

MANTHAN

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1. Nafithromycin: Country's First Indigenous Antibiotic

- Antimicrobial resistance has long been a growing global concern, with pharmaceutical companies striving to develop new medicines to combat it worldwide.
- Despite years of challenges and relentless effort, a breakthrough has finally emerged.
- After three decades of research and hard work, India has led the way with the creation of Nafithromycin, the country's first indigenous Macrolide antibiotic.
- This remarkable achievement marks a pivotal moment in the fight against antimicrobial resistance, showcasing India's growing capabilities in pharmaceutical innovation.

India's Fight Against Antimicrobial Resistance

- Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines.
- As a result of drug resistance, antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines become ineffective and infections become difficult or impossible to treat, increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness, disability and death.
- While AMR is a natural process driven by genetic changes in pathogens over time, its spread is significantly accelerated by human activities, particularly the overuse and misuse of antimicrobial drugs in humans, animals, and plants.
- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a major global health issue, with around 6 lakh lives lost in India each year due to resistant infections.
- However, India is making significant strides in addressing AMR, particularly through the development of new drugs.
- Nafithromycin, developed with ₹8 crore in funding under the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) Biotech Industry Program for Phase 3 clinical trials, is a key milestone in this effort.
- Since India carries a large share of the global pneumonia burden, introducing Nafithromycin is especially important, as there have been no new antibiotics in recent years. Nafithromycin offers improved patient compliance and is a vital step in combating AMR.

Nafithromycin: Milestone for Public Health

- Nafithromycin, was officially launched on November 20, 2024, by Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh. Developed by Wockhardt with support from the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Nafithromycin, marketed as "Miqnaf," targets Community-Acquired Bacterial Pneumonia (CABP) caused by drug-resistant bacteria, which disproportionately affects vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems.
- This groundbreaking antibiotic is ten times more effective than current treatments like azithromycin and offers a three-day treatment regimen, significantly shortening the recovery time while improving patient outcomes. Nafithromycin is designed to treat both typical and atypical drug-resistant bacteria, making it a crucial tool in addressing the global health crisis of AMR (Anti-microbial Resistance). It boasts superior safety, minimal side effects, and no significant drug interactions.

- Nafithromycin’s development marks a historic milestone as the first new antibiotic in its class to be introduced globally in over 30 years. The drug, which has undergone extensive clinical trials across the U.S., Europe, and India, has been developed with an investment of ₹500 crores and is now awaiting final approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).
- This innovation exemplifies the power of public-private collaboration and underscores India’s growing capabilities in biotechnology. Nafithromycin’s successful introduction represents a major leap in the fight against AMR, offering hope for treating multi-drug-resistant infections and saving lives worldwide.

Government’s Other Initiatives to Combat AMR

- Other than developing Nafithromycin, the Government of India has taken significant steps to combat Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) through a series of strategic initiatives aimed at surveillance, awareness, and collaboration. These efforts focus on enhancing AMR containment, improving infection control, and fostering national and international partnerships.
 - **Surveillance and Reporting:** National surveillance networks, including laboratories across the country, have been established to generate annual AMR surveillance reports, with data submitted to the Global AMR Surveillance System (GLASS).
 - **Awareness and Training:** Awareness materials on the judicious use of antimicrobials, hand hygiene, and infection prevention have been developed and shared with stakeholders. National Guidelines on infection prevention have been launched, and a “train-the-trainer” program has been conducted across all states and UTs, with ongoing cascading of training at the state level.
 - **Judicious Use of Antimicrobials:** To promote responsible usage, surveillance of antimicrobial use has been initiated at tertiary care hospitals.
 - **National Action Plan on AMR (NAP-AMR):** Launched in 2017, the NAP-AMR aligns with the Global Action Plan on AMR. The plan has been implemented across multiple ministries and was initially set for five years.
 - **NAP-AMR 2.0 Development:** National consultations were held in 2022 across sectors (human health, research, environment, animal husbandry) to develop NAP-AMR 2.0, which includes SWOT analysis and recommendations for AMR research policies.
 - **Red Line Awareness Campaign:** The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) launched the Red Line campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of using antibiotics without a prescription. The campaign advises the public not to use antibiotics marked with a red vertical line unless prescribed by a doctor.
 - **ICMR Guidelines:** The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has issued treatment guidelines to regulate the use of antibiotics, especially for common conditions like viral bronchitis and low-grade fever. These guidelines aim to prevent unnecessary antibiotic use.
 - **Regulation of Antibiotics under Schedule H and H1:** Antibiotics are listed under Schedule H and H1 of the Drugs Rules, 1945, ensuring they are only available with a prescription from a registered medical practitioner. Drugs under Schedule H1 are also subject to strict record-keeping, with supply records maintained for three years.
 - **CDSCO Notification for High-End Antibiotics:** The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has included 24 high-end antimicrobials under Schedule H1, mandating strict regulation and oversight to prevent misuse.

Global Cooperation to Fight AMR

- **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Collaborations:** NCDC collaborates with global organizations and countries to address AMR, focusing on AMR surveillance, capacity building, and specialized lab testing. Notable international collaborations include:

- **India-US CDC Partnership:** Focused on AMR surveillance, SOP development, and data management using WHONET (World Health Organization (WHO) Network) software, with support for HAI (Healthcare Associated Infection) surveillance through ICMR-AIIMS.
- **USAID (United States Agency for International Development) Collaboration:** Focused on strengthening AMR containment in six states.
- **Indo-Netherlands Collaboration:** Pilot project in Andhra Pradesh integrating AMR surveillance with a One Health approach.
- **Fleming Fund (UK):** Supported training of trainers on infection prevention and control (IPC), strengthening AMR surveillance networks in three states, and conducting surveys on antibiotic use in tertiary hospitals.
- **India-Denmark Collaboration:** A recent technical collaboration plan to address AMR.
- These initiatives aim to address the escalating threat of AMR through collaborative efforts across multiple sectors.
- Additionally, India's pharmaceutical industry is vital in bolstering the country's healthcare infrastructure, providing further support to these AMR containment strategies.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when _____, viruses, fungi, and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines.
2. India's first indigenous Macrolide antibiotic, developed after three decades of research, is called _____.
3. Nafithromycin, marketed as "Miqnaf," is designed to target _____, which disproportionately affects vulnerable populations like children and the elderly.
4. The development of Nafithromycin was supported by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) and officially launched by Union Minister _____ on November 20, 2024.
5. The Indian government launched the _____ campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of using antibiotics without a prescription.
6. The National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR) was launched in _____ and aligns with the Global Action Plan on AMR.
7. Nafithromycin is reported to be ten times more effective than current treatments like _____ and offers a shorter, three-day treatment regimen.
8. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has included 24 high-end antimicrobials under _____ to regulate their use and prevent misuse.
9. To monitor antimicrobial resistance, India submits AMR surveillance data to the global system known as _____.
10. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has issued treatment guidelines to reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics for common conditions like _____ and low-grade fever.

