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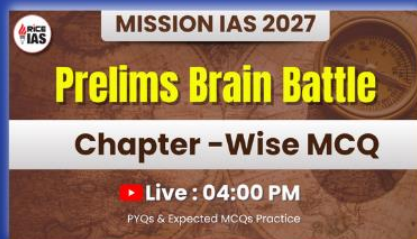
Daily newspaper analysis focused on the most relevant issues from The Hindu.



MONDAY – SATURDAY

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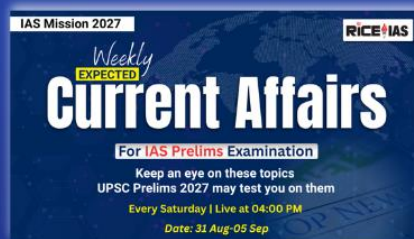
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MONDAY – FRIDAY | 4:00 PM (Live)

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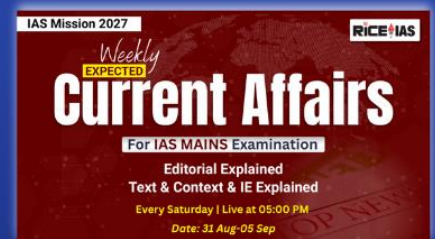
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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1. SUPREME COURT RESTRICTS BCI AUTHORITY OVER LAW STUDENTS

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court of India ruled that neither the **Bar Council of India (BCI)** nor State Bar Councils possess statutory jurisdiction or powers under the Advocates Act, 1961, to take disciplinary or punitive actions against law students.



Key SC Observations

- The Court held that the **Advocates Act, 1961** does not confer either an express or implied power on the BCI or State Bar Councils to discipline students pursuing legal education.
- The Court clarified that disciplinary action against law students falls within the authority of their parent university/institution or any authority specifically empowered under its regulations/by-laws.
- BCI's disciplinary powers under the Act are limited to registered/enrolled advocates only — not students who haven't yet enrolled.
- BCI's disciplinary jurisdiction** applies after enrolment as **an advocate**.
- Studying law alone does not place students under Bar Council discipline.

About Bar Council of India (BCI)

- Nature: Statutory body.
- Parent legislation: Advocates Act, 1961.
- Primary role: Regulation of the legal profession and legal education in India.
- It lays down standards of professional conduct and etiquette for advocates.
- BCI Chairperson is elected by its members (not a government appointee).

About Advocates Act, 1961

- Consolidated law relating to legal practitioners; created **All India Bar** with common roll of advocates.
- Established BCI at the Centre and **State Bar Councils** in states.
- Provides for two classes: **Senior Advocates** and **other advocates**.

Fundamental Rights Intersecting the Ruling

- Article 19(1)(a):** Protects the freedom of speech and expression, including the right of students to peaceful dissent and protest.
- Article 19(1)(c):** Guarantees the right to form associations or unions.

Advocate vs Lawyer: Key Difference

Lawyer	Advocate
A person who has studied law and holds a law degree.	A lawyer who is enrolled with a State Bar Council and is entitled to practise law in courts.

May work in legal consultancy, corporate jobs, academia, etc.	Can represent clients before courts and tribunals , subject to applicable rules.
The term is broader.	It is a specific professional status under the Advocates Act, 1961.

1.2. NICOTINE POUCHES AND INDIA'S REGULATORY GAP

Context

- A recent study by **ICMR–National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research (NICPR)** has highlighted the growing availability of **nicotine pouches** in India through online platforms, tobacco/hookah shops and delivery services.



What are Nicotine Pouches?

- Nicotine pouches are **small, tobacco-free oral products** containing:
 - Nicotine
 - Flavouring agents
 - Plant-based fibres and other ingredients
- They are placed between the **lip and gum**, from where nicotine is absorbed through the oral mucosa.

Why does a Regulatory Gap Arise?

India's major nicotine-related laws were designed around **specific categories of products**, such as:

1. COTPA, 2003

- The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) regulates cigarettes and tobacco products.
- Since nicotine pouches are marketed as **tobacco-free**, their automatic classification under COTPA is legally problematic.

2. PECA, 2019

- The **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act (PECA)** prohibits the production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement of **electronic cigarettes**.

Why nicotine pouches fall outside this framework?

- Because they are:
 - Not electronic
 - Do not generate vapour/aerosol
 - Do not require a vaping device

Could Nicotine Pouches Be Treated as Drugs?

- This is another issue raised by their legal classification.
- The **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** regulates drugs and certain therapeutic products.
- Nicotine is used in **nicotine-replacement therapies (NRTs)** such as: Nicotine patches, Nicotine lozenges.
- These are intended to help in **tobacco cessation**.
- However, a nicotine pouch intended for **recreational nicotine consumption** cannot automatically be treated as a therapeutic drug merely because it contains nicotine.

Can They Be Sold at Duty-Free Shops?

- Duty-free does not mean law-free.
- A duty-free shop primarily concerns customs-duty treatment. It does not automatically exempt a product from other applicable laws or import restrictions.
- Hence, the mere presence of a nicotine pouch in a duty-free environment does **not by** itself establish that its import or sale is legally permissible.

1.3. FSSAI's FRONT-OF-PACK WARNING LABELS ON PACKAGED FOODS

Context

- Recently, the **Supreme Court** has sought clarity from the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** on its proposed **front-of-pack warning labels** for packaged foods high in **added sugar, salt and fat**. FSSAI has proposed **red hexagonal warning labels**, with nutrient thresholds linked to the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**.



Supreme Court's Key Concerns

- **Ambiguous Nutrient Thresholds:** Questioned the clarity and scientific methodology FSSAI uses to determine when packaged food is classified as "high" in salt, sugar, or saturated fats.
- **Child and Public Health Risks:** Emphasized that weak or delayed food safety standards pose direct long-term health risks, particularly to growing children.
- **Regulatory Laxity:** Urged FSSAI to treat **front-of-pack** warning label enforcement as a critical matter of "national interest" rather than delaying action.

What are Front-of-Pack Warning Labels?

- **Front-of-Pack Labelling (FoPL)** provides simplified nutritional information on the **front side of packaged food**, allowing consumers to identify important health-related information quickly.
- Warning labels are intended to highlight products containing **high levels of nutrients of concern**, such as sugar, salt/sodium and fats.
- FSSAI's proposed system uses a **red hexagonal warning** to alert consumers when a packaged food crosses the prescribed threshold for specified nutrients.

Basis for Determining “High” Levels

- FSSAI has indicated that the proposed thresholds would be based on the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**.
- These guidelines were developed by the **ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN)**.
- The Supreme Court has sought greater clarity on **how the regulator will determine the threshold beyond which a food product will be classified as “high”** in sugar, salt or fat.

About FSSAI

- FSSAI** is India's statutory food-safety regulator.
- It was established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- It works under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- Its broad mandate includes:
 - Setting **food standards**.
 - Regulating the **manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food**.
 - Ensuring the **availability of safe and wholesome food**.
 - Providing scientific and regulatory frameworks for food safety.

1.4. FOREST RIGHTS ACT & GRAM SABHA CONSENT

Context

- A recent debate has emerged over whether Gram Sabha consent is legally mandatory for projects involving diversion of forest land under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA).



Core Dispute

- MoTA’s Legal Standpoint:** Ministry of Tribal Affairs clarified that the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 does not contain any provision requiring Gram Sabha consent for **stage –II forest clearance**, matters concerning such consent do not fall under the Ministry’s purview.
- The Regulatory Mandate (Forest Conservation Guidelines):** While the text of the FRA lacks the explicit terminology, guidelines under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** specifically require that all FRA processes be completed—and a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) secured from affected Gram Sabhas—before forest land can be formally diverted.

What is the Forest Rights Act, 2006?

Parameter	Statutory Provision
Nodal Authority	Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA). Implementation at the ground level rests with State/UT Governments.
Beneficiaries	FDST: Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes living in the area prior to December 13, 2005 .

	OTFD: Other Traditional Forest Dwellers residing for at least 3 generations (75 years) prior to Dec 13, 2005.
Ceiling Limit	Individual Forest Rights (IFR) land holding is capped at a maximum of 4 hectares per family for actual occupation.
Gram Sabha Authority	Statutory authority to initiate the process of determining nature and extent of individual or community forest rights (CFR).
Appellate Machinery	3-Tier Structure: Gram Sabha → Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) → District Level Committee (DLC). The DLC's decision is final and binding.

Role of the Gram Sabha under FRA

- The **Gram Sabha is the primary authority** under the FRA for initiating and determining forest rights claims.
- Key functions:
 - Receives and verifies claims.
 - Prepares resolutions on forest rights.
 - Determines the nature and extent of rights.
 - Plays a crucial role in protecting **community forest resources**.
 - Exercises responsibilities relating to conservation and management of forest resources.
- Niyamgiri Judgment (2013):** *Orissa Mining Corporation v. Ministry of Environment & Forest* — The Supreme Court held that the Gram Sabha has the ultimate authority under **PESA and FRA** to decide whether mining/diversion affects religious, cultural, or community rights over forest land.

Key takeaway

- The controversy is essentially about **the distinction between:**
- “Consent expressly mandated by the FRA” and “Procedural requirements imposed through forest-diversion guidelines to ensure FRA compliance.”**

Proposed Reform

- A **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings** examined delays in forest clearances for NHPC hydropower projects.
- Average forest-clearance time for under-construction hydropower projects was reported at **106 months**.
- Teesta-IV Hydroelectric Project** was reportedly stalled due to pending consent from some Gram Panchayats.
- The committee supported replacing **unanimous consent** with a **70–75% “qualified super-majority”** for large hydropower projects of national importance.
- It recommended that the **Power Ministry** examine the proposal in consultation with the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs**.

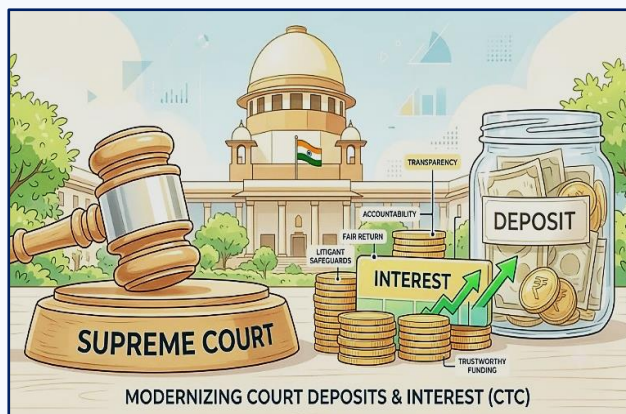
1.5. SUPREME COURT CALLS FOR LAW TO SAFEGUARD COURT DEPOSITS

Context

- Recently, the **Supreme Court** called for a **uniform statutory framework** to regulate litigants' court deposits, ensuring their **proper investment and protection of time value and interest**.

What are Court Deposits?

- Court deposits** are amounts deposited by litigants with a court/tribunal, often as a condition for obtaining a **stay, pursuing an appeal or complying with a judicial order**.
- The money remains subject to the outcome or directions of the court.
- Since cases can remain pending for years, **how the deposited money is invested and whether it earns interest** becomes important.



Why Did the Supreme Court Raise the Issue?

- Different courts follow **different methods** for handling deposited money.
- Some courts invest deposits in **Fixed Deposits (FDs)**, while others follow different banking or government-security mechanisms.
- Such differences can result in **unequal treatment of similarly placed litigants**.
- Lack of uniformity can also create disputes regarding **investment, accounting and interest**.

Supreme Court's Proposed Approach

The Court suggested:

- A **uniform mechanism** for handling court deposits.
- Deposited money could be pooled through a **common platform**.
- The pooled funds could be invested in an appropriate **financial instrument** to protect their value and generate returns.
- It referred to the **U.S. Court Registry Investment System (CRIS)** as an international model worth examining.
- It requested the **Law Commission of India** to examine the need for legislation and consult relevant institutions, including the **RBI, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Law & Justice**.

Examples of Different Practices



Delhi High Court: Court deposits are provided for being kept in **fixed deposits** under its Original Side Rules.



Allahabad High Court: Certain court deposits are sent to the **State Bank of India**.



Calcutta High Court: Certain deposits are held through the **Reserve Bank of India** mechanism.



Madras High Court: Uses **Suitors' Funds Accounts** with RBI and specified securities.

Existing Supreme Court Position

- In **K.L. Suneja v. Dr. Manjeet Kaur Monga (2023)**, the Supreme Court had directed courts and judicial forums to frame guidelines so that money deposited with their registry/office is **mandatorily placed in a bank or financial institution**, thereby preventing loss to litigants.

1.6. REMOVAL OF THE CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

Context

- **Recently**, opposition parties submitted a Rajya Sabha notice signed by 63 MPs seeking the removal of **CEC**, invoking **Article 324(5)** and related removal procedures.

Core Constitutional & Statutory Framework (Article 324)

- **Constitutional Basis:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) functions under **Article 324** of the Constitution.
- **Security of Tenure:** Article 324(5) states that the CEC cannot be removed from office *except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court*.
- **Statutory Reinforcement:** The provisions regarding removal are also aligned with the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.



Grounds & Procedure for Removal of CEC

- **Grounds:** Only **proved misbehaviour or incapacity** under **Article 324(5)**.
- **Initiation:** Motion can begin in either House with **100 Lok Sabha or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs' signatures**.
- **Inquiry:** A **3-member committee** investigates charges under the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**.
- **Parliamentary Approval:** Requires **Special Majority** in both Houses.
- **Final Removal:** Parliament's address is submitted to the **President**, who issues the removal order.
- Till now **no Chief Election Commissioner has ever been impeached or removed** through Parliament.

CEC vs. Other Election Commissioners

Feature	Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)	Other Election Commissioners (ECs)
Removal Method	Removed like a Supreme Court Judge (Special majority + Inquiry)	Can only be removed upon the recommendation of the CEC .
Constitutional Protection	Highest level of security of tenure to insulate the office from executive interference.	Protected against direct executive removal; dependent on the CEC's recommendation.

About CEC

- Under the *Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners Act, 2023*, the CEC and other ECs are appointed by the President based on the recommendation of a 3-member committee comprising:
 - **Prime Minister** (Chairperson)
 - **Leader of the Opposition (LoP)** in the Lok Sabha
 - **A Union Cabinet Minister** nominated by the Prime Minister

- **Nature of the ECI:** It is a multi-member body (one CEC and two Election Commissioners). The CEC functions as "**first among equals**".
- **Section 16, 2023 Act:** Election Commissioners are protected from **civil and criminal proceedings** for official acts when acting **collectively as a multi-member body**.

1.7. SUPREME COURT CLARIFIES RIGHTS OVER NATIONAL SONG

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court held that refusing to sing or recite the National Song on grounds of conscience or religious belief cannot by itself justify criminal prosecution, and it has sought the Union Government's response to a petition challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026 along with related Home Ministry directions.



Supreme Court's Observations

- The Court observed that while the **National Song is not in dispute**, the State cannot infringe the **fundamental rights under Articles 25 and 26** relating to religious freedom.
- A **conscientious objector** cannot be compelled to sing or recite one or more stanzas of the National Song by subjecting them to **criminal prosecution**.
- The Court referred to the **1986 Supreme Court judgment in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala***, which upheld the right to religious freedom of students who respectfully declined to sing the National Anthem.

Constitutional Provisions Involved

- **Article 25:** Freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion.
- **Article 26:** Freedom to manage religious affairs, subject to constitutional limitations.
- **Article 19:** Protects specified freedoms, including freedom of speech and expression.
- The issue involves balancing **respect for national symbols** with **fundamental rights and freedom of conscience**.

About Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971

- The Act provides legal protection to:
 - National Flag
 - Constitution
 - National Anthem
- **2026 Amendment:** The amendment expanded **Section 3** to include the **National Song, Vande Mataram**, along with the National Anthem.
- It provides punishment for intentionally:

- preventing the singing of the **National Anthem or National Song**, or
- causing disturbance to an assembly engaged in such singing.
- **Punishment:** Imprisonment up to **3 years**, or fine, or both.

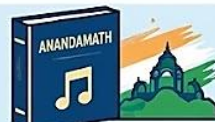
National Anthem vs National Song

India has two important national symbols – the National Anthem and the National Song. While both evoke patriotism and pride, they differ in origin, author, and constitutional status.



NATIONAL ANTHEM “Jana Gana Mana”

Title	Jana Gana Mana
Author	Rabindranath Tagore
Language	Bengali
First Published	1911
Source	<i>Bhoro to Bhagyo Bidhata</i>
Adopted	24 January 1950
Status	National Anthem of India
Constitutional Provision	Article 51A(a) – Fundamental Duty to respect the National Anthem
Historical Significance	Symbol of national unity and sovereignty



NATIONAL SONG “Vande Mataram”

Title	Vande Mataram
Author	Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay
Language	Sanskritised Bengali
First Published	1875
Source	<i>Anandamath</i>
Adopted	24 January 1950
Status	National Song of India
Constitutional Provision	No specific constitutional provision
Historical Significance	Closely associated with the Indian freedom movement, particularly the Swadeshi Movement

About Vande Mataram

Aspect	Fact
Composer	Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay
Language	Sanskritised Bengali
First published	1875
Novel	<i>Anandamath</i>
First Sung	It was first sung at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta, by Rabindranath Tagore.
Freedom movement	Associated particularly with the Swadeshi Movement
Status	The first two stanzas were adopted as the National Song of India.
National Recognition	On 24 January 1950 , Dr Rajendra Prasad stated in the Constituent Assembly that Vande Mataram would be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana .

1.8. SUPREME COURT RULING ON ARTICLE 22(1)

Context

- The Supreme Court held that an arrested person is entitled to immediate release if they are kept in the dark about the grounds of arrest or denied access to a lawyer of their choice, as guaranteed under **Article 22(1)** of the Constitution.



What is Article 22(1)?

- Article 22(1) provides constitutional protection to a person who is arrested.
- It states that an arrested person:
 - Must be informed of the grounds of arrest as soon as possible.
 - Has the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.

