

UPSC ESSENTIALS

January 2025 Issue



LETTER TO ASPIRANTS

Dear Aspirants,

As we enter the New Year, it is time to assess our position both in the examination and preparation cycle. In 2025 there will be a lot of aspirants who will be again beginning from scratch to meet their ultimate dream, to become an IAS officer, and on the other hand, there will be a few who will be fastening their laces for the final lap, the interview. No matter which stage of the journey you belong to, enriching your knowledge is a must. And therefore, we are back with the January 2025 issue of the UPSC Essentials divided into its usual three parts.

The Cover Story welcomes 2025 and offers what to watch out for in this new year in global affairs and law. At the same time, it is important to reflect on the significant transformations in the economy and healthcare that defined 2024. With so much in store, it is generally not an easy task to get everything in one place. So, this might help.

The Express Edge section of this issue brings to you some of the must-reads classified into different subjects. This month many seasoned writers and scholars wrote on issues and concepts like *Indo-Pacific frameworks and alliances*, *Inflation*, *Dances in India*, *Untouchability*, *Migration pattern*, etc.

And finally, the UPSC Specials, apart from its usual coverage, becomes unique for two important reasons. Firstly, in the Ethics Simplified article, we cover an 'ethical' reading of your 2024 issues. Secondly, our Expert Talk of this month focusses on BPSC aspirants' protests. Our other articles which you find every month, including the current affairs quiz, continue to prepare you for your prelims and mains.

Aspirants, the normal year cycle doesn't correspond with your exam cycle. That doesn't mean you shouldn't enjoy or celebrate the new year but it does mean to make the best use of time both at work and at leisure for your next big goal --UPSC CSE 2025. For more, write to me at manas.srivastava@indianexpress.com and keep reading UPSC Essentials of The Indian Express.

Happy New Year.

**THINK SMART
WORK HARD
CONQUER YOUR GOAL!**

Enjoy reading

Manas Srivastava

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COVER STORY

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Economy and healthcare in 2024 to law and global affairs in 2025

Written by **Roshni Yadav**

INTRODUCTION

As we have entered the new year 2025, it is critical to reflect on the significant transformations in the economy and healthcare that defined 2024. Additionally, let's look ahead to see how 2025 promises to bring dynamic changes in global affairs and legal developments. Here's what you need to know to stay ahead of the curve.

What were the positive and negative aspects of the Indian economy in 2024?



To understand the current economic landscape of our nation, it is essential to assess **how the Indian economy performed in 2024**. We should consider both the positive and negative aspects of the economy. Let's begin with the positives, as there are some clear upsides to the current economic situation.

Positives

- 1. Growth in Services:** India's services surplus as a percentage of GDP hit a record high in October 2024. This growth has been attributed to the fragmentation of global services value chains, increased cross-border telecom bandwidth, and the rise in remote work, all of which support India's services exports to developed markets.
- 2. Government Spending:** Fiscal spending is expected to rise as the election aftermath settles. The recent reduction in the cash reserve ratio (CRR) has released funds held by banks with the RBI. The capex cycle seems to have restarted in some sectors, boosting capital formation, says economist Neelkanth Mishra, adding that this growth will be investment-led. Also, monetary easing is expected to support growth in the coming financial year. But the government will likely have to continue to do the heavy lifting.
- 3. Possible MSME recovery:** Corporate growth is slowing, partly due to sliding consumption growth, but there could be an upside. Former Chief Statistician Pronab Sen said Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which have been hit repeatedly by shocks such as demonetisation, implementation of GST, and the **Covid-19** lockdown, are perhaps getting back in business and competing with the corporate sector.

Negatives

- 1. Widening Savings-Investment Gap:** The decline in the household financial savings rate poses a significant challenge. The Reserve Bank of India's latest Financial Stability Report indicates that net financial savings of

households dropped to 5.3% of GDP in FY23, down from 7.3% in FY22.

This figure is considerably below the 8% average seen over the previous decade. Household net savings refer to the total amount of money and investments that families have, including deposits, stocks, and bonuses, minus any liabilities such as loans and other debts. Notably, a large part of savings is also entering financial markets, bypassing the banking industry, which is another worry.

2. Fiscal prudence: At the Centre, fiscal consolidation has been a consistent theme. A projected decline in fiscal deficit from 6.4% to 5.9% of GDP in FY24 will stabilise public debt at around 83% of GDP — a promising indicator of sustainability, given India's growth outlook, according to the IMF.

But competitive loosening of purse strings by states poses a fiscal problem. The RBI has flagged concerns over a sharp increase in expenditure by states on various subsidies, including farm loan waivers and cash transfers.

3. Rise in Non-Performing Assets (NPAs): While bad loans have been coming down, there are new concerns over a significant rise in NPAs in the personal loan and credit card segments. Both these types of credit are unsecured and carry high interest rates.

4. Sluggish Investments: Many corporations are experiencing a decline in performance, and investments are facing challenges.

What were the significant advancements in healthcare in 2024?

Healthcare in 2024 experienced notable advancements across various specializations. With the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, focus has shifted back to the increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Here are some significant advancements in healthcare that took place in 2024:

1. NexCAR19: In 2024, India launched its first homegrown CAR-T cell therapy called NexCAR19, developed as a collaboration between academia and industry. NexCAR19 is designed to treat B-cell lymphomas and B-acute lymphoblastic leukaemia in patients aged 15 and older. It is the world's most affordable CAR-T therapy, which can make advanced cancer treatments more accessible and put Indian cell and gene therapy innovation on the global stage.

2. Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad (CVLP): In England, the NHS Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad (CVLP) has been launched, with a focus on personalised cancer vaccines made using mRNA technology. These vaccines are created by analysing a patient's tumour to find unique mutations, helping the immune system target the cancer more effectively.

TREATMENT FOR SPECIFIC B-CELL CANCERS

NexCAR19 is a prescription drug for B-cell lymphomas, lymphoblastic leukaemias when other treatments have been unsuccessful

PATIENT'S WHITE blood cells are extracted by a machine through a process called leukapheresis and genetically modified, equipping them with the tools to identify and destroy the cancer cells.

NEXCAR19 IS manufactured to an optimal dose for the patient, and typically administered as a single intravenous infusion. Prior to this, the patient is put through chemotherapy to prime the body for the therapy.

HOW NEXCAR19 WORKS



T-cells are naturally made by the body as an advanced defence against viruses and cancer cells.

As T-cells mature, they develop specific connectors (receptors) to target key signals on cancer cells.



However, cancers can limit the inbuilt extent and efficiency with which T-cells are able to seek and fight them. This results in an increase in cancer burden.

Source: ImmunoACT



Scientists have identified certain proteins that are abnormally expressed on the surfaces of specific types of cancer cells. Specially designed receptors can find and bind to these cells.



A safe shell of a virus is used to genetically engineer T-cells so they express Chimeric Antigen Receptors — connectors that target a protein called CD19 on B-cell cancer.

HPV Vaccination Campaign

India will roll out a nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign in 2025. The vaccine protects against strains of the virus responsible for the majority of cervical cancers, as well as some cancers of the anus, vagina, and throat. It also guards against the strains that cause the most genital warts, offering a shield against a wide range of HPV-related diseases. This is a very important campaign—cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among Indian women; India bears a staggering 20% of the global burden of the disease.

3. Ozempic & Wegovy: Highly effective weight-loss treatments have been introduced in recent years, especially in the United States and Europe. The development of glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) drugs—which have a range of beneficial effects, including helping lower blood sugar levels and promoting weight loss—has seen significant advances and expanding market potential, offering the promise of life-changing treatments for major health conditions.

Novo Nordisk's Ozempic, containing semaglutide, which was approved by the US FDA in 2017 for treatment of type 2 diabetes, soon gained attention for off-label use in weight loss. In 2021, the Denmark-headquartered company launched Wegovy, a semaglutide pen-injection, which became the first FDA-approved drug for long-term weight management in almost a decade.

4. Casgevy and Lyfgenia: In December 2023, the FDA approved two groundbreaking treatments, Casgevy and Lyfgenia, the first cell-based gene therapies to treat sickle cell disease (SCD) in patients aged 12 and older.

In 2024, Boston-based Verve Therapeutics, a company that specialises in gene-editing medicines, announced its experimental therapies VERVE-101 and VERVE-102, which are designed to lower cholesterol by targeting the PCSK9 gene in the liver.

Thus we see that in 2024, major advancements in healthcare were evident, with exciting developments in gene editing opening new doors to address genetic disorders and enhance targeted treatments.

What should you look for in global affairs in 2025?

The year 2024 was undoubtedly significant in terms of geopolitics. With two ongoing wars, regime changes in India's neighbourhood and West Asia, and the remarkable return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, the year has been full of crucial changes. These developments are likely to shape global affairs in 2025, which seems to be both fascinating and complex.

“From New Delhi, 2025 looks promising and challenging. India will host the Quad leaders' summit and a possible India-EU summit; Prime Minister Narendra Modi could travel to China for the SCO summit, and President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India. A Modi-Trump meeting is likely sooner than later in the year.”- **Shubhajit Roy**

In this context, here are some important developments to follow in 2025.

Challenges in India's Neighbourhood

In 2024, important countries in India's neighbourhood saw regime change, which poses significant challenges for India on various fronts.

1. Bangladesh: Weeks of sustained street protests drove **Sheikh Hasina** from power after 16 years and forced her to flee to India. The new establishment under Chief Adviser **Muhammad Yunus** has asked New Delhi to send her back, even as his interim government itself faces heat on the struggling economy and for failing to protect religious minorities in Bangladesh.

2. Nepal: **K P Sharma Oli**, whose pro-China stand has not been comforting to India, became Prime Minister for the fourth time in July. His alliance with Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress, however, has had a calming influence.

Donald Trump 2.0

The US Presidential Election, the most significant election globally, has returned Donald Trump to the office he left in early 2021. Trump has come back after a break, more confident and possibly wiser — and has announced nominees for all key appointments long before inauguration day on January 20. His declared intentions of ending ongoing wars and imposing steep tariffs on trade rivals of the US have piqued curiosity and anxiety in many countries. We will need to wait and see how the decisions of the US administration under Donald Trump shape global politics.



Donald Trump won the 2024 US Presidential election defeating his Democrat rival and Vice President Kamala Harris. (AP/PTI photo)

Elections and New Leaders in Europe

Fresh elections are scheduled in Germany for 2025. Meanwhile, France is grappling with political instability. The rise of far-right groups appears unlikely to be reversed, and it may only be a matter of time before these parties come to power in both countries.

The escalating debate on immigration is creating concerns for Indians and others seeking to study, live, and work in Europe. This issue is expected to arise during negotiations for a free trade agreement between India and Europe. The United Kingdom, which has taken a strong stance on immigration under the Conservative government, is also in talks for a trade pact with India. It will be interesting to see if the British negotiators address the key sticking points. Additionally, an India-EU summit is being planned.

Bilateral Relations with Canada and the USA

The assassination of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, for which Canada has accused India, has severely damaged diplomatic ties and complicated aspects of India's relationships with not only Canada but also the United States.

Additionally, the alleged plot targeting Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the U.S. poses a reputational risk for India's global image, especially among supporters of Indian democracy in the West who view India favourably in comparison to authoritarian China. This is a question that India will need to address in order to alleviate concerns across Western capitals.

What are the key issues to follow in India's top court in 2025?

In 2024, the **Supreme Court of India made important rulings and interventions** in several significant cases. It declared the electoral bonds scheme unconstitutional, issued guidelines to prevent illegal bulldozer demolitions, and prohibited trial courts from hearing mandir-masjid cases. Additionally, the Court limited the vast powers of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to arrest individuals and reversed the Gujarat government's decision to grant remission to the convicts in the Bilkis Bano gang rape case.

In this context, as we begin the year 2025, it is essential to understand the important issues that will impact citizens' personal lives, religious beliefs, and their relationships with the state and its laws. These are the matters that the Supreme Court will be addressing this year.

1. Essential Religious Practice Test: In 2020, the Supreme Court decided to review its 2018 ruling, which had determined the practice of excluding women from the **Sabarimala** temple unconstitutional. The ruling was sought to be reviewed by a larger bench, expanding the premise of the case to how religious practices are to be reviewed judicially. The focus of the pending appeal is to reconsider the so-called "essential religious practice test," a contentious doctrine evolved by the court to protect only those religious practices that are essential to the religion.

Notably, this case will also affect a long-standing challenge by two Parsi women who married outside their community. They have sought permission to enter the Tower of Silence and other religious sites. Additionally, there is a separate plea calling for Muslim women to be allowed entry into mosques.

Three CJI's in 2025

Three judges will occupy the office of Chief Justice of India in 2025. CJI Sanjiv Khanna is due to retire on May 13, and Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai will take over for 194 days. He will be succeeded by Justice Surya Kant in November, who will remain CJI until February 2027.

2. Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019: The challenge to **The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019**, is pending before the SC. The law, introduced as Section 6B of The Citizenship Act, 1955, seeks to grant citizenship to a class of migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities who entered India before December 31, 2014, from three Muslim-majority neighbouring countries: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

The challenge argues that by excluding Muslims, the amendment violates the right to equal protection before the law and the principles of secularism. In October, the SC upheld the validity of the Assam Accord and, consequently, Parliament's power to specify a cut-off date for peculiar circumstances. However, the SC also framed the idea of citizenship in terms of fraternity and plurality, which will be key to the challenge to the 2019 law.

3. Places of Worship Act: Given that a larger constitutional challenge to the Places of Worship Act that froze the religious character of all places of worship except the (then) disputed structure in Ayodhya as they stood at the dawn of Independence is pending before the court, disputes over the title and religious character of certain mosques, allegedly built by razing Hindu temples, will continue to play out in 2025. The Places of Worship Act has been challenged on two main grounds.

(i) First, that it takes away the power of **judicial review** by abating claims that existed at the time of passing the law and prohibiting fresh claims in courts.

(ii) Second, it is arbitrary in retrospectively picking August 15, 1947, as the cut-off date for determining the religious character of a place of worship.

The other side has argued that the law fortifies the principles of secularism and non-retrogression, which are held to be part of the **basic structure** of the Constitution.

4. Review of ED's powers: While granting bail to former Delhi Chief Minister **Arvind Kejriwal** in the money laundering case in the alleged excise policy scam, the SC

raised questions on the Enforcement Directorate's vast powers to arrest. It referred a key issue—on when an arrest is legally necessitated—to a larger bench. In a series of separate rulings since the 2022 verdict, the SC has also mandated key procedural safeguards in ED cases—the grounds of arrest must be informed in writing, and the stringent “twin conditions” for bail can now be “relaxed” if the accused has undergone a long period of incarceration.

Beyond the above-mentioned cases, new criminal laws are likely to be subject to judicial review. Notably, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023; the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023; and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, have replaced the Indian Penal Code of 1860, the Criminal Procedure Code of 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.

While these new laws introduce several progressive elements, certain aspects have sparked controversy. For example, allowing police officers up to 14 days for a preliminary investigation before registering a First Information Report (FIR), the complete removal of Section 377 of the IPC (which previously offered protection to men and LGBTQIA+ individuals from non-consensual sexual intercourse), and extending detention periods up to 90 days have been challenged before the Supreme Court. As the significant task of adapting to the new laws continues, additional issues are likely to arise.

CONCLUSION

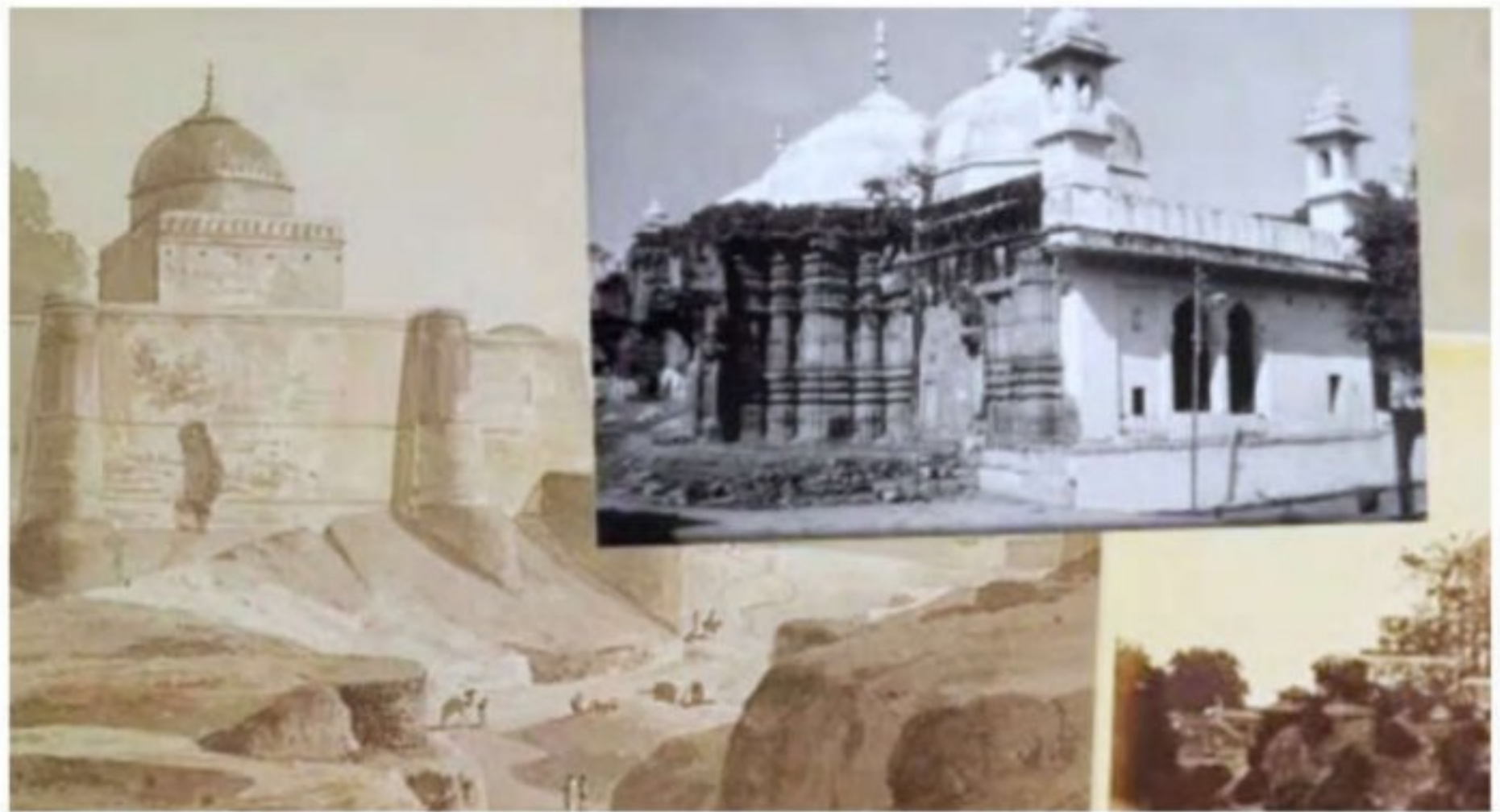
Undoubtedly, 2024 was a year rich with developments across various fields, including the economy, healthcare, global affairs, and the national legal landscape. In 2025, we will witness new developments in these areas. It is important to stay informed about these themes and related topics to remain ahead of the curve.

Post Read Questions

Prelims

(1) How many of the following states share the borders with Bangladesh?

1. Assam
2. West Bengal
3. Tripura
4. Mizoram



L-R: Shahi Jama Masjid, Gyanvapi Mosque & Babri Masjid (Edited by Abhishek Mitra)

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) One only
- (b) Two only
- (c) Three only
- (d) All four

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(2) Consider the following statements about CAR-T cell therapy:

1. It modifies immune cells by turning them into potent cancer fighters.
2. It makes treatment easier with a one-time therapy.
3. NexCar19 is a type of CAR-T therapy developed indigenously in India.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

(3) 'Exercise SAMPRITI' is a military exercise between India and which of the following nations?

- (a) Bangladesh
- (b) Sri Lanka
- (c) Nepal
- (d) Thailand

Mains

(1) What are the emerging challenges to the Indian economy? What initiatives have been taken by the government to promote higher private sector investment?

(2) Discuss the significance of India's relationship with Bangladesh in the context of regional cooperation and development. Highlight the recent developments between the two countries.

(3) What is CAR-T cell therapy? Discuss how effective and different is this from other cancer treatments.

(4) Critically examine the compulsions which prompted India to play a decisive role in the emergence of Bangladesh. (UPSC CSE 2013)

Prelims Answer Key

1. (d) 2. (c) 3. (a)

(Sources: **Looking at 2025, Law: Key questions of religion, society** written by Apurva Vishwanath, **Looking at 2025, Diplomacy: Challenges of a complex world**, **Looking at 2025, The Economy: Some positives, some concerns**, **Looking at 2025, Health: Breakthroughs of hope and promise**)

EXPRESS EDGE

History & Culture

Why Hindu gods dance, and those in other religions don't

In India, dance acts as a powerful vehicle for politics, philosophy, festivals, rituals, identity, and entertainment. But what kind of dance competitions among gods, apsaras, and royal dancers are mentioned in Sanskrit and Puranic traditions?

Written by **Devdutt Pattanaik**

Dance is an integral part of culture. It cannot be captured in a museum — except as photographs or videos. But as a performance, it is something that changes with time and space. Therefore, like music, it is an intangible heritage.

Hindu temple art shows gods dancing — Shiva dancing, Krishna dancing, Ganesha dancing. The dance of devadasi is how gods were entertained in temples. But we will never see images of Buddha dancing, the Tirthankaras dancing, the Islamic prophets dancing. In fact, dance is *haram* in orthodox Muslim traditions while in mystical traditions of Sufism, and the bhakti movement, dance is a tool to experience the divine.

In Europe, dance was linked to paganism and rejected by Christianity. Dance thus reveals the ideology of different faiths, different communities, and different tribes. For Hindus, it represented worldliness. For Buddhists, it represents temptation. Monotheistic faiths associated it with idolatry.

Dance in ancient times

Evidence of Indian dance comes from ancient times. The earliest is the 'wizard dance' of Bhimbetka caves in Central India, where people wearing horns are seen dancing. This belongs to the Stone Age. In Harappa we see seals of seven people, dressed in the same clothes, dancing around a tree. It is an indicator of a form of tribal dance. Like in the Bhimbetka caves, the dancers wear horns.

In the Vedas, dance is not discussed as much as music — remember Vedas as “shruti”, to be heard. **Sama Veda gave melodies to the hymns of Rig Veda.** Yajur Veda introduces the idea of mudra (gestures) during ceremonies. This is said to have been the origin of dance.



Kerala's Theyyam, loosely translated to 'dance of the gods', is celebrated as a medium of access (to the gods on earth) and protest (against the caste system). (Source: Manu Mayyil)

Later, dance and song were used as entertainment during Vedic ceremonies to tell stories related to ancient kings, sages and gods.

Sculptures from the **Mauryan period (321–185 BCE)** at sites like Sanchi, Barhut, and Amaravati include representations of dancers. Similarly, Greek dancers in Gandharan Buddhist art imitate the followers of Bacchus/**Dionysus** (the Greek god of wine and ecstasy). By the Gupta period, terms like “nritya” (expressive dance) and “nataka” (drama) appeared with Bharata Muni’s Natyashastra emerging as the classical treatise on the performing arts.

In the heavens, this was the domain of apsaras (celestial dancers). On earth, this was done by *ganikas* (courtesans). The dance manuals in classical texts such as the Natyashastra speak of *abhinaya* (expressions), *mudra* (gestures), and *angika* (postures). Movements follow the rules of geometry. There is much in dance to indicate it was the forerunner of *yogic asanas* (yoga postures).

