

MANTHAN

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1. US pauses water-sharing negotiations with Canada over Columbia River

- The United States has paused negotiations with Canada on the Columbia River Treaty, a key water-sharing agreement, amid rising tensions fueled by Donald Trump's aggressive stance toward Canada.
- The treaty, in effect since 1964, governs flood control, power generation, and water supply for the Columbia River, which originates in British Columbia and flows into the Pacific Ocean.
- The river supplies nearly 40% of U.S. hydroelectric power and almost half of British Columbia's hydropower.
- Under the agreement, Canada regulates the river's flow to prevent flooding and ensure consistent power generation in the U.S., receiving approximately \$200 million annually in return.
- The U.S. also shares half of the additional hydroelectric power generated. In July, the Biden administration secured an in-principle deal for a revised treaty before its September deadline. However, negotiations were not fully concluded before Trump took office, leaving only a three-year interim agreement in place.
- Trump has taken a confrontational approach toward Canada, dismissing the border as "imaginary" and threatening economic harm.
- He previously suggested diverting British Columbia's water to California, a remark interpreted as referencing the Columbia River.
- His administration's review of the treaty has now stalled negotiations.
- Indigenous groups, historically excluded from the treaty, had hoped renegotiations would recognize their rights and support salmon habitat restoration.
- The pause in talks raises concerns about the future of U.S.-Canada water-sharing agreements and environmental commitments, as Trump's rhetoric continues to strain bilateral relations.

Columbia River Treaty (1964)

- The Columbia River Treaty (1964) is a landmark agreement between the United States and Canada for the cooperative development and management of the Columbia River Basin, primarily for hydropower production and flood control.

Key Aspects of the Treaty:

- **Signed:** January 17, 1961
- **Ratified:** September 16, 1964
- **Parties Involved:** United States & Canada

Primary Goals:

- Coordinated flood control in the Columbia River Basin.
- Optimized hydroelectric power generation.
- Benefits sharing between both countries.

Main Provisions:

- **Canada built three dams:** Duncan (1967), Hugh Keenleyside (1968), and Mica (1973). These dams increased water storage capacity and helped prevent flooding.

- **Libby Dam (1975) in the U.S.:** Built as part of the treaty, creating Lake Koocanusa, which extends into Canada.
- Canada receives payments (called the “Canadian Entitlement”) for half of the additional hydroelectric power generated downstream in the U.S.
- The flood control agreement under the treaty required Canada to provide storage space for floodwaters, significantly reducing flood risks in the U.S.

Modern Reassessment & Renegotiation

- The treaty has no fixed end date, but either country can terminate it with a 10-year notice starting in 2024.

Discussions on treaty modernization began in 2018, focusing on

- Ecosystem restoration (*e.g.*, salmon migration).
- Indigenous and tribal rights.
- Adaptation to climate change.
- Rebalancing power benefits.

Significance of the Treaty

- Helped prevent catastrophic floods (*e.g.*, 1948 Vanport flood in Oregon).
- Provided stable and renewable power for millions of people.
- Currently undergoing renegotiations to reflect environmental, Indigenous, and climate concerns.

Endangered Salmon populations in the Columbia River

- The endangered salmon populations in the Columbia River face multiple challenges due to habitat destruction, climate change, and human activities such as dam construction and overfishing. Key species at risk include:
 - **Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*)** – Listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
 - **Sockeye Salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*)** – The Snake River population is endangered.
 - **Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)** – Several populations in the Columbia Basin are listed as threatened.

Threats to Salmon in the Columbia River

- **Dams & Hydropower:** Block migration routes, alter water temperature, and reduce spawning habitat.
- **Climate Change:** Rising water temperatures and altered river flows impact salmon survival.
- **Habitat Loss:** Urbanization, agriculture, and logging degrade spawning and rearing environments.
- **Overfishing:** Both commercial and recreational fishing pressure impact already vulnerable populations.

Conservation Efforts

- **Dam Removal & Fish Passage Improvements:** Efforts like breaching lower Snake River dams are being debated.
 - **Hatchery Programs:** Supplement wild populations but raise concerns about genetic diversity.
 - **Habitat Restoration:** Efforts to improve spawning grounds and re-establish natural river flows.
 - **Fishing Regulations:** Seasonal restrictions and quotas to prevent overharvesting.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

1. The longest border between any two countries in the world is between:
 - A. Canada and the United States of America
 - B. Chile and Argentina
 - C. China and India
 - D. Kazakhstan and Russian Federation
2. What was the primary purpose of the Columbia River Treaty (1964) between the U.S. and Canada?
 - A. To promote trade between Canada and the U.S.
 - B. To develop nuclear power plants along the Columbia River
 - C. To ensure cooperative hydropower production and flood control
 - D. To establish fishing rights for Indigenous communities

2. Chinese Architect Liu Jiakun Wins Pritzker Prize

- Liu Jiakun, a renowned architect from Chengdu, China, has been named the 2025 Laureate of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, recognized as the highest honor in the field. Liu believes that architecture should reveal and amplify the essence of local communities, shaping human behavior while fostering compassion and a sense of belonging.
- His work seamlessly integrates seemingly opposing concepts such as utopia versus daily life, history versus modernity, and collectivism versus individuality, creating spaces that elevate the human spirit.
- Rather than adhering to a fixed style, Liu employs a flexible, context-driven approach to design, ensuring that each project responds uniquely to its environment and societal needs.
- His strategy emphasizes wisdom and common sense over rigid aesthetic principles, reimagining ordinary spaces to enrich everyday life.
- The Pritzker Prize jury praised his ability to craft deeply coherent and high-quality works that redefine architectural norms.
- Liu addresses urban density challenges by designing innovative public spaces that encourage community engagement.
- His West Village project in Chengdu (2015) is a prime example, spanning an entire city block with an open yet enclosed design that integrates cultural, recreational, and business activities while harmonizing with the surrounding landscape.
- Similarly, his Sichuan Fine Arts Institute Department of Sculpture (Chongqing, 2004) maximizes space through an outward-extending structure, demonstrating his inventive use of architectural forms.
- Through his work, Liu Jiakun transforms architecture into a tool for social connection, creativity, and cultural expression.

- His designs prioritize inclusivity and adaptability, fostering environments that enhance the quality of urban life while preserving historical and social contexts.

Pritzker Architecture Prize

- The Pritzker Architecture Prize is one of the most prestigious awards in the field of architecture. It is often referred to as the “Nobel Prize of Architecture.”

About the Pritzker Prize

- **Established:** 1979
- **Founder:** Jay A. Pritzker and Cindy Pritzker, of the Pritzker family, who own the Hyatt Hotels Corporation.
- **Administered by:** The Hyatt Foundation
- **Purpose:** To honor a living architect or architects whose work has made a significant contribution to humanity and the built environment through architecture.
- **Prize Money:** \$100,000 USD along with a bronze medallion.
- **Annual Ceremony:** Held at different architecturally significant locations worldwide.

