MANTHAN

DECEMBER 2024 : WEEK-3

Contents

1. How does La Niña affect India's climate?

- La Niña, a phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), occurs when the region of the Pacific Ocean between Indonesia and South America is cooler than usual.
- Its counterpart, El Niño, represents a warming of the same region.
- These two phases significantly influence global atmospheric circulation and weather patterns.
- During La Niña years, India receives normal or above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season.
- Yet the same phenomenon causes droughts in Africa and intensifies hurricanes over the Atlantic Ocean.
- Conversely, the El Niño brings extreme summers and droughts in India while increasing rainfall in the southern United States.
- While the La Niña was expected to emerge by July this year, it is yet to.
- The India Meteorological Department now expects a La Niña to set in by late 2024 or early 2025, plus a milder winter due to this delay.
- This decade began with three consecutive La Niña events (2020-2022), a rare occurrence known as Triple Dip La Niña, followed by an El Niño in 2023.
- Climate change may increase the frequency and intensity of both La Niña and El Niño events, as rising sea and land temperatures disrupt the Pacific's balance.
- This could also amplify extreme La Niña events, which generally lead to harsh winters in India.

Meteorology of a La Niña winter

- Cities in southern India like Bengaluru and Hyderabad are experiencing a colder than usual winter this year, while north India is witnessing a delayed winter with above-normal temperatures.
- An analysis of meteorological data over 35 years by researchers at the Council on Energy Environment and Water, New Delhi, has revealed that while La Niña winters feature colder nights compared to El Niño, daytime temperatures tend to be higher.
- Meteorological parameters like wind speed and planetary boundary layer height (PBLH) — the lowest atmospheric layer directly influenced by land-atmosphere interactions — also vary during ENSO phases, affecting air quality.
- The team found the average wind speed is higher throughout the day during La Niña winters.
- Faster winds help reduce air pollution by transporting pollutants away.
- They also found that the average PBLH is slightly lower during La Niña winters.
- If La Niña sets in, lower temperatures in north India may lead people to burn more biomass for heating, worsening air pollution.
- A lower PBLH could also trap more pollutants near the ground.
- But higher wind speeds could disperse the pollutants, potentially leading to better air quality.

La Niña and the monsoons

- El Niño summers are relatively harsher, as was the case in April this year, when India experienced intense, record-breaking heat waves.
- If a La Niña arrives and persists into the summer of 2025, it may offer relief from high heat.

- Additionally, an El Niño often disrupts monsoons, with India historically receiving below-average rainfall during at least half of all El Niño years since 1871.
- But the same figures also indicate evolving patterns since 1980.
- Both north and south India, for instance, have received less rainfall during more intense El Nino events while central India has been barely affected.
- A La Niña, on the other hand, promotes robust monsoons as evidenced by the "normal" or "above-normal" rainfall in the La Niña years of 2020, 2021, and 2022.
- There were "below normal" rains in the El Niño year of 2023.
- Thus it would be a welcome development if a La Niña forms now or early next year and continues until the monsoon season.
- This would mean a less intense summer and more rains for India.

Impact of La Niña on India

Enhanced Southwest Monsoon (Increased Rainfall)

- **Positive Impact:** La Niña typically strengthens the Indian monsoon, leading to above-average rainfall in most parts of India, especially the central, eastern, and southern regions.
- **Agricultural Impact:** Since India's economy and livelihood are heavily dependent on agriculture, good monsoons contribute to higher crop yields, boosting the production of rice, sugarcane, pulses, and other rain-fed crops.
- **Negative Impact:** Excess rainfall can also lead to floods in certain areas, especially in northeastern and eastern India, causing damage to crops, infrastructure, and loss of life.

Cyclone Activity in the Bay of Bengal

- During La Niña years, the Bay of Bengal sees an increase in the frequency and intensity of cyclones, especially during the post-monsoon period (October to December).
- Cyclones like Cyclone Amphan (2020) and Cyclone Yaas (2021) occurred during La Niña conditions, resulting in large-scale destruction in eastern coastal states like West Bengal and Odisha.

Cooler Winters in North India

- La Niña events are associated with colder winters in northern India due to the flow of icy winds from the Himalayas.
- The drop in temperature can have adverse effects on health, especially for vulnerable groups like the elderly and children.
- Drought in Southern and Western Regions (Uncommon)
- Occasionally, some regions like the southern parts of Tamil Nadu may experience drier conditions during La Niña.
- The impact on groundwater and drinking water availability can be a concern, especially in regions dependent on the northeast monsoon (October to December) for their water supply.

Impact on Inflation and Economy

- While La Niña-induced good monsoons boost agricultural production, excessive floods can damage crops and supply chains, impacting food prices.
- Crop surpluses lower the prices of essential commodities like rice, sugar, and cotton, benefiting consumers but impacting farmers' incomes.

Energy Production

- La Niña enhances the water flow into India's hydropower dams, leading to increased hydropower production.
- However, excessive floods can damage hydropower infrastructure, as seen in parts of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. La Niña occurs when the Pacific Ocean region between Indonesia and South America becomes _____ than usual.
2. During La Niña years, India experiences _____ or above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season.
3. The phenomenon of three consecutive La Niña events from 2020 to 2022 is referred to as _____.
4. The El Niño phase typically brings _____ summers and droughts to India.
5. La Niña winters are associated with colder nights but relatively _____ daytime temperatures in India.
6. The average wind speed during La Niña winters is _____ than usual, which helps in reducing air pollution.
7. La Niña typically strengthens the Indian monsoon, leading to increased rainfall, especially in the _____, _____, and _____ regions of India.
8. During La Niña years, the frequency and intensity of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal _____ compared to normal years.
9. La Niña events cause colder winters in North India due to the flow of icy winds from the _____.
10. Enhanced monsoon rains during La Niña increase water flow into India's hydropower dams, leading to higher _____ production.

2. National Energy Conservation Day

- Energy efficiency stands as a cornerstone of sustainable development, weaving together the threads of progress and environmental stewardship.
- In India, this deep dedication to sustainability is passionately commemorated on December 14 as National Energy Conservation Day.
- This annual observance shines as a ray of hope and shared responsibility, underscoring the critical need for adopting sustainable energy practices.
- Far beyond a ceremonial occasion, it serves as a driving force for individuals, industries, and institutions to embrace energy efficiency, paving the way for a greener, more harmonious future.

Background and Significance

- National Energy Conservation Day serves as a reminder of the vital role energy plays in our lives and the urgency of conserving it. Introduced in 1991, this day is championed by the Bureau of Energy

Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power, symbolizing the nation's commitment to energy efficiency and conservation.

- Energy conservation, at its core, is about reducing unnecessary energy usage by promoting efficient practices and technologies. It is a collective responsibility that requires integrating energy-conscious behaviour into our daily routines.

- By doing so, we not only save resources for future generations but also contribute to reducing environmental degradation.

National Energy Conservation Awards: Recognizing Excellence in Energy Efficiency

- A showstopper of the National Energy Conservation Day celebrations is the prestigious National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA), an initiative by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power.

- Instituted in 1991, alongside the declaration of National Energy Conservation Day, these awards honour the exceptional efforts of industrial units, institutions, and establishments that have significantly reduced energy consumption while maintaining or enhancing their operational efficiency.

- Each year, on December 14, these awards are presented by esteemed dignitaries. Over the years, the NECA has evolved into a prominent platform, fostering a spirit of competition and innovation among stakeholders across various sectors to excel in energy conservation.

- The 2024 National Energy Conservation Awards will be presented during the Energy Conservation Day celebrations on December 14, 2024.

- This grand ceremony will shine a spotlight on pioneering and impactful projects from across India, showcasing how organizations are enhancing energy efficiency and contributing to environmental sustainability.

- Participation in NECA not only brings national recognition to organizations but also inspires others to adopt best practices in energy conservation, reaffirming their commitment to environmental stewardship.