Shastra and classical dance

Sanskrit plays, and Puranic stories, refer to a dance competition between gods, apsaras and royal dancers. In Tamil temple lore, Shiva competes with Shakti in a dance competition, and wins by raising a leg which the goddess is too shy to do. Then there is the story of how Bhasmasura is asked by Mohini to dance with her. By following her movements, Bhasmasura touches his head and is reduced to ash.

Islam forbids dance. But Mughals who married Rajput women encouraged the *tawaifs* (courtesans) to perform in their courts. Thus dance was patronised in royal courts, reminding one of the dancing halls of temples, as well as the dance performed in the heavenly court of Indra. These dances continue even today in Bollywood films.

Shastra means a subject that is well documented, with details classified. Classical dance is a shastra because it has a long history, is documented in some formats and requires training to perform as well as appreciate it. India has seven classical dance forms, each with distinct styles and origins.

Kathakali and Mohiniattam are theatrical and performative. Bharatanatyam, characterised by its geometric and angular movements, is a modern refined version of the temple dances of the Devadasis. Kuchipudi dancers often dance on plates while Odissi is more soft and fluid, with the tribhanga pose — where the body bends in opposite directions at the neck, hips, and knees.

Then, we have Manipuri dance, which is rooted in the Vaishnava faith of the Meiteis, or people of the Manipur valley, and Sattriya from Assam, the last dance form to be given classical status. In the North, we only have Kathak as a notified classical dance form, which was performed first in temples, and then in courts.

Folk dance

Chhau, a masculine, almost military, dance form, is performed in Bengal, **Odisha**, and Jharkhand. Masks are an integral part of Purulia Chhau in Bengal and Jharkhand. In Odisha, masks are not worn. Although Chhau is not as refined as the classical dance forms, some consider it classical. However, this folk-classical distinction is a contentious issue and annoys many people.

Sometimes folk performances are also linked with rituals, like **Karnataka’s** Bhoota Kola or **Kerala’s Theyyam**. These performances reflect subaltern traditions, showcasing how they communicate with gods and relate to nature. In Ladakh and Shillong, one finds masked dancers enacting stories of Buddhist siddhas defeating demons and taming angry spirits.

The aim of folk dance is also to unite the community through synchronised dance with simple steps and a basic

percussive beat. In tribal communities, dance is usually collective rather than individual. This gave rise to harvest rituals, like the Bihu dance of Assam, typically performed during harvest.

The tribes of the Northeast have many unique dances that symbolise their unique identity. Dance such as nautanki and lavani are meant for the entertainment of the masses. Thus dance can be a vehicle for politics, philosophy, festivals, rituals, identity, and entertainment.

Post Read Questions

1. What types of dance competitions are mentioned in Sanskrit plays and Puranic stories?
2. In Tamil temple lore, how does Shiva win the dance competition against Shakti?
3. Which Veda introduces the idea of mudra (gestures), and in what context?
4. How are folk performances like Bhoota Kola in Karnataka and Theyyam in Kerala connected to rituals and subaltern traditions?
5. How can dance serve as a medium for politics, philosophy, festivals, rituals, identity, and entertainment?

(Devdutt Pattanaik is a renowned mythologist who writes on art, culture and heritage.)

How did untouchability originate in India?

What did BR Ambedkar's research reveal about the origins of untouchability in India, and why did he argue that it was neither racial nor occupational in nature?

Written by **Dileep P Chandran**

The Supreme Court recently **ruled** on the subclassification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to ensure equitable distribution of benefits. The judgement reignited the debate about whether SCs constitute a homogeneous category and whether untouchability remains the sole unifying criterion for inclusion under the category.

Untouchability continues to manifest in various forms in contemporary India even though the Constitution prohibits its practice in any form under Article 17. In that context, the visions of Dr. BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and a fierce critic of the caste system, remain relevant. On his death anniversary observed on 6 December, let's revisit his vision for social justice and equality.



*Ambedkar calls untouchability in India a unique phenomenon compared to various forms of impurity or pollution prevalent among other religions or cultures.
(Illustration: Suvajit Dey)*

Origin of untouchability

How did untouchability originate in India? Whether its roots were racial or occupational? Ambedkar's research on the historical origin of untouchability in India proved that its source was neither racial nor occupational. Untouchables in their origin were "broken men" who were in conflicts with settled communities and lived outside villages from the very beginning. Most importantly, their marginalisation didn't stem from untouchability. The only difference between settled communities and "broken men" was that they belonged to different tribes.

Ambedkar dismissed the racial theory of untouchability, which posits that untouchables were a different race (distinct from Aryans or Dravidians), by referring to anthropometric and ethnological studies on tribes in India. He also countered the occupational theory of untouchability, which propounded that untouchability arose because certain groups performed "unclean" or "polluting" tasks (such as handling leather or disposing of carcasses). Ambedkar argued that all classes were engaged in such tasks at some point. Hence, occupation alone could not explain the origin of untouchability.

Historical and sociopolitical context

In his popular book *The Untouchables: Who were they and why they Became Untouchables* (1948), Ambedkar depicts how the rise of untouchability coincided with the Brahmins giving up beef-eating and adopting vegetarianism. He

attributed this change to the struggle for supremacy between Brahmins and Buddhists in India. Buddhism emphasised non-violence and rejected animal sacrifices, which resonated with the agricultural population dependent on cattle. In order to regain the ground lost to Buddhism, Brahmins adopted vegetarianism.

However, the “broken men” could not afford to emulate Brahmins for they relied on scavenging, particularly eating and handling the carcasses of dead cows, for their survival. Eventually, the communities that couldn’t give up beef-eating were set apart socially and treated as untouchables. Ambedkar connected the emergence of untouchability to the period when Brahmins, engaged in struggles to regain the lost ground to Buddhism, renounced beef-eating that happened around the 4th century AD.

Unlike other forms of defilement or impurity in other cultures or religions, untouchability in India is marked by its permanence and hereditary nature. It involves the systemic isolation of not just individuals but a group of people or communities and often includes territorial segregation, with untouchables often forced to live outside village boundaries.

Therefore, Ambedkar calls untouchability a unique phenomenon compared to various forms of impurity or pollution prevalent among other religions or cultures. For instance, in some cultures, impurity causes pollution only during ceremonial occasions. In contrast, untouchability in India is permanent, hereditary, and part of everyday life.

Conditions for political safeguards

Ambedkar put forward conditions on which depressed classes would give consent to place themselves under majority rule in independent India.

- Equal citizenship and fundamental rights: The first condition was equal citizenship, primarily to abolish untouchability and secure equal rights. Ambedkar saw the inclusion of fundamental rights in the Constitution as a prerequisite for ensuring equality.
- Penalties for infringement of rights: Free enjoyment of equal rights was the second condition which required penalties for the infringement of these rights.
- Protection against discrimination: The third condition demands protection from discrimination in the form of legislation and executive orders in the future.
- Representation in legislatures and public services: Adequate representation in the legislatures and in public services were the fourth and fifth conditions respectively.

Ambedkar also sought special mechanisms, such as departments dedicated to the welfare of marginalised communities and guaranteed representation in decision-making bodies like the Cabinet. These measures aimed to ensure the interests of the depressed classes would not be ignored or neglected in majority rule.

“Annihilation of caste”

Annihilation of caste is a text of an undelivered speech prepared by Ambedkar for the 1936 annual conference of the **Jat Pat Todak Mandal**, an anti-caste organisation based in Lahore. However, in light of its apparent controversiality, the organisers revoked Ambedkar’s invitation. Consequently, Ambedkar self-published the speech which would become arguably his most famous piece of writing.

In this speech, Ambedkar argues that caste has disorganised and demoralised people, undermining the possibility of

collective and unified social life. He writes, “anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole.” Hence, he asserts that national identity and true morality cannot be built on the foundations of caste.

For Ambedkar, caste is not a physical barrier but a notion or a state of mind. Hence, inter-marriage and inter-dining alone would not annihilate caste. He urged to “destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras” which legitimise the varna and caste order. To be specific, Ambedkar condemns the “religion of rules” not the “religion of principles”.

He reimagines an ideal society based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity – concepts that were also the foundation of democracy. Hence, democracy should not just be a form of government but a way of living together in mutual respect and association. Ambedkar concluded his speech by declaring that the annihilation of caste was more important than swaraj (self-rule) and casteless society was essential for building a strong, united nation, which would defend itself against different challenges.

Notably, Both Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi claimed to be the true representatives of depressed classes suffering from untouchability in India. However, the debate following the publication of *Annihilation of caste* exposed the dispute on the question of untouchability between the two giant figures. How did Gandhi refute the empirical evidence of Ambedkar and how did Ambedkar respond to it?

Post Read Questions

1. How does BR Ambedkar challenge racial and occupational theories of untouchability?
2. In what ways does BR Ambedkar’s critique of caste reflect his vision of an ideal society?
3. How does BR Ambedkar differentiate between a “religion of rules” and a “religion of principles”?
4. What does BR Ambedkar mean by the statement, “anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole”?

(Dileep P Chandran is Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science in University of Calicut, Kerala.)

The Ambedkar-Gandhi debate on untouchability

<https://telegram.me/+KSUmQ-87JBE2NTE1> Mags@Papers

What were the key ideological differences between Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar over the political rights of the untouchables? How do the terms 'Harijans' and 'Dalits' reflect their contrasting philosophies on caste and social reform?

Written by **Dileep P Chandran**

In the previous article, *How did untouchability originate in India*, BR Ambedkar's critique of caste and his vision of social justice and equality were briefly discussed. The article also raised the difference between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi on the question of untouchability. In this article, let's see how the two towering figures, while fighting for the cause of untouchables, differed in their approaches to caste and social reform.



Ambedkar led the satyagraha in Mahad (1927) to claim the right to take water from a public tank. Gandhi, however, warned against using satyagraha lest it devolved into "duragraha" (stubborn insistence). (File/Wikimedia Commons)

When Ambedkar first met Gandhi

At the invitation of Gandhi, Ambedkar first met him on 14 August 1931 at Mani Bhavan in **Maharashtra**. But Gandhi gave him a cold shoulder response and did not acknowledge his presence for a while. After some time, the dialogue began with Gandhi's response to Ambedkar's grievances against him and the Congress on the problems of untouchables.

Ambedkar had expressed his lack of faith in great leaders or Mahatmas and was critical of the Congress for its token recognition of untouchability and sincerity on the issue. He said, "Gandhiji, I have no homeland"... "No self-respecting Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land." Ambedkar prioritised the question of untouchability and caste-based discrimination over the self-determination of the country.

Before leaving, Ambedkar asked Gandhi about his opinion on the recognition of the political rights of depressed classes in the first Round Table Conference (attended by Ambedkar and boycotted by Gandhi and Congress). Gandhi, while sympathetic to the plight of the untouchables, opposed **separate electorates** for depressed classes, believing it would fragment Hindu society.

Differences over separate electorates

During the Second Round Table Conference (RTC) in 1931, the irreconcilable position of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the political rights of the untouchables came to the fore. Gandhi was cited as saying, "Those who speak of the political rights of the Untouchables do not know their India."

Reiterating his opposition to the separate electorate for Dalits, he resorted, “I would far rather that Hinduism died than that Untouchability lived.” Gandhi also contested Ambedkar’s claim to represent all untouchables in India and feared it would create division in Hindu society.

But Ambedkar remained skeptical of Gandhi’s approach and the Congress’s sincerity in addressing untouchability. He prioritised the self-respect and political empowerment of the Depressed Classes over the unity of Hindu society. The debate also highlighted the contrasting philosophies of the two leaders, with Gandhi using the term “Harijans” (Children of God) and Ambedkar employing the Marathi term ‘Dalits’ (Broken People). The clash at the RTC ended without a resolution.

The Poona Pact

Notwithstanding Gandhi’s opposition, Dalit leaders continued to demand separate electorates for Dalits. Ambedkar went to London to lobby British cabinet members for it. Eventually, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced the Communal Award of 1932 (also known as the MacDonald Award), which provided separate electorates for Depressed Classes along with other minorities including Muslims.

Gandhi, imprisoned in Yerawada Jail in Poona, responded by announcing an indefinite fast until the provision of separate electorates for untouchables was revoked. Ambedkar had to concede to Gandhi’s “extreme form of coercion” and sign the Poona Pact on 24 September 1932. **Madan Mohan Malviya** signed on behalf of Gandhi. The pact replaced the separate electorate with reservations for the Depressed Classes.

Following the pact, Gandhi broke his fast and proposed to establish the Anti-Untouchability League to continue the fight against untouchability. However, tensions between Gandhi and Ambedkar persisted, reflecting their fundamentally different approaches to caste and social reform.

Ambedkar’s Annihilation of Caste and Gandhi’s counterattack in Harijan

The publication of Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) further angered Gandhi for its critique of Hinduism and caste-based discrimination. He responded by publishing two articles in his newspaper Harijan (11 and 18 July 1936) titled Dr. Ambedkar’s Indictment. Gandhi accused Ambedkar of wanting publicity.

He stated that religion has nothing to do with caste and blamed Ambedkar for misquoting scriptures and disregarding their interpretations by saints and sages. Gandhi went to the extent of calling Ambedkar a ‘challenge to Hinduism’. Despite Gandhi’s sharp criticism, *Annihilation of Caste* remains a seminal text, reflecting Ambedkar’s disappointment with the Poona Pact.

In the 1937 edition of *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar included Gandhi’s responses and provided a detailed reply. He clarified that his motive was not to seek publicity but to provoke Hindus to think. Ambedkar rejected Gandhi’s scepticism about the authenticity and interpretation of Hindu texts, arguing that the masses could not distinguish between genuine texts and interpolations.

Ambedkar was sceptical of the authority of saints on the ground that they never opposed the caste system and untouchability, stating that saints and Mahatmas ‘understand shastras differently from the learned few and ignorant many’. Ambedkar even criticised Gandhi for playing the double role of Mahatma and politician.

He also refuted Gandhi’s argument that religion should be judged by its best specimens rather than its worst practices. He accused Gandhi of not practicing what he was preaching on varna, and for having no clear differentiation between varna and caste.

Deadlock continues

The standoff between Ambedkar and Gandhi continued on issues like conversion, village republic, and method of satyagraha. Ambedkar likened the caste-ridden Hindu society to ‘a multi-storeyed tower with no staircase and no entrance’, symbolising its hierarchical system. Hence, he wanted to leave Hinduism and declared in Nasik in 1935 that he would not die a Hindu. In 1956, he converted to Buddhism.

Gandhi found Ambedkar’s announcement of leaving Hinduism unbelievable since he found no relation between religion and caste. Similarly, their views on village republics clashed. Gandhi idealised villages as the soul of India, whereas Ambedkar viewed villages as the ground for untouchability and other caste-based discriminations. The urge for justice and equality turned Ambedkar towards urbanisation, modernity, and industrialisation, while Gandhi was critical of the idea of modernity.

In addition, Ambedkar led the satyagraha in Mahad (1927) to claim the right to take water from a public tank. Gandhi, however, warned untouchables against using satyagraha lest it devolved into “duragraha” (stubborn insistence). He advocated “sweet persuasion” in caste issues to avoid animosity. Hence, the fundamental difference in their approach underscored their contrasting visions for achieving social justice.

Post Read Questions

1. **What were the key ideological differences between Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar over the political rights of the untouchables?**
2. **What significance did the terms ‘Harijans’ and ‘Dalits’ hold, and how did they reflect the contrasting philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar?**
3. **Mahatma Gandhi asserted, “I would far rather that Hinduism died than that Untouchability lived”. Evaluate his comment in light of his differences with BR Ambedkar on untouchability.**
4. **What were the main terms of the Poona Pact, and how did it differ from the original provision for separate electorates in the Communal Award?**
5. **Why did Mahatma Gandhi accuse BR Ambedkar of seeking publicity through the publication of Annihilation of Caste, and how did Ambedkar respond to this criticism?**

Reading recommendations

Annihilation of Caste by BR Ambedkar.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches (Vol. 17) by BR Ambedkar.

Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India by Gail Omvedt.

The Essential Writings of B R Ambedkar edited by Valerian Rodrigues.

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Polity

How the shift to multiparty system shaped India's political landscape

India's party system underwent transformations, particularly after the 1967 General Elections. What role did the emergence of regional and non-Congress parties play in reshaping India's political landscape since?

Written by **Dileep P Chandran**

Regionalism in India that primarily emerges from the diversity of the country manifests itself through demand for preserving cultural identity, political and administrative autonomy, and economic development. The regional aspirations have the potential for both divisive and uniting impacts on the fabric of centre-state relations in India.

The newly elected **Jammu and Kashmir Assembly** passed a **resolution** on 6 November, urging the

Union government to initiate dialogue with the Union Territory's elected representatives for the restoration of special status. Does the Constitution of India provide the flexibility to accommodate the concerns of federal units? It can be better explained by taking into account the rise of regional political parties on India's political landscape and the dynamic nature of India's federal structure.



BJP legislators hold a protest after the Assembly passed a resolution on Article 370 restoration by voice vote, in Srinagar, Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2024. (PTI Photo)

Rise of regional political parties

Although regional parties existed in India since independence, they largely remained dormant in electoral politics because of the dominance of the **Indian National Congress (INC)**. However, in post-independent India, several factors contributed to the rise of regional political parties, including growing regional consciousness, the democratic federal polity, uneven development, linguistic reorganisation of states, caste-based political mobilisation, the "sons of the soil" movement, and ethnic differences.

The 1967 General Election particularly marked a turning point as states began veering away from the one-party system or the 'Congress system'. The shift gave momentum to state politics and elevated the role of regional political parties. However, given India's heterogeneity, this was not a surprising development and rather reflected the country's diverse social and political landscape.

The rise of regional political parties became evident with the **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)** of **Tamil**

Nadu capturing power in 1967, marking the first instance of a regional party successfully challenging the Congress's dominance at the state level. The growing electoral influence of parties like Akali Dal in Punjab, Bangla Congress in **West Bengal**, and Bharatiya Kranti Dal in **Uttar Pradesh** reinforced this trend.

After the 1971 General Election, parties such as **Shiv Sena** in **Maharashtra** and Socialist parties in Bihar emerged as powerful regional forces. Despite their declared national goals, most of these political parties were labeled as 'chauvinistic' for prioritising regional interests.

Changing nature of the party system

The paradigm shift in the party system from one party to the multiparty system coincided with the growing significance of regional parties in electoral politics. Political scientist **Paul Brass** argued that most of the national parties are regional parties spread over a few states. Hence, he called the party system in India an 'unstable fragmented multiparty system'.

For instance, some scholars consider national parties like CPI(M) as 'cross-regional parties' because such parties have a presence in multiple states but don't identify with specific regional cultures, languages, religions, etc.

In the 1980s, state assembly elections elevated the electoral presence and influence of regional parties. These parties which became coalition partners of national parties started to determine the electoral agenda and negotiated to adjust national politics with regional aspirations. **The recent Lok Sabha election** also proved that no single party can secure a majority without the support of regional parties.

Even national parties have to address regional political dynamics for electoral gains at the national level. Hence, the representation of and attention to local issues by national parties blur the boundary between national and local issues in electoral politics.

Dynamic nature of India's federal structure

It is often observed that electoral victories of national parties usually centralise power, while regional parties tend to work towards decentralisation of power in national politics. However, the experiences of federal functioning do not offer a simplistic picture of the nuanced interplay between regional party growth and centre-state relations.

The rise of regional parties loosened the constitutional framework in which federalism leaned towards a powerful centre. This shift marked a tilt in the balance of power between the centre and states, oscillating across different phases.

As mentioned earlier, following the defeat of the INC in some states in the 1967 elections, central dominance started to weaken and tensions arose between the centre and states. However, the 1970s saw a reversal, with power consolidating at the centre, culminating in the declaration of the national emergency in 1975 under Article 352.

In 1983, four Chief Ministers of southern states formed a council of southern Chief Ministers. They demanded changes in the Constitution and equitable distribution of financial resources. A conclave of nine opposition parties at Suraj Kund urged for the restoration of cooperative federalism. All these factors led the central government to constitute the Sarkaria Commission.

The loosening of India's centralised federal structure helped to address economic disparities across regions and other local issues. Coalition politics facilitated political inclusiveness, allowing regional parties to represent their constituencies effectively at the national level.

However, the post-economic reform period witnessed competition among states for attracting foreign direct investments, further widening the existing income and consumption gap between states. This disparity led to grievances among rich states as they began resenting their disproportionate contributions to central assistance for underdeveloped states, often labelling it as 'reverse discrimination'.

Commissions on centre-state relations

In order to review the working of centre-state relations in the changing socio-economic context, the central government constituted the Sarkaria Commission, chaired by Justice R S Sarkaria (B Sivaraman and S R Sen were other members) in 1983. The commission submitted its report in 1988 and made 247 recommendations.

Among its most important recommendations was the establishment of a standing Inter-State Council under Article 263 of the Constitution to facilitate coordination of relations between the centre and states. The commission also underlined the significance of cooperative federalism and non-partisan governors.

In 2007, the Union Government appointed the second commission on centre-state relations under the chairmanship of Madan Mohan Punchhi, along with four other members. The Punchhi Commission submitted its report in 2010 and made 273 recommendations.

It recommended the creation of a national integration council, amendments to state emergency provisions (Articles 355 and 356), non-partisan appointment of governors, and consultation with states before legislating on matters in the Concurrent List. However, opposition parties have questioned successive governments for delaying the report's implementation.

Rebuilding trust

Some of the recent initiatives by the central government have contributed to rebuilding trust between the Union and state governments. For example, the extension of the GST compensation cess until March 2026 is one of the recent positive gestures in centre-state relations. The organisational structure of NITI Aayog provides a deliberative platform for states, strengthening the ideals of both cooperative and competitive **federalism in India**.

In addition, federal constitutional mechanisms for accommodating regional aspirations work as safety valves to accommodate regional aspirations and prevent tensions. The legislative framework for the pandemic response also signified the responsible role of the centre during an emergency.

Nonetheless, some regional parties, especially those in power in states have voiced concerns about discrimination and limitations on state autonomy. Such issues often influence their mode of political mobilisation both at the state and national levels. For instance, ruling parties at the state and central levels accuse each other of delays in welfare service delivery or development projects.

Moreover, issues such as tensions between the office of the Governor and state governments, central legislation on matters in the Concurrent List, and delays in the allocation of disaster relief funds to states etc. exacerbate the trust deficit in centre-state relations.

To sum up, it can be said that regionalism in India is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and has the potential for both strengthening centre-state relations and challenging national unity.

Post Read Questions

1. How did the shift to a multiparty system impact governance in India after the 1967 elections?
2. What challenges and opportunities arose from the emergence of regional parties in India's political system?
3. What was the primary objective of the Sarkaria Commission in reviewing centre-state relations? What were the main recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission?
4. In what ways do federal mechanisms help prevent tensions between the centre and regional units?

(Dileep P Chandran is an Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science in University of Calicut, Kerala.)

Economy

How to facilitate safer and more productive migration patterns

Internal migration plays a crucial role in shaping both urban and rural economies in India. What measures can be taken to further improve the welfare and economic opportunities for internal migrants across the country?

Written by **Ritwika Patgiri**

Migration is seen as an important and essential livelihood strategy for rural households in the developing world. In India, internal migration or domestic migration – the movement of people within a country's borders – plays a crucial role in shaping both urban and rural economies.

Internal migration can be understood and measured in terms of types or streams of movement.

The types of internal migration can be intra-district or within the district, intra-state or within the state, and inter-state.

The streams of internal migration can be rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, and urban-urban.



The Census of India provides useful data on understanding permanent movement and, to some extent, semi-permanent migration. (Express Photo: Praveen Khanna)

Who are migrants?