Notable Pritzker Prize Laureates

- **Philip Johnson (1979)** – First-ever winner
- **Frank Gehry (1989)** – Known for the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
- **Zaha Hadid (2004)** – First woman to win the prize
- **Balkrishna Doshi (2018)** – First Indian architect to win
- **Diébédo Francis Kéré (2022)** – First African-born winner

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

3. India and China are member countries in which of the following organizations/groups?
- | | |
|----------|------------|
| 1. BRICS | 4. BIMSTEC |
| 2. G20 | 5. SCO |
| 3. ASEAN | 6. QUAD |

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1, 2 and 5 only
B. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
C. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
D. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
4. Who was the first Indian architect to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize?
- A. Charles Correa
B. Raj Rewal
C. Balkrishna Doshi
D. Laurie Baker

3. Jayshree Vencatesan becomes first Indian to win Ramsar award for Wetland Wise Use

- Jayshree Vencatesan, co-founder of Chennai-based Care Earth Trust, has become the first Indian to receive the Ramsar Award for 'Wetland Wise Use.'
- This globally recognized accolade honors her contributions to the sustainable management of wetlands.
- She is one of 12 women changemakers in the world of wetlands announced by the Ramsar Secretariat in Geneva on the eve of International Women's Day, under the 'wise use of wetlands' category.
- Jayshree has dedicated decades to preserving India's wetlands, particularly Chennai's Pallikaranai Marsh. Starting with just \$350, she worked tirelessly to protect marshlands often dismissed as "wastelands."
- Her research documented the biodiversity and ecological importance of Pallikaranai, highlighting its role in flood mitigation and as a habitat for 337 species of flora and fauna.
- Leading an all-women research team, she has not only safeguarded wetlands but also mentored future female conservationists.
- She dedicated the award to her late father, Mayur Narasimhan, whose nature-loving philosophy shaped her conservation journey.
- Calling for greater investment in equipping women with technical skills in wetland management, she emphasized that real change requires persistence over decades.
- Jayshree also highlighted the bureaucratic and systemic challenges hindering wetland conservation.
- Issues such as outdated land titles and user rights over obsolete practices have derailed key restoration efforts. Additionally, personal egos and misinterpretations have often jeopardized critical conservation work.
- Tamil Nadu now leads among Indian states with a total of 20 Ramsar sites, reatly benefits from Jayshree's work, which serves as an inspiration for continued wetland conservation despite urban pressures.
- Other notable women changemakers in the Ramsar list include Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization; Jennifer George, CEO of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat; and Tatiana Minayeva, a consultant for Care for Ecosystems.

Ramsar Wetland

- A Ramsar Wetland is a wetland site designated under the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.
- The treaty aims to protect wetlands of international importance, particularly as habitats for waterfowl and other biodiversity.

Key Features of Ramsar Wetlands:

- **Biodiversity Hotspots** – These wetlands provide critical habitat for migratory birds, fish, amphibians, and plant species.
- **Ecosystem Services** – They help in flood control, groundwater recharge, water purification, and carbon sequestration.

- **International Recognition** – Once designated, these wetlands receive protection under global conservation frameworks.
- **Wise Use Principle** – Encourages sustainable utilization while maintaining ecological character.

India and Ramsar Wetlands

- As of February 2025, India has 89 Ramsar sites, following the addition of four new wetlands.
- The first Ramsar sites in India (designated in 1981) were Chilika Lake (Odisha) and Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan).
- The largest Ramsar site in India is Sundarbans Wetland (West Bengal).
- **New additions:** Sakkarakottai Bird Sanctuary and Therthangal Bird Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu, Khecheopalri Wetland in Sikkim, and Udhwa Lake in Jharkhand.
- This marks a significant milestone for Sikkim and Jharkhand, as they have secured their first ever Ramsar sites.

Examples of Ramsar Wetlands in India

- **Loktak Lake (Manipur)** – The only floating national park (Keibul Lamjao) and home to the endangered Sangai deer.
- **Vembanad-Kol Wetland (Kerala)** – The largest lake in Kerala, crucial for backwater tourism and fishing.
- **Ropar Wetland (Punjab)** – A significant water reservoir supporting a variety of migratory birds.

World Wetland day

- World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on February 2nd to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands and promote their conservation.
- The day marks the anniversary of the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, for the protection and sustainable use of wetlands.

Significance of World Wetlands Day

- Wetlands play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, water purification, and flood control.
- They provide habitats for diverse flora and fauna, including migratory birds, fish, and amphibians.
- Wetlands help in carbon sequestration, reducing the impacts of climate change.
- The theme for World Wetlands Day 2025 is “Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future”.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

5. “If rainforests and tropical forests are the lungs of the Earth, then surely wetlands function as its kidneys.” Which one of the following functions of wetlands best reflects the above statement?
 - A. The water cycle in wetlands involves surface runoff, subsoil percolation and evaporation.
 - B. Algae form the nutrient base upon which fish, crustaceans, molluscs, birds, reptiles and mammals thrive.
 - C. Wetlands play a vital role in maintaining sedimentation balance and Soil stabilization.
 - D. Aquatic plants absorb heavy metals and excess nutrients.

6. Consider the following Pair:

Wetland/Lake	: Location
1. Hokera Wetland	: Punjab
2. Renuka Wetland	: Himachal Pradesh
3. Rudrasagar Lake	: Tripura
4. Sasthamkotta Lake	: Tamil Nadu

How many pairs given above are correctly matched?

- A. Only one pair
- B. Only two pairs
- C. Only three pairs
- D. All four pairs

4. World Consumer Rights Day 2025

- World Consumer Rights Day, observed annually on March 15, serves as an essential reminder of the need to uphold consumer rights and protection. The day is an opportunity to promote the basic rights of all consumers and encourage those rights to be respected and protected.
- World Consumer Rights Day was first observed in 1983.
- This date was chosen to commemorate President John F. Kennedy's address to the US Congress on March 15, 1962, where he became the first world leader to formally recognize consumer rights.
- The theme for World Consumer Rights Day 2025 is, 'A Just Transition to Sustainable Lifestyles.'
- This theme reflects the urgent need to make sustainable and healthy lifestyle choices available, accessible, and affordable for all consumers – while ensuring that these transitions uphold people's basic rights and needs.
- This year's campaign highlights the pathways needed to achieve sustainable lifestyles and call for stronger consumer protection and empowerment worldwide.
- The Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India, has introduced several new initiatives and policies to empower consumers, strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms, and ensure a transparent and fair marketplace.
- In 2024, major developments included improvements in e-commerce regulations, digital consumer protection, product safety standards, and sustainable consumption initiatives.

Consumer Protection Act, 2019

- With a view to modernize the framework governing the consumer protection in the new era of globalization, technologies, e-commerce markets etc., the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was repealed and Consumer Protection Act, 2019 was enacted.
- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 provides for a three tier quasi-judicial machinery at District, State and Central levels commonly known as "Consumer Commissions" for protection of the rights of consumers and to provide simple and speedy redressal of consumer disputes including those related with unfair trade practices.

- The Consumer Commissions are empowered to give relief of a specific nature and award, wherever appropriate, compensation to consumers.
- Further, in terms of Section 38 (7) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, every complaint shall be disposed of as expeditiously as possible and endeavour shall be made to decide the complaint within a period of three months from the date of receipt of notice by opposite party where the complaint does not require analysis or testing of commodities and within five months if it requires analysis or testing of commodities.

Consumer Welfare Fund

- The overall objective of the Consumer Welfare Fund is to provide financial assistance to promote and protect the welfare of consumers and strengthen the consumer movement in the country.
- Under the Rules, funds are given to the states/UTs as seed money as one time grant on 75:25 basis (90:10 in the case of Special Category states/UTs) to create a Consumer Welfare (Corpus) Fund.
- The states/UTs are required to carry out activities to provide coverage to projects for consumer welfare of local relevance out of the interests generated in the Corpus Fund every year
- During the FY 2024-25, Rs. 32.68 crore have been released to various states for the establishment/enhancement of their respective State Consumer Welfare (Corpus) Fund as Central Govt. share. As such, out of 28 States and 8 UTs, 24 States and 1 UT have established the Consumer Welfare (Corpus) Funds.

Expansion of E-Daakhil for Online Consumer Complaints

- Going through restrictions on consumers due to COVID-19, the E-Daakhil portal was introduced as inexpensive, speedy and hassle-free mechanism for filing consumer complaints.
- E-Daakhil is an innovative online platform designed to streamline the consumer grievance redressal process, providing an efficient and convenient way for consumers to approach the relevant consumer forum, dispensing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievances.
- Since its inception, E-Daakhil has been a game-changer in promoting consumer rights and ensuring timely justice.
- The portal offers an intuitive and easy-to-navigate interface, allowing consumers to file complaints with minimal effort. From filing complaints to tracking their status, E-Daakhil ensures a paperless and transparent process with respect to filing of cases.
- The E-Daakhil portal was first launched on 7th September 2020 by the National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission.