2. Ghana's former president John Dramani Mahama wins election

- John Dramani Mahama, Ghana's former president (2012-2017), has made a historic political comeback by winning the 2024 presidential election.
- Running as the candidate of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), Mahama defeated the ruling New Patriotic Party's (NPP) candidate, Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia.
- This victory marks Mahama's third attempt to reclaim the presidency after unsuccessful bids in 2016 and 2020.
- His win also brings an end to the NPP's eight-year rule under President Nana Akufo-Addo, a period characterized by severe economic challenges that played a significant role in shaping voter sentiment.
- The NDC's spokesperson, Sammy Gyamfi, announced that Mahama secured 56.3% of the vote, while Bawumia received 41.3%.
- Political parties, including the NDC and NPP, stationed agents at polling centers to observe and tally the initial vote counts, offering early projections before the official declaration by Ghana's election commission.
- This proactive monitoring was part of a broader strategy to ensure transparency and credibility in the election process.
- The 2024 presidential election was heavily influenced by Ghana's economic crisis, which had a profound impact on public sentiment.
- Over the past few years, Ghana faced one of its worst economic downturns in decades, marked by high inflation, a depreciating currency, and a debt default.
- The country, known as one of Africa's leading gold producers and the world's second-largest cocoa exporter, also had to rely on a \$3 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Although inflation dropped from a peak of over 50% to around 23%, public frustration over the high cost of living remained strong. This economic discontent significantly undermined the NPP's electoral chances, with many voters blaming the ruling party for their financial hardships.
- Mahama's victory was seen as a call for change amid the economic distress. However, his return to power was not without criticism.
- During his earlier presidency, Mahama faced backlash over massive power cuts and financial instability. Critics argued that his administration's handling of these crises left lasting negative effects on Ghana's economy.
- Nonetheless, the electorate's dissatisfaction with the NPP's economic management outweighed concerns about Mahama's prior governance record, leading to his successful bid for a second non-consecutive term.
- Ghana's democratic credentials have been bolstered by its history of peaceful transfers of power since it transitioned to multiparty democracy in 1992. The country's political system is characterized by a duopoly of the NDC and NPP, with power alternating between the two major parties.
- Mahama's win continues this pattern, demonstrating the resilience of Ghana's democracy and the electorate's capacity to demand change through the ballot box. His return to power signals a renewed mandate from the people, who are eager for solutions to the nation's pressing economic problems.

- Overall, Mahama's comeback represents a significant shift in Ghana's political landscape.
- While his previous tenure faced criticism, his electoral success reflects the Ghanaian people's demand for change amid economic hardship.
- With high expectations placed on his leadership, Mahama's second term will likely be shaped by efforts to stabilize the economy, restore public confidence, and address the challenges that led to the NPP's electoral defeat.

Ghana

- **Official Name:** Republic of Ghana
- **Capital:** Accra
- **Largest City:** Accra (followed by Kumasi and Tamale)
- **Official Language:** English (with several local languages, such as Akan, Ewe, and Ga)
- **Currency:** Ghanaian Cedi (GHS)
- **Area:** 238,533 sq. km (92,098 sq. mi)
- **Population:** Approximately 34 million (2024 estimate)
- **Time Zone:** GMT (Greenwich Mean Time)
- **Independence:** March 6, 1957 (from British colonial rule)

2. Political System

- **Government Type:** Unitary Presidential Constitutional Republic
- **President:** The President of Ghana is both the head of state and the head of government.
- **Current President:** Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (since January 2017)
- **Legislature:** Unicameral Parliament
- **Judiciary:** Independent judiciary with a Supreme Court as the highest authority

3. Geography and Climate

- **Location:** West Africa, bordered by Côte d'Ivoire (west), Burkina Faso (north), Togo (east), and the Gulf of Guinea (south).
- **Topography:** Coastal plains, forests, savannas, and mountainous regions.
- **Major Rivers:** Volta River (which forms Lake Volta, one of the world's largest man-made lakes).
- **Climate:** Tropical climate with two main seasons — rainy (April to October) and dry (Harmattan winds from November to March).

4. Economy

- **Economic Classification:** Lower-middle-income economy
- **Major Sectors:**
 - **Agriculture:** Cocoa (2nd largest exporter globally), yams, maize, and cassava.
 - **Mining:** Gold (among the top 10 producers globally), bauxite, manganese, and diamonds.
 - **Oil and Gas:** Offshore oil exploration and production play a growing role.
 - **Manufacturing and Services:** Processing of agricultural products, tourism, banking, and telecommunications.
- **Key Exports:** Gold, cocoa, oil, timber, and cashew nuts.
- **Challenges:** Debt burden, inflation, and youth unemployment.

5. Culture and Society

- **Ethnic Groups:** Akan (largest), Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, Ga-Dangme, and Gurma, among others.
- **Religion:**
 - Christianity (about 71%)
 - Islam (about 17%)
 - Indigenous African religions and others (about 12%)
- **Festivals:**
 - Homowo Festival (celebrated by the Ga people to mark the end of famine)
 - Aboakyer Festival (by the Effutu people, involving deer hunting)
 - Chale Wote Street Art Festival (a modern, urban street art festival in Accra)
 - Traditional Attire: The colorful Kente cloth is one of Ghana's most famous cultural symbols, often worn during ceremonies and celebrations.

6. History

- **Ancient Kingdoms:** Ghana was part of ancient West African empires like the Ashanti Kingdom.
- **Colonial Rule:** Ghana was colonized by the British and was known as the Gold Coast due to its vast gold reserves.
- **Independence:** Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule on March 6, 1957, led by Kwame Nkrumah, a prominent Pan-Africanist and Ghana's first President.

7. Education and Health

- **Education:** Free compulsory basic education (6-15 years) with growing access to tertiary education.
- **Prominent Institutions:** University of Ghana (Legon), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and University of Cape Coast (UCC).
- **Healthcare:** Public and private healthcare system with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to improve access to affordable healthcare.

8. Tourism and Heritage

- **Natural Sites:**
 - Lake Volta: One of the world's largest man-made lakes.
 - Mole National Park: A wildlife reserve with elephants, antelopes, and baboons.
 - Kakum National Park: Known for its canopy walkway through the rainforest.
- **Heritage Sites:**
 - Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle: Important UNESCO World Heritage Sites linked to the transatlantic slave trade.
 - Nzulezo Stilt Village: A village built on stilts over Lake Tadane.
 - Cultural Tourism: Tourists experience traditional music, dance, drumming, and storytelling.

9. International Relations

- **Regional Membership:** Ghana is a member of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the African Union (AU), and the Commonwealth of Nations.

- **Global Role:** Known for its peacekeeping efforts, Ghana frequently contributes troops to UN peacekeeping missions.

10. Key National Symbols

- **Flag:** Three horizontal stripes — red (symbolizing bloodshed for independence), yellow (wealth and resources), and green (agriculture and natural wealth) with a black five-pointed star in the center.
- **National Motto:** “Freedom and Justice”
- **National Anthem:** “God Bless Our Homeland Ghana”

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. John Dramani Mahama secured a historic comeback victory in Ghana’s 2024 presidential election, defeating Vice-President _____, the candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).
2. The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) faced criticism during its eight-year rule due to Ghana’s economic crisis, which included high inflation, currency devaluation, and a \$_____ IMF bailout.
3. Ghana is a leading African producer of gold and the world’s second-largest exporter of _____.
4. The official currency of Ghana is the _____.
5. Ghana’s independence from British colonial rule was achieved on _____.
6. The two main seasons in Ghana’s tropical climate are the rainy season (April to October) and the dry season, characterized by the _____ winds from November to March.
7. The Ghanaian flag consists of three horizontal stripes: red (symbolizing bloodshed for independence), yellow (wealth and resources), and green (natural wealth), with a black _____ in the center.
8. Ghana’s _____ River forms Lake Volta, one of the world’s largest man-made lakes.
9. The most widely spoken language in Ghana is _____, but the official language is English.
10. Ghana’s national motto is “_____ and _____.”