- Since its inception, the awards have encouraged industries and establishments to adopt innovative measures and technologies, setting benchmarks in sustainable energy practices.

Steps Taken by the Government for Energy Conservation

- India's dedication to energy sustainability is evident in its strides in power generation, renewable energy, and infrastructure upgrades, paving the way for a greener future.

Perform Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme

- The Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme is a mechanism designed to achieve energy reduction in energy intensive industries and it is designed on the concept of reduction in Specific Energy Consumption (SEC).

- The programme has saved energy worth Rs. 55,000 Crore annually and about 110 million ton of CO_2 emissions have been avoided.

Standard and Labelling (S&L) Programme

- The Standards and Labelling (S&L) Program is one of the major thrust areas of BEE.

- This Program was launched with the key objective of providing consumers an informed choice about the energy and cost saving potential of the labelled appliances/ equipment being sold commercially.

"Go Electric" Campaign

- Ministry of Power launched the "GO ELECTRIC" Campaign on 19th February 2021.
- The objective of this campaign is to create awareness among masses about benefits of switching over to Electric Vehicles (EVs), including various initiatives taken by Centre & State Governments to enhance acceptability of Electric Vehicles, and Electrical Cooking.

EV Yatra" web portal and Mobile Application

- BEE launched "EV Yatra" web-portal & Mobile App on 14th Dec 2022 with the objective of creating awareness among the EV users and masses at large to promote e-mobility in the country.
- The portal has been developed to evolve as a National online database of operational public EV charging stations, in the country wherein an EV users can check availability of the nearest compatible EV charger for complaint with their electric vehicles in addition to other services.

Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for ALL (UJALA)

- Hon'ble Prime Minister, on 5th January 2015 launched UnnatJyoti by Affordable LED for All (UJALA) program.
- Under UJALA scheme, LED bulbs, LED Tube lights and Energy efficient fans are being sold to the domestic consumers for replacement of conventional and inefficient variants.
- Across India, 36.87 Crore LED bulbs and 72 Lakh LED Tube lights have been distributed by EESL.
- As per the Data from Lighting Industry, approximately 382 Crore LED Bulbs and 151 Crore LED Tube Lights have been sold by the private industry, in addition to the bulbs and tube lights distributed by EESL.
- This has resulted in estimated energy savings of 176.2 billion kWh per year, GHG emission reduction of 125 million ton CO_2 per year and estimated annual monetary savings of INR 70,477 crore in consumer electricity bills.

Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP)

- Hon'ble Prime Minister, on 5[th]January, 2015 launched Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP) to replace conventional street lights with smart and energy efficient LED street lights across India.
- Till date, EESL has installed over 1.30 crore LED Street Lights in ULBs and Gram Panchayats across India.
- This has resulted in estimated energy savings of 8.76 billion kWh per year with avoided peak demand of 1,459 MW, GHG emission reduction of 6.03 million ton CO_2 per year and estimated annual monetary savings of INR 6,130 crore in electricity bills of municipalities.

The Road Ahead

- National Energy Conservation Day is more than an annual event; it is a movement that seeks to instil a culture of energy consciousness in India.
- As the nation progresses, the emphasis on sustainable practices and energy efficiency becomes increasingly crucial.
- By aligning individual actions with national objectives, we can collectively illuminate the path to a greener, more sustainable future.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. National Energy Conservation Day is observed every year on _____ to promote energy efficiency and sustainable energy practices in India.
2. The National Energy Conservation Awards (NECA) were instituted in the year _____ by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power.
3. The _____ scheme is a market-based mechanism aimed at reducing Specific Energy Consumption (SEC) in energy-intensive industries.
4. The _____ Programme was launched to help consumers make informed choices about energy-efficient appliances by using energy labels.
5. The "Go Electric" campaign, launched on _____, aims to promote the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and electric cooking in India.
6. The "EV Yatra" web portal and mobile application, launched on _____, serves as a national online database for public EV charging stations.
7. The Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) programme was launched on _____ to promote energy-efficient LED bulbs, tube lights, and fans.
8. The Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP) aims to replace conventional streetlights with _____ streetlights across India.
9. As of now, under the UJALA scheme, approximately _____ LED bulbs have been distributed across India, resulting in significant energy savings.
10. The estimated energy savings from the Street Lighting National Programme (SLNP) amount to _____ billion kWh per year, with an avoided peak demand of 1,459 MW.

3. Why German Chancellor Olaf Scholz faced a no-confidence vote

- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz faced a no-confidence vote in Parliament a month after the collapse of his ruling coalition.
- His party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), lost the vote, with 394 of 717 members voting against him. Scholz needed 367 votes to retain confidence but fell short, paving the way for fresh elections expected in February.
- Following the vote, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is anticipated to dissolve Parliament and initiate general elections in the coming weeks.
- In his final address to the Bundestag as Chancellor, Scholz criticized the Free Democratic Party (FDP), his former coalition partner, for undermining the government and causing the coalition's breakdown.
- He accused them of engaging in theatrics that not only damaged the government's image but also harmed Germany's democracy.
- Scholz emphasized that "politics is not a game," expressing regret over the coalition's failure and the instability it created in the German political landscape.

What necessitated a confidence vote now?

- The current political turmoil in Germany stems from the inherent ideological differences within the 'traffic light coalition', comprising the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The coalition, named after the parties' traditional colours, was formed following the 2021 parliamentary elections.
- The SPD, led by Olaf Scholz, secured its best result in two decades, winning 25.7% of the vote and emerging as the largest party for the first time since 2002.
- However, its alliance with the Greens, another centre-left party, was insufficient to achieve an absolute majority, necessitating the inclusion of the FDP.
- The FDP, an economically liberal party, had gained momentum in the 2019 and 2021 elections, campaigning on fiscal discipline, constitutional adherence to the debt brake, and minimal government interference except under extraordinary circumstances.
- These principles clashed with the SPD and the Greens, both of which advocated for increased state intervention in social policy and climate protection.
- Despite these ideological differences, the three parties formed a coalition after dismissing the possibility of a grand coalition with the CDU/CSU
- Political discord within the coalition emerged within its first 100 days, with the FDP opposing key legislative initiatives from its partners.
- Contentious issues included renewable energy policies, the upholding of the debt brake, and reforms to immigration laws.
- The internal strife was compounded by poor performances in the regional elections in Thuringia and Saxony in September 2024, where all three coalition partners suffered electoral setbacks.
- This marked a significant shift in Germany's political landscape, as the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) achieved unprecedented success, becoming the first right-wing party to win elections in Germany since World War II.
- The coalition's collapse was precipitated by the dismissal of Finance Minister Christian Lindner, the FDP's leader, by Chancellor Olaf Scholz on November 6, 2024.
- This prompted the FDP to withdraw from the coalition, depriving the government of its parliamentary majority and plunging the nation into political uncertainty.
- The breakdown of the 'traffic light coalition' underscores the challenges of governing with ideologically diverse partners and raises questions about Germany's future political direction.

Under what circumstances is a confidence vote held?

- Article 68 of the German constitution authorises the President to dissolve the Bundestag (German parliament) within 21 days if "a motion of the Federal Chancellor for a vote of confidence is not supported by the majority of the Members of the Bundestag".
- Additionally, this right of dissolution shall lapse once the Bundestag elects another Chancellor.
- The provision was made in the constitution post World War II to prevent a situation of political instability akin to what followed with the collapse of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s-30s.
- This would ensure the Chancellor cannot unilaterally dissolve the Bundestag on their own.
- In the past, the confidence vote has been used five times to dissolve parliament and call for early polls. Most recently, former SPD Chancellor Gerhard Schröder triggered Germany's third election in 2005 after calling for a confidence vote.
- His party narrowly lost the election to a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), and Angela Merkel succeeded him as Chancellor.

What comes next for Germany?

