

MANTHAN

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1. Mexico has become the first country in the world to elect all its judges by popular vote



- Mexico has become the first country in the world to elect all its judges by popular vote, a significant shift from the traditional appointment-based system.
- This reform, signed into law by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in September 2024 and supported by his successor, President Claudia Sheinbaum, aims to enhance judicial accountability and reduce corruption within the judiciary.
- The inaugural judicial elections, held on June 1, 2025, resulted in the election of nearly 900 federal judges and judges in 19 out of 32 Mexican states.
- Preliminary results indicate that nominees from the ruling Morena party secured a significant number of these positions, raising concerns about the potential consolidation of judicial power and the erosion of judicial independence.
- One notable outcome of the elections is the potential appointment of Hugo Aguilar, an Indigenous Mixtec lawyer from Oaxaca, as the head of Mexico's Supreme Court.
- With approximately 5.15 million votes, Aguilar leads the race, ahead of Lenia Batres, a candidate aligned with the Morena party.
- Aguilar's candidacy is historic, as no Indigenous person has led the court since the 19th century.
- Despite the reform's intent to democratize the judiciary, it has faced criticism from various quarters.
- Opponents argue that the election process was opaque and that the low voter turnout of around 13% undermines its legitimacy.
- Additionally, there are concerns that elected judges may be more susceptible to political pressures and influence from organized crime, potentially compromising the impartiality of the judiciary.
- The reform has also sparked protests and strikes among judicial employees, with some demonstrators storming the Senate building during debates.

- Critics warn that the changes could weaken democratic checks and balances, while supporters argue that the reform is a step toward a more transparent and accountable judicial system.

Mexico

Historical Significance

Ancient Civilizations:

- Mexico is home to some of the most advanced ancient civilizations, including the Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, and Aztec.
- These cultures contributed significantly to architecture, mathematics, astronomy, and written language.
- **Spanish Colonization:** In 1521, Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire, leading to nearly 300 years of Spanish colonial rule, which shaped Mexico's language, religion (Catholicism), and culture.
- **Independence Movement:** Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821 after a protracted struggle led by figures like Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos.
- **Revolution:** The Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) was a major social and political upheaval that transformed Mexico, leading to land reforms and the establishment of a more democratic constitution in 1917.

Geographical Significance

- **Location:** Mexico is located in the southern part of North America, bordered by the United States to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west and south, the Gulf of Mexico to the east, and Guatemala and Belize to the southeast.
- **Diverse Landscapes:** It features deserts (e.g., Sonoran), tropical rainforests (Chiapas), mountain ranges (Sierra Madre Occidental and Oriental), and extensive coastlines.
- **Natural Resources:** Mexico has rich natural resources such as oil, silver, copper, gold, and agricultural land.
- **Biodiversity:** It is one of the world's most biodiverse countries, with numerous endemic species of flora and fauna.

Political Significance

- **Federal Republic:** Mexico is a federal republic composed of 31 states and a Federal District (Mexico City), with a presidential system of government.
- **Important Regional Player:** Mexico is a key player in Latin American politics, often involved in regional organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).
- **US Relations:** It shares a long and complex border with the United States, leading to significant political and economic interactions, especially regarding trade, immigration, and security.
- **Democratization:** Since the late 20th century, Mexico transitioned from one-party dominance (PRI) to a more competitive multi-party democracy.

Economic Significance

- **Emerging Market:** Mexico has the 15th largest economy in the world (by nominal GDP) and is classified as an upper-middle-income country.
- **Manufacturing Hub:** It is a major manufacturing center, especially in the automotive, electronics, and aerospace industries, largely due to trade agreements like USMCA (formerly NAFTA).

- **Oil and Energy:** Mexico is a significant oil producer, with the state-owned company PEMEX playing a central role in the economy.
- **Trade:** As a member of USMCA and other trade agreements, Mexico is a major exporter of goods, especially to the United States.
- **Challenges:** Despite economic growth, Mexico faces challenges including income inequality, poverty, and corruption.

Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo

- Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, born on June 24, 1962, in Mexico City, is a Mexican politician and environmental engineer who has made history as the first woman and the first person of Jewish descent to serve as President of Mexico.
- She assumed office on October 1, 2024, after a decisive victory in the June 2024 presidential election, representing the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party.

Memorandum of procedure of appointment of Supreme Court Judges of India

- The Chief Justice of India and the Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution.

CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA:

- Appointment to the office of the Chief Justice of India should be of the seniormost Judge of the Supreme Court considered fit to hold the office. The Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs would, at the appropriate time, seek the recommendation of the outgoing Chief Justice of India for the appointment of the next Chief Justice of India.
- Whenever there is any doubt about the fitness of the seniormost Judge to hold the office of the Chief Justice of India, consultation with other Judges as envisaged in Article 124 (2) of the Constitution would be made for appointment of the next Chief Justice of India.
- After receipt of the recommendation of the Chief Justice of India, the Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs will put up the recommendation to the Prime Minister who will advise the President in the matter of appointment.

JUDGES OF THE SUPREME COURT:

- Whenever a vacancy is expected to arise in the office of a Judge of the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice of India will initiate proposal and forward his recommendation to the Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs to fill up the vacancy. The opinion of the Chief Justice of India for appointment of a Judge of the Supreme Court should be formed in consultation with a collegium of the four seniormost puisne Judges of the Supreme Court. If the successor Chief Justice of India is not one of the four seniormost puisne Judges, he would be made part of the collegium as he should have a hand in selection of Judges who will function during his term as Chief Justice of India.
- The Chief Justice of India would ascertain the views of the seniormost Judge in the Supreme Court, who hails from the High Court from where the person recommended comes, but if he does not have any knowledge of his merits and demerits, the next seniormost Judge in the Supreme Court from that High Court should be consulted.
- The requirement of consultation with a Judge of the Supreme Court would not be confined to that Judge only who has that High Court as a parent High Court and, therefore, would not exclude Judges who have, on transfer, occupied the office of a Judge or Chief Justice of that High Court.
- The opinion of members of the collegium in respect of each of the recommendations as well as the seniormost Judge in the Supreme Court from the High Court, from which a prospective candidate comes,

would be made in writing and the Chief Justice of India, in all cases, must transmit his opinion as also the opinion of all concerned to the Government of India as part of record. If the Chief Justice of India or the other members of the Collegium elicit views, particularly those from the non-Judges, the consultation need not be in writing but he, who elicits the opinion, should make a memorandum thereof and its substance in general terms which should be conveyed to the Government of India.

- After receipt of the final recommendation of the Chief Justice of India, the Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs will put up the recommendations to the Prime Minister who will advise the President in the matter of appointment.
- As soon as the appointment is approved, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Justice will inform the Chief Justice of India and obtain from the person selected a certificate of physical fitness signed by a Civil Surgeon or a District Medical Officer. The Medical Certificate is to be obtained from all persons selected for appointment whether they are at the time of appointment in the service of the State or not. The certificate should be in the form annexed.
- As soon as the warrant of appointment is signed by the President, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Justice will announce the appointment and issue the necessary notification in the Gazette of India.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE:

- Appointment of acting Chief Justice is to be made by the President under Article 126 of the Constitution. Vacancy in the office of the Chief Justice must be filled whatever the period of vacancy. In such an eventuality, the seniormost available Judge of the Supreme Court will be appointed to perform the duties of the office of the Chief Justice of India. As soon as the President has approved the appointment, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Justice will inform the Chief Justice of India or in his absence the Judge concerned of the Supreme Court, and will announce the appointment and issue the necessary notification in the Gazette of India.

APPOINTMENT OF AD HOC JUDGES:

- Article 127 of the Constitution provides that if at any time there should not a quorum of Judges of the Supreme Court available to hold or continue any session of the Court the Chief Justice of India may, with the previous consent of the President and after consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned request, in writing, a Judge of a High Court duly qualified for appointment as a Judge of the Supreme Court to attend, for such period as may be necessary, the sittings of the Supreme Court. Whenever the necessity for such an appointment arises, the Chief Justice of India will consult the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned whether a Judge is available to attend the sittings of the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice of the High Court will communicate his consent to the release of a particular Judge after consulting the Chief Minister of the State in which the High Court is situated. The Chief Justice of India will then communicate to the Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs the name of the Judge and the period for which he will be required to attend the sittings of the Supreme Court, certifying that the release of the Judge has been agreed to by the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned and the Chief Minister of the State. The Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs will put up the recommendation to the Prime Minister, who will advise the President as to the person to be appointed to attend the sittings of the Supreme Court. As soon as the President gives his consent to the appointment, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Justice will (i) inform the Chief Justice of India, who will formally request the Judge concerned, in writing, to attend the sittings of the Supreme Court as an ad hoc Judge and (ii) announce the appointment and issue the necessary notification in the Gazette of India.

QUESTIONS

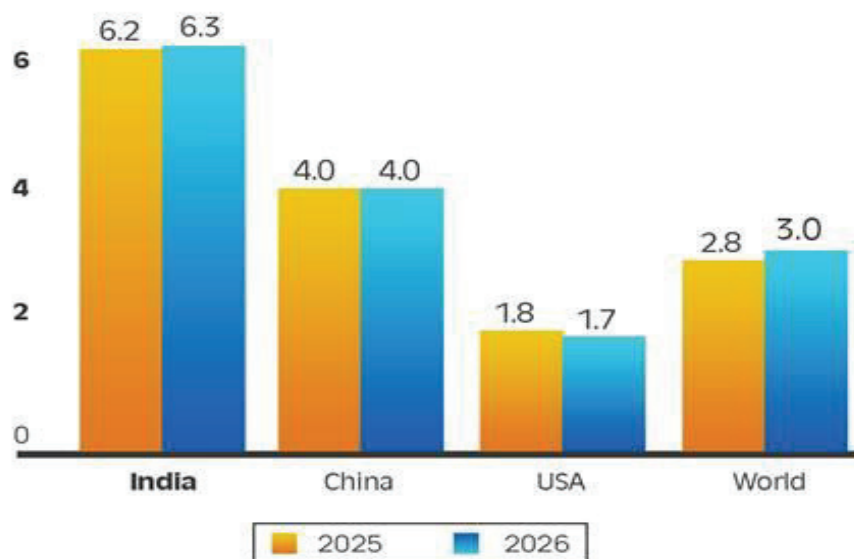
1. Which of the following statements about the appointment of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is incorrect as per the Memorandum of Procedure?
 - A. The seniormost Judge of the Supreme Court is usually appointed as the CJI.
 - B. If there is doubt about a judge's fitness to become CJI, consultation with other Judges is undertaken.
 - C. The Law Minister directly advises the President on the appointment of the CJI.
 - D. The Law Minister forwards the recommendation of the outgoing CJI to the Prime Minister.
2. Under the Memorandum of Procedure, who among the following is mandatorily included in the collegium for appointing Supreme Court Judges if he is not already among the four seniormost puisne Judges?
 - A. Chief Minister of the State
 - B. Chief Justice of India
 - C. Attorney General of India
 - D. Successor-designate Chief Justice of India
3. In the appointment of Ad hoc Judges under Article 127 of the Constitution, which of the following is not required before the Chief Justice of India sends a request for such appointment?
 - A. Consent of the President
 - B. Consultation with the Chief Minister of the State
 - C. Approval from the Prime Minister
 - D. Consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court
4. Which of the following countries has become the first country in the world to elect all its judges by popular vote, a significant shift from the traditional appointment-based system?
 - A. India
 - B. Cuba
 - C. Brazil
 - D. Mexico

2. India releases provisional GDP estimates

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released two interrelated data sets on India's national income and the size of its economy.
- The first provides an estimate of India's economic growth in the fourth quarter (Q4, January to March) of the last financial year (2024-25 or FY25). The second provides provisional estimates of economic growth for FY25.