Enhancements to the National Consumer Helpline (NCH)

- The NCH has emerged as a central point of access for consumers seeking to address their grievances. It has played an essential role in enabling consumers to register complaints and seek resolutions in an efficient and effective manner.
- To further enhance the consumer grievance redressal process, the National Consumer Helpline (NCH) has rolled out the NCH 2.0 initiative, which incorporates advanced technologies to streamline complaint handling.
- This includes the introduction of AI-powered Speech Recognition, a Translation System, and a Multilingual Chatbot.
- NCH has also partnered with over 1000 companies under its Convergence Programme to expedite grievance resolution.
- These companies span major sectors, including e-commerce, travel and tourism, private education, FMCG, consumer durables, electronic products, retail outlets, automobiles, DTH & cable services, and banking.

- Complaints related to these convergence companies are directly transferred to them for online resolution.

Jaago Grahak Jaago Portal and Mobile App

- The Department of Consumer Affairs provides essential e-commerce information about all URLs during a consumer's online activities, alerting them if any URL may be unsafe and requires caution, through the Jaago Grahak Jaago online portal and the recently launched mobile application.
- These portals are dedicated to empowering consumers by providing them with the information, resources and support they need to make informed decisions and assert their rights in the marketplace.

New E-Commerce Guidelines

- To safeguard consumers from unfair trade practices in e-commerce, the Department of Consumer Affairs has also notified the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020 under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- These rules, inter-alia, outline the responsibilities of e-commerce entities and specify the liabilities of marketplace and inventory e-commerce entities, including provisions for customer grievance redressal.

E-Commerce – Principles and Guidelines for Self-Governance Draft Standard by BIS

- The draft Indian standard on “E-Commerce – Principles and Guidelines for Self-Governance” by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) aims to establish a transparent, fair, and consumer-friendly framework for online marketplaces.
- It outlines principles across three key phases—pre-transaction, contract formation, and post-transaction—to ensure ethical e-commerce operations.
- The document mandates clear product disclosures, including pricing breakdowns, seller details, country of origin, return policies, and data privacy measures. It enforces explicit consumer consent for transactions, prohibits misleading advertisements, and strengthens grievance redressal mechanisms under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
- Additionally, it introduces strict measures against counterfeit products, unfair trade practices, and preferential treatment of sellers, ensuring a level playing field for all stakeholders.
- As India observes World Consumer Rights Day 2025, the focus remains on ensuring a safer, more transparent, and consumer-friendly economy.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

- Which of the following statements regarding the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 is correct?
 - It provides a two-tier quasi-judicial system for consumer disputes.
 - It replaces the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
 - Consumer complaints must be resolved within one month, irrespective of the nature of the dispute.
 - The Act applies only to physical markets and does not cover e-commerce transactions.
- What is the significance of the E-Daakhil portal launched under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019?
 - It allows consumers to track the movement of their goods in transit.
 - It is an online platform for filing and tracking consumer complaints.
 - It helps businesses register their products for quality certification.
 - It provides financial compensation to all online consumers.

5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives the highest Civilian Award of Mauritius at the National Day Celebrations

- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi attended the 57th National Day celebrations of the Republic of Mauritius as the Chief Guest.
- During the celebrations, President of the Republic of Mauritius Mr. Dharambeer Gokhool conferred the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean (G.C.S.K) award, the highest civilian award of Mauritius, on Prime Minister Modi.
- This is the first time that an Indian leader is receiving this honour.
- Prime Minister Modi dedicated this award to the special friendship between India and Mauritius and to the 1.4 billion people of India and their 1.3 million brothers and sisters in Mauritius.
- During the National Day celebrations, an Indian Navy marching contingent participated in the parade. An Indian Naval Ship also made a Port Call to coincide with the National Day celebrations.
- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam jointly inaugurate the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Public Service and Innovation in Mauritius
- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius, Navinchandra Ramgoolam, jointly inaugurated the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Public Service and Innovation in Reduit, Mauritius. This landmark project, implemented under the India-Mauritius development partnership, underscores India's commitment to capacity building in Mauritius.
- Funded through a grant of US\$ 4.74 million under a 2017 MoU, the state-of-the-art institute will cater to the training needs of Mauritian civil servants across ministries, public offices, parastatal bodies, and government enterprises. Beyond training, the institute would serve as a centre of excellence in public administration, fostering research, governance studies, and institutional linkages with India.
- On the occasion, PM also interacted with ITEC and GoI scholarship alumni, who have previously undergone training and education in India. These capacity building exchanges have added depth to the strong people-to-people ties between the two nations.
- Aligned with India's commitment to the Global South, the institute reflects India's role as a trusted partner in the Indian Ocean Region and its unwavering commitment to strengthening the comprehensive India-Mauritius partnership.

Prime Minister visits Ganga Talao

- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited the sacred Ganga Talao in Mauritius. He offered prayers and immersed the holy water from the Triveni Sangam at the sacred site.
- Prime Minister's gesture of bringing the holy water from the revered Mahakumbh Mela to Ganga Talao signifies not only the spiritual unity between the two nations, but also their commitment to preserve and nurture the rich traditions that form the foundation of their shared cultural ties.

Prime Minister Modi and Outcome of Mauritius Visit

- The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP and the Prime Minister of India His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi had comprehensive and productive discussions on the entire gamut of bilateral relations between Mauritius and India during the latter's State Visit to Mauritius from 11 to 12 March 2025.

- During the bilateral meeting held on 11 March 2025, the two leaders reaffirmed that Mauritius and India enjoy a special and unique relationship that is unparalleled, given the shared bonds of history, language, culture, heritage, kinship, and values.
- They further acknowledged that Mauritius-India ties, anchored in people-to-people and cultural exchanges, have grown from strength to strength in the last several decades into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that cuts across various domains and benefits the two countries, their people and the wider Indian Ocean Region.
- The Prime Minister of Mauritius underscored India's role as a time-tested and trusted partner of Mauritius in its socio-economic development since the time of its independence. Noting that India has steadfastly supported Mauritius at all times, Prime Minister of Mauritius reaffirmed his firm commitment to further build upon the bilateral partnership that exists between the two countries to cater to future developments.
- The Prime Minister of India, recollecting his earlier visit to Mauritius in March 2015, during which India's Vision SAGAR, i.e., Security and Growth For All in the Region, was unveiled, emphasized that Mauritius remains a crucial partner for realising Vision SAGAR and lauded the extensive support extended by the Government of Mauritius in advancing bilateral relations.
- He further noted that Mauritius stands at the junction of India's Vision SAGAR, its Neighbourhood First approach and its commitment to the Global South, and underlined the important role played by Mauritius in advancing these policies for the common benefit of both countries.

India and Mauritius relations

- India and Mauritius share a deep-rooted historical, cultural, and economic relationship, marked by strong diplomatic ties and strategic cooperation. Their relationship is based on common values, shared democratic traditions, and a significant Indian diaspora in Mauritius.

1. Historical and Cultural Ties

- Mauritius has a large Indian-origin population (around 70%), primarily descendants of indentured laborers who migrated during British rule in the 19th century.
- Hindi, Bhojpuri, and other Indian languages are widely spoken, and Indian festivals like Diwali are celebrated at a national level.
- The Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius, a UNESCO World Heritage site, commemorates Indian migration.

2. Political and Diplomatic Relations

- India and Mauritius maintain high-level engagements; Indian leaders frequently visit Mauritius, and vice versa.
- Mauritius is a key partner in India's "Neighborhood First" and "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policies.
- India has consistently supported Mauritius in international forums.

3. Economic and Trade Relations

- India is a major trading partner and investor in Mauritius.
- Mauritius has traditionally been a key source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India due to its tax treaty benefits (though a revised India-Mauritius tax treaty was signed in 2016).
- India and Mauritius signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) in 2021, Mauritius' first trade pact with any country.

4. Strategic and Security Cooperation

- India provides defense assistance, including training Mauritian security forces and supplying patrol vessels.

- Indian Naval ships frequently visit Mauritius, and India has helped modernize Mauritius' coast guard and maritime security infrastructure.
- Both countries collaborate in counterterrorism and anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean.