- If Scholz loses the no-confidence vote, the country will likely go to the polls on February 23, seven months before originally slated.
- The CDU/CSU is currently the frontrunner to win a majority but seems unlikely to form a government without allying itself with the SPD or the Greens.
- In such a case, party leader Friedrich Merz, currently tipped to be the next Chancellor, would face the unsavoury challenge of reining in the stagnating economy and tackling the threat of tariffs from the US.
- Among other issues of contention have been the questions of sending increased aid to Ukraine, and addressing growing concerns on immigration, which the AfD has banked upon.

German Chancellor

- The Chancellor of Germany is the head of government and the most powerful political figure in the country, responsible for leading the executive branch and setting government policy.

1. Role of the German Chancellor

- **Head of Government:** The Chancellor directs the federal government's activities and sets its agenda.
- **Executive Authority:** While the German President is the ceremonial head of state, the Chancellor holds executive power.
- **Policy-Making:** The Chancellor has significant influence over domestic and foreign policy decisions.
- **Leader of the Cabinet:** The Chancellor appoints federal ministers and oversees their work.

2. Election Process of the German Chancellor

- The process of electing the Chancellor is clearly outlined in Article 63 of the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz).

Parliamentary Election (Bundestag Elections)

- Germany holds federal elections every four years to elect members of the Bundestag (German Federal Parliament).
- Political parties compete, and seats are allocated based on a mixed-member proportional representation system.

Nomination by the Federal President

- After the Bundestag elections, the President of Germany proposes a candidate for Chancellor.
- Usually, this candidate comes from the party (or coalition) with a majority of seats in the Bundestag.

Vote in the Bundestag

- The Bundestag (federal parliament) votes on the proposed candidate.
- A majority vote (absolute majority) of all Bundestag members (not just those present) is required to elect the Chancellor.

If the First Round Fails

- If the candidate does not receive a majority, the Bundestag has 14 days to elect a Chancellor through its own nominations and voting rounds.
- If no candidate achieves a majority within 14 days, a final vote is held.
- In this case, if a simple majority (more votes for than against) is achieved, the President can either appoint the candidate as Chancellor or dissolve the Bundestag, leading to new elections.

- Once elected, the Chancellor is formally appointed by the Federal President.
- The Chancellor then selects ministers and forms a government.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz faced a no-confidence vote in Parliament a month after the collapse of his _____ coalition.

2. Scholz needed _____ votes to retain confidence but fell short, paving the way for fresh elections expected in February.

3. After the no-confidence vote, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is expected to _____ Parliament and call for general elections.

4. The coalition between the SPD, the Greens, and the FDP in Germany was called the _____ coalition, named after the parties' traditional colours.

5. The FDP is an economically _____ party that campaigned on fiscal discipline and minimal government intervention.

6. The breakdown of the 'traffic light coalition' began with the dismissal of Finance Minister _____ on November 6, 2024.

7. Under Article _____ of the German constitution, the President can dissolve the Bundestag if a motion of no confidence is not supported by the majority.

8. In the past, the confidence vote has been used _____ times to dissolve parliament and call for early elections.

9. If Scholz loses the no-confidence vote, the country is expected to hold elections on _____ 23, 2025.

10. The election of the German Chancellor requires a majority vote from the _____ of all Bundestag members, not just those present.

4. Argentina's President Javier Milei given Italian citizenship

- Italy's government has granted Italian citizenship to Argentina's President, Javier Milei, due to his Italian family roots, sparking criticism from opposition politicians.
- They argue that the decision highlights a disparity in treatment compared to migrant children born in Italy, who face more stringent citizenship requirements.
- Milei, who is in Rome to meet Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and attend the annual festival of Meloni's right-wing party, Brothers of Italy, has had his citizenship granted under Italy's laws based on "blood ties," which allow even distant descendants of Italian nationals to obtain citizenship.
- In contrast, foreigners born in Italy or who migrate there face tougher criteria.
- Pro-migrant groups have advocated for reforms to ease these citizenship restrictions, proposing a referendum, but Meloni's coalition has opposed such changes.

- Riccardo Magi, a lawmaker from the opposition +Europa party, criticized the move as discriminatory, particularly against young people who face lengthy waits to secure citizenship.

- Milei, who has Italian roots through three of his grandparents, previously expressed feeling "75% Italian" and has a strong passion for Italian opera.

- His relationship with Meloni is close, with the two leaders having met in Buenos Aires last month.

- During that meeting, Milei gifted Meloni a statuette of himself holding his trademark chainsaw, a symbol of his political persona.

- This move has raised further debate about the fairness of Italy's citizenship laws, particularly in the context of the treatment of migrants and their descendants.

Argentina

- Argentina is a country in South America, known for its diverse landscapes, rich culture, and vibrant history.

- Its capital is Buenos Aires, a major cultural and economic hub. Argentina has a long and storied history, from its indigenous peoples and Spanish colonization to its struggles for independence and later political and economic challenges.

- **Geography:** Argentina stretches from the southern tip of South America (Patagonia) to the tropical north (near the equator), offering a variety of climates and ecosystems, from glaciers in the south to jungles in the north.

- **Culture:** Argentina is known for tango music and dance, its beef (often regarded as some of the best in the world), and its wine (particularly Malbec). Soccer (football) is a key part of Argentine culture, with iconic players such as Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi.

- **Economy:** Historically one of the wealthiest nations in the region, Argentina's economy is based on agriculture, manufacturing, and services, with soybeans, wheat, and beef being major exports. However, the country has faced significant economic challenges, including inflation and debt crises.

- **Political History:** Argentina has had a complex political history, including periods of military dictatorship (notably the "Dirty War" in the 1970s) and democratic governance. The nation is a federal republic, with a president serving as both head of state and government.

- **Tourism:** Argentina boasts a range of attractions for travelers, including the Iguazú Falls, Patagonia, Mendoza's wine region, and the Andes mountains. Its cosmopolitan capital, Buenos Aires, is known for its European-style architecture, cultural venues, and vibrant nightlife.

Italy

- Italy is a country located in Southern Europe, renowned for its rich history, cultural heritage, and significant contributions to art, science, and politics.

1. Geography

- **Location:** Italy is located on the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia to the north.

- **Capital:** Rome, which is also the largest city in Italy.

- **Area:** Approximately 301,340 square kilometers (116,350 square miles).

- **Regions:** Italy is divided into 20 regions, including Tuscany, Sicily, Lombardy, and Veneto.

2. Political Structure

- **Government Type:** Republic with a parliamentary system.

- **President:** The President of Italy is the head of state, elected for a seven-year term.

- **Prime Minister:** The Prime Minister is the head of government, typically the leader of the majority party in Parliament.
- **Legislature:** The Italian Parliament consists of two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic.

3. Population

- **Population Size:** Approximately 60 million people (as of 2023).
- **Languages:** The official language is Italian. There are also minority languages spoken, such as German, French, and Slovenian, particularly in border regions.
- **Religion:** The majority of Italians are Roman Catholic, though there is a growing secular population.

4. Economy

- **Currency:** Euro (€).
- **Major Industries:** Italy is a global leader in sectors such as fashion, automotive (Ferrari, Fiat, Lamborghini), luxury goods, tourism, agriculture (olive oil, wine), and manufacturing.
- **GDP:** Italy has one of the largest economies in Europe, though it faces challenges such as high public debt and low growth in some sectors.

5. History

- **Ancient Rome:** Italy was the center of the Roman Empire, one of the most influential civilizations in history.
- **Renaissance:** Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance, a period of cultural, artistic, and scientific advancements in the 14th-17th centuries. Key figures include Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Galileo Galilei.
- **Unification:** Italy was unified in the 19th century, with the Kingdom of Italy officially established in 1861.
- **World Wars:** Italy played a significant role in both World War I and World War II. During the Second World War, it was initially part of the Axis Powers, led by Mussolini's fascist regime. After WWII, Italy became a republic in 1946.

