

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS

DECEMBER 2025 : WEEK-2

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1. Putin's India visit



1. High-Stakes Visit Amid Global Tensions

Date & Context:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in New Delhi on December 4–5, 2025, receiving a warm welcome from PM Modi at Palam Airport, signalling India's intent to keep ties with Russia strong despite:
 - Western pressure, including concerns from the US and EU
 - ICC arrest warrant against Putin
 - Extensive U.S. and European sanctions on Russia
- **The visit comes at a time India is handling a delicate geopolitical balance ahead of:**
 - A U.S. trade delegation in December
 - Visit of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in January
 - Republic Day hosting of EU leadership (Ursula von der Leyen & Antonio Costa)
- **India aims to finalise:**
 - EU–India FTA
 - U.S.–India FTA
- Within weeks, making the optics of Putin's visit strategically sensitive.

2. Oil, Trade & Economic Realignment

A. Sharp Reduction in Russian Oil Imports

- India's purchase of Russian oil rose from <2% pre-Ukraine war to 40% in 2023–24, driving bilateral trade to \$68.7 billion in 2024–25.
- However, U.S. sanctions have forced India to cut Russian crude imports by 38% in October 2025—the steepest monthly fall to date.

B. New Trade Model to Replace Oil

- India and Russia discussed reducing oil dependence and compensating via:
- Increased Russian supplies of other commodities
- **Boosting Indian exports of:**
 - Agricultural produce
 - Processed foods
 - Apparel
 - Specific machinery
- Utilising the new Eastern Maritime Corridor (Chennai–Vladivostok) for faster logistics.

C. Push for India–EAEU FTA

- Both sides emphasised renewed momentum on the India–Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement, important as Indian exporters face:
 - 50% tariffs from the U.S.
 - Loss of market access in Western economies
 - The FTA with EAEU is seen as a critical diversification mechanism.

3. Labour Mobility Agreement: The Centrepiece of the Visit

A. Major Strategic Pact

- The India–Russia Labour Mobility Agreement is the highlight of the summit.
- Designed to facilitate movement of skilled and semi-skilled Indian workers to Russia.

B. Why It Matters

- **India:**
 - Provides new overseas employment openings as Western nations tighten immigration norms.
- **Russia:**
 - Facing an estimated 3.1 million labour shortage by 2030 due to war, sanctions, and demographic decline.
 - Needs Indian workers in construction, manufacturing, and technology sectors.

4. Defence Cooperation: Expanding Despite U.S. Pressure

A. Discussions & New Requests

- India signalled interest in additional S-400 missile system batches, despite earlier U.S. threats under CAATSA sanctions.
- **At the bilateral defence ministerial meeting:**
 - Both sides reaffirmed commitment to deepening defence and strategic cooperation.
 - Emphasis on Russian technology transfer, still unmatched by Western states.

B. Military Logistics & Exercises

- The Russian Duma has cleared the RELOS (Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support) Pact.
- Enables closer military interoperability
- Facilitates joint missions, resupply, and operations
- Expanded India–Russia military exercises may resume—despite prior EU objections.

5. Nuclear Energy Collaboration: A New Phase

India's Department of Atomic Energy confirmed discussions with Rosatom on:

- Five indigenous small modular reactor (SMR) projects
- Russia remains a major nuclear partner even as:
- France and EU states bid for the same SMR projects
- The outcome may influence India's civil-nuclear diversification strategy.

6. Diplomatic Optics & Soft Power

A. Modi–Putin Personal Bonding

- **PM Modi gifted Putin a Russian-language edition of the Bhagavad Gita, highlighting:**
 - Shared cultural diplomacy
 - Symbolic continuity of India–Russia friendship
 - Modi hosted a private dinner for Putin at his official residence, underscoring warm personal ties.

7. India's Tightrope Walk between Moscow and the West

A. Key Balancing Challenges

- **India must ensure that announcements from the Russia visit:**
 - Do not jeopardise the EU–India or U.S.–India FTAs
 - Do not trigger new Western sanctions
 - Do not appear to undercut Western strategic interests
- **Yet India seeks to preserve:**
 - Defence autonomy
 - Energy security
 - Access to Russian technology
 - A stable Eastern partner amid global fracturing

B. Strategic Outlook

India continues a multi-alignment foreign policy

- **Russia remains a critical partner in:**
 - Defence
 - Nuclear energy
 - Arctic access and connectivity
 - Workforce exchange
- **While the West remains vital for:**
 - Trade
 - Investment
 - High-tech supply chains
 - Strategic balancing in the Indo-Pacific

QUESTIONS

1. With reference to the **23rd India–Russia Annual Summit**, consider the following statements:

1. India and Russia reaffirmed their Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership on the 25th anniversary of the 2000 Strategic Partnership Declaration.
2. Both countries agreed to fast-track a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union.
3. India and Russia set a target of achieving USD 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2025.
4. Energy cooperation was reaffirmed as a key pillar of the India–Russia partnership.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

2. With reference to **connectivity and regional cooperation initiatives** discussed at the summit, consider the following statements:

1. India and Russia agreed to deepen cooperation on the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
2. The Chennai–Vladivostok maritime route was highlighted as a connectivity priority.
3. India agreed to withdraw from Arctic consultations due to geopolitical uncertainties.
4. Cooperation in the Russian Far East and Arctic will be guided by a 2024–2029 framework.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

3. With reference to **defence, multilateral and counter-terrorism cooperation** between India and Russia, consider the following statements:

1. India–Russia defence cooperation has shifted from a buyer–seller model to joint R&D, co-development and co-production.
2. Russia supported India’s demand for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.
3. Russia adopted the framework agreement to join the International Big Cat Alliance.
4. Both sides opposed the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

4. With reference to Russia's international borders and territorial changes, consider the following statements:
1. Russia is the largest country in the world by land area and shares land borders with fourteen sovereign states.
 2. Russia has maritime boundaries with both the United States and Japan.
 3. Russia's internationally recognised land border is the longest in the world.
 4. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in 2022 have altered Russia's **de facto** borders with Ukraine but remain internationally unrecognised.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

5. Consider the following countries:

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. Norway | 4. Azerbaijan |
| 2. Finland | 5. Sweden |
| 3. Poland | 6. Georgia |

How many of the above countries share border with Russia?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| A. Only three | C. Only five |
| B. Only four | D. All six |

6. Consider the following countries:

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. Bulgaria | 4. Latvia |
| 2. Czech Republic | 5. Lithuania |
| 3. Hungary | 6. Romania |

How many of the above countries **share a land border with Ukraine?**

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| A. Only two | C. Only four |
| B. Only three | D. Only five |

7. India is one of the founding members of the **International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, a multimodal transportation corridor. The INSTC will connect:

- A. India to Central Asia to Europe via Iran
- B. India to Central Asia via China
- C. India to South-East Asia through Bangladesh and Myanmar
- D. India to Europe through Azerbaijan

2. 79 years ago, the Constituent Assembly held its first meeting on 9th December



I. Background: A Constitution in a Turbulent Era

- The Indian Constitution was drafted in an environment marked by political upheaval, social diversity, and the imminent end of British rule.
- A relatively small, educated, and elite group represented a vast population that was largely illiterate and deeply diverse in caste, religion, region, and culture.
- Members derived legitimacy from the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, which structured representation for British provinces, princely states, and chief commissioners' provinces.

Initial composition:

- 292 from Provincial Legislative Assemblies
- 93 from Princely States
- 4 from Chief Commissioners' Provinces
- After Partition through the Mountbatten Plan (June 1947), a separate Assembly was created for Pakistan, reducing India's Constituent Assembly to 299 members.
- The drafting process ultimately took 2 years, 11 months, and 17 days, culminating in the adoption of one of the world's longest constitutions.