5. Infrastructure and Development Assistance

- India has financed major projects in Mauritius, including metro rail, hospitals, and government buildings.
- The Mauritius Metro Express Project, supported by India through a \$275 million line of credit, is a key infrastructure initiative.
- India provides grants and concessional loans for various Mauritian development projects.

6. Space and Technology Cooperation

- India has launched satellites for Mauritius, supporting its maritime security and climate studies.
- Mauritius uses Indian space technology for disaster management and environmental monitoring.

7. Education and Cultural Exchange

- India provides scholarships and training programs for Mauritian students and professionals.
- Mauritius hosts institutions like the World Hindi Secretariat and frequently organizes cultural events promoting Indian heritage.

8. Recent Developments

- In 2022, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurated the India-assisted social housing project in Mauritius.
- In 2024, Mauritius was a key participant in India's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, highlighting diaspora engagement.

Vision SAGAR

- Vision SAGAR is India's maritime security and cooperation initiative, launched in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The term SAGAR stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region.

Vision SAGAR:

- **Maritime Security:** Strengthening India's naval presence and securing maritime trade routes, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- **Economic Cooperation:** Enhancing blue economy partnerships with littoral and island nations.
- **Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance:** Providing relief and assistance to neighboring countries during natural disasters, such as Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (2019) and COVID-19 pandemic assistance.
- **Combating Maritime Threats:** Addressing piracy, illegal fishing, and trafficking in the IOR.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Promoting sustainable maritime policies and protecting marine resources.

Geopolitical Importance

- Strengthens India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean.
- Counters China's growing influence under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- Enhances relations with key partners like ASEAN, Africa, and island nations (Seychelles, Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, etc.).

Solve the multiple choice questions:

9. What is the primary significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius in the context of India's foreign policy?
 - A. Enhancing trade relations through new economic agreements.
 - B. Establishing military bases for India in the Indian Ocean region.
 - C. Strengthening diplomatic and cultural ties under the 'Neighborhood First' and 'SAGAR' policies.
 - D. Introducing new visa policies for Mauritian citizens.
10. What does the Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius primarily commemorate?
 - A. The establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Mauritius.
 - B. The migration of Indian indentured laborers during British colonial rule.
 - C. The trade agreements signed between India and Mauritius.
 - D. The cultural exchanges between India and Mauritius through language and festivals.

6. National Housing Bank releases report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India 2024

- National Housing Bank (NHB), a statutory body under the Government of India has released the Report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India, 2024 pursuant to provisions of Section 42 of National Housing Bank Act, 1987.
- The report broadly covers the housing scenario and house price movements, flagship programmes of GoI on housing sector, role of Primary Lending Institutions (PLIs) in providing housing credit, performance of Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) and outlook for the sector.

Key highlights are:

- As of September 30, 2024, individual housing loans outstanding stood at Rs. 33.53 lakh crore, reflecting a 14% year-on-year growth.
- The distribution of loans shows that the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Low-Income Group (LIG) accounted for 39%, the Middle-Income Group (MIG) for 44%, and the High-Income Group (HIG) for 17%. During the half-year ending September 2024, Rs. 4.10 lakh crore was disbursed in housing loans, while the total for the fiscal year ending March 2024 stood at Rs. 9.07 lakh crore.
- The Housing Price Index (NHB-RESIDEX) recorded a 6.8% year-on-year increase for the quarter ending September 2024, up from 4.9% the previous year.
- Government initiatives such as PMAY-G, PMAY-U, the Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF), and the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) scheme have played a significant role in shaping the sector.

- The report highlights challenges such as regional disparities in credit flow and climate-related risks while identifying technological advancements, digitization of land records, and innovative construction techniques as key growth drivers.
- The Indian housing sector has undergone substantial transformations, driven by government policies, economic changes, and evolving market trends, presenting both opportunities and challenges for the future.

Government Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):** Launched in 2015, PMAY aims to provide affordable housing to both urban and rural populations. The urban component targets the construction of 20 million affordable homes by 2022, focusing on eliminating slums and providing housing for the urban poor.
- The rural counterpart, **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana (PMAY-G)**, seeks to provide “Housing for All” by 2028, with financial assistance allocated for constructing pucca houses.
- **Svmitva Yojana:** Initiated in 2020, this scheme employs drone technology to survey and map rural inhabited lands, providing villagers with property cards. This initiative aims to reduce property disputes and boost financial liquidity by formalizing property ownership.

Market Trends

- **Rising Property Prices:** The Indian housing market has experienced a steady increase in property prices, primarily driven by demand from high-income earners and ultra-high-net-worth individuals. National home prices, which grew 4.3% last year, are expected to increase by 7.75% this year and another 6.0%-6.25% over the next two years.
- **Rental Market Dynamics:** Urban areas have seen a significant surge in rental costs, with projections indicating a 7.0%-10.0% increase, outpacing the expected consumer inflation rate of around 4.3%-4.4% over the next two fiscal years. This trend underscores the growing demand for rental housing, especially among working-class families facing affordability challenges in purchasing homes.
- **Resilience Amid Economic Slowdown:** Despite forecasts of economic deceleration, the housing market has shown resilience. Factors such as robust demand for luxury properties and sustained interest from affluent buyers have contributed to this stability.

Challenges and Considerations

Affordability Concerns:

- The escalation in property prices and rents has made homeownership increasingly unattainable for many, particularly first-time buyers from middle- and lower-income groups.
- The focus on luxury housing has led to a shortage of affordable homes, sidelining many potential homeowners.

Urban Infrastructure Strain:

- Rapid urbanization, exemplified by cities like Bengaluru, has resulted in challenges such as traffic congestion, rising housing prices, and water crises. These issues highlight the need for sustainable urban planning and infrastructure development to accommodate growing populations.

Economic Disparities

- While the housing market thrives, the benefits are primarily accruing to a select few, creating challenges for millions of job-seekers. The affordable housing supply is dwindling while luxury housing flourishes, making it difficult for first-time buyers to afford homes, leading them to continue renting.

- India's housing sector is at a pivotal juncture, characterized by ambitious government initiatives and dynamic market forces.
- While strides have been made in promoting affordable housing and formalizing property ownership, challenges such as affordability, urban infrastructure strain, and economic disparities persist.
- Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including policy interventions, sustainable urban planning, and inclusive economic growth to ensure that the benefits of housing development are equitably distributed across all segments of society.

National Housing Bank (NHB)

- The National Housing Bank (NHB) is the apex financial institution for housing in India, established on July 9, 1988, under the National Housing Bank Act of 1987.
- It operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, with its headquarters in New Delhi.

Primary Objectives

- **Promotion and Development:** NHB aims to promote a sound, healthy, viable, and cost-effective housing finance system to cater to all segments of the population and to integrate the housing finance system with the overall financial system.
- **Regulation and Supervision:** The bank regulates and supervises Housing Finance Companies (HFCs), ensuring their activities align with national housing policies.
- **Resource Augmentation:** It works to augment resources for the housing sector and channel them for housing purposes, making housing credit more affordable.

Recent Developments

- In 2019, the Finance Act amended the National Housing Bank Act of 1987, transferring the regulatory powers over Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) from NHB to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- This shift aimed to streamline the regulation of HFCs under a single regulatory authority.

Finance Act, 2019

- The Finance Act, 2019 was enacted by the Indian government to give effect to financial proposals for the fiscal year 2019-20. Here are some key highlights of the Finance Act, 2019:

1. Taxation Changes

Surcharge on High-Income Earners:

- Increased surcharge on individuals with taxable income between Rs. 2 crore to Rs. 5 crore (25%).
- Further increase for those earning above Rs. 5 crore (37%).

Corporate Tax Reduction:

- Companies with an annual turnover of up to Rs. 400 crore were eligible for a lower corporate tax rate of 25% (earlier, the threshold was Rs. 250 crore).

Interchangeability of PAN & Aadhaar:

- Allowed individuals to use Aadhaar in place of PAN for tax filing.

TDS on Cash Withdrawals:

- 2% TDS imposed on cash withdrawals exceeding Rs. 1 crore in a year from a bank account.