3. India’s Constituent Assembly

- On Constitution Day (November 26), President Droupadi Murmu recalled the role of women members in the Constituent Assembly of India, the body tasked with formulating the Constitution of independent India.
- The 299-member body had 15 women members (of whom two later resigned), including prominent figures such as Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. But it also had lesser-known women from different parts of the country, who participated in debates on gender, caste and reservations. We recall five of them.
- India’s Constituent Assembly played a crucial role in drafting the Constitution of India, which came into effect on January 26, 1950. It was a unique body that laid the foundation of India’s democracy, ensuring the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Below are key details about its composition, structure, and significance.

1. Formation of the Constituent Assembly

- **Establishment:** Formed under the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, which was proposed by British officials to grant India independence.
- **First Meeting:** The first session of the Constituent Assembly was held on December 9, 1946, in New Delhi.
- **Total Members:** Originally, it had 389 members, but after Partition in 1947, the number reduced to 299 members.
- **Elections:** Members were indirectly elected by the provincial legislative assemblies through proportional representation.

2. Composition of the Assembly

- **Provincial Representatives:** 292 members were elected from British Indian provinces.
- **Princely States:** 93 members represented princely states, though many princely states did not initially participate.
- **Minorities & Communities:** Seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes, minorities, and other communities to ensure inclusivity.

3. Key Members of the Constituent Assembly

- **Dr. Rajendra Prasad:** President of the Constituent Assembly.
- **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:** Chairman of the Drafting Committee and the “Architect of the Indian Constitution.”
- **Jawaharlal Nehru:** Proposed the Objective Resolution, which laid the foundation of the Preamble.
- **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel:** Played a significant role in negotiating with princely states.
- **Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar and K.M. Munshi:** Prominent members of the Drafting Committee.
- **Hansa Mehta, Sarojini Naidu, and Durgabai Deshmukh:** Represented women’s voices in the Assembly.

4. Key Committees in the Assembly

- **Drafting Committee:** Headed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, this committee prepared the final text of the Constitution.
- **Union Powers Committee:** Chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru, responsible for defining the powers of the Union and States.
- **Fundamental Rights Committee:** Chaired by Sardar Patel, it was responsible for framing the Fundamental Rights.
- **Advisory Committee:** Chaired by Sardar Patel, it handled issues like minority rights and fundamental rights.

5. Drafting of the Constitution

- **Objective Resolution:** Introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru on December 13, 1946, it laid the vision for the Constitution.
- **Time Taken:** The Assembly took 2 years, 11 months, and 18 days to complete the Constitution.
- **Public Debates:** Deliberations were held over 114 days, with contributions from various members and experts.
- **Adoption:** The final draft of the Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949, celebrated as Constitution Day.

6. Salient Features of the Constitution

- **Longthiest Constitution:** It is one of the longest written constitutions in the world, with 448 Articles, 12 Schedules, and 25 Parts.

Borrowed Provisions: Drew inspiration from multiple countries:

- Parliamentary system – UK
- Fundamental Rights – USA
- Directive Principles of State Policy – Ireland
- Federal structure – Canada

Fundamental Rights & Duties: Provides rights like freedom, equality, and the right against exploitation, along with duties for citizens.

Preamble: Declares India to be a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, and Democratic Republic.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Constituent Assembly of India was formed under the _____ Plan of 1946, which aimed to grant India independence.
2. The first session of the Constituent Assembly was held on _____ in New Delhi.
3. After the Partition of India in 1947, the total number of members in the Constituent Assembly was reduced from 389 to _____.
4. _____ was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and is regarded as the “Architect of the Indian Constitution.”
5. The Objective Resolution, which laid the foundation for the Preamble, was proposed by _____ on December 13, 1946.
6. The final draft of the Constitution of India was adopted on _____, which is celebrated as Constitution Day.
7. _____ was the first President of the Constituent Assembly of India.
8. The Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution were inspired by the Constitution of _____.
9. The Preamble of the Constitution of India declares India to be a Sovereign, Socialist, _____, and Democratic Republic.
10. The Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution were inspired by the Constitution of _____.

4. Bashar al-Assad defeated

- After almost 15 years of civil war, the final push to overthrow Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad took less than 15 days.
- Rebel forces overran the capital Damascus, while Assad appears to have left for an undisclosed location.

Why is Syria in the midst of a civil war?

- Since 1971, Syria was in the control of Hafez al-Assad, the all-powerful President seen by many as a dictator. After Hafez died in 2000, his son, Bashar, took over.
- In 2011, when the Arab Spring saw dictators being toppled across West Asia, protests began against Assad too.
- Assad belongs to the Alawite community, a sect of Shia Islam. Many in Syria believed that while Sunnis were the majority, power and resources were concentrated in the hands of the Alawites.
- After coming to power, Assad had opened up the economy, but the gains had largely been limited to the elites.
- Thus, when protests began — initially peacefully — price rise and unemployment were among the major issues.
- Assad's regime cracked down on the protesters, and the agitation soon spiralled into armed civil war.
- Among the fighters were many factions — with different external backers — and many aims, but forcing Assad to step down was a largely common goal.
- The rebels had taken control of areas to the northeast and northwest of the country.
- However, Assad was in control of a large section of Syria. This was made possible thanks to a major offensive in 2015, when Russia provided air support and Assad's forces, with the help of Iran, beat back the rebels. Since 2020, the civil war had remained a frozen conflict, till the anti-government forces mounted a quick and surprisingly effective campaign from November 27.

Who was fighting whom, and why?

- The leader of the group that just captured Damascus is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by Abu Mohammad al-Jolani.
- The HTS was founded in 2011 as Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda's branch in Syria.
- In 2016, it broke away to form the Jabhat Fateh al-Shaam (JFS), standing for the liberation of al-Shaam, or the Levant (the sub-region of the Middle East lying near the Mediterranean Sea, including Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine).
- The HTS wanted to overthrow Assad and establish a Sunni-Islamic rule.
- The other significant player are the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a collection of Kurdish militias that want more autonomy and rights for the Kurds. They are not a major enemy of Assad.
- Then is the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army, opposing both Assad and the Kurds.
- Among foreign players, Iran and Russia support Assad, and Lebanon's Hezbollah have provided him with crucial fighting support. The US and Turkey have backed the anti-Assad forces, though Turkey's beef is mainly with the Kurds, including those within its own borders.

What happened over the last two weeks, what happens now?

- With Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia all distracted with their own wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and Ukraine, respectively, Assad was missing critical support. As the rebels ran over the country, they met little effective resistance from the official Syrian Army.
- However, it is too early to say if Assad's fall is the end of the Syrian civil war, or just another chapter.
- While Assad was undoubtedly unpopular, many believed him to be a bulwark against Sunni Islamic fundamentalism, and a champion of minority rights.
- Assad was never meant to be Syria's leader. He was an ophthalmologist practising in London when his elder brother and father's heir apparent, Basil, died in a car crash in 1994. After he came to power in 2000, there were early, nascent indications that his rule would not be as authoritarian as his father's. His

marriage to London-born investment banker Asma Akhras further boosted his liberal image. But his response to the 2011 protests, and the increasing brutality of repression since, ended all hopes of a ‘Damascus Spring’.