Global Economic Growth Rates

(2025-2026)



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, April 2025

**GDP growth rates for India are on a fiscal year (FY) basis, 2025 refers to 2025/26*

How is national income measured?

Economic growth is measured using two metrics.

- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** is calculated by adding up all the expenditures made in the economy, including expenditures by Indians in their individual capacity, expenditures by governments, expenditures by private businesses, etc. This provides a picture of the demand side of the economy.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA)** looks at the supply side.
- It effectively measures the contribution of each sector of the economy by calculating and summing the value added (or income) at each stage of production.
- Both GDP and GVA are linked: they measure the same economic performance but through different routes. Their relationship can be spelled out using the following equation:

$$\text{GDP} = (\text{GVA}) + (\text{taxes earned by government}) - (\text{subsidies provided by government})$$

- MoSPI provides GDP and GVA data both in nominal terms (in present day prices) and real terms (after taking away the effect of inflation).
- Both nominal and real data have their own analytical significance.

Why are the estimates “provisional”?

- What makes the estimates released “provisional” is that they will be revised over the next few years.
- For any financial year, GDP estimates go through several revisions.
- In January, the government releases the First Advance Estimates (FAEs) for that financial year.
- At the end of February, after incorporating the data from Q3 (third quarter, October to December), MoSPI comes up with the Second Advance Estimates (SAEs).

- By May-end come the Provisional Estimates (PEs) after incorporating data from Q4.
- The PEs are then revised over the next two years: the First Revised Estimates come a year later, and the Final Estimates two years later.
- For FY25, these will come in 2026 and 2027 respectively. Each revision benefits from more data, making GDP estimates more accurate.

What are the key takeaways?

There are four key takeaways from the data released:

Nominal GDP & its growth

- India's nominal GDP grew to Rs 330.7 trillion (lakh crore) by the end of March 2025, a growth of 9.8% over the GDP in FY24.
- When converted into US dollar terms (dividing by the dollar- rupee exchange rate of 85.559) for international comparisons, by March-end, the size of India's economy was \$3.87 trillion.
- It is noteworthy that the growth of the nominal GDP is less than 10%: at 9.8%, FY25's growth was the third-slowest since the current government took charge in 2014, and the sixth slowest growth rate in nominal GDP since India liberalised its economy in 1991.
- The Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) since 2014-15 stands at 10.3% while the CAGR since the start of the second term of the NDA government in 2019 stands at 9.8%.

Real GDP & its growth

- While the size of the economy uses nominal GDP data, international comparisons of growth rate are done based on the growth rate of real GDP.
- This is because inflation differs from country to country, and only real GDP provides a genuine understanding about how many actual new goods and services were produced in a particular year.
- India's real GDP grew by 6.5% in FY25 to reach a level of Rs 188 trillion. The deceleration in the pace of real GDP growth — compared to FY24, when the growth rate was 9.2% — is even more stark than in the case of nominal GDP growth. The gap between the real and nominal GDP shows the effect of inflation in prices of goods and services.

GVA & sectoral health of economy

The real GVA across the three main sectors of the Indian economy:

- **Agriculture and allied activities (such as forestry, etc.);**
- **Industry (including sub-sectors such as manufacturing, construction etc.); and**
- **Services (including fields like financial services, trade and hotels etc.)**
- For FY 25, the real GVA grew by 6.4%, losing a step over the 8.6% growth in FY24.
- But notably, none of the sectors have grown at a CAGR anywhere close to 6% since 2019-20.
- The GVA data best captures the true momentum of the Indian economy; not only does it provide insight into the health of each sector, it also excludes the effects of taxes and subsidies, which can distort GDP figures.

Manufacturing growth slower than agriculture

- Since 2019-20 manufacturing GVA has registered a slower growth rate (CAGR of 4.04%) than even agriculture and allied activities (4.72%).

- This explains, to some extent, the high urban — in particular, youth — unemployment in India.
- It also provides an understanding of why labour has been moving back to Indian villages, and joining agriculture and allied activities.
- Boosting manufacturing growth has been a cornerstone for all governments, none more than the current one, which started the Make in India initiative in 2016.
- Indeed, manufacturing is the new battleground globally with the US, Europe, and China getting locked in a trade war to protect domestic manufacturing.
- The weakness in the Indian manufacturing sector is the most important and worrisome take away from the latest economic growth data.

Indian Economy (2025)

- **GDP Size:** India is the 5th largest economy globally by nominal GDP and 3rd largest by purchasing power parity (PPP).
- **Growth Rate:** India has consistently maintained a growth rate of 6-7% in recent years, often outpacing other major economies.
- **Demographics:** Young population with median age around 28 years, offering a demographic dividend.
- **Key Sectors:** Services (IT, finance, telecom), manufacturing, agriculture.
- **Challenges:** Infrastructure deficit, income inequality, unemployment, informal sector dominance, regulatory hurdles.

Factors Driving Growth Till 2050

Demographic Dividend:

- India's population is expected to peak around 1.6 billion mid-century, with a large working-age population.
- This can boost productivity and consumption if adequate education and skill development are ensured.

Urbanization and Infrastructure:

- Rapid urbanization expected to continue, driving demand for housing, transport, utilities.
- Government initiatives like Smart Cities, Digital India, and improved connectivity will support this.

Technology and Innovation:

- Strong IT and digital services sector.
- Increasing adoption of AI, automation, renewable energy, and biotech can boost productivity.

Manufacturing and "Make in India":

- Efforts to grow manufacturing and export sectors could shift India towards becoming a global manufacturing hub.
- Potential for significant job creation.

Rising Middle Class & Consumption:

- Growth of the middle class will increase domestic consumption across sectors like retail, healthcare, education, and entertainment.

Global Economic Integration:

- Enhanced trade agreements and geopolitical positioning can increase India's role in global supply chains.

Potential Challenges

Climate Change and Sustainability:

- India is vulnerable to climate impacts, requiring sustainable growth models.

Education and Skill Gap:

- Need to improve education quality and align skills with future job markets.

Income Inequality & Poverty:

- Addressing disparity and rural-urban divide.

Political and Regulatory Stability:

- Maintaining investor confidence and ease of doing business.

Healthcare and Social Security:

- Expanding access and quality will be crucial for a productive workforce.

Outlook for 2050

GDP Size:

- India could become the world's 2nd largest economy, potentially surpassing the US, with GDP estimated between \$40 to \$60 trillion (nominal).

Per Capita Income:

- Expected to increase substantially, but still lower than developed countries unless structural reforms accelerate.

Technological Leadership:

- India could lead in areas like digital finance, renewable energy, space tech, and pharmaceuticals.

Global Influence:

- Increased geopolitical and economic clout as a major global power.

QUESTIONS

5. Which of the following best explains the significance of using real GDP instead of nominal GDP when comparing economic growth across countries?
 - A. Real GDP includes external sector contributions, unlike nominal GDP
 - B. Real GDP removes the effects of inflation, ensuring comparability across countries
 - C. Real GDP measures government spending only, which is more stable across countries
 - D. Real GDP includes subsidies and taxes, offering a fuller picture than nominal GDP
6. Which of the following statements about GDP and GVA is correct?
 - A. GVA includes taxes and subsidies, while GDP excludes them
 - B. GDP measures income at the firm level, while GVA aggregates household expenditures
 - C. GVA is the supply-side measure, while GDP represents demand-side performance
 - D. GDP is calculated at constant prices, while GVA is always in current prices

3. French nuclear umbrella mean for Europe

Operation Spider's Web

Part of the attacks in Russia during the Russian invasion of Ukraine



- French President Emmanuel Macron stated that France is “open to dialogue” on potentially stationing its nuclear weapons in other European countries.
- This development occurred amid security concerns in Europe due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

What lies behind France’s offer?

- France’s consideration of a broader European role for its nuclear deterrent aligns with its “European strategic autonomy” policy, which aims to enhance the EU’s capacity to act independently in security and defence matters.
- President Macron’s Sorbonne University speech emphasised Europe’s need to bolster its defence capabilities, in order to be a more “sovereign Europe.”
- Moreover, U.S. President Donald Trump has questioned unconditional U.S. security guarantees to NATO allies, linking support to the 2% GDP defence spending target for security guarantees, prompting European nations to seek additional security assurances.
- Historically, France has fiercely guarded the independence of its nuclear deterrent, viewing it as a strictly national tool.
- This openness, thus, signifies an evolution in its strategic thinking.

What is the nuclear sharing model?

- “Nuclear sharing” involves a nuclear-weapon state stationing nuclear weapons on allied non-nuclear-weapon states’ territory, with specific arrangements for potential use.
- Within NATO, the U.S. has maintained such arrangements for decades.

- Currently, U.S. B61 tactical nuclear gravity bombs are understood to be deployed in five NATO states: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye.
- Under these arrangements, the U.S. retains legal ownership and custody of the warheads.
- The U.S. President also retains the power to make the decision to use these weapons, following NATO consultation.
- This Cold War-era posture aims to demonstrate alliance solidarity, and share nuclear risks.

Does France have enough weapons?

- France's arsenal is around 290 nuclear warheads, deliverable by submarine-launched ballistic missiles and air-launched cruise missiles via Rafale jets.
- A 2023 Centre for Strategic and International Studies report analysed that extending France's nuclear deterrent by basing warheads abroad would pose logistical and doctrinal challenges with its current arsenal size, suggesting that an increase in warheads might be needed for credible extended deterrence.
- Such deployments would require stationing French Air Force units, including Rafales and support infrastructure, abroad.
- Establishing secure command and control systems in a multinational setting would be complex.

Would it strengthen deterrence?