6. Culture

- **Art and Architecture:** Italy is home to a wealth of cultural heritage, including historical landmarks like the Colosseum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Vatican, and countless Renaissance artworks.
- **Cuisine:** Italian cuisine is known worldwide for its emphasis on fresh ingredients. Iconic dishes include pasta, pizza, and gelato. Regional variations, like risotto in the north and seafood in the south, reflect Italy's diverse culture.
- **Fashion:** Milan is considered one of the fashion capitals of the world, hosting major fashion events like Milan Fashion Week.

7. Tourism

- Italy is one of the world's most visited countries, attracting tourists to its historical sites, art museums, scenic landscapes, and Mediterranean beaches.
- Popular destinations include Rome, Venice, Florence, Naples, Sicily, and the Amalfi Coast.

8. UNESCO World Heritage Sites

- Italy has the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with notable ones including Pompeii, the historic centers of Florence, Venice, and Rome, and the archaeological sites of Paestum.

9. Sports

- **Football (Soccer):** Italy is passionate about football, and the national team has won multiple FIFA World Cup titles (1934, 1938, 1982, and 2006).
- **Cycling:** Italy is known for its strong cycling culture, with races like the Giro d'Italia.
- **Winter Sports:** Italy has hosted the Winter Olympics twice, in 1956 (Cortina d'Ampezzo) and 2006 (Turin).

10. Climate

- Italy has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, particularly along the coast. Northern regions, like the Alps, experience colder winters and snow.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Italy's government granted Italian citizenship to Argentina's President, _____, due to his Italian family roots.
2. Opposing politicians have criticized the decision, arguing that it highlights a disparity compared to migrant children born in _____, who face stricter citizenship requirements.
3. Javier Milei's Italian citizenship was granted under Italy's laws based on "_____," which allows descendants of Italian nationals to obtain citizenship.
4. _____ is the capital of Argentina, known as a major cultural and economic hub in South America.
5. Italy's population is approximately _____ million people as of 2023.
6. Italy was the center of the _____ Empire, one of the most influential civilizations in history.
7. _____, a region in Italy, is known as a global fashion capital and hosts major events like Milan Fashion Week.
8. Argentina is famous for its _____, which is often regarded as some of the best in the world.
9. Italy is one of the world's most visited countries, with popular destinations such as _____, Venice, and Florence.
10. Argentina's economy is historically based on _____, manufacturing, and services, with major exports including soybeans, wheat, and beef.

5. Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal over a hydel power project in Mandi

- Haryana has added a new dimension to the ongoing legal dispute between Himachal Pradesh and Punjab over the British-era 110 MW Shanan Hydel Project by filing a petition in the Supreme Court.
- Haryana has requested to be made a party to the case.

- Experts believe this is an unprecedented move by Haryana, a state that was part of undivided Punjab, like Himachal Pradesh, before 1966, seeking to have its voice heard in the matter.

What is the Shanan Project?

- The Shanan Hydel Project, which is located in Jogindernagar, Mandi, was leased to Punjab in 1925 for 99 years.

- The lease agreement was signed between the then ruler of Mandi, Raja Joginder Bahadur, and Colonel B C Batty, a British representative and Chief Engineer of Punjab.

- Before Independence, the project supplied electricity to undivided Punjab, Lahore, and Delhi.

- After Partition, electricity supply to Lahore was discontinued, and the transmission line was terminated at Verka village in Amritsar.

- Initially designed as a 48 MW project, the Shanan Project was later upgraded to 60 MW and eventually 110 MW by Punjab to meet its growing electricity demands.

- Under the current lease terms, the project also provides Himachal Pradesh with 500 kW of free electricity as it draws water from the Uhl river, which is located in the state.

Why was Punjab given the control of the project after its reorganisation?

- Following the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966, the Shanan Hydel Project was allocated to Punjab as Himachal Pradesh was a Union Territory at the time.

- A notification issued by the Ministry of Irrigation and Power on May 1, 1967, granted Punjab legal control over the project under the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966.

- However, after the project's lease expired on March 2, 2024, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu firmly stated that Punjab cannot claim the project.

- Himachal Pradesh has alleged that the project has been poorly maintained by Punjab as it has neglected repair work.

What has Punjab said in SC?

- Punjab filed a petition in the SC seeking a permanent injunction to prevent Himachal Pradesh from interfering with the Shanan Hydel Project's possession and operations.

- Punjab's civil suit asserts that the project is managed by the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (formerly the Punjab State Electricity Board) and was legally allocated to Punjab under the 1967 notification. Punjab also requested a temporary injunction to maintain the status quo.

What has Himachal Pradesh argued in SC?

- In response to Punjab's civil suit, Himachal Pradesh filed a petition, urging the SC to dismiss Punjab's claims.

- Himachal Pradesh argued that the case's foundation is based on a pre-Constitution agreement and the dispute does not fall under the SC's jurisdiction as per Article 131 of the Constitution.

- Article 131 gives the SC the exclusive right to handle disputes involving the government of India and one or more states, government of India and some states on one side and one or more other states on the other, two or more states, if the issue involves a legal right. Only the SC can hear these cases; no other court has this authority. However, the Constitution bars the jurisdiction of the SC over interstate river water disputes.

- Article 262 states that Parliament can make a law for the adjudication of any dispute regarding the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.

- These disputes are governed by the Interstate River Water Disputes Act 1956. Under this law, water Disputes Tribunal is set up for the adjudication.

- However, the SC, for the enforcement of such tribunal awards or in appeal against the tribunal's decision, has intervened in several interstate river water disputes.

- Himachal Pradesh has also highlighted that the 1925 agreement was between the British government and the Raja of Mandi, and the Mandi State was never part of Punjab.

What was the central government's response?

- On March 1, 2024, a day before the lease expired, the Ministry of Power ordered the status quo to be maintained regarding the Shanan Project as an interim measure.

Why has Haryana filed an application?

- In its application submitted on December 12, Haryana argued that the Shanan project, located on the Uhl River— a tributary of the Beas — also feeds the Bhakra Dam.

- As Haryana has a stake in the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), it contends that it has a legitimate claim to the project.

- Haryana's application also cites the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, asserting its historical connection as a part of undivided Punjab.

- Himachal Pradesh Advocate General Anup Kumar Rattan said that Himachal Pradesh would oppose Haryana's application, asserting that the matter is primarily between Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Punjab is also expected to oppose Haryana's move.

- Himachal Pradesh plans to file its objection during the Supreme Court hearing scheduled for January 15, 2025.

Major Indian Dams

- **Bhakra Nangal Dam (Himachal Pradesh/Punjab) –** One of the highest gravity dams in the world, it is situated on the Sutlej River and is a major source of irrigation and electricity generation.

- **Sardar Sarovar Dam (Gujarat)** – Located on the Narmada River, this dam is a part of the Narmada Valley Project and is crucial for irrigation, power generation, and drinking water supply.

- **Hirakud Dam (Odisha)** – Built across the Mahanadi River, it is one of the longest earthen dams in the world, serving purposes of irrigation, power generation, and flood control.

- **Tehri Dam (Uttarakhand) –** Situated on the Bhagirathi River, it is one of the tallest dams in India and plays a significant role in hydroelectric power generation and irrigation.

- **Kakrapar Dam (Gujarat) –** A part of the Narmada River Project, it serves multiple purposes including irrigation and water supply to the surrounding areas.

- **Dhauli Ganga Dam (Uttarakhand)** – Located on the Dhauli Ganga River, it is a key source of hydroelectric power generation.

- **Nagara Dam (Madhya Pradesh)** – Built on the Chambal River, this dam supports irrigation and flood control measures.

- **Rihand Dam (Uttar Pradesh)** – Built on the Rihand River, it is a major source of irrigation and hydroelectric power for the region.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Shanan Hydel Project, located in _____, was leased to Punjab in 1925 for 99 years.

2. The lease agreement for the Shanan Hydel Project was signed between the then ruler of Mandi, Raja Joginder Bahadur, and Colonel B C _____, a British representative.