Why Must Grounds of Arrest Be Given?

- Understand why they have been arrested.
- Consult a lawyer effectively.
- Challenge the legality of the arrest before a court.
- Exercise other constitutional and legal remedies.
- Therefore, communicating the grounds is not merely a procedural formality, but an important safeguard for personal liberty.

Supreme Court's Key Observations

The Court clarified that:

- Written communication of the grounds of arrest is necessary.
- Simply telling the accused the grounds orally is not enough.
- The grounds should be communicated in a manner and language that the accused can understand.
- If the constitutional requirement is violated, the arrest can be held illegal and the person may be entitled to release.

What if Police Want to Re-arrest?

- Release due to violation of Article 22(1) **does not permanently protect an accused from arrest.**
- For re-arrest:
 - The written grounds of arrest must first be furnished.
 - Police must approach the **concerned Judicial Magistrate**.
 - The application must explain why the grounds were not supplied during the first arrest.
 - The Magistrate must be satisfied that there are **bona fide reasons** and that re-arrest is necessary.
 - The investigation must be transferred to **another officer**.
 - Departmental inquiry can be initiated against the officer responsible for the violation.

1.9. ELECTION COMMISSION'S POWER TO RESOLVE PARTY SYMBOL DISPUTES

Context

- **Recently**, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court by a political leader challenging the Election Commission's (ECI) interim decision to **freeze a political party's symbol** and allot separate temporary names and symbols to rival factions under the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**.

Allotment and Freezing of Election Symbols

- **Statutory Framework:** The allocation, reservation, and freezing of party symbols are governed by the **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968**.
- **Power of the Election Commission:** Under **Paragraph 15** of the 1968 Order, the ECI is the sole authority to decide disputes regarding recognized political parties that split into rival groups or factions.
- **Binding Decision:** The decision of the Election Commission in such disputes is legally binding on all rival sections/factions.

How Does the ECI Resolve Party Symbol Disputes?

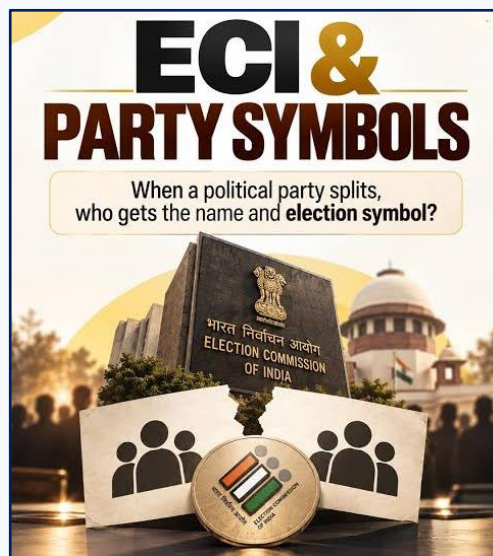
- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** derives its authority from:
 - **Article 324** - Gives the ECI superintendence, direction and control over elections.
 - **Representation of the People Act, 1951** - Provides the framework for political parties.
 - **Election Symbols Order, 1968** - Governs party recognition and symbol allotment. **Paragraph 15** empowers the ECI to decide which faction represents a recognised party and is entitled to its **reserved symbol**; the decision is subject to **judicial review**.

When a Party Dispute Cannot Be Resolved Before an Election

- If the ECI cannot decide a party dispute before an imminent election, it may **freeze the existing party name and reserved symbol temporarily**.
- Neither faction can use the frozen name or symbol.
- Factions receive **separate temporary names**.
- Each is allotted/allowed to choose a **different free symbol**.
- The arrangement remains in force **until the dispute is finally decided**.

How Does the ECI Decide the "Real" Party?

- The Supreme Court held that when determining which faction constitutes the party, the **numerical strength of the rival groups is an important factor**, as the Commission has to determine which group substantially constitutes the party.
- The ECI may consider:
 - **Party Constitution** - Compliance with organisational rules.



- **Organisational Support** - Support among office-bearers, members and delegates.
- **Legislative Support** - Support among elected MPs and MLAs.

What Happens to the Losing Faction?

- The recognised faction retains the **party name and reserved symbol**.
- The other faction cannot use that reserved identity.
- It may continue as a **separate party with a new name and symbol**.
- Future **State or National party recognition** depends on its subsequent electoral performance.

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UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. With reference to the recent Supreme Court judgment concerning the Bar Council of India (BCI), consider the following statements:

1. The BCI derives its statutory powers from the **Advocates Act, 1961**.
2. The BCI has express or implied disciplinary power over law students before their enrolment as advocates.
3. Disciplinary action against law students can be taken by the concerned educational institution under its applicable rules.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The BCI is a statutory body constituted under the **Advocates Act, 1961**.
- **Statement 2 is Incorrect:** The Supreme Court held that the Advocates Act gives the BCI **neither express nor implied power to punish law students**.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** The concerned **university or educational institution** can take disciplinary action against students according to its applicable rules.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding nicotine pouches in India:

1. They contain tobacco leaves and are therefore automatically regulated as tobacco products under COTPA.
2. The Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2019 directly prohibits nicotine pouches.
3. Indian food-safety regulations prohibit the use of nicotine as an ingredient in food products.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 3 only

Statement 1 is Incorrect: Nicotine pouches are **tobacco-free oral products**. They contain nicotine but not tobacco leaves. Therefore, they cannot be automatically treated as tobacco products under **COTPA, 2003** merely because they contain nicotine.

Statement 2 is Incorrect: The **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act (PECA), 2019** specifically targets **electronic cigarettes**. Nicotine pouches are **non-electronic** and do not produce vapour/aerosol. Hence, PECA does not directly cover them.

Statement 3 is Correct: Under India's food-safety framework, **nicotine and tobacco cannot be used as ingredients in food products**. Therefore, the statement is correct.

Q. With reference to front-of-pack warning labels in India, consider the following statements:

1. FSSAI has proposed prominent warning labels on packaged foods containing high levels of specified nutrients such as added sugar, added fat and salt.
2. The proposed thresholds are linked to the Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024.
3. FSSAI is a statutory authority established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
4. Front-of-pack labelling is intended only to provide information about the manufacturing and expiry dates of packaged food.

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

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** FSSAI has proposed prominent warning labels for packaged foods high in specified nutrients such as added fat, added sugar and salt.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** The proposed thresholds are to be based on the **Dietary Guidelines for Indians, 2024**, issued by ICMR-NIN.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** FSSAI is a statutory authority established under the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**.
- **Statement 4 – Incorrect:** Front-of-pack labelling primarily provides **simplified nutritional information**, not merely manufacturing or expiry details.

Q. With reference to the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, consider the following statements:

1. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal ministry for implementation of the FRA.
2. The FRA explicitly mandates 100% Gram Sabha consent for diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.
3. Gram Sabha plays a central role in the recognition and determination of forest rights under the FRA.

4. The proposal for 70–75% “qualified super-majority consent” is an existing statutory requirement under the FRA.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal ministry for the FRA.
- **Statement 2 is Incorrect:** The FRA does **not explicitly mandate 100% Gram Sabha consent** for Stage-II forest clearance.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Gram Sabha is a key authority in the recognition and determination of forest rights.
- **Statement 4 is Incorrect:** The **70–75% qualified super-majority** was a proposal / recommendation for large hydropower projects, not a statutory provision under the FRA.



Scan to attempt more questions

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. INDIA–BELGIUM JOINT STATEMENT

Context

- Recently, the Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever visited India at the invitation of Prime Minister of India. The visit resulted in a wide-ranging India–Belgium Joint Statement covering strategic, economic, defence, technology, energy and people-to-people cooperation.



Historical Foundations & Shared Legacy

- World War I Sacrifice:** Both leaders honored the sacrifice of over 9,000 Indian soldiers in the **Flanders Fields** during WWI. Institutional linkages continue between the **Flanders Fields Museum** (Ypres) and the **Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research (CAFHR)** in New Delhi.
- Diplomatic Milestones:** Belgium was among the earliest European nations to establish diplomatic ties with India in **1947**.

Strategic Bilateral Mechanisms & Multilateral Alliances

- Strategic Dialogue:** Established in **Brussels (July 2026)** to strengthen trade, security and technology ties.
- Investment Fast-Track:** SFPIM–NIIF cooperation to ease regulatory hurdles and promote the **Indo-Belgian Economic Corridor**.
- UNSC:** Mutual support for **India (2028–29)** and **Belgium (2037–38)** non-permanent seats; Belgium backed India's permanent membership in a reformed UNSC.
- Counter-Terrorism:** Proposed a **Joint Working Group**; CBI–Belgian Federal Police MoU targets **organized and cybercrime**.

Trade, Maritime Infrastructure & Economic Growth

- Bilateral Trade Target:** Explicit commitment to **double bilateral trade within the next 5 years**.
- Diamond Trade Synergy:** Endorsed the historic economic pipeline connecting **Antwerp** (Belgium) with **Mumbai** and **Surat** (India).
- Maritime & Port Development:**
 - Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue:** Planned participation of Flanders leadership in New Delhi (Oct 2026).
 - APEC-JNPA Collaboration:** Capacity building between **APEC** (Antwerp/Flanders Port Training Centre) and India's **Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA)**.

Astronomy, Science & Emerging Technologies

- BINA Framework:** Scientific cooperation anchored under the **Belgo-Indian Network for Astronomy and Astrophysics (BINA)**. Belgian collaboration supports landmark Indian facilities:
 - Devasthal Optical Telescope** (Uttarakhand)
 - Devasthal International Liquid Mirror Telescope (ILMT)** (Uttarakhand)

- **Mount Abu Telescope** (Rajasthan)
- **Multi-Application Solar Telescope (MAST)** (Udaipur, Rajasthan)
- **Semiconductor Integration:** Engagement between Indian entities (**ChipIn Centre, C-DAC**) and Belgium's **imec** (a premier research hub in nanoelectronics and digital tech).
- **Innovation & Startups:** Bilateral tie-ups between **MEITY Start Up Hub** (India) and **Hub Brussels** (Belgium).

Clean Energy Transition & Climate Action

- **Renewed Green Hydrogen Framework:** Expanded MoU on Renewable Energy covering green hydrogen, offshore wind energy, solar energy, bio-energy, and pumped storage.
- **Hydrogen Value Chain:** Collaboration driven by **GH2 India**, the **Belgian Hydrogen Council**, and **Flanders Investment & Trade**.
- **Climate Governance:** Shared commitment to the Paris Agreement, BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) Agreement, and ocean governance ahead of COP31.

Defense Collaboration & Talent Mobility

- **Defense Letter of Intent (LoI):** Framework for staff talks, military training exchanges, co-production, and joint R&D. Includes student exchanges with the **College of Defence Management (Secunderabad)** and the Belgian Defence College.
- **Naval Engagement:** Resident **Defence Attachés** in Brussels/New Delhi and Belgian frigate *LEOPOLD I* visit.
- **EU Legal Gateway:** Pilot initiative to facilitate EU mobility for **skilled workers, nurses, researchers and students**.

2.2. INDIA-U.S. ARMIES COMMENCE EXERCISE YUDH ABHYAS 2026

Context

- The Indian and U.S. Armies have commenced the 22nd edition of Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2026, the exercise focuses on high-altitude warfare, long-range precision fires, counter-drone capabilities, and enhanced operational interoperability.



About Yudh Abhyas

- **Yudh Abhyas** is an **annual bilateral Army exercise** between **India and the United States**.
- It has been conducted **since 2004**, with the venue generally alternating between India and the U.S.
- The **21st edition (2025)** was held at **Fort Wainwright, Alaska**, involving the Indian Army and the U.S. Army's **11th Airborne Division**.
- The exercise aims to enhance **interoperability, joint operational capabilities and sharing of military best practices**.

Key Features of Yudh Abhyas 2026

- Focus on **long-range precision fires**, integrated command-and-control and **counter-drone capabilities**.

- The exercise is being conducted in **two theatres—Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan and Auli in Uttarakhand**, combining desert and high-altitude operational environments.

Major India–USA Military Exercises

Exercise	Participating Forces	Key Focus
Yudh Abhyas	Indian Army + U.S. Army	Joint land warfare, interoperability
Vajra Prahar	Indian Army Special Forces + U.S. Special Forces	Special operations, counter-terrorism
Tiger Triumph	Tri-Service	Amphibious operations + HADR
Cope India	Indian Air Force + U.S. Air Force	Air combat and air operations
Red Flag	Indian Air Force + U.S. Air Force and other countries	Multinational air combat training
Tiger Claw	Indian Air Force + U.S. Air Force Special Forces	Airborne/Special Forces operations
Malabar	India + USA + Japan + Australia	Naval/maritime operations

2.3. SCO SUMMIT 2026: INDIA CALLS FOR DISMANTLING TERRORISM ECOSYSTEM

Context

- Recently, at the **26th SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**, Prime Minister of India called for dismantling the **entire ecosystem of terrorism**, including **terror financing, recruitment, radicalisation and safe havens**.



Key Outcomes & Highlights

- Bishkek Declaration:** Adopted alongside 4 MoUs and over 20 decisions/statements covering climate action, energy conservation, nuclear safety, and combating drug trafficking.
- SCO Chairmanship Transition:** Kyrgyzstan concluded its presidency, handing over the SCO Chairmanship for 2026–27 to **Pakistan**.
- Stand on Global & Regional Security:**
 - Afghanistan:** Called on the Taliban administration in Kabul to establish an **inclusive government** representing all ethno-political groups and highlighted drug trafficking as a regional security threat.
 - West Asia & Persian Gulf:** Expressed deep concern over instability in West Asia, noting its adverse impacts on maritime safety, global supply chains, and energy security.
 - Global Defense Initiatives:** Criticized the unilateral deployment of global missile defense systems by certain nations as a factor destabilizing international security.

India's Core Agenda & Proposals

- **Pillars of Engagement:** Reaffirmed commitment to the vision of **Security, Connectivity, and Opportunity** across Eurasia.
- **Zero-Tolerance on Terrorism:** Demanded dedicated international action to dismantle the terror ecosystem (financing, recruitment, and safe havens) with **no double standards**.
- **Sovereignty in Connectivity:** Supported infrastructure and economic trade corridors while emphasizing that all connectivity initiatives must strictly respect national sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- **India-Led Flagship Initiatives Finalized:**
 1. Inclusion of **English** as an Official Language in the SCO Charter.
 2. Launch of the **SCO Civilisation Dialogue Forum** (First edition to be hosted by India).
 3. Establishment of the **SCO Young Scientist Forum** and **Young Author's Conclave**.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- **Establishment:** SCO was established in **2001** in Shanghai.
- **Founding Members:** **China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**.
 - **Expanded Members:** India (2017), Pakistan (2017), Iran (2023), Belarus (2024).
- **Headquarters:** **Beijing, China**.
- **Nature:** SCO is a **permanent intergovernmental international organization** focused on regional cooperation.
- **Core Focus:** Cooperation in areas such as security, counter-terrorism, economic cooperation, connectivity and cultural exchanges.
- **Official Languages:** **Chinese and Russian** have traditionally been the official languages of the SCO; the 2026 **Bishkek Summit** supported/endorsed the inclusion of English as an official language.
- **Highest Decision-Making Body:** The Council of Heads of State (CHS) is the highest decision-making body. It determines the priorities and major directions of SCO activities and **meets once a year**.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):** Located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; facilitates cooperation against the "Three Evils" — terrorism, separatism and extremism.

2.4. NORTH KOREA EXPANDS URANIUM ENRICHMENT CAPACITY AT YONGBYON & KANGSON

Context

- Recently, The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** has reported that North Korea is expanding its uranium-enrichment infrastructure, including a **new enrichment facility at the Yongbyon nuclear complex** capable of accommodating up to **28 gas-centrifuge cascades**.



What has the IAEA found?

- A new two-storey uranium-enrichment building has been identified at Yongbyon.
- The facility has been designated Yongbyon Uranium Enrichment Facility 2 (UEF2) by the IAEA.
- It can accommodate up to **28 centrifuge cascades**.
 - Since a **single centrifuge cannot achieve** the required enrichment, many centrifuges are connected in stages to form a cascade, progressively increasing the U-235 concentration.
- The IAEA also found indications of expanded operations at the Kangson **Uranium Enrichment Facility**.

Why is Uranium Enrichment Important?

- In nature, mined uranium consists of about 99.3% non-fissionable Uranium-238 and only **0.7% fissionable Uranium-235**.
- Enrichment increases the U-235 concentration, making uranium suitable for many nuclear applications.
- **Types of Enriched Uranium**
 - **Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU, 3–5% U-235):** Mainly used as fuel in civilian nuclear power reactors.
 - **High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium / Medium Enrichment (5–20% U-235):** Used in advanced/research reactors and some naval applications.
 - **Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU, 20% to 90%+ U-235):** Used for certain specialized reactor applications; at around 90% U-235, it is generally considered weapons-grade.

About IAEA

- **Established:** 1957
- **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria
- **Nature:** Intergovernmental organisation within the UN family; works as the world's "Atoms for Peace and Development" organisation.
- **Members:** 180+ Member States.
- It reports to **both the UNGA and the UN Security Council**.
- **General Conference:** Highest policy-making body; includes all Member States.
- **2005 Nobel Peace Prize:** Awarded jointly to the IAEA and Mohamed ElBaradei for efforts to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes.

Core Objectives

- **Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy:** Promotes safe, secure and peaceful applications of nuclear technology.
- **Nuclear Safety:** Develops international **safety standards** for nuclear facilities and activities.
- **Nuclear Security:** Helps prevent nuclear and radioactive materials from being used for malicious purposes.
- **Nuclear Safeguards:** Verifies that nuclear material is **not diverted from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons programmes**.
- **Technology & Development:** Supports nuclear applications in **health, agriculture, water, food and industry**.