II. December 9, 1946: The First Sitting of the Constituent Assembly

1. Atmosphere on Opening Day

- The venue—Constitution Hall, now Samvidhan Sadan—was adorned with elegant lighting, high ceilings, and newly arranged seating.
- Members sat in semi-circular rows before the Presidential dais, while press and visitors filled the galleries.
- Prominent leaders such as Nehru, Ambedkar, Azad, Patel, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad, and Sarojini Naidu occupied the front row.

2. Appointment of the Temporary Chairman

- Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, the senior-most member, was appointed temporary Chairman.
- He opened the session at 11 am and began with messages of goodwill from foreign nations.

III. International Greetings: Symbolic Global Recognition

1. United States

- Extended “sincere good wishes” and emphasised India’s potential contribution to peace, stability, and cultural advancement worldwide.
- Expressed that global “freedom-loving people” would watch India’s constitutional work with interest.

2. China

- Not under Communist rule yet, China wished for the Assembly’s success and hoped it would build the foundation for a democratic and prosperous India.

3. Australia

- Watched India’s political evolution with “keen interest and sympathy,” calling the Assembly’s opening a sign of India’s rightful place in global affairs.

IV. Sinha’s Inaugural Speech: Vision and Philosophical Foundations

1. Ideals for a Democratic India

- Quoted political thinkers and highlighted the Congress’s 1936 Faizpur Resolution, which committed to democracy and a constitution shaped by a sovereign Constituent Assembly.

2. Appeal for Wisdom and National Purpose

- Invoked divine blessings for patriotism, justice, tolerance, fairness, and vision.
- Emphasised rebuilding India’s past glory and securing a respected place among world nations.

3. Literary and Scriptural References

- Quoted Allama Iqbal’s famous lines on the endurance of India’s civilisation, interpreting it as a testament to India’s eternal cultural spirit.
- Cited the Bible: “Where there is no vision the people perish,” urging members to think beyond narrow interests.

4. Formal Business

- After the speech, 207 members submitted credentials and signed the Assembly register, marking the start of constitutional deliberation.

V. Women in the Constituent Assembly: Pioneers of Social Reform

- Out of 299 members, 15 were women, including both celebrated and lesser-known figures. Their contributions shaped debates on gender justice, caste, reservations, and civil rights.

1. Ammu Swaminathan (1894–1978)

- Born in Palakkad, Kerala; married young but insisted on personal freedoms within marriage.
- Opposed oppressive widowhood practices after witnessing her mother’s experiences.
- Joined Congress politics and advocated for women’s rights and social reform.
- In the Assembly, spoke strongly on the Hindu Code Bill and gender equality, despite frequent dismissal by male colleagues.
- Later became an MP and served as India’s goodwill ambassador to several countries.



2. Annie Mascarene (1902–1963)

- From a Latin Christian family in Travancore; academically gifted and trained in law.
- Faced violence and intimidation during anti-monarchy political movements in Travancore.
- Helped lead the Travancore Joint Political Congress, pushing for universal franchise.
- In the Constituent Assembly, emphasised a strong Centre balanced with empowered local governments.
- Won the 1952 election from Thiruvananthapuram as an independent.

3. Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul (1909–2001)

- Came from a privileged Muslim family in Punjab; overcame orthodox resistance to her education.
- Discarded purdah after marriage and entered politics despite criticism.
- Member of the Muslim League; campaigned for women's issues but opposed separate religious electorates.
- Her views on Partition were nuanced—she saw potential benefits for Muslims but feared poverty's impact in India.
- Stayed in India and later served in the Rajya Sabha, contributing to sports and women's welfare.

4. Dakshayani Velayudhan (1912–1978)

- First Dalit woman science graduate and first Dalit woman in the Cochin legislature.
- From the Pulaya community, faced caste discrimination even in education.
- Married in Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram in an egalitarian ceremony.
- Elected to the Constituent Assembly at 34; disagreed with Ambedkar on separate electorates, seeing them as divisive.
- Later remained active in the Dalit movement despite financial obstacles limiting her political career.

5. Renuka Ray (1904–1997)

- From a prominent Bengal family; influenced by Gandhi to join the freedom struggle.
- Studied at the London School of Economics and became a leading women's rights activist.

- Advocated reforms in inheritance and divorce laws; represented women's groups before joining the Assembly.
- Opposed women's reservation, arguing it underestimated women's capabilities.
- After politics, devoted herself to social work and legal reforms.

QUESTIONS

8. With reference to the **Constituent Assembly of India**, consider the following statements:

1. The Constituent Assembly derived its legitimacy from the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946.
2. Before Partition, the Assembly consisted of representatives only from British Indian provinces.
3. After the Mountbatten Plan of 1947, the strength of India's Constituent Assembly was reduced to 299 members.
4. The drafting of the Indian Constitution was completed in less than two years.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

9. With reference to the **first sitting of the Constituent Assembly on 9 December 1946**, consider the following statements:

1. The first sitting was held in Constitution Hall, now known as Samvidhan Sadan.
2. Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha was appointed as the temporary Chairman of the Assembly.
3. The session began with the presentation of the Objectives Resolution.
4. On the first day, 207 members submitted their credentials and signed the Assembly register.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

10. With reference to **women members of the Constituent Assembly**, consider the following statements:

1. The Constituent Assembly included 15 women members.
2. Dakshayani Velayudhan supported the idea of separate electorates for Dalits.
3. Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul opposed separate religious electorates.
4. Renuka Ray supported women's reservation as a constitutional necessity.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

11. Which of the following statements regarding the **Constituent Assembly of India** are correct?

1. It was not based on adult franchise.
2. It resulted from direct elections.
3. It was a multi-party body.
4. It worked through several committees.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

12. Who was the **Provisional (Temporary) President of the Constituent Assembly of India** before **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** took over?

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| A. C. Rajagopalachari | C. T. T. Krishnamachari |
| B. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar | D. Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha |

3. Lithuania declares state of emergency over balloons from Belarus



1. Escalating Cross-Border Tensions

- Lithuania has taken the extraordinary step of declaring a state of emergency following a surge of smuggler balloons drifting into its airspace from neighboring Belarus.

- These incidents, which Lithuanian authorities describe as deliberate provocations, have repeatedly impacted civil aviation, leading to airport closures and raising broader concerns about national security.
- The situation highlights the increasingly strained relations between the two countries and the broader geopolitical challenges in Eastern Europe.

2. Wave of Smuggler Balloons Disrupts Lithuanian Airspace

A. Growing Number of Aerial Intrusions

- Over recent months, Lithuania has documented a significant rise in weather-balloon-type devices drifting from Belarusian territory.
- These balloons are believed to be used by smugglers transporting illegal cigarettes, a long-standing issue on the Belarus–Lithuania border.
- Lithuanian authorities argue that the frequency and scale of the activity point to a coordinated effort, not isolated smuggling operations.

B. Impact on Civil Aviation and Airport Operations

- Vilnius International Airport, the country’s busiest aviation hub, has been forced to close multiple times after air traffic controllers detected unidentified objects in the flight path.
- **These closures have:**
 - Disrupted flight schedules
 - Caused delays and cancellations
 - Raised alarm among aviation safety agencies
- Lithuanian officials emphasize that even small airborne devices can pose serious risks to aircraft, particularly during takeoff and landing.

3. Lithuania Labels the Balloon Incursions as a “Hybrid Attack”

A. Official Characterization of the Threat

- The Lithuanian government asserts that the balloon activity is not merely smuggling, but an orchestrated attempt to destabilize the country.
- It has categorized the incidents as a “hybrid attack”, implying the use of unconventional tactics—such as smuggling operations—to provoke political and security instability.