What were India’s ties with Bashar al-Assad?

- India has had friendly ties with Syria under Assad. In fact, The 6th Round of India-Syria Foreign Office Consultations took place in New Delhi on November 29.
- The Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release then, “India and Syria enjoy warm and friendly relations based on historic and civilisational ties.
- India has been a keen developmental partner for Syria and is also actively involved in capacity building of the Syrian youth.
- Both the countries also cooperate on various multilateral forums. The discussions held will contribute in further strengthening of India-Syria bilateral partnership.”

Arab Spring

- The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings and protests that swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region starting in December 2010.
- It led to significant political and social changes in several countries, with some regimes being overthrown while others faced ongoing unrest. The term “Arab Spring” symbolizes a “new beginning” akin to springtime, representing hope for democracy, freedom, and human rights.

Causes of the Arab Spring

- **Economic Hardship:** High unemployment, poverty, and rising food prices led to dissatisfaction with living conditions.
- **Authoritarian Regimes:** People opposed long-standing dictatorships and the lack of democratic governance.
- **Corruption:** Corrupt political and business elites created economic inequality and limited social mobility.
- **Human Rights Violations:** Arbitrary arrests, torture, and repression of political dissent fueled public outrage.
- **Social Media and Technology:** Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube played a key role in mobilizing protests and spreading awareness globally.
- **Inspiration from Tunisia:** The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010 became a catalyst for protests, inspiring other movements in the region.

Key Countries Affected

Tunisia:

- **Trigger Event:** Self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi (December 2010)
- **Outcome:** President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia. Tunisia transitioned to a democratic government and is often seen as the Arab Spring’s only success story.

Egypt:

- **Key Event:** Tahrir Square protests (January 2011)

- **Outcome:** Ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, followed by the election of Mohamed Morsi (linked to the Muslim Brotherhood). However, Morsi was later overthrown by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in a military coup.

Libya:

- **Key Event:** Civil War (February 2011)
- **Outcome:** Overthrow and death of Muammar Gaddafi. Libya descended into ongoing conflict and instability, with competing factions controlling parts of the country.

Syria:

- **Key Event:** Anti-government protests (March 2011)
- **Outcome:** The uprising evolved into a civil war. President Bashar al-Assad clung to power, with support from Russia and Iran. The war led to a massive humanitarian crisis, with millions of refugees and casualties.

Yemen:

- **Key Event:** Anti-government protests (January 2011)
- **Outcome:** President Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to step down in 2012. However, Yemen descended into civil war between Houthi rebels and forces loyal to the government, exacerbated by Saudi-led intervention.

Bahrain:

- **Key Event:** Protests led by the Shia Muslim majority against the ruling Sunni monarchy.
- **Outcome:** Protests were violently suppressed with the help of Saudi Arabia and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) forces. The monarchy retained power.

Other Countries:

- Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Sudan experienced protests, but these did not result in regime change.

Impact of the Arab Spring

Political Changes:

- Overthrew regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.
- Triggered political reforms in countries like Morocco and Jordan.
- Civil war erupted in Syria, Yemen, and Libya.

Rise of Extremist Groups:

- Power vacuums in Libya, Syria, and Iraq allowed groups like ISIS to emerge and expand their control.

Refugee Crisis:

- Millions of people fled war zones, particularly from Syria, Libya, and Yemen, causing a refugee crisis, especially in Europe.

Geopolitical Shifts:

- Greater involvement of global powers like Russia, the US, and Iran in the region's politics and conflicts.

Mixed Results:

- While Tunisia succeeded in transitioning to democracy, other countries faced violence, civil wars, and authoritarian repression.

Legacy of the Arab Spring

- Tunisia remains the most notable success, with a functioning democracy.
- Syria, Libya, and Yemen are mired in conflict and humanitarian crises.
- Authoritarian backlash occurred in countries like Egypt, where a military regime reasserted control.
- **Rise of Populism:** The movement exposed the power of social media and civil society but also revealed the risks of power vacuums and foreign intervention.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. After the death of Hafez al-Assad in 2000, his son, _____, took over as the President of Syria.
2. The Arab Spring began in December 2010 and was triggered by the self-immolation of _____ in Tunisia.
3. The leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the rebel group that captured Damascus, is _____.
4. Syria's President Bashar al-Assad belongs to the _____ community, a sect of Shia Islam.
5. The civil war in Syria escalated after protests in 2011 were met with a violent crackdown by the _____ regime.
6. The two foreign countries that have been key supporters of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war are _____ and _____.
7. India and Syria maintain strong bilateral ties, and the 6th Round of India-Syria Foreign Office Consultations took place in _____ on November 29, 2024.
8. The former name of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) was _____, which was initially an affiliate of al-Qaeda.
9. The main aim of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is to secure greater autonomy and rights for the _____ ethnic group.
10. The Arab Spring uprisings led to the overthrow of leaders in four countries: Tunisia, Egypt, _____, and Yemen.

5. Opposition moves no-confidence motion against Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar in Rajya Sabha

- The Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, making it the first such action in India's parliamentary history.
- While there was no confirmation from the Congress, sources in one of the Opposition parties said the motion had been moved, with 65 signatures. The minimum required numbers for moving a motion to remove the vice president is 50.

- Though the motion is expected to be defeated given how the numbers are stacked in the Rajya Sabha, the Opposition – that had contemplated a no-trust motion against Dhankhar in August as well – wants to prove its point of not being given an opportunity to speak in the House by the presiding officer.

Legal Provisions for Removal

- The removal of the Vice-President is governed by Article 67(b) of the Indian Constitution.
 - **Initiation:** The motion can only be introduced in the Rajya Sabha, not the Lok Sabha.
 - **Notice Requirement:** At least 14 days' prior notice is required before introducing the resolution.

Voting:

- In the Rajya Sabha, an effective majority is needed (i.e., a majority of members present and voting).
- In the Lok Sabha, a simple majority (more than 50% of the members present and voting) is required to pass the resolution

Reasons for the Motion

- The opposition has cited several grievances against Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, including:
 - **Microphone Issues:** Allegations that the microphone of the Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, is frequently turned off.
 - **Handling of Complaints:** Complaints from opposition members are reportedly not addressed on the House floor but are redirected to the Chairman's chamber.
 - **Personal Remarks:** Accusations that the Chairman made personal remarks against members, which allegedly violates Rule 238(2) of the Rajya Sabha, which prohibits personal charges against members.
- This development is significant as it marks a rare and historic instance of an attempt to remove a sitting Vice-President. It also reflects the ongoing tensions between the ruling party and the opposition in India's parliamentary system.

Vice President of India

Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha:

- The Vice President serves as the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament), responsible for maintaining order and decorum in the House.
- The Vice President has the authority to cast a tie-breaking vote in the case of a deadlock.

Succession to the President:

- In case of vacancy, resignation, impeachment, or death of the President, the Vice President takes over as the acting President until a new President is elected.

Ceremonial Role:

- The Vice President represents India in various ceremonial and diplomatic events as required.

Election of the Vice President

- **Electoral College:** The Vice President is elected by members of both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) through a system of proportional representation and a secret ballot.
- **Term:** The Vice President serves for a 5-year term but can be re-elected.

Eligibility:

- Must be an Indian citizen.
- Must be at least 35 years old.
- Must be qualified to be a member of the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament).