IAEA & NPT

- **NPT = Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968).**
- IAEA safeguards help verify compliance with the NPT's **non-proliferation obligations**.
- **India is not a party to the NPT**, but India has an **IAEA safeguards agreement** covering its designated civilian nuclear facilities.
- **North Korea joined the NPT in 1985**, but later announced its withdrawal and has subsequently operated outside the treaty framework.
- **Important:** IAEA **does not itself impose sanctions**; the **UN Security Council** can take enforcement action.

2.5. THE HAGUE COURT AND THE KOSOVO WAR

Context

- Hashim Thaçi, the former President of Kosovo and a prominent former leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), has been sentenced to 25 years in prison by special European Union-backed court at The Hague.



Escalation of Conflict & Kosovo's Independence

- The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed — an ethnic Albanian militant force seeking Kosovo's independence from Serbia and Yugoslavia.
- **War & Intervention: KLA attacks** triggered a **Serbian military crackdown**, causing the displacement of **hundreds of thousands** and nearly **13,000 deaths**, mostly ethnic Albanians.
- **NATO Intervention:** The hostilities ended after NATO launched air strikes and bombardments against Serbian targets, forcing Serbian forces to withdraw.
- **Declaration of Independence:** In 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. While recognized by the United States and several European nations, it is not recognized as an independent state by Serbia, **India, or the United Nations**.

What Was the Trial For?

- The case was heard by the **Kosovo Specialist Chambers**, a special tribunal backed by the European Union and constituted in **The Hague in 2016**.
- Its mandate was to examine crimes linked to the KLA's insurgency and the broader conflict of the 1990s.



- The tribunal's creation followed a Council of Europe report (the "Marty report," 2010) that alleged the KLA had run secret detention centres where Serbians were subjected to inhumane treatment, including claims of organ trafficking from prisoners.

What is the Kosovo Specialist Chambers?

- The KSC is a specialized domestic (national) court of Kosovo, not a UN or international tribunal.
- While legally attached to Kosovo's judicial hierarchy, it is physically located in The **Hague, Netherlands**.
- The KSC was created following an Exchange of Letters between Kosovo and the European Union in 2014.
- The Kosovo Assembly subsequently adopted Article 162 of the Kosovo Constitution and the Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office on 3 August 2015.

Structure of the KSC; The KSC consists principally of:

1. Chambers

- Perform the **judicial functions**.
- Include **international judges**.
- Have panels for **Pre-Trial, Trial, Appeals, Supreme Court and Constitutional Court** functions.

2. Registry

- Provides administrative and judicial support
- Handles functions including **detention, legal aid, victims' participation, interpretation and translation**.

2.6. THE 1991 AGREEMENT ON ADVANCE NOTICE ON MILITARY EXERCISES

Context

- Recently, India summoned Pakistan's envoy after a Pakistani naval vessel collided with an Indian warship in the North Arabian Sea, with New Delhi terming the manoeuvre unsafe and citing a violation of the three-nautical-mile provision under the **1991 India-Pakistan maritime pact**. No major damage was reported



About the 1991 Agreement

- **Military Exercises:** Major exercises near each other's territory should be avoided; where conducted, they must follow prescribed rules and be notified in advance
- **Advance Notice:** **15 days** for specified air and naval exercises, **60 days** for corps-level exercises and **90 days** for army-level exercises
- **Information Sharing:** Either side can seek details on the **force assembly, direction, scale and duration** of an exercise

- **Major Naval Exercise:** Defined as an exercise involving **six or more destroyer- or frigate-sized combat vessels** operating together and entering the other country's EEZ
- **Article 10:** Naval ships and submarines of both countries must maintain a minimum distance of **3 nautical miles** from each other while operating in international waters to prevent accidents
- **Aircraft Separation:** Combat aircraft must maintain a **10-km separation** from each other's airspace, including Air Defence Identification Zones (ADIZs)
- **Special Provision:** A **5-km separation** applies to aircraft operating from specified airfields, including **Jammu, Pathankot, Amritsar and Suratgarh** in India and **Pasrur, Lahore, Vehari and Rahimyar Khan** in Pakistan

2.7. U.S.–DENMARK GREENLAND SECURITY AGREEMENT

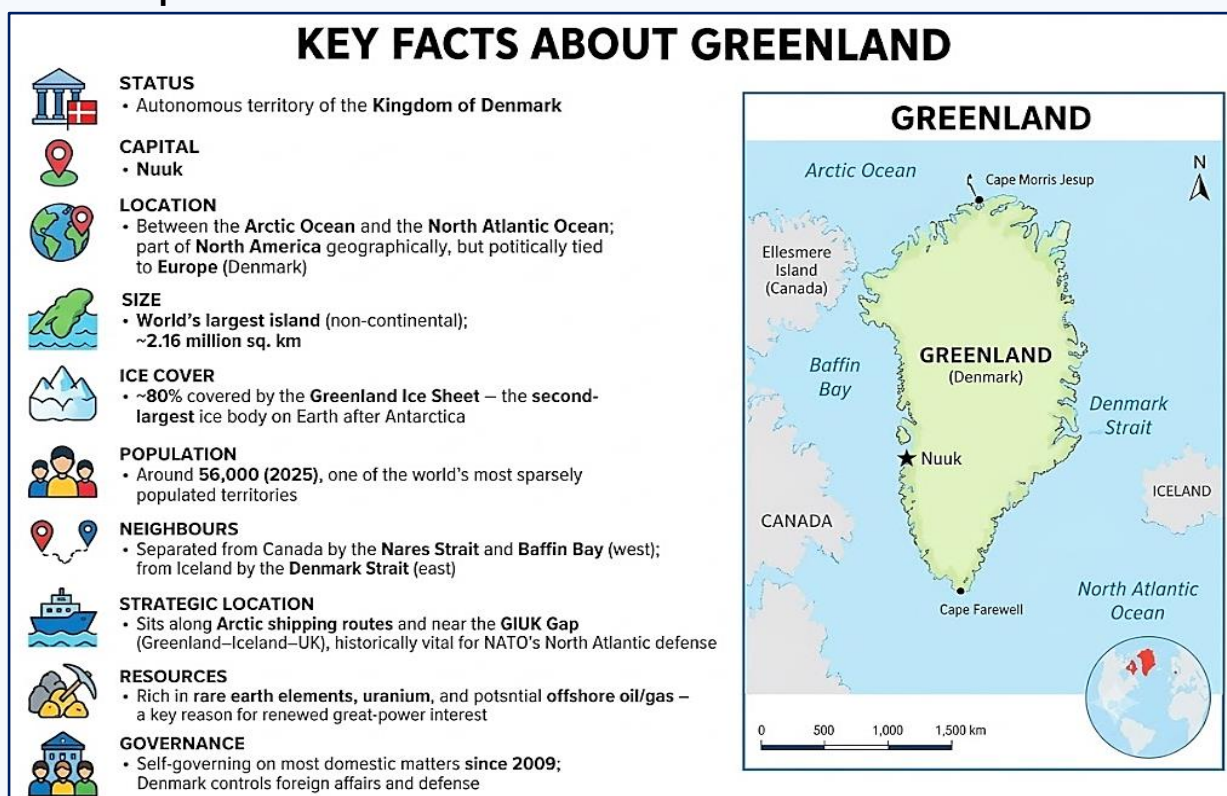
Context

- Recently, the United States, Denmark and Greenland signed an agreement to amend the 1951 U.S.–Denmark Defence Agreement, expanding U.S. military access in Greenland while reaffirming Danish sovereignty and Greenlandic self-determination.



Key Highlights of the Security Agreement

- **Expanded U.S. Base Access:** Building on the foundational 1951 U.S.-Denmark Defense Agreement, the new deal allows the U.S. to build additional military facilities at **Narsarsuaq** (in the south) and **Mestersvig** (in the east, along the Norwegian Sea), supplementing its existing presence at **Pituffik Space Base**.



- **Third-Country Military Presence:** States that are **not NATO members** will not be allowed to establish their own military installations or maintain a persistent military presence in Greenland, unless otherwise agreed by the parties.
- **Sovereignty & Self-Determination:** Denmark and Greenland retain sovereignty; Greenland can pursue independence and its people would decide any future political status.

Strategic Rationale

- **Arctic geopolitics:** Rising Chinese and Russian activity in the Arctic, plus melting sea ice opening new shipping lanes, has increased the region's strategic salience.
- **Historical base:** The 1951 U.S.–Denmark defense agreement already allowed American bases; this deal builds on and expands that framework.

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UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. With reference to India–Belgium relations, consider the following statements:

1. The India–Belgium Strategic Dialogue was launched in July 2026.
2. Belgium supports India’s candidature for permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council.
3. India and Belgium aim to double bilateral trade in the next five years.
4. The Investment Fast-Track Mechanism is intended to facilitate bilateral investments and address investment bottlenecks.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is Correct:** The **India–Belgium Strategic Dialogue** was launched in **Brussels on 15 July 2026** to provide a regular mechanism for bilateral cooperation.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Belgium supports India’s candidature for permanent membership of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Both countries expressed their determination to **double bilateral trade within the next five years**.
- **Statement 4 is Correct:** The **India–Belgium Investment Fast-Track Mechanism** aims to facilitate investments, address investment bottlenecks and create a conducive environment for long-term economic cooperation.

Q. With reference to mangroves and blue carbon, consider the following statements:

1. Mangroves are important blue-carbon ecosystems because they store carbon in both biomass and sediments.
2. Pichavaram Mangroves are located in Tamil Nadu and are associated with the Vellar–Coleroon river system.
3. Blue carbon refers exclusively to carbon stored in terrestrial forests and grasslands.

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:** Mangroves store substantial carbon in vegetation, roots, soils and sediments.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Pichavaram is a major mangrove ecosystem of **Tamil Nadu**, located between the **Vellar and Coleroon river systems**.
- **Statement 3 is Incorrect:** **Blue carbon** is associated with coastal and marine ecosystems such as **mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes**.

Q. With reference to Exercise Yudh Abhyas, consider the following statements:

1. **Yudh Abhyas** is an annual bilateral military exercise conducted between the **Indian Army and the U.S. Army**.
2. The exercise has been conducted since **2004**, with its venue generally alternating between India and the United States.
3. The **2026 edition** focuses, among other things, on **high-altitude warfare, long-range precision fires and counter-drone capabilities**.

4. **Yudh Abhyas** is a **tri-service exercise** involving the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force along with their U.S. counterparts.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Yudh Abhyas is a bilateral Army exercise between India and the United States.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The exercise has been conducted since 2004, generally alternating between India and the U.S.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Yudh Abhyas 2026 focuses on areas such as high-altitude warfare, long-range precision fires, integrated command-and-control and counter-drone capabilities.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** Yudh Abhyas is an **Army-to-Army exercise**, not a tri-service exercise. **Tiger Triumph** is the India–U.S. tri-service exercise.

- Q. Yongbyon and Kangson, recently in the news, are located in which country?**

- (a) North Korea
- (b) South Korea
- (c) Japan
- (d) China

Answer: (a) North Korea.

Explanation:

Yongbyon is North Korea's principal nuclear facility, housing its major research reactors, power plants, and uranium enrichment facilities (including the newly reported **UEF2**).

Kangson is another key site in North Korea identified by intelligence and international monitors (including the IAEA) as harboring a covert or expanded uranium enrichment facility.



Scan to attempt more questions

ECONOMY

3.1. RBI'S FOREX SWAP FACILITY ATTRACTS OVER \$136 BILLION

Context

- According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, the central bank's **special USD-INR forex swap facility**—introduced on June 8 to cushion forex outflows from high global oil prices and foreign capital flight—mobilised over \$136 billion (\$1,36,377 million).



Key Financial & Economic Concepts

1. Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] Deposits

- Term deposits maintained in designated foreign currencies (e.g., USD, GBP, EUR) by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs).
- Key Feature:** Foreign exchange risk is borne by the bank (or central bank scheme), not the depositor. Principal and interest are fully repatriable.

2. USD-INR Forex Swap Facility

- A monetary tool where the RBI buys foreign currency (USD) from commercial banks in exchange for domestic currency (INR) at the prevailing spot rate, while simultaneously agreeing to sell back the dollars at a future date (forward rate).
- Purpose:** Injects Rupee liquidity into the domestic banking system while augmenting central bank foreign exchange reserves.

3. Short Forward Dollar Position

- Currency derivative contracts where the central bank agrees to sell dollars at a predetermined rate at a future date.
- Strategic Utility:** Defends the domestic currency against depreciation without immediately drawing down spot foreign exchange reserves. As per industry analysis, RBI may utilise incoming foreign currency deposits to settle/close these outstanding short forward obligations.

4. Liquidity & Call Rate Management

- Large foreign currency inflows converted to domestic currency lead to surplus Rupee liquidity in the banking system.
- RBI Action:** The central bank absorbs surplus Rupee liquidity to prevent short-term money market call rates from falling below the policy repo rate, controlling inflationary pressures.

Impact on Domestic Liquidity and the Banking Sector

I. Rupee Influx & Inflation Risk:

- Forex operations can inject **rupee liquidity** into banks.
- Excess liquidity may push the **call money rate below the repo rate** and create inflationary pressures.

II. Sterilisation Measures: RBI absorbs surplus liquidity through tools such as the **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF)** and **repo operations** to maintain its monetary-policy stance.

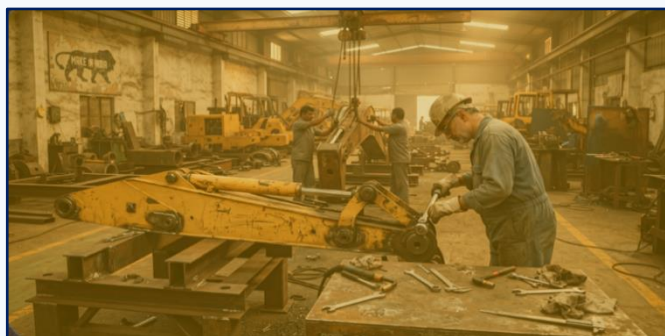
III. Benefits for Banks:

- Greater access to stable, relatively low-cost funds can reduce dependence on **costly wholesale deposits**.
- This can support **domestic credit growth** over the medium term.

3.2. CONSTRUCTION AND INFRASTRUCTURE EQUIPMENT (CIE) SCHEME

Context

- Recently, the **Union Heavy Industries Minister** stated that the **Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) Scheme**, announced in the **Union Budget 2026-27**, aims to boost local manufacturing, strengthen domestic supply chains and reduce import dependence.



All about the Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) Scheme

- **Objective:** Boost domestic manufacturing of high-value **construction and infrastructure equipment** while reducing import dependence.
- **Approach:** Strengthen domestic supply chains and promote greater participation of **MSMEs** in equipment and component manufacturing.

Scale & Scope of the CIE Scheme

- **Broader Programme Under Consideration:** Some reports suggest the Centre is considering a much larger incentive programme with an outlay of **₹11,500 Crore over seven years**.
- **Modalities Pending:** The scheme's exact modalities, including eligibility criteria and the disbursement mechanism, are yet to be finalised.

Rationale: Import Substitution & MSME Participation

- **Import Substitution:** The scheme aims to boost domestic manufacturing capacity, strengthen the local supply chain, and reduce excessive dependence on imported construction equipment.
- **MSME Participation:** The Minister underlined the need for greater participation of **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** in the construction equipment value chain.

India's Construction Equipment Industry

- **Global Ranking:** India is the world's **third-largest construction equipment market**, after **China** and the **United States**.
- **Industry Valuation:** The industry was valued at about **₹97,500 crore in 2024-25** and is projected to touch **₹2.28 lakh crore by 2029-30**.
- **Employment:** The sector currently provides direct employment to about **10 lakh people**.

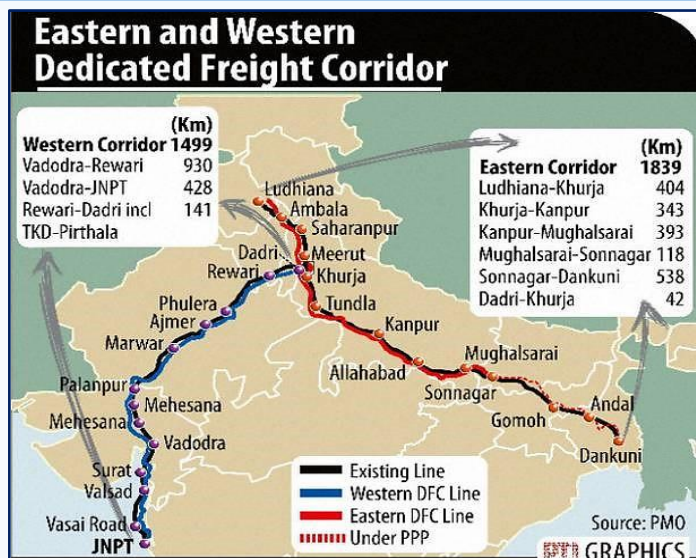
3.3. DEDICATED FREIGHT CORRIDOR (DFC) & COMPLETION OF THE WESTERN DFC

Context

- The Prime Minister inaugurated final key sections of the **Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)** connecting Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) in Navi Mumbai (Maharashtra) to Dadri (Uttar Pradesh), marking the operational completion of the corridor.

What are Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs)?

- DFCs are specialized railway tracks designed solely for freight transport. These corridors, utilizing double-stack container and heavy-haul trains, increase capacity and ensure faster freight transit.



Key Features of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC)

- Terminals:** Connects **Dadri (Uttar Pradesh)** to **JNPT (Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra)** spanning approximately 1,504 km.
- State Coverage:** Traverses 5 major states — **Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.**
- Funding Agency:** Funded primarily by the **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).**
- Designed for **double-stack container train operations** using high-reach Overhead Equipment (OHE).
- Maximum design speed of **100 km/h** for freight trains (compared to ~25 km/h average on traditional tracks).