B. Interior Minister’s Statement on National Security

- Interior Minister Vladislav Kondratovic, during a government session broadcast live, stressed that the situation extends well beyond aviation concerns.
- The state of emergency aims to safeguard both aviation safety and broader national security interests.
- Lithuania must enhance its readiness to respond to emerging hybrid threats, particularly given its geopolitical position on NATO’s eastern flank.
- The incursions are viewed as part of a broader pattern of Belarusian pressure and destabilization tactics.

4. Government Response: Military Support Requested

A. Seeking Expanded Security Measures

- Following escalating incidents, the Lithuanian government has asked parliament to authorize military support for police forces and border guards.
- This step underscores the seriousness with which Lithuania perceives the incursions, signaling that existing civil resources may be insufficient.

B. Enhancing Border and Airspace Surveillance

- **The plan includes:**
 - Deploying military units to assist with monitoring and securing the border
 - Investing in enhanced radar and drone detection technologies
 - Increasing the number of personnel stationed along the Belarusian frontier
 - Boosting rapid-response capabilities in case of future airspace disruptions
 - Officials argue these measures are necessary to avoid further threats to civil aviation and public safety.

5. Belarus Denies Allegations and Accuses Lithuania of Provocations

A. Minsk Rejects Responsibility

- Belarusian officials have denied any involvement, insisting the balloons are not state-approved operations.
- They argue that Lithuania is intentionally inflating minor incidents to justify heavier militarization along the border.

B. Counter-Accusations toward Lithuania

- Belarus has accused Lithuania of engaging in its own provocations, including:
- Allegations that Lithuanian authorities used a drone to drop “extremist material” over Belarusian territory.
- Lithuania has firmly denied these claims, calling them baseless and politically motivated.

6. Lukashenko Responds: Claims Lithuania Is Overreacting

A. Attempt to Downplay the Situation

- Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko commented publicly that Lithuania is exaggerating the balloon incidents.
- He suggested that the claims of hybrid attacks are politically driven and designed to justify Lithuania’s security measures.

B. Insistence on Avoiding Regional Conflict

- Lukashenko emphasized that Belarus has no desire for conflict with its neighbors.
- He framed Lithuania’s response as unnecessarily provocative and argued that Minsk is being unfairly blamed for the actions of smugglers.

QUESTIONS

13. Consider the following countries:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. Latvia | 4. Russia |
| 2. Poland | 5. Ukraine |
| 3. Belarus | |

How many of the above countries **share a land border with Lithuania**?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| A. Only two | C. Only four |
| B. Only three | D. Only five |

14. Consider the following countries:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. Austria | 4. Serbia |
| 2. Bulgaria | 5. Sweden |
| 3. Croatia | 6. North Macedonia |

How many of the above are members of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**?

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| A. Only three | C. Only five |
| B. Only four | D. All the six |

15. The **Minsk Agreements**, often mentioned in the context of the Ukraine conflict, were primarily aimed at:

- A. Establishing a permanent military alliance between Ukraine and NATO
- B. Ending the conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region through ceasefire arrangements
- C. Granting Ukraine membership in the European Union
- D. Dividing Ukraine into separate sovereign states

4. IMF Lists UPI as World's Largest Real-Time Payment System

1. IMF Recognition of UPI

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recognised India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as the world's largest retail fast-payment system by transaction volume.
- This recognition appears in the IMF report "Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)", dated June 2025.



2. Global Rankings in Real-Time Payments (ACI Worldwide, 2024)

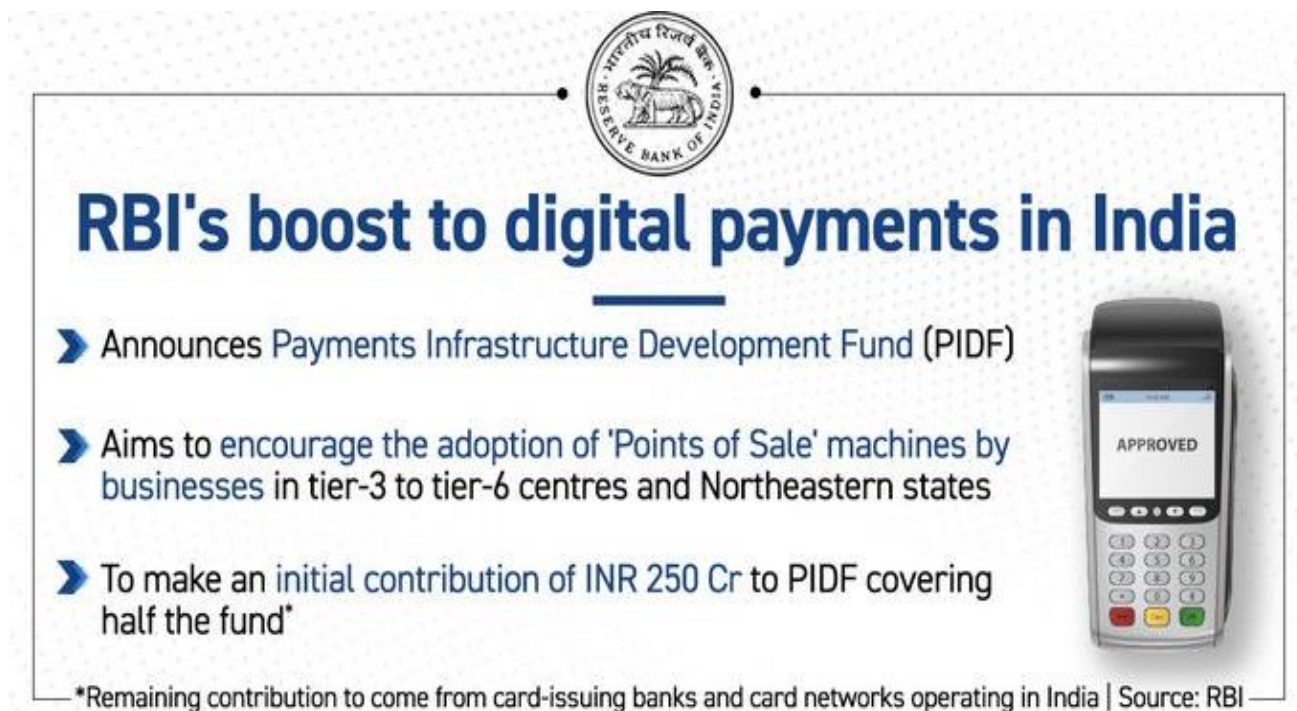
- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • According to ACI Worldwide's "Prime Time for Real-Time 2024" report: | |
| • UPI ranks #1 globally, with: | • Brazil (#2): |
| ○ 49% global market share | ○ 14% market share |
| ○ 129.3 billion transactions | ○ 37.4 billion transactions |

- **Thailand (#3):**

- 8% market share
- 20.4 billion Transactions

- **China (#4):**

- 6% market share
- 17.2 billion transactions



The infographic features the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) logo at the top center. Below it, the title "RBI's boost to digital payments in India" is prominently displayed in a large, bold, blue font. To the right of the text is an image of a black Point of Sale (POS) terminal with a screen showing the word "APPROVED". The main content consists of three blue arrow-shaped bullet points: "Announces Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)", "Aims to encourage the adoption of 'Points of Sale' machines by businesses in tier-3 to tier-6 centres and Northeastern states", and "To make an initial contribution of INR 250 Cr to PIDF covering half the fund*". At the bottom, a small line of text reads: "*Remaining contribution to come from card-issuing banks and card networks operating in India | Source: RBI".

3. Government and Regulatory Support for Digital Payments

- Multiple initiatives by the Government of India, RBI, and NPCI aim to support digital payments for small merchants.