2. GST and Indirect Tax Provisions

Easier Compliance for Startups & Small Businesses:

- Extended tax benefits for startups under Section 80-IAC.

Customs Duties:

- Changes in customs duties for certain goods to encourage local manufacturing.

3. Banking and Financial Sector Reforms

Merger of NBFCs with Banks:

- Allowed NBFCs (Non-Banking Financial Companies) to directly transfer loans to banks.
- Regulation of Housing Finance Companies (HFCs):
- Shifted regulatory authority from National Housing Bank (NHB) to RBI.

4. Measures for Economic Growth

Disinvestment Target:

- Set at Rs. 1.05 lakh crore for FY 2019-20.

Boost to Infrastructure:

- Allocation for roads, railways, and rural infrastructure increased.
- Public Shareholding Increase:
- Proposal to increase minimum public shareholding in listed companies from 25% to 35%.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

11. According to the National Housing Bank's report, which of the following groups accounted for the largest share of housing loans outstanding as of September 30, 2024?
 - A. Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and Low-Income Group (LIG)
 - B. Middle-Income Group (MIG)
 - C. Rural Households
 - D. Urban Poor
12. Which of the following is a key challenge identified in the National Housing Bank's 2024 report concerning the housing sector in India?
 - A. Lack of demand for housing loans.
 - B. Technological advancements slowing down the market.
 - C. Regional disparities in credit flow and climate-related risks.
 - D. Excessive availability of housing units.

7. Byrnihat on Assam-Meghalaya border has 'world's worst air'

- According to the World Air Quality Report for 2024 published by IQAir, a Swiss company that tracks global air quality, Byrnihat on the Meghalaya-Assam border is the "most polluted city in the world".

- The annual average PM_{2.5} concentration in Byrnihat was 128.2 micrograms per cubic m ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), many times the World Health Organization's annual air quality guideline of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- In January this year, the Helsinki-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air ranked Byrnihat the most polluted city in India, based on monthly average PM_{2.5} levels.

Town and its industries

- Byrnihat is located around 20 km from Guwahati and 65 km from Shillong, in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district, where the hills of Meghalaya descend into Guwahati.
- Over the years, Byrnihat has developed into a regional industrial hub. The residential town is in Meghalaya, and the industrial units surrounding it are in both Meghalaya and Assam.
- In Meghalaya, the industries are in the Byrnihat Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP); in Assam, they are in Tamulikuchi in the Kamrup Metropolitan district, along the national highway that runs through the town.
- The industries include those involved in the production of coke (fuel), cement, ferro alloys, and steel, and in distillation and brickmaking. They mushroomed in the area because of the proximity to coal reserves in Meghalaya and the large urban centre of Guwahati, as well as the supply of water from the Umtru river.
- The Meghalaya state Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Air Pollution was released in December 2024. It records 39 industrial units in Assam and 41 in Meghalaya in Byrnihat.
- Twenty units in Assam and five in Meghalaya are "red category" industries — identified by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests as "heavily polluting" (including cement, distillery and fermentation, iron and steel, coke production)
- Fifteen units in Assam and 22 in Meghalaya are in the "orange category" (brick manufacturing, cement clinker grinding units), according to the Action Plan.

Non-compliance with norms

- Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma told the legislative Assembly that following surprise checks in industrial areas in Meghalaya in late January and early February, the state Pollution Control Board had served closure notices on seven units, and imposed environmental compensation on two others.
- The violations included "heavy emissions from chimneys due to non-operation of pollution control devices, ineffective pollution control devices, and non-transmission of online emission data", the Chief Minister said.
- Assam Pollution Control Board chairman Arup Kumar Misra that the board has served notices on several industries in its area. "There are industries there which are not following the rules... Many have the required devices which can trap pollutants but don't use them because those are energy intensive and incur costs," Misra said.

Vehicles and topography

- Dr Ganesh Chandra Dhal of NIT Meghalaya, who has carried out research on air pollution in Byrnihat, pointed to vehicular emissions in the area.
- "This is an important transit point for vehicles. Material is loaded and unloaded from heavy diesel vehicles, many of which do not comply with tailpipe emission norms. Vehicles idle in congestion on the road. Besides PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀, sulphur dioxide levels are also high in the area," he said.
- A CSIR-NEERI team that surveyed the area in 2022-23 found that unpaved roads in the area aggravated road dust.
- Experts have also pointed to the area's "bowl-like" topography. The surrounding hills inhibit the dispersal of pollutants in the air.

- The fall in air quality in India is caused by a combination of natural and human-made factors.

1. Industrial and Vehicular Pollution

- **Factories & Power Plants:** Emissions from industries, including coal-fired power plants, release high levels of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), and particulate matter (PM).
- **Vehicle Emissions:** The increasing number of vehicles, especially those using diesel, contributes to high levels of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀.

2. Agricultural Stubble Burning

- Farmers in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh burn crop residue (mainly in October-November), significantly increasing particulate matter in the air. This worsens air pollution, especially in Delhi-NCR.

3. Construction and Road Dust

- Unregulated construction activities and poor dust control measures contribute to high levels of PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}, particularly in urban areas.

4. Waste Burning

- Open burning of garbage, including plastic and electronic waste, releases toxic pollutants like dioxins, furans, and heavy metals.

5. Deforestation and Urbanization

- Reduction in green cover leads to fewer trees that can absorb pollutants, exacerbating air pollution in expanding urban areas.

6. Meteorological Factors

- **Winter Inversions:** In colder months, temperature inversion traps pollutants close to the ground, leading to hazardous smog levels, especially in North India.
- **Wind Patterns:** Low wind speeds prevent pollutants from dispersing, causing air stagnation in cities like Delhi.

7. Firecrackers and Festival Pollution

- During festivals like Diwali, the bursting of firecrackers releases heavy metals and toxic gases, causing a temporary but severe spike in pollution levels.

8. Industrial and Domestic Biomass Burning

- In rural areas, many households rely on biomass fuels like wood, dung cakes, and coal for cooking, leading to indoor and outdoor air pollution.

9. Climate Change and Global Factors

- Increasing temperatures, desertification, and changing weather patterns can contribute to worsening air quality through more frequent dust storms and wildfires.

10. Lack of Stringent Enforcement

- Despite regulations like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), weak enforcement of pollution control measures allows industries, vehicles, and construction sites to continue polluting beyond permissible limits.

2024 World Air Quality Report

- The 2024 World Air Quality Report by IQAir highlights significant global air pollution challenges, with only seven countries meeting the World Health Organization's (WHO) air quality guidelines.
- These countries are Australia, New Zealand, Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Estonia, and Iceland.

Most Polluted Countries

- Chad and Bangladesh emerged as the most polluted countries in 2024, with PM2.5 levels approximately 15 times higher than WHO recommendations.
- Other countries with high pollution levels include Pakistan, India, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

India's Air Quality

- India ranked fifth among the most polluted countries. Notably, six of the nine most polluted cities globally are in India, with Byrnihat being the most affected. Despite a 7% reduction in PM2.5 levels, several Indian cities remain highly polluted.

Global Trends and Challenges

- The report underscores that 83% of cities worldwide do not meet WHO air quality standards.
- A concerning development is the suspension of air quality monitoring by the U.S. Department of State, limiting data availability in developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa.
- Additionally, regions like Africa face significant monitoring challenges, with only one monitor for every 3.7 million people.

Health Implications

- Long-term exposure to polluted air is linked to severe health issues, including respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and cognitive impairments. Air pollution remains a leading risk factor for mortality globally, second only to high blood pressure.
- The 2024 World Air Quality Report serves as a critical reminder of the ongoing global air pollution crisis and the urgent need for comprehensive measures to improve air quality and safeguard public health.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

13. In the context of WHO Air Quality Guidelines, consider the following statements:

1. The 24-hour mean of PM2.5 should not exceed $15 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and annual mean of PM2.5 should not exceed $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
2. In a year, the highest levels of ozone pollution occur during the periods of inclement weather.
3. PM10 can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the bloodstream.
4. Excessive ozone in the air can trigger asthma.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1, 3 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4
- D. 1 and 2 only

14. In the cities of our country, which among the following atmospheric gases are normally considered in calculating the value of Air Quality Index?