About India's Dedicated Freight Network

- **DFCCIL (Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited):**
 - A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) incorporated as a Public Sector Undertaking under the **Companies Act, 1956** (not a statutory body).
 - Functions under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Railways.**
- **Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC):**
 - Connects **Sahnewal/Ludhiana (Punjab)** to **Dankuni (West Bengal)** covering ~1,875 km.
 - Funded primarily by the **World Bank.**
- **Present Status of Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC)**
 - DFCs now handle over **10% of Indian Railways' freight.**
 - **An average of 325 trains run on DFC tracks daily**, a 60% increase from previous years.
 - Since their inception, DFCs have managed **over 232 billion Gross Tonne Kilometres (GTKMs) and 122 billion Net Tonne Kilometres (NTKMs)**, underscoring their role in enhancing rail freight capacity.

Objectives

- **Traffic Segregation:** Separates freight from passenger rail corridors to release capacity on trunk routes.
- **Logistics Cost Reduction:** Targets lowering India's logistics cost from ~13-14% of GDP down to single digits.
- **Decarbonization:** Shift of freight from road to energy-efficient electric rail reduces global greenhouse-gas emissions.
- **Integration:** Key element under the **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan** for multi-modal connectivity.

3.4. EPFO WAGE CEILING RAISED TO ₹25,000

Context

- Recently, The Union Cabinet has approved an increase in the wage ceiling for mandatory EPFO coverage from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000 per month. The ceiling was last revised to ₹15,000 in September 2014.



What Has Changed?

Earlier	New
₹15,000/month wage ceiling	₹25,000/month
Employees above the ceiling were not automatically covered	Employees earning up to ₹25,000 can come under mandatory EPFO coverage, subject to applicable provisions
Narrower coverage	51 lakh+ additional employees expected to be covered

EPFO and Its Three Key Schemes

- The expansion will extend access, under applicable scheme provisions, to three major components of EPFO social security:
 - **Employees' Provident Fund (EPF):** Provides accumulated retirement savings to employees.
 - **Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995:** Provides pension-related benefits to eligible members.
 - **Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI), 1976:** Provides insurance benefits linked to the employee's EPF membership.
- EPFO administers these schemes under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment**.

Financial Implication

- The decision is estimated to bring over 51 lakh additional employees under mandatory EPFO coverage.
- The annual Government outgo is estimated at around **₹11,339 crores**, compared with existing annual budgetary support of about **₹10,250 crore**.

- The measure is also expected to strengthen **formalisation of employment** and wider social-security coverage.

EPFO: Contribution Mechanics

Contribution Mechanics

Standard rate — **12% of Basic + DA, contributed by both employee and employer**

Split-up of Employer's 12% share

3.67% EPF	8.33% EPS
-----------	-----------

EPS portion is subject to the wage ceiling cap

Government Contribution: Central Government contributes **1.16%** of the wage ceiling toward the Employee's Pension Scheme (EPS).

About EPFO

Statutory Body Status:
Established under the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952.

Administrative Ministry:
Functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Mandatory vs. Voluntary: Coverage is **mandatory** for employees earning below the wage threshold; contributions beyond the wage limit are **voluntary**.

3.5. SURGE IN GLOBAL COPPER PRICES AND ITS DOMESTIC IMPACT

Context

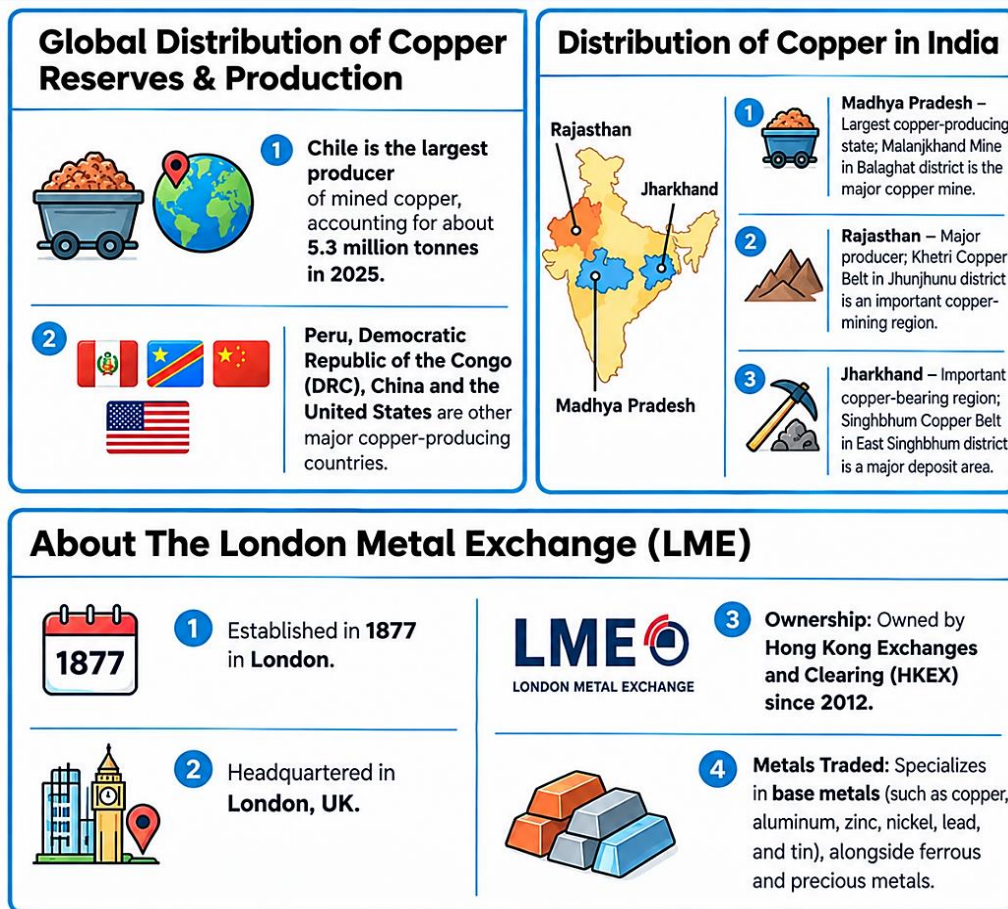
- Copper prices have surged to record levels, with the **London Metal Exchange (LME)** copper touching an all-time high of \$14,779 per tonne, increasing input costs for electric vehicles (EVs), consumer electronics, electrical wires and engineering goods.



Why are Copper Prices Rising?

- LME Benchmark Pressure:** Physical contracts worldwide index directly to London Metal Exchange (LME) prices, which spiked as exchange inventories dwindled.
- Mine Supply Deficits:** Operational disruptions in top producers like Chile cut concentrate output, creating an upstream supply squeeze.
- Tariff Stockpiling & Arbitrage:** Front-loaded buying by US importers ahead of anticipated tariffs diverted global flows and depleted spot warehouse stocks.

- **Clean-Tech & AI Demand:** Rapid rollout of copper-heavy EVs, power grids, and AI data centres created structural, long-term consumption pressure.



Sectors Affected - Cost Pressure Chain

- **Electric Vehicles (EVs):** Higher input costs for wiring and electric motors.
- **Consumer gadgets and appliances:** Rising component costs.
- **Electric wires and engineering goods:** Direct raw material cost increase.
- Indian industry imports ~**85% of its copper requirements**, making India particularly vulnerable to global price cascades.

Aluminium as a Substitute

- Industry (EVIA — Electric Vehicle Industry Alliance) suggests **aluminium** is emerging as an alternative:
 - **61% of copper's electrical conductivity.**
 - **6× larger cross-sectional area** required for the same electrical load.
 - Aluminium conductors therefore need to be larger in size to carry the same electrical load.
- Copper remains difficult to replace in several applications requiring **compactness and high conductivity**.

Impact on Indian Industries

- India imports around **85% of its copper requirements**, making domestic industries vulnerable to global price fluctuations.

- Higher copper prices can raise **input and production costs** for electrical goods, engineering products, **EVs and consumer electronics**.
- The impact is greater in sectors where **copper has limited substitutes**, potentially putting pressure on manufacturers' profit margins.

3.6. GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2026

Context

- Recently, the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** released the 20th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report 2026, benchmarking gender parity across 145 economies, with **India ranking 131st** and closing 64.5% of its overall gender gap against the global average of 69.2%, while Iceland retained the highest position in the index.

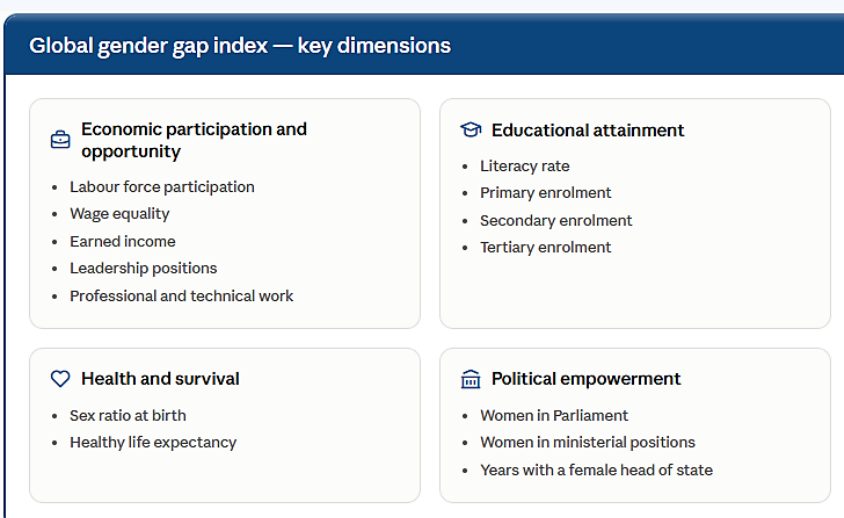


What is the Global Gender Gap Index?

- The **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)** was introduced by the **World Economic Forum in 2006** to measure the relative gaps between women and men across key areas of social and economic life.
- Scoring Methodology:** Scores range from **0 to 1** (or 0% to 100%), where **1.0 represents full gender parity** and **0 represents complete disparity**.
- Key Principle:** The index evaluates gender gaps in outcomes rather than the absolute level of available resources or overall development of a nation.

Global Rankings Overview (2026)

- Top Performers:** Iceland maintained the **1st rank globally** (the long-standing global leader), followed by **Finland (2nd) and Norway (3rd)**.
- Bottom Performers:** Chad was the lowest-ranked nation, joined by Iran and Pakistan in the bottom three slots.
- Countries Ranked Below India:** 14 countries scored lower than India, including Papua New Guinea, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and DR Congo.



India's Performance

- India retained the **131st position** with an overall gender parity score of **64.5%**.
- Its score has improved by **4.3 percentage points since 2006**, with much of the long-term improvement coming from **Educational Attainment**.

India's Dimension-Wise Summary

Dimension	Score	Key Takeaway
Political Empowerment	24.5%	Highest rank (67th globally); Parliament (16.1%) and ministerial parity (5.9%) remain low.
Educational Attainment	96.6%	Full parity in secondary and tertiary enrolment; adult literacy lags at 82.5%.
Health and Survival	95.6%	Score improved, but sex ratio at birth remains below the 2006 baseline.
Economic Participation & Opportunity	41.2%	Lowest-performing area; labour force parity stands at 44.1%.

3.7. NSO RELEASES FIRST-EVER DISTRICT-LEVEL DATA ON UNINCORPORATED NON-FARM SECTOR

Context

- For the first time, the **National Statistics Office (NSO)** under **MoSPI** released district-level data for small, informal (unincorporated) **non-agricultural** businesses. It uses data from the **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2025** to help design targeted policies at the local district level.



Key Institutional Survey Facts

Item	Detail
Releasing body	National Statistics Office (NSO) , under MoSPI (Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation)
Survey base	ASUSE 2025 (Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises)
Novelty	First-ever district-level estimates from a large-scale nationwide enterprise survey
Districts covered	757 out of 770 districts in the ASUSE 2025 sampling frame
Districts excluded	District-level estimates were not generated for Delhi (due to merged sampling strata) or Chandigarh and Lakshadweep (each treated as a single UT-level stratum)

What ASUSE Covers

- Geographic coverage:** Whole of India, rural and urban (**except some inaccessible Andaman & Nicobar villages**).

- **Sectors covered: Manufacturing, Trade, and Other Services** (non-agricultural, unincorporated).
- **Ownership types covered:** Proprietorship, partnership (**excluding LLPs**), cooperatives, societies/trusts.
- **Sampling method:** Multi-stage stratified sampling.
 - First Stage Units (FSUs): Census villages (rural) / UFS blocks (urban) — exception: **rural Kerala uses Panchayat wards** as FSUs.
 - Ultimate Stage Units (USUs): Establishments.
- **Data collection: CAPI** (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) via tablets; oral enquiry, monthly reference period.

Key Economic Findings

- **Geographical Concentration:**
 - **Top 10 Districts:** Account for ~10% of all establishments, workforce, and Gross Value Added (**GVA**). Located across 4 states: Gujarat, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.
 - **Top 50 Districts:** Account for nearly **one-third (33%)** of the sector's total establishments, workforce, and GVA across 12 states.
 - **Scale Distribution:** ~33% of districts have >1 lakh establishments; 16 districts have >5 lakh establishments (led by West Bengal with 8 districts).
- **Productivity Metrics:**
 - **National Benchmark:** All-India average GVA per worker is **₹1,56,539**.
 - **High-Productivity Districts:** 280 districts surpass the all-India average GVA per worker.
- **Women's Participation & Entrepreneurship:**
 - **Workforce Inclusion:** Women constitute **at least one-third (33%)** of the unincorporated workforce in **237 districts**, and **>50%** in 25 districts.
 - **Top Female-Led Districts:** Concentrated heavily in **Telangana, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram**. In Mizoram, female-owned proprietary units account for at least **50%** of establishments across *every* district.

Strategic State Leaders (Top Contributing District per State)

State/UT	Top District	% Contribution
Maharashtra	Pune	9.14%
Karnataka	Bengaluru (Urban)	12.83%
Tamil Nadu	Chennai	7.13%
Telangana	Rangareddy	23.53%
West Bengal	North 24 Parganas	15.99%
Gujarat	Surat	19.43%
Goa	North Goa	77.66%
Puducherry	Puducherry	76.64%
Ladakh	Leh	59.00%
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.48%

3.8. INDIA'S FIRST BLUE BOND

Context

- SBI-backed Sagarmala Finance Corporation, India's first maritime lender, plans to launch India's first blue bond. The proposed bond aims to mobilise funds for projects related to the **sustainable use and conservation of ocean resources**.



What is a Blue Bond?

- A **blue bond** is a **debt instrument** that raises funds specifically for **marine and ocean-related sustainable activities**.
- Like a **green bond**, but focused on the **sustainable management of water and marine resources**.
- Funds may support **clean water, marine ecosystem protection, sustainable fisheries, ocean energy, and marine mapping**.

Significance of the Blue Bond

- Mobilises Finance:** Raises long-term funds for **marine and ocean-related sustainable projects**.
- Protects Oceans:** Supports **marine ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and ocean conservation**.
- Improves Water Management:** Funds **clean water, coastal resilience and related infrastructure**.
- Promotes Sustainable Development:** Supports **ocean energy and sustainable use of marine resources**.
- Expands Sustainable Finance:** Diversifies the **green finance market** into **water and marine sectors**.

About Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited

- Established:** Formerly Sagarmala Development Company Limited; restructured as **Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SMFCL)** in **June 2025**.
- India's First Maritime NBFC:** Registered with the **Reserve Bank of India** as India's first maritime-focused Non-Banking Financial Company.
- Purpose:** Bridges financing gaps in **ports, shipping infrastructure and related maritime industries**.
- Financing:** Provides **short-, medium- and long-term finance** to ports, shipping companies, small businesses, startups and maritime institutions.
- Strategic Sectors:** Also supports **shipbuilding, renewable energy, cruise tourism and maritime education**, aligned with India's maritime development goals.

3.9. 'DURGA' SCHEME

Context

- The Delhi Cabinet recently approved the '**DURGA**' scheme to allocate electric autos exclusively to women and transgender persons.

About the 'DURGA' scheme

- DURGA** stands for **Driving Upliftment and Rozgar for Women/Transgender Green E-Auto** scheme.
- It aims to create **self-employment opportunities among woman and transgender person** and increase their participation in the transport sector and promote **clean urban mobility**.



How will the 'DURGA' scheme work?

- Total:** 1,300 pink e-autos will be given in the first phase.
- Women:** 1,170 e-autos will be allocated.
- Transgender persons:** 130 e-autos will be allocated.
- In each revenue district:** Up to **90 e-autos for women + 10 for transgender persons** can be allocated.

Who can apply for the 'DURGA' Scheme?

- Applicants must generally: Be a **Delhi resident** who is between **20–40 years old**.
- Have a valid Voter ID and have an LMW driving licence and PSV badge.
- Have family income of not more than **₹5 Lakh** along with having a family that does not already own a transport vehicle or three-wheeler.
- A woman with more than three children is not eligible.
- Transgender applicants need a certificate from the District Magistrate.

Significance of the DURGA Scheme

- Women's Empowerment:** Provides self-employment and livelihood opportunities for women.
- Transgender Inclusion:** Promotes participation of transgender persons in the transport sector.
- Clean Mobility:** Encourages electric vehicles and cleaner urban transport.
- Better Connectivity:** Improves last-mile connectivity in Delhi.
- Social & Economic Inclusion:** Promotes livelihood, inclusion and sustainable mobility.

3.10. VARIABLE RATE REVERSE REPO (VRRR) AUCTION

Context

- Recently, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** absorbed **₹71,971 crore** of surplus liquidity from banks through an **overnight Variable Rate Reverse Repo (VRRR) auction**.

About Variable Reverse Repo Rate (VRRR)

- Definition:** VRRR is a sub-tool under the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF) where the central bank absorbs surplus liquidity from commercial banks at a market-determined, variable rate rather than a fixed rate.