Key schemes and interventions:

- Incentive scheme to promote low-value BHIM-UPI transactions.

Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF):

- Provides grant support for deploying digital infrastructure (POS terminals, QR codes) in tier-3 to tier-6 centres.

4. Deployment of Digital Infrastructure

As of October 31, 2025:

- 5.45 crore digital touchpoints deployed in tier-3 to tier-6 areas through PIDF.

As of FY 2024-25:

- 56.86 crore QR codes deployed to approx. 6.5 crore merchants.

5. Nationwide Expansion of Digital Transactions

- The Government, RBI, and NPCI are expanding digital payments through:
 - UPI
 - RuPay
- These payment systems are being integrated across:
 - Public services
 - E-commerce platforms
 - Transport
 - Various business sectors nationwide

QUESTIONS

16. With reference to **India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**, consider the following statements:

1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recognised UPI as the world's largest retail real-time payment system by transaction volume.
2. This recognition was mentioned in the IMF report titled "*Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)*" published in June 2025.
3. According to ACI Worldwide's 2024 report, UPI accounts for less than one-third of global real-time payment transactions.
4. Brazil ranks ahead of India in terms of global market share of real-time payment systems.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

17. With reference to **India's digital payments ecosystem**, consider the following statements:

1. The Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF) supports the deployment of digital payment infrastructure in tier-3 to tier-6 centres.
2. As of October 31, 2025, more than five crore digital touchpoints had been deployed in smaller towns through PIDF.
3. UPI and RuPay are being integrated only in private-sector platforms and not in public services.
4. An incentive scheme exists to promote low-value transactions through BHIM-UPI.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

18. Consider the following countries:

1. United Arab Emirates
2. France
3. Germany
4. Singapore
5. Bangladesh

How many countries among the above, **other than India**, have **international merchant payments accepted under UPI**?

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| A. Only two | C. Only four |
| B. Only three | D. All the five |

19. Which of the following is the **most likely consequence** of implementing the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**?
- A. Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.
 - B. Digital currency will totally replace physical currency in about two decades.
 - C. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows will drastically increase.
 - D. Direct transfer of subsidies to poor people will become very effective.
20. With reference to **digital payments**, consider the following statements:
- 1. The **BHIM app** allows a user to transfer money to anyone with a **UPI-enabled bank account**.
 - 2. While a **chip-and-PIN debit card** has four factors of authentication, the **BHIM app** has only two factors of authentication.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

5. Thailand launches strikes into Cambodia



1. Latest Escalation (December 8 Incident)

- Thailand's army launched airstrikes on "military targets" in Cambodia after claiming Cambodian forces killed at least two Thai soldiers along the border.
- Cambodia denied initiating any attack and said it refrained from retaliation.

Casualties reported:

- **Thailand:** 1 soldier dead, 8 injured.
- **Cambodia:** 3 civilians injured in Thai strikes.
- Thousands evacuated on both sides due to renewed clashes.
- This flare-up comes just two months after a Malaysia-brokered, Trump-supervised peace deal.

2. Background: The July Conflict

- May skirmishes killed one Cambodian soldier → triggered nationalist rhetoric, diplomatic expulsions, and escalating tensions.
- Thailand accused Cambodia of newly laid landmines that maimed a Thai soldier; Cambodia denied the charges.

Military escalation (July):

- Fighting spread across Thai provinces Surin, Sisaket and Cambodian Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear.
- Thailand conducted airstrikes; Cambodia retaliated with rocket and artillery fire.
- **Toll:** 48 deaths and thousands temporarily displaced.

Peace efforts:

- Thailand initially rejected Malaysian mediation.
- Accepted after a Trump ultimatum, tying peace to future US trading agreements.

Post-ceasefire tension persisted:

- August landmine blast injured Thai soldiers; Thailand accused Cambodia of violating ceasefire.

3. Thailand's Current Demands

Thailand requires Cambodia to:

- Remove heavy weapons from the border.
- Clear landmines in the conflict zone.
- Curb cross-border crime in cooperation with Thai authorities.
- Manage sensitive border zones to prevent more clashes.



4. Deep Roots: The Contested Border

- The border was drawn by France in 1907, creating longstanding disputes despite ethnic and cultural ties.
- Nationalist narratives on both sides claim cultural ownership of heritage sites, fueling periodic tensions.
- Dispute has persisted since Cambodia's independence (1953).

5. Core Flashpoint: Preah Vihear (Phra Viharn) Temple

- An 11th–12th century temple from the Khmer Empire, symbolically and culturally significant to both nations.
- 1904 treaty placed frontier along the watershed (favoring Siam), but 1907 French map assigned the temple to Cambodia.

Control changed multiple times historically:

- Siam regained it during WWII through alliance with Japan, but returned it post-war.

Key legal milestones:

- **1962 ICJ ruling:** Temple belongs to Cambodia.
- **2008 UNESCO listing bid:** Reignited nationalist politics in both countries.
- **2013 ICJ clarification:** Reaffirmed Cambodia's claim, ordered a demilitarized zone (never implemented).
- Thailand now rejects ICJ jurisdiction.

QUESTIONS

21. With reference to the **Thailand–Cambodia border dispute**, consider the following statements:

1. The disputed border was originally drawn by France in 1907.
2. The conflict has persisted since Cambodia's independence in 1953.
3. Ethnic, cultural, and heritage claims by both sides have fueled nationalist tensions.
4. The border dispute emerged only after the UNESCO listing of Preah Vihear Temple in 2008.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

22. With reference to the **Preah Vihear (Phra Viharn) Temple dispute**, consider the following statements:

1. The temple dates back to the Khmer Empire of the 11th–12th centuries.
2. The **International Court of Justice** ruled in 1962 that the temple belongs to Cambodia.
3. A demilitarized zone around the temple ordered in 2013 has been fully implemented by both countries.
4. Thailand currently rejects the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice over the dispute.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

23. The Cambodia–Thailand border is the international border between Cambodia and Thailand. The border is 817 km in length and runs from the tripoint with_____.
- Laos in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south
 - Brunei in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south
 - Vietnam in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south
 - Malaysia in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south
24. With reference to the **geographical boundaries of Cambodia and Thailand**, consider the following statements:
- Cambodia shares land borders with Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam and has a coastline along the Gulf of Thailand.
 - Cambodia is a landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia.
 - Thailand shares land borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia.
 - Thailand has maritime boundaries with both the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- Only one
 - Only two
 - Only three
 - All the four
25. With reference to **Angkor Wat**, consider the following statements:
- Angkor Wat was originally constructed as a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu.
 - It was built during the early 12th century by the Khmer king Suryavarman II as a state temple and mausoleum.
 - Angkor Wat is the largest religious structure in the world and a prime example of Khmer architecture.
 - From the time of its construction, Angkor Wat functioned exclusively as a Buddhist temple.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- Only one
- Only two
- Only three
- All the four

6. Vande Mataram at 150 years

1. Parliamentary Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated a special discussion in the Lok Sabha to mark 150 years of the national song Vande Mataram.
- The discussion aimed to commemorate the historic, cultural, and emotional significance of the song in India's freedom movement.
- Modi highlighted that Vande Mataram goes beyond a political slogan—it embodies a spiritual and cultural uprising representing the freedom of the motherland from all forms of subjugation.



2. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Key Remarks

- Modi emphasized that Vande Mataram is not merely a chant for political liberation but a symbol of India's profound emotional and cultural bond with the nation.

He noted:

- The song encapsulates the Indian freedom struggle's deeper purpose—to liberate the motherland itself, not merely expel colonial rulers.
- It served as a source of strength, unity, and moral courage for countless freedom fighters during India's independence movement.
- Modi's speech underlined the song's timeless relevance and its role as an enduring expression of India's civilizational ethos.