1. Carbon dioxide
2. Carbon monoxide
3. Nitrogen dioxide

4. Sulfur dioxide
5. Methane

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 2, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 4 and 5 only
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

8. Why former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested on ICC warrant

- Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which was investigating allegations that “crimes against humanity” had been committed during his so-called “war on drugs”.

Duterte’s crimes

- Before becoming the President in 2016, Duterte was the mayor of Davao, a sprawling southern metropolis, for 22 years, and gained fame for making the city one of the country’s safest from street crimes.
- He used Davao’s reputation to cast himself as a tough-talking anti-establishment politician and won the 2016 elections by a landslide.
- In the final campaign rally that year, Duterte told the crowd to “forget the laws on human rights”.
- During his single, six-year term, which ended in 2022, 6,000 suspects were gunned down by police or unknown assailants as part of his “war on drugs” campaign. However, rights groups claimed that the number could be higher.
- A UN report subsequently revealed that most of the victims were young, poor urban males, and that “the police who do not need search or arrest warrants to conduct house raids, systematically forced suspects to make self-incriminating statements or risk facing lethal force.”.
- Despite the brutal crackdown, authorities could only target street-level pushers and failed to catch big-time drug lords, according to experts.
- Duterte, who denied all the accusations, also withdrew the Philippines from the ICC in 2019.
- The international court first took note of the alleged abuses in 2016, and started its investigation in 2021.
- It covered cases from November 2011, when Duterte was mayor of Davao, to March 2019.

The political angle

- Duterte’s arrest has come at a time when his relationship with Ferdinand R Marcos Jr — successor of the former President, and son of the late dictator Ferdinand E Marcos — has deteriorated.

- Marcos rose to the presidency after forming a political alliance with Duterte's daughter Sara, who was elected as his vice president.
- However, Marcos and Sara got embroiled in a political tussle, especially due to their different views about what the US and China mean for the Philippines.
- Although the Philippines had decided to not rejoin the ICC, the Marcos government in late 2023 quietly allowed the court's investigators to enter the Philippines.
- Last year, the country's House of Representatives also started an inquiry into Duterte's drug war.
- The former President remains a popular leader in the country as he is the "first leader from Mindanao, a region south of Manila, where many feel marginalised by the leaders in the capital,".
- Moreover, his daughter is expected to be a potential presidential candidate in 2028.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) is a permanent international tribunal established to prosecute individuals for crimes such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. It is headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands.
 - **Established:** 1 July 2002 (when the Rome Statute came into force)
 - **Legal Basis:** The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted in 1998)
 - **Jurisdiction:** Investigates and prosecutes crimes committed after 1 July 2002 in member states or by their nationals.
 - **Membership:** 124 countries are State Parties to the Rome Statute (as of 2024). However, major countries like the United States, China, India, and Russia are not members.
 - **Prosecutor:** The ICC has a Chief Prosecutor who leads investigations and prosecutions (currently Karim Khan, as of 2021).
 - **Judges:** The ICC has 18 judges elected for 9-year terms.

Notable Cases and Investigations

- **Omar al-Bashir (Sudan)** – Arrest warrants for genocide in Darfur.
- **Joseph Kony (Uganda)** – Leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, charged with war crimes.
- **Vladimir Putin (Russia)** – Arrest warrant issued in 2023 for alleged war crimes in Ukraine.
- **Muammar Gaddafi (Libya)** – Indicted but killed before trial.

Challenges and Criticism

- **Lack of universal jurisdiction:** Some powerful nations, like the US, Russia, China, and India, do not recognize the ICC's authority.
- **Enforcement Issues:** The ICC relies on member states to arrest suspects, which can be difficult.
- **Allegations of bias:** Some African nations have accused the ICC of disproportionately targeting African leaders.
- **Political pressures:** The ICC's decisions sometimes face geopolitical resistance.
- As of January 2025, 125 countries are party to the Rome Statute, including Britain, Japan, Afghanistan, and Germany. India, China, and the United States are not members.

Crimes that ICC focuses on

- The ICC has international jurisdiction over four types of crimes: crimes against humanity, genocide, crimes of aggression, and war crimes. It can step in when countries are unwilling or unable to prosecute suspects for these crimes.
- Notably, the court, which prosecutes only individuals, does not have its own policing body and relies on other countries for support in “making arrests, transferring arrested persons to the ICC detention centre in The Hague, freezing suspects’ assets, and enforcing sentences,” according to the court.
- Additionally, the offences should be committed either in a country that ratified the Roman Statute or by a national of a ratifying country. The ICC can also practise its jurisdiction over cases referred by the UN Security Council to it.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

15. What was the primary reason for the International Criminal Court (ICC) issuing an arrest warrant against Rodrigo Duterte?
 - A. Allegations of corruption during his presidency.
 - B. His withdrawal of the Philippines from the ICC.
 - C. Allegations of crimes against humanity during his ‘war on drugs’.
 - D. His political rivalry with Ferdinand R Marcos Jr.
16. Which of the following best describes the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC)?
 - A. It can prosecute crimes committed before its establishment in 2002.
 - B. It has jurisdiction over crimes committed by any individual, regardless of membership.
 - C. It only prosecutes crimes committed by nationals of member states or within member states’ territories after July 1, 2002.
 - D. It only handles political disputes between countries.

9. Why is a Peruvian farmer taking Germany’s RWE to court over climate change?

- A Peruvian farmer is getting his day in court in a landmark climate case against German energy giant RWE that could shake up how the effects of companies’ emissions are litigated.
- The Higher Regional Court of Hamm will start a hearing between farmer Saul Luciano Lliuya and RWE.
- Lliuya is suing RWE for some 21,000 euros, arguing the company’s emissions have contributed to the melting of Andean glaciers, causing a lake above his hometown to swell to dangerous levels.

Case

- In 2015, Lliuya, backed by activist group Germanwatch, filed a lawsuit claiming RWE's greenhouse gas emissions have contributed to the melting of an Andean glacier which has raised the water level at Laguna Pacacocha, creating a significant flood risk to his home in the nearby town of Huaraz.
- Lliuya is demanding RWE contribute some 21,000 euros to an estimated \$3.5 million cost of a flood defence project.
- He contends the company has contributed nearly 0.5% of global manmade greenhouse gas emissions since the industrial revolution, and should pay the equivalent fraction of flood protection costs in the area.

Why it took 10 years for hearing?

- The case was first filed at a regional court in the German city of Essen, where RWE is based.
- The court dismissed the claims, saying there were countless emitters of carbon dioxide worldwide and any risks from potential flooding as a result of the melting of glacial ice could not stem solely from RWE.
- Lliuya appealed against the decision with the higher regional court in Hamm, which admitted the case in 2017 and said it would seek evidence.
- A visit by court-appointed experts to study flood risks around the glacier was delayed until 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Over a year later, a 200-page expert opinion was available, which had to be examined by the two parties.

Legal Base

- The case is based on section 1004 of the Civil Law Code which states that if a property is interfered with, the owner may require the disturber to remove the interference.
- If the court confirms that the flood risk claimed by the plaintiff is real, it must determine in a second phase to what extent RWE's CO₂ emissions have contributed to the risk of a glacial lake outburst flood.
- As a first step, the upcoming hearing will focus on the assessment of experts commissioned by the court.

Case and its Popularity

- If the court finds that glacier melting poses a flood risk and holds RWE responsible for its share of climate change, it would set a precedent for holding companies legally accountable for climate change.
- "The sum in dispute may be less than 20,000 euros but the precedent-setting potential is clear," according to Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer's website, the law firm representing RWE in the case.
- Roda Verheyen, Lliuya's lawyer, said even if the court does not conclude there is a flood risk, its verdict would provide a base for further cases.

Science says:

- In 2021, scientists at the University of Oxford and the University of Washington proved that the melting of a glacier in the Peruvian Andes was being caused by man-made global warming and was raising flooding risks for nearby residents.