- **Mechanism:** Banks park their surplus funds with the RBI for a designated tenor (e.g., overnight/1-day, 7-day, 14-day) against government securities acting as collateral.
 - **Unlike the fixed reverse repo rate**, the interest rate under VRRR is variable and is discovered through the auction process.
- **Nature:** It is a **temporary liquidity management** operation rather than a change in the policy rate.
- **Recent Auction Highlights:** Against a notified amount of ₹75,000 crore, banks placed bids absorbing ₹71,971 crore (approx. 96% subscription) at a cut-off rate of 5.24% for a 1-day tenor.

Why Does RBI Absorb Liquidity?

- Excess liquidity means banks have more funds available than they immediately need for lending and other purposes.
- If surplus liquidity remains high for a prolonged period, it can:
 - Increase the availability of money in the financial system.
 - Put downward pressure on short-term interest rates.
 - Potentially contribute to **inflationary pressures** if it leads to excessive demand.
 - Cause the overnight money-market rate to move away from the RBI's desired policy corridor.
- Therefore, RBI uses liquidity-management operations to maintain **appropriate liquidity conditions**.

3.11. OLED IMPORT TARIFF DISPUTE

Context

- India is investigating **LG Electronics and Samsung** over allegations of paying a lower import duty on **OLED display components** used in high-end televisions.

What is the Dispute and Why the Tariff Dispute Matters?



- India's customs schedule offers a **concessional 5% duty** on **open cells for LCD/LED TVs** (to promote domestic TV assembly under "**Make in India**").
- **DRI's contention:** OLED is **technologically distinct** from LCD/LED (self-emissive vs backlit), so it doesn't qualify for the same concessional slab — hence the demand for **15% duty**.
- **Companies argue:** OLED is just an **evolved/advanced form of LED**, so the same concessional rate should extend to it.
- This is essentially a **product classification dispute** under the **Customs Tariff Act** — a recurring theme in India's trade-tax landscape (similar disputes have hit **Samsung** and **Volkswagen** previously).

Basic Concept: LED vs LCD vs OLED (Display Technologies)

Parameter	LCD (Liquid Crystal Display)	LED (Light Emitting Diode)	OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode)
Light Source	External backlight using Cold Cathode Fluorescent Lamps (CCFL).	External backlight using inorganic LED diodes .	Self-emissive ; individual organic pixels generate their own light.
Technology Class	Transmissive (requires backlight behind liquid crystals).	Transmissive (a subtype of LCD display using LED backlighting).	Emissive (no backlight layer required).
Material Base	Inorganic liquid crystals and glass layers.	Inorganic semiconductors (Gallium Nitride, Silicon, etc.).	Organic (carbon-based) small molecules or polymers.
Black Levels & Contrast	Poor black levels due to constant light leakage from CCFL backlight.	Moderate black levels; dynamic dimming helps but backlight leakage persists.	True/Absolute Black ; individual pixels switch completely off (infinite contrast ratio).
Form Factor & Flexibility	Bulky, rigid, and energy-intensive.	Thinner than LCD, but limited flexibility due to backlight requirements.	Ultra-thin, flexible, rollable, and foldable display panels.
Viewing Angles	Narrow viewing angles; color shift at off-center positions.	Moderate to good viewing angles.	Exceptionally wide viewing angles without loss of contrast.

3.12. ALTERNATIVES TO THE SWIFT PAYMENT SYSTEM

Context

- Driven by geopolitics, financial sanctions, and the weaponization of the U.S. dollar, nations across the Global South and BRICS are seeking alternatives to the Belgium-based SWIFT network.

Why Are Countries Moving Away from SWIFT?

- Multiple wars and repeated **U.S. weaponisation of dollar-based financial sanctions** are pushing Global South countries to seek alternatives.
- SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) has long been the near-universal Belgium-based system for cross-border interbank messaging.
- Attempts to bypass it have been patchy so far, but interest in alternatives is growing amid geopolitical tension.



What is SWIFT?

- It is a **global messaging network** used by financial institutions to communicate information about international financial transactions.
- **SWIFT does not itself transfer money.**
- It provides a secure system through which banks exchange **standardised payment instructions**.
- It is headquartered in **Belgium**.
- It is a cooperative organisation owned by its member financial institutions.

Key Alternatives to SWIFT

1. Project mBridge

- A group comprising the central banks of **Thailand, UAE, China (Digital Currency Institute of the PBOC), Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and Saudi Arabia**.
- Enables cross-border transactions directly using central bank digital currencies (**CBDs**), bypassing traditional correspondent banking chains.
- Built on a custom blockchain (**mBridge Ledger**) designed for multi-currency, cross-border payments in CBDs.

2. SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages)

- Developed by **Russia in 2014** specifically to bypass Western messaging systems.
- Usage increased sharply after **2022**, when Russian banks were cut off from SWIFT following sanctions over Ukraine.

3. CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System)

- Backed by the **People's Bank of China**; launched in **2015**.
- Allows global banks to clear cross-border yuan transactions directly, rather than routing through offshore clearing hubs.
- Includes participation from **SEPAMA** (Iran's local interbank telecom system with ~52 Iranian bank branches) and foreign banks connecting via **106 nodes**, including the Central Bank of Iran since 2023.

UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. With reference to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) USD-INR forex swap operations and foreign currency accounts, consider the following statements:

1. Under a USD-INR buy/sell swap, the immediate injection of foreign exchange into the RBI's reserves simultaneously drains primary Rupee liquidity from the domestic banking system.
2. In a Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] deposit account, the exchange rate fluctuation risk is borne by the commercial bank rather than the depositor.

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: (b) 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** In a buy/sell forex swap, the RBI purchases US dollars from banks and pays them in Rupees. This **injects** primary Rupee liquidity into the banking system, rather than draining it.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** FCNR(B) accounts are held directly in foreign currencies (like USD or EUR). The bank must return the principal and interest in that foreign currency, so the **bank** bears the exchange rate risk.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) Scheme:

- I. The Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) scheme was announced in the Union Budget 2025-26.
- II. India is currently the world's second-largest construction equipment market.

- III. The construction equipment industry in India was valued at about ₹97,500 Crore in 2024-25.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (c) III only

Explanation:

Statement I is Incorrect: The Construction and Infrastructure Equipment (CIE) Scheme was announced in the **Union Budget 2026-27**, not 2025-26.

Statement II is Incorrect: India is the world's **third-largest** construction equipment market, after **China** and the **United States**, not the second-largest.

Statement III is Correct: The construction equipment industry in India was valued at about **₹97,500 crore in 2024-25**, and is projected to reach **₹2.28 lakh crore by 2029-30**.

Q. With reference to Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC) connects Dadri in Uttar Pradesh directly to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) in Maharashtra.
2. The Western DFC is funded primarily by the World Bank, whereas the Eastern DFC is funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).
3. The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL) is a statutory body established through a dedicated Act of Parliament.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The WDFC runs ~1,504 km from Dadri (UP) to JNPT in Navi Mumbai (Maharashtra).
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The funding agencies are reversed. The **WDFC** is funded by **JICA (Japan)**, while the **EDFC** is funded by the **World Bank**.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** DFCCIL is not a statutory body; it is a Special Purpose Vehicle registered as a Public Sector Enterprise under the **Companies Act, 1956**, under the Ministry of Railways.

Q. With reference to copper and its industrial use, consider the following statements:

1. Electric vehicles utilize significantly less copper compared to conventional internal combustion engine vehicles due to battery miniaturization.
2. India relies on imports for more than 80% of its domestic copper requirements.
3. Aluminium possesses higher electrical conductivity than copper, making it the

preferred substitute in compact electric vehicle motors.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Electric vehicles (EVs) require approximately 3 to 4 times more copper than traditional combustion vehicles due to electric motors, battery packs, inverters, and charging harnesses.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** India is heavily import-dependent, importing around 85% of its total copper requirements.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Aluminium has only about 61% of the electrical conductivity of copper; an aluminium conductor must be roughly 1.6 times larger in cross-section to transmit the same electrical load, limiting its feasibility in tight, high-heat EV motors.



Scan to attempt more questions

ENVIRONMENT & GEOGRAPHY

4.1. SC DIRECTS TAMIL NADU TO FRAME PURSE SEINE TRANSIT RULES

Context

- Recently, the **Supreme Court** has directed the **Tamil Nadu** government to formulate rules under the Marine Fishing Regulation Rules to create a "specified channel," or official navigation corridor, for the transit of fishing vessels using purse seine nets from the State's territorial waters to the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**.



Supreme Court Ruling & Directives

- Directive to Tamil Nadu:** The Supreme Court directed the Tamil Nadu government to frame rules establishing a "**specified channel**" (**official navigation corridor**) under the **Marine Fishing Regulation Rules, 2020**.
- Purpose:** To allow fishing vessels carrying purse-seine nets to transit safely from Tamil Nadu's territorial waters to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Cooperative Federalism:** The Bench highlighted **cooperative federalism** between the Centre and the State to balance coastal regulation with the livelihood rights of fishermen.
- No Conflict Verdict:** The Court held that there is **no conflict** between the State's Marine Fishing Regulation Rules, 2020 and the Union's Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone Rules, 2025.

Maritime Zones & Regulatory Division

Zone / Parameter	Distance Limits	Regulating Authority	Relevant Rules / Scope
Territorial Waters	Up to 12 Nautical Miles	State Government	TN Marine Fishery Regulation Rules, 2020 (Regulates local gear and prevents purse-seine fishing close to shore).
Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)	Beyond 12 Nautical Miles (up to 200 NM)	Central / Union Government	Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the EEZ Rules, 2025 (Permits regulated deep-sea fishing via access passes).

Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in EEZ Rules, 2025

- The Union Government notified the **Sustainable Harnessing of Fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone Rules, 2025** under the **Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976**.
- The Rules introduced an "**Access Pass**" mechanism for fishing vessels operating in India's EEZ.
- Key features include:**
 - Eligibility and registration of fishing vessels.

- Verification by designated State authorities.
- Catch reporting requirements.
- Measures against **juvenile fishing**.
- Measures against **illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing**.
- Preparation of an **eco-centric fisheries management plan**.

Some key Important facts

- **Entry 21, State List (List II):** Fisheries.
- **Entry 57, Union List (List I):** Powers relating to fisheries beyond territorial waters.
- **Purse seine fishing:** a fishing method using a large wall of netting to **encircle schools of fish**; often flagged for overfishing/juvenile fish capture concerns.

4.2. BIHAR & JHARKHAND SONE WATER AGREEMENT

Context

- Bihar and Jharkhand have signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to resolve a 25-year-old inter-state dispute over sharing the **Sone River waters**.
- The division of water allocated to undivided Bihar under the **1973 Bansagar Agreement**.



Strategic Significance

- **Storage & Hydropower:** The pact removes legal bottlenecks for constructing the long-pending **Indrapuri Reservoir** (between Garhwa, Jharkhand and Rohtas, Bihar) along with a proposed 300 MW hydroelectric project.
- **River Linking & Drought Relief:** Accelerates the proposed **Sone–Falgu river link**, boosting irrigation and drinking water security in drought-prone districts of South Bihar (Bhojpur, Rohtas, Gaya) and Jharkhand (Palamu, Garhwa).

About Sone River

- Originates near Amarkantak Hills (Maikal Range) in Chhattisgarh/MP border, just east of the Narmada River's source.
- It flows through Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar.
- Joins the Ganga River on its right bank near **Maner (Patna district, Bihar)**.
- It is the **second-largest southern (right-bank) tributary** of the Ganga, after the Yamuna.

Key Tributaries:

- **Right-bank:** Rihand, North Koel, Kanhar, Gopad.
- **Left-bank:** Johilla, Ghaghar, Chhoti Mahanadi.

Major Water Dam Infrastructure:

- **Bansagar Dam:** Located in Shahdol district, Madhya Pradesh.

- **Indrapuri Barrage:** Located at Dehri-on-Sone (Rohtas, Bihar), feeds the extensive Sone Canal System.
- **Rihand Dam (Govind Ballabh Pant Sagar):** Built on the Rihand River, a chief tributary of the Sone.

4.3. PARIVARTAN SCHEME: CLEANER COMMERCIAL TRANSPORT IN DELHI-NCR

Context

- The Union Government has launched the **PARIVARTAN Scheme** to replace over **2 lakh old trucks and buses** registered in Delhi-NCR with **BS-VI/stricter emission-compliant or electric vehicles**, addressing vehicular air pollution from ageing commercial vehicles.



About PARIVARTAN Scheme

- **Full Form:** Programme for Accelerated Renewal and Incentivization of Vehicle Assets for Reducing Transport Air Pollution and Network Emissions.
- **Approved:** 3 June 2026 by the Union Cabinet.
- **Duration:** Two-year enrolment/implementation framework.
- **Target:** About **2.07 lakh vehicles** — 1.91 lakh trucks and 16,329 buses.
- **Coverage:** Delhi and NCR districts of **Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Outlay:** **₹9,585 crores**, including ₹5,041 crore Central Government support.
- **Funding:** Through **National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB)** under MoHUA.
- **Implementation:** Primarily by **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH)**, with participating governments and MoPNG.

Who is Eligible?

- Vehicles registered in Delhi-NCR conforming to **BS-IV or earlier emission norms**.
- They can be replaced with **BS-VI/stricter-compliant or electric vehicles**.
- **BS-III and older vehicles:** Scrapping at authorised scrapping facilities is mandatory.
- **BS-IV vehicles:** May be scrapped or sold outside NCR in eligible non-NCAP areas.
- **Government vehicles are excluded.**

Special Provisions for Delhi

- **Light Goods Vehicles:** New vehicles purchased under the scheme must be **electric**.
- **Buses:** Must be **BS-VI CNG or electric**.

Major Incentives

- **5% interest subvention** on vehicle loans for 5 years.
- **Up to ₹4,800/month fuel vouchers** for eligible BS-VI diesel/CNG vehicles.
- **₹64,000–₹2.56 lakh one-time incentive** for eligible EV purchases.
- **At least 8% OEM discount** on ex-showroom price.

- **Registration-fee waiver** and motor-vehicle tax concessions by participating States.
- Benefits are delivered through an **integrated digital platform** linked with systems such as VAHAN and vehicle-scraping platforms.

Why to Focus on Trucks and Buses?

- Ageing commercial vehicles are significant sources of **particulate matter, NOx and other air pollutants**. Replacing them can simultaneously address:
- Old high-emission fleet → Fleet modernisation → Lower vehicular emissions → Better NCR air quality

Bharat Stage (BS) Emission Norms

- **BS norms** regulate permissible emissions from motor vehicles in India.
- They prescribe limits for pollutants such as **particulate matter, NOx, hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide**.
- **BS-VI** is India's current nationwide emission standard for new vehicles.
- India moved directly from **BS-IV to BS-VI in 2020**, skipping BS-V.

4.4. FIVE YOUNG ORANGUTANS RESCUED IN ODISHA

Context

- Recently, the **Odisha Forest Department** **rescued five young orangutans** from a **casuarina plantation in Balasore's Udayapur-Talsari area**. Found abandoned during patrolling, the animals were shifted to **Nandankanan Zoological Park** for medical examination.



About Orangutan

Feature	Key Information
Scientific genus	<i>Pongo</i>
Taxonomic group	Great ape; Family Hominidae
Native Habitat & Endemism	Orangutans are native exclusively to the tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia, specifically restricted to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra (shared across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei). They are Asia's only living non-human great ape species.
Lifestyle	Predominantly arboreal
Diet	Primarily frugivorous, but broadly omnivorous
IUCN Status	Critically Endangered
CITES	Appendix I

Physical & Anatomical Adaptations

- **Arboreal Lifestyle:** Among the largest tree-dwelling mammals; spend most of their time in forest canopies.
- **Long Arms:** Arm span can reach ~2.2 m, much greater than body height.
- **Flexible Joints:** Highly mobile shoulders and hips, with **grasping hands and feet**, facilitate movement through trees.

Behaviour & Cognition

- **Tool Use:** Use sticks, leaves and other objects for **feeding, protection and communication**.
- **Mostly Solitary:** Adult orangutans are largely solitary; **females remain with offspring**, while males maintain large ranges.
- **Extended Maternal Care:** Young may remain with their mothers for **7–8 years**, learning feeding techniques, nest-building and movement through the forest.

Three Species of Orangutan

Same genus | Different traits | All Critically Endangered

Bornean Orangutan
(*Pongo pygmaeus*)



Key Characteristics

- Darker red/maroon coat.
- Males develop large, forward-facing cheek pads (flanges).

CR Status Critically Endangered

Sumatran Orangutan
(*Pongo abelii*)



Key Characteristics

- Lighter cinnamon fur.
- Longer face.
- Form closer social ties than Bornean species.

CR Status Critically Endangered

Tapanuli Orangutan
(*Pongo tapanuliensis*)



Key Characteristics

- Identified as a separate species in 2017.
- Rarest ape with fewer than 800 individuals.

CR Status Critically Endangered

Genus : Pongo
Family : Hominidae
Group : Great Apes

Natural Range
Borneo & Sumatra
Countries
Indonesia & Malaysia

Habitat
Tropical rainforests
Diet
Mainly fruits (broadly omnivorous)

Quick Note
India has no naturally occurring wild population of orangutans.

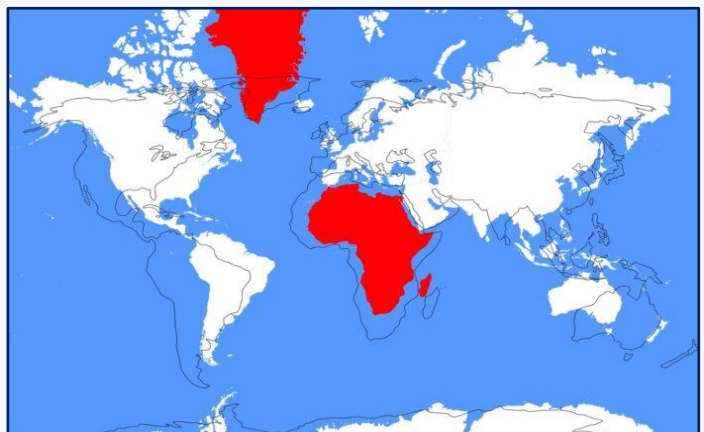
4.5. CORRECT THE MAP RESOLUTION

Context

- Recently, The UN General Assembly adopted the resolution "Correct the Map: Rebalancing Global Cartographic Representation and Promoting Equitable Representation of the World's Regions, Particularly Africa" on 4 September 2026.

