Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and safely returning them to Earth.
2. The Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS) helps the Crew Module regain an upright position after sea splashdown.
3. The Service Module is the pressurised habitable module that carries astronauts during the mission.
4. The mission will be launched using the human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer (a)

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Gaganyaan is India's first indigenous human spaceflight mission, which aims to demonstrate India's capability to send astronauts to Low Earth Orbit (around 400 km) for up to three days and safely return them to Earth.

- **Statement 2 is correct:** The Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS) helps restore the Crew Module to an upright position after sea splashdown by using a cold-gas inflation system to deploy flotation bags.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The Crew Module, not the Service Module, is the pressurised habitable module that carries astronauts and supports life during the mission.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Gaganyaan will be launched using the human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle developed by ISRO.

5.4. INDIA'S FIRST HYDROGEN-POWERED TRAIN

Context:

- Recently, Indian Railways inaugurated India's first indigenous hydrogen fuel cell-powered train, marking a major step towards clean and sustainable transportation.
- Scheduled to commence operations on 17 July 2026 on the **Jind-Sonipat section of the Northern Railway**, the train generates electricity onboard using hydrogen and is supported by dedicated storage and refuelling infrastructure



Key Features of the Hydrogen Powered Train

- **10-car** hydrogen fuel cell-based trainset.
- Powered by a **1200 kW** hydrogen fuel cell propulsion system.
- Approved to operate at a maximum speed of 75 kmph with a design speed of 110 kmph.
- Capacity of Around 2,600 Passengers.
- Developed from the design stage through prototype manufacturing.
- It will connect Jind Junction, Gohana Junction and Sonipat while serving intermediate stations.
- Proposed halts include Jind City, Pandu Pindara Junction, Lalit Khera Halt, Bhambhewa, Isapur Kheri Halt, Butane Halt, Khandrai Halt, Rabrah Halt, Lath Halt, Mohana, Barwasni Halt and Sonipat New.

Technology Behind the Train

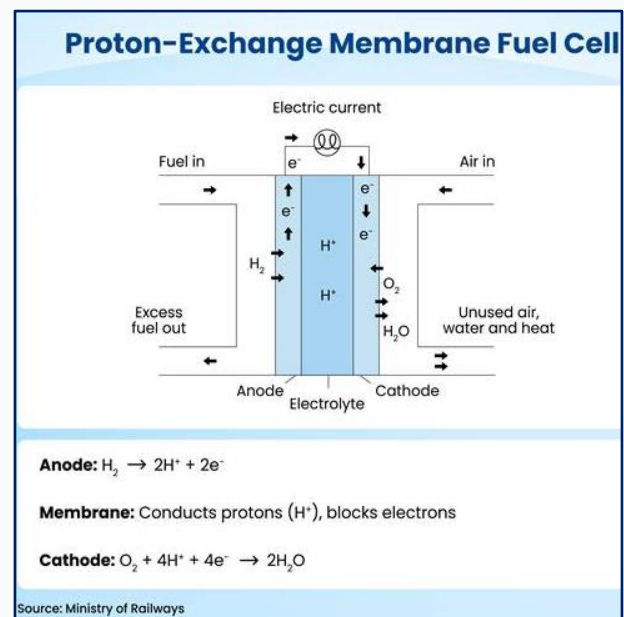
- **Working Principle:** Hydrogen fuel cell technology generates electricity through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen.
- **Technology Used:** The train is powered by a **Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC)**.
- **PEMFC Mechanism:** It produces electricity by reacting hydrogen and oxygen across a proton-conducting Perfluorosulfonic Acid (PFSA) polymer membrane.
- **By-products:** The process emits only water vapour and heat, ensuring near-zero emissions.
- **High Energy Density:** Hydrogen has an energy content of 120 MJ/kg, significantly higher than diesel's 43 MJ/kg.
- **Advantages:** It is a low-maintenance technology with a relatively small carbon footprint.
- **Significance:** Hydrogen fuel cells are considered the cleanest propulsion technology currently available for rail transport.
- **Supporting Infrastructure:** Indian Railways has developed dedicated hydrogen storage, refuelling and operational infrastructure to support the technology.

Hydrogen Infrastructure

- The country's largest railway hydrogen storage and refuelling facility has been established at **Jind, Haryana**.
- The indigenous facility can store nearly **3,000 kg of hydrogen** at a time to support hydrogen-powered train operations.
- The required licence for storage and dispensing of compressed hydrogen gas has been granted by the **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)**.
- The hydrogen ecosystem has been designed in accordance with international standards, including **NFPA-2** and the **ISO 19880 Series**.
- The entire system has undergone an independent third-party safety assessment by **TÜV SÜD, Germany**.
- The train comprises **two Hydrogen Driving Power Cars (DPCs)** and **eight Trailer Coaches (TCs)**.
- Each DPC houses:
 - Fuel cells.
 - Lithium iron phosphate (LFP) batteries.
 - Hydrogen storage cylinders.
- The supporting infrastructure includes:
 - A hydrogen compression system for refuelling operations.
 - Technical support and critical spare parts.
 - A standby compressor to ensure uninterrupted refuelling.
- The integrated infrastructure ensures safe and efficient hydrogen-powered rail operations.