Significance of the Office

- The Vice President plays a crucial role in maintaining the functioning of Parliament, especially in the Rajya Sabha, which often deals with crucial legislative and constitutional matters.
- The role becomes even more critical in situations where there is a potential power vacuum in the Presidency.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman _____, marking the first such action in India's parliamentary history.
2. The removal of the Vice-President is governed by Article _____ of the Indian Constitution.
3. To initiate a motion for the removal of the Vice-President, at least _____ signatures are required.
4. The Vice President serves as the ex-officio _____ of the Rajya Sabha, responsible for maintaining order and decorum in the House.
5. The Vice-President is elected by an electoral college consisting of members from _____ and _____ through a system of proportional representation.
6. If a vacancy arises in the office of the President of India, the _____ takes over as acting President until a new President is elected.
7. As per the removal process, at least _____ days' prior notice is required before introducing a resolution to remove the Vice-President.
8. The Vice-President must be at least _____ years old to be eligible for the position.
9. The Vice-President has the authority to cast a _____ vote in the case of a deadlock in the Rajya Sabha.
10. One of the reasons cited by the Opposition for the no-confidence motion was that the microphone of _____, the Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, was frequently turned off.

6. Tokyo to implement four-day workweek to tackle declining fertility rates

- The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has announced a four-day workweek initiative for its employees, aimed at addressing Japan's declining fertility rates and supporting young families.
- The policy, revealed by Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike in a recent policy speech, will allow employees to opt for three days off per week starting in April.

- In addition, parents of elementary school children will have the option to reduce their working hours with a slight salary reduction.
- This move is part of broader efforts to combat Japan's record-low fertility rate, which fell to 1.2 children per woman last year—well below the 2.1 replacement level required for population stability.
- Despite various government initiatives, the birth rate continues to decline, with only 727,277 births recorded nationwide last year, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.
- Governor Koike highlighted the urgent need for action, stating, “Now is the time for Tokyo to take the lead in protecting and improving the lives, livelihoods, and economy of our people during these challenging times for the nation.”
- Experts attribute part of Japan's fertility crisis to its demanding work culture, which is characterized by long hours that discourage women from balancing careers and family life.
- The World Bank's data from last year revealed a significant gender gap in workforce participation, with rates of 55% for women and 72% for men.
- The four-day workweek has been trialed in several countries with considerable success.
- A 2022 global pilot programme, organized by the nonprofit 4 Day Week Global, saw numerous companies testing shorter workweeks.
- Over 90% of participants expressed a desire to continue with the new schedule, reporting benefits such as improved mental and physical health, better work-life balance, and higher overall life satisfaction.
- The trial also led to significant reductions in stress, burnout, and work-family conflicts, with participants rating the experience 9.1 out of 10.
- Similar strides in flexible work arrangements have been observed in other regions, such as Singapore, where businesses are now required to consider employee requests for alternative schedules, including shorter workweeks or staggered hours.
- Tokyo's four-day workweek initiative reflects a growing global shift toward flexible work arrangements to improve employee well-being, increase workforce participation, and address broader social challenges like fertility decline.
- If successful, it could serve as a model for other Japanese municipalities and nations facing similar demographic and labor issues.

Total Fertility Rate

- Total Fertility Rate (TFR) refers to the average number of children that a woman is expected to have during her reproductive years (usually considered to be ages 15 to 49) if she experiences the current age-specific fertility rates throughout her lifetime. It is a key demographic indicator used to assess population growth and reproductive behavior in a society.

Measurement:

- TFR is calculated as the sum of the age-specific fertility rates (ASFR) for all age groups of women in a specific time period, usually expressed per 1,000 women.

Replacement Level Fertility:

- Replacement-level fertility is the TFR required to maintain a stable population, i.e., for each generation to “replace” itself.
- It is generally considered to be 2.1 children per woman in developed countries (to account for child mortality and other factors).

- If TFR is below 2.1, the population will eventually shrink, while a TFR above 2.1 results in population growth.

Global Trends:

- In developed countries, TFR is often below replacement level (e.g., Japan, South Korea, and many European nations have TFRs below 2.1).
- In developing countries, TFR tends to be higher, but it has been declining due to increased education, access to family planning, and improved healthcare.

Determinants of TFR:

- **Socioeconomic factors:** Education, especially female education, is inversely related to TFR.
- **Health factors:** Access to contraception and healthcare services can reduce TFR.
- **Cultural and religious factors:** Norms, beliefs, and societal roles influence family size.
- **Economic factors:** In agrarian societies, larger families are seen as a source of labor, while urbanization and higher living costs encourage smaller families.

TFR in India:

- India's TFR has declined to 2.0 (according to NFHS-5, 2019-2021), which is below the replacement level of 2.1.
- The decline is attributed to better access to education, family planning, healthcare, and urbanization.
- States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have higher TFRs, while Kerala and Tamil Nadu have much lower TFRs (close to 1.7 or below).

Implications of TFR:

- **High TFR:** Leads to rapid population growth, which can strain resources like education, healthcare, and employment.
- **Low TFR:** May result in an aging population and a shrinking workforce, as seen in countries like Japan, South Korea, and Italy.
- **Population Policies:** Governments aim to manage TFR through initiatives like family planning, healthcare access, and social support for childbearing.

Workday per Week

- A workday per week typically refers to the number of days employees are required to work within a week. The number of workdays varies across countries, industries, and organizations.

5-Day Work Week (Monday to Friday)

- Standard in most countries like the U.S., India, the U.K., and many parts of Europe.
- Employees work 5 days a week, with weekends (Saturday and Sunday) as rest days.
- Total weekly work hours are often 40 (8 hours/day × 5 days).

6-Day Work Week (Monday to Saturday)

- Common in certain sectors, especially manufacturing, construction, retail, and small businesses.
- Some Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian countries follow a 6-day work week.
- The work hours can be shorter (e.g., 6-7 hours/day) to avoid overwork.

4-Day Work Week (New Trend)

- Gaining traction in countries like Iceland, Japan, and some companies in the U.S. and Europe.
- Employees work for 4 days a week, but the total work hours may remain the same (compressed schedule) or be reduced.
- Research suggests increased productivity, better work-life balance, and improved mental well-being.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government's four-day workweek initiative aims to address Japan's declining _____ rates.
2. Tokyo's four-day workweek policy will allow employees to opt for _____ days off per week starting in April.
3. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan recorded only _____ births nationwide last year.
4. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is calculated as the sum of the age-specific fertility rates for all age groups of women in a specific time period, usually expressed per _____ women.
5. Replacement-level fertility is generally considered to be _____ children per woman in developed countries.
6. In developed countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and many European nations, the TFR tends to be _____ replacement level.
7. The 2022 global pilot program for a four-day workweek was organized by the nonprofit _____.
8. In the 2022 global pilot program, over _____% of participants expressed a desire to continue with the new four-day workweek schedule.
9. The Total Fertility Rate in India has declined to _____ according to the NFHS-5, 2019-2021.
10. A workday per week typically refers to the number of days employees are required to work within a _____.

7. How RBI is leveraging AI to crack down on 'mule bank accounts'

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that it has created an artificial intelligence (AI) powered model that could reduce digital fraud by helping banks deal with the increasing problem of "mule" bank accounts. The model, called MuleHunter.AI, has been developed by the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH), Bengaluru, a subsidiary of the central bank.

What is a mule bank account?

- A mule account is a bank account that is used by criminals for illegal activities, including the laundering of illicit funds.