RWE stance on case

- RWE says Lliuya's complaint is unfounded, arguing a single emitter cannot be held responsible for global warming.
- The company has been transitioning from coal-fired power but still operates 7 lignite or brown coal power plants, accounting for 26.7% of its total power generation, down from 20 plants in 2020. It also runs 21 gas power plants across Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Turkey.

- RWE's CO₂ emissions almost halved to 60.6 million tons in 2023 from 118 million tons in 2018, with further reductions expected, the company said. It aims to fully phase out lignite by 2030.

Andean Glaciers

- Andean glaciers are a critical component of South America's ecosystem, serving as vital freshwater sources for millions of people.
- These glaciers are primarily found in the Andes mountain range, stretching across countries like Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, and Chile.

Features of Andean Glaciers

- **High-Altitude Glaciers:** They are located at altitudes above 4,000 meters (13,000 feet).
- **Tropical Glaciers:** The Andes host some of the world's few tropical glaciers, mainly in Peru and Bolivia.
- **Climate Sensitivity:** These glaciers are rapidly retreating due to climate change and rising global temperatures.

Notable Andean Glaciers

- **Quelccaya Ice Cap (Peru):** The largest tropical ice cap in the world, crucial for water supply.
- **Humboldt Glacier (Venezuela):** One of the last remaining glaciers in the country, nearly vanished.
- **Upsala Glacier (Argentina):** Part of Los Glaciares National Park, affected by ice loss.

Threats and Impacts

- **Melting and Retreat:** Many Andean glaciers have lost significant ice mass in the past few decades.
- **Water Scarcity:** Cities like Lima and La Paz depend on glacial meltwater for drinking and agriculture.
- **Natural Disasters:** Melting can lead to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and landslides.

Conservation Efforts

- Monitoring glacier retreat through satellite imaging.
- Implementing water conservation strategies.
- Promoting policies to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

17. Which of the following statements about the Andes Mountain Range is correct?
 - A. It is the smallest continental mountain range in the world.
 - B. It is the longest continental mountain range in the world.
 - C. Its average height is about 2,000 m.
 - D. It stretches from North to South through eight South American countries.
18. Which of the following statements about the Rocky Mountains is correct?
 - A. The Rocky Mountains are the longest mountain range in the world.
 - B. They extend from Alaska to Mexico.
 - C. They are the largest mountain system in North America.
 - D. Their total length is approximately 1,500 miles.

10. 2025 ICC Champions Trophy

- The 2025 ICC Champions Trophy was the ninth edition of the ICC Champions Trophy.
- It was hosted by Pakistan Cricket Board from 19 February to 9 March 2025 and featured 15 matches held across three venues in Pakistan and one in the United Arab Emirates.
- The tournament was contested by the top eight ranked men's national teams qualified from the 2023 World Cup. Afghanistan made their debut appearance in the tournament.
- Pakistan were the defending champions and were eliminated in the group stage. India became the champions by defeating New Zealand in the final and also became the first team to win three Champions Trophy titles.
- The ICC Champions Trophy is a quadrennial ODI cricket tournament organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC). Initially held as a biennial tournament since its inaugural edition in 1998 as ICC KnockOut Trophy, it was rebranded as ICC Champions Trophy in 2002 and has been held as a quadrennial tournament since 2009. In 2016, the ICC cancelled future editions of the Champions Trophy after the 2017 tournament, aiming to have only one major tournament in each format of international cricket.
- However in November 2021 as part of the 2024–2031 ICC men's hosts cycle, ICC announced that the tournament would return from 2025 onwards.

Host selection

- Pakistan was announced as the host of the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy on 16 November 2021 as part of the 2024–2031 ICC men's hosts cycle.
- It is the first global tournament to be hosted by Pakistan after almost 29 years, since the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan team.
- The last major tournament to take place in the country was the 1996 Cricket World Cup which it co-hosted with India and Sri Lanka.
- United Arab Emirates was announced as a neutral venue for Indian Cricket Team matches due to India's refusal to play in Pakistan.

Format

- The format of the competition had remained the same as it was since eight teams were introduced in the fray back in 2006.
- All eight teams were slotted into two groups of four, with each team playing once against every other team in the group.
- The top two teams from each group advanced to the knockout stage, featuring two semi-finals leading up to the final.

Neutral venue arrangements

- On 19 December 2024, following an agreement between BCCI and PCB, the ICC in an update issued on India and Pakistan hosted matches at ICC events, established that the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 will be played across Pakistan and a neutral venue.
- The ICC board confirmed that India and Pakistan matches hosted by either country at ICC events between 2024 and 2027 would be played at a neutral venue. This will also apply to the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup (hosted by India; but only if Pakistan qualifies for the tournament) and the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup (hosted by India and Sri Lanka).

- It was also announced that Pakistan had been awarded hosting rights of the 2028 Women's T20 World Cup, where neutral venue arrangements will also apply.
- The fixtures were announced on 24 December 2024, along with the Dubai International Cricket Stadium in Dubai, UAE as the neutral venue for the tournament.

Prize money

- The ICC allocated a pool of US\$6.9 million in prize money for the tournament, a 53 percent increase from the previous edition. The winners would receive the grand prize of \$2.24 million, with each team receiving an additional \$125,000 for participating.
- On 30 January 2025, it was announced that a captains' event would not be held for the tournament.
- The official theme song for the tournament titled "Jeeto Baazi Khel Ke" produced by Abdullah Siddiqui and performed by Atif Aslam was released on 7 February 2025.
- On 12 February 2025, the ICC revealed Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shane Watson, Shikhar Dhawan and Tim Southee as the ambassadors for the tournament.
- On 16 February 2025, a curtain raiser event was held at Lahore Fort in Pakistan, to mark the commencement of the tournament.
- Three days later on 19 February 2025, the opening ceremony took place at the National Stadium, Karachi. The event featured an aerobatic display by the Pakistan Air Force's Sherdils Squadron with the President Asif Ali Zardari in attendance as the chief guest.

Venues

- In December 2022, the Pakistan Cricket Board was given approval by the Government of Pakistan for the construction of a new cricket stadium in Islamabad for the tournament.
- On 28 April 2024, three existing venues were proposed for the event by Pakistan.
- The matches are being hosted in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi with India playing in Dubai.

Final

- India won their 2nd consecutive ICC tournament, both unbeaten (without losing a single game), in just a span of 8 months and 10 days, first the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 and then this was their overall 3rd Champions Trophy title, after the 2002 (joint-winners with Sri Lanka) and the 2013 edition, becoming the most successful team at the ICC Champions Trophy.
- New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra was named Player of the Tournament, showcasing consistent excellence throughout the competition.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

19. Consider the following statements in respect of the ICC World Test Championship:

1. The finalists were decided by the number of matches they won.
2. Australia are the current champions, having defeated India in the 2023 final.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

20. Why was the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy significant for Afghanistan?

- A. They hosted the tournament for the first time.
- B. They became the champions.
- C. It was their debut appearance in the ICC Champions Trophy.
- D. They reached the final.