Safety Measures

- Hydrogen leak detectors have been installed at the production, storage and dispensing facilities.
- Flame detectors have also been installed for continuous monitoring.
- Safety sensors will undergo regular inspection and cleaning.
- Non-stop ventilation keeps air moving through the train at all times.
- If anything unusual is detected, like heat, flame or smoke, the system can automatically cut off the hydrogen supply on its own.
- The Loco Pilot's cabin has been designed with a special mode that allows the train to be moved to safety in an emergency.
- A screen shows the real health of the whole system to the Loco Pilot at all times.
- Inspection and maintenance schedules have been prescribed to ensure safe operations.



Q. With reference to India's first hydrogen fuel cell-powered train, consider the following statements:

1. The train generates electricity onboard through a Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC) using hydrogen and oxygen.
2. Hydrogen fuel cells emit only water vapour and heat as by-products at the point of use.
3. The hydrogen storage and refuelling facility established at Jind can store nearly 30,000 kg of hydrogen at a time.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The train is powered by a Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC), which generates electricity through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Hydrogen fuel cells produce only water vapour and heat as by-products, resulting in near-zero emissions at the point of use.
- **Statement 3 is Incorrect:** The hydrogen storage and refuelling facility at Jind, Haryana, can store nearly **3,000 kg**, not 30,000 kg, of hydrogen.

5.5. GLOBAL BIDS INVITED FOR 10 GWH ACC BATTERY MANUFACTURING UNDER PLI SCHEME

Context

- **The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI)** has invited global bids to select beneficiaries for establishing **10 GWh of mega-scale Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery manufacturing capacity** in India under the **PLI Scheme for ACC Battery Storage**.



- **The entire 10 GWh capacity** is earmarked for **Grid-Scale Stationary Storage (GSSS)** to store electricity generated from **solar and wind energy** for **grid balancing**.

About the PLI-ACC Scheme

- **Approved by:** Union Cabinet, **May 2021**
- **Full name:** National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI)
- **Total outlay:** ₹18,100 crore
- **Target capacity:** 50 GWh of domestic ACC manufacturing
- **Objective:** Reduce India's dependence on **imported ACCs**, strengthen domestic manufacturing capability, and build a **globally competitive battery-manufacturing ecosystem**.

Allocation So Far (40 GWh of 50 GWh target)

- **Ola Electric** -20 GWh

- **Reliance New Energy** -15 GWh (5 GWh in the first round + 10 GWh in a later round, after Hyundai Global Motors withdrew its original 20 GWh allocation)
- **Rajesh Exports** -5 GWh
- Balance **10 GWh** now thrown open via the fresh global tender.

Key Features of New Tender

- Beneficiaries for the 10 GWh capacity—reserved exclusively for Grid-Scale Stationary Storage (GSSS) rather than earlier EV battery allocations—will be selected via a global competitive RFP on the CPP Portal using a two-stage QCBS process.
- Key dates include tender document availability on 15 July 2026, a pre-bid conference on 29 July 2026, the bid submission deadline on 13 October 2026, and technical bid openings on 14 October 2026.

What is an Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC)?

- ACCs are new-generation energy storage devices that store electric energy either as **electrochemical or chemical energy** and convert it back to electric energy as and when required.
- Includes technologies such as **Lithium-ion** and other advanced battery chemistries used in EVs, consumer electronics, and grid storage.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage:

1. The scheme was approved with the objective of achieving 50 GWh of domestic ACC manufacturing capacity.
2. The entire 50 GWh capacity under the scheme has already been fully allocated to domestic manufacturers.
3. The newly tendered 10 GWh capacity is earmarked specifically for Grid-Scale Stationary Storage applications.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 -Correct:** The scheme's target is 50 GWh of domestic ACC manufacturing capacity, with a ₹18,100 crore outlay.
- **Statement 2 -Incorrect:** Only **40 GWh** has been allocated so far; the remaining **10 GWh** is under the fresh global tender -allocation is not complete.
- **Statement 3 -Correct:** The new 10 GWh capacity is explicitly earmarked for **Grid-Scale Stationary Storage (GSSS)** applications, distinct from earlier EV-focused allocations.