- A mule account is typically bought over by the criminals from their original users, individuals who are often from lower income groups, or have low levels of technical literacy.
- The related term “money mule” is used to describe the innocent victims who are used by the criminals to launder stolen or illegal money via their bank accounts.
- When such incidents are reported, the money mule becomes the target of police investigations, because it is their accounts that are involved, while the actual criminals remain undetectable.
- “The Reserve Bank has been taking various measures in coordination with banks and other stakeholders to prevent and mitigate digital frauds in the financial sector.
- These include RBI guidelines to regulated entities for strengthening cybersecurity, cyber fraud prevention and transaction monitoring. Use of money mule accounts is a common method adopted by fraudsters to channel proceeds of frauds,”.
- The RBI said MuleHunter.AI “enables detection of mule bank accounts in an efficient manner”.
- The release said that a pilot with two large public sector banks had yielded encouraging results, and asked banks to collaborate with RBIH to further develop the MuleHunter.AI model “to deal with the issue of mule bank accounts being used for committing financial frauds”.

How big is the mule accounts problem in India?

- Mule bank accounts are seen as a key element in the majority of online financial frauds in India. The Centre had frozen around 4.5 lakh such bank accounts, which were typically used for laundering proceeds of cyber crime.
- Of these 4.5 lakh mule accounts, around 40,000 were detected in various branches of SBI; 10,000 in Punjab National Bank (including Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India); 7,000 in Canara Bank (including Syndicate Bank); 6,000 in Kotak Mahindra Bank; and 5,000 in Airtel Payments Bank.

And what has the government done to crack down on mule accounts?

- The Department of Financial Services (DFS) Secretary recently held a meeting with officials from the RBI, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), NABARD, and public- and private-sector banks to address the growing issue of digital financial fraud, particularly mule accounts.
- Several such discussions have taken place with various stakeholders to tackle this challenge.
- During the meeting, banks were urged to adopt best practices, leverage advanced tools, and foster inter-bank collaboration to combat mule accounts effectively.
- Banks were instructed to incorporate cutting-edge technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), to detect mule accounts in real-time.
- Additionally, staff training on fraud detection and prevention was emphasized. The adoption of the RBI’s Mulehunter solution was encouraged for enhanced detection and monitoring of these fraudulent accounts.
- In November 2023, former DFS Secretary Vivek Joshi proposed restrictions on withdrawing money from dormant bank accounts that suddenly become active, especially when large sums are deposited unexpectedly.
- He suggested that while deposits may not be problematic, withdrawal restrictions should apply in such cases.
- Moreover, the RBI is running a hackathon themed “Zero Financial Frauds” to foster innovative solutions, with a focus on mule accounts.

- This initiative seeks to encourage the development of effective tools and strategies to prevent financial fraud and address the growing threat posed by mule accounts.

New Governor of Reserve Bank of India

- The new Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is Sanjay Malhotra. He assumed office on December 11, 2024, following the conclusion of Shaktikanta Das's six-year term.
- Malhotra, an IAS officer from the 1990 batch, has a diverse background, having worked in sectors such as finance, taxation, power, and information technology.
- Prior to his appointment as RBI Governor, he served as the Secretary of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance.
- His educational qualifications include a degree in computer science from IIT Kanpur and a Master's in Public Policy from Princeton University.

Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

- The Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is selected through a formal process that involves several key steps. The selection is done by the Government of India and involves the following criteria and considerations:

1. Appointment Process:

- The Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are typically involved in the selection process.
- The President of India formally appoints the RBI Governor, as per the recommendations from the government.
- The selection is made after evaluating the candidates' qualifications, experience, and suitability for the role.

2. Criteria for Selection:

- While there is no fixed set of formal requirements, the following factors are typically considered:
 - **Experience in Banking or Financial Sector:** The Governor is usually an individual with a deep understanding of financial markets, banking systems, and economic policy. They often have previous experience in senior positions in public sector banks, international financial institutions, or academia.
 - **Expertise in Economics:** A background in economics, particularly monetary policy, is highly preferred. Many governors have been economists or have worked in central banks, finance ministries, or related fields.
 - **Leadership Qualities:** The Governor needs to have strong leadership skills to manage the operations of the RBI and oversee its regulatory functions. Effective decision-making and handling critical economic issues, such as inflation, interest rates, and currency management, are essential qualities.
 - **Reputation and Integrity:** The RBI Governor is expected to maintain a high level of integrity and independence. They should be viewed as someone who is capable of standing firm on policies and decisions that may not always be politically popular.
 - **Public Policy Experience:** Having experience in shaping public policy, particularly in relation to the financial or economic sectors, is another important aspect.

3. Tenure:

- The tenure of an RBI Governor is typically three years, but it can be extended. The Governor can continue for longer periods based on mutual agreement between the Government and the individual, as long as they are performing well and meeting expectations.

4. Independence:

- One of the key features of the RBI's role is its independence from the government. This is crucial for maintaining credibility in policy decisions, especially in areas like inflation control and monetary policy.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has created an AI-powered model called _____ to reduce digital fraud by helping banks detect mule bank accounts.
2. A _____ account is a bank account used by criminals for illegal activities, including money laundering.
3. The RBI's MuleHunter.AI model has been developed by the _____ (RBIH), a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India.
4. The Department of Financial Services (DFS) recently held a meeting with RBI, I4C, and other stakeholders to address the growing issue of _____.
5. _____ is the new Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, assuming office on December 11, 2024.
6. Mule bank accounts are a key element in the majority of online _____ in India.
7. In 2023, the government froze around _____ mule bank accounts that were typically used for laundering cyber crime proceeds.
8. The RBI encourages banks to incorporate _____ and Machine Learning (ML) to detect mule accounts in real-time.
9. The RBI's hackathon, themed "_____,", aims to foster innovative solutions to combat financial fraud and mule accounts.
10. The tenure of an RBI Governor is typically _____ years, but can be extended based on mutual agreement.

8. Saudi Arabia secured hosting rights for 2034 football World Cup

- FIFA is set to reveal Saudi Arabia as the host for the 2034 World Cup, marking the Gulf nation's return to the global football stage just 12 years after Qatar hosted the 2022 tournament.
- The announcement is expected to be straightforward, as Saudi Arabia is the only bidder for the event.

- This victory is the result of the country's strategic investments, sponsorships, and global influence, which helped secure the hosting rights for the prestigious competition.
- Saudi Arabia's success is a significant moment for India, which is also competing for the 2036 Olympics.
- Saudi Arabia, alongside Qatar, is one of India's major rivals in this race.
- Both nations have made substantial investments in global sports, with Saudi Arabia also set to host the 2034 Asian Games.
- The way Saudi Arabia won the World Cup bid unopposed could offer insights into how the Kingdom may approach its bid for the 2036 Olympics, depending on their level of ambition and commitment.
- India must be prepared to compete against such financially powerful nations in the pursuit of hosting the 2036 Olympic Games.

910 sponsorship deals

- A recent investigation by the Danish research organization Play the Game revealed Saudi Arabia's significant investment in sports, particularly football.
- The country has secured 910 sponsorship deals across 28 sports, including prominent events like the Islamic Solidarity Games and Saudi Games.
- Of these, 194 were focused solely on football, with the Public Investment Fund (PIF), Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, involved in 346 of these sponsorships.
- Saudi Arabia has also signed 48 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with countries worldwide, which Play the Game describes as powerful strategic alliances.
- These MoUs foster goodwill and pave the way for increased collaboration and direct access to key decision-makers within federations, who influence major FIFA decisions, including host selections and governance matters.
- An example of this was the MoU signed on October 6, 2022, between the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation.
- The agreement included technological support, youth competitions, and exchanges of football and governance expertise.
- However, after a costly bidding process, India unexpectedly withdrew from the race to host the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, with Saudi Arabia ultimately awarded the event on February 1, 2023.