It is difficult to precisely calculate the volume of migration, especially because of the informal nature of the Indian economy. The Census of India provides useful data on understanding permanent movement and, to some extent, semi-permanent migration. The Census defines two types of migrants in India – migration by place of birth and migration by last residence.

A migrant by birth is a person who is enumerated in a Census at a different place than where they were born. A migrant by the last residence is one who resides at a place different from the place of enumeration continuously for at least six months prior to the migration.

According to the Census data, the number of **internal migrants in India has increased** from 232.1 million in 1991 to 314.6 million in 2001, and further to 453.7 million in 2011. It has been found that between 1991 and 2011, the share of migrants in rural India increased from 26.1 per cent to 32.5 per cent while in urban India, the same increased from 32.3 per cent to 48.4 per cent.

Migration for marriage has been one of the most important reasons for migration and most of these migrants are generally women. Further, the general trend for migration for work or employment reflects that such migrants are mostly youth, indicating the role of the demographic dividend and the gendered layers of migration. Migration in India is also segmented on caste, tribe, religious, and regional identities.

Streams of migration

In terms of the streams of migration, close to 85 per cent of the migration has been within the state. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) also provide useful data on internal migration. According to NSSO surveys, rural-urban migration is the most dominant form of migration and comprises 25.2 per cent of all internal migration in India, followed by urban-urban (22.9 per cent), urban-rural (17.5 per cent), and rural-rural (4.4 per cent).

Census data has found that while the number of internal migrants has increased in India, the movement has been mostly limited to intra-state migration. The 2011 Census estimated around 453 million migrants in India, which is 37 per cent of the total population. This marks a notable increase from 30 per cent recorded between 1991 and 2001.

In the absence of the 2021 Census data, it has become difficult to capture an updated number of migrants. However, according to Migration in India (2020-21) survey, 29 per cent of Indians are migrants, which is nearly 400 million. In comparison to the other countries in the world, India can be seen as an “immobile country” with fairly low levels of internal migration. For instance, a study of 82 countries in 2014 found that India is ranked 81st in terms of internal migration.

Economists have also pointed out that urbanisation rate – another way of capturing internal migration trends – in India is lower than in most countries. For instance, according to World Bank data, 35 per cent of Indians lived in cities as of 2021 as compared to 63 per cent in China and 43 per cent in lower-middle-income countries. India’s slower urbanisation rate suggests limited internal mobility, despite urban economic growth.

Circular and seasonal nature of migration

Academics and economists argue that one issue why the data shows such low levels of internal migration is that the nature of migration in India is often seasonal, temporary, short-term, and circular, making it difficult to measure. Both Census and NSSO data fail to adequately capture seasonal short-term migration.

As mentioned earlier, the Census mainly captures migration through two parameters: migration by place of birth and last residence. However, the NSSO has tried to capture migration data from different perspectives. The 64th round of NSSO (2007-08) attempted to capture seasonal or short-term migrants, who have migrated for a period of one month but not exceeding six months for employment.

Seasonal migration refers to the temporary movement of individuals or groups from one location to another in response to changes in seasons or cyclical economic conditions. Seasonal migrants are involved in seasonal occupations at the destination. This type of migration is typically driven by the availability of resources, employment opportunities, or climatic conditions specific to a particular time of year.

In India, seasonal migration has often been described as distress-driven and often individuals migrate with the entire household, leading to family migration. There is also increasing recognition that seasonal migrants in cities remain on the extreme margins in their urban work destinations, with layers of social, economic, and political vulnerabilities.

However, it has been noted that seasonal migrants contribute significantly to the economy. Migrants in large cities

work in construction, factories, small hotels, restaurants and food stalls, as domestic help, in head loading, scrap recycling, vegetable vending, etc. Further, housing and basic services for migrants in their urban work destinations remain inadequate along with other **issues of urbanisation**.

Reverse migration

The structural changes in the Indian economy post-liberalisation in 1991 contributed to the growth of the informal economy, which became a major source of employment, especially for migrant labour. Migrant workers, often coming from rural areas with limited skills and resources, primarily get absorbed in informal sectors (construction, manufacturing, domestic work, and small-scale industries). They also find it hard to enter into formal jobs because of limited bargaining power and constrained networks.

The **Covid-19** pandemic highlighted the precarious nature of these informal jobs that triggered a large-scale reverse migration from destination to the source. Due to Covid-induced lockdown, migrant workers particularly in urban areas lost their jobs as factories, construction sites, and other informal sectors came to a halt.

Various sources reported that as many as 50 to 120 million workers departed for their native places. The NSSO conducted the **annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in 2020-21** and incorporated questions related to migration. This data confirms that many individuals moved from urban to rural areas.

Return migrants can be defined as individuals who report their current place of enumeration as their usual place of residence at any time in the past. In simple words, a return migrant is an individual who moves back to their place of origin or previous residence after spending a significant period in another location. As per PLFS 2020-21 data, return migrants accounted for 53 per cent of migrants in that time period.

One prime concern in the aftermath of the reverse migration was the absorption of the returnees. Migrant workers were also at the risk of falling deeper into poverty during the crisis due to the informal nature of their work. Encouraging the provision of safety nets and social security benefits can provide leverage to migrant workers.

Economists have also talked about the reduction of the costs of migration to facilitate inter-state migration of workers. There has been some progress made on food security. Schemes like “**one nation one ration card**” and fair-price shops can also help in the betterment of migrant lives in India.

Post Read Questions

1. Why is migration considered an essential livelihood strategy for rural households in developing countries like India?
2. What role does internal migration play in shaping urban and rural economies in India?
3. How is internal migration defined, and what are its key characteristics?
4. Why is the informal economy a major source of employment for migrant workers in India?
5. What is the concept of “One Nation, One Ration Card,” and how does it benefit migrant workers?

(Ritwika Patgiri is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Economics, South Asian University.)

How inflation affects cost of living

Rising inflation results in the decrease of purchasing power of money or real income, affecting the households' cost of living. But what is inflation, and how is it measured?

Written by **Meera Malhan and Aruna Rao**

Driven by a 10.87 per cent spike in food prices, **India's retail inflation surged to a 14-month high** of 6.21 per cent in October last year. While unseasonal rains and extended monsoons in certain parts of the country contributed to the surge in vegetable prices, rising global food and fuel prices due to geopolitical tensions also contributed to domestic inflation.



Driven by a 10.87 per cent spike in food prices, India's retail inflation surged to a 14-month high of 6.21 per cent in October this year. (Express file)

What is inflation?

Inflation refers to the rate at which the general price level for goods and services increases over a period of time, causing a decrease in purchasing power of money or real income. In other words, as inflation rises, each unit of currency can buy fewer goods and services than before.

Rising inflation affects the financial well-being of households, especially those with lower incomes or fixed incomes. As the cost of goods and services increases, it reduces the quantity of goods and services that can be purchased with the same nominal income, thereby affecting households' cost of living.

But what is nominal and real income? Nominal income is the total amount of money that an individual, household or entity earns over a specific period. For instance, if someone earns Rs. 50,000 per month, this amount is their nominal income. However, if the cost of goods and services increases (inflation), the real value of Rs. 50,000 decreases.

Real income, on the other hand, stands for the actual value of income in terms of what it can buy after adjusting for inflation.

$\text{Real Income} = \text{Nominal Income} \div \text{Price of Goods}$

In addition to real income, rising inflation affects **real interest rates**. Real interest rate is essentially derived after subtracting the inflation rate from the nominal interest rate (what the bank pays you). If the nominal interest rate is 10 per cent and inflation is 8 per cent then the real interest will be 2 per cent.

$\text{Real Interest} = \text{Nominal Interest Rate} - \text{Inflation Rate}$

Therefore, with rising inflation, the real interest rate goes down, which might discourage people from saving because the value of their money doesn't grow as much.

Measuring inflation

There are different methods for measuring inflation such as Consumer Price Index (CPI), **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**, GDP deflator, Producer Price Index (PPI), and wage inflation, with each focusing on a specific aspect of price changes.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)

Typically, inflation relates to consumer prices of all goods purchased by the consumer which may be either domestically produced or imported. The government publishes CPI each month. **CPI measures changes over time** in the general level of prices of goods and services that households purchase for consumption.

The formula for calculating inflation is $((CPI_{x+1} - CPI_x) / CPI_x) * 100$.

CPI_x = the value of the CPI in the initial/base year x .

The government releases the annual inflation rate figures every year. The annual inflation rate is calculated by measuring a year-on-year change in CPI, that is, the current month CPI over the CPI of the same month in the previous year. The percentage increase in this index over 12 months indicates the rate at which prices have risen.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) calculates and publishes the CPI for the entire country as well as for the individual states.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)

While the CPI measures the price changes in the retail market (maximum retail prices {MRP}, inclusive of taxes), the WPI measures the price changes in the wholesale market. Say, for example, the price of a commodity (such as onions) would vary depending on the fact that it is bought from the wholesale market or retail market.

The WPI measures the inflation of goods across 697 commodities that consumers buy in bulk from factories, mandis, etc. (reflecting wholesale prices). A **key difference between CPI and WPI** is that while CPI takes into account the change in prices of services — say a haircut or a banking transaction, WPI doesn't.

The official increase in WPI for October 2024 in India is 2.36 per cent, while the increase in CPI for the same period is 6.21 per cent. This increase is mainly due to an increase in inflation of vegetables, fruits, oils, and fats. The difference in percentage rates reflects the use of WPI and CPI in calculating inflation. In India, the inflation figures over the past 12 months have averaged 5 per cent.

GDP deflator

Another measure of inflation relates to the rate at which the prices of all domestically produced goods and services change. The price index used in this case is the GDP deflator.

The GDP deflator (also called implicit price deflator) is the ratio of the value of goods and services an economy produces in a particular year at current prices to that at prices prevailing during any other reference (base) year.

Since the GDP deflator covers the entire range of goods and services produced in the economy — as against the limited commodity baskets for the wholesale or consumer price indices — it is seen as a more comprehensive measure of inflation.

GDP Deflator = $((\text{Nominal GDP} / \text{real GDP})) * 100$.

The GDP deflator captures price changes for all domestically produced goods and services but excludes imports, while CPI focuses on a basket of goods and services and includes imports. Therefore, the GDP deflator and the CPI give different values.

Producer Price Index (PPI)

The Producer Price Index (PPI) is another indicator that measures the average changes in prices that producers receive for their goods and services produced. Here, we look at prices from the producer's point of view.

The PPI excludes the taxes, transport, trade margins and other charges that are imposed when those products reach consumers or as inputs to other producers. In other words, it is the suppliers' price.

Wage Inflation

Moreover, it is possible to give the rate of inflation of wage rates (wage inflation). Wage inflation refers to the rate at which wages (the compensation paid to workers) increase over time. Thus, compared to general inflation which measures the increase in prices of goods and services, wage inflation measures the rise in wages.

The labour unions, while negotiating the increase in wages rate, base their calculations on the expected rate of inflation. If the expected rate of inflation is 2 per cent, they will negotiate for a wage increase of more than 2 per cent, so that the increase in the wage rate will be positive in real terms. Wage inflation helps understand labour market dynamics.

Post Read Questions

1. **What is inflation, and how does it affect the purchasing power of money?**
2. **What is nominal income, and how is it different from real income?**
3. **What is the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), and how is it different from the CPI in measuring inflation?**
4. **What is wage inflation, and how is it different from general inflation?**

(Meera Malhan and Aruna Rao are Professors in economics at Delhi University. In the second part of the article, the authors will analyse the causes of inflation.)

International Relations

Navigating the maze of Indo-Pacific frameworks and alliances

The increasing significance of the Indo-Pacific region has resulted in the proliferation of diverse strategies, frameworks, groupings and alliances. How are countries like the US, Japan, ASEAN, and the EU shaping their strategies, and why is it important to understand the concepts of strategy, frameworks, and alliances in the context of the Indo-Pacific?

Written by **Anudeep Gujjeti**

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a “strategic reality” of the 21st century in global geopolitics. Its increased significance derives from its extensive geographical span, encompassing over half of the global population, and its economic contributions, which account for about 62 per cent of global GDP and half of global trade.

The increased **significance of the Indo-Pacific region** has paved the way for the proliferation of diverse strategies, frameworks, groupings

and alliances. Countries such as the US, Japan, the Association of South East Asian States (**ASEAN**), the European Union, Australia, and more recently Canada and Sweden have all formulated their respective Indo-Pacific strategies to influence the developments in the region.

In this context, it is important to have a clear understanding of the concepts such as strategy, frameworks and alliances that underpin the current geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Strategies, frameworks and alliances

The definition of “strategy” has evolved over a period of time. Earlier, international relations theorists concentrated on the military dimensions of strategy. Colin S. Gray in *Modern Strategy* (1999) notes that strategy is “the application of military power to achieve political objectives.”

However, the concept of strategy has broadened to encompass “power” and “processes”. According to John Baylis, “strategy provides the bridge between military means and political goals”, linking a national policy towards a region to attain national interests. It involves long-term plans and policies designed to achieve specific national or collective aims.

In contrast, a framework refers to set guidelines outlining how actions or interactions should occur to achieve a



From left: Australian PM Anthony Albanese, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida. (Photo: X/@narendramodi)

particular outcome. Whereas, formal alliances, as defined by the U.S. Department of Defense, are “formal agreements between two or more nations” formed through treaties to defend each other during times of war or aggression. Alliance partnerships can be bilateral or multilateral, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (**NATO**).

Major strategies and groups shaping the Indo-Pacific

— Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Strategy – In 2016, former Japanese Prime Minister **Shinzo Abe** announced the FOIP Strategy at TICAD VI (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) in Kenya. Japan’s FOIP vision marked a significant step towards enhancing connectivity between Asia and Africa (with ASEAN positioned as the key link between the two oceans), promoting regional stability and prosperity while emphasising the rule of law and inclusive international order.

Japan’s vision is built on three pillars: (i) the promotion of the rule of law, (ii) the pursuit of economic prosperity, and (iii) a commitment to peace and stability by focusing on capacity building in maritime law enforcement and cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

— The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) – It was adopted in 2019 during the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok. Its goal is not to create new mechanisms or replace existing ones but to enhance ASEAN’s Community building process and strengthen ASEAN-led mechanisms like the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF).

It even highlighted the broad areas of cooperation such as connectivity, maritime cooperation, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic cooperation. It further envisages avoiding any sort of mistrust, miscalculation, or economic and military confrontation based on a “zero-sum game”.

It reflects ASEAN’s desire to promote an open, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture that balances relations between major powers, particularly in light of rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

— The United States Indo-Pacific Strategy – The Biden administration released the Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022, focussing on a free and open Indo-Pacific. It emphasised sovereign decision-making by countries in accordance with international law and lawful governance of shared domains like seas and skies. The key objectives the US wants to advance are a free and open Indo-Pacific, build connections within and beyond the region, drive regional prosperity, bolster Indo-Pacific security, and build regional resilience to transnational threats.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has committed to “collaborating with allies and partners”, emphasising the significance of partnership in achieving these goals in view of the vastness and diversity of the Indo-Pacific. The vision draws attention to key groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), Australia, the United Kingdom, United States (AUKUS).

Quad and AUKUS

While the above three represent strategic frameworks or visions for the Indo-Pacific region, there are other variants working in the region as groups or alliances. One of them is **the Quad** (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). It is a diplomatic grouping comprising India, the US, Australia and Japan – all democratically governed nations with shared interests.

The Quad seeks to promote practical cooperation in various fields, which includes infrastructure development, climate change, critical and emerging technologies, and health (vaccines). Over time, the Quad has expanded its areas of functioning in the region and announced many partnerships such as the Quad Health Security Partnership, Indo-Pacific

Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network, and announced its first-ever **Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025**. The Quad's mandate is very broad and encompasses many functional areas, unlike the AUKUS.

AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US, with the primary goal of enhancing military cooperation, particularly by equipping Australia with nuclear-powered submarines as early as 2030. The second pillar of the alliance focuses on accelerating capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, electronic warfare, and hypersonic technologies. This alliance is widely seen as a direct response to China's growing military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific and is primarily focused on the security dimension.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), another initiative launched by the US in 2022 with thirteen other nations, represents a distinct economic initiative. Together, these countries account for over 40 per cent of global GDP. The framework is organised around four pillars, namely trade, supply chains, clean economy, and fair economy. Unlike traditional free trade agreements, the IPEF offers flexibility and an open arrangement that allows partner countries to join any of the pillars based on their interests and priorities.

This framework is designed to provide new opportunities for economic growth and strengthen partnerships among participating nations while avoiding commitments associated with conventional trade agreements.

In conclusion, the frameworks, visions, groups and alliances outlined above provide a brief overview of the many initiatives shaping the Indo-Pacific region. As nations endeavour to safeguard their national interests and limit China's growing influence, the region has become a complex landscape of overlapping strategies, alliances, and policies.

The many initiatives often complicate the adoption of a unified and targeted approach, increasing the possibility of overlapping strategies or conflicts or a lack of clear objectives. Therefore, it's useful to carefully understand the subtle differences among these frameworks and alliances. An informed and nuanced understanding will be crucial for effectively navigating the region's evolving dynamics.

Post Read Questions

1. **What has led to the proliferation of strategies, frameworks, groupings, and alliances in the Indo-Pacific?**
2. **How are countries like the US, Japan, ASEAN, and the EU shaping their Indo-Pacific strategies to advance national interests?**
3. **Why is it important to understand the concepts of strategy, frameworks, and alliances in the context of the Indo-Pacific?**
4. **In what ways can India's involvement in the Indo-Pacific contribute to a cooperative and sustainable regional order?**
5. **What are the key areas of cooperation between India and other regional players, such as Japan, ASEAN, and Australia, to promote stability in the Indo-Pacific?**

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Environment

Hindu Kush Himalaya faces increased risks amid record glacier melting

Due to rising temperatures, record glacier melting has occurred in 2023 globally, including in Asia, according to the State of the Cryosphere 2024 report. How does cryosphere loss in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region exacerbate catastrophic hazards?

Written by **Abhinav Rai**

If carbon dioxide emissions continue to rise at the current pace, global temperatures will likely increase by 3°C or more than the pre-industrial levels by the end of this century, posing a grave threat to the planet's cryosphere, with far-reaching consequences for ecosystems, livelihoods, and the global economy.

These concerns were highlighted in the State of the Cryosphere 2024 – Lost Ice, Global Damage, a report released at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan (November 11-22). This is an annual report about the health of the Cryosphere around the World, which has been published since 2021 by the International Cryosphere Climatic Initiative.

The report states that due to rising temperatures, record glacier melting has occurred in 2023 globally, including in Asia. The Indian Himalayan Region is among the regions directly affected by these changes. Before examining the **impacts of cryosphere loss in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region**, let's first understand what is the cryosphere, its components and significance, and how rising global temperatures are affecting it.

Cryosphere: Components and significance

The term Cryosphere has its roots in the Greek word *Kryos*, which means "icy cold". The Cryosphere refers to the frozen water part of the Earth's surface. Its components include snow, glaciers, ice caps, ice sheets, sea ice and permafrost. These elements are primarily found in polar regions, high latitudes and high-altitude areas of the Earth's surface. Permafrost is the surface which remains frozen for at least two consecutive years.

The Cryosphere plays a crucial role in the Earth's climate and water systems. It acts as a buffer stock of water and provides crucial water resources when perennial sources run dry or water availability is low. Snow, with its



The Indian Himalayan Region is among the regions directly affected by the record glacier melting that occurred globally in 2023.

high albedo, reflects more than 90 per cent of solar radiation falling on its surface, helping to regulate the Earth's temperature and making the planet cooler.

The glaciers of the HKH region, also known as the "Third Pole" or the "Water Tower of the Earth", are the source of some of the world's major river systems like the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra. Glaciers, formed due to the accumulation of snow over centuries or millennia, serve as a critical indicator of climate change and global warming.

So, when snow layers accumulate, they trap information about the climate of their time, including temperature, air bubbles, dust, particles of heavy metals, and traces of acids. This historical information about the changing climatic conditions is preserved in ice sheets and glaciers, and can be analysed using ice-coring techniques. However, the thawing of permafrost releases greenhouse gases such as methane (CH₄) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere, exacerbating global warming.

Inadequate climate commitments

The current rise in global temperature is approximately 1.2°C above the pre-industrial levels. The Paris Climate Accord (2015) set the goal to keep the global temperature rise below 2°C (upper limit) and make further efforts to restrict it to below 1.5°C by the end of this century. To achieve this, the Paris Agreement required countries to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outlining their climate actions and commitments.

However, the State of the Cryosphere report states that current NDCs and climate commitments are inadequate. Even if these commitments are fulfilled, the 2°C upper limit set by the Paris Agreement is likely to be breached. If the carbon dioxide emissions continue to grow at the current pace, global temperature could rise by 3°C or more than the pre-industrial levels by the end of this century, with severe consequences for the planet.

Impacts on the global cryosphere

Rising temperatures are affecting every part of the Cryosphere. This year's summer is the third in a row when sea ice in Antarctica was reduced to less than 2 million square kilometers. Studies suggest that the threshold for Greenland and parts of Antarctica – the world's two largest ice sheets – is well below 2.2°C.

If the current warming trend of 1.2°C continues to grow, there is a possibility of complete sea ice loss around Antarctica during the summer months. This would cause the warming of water and further melting of Antarctica's ice sheet through calving. The same is true for the Arctic Ocean. It is estimated that exceeding the 1.5°C limit could cause a rise above 10 meters in sea level in the coming centuries.

The cryosphere's decline is evident in regions worldwide. Venezuela lost its last glacier, 'Humboldt,' this year, while Indonesia's 'Eternity Glacier' will likely melt completely within the next two years. Most glaciers in the tropical Andes are losing mass ten times faster than the global average. In Europe, one-third of the Alps glacier ice would vanish by 2050 under current warming trends, and up to two-thirds could be lost if high emissions persist through mid-century.

As the temperature increases, there will be less solid precipitation (snow) and more liquid precipitation, even at higher altitudes, resulting in less seasonal snow occurrence overall. Additionally, thawing permafrost will lead to increased concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Scientists have identified 450 ppm as a critical CO₂ level, yet current projections indicate atmospheric levels could reach 500 ppm, even if existing NDCs are fulfilled.

Hindu Kush Himalayan region

The report underlines that due to warming, record glacier melting has occurred in 2023 globally, including in Asia. The HKH region witnessed record-low snowfall during the winter of 2023-2024. This decline in seasonal snow availability will also have an impact on food, energy and water security for both the country and the region.

The Indian Himalayan Region, which spans 13 states and Union Territories, will be directly affected by these changes. It is projected that even a 2°C rise in global temperatures could result in a 50 per cent loss of ice from High Mountain Asian glaciers. Furthermore, even at a 1.5°C increase, a significant cryosphere loss in the HKH region will be unavoidable.

This will intensify catastrophic hazards, such as the Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), already occurring in High Mountain Asia, particularly in India. Recently, we saw it happening in South Lhonak Lake in Sikkim (October 2023), which led to the loss of human lives and extensive damage to infrastructure.

The way forward

There is an urgent need for actions by the global community to limit the warming within 1.5°C, which the report suggests is the only viable scenario to preserve substantial parts of the Cryosphere and mitigate catastrophic events.

Apart from reducing emissions, significant resources need to be directed towards enhancing the adaptation capabilities of the communities directly affected by these changes. The next round of revisions for NDCs will take place in 2025, offering an opportunity for countries to revise and fulfil their climate commitments.