HISTORY & CULTURE

6.1. BADAGA COMMUNITY OF NILGIRIS & DEVVA HABBA FESTIVAL

Context

- Members of the **Badaga community** in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, recently celebrated their traditional harvest festival, **Devva Habba**, at a sacred forest temple (*banagudi*) in Udthagamandalam (Ooty).



Who are the Badagas?

- Location:** They are the largest indigenous ethno-linguistic group residing in the **Nilgiri Hills (Blue Mountains)** of Tamil Nadu, living across nearly 400 distinct hill hamlets known as **Hattis**.
- Linguistic Profile:** They speak **Badaga (Badugu)**, a distinct Dravidian language closely related to 16th-century Old Kannada. It has no unique script of its own and is typically written using the Kannada script.
- Socio-Economic Profile:** Traditionally known as the agriculturists of the Nilgiris plateau, they revolutionized small-scale highland tea farming, alongside the cultivation of millets, potatoes, and cabbage.
- Inter-tribal Relations:** Historically, the Badagas maintained a complex socio-ecological symbiosis with other Nilgiri tribes, including the **Toda** (pastoralists), **Kota** (artisans), and **Kurumba** (forest dwellers/honey-gatherers).

About Devva Habba & Rituals

- Devva Habba is a traditional harvest festival celebrated by the Badaga tribe of the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu.
- It is observed to express gratitude for a successful harvest and to seek blessings for prosperity and well-being.
- The festival begins with the ritual of Niligolu, in which sacred fire is traditionally produced by friction using wooden sticks or stones (Chikkimukki kallu).
- The sacred fire is then used to boil milk and cook barley (ganje).
- The ritual feast, prepared without salt or sugar, is offered to the ancestors.
- The celebrations are marked by community prayers, folk songs, and traditional dances.
- Members from several Badaga villages participate in the festivities.

Legal & Constitutional Dimension: The ST Status Debate

- Current Status:** The Badaga community is classified under the **Other Backward Classes (OBC)** category in Tamil Nadu.
- Historical Classification:** They were designated as an "important primitive tribe" in the 1931 Census during the British Raj and retained the status in the 1951 Census before being de-scheduled.

- **Recent Judicial Ruling (March 2025):** The Madras High Court dismissed a petition seeking a revised proposal for their ST status, noting that the Registrar General of India (RGI) did not concur with their inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes list due to a lack of traditional tribal vulnerability.

Q. With reference to the Badaga community and Devva Habba festival, consider the following statements:

1. The Badagas are the largest indigenous ethno-linguistic community of the Nilgiri Hills.
2. Badaga is an Indo-Aryan language written in the Tamil script.
3. Devva Habba begins with the ritual of Niligolu, in which sacred fire is produced by friction.
4. The Badaga community is currently classified as a Scheduled Tribe in Tamil Nadu.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

Explanation

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The Badagas are the largest indigenous ethno-linguistic group in the Nilgiri Hills.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Badaga is a **Dravidian language** and is generally written in the Kannada script.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** The festival begins with **Niligolu**, a ritual involving the production of sacred fire through friction.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** The Badagas are currently included in the **OBC category**, not the Scheduled Tribes list.

6.2. RATH YATRA: PURI'S GRAND CHARIOT FESTIVAL

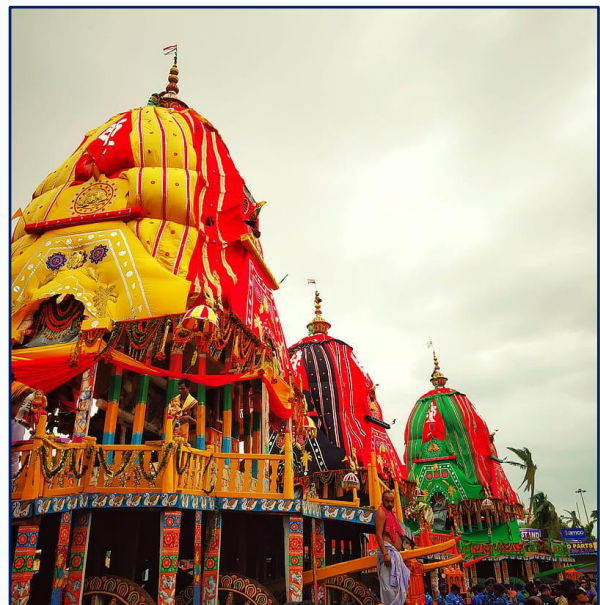
Context

- Recently, President **Droupadi Murmu**, ahead of the **Rath Yatra** beginning on **16 July 2026** in Puri, shared her lifelong devotion to **Lord Jagannath**, describing the festival as the most spectacular celebration in Puri. The event has once again brought the **Jagannath tradition and Odisha's cultural heritage** into national focus.