3. After the Partition, the Shanan Project's electricity supply to _____ was discontinued, and the transmission line was terminated at Verka village in Amritsar.

4. The Shanan Hydel Project was initially designed as a _____ MW project but was later upgraded to 110 MW by Punjab.

5. Under the current lease terms, the Shanan Project also provides _____ kW of free electricity to Himachal Pradesh.

6. After the reorganisation of Punjab in _____, the Shanan Hydel Project was allocated to Punjab as Himachal Pradesh was a Union Territory at the time.

7. Punjab filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking a permanent injunction to prevent _____ from interfering with the Shanan Hydel Project's possession and operations.

8. Himachal Pradesh argues that the dispute does not fall under the Supreme Court's jurisdiction as per Article _____ of the Constitution.

9. The Ministry of Power ordered the status quo to be maintained regarding the Shanan Project on _____, a day before the lease expired.

10. Haryana has filed an application in the Supreme Court citing its connection to the _____ Dam, which the Shanan Project also feeds.

6. What is Jetson Orin Nano Super, Nvidia's affordable tiny supercomputer?

- Leading graphic processing units (GPUs) maker Nvidia introduced its new compact generative AI supercomputer.
- Jetson Orin Nano Super, comes at a lower price, boasts enhanced performance, and a software upgrade.
- Nvidia deciding to offer the dev kit for the supercomputer for as low as $249 (around Rs. 21,147).
- According to Nvidia, the Jetson Orin Nano Super Developer Kit fits in the palm of your hand. From commercial AI developers to students, the Jetson Orin Nano Super offers generative AI capabilities and performance to develop their own AI tools.

What is Jetson Orin Nano Super?

- Nvidia has defined its latest offering as a '"compact, yet powerful computer" that redefines generative AI for small edge devices.
- When it comes to performances, the Justin Orin Nano Super delivers up to 67 TOPS of AI, which is a 1.7 times improvement when compared to its predecessor.

- In simple words, TOPS or Trillions of Operations Per Second, is a key indicator to measure the computational prowess of AI chips and NPU chips (neural processing unit chips that mimic the human brain's neural network, which is designed to accelerate AI tasks).
- The super computer is capable of running some of the most popular generative AI models such as vision transformers, large language models, vision-language models, etc.
- It features a memory bandwidth of 102 GB/s and CPU frequency of 1.7 GHZ. The computer does not come with built-in storage, and a user may be required to download the operating system to a microSD card to boot the system, much similar to a Raspberry Pie.

What's in the Jetson Orin Nano Super Developer Kit?

- The developer kit is essentially a compact computing platform suitable for generative AI applications. It features an 8 GB module based on Nvidia's Ampere GPU architecture with 1,024 CUDA cores, and 32 tensor cores.
- Both CUDA and tensor cores are specialised processing units in Nvidia's GPUs.
- The device comes with a 6-core ARM Cortex-A78 CPU, a processor that has been designed to deliver high-end performance at the best efficiency.
- The carrier board on the supercomputer comes with connectivity options such as two camera connectors, four USB 3.2 ports, M.2 slots, and Gigabit Ethernet which allows the computer to connect with servers in local networks.
- The computer runs on the Nvidia AI software stack. Based on the features, the kit is compact, efficient, and developer-friendly.

What are the use cases of the Jetson Orin Nano Supercomputer?

- While introducing the Jetson Orin Nano Super, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said that one could run Cuda, CudNN, and TensorRT and can be used to create an agentic AI that reasons and plans. Essentially, one can use it to build robots or workstations. The Jetson Orin Nano Super Developer Kit, although tiny, can help developers unravel an assortment of applications across industries. It can be put to use in a plethora of scenarios such as smart surveillance systems, robotics, smart retail, healthcare, AI-powered smart home devices and wearables, autonomous vehicles, research and education, content creation, etc.
- When it comes to smart surveillance, the computer via camera connectivity can detect anomalies, and identify faces and objects in real-time. Robotics can use its high-performance AI for autonomous manufacturing, logistics, while healthcare can deploy the same to perform some simple tasks such as sorting and delivering. Moreover, small businesses will now be able to deploy generative solutions for predictive analytics and chatbots. In a way, Nvidia's latest tiny supercomputer is making AI accessible for businesses of all sizes.

India has developed several high-performance supercomputers, primarily under the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM) and other initiatives.

PARAM Siddhi-AI

- **Location:** Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Indore
- **Purpose:** Primarily designed for artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning workloads.
- **Capabilities:** PARAM Siddhi-AI is one of the fastest supercomputers in India, ranked among the top supercomputers in the world. It was developed under the NSM with the goal of enhancing research in AI, scientific computing, and big data analytics.

PARAM Brahma

- **Location:** IIT Bhilai
- **Purpose:** Part of the NSM's efforts to provide a robust computational resource for Indian researchers, focusing on various scientific domains.
- **Capabilities:** PARAM Brahma is designed to support high-performance computing for research in fields like aerospace, climate studies, and physics.

PARAM Shakti

- **Location:** Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur
- **Purpose:** Developed to meet the needs of scientific and engineering computations.
- **Capabilities:** It serves as a resource for Indian researchers and scientists, providing capabilities for advanced simulations, data analysis, and modeling.

Bharat Supercomputer

- **Location:** Multiple research institutions across India
- **Purpose:** A collective initiative for various scientific domains, including climate modeling, space research, and biotechnology.
- **Capabilities:** It aims to make high-performance computing more accessible to Indian researchers and institutions.

Supercomputing Facility at the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF):

- **Location:** Noida
- **Purpose:** Weather and climate research.
- **Capabilities:** NCMRWF operates several supercomputing systems for weather prediction and climate modeling, crucial for meteorological research and disaster management.

Arka and Arunika

- **Location:** Various
- **Purpose:** Advanced weather modeling and climate forecasting.
- **Capabilities:** These supercomputers are designed to support India's weather forecasting and disaster management systems with enhanced computing power.

Param Yuva II

- **Location:** Various institutions
- **Purpose:** Aimed at providing high-performance computing for scientific research and industrial applications.
- **Capabilities:** PARAM Yuva II has been used for various applications, from weather prediction to complex simulations in engineering and material science.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. Nvidia introduced its new compact generative AI supercomputer called the _____.
2. The Jetson Orin Nano Super Developer Kit is priced at _____.
3. The Jetson Orin Nano Super delivers up to _____ TOPS of AI, a 1.7 times improvement compared to its predecessor.

4. The Jetson Orin Nano Super is capable of running generative AI models such as _____, large language models, and vision-language models.

5. The Jetson Orin Nano Super features a memory bandwidth of _____ GB/s and a CPU frequency of 1.7 GHz.

6. The Jetson Orin Nano Super Developer Kit is based on Nvidia's _____ GPU architecture.

7. The Jetson Orin Nano Super computer comes with a _____ processor, designed to deliver high-end performance at the best efficiency.

8. The Jetson Orin Nano Super features connectivity options such as _____ camera connectors, four USB 3.2 ports, M.2 slots, and Gigabit Ethernet.

9. The Jetson Orin Nano Super can be used for applications like smart surveillance, robotics, healthcare, AI-powered smart home devices, and _____ vehicles.

10. India's PARAM Siddhi-AI supercomputer, developed under the National Supercomputing Mission, is ranked among the _____ supercomputers in the world.

7. How would a US bitcoin strategic reserve work?

- Bitcoin hit a record high above $107,000 after President-elect Donald Trump reiterated plans to create a U.S. bitcoin strategic reserve, stoking the enthusiasm of crypto bulls.

What is a strategic reserve?

- A strategic reserve is a stock of a critical resource which can be released at times of crisis or supply disruptions.
- The best-known example is the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the world's largest supply of emergency crude oil, which was created by an act of Congress in 1975 after a 1973-74 Arab oil embargo throttled the U.S. economy.
- Presidents have tapped the stockpile to calm oil markets during war or when hurricanes hit oil infrastructure along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico.
- Canada has the world's only strategic reserve of maple syrup, while China has strategic reserves of metals, grains and even pork products.