Post Read Questions

1. What is the Cryosphere, and what are its main components? What role does the Cryosphere play in the Earth's climate and water systems?
2. How has global warming contributed to record glacier melting in 2023 globally and in Asia?
3. How does cryosphere loss in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region exacerbate catastrophic hazards such as Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)?
4. Comment on the consequences of the October 2023 Glacial Lake Outburst Flood in South Lhonak Lake, Sikkim, for human lives and infrastructure.

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UPSC SPECIALS

Issue at a Glance

How to prevent stampedes at mass gatherings

At least six people were killed and dozens injured in a stampede that occurred on the evening of January 8 in Tirupati. This tragic incident follows a previous stampede at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad during the premiere of Allu Arjun's film 'Pushpa 2' on December 4, which highlighted the issue of stampedes and the need for effective crowd management. Here's what you must know.

Written by **Roshni Yadav**

What is the issue?

At least six people were killed and dozens injured in a stampede in **Andhra Pradesh**'s Tirupati on Wednesday (January 8) evening. A stampede at Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad during the premiere of "Pushpa 2" on the night of December 4 also resulted in the death of a woman and left her 9-year-old son injured. Last year, on July 2, at least 121 people were killed in a stampede during a religious gathering in the Hathras district of **Uttar Pradesh**.

These incidents have highlighted the critical importance of crowd management and the need to address the issue of stampedes.

Why is this issue relevant?

The issue of stampedes is significant for UPSC CSE aspirants as it pertains to disaster management, governance, and public safety measures. Understanding the causes, preventive strategies, and case studies related to stampedes can help address questions on governance, ethical responsibilities, and disaster preparedness in both the mains examination and interviews.



With a stampede occurring during the benefit show of Pushpa 2, and resulting in the death of a woman named Revathi, and grievous injury to her son, Sri Tej, Allu Arjun has been charged for the same.

What will you learn from this article?

1. *What is a stampede?*
2. *What are the factors leading to stampedes?*
3. *What are the NDMA guidelines for crowd management in India?*
4. *What should be done for effective crowd management and preventing stampedes?*

Question 1: What is a stampede?

Wenguo Weng and others define a stampede as “an impulsive mass movement of a crowd that often results in injuries and deaths” (“Review of analyses on crowd-gathering risk and its evaluation methods”, 2023).

According to Illiyas and others, “Stampede is the surge of individuals in a crowd, in response to a perceived danger or loss of physical space. It often disrupts the orderly movement of crowds resulting in irrational and dangerous movement for self-protection leading to injuries and fatalities”.

Stampedes have high mortality rates and are, along with heat-related illnesses, the most common causes of death at mass gatherings.



What are some notable stampedes and why did they occur?

<p>Allahabad, India (1954):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kumbh Mela stampede caused by crowd surge, poor planning, and VIP presence. ● Around 800 people died. 	<p>Moscow, Russia (1896):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More than 1,000 people were crushed or trampled to death during Tsar Nicholas II's coronation ceremony.
<p>Mina, Saudi Arabia (2015):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two large groups of pilgrims intersected during Hajj pilgrimage. ● Over 2,000 killed, despite official figures being lower. 	<p>Lima, Peru (1963):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fans panicked during a Peru-Argentina match; over 326 were killed.
	<p>Wai, India (2005):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Over 340 people were trampled to death at Maharashtra's Mandhardevi temple pilgrimage.



Two types of Stampedes

K M Ngai and others classify two types of stampedes on the basis of movement — unidirectional or turbulent (“Human Stampedes: A Systematic Review of Historical and Peer-Reviewed Sources”, 2009). **Unidirectional stampede** events may occur when a crowd moving in the same direction encounters a sudden positive or negative change in force which alters its movement. A positive force can be a “sudden stop” situation like a bottleneck and blocked exit, whereas a negative force would be something like a broken barrier or column which sends a group of people tumbling. **Turbulent stampede** events can occur in situations with uncontrolled crowds, induced panic, or crowds merging from numerous directions.

Question 2: What are the factors leading to stampedes?

Crowd management is a crucial tool for ensuring the safety of citizens during various types of mass gatherings. Unfortunately, stampedes still occur. According to nidm.gov.in, such unfortunate events happen due to a lack of (i) understanding of crowd behaviour, (ii) coordination, (iii) clear roles & responsibilities of various stakeholders, and (iv) proper planning on the part of organizers. Some of the factors leading to stampedes are:

1. Human Psychology: Human psychology is an important factor leading to stampedes, as all stampedes are either triggered or made worse by panic. In a seminal paper, psychologist Alexander Mintz theorised that “in panic-producing situations, cooperative behaviour is needed for success and is rewarding to individuals as long as everybody cooperates. However, once the cooperative pattern of behaviour is disturbed, cooperation ceases to be rewarding to the individuals” (“Non-adaptive group behaviour,” 1952).

Some stampedes may also be triggered by what sociologist Neil J. Smelser refers to as a “**craze**.” In *Theory of Collective Behaviour* (1962), he defined the term as “[the] mobilisation for action based on a positive wish-fulfilment belief.” This belief can be rational or irrational. But in large group settings, it percolates to every member and can make them act in the detriment of their interests.

Take for example what happened in Hathras. **Uttar Pradesh** Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, after visiting the site of the tragedy, said: “I am told that people rushed to touch his [the preacher’s] feet and tried to collect soil [from where he walked], and a stampede took place”.

2. Structural Issues: In addition to human psychology, the structural issues play a significant role in contributing to stampedes. Chun-Hao Shao and others have listed a number of factors in their paper “Stampede Events and Strategies for Crowd Management” (2018) that lead to human stampedes. These include:

- ♦ Lack of light
- ♦ Crowd flow not being divided for different crowds
- ♦ Collapse of barriers, buildings
- ♦ Blocked exits, evacuation route



- ◆ Poor design of hardware (such as a revolving door at the entrance)
- ◆ Fire hazards

Why do stampedes kill?

Most stampede casualties are caused by **traumatic asphyxia** — there is partial or complete cessation of respiration due to external compression of the thorax and/or upper abdomen. Other possible reasons for stampede-related deaths include myocardial infarction (heart attack, caused by decreased or complete cessation of blood flow to a portion of the heart), direct crushing injury to internal organs, head injuries, and neck compression.

3. High Crowd Density: Crowd density, defined as the number of people per unit area, plays a crucial role in determining how spaces for mass gatherings should be organized. When the crowd density exceeds the available space, it can create panic among attendees, especially if crowd management is lacking. This situation can sometimes lead to dangerous outcomes, such as stampedes.

According to Chun-Hao Shao and others' simulation, "When the density approached 3 and 4 persons/ sq m, most cases spent over 8 min in evacuation... If evacuees spend too much time waiting for evacuation or are blocked near the exit, crowd panic will increase, as will stampede risk".

Therefore, it is evident that various factors contribute to the occurrence of a stampede.



At least six devotees died and dozens were injured in the stampede on the night of January 8 as hundreds of them jostled for tickets for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam at the Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple on Tirumala Hills. (Source: Screengrab/ANI)

Question 3: What are the NDMA guidelines for crowd management in India?

Crowd management is defined as a systematic process of planning, organizing and monitoring large gatherings. Such management must be anticipated and planned accordingly for the worst situation and therefore should strategise to reduce and mitigate the risks in advance.

Recognising the issue of recurring stampedes at mass gatherings, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued guidelines for crowd management. The objective of these guidelines is to assist all stakeholders, including state governments, local authorities, and organisers/administrators of events and venues of mass gatherings, in overall planning and establishing required systems for effective crowd management.

1. Capacity Planning: For effective management of the crowd, an effective method for counting and monitoring visitors passing through a staging point should be implemented to manage the flow. Ensure that there are designated

physical or virtual locations that each visitor must pass through. Each staging point should provide adequate facilities for resting, eating, drinking water, and maintaining hygiene. Additionally, it is important to encourage multiple routes to enhance visitor movement and reduce congestion.

2. Crowd Control: During the crowd control focus should be on managing the demand-supply gap through: i) controlling crowd inflow, ii) regulating crowd movement at the venue, and iii) managing crowd outflow if necessary.

3. Conducting Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability analysis (HRVA): To transition from the traditional “crowd control” approach to a more effective “crowd management” strategy, strategic planning is necessary at all levels—from the events and venues where large gatherings occur to district and state-level disaster management plans. Conducting HRVA for mass gathering locations, along with pre-event scenarios can provide a foundation for preparing for all three phases of any severe incident: response, recovery, and mitigation.

The HRVA can facilitate the creation of a decision support system that can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of rescue and relief operations during crowd-related disaster scenarios.

(i) Identifying Threats and Causes: Planners can utilize existing information to recognize a variety of potential threats and causes of disasters at places where large crowds gather.

(ii) Risk Assessment and Planning: After identifying these potential threats and causes, it is essential to assess their risks.

4. Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA): NDMA has recommended that all event organizers/planners conduct FMEA. This methodology involves rating every possible hazard on the dimensions of a) Severity, b) Frequency of Occurrence, and c) Difficulty of detection on a scale of 1-10 to arrive at an overall Risk Priority Number (RPN).

Higher the severity, higher the frequency of occurrence, higher the difficulty of detection, the score assigned would be higher. The basic premise is that if a disaster can be foreseen, the probability of occurrence is high. For every hazard, actions are then warranted to reduce/remove the risks.

5. Develop a Course of Action: A course of action should be created to address each threat, cause, or gap identified by FEMA. After selecting potential courses of action, the planning team should identify the resources required for each option and assess them against the resources available.

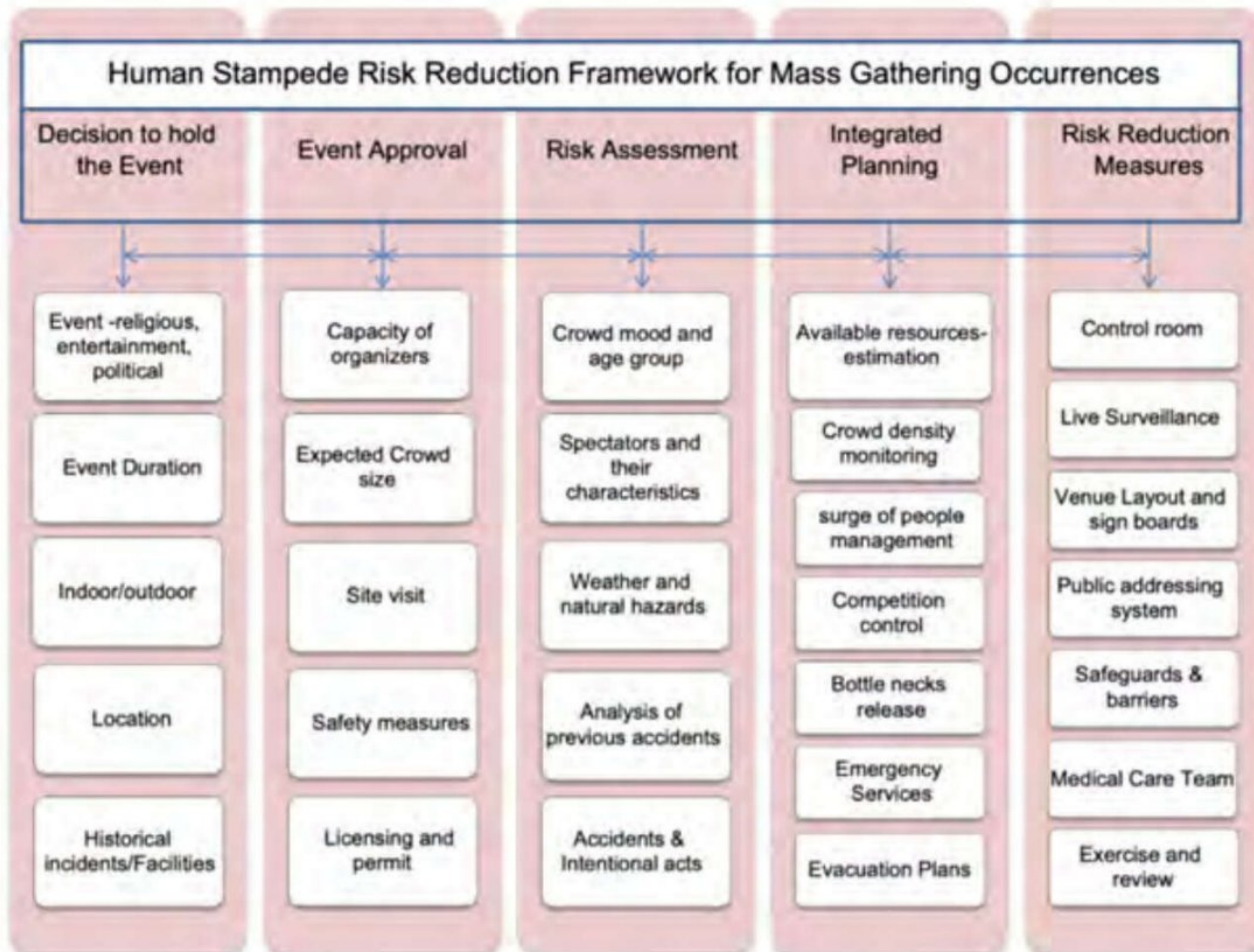
Question 4: What should be done for effective crowd management and preventing stampedes?

As the human population continues to grow and travel increases, mass gatherings are becoming more frequent and attracting larger numbers of participants. These gatherings can be spontaneous, such as those that occur at train stations during rush hour, or they can be planned events, like sports, religious, cultural, or political gatherings. Regardless of the type of mass gathering, effective strategy for crowd management is essential for preventing stampedes.

In an ideal situation, planners/organizers should limit the number of people allowed to enter a confined space. However, this is not always feasible. In those cases, the number and location of exits become critical. Additionally, the vigilance of event organizers, along with monitoring and real-time preventive measures, is essential. Following measures can be taken for management of mass gatherings:

1. Stampede Risk-Reduction Framework: Having the right framework for planning mass gatherings is crucial, as it involves an inter-agency, multi-disciplinary approach that relies on identifying potential hazards to design and

implement appropriate mitigation measures, as noted by Illyas and others. They have also developed a stampede risk-reduction framework.



Framework for stampede prevention

(Source: Human stampedes during religious festivals: A comparative review of mass gathering emergencies in India 2013).

2. Better Design of Spaces: Improving the physical organization and design of spaces is essential for effective crowd management. Many stampedes can be prevented by enhancing the design of areas meant for mass gatherings, as well as locations where gatherings may occur spontaneously. For instance, having sufficient exits can help in crowd movement.

3. Live Surveillance of the Crowd: The live surveillance of the crowd can help organizers monitor crowd density, bottlenecks, pressure buildup, and identify the source of disturbances which can help in better crowd management.

4. Inter-agency Communication: Effective communication among organizers and the crowd is essential. It is crucial for organizers, who often represent different bodies such as temple authorities, local administration officials, and police, to communicate clearly. Additionally, organizers must be prepared for situations that may require issuing warnings to the crowd. They need to establish who will be responsible for issuing the warning and determine how the crowd will be informed.

Express View: Lessons from the Hathras stampede

Religious gatherings, festivals, weddings and functions that draw large crowds are a regular part of the cultural, political and religious calendars of almost every district, or even neighbourhood, in the country... Authorities must be stringent about the size of a gathering. However, the administrative and police machinery is not always equipped to ensure that the crowd does not swell beyond the sanctioned numbers. In such situations, the number and placement of exits at the event are crucial, as are real-time interventions to ensure that religious or cultural fervour does not imperil public safety. Healthcare facilities should be kept on alert. Authorities across the country must ensure that mass gatherings do not turn chaotic and take such a high toll.

Post Read Questions

- 1. Discuss the recent measures initiated in disaster management by the Government of India departing from the earlier reactive approach. (UPSC CSE 2020)**
- 2. Crowd management is an important tool for the safety of citizens especially at religious places. Unfortunately, crowd disasters still happen. What are the major reasons behind such disasters? Suggest strategies to avoid crowd disasters.**

(Sources: [Hathras stampede kills over 100: Why stampedes take place](#), [Express View: Lessons from the Hathras stampede](#), [UPSC Essentials | Case Study — IAS officer who conducted 'Sabarimala Yatra' through strategic planning](#), [ndma.gov.in](#))

ESSAYS SIMPLIFIED

Are we a 'soft' state? — a previous year question that remains popular

Take a look at how our expert dealt with a 2009 essay question that wasn't alien to aspirants but demanded a careful, balanced and apolitical approach.

Written by **Pranay Aggarwal**

Can a civilizational state which has withstood millennia of invasions and colonization be 'soft'? Can a nation whose very essence is the coexistence of chaos and order, diversity and unity, be regarded as weak? At the very outset, one is compelled to **categorically reject the characterization of India as a soft state**. 'Soft state' – the term itself reeks of colonial condescension, an attempt to pigeonhole India into western definitions of strength and order. India defies such simplistic labels, turning what may seem like fragility into an unshakable force of cultural, political, and moral authority. To truly understand India is to grasp the paradox that its supposed softness is the very foundation of its enduring strength.



Aspirants often tend to doubt the choice of their essay — Is this a trick question? Should I attempt such a question even if it seems like a fun topic? One such topic was asked by UPSC in 2009 in its Essay paper of the civil services exam — Are we a 'soft' state?

The term 'soft state' is used to describe nations struggling to assert authority, but to use it for India is a profound misapplication. Far from being soft, **India exemplifies the strength and adaptability required for a modern state**. In fact, India's resilience as a nation-state is unparalleled. Emerging from the shadows of colonial exploitation, India adopted a democratic framework that has withstood numerous challenges – from wars and insurgencies to the pandemic and global economic crises. The flourishing of our democracy in the face of such adversity highlights the robustness of our political institutions. The Indian state has successfully safeguarded its sovereignty, and also integrated diverse cultures and social groups into a cohesive national identity. Its ability to conduct the world's largest free and fair elections, maintain rule of law across a billion-plus people, and sustain one of the fastest-growing economies in the world underscore its strengths.

The Indian civilizational state, in fact, predates many modern European nations which characterize us as 'soft'. Bharat has endured over millennia, when other ancient civilizations have perished. Bharat's civilizational continuity is a testament to its inherent strength and vitality, discrediting any notion of it being a soft state. Such historical continuity is unparalleled – India is not merely a modern state but the inheritor of a civilization that has demonstrated extraordinary hardiness. As Iqbal rightly observed "Yunan, Misra, Roma, sab mit gaye jahaan se, Ab tak magar hai baki naam-o-nishan hamara!" Its ability to preserve its cultural and social fabric while evolving politically underscores the indomitable strength of the Indian state.

The very idea of a soft state reeks of a colonial hangover and a west-centric worldview. Much like other reductive labels such as ‘third world’ or ‘failed state’, the soft state label reflects an outdated and patronizing perspective that measures non-western nations against arbitrary standards of strength and governance set by the West. Such epithets fail to appreciate the unique contexts and histories of countries like India. The label disregards India’s ability to safeguard its territorial integrity, navigate developmental challenges, and contribute meaningfully to the global order. It also reveals the double standards inherent in these judgments, as many so-called ‘strong states’ rely on centralization, corporatism, militarism, and clampdowns of free speech, often to the detriment of their own people.

For the land of Gandhi and Buddha, what may be perceived as **softness is strength** – rooted in the ideals of non-violence, compassion, and dialogue. What appears soft to the outsider is, in fact, the hard-earned wisdom of a civilization that has outlived empires. This ethos has shaped India’s approach to governance and diplomacy, emphasizing consensus over coercion and inclusion over exclusion. Far from being a weakness, this ‘softness’ reflects resilience – the ability to absorb differences and weather adversities. It is this character that has enabled India to integrate diverse communities, uphold democratic values, and maintain internal harmony despite challenges. Outwardly, too, the philosophy of non-aggression towards other nations does not make India weak. Instead, it enables sustained growth and fosters enduring relationships.

While rejecting the label of soft state for India, one can argue that the Indian state does wield soft power. India’s soft power emanates from its cultural, spiritual, and intellectual traditions. Yoga, Ayurveda, Bollywood, and Indian cuisine have found global audiences. The principles of Satya and Ahimsa championed by Mahatma Gandhi continue to inspire movements worldwide, while India’s democratic success serves as a model for other nations. Initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, Vaccine Maitri during Covid, and our leadership role in climate change negotiations demonstrate India’s commitment to global welfare.


Equally, while India is far from being a soft state, **we must not harbor illusions of grandeur.** We must acknowledge the **challenges** in our developmental journey. There are stark economic inequalities, regional disparities and barriers to social mobility. The bureaucracy, while robust in structure, does grapple with inefficiency and corruption. Inadequate social and physical infrastructure impedes economic growth. Rising communal tensions and caste polarization pose challenges to social harmony. Yet, these are not marks of a soft state; but symptoms of a developing nation navigating its path amid immense diversity, complexity, and a rapidly changing environment. Recognizing these challenges enables India to address them with resolve. These challenges, though formidable, are not insurmountable.

These challenges can be overcome with collective effort, with the state playing a pivotal role in addressing them. Through innovative policies, robust implementation, and people’s participation, these obstacles can be systematically addressed. Strengthening institutions, reducing bureaucratic laxity, and leveraging technology can ensure effective delivery of services. The state can work to bridge regional disparities by focusing on equitable development and empowering local governments. Collaborative partnerships with the private sector, civil society, and international organizations can amplify efforts in areas of education, healthcare, and skill development.

Moreover, **challenges in governance are not unique to India.** After all, which country doesn’t face any? Even developed countries face systemic issues. The USA grapples with deep racial inequalities, homelessness crisis, and frequent mass shootings. France and Germany contend with the integration of migrants, rising right-wing extremism, and labor strikes. Japan is grappling with an economic slowdown and an aging population. The United Kingdom struggles with political instability and regional discontent in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Should these states then be labeled as soft? It would be equally absurd to apply the term to India, whose governance challenges are compounded by its size and diversity.


In conclusion, India has always defied such imposed categories. From the ashes of colonialism, we have built a democratic polity and pluralistic society that, while imperfect, has persisted and evolved into a shining example for the rest of the world. The Indian state's seeming softness is not a flaw but a feature. It is a reflection of our commitment to pluralism, negotiation, and inclusive growth. It is not the absence of power but the presence of patience, tolerance, and deliberation that defines India. The Indian state, far from being soft, reflects a quiet confidence that springs from a self-assured sense of national character, a respect for diversity and debate, and an inclusive approach to governance.

Expert Tip:



Try to frame your arguments in the essay like the flow of a river - start strong, flow logically from one portion to the next, and end with the depth of conviction.

-Pranay Aggarwal



UPSC Essays Simplified

About our Expert: Pranay Aggarwal is an educator and mentor for aspirants preparing for UPSC Civil Services exam. With more than 10 years of experience guiding civil service aspirants, he is acknowledged as an expert on civil service exam preparation, especially on subjects like Social Issues and Sociology. He is the India representative on the Research Committee on Education, Religion and Political Sociology for UNESCO's International Sociological Association and a committee member of Indian Sociological Society and its committee on social movements. He is also the Convenor of Indian Civil Services Association, a think tank of senior bureaucrats.

UPSC Ethics Simplified

<https://telegram.me/+KSUmQ-87JBE2NTE1> Mags@Papers

BPSC aspirants protests in Bihar, Pooja Khedkar's case: Here's an 'ethical' reading of your 2024 issues

Why 'Ethics' remained a buzzword in 2024 and will continue to remain in 2025? As the year comes to a close, Nanditesh Nilay provides an ethicist view on incidents that affected aspirants' life, UPSC and more.

Written by **Manas Srivastava**

From aspirants' protests in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and other states to the controversy involving UPSC in Pooja Khedkar's case, along with corruption scandals involving civil servants dominated headlines in 2024. These issues have once again brought 'ethics' in the spotlight.