Key Facts

1. The Deities & Cultural Core

- **The Triad:** The festival revolves around three deities: **Lord Jagannath** (a form of Lord Vishnu/Krishna), his elder brother **Lord Balabhadra**, and his younger sister **Goddess Subhadra**, along with the weapon **Sudarshana Chakra**.



- **Material & Renewal:** Unlike the stone or metal idols typical of most Hindu shrines, these idols are crafted out of sacred neem wood (**Daru Brahma**). They are ceremonially replaced every 12 to 19 years in a ritual known as **Nabakalebara**.
- **Anasara Period:** Following the annual ritual bathing festival (**Snana Yatra**), the deities are believed to fall ill and are kept away from public view for 15 days, during which they are represented by traditional Odia cloth paintings called **Anasara Pattis**.

2. The Chariots (Raths)

The three grand wooden chariots are constructed fresh every year starting on *Akshaya Tritiya* without using metal nails, employing ancient joinery techniques instead.

Deity	Chariot Name	Canopy Colours	Number of Wheels
Lord Jagannath	Nandighosa (or Garudadhwa)	Red and Yellow	16 wheels
Lord Balabhadra	Taladhwa	Red and Bluish-Green/Green	14 wheels
Goddess Subhadra	Darpadalana (or Devadalana)	Red and Black	12 wheels

3. Key Rituals

- **Chhera Pahanra:** The Gajapati King of Puri sweeps the floor of the chariots with a golden broom before the procession starts. This ritual signifies absolute equality before the divine, demonstrating that even the highest temporal authority is a humble servant.
- **Gundicha Yatra & Return:** The deities travel along the **Bada Danda** (Grand Avenue) to the Gundicha Temple (their aunt's home), staying for nine days before making their return journey, known as the **Bahuda Yatra**.

Shree Jagannath Temple

- **Historical Origin:** Built in the **12th Century CE** by **King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva** of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty, and completed by Anangabhimha Deva III.
- **Style:** A classic example of the **Kalinga style of architecture** (a distinct sub-style of the Northern Nagara style).
- **Temple Layout:** It is a *Pancharatha* plan temple built on an elevated platform. It features four main interconnected axial structures:
 - **Vimana / Deula:** The sanctum sanctorum housing the deities.
 - **Jagamohana:** The assembly hall for devotees.
 - **Natamandira:** The dancing/festival hall.
 - **Bhogamandapa:** The hall for food offerings.
- **Key Identifiers:**
 - Known historically to sailors as the **"White Pagoda"** (while the Konark Sun Temple was called the "Black Pagoda").



- It is one of the standard **Char Dham** pilgrimage sites (alongside Badrinath, Dwarka, and Rameswaram).
- The top of the temple is adorned with the **Nilachakra** (an eight-spoked alloy wheel) and the fortifying outer boundary wall is named **Meghanada Pacheri**.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Puri Rath Yatra and the Jagannath Temple architecture:

1. Unlike traditional Hindu shrines, the idols of the main triad are carved from sacred wood and undergo a ceremonial renewal process known as *Nabakalebara*.
2. The *Chhera Pahanra* ritual, where the Gajapati King sweeps the chariots, symbolizes the concept of absolute spiritual equality.
3. The temple complex represents the Nagara sub-style of architecture and was constructed by the rulers of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.

Which of the statements database 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: D) 1, 2 and 3

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The idols are made of sacred neem wood (*Daru Brahma*) and are periodically replaced in the *Nabakalebara* ritual, unlike stone or metal idols.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The ritual of the King of Puri sweeping the chariots with a golden broom highlights that everyone, regardless of social or temporal rank, is equal before the divine.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** The Shree Jagannath Temple is a classic specimen of the Kalinga architecture (a distinct sub-style of the Nagara style) and was commissioned by King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty in the 12th century.

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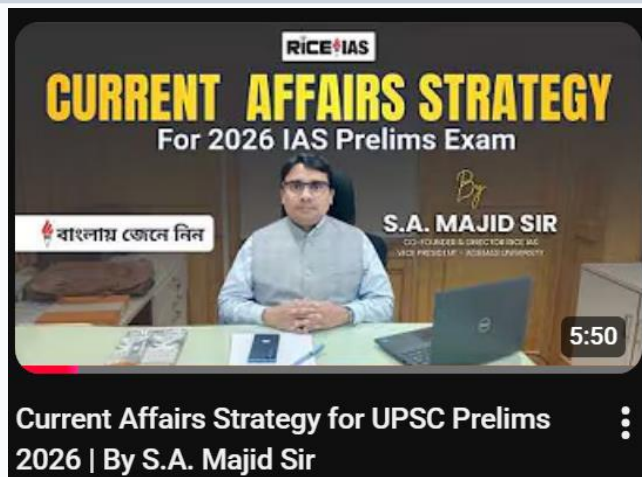
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