3. Origins and Historical Background of Vande Mataram

3.1 Composition and Publication

- Vande Mataram (meaning "Mother, I bow to thee") was composed in sanskritised Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Key details:

- **Year of composition:** 1875
- **First publication:** 1882, within Bankim Chandra's celebrated novel Anandamath.
- **The novel and the song were deeply inspired by:**
 - The 18th-century Sannyasi Rebellion.
 - The 1857 revolt, often described as India's first war of independence.

3.2 Themes and Symbolism

- The song personifies the nation as a divine mother figure, blending nationalism with spiritual and cultural veneration.
- **It evokes images of:**
 - Fertility and natural beauty of the land
 - Devotion to the motherland
 - Sacrifice and courage of citizens
 - A call to rise against oppression

4. Role of Vande Mataram in the Freedom Struggle

4.1 Adoption by the Indian National Congress

- In 1905, Vande Mataram was officially adopted by the Indian National Congress.
- **Objective:**
 - To mobilize nationalist sentiment.
 - To use the song as a rallying cry against British colonialism.
 - It rapidly gained status as the anthem of resistance, sung in public gatherings, processions, and protests.

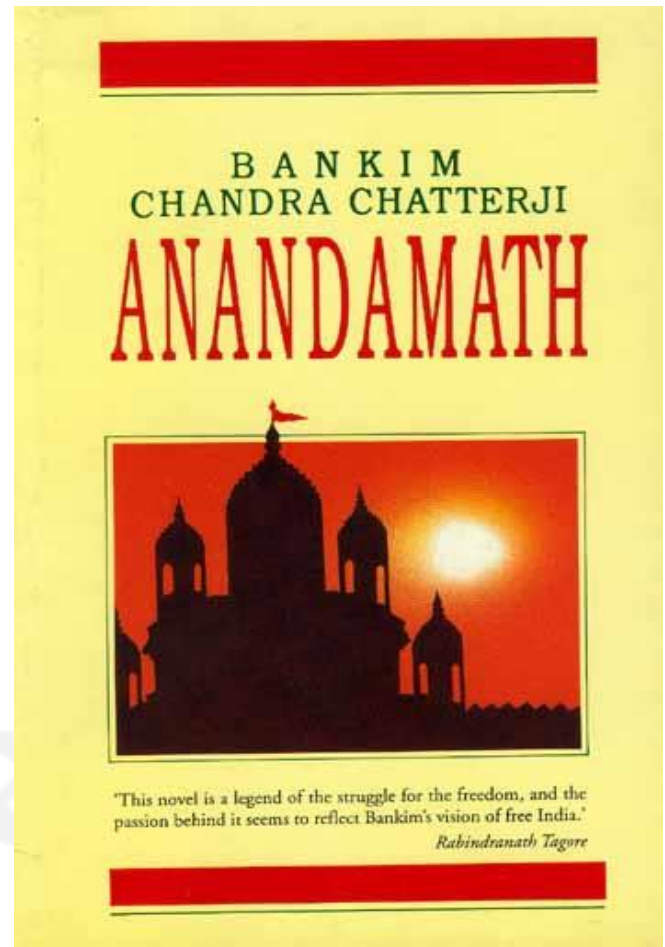
4.2 Influence on Freedom Fighters

- The song became a powerful emotional and ideological tool.
- Many leaders and revolutionaries viewed it as a symbol of patriotic commitment.
- It served as a unifying chant during movements like:
 - Swadeshi Movement
 - Non-Cooperation Movement
 - Various revolutionary uprisings

5. Constitutional Recognition and Equal Honour

5.1 Constituent Assembly Debate of 1950

- Dr. Rajendra Prasad, then President of the Constituent Assembly (and later India's first President), made a landmark statement.
- **He declared that:**
 - Jana Gana Mana would be the National Anthem, formally recognized and protected.
 - Vande Mataram would be given equal honour and status, acknowledging its historic contribution to the freedom struggle.
- **This unique recognition highlights its dual identity:**
 - Not the official anthem
 - Yet deeply revered and constitutionally respected



6. Difference between the National Song and the National Anthem

6.1 Constitutional and Legal Status

- **National Anthem (Jana Gana Mana):**
 - Enjoys explicit constitutional recognition.
 - **Article 51A(a):** Respecting the National Anthem is a fundamental duty of every Indian citizen.
- **Specific decorum for playing/singing it is governed by:**
 - Orders Relating to the National Anthem of India
 - The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971
- **National Song (Vande Mataram):**
 - Although honoured by the Constituent Assembly, it does not enjoy the same level of constitutional protection or legal guidelines.
 - There are no statutory penalties or formal rules governing its singing or performance.

6.2 Symbolic and Cultural Distinction

- **Jana Gana Mana:**
 - Selected for its secular, inclusive, and pan-Indian message.
 - Emphasizes unity in diversity, making it an appropriate national anthem for a pluralistic nation.
- **Vande Mataram:**
 - Revered for its emotional, patriotic, and historical resonance.
 - Embodies spiritual nationalism, drawing from cultural symbols and imagery of the motherland.

QUESTIONS

26. With reference to **Vande Mataram**, consider the following statements:

1. Vande Mataram was composed by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** in Sanskritised Bengali.
2. The song was first published in the novel *Anandamath* in 1875.
3. The composition was inspired by the Sannyasi Rebellion and the Revolt of 1857.
4. Vande Mataram was originally written as a Buddhist hymn.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

27. With reference to the role of **Vande Mataram in India's freedom movement**, consider the following statements:

1. Vande Mataram was adopted by the Indian National Congress in 1905.
2. It became a rallying cry during movements such as the Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation movements.
3. The song was discouraged by nationalist leaders due to its limited emotional appeal.
4. It played a unifying role in public protests and revolutionary activities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

28. With reference to the **constitutional status of Vande Mataram**, consider the following statements:
1. Vande Mataram was declared the National Anthem by the Constituent Assembly.
 2. **Rajendra Prasad** stated that Vande Mataram would enjoy equal honour with the National Anthem.
 3. Respecting Vande Mataram is listed as a Fundamental Duty under Article 51A.
 4. Vande Mataram enjoys constitutional respect but not the same legal status as the National Anthem.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. Only three
D. All the four
29. With reference to the **National Song and National Anthem of India**, consider the following statements:
1. The National Anthem enjoys explicit constitutional and legal protection.
 2. The National Song has statutory penalties governing its performance.
 3. The National Anthem was selected for its secular and pan-Indian character.
 4. Vande Mataram reflects spiritual nationalism rooted in cultural symbolism.
- Which of the statements given above are correct?
- A. Only one
B. Only two
C. Only three
D. All the four
30. Consider the following statements:
1. The **Jana Gana Mana**, the National Anthem of India, was adopted by the **Constituent Assembly of India** on **24 January 1950**.
 2. The first political occasion when **Vande Mataram**, the National Song of India, was sung was at the **1896 session of the Indian National Congress**.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- A. 1 only
B. 2 only
C. Both 1 and 2
D. Neither 1 nor 2

7. United States' HIRE Act

1. What is the HIRE Act?

- A bill reintroduced by U.S. Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi to boost America's long-term economic and technological competitiveness.
- Doubles annual H-1B visas from 65,000 → 130,000.
- Removes the 20,000-visa cap for applicants with U.S. advanced degrees.



- Allocates new funding for STEM education in U.S. elementary and secondary schools.
- Aims to support innovation by strengthening both domestic talent and high-skilled immigration.
- Supported by ITServe Alliance; seen as a step toward modernising the U.S. high-skilled immigration system.

2. Why the Act Matters Now

- Follows President Donald Trump's imposition of a \$100,000 annual fee on all first-time H-1B applications (from September).
- The fee is part of a broader protectionist policy to encourage hiring American workers.
- Could significantly impact skilled foreign workers—especially Indians.