Partnerships with AFC

- Saudi Arabia has significantly strengthened its ties with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) through strategic partnerships. Notably, Neom, Saudi Arabia's ambitious megacity project, became the AFC's Global Partner from 2021 to 2024, with the agreement extended for an additional five years.
- Furthermore, Visit Saudi was appointed as the AFC's official Global Partner until December 2024.
- These collaborations marked an important step for Saudi Arabia in advancing its position in global football.
- A major milestone occurred in February 2023, when the AFC announced Saudi Arabia as the host for the 2027 Asian Cup.
- On the same day, Yasser Al-Misehal, president of Saudi Arabia's football federation, was elected as Asia's representative to the FIFA Council.
- This influential body plays a key role in making decisions on the most critical aspects of world football, solidifying Saudi Arabia's presence on the global football stage.

Aramco steps in

- Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil and gas company, Aramco, entered into a controversial partnership with FIFA, which sparked criticism, particularly from over 100 female footballers who urged FIFA to end the deal due to Saudi Arabia's alleged human rights violations and restrictions on women's rights.
- Despite the backlash, Saudi Arabia continued investing heavily in football by attracting top players, including Cristiano Ronaldo, and acquiring football teams across Europe.
- Notable investments include Riyadh Air's sponsorship of Atletico Madrid, Riyadh Season sponsoring AS Roma, and the Public Investment Fund (PIF) owning Newcastle United. Saudi royal family member Abdullah bin Musaid Al Saud expanded his portfolio, owning clubs like Beerschot VA, Al Hilal United, LB Chateauroux, Sheffield United, and Kerala United in India.
- With this global footprint, Saudi Arabia aimed to host the FIFA World Cup, further solidifying its presence in international football.

Australia pulls out

- In October 2023, FIFA set a 25-day deadline for countries to express interest in hosting the 2034 World Cup.
- Less than two hours after the announcement, Saudi officially declared its bid. A few days later, Australia entered the race but pulled out to focus on securing the 2026 Women's Asian Cup and the 2029 FIFA Club World Cup.
- That left Saudi Arabia as the sole bidder for the 2034 World Cup. Last week, FIFA gave a glowing review of Saudi's bid, scoring it 4.2 out of 5 — more than the 2026 bid of USA, Canada and Mexico, which received 4 out of 5.

2026 FIFA World Cup

- The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be the 23rd edition of the tournament and the first to be hosted by three countries: the United States, Mexico, and Canada.
- **Host Countries:** This will be the first time the World Cup is jointly hosted by three nations. The USA will host the majority of the games, while Mexico and Canada will also host matches in various cities.
- **Expansion:** For the first time in history, the World Cup will feature 48 teams, an increase from the traditional 32. The tournament will be divided into 16 groups of three teams each, with the top two teams from each group progressing to the knockout stage.
- **Dates:** The tournament is scheduled to take place from June to July 2026. Specific dates have not yet been finalized, but it will likely be in the summer months, as usual.

Venues: Matches will be played in 16 cities across North America:

- United States: 11 cities, including New York, Los Angeles, and Miami.
- Mexico: 3 cities, including Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.
- Canada: 2 cities, including Toronto and Vancouver.
- **Significance:** This World Cup will be historic in many ways, not just due to the expanded format, but also because it marks the first time Canada will host World Cup matches. Additionally, the 2026 tournament will also serve as a platform for North American nations to strengthen their football infrastructure and development.

FIFA

- FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) is the global governing body of soccer (football).

- It is responsible for organizing and overseeing international competitions, including the FIFA World Cup, the most prestigious tournament in world football.
- Established in 1904, FIFA is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, and has 211 member associations worldwide; making it one of the largest sports organizations globally.

FIFA's key roles include:

- **Organizing Major Tournaments:** FIFA organizes the men's and women's World Cup tournaments, which are held every four years. These are the most-watched and followed sports events globally.
- **Regulating the Sport:** FIFA sets the global rules of football (the Laws of the Game) and works with national and regional federations to promote the sport's growth, fair play, and integrity.
- **Developing Football:** FIFA also invests in grassroots development, coaching education, and infrastructure in various countries, aiming to grow the sport worldwide.
- **Promoting Women's Football:** FIFA has been actively promoting women's football through the Women's World Cup and other initiatives to boost the visibility and opportunities for female athletes in the sport.
- **Fostering Global Partnerships:** FIFA works with other organizations, sponsors, and governments to further the sport's reach and impact globally.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. FIFA is the global governing body of _____ and is responsible for overseeing international competitions.
2. The FIFA World Cup is the most prestigious tournament in _____.
3. FIFA was established in _____ and is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland.
4. The FIFA World Cup is held every _____ years.
5. As of now, FIFA has _____ member associations worldwide.
6. The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be jointly hosted by the United States, _____, and Canada.
7. The 2026 World Cup will feature _____ teams, an increase from the traditional 32 teams.
8. In October 2023, Saudi Arabia officially declared its bid for the _____ FIFA World Cup.
9. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) was involved in _____ sponsorship deals related to sports.
10. In February 2023, Saudi Arabia was announced as the host of the _____ Asian Cup.

9. Komagata Maru incident

- The Komagata Maru incident refers to a significant event in the history of Indian migration and the struggle for independence during British colonial rule.
- It involved the Japanese ship Komagata Maru, which was carrying 376 Indian passengers, mostly Sikhs, from British-controlled India to Canada in 1914.

- The ship's passengers were attempting to bypass the strict immigration laws that limited Asian immigration to Canada.

Incident Details:

- **Departure:** The Komagata Maru left Calcutta (now Kolkata) in April 1914 and sailed towards Vancouver, Canada, carrying passengers from Punjab.
- **Canada's Immigration Laws:** At the time, Canada had restrictive immigration laws designed to limit the number of non-European immigrants. One of the key laws was that immigrants had to travel directly from India to Canada without stopping at any other port. However, the Komagata Maru made stops along the way, and the passengers faced difficulty in meeting these criteria.
- **Denial of Entry:** Upon reaching Vancouver in May 1914, the passengers were denied entry to Canada. The Canadian authorities refused to allow them to disembark, despite the passengers' legal right to enter under British Empire laws.
- **Standoff and Return:** The ship was forced to remain in Vancouver's harbor for two months, during which time there was a standoff between the passengers and Canadian authorities. Eventually, the ship was ordered to return to India, where it arrived in July 1914. Upon arrival, the British authorities in India treated the passengers harshly, and many were arrested or killed when clashes broke out with the police.