What is the issue?

- The initiative seeks to promote world maps that **better represent the relative size of continents**, particularly correcting the disproportionate visual representation of Africa and other equatorial regions.



The Problem with the Mercator Projection

- The Mercator projection (1569) is a conformal projection designed primarily for navigation.
- It:
 - Preserves local angles and direction
 - Greatly distorts area, especially towards the poles

- Makes Greenland and other high-latitude regions appear disproportionately large
- Makes equatorial regions such as Africa appear relatively smaller

What Does “Correct the Map” Seek to Change?

- The resolution promotes the wider use of cartographic projections that represent the relative size of continents more accurately.
- It particularly highlights the **Equal Earth projection**, developed in 2018.

Equal Earth Projection

- Preserves the relative area of continents more accurately.
- Gives a more proportionate visual representation of Africa, South Asia and Latin America
- Parallels are straight horizontal lines, making it easy to compare latitude across different regions.

Mercator vs Equal Earth Projection		
Two world maps, different goals — shape vs size.		
Mercator Projection		Equal Earth Projection
 (Greenland and Antarctica appear much larger than their actual size)		 (Landmasses retain their true relative size, with minimal distortion)
 Primary Property	Conformal Preserves shapes, angles and directional bearings locally.	Equal-Area Preserves the relative proportions and real-world sizes of landmasses.
 Area Accuracy	Distorted High-latitude areas (e.g., Greenland, Antarctica) appear massively inflated.	Accurate Continents like Africa, South America and Asia retain their true relative scale.
 Grid Lines	Meridians and parallels are straight lines intersecting at 90° angles.	Parallels are straight horizontal lines; meridians are smooth curves.
 Polar Regions	Cannot display the poles Extends infinitely to top/bottom.	Displays flat poles With minimal aesthetic distortion.
 Primary Uses	Marine navigation, aeronautical charting, web maps (e.g., Google Maps, OpenStreetMap).	World thematic maps, educational materials, global data distribution (e.g., climate, population).

What Does It Mean for India?

- India **supported** the resolution.
- However, India also clarified that any cartographic representation must accurately reflect India's sovereign territory and official position on its boundaries, including Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Is the New Map Compulsory?

- The UN resolution is **not a legally binding** order requiring every country to replace the Mercator projection.
- It encourages governments, educational institutions and other stakeholders to promote more accurate representations of relative continental size.

4.6. DECARBONISATION OF INDIA'S STEEL SECTOR & GREEN STEEL TRANSITION

Context

- A recent analysis argues that India can substantially reduce future steel-sector emissions by redirecting investments from new or relined coal-based blast furnaces towards Direct Reduced Iron (DRI), Electric Arc Furnaces (EAFs) and eventually green hydrogen-based production.



India's Steel Production and Emissions Profile

- Steel is called a "**hard-to-abate**" sector — high heat and carbon (as reducing agent) are intrinsic to conventional production.
- India is the **second-largest** crude steel producer in the world, after China.
- India produced around 160 million tonnes of crude steel in FY 2025–26.
- Steelmaking accounts for nearly 12% of India's greenhouse-gas emissions.
- India's steelmaking emissions intensity is around 2.55–2.65 tCO₂e per tonne of crude steel, higher than the global average.
- India is targeting **net-zero emissions by 2070**; steel is one of the toughest sectors to align with this goal.

The Problem of "Carbon Lock-in"

- **Carbon lock-in** occurs when investment in long-lived fossil-fuel infrastructure makes continued emissions economically and institutionally difficult to avoid. This is particularly important for blast furnaces.
- **Blast furnaces (BF)** typically operate **20–25 years**; a mid-life "**relining**" (capital-intensive relining of the furnace lining) extends life by another **15–20 years**.

Key Steelmaking Production Routes in India

- **BF-BOF (Blast Furnace–Basic Oxygen Furnace)**: Uses coal/coke to melt iron ore; **highly carbon-intensive**. Accounts for ~43% of Indian steel production and 70.4% of global steelmaking still uses BF-BOF.
- **Electric Arc Furnace (EAF)**: EAF uses electricity to melt steel scrap and DRI, and can have much lower emissions than the coal-based BF–BOF route when powered by clean electricity.
- **Direct Reduced Iron (DRI)**: DRI removes oxygen from iron ore without melting it, using natural gas or hydrogen as the reducing agent.
 - Direct Reduced Iron – Electric Arc / Induction Furnace Accounts for ~57% of Indian production.
- **Hydrogen-based DRI-EAF ("Green Steel")**: Green hydrogen replaces natural gas/coal as the reducing agent; **near-zero emissions** if hydrogen is produced from renewables.

Major Initiatives & Policy Frameworks

- **National Mission on Green Steel / National Green Hydrogen Mission linkage:**
 - **Target:** lower steel sector emissions intensity from current ~2.55–2.65 tCO₂e/tonne to **2.2 tCO₂e/tonne of crude steel by 2029-30**.
 - A **2024 Green Steel certification scheme** labels steel with emissions intensity below 2.2 tCO₂e as "**green**."
 - **Note:** Even India's "green" threshold (2.2 tCO₂e) remains well above the **global average of ~1.85 tCO₂e**.
- **Draft National Steel Policy 2025:**
 - Aims to cut emissions intensity to **2 tCO₂/tonne by 2035-36**.
 - Targets more than doubling crude steel capacity to **400 million tonnes/year by 2035-36**.

- Reduce coking coal import dependence from roughly 90% down to 80%.
- **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)** funded pilot projects (~₹400+ crore) to validate 100% green hydrogen injection in DRI (Direct Reduced Iron) and blast furnaces.

4.7. INDIA'S FIRST OVERSEAS LITHIUM ORE SHIPMENT

Context

- Recently, Indian critical-minerals company **LOHUM** dispatched its first shipment of lithium ore from Zimbabwe, marking the start of its overseas lithium mining operations and, according to the company, making it the **first Indian company** to produce lithium **from overseas mining assets**.



Strategic & Policy Dimensions

- **Critical Mineral Security:** India has no commercial domestic lithium production and relies on **100% imports**. Securing overseas reserves builds supply chain resilience for Electric Vehicle (EV) batteries and grid storage tenders under national initiatives.
- **Institutional & Policy Support:**
 - **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM):** Administered by the Ministry of Mines, focusing on building self-reliance across 30 identified critical minerals (including Lithium, Cobalt, Nickel, and REEs).
 - **KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Ltd.):** A Joint Venture of NALCO, HCL, and MECL focused on acquiring overseas strategic mineral assets (such as lithium blocks in Argentina's Lithium Triangle).

About Zimbabwe

- A landlocked sovereign republic situated in southern Africa, **between the Zambezi and Limpopo River**.
- **Capital:** Harare
- **Bordering Countries:** Bordered by South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique.
- **Victoria Falls:** It is one of the world's largest and most spectacular waterfalls, is located in the country's extreme northwest and is part of the Zambezi river.
- **Matabeleland South Province:** located in southwestern Zimbabwe, where the lithium blocks are situated



4.8. NEW LEGLESS AMPHIBIAN DISCOVERED IN MAHARASHTRA

Context

- Recently, Scientists have discovered a **new species of legless amphibian, *Gegeneophis chandgadi***, from **Chandgad in Kolhapur district, Maharashtra**. The discovery takes the number of known *Gegeneophis* species in India to **12**, of which **11 are endemic to the Western Ghats**.



About *Gegeneophis chandgadi*

- New Species:** *Gegeneophis chandgadi* is a newly described **caecilian**, a limbless, burrowing amphibian belonging to the order Gymnophiona.
- Location:** It was discovered near Buzawade village in Chandgad, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, in the Northern Western Ghats.
- Physical Features:** It has a slender, flesh-coloured, worm-like body with ring-like folds called annuli.
- Habitat:** Like other caecilians, it is adapted to a subterranean lifestyle, spending most of its life in moist soil.
- Naming Classification:** The species name chandgadi pays tribute to the local culture, being named after the **Chandgadi language**, a distinct dialect of Marathi spoken by the people of the region where the species was discovered.

What are Caecilians?

- Caecilians are **legless, elongated amphibians** adapted mainly to a **burrowing lifestyle**.
- Their worm-like appearance can lead to confusion with **earthworms or snakes**, but they are **amphibians**.
- They generally live **underground or in moist soil**, making them difficult to detect.
- Their reduced eyes and specialised sensory structures reflect their **subterranean adaptation**.
- Caecilians constitute one of the **three living orders of amphibians**.

Ecological Importance of Caecilians

- Soil Health:** Burrowing helps maintain **soil aeration and nutrient cycling**.
- Food Web:** Act as both **predators and prey** in soil ecosystems.
- Bioindicators:** Their dependence on moist habitats can indicate **ecosystem health**.
- Biodiversity:** Their high endemism reflects the **unique biodiversity of the Western Ghats**.

Gegeneophis chandgadi

- Group:** Caecilian
- Order:** Gymnophiona
- Genus:** *Gegeneophis*
- Distribution:** Northern Western Ghats, Maharashtra

- **Habitat:** Moist soil and **subterranean environments**
- **Endemism:** Part of the highly endemic caecilian diversity of the Western Ghats.

4.9. MONTREAL PROTOCOL AND THE ROAD TO OZONE RECOVERY

Context

- 16 September is observed as World Ozone Day, marking the adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1987.

Why Was the Montreal Protocol Needed?

The stratospheric ozone layer absorbs harmful **Ultraviolet-B** (UV-B) radiation. Certain man-made chemicals release chlorine and bromine in the stratosphere, which catalytically destroy ozone.



- **Ozone depletion:** Reduction in stratospheric ozone concentration.
- **Ozone hole:** A region of severe seasonal ozone depletion, most prominently over Antarctica.
- **Major ozone-depleting substances (ODS):** CFCs, halons, carbon tetrachloride, methyl chloroform, HCFCs and methyl bromide.
- **Major impacts:** Increased risk of skin cancer, cataracts and damage to ecosystems.

INDIA AND THE MONTREAL PROTOCOL

- **Kigali Amendment:** India ratified it in 2021.
- **Category:** India is an Article 5, Group 2 country.
- **Baseline:** HFC baseline is based on the 2024–2026 average.
- **Freeze Year:** India will freeze HFC consumption in 2028.
- **Target:** India aims to reduce HFC consumption by 85% by 2047.

Domestic Action

- **HPMPs:** India is implementing HCFC Phase-out Management Plans.
 - Phased reduction of HCFCs used in refrigeration, air-conditioning and foam sectors.
- **Regulation:** ODS are regulated through the ODS (Regulation and Control) Rules.

Montreal Protocol at a Glance

- **Adopted:** 1987; **Entered into force:** 1989.
- **Objective:** Protection of the **stratospheric ozone layer**.
- **Focus:** Phasing out **Ozone-Depleting Substances (ODS)**.
- **Nature:** **Legally binding international environmental treaty** under the **Vienna Convention framework**.
- **Implementation:** Different phase-out schedules for **developed and developing countries**.
- **Multilateral Fund:** Provides **financial and technical assistance** to developing countries.
- **Kigali Amendment (2016):** Entered into force: 1 January 2019, mandates the **phase-down of HFCs**, which are **not ODS but are potent greenhouse gases**.

What Does the Protocol Control?

The Protocol does not merely regulate emissions after production. It controls the production, consumption, trade and use of ODS.

Important substance groups

Substance	Major historical use	Ozone significance
CFCs	Refrigeration, aerosols	Major ozone-depleting chemicals
Halons	Fire extinguishers	High ozone-depleting potential
HCFCs	Transitional refrigerants	ODS, though generally less damaging than CFCs
Methyl bromide	Fumigation	Ozone-depleting substance
HFCs	Refrigeration and air-conditioning	Do not deplete ozone, but are powerful greenhouse gases

4.10. SIANG UPPER MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

Context

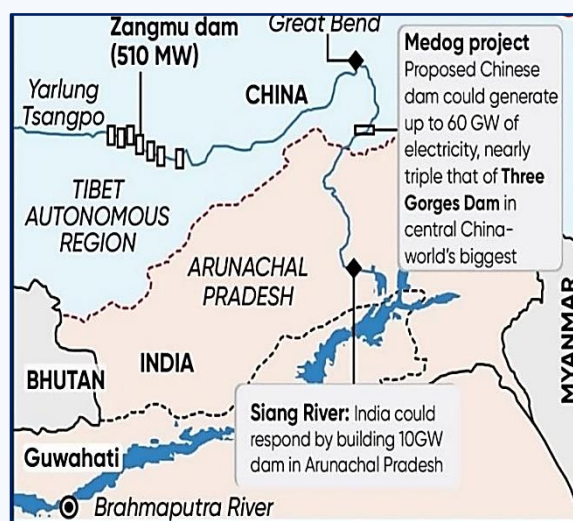
- The **Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet** approved an **Empowered High-Level Committee** to coordinate the **PFR survey and related activities** for the proposed **Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP)** in **Siang and Upper Siang districts**, amid local opposition and environmental concerns.

About Siang Upper Multipurpose Project

- Location:** Siang River basin, the area is primarily inhabited by the Adi Tribe, an indigenous community with a strong connection to the Siang River.
- Districts involved:** **Siang and Upper Siang.**
- Proposed capacity:** Around **11,000 MW** of hydropower.
- Nature:** A proposed **multipurpose hydropower and storage project.**
- National Project:** The project was declared a **National Project by the Centre in 2008.**
- Current stage:** **Pre-Feasibility Report (PFR) survey**, not construction.
- Purpose:** Besides power generation, the project is associated with **water security, flood moderation in the Siang–Brahmaputra basin, employment and regional development.**

Strategic Significance

- Hydropower generation** in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Water security** in the Siang–Brahmaputra basin.
- Flood moderation** downstream.
- Employment and socio-economic development** in the region.
- The broader strategic importance of Arunachal Pradesh as a **border State.**



4.11. PICHAVARAM MANGROVES THE BLUE CARBON POWERHOUSE

Context

- A recent study has estimated the **Total Economic Value (TEV) of the Pichavaram Mangrove Ecosystem at ₹2,485.38 crores**, highlighting the economic importance of mangroves through **ecosystem services and blue-carbon storage**.



Pichavaram Mangroves Ecosystem

- Location:** Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, near Chidambaram.
- Ecosystem:** Mangrove and coastal wetland with **interconnected backwaters and channels**.
- Importance:** Supports **biodiversity, fisheries, coastal protection and climate regulation**. It is a designated as a **Ramsar Site**

Mangrove: The Coastal Ecosystem

- Mangroves are **salt-tolerant woody plants** found mainly in tropical and subtropical **intertidal zones**.
- These ecosystems thrive in high-rainfall areas (1,000–3,000 mm) with temperatures ranging from **26°C to 35°C**.
- They occur along **estuaries, deltas, tidal creeks, lagoons and sheltered coastlines**.
- They are adapted to **salinity, waterlogging and low-oxygen soils**.
- Special adaptations include **pneumatophores, prop roots and salt-excretion mechanisms** in different species.
- Ecological Importance**
 - As per **World Wildlife Fund** mangroves store 7.5–10 times **more carbon** per acre than tropical forests.
 - Provide **breeding and nursery grounds** for fish, crustaceans and other organisms.
 - Protect coastlines from **erosion, storm surges and cyclones**.
 - Support **fisheries and coastal livelihoods**.
 - Store significant amounts of **carbon in biomass and sediments**.
 - Contribute to **biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation**.



About Carbon Sequestration, Carbon Storage & Carbon Sink

Concept	Meaning
Carbon Sequestration	Process of capturing CO ₂ from the atmosphere and storing it in biomass, soil, oceans or geological formations.

Carbon Storage	Carbon already held in biomass, soil, sediments, oceans or geological formations.
Carbon Sink	A natural or artificial system that absorbs more carbon than it releases.

Green Carbon vs Blue Carbon

Green Carbon	Blue Carbon
Mainly associated with terrestrial ecosystems	Associated with coastal and marine ecosystems
Forests, grasslands, agricultural ecosystems	Mangroves, seagrass, salt marshes
Stored in vegetation and soils	Stored significantly in biomass and coastal sediments

Key Important Terms

- **Total Economic Value (TEV):** A framework used in environmental economics to value both market (use) and non-market (non-use) benefits of an ecosystem, including provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural services.
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):** A market-based mechanism where beneficiaries of ecosystem services pay providers (often local communities) to maintain or restore the ecosystem.

India's Progress in Mangrove Conservation: As per the India State of Forest Report 2023 (ISFR-2023)

- **Total Mangrove Cover (2023):** 4,991.68 sq. km, covering **0.15%** of India's geographical area.
- **Long-term growth:** Increased by 363.68 sq. km (7.86%) between 2013–2023.
- **Overall growth:** Increased by 509.68 sq. km (11.4%) between 2001–2023.
- **Largest share:** West Bengal – 42.45%, followed by Gujarat – 23.32% and Andaman & Nicobar Islands – 12.19%.
- **Gujarat's progress:** Mangrove cover increased by 253.06 sq. km (2001–2023), supported by plantations, community participation and public-private partnerships.

4.12. SOHAR PORT

Context

- Amid disruptions around the **Strait of Hormuz**, Oman's **Sohar Port** is gaining importance as an alternative maritime gateway for **Indian cargo to GCC countries**.

About Sohar Port

- A **deep-sea commercial port and industrial free zone** in northern Oman.
- Located in the **Wilayat of Liwa, Al Batinah North Governorate**, Oman.
- Situated on the **Gulf of Oman**, outside the **Strait of Hormuz**, with access to the **Arabian Sea**.