As 2025 begins, Nanditesh Nilay, our ethics expert, in conversation with Manas Srivastava of **The Indian Express** provides an ethicist view to

many incidents that the year witnesses affecting the lives of individuals or integrity of public service commissions.



"If there will be transparency and trust between stakeholders, then the path of protests can be avoided. Aspirants need a free and fair examination system," says Nanditesh Nilay.

Q. The year 2024 saw aspirants protesting for their various demands related to the examination process. Even today as we speak, many BPSC aspirants in Bihar are protesting. How should we understand these protests from an ethical perspective?

Why is there a need for an aspirant protest? The answer is simple, in a developing democracy, everyone's needs have to be addressed — like Maslow's pyramid. Maslow's pyramid, also known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is a motivational theory that organises human needs into five levels: Physiological, Safety, Love and belonging, Esteem, and Self-actualisation.

Every government needs to understand this. We must realise that an aspirant is a citizen first. So their genuine needs must be addressed at priority without



Hundreds of candidates who had appeared for the BPSC prelims, conducted on December 13 at 912 centres across Bihar, have been protesting in Patna since December 18. (PTI Photo)

any protest. If there will be transparency and trust between stakeholders, then the path of protests can be avoided. Aspirants need a free and fair examination system. We should avoid politicising it.

Q. Sanjeev Sanyal's posts on social media platform X earlier this year created a stir. He wrote, "As mentioned, it (is) perfectly fine to attempt the UPSC or other such exams, but only if the person wants to be an administrator. The problem is that lakhs of people are spending 5-8 years repeatedly doing this exam as a 'way of life'. This is such a waste of youthful energy." Your views ...

Neither does this exam give us the liberty to treat the outcome as a way of life, nor does it expect some form of fixed administrative skills. When you look at the issues in health, education, law and order, infrastructure, and even public sensitivity toward civic life, you will agree that a public servant has to be a person who must have a deeper sense of understanding of the policies as well as of civil life; which further can lead and guide common people towards peace and prosperity. The least we can expect is to have someone who stands higher in values and competencies.

Q. Three UPSC aspirants died in July this year after they were trapped in the basement of Rau's IAS coaching centre in Central Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar, which was flooded when a drain burst during heavy rain. How do you see this incident?

The whole incident was tragic. Students died due to the negligence and cruelty of coaching and the system. We hope that the whole mess up at Karol Bagh and Mukherjee Nagar area will be addressed with full sincerity and honesty. What also worries me is that the incident happened in Delhi, a tier-one city. What about places like Kota or other coaching hubs in smaller towns with less facilities and vigilance.

Lakhs of students' lives can come in danger if the system does not take strict safety measures in advance. There is no scope of politics here. But there is definitely a scope for repentance and ethical decision making. What we must pray for is that such incidents should not be repeated. Charlie Chaplin was right when he said that life is a tragedy in closeup. Afterall, above anything else, it is a question of human being's life.

Q. The UPSC in July cancelled trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Puja Khedkar's candidature in the 2022 Civil Services Examination (CSE) and barred her from appearing for any future examinations of the commission, after finding she had violated rules by appearing for the exam more times than what was allowed. The whole incident brought ethics of individuals and institutions into question. Your comments...

It was a discouraging episode. It has arrested the image of civil service as well as the steel frame of Bharat. Simultaneously, this incident will have a chagrin effect on all those aspirants, and serving civil servants who believe in ethics. Now if anyone after qualifying for any examination will act so arrogant and child-like, and give priority to the mundane then I must remind them of Epicetus who said that you become what you give attention to.



Former IAS trainee officer Puja Khedkar

Regarding the UPSC exam process, one must know that the whole process not only prepares an examinee for an exam but also crafts the person with that kind of knowledge which can be expressed succinctly. UPSC has a robust and structured selection process. However, no one can deny that this incident has robbed its bastion and brought a dent in its image.

We all wish to see the moral compass bending towards justice. When I think of the solution, I think of ethics.

Till the time an individual will not wish to become a good human being and ethics will not become a natural expression of behavior, such incidents of temptations, errors and obnoxious behavior will loom large and will eclipse the ethos of this service.

Q. The above mentioned cases of corruption, controversies, and unethical practices by civil servants that made headlines in 2024 have raised questions about the relevance of ethics. A veteran even suggested removing the ethics paper from the Civil Services Exam, claiming it serves no purpose. What is your opinion on such views?

The purpose of Morality, Values and Ethics has always been the same — ‘Goodness’. By introducing this paper, UPSC also felt the same. The Commission hoped to see the civil servants pass the baton of policies and benefits to the last man without carrying any ego, arrogance, superiority, apathy any prejudices.

The paper on Ethics has a similar message i.e. to believe in goodness — to become and remain a good human being. Remember, any developing nation needs not only brilliant officers in governance but also those who are caring, compassionate and courageous. So, moral intent and a clear message on values and ethics were what the ethics paper had at its core as a part of the UPSC syllabus.

I am reminded of the first ethics paper in 2013, in which you will notice signs of a clear thought process, conscious planning and a methodical approach to bring objectivity to the assessment mechanism. For example, if the questions were asked on integrity, the voice of consciousness or any concept, case studies that followed validated the understanding of those concepts which the examinee has answered in the paper. Only this kind of framework can assess and validate that alignment for a better understanding of the examinee’s thought process. We can not ask questions in ethics only for the sake of asking. It must carry a structured objective pattern for facilitating the assessment process. There is a qualitative aspect of this paper that cannot be counted in numbers but can only be felt in the longer run.

Should we remove this paper from the syllabus? No way. Infact, I will suggest bringing Ethics in Prelims too.

Exposure to goodness is an opportunity. Only ethics and values can answer fundamental questions of democratic societies. Consider Japan as an example: the Japanese education system and citizen behavior emphasise ethics. A soldier’s conduct differs from that of a civilian primarily in their stronger sense of values and ethics. This defines what it means to be a soldier.

Let’s ponder: Are courage, integrity, compassion, empathy, togetherness, love, and discipline only meant for soldiers? What about other institutions and their representatives?

Q. So where is the problem with all the controversies around the UPSC universe and as we step in 2025 in a few days, what should be the solutions?

The problem is everywhere. Unethical practices have been treated as normal behaviour across the globe and even in our country after independence. Plato said that the state of justice depends on the state of a just man, a just state. Ultimately ethics is not a one-way traffic. Even Mahatma Gandhi was worried about the state of affairs, particularly about the conduct of citizens. Don't forget that the battle of Plassey was over in a few minutes due to a few compromises and the result was that the destiny of India was doomed.

When I completed my second PhD in 2022 from IIT Delhi (NRCVEE) in *A study on Ethical decision-making by Indian Bureaucrats*, the results and findings were highly encouraging and simultaneously suggested something urgent and important to be taken care of for an effective, efficient and ethical governance. The work specifically has practical relevance, since the outcomes of the qualitative studies can be used in the expansion of the code of conduct as well as the training material to include guidelines on handling the conflicting situations of various types of ethical dilemmas as highlighted in this study. It also highlights the need to improve the ethical climate in Indian bureaucracy to strengthen the moral courage of the officers required for ethical decision-making. It is hoped that the outcome of this work can be used to have a positive influence on ethical decision-making among the Indian bureaucrats.

The training curriculum at LBSNAA and all state academies must have an open-minded approach to ethics and values. Ethics should be incorporated in all kinds of teaching and training endeavours. Ultimately governance is for whom, and for what? All those who have been uninitiated must realise that becoming a civil servant is not only competency-driven but value-driven too.

Further, in all kinds of performance appraisals, values and moral conduct must be given preferences. If someone has done hard work with utmost sincerity, honesty and kindness, that effort must be counted and it should not be lost in the result driven mindset. The moral act is itself as important as the result of the act. The Categorical Imperative of Kant should be treated as pragmatic as the Utilitarianism of Bentham.

In the long run, the moral science paper must begin from the nursery itself. Make it a compulsory subject at all levels. It is also pertinent to remind ourselves that we need good doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, police, judges, leaders, citizens etc.



"In the long run, the moral science paper must begin from the nursery itself," says Nanditesh Nilay.

Therefore why is this paper only for the civil services exam, and not for all exams? The change must begin from the top. It has been said that values are like water drops and they should reach to the top and economic benefit is like smoke and must reach to the bottom first. Values must be weighed with the spirit of justice.

(Nanditesh Nilay is the author of 'Being Good and Aaiye, Insaan Banaen', 'Ethikos: Stories Searching Happiness' and 'Kyon'. He teaches courses on and offers training in ethics, values and behaviour. He has been the expert/consultant to UPSC, SAARC countries, Civil services Academy, National Centre for Good Governance, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Competition Commission of India (CCI), etc. He has PhD in two disciplines and has been a Doctoral Fellow in Gandhian Studies from ICSSR. His second PhD is from IIT Delhi on Ethical Decision Making among Indian Bureaucrats. He writes for the UPSC Ethics Simplified (concepts and caselets) fortnightly.)

Expert's Talk

Why aspirants protest and how should govt address it?

‘The politicisation of student protests, while often seen negatively, has its advantages,’ says our Expert Ravi Kapoor on BPSC aspirants’ protest. But what should be the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to address aspirants’ demands?

Written by **Manas Srivastava**



‘When politicized responsibly, aspirants’ protests can be a catalyst for change,’ says Ravi Kapoor.

Why have student protests become a regular occurrence? *Is politicisation of student protests doing any good?*

Hundreds of candidates who had appeared for the BPSC prelims, conducted on December 13 at 912 centres across Bihar, have been protesting in Patna since December 18, calling for the cancellation of the exam, alleging that CCTV cameras and jammers had not been functional at several examination centres and that question papers had been distributed late at some locations. In conversation with Manas Srivastava, our expert, **Ravi Kapoor**, answers some of the most important queries related to the episode which every aspirant must know.

About our Expert: Ravi Kapoor (Ex-IRS) offers free quality mentorship to UPSC aspirants, drawing upon his ten years of experience to create customised and productive curriculum. Through a free mentorship programme, he integrates tailored educational materials, psychological principles, visual learning techniques, and a strong emphasis on mental well-being into his teaching skills granting aspirants a chance to learn from his expertise.

Manas: In the race for government jobs, especially civil services in India, why have student protests become a regular occurrence?

Ravi Kapoor: Student protests have become frequent because of widespread disillusionment and mistrust in the government's examination processes. Scams like NEET and UGC paper leaks have exposed systemic flaws, eroding public confidence. Aspirants feel let down by a system that appears incapable of safeguarding their aspirations, leading to frustration and collective action.

Manas: Is the government's/commission's current approach to conducting Government exams a disservice to the nation's youth?

Ravi Kapoor: The current approach is outdated and fails to meet the expectations of a modern, tech-savvy generation. Flawed processes, inefficiencies, and lack of transparency make it a disservice to the youth. It is imperative to revamp the system through digitization, standardization, and even privatization wherever feasible, ensuring a more robust and efficient recruitment process.

Manas: Out of the many demands raised over the years, which ones should the government/commission definitely address?

Ravi Kapoor: In my opinion, the government must prioritize implementing computer-based testing with immediate feedback systems. These systems, while requiring significant investment in infrastructure, are highly secure, transparent, and efficient. Such reforms would enhance the credibility of the examination process and restore faith among aspirants.

Manas: Your views on the politicisation of student protests...

Ravi Kapoor: The politicisation of student protests, while often seen negatively, has its advantages. It brings critical issues to the forefront, forcing them into the political and public spotlight. This creates pressure on policymakers to act and ensures the demands of students gain the attention and seriousness they deserve. When politicized responsibly, it can be a catalyst for change.

Manas: What should be the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to address aspirants' demands?

Ravi Kapoor: The government must adopt a transparent and proactive approach to addressing aspirants' concerns. A direct video acknowledging and addressing the issue would demonstrate accountability and empathy. Presenting clear, actionable solutions, followed by visible implementation, would not only resolve grievances but also rebuild trust in the system. Transparency and open communication are essential for long-term reform.



Jan Suraaj chief Prashant Kishor with others during an indefinite hunger strike demanding the cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination (CCE), 2024, conducted by the BPSC, over allegations of question paper leak, near Mahatma Gandhi statue in Patna, Thursday. (PTI Photo)

UPSC Current Affairs Pointers

Prelims Tidbits for the month of December

UPSC Current Affairs Pointers will help you to consolidate your prelims exam prep. Take a quick look at last month's current affairs tidbits curated specially for those preparing for UPSC and various other competitive examinations.

Compiled by **Khushboo Kumari**

Report

• Study published in Nature Journal on Carbon trade

— According to a new study published in **Nature Journal**, Carbon trade has been largely ineffective till now, and only a very small number of projects have resulted in real emissions reduction.

— The study looked at thousands of projects that together generated carbon credits worth one billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, and found that only 16 per cent of these credits represented actual reductions in emissions.

— Carbon markets allow for trade in **carbon credits** by incentivising emissions reductions. An industrial unit that outperforms its emission standards, meaning that it produces less emissions than it is mandated to, can earn carbon credits. Another unit, which is struggling to meet its emissions standards, can buy these credits.

— The Nature study found that the **most effective emissions reductions** happened in projects that involved the abatement of **HFC-23** chemicals.

— **HFC-23**, also known as trifluoromethane, is produced during the manufacture of a common refrigerant gas called HCFC-22, belonging to the hydrochlorofluorocarbon family. HFC-23 has 14,800 times more potential to cause global warming as compared to carbon dioxide.

• Global Carbon Project

— According to a new report by **Global Carbon Project**, an organisation that quantifies the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, India's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from burning fossil fuels are expected to increase by 4.6% in 2024, the highest among major economies.

— Globally, fossil-based CO₂ emissions are set to touch a record high of 37.4 billion tonnes this year, a rise of 0.8% from 2023.

— At this rate, there is "a 50% chance global warming will exceed 1.5 degree Celsius consistently in about six years".

● **Lancet Report**

— According to a new study published in the Lancet Magazine, pollution caused by landscape fires could have claimed more than **1.2 lakh deaths** in India every year on an average in the 20-year period between 2000 and 2019.

— **Agricultural burning** is just one type of landscape fires contributing to air pollution.

— **China** had the largest number of such casualties during this period, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, and Nigeria. Globally, more than 1.53 million deaths could be attributable to such landscape fire incidents, the study said.

— Lower socio-economic countries were more likely to have higher deaths from respiratory illness caused by fires than higher socio-economic countries. The global cardiovascular deaths due to fire pollution increased by an average 1.67 per cent per year.

● **Working paper of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**

— The **female labour force participation rate (LFPR)** increased in almost all states in India during 2017-18 to 2022-23, with rural areas seeing larger gains than urban areas, a new working paper released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) stated.

— **Rural female LFPR** rose to **41.5 per cent** (~69 per cent growth) from 24.6 per cent during 2017-18 to 2022-23, while urban LFPR rose to 25.4 per cent from 20.4 per cent.

— It pointed out that even after excluding all those who worked as unpaid family workers or helpers in household enterprises from 2004-05 until 2022-23, the overall trends for increase in female LFPR remain the same as before.

— **Punjab** and **Haryana** have recorded **low female LFPR** among the northern states. Among the eastern states, rural Bihar had the lowest LFPR in the country.

— Among the northeastern states, there has been improvement in female LFPR in rural areas with Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh leading among the states of the region.

Events

● **World Heritage Week**

— Every year, **November 19 to November 25** is celebrated as World Heritage Week 2024, under the theme “Discover and Experience Diversity.”

— This annual global observance marks the heritage sites recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

— The roots of this week were created by UNESCO in 1945 to promote moral and intellectual unity following two catastrophic world wars as a way to support enduring world peace.

● **International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women**

— The United Nations General Assembly designated **November 25** as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1999 to raise awareness against Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG).

— This date was chosen to honour the Mirabal Sisters of the Dominican Republic, who became the symbol of resistance against tyranny and violence.

● **Global Conference of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)**

— the ICA Global Cooperative Conference 2024 was inaugurated in New Delhi, India. The conference will run from 25 to 30 November 2024. The theme of the conference is ‘**Cooperatives Build Prosperity for All**’.

— The ICA Global Cooperative Conference and ICA General Assembly are being organised in India for the first time in the 130-year history of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the premier body for the global cooperative movement.

— On inauguration, PM Narendra Modi launched the UN International Year of Cooperatives 2025, saying that the conference will provide insights into India’s future cooperative journey.

— A commemorative **postal stamp**, symbolising India’s commitment to the cooperative movement was also launched.

— The stamp showcases a **lotus**. The five petals of the lotus represent the **five** elements of nature (panchatatva), highlighting cooperatives’ commitment to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The design also incorporates sectors like agriculture, dairy, fisheries, consumer cooperatives, and housing, with a drone symbolising the role of modern technology in agriculture.

● **National Milk Day**

— National Milk Day has been observed annually on **November 26** since 2014 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr Verghese Kurien.

— About **Dr Verghese Kurien**: He was born in Kozhikode, Kerala on November 26, 1921. Kurien and Tribhuvandas Patel, along with Dara Khurody – who had established the Aarey Milk Colony in Bombay, which provided pasteurising and distribution facilities for the milk from Anand – were awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 1963.

● **World AIDS Day**

— World AIDS Day has been observed annually since **December 1, 1988**.

— It aims to provide a global platform to create awareness about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) /AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

— The theme for this year is “*Take the right path: My health, my right!*”

About HIV

— Once contracted, HIV has the potential to attack the body’s immune cells called **CD4**, which help the body to respond to infection. Once HIV attacks the CD4 cells, it starts replicating



Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

itself and destroys, weakening the body's immune system making it more prone to certain "opportunistic infections" that take advantage of the weak immune system.

— Some of the opportunistic infections associated with AIDS include cryptococcal meningitis, toxoplasmosis, oesophageal candidiasis and certain cancers.

— Certain bodily fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids and breastmilk can be carriers for HIV. It can be transmitted through unprotected sex, transfusion of contaminated blood, sharing needles and syringes and from a mother with HIV to her infant during pregnancy.

— As of now, **there is no cure for HIV** and it can be treated by the administration of antiretroviral (ART) drugs that stop the virus from replicating itself.

● **International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)**

— **December 3** is annually observed as the **International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)** by the United Nations since 1992.

— The theme for this year is "*Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future.*"

— In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 was enacted to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

● **December 21**

— The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has adopted the resolution to declare December 21, observed as Winter Solstice, as **World Meditation Day**.

— In 2014, India took the lead in declaring **June 21** as the **International Day of Yoga**.

Polity

● **One Nation One Subscription**

— The Union Cabinet has approved the 'One Nation One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme, under which all centrally-run and state-run higher **education institutions** will have access to **reputed journals** published by international publishers on a single platform.

— Access will be provided through a national subscription, coordinated by the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET), an autonomous inter-university center under the University Grants Commission (UGC).

— The scheme involves an outlay of **₹6,000 crore** for three years, until 2027, and will provide subscriptions to around 13,000 journals published by 30 international publishers.

● **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)**

— The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of its flagship initiative, the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), and allocated a budget of **Rs.2,750 crore** for the period up to March 31, 2028.

— AIM which works under the aegis of NITI Aayog is the government's flagship initiative, launched in 2016, aims to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

— It has launched the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs). ATLs aspires to instil in young minds the curiosity, creativity, and adaptive learning required to become entrepreneurs.

Global Innovation Index (GII) 2024

According to GII, released by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), India has risen significantly from 81st in 2015 to **39th in 2024**. With a score of 67.5, Switzerland ranks at the top.

● National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF)

— The Union Cabinet on November 25 approved the launch of the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) as a standalone **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare with a budget outlay of **Rs 2,481 crore**.

— The Agriculture Ministry defines natural farming as a “chemical-free” farming system that only uses inputs produced using livestock and plant resources.

— The proposed NMNF is an improvement of the **Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhti (BPKP)** launched by the NDA government in its second term (2019-24). The initiative was launched under an umbrella scheme of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojna (PKVY).

— The NMNF mission aims to bring an additional 7.5 lakh hectares of area under natural farming. In the next two years, it will be implemented in 15,000 clusters in Gram Panchayats.

● Places of Worship Act, 1991

— A district court in Sambhal ordered a survey of the **Shahi Jama Masjid**, the town in western Uttar Pradesh after a plea which claimed that Sambhal's Jama Masjid was built on the site of a Hindu temple. At the heart of the matter is the interpretation of the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

— The **Places of Worship Act** states that the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, must be maintained.

—Section 3 of the Act bars the conversion, in full or part, of a place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious denomination — or even a different segment of the same religious denomination.

● PAN 2.0

— The Union Cabinet approved the **PAN 2.0** Project to make PAN the “single source of truth and data consistency”.

— The upgrades will include— the enhancement of the QR code feature for new and old cards, a completely online application process, and a merger of all existing



A 10-digit alphanumeric number, PAN, enables the Income Tax Department to link all transactions of a person with the department. (File)

identification numbers to make PAN as the common identifier for businesses.

— A “**PAN data vault system**” will also be created for all entities using PAN data, for data protection and cybersecurity purposes.

— The existing PAN cards will continue to be valid under PAN 2.0. It will require an upgradation at free of cost.

— PAN enables the I-T Department to link transactions such as tax payments, Tax Deducted at Source (TDS)/Tax Collected at Source (TCS) credits and income returns with the department.

● **PM Kisan Samman Nidhi**

— Over 60,000 ineligible persons, including income taxpayers, in Kerala have been pocketing central government’s flagship Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kishan).

— The Government of India launched the **PM-Kisan Yojana in 2018**. Under this scheme, farmers receive Rs 6000 yearly in three instalments of Rs 2000 each every four months.

— It is a Central Sector scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India and the fund is transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

● **Kisan Pehchaan Patra or Farmer ID**

— A Farmer ID, also known as **Kisan Pehchaan Patra**, is an **Aadhaar**-based unique digital identity linked dynamically to a state’s land records bearing information such as demographics, crops sown and ownership details.

— It will form the core of the **Farmers’ Registry**, one of the three registries under the AgriStack component of the Centre’s Digital Agriculture Mission for the creation of digital public infrastructure in the farm sector, which got the Union Cabinet’s approval earlier this year.

— The Government aims to create digital identities for 11 crore farmers in three phases by 2026-27 — 6 crore of them this fiscal itself.

— **Gujarat** is set to become the first state to avail of the Centre’s incentives for creating a Farmers’ Registry.

● **PRAGATI**

— According to the study, Oxford University’s Saïd Business School in collaboration with the **Gates Foundation**, reveals how digital governance under the highest level of political leadership can help nations overcome traditional bottlenecks in infrastructure development.

— PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) was launched in **2015** by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It combines leadership with video conferencing, drone feeds, and data management to enable oversight of critical infrastructure.

— The platform’s impact has helped complete long-delayed projects like segments of National Highway 8 in **Maharashtra**, the Chenab Bridge in **Jammu** and Kashmir, which is now the world’s highest rail bridge, and the Bogibeel Bridge in Assam, which had languished for more than a decade before being completed within three years of coming under review in PRAGATI.

— **PARIVESH** (Proactive and responsive facilitation by interactive, virtuous and environmental single window hub) is an application to seek clearances related to environment, wildlife and forest from central, state and district authorities.

● **100-Day TB Elimination Campaign**

— Union Health Minister JP Nadda officially launch the ambitious 100-Day TB Elimination Campaign in **Panchkula, Haryana** on December 7, 2024.

— The campaign, focused on enhancing detection, reducing diagnostic delays and improving treatment outcomes, will be implemented in 347 districts of 33 states where the prevalence of the disease is higher.

— According to the latest World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Tuberculosis Report, while the estimated number of tuberculosis (TB) cases in India decreased slightly in 2023, the number of cases reported increased – a positive sign that the gaps in diagnosis are closing.

— TB is caused by an organism called **mycobacterium tuberculosis**, which mainly affects the lungs, but can also impact other parts of the body.