How would a US strategic bitcoin reserve work?

- It is currently unclear whether Trump could use his executive powers to create the reserve, or whether an act of Congress would be necessary.
- Some have argued Trump could create the reserve via an executive order directing the U.S. Treasury's Exchange Stabilization Fund, which can be used to purchase or sell foreign currencies, and to also hold bitcoin.
- This reserve could include bitcoin seized from criminal actors by the government.
- That stands at around 200,000 tokens, worth about $21 billion at the current price, according to bitcointreasuries.net.

- Trump suggested in a July speech unveiling his bitcoin reserve plan that this stockpile could be the starting point.
- Trump has not said if the government would add to that stockpile by buying more bitcoin in the open market.
- To do that, the government may have to issue debt, although some proponents of a bitcoin reserve say the United States could sell some of its gold reserves and use the proceeds to buy bitcoin.

What are the benefits of a bitcoin reserve?

- In his July speech, Trump suggested a bitcoin reserve would help the U.S. dominate the global bitcoin market in the face of growing competition from China.
- Other proponents argue that by holding a stockpile of bitcoin, which they say is likely to continue appreciating over the long term, the U.S. could reduce its deficit without raising taxes, strengthening the U.S. dollar.
- A strong dollar would in turn give the United States more leverage over foreign adversaries like China and Russia, proponents say.

What are the risks?

- Crypto sceptics say that, unlike most other commodities, bitcoin has no intrinsic use and is not crucial to the functioning of the U.S. economy.
- Created in 2008, bitcoin remains too young and volatile to presume its value will continue to rise in the long term, while crypto wallets remain notoriously vulnerable to cyber attacks, they also argue.
- And given its volatility, any government purchases or sales could have an outsized impact on bitcoin's price.

Bitcoin

- Bitcoin is a decentralized digital currency that operates on a peer-to-peer network, meaning it doesn't rely on central authorities like banks or governments. It was introduced in 2008 by an anonymous person or group under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto.
- Bitcoin transactions are verified by network nodes through cryptography and recorded on a public ledger called the blockchain.

Features of Bitcoin include:

- **Decentralization:** Bitcoin operates without a central authority or intermediary.
- **Limited Supply**: The total supply of Bitcoin is capped at 21 million coins, making it a deflationary asset.
- **Mining:** Bitcoin is created through a process called mining, where miners use computational power to solve complex cryptographic puzzles. This process also secures the network.
- **Security:** Bitcoin transactions are secure, transparent, and irreversible once confirmed.
- **Price Volatility:** The price of Bitcoin can fluctuate significantly due to market demand, investor sentiment, and macroeconomic factors.
- Bitcoin has gained popularity as both a store of value and a speculative investment. It is often compared to gold due to its scarcity and potential for long-term wealth preservation.
- However, its volatility and regulatory uncertainty make it a high-risk asset.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. A strategic reserve is a stock of a critical _____ which can be released at times of crisis or supply disruptions.
2. The best-known example of a strategic reserve is the U.S. _____ Reserve, which is the world's largest supply of emergency crude oil.
3. In 1975, the U.S. Congress created the Strategic Petroleum Reserve after a _____ oil embargo caused economic issues in the U.S.
4. A U.S. strategic bitcoin reserve could include bitcoin seized from _____ actors by the government.
5. One possible way for Trump to create a U.S. bitcoin reserve is by directing the U.S. _____ Stabilization Fund to hold bitcoin.
6. The U.S. could potentially fund the purchase of more bitcoin by _____ some of its gold reserves.
7. Bitcoin is a _____ digital currency that operates on a peer-to-peer network, without reliance on central authorities like banks or governments.
8. Bitcoin transactions are recorded on a public _____ called the blockchain.
9. Critics argue that bitcoin's volatility makes it risky for the U.S. to hold as a _____ reserve.
10. The total supply of bitcoin is capped at _____ million coins, making it a deflationary asset.

8. 1991 Places of Worship Act: What Supreme Court stopped, why

- The Supreme Court barred civil courts across the country from registering fresh suits challenging the ownership and title of any place of worship, and from ordering surveys of disputed religious places until further orders.

- "As the matter is sub judice…, we deem it appropriate to direct that no fresh suits may be filed nor registered or proceedings be ordered till further orders of this court… We also direct that in pending suits, the courts would not pass any effective interim orders or final orders including orders of survey till the next date of hearing," the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna said.

Case before the court

- The Bench, also comprising Justices P V Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan, was hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

- The law, brought in the wake of the Ayodhya movement, prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of places of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.

- Only the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was kept out of the purview of the law since the case was already sub judice.

What the order impacts

- The order applies to both civil suits that are already pending (there are several) and to those that may be filed in the future.

- The order bars the "registration" of cases by civil courts. Consequently, they also cannot order a survey, or seek a report from the Archeological Survey of India (ASI), as they have done in several recent instances.

- All these civil cases have raised questions on the title of mosques, arguing that they were built on Hindu religious structures that were razed by medieval rulers.
- The SC also observed that court orders in these civil suits could be challenged on the grounds that they violate larger constitutional principles of secularism and the rule of law, irrespective of the Places of Worship Act.

Challenge to the 1991 Act

- Meanwhile, the SC will have to hear the constitutional challenge to the 1991 Act. These petitions have been pending since 2020. It remains to be seen if the Centre will defend the law or argue against it.
- The petitioners have challenged the law on two main grounds. First, that it takes away the power of judicial review by abating claims that existed at the time of passing the law and prohibiting fresh claims in courts. Second, that it is arbitrary in retrospectively picking August 15, 1947 as the cut-off date for determining the religious character of a place of worship.
- In 2019, in the five-judge Constitution Bench ruling in the Ayodhya case, the SC had referred to the 1991 law as forming a part of the "basic structure of the Constitution". While the 1991 law was not directly under challenge in that case, the SC observations could still be relevant in determining the constitutional validity of the law.

Constitution Benches in India

- In India, Constitution Benches are special benches of the Supreme Court that are constituted to hear and decide cases involving important issues related to the interpretation of the Constitution.
- These benches consist of a larger number of judges, usually a minimum of five, but in some cases, they can have more.

Constitution Benches:

- **Composition:** A Constitution Bench is typically made up of five or more judges. It is usually headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), but it can also be headed by any other senior judge, depending on the case.
- **Purpose**: These benches are set up to resolve significant constitutional questions. This includes cases that involve the fundamental rights, the powers of various government organs, the structure of the Constitution, and other matters of national importance that require an authoritative interpretation.
- **Jurisdiction:** The cases before Constitution Benches are generally referred to them by a larger bench of the Supreme Court, or in some cases, the Chief Justice of India may decide to constitute a bench for a particular issue.
- **Historical Importance:** The establishment of Constitution Benches is an essential part of India's judicial system, as it ensures that decisions regarding constitutional interpretation are made with great care and consideration. These benches play a crucial role in the evolution of India's constitutional law.

Notable Cases: Some famous cases that have been heard by Constitution Benches include:

- **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973):** This case is most notable for the introduction of the "basic structure" doctrine, which limits the power of Parliament to amend the Constitution.
- **Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980):** Another case that reinforced the basic structure doctrine and protected fundamental rights.
- **Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975):** This was a significant case on the power of the Prime Minister and the application of the 39th Amendment.
- **S. R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994):** This case discussed the powers of the President under Article 356 and the issue of State dissolution.

Fill in the Blank:

1. The Supreme Court has barred civil courts across the country from registering fresh suits challenging the ownership and title of any _____ until further orders.

2. The Supreme Court directed that no fresh suits may be filed nor registered, and no proceedings may be ordered, till _____ orders of the court.

3. The Bench hearing the petitions regarding the Places of Worship Act, 1991, was headed by Chief Justice of India _____.