Key Features

- **Strategic Location:** Provides maritime access without vessels having to pass through the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- **Deep-water Port:** Has berths capable of handling **large bulk carriers**, including Valemax-class vessels.
- **Integrated Industrial Zone:** Major clusters include **Logistics, Petrochemicals, Metals and Food**.
- **Multimodal Connectivity:** Road links connect Sohar with **UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait**, enabling onward movement of cargo by land.

Strategic Significance

- Sohar provides an **alternative logistics corridor** for trade between India and the Gulf, particularly during disruptions in the **Strait of Hormuz**.
- It can also complement India's wider connectivity initiatives in West Asia, including the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**.

4.13. CAZRI MOTH BEAN VARIETIES

Context

- **ICAR-CAZRI, Jodhpur** developed four moth bean varieties- **CAZRI Moth-4, 5, 6 & 7**- that withstood a 35-day dry spell during Kharif 2026, showing strong potential for climate-resilient agriculture in western Rajasthan.

What is Moth Bean?

- Moth bean is an important **Kharif pulse crop of the hot arid regions of western Rajasthan**, cultivated over nearly **10 lakh hectares**.
- **Native to South Asia**, it is primarily cultivated in hot, rainfed and marginal desert regions, particularly the Thar Desert of western Rajasthan, as well as parts of Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab.
- Planted at the onset of the monsoon rains around June or July and harvested in September or October.
- Highly drought-resistant and suited for hot, arid, or semi-arid regions.



Significance

- **Nutritional Security:** Provides **plant-based protein, essential amino acids and minerals**, particularly benefiting resource-poor rural communities in desert regions.
- **Livestock Support:** Offers **protein-rich green and dry fodder (pala)** for livestock during **post-monsoon and drought periods**.
- **Dryland Agriculture:** Supports **crop rotation and mixed cropping** while contributing to **sand-dune stabilisation**.
- **Climate Resilience:** Its adaptability to harsh arid conditions strengthens **dryland farming systems** amid increasing climate variability.

- **Pulse Self-Reliance:** Contributes to India's efforts towards **greater self-sufficiency in pulse production**.

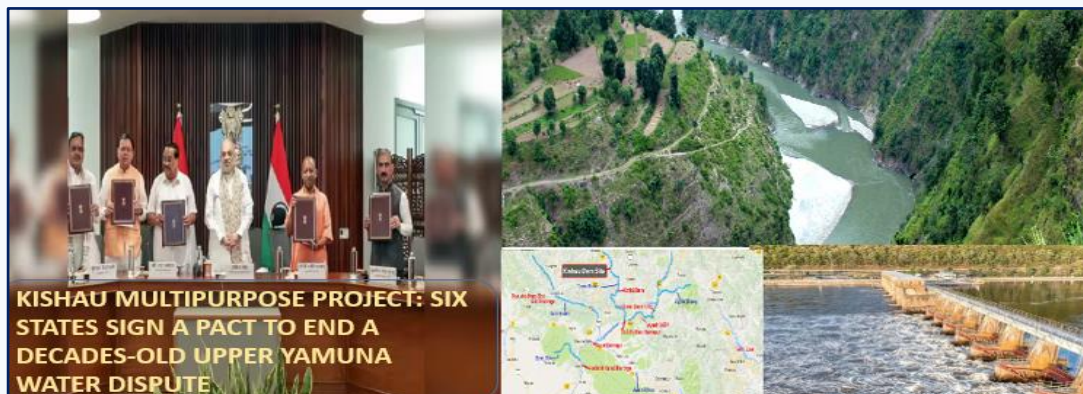
About CAZRI

- **Full Name:** Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI).
- **Headquarter:** Jodhpur, Rajasthan.
- **Ministry:** It is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Agriculture Research and Education (DARE) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of Government of India.
- **Focus:** It conducts research on agriculture and natural-resource management in arid and desert regions.
- **Significance:** CAZRI develops climate-resilient crops and technologies suited to the harsh and water-scarce conditions of arid regions.

4.14. KISHAU MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

Context

- **Recently,** six states - Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Rajasthan—have signed a milestone agreement to implement the ₹15,624-crore Kishau Multipurpose Project, marking the resolution of a long-standing inter-state water sharing dispute.



Key Points of the Agreement:

- **Participating States:** Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Rajasthan.
- **Location:** A 232.6-metre-high dam built on the **Tons River** (a major tributary of the Yamuna) on the border between Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

KISHAU MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT

OBJECTIVE:
Multipurpose dam on the **Tons River** for drinking water, irrigation and hydropower.

LOCATION:
Proposed on the **Himachal Pradesh-Uttarakhand border** in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

POWER CAPACITY:
The project has a proposed generation capacity of **660 MW**.

UPPER YAMUNA PROJECTS:
Kishau, Lakhwar and Renukaji are the three identified storage projects in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

STATES INVOLVED:
Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi.

- **Total Cost & Funding:** The Central Government will pay around **90%** of the cost, and the remaining **10%** will be shared among the six states.

Main Benefits of the Project:

- **Electricity:** Generates 422 MW of hydropower (approx. 1,476 million units of clean electricity per year).
- **Irrigation:** Provides water to irrigate roughly 97,000 hectares of farmland.
- **Drinking Water:** Delhi will be a major beneficiary, receiving around 110 million cubic metres of drinking water annually to address shortages.




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UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following statements regarding coastal and maritime jurisdiction in India:

1. Regulation of fishing within the 12 nautical miles of territorial waters falls under the primary domain of the respective coastal State Governments.
2. Fishing activities beyond territorial waters in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are regulated by Central laws.
3. State governments can completely ban the transit of fishing gear through territorial waters even if the gear is meant strictly for EEZ fishing.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Under the constitutional scheme and maritime laws of India, regulation of marine fishing within the 12 nautical miles of **Territorial Waters** falls under the jurisdiction of the respective coastal State Governments, governed by their specific Marine Fishing Regulation Acts.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Beyond 12 nautical miles, the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** (extending up to 200 nautical miles) comes under the executive and legislative domain of the Central/Union Government.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** State governments cannot completely prohibit or block the transit of vessels or fishing gear through territorial waters if the fishers are bound for the EEZ. The Supreme Court clarified that while States can regulate or restrict specific gear (like purse-seine nets)

within their 12 nautical miles to protect local ecology, they must provide a **"specified channel" or official navigation corridor** to allow fishermen lawful transit to fish in the EEZ under Union rules.

Q. With reference to the Sone River system, consider the following statements:

1. It is the largest right-bank tributary of the Ganga River system.
2. It originates near the Amarkantak Plateau, close to the source of the Narmada River.
3. Rihand and North Koel are major right-bank tributaries of the Sone River.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is Incorrect:** Yamuna is the largest right-bank tributary of the Ganga. The Sone is the **second-largest** southern (right-bank) tributary.
- **Statement 2 is Correct:** Sone originates near the **Amarkantak Plateau** in Anuppur district, Madhya Pradesh, in close geographic proximity to the source of the Narmada River.
- **Statement 3 is Correct:** Both the **Rihand** (which feeds the Govind Ballabh Pant Sagar) and the **North Koel** are major right-bank (southern) tributaries joining the Sone.

Q. With reference to the PARIVARTAN scheme, consider the following statements:

- I. The scheme seeks to replace over two lakh trucks and buses conforming to BS-IV or older emission norms in Delhi and select NCR districts within one year.
- II. The scheme is funded through the National Capital Region Planning Board under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.
- III. Trucks and buses contribute about 36% of vehicular PM2.5 emissions in the Delhi-NCR region despite forming only 3.1% of the total vehicle fleet.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) I and III only

Explanation

Statement I is Correct: PARIVARTAN seeks to replace more than two lakh trucks and buses registered in Delhi and the NCR districts of Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh that conform to BS-IV or older norms, within one year.

Statement II is Incorrect: The scheme is funded through the National Capital Region Planning Board under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, though it is implemented by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Statement III is Correct: Officials stated that trucks and buses form only 3.1% of the region's total vehicle fleet but account for 36% of vehicular PM2.5 emissions.

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

1. Orangutans are naturally found in India.
2. All three living orangutan species are classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN.
3. Orangutans are listed under CITES Appendix I.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

Statement 1 is Incorrect: Orangutans are **not native to India**; their natural range is restricted to **Borneo and Sumatra**.

Statement 2 is Correct: The **Bornean, Sumatran and Tapanuli orangutans** are all **Critically Endangered**.

Statement 3 is Correct: All three orangutan species are included in **CITES Appendix I**, providing the highest level of protection against international commercial trade.



Scan to attempt more questions

5.1. ORV SAGAR MANTHAN

Context

- Recently, India launched **ORV Sagar Manthan**, an advanced indigenous **Ocean Research Vessel**, built by **GRSE for NCPOR under the Ministry of Earth Sciences**, to strengthen deep-ocean exploration, marine scientific research, climate studies and India's maritime capabilities.



Some Key Facts

1. Nodal Ministry & Agencies

- Designed, engineered and constructed by:** Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Limited (GRSE), a defence Public Sector Undertaking (PSU).
- For:** National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**.

2. Mission Purpose and Strategic Succession

- Mission Alignment:** Direct operational asset under Vertical-4 (Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration) of India's flagship Deep Ocean Mission (DOM).
- Replacement:** It will gradually replace ORV **Sagar Kanya**, a 43-year-old vessel procured from Germany in 1983

3. Technical Specifications & Features

Feature	Technical Detail / Significance
Dimensions & Tonnage	89.5-m long and 18.8-m wide
Operational Capabilities	Max speed of 14 knots; capable of surveys up to depths of 6,000 metres (6 km) .
Station Keeping	Dynamic Positioning System: Holds coordinates precisely without anchor deployment.
Sensor Deployment	Drop Keels: Lowers acoustic instruments below the hull to avoid vessel noise and bubble interference.
Subsea Vehicles	Functions as a mothership to launch ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicles) and AUVs (Autonomous Underwater Vehicles).
Certification	Dual-class certified by the Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) and American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) .

4. Operational & Research Verticals

- Deep-Sea Mineral Exploration:** Surveying mid-oceanic ridges to map **hydrothermal sulphide deposits**, polymetallic crusts, and critical raw materials.

- **Geophysical & Seabed Mapping:** Executes 3D multibeam **bathymetric mapping**, sub-bottom sedimentary profiling, and multichannel seismic subsurface analysis.
- **Ocean-Climate Interactions:** Upper-air observations, Conductivity-Temperature-Depth (CTD) profiling, and water column sampling to study climate dynamics and Southern Ocean conditions.

GRSE's Growing Capabilities

- GRSE has nearly **four decades of experience** in building **survey vessels** for the Indian Navy.
- GRSE has delivered **four large survey vessels** to the Navy; **the latest, INS Sanshodhak**, was delivered in **March 2026**.
- Currently, GRSE is building nine warships, including:
 - **1 Project 17A** guided-missile frigate
 - 4 ASW-SWC corvettes
 - 4 Next-Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs)

Project 17A (Nilgiri Class)

1. **Project 17A** is a programme to build **7 advanced stealth guided-missile frigates** for the Indian Navy.
2. **Builder: GRSE – 3 ships; Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) – 4 ships.**
3. It is an improved successor to the **Project 17 (Shivalik-class) frigates**.
4. Key features include **enhanced stealth, advanced sensors, improved automation and indigenous systems**.
5. **GRSE-built ships: INS Himgiri, INS Dunagiri and INS Vindhyagiri.**
6. **MDL –built ships: INS Nilgiri, INS Udaygiri, INS Taragiri and INS Mahendragiri.**

5.2. SPIDER VENOM SHOWS ANTI-CANCER POTENTIAL IN STEGODYPHUS SARASINORUM

Context

- Recently, Indian researchers conducted the first detailed study of the venom gland of *Stegodyphus sarasinorum*, identifying bioactive molecules that showed effects against cancer cells in laboratory tests.



What Did the Researchers Study?

I. A Multi-Omics Approach

- Researchers combined multiple techniques to understand the venom gland at the molecular level:
 - **Transcriptomics** → studies RNA/transcribed genes.
 - **Proteomics** → identifies and studies proteins.
 - **Metabolomics** → identifies small molecules/metabolites.

- **Confocal Raman Spectroscopy** → helps identify and map biomolecules within biological tissues.

II. Key Findings

- **31 protein components** were identified through transcriptomic analysis.
- **32 proteins** were identified through proteomic analysis.
- **81 metabolites** were detected using Ultra High-Performance Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (UHPLC-MS)
- These included **amino acids, biogenic amines, nucleotides, nucleosides and organic acids**.

Cytotoxicity & Drug Discovery Potential

- **Cytotoxicity** means the ability of a substance to **damage or kill cells**.
- Venom-gland extracts were tested against **Dalton's Lymphoma Ascites (DLA) cancer cells**.
 - Dalton's Lymphoma Ascites (DLA) is a widely used transplantable mouse tumour model in cancer research
- The extracts demonstrated **dose-dependent cytotoxicity**.
- Higher concentrations resulted in greater destruction of cancer cells.
- This does not mean that spider venom is a proven cancer treatment. The findings are preliminary and laboratory-based.

Why is Spider Venom Interesting?

- Spider venoms contain diverse **peptides, proteins and other bioactive molecules**.
- Some venom components can interact with **ion channels, cell membranes and signalling pathways**.
- Earlier research has also investigated spider-venom compounds for potential **anticancer activity**, including against breast-cancer cells.

About *Stegodyphus sarasinorum*

- It is commonly known as the Indian cooperative spider, is a social species of velvet spider in the family Eresidae found across parts of **South and Southeast Asia**.
- **Habitat and Distribution**: Native to India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Myanmar.
- **Key Characteristics**:
 - Unlike most eresid spiders that live on the ground, *Stegodyphus sarasinorum* is arboreal (living in trees and bushes).
 - It is a **social spider**, living in permanent colonies.
 - It builds **communal silk nests** and can **cooperatively** capture prey.
 - Females practice **suicidal maternal care**. After hatching, spiderlings first feed on regurgitated fluids and eventually consume the mother entirely (matrphagy).
- Its venom represents a potential source of **bioactive molecules for pharmaceutical research**.

5.3. ISRO LAUNCHES ADVANCED EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITE EOS-05

Context

- Recently, the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** launched **Earth-observation satellite EOS-05** aboard **GSLV-F17** from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota to establish persistent geo-imaging over the Indian subcontinent and adjoining regions.

About EOS-05 Earth Observation Satellite

- First geosynchronous imaging satellite:** EOS-05 is India's first-ever imaging satellite from a **geosynchronous orbit (Orbital period equals Earth's rotation)**.
- Payload Weight:** At 2,367 kg, EOS-05 is the **heaviest satellite ever** placed into orbit by a GSLV rocket.
- Replaces **EOS-03**, which was lost in the unsuccessful GSLV-F10 mission (August 2021).
- The satellite is designed to provide near-real-time observation ("**Eye in the Sky**") of Earth's surface.
- Launch Vehicle: GSLV-F17** (3-stage, 51.7-meter-tall rocket with a cryogenic 3rd stage and a lift-off mass of ~420.5 tonnes).
- Multi-Band Imaging:** Features advanced optical sensors across visible, infrared, multi-spectral, and hyperspectral bands.
- Mission life:** 9 years.
- Applications:** Agriculture, disaster management, water resources, forestry and urban planning.



What is Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle?

- Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)** are **Indian rockets developed by ISRO**.
- It is primarily designed to launch **heavier communication and other satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)**.
- Three-stage vehicle:**
 - First stage – Solid-fuel core (S139) with four liquid strap-on boosters
 - Second stage – Liquid fuel (Vikas engine)
 - Third stage – **Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS)** — the most technologically critical part
- Variants:**
 - GSLV Mk II** – Uses the indigenous cryogenic stage; operational since 2014 (after early failures).
 - GSLV Mk III (now called LVM3)** – A more powerful, next-generation vehicle with a more powerful **CE-20 cryogenic engine**; used for larger missions like **Chandrayaan-2**, **Chandrayaan-3**, and crewed **Gaganyaan** test flights.
- High-Profile Projects:**
 - GSLV/LVM3 variants have launched major missions such as Chandrayaan-2, Chandrayaan-3, GSAT, NVS, and OneWeb satellites, and are also designated for Gaganyaan human spaceflight missions.

Key Difference: PSLV vs GSLV

Feature	PSLV	GSLV Mk II
Primary use	Polar, Sun-synchronous & LEO satellites	Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) & higher orbits
Stages	4 stages	3 stages + liquid strap-ons
Propulsion	Solid + Liquid stages	Solid + Liquid + Cryogenic
Cryogenic engine	No	CE-7.5

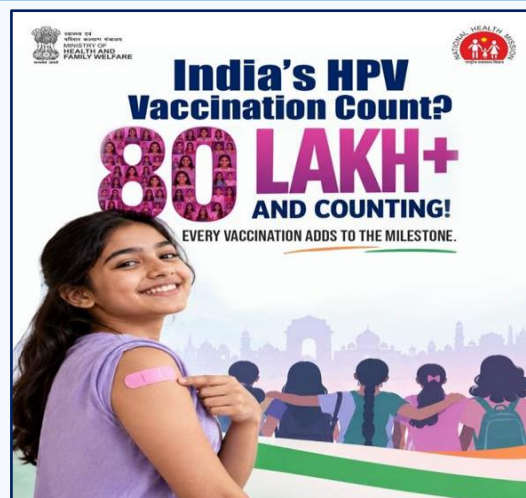
5.4. NATIONAL HPV VACCINATION CAMPAIGN & CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION

Context

- India achieved a major public health milestone by administering over **80 Lakh (8 million) doses** of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine under the **National HPV Vaccination Campaign** within seven months of its rollout.

About National HPV Vaccination Campaign

- Launch & Nodal Ministry:** Launched in **February 2026**; implemented by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)**.
- Target Beneficiaries:** **14-year-old adolescent girls**.
- Annual Cohort Size:** Approximately **1.2 crore (12 million) girls** annually, based on **Registrar General of India (RGI) 2021 estimates**.
- Delivery Protocol:** Voluntary, free-of-cost single-dose vaccination with mandatory parental consent, delivered at Government health facilities.