Union Health Minister J P Nadda launches intensified 100-Day TB Elimination Campaign in Panchkula on Saturday. PTI

● **Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024**

— The Rajya Sabha on December 3 passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024.

— The Bill amends the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act of 1948. It draws a clear line between the law governing the mining of “minerals” — defined under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 — and the Oilfields Act.

— The Bill defines mineral oils as “any naturally occurring hydrocarbon, whether in the form of natural gas or in a liquid, viscous or solid form, or a mixture thereof”.

— The Bill scraps criminal punishment for those who contravene provisions of the Oilfields Act, replacing it with fines.

● **Removal of the Vice-President of India**

— The Opposition gave notice for a motion of **no-confidence** against Rajya Sabha chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar on December 10, the first such action in India's parliamentary history.

— Since the Vice President and Rajya Sabha chairperson must be the same individual, the process for their removal is also the same – and is laid down under Article 67.

— Under this provision, the Vice President “shall hold office for a term of five years from the date on which he enters upon his office” unless the Vice President resigns before that by sending a letter to the President, or is removed from office.

— The requirements for removing or impeaching the Vice President are provided under **Article 67(b)**.

— It states that the Vice President may be removed if a majority “all the then members of the Council (Rajya Sabha)” passes a resolution for his removal, which must then be “agreed to” by the House of the People (Lok Sabha).

— Under this provision, “no resolution...shall be moved unless at least fourteen days’ notice has been given of the intention to move the resolution”.



Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar upon his arrival to conduct proceedings in the House during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi. (PTI Photo)

● **Bima Sakhi Yojana**

— Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has launched the ‘Bima Sakhi Yojana’ of the state-owned **Life Insurance Corporation (LIC)** in Panipat, Haryana.

— It is a Stipendiary Scheme, **exclusively for Women**, with a stipendiary period of 3 years.

● **Impeachment of the High Court Judge**

— An impeachment motion was moved in Rajya Sabha against Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav over his remarks at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad last week.

— The process of **impeachment of a judge** of the Supreme Court is laid down in Article 124(4) of the Constitution of India. Article 218 says the same provisions shall apply in relation to a judge of the High Court as well.

— Under **Article 124(4)**, a judge can be removed by Parliament through a laid-down procedure on only two grounds: “proved misbehaviour” and “incapacity”.

— For an impeachment motion against an SC or HC judge to go through, at least two-thirds of those “present and voting” in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha must vote in favour of removing the judge — and the number of votes in favour must be more than 50% of the “total membership” of each House.

— Once the MPs submit the motion, the presiding officer of the House can either accept or reject it. If accepted, a three-member committee, comprising two judges and a jurist, is constituted to probe the complaint and determine if it is a case fit for initiating the process of impeachment.

Economy

• Windfall Tax

— The government on December 2 withdrew the windfall gains tax on domestic production of crude oil and export of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF). It was **first** introduced on **July 1, 2022**.

— “Windfall gains tax” was a term used to describe cesses under the ambit of central excise imposed on fuel exports and domestic crude oil production, to tax super-normal profits of fuel exporters and oil producers.

— In case of domestic crude oil and ATF exports, the windfall gains tax was in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED), while on diesel and petrol, it was a combination of SAED and Additional Excise Duty (AED), the latter also known as Road and Infrastructure Cess (RIC).

• Potato

— Odisha food supplies and consumer welfare minister KC Patra accused the West Bengal government of creating an artificial scarcity of potatoes to “tarnish the reputation” of the state’s BJP government.

— **India** is the **second largest producer** of **potato** in the world, after China.

— In India, potatoes are grown during the rabi (winter-spring) season, mainly in **Uttar Pradesh**, **West Bengal**, Bihar, Gujarat, **Madhya Pradesh**, Punjab, Haryana, Assam, Jharkhand and **Chhattisgarh**.



Uttar Pradesh was the biggest producer of potato in the country in 2021-22. It was followed by West Bengal.

— A small quantity of potato is also grown during the kharif (monsoon) season in Uttarakhand, **Karnataka**, Himachal Pradesh, **Tamil Nadu** and **Maharashtra**.

— With a production of 161 lakh tonnes, **Uttar Pradesh** was the biggest producer of potato in the country in 2021-22. It was followed by **West Bengal**, which recorded a production of 124 lakh metric tonnes.

— Potato is a temperate climate crop, requiring low temperatures from 15°C to 25°C, and Odisha’s agro-climatic conditions are not conducive for potato cultivation.

• MuleHunter.AI

— The **RBI** has created an AI-powered model called **MuleHunter.AI**, which could reduce digital fraud by helping banks deal with the increasing problem of “mule” bank accounts.

— It has been developed by the **Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH)**, **Bengaluru**, a subsidiary of the central bank.

— A mule account is a bank account that criminals use for illegal activities, including the laundering of illicit funds.

— The related term “money mule” is used to describe the innocent victims who are used by the criminals to launder stolen or illegal money via their bank accounts.

- **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)**

— The MPC of RBI has announced the bi-monthly monetary policy for FY25. They have kept the **repo rate** unchanged at 6.5 percent, maintaining their neutral stance. However, the RBI slashed the **cash reserve ratio (CRR)** by 50 basis points (bps) to **4 per cent** from 4.5 per cent in a bid to boost liquidity in the financial system.

— Under **Section 45ZB** of the amended RBI Act, 1934, the central government is empowered to constitute a six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to determine the policy interest rate required to achieve the inflation target. The first such MPC was constituted on September 29, 2016.

— The **MPC shall consist** of the RBI Governor as its ex officio chairperson, the Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, an officer of the Bank to be nominated by the Central Board and three persons to be appointed by the central government.

— The **CRR** is the percentage of a bank's total deposits that is required to maintain liquid cash with the RBI as a reserve.

— The interest rate that the RBI charges when commercial banks borrow money from it is called the **repo rate**. It is used by the banks to meet their short-term funding needs.

International Cooperation

- **India-Nigeria**

— Nigeria has conferred its second-highest national award, the **Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger**, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, making him the second foreign dignitary to receive the distinction after Queen Elizabeth, who was conferred the award in 1969.

— The PM is in Nigeria on the first leg of his three-nation visit at the invitation of **President Bola Ahmed Tinubu**. This visit is the first by an Indian PM to Nigeria in 17 years.

— Three MoUs — the Cultural Exchange Programme, Customs Cooperation and Survey Cooperation — were signed during the visit.

— Nigeria is referred to as the “Giant of Africa” because its economy is the fourth-largest in the continent and its population the largest.

- **India-Guyana**

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred ‘*The Order of Excellence*’ by Guyanese President Irfaan Ali.

— He was awarded the highest national award of Guyana for his exceptional service to the global community, statesmanship, and contribution to deepening India-Guyana ties.

— Modi is the fourth foreign leader to be conferred the highest national award in Guyana.

● **India-Dominica**

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred the “**Dominica Award of Honour**” by President Sylvanie Burton of Dominica on the sidelines of the India-CARICOM Summit.

— The award is a recognition of PM’s statesmanship and contribution to Dominica during the COVID-19 pandemic and his commitment to strengthening India-Dominica ties.

● **India-Barbados**

— Barbados also conferred the honorary **Order of Freedom**, its top award on Prime Minister Modi, bringing his tally of international honours to 19.



Before this, the prime minister was conferred the “Dominica Award of Honour” by President Sylvanie Burton of Dominica on the sidelines of the India-CARICOM Summit here. (PTI Photo)

● **Global Alliance for Hunger and Poverty**

— **Brazil** launched the Global Alliance for Hunger and Poverty on Friday at the G20 Summit in Rio with an initial 41 participating members.

— The members have pledged to lift 500 million people out of poverty through cash transfers and social protection systems.

— The initiative brings together developed nations, NGOs, and financial institutions to donate money and expertise to countries in need.

— The initiatives include expanding cash transfer programs to reach 500 million people, providing school meals to an additional 150 million children and assisting 200 million children up to age 6 and pregnant women with health programs.

— It will provide a platform for countries to support each others’ public policies aimed at eradicating hunger and poverty.

— Donors include Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, Spain, the European Union, and institutions such as the World Bank, FAO, and the World Food Programme.

● **International Criminal Court**

— The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant for “crimes against humanity and war crimes”.

— The ICC, headquartered in **The Hague, Netherlands**, was established under a 1998 treaty called the “Rome Statute”. It “investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.”

— At present, 124 countries are party to the Rome Statute, including Britain, Japan, Afghanistan, and Germany. **India**

is **not** a **member**, **nor** are **China** and the **US**.

— The ICC was established to prosecute the most heinous offences only when a country's legal machinery was unable or unwilling to act.

- **Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29**

— India and Italy have announced the Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29 outlining their vision for collaboration in a range of key sectors, including defence, trade, energy, and space.

- **UNSC Resolution 1701**

— **Israel and Lebanon** entered into a ceasefire on November 27 a day after Israel's security cabinet approved a US-backed proposal to end the 13-month-long conflict that escalated in September.

— The ceasefire proposal draws on the provisions of Resolution 1701 passed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2006. It aims at ending hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, and calls for the creation of a buffer zone as well as a permanent ceasefire.

— The resolution was meant to complete the **withdrawal of Israeli forces** in 2000 from southern Lebanon along the 'Blue Line', the de facto border separating Israel and Lebanon, and the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights.

- **New Development Bank**

— India has contributed nearly \$2 billion to the **BRICS New Development Bank (NDB)**, and 20 externally aided projects, with loans amounting to \$4,867 million. It came as a response in the Lok Sabha session.

— NDB was established in 2015 by BRICS with an initial subscription of five hundred thousand shares totalling USD 50 billion from the founding members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The headquarter is located in Shanghai.

- **Belgium**

— **Belgium** has become first of its kind in the world to recognise sex workers' rights, offering them the same benefits as other workers, including maternity leave, pensions, health insurance, and sick leave.

— This landmark legislation, introduced after sex work was decriminalised in 2022, ensures sex workers have the same protections as other professions.

- **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**

— On December 2, the ICJ began hearings in a case that seeks its advisory opinion on the obligations of countries on climate change under existing international laws, and the legal consequences of those obligations.

— The ICJ is the **principal judicial organ** of the **United Nations (UN)**. It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

— The court is the successor to the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), which was brought into being

through, and by, the League of Nations.

— The ICJ is based at the **Peace Palace in The Hague**. It is the only one of the six principal organs of the UN that is not located in New York City.

— All members of the UN are automatically parties to the ICJ statute, but this does not automatically give the ICJ jurisdiction over disputes involving them. The ICJ gets jurisdiction only if both parties consent to it.

— The judgment of the ICJ is final and technically binding on the parties to a case. However, the ICJ has no way to ensure compliance of its orders, and its authority is derived from the willingness of countries to abide by them.

— The ICJ has **15 judges** who are elected to nine-year terms by the UN General Assembly and Security Council, which vote simultaneously but separately.

● **Manama Dialogue**

— It is a forum for ministers, policymakers, and decision-makers to debate the Middle East's most pressing foreign-policy, defence and security challenges. The dialogue was held from 6-8 December and was attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

— Held annually since 2004 in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Dialogue is a central element of the Middle East's security architecture.

— The theme of the 20th edition of the event was 'Middle East leadership in shaping regional prosperity and security'.



Jaishankar while speaking at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain said that there were "challenges from Gaza to Lebanon to Syria", and that India has to be realistic about competing interests in the region.

● **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham**

— The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) central to the Syrian Civil War has overthrown President Bashar al-Assad, whose Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party had been in power since the 1960s.

— The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which Abu Mohammad al-Jolani leads, was founded in **2011** as Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda's branch in Syria.

— HTS has been designated as a terrorist outfit by the United Nations, the United States, and Turkey.

● **India-Switzerland**

— Switzerland has suspended the **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN)** clause in the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) that India and Switzerland entered originally in 1994 and amended in 2010.

— The Swiss authorities said that the suspension was enforced due to a lack of "reciprocity" in the DTAA by the Indian government.

— India and four-nation **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**, an intergovernmental grouping of Iceland,

Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland signed a free trade agreement where the EFTA countries committed investment worth \$100 billion investment in India over a 15-year.

— Tax experts said that the move by the Swiss could “impact investments” in India as dividends would be subject to “higher withholding tax”.

Environment

• Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve

— The central government has notified Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve of Chhattisgarh as the **56th Tiger Reserve** in the country and the third largest tiger reserve in India.

— With this Chhattisgarh has four tiger reserves, the other three are **Achanakmar**, **Udanti Sitanadi**, and **Indravati**.

— The constituent units of the Tiger Reserve, Guru Ghasidas National Park and Tamor Pingla Wildlife Sanctuary, are spread over 1,44,000 hectares (1,440 sq km) and 60,850 hectares (608.5 sq km) respectively.

— It is spread across four districts, Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur (MCB), Korea, Surajpur, and Balrampur in the northern tribal Sarguja region of Chhattisgarh.

— The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla falls between two other important tiger reserves located in Bandhavgarh, **Madhya Pradesh** and Palamau, Jharkhand. It is adjacent to Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, also in MP.

— Guru Ghasidas National Park was the last known habitat of the Asiatic cheetah in the country. There are five to six tigers at the Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve as of now.

— **Andhra Pradesh**'s Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve is the country's largest tiger reserve, covering 3,296.31 sq km. Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam is the second largest with an area of 2,837.1 sq km. Both have 58 tigers.



The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla is the fourth tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh after Achanakmar, Indravati, and Udanti Sitanadi. (Source: Getty images/Thinkstock)

• Global Stock Take (GST)

— One of the issues at COP 29 is regarding the right approach for this year's agreement on the Global Stock Take (GST) which was taken in Dubai last year.

— Several countries, including India, are objecting to one particular paragraph mentioned in the GST which had asked all countries to transition away from fossil fuels, triple renewable energy by 2030, reduce emissions of non-CO2 gases including methane, and phase-down coal, among other things.

— Global Stock Take is a **five-year exercise** mandated by the **2015 Paris Agreement** to take stock of the progress being made in the fight against climate change and suggest measures to make course corrections. The first of these exercises was held in Dubai last year.

● **Global Plastic Pollution Treaty**

- The **fifth session** of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution including marine pollution began in Busan, Republic of Korea.
- The session took place from 25 November to 1 December however, they failed to reach any agreement. The talks will resume next year.
- The annual global production of plastic doubled from 234 million tonnes (mt) in 2000 to 460 mt in 2019. Nearly half of this was produced in Asia, followed by North America (19%) and Europe (15%).
- Plastic production is expected to touch 700 mt by 2040, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

India's contribution to global plastic pollution

- India contributes to a **fifth** of global plastic pollution, according to a study published in the journal Nature in September.
- It accounts for **20% of the world's global plastic pollution** with emissions of 9.3 mt, which is significantly more than the countries next in the list — Nigeria (3.5 mt), Indonesia (3.4 mt) and China (2.8 mt), the study said.
- India has **banned** the use of **single-use plastics** covering 19 categories in 2022.

● **Project Cheetah**

- Two days after cheetah Nirva delivered cubs at Sheopur's Kuno National Park, two newborns were found dead by wildlife officials. Nirva is one of the cheetahs that was relocated from South Africa in 2022 under Project Cheetah.
- **Project Cheetah** began with the intercontinental translocation of African cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa to the Kuno National Park in **Madhya Pradesh**. This translocation took place in two batches of eight and then 12 cheetahs.
- The aim behind the translocation is not only to restore India's 'historic evolutionary balance', but also to develop a cheetah '**metapopulation**' that will help in the global conservation of the animal.
- As it is a flagship species, the conservation of the cheetah will revive grassland-forests and its biome and habitat, much like Project Tiger has done for forests and all the species found in these forests.
- The cheetah is believed to have disappeared from the Indian landscape in 1947 when Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya princely state hunted down and shot the last three recorded Asiatic cheetahs in India. The cheetah was **officially declared extinct** by the Indian government in **1952**.
- India was home to **Asiatic cheetahs**, and not the African subspecies that were introduced in 2022. The Asiatic cheetah is classified as a "**critically endangered**" species by the IUCN Red List and is believed to survive only in Iran. While African Cheetah is listed as a **vulnerable (VU)** species on the IUCN Red List.

● **Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary**

- Ratapani Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh has been notified as the **57th Tiger Reserve** of the country.
- It has a core area of 763.8 sq km, buffer area of 507.6 sq km and total area of 1271.4 sq km. Now, there are **Eight**

tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh.

— A tiger reserve in India is a designated area established under the Project Tiger initiative of 1973 to ensure the conservation of tigers and their habitats. These reserves are part of the government's efforts to protect the tiger population, maintain biodiversity, and restore ecological balance.

— Currently, there are **57 tiger reserves in India**, spread across around 82,000 sq kilometres and accounting for over 2.3 per cent of India's geographical area, as per the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

● Asiatic Lions

— According to new research, Asiatic Lions – whose entire population numbering **674** is in Gujarat – co-exist with humans through mutual adaptation, enforced legal protection, economic drivers, and government compensation for livestock, among others.

— The co-existence comes in the backdrop of the geographic range of lions rising by **36 per cent between 2015** and 2020 and population increasing at 6 per cent per annum.

— **Gujarat** is the only home of the Asiatic Lions.

— Asiatic lions are slightly smaller than African lions. Asiatic lions have longitudinal fold of skin running along its belly which is rarely seen in African lions.

— **Conservation status:** Listed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, in Appendix I of CITES and as Vulnerable on IUCN Red List.

● Golden tabby tiger

— A three-year-old golden tiger named Ava has captured hearts online, becoming a viral sensation and giving tough competition to Moo Deng, the baby pygmy hippo. Golden tiger are also known as '**Tabby tiger**' or '**Strawberry tiger**'.

— Ava belongs to a rare Bengal tiger variant. They are named so because of the colour variant. They are even rare than white tigers with fewer than 30 golden tigers in captivity worldwide.



Thailand's 'cute' golden tiger, Ava, goes viral

— In 2020, one such golden tiger was spotted in **Kaziranga National Park, Assam**.

● Cyclone Fengal

— Cyclone Fengal made landfall over Puducherry on November 30. This tropical cyclone was named by **Saudi Arabia**.

— Landfall is the event of a tropical cyclone coming onto land after being over water. As per the India Meteorological

Department (IMD), a tropical cyclone is said to have made landfall when the centre of the storm – or its eye – moves over the coast.

— A cyclone is a large-scale system of air that rotates around the centre of a low-pressure area. It is usually accompanied by violent storms and bad weather.

— **Tropical cyclones** are those which develop in the regions between the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer. They are the most devastating storms on Earth.

— Tropical cyclones have different names depending on their location and strength. For instance, they are known as hurricanes in the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, the North Atlantic Ocean and the eastern and central North Pacific Ocean. In the western North Pacific, they are called typhoons.

Science and technology

• WOH G64

— Scientists have captured an extreme close-up of the **dying star** WOH G64 that is 1,60,000 light years away, dwelling in another galaxy.

— WOH G64 has been imaged with remarkable sharpness by the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope Interferometer (ESO's VLTI). The latest image reveals that the star emanates dust and gas, a sign that it is in its last stages before becoming a supernova triggered by a powerful explosion towards the end of a star's life.

— The **WOH G64** is a giant star that dwells in the Large Magellanic Cloud, a dwarf or satellite galaxy that orbits our Milky Way, which also happens to be one of the closest galaxies to us. It was discovered in the 1970s by Bengt Westerlunds, Olander, and Hedin.

• Nafithromycin

— The government has announced the soft launch of Nafithromycin, **India's first indigenously developed antibiotic** designed to **combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**.

— Nafithromycin is designed for the treatment of **Community-Acquired Bacterial Pneumonia (CABP)**, a serious illness caused by drug-resistant bacteria that affects vulnerable populations.

— It has been developed with support from the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), which is a unit of the Department of Biotechnology.

— Nafithromycin is marketed as "Miqnaf" by the pharmaceutical company Wolkardt. It is 10 times more potent than **Azithromycin**, a safer, faster, and more tolerable solution for patients.

• Proba-3 Mission

— The **European Space Agency's** Proba-3 mission, expected life of two years, will be launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on its PSLV rocket.

— The mission aims to study the solar corona, the outermost and hottest part of the Sun's atmosphere. It will also attempt the first-ever "precision formation flying", where two satellites will fly together and maintain a fixed configuration in space.

— Its predecessors Proba-1 (also launched by ISRO) and Proba-2 were launched in 2001 and 2009, respectively.

— Proba-3 will have three instruments onboard:

- The Association of Spacecraft for Polarimetric and Imaging Investigation of the Corona of the Sun (**ASPIICS**) or the coronagraph. Its field of view is between the Sun's outer and inner corona, a circular belt normally observable during solar eclipse events.
- The **Digital Absolute Radiometer (DARA)** will maintain a continuous measurement of the Sun's total energy output, known as the total solar irradiance.
- The **3D Energetic Electron Spectrometer (3DEES)** will measure electron fluxes as it passes through Earth's radiation belts, providing data for space weather studies.

— In Probe-3, the two satellites — **Occulter Spacecraft** (weighing 200 kg) and the **Coronagraph Spacecraft** (weighing 340 kg) — will mimic a natural solar eclipse. They will manoeuvre precisely in Earth's orbit so that one satellite casts a shadow onto the other.

• **INS Tushil**

— The Russian-manufactured multi-role stealth-guided missile frigate INS Tushil was commissioned on December 9 in the coastal city of Kaliningrad. It is an upgraded Krivak III class frigates of the Project 1135.6 of which, six are already in service

— INS Tushil has been constructed in Russia as part of an over USD 2.5-billion deal that New Delhi had inked with Moscow in 2016 for four stealth frigates for the Indian Navy.

— Under the deal, two ships were to be built in Russia, while the other two were to be manufactured in India.

Art and Culture

• **Tanesar Mother Goddess**

— The sculpture of **Tanesar Mother Goddess** was among the 1,400 antiquities valued at \$10 million returned to India by the US authorities this week.

— It is carved from green-gray schist, and looted from the village of Tanesara-Mahadeva in Rajasthan.

• **Maori Haka**

— **Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke**, a 22-year-old Maori Party MP, performed a powerful Maori haka in parliament in protest of a contentious Bill.

— The haka is of deep cultural significance to Maori identity and is traditionally performed by warriors on the battlefield or to welcome another tribe.

— The Haka traces its roots to the Maori people, the indigenous Polynesian inhabitants of **Aotearoa** (the Maori name for New Zealand). Traditionally, the haka was a ceremonial dance or challenge performed by warriors before battle.

— It was designed to intimidate opponents with synchronised movements, powerful chants, and piercing expressions.

Defence

• Long-range Hypersonic Missile

— India has successfully test-fired the first long-range hypersonic missile off the coast of Odisha which was developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

— It is designed to carry various payloads for ranges **greater than 1,500 km**. The term “Hypersonic” refers to a speed at least five times the speed of sound (also called **Mach-5**).

— The two types of hypersonic weapons systems are Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles. The HGVs are launched from a rocket before gliding to the intended target while HCMs are powered by air-breathing high-speed engines or ‘scramjets’ after acquiring their target.

• Poorvi Prahar

— A joint exercise of the **Army, Navy, and Air Force** was organised in Arunachal Pradesh’s Shi-Yomi district.

— This exercise, being conducted from November 10-18, aims to hone the combat effectiveness of the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force in executing Integrated Joint Operations in the challenging mountainous terrain of the region.

• ATACMS

— In a major escalation of the war on its 1,000th day, Russia on Tuesday alleged that debris from a US-made ATACMS missile has fallen in the Bryansk region of the country.

— Weeks before leaving the White House, Joe Biden provided authorisation to Kyiv to use the Army Tactical Missile System, also known as ATACMS, inside Russia.