4. The Places of Worship Act, 1991, was introduced in the wake of the _____ movement.

5. The Places of Worship Act, 1991, prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and mandates the maintenance of the religious character of places of worship as it existed on _____, 1947.

6. The Supreme Court observed that court orders in civil suits could be challenged on the grounds that they violate constitutional principles of _____ and the rule of law.

7. The petitioners challenging the 1991 law argue that it is arbitrary in retrospectively picking _____, 1947, as the cut-off date for determining the religious character of a place of worship.

8. The Supreme Court's five-judge Constitution Bench ruling in the _____ case referred to the 1991 law as forming part of the "basic structure of the Constitution."

9. In India, Constitution Benches are special benches of the Supreme Court that are constituted to hear cases involving important issues related to the _____ of the Constitution.

10. One famous case heard by a Constitution Bench is the _____ case, which introduced the "basic structure" doctrine that limits the power of Parliament to amend the Constitution.

9. E-Courts Mission Mode Project

- The e-Courts Mission Mode Project is a flagship initiative aimed at leveraging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the modernization and development of the Indian Judiciary.

- Spearheaded by the Department of Justice, Government of India, this transformative project is being implemented in close collaboration with the e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India.

- The decentralized approach ensures that the project is executed effectively through the respective High Courts, enabling tailored solutions that address the unique needs and challenges of each judicial region.

- By integrating cutting-edge technology into the judicial framework, the project seeks to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accessibility in the justice delivery system across the nation.

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the e-Courts Project Phase III as a Central Sector Scheme (2023 onwards) with a financial outlay of Rs. 7210 crore.

- The Phase II of the e-Courts Project has concluded in 2023. Phase III of the e-Courts Project in India is rooted in the philosophy of access and inclusion.

- It aims to usher in a regime of maximum ease of justice by moving towards digital, online, and paperless courts through digitization of the entire court records including legacy records, and by bringing in universalization of e-filing/ e-Payments through saturation of all court complexes with e-Sewa Kendras.

- It will put in place intelligent smart systems enabling data-based decision-making for judges and registries while scheduling or prioritizing cases.
- The main objective of Phase III is to create a unified technology platform for the judiciary, which will provide a seamless and paperless interface between the courts, the litigants, and other stakeholders.

Achievements of E-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project

E-Courts Phase I: 2011-15
- Outlay: Rs. 935 Cr. Expenditure: Rs. 639.41 Cr.
- Over 14,000 Judicial Officers were trained in the use of UBUNTU-Linux Operating System.
- More than 3900 court staff were trained in Case Information System (CIS) as System Administrators.
- 347 Jails and 493 Court complexes: VC (Video conferencing) Enabled

E-Courts Phase II: 2015-2023
- Outlay: Rs. 1670 Cr. Expenditure: Rs. 1668.43 Cr.
- **National Judicial Data Grid:** Data Repository of orders, judgments, and case details of District & Subordinate Courts created as an online platform under the e-Courts Project.

E-Courts Phase III (2023-2027)
- The Union Cabinet approved e-Courts Phase III (2023-2027) in September 2023, with an allocated outlay of Rs. 7,210 crore, which is over four times the funding for Phase II.

The project introduces various advanced digital measures, including:
  - Establishment of Digital and Paperless Courts to digitize court proceedings.
  - Comprehensive digitization of court records, including legacy records and pending cases.
  - Expansion of video conferencing facilities to courts, jails, and hospitals.
  - Broadening the scope of online courts beyond adjudication of traffic violations.
  - Saturation of court complexes with e-Sewa Kendras for citizen convenience.
  - Creation of a state-of-the-art Cloud-based data repository for secure storage and efficient retrieval of digitized court records.
  - Implementation of software applications for live streaming and electronic evidence handling.
  - Integration of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its subsets like Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for case pendency analysis and forecasting future litigation trends.
- These measures aim to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of the judiciary by ensuring ease of justice for citizens through convenient and hassle-free court experiences.
- By integrating technology with governance, e-Courts Phase III is determined to be a transformative initiative, setting a benchmark for the digitization of justice delivery in India.

Initiatives Taken Under ECourts Project
- Under the Wide Area Network (WAN) Project, 99.5% of the court complexes across India have been connected with bandwidth speeds ranging from 10 Mbps to 100 Mbps.
- The WAN Project, which is part of the e-Courts initiative, connects all District and Subordinate Court complexes across the country using various technologies, including Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS), Optical Fibre Cable (OFC), Radio Frequency (RF), Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT),

- and Submarine Cable, creating a robust backbone for the e-Courts Project to ensure seamless data connectivity in the courts nationwide.

- Currently, 209 new court complexes are being connected by BSNL using Software-Defined Wide Area Network (SD-WAN) Technology.

- The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) is an online database containing orders, judgments, and cases from all computerized district and subordinate courts in the country, offering litigants access to case information and over 27.64 crore orders and judgments.

- A customized Case Information Software (CIS) based on Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS) has been developed. Currently, the CIS National Core Version 3.2 is being implemented in District Courts, while Version 1.0 is being rolled out in High Courts.

- As part of the e-Courts initiative, seven platforms have been set up to provide real-time updates on case status, cause lists, judgments, and more. These updates are sent to lawyers and litigants through SMS Push and Pull (over 4 lakh SMS sent daily), email (over 6 lakh sent daily), the multilingual e-Courts services portal (with 35 lakh hits daily), Judicial Service Centres (JSCs), and Info Kiosks.

- Additionally, Electronic Case Management Tools (ECMT) have been developed, including a mobile app for lawyers (which has been downloaded 2.69 crore times as of October 31, 2024) and the JustIS app for judges (with 20,719 downloads till the same date).

- India has emerged as a leader in conducting court hearings via video conferencing. As of October 31, 2024, the District & Subordinate courts heard 2,48,21,789 cases while the High Courts heard 90,21,629 cases (totaling 3.38 crore) using video conferencing system. The Supreme Court has conducted over 7.54 lakh hearings from March 23, 2020 to June 04, 2024 through video conferencing.

- Video conferencing facilities have been enabled between 3240 court complexes and 1272 jails across the country.

- Live streaming of court proceedings has been introduced in several High Courts, including those in Gujarat, Gauhati, Orissa, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Patna, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Calcutta, and the Supreme Court of India, allowing media and other interested parties to participate in the proceedings.

- Virtual Courts have been launched in 21 States/UTs to handle traffic challan cases. These courts have handled over 6 crore cases, and in more than 62 lakh cases, online fines totalling more than Rs. 649.81 crore have been collected as of October 31, 2024.

- The e-Filing system (Version 3.0) has been upgraded to allow lawyers to access and upload documents for cases from any location, 24/7.

- The e-Payment system has been introduced as part of e-Filing, allowing for the electronic payment of court fees, fines, and penalties, which are directly paid into the Consolidated Fund.

- To bridge the digital divide, 1394 e-Sewa Kendras (Facilitation Centres) have been set up in District Courts and 36 e-Sewa Kendras in High Courts to provide services to lawyers and litigants, especially those in remote areas or unable to afford technology. These centres help citizens access e-Courts services, e-filing, virtual hearings, and more.

- The National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP) system has been launched to enable technology-driven process serving and the issuing of summons, with implementation in 28 States/UTs.

- A new Judgment Search portal has been launched, offering free access to search judgments by various criteria, including Bench, Case Type, Case Number, Year, Petitioner/Respondent Name, Judge Name, Act, Section, Decision: From Date, To Date and Full Text Search. This facility is being provided free of cost to all.