3. Impact on Indians

- Indians form 70%+ of all approved H-1B petitions yearly.
- In FY2023, 72% of H-1B visas went to Indian nationals.
- Over 80,000 Indians applied fresh H-1B petitions last year.
- The HIRE Act, if passed, may offer more opportunities for Indian STEM workers, countering restrictive U.S. visa policies.
- However, passage in U.S. Congress remains uncertain.

4. Global Opportunities Emerging for Skilled Workers

Several countries are seeking to attract talent affected by U.S. restrictions:

a. Canada

- PM Mark Carney hinted at new proposals to attract displaced H-1B talent.
- May revive the 2023 program that allowed H-1B holders to move to Canada for up to 3 years (cap reached at 10,000).

b. United Kingdom

- Exploring the abolition of visa fees for top global professionals.
- Targeting scientists, academics, and digital experts via a “global talent task force.”



c. Germany

- Declared open invitation to Indian skilled workers.
- Needs ~288,000 immigrants annually until 2040.
- Plans to issue 10% more professional visas; 130,000+ Indians already working there.

d. China

- Launched K Visa (from Oct 1) to attract STEM talent.
- Does not require employer sponsorship, a major advantage over H-1B.

e. South Korea

- Directing ministries to design pathways to attract scientists and engineers amid visa changes.
- Focusing on AI and advanced tech sectors.

5. Impact on U.S. Tech Companies

- H-1B fee hike may hurt major tech employers like Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Apple, who rely heavily on foreign tech talent.
- Roughly two-thirds of H-1B jobs are tech-related.
- In FY2024, Indians received ~71% of all H-1B approvals.

6. Shift toward Global Capability Centres (GCCs)

- Due to tightening U.S. immigration rules, tech companies are expanding operations in India.
- India now hosts 1,600+ GCCs, employing 2 million+ professionals in fields like design, supply chain, R&D, data analytics, and more.

QUESTIONS

31. With reference to recent global developments related to H-1B visa policies, consider the following statements:

1. Indian nationals account for more than 70% of approved H-1B petitions annually.
2. The United States has imposed a \$100,000 annual fee on all first-time H-1B applications as part of a protectionist policy.
3. Germany and China have announced visa pathways aimed at attracting skilled foreign professionals affected by U.S. visa restrictions.
4. Due to restrictive U.S. immigration policies, the number of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in India has declined.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

32. The longest international border between any two countries in the world is between:

- A. Canada and the United States of America
- B. Chile and Argentina
- C. China and India
- D. Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation

8. Deepavali inscribed on UNESCO'S Intangible Cultural Heritage list



- Deepavali, the festival of lights, is now part of the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- The festival is a new inscription on the list, alongside cultural symbols from many other countries, like Ghana, Georgia, Congo, Ethiopia and Egypt, among others.
- India is hosting a session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).
- Deepavali, also known as Diwali, is the most widely celebrated Hindu festival in India. The decision to have the festival on the cultural heritage list was reportedly taken during a key meeting of UNESCO being hosted at the Red Fort in Delhi.
- Notably, the 2025 session on the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) will be chaired by HE Vishal V Sharma, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of India to UNESCO.
- The 20th session of the panel is underway from December 8 to 13 at the Red Fort.

Countries represented on heritage list

- Not just India, cultural heritage symbols of several countries made it to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
 - Iceland's Swimming pool culture
 - The Compas of Haiti



- Ghana's highlife music and dance
- Georgian wheat culture
- Ethiopia's Gifaataa, Wolaita people New Year festival
- ElSalvador's Confraternity of flowers and palms
- Egypt's Koshary, daily life dish
- Czechia's amateur theatre acting
- Cyprus's Commandaria wine
- Cuba's practice of Cuban Son
- Yemen's Hadrami Dan gathering

UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

- UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is an international register created to help recognize, celebrate, and safeguard living cultural traditions around the world.

What the List Represents

- The List highlights practices and expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, such as:
 - Performing arts (dance, music, theater)
 - Social practices and rituals
 - Festivals and celebrations
 - Traditional craftsmanship
 - Knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe
 - Oral traditions and expressions



Purpose of the List

- **UNESCO established the list to:**
 - Raise awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage.
 - Promote cooperation among nations and communities for safeguarding traditions.
 - Encourage transmission of cultural knowledge to future generations.
 - Celebrate cultural diversity worldwide.

Examples of Elements (general types)

- Traditional dances (e.g., tango, flamenco)
- Culinary practices (e.g., certain traditional food-making techniques)
- Craftsmanship (e.g., pottery, calligraphy, weaving)
- Seasonal festivals and rituals
- Indigenous knowledge systems

Key Indian Traditions on UNESCO's ICH List

Tradition / Cultural Element	What it is / Where from
Ramlila	Traditional performance of the Ramayana, especially in North India; a theatrical-dramatic enactment of epic tales.

Tradition / Cultural Element	What it is / Where from
Vedic chanting	Ancient oral recitation of sacred Vedic texts — part of India's ancient spiritual and oral heritage.
Kutiyattam	A Sanskrit theatre tradition from Kerala — one of the world's oldest living theatre forms.
Ramman	A religious festival / ritual-theatre tradition from the Garhwal Himalayas (Uttarakhand), combining folk theatre, music and community rituals.
Chhau dance	A folk/semi-classical dance form, especially from eastern India — combining martial, tribal and classical dance features.
Kalbelia dance and folk songs	Traditional dance + song form from Rajasthan — associated with the nomadic Kalbelia community.
Mudiyettu	Ritual theatre / dance-drama from Kerala, depicting mythological tales (e.g. goddess Kali vs demon Darika).
Sankirtana (of Manipur)	Ritual singing, drumming and dancing from Manipur — part of Vaishnava religious tradition in the region.
	Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making (Thatheras of Jandiala Guru) Traditional craft from Punjab — artisan-making brass and copper utensils using old methods.
Buddhist chanting of Ladakh	Sacred recitation of Buddhist texts by priests in Ladakh (trans-Himalayan region) — an oral-ritual heritage.
Garba of Gujarat	Folk dance during Navaratri festival — celebrating feminine energy and community bonding.
	According to the official record, India has around 15–16 traditions already inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List.

QUESTIONS

33. With reference to Deepavali being inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, consider the following statements:

1. Deepavali has been included as a new inscription in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
2. The decision was taken during a UNESCO meeting hosted at the Red Fort in Delhi.
3. Deepavali is the first Indian festival to be inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.
4. India is hosting a session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

34. With reference to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, consider the following statements:

1. The List includes living traditions such as festivals, rituals, performing arts, and culinary practices.
2. The primary objective of the List is to legally protect heritage elements through binding international law.
3. The List seeks to promote cultural diversity and inter-national cooperation in safeguarding traditions.
4. Only ancient traditions dating back more than a thousand years are eligible for inscription.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

35. With reference to India's representation on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, consider the following statements:

1. Both ritual theatre traditions and folk dance forms from India are included on the list.
2. Garba of Gujarat and Sankirtana of Manipur are examples of Indian cultural elements on the list.
3. Only Hindu religious traditions from India are represented on UNESCO's ICH list.
4. Traditional craftsmanship practices from India are also part of the list.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| A. Only one | C. Only three |
| B. Only two | D. All the four |

36. Consider the following properties included in the World Heritage List released by UNESCO:

1. Shantiniketan
2. Rani-ki-Vav
3. Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas
4. Mahabodhi Bodhgaya Temple Complex at Bodhgaya

How many of the above properties were included in 2023?

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

9. Roots of Japan-China tensions

Rising Frictions in Asia's Geopolitical Landscape

- Tensions in East and South Asia have intensified owing to a series of diplomatic clashes involving Japan, China, the United States, and India.