— It is a surface-to-surface ballistic missile capable of hitting targets at up to 300km (186 miles). This range means that Ukraine may now be able to hit targets inside Russia, including Russian-annexed Crimea.

— The missiles are fuelled by solid rocket propellant and follow a ballistic path into the atmosphere before coming back down at a high speed and high angle, making them difficult to intercept.

• K-4 nuclear-capable ballistic missile

— India has tested the K-4 missile from submarine **INS Arighaat** off the coast of Visakhapatnam.

— It was the first test of the nuclear-capable **submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM)** from a submarine with a range of around 3,500 km.

— Hypersonic missiles, capable of carrying conventional explosives or nuclear warheads, can fly in the range of five times the speed of sound. However, some advanced versions of hypersonic missiles can even fly at the speed of over 15 Mach.

• Exercise CINBAX

— The inaugural edition of the joint tabletop exercise CINBAX between the **Indian Army** and **Cambodian Army** commenced at a foreign training node in Pune.

— The exercise, being conducted from December 1 to 8, comprises 20 personnel each from an Infantry Brigade, from Cambodian Army contingent, and an Indian Army contingent.

● **Hypersonic Oreshnik missile**

— In a televised address, Putin said Moscow struck a Ukrainian military facility with a new medium-range, hypersonic ballistic missile known as “**Oreshnik**” (the hazel).

— Ballistic missiles use projectile motion to deliver warheads on a target. They are powered for a relatively brief time, after which they let the laws of physics take them to their target.

— The experimental **intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM)** was based on Russia’s RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) model, and Russia likely possesses only a handful of these missiles at present.

— According to Western sources, the missile fired by Russia boasts a range of as much as 5,500 km, enough to effectively target every European city from Russian territory.

Table: Ballistic Missiles by Range

Name	Range
Tactical ballistic missile (TBM)	< 300 km
Short-range ballistic missile (SRBM)	300-1,000 km
Medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM)	1,000-3,500 km
Intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM)	3,500-5,500 kilometres
Intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)	> 5,500 km

Source: UN Office of Disarmament Affairs

**Note: Not a watertight categorisation*

Persons in News

(**Just FYI:** Noting historical personalities’ anniversaries aids UPSC prep. UPSC often includes such personalities in questions, so revisiting their lives refreshes your static syllabus.)

● **S M Khan**

— S M Khan, a retired Indian Information Services officer and Press Secretary to former President A P J Abdul Kalam, passed away in New Delhi at the age of 67.

— He has written a book titled “The People’s President”, narrating his experiences working with Dr Kalam.

● **K. Sanjay Murthy**

— K Sanjay Murthy, a 1989-batch Himachal Pradesh cadre IAS officer, will be the next **Comptroller and Auditor General of India**.

— He will succeed incumbent Girish Chandra Murmu, who is retiring on November 20.

— **Article 148** of the constitution provides for the appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India who shall be appointed by the President and shall only be removed from office in like manner and on like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court.



A 1989-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from the Himachal Pradesh cadre, Murthy succeeds Girish Chandra Murmu.

● **Captain Avhilash Rawat**

— Captain Avhilash Rawat has received the **2024** International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) **Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea** for the "extraordinary courage" shown in a Red Sea rescue mission earlier this year.

● **Moinuddin Chishti**

— On November 27, the Ajmer Court admitted a petition requesting a survey of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, the shrine of the revered Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (also spelt 'Muinuddin', 'Muiniiddin', or 'Mu'in al-din').

— **Moinuddin was born in 1141 CE in Sistan**, a province in Persia (Iran) which borders present-day Afghanistan.

— While on the path of self-discovery and spirituality, Moinuddin met Khwaja Usman Harooni, a Sufi master of the Chishti order, in whom he found a mentor and spiritual teacher, and was initiated into the Chishti silsila (chain of spiritual descent).

— Moinuddin accepted **Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki as his first follower**, with whom he journeyed to Multan, where he studied Sanskrit and talked to Hindu scholars. He then went to Lahore, then to Delhi, and finally reached Ajmer in 1191.

— He met his wife, Bibi Ummatullah, in Ajmer, and decided to stay in the city. Moinuddin died in 1236. A pucca mausoleum for the pir was first constructed in the 1460s.

— The current white marble dome of the Ajmer Dargah was built in 1532, during the reign of the Mughal emperor Humayun, according to an inscription on the northern wall of the building.

— **Other leaders of the Chishti order of Sufism:** Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, and Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh Dehlavi.



Moinuddin was born in 1141 CE in Sistan, a province in Persia (Iran) which borders present-day Afghanistan. He is said to have been a descendent of Prophet Muhammad. (Wikimedia Commons)

• **Sanjay Malhotra**

<https://telegram.me/+KSUmQ-87JBE2NTE1> Mags®Papers

— **Sanjay Malhotra** has been appointed as the **new Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Governor**, replacing Shaktikanta Das. He assumes charge as the 26th Governor of the RBI.

— The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor is appointed in accordance with the RBI Act, 1934, which specifies that the Governor is selected by the Central government.

— The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee, comprising the Cabinet Secretary, the current RBI Governor, the Financial Services Secretary, and two independent members, prepares a list of eligible candidates for the position.

— The shortlisted candidates are interviewed, and their names are forwarded to the Cabinet Committee on Appointments, chaired by the Prime Minister. The committee finalizes the selection by confirming the appointment.

— The Governor's tenure is limited to a maximum of five years, with the duration determined by the government at the time of appointment. The RBI Governor is also eligible for reappointment or an extension of their term.



RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said that with geopolitical tensions, the impact of climate change and political uncertainties around the world, the situation is constantly changing. (Reuters)

• **Devanur Mahadeva**

— Celebrating the significance of social justice and literary excellence, the **2024 Vaikom Award** was conferred upon **Devanur Mahadeva, one of Kannada literature's most celebrated voices** and a lifelong advocate for the oppressed.

— The Vaikom Award, instituted in **2023** to honour individuals or organisations from across India who embody the values of equality and justice, recognises Mahadeva's extensive work in advocating for Dalit rights, his literary achievements, and his ideological synthesis of Gandhi and Ambedkar's philosophies.

— The award is linked to the **Vaikom Satyagraha**, between 1924 to 1925, aimed at challenging caste-based restrictions on access to the Vaikom Temple in Kerala.

— The Satyagraha, which marked a significant step in India's struggle against untouchability and inspired subsequent temple entry movements across the country, was backed by Mahatma Gandhi, and E V Ramasamy, or 'Periyar', the Tamil social reformer.

Places in News

(**Just FYI:** The location of the place is important, considering that UPSC has asked several questions about places that were in the news, such as Aleppo and Kirkuk, in the 2018 UPSC Prelims. The best way to remember them is to plot them on a world map.)

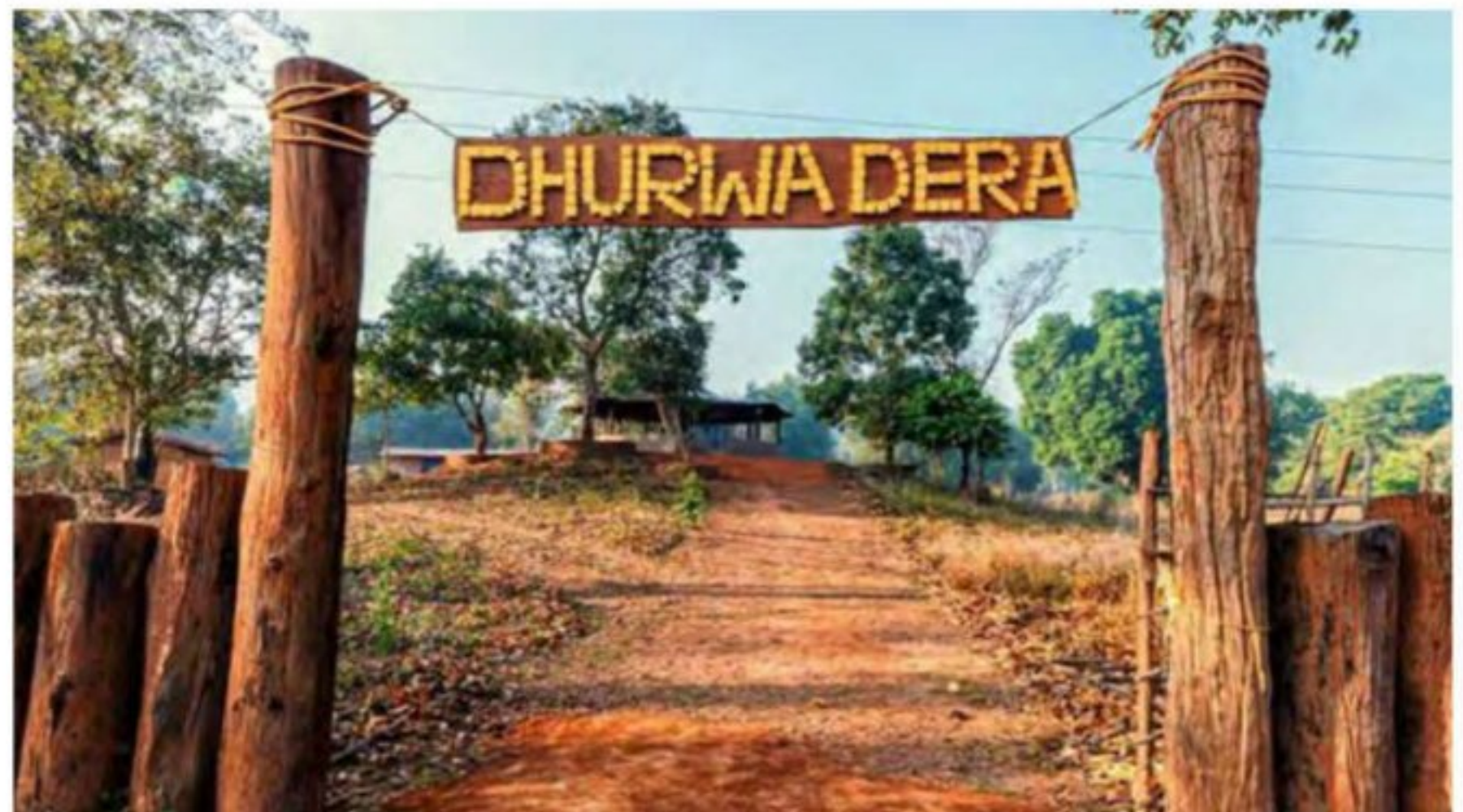
● **Dhudmaras, Chhattisgarh**

— A small village in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, **Dhudmaras** has been selected by the **United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)** for its Best Tourism Village Upgrade programme, highlighting its potential for sustainable tourism development.

— Under this, it will receive support to enhance tourism infrastructure, promote cultural heritage, and improve the quality of life for residents.

— This year, 55 villages across the world received the recognition of Best Tourism Village under the UNWTO initiative.

— Dhudmaras is situated in the heart of Kanger Valley National Park. Nestled in dense forests with the Kanger River flowing through it, Dhudmaras offers an idyllic setting for eco-tourism.



A tourism spot at Dhudmaras in Bastar which is situated in the heart of Kanger Valley National Park. (Facebook/Chhattisgarh Tourism)

● **Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque**

— Pictures of Diljit Dosanjh from the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque—dressed in traditional attire—are making rounds on the Internet.

— It is the **largest mosque in the United Arab Emirates**, and one of the largest places of worship in the world.

— The mosque was envisioned by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of the United Arab Emirates.

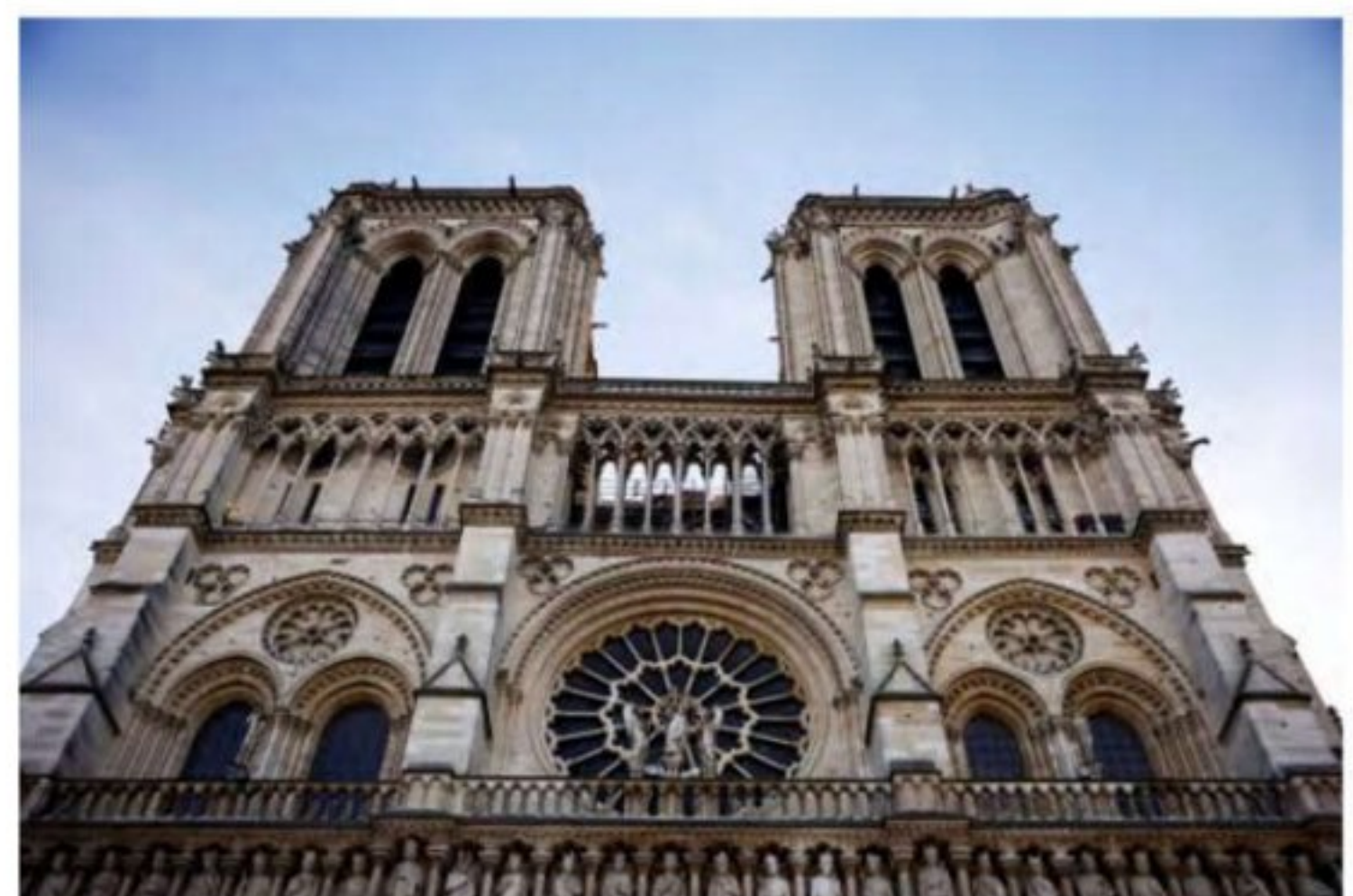
— The first considerations to build the Mosque began in the late 1980s, the construction began on November 5th, 1996, and it opened for worship on Eid Al Adha in the year 2007.

● **Notre Dame cathedral**

— The Notre Dame cathedral in **Paris** witnessed its first Mass service in five years on December 8, a day after it was reopened to the world in a lavish ceremony featuring firefighters, world leaders, and artists.

— In 1160, Notre Dame was envisioned by Maurice de Sully, the Bishop of Paris, as a grand Gothic cathedral that would accommodate the city's growing population. Construction began three years later and is believed to have been completed by 1260.

— During the French Revolution, its spiritual significance took a dramatic turn, as it was repurposed into the



Notre-Dame Cathedral is seen in Paris, Friday Nov. 29 2024 ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron's final visit to the construction site to see the restored interiors before the iconic monument's reopening for worship on Dec. 8. (Sarah Meyssonier, Pool via AP)

“Temple of Reason” and later the “Temple of the Supreme Being.”

— It was also the site of King Napoleon’s coronation in 1804.

— It is the finest example of **Gothic architecture**, featuring soaring spires, intricate stained glass windows, and impressive flying buttresses.

● Aleppo

— The Syrian military said that rebels had entered large parts of Aleppo city during an offensive in which dozens of soldiers had been killed, forcing the army to redeploy. This marked a major movement in the Syrian civil war that began in 2011.

— Syrian rebel forces are also trying to get control of Hama, a city south of Aleppo.

— The **Syrian civil war** began around the “Arab Spring” of 2010, dubbed so as many countries in the Middle East and North Africa saw uprisings against authoritarian governments that had been in power for decades. In some nations, such as Tunisia and Egypt, ruling governments were forced out. In most others, governments and militaries crushed the movements.

— **Places in Syria that were in the news:** Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Saraqib, and Bab al-Hawa.



● Ajmer

— A court in Ajmer last Wednesday admitted a petition requesting a survey of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, the shrine of the revered Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

— Ajmer, then referred to as **Ajaymeru**, was once the capital of the **Chauhans**, a Rajput clan that ruled parts of present-day Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh from the seventh to the 12th centuries CE. Ajaydeva is credited with constructing the city in the mid-12th century.

— The Afghan invader Muhammad of Ghor sacked the town after he defeated Prithviraj III (popularly known as Prithviraj Chauhan) in the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192.

● Nazca lines

— The Nazca Lines were discovered by chance in the mid-1920s. It took almost a century to discover some 430 of these geoglyphs. And then, in a span of under six months, artificial intelligence (AI) fuelled a spurt of 303 fresh discoveries.

— Geoglyphs are motifs created on the ground by manipulating surface stones, soil, or gravel. The ones in Nazca —

the oldest among which are more than 2,000 years old — were built by removing rocks and earth to create “negative” images.

— The Nazca Lines of Peru is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its depictions of larger-than-life animals, plants, and imaginary beings.

● **Kumhrar, Patna**

— The ASI has decided to uncover the Mauryan pillars at the archaeological site of **Kumhrar**, a little over five km from the Patna railway station, **Bihar**.

— The ASI had excavated the 80-pillar assembly hall in two phases. The first excavation, in 1912-15, was done by American archeologist David Brainard Spooner, who found one pillar, a number of stone fragments and 80 pits, which, he concluded, were spots where the other pillars stood. The second excavation, in 1961-55, was by the K P Jayaswal Research Institute in Patna, found four more pillars.



The site at Kumhrar, before being covered up in 2004–05, displayed stumps and pits where 80 sandstone pillars once stood, supporting the Buddhist assembly hall. (Special arrangement)

— Historians believe that it was here, in this open-air hall, with its 80 pillars standing on a wooden floor and holding up a wooden ceiling, that **Emperor Ashoka**, who ruled between 268 and 280 BCE, called a decisive meeting of the third Buddhist Council to unify the faction-ridden Buddhist sangha.

● **Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra**

— An Ajmer court admitting a petition to survey the revered Dargah Sharif has renewed similar demands for the **historic Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra** which is an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monument.

— The mosque was commissioned by **Qutbuddin Aibak**, a slave-turned-general in the Ghurid army, who established the Mamluk Dynasty to kickstart the Delhi Sultanate in 1206.

— It was commissioned by Qutabuddin after the Muhammad of Ghor defeated Prithviraj III (popularly known as Prithviraj Chauhan) in the Second Battle of Tarain.

— The central mihrab in the mosque contains an inscription indicating its completion in 1199, with the roof of a second dome from the north giving a date of 1200. This makes it the oldest surviving monument in Ajmer, and the second oldest completed mosque in North India after the Quwwat ul Islam mosque in Delhi.

Sports

(**Just FYI:** With the unpredictability of the UPSC examinations and questions like the ICC World Test Championship question 2021, you can't be sure of anything. It is wise to know what it is and not go into too much detail.)

● Women's Asian Champions Trophy 2024

— India retained the Women's Asian Champions Trophy title with a narrow 1-0 win over China after a hard-fought win in the finale against China.

— Deepika made the only goal in the final. She finished as the tournament's top goal scorer with a tally of 11.

— This was India's third Women's Asian Champions Trophy hockey title, with this India is now leveled with the Republic of Korea as the most successful nation in the competition's history.



Deepika scores as India celebrate retaining the Women's Asian Champions Trophy 2024 title (Hockey India photos)

● Syed Modi International 2024 badminton tournament

— **PV Sindhu** won the women's singles final at the Syed Modi International 2024 badminton tournament after defeating Wu Luo Yu of the Republic of China.

— **Lakshya Sen** won the **Men's singles final** after defeating Jia Heng Jason Teh of Singapore.



While PV Sindhu's third Syed Modi title was a result of staying efficient in rallies, Lakshya's first in Lucknow was a performance filled with jaw-dropping moments. (UPBA)

● **World Chess Champion**

— **D Gukesh** became the youngest world chess champion after defeating defending champ Ding Liren in Singapore. He became the 18th World Champion.

— Gukesh surpassed Russian great Garry Kasparov, who won the crown in 1985 at 22.

— Gukesh is the second **grandmaster** from his country to hold the world title. Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand was the undisputed world champion for six years starting in 2007.

● **FIFA World Cup 2034**

— **Saudi Arabia** was officially announced as the hosts of the FIFA World Cup 2034 while the 2030 edition will take place in Morocco, Spain and Portugal.

— The 2030 World Cup, which will also be the 100th anniversary of the showpiece will be hosted in six different countries, on 3 different continents.

— Saudi Arabia is also the host for the 2034 Asian Games as well as the 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

Awards

● **Turner Prize for art**

— Indian-origin Scottish artist **Jasleen Kaur** has won the prestigious **Turner Prize 2024** for her exhibition, “Alter Altar”, that reflects on plurality, personal and political themes.

— The prize is named after English painter JMW Turner (1775-1851), known for his paintings of sceneries, the ocean and dramatic depictions of light. Many of his works show red and yellow hues of sunsets in great detail.

— The Turner Prize was **first awarded in 1984**, founded by a group called the Patrons of New Art. It sought to “encourage wider interest in contemporary art and assist Tate in acquiring new works.”

FIVE WORLD CHAMPIONS BEFORE GUKESH BECAME THE 18TH



NO 17: DING LIREN
CHINA, 2023–2024

Only the 2nd Asian to hold the title (after Visly Anand), Ding got the chance to compete for the title with Ian Nepomniachtchi in 2021 after Magnus Carlsen decided to not defend his title because he lost motivation. Ding won the title in tiebreaks



NO 16: MAGNUS CARLSEN
NORWAY, 2013–2023

Visly's grip on the World Champion title was taken away at his home ground by Carlsen. Then 22, Carlsen went on to win the title 5 times before relinquishing the format. Holds a peak rating of 2882, which is the highest ever achieved in chess



NO 15: VISWANATHAN ANAND
INDIA, 2007–2013

India's original history-maker in chess, Anand is the first Grandmaster from the country. In 2007, he became the undisputed world champion, also the first from India. In 2000, he had won the FIDE championship when there was a split in the chess world



NO 14: VLADIMIR KRAMNIK
RUSSIA, 2000–2007

A controversial figure in the chess world, mostly for his views on cheating in the sport, Vladimir Kramnik ended Garry Kasparov's 15-year reign. The 2000 title clash in London was the first time Kasparov lost a World Championship match



NO 13: GARRY KASPAROV
RUSSIA, 1985–2000

Considered one of the greatest chess players of all time, Kasparov became the youngest undisputed world champion when he triumphed in 1985 at the age 22 against Anatoly Karpov — Gukesh broke the record with his win. Kasparov broke away from FIDE in 1993, and held the classical world title till 2000



Jasleen Kaur at the award ceremony in London. (David Parry/PA Media Assignments)

— Malcolm Morley, the prize's first recipient, however, criticised it for turning artists against each other like a "blood sport".