- A total of 605 training and awareness programs have been conducted between May 2020 and October 2024, covering nearly 6.64 lakh stakeholders, including High Court judges, District Judiciary judges, court staff, master trainers, technical staff from High Courts, and advocates.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The e-Courts Mission Mode Project is a flagship initiative aimed at leveraging _____ for the modernization of the Indian Judiciary.
2. The e-Courts Project is being implemented in close collaboration with the _____ of the Supreme Court of India.
3. Phase III of the e-Courts Project, approved by the Union Cabinet in September 2023, has an allocated outlay of Rs. _____ crore.
4. The main objective of Phase III of the e-Courts Project is to create a unified _____ platform for the judiciary.
5. Under the e-Courts Project, over _____ judicial officers were trained in the use of the UBUNTU-Linux Operating System during Phase I.
6. The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) provides litigants access to over _____ crore orders and judgments from District and Subordinate Courts.
7. The _____ app for judges has been downloaded 20,719 times as of October 31, 2024.
8. As of October 31, 2024, the District & Subordinate courts heard a total of _____ crore cases through video conferencing.

10. Iran Postpones Controversial Hijab Law for Women

- Iran has postponed the enforcement of a new, stricter law mandating women to wear the hijab.
- The move comes amid concerns that the law could spark protests, specially by those triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022.
- The law, which was approved by parliament in September 2023, will not be sent to the government this week as initially scheduled. This effectively halts its implementation.
- The proposed law includes harsher penalties for women who fail to wear the hijab, as well as for businesses that serve them. Iran's reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian had previously opposed such penalties while trying to revive negotiations with Western countries over nuclear sanctions.

Potential Consequences of the Law

- The proposed law includes severe penalties for women who do not comply with the hijab mandate.
- Fines of USD 800 would be imposed for first offenses, with penalties escalating to USD 1,500 for second offenses, and prison sentences of up to 15 years for third offenses.
- Celebrities and public figures could face confiscation of 8 percent of their net worth, while businesses serving women without hijabs could face closure and fines. Offenders could also be subject to travel bans.

- In addition, the law would have allowed foreign nationals in Iran, including millions of Afghan refugees, to act as informers to report women who do not wear the hijab. Business owners and taxi drivers would be encouraged to report uncovered women or face monetary fines themselves.
- The scope of the law, which was designed to last for three years, is striking even by the standards of the Islamic Republic. It would also grant police access to private surveillance footage, including material recorded by security forces, the Ministry of Defence, and Iran's civilian nuclear agency.

Historical Context

- The announcement comes in the wake of Mahsa Amini's tragic death on September 16, 2022, following her arrest by Iran's morality police for allegedly violating the country's hijab regulations. While Iran denies responsibility for her death and disputes that she was beaten, United Nations investigators have concluded that Amini "was subjected to physical violence that led to her death". The crackdown that followed resulted in over 500 deaths and more than 22,000 detentions.
- Despite the strict enforcement of hijab laws, many Iranian women have increasingly defied the regulations in public, walking with their hair uncovered in protest, despite the ongoing threat of arrest or harassment.

Iran's New 'Hijab Bill'

- Iran has passed a controversial bill that aims to increase prison terms and fines for women and girls who break the dress code. "Inappropriate" attire will land women in jail for up to 10 years with an agreed three-year "trial". However the bill is pending approval from the Guardian Council to qualify as a law.
- The bill followed after a year of protests over the death of Mahsa Amini who was held in custody by morality policy for an allegedly improper hijab. Women burnt their headscarves and waved them in the air at the nationwide protests against the clerical authorities. Hundreds of people were also reportedly killed in a crackdown by security forces.
- An increasing number of women have ceased to cover their heads in public at all, despite the resurgence of the morality policy in the streets, since the unrest subsided.
- The morality police was even insistent on installing surveillance cameras.

The Legislation

- The Iranian Law which has been based on their interpretation of Sharia dictates women and girls who have hit puberty to cover their hair with hijab and always wear long, loose-fitting clothes to obscure their figures for the onlookers.
- The proposed legislation defines unacceptable covering for women as "revealing or tight clothing, or clothing that shows parts of the body lower than the neck or above the ankles or above the forearms", and for men, it has been defined as "revealing clothing that shows parts of the body lower than the chest or above the ankles, or shoulders".
- As per the current law, on non-compliance the guilty will risk meeting with a prison term of between 10 days and two months or a fine of between 5,000 and 500,000 rials ($0.10-$10.14 at the black market exchange rate).
- However, members of the parliament voted by 152 to 34- wherein,152 voted in favour, 34 against and seven abstained from voting, passed the "Hijab and Chastity Bill", which rules that people when caught dressed "inappropriately" in public places will be subjected to a "fourth degree" punishment.
- The legislation was implemented not through a parliament vote but by a special committee consisting of 10 lawmakers.
- A fourth degree punishment according to the penal code means a prison sentence of between five and 10 years and a fine of between 180m and 360m rials ($3,651-$7,302).

- The bill also proposes fines for those who are caught "promoting nudity" or "making fun of the hijab" on social media. The fine also extends to owners of vehicles in which a female driver or passenger is not wearing the hijab or appropriate clothing, AFP reported.
- Anyone who is found violating the dress code "in an organised manner" or "in co-operation with foreign or hostile governments, media, groups or organisations" could also be given a term for between five and 10 years, the bill underlines.
- The bill will be sent to the Guardian Council, a conservative body of clerics and jurists. The council holds the power to veto the bill if they consider it inconsistent with the constitution and Sharia.

Human Rights Violation

- A group of United Nations experts termed the hijab bill as a "form of gender apartheid" "The draft law imposes severe punishments on women and girls for noncompliance which may lead to its violent enforcement,"
- "The bill also violates fundamental rights, including the right to take part in cultural life, the prohibition of gender discrimination, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful protest, and the right to access social, educational, and health services, and freedom of movement".
- Notably, the bill was passed days after the first death anniversary of Mahsa Amini.
- The establishment has taken a series of steps to counter dissent, including using smart cameras.
- Forming court cases against celebrities and shutting down businesses that offered services to women who are deemed to be violating the mandatory dress code.

Mahsa Amini

- Mahsa Amini, also known as Jina Amini, was a 22-year-old Iranian woman who became a symbol of resistance and protest after her death in September 2022.
- She was arrested by Iran's "morality police" for allegedly violating the country's strict dress code, which mandates that women wear a hijab and loose clothing.
- While in police custody, she reportedly fell into a coma and died under suspicious circumstances.
- Her death sparked widespread protests in Iran, with many people, especially women, taking to the streets to demand greater freedoms, including the right to choose whether or not to wear the hijab.
- The protests quickly spread beyond just the issue of the hijab, becoming a larger movement against the Iranian government's repression of personal freedoms, women's rights, and human rights in general.
- The slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" became a rallying cry for the protesters.
- Mahsa Amini's death and the subsequent protests attracted global attention, highlighting the ongoing struggles for women's rights and social justice in Iran.

QUESTIONS

Fill in the Blank:

1. The enforcement of a new, stricter law mandating women to wear the hijab in Iran has been _____ amid concerns that it could trigger protests.

2. The tragic death of _____ in September 2022, following her arrest by Iran's morality police, sparked nationwide protests demanding greater freedom for women.

3. Under the proposed hijab law, fines for first-time offenders would amount to _____ USD, escalating to _____ USD for a second offense.

4. The new hijab law allows _____ nationals, including millions of Afghan refugees, to act as informers to report women who do not wear the hijab.

5. The "Hijab and Chastity Bill" was passed by a special committee of _____ lawmakers rather than through a parliamentary vote.

6. According to the proposed legislation, women found "inappropriately" dressed could face a "fourth degree" punishment, which includes a prison sentence of between _____ and _____ years.

7. The Guardian Council, a conservative body of clerics and jurists, has the authority to _____ the hijab bill if it is found to be inconsistent with Sharia law or the constitution.

8. The protests following Mahsa Amini's death were symbolized by the slogan "_____, Life, Freedom," which became a rallying cry for women's rights in Iran.

9. United Nations experts have criticized the hijab bill, labeling it a form of "gender _____" and warning that it violates fundamental human rights.

10. The bill proposes that businesses serving women without hijabs could face closure and fines, while _____ drivers and business owners could be penalized for not reporting women in violation of the hijab mandate.