- Deploying additional nuclear weapons in Europe has varied security implications. Proponents argue it could enhance deterrence against Russia by increasing NATO's nuclear assets and demonstrating European resolve.
- Conversely, Russia would likely view such deployments as a significant escalation, potentially leading to "military-technical measures" in response.
- Russia's 2023 stationing of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus is cited by some as a preceding escalatory step.

Is it legal under international law?

- The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the primary legal instrument for regulating nuclear weapons.
- Article I of the treaty prohibits nuclear-weapon states (like France) from transferring nuclear weapons or control over them.
- Existing NATO nuclear sharing is justified by participants as being NPT-compliant because no "transfer" of legal ownership or control occurs in peacetime; the U.S. maintains custody.
- Non-proliferation advocates and various research institutions have consistently challenged this legality.

Ukraine's "Operation Spider's Web"

- Ukraine's "Operation Spider's Web" represents a significant evolution in modern warfare, showcasing the strategic use of drones in deep behind-enemy-lines strikes.

Overview of Operation Spider's Web:

- The operation involved 117 explosive drones launched from semi-trucks, targeting Russian airbases up to 8,000 km from Ukraine.
- The drones were concealed in removable roofs of wooden containers, resembling regular mobile cabins, to evade detection during transport.
- Upon arrival, the roofs were remotely opened, and the drones were flown by operators using open-source software over the Russian mobile network.

Technological Innovations

- A notable feature of these drones was their artificial intelligence capabilities. In instances where the drones lost signal, they autonomously followed pre-programmed routes and activated their warheads upon identifying targets, ensuring mission success even in GPS-denied environments.

Impact and Significance

- The operation resulted in the destruction or severe damage of 41 Russian aircraft, including strategic bombers and refueling planes, leading to an estimated \$7 billion in damages.
- Analysts describe the attack as pioneering and potentially transformative for modern warfare, highlighting the increasing role of drones in military strategy.
- Operation Spider's Web underscores a pivotal moment in defense innovation, with wide-ranging implications for global military strategy and national security planning.

QUESTIONS

7. Under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), how is NATO's nuclear sharing policy justified by its participants despite the treaty's explicit prohibition on nuclear transfers?
 - A. It is considered valid as long as nuclear weapons are transferred during active wartime
 - B. The treaty allows sharing between allies if both are NPT nuclear-weapon states
 - C. The policy maintains U.S. custody of nuclear weapons during peacetime, avoiding "transfer"
 - D. The NPT permits nuclear sharing under Article IV related to peaceful use
8. Which of the following technological feature of the drones used in Operation Spider's Web most contributed to their operational success in GPS-denied or communication-jammed environments?
 - A. Ability to jam Russian radar networks autonomously
 - B. AI-enabled visual recognition and target activation system
 - C. Integration with NATO satellite imagery in real time
 - D. Use of supersonic flight and stealth coating to avoid radar

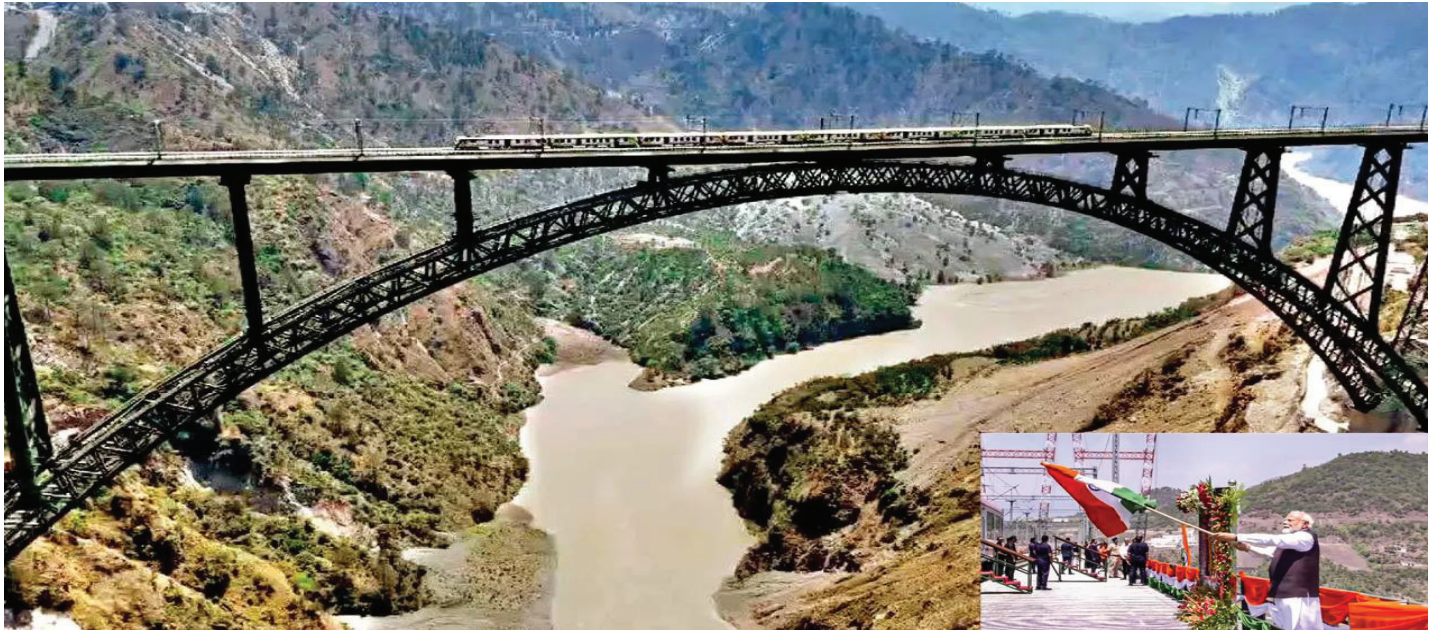
4. World's tallest railway bridge

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to flag off two specially designed Vande Bharat trains between Srinagar and Katra, marking the completion of a 42-year-old project to link Kashmir with the rest of the country via trains.
- Of the last stretch of the 272-km Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Line (USBRL), the 118-km Qazigund-Baramulla section was commissioned in October 2009, followed by an 18-km stretch between Qazigund and Banihal in June 2013, Udhampur-Katra (25 kms) in July 2014 and Banihal-Sangaldan (48.1 km) stretch in February 2024.
- The remaining 63-km Katra-Sangaldan section is to be commissioned on June 6, and it is this section where the Prime Minister will also be inaugurating the world's highest railway bridge over Chenab.

The Chenab Bridge

- Built at a cost of around Rs 1,400 crore, the Chenab Bridge is the highest rail and arch bridge in the world with a dock height of 359 meters from the river bed, 35 meters taller than Paris's iconic Eiffel Tower.

- A 1,315-meter steel arch and concrete structure, consisting of a 530-meter approach bridge and a 785-meter deck arch bridge (the part of the bridge on which vehicles run), it is considered India's most recent marvel in civil engineering.



What were the challenges involved in its construction?

- Built between Bakkal and Kauri in Reasi district, the bridge falls in zone-V, a major seismic zone with a fractured geology.
- One of the biggest challenges was to build the bridge without obstructing the flow of the Chenab River.
- In the absence of any road link, carrying heavy machinery and material to the site was another big challenge.

Who did what?

- Overseen by the Konkan Railway Corporation, the bridge's design and construction was awarded to a joint venture consisting of Afcons Infrastructure, South Korea-based Ultra Construction & Engineering Company, and VSL India.
- While the Finland-based WSP Group and Germany-based Leonhardt Andra and Partners designed its viaduct and foundations, and arch, respectively, the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, prepared a design for its foundation protection.
- The Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, analysed the slope stability. IITs Delhi and Roorkee did seismic analysis, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) helped in making the bridge blast-proof.

How was its construction completed?

- The Chenab bridge was proposed in one of the most complicated and isolated terrains in India.
- Its deck is located on a transition curve (the part between straight and circular sections of roads) with changing radius.
- The bridge's construction, thus, was carried out in stages.
- The Steel Authority of India provided steel and a Swiss company, Mageba, supplied spherical stopper bearings for the bridge, which involved fabrication of 28,660 MT of steel for 26 km of motorable roads.

- The sophisticated Tekla software, which builds 3D models of buildings or infrastructure projects, was used for the bridge.

What is the life of the bridge and how safe is it?

- It is designed to have a lifespan of 120 years and handle train speeds upto 100 km per hour.
- It can withstand earthquakes up to a magnitude of 8 on the Richter Scale, besides high-intensity explosions equivalent to 40 tonnes of TNT.

World's Important Bridges

Engineering Marvels

- These bridges are known for their groundbreaking design and engineering feats:

Millau Viaduct (France)

- Tallest bridge in the world (343 m / 1,125 ft).
- Cable-stayed design spanning the Tarn River valley.

Akashi Kaikyō Bridge (Japan)

- Longest suspension bridge span in the world (1,991 m / 6,532 ft).
- Connects Kobe and Awaji Island.



Danyang–Kunshan Grand Bridge (China)

- Longest bridge overall (164.8 km / 102.4 mi).
- A viaduct on the Beijing–Shanghai High-Speed Railway.

Rusky Bridge (Russia)

- Longest cable-stayed bridge span in the world.

Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge (China)

- World's longest sea-crossing bridge–tunnel system.

Historical Significance

These bridges have played important roles in history:

London Bridge (UK)

- Several versions over centuries; current version built in 1973.
- Original was key to London's development.

Ponte Vecchio (Italy)

- Medieval stone bridge in Florence.
- Famous for its shops built along it.

Brooklyn Bridge (USA)



- Opened in 1883, connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn.
- First steel-wire suspension bridge.

Charles Bridge (Czech Republic)

- 14th-century Gothic bridge in Prague.
- Famous for its statues and cobblestone structure.

Culturally Iconic Bridges

Recognized as national or cultural symbols:

Golden Gate Bridge (USA)

- Icon of San Francisco and a global symbol of engineering beauty.

Tower Bridge (UK)

- Distinctive drawbridge over the Thames; London landmark.

Sydney Harbour Bridge (Australia)

- Known as “The Coathanger.”
- Integral to Sydney’s skyline.

Rialto Bridge (Italy)

- One of Venice’s oldest and most famous bridges.

Pont du Gard (France)

- Ancient Roman aqueduct bridge still standing.