Career
Launcher

ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. **A** The longest international border in the world is the border between Canada and the United States, stretching 8,891 kilometers (5,525 miles). This vast boundary runs across land and water, covering diverse geographical regions, including forests, mountains, rivers, and lakes.
2. **C** The Columbia River Treaty (1964) is a landmark agreement between the United States and Canada for the cooperative development and management of the Columbia River Basin, primarily for hydropower production and flood control.
3. **A** India and China are members of: BRICS (1): A group of five major emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Established in 2009, it focuses on economic cooperation and development. G20 (2): A group of 20 major economies, including India and China, that work on global economic issues. SCO (5) - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: A political, economic, and security alliance led by China and Russia. India became a full member in 2017. India and China are NOT members of: ASEAN (3) - Association of Southeast Asian Nations: A regional bloc of 10 Southeast Asian nations (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam), but neither India nor China is a member. However, both engage as dialogue partners. BIMSTEC (4) - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation: Includes India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan. China is NOT a member. QUAD (6) - Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: A strategic grouping of India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia focused on Indo-Pacific security. China is NOT a member and views QUAD as a counterbalance to its influence.
4. **C** Balkrishna Doshi won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2018, becoming the first Indian architect to receive the honor. His work focuses on sustainable and culturally relevant architecture, with notable projects like Aranya Low-Cost Housing and IIM Bangalore.
5. **D** The analogy compares rainforests to lungs, as they absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, playing a crucial role in Earth's atmospheric balance. Similarly, kidneys filter waste from the body, just as wetlands filter pollutants from water, improving its quality. Wetlands absorb heavy metals, excess nutrients, and other contaminants, preventing them from reaching larger water bodies like rivers, lakes, and oceans. This purification function makes wetlands essential for maintaining a healthy aquatic ecosystem.
6. **B** Pair 1 is incorrectly matched. Hokera Wetland is located in Jammu and Kashmir, not Punjab. Hokera wetland is about 10 km from Srinagar. It is a natural perennial wetland contiguous to the Jhelum basin. Pair 2 is correctly matched. Renuka Wetland is the largest natural lake in Himachal Pradesh. It is a natural wetland with freshwater springs and inland subterranean karst formations. Pair 3 is correctly matched. Rudrasagar Lake, also known as Twijilikma, is a lake located in Melaghar, Tripura, India. The Government of India's Ministry of Environment and Forest has identified Rudrasagar as one of the wetlands of National Importance for Conservation and sustainable use based on its bio-diversity and socio-economic importance. The lake is designated as a Ramsar site. A lowland sedimentation reservoir in the northeast hills, fed by three perennial streams discharging to the River Gomti. Pair 4 is incorrectly matched. Sasthamkotta is located in the Kollam district of Kerala, not Tamil Nadu. It is the largest freshwater lake in Kerala.
7. **B** The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 was enacted to replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to address modern consumer issues, including e-commerce and unfair trade practices. It introduced a three-tier quasi-judicial system (not two-tier) at District, State, and Central levels for consumer dispute

redressal. Complaints must be resolved within three months (if no product testing is required) and within five months (if testing is needed). The Act explicitly includes e-commerce platforms, ensuring consumer rights are protected in digital transactions.

8. **B** E-Daakhil, launched on 7th September 2020, is an online portal that provides a quick, inexpensive, and hassle-free way to file consumer complaints. It eliminates the need for physical presence in consumer forums, making the process paperless and transparent. This initiative has been crucial, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that consumers can file grievances remotely and track their case status online.
9. **C** The visit by Prime Minister Modi aligns with India's 'Neighborhood First' and 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policies. These policies emphasize fostering strong diplomatic and cultural ties with Indian Ocean Region countries, including Mauritius, reflecting India's commitment to regional cooperation and stability.
10. **B** The Aapravasi Ghat, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Mauritius, commemorates the migration of Indian indentured laborers who were brought to Mauritius during British colonial rule in the 19th century. It serves as a historical site that acknowledges the heritage and contributions of Indian-origin people in Mauritius.
11. **B** The report highlights that the Middle-Income Group (MIG) accounted for 44% of the total housing loans outstanding, which is the largest share among all groups, followed by EWS & LIG at 39% and HIG at 17%.
12. **C** The report mentions regional disparities in credit flow and climate-related risks as major challenges faced by the Indian housing sector. While technological advancements are considered growth drivers, they are not seen as challenges.
13. **B** **Statement 1:** The 24-hour mean of PM_{2.5} should not exceed 15 µg/m³ and annual mean of PM_{2.5} should not exceed 5 µg/m³. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Air Quality Guidelines, the annual mean of PM_{2.5} should not exceed 5 µg/m³, and the 24-hour mean should not exceed 15 µg/m³. This is intended to minimize the health risks associated with long-term exposure to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which can penetrate deeply into the lungs and cardiovascular system. **Statement 2:** In a year, the highest levels of ozone pollution occur during the periods of inclement weather. Incorrect. Ozone pollution levels tend to be highest during warm and sunny conditions, especially in the afternoon and early evening. This is because ozone is formed when sunlight reacts with pollutants such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x). Inclement weather (rain, storms, etc.) usually disperses or dilutes pollutants rather than intensifying them. **Statement 3:** PM₁₀ can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the bloodstream. Incorrect. PM₁₀ particles are relatively large (with diameters of 10 micrometers or less) and generally do not penetrate the lung barrier to enter the bloodstream. Instead, they tend to lodge in the respiratory tract, causing irritation and respiratory problems. PM_{2.5}, which is smaller (2.5 micrometers or less), can penetrate the lung barrier and enter the bloodstream, causing more severe health issues. **Statement 4:** Excessive ozone in the air can trigger asthma. Excessive ozone exposure is known to trigger asthma attacks, worsen existing respiratory diseases, and cause breathing difficulties. It is particularly harmful to children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing respiratory conditions.
14. **B** The Air Quality Index (AQI) is a measurement used to communicate the quality of air to the public. It considers the concentrations of certain harmful air pollutants that have direct adverse effects on human health. The AQI in India usually considers the following eight pollutants: Particulate Matter (PM₁₀),

Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Ozone (O₃), Ammonia (NH₃) and Lead (Pb). Carbon Monoxide (CO), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), and Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂) are direct air pollutants monitored by the AQI. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) and Methane (CH₄) are not part of AQI calculations as they are primarily greenhouse gases contributing to climate change rather than direct air quality concerns.

15. **C** The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against Rodrigo Duterte based on allegations of crimes against humanity committed during his ‘war on drugs’ campaign. This campaign, which resulted in thousands of deaths, mainly targeted street-level pushers and poor urban males. The ICC investigation focuses on abuses committed between 2011 and 2019, including Duterte’s tenure as mayor of Davao and his presidency.
16. **C** The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established on July 1, 2002, when the Rome Statute came into force. Its jurisdiction is limited to crimes committed after this date and applies to individuals who are either nationals of member states or have committed crimes within the territories of member states. The court prosecutes genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression.
17. **B** The Andes is the longest continental mountain range in the world, extending approximately 8,900 km (5,530 mi) along the western edge of South America. The Andes, Andes Mountains or Andean Mountain Range are the longest continental mountain range in the world, forming a continuous highland along the western edge of South America. The range is 8,900 km (5,530 mi) long and 200 to 700 km (124 to 435 mi) wide (widest between 18°S and 20°S latitude) and has an average height of about 4,000 m (13,123 ft). The Andes extend from South to North through seven South American countries: Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela.
18. **C** The Rocky Mountains, also known as the Rockies, are the largest mountain system in North America, stretching approximately 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometers) from Western Canada (British Columbia and Alberta) to New Mexico in the Southwestern United States. A. The Andes, not the Rockies, are the longest continental mountain range in the world. The Rocky Mountains are not exclusive to the United States; they also extend into Canada. C. The range does not extend to Alaska or Mexico; it spans from Canada to New Mexico. E. The total length is approximately 3,000 miles, not 1,500 miles.
19. **B** The finalists of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) are not decided by the number of matches won alone. The qualification for the final is based on the percentage of points earned (PCT), calculated by dividing the number of points won by the total number of points contested by each team in the WTC cycle. This system is designed to be fair to teams playing different numbers of matches due to the varying lengths of series. Therefore, winning percentage (based on points earned per available points) is the deciding factor, not the absolute number of wins. The ICC World Test Championship (WTC) is a biennial cricket tournament organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC). It is played over two years and is the premier championship for Test cricket. Australia are the current champions, having defeated India in the 2023 final. They will face South Africa in the 2025 final at Lord’s. WTC league games are organized by the host nation’s cricket board, whereas the final is organized directly by the ICC. The inaugural ICC World Test Championship started with the 2019 Ashes series and finished with New Zealand lifting the trophy after defeating India in the final in June 2021.
20. **C** The 2025 ICC Champions Trophy was significant for Afghanistan because it marked their debut appearance in the tournament. They qualified as one of the top eight ranked men’s national teams from the 2023 World Cup. A. The tournament was hosted by Pakistan, not Afghanistan. B. Afghanistan did not win the tournament. D. Afghanistan did not reach the final.