- Comments by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi regarding potential military intervention in a Taiwan crisis triggered sharp reactions from China.
- In parallel, China's continuing assertiveness over Taiwan and Arunachal Pradesh, coupled with high-level US–China communication, has placed regional geopolitics in sharp focus.

2. Why China Continues Criticising Japan

- PM Sanae Takaichi recently stated in Japan's Parliament that any escalation of Chinese military activity around Taiwan might require Japanese military involvement.
- China, which considers Taiwan a breakaway province, saw Takaichi's comments as a major provocation.
- A Chinese diplomat escalated rhetoric, threatening to “cut off that dirty neck”, intensifying diplomatic hostility.



Recent Developments

- Beijing sharply criticised Tokyo's plan to deploy a medium-range surface-to-air missile unit on Yonaguni, an island roughly 110 km from Taiwan.
- China claims this move threatens regional stability and signals Japan's active alignment with US strategic interests.

Why China's Reaction Is So Intense

Historical Memory and Nationalism

- Deep-rooted Chinese perceptions of Japanese military aggression during the 19th and 20th centuries shape current sensitivities.
- Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule from 1895 to 1945, further adding a historical layer to Chinese concerns.

Taiwan's Centrality to Chinese National Strategy

- China sees reunification with Taiwan as an uncompromisable national goal.
- Comments by Japanese leaders are viewed as interference in China's internal affairs and a crossing of Beijing's political “red lines.”

Japan's Strategic Concerns and Alliance Structure

- Although Japan has no territorial claims over Taiwan, it sees Chinese control over the island as a serious security threat.
- Former PM Shinzo Abe's doctrine—“A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency”—still influences Japanese strategic thinking.
- Japan's alliance with the United States positions it firmly within any Taiwan-related security framework.

Chinese Political Messaging

- China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi invoked World War II, implying Taiwan was “stolen” by Japan and that Japan is now provoking China again.

- His remarks served dual purposes:
 - Reinforcing China’s historical narrative domestically.
 - Signalling a readiness to “strike back” diplomatically or militarily if Japan crosses further “red lines.”

3. The Xi–Trump Call: Taiwan Takes Center Stage Again

- Chinese President Xi Jinping initiated the phone call to US President Donald Trump — a rarity in recent leader-to-leader communication.
- Discussion topics included:
 - Ukraine–Russia conflict
 - Agricultural trade
 - Taiwan
 - Statements and Outcomes
- Trump acknowledged the importance of Taiwan for China.
- Both leaders described bilateral relations as “extremely strong.”
- Trump accepted Xi’s invitation to visit China in April.
- He also extended an invitation for Xi to make a state visit to the US.

Implications

- The call underscores Taiwan’s continued centrality in US–China relations.
- **Xi’s proactive outreach suggests:**
 - A desire to stabilise relations with Washington.
 - A need to prevent Japan and the US from forming a consolidated front over Taiwan.
 - Following the call, Trump urged PM Takaichi to avoid escalating tensions with China — signaling Washington’s preference for managed stability, even as China dominates US diplomatic attention.

4. China’s Claims over Arunachal Pradesh: The Passport Incident

- A UK-based woman of Indian origin, Pema Thongdok, from Arunachal Pradesh, was detained for 18 hours by Chinese immigration officials in Shanghai.
- The officials allegedly refused to recognise her Indian passport, claiming Arunachal Pradesh is not part of India.

Official Responses

- India sharply criticised the incident as “most unhelpful”, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an “indisputable and integral” part of India.
- China restated its territorial claims, referring to Arunachal Pradesh as “Zangnan” (South Tibet).

Context and Pattern

- **This is not an isolated incident:**
 - In 2023, China issued stapled visas to Arunachal athletes at the Chengdu University Games, prompting India to withdraw its contingent.
- **China’s strategy includes:**
 - Rejecting the McMahon Line, the 1914 boundary between British India and Tibet.
 - Renaming locations in Arunachal Pradesh (lists issued in 2017, 2021, and 2023), attempting to cement territorial claims through administrative nomenclature.

Broader Significance

- **The border dispute reflects China's effort to:**
 - Maintain pressure on India.
 - Politically reinforce its claim over the eastern sector of the India-China boundary.
 - Use bureaucratic and symbolic measures to contest Indian sovereignty.

5. Conclusion: A Complex Web of Overlapping Tensions

- Japan–China relations remain tense due to Taiwan's strategic role, historical grievances, and growing militarisation in East Asia.
- US–China relations, while stabilising at the leadership level, continue to hinge on the Taiwan question.
- India–China relations remain affected by longstanding border disputes, now amplified by symbolic bureaucratic actions.
- Together, these developments highlight an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment in Asia, where history, nationalism, and territorial ambitions intersect with present-day strategic interests.

QUESTIONS

37. Senkaku Islands are disputed between which of the following countries?
- A. Russia and China
 - B. Russia and Japan
 - C. China and Japan
 - D. Japan and North Korea
38. The Kuril Islands dispute involves which two countries?
- A. Russia and China
 - B. Russia and Japan
 - C. China and Japan
 - D. Japan and North Korea

ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The summit coincided with the 25th anniversary of the 2000 Strategic Partnership Declaration.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Both sides agreed to fast-track the FTA with the Eurasian Economic Union.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The bilateral trade target of **USD 100 billion is set for 2030**, not 2025.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Energy was reaffirmed as a core pillar of cooperation.

2. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** INSTC was identified as a key connectivity corridor.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The Chennai–Vladivostok maritime route featured prominently.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** India expressed readiness to play a *more active role* as an Observer in the Arctic Council.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Cooperation in the Far East and Arctic is guided by the **2024-2029 framework**.

3. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Defence ties now focus on joint development and Make-in-India production.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Russia reaffirmed support for India's permanent UNSC membership.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Russia adopted the framework agreement to join the **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** Both countries **supported finalizing** the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

4. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Russia is the world's largest country by area and shares land borders with **14 sovereign states**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Russia has **narrow maritime boundaries** with the **United States (Bering Strait)** and **Japan**.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Russia has the **second-longest land border** in the world (22,407 km); **China** has the longest.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** The annexations of **Crimea (2014)** and **four Ukrainian oblasts (2022)** changed **de facto borders**, but these actions are **not internationally recognised**.

5. C Only five

- Russia shares land borders with **14 countries**: Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania (via Kaliningrad), Poland (via Kaliningrad), Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, and North Korea, plus maritime borders with Japan and the U.S.. It has the world's longest land frontier, connecting Europe and Asia, bordering NATO members in the west and Asian nations in the east, with significant geopolitical complexity.

6. A Only two

- Ukraine shares land borders with **Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Belarus, and Russia.**
- Now examine each country listed:
 - **Bulgaria** – Does **not** share a land border with Ukraine; it is separated by Romania and the Black Sea.
 - **Czech Republic** – Does **not** share a border with Ukraine; Slovakia lies between them.
 - **Hungary** – **Shares a land border** with Ukraine along its northeastern boundary.
 - **Latvia** – Does **not** share a land border with Ukraine; Belarus separates them.
 - **Lithuania** – Does **not** share a land border with Ukraine; Poland and Belarus lie in between.
 - **Romania** – **Shares a land border** with Ukraine along its northern and eastern frontiers.