QUESTIONS

9. The Chenab Bridge is a vital part of which railway stretch?
 - A. Srinagar–Leh
 - B. Katra–Banihal
 - C. Jammu–Udhampur
 - D. Baramulla–Kupwara
10. What was the primary reason the railway authorities switched from an arch bridge to a cable-stayed bridge at Anji Khad?
 - A. Geological instability made the arch design unfeasible
 - B. Arch bridges are more expensive than cable-stayed ones
 - C. The site lacked adequate steel supply for arch construction
 - D. The region was prone to flash floods, making arch bridges unsafe
11. What are the headwater sources of the Chenab River, and where do they originate?
 - A. Ravi and Beas rivers, originating in Uttarakhand
 - B. Chandra and Bhaga rivers, originating in Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh
 - C. Indus and Jhelum rivers, originating in Tibet
 - D. Ganga and Yamuna rivers, originating at Gangotri
12. What is the name of the river over which the world's highest railway bridge was inaugurated in June 2025?
 - A. Ganga
 - B. Yamuna
 - C. Chenab
 - D. Sutlej

5. Regulating India's virtual digital assets

- India continues to lead in grassroots crypto adoption, for the second consecutive year in the 'Geography of Crypto' report by Chainalysis (2024).
- A National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) report finds that Indian retail investors poured \$6.6 billion into crypto assets and predicts the industry could create over eight lakh jobs by 2030. India also boasts one of the largest and fastest-growing web3 developer cohorts.
- This vibrancy may seem surprising, given the rocky journey of crypto, known as 'Virtual Digital Assets' (VDA), in India, within the domestic regulatory and policy landscape. In May 2025, the Supreme Court of India questioned the absence of comprehensive and clear crypto regulation in India, with a remark, "Banning may be shutting your eyes to ground reality".
- This observation highlights the dissonance between VDA reality and VDA policy which has created significant challenges for regulators and market players.

Navigating India's VDA regulatory gaps

- India's regulatory approach to Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) reflects a tension between strict capital controls and the decentralized nature of cryptocurrencies.
- Since 2013, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has expressed concerns over VDAs due to their lack of central bank oversight.
- In 2018, the RBI attempted to curb the crypto market by barring financial institutions from dealing with VDA entities, but this circular was overturned by the courts in 2020.
- Subsequently, the government introduced tax measures in 2022, including a 1% tax deducted at source (TDS) on VDA transactions over ₹10,000 and a 30% capital gains tax disallowing loss offsetting, aiming to boost transparency and limit speculation.
- Despite these efforts, a significant share of VDA trading moved offshore, with Indians trading over ₹1.03 trillion on non-compliant platforms between mid-2022 and late 2023, and ₹2.63 trillion more by October 2024.
- This offshore activity led to substantial tax revenue losses—over ₹2,488 crore uncollected from capital gains and more than ₹60 billion in unpaid TDS.
- Attempts to block access to non-compliant exchanges through URL blocking have largely failed, as users circumvent restrictions via VPNs, mirror sites, and alternative platforms.
- Consequently, India continues to face challenges in effectively regulating and taxing its burgeoning crypto market.

Role of VASPs

- Global standard-setting bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Financial Stability Board (FSB), and Financial Action Task Force (FATF) advocate for comprehensive, risk-based regulation of Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs), aligned with international standards.

- These frameworks depend heavily on compliant domestic intermediaries or Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) to serve as regulatory bridges, ensuring visibility, enforcement, and informed policymaking within the ecosystem.
- In contrast, India's current policy environment inadvertently drives VDA users toward offshore, non-compliant platforms, undermining the country's capacity to manage associated risks and diminishing potential tax revenues.
- This regulatory gap hampers India's ability to fully benefit from and oversee the rapidly evolving VDA sector.
- However, Indian VASPs are maturing swiftly and demonstrating a strong commitment to regulatory compliance.
- Their active collaboration with the Financial Intelligence Unit-India has significantly bolstered anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) measures, garnering positive recognition from the FATF.
- A major turning point came after the significant \$230 million hack in 2024, which exposed vulnerabilities within the ecosystem.
- In response, Indian exchanges implemented robust cybersecurity enhancements, created dedicated insurance funds to cover future losses, and collectively developed stringent industry-wide cybersecurity protocols.
- Overall, while India's regulatory stance needs recalibration to prevent capital flight and improve oversight, Indian VASPs are increasingly positioning themselves as trustworthy partners in regulation and enforcement, contributing positively to the integrity and security of the domestic VDA landscape.

Need for a framework

- Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) play a pivotal role in enhancing the safety and integrity of the digital asset ecosystem.
- Beyond their technological and financial contributions, VASPs also support national economic growth and value creation.
- They offer a regulated and transparent channel for fund flows, aligning with the objectives of Indian regulators.
- However, the current policy environment in India imposes taxes on digital assets without offering a clear or supportive regulatory framework.
- These disconnect hampers industry development and innovation.
- To foster a more secure, sustainable, and growth-oriented crypto ecosystem, India must move beyond the existing policy deadlock.
- A balanced, pragmatic, and forward-looking regulatory structure is urgently needed—one that not only mitigates risks like fraud and misuse but also enables innovation and responsible adoption.
- Proactive and decisive legislation will ensure India harnesses the full potential of digital assets while maintaining financial stability and regulatory oversight.

Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)

- A Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) is a digital form of a country's fiat currency issued and regulated by its central bank.

- In India's case, it's issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).



1. What is India's CBDC?

- Known as the Digital Rupee (or e₹).
- Issued and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- It is legal tender, meaning it is recognized by the law as a valid form of payment.

2. Types of CBDC in India

Retail CBDC (e₹-R):

- For use by the general public.
- Acts like physical cash but in digital form.
- Can be used for person-to-person (P2P) and person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions.

Wholesale CBDC (e₹-W):

- Intended for use by financial institutions.
- Aims to improve efficiency in the interbank market.

3. Pilot Projects

- Wholesale CBDC pilot: Launched on November 1, 2022.
- Retail CBDC pilot: Started on December 1, 2022, in select cities with select banks (like SBI, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank).

4. How It Works

- Distributed through banks.
- Stored in a digital wallet, provided by banks or RBI-authorized apps.
- Does not require a bank account for basic transactions (mimicking cash).

5. Benefits

- Reduces cost of currency management.
- Enables faster and more secure payments.
- Helps combat financial fraud and money laundering.
- Boosts digital financial inclusion.

6. Challenges

- Cybersecurity concerns.
- Privacy and data protection.
- User adoption and digital literacy.

Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs)

- Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs) typically refer to digital representations of value that can be transferred, stored, or traded electronically. In many jurisdictions, especially after the rise of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology, VDAs have become an important legal and regulatory concept.



Definition of Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs)

In many countries, VDAs include:

- Cryptocurrencies (e.g., Bitcoin, Ethereum)
- Tokens (utility tokens, governance tokens)
- Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs)
- Stablecoins (though some jurisdictions treat them differently)

They are not:

- Traditional fiat currencies (like USD, INR)

- Digital representations of fiat (e.g., CBDCs or digital bank balances)

Legal and Tax Context (Example: India)

- In India, under Finance Act 2022, the government officially defined VDAs and brought them under a special tax regime:

VDA Definition (Section 2(47A), Income Tax Act):

- Includes any information or code or number or token (not being Indian currency or foreign currency) generated through cryptographic means or otherwise, providing a digital representation of value exchanged.

Taxation:

- 30% tax on income from the transfer of VDAs (plus surcharge & cess).
- 1% TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) on transfer of VDAs (Section 194S).
- No deduction for expenses (other than cost of acquisition).
- Losses from VDAs cannot be set off against other income.

QUESTIONS

- Which of the following correctly distinguishes India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) from a Virtual Digital Asset (VDA) under Indian law?
 - CBDC is privately issued; VDAs are state-backed
 - CBDC is legal tender; VDAs are not recognized as currency
 - CBDC is taxed under capital gains; VDAs are exempt from tax
 - VDAs are regulated by RBI; CBDCs are regulated by SEBI
- In the Indian context, which of the following statements is NOT true regarding taxation on Virtual Digital Assets (VDAs)?
 - Income from VDAs is taxed at 30% plus surcharge and cess
 - A 1% TDS applies on every transfer of VDAs under Section 194S
 - Losses from VDA transfers can be carried forward to future years
 - No deduction is allowed for any expense other than cost of acquisition
- In India, what is the primary difference between the retail CBDC (₹-R) and wholesale CBDC (₹-W)?
 - ₹-R is pegged to gold; ₹-W is backed by RBI reserves
 - ₹-R is for interbank settlements; ₹-W is for public cash transactions
 - ₹-R is for the public; ₹-W is for financial institutions
 - ₹-W is programmable; ₹-R is not
- Which of the following accurately reflects India's pilot timeline for CBDCs?
 - Wholesale CBDC began in December 2022; Retail CBDC in November 2022
 - Both Retail and Wholesale CBDCs began in November 2022
 - Retail CBDC and Wholesale CBDC both began in December 2021
 - Retail CBDC began in December 2022; Wholesale CBDC in November 2022

6. India to Build First-Ever Polar Research Vessel as GRSE Signs MoU with Norway's Kongsberg

- The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Kolkata-based Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Limited (GRSE) and Norwegian firm Kongsberg, marked the beginning of India's journey to build its first-ever Polar Research Vessel (PRV).
- The MoU was signed during Sarbananda Sonowal's official visit to Norway as part of the Nor-Shipping 2025 event, highlighting India's commitment to advancing oceanic and polar research capabilities while strengthening its indigenous shipbuilding industry under the 'Make in India' initiative.
- The PRV will be developed with design expertise from Kongsberg and constructed by GRSE in Kolkata.
- It will cater to the requirements of the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), enabling scientific exploration in the polar and Southern Ocean regions.
- Equipped with state-of-the-art scientific instruments, the vessel will support marine research, ecosystem studies, and contribute to global climate change efforts.
- GRSE's extensive experience in building complex maritime platforms such as warships and research vessels positions it as a natural choice for this pioneering project.
- The initiative is expected to enhance India's strategic autonomy in the polar research domain and bolster the country's maritime R&D capacity.
- While in Norway, Sonowal also participated in a high-level ministerial panel on "Shipping and Ocean Business," where he presented India's expanded maritime strategy—MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security Across the Regions)—an upgrade from the earlier SAGAR initiative.
- Sonowal emphasized the government's ambitious Sagarmala 2.0 programme, which focuses on infrastructure modernization, shipbuilding, recycling, and logistics to position India as a global maritime hub.
- India's shipyards currently handle 11% of NSA's global order book. Sonowal called for further expansion of these orders and encouraged recruitment from India's seafaring workforce—ranked second in NSA's fleet.
- Investment opportunities under the \$2.9 billion Maritime Development Fund and the Sagarmala initiative and called for collaboration in green shipping, digital innovation through platforms like ONOP and MAITRI, and sustainable ship recycling.
- Notably, 87% of India's ship recycling yards are now Hong Kong Convention (HKC) compliant.

MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security across the Regions)

- MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security across the Regions) is an initiative or concept that seems to emphasize regional maritime cooperation, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- The term "Mahasagar" literally means "ocean" in several Indian languages, which aligns well with the focus on maritime security and cooperation.
- While there's no widely established program named "MAHASAGAR" (as of my latest knowledge), the title and acronym clearly suggest a strategic maritime security initiative.
- It could represent or be proposed as an Indian-led multilateral or regional framework aimed at:

Possible Objectives of MAHASAGAR

Enhancing Maritime Security

- Joint naval exercises
- Intelligence sharing on maritime threats
- Anti-piracy and anti-smuggling operations

Promoting Regional Stability

- Conflict resolution and diplomacy in maritime disputes
- Counter-terrorism coordination
- Cybersecurity in maritime domains

Environmental and Resource Protection

- Marine ecosystem conservation
- Sustainable fishing practices
- Collaborative marine research

Disaster Response and Humanitarian Assistance

- Coordinated disaster relief operations (tsunamis, cyclones)
- Sharing best practices in disaster risk reduction

Economic Cooperation

- Blue economy development
- Maritime trade facilitation
- Port infrastructure collaboration

Potential Member Nations or Partners

- Given its focus on regional maritime security, MAHASAGAR might involve:
 - India (as a lead initiator)
 - Indian Ocean littoral states: Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Seychelles, Mauritius, etc.
 - Africa's eastern coastal nations: Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique
 - Strategic partners: Australia, France (via Réunion), Indonesia, etc.

Strategic Relevance

- MAHASAGAR would align with India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy and could complement initiatives like:
 - SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)
 - IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association)
 - QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)
 - Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)

- The SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative is India's strategic framework aimed at fostering maritime security, sustainable development, and regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

- Unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015, SAGAR underscores India's commitment to being a “net security provider” and a “first responder” in the region.

Key Objectives of SAGAR

- **Maritime Security:** Enhancing naval cooperation, maritime domain awareness (MDA), and anti-piracy measures.
- **Economic Growth & Blue Economy:** Boosting trade, fisheries, and sustainable ocean resources.
- **Disaster Resilience:** Strengthening aid and response to natural disasters.
- **Regional Connectivity:** Developing ports, shipping routes, and digital links.
- **Environmental Protection:** Tackling climate change, marine pollution, and coastal management.

Mission SAGAR: Humanitarian Outreach

- In May 2020, India launched Mission SAGAR to provide humanitarian assistance to countries in the IOR during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The mission delivered essential supplies such as medicines and food to nations including the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.

Evolution to MAHASAGAR

- Building upon SAGAR, India introduced the MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) initiative.
- Launched in 2025, MAHASAGAR aims to extend cooperation through technology sharing, concessional loans, and grants, focusing on trade for development, capacity building for sustainable growth, and mutual security for a shared future.

Recent Developments: IOS Sagar Initiative

- In April 2025, the Indian Navy's INS Sunayna embarked on a month-long deployment in the IOR as part of the Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) Sagar initiative.
- The mission involved a multinational crew from nine countries, including Comoros, Kenya, and Sri Lanka, and aimed to bolster regional maritime cooperation.
- Activities included joint naval exercises, exclusive economic zone (EEZ) surveillance, and professional and cultural exchanges in nations such as Tanzania, Mozambique, Mauritius, Seychelles, and the Maldives.

Strategic Significance

- SAGAR and its successor, MAHASAGAR, reflect India's proactive approach to regional security and development.
- By enhancing maritime cooperation and providing humanitarian assistance, India aims to strengthen its partnerships with neighboring countries and contribute to a stable and prosperous IOR.

Polar Research Vessel (PRV)

- A Polar Research Vessel (PRV) is a specially designed ship equipped to conduct scientific research in polar regions—both the Arctic and the Antarctic.
- These vessels are built to withstand extreme cold, navigate through sea ice, and support a wide range of scientific operations.

Key Features of PRVs:

Icebreaking Capability:

- Reinforced hulls and powerful engines allow them to break through thick sea ice.

- Some are classified as icebreakers or ice-strengthened vessels.

Scientific Equipment:

- Laboratories for biology, oceanography, climatology, and geology.
- Hydrographic and geophysical survey systems.
- Facilities for deploying autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs).

Living and Working Spaces:

- Accommodations for scientists and crew.
- Workspaces for field operations like coring, sampling, and deploying instruments.

Environmental Monitoring:

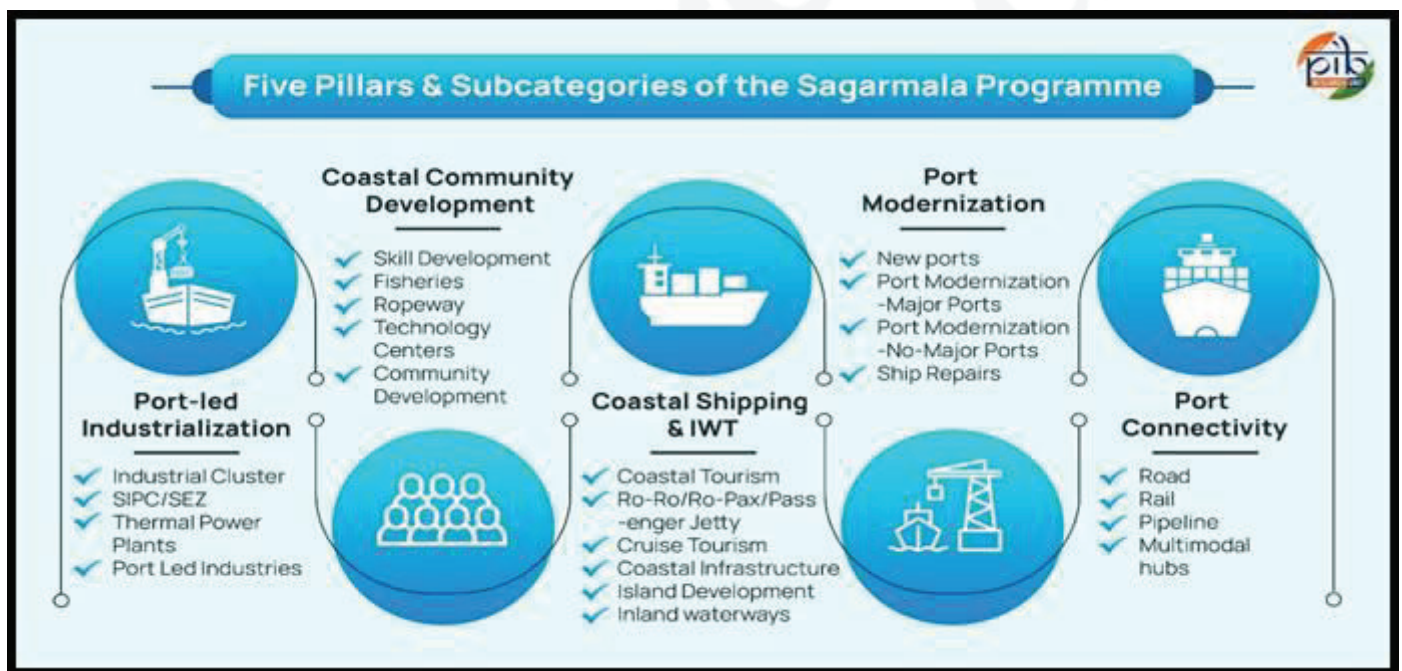
- Meteorological stations and sea/ice sensors.
- Used for climate change studies, marine ecosystem research, and ice dynamics.

Helicopter Deck:

- Many PRVs have a helipad for aerial surveys, ice reconnaissance, and transport to remote areas.

Sagarmala initiative

- The Sagarmala Initiative is an ambitious infrastructure development project launched by the Government of India in 2015, aimed at modernizing the country's port infrastructure and boosting the maritime economy. It is coordinated by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.



Objectives of the Sagarmala Initiative:

Port Modernization and New Port Development:

- Upgrade existing ports to become more efficient and modern.
- Develop new greenfield ports to handle increasing cargo traffic.

Port-Linked Industrialization:

- Establish coastal economic zones (CEZs), special economic zones (SEZs), and industrial clusters near ports to promote manufacturing and logistics.

Port Connectivity Enhancement:

- Improve road, rail, and inland waterways connectivity between ports and the hinterland to reduce logistics costs and time.

Coastal Community Development:

- Improve livelihoods in coastal areas through skill development, tourism, and sustainable fisheries.

Key Features:

- Focus on reducing logistics cost and time for domestic and EXIM (export-import) cargo.
- Enhance port-led development to support India's "Blue Economy".
- Integrate public-private partnerships (PPP) in infrastructure development.
- Promote use of inland waterways and coastal shipping as cost-effective transport modes.

Major Projects under Sagarmala:

- Development of multi-modal logistics parks.
- Construction of new container terminals and cargo berths.
- Development of ro-ro (roll-on/roll-off) terminals for vehicles.
- Enhancements to National Waterways for cargo movement.

Impact and Benefits:

- Reduces overall logistics cost (estimated savings of ₹35,000–40,000 crore annually).
- Generates employment (millions of direct and indirect jobs projected).
- Boosts coastal shipping and trade.
- Enhances ease of doing business through improved infrastructure.

QUESTIONS

17. Which of the following institutions will the upcoming Indian Polar Research Vessel (PRV) primarily serve?
 - A. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)
 - B. Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)
 - C. National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR)
 - D. Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)
18. What is the primary role of the Norwegian firm Kongsberg in India's first Polar Research Vessel project?
 - A. Providing design expertise for the PRV
 - B. Funding the construction of the PRV
 - C. Designing and operating the PRV
 - D. Building the vessel in Norway for India
19. Which of the following differentiates MAHASAGAR from the earlier SAGAR initiative in India's maritime strategy?
 - A. MAHASAGAR excludes security components and focuses only on oceanic research.
 - B. SAGAR was confined to bilateral relationships, while MAHASAGAR expands to multilateral maritime coalitions.
 - C. MAHASAGAR integrates infrastructure, digital innovation, and green shipping under a broader strategic framework.
 - D. SAGAR focused on the Pacific Ocean, whereas MAHASAGAR is restricted to the Arabian Sea.

20. Which of the following best reflects the strategic importance of building India's first Polar Research Vessel (PRV) domestically through GRSE?
- A. To enhance strategic autonomy and strengthen maritime R&D under 'Make in India'
 - B. To reduce India's reliance on foreign scientists for polar studies
 - C. To assert India's sovereignty over Arctic territories
 - D. To promote naval warfare technology exports through private shipyards

7. Centre's new regulations for jobs and domicile in Ladakh

- The Centre has notified a series of regulations for Ladakh's land, jobs, and cultural preservation, aimed at addressing concerns raised by the civil society in Ladakh over the past five years.
- The new legal framework introduces a domicile-based job reservation system, recognition of local languages, and procedural clarity in civil service recruitment.