— Today, £25,000 is awarded to the winner and £10,000 to the other shortlisted artists.

— The prize is awarded to a British artist working globally or an immigrant working in Britain. Before Kaur, the only other Indian-origin artist to have won the prize was sculptor Anish Kapoor in 1991.

● **National Panchayat Awards**

— The **Tripura government** has bagged **seven National Panchayat Awards**. The awards will be given out at the National Panchayat Award Ceremony slated to be held on December 11 in New Delhi.

— The Amarpur RD block in Tripura's Gomati district has been ranked the best district panchayat and the best block panchayat under the Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Satat Vikas Puraskar.

— Gomati district will get Rs 5 crore and Amarpur RD block another Rs 1.75 crore as prize money for winning the award.

● **52nd International Emmy Awards**

— **Vir Das** created history by becoming the first Indian to host the International Emmy Awards.

List of winners:

Best Drama Series: Drops of God (France/Japan)

Best Comedy Series: División Palermo (Argentina)

Best Performance by an Actor: Timothy Spall in The Sixth Commandment (United Kingdom)

Best Performance by an Actress: Chutimon Chuengcharoensukying in Hunger (Thailand)

Best Documentary: Otto Baxter – Not a F**ing Horror Story (United Kingdom)

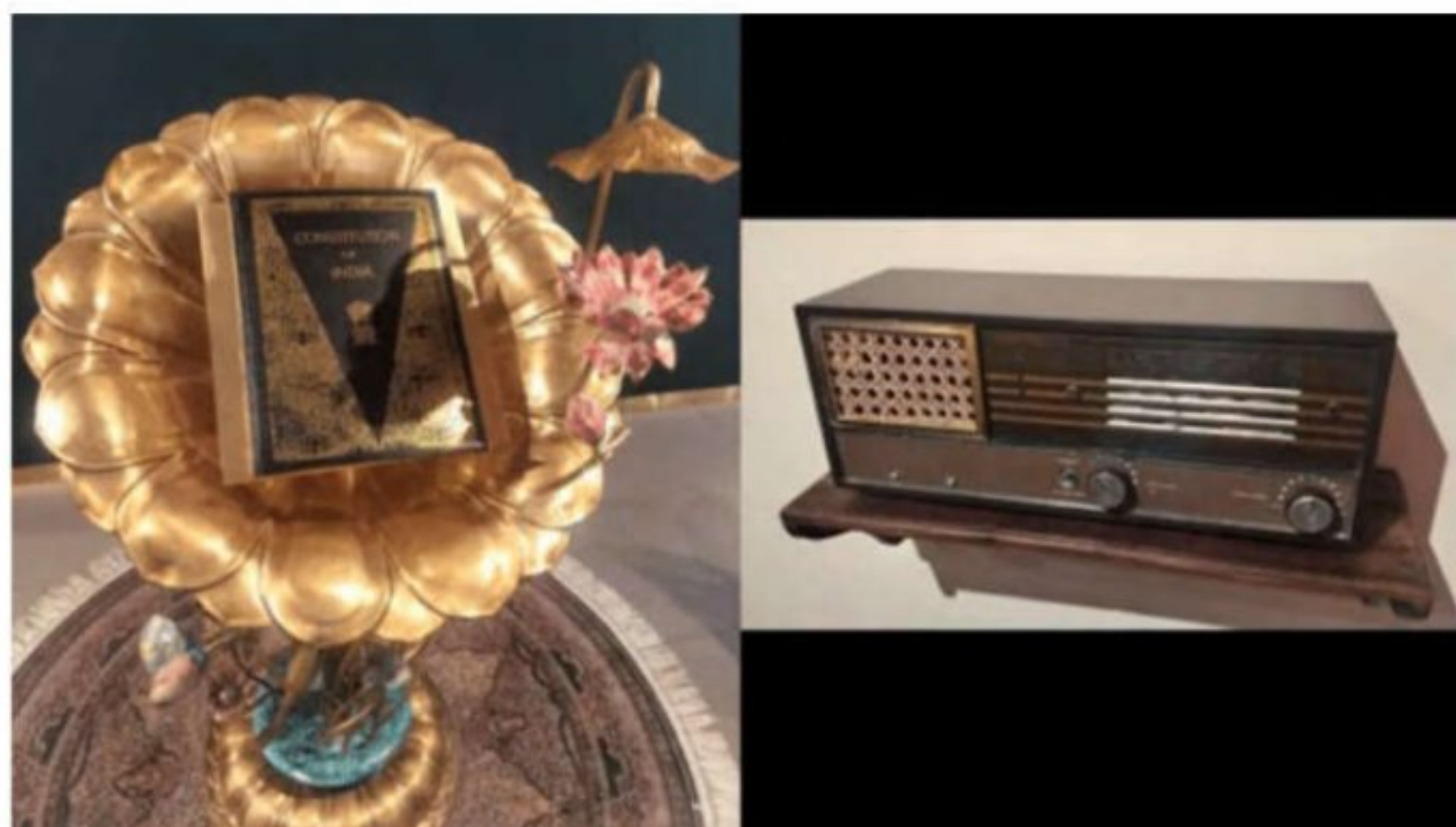
Miscellaneous

● **First Constitution Museum**

— The country's first-ever Constitution Museum was inaugurated at **O P Jindal Global University in Sonipat, Haryana**.

— The museum was inaugurated by Lok Sabha Speaker **Om Birla** and Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal.

— The museum is curated by **Anjchita B Nair**. It offers audio-visual interactive experiences to the visitors, as well as digital



Facsimile of Constitution and a radio that broadcasts narratives of historical events from 1940. (Express)

quizzes and a robot gives the visitors a tour of the museum.

— Mini busts of 300 members of the Constituent Assembly are also neatly displayed in the museum. A bigger bust on display is that of B N Rau, a jurist who was instrumental in drafting the Constitution.

● **Assisted Dying Bill**

— The Members of the House of Commons in the **United Kingdom** have voted in favour of whether to legalise the practice of assisted dying in England and Wales.

— **Euthanasia** refers to the practice of an individual deliberately ending their life, oftentimes to get relief from an incurable condition, or intolerable pain and suffering. Euthanasia, which can be administered only by a physician, can be either ‘active’ or ‘passive’.

— **Active euthanasia** involves an active intervention to end a person’s life with substances or external force, such as administering a lethal injection. **Passive euthanasia** refers to withdrawing life support or treatment that is essential to keep a terminally ill person alive.

— In 2018, the Supreme Court recognised the **legality of ‘passive euthanasia’** for terminally-ill patients, holding that the ‘right to die with dignity’ forms a part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

— Recently, the Union Health Ministry has released a draft of guidelines on withdrawing or withholding medical treatment in terminally ill patients, closing a regulatory gap that left medical professionals in a lurch.

● **Akal Takht**

— The former Punjab deputy Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader were found to be ‘tankhaiya’ or guilty of religious misconduct by **Akal Takht**. As punishment, he was directed to perform the duties of a ‘sewadar’, sitting outside the Golden Temple. On December 4, an **assassination attempt** was made on him while he was on guard duty at the Golden temple.

— The Akal Takht, which faces the Harmandir Sahib in the Golden Temple complex, was established by the sixth Sikh master **Guru Hargobind** in **1606** following the execution of his father, Guru Arjan Dev, by the Mughals.

— Guru Hargobind used this platform for governance, and is believed to have issued the first directive (Hukamnama) from here, urging Sikh congregations to contribute horses and weapons to the Panth.

— The Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takht, following the enactment of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1925, is appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), a body formed in 1920 to manage Sikh shrines and free them from British-supported mahants.



Sukhbir Singh Badal and former Rajya Sabha MP Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa were made to stand guard. (Express photo)

— The SGPC is currently the apex governing body of all Sikh gurdwaras in the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Chandigarh.

— Any person who identifies as a Sikh can be summoned to the Akal Takht, tried, and sentenced.

Terms making buzz

— **3zero club**: Bangladesh Chief Adviser **Muhammad Yunus** and **Pope Francis** jointly launched a ‘Pope Francis Yunus 3Zero Club’ in Rome in an effort to “usher in a transformative and inclusive future for humanity,” it was announced on Saturday. The three Zs stand for **zero poverty**, **zero unemployment**, and **zero net carbon emissions**.

— **Peak Oil**: The term “peak oil” used to mean the point when global production would top out, before entirely running out.

— **White Knight Corps**: It is a corps of the Indian Army that was established in 1972 to oversee operations in the region south of Jammu and Kashmir’s Pir Panjal.

— **Lake-effect snow**: It happens when warm, moist air rising from a body of water mixes with cold dry air overhead. Recently, parts of Michigan were battered by lake-effect snow.

— **Hornbill Festival**: The Hornbill Festival is taking place in **Nagaland** from December 1 to December 10, 2024. The festival is organised by the Nagaland government.

— **Rock bolt technology**: This is an Australian technique that involves removing loose landslide debris by soil nailing in soil and rock bolting in bedrock. It is successfully treating active landslide zones in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand.

Practice Quiz

Current Affairs Revision MCQs

Brush Up Your Current Affairs Knowledge And Consolidate Your UPSC CSE Preparation.

Compiled by **Nitendra Pal Singh**

QUESTION 1

With reference to the PM-Vidyalaxmi scheme, consider the following statements:

1. The scheme makes students who get admission in Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs) eligible for a collateral-free and guarantor-free education loan.
2. Students would be provided a 25% credit guarantee by the central government for loans up to Rs 7.5 lakh.
3. The interest subvention support will be given to 1 lakh students every year.
4. The scheme will be applicable only to the government institutions.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 2

With reference to the comparison between airships and aircraft, consider the following statements:

1. Aircrafts are lighter than airships.
2. Aircrafts are faster than airships in terms of speed.
3. Airships use more fuel to move the same mass of material as compared to aircrafts.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

- (c) 3 only
- (d) 2 and 3 only

QUESTION 3

Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: India's current climate policies are projected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around four billion tonnes between 2020 and 2030.

Statement 2: Policies promoting renewable energy are expected to drive a 24-per cent decline in coal-based electricity generation by 2030.

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

- (a) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and Statement 2 is the correct explanation for Statement 1.
- (b) Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 are correct and Statement 2 is not the correct explanation for Statement 1.
- (c) Statement 1 is correct but Statement 2 is incorrect.
- (d) Statement 1 is incorrect but Statement 2 is correct.

QUESTION 4

The Chabahar Port was recently in the news. It is nearest to:

- (a) Port of Salalah
- (b) Gwadar Port
- (c) Kandla Port
- (d) Shuwaikh Port

QUESTION 5

The first Integrated Check Post (ICP) was inaugurated at Darranga in Assam along:

- (a) India-Bangladesh border
- (b) India-Nepal border
- (c) India-Myanmar border
- (d) India-Bhutan border

QUESTION 6

Recently, ten elephants died at Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve after consuming kodo millet plants due to the presence of:

- (a) Oxalic acid
- (b) Poison hemlock
- (c) Cyclopiazonic acid
- (d) Glycoalkaloids

QUESTION 7

Consider the following cases:

1. Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India
2. Shafin Jahan v Union of India
3. Government of NCT of Delhi v Union of India
4. Property Owners Association and ors v State of Maharashtra and Ors

In how many of the above cases did the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud gave landmark judgements?

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

QUESTION 8

Consider the following statements about minority educational institution (MEI):

1. Under Article 30(1), all minorities have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

2. Under Article 15(5), MEIs are exempt from providing reservations for SCs and STs.

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

QUESTION 9

Which among the following personalities has discovered X-radiation (x-rays)?

- (a) Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen
- (b) Joseph John Thomson
- (c) Ernest Rutherford
- (d) James Chadwick

QUESTION 10

Consider the following statements:

1. Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang are the districts of this state.
2. This state is home to members of — Konyak, Khiamniungan, Chang, Sangtam, Tikhir, Phom, and Yimkhiung tribes.
3. This state has only 60 seats in its Legislative Assembly.

The above mentioned statements refer to which state?

- (a) Tripura
- (b) Meghalaya
- (c) Arunachal Pradesh
- (d) Nagaland

QUESTION 11

The Bibek Debroy Committee was associated with:

- (a) Tax structure
- (b) Capital Goods

- (c) Indian Railways
- (d) Indian Private Sector Banks

QUESTION 12

He led the expedition to peacefully integrate Tawang into India. He was also instrumental in establishing essential military and security frameworks, such as the Sashastra Seema Bal and the Naga Regiment. By the time of the Tawang expedition, he had already made a name for himself in the Second World War.

Identify the personality in the above given lines.

- (a) U Tirot Sing
- (b) Gopinath Bordoloi
- (c) Jairamdas Daulatram
- (d) Bob Khathing

QUESTION 13

What is Laika?

- (a) the first living creature to orbit the earth
- (b) the first test tube child to be born in the world
- (c) the first AI news anchor in India
- (d) None of the above

QUESTION 14

With reference to the 'Animal Health Security Strengthening in India for Pandemic Preparedness and Response' initiative consider the following statements:

1. The project was approved by the Pandemic Fund, created by G20 countries under Indian presidency in 2023.
2. The project will work with the help of three implementing agencies—Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2

- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

QUESTION 15

With reference to the Mobility Arrangement for Talented Early-professionals Scheme (MATES), recently seen in the news, consider the following statements:

1. India has come up with a new scheme that allows talented young people from low-income countries and lower-middle-income countries to work in India for some time.
2. MATES has been established under the Migration and Mobility Partnership Arrangement (MMPA) that supports and promotes migration and mobility between the two countries, while addressing issues pertaining to illegal and irregular migration.

Which of the above given statements are true?

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

QUESTION 16

With reference to the Smog, consider the following statements:

1. It is a type of air pollution that creates a hazy or foggy atmosphere.
2. It forms when pollutants react chemically in the presence of sunlight.
3. Volatile organic compounds are not a part of the smog.
4. Stubble burning is cited as a major contributor to smog in northern India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 17

With reference to Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD), consider the following statements:

1. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), India is obligated to promote accessibility as an essential right.
2. In its current form, the RPwD rules do not provide for “non-negotiable” compulsory standards but only persuasive guidelines.

Which of the above given statements is/are true?

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

QUESTION 18

The da Vinci Surgical System is:

- (a) performed when there is a major complication after cardiac surgery.
- (b) AI guidelines for surgery.
- (c) performed for the assessment of oncological surgical care.
- (d) robotic system that allows surgeons to perform minimally invasive surgeries.

QUESTION 19

With reference to the LignoSat, consider the following statements:

1. It is the world’s first wood-panelled satellite developed by NASA.
2. The satellite will test the durability of wood in the extreme environment of space.
3. The satellite has been made using a traditional Japanese crafts technique without screws or glue to hold it together.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 20

The “DIGIT platform” was recently in the news. It is associated with:

- (a) Medical facilities for Rural areas
- (b) 24*7 water supply
- (c) Domestic aviation
- (d) Urban governance

QUESTION 21

With reference to the International Chess Federation (FIDE), consider the following statements:

1. Players get official ratings by participating in any of the chess tournaments around the world.
2. Anish Sarkar has become the world’s youngest chess player to be ranked by the International Chess Federation.
3. To get a Standard rating, you will need to play at least 5 games against players who are already rated, and score at least ½ point (a draw) in those games.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 22

Which of the following paramilitary forces has got approval for the first-ever all-woman battalion recently?

- (a) Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
- (b) Border Security Force (BSF)
- (c) Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)
- (d) Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)

QUESTION 23

With reference to the new rules for imposing penalties for violations of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, consider the following statements:

1. The adjudication officer has the power to issue notice to persons against whom complaints have been filed.
2. An adjudication officer has to be a person not below the rank of a joint secretary or secretary to the state government.
3. The whole process of imposing penalties for violations has to be completed within three months from the issuance of notice to the opposite party.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

QUESTION 24

Consider the following statements:

1. Lead contamination in turmeric is likely due to adulteration practices that involve adding non-edible substances to enhance colour.
2. India's Food Safety and Standards Authority (FSSAI) limit for lead in turmeric powder is set at just 10 µg/g.
3. As per the World Health Organization (WHO), 127 µg/g lead is safe for human consumption.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 25

With reference to the CAG reports for urban local bodies, consider the following statements:

1. Less than half of the revenue of the urban bodies was their own, with the rest coming from the Union and state governments.
2. More than three-fourths of the current expenditure of the urban local bodies was directed towards programmatic and development work.

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

QUESTION 26

Recently seen in the news, the term 'DOGE' is related to:

- (a) Astronomy
- (b) Artificial Intelligence
- (c) Disaster Management
- (d) None of the above

QUESTION 27

Why are *Turritopsis dohrnii* and *Mnemiopsis leidyi* in news?

- (a) When their adult forms are stressed, they revert to an earlier stage in their life-cycle — rather than die.
- (b) These extremely small new species discovered

recently are so inconspicuous that even the mature plants can be easily mistaken for seedlings.

(c) These are two new species of medicinal mushroom, endemic to South Africa, identified by a student using genetic sequencing.

(d) These are species which are the most common bacteria and fungi, respectively, on the International Space Station.

QUESTION 28

Who has won The Booker Prize 2024?

- (a) Percival Everett
- (b) Samantha Harvey
- (c) Anne Michaels
- (d) Rachel Kushner

QUESTION 29

With reference to the International Criminal Court (ICC), consider the following statements:

1. The founding treaty of ICC is known as the Rome Statute.
2. ICC cannot prosecute crimes against humanity.
3. The crime of aggression falls within the ICC's jurisdiction.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 30

The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty was in the news. It was launched by:

- (a) Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
- (b) Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- (c) G20
- (d) East Asia Summit

QUESTION 31

With reference to the Paris Agreement, consider the following statements:

1. It is an international accord adopted in 2015 to address climate change and its adverse effects.
2. The treaty also requires all Parties to state every five years what they are doing to tackle climate change.
3. There is no procedure and timeline for a country's withdrawal from the treaty.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 32

Recently, the Madras High Court allowed The Music Academy, Madras, to confer the Sangita Kalanidhi Award — considered the highest honour for a Carnatic musician — on vocalist:

- (a) N. L. Ganasaraswathi
- (b) L. R. Eswari
- (c) Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Ayyar
- (d) T M Krishna

QUESTION 33

With reference to the Instrument Landing System (ILS), consider the following statements:

1. It allows planes to land in extremely poor visibility conditions.
2. It provides the horizontal angle between a reference direction (in this case the runway) and a line to a point of interest (the aircraft).
3. The ILS does not provide the vertical descent profile for the aircraft.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only

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

QUESTION 34

The Kursk region was seen in the news. It is located in:

- (a) Russia
- (b) Romania
- (c) Ukraine
- (d) Turkey

QUESTION 35

With reference to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), consider the following statements:

1. The law was first brought as an ordinance and then notified as an Act in 1958.
2. It traces its roots to a colonial statute introduced in response to the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.
3. It has never been imposed in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.
4. It gives military personnel power to arrest individuals and search premises without warrants on the basis of "reasonable suspicion".

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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

QUESTION 36

With reference to the Small modular reactors, consider the following statements:

1. These are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 1000 MW(e) per unit.
2. It is more complex to build than large power

reactors.

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

QUESTION 37

The term "peak oil" refers to:

- (a) an estimate of the amount of petroleum that can be recovered from known sources.
- (b) an oil well with so much pressure that oil flows out of the well head into the air.
- (c) highest amount of oil extraction from any country at any given point of time.
- (d) the point when global production would top out, before entirely running out.

QUESTION 38

WOH G64 was in the news. It refers to:

- (a) Jupiter's moon
- (b) Galaxy 1.8 light years away from Milky Way
- (c) Giant star in the Large Magellanic Cloud
- (d) Asteroid

QUESTION 39

Section 479 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) is related to:

- (a) Plea bargaining
- (b) Provide compensation to people who are wrongfully accused
- (c) forensic investigation for offences punishable with at least seven years of imprisonment.
- (d) Maximum period for which an undertrial prisoner can be detained.

QUESTION 40

With reference to Coking coal, consider the following statements:

1. Coking coal is included in the list of critical minerals of India.
2. India's export of the mineral is much higher than that of the EU.

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

QUESTION 41

'Fentanyl' seen in news is:

- (a) synthetic opioid drug
- (b) an oxidiser ingredient in solid propellant mixtures for missiles, rockets, and munitions.
- (c) reverse ageing chemical
- (d) psychoactive drug used as a truth serum

QUESTION 42

With reference to the electric vehicles in India, consider the following statements:

1. More than 30 per cent of India's electric vehicles comprise four-wheelers.
2. A new study has found that a shift to night-time charging of e-vehicles could avoid an additional ten per cent of emissions.

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

QUESTION 43

Which of the following are the impacts of satellite pollution?

1. Warming of atmosphere
2. Space debris
3. Depletion of ozone layer

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

QUESTION 44

Which of the following are the applications of high-altitude balloons?

1. Space exploration
2. Tourism
3. Disaster relief and rescue
4. Military reconnaissance

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

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

QUESTION 45

The cyclonic storm "Fengal" hovering over:

- (a) Arabian Sea
- (b) Southern Indian Ocean
- (c) Persian Gulf
- (d) Bay of Bengal

QUESTION 46

Consider the following statements:

1. He was born in 1141 CE in Sistan, a Persia (Iran) province bordering present-day Afghanistan.
2. He is said to have been a descendant of Prophet Muhammad.
3. By the age of 20, he had travelled far and wide studying theology, grammar, philosophy, ethics, and religion in seminaries at Bukhara and Samarkand.

The above mentioned statements refer to:

- (a) Nizamuddin Auliya
- (b) Naseeruddin Charagh
- (c) Fareeduddin Ganj-e-Shakar
- (d) Moinuddin Chishti

QUESTION 47

Consider the following states:

1. Arunachal Pradesh
2. Mizoram
3. Nagaland
4. Tripura

The state of Manipur shares borders with:

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

QUESTION 48

Large Magellanic Cloud refers to:

- (a) feathery clouds
- (b) clouds formed at the vent of volcanoes
- (c) Clouds resulting in the formation of cyclones
- (d) a satellite galaxy

QUESTION 49

The Union Cabinet approved the PAN 2.0 Project to make PAN the “single source of truth and data consistency”. The Permanent Account Number (PAN) is a:

- (a) 12-digit alphanumeric
- (b) 8-digit numerical
- (c) 10-digit alphanumeric
- (d) 14-digit numerical

QUESTION 50

With reference to the bromalites, consider the following statements:

1. These are fossilised feces which are also known as coprolites.
2. They preserve digestive byproducts.
3. They do not contain leaves and insects.
4. Several bromalites revealed that the earliest dinosaurs were opportunistic omnivores that ate mainly insects.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer Key									
1. (b)	2. (b)	3. (a)	4. (b)	5. (d)	6. (c)	7. (d)	8. (c)	9. (a)	10. (d)
11. (c)	12. (d)	13. (a)	14. (b)	15. (b)	16. (b)	17. (c)	18. (d)	19. (b)	20. (d)
21. (c)	22. (d)	23. (b)	24. (b)	25. (a)	26. (d)	27. (a)	28. (b)	29. (b)	30. (c)
31. (c)	32. (d)	33. (d)	34. (a)	35. (b)	36. (d)	37. (d)	38. (c)	39. (d)	40. (d)
41. (a)	42. (d)	43. (c)	44. (d)	45. (d)	46. (d)	47. (b)	48. (d)	49. (c)	50. (c)

Click the links below for detailed explanations:

Question 1 to Question 14 - Click here
Question 15 to Question 28 - Click here
Question 29 to Question 41 - Click here
Question 42 to Question 50 - Click here