State-Wise Coverage Highlights

- 100% Coverage** Achieved: Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Mizoram.
- More than 90%** Coverage Achieved: Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Assam.
- Highest Absolute Volume:** **Uttar Pradesh** leads nationwide with over 22 Lakh adolescent girls vaccinated.

Monitoring Mechanism

- U-WIN Platform:** Enables real-time district-level vaccination monitoring, identifies coverage gaps/missed beneficiaries, and supports resource allocation.
- AEFI (Adverse Events Following Immunization) Management:** Ensures post-vaccination safety through trained Medical Officers and 24×7 referral hospital linkages for managing severe reactions, strengthening public trust and addressing vaccine hesitancy.
- Community Engagement:** ASHAs, ANMs, teachers, pediatricians, gynecologists and AIIMS experts help address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation.

About HPV

- **Types:** Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of over 200 related non-enveloped **DNA viruses**.
- **Primary Types:** HPV 16 and HPV 18 (responsible for ~70% of cervical cancers globally).
- **Genetic Material:** **Double-stranded circular DNA** enclosed within an icosahedral protein capsid (composed mainly of L1 and L2 proteins).

- **Transmission:** Direct skin-to-skin contact, **primarily sexual contact** (vaginal, anal, or oral).
- **Prevention:** HPV vaccination is highly effective when administered before exposure to the virus (**ideally between ages 9–14**).
- **Major Cancers:** HPV is strongly associated with cervical cancer and also contributes to cancers of the anus, penis, vulva, vagina and oropharynx.
- **Types of Vaccines:**
 - **Gardasil 9:** Nonavalent vaccine covering types 6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, and 58.
 - **Cervavac:** India's indigenous quadrivalent HPV vaccine developed by the Serum Institute of India (SII) covering types 6, 11, 16, and 18.

5.5. BADRI CATTLE

Context

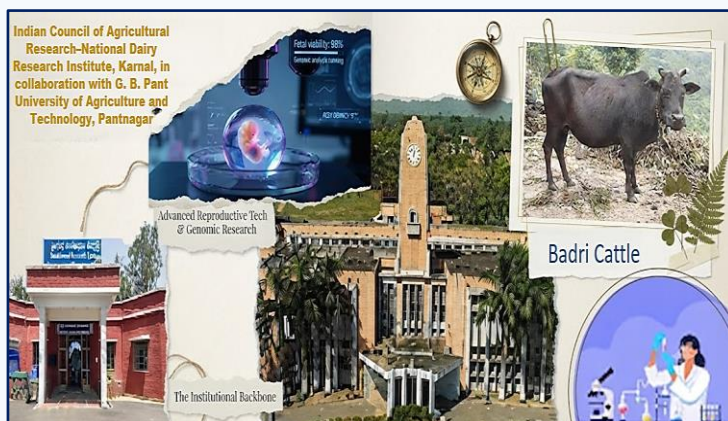
- Recently, a healthy Badri female calf was successfully born through Ovum Pick-Up and In Vitro Fertilization (OPU-IVF) technology, marking an important step towards the conservation and genetic improvement of Uttarakhand's indigenous Badri cattle breed.

Key Highlights of the Achievement

- **Breed Significance:** Badri cattle are the indigenous state animal of Uttarakhand.
- **Collaborating Institutions:** ICAR–National Dairy Research Institute (ICAR-NDRI), Karnal, and G. B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, with funding from the Uttarakhand Biotechnology Council, Haldi.

What is OPU-IVF?

- **Ovum Pick-Up (OPU):** A technique in which **oocytes (egg cells)** are collected from **genetically valuable female animals**, generally through ultrasound-guided procedures.
- **In Vitro Fertilization (IVF):** The collected oocytes are **matured and fertilised with semen under controlled laboratory conditions**.
- **Embryo Transfer:** The resulting embryos are transferred into **synchronised recipient cows** for gestation.
- **Advantage:** Enables the production of **multiple embryos from elite females**, potentially accelerating the multiplication of superior germplasm compared with conventional reproductive methods.



About Badri Cattle

- **Indigenous Breed:** Badri cattle are an important **indigenous cattle genetic resource of Uttarakhand**.
- **State Animal:** Badri cattle are recognised as the **state animal of Uttarakhand**.
- **Conservation:** Advanced reproductive technologies such as **OPU-IVF and embryo transfer** can support their long-term conservation and genetic improvement.
- **Characteristics:** Badri cattle are relatively small in size, with varied coat colors ranging from black, brown, red, and white to gray. Badri is reared mainly for **bullock power, milk and manure**.

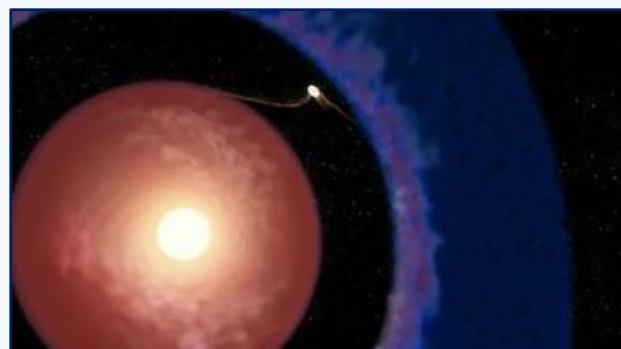
Significance for Himalayan Livestock Development

- The initiative demonstrates how **indigenous genetic resources can be integrated with advanced reproductive biotechnology**.
- It supports the **conservation of indigenous breeds**, faster multiplication and wider dissemination of **elite germplasm**, and genetic improvement of valuable cattle.
- It also promotes **sustainable livestock development** and strengthens cattle breeding in the **Himalayan region**.

5.6. ELIAS 2-24 B

Context

- Astronomers have confirmed **Elias 2-24 b**, a gas-giant exoplanet that is **less than one million years old**, making it the **youngest known planet discovered so far**. The confirmation was made using **NASA-funded archival observations from the W. M. Keck Observatory**.



About Elias 2-24 b

- **Elias 2-24 b** is a **Jupiter-mass, gas-giant exoplanet** orbiting the young star **Elias 2-24**, located around **450 light-years from Earth** in a star-forming region.
- It is still embedded in the **natal circumstellar disk** of gas and dust and is believed to be actively accumulating material as it forms.
- **Youngest known planet:** Less than **1 million years old**, compared with the previous record holders around **PDS 70 and WISPIT 2**, which are more than 5 million years old.
- **Wide orbit:** It lies about **55 Astronomical Units (AU)** from its host star - 55 times the average Earth–Sun distance.
- **Still forming:** The planet is located within a prominent **gap in the circumstellar disk**, where it is actively accreting gas and dust.

How was it detected?

- **ALMA** first detected a gap in the dusty disk around Elias 2-24, while the VLT identified a faint object within it.

- **Archival Keck Observatory** images from 2018–2020 confirmed the object's movement, establishing it as a planet.
- **Coronagraphic Detection:** Detected using high-contrast coronagraphy, which blocks the intense glare of the host star and enables the detection of faint infrared signatures in archival images captured between 2018 and 2020.

Future observations

- **NASA's Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope**, with its advanced coronagraph, will improve the detection of young and distant exoplanets hidden by stellar glare.

5.7. CO-PRODUCTION OF JAVELIN FOR INDIAN DEFENCE FORCES

Context

- **Recently Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL)** has signed an **MoU with Javelin Joint Venture (JJV)**-a partnership of **Raytheon and Lockheed Martin**-to explore **co-producing Javelin Anti-Tank Guided missiles in India**.



About the Javelin Missile System

- **Type:** The Javelin All Up Round is a man-portable, fire-and-forget **anti-tank guided missile (ATGM)** system.
- **Origin:** Jointly produced by **Raytheon and Lockheed Martin** through the Javelin Joint Venture of the United States.
- **Procurement Route:** Acquired by India via **Foreign Military Sales (FMS)**, a US government-to-government arms transfer mechanism, invoked here under emergency procurement powers.

About Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)

- **ATGM** is a **precision-guided missile designed to destroy or disable armoured targets**, particularly tanks.
- It uses guidance technologies such as **infrared, laser or command guidance** to accurately track and hit targets.
- ATGMs can be **man-portable, vehicle-mounted or helicopter-launched**, making them useful across different combat situations.
- They are an important **anti-armour weapon** for modern infantry and mechanised forces.
- Some modern **ATGMs** like **Javelin** have **fire-and-forget capability**, allowing the operator to move or take cover after launch.

About Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL)

- **TASL**, the **defence and aerospace arm of the Tata Group**, develops and manufactures **aircraft structures, missiles, radars, unmanned systems and other advanced defence technologies**.

- **Key Projects**

- **C295 aircraft:** TASL and Airbus are jointly involved in manufacturing **C295 transport aircraft** for the Indian Air Force at the Final Assembly Line in **Vadodara, Gujarat**. It is the **first private-sector aircraft Final Assembly Line in India**.
- **Airbus H125 helicopter:** TASL inaugurated India's **first private-sector helicopter Final Assembly Line** at **Vemagal, Karnataka**, in 2026.
- **C-130J Super Hercules:** TASL is a global single-source provider of **empennages** for the aircraft.
- **Defence systems:** Its portfolio includes **missiles, radars, UAVs, satellites, weapon systems, sensors, C4I systems and armoured vehicles**.

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UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following statements regarding ORV Sagar Manthan:

1. It is an indigenously built Ocean Research Vessel constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE).
2. It operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways.
3. It is designed to conduct deep-sea surveys at depths up to 6,000 metres under the Deep Ocean Mission.

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

- **Explanation: Statement 2 is incorrect.** The vessel operates under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)** via the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR).

Q. With reference to the Earth Observation Satellite-05 (EOS-05) recently launched by ISRO, consider the following statements:

1. It is India's first dedicated imaging satellite placed in a geosynchronous orbit (~36,000 km above Earth).
2. The satellite was injected directly into its final geostationary orbit using the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
3. It serves as a replacement for the EOS-03 satellite lost during the GSLV-F10 mission.

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:** EOS-05 is India's first dedicated imaging satellite designed to monitor the Earth from a geosynchronous orbit (~36,000 km altitude), enabling near real-time persistent monitoring.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** EOS-05 was launched aboard the **GSLV-F17** (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle), not PSLV. Furthermore, it was injected into a **Sub-Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (Sub-GTO)** from where onboard propulsion engines will raise it to its final operational orbit.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** EOS-05 replaces the EOS-03 satellite, which was lost during the unsuccessful GSLV-F10 mission in August 2021.

Q. With reference to *Stegodyphus sarasinorum* (Indian cooperative spider), recently in the news, consider the following statements:

1. It is a social spider that lives in permanent colonies.
2. Unlike most eresid spiders that live on the ground, *Stegodyphus sarasinorum* is arboreal.
3. Males practice suicidal maternal care.

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

- **Statement 1 is correct:** *Stegodyphus sarasinorum* (commonly known as the Indian cooperative spider) is one of the very few

permanently social spider species worldwide. They build communal silk nests and live in permanent cooperative colonies where they hunt, feed, and raise young together.

- **Statement 2 is correct:** While the vast majority of spiders in the family Eresidae (velvet spiders) are ground-dwelling or terrestrial, *Stegodyphus* is the **only genus in the family Eresidae that is strictly arboreal**. They construct their nests on trees, bushes, and shrubs.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Suicidal maternal care (a phenomenon known as **matriphagy**, where adults liquefy their internal organs to feed their young and ultimately sacrifice their bodies for their offspring to consume) is practiced by **females** (mothers and unmated virgin females), **not males**. Males do not engage in suicidal care or matriphagy.

Q. With reference to the National HPV Vaccination Campaign and cervical cancer in India, consider the following statements:

1. The National HPV Vaccination Campaign targets 14-year-old adolescent girls for a voluntary, single-dose vaccination at government health facilities.
2. The campaign utilizes the Co-WIN platform for district-level tracking of vaccination coverage and missed beneficiaries.
3. Cervical cancer is primarily caused by persistent infection with high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) types 16 and 18.
4. Madhya Pradesh has recorded the highest absolute number of adolescent girls vaccinated under the national campaign.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The campaign provides voluntary, free-of-cost single-dose HPV vaccination to 14-year-old adolescent girls with parental consent at government facilities.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The campaign leverages the **U-WIN platform** (dedicated to universal immunization), not the Co-WIN platform (which was developed specifically for COVID-19 vaccination tracking).
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Over 80% of cervical cancer cases in India are caused by persistent infection with oncogenic HPV types **16 and 18**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** Among all States and UTs, **Uttar Pradesh** leads in absolute numbers, having vaccinated over 22 Lakh adolescent girls.



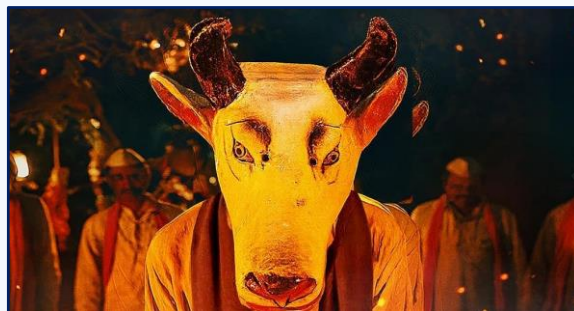
Scan to attempt more questions

HISTORY & CULTURE

6.1. GONDHAL CHOSEN AS INDIA'S OFFICIAL OSCAR ENTRY FOR 2027

Context

- Recently, the Marathi film **Gondhal** has been selected as India's official entry for the Best International Feature Film category at the 99th Academy Awards (Oscars 2027).



About Marathi film Gondhal

- Language:** Marathi
- Director:** Santosh Davakhar, who won the **Silver Peacock for Best Director** at IFFI 2025
- Setting:** Rural Maharashtra
- Theme:** Traditional **Gondhal ritual** and its interaction with social and personal conflicts.

What is Gondhal?

- Gondhal** is a traditional **ritualistic folk performance of Maharashtra**, associated with devotional practices.
- It involves **music, dance, narration and ritual elements** and is traditionally performed in honour of certain deities.
- The film derives its title and cultural setting from this traditional performance tradition.

**THE OSCARS**
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**The Oscars**
The Academy Awards, popularly known as the Oscars, are presented annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

They recognise artistic and technical excellence in filmmaking across various categories.
The awards were first presented in 1929 in Hollywood, California.


**India's Association with the Oscars**
Bhanu Athaiya became the first Indian to win an Oscar for Best Costume Design for *Gandhi* in 1983.
Satyajit Ray received an Honorary Academy Award in 1992 for his exceptional contribution to cinema.
A.R. Rahman won two Oscars for *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2009 — Best Original Score and Best Original Song.
Gulzar shared the Best Original Song Oscar with A.R. Rahman for "Jai Ho" from *Slumdog Millionaire*.
Resul Pookutty won the Oscar for Best Sound Mixing for *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2009.
The *Elephant Whisperers* won the Best Documentary Short Film award at the 95th Academy Awards in 2023.

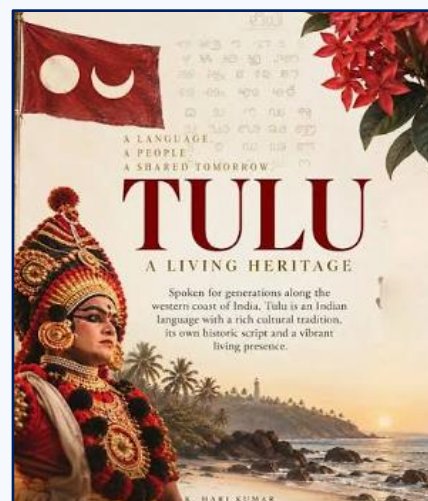
6.2. TULU GETS ADDITIONAL OFFICIAL LANGUAGE STATUS IN KARNATAKA

Context

- The **Karnataka Cabinet** decided to accord **additional official language status to Tulu** in specified districts of Karnataka.

About Tulu

- Tulu** is a **Dravidian language** spoken predominantly in **Dakshina Kannada and Udupi** districts of Karnataka.
- It is also spoken by communities in neighbouring regions.
- Tulu has a long literary and cultural tradition and is associated closely with the **linguistic heritage of coastal Karnataka**.



- The **Census** recognises Tulu as an important language spoken by a significant linguistic community.
- Tulu is **not included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution**.

Constitutional Provision

- **Article 345** empowers a State Legislature to adopt **one or more languages in use in the State** or **Hindi** as the official language(s) of the State.
- **Article 346:** Governs the official language for communication between one State and another State, or between a State and the Union.
- **Article 347:** Contains special provisions relating to a language spoken by a section of the population of a State (Presidential direction to recognise a language if requested).
- Karnataka currently has Kannada as its official language.
- Declaring Tulu as an **additional official language** would require the necessary **legal/legislative process** (e.g., amending Section 2 of the Karnataka Official Language Act, 1963), beyond a Cabinet decision alone.

Tulu in Education

- Tulu is taught as an **optional language** in some educational institutions.
- The language has a strong literary and cultural tradition in the **Tulu-speaking region**.

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UPSC PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Tulu language:

1. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages.
2. It is primarily spoken in coastal Karnataka and northern parts of Kerala.
3. It is listed as one of the 22 scheduled languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Tulu belongs to the Dravidian language group.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** It is mainly spoken in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi (Karnataka), and Kasaragod (Kerala).
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Tulu is currently a non-scheduled language and is not in the Eighth Schedule.

Q. Consider the following statements regarding *Gondhal*:

1. *Gondhal* is a Marathi film set against the cultural backdrop of Maharashtra.

2. It has been selected as India's official entry for the Best International Feature Film category at the Oscars 2027.
3. The film's director won the Silver Peacock for Best Director at IFFI 2025.
4. India has already won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 2 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:** Gondhal is a Marathi film set in rural Maharashtra.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** It has been selected as India's official entry for the 2027 Oscars.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Santosh Davakhar won the Silver Peacock for Best Director at IFFI 2025.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** India has **not yet won** the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film.



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