What are the new regulations?

The government notified five regulations:

1. Ladakh Civil Services Decentralization and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025

- This regulation introduces a domicile requirement for recruitment in government posts under the Union Territory of Ladakh, for the first time.
- The domicile is defined as a person who has resided in Ladakh for 15 years; or a person who has studied for 7 years and appeared in either Class 10 or 12 examination in Ladakh; Children of Central Government employees who have served in Ladakh for at least 10 years; and children and spouses of domiciles.

2. Ladakh Civil Services Domicile Certificate Rules, 2025

- These rules lay out the procedure and documentation required to obtain a domicile certificate.
- The tehsildar is designated as the issuing authority, while the Deputy Commissioner is the appellate authority.
- Applications can be submitted both physically and electronically.

3. Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025

- This regulation caps the total reservation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and other socially and educationally backward groups at 85%, excluding the 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).
- Importantly, these reservations have also been extended to professional institutions, such as engineering and medical colleges in Ladakh. The quota for SC, ST and OBC for admissions into these colleges was earlier capped at 50% and has now been expanded to 85%.

4. Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025

- This law recognises English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi as the official languages of Ladakh.
- It also mandates institutional support for the promotion of Shina, Brokskat, Balti, and Ladakhi, for preserving Ladakh's linguistic and cultural diversity.

5. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Amendment) Regulation, 2025

- This amends the LAHDC Act of 1997 to reserve one-third of the seats for women in the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils of Leh and Kargil, through rotation.

Why are these regulations significant?

- This is the first comprehensive attempt by the Centre to tailor governance and administrative frameworks specifically for Ladakh, following its bifurcation from Jammu & Kashmir in 2019.
- Since the government is reluctant to grant Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh, which would result in greater autonomy under the Constitution, the regulations aim to address Ladakhi concerns through executive orders rather than constitutional guarantees.
- By defining the domicile criteria and creating a legal filter for recruitment, the government has taken a significant step towards reserving jobs for the local population, a demand that has been at the heart of the protest movement.
- Additionally, the language regulation offers long-awaited recognition to Bhoti and Purgi, which are mother tongues for large sections of the population.
- The promotion of Ladakhi, Balti, and other minority dialects reflects an understanding of the importance of cultural identity in political demands.

What were the demands in Ladakh?

- Since the abrogation of Article 370 and the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, the political and legal status of Ladakh has been a deeply contentious subject.
- With the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir being bifurcated into two UTs — Jammu & Kashmir with a legislature, and Ladakh without one — the people of Ladakh found themselves under direct central administration.

What followed was not a celebration, but concern.

- Despite assurances from the Centre, residents feared that without constitutional protections, Ladakh's unique tribal identity, fragile ecology, and limited resources would come under pressure from external economic and demographic forces.
- This led to a growing demand for the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, which provides tribal-majority areas in certain northeastern states with legislative and financial autonomy through autonomous district councils.
- The demand is grounded in the fact that more than 90% of Ladakh's population belongs to Scheduled Tribes.
- The demand has been consistently voiced by the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), which jointly represent the Buddhist and Muslim communities in the region.
- In 2024 and 2025, the movement gained national visibility thanks to a high-profile hunger strike led by Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer, innovator and climate activist.

How are the new regulations different from existing provisions?

- Before these regulations, Ladakh was governed largely by adapted versions of laws in J&K, including the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004 and the Civil Services Decentralization and Recruitment Act, 2010.
- These did not include any concept of domicile specific to Ladakh, protection for jobs for locals, clear reservation caps or exclusions for EWS, and recognition of Ladakhi languages in official use.
- In that sense, the 2025 regulations represent a departure from borrowed laws and a move towards region-specific governance.

How do they compare with Jammu & Kashmir's protections?

After bifurcation, the UT of Jammu & Kashmir received:

- Domicile laws that restrict government jobs to locals;
- Land ownership restrictions, preventing outsiders from purchasing land in the UT;
- A legislative assembly, which gives residents a voice in law-making.

In contrast, Ladakh:

- Has no legislature;
- Until now, had no job reservation policy for locals;
- Still does not have any legal land protection mechanism.

So, while these regulations bring Ladakh somewhat closer to the protections given to Jammu & Kashmir post-2019, the region still lags behind in constitutional safeguards.

What are the limitations of these regulations?

- Despite being an important step, the regulations fall short of addressing certain core demands of the Sixth Schedule movement:
- **Lack of constitutional protection:** All new rules and regulations have been made under Article 240 of the Constitution, which allows the President to make regulations for UTs without the legislature.
These are executive decisions that can be amended or withdrawn by the Centre at any time, unlike the Sixth Schedule, which is part of the Constitution and offers guaranteed protections.
- **No land safeguards:** The most critical omission is the absence of any restriction on land ownership by non-domiciles. This is a key issue in Ladakh, given concerns over large-scale tourism, infrastructure projects, and climate vulnerability.
- **No local legislature or council with law-making powers:** The Sixth Schedule allows for the creation of Autonomous District Councils with powers over land, forests, customs, education, and more. The LAHDCs, even with one-third seats now reserved for women, remain administrative bodies without legislative power.
- **Symbolic cultural protection:** While local languages have been recognised, there is no roadmap for their official use in education, governance, or the judiciary.

Union Territory (UT) in India

- In India, a Union Territory (UT) is a type of administrative division that is governed directly by the Central Government of India, unlike the states which have their own elected governments.
- The formation and governance of Union Territories are provided for in the Indian Constitution.

Formation of Union Territories: Constitutional Power

The power to form Union Territories comes from:

Article 2 and Article 3 of the Indian Constitution

- **Article 2:** Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.
- **Article 3:** Parliament may by law—
 - form a new state or UT by separation of territory from any state or by uniting two or more states or parts of states;
 - increase or diminish the area of any state or UT;
 - alter the boundaries or names of states or UTs.
- Only Parliament has the power to create or alter a Union Territory, not the state legislatures.

Current Union Territories in India (as of 2025):

India currently has 8 Union Territories:

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Chandigarh
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu
- Delhi (National Capital Territory)
- Jammu and Kashmir (since August 5, 2019, it's a UT with legislature)
- Ladakh
- Lakshadweep
- Puducherry (also has a legislature)

Administration of Union Territories:

There are three types of administrative structures for UTs:

- UTs without a legislature – directly governed by the President through an Administrator or Lieutenant Governor (e.g., Lakshadweep, Chandigarh).
- UTs with legislature – like Delhi and Puducherry – have elected legislative assemblies, but the central government retains more control compared to states.
- Special status UTs – e.g., Jammu & Kashmir, which has a unique arrangement post-2019.

QUESTIONS

21. Which of the following statements correctly defines the domicile criteria introduced under the Ladakh Civil Services Decentralization and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025?
 - A. Only those born in Ladakh are eligible for domicile status.
 - B. Only residents of at least 25 years are considered domiciles.
 - C. Domicile includes residents of 15 years, students who studied for 7 years and appeared in Class 10/12 in Ladakh, and children/spouses of certain central government employees.
 - D. Any Indian citizen with an Aadhaar card is eligible for domicile in Ladakh.
22. Under the Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025, what is the maximum reservation percentage allowed for SCs, STs, OBCs, and other backward groups, excluding EWS?
 - A. 50%
 - B. 75%
 - C. 95%
 - D. 85%
23. Which of the following pairs is correctly matched with respect to official languages recognized under the Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025?
 - A. Bhoti – Official Language; Shina – Official Language
 - B. Purgi – Not recognized; Balti – Official Language
 - C. English – Not recognized; Ladakhi – Official Language
 - D. Hindi – Official Language; Brokskat – Supported Language

8. Jharkhand to set up its first tiger safari

- The Jharkhand government plans to establish the state's first tiger safari in the fringe area of the Barwadih Western Forest Range in Latehar district, which falls under the Palamau Tiger Reserve (PTR).
- The government believes that the project will help boost tourism in the state, and serve as a conservation and education centre for wildlife, offering experiential learning and nature-based recreation.
- However, experts have raised numerous concerns about the project, including the potential displacement of local communities.

What is a tiger safari?

- Tiger safari is not defined under The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which says “no construction of commercial tourist lodges, hotels, zoos and safari parks shall be undertaken inside a sanctuary except with the prior approval of the National Board” [for Wild Life] constituted under the Act.
- The concept was first envisaged in the Guidelines for Tourism issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in 2012, which provided for such establishments in the buffer areas of tiger reserves “which experience immense tourist influx in the core/ critical tiger habitat for viewing tigers”.
- The idea was to build an enclosure within tiger reserves where animal sightings are not left to chance, unlike in the case of traditional wild safaris that are undertaken, for example, in the Jim Corbett National Park.
- This would be done by housing animals in large naturalistic enclosures within a tiger reserve.
- In 2016, the NTCA issued guidelines for establishing tiger safaris in the buffer and fringe areas of tiger reserves for rescued, conflict-prone, or orphaned tigers with the clear restriction that no zoo-bred animals would be introduced.
- Three years later, however, the NTCA made an amendment that allowed tigers from zoos to be housed in safari parks.
- The authority to identify and approve such zoo animals was delegated to the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), which also became responsible for overseeing animal welfare, enclosure design, and compliance with zoo standards in safari projects.
- In March 2024, the Supreme Court directed that tiger safaris should be established outside the core and buffer areas of tiger reserves. It said that such initiatives should not disturb natural habitats or compromise conservation goals.

How does Jharkhand plan to establish its first tiger safari?

- Keeping in line with the apex court’s directive, the Jharkhand government plans to create the safari in the fringe area of the Barwadih Western Forest Range, beyond the protected core and buffer zones of PTR.
- The safari will be set up in around 150 hectares of forest land.
- The project will not feature any wild animals — it will house only conflict, injured, or orphaned animals rescued from tiger reserves and zoos across India.
- The Jharkhand government believes that the safari would not only increase tourism but also generate direct jobs for at least 200 locals in the tourism sector.
- People would be required for the roles of guides, support staff, and maintenance crews.
- Currently, the project is in the ideation stage. Once the state Forest Department gives the go-ahead, the Deputy Director of PTR will prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) and send it to the NTCA and CZA.
- The CZA will evaluate the proposed area and the selection of species. The entire approval and clearance process could take up to five to six months, followed by a construction period of around 18 months.

Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

- The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was enacted to provide protection to wildlife species and their habitats in India.
- It aims to ensure the conservation of wildlife and to regulate hunting, poaching, and trade of wild animals and plants.

Protection of Wildlife:

- Prohibits hunting of wild animals, except under specific conditions with permission.
- Provides legal protection to endangered species.