Effect and Impact:

- **Nationalism and Protest:** The Komagata Maru incident fueled nationalist sentiments among Indians, especially those in the diaspora.
- It highlighted the racial discrimination faced by Indian immigrants and became a symbol of resistance against British imperialism.
- **Ghadar Movement:** The incident played a crucial role in strengthening the Ghadar Party, an organization formed by Indian expatriates in the United States and Canada.
- Many of the passengers on the Komagata Maru were associated with the Ghadar Party, which sought to overthrow British rule in India through armed resistance.
- **International Awareness:** The incident brought international attention to the discriminatory practices of the British Empire, particularly regarding the treatment of people from colonies like India.
- It drew sympathy from the broader international community, further showcasing the injustices of colonial rule.
- **Political Legacy:** The incident remained a symbol of oppression and injustice. In the years following the event, Indian leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Bhagat Singh used the incident to rally support for India's freedom struggle.
- The harsh treatment of the passengers deepened the anger and resentment towards the British government, contributing to the growing demand for independence.
- **Reparations and Recognition:** In the years following the event, there was increasing recognition of the injustice suffered by the passengers.
- In 2008, the Canadian government formally apologized for the incident, acknowledging the wrongs done to the passengers.
- In 2014, the Indian government also marked the 100th anniversary of the incident, paying tribute to the victims.
- **Cultural and Historical Legacy:** The Komagata Maru incident is now remembered as a key moment in the history of the Indian diaspora and Canada's immigration policy.

- It is also an important part of the broader narrative of resistance against colonial oppression.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Komagata Maru incident occurred in the year _____.
2. The Japanese ship involved in the incident was called _____.
3. The passengers aboard the Komagata Maru were primarily from the region of _____ in India.
4. The passengers of the Komagata Maru were attempting to bypass Canada's _____ immigration laws.
5. The Komagata Maru departed from _____ (now Kolkata) in April _____.
6. The Canadian immigration laws at the time required immigrants to travel directly from _____ to Canada without stopping at other ports.
7. Upon reaching Vancouver, Canada, in _____, the passengers were _____ entry by Canadian authorities.
8. The Komagata Maru was forced to remain in _____'s harbor for two months before being ordered to return to _____.
9. The passengers of the Komagata Maru faced harsh treatment upon their return to India, with many being _____ or _____ during clashes with the police.
10. In _____ the Canadian government formally _____ for the injustice suffered by the passengers of the Komagata Maru.

10. India-Myanmar Relations

India and Myanmar share a 1,643-km-long border and have deep historical, cultural, and economic ties. Their relationship is significant for India's "Act East Policy", regional connectivity, and efforts to maintain peace and security in the northeast. Myanmar serves as a strategic bridge between India and Southeast Asia.

1. Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

- **Border Security:** The shared border poses security challenges, including cross-border insurgency. India collaborates with Myanmar to combat insurgent groups like NSCN-IM, ULFA, and PLA, which operate from Myanmar.
- **Geostrategic Position:** Myanmar's location is critical for India to access ASEAN markets and counter China's influence in the region.
- **Countering China's Influence:** China's growing footprint in Myanmar, particularly in infrastructure projects like the Kyaukpadaung deep-sea port, has heightened India's need to strengthen ties with Myanmar.

2. Economic and Trade Relations

- **Bilateral Trade:** Bilateral trade stood at approximately \$2 billion (2022-23), with India exporting pharmaceuticals, machinery, and consumer goods, while importing pulses, timber, and gemstones.
- **Connectivity Projects:**
 - **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway:** Aims to link India to Southeast Asia, enhancing trade and people-to-people connectivity.

- **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project:** Connects India's eastern seaports with Myanmar's Rakhine State via Sittwe Port and further into India's northeastern states.
- **Development Assistance:** India has provided support for infrastructure, capacity-building, and humanitarian aid to Myanmar.

3. Cultural and People-to-People Ties

- **Buddhism:** Myanmar and India share a Buddhist heritage, and India promotes Buddhist diplomacy through pilgrimages to Bodhi Gaya and other Buddhist sites.
- **Diaspora Links:** A significant Indian diaspora resides in Myanmar, and cross-border movement between communities living in Manipur, Mizoram, and Myanmar's Chin and Sagaing regions is common.

4. Defense and Security Cooperation

- **Counter-Insurgency Operations:** Joint military operations, like Operation Sunrise, target insurgent camps along the border.
- **Military Ties:** India trains Myanmar's military (Tatmadaw) and offers equipment like patrol boats to strengthen maritime security.

5. Recent Developments

- **Coup in Myanmar (2021):** The military coup that ousted the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi strained India-Myanmar ties, especially as international pressure mounted on India to condemn Myanmar's military junta.
- **Balancing Act:** India adopted a neutral stance on the coup, balancing its strategic interests with concerns about human rights. India emphasized "quiet diplomacy" rather than outright condemnation.
- **Refugee Crisis:** Thousands of refugees from Myanmar have fled to India's northeastern states, especially Mizoram, leading to local humanitarian challenges.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** India has provided aid and COVID-19 vaccines to Myanmar under the Vaccine Maitri initiative.

6. Challenges in Relations

- **Myanmar's Instability:** The military's continued hold on power has made diplomatic engagement complex.
- **Insurgency and Border Management:** Cross-border insurgency groups continue to use Myanmar as a sanctuary.
- **China's Influence:** China's growing influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and strategic infrastructure projects puts India under pressure to maintain stronger ties with Myanmar.

Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)

- The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an intergovernmental initiative that promotes cooperation between India and five Southeast Asian countries—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Established on November 10, 2000, in Vientiane, Laos, the MGC aims to foster closer cultural, economic, and social ties.
- **Cultural and Civilizational Linkages:** The Mekong and Ganga rivers are seen as symbols of civilizational connectivity between Southeast Asia and South Asia.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Enhance trade and connectivity between the member countries.
- **Tourism Promotion:** Promote tourism and the sharing of tourism-related infrastructure.

- **Transport and Connectivity:** Strengthen infrastructure and connectivity through roads, rail, and maritime routes.
- **Education and Capacity Building:** Provide scholarships, training, and technical assistance.
- **People-to-People Contact:** Increase cultural exchanges, youth programs, and human resource development.

Priority Areas of MGC

- **Tourism:** Promoting joint tourism packages and developing Buddhist tourism circuits.
- **Culture:** Preservation of cultural heritage, including the promotion of shared heritage sites like the Angkor Wat in Cambodia.
- **Education:** Scholarships for students from MGC countries to study in India and other member countries.
- **Transport and Connectivity:** Focus on multi-modal connectivity projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.
- **Health and Pandemic Response:** Cooperation in the health sector, especially in response to pandemics.
- **Agriculture and Environment:** Collaboration in sustainable agriculture and environment protection, including water resource management.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. India and Myanmar share a _____ km-long border, which plays a crucial role in India's Act East Policy and regional connectivity.
2. The _____ Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project aims to connect India's eastern seaports with Myanmar's Rakhine State via Sittwe Port.
3. India-Myanmar-Thailand _____ Highway is a key connectivity project that links India to Southeast Asia, enhancing trade and people-to-people ties.
4. The shared India-Myanmar border poses security challenges, including cross-border insurgency involving groups like _____, ULFA, and PLA.
5. Myanmar's geostrategic position is significant for India as it serves as a bridge to _____ markets and helps counter China's influence.
6. Joint military operations like Operation _____ are conducted by India and Myanmar to target insurgent camps along their shared border.
7. The _____-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is an intergovernmental initiative promoting cooperation between India and five Southeast Asian countries.
8. India maintains a neutral stance on Myanmar's political situation, adopting a policy of _____ diplomacy to balance strategic interests and human rights concerns.
9. Myanmar's deep-sea port project at _____ has increased China's influence in the region, prompting India to strengthen its ties with Myanmar.
10. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation prioritizes the promotion of shared Buddhist heritage and tourism through initiatives like the _____ Tourism Circuit.