Schedules:

- Animals and plants are classified into different schedules with varying degrees of protection.
- **Schedule I & II:** Highest level of protection with severe penalties for offenses.
- **Schedule III to VI:** Lesser protection, covering common species and plants.

Establishment of Protected Areas:

- Enables the creation of National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves, and Community Reserves.
- These areas are designated for the conservation of wildlife and habitat protection.

Regulation of Trade:

- Controls and regulates trade in wild animals, animal articles, trophies, and plants.

Authorities:

- Appointment of Wildlife Wardens and other officers to enforce the Act.
- Formation of advisory committees for wildlife management.

Penalties:

- Provides for stringent penalties including fines and imprisonment for offenses such as poaching and illegal trade.

Amendments:

- The Act has been amended multiple times to enhance protection measures, including stricter punishments and adding more species under protection.

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.
- Established in December 2005 under Section 38-O of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the NTCA administers the Project Tiger scheme, which was launched in 1973 to protect the endangered Bengal tiger and its habitats.



Key Objectives and Functions

The NTCA is responsible for:

- Approving and implementing Tiger Conservation Plans prepared by state governments.
- Monitoring and surveillance of tiger populations and their habitats.
- Providing technical and financial support for conservation activities in tiger reserves.
- Addressing human-wildlife conflicts and promoting coexistence.
- Conducting research and capacity building for forest officials and staff.

Tools and Technologies

The NTCA employs various tools to enhance conservation efforts:

- M-STripES (Monitoring System for Tigers - Intensive Protection and Ecological Status): An Android-based software used for real-time monitoring of tiger populations, patrolling activities, and ecological status in tiger reserves.
- Infrared thermal cameras and wireless communication systems: To assist in patrolling and surveillance.
- Geographic Information System (GIS) for spatial analysis and mapping of tiger habitats.

Achievements

- As of 2023, India is home to approximately 3,682 wild tigers, accounting for nearly 75% of the global wild tiger population. Notable achievements include:
- Completion of 50 years of Project Tiger in 2023, marking a significant milestone in tiger conservation.
- Reintroduction of tigers in areas where they had become locally extinct, such as parts of Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
- India has designated 58 protected areas as tiger reserves, covering approximately 82,836.44 square kilometers, according to ENVIS Centre on Wildlife & Protected Areas.
- Accreditation of tiger reserves under the Conservation Assured Tiger Standards (CA|TS), with 23 reserves achieving this status by 2023.

QUESTIONS

24. What is the primary objective behind setting up Jharkhand's first tiger safari in the Palamau Tiger Reserve?
- A. To breed tigers in captivity for commercial purposes
 - B. To displace local communities from core forest areas
 - C. To promote tourism and act as a conservation and education center
 - D. To allow hunting in buffer zones for population control
25. According to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, what must be obtained before undertaking construction of safari parks inside a wildlife sanctuary?
- A. Approval from the National Board for Wildlife
 - B. Approval from the local panchayat
 - C. Approval from the Ministry of Tourism
 - D. No approval is required for buffer areas
26. What significant amendment did the NTCA make in 2019 regarding tiger safaris?
- A. Allowed safaris to be constructed in core areas of reserves
 - B. Permitted zoo-bred tigers to be housed in safari parks
 - C. Banned use of orphaned or conflict-prone tigers in safaris
 - D. Made it mandatory to have private ownership of safari parks

9. Remains of Mayan city nearly 3,000 years old unearthed in Guatemala

- Archaeologists have discovered the remains of an ancient Mayan city named *Los Abuelos* (“The Grandparents”) in the northern Petén region of Guatemala.
- This significant archaeological find dates back nearly 3,000 years to the Middle Preclassic period (approximately 800–500 BC), making it one of the oldest and most important ceremonial centers of the early Mayan civilization.
- The city is located about 21 kilometers from Uaxactun, another key archaeological site, and not far from the renowned site of Tikal.
- Covering an area of about 16 square kilometers (6 square miles), *Los Abuelos* features complex urban and ceremonial planning.
- Among the most striking features are large pyramids, monumental sculptures, and unique architectural elements.
- A particularly notable pyramid stands at 33 meters (108 feet) tall, decorated with murals from the Preclassic period, and accompanied by an unusual canal system that may have supported the city’s ceremonial or urban functions.
- The site derives its name from two human-like sculptures identified as an “ancestral couple”, which were discovered within the city.
- These figures, dating from 500 to 300 BC, are thought to be related to ancient rituals involving ancestor worship, a practice deeply rooted in early Mesoamerican belief systems.
- The unique iconography and sophisticated planning observed at *Los Abuelos* suggest it was a major spiritual and political hub in its time.
- The discovery was made by a team of Guatemalan and Slovak archaeologists working in relatively unexplored areas within Uaxactun National Park.
- Their work sheds new light on the development of ceremonial and urban traditions in early Maya culture, particularly in the densely forested Petén region near the Mexican border.
- In a broader archaeological context, the discovery of *Los Abuelos* adds to the growing evidence of complex interactions between ancient Mesoamerican civilizations.
- For example, in April, researchers found a 1,000-year-old altar from Mexico’s Teotihuacán culture at Tikal, indicating cultural and possibly political connections across long distances—over 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) apart.
- Tikal, located only 23 kilometers from Uaxactun, remains Guatemala’s most prominent archaeological site and a major tourist destination.
- The new findings at *Los Abuelos* enrich the understanding of early Maya society and highlight the depth and continuity of ceremonial traditions that would shape the broader Mesoamerican world for centuries.

Maya Civilization

- The Maya civilization was one of the most sophisticated and influential ancient cultures of Mesoamerica.
- It developed in what is now southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador, flourishing from around 2000 BCE to 1500 CE, though its peak period—known as the Classic Period—was from 250 to 900 CE.



Features of the Maya Civilization:

1. Architecture & Cities

- Built impressive cities with pyramids, palaces, and plazas.
- Famous sites include Tikal, Palenque, Copán, Calakmul, and Chichén Itzá.
- Structures often aligned with astronomical events.

2. Writing System

- Developed a complex hieroglyphic script, one of the most sophisticated writing systems in the pre-Columbian Americas.
- Wrote on stone monuments, ceramics, and bark-paper books (called codices).

3. Mathematics & Astronomy

- Created a vigintimal (base-20) number system and independently developed the concept of zero.
- Excelled in astronomy, accurately predicting solar eclipses and developing a detailed calendar system.

4. Calendars

- Used multiple calendars, including the 260-day ritual calendar (Tzolk'in) and the 365-day solar calendar (Haab').

- Combined in the Calendar Round and supplemented by the Long Count, which tracked longer spans of time.

5. Religion and Cosmology

- Polytheistic, with gods tied to nature (*e.g.*, maize god, sun god, rain god).
- Practiced rituals including bloodletting, human sacrifice, and offerings to appease deities.
- Believed in a multi-layered universe (heavens, earth, and underworld).

6. Society and Politics

- Society was hierarchical: kings (ajaw), nobles, priests, artisans, farmers, and slaves.
- City-states often warred with each other, and politics included alliances, betrayal, and conquest.

7. Collapse and Legacy

- The Classic Maya Collapse around 900 CE led to the abandonment of many major cities, especially in the southern lowlands.
- Possible causes: drought, warfare, environmental degradation, political unrest.
- Maya culture persisted in the Postclassic Period (900–1500s CE), and many Maya communities still exist today, preserving aspects of their language and traditions.

Middle Preclassic period

- The Middle Preclassic period refers to a phase in Mesoamerican history, typically associated with early complex societies and cultural developments before the Classic period civilizations like the Maya and Aztec emerged.

General Overview:

- **Time frame:** Roughly 1000 BCE to 400 BCE (dates can vary slightly depending on the region).
- **Region:** Mainly Mesoamerica, including areas like the Maya lowlands, the Gulf Coast, and parts of central Mexico.
- **Significance:** This period marks significant cultural advancements such as:
 - The rise of early city-states and ceremonial centers.
 - The development of more complex social and political structures.
 - Advances in agriculture, pottery, and architecture.
 - Early use of writing and calendrical systems in some cultures.

Key Features:

- **Architecture:** Construction of large ceremonial platforms, early pyramids, and public buildings.
- **Society:** Increasing social stratification with emerging elite classes.
- **Economy:** Expansion of trade networks for obsidian, jade, and other valuable goods.
- **Art:** Development of more sophisticated pottery styles and figurines.
- **Example:**
 - The Olmec civilization, often considered the “mother culture” of Mesoamerica, flourished during the Middle Preclassic period (roughly 1200–400 BCE).
 - The Maya also began to establish early settlements and ceremonial centers during this time.

QUESTIONS

27. What is the most significant feature of the newly discovered Mayan city Los Abuelos that highlights its ceremonial importance?
- A. Underground burial chambers and jade ornaments
 - B. A 33-meter tall pyramid with Preclassic murals and a canal system
 - C. Gold coins bearing Mayan script
 - D. Evidence of Roman-style amphitheaters
28. Why is the discovery of Los Abuelos considered crucial for understanding early Maya civilization?
- A. It proves that the Maya had direct contact with the Inca civilization
 - B. It demonstrates European influence on Mayan architecture
 - C. It provides insights into early ceremonial traditions and urban planning during the Middle Preclassic period
 - D. It is the first Mayan site discovered in southern Mexico

10. Lee Jae-myung wins election as South Korean president

- Lee Jae-myung, leader of South Korea's Democratic Party, has been elected as the nation's new president following a snap election.
- He secured 49.42% of the vote, defeating conservative candidate Kim Moon-soo, who received 41.15%.
- Voter turnout was exceptionally high at 77.8%, the highest since 1997.
- Lee's victory comes after the impeachment of former President Yoon Suk Yeol in December 2024, triggered by his declaration of martial law, which led to a national crisis.
- Lee, a former human rights lawyer and labor advocate, ran on a platform emphasizing economic revitalization, social equity, and a pragmatic foreign policy.
- He has pledged to uphold South Korea's alliances with the U.S. and Japan while seeking to re-engage diplomatically with North Korea.
- Despite his electoral success, Lee faces significant challenges, including ongoing legal trials related to alleged corruption and strained relations with neighboring countries.
- His administration is expected to prioritize social reforms and economic recovery while navigating complex international dynamics.
- Lee was sworn in as president on June 4, 2025, without a customary transition period, marking a swift return to democratic governance in South Korea.

South Korea

- South Korea plays a crucial role in the global landscape across several domains, including economics, technology, geopolitics, and culture.

1. Economic Powerhouse

- 11th-largest economy in the world (by nominal GDP).
- Home to major multinational corporations like Samsung, Hyundai, LG, and SK.
- Leading exporter of semiconductors, electronics, automobiles, and ships.
- Strong presence in the global supply chain, especially in high-tech and manufacturing sectors.

2. Technology and Innovation Hub

- South Korea is a global leader in technology and innovation, ranking high in R&D spending and patent filings.
- Samsung Electronics is one of the world's largest producers of smartphones and semiconductors.
- Highly advanced digital infrastructure and 5G adoption.
- Seoul is considered a smart city model globally.

3. Cultural Influence (Hallyu / Korean Wave)

- Massive global spread of K-pop, Korean dramas, and films (*e.g.*, BTS, BLACKPINK, Parasite, Squid Game).
- Korean cuisine (*e.g.*, kimchi, Korean BBQ) has gained worldwide popularity.
- Strong soft power influence through entertainment, fashion, and beauty industries.

4. Geopolitical Significance

- Strategically located between China, Japan, and North Korea, making it critical in East Asian security dynamics.
- A key ally of the United States, hosting US military bases and engaging in joint military exercises.
- Plays a pivotal role in North Korea-related diplomacy and regional stability.

5. Education and Human Capital

- Boasts one of the world's most educated populations, with high literacy and tertiary education rates.
- High-performing students in STEM fields and strong emphasis on academic achievement.

6. Green Technology and Sustainability

- Investing heavily in renewable energy, smart grids, and green tech.
- Committed to reducing carbon emissions and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

South Korea: A Historical Overview

Ancient and Medieval Periods

- **Three Kingdoms Period (1st century BCE – 7th century CE):** Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla were powerful kingdoms.
- **Unified Silla and Goryeo Dynasties (668–1392):** Silla unified the peninsula; Goryeo gave the country its modern name.
- **Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897):** A long and stable Confucian dynasty, it laid much of modern Korea's cultural and political foundation.

Colonial Era and Liberation

- **1910–1945:** Korea was annexed by Japan and underwent harsh colonial rule.
- **1945:** After Japan's defeat in World War II, Korea was liberated—but divided.

Korean War and Aftermath

- **1950–1953:** The Korean War between the North (backed by China and USSR) and the South (backed by the U.S. and UN) ended in an armistice, not peace, creating a tense DMZ (Demilitarized Zone).

Modern South Korea: Global Power

Economic Miracle

- **1960s–1990s:** Transformed from a war-torn country into a major industrial power (the “Miracle on the Han River”).
- Chaebols (large family-run conglomerates like Samsung, Hyundai, LG) fueled export-driven growth.

Democracy and Society

- Transitioned from military dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s.
- Now a vibrant democracy with a strong civil society, advanced technology, and influential pop culture.

Global Influence

- **Technology:** Leading in semiconductors, 5G, AI, and robotics.
- **Culture:** Korean Wave (Hallyu) includes K-pop (*e.g.*, BTS, Blackpink), K-dramas, and cinema (*e.g.*, “Parasite”).
- **Geopolitics:** Strong U.S. ally; tense relationship with North Korea; growing diplomatic presence in Asia and globally.

QUESTIONS

29. What event directly led to the snap presidential election in South Korea that brought Lee Jae-myung to power?
- A. Economic crisis due to global recession
 - B. Resignation of the prime minister
 - C. Impeachment of former president Yoon Suk Yeol
 - D. Constitutional amendment mandating early elections
30. Which historical event marks the beginning of Korea’s modern geopolitical division?
- A. Liberation from Japan and subsequent division in 1945
 - B. Korean War Armistice in 1953
 - C. Annexation by Japan in 1910
 - D. Imposition of martial law in 2024

ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. **C** The Law Minister does not directly advise the President. The procedure involves the Law Minister forwarding the recommendation to the Prime Minister, who advises the President. Hence, Option C is incorrect.
2. **D** If the successor to the Chief Justice of India (i.e., the next in line to become CJI) is not among the four seniormost puisne Judges, he must be included in the collegium. This is because he will work with the Judges appointed during his tenure, and hence, his involvement in the selection is essential.
3. **C** The CJI must consult the Chief Justice of the High Court and the Chief Minister of the State, and obtain prior consent of the President, before making a request. However, formal approval from the Prime Minister is not required at this stage. The Law Minister later forwards the recommendation to the Prime Minister, but not before the request is made by the CJI.
4. **D** Mexico has become the first country in the world to elect all its judges by popular vote, a significant shift from the traditional appointment-based system.
5. **B** Real GDP adjusts for inflation, making it suitable for cross-country comparisons, where inflation levels differ. Nominal GDP includes price changes and can distort growth comparisons. Real GDP reveals the actual quantity of goods and services produced.
6. **C** GVA reflects the supply side by summing the value added by all sectors. GDP captures expenditures in the economy and is a demand-side metric. The relationship is: $GDP = GVA + \text{taxes} - \text{subsidies}$.
7. **C** Article I of the NPT prohibits nuclear-weapon states from transferring control of nuclear weapons to others. NATO participants argue that since the U.S. retains custody of nuclear weapons during peacetime, no legal "transfer" occurs, thus remaining NPT-compliant. However, this justification is contested by non-proliferation experts.
8. **B** The drones were equipped with AI capabilities that allowed them to operate independently of human control when communication was lost. They followed pre-programmed routes and activated warheads upon identifying targets visually, making them effective even in jammed or GPS-denied zones.
9. **B** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 6, 2025 inaugurated the world's highest railway bridge over the Chenab River, which was completed at a cost of Rs. 1,486 crore in more than eight years. The architectural marvel Chenab Rail Bridge situated at a height of 359 metres above the river and 35 metres higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris, is a 1,315-metre-long steel arch bridge engineered to withstand seismic and wind conditions. The bridge forms a crucial link in the 111-km stretch from Katra to Banihal, and its construction was approved in 2002, but the work started only in 2017. Before the construction, 26 km of approach roads and a 400-metre-long tunnel were built to reach the site, railway officials said.
10. **A** The plan to build an arch bridge at Anji Khad was abandoned due to the region's geological fragility, with faults, folds, and seismic activity making it unsuitable for an arch structure. Hence, an asymmetrical cable-stayed bridge was selected as a safer alternative.
11. **B** The Chenab River is formed by the confluence of the Chandra and Bhaga rivers, both of which rise in the Lahaul region of Himachal Pradesh. These rivers merge at Tandi to form the Chenab.

12. **C** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 6, 2025 inaugurated the world's highest railway bridge over the Chenab River, which was completed at a cost of Rs. 1,486 crore in more than eight years. The architectural marvel Chenab Rail Bridge situated at a height of 359 metres above the river and 35 metres higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris, is a 1,315-metre-long steel arch bridge engineered to withstand seismic and wind conditions.
13. **B** CBDC (Digital Rupee) is issued by the RBI and is legal tender, meaning it can legally be used to settle payments. VDAs (like cryptocurrencies and NFTs) are not legal tender and are treated as digital assets rather than currency. They are taxed but not accepted for legal payment.
14. **C** Under the Finance Act 2022, losses from the transfer of VDAs cannot be set off against any other income, nor can they be carried forward. This treatment is stricter than normal capital gains taxation.
15. **C** e₹-R (Retail CBDC) is designed for use by individuals in P2P and P2M transactions, similar to physical cash. e₹-W (Wholesale CBDC) is intended for banks and institutions to settle interbank transfers efficiently.
16. **D** According to RBI data, the Wholesale CBDC pilot was launched on November 1, 2022, and the Retail CBDC pilot started on December 1, 2022, in select cities and banks.
17. **C** The PRV is being built to cater to the requirements of NCPOR, which is India's apex body for polar and oceanic research. The vessel will enable scientific exploration in the polar and Southern Ocean regions.
18. **A** Under the MoU signed during the Nor-Shipping 2025 event, Kongsberg will offer design expertise, while India's GRSE (Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers) will construct the vessel in Kolkata under the Make in India initiative.
19. **C** While SAGAR emphasized maritime security and growth in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), MAHASAGAR builds upon it by incorporating modern elements such as green shipping, digital maritime platforms (like ONOP and MAITRI), and sustainable ship recycling, expanding India's maritime vision.
20. **A** The PRV project is significant not only for scientific research in polar regions but also for advancing India's indigenous shipbuilding capabilities under the Make in India initiative, thereby boosting strategic autonomy in oceanic and climate research.
21. **C** The domicile criteria include multiple eligibility conditions such as: 15 years of residence in Ladakh, 7 years of education and having appeared in Class 10 or 12 in Ladakh, Children of Central Govt. employees who have served at least 10 years in Ladakh, Children/spouses of Ladakh domiciles. Options A, B, and D are either too narrow or incorrect.
22. **D** The amended regulation increases the upper cap of reservations for SC, ST, OBC, and other backward groups to 85%, excluding the 10% reservation for EWS. Earlier, reservations for admissions to professional courses were capped at 50%.
23. **D** Hindi – Official Language; Brokskat – Supported Language. The regulation recognizes five official languages: English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi. It also provides institutional support for the promotion (not official status) of Shina, Brokskat, Balti, and Ladakhi. Thus, Hindi is officially recognized, and Brokskat is a supported but not official language.

- 24. C** The Jharkhand government aims to boost tourism and create a conservation-cum-education centre for experiential learning and nature-based recreation. Hunting and commercial breeding are prohibited, and displacement is a concern raised by critics, not an objective.
- 25. A** Under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, no commercial construction, including safari parks, can be undertaken inside a sanctuary without prior approval from the National Board for Wildlife.
- 26. B** Originally, NTCA guidelines (2016) restricted tiger safaris to rescued, orphaned, or conflict-prone tigers. However, in 2019, the NTCA amended the guidelines to allow zoo-bred tigers in safaris, with oversight by the Central Zoo Authority (CZA). The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, is responsible for administering Project Tiger, issuing tiger safari guidelines, and overseeing tiger conservation across India.
- 27. B** The standout feature at Los Abuelos is a 33-meter tall pyramid decorated with murals from the Preclassic period, along with an unusual canal system believed to have had ceremonial or urban utility. This highlights its early ceremonial and spiritual significance.
- 28. C** Dating back to 800–500 BCE (Middle Preclassic period), Los Abuelos offers critical evidence of ceremonial and urban development, including pyramids, sculptures, and ancestor worship, shedding light on early Maya societal structure and belief systems. The "ancestral couple" sculptures, dating from 500–300 BCE, are believed to reflect ancestor worship, a key ritualistic element in early Mesoamerican religious culture, indicating deep-rooted spiritual traditions in Maya society.
- 29. C** The snap election was triggered by the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol in December 2024, following his controversial declaration of martial law, which created a national crisis.
- 30. A** After Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945, Korea was liberated but divided into North and South, laying the foundation for the later Korean War and ongoing tensions across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).