7. A India to Central Asia to Europe via Iran

- The **International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** is a **7,200-kilometre-long multimodal network** comprising **sea, rail, and road routes**, linking India, Iran, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe, cutting transit times by offering a shorter route than traditional sea lanes. Initiated by India, Iran, and Russia in 2000, it uses Iranian ports like Chabahar and Bandar Abbas, connecting the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea and onward to Russia and Europe, boosting trade and connectivity for landlocked nations.
 - The corridor **originates in India**, moves through **Iran** using ports such as **Chabahar and Bandar Abbas**,
 - Then connects to the **Caspian Sea region**,
 - And proceeds onward to **Russia, Central Asia, and Europe**, often via **Azerbaijan**.
- This route significantly **reduces transit time and cost** compared to traditional maritime routes through the Suez Canal.

8. B Only two

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) structured representation for provinces, princely states, and chief commissioners' provinces.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The Assembly included members from **princely states and chief commissioners' provinces**, not only British provinces.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** After Partition, India's Constituent Assembly was reduced to **299 members**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** The drafting took **2 years, 11 months, and 17 days**, not less than two years.

9. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The venue was **Constitution Hall**, now **Samvidhan Sadan**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Dr. **Sachchidananda Sinha**, the senior-most member, served as temporary Chairman.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The Objectives Resolution was moved later by Jawaharlal Nehru, not on the first day.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** **207 members** formally registered on the opening day.

10. B Only two

- **Statement 1 is correct:** There were **15 women members** in the Constituent Assembly.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Dakshayani Velayudhan **opposed separate electorates**, considering them socially divisive.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul argued against **separate religious electorates**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** Renuka Ray **opposed women's reservation**, believing it underestimated women's abilities.

11. D 1, 3 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct:**
- Members of the Constituent Assembly were **not elected by universal adult franchise**. They were elected **indirectly** by the Provincial Legislative Assemblies.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:**
- The Constituent Assembly did **not** result from **direct elections** by the people.
- **Statement 3 is correct:**
- The Assembly was a **multi-party body**, comprising members from the Indian National Congress, Muslim League, Scheduled Caste Federation, Hindu Mahasabha, Communists, Socialists, and independents.
- **Statement 4 is correct:**
- The Constituent Assembly carried out its work through **multiple committees**, such as the Drafting Committee, Union Powers Committee, Advisory Committee, etc.

12. D Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha

- The **Constituent Assembly of India** held its **first meeting on 9 December 1946**. This session was attended by **211 members**, as the **Muslim League boycotted** the proceedings while demanding a separate state of Pakistan.
- **Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha**, being the **senior-most (oldest) member** of the Assembly, was appointed as the **Provisional/Temporary President**, following the **French parliamentary practice**.
- He presided over the initial proceedings until the Assembly formally elected its permanent leadership.
- Subsequently, **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** was elected as the **President of the Constituent Assembly**.

13. C Only four

- Lithuania is a country in the Baltic region of Europe. It is one of three Baltic states and lies on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, bordered by Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the south, and the Russian semi-exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast to the southwest, with a maritime border with Sweden to the west.

14. B Only four

- Let us examine each country's NATO membership status:
 - **Austria – Not a member**; it follows a policy of permanent neutrality.
 - **Bulgaria – Member** of NATO since **2004**.
 - **Croatia – Member** of NATO since **2009**.

- **Serbia – Not a member**; it maintains military neutrality and is not part of NATO.
- **Sweden – Member** of NATO since **2024**, after ending its long-standing neutrality.
- **North Macedonia – Member** of NATO since **2020**.

15. B Ending the conflict in Ukraine’s Donbas region through ceasefire arrangements

- The **Minsk Agreements—Minsk I (2014) and Minsk II (2015)**—were negotiated to **end hostilities in eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region** between Ukrainian government forces and **Russian-backed separatists**.
- They included provisions such as:
 - A **ceasefire**,
 - **Exchange of prisoners**,
 - **Withdrawal of foreign armed forces**, and
 - Granting a **special status to parts of Donbas**.
- However, due to **persistent non-compliance by both sides**, the agreements collapsed and failed to prevent the escalation of the conflict, culminating in **Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine**.

16. B Only two

- **Statement 1 is correct:** IMF has recognised UPI as the **world’s largest retail fast-payment system** by transaction volume.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The recognition appears in the IMF report published in **June 2025**.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** UPI accounts for **49% of the global market share**, which is well above one-third.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** India ranks **first**, while Brazil ranks **second** globally.

17. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** PIDF provides **grant support** for POS terminals and QR codes in **tier-3 to tier-6 areas**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** **5.45 crore digital touchpoints** were deployed by October 31, 2025.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** UPI and RuPay are integrated across **public services, transport, e-commerce, and business sectors**, not limited to private platforms.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** The government runs an **incentive scheme for low-value BHIM-UPI transactions**.

18. B Only three

- As of now, **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** is enabled for **international merchant payments** in a limited number of countries outside India. These include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ United Arab Emirates ▪ France ▪ Singapore ▪ Sri Lanka ▪ Mauritius 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bhutan ▪ Nepal ▪ Qatar: Recently added for airport and tourist areas.
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19. A Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments

- The **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** enables **instant bank-to-bank transfers** directly using a mobile phone, without the need for intermediaries.
 - UPI allows users to make payments **directly from their bank accounts** using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA), QR codes, or mobile numbers.
 - This reduces the **dependence on mobile wallets** for online and peer-to-peer payments, as funds no longer need to be stored in separate wallet balances.

20. A 1 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.**

The **BHIM** (Bharat Interface for Money) enables users to transfer funds directly to **any** bank account that is enabled on the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**. Transfers can be made using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA), mobile number, or QR code.

- **Statement 2 is incorrect.**
 - A **chip-and-PIN debit card** typically involves **two-factor authentication** (the card itself + the PIN).
 - The **BHIM app** also uses **two-factor authentication** (device binding and UPI PIN). Hence, it is incorrect to state that the debit card has four factors while BHIM has only two.

21. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** France drew the border in **1907**, leading to long-standing disputes.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The dispute has continued since **Cambodia's independence in 1953**.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Competing nationalist narratives over culture and heritage sustain tensions.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** The dispute **predates** the 2008 UNESCO listing, though the listing reignited tensions.

22. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The temple originates from the **Khmer Empire (11th–12th century)**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** The ICJ ruled in **1962** that the temple belongs to Cambodia.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** The **demilitarized zone was never implemented**.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Thailand now **rejects ICJ jurisdiction** in this matter.

23. A Laos in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south

- The Cambodia–Thailand border is the international border between Cambodia and Thailand. The border is 817 km in length and runs from the tripoint with Laos in the north-east to the Gulf of Thailand in the south.

24. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** **Cambodia** borders **Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam**, and has a coastline along the **Gulf of Thailand**. Cambodia's neighboring countries are Thailand to the west/northwest, Laos to the northeast, and Vietnam to the east, with a coastline along the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. It's a landlocked country with only these three land borders in mainland Southeast Asia, bordering the sea on its southern side.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** Cambodia is **not landlocked**; it has access to the sea via the Gulf of Thailand.

- **Statement 3 is correct:** **Thailand** shares land borders with **Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia**. Thailand borders four countries: Myanmar to the northwest, Laos to the north and northeast, Cambodia to the east, and Malaysia to the south, along the Malay Peninsula. It also has maritime borders with the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Thailand has maritime boundaries with both the **Andaman Sea** (west) and the **Gulf of Thailand** (east).

25. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Angkor Wat was originally built as a **Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** It was commissioned by **Suryavarman II** in the early 12th century as his **state temple and eventual mausoleum**.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Angkor Wat is widely regarded as the **largest religious monument in the world** and a masterpiece of **Khmer architecture**, symbolizing **Cambodia**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** Angkor Wat was **later gradually transformed into a Buddhist temple**, not Buddhist from its inception.

26. B Only two

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed the song in Sanskritised Bengali.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The song was composed in **1875** but first published in **1882** in *Anandamath*.
- Statement 3 is correct: The song drew inspiration from the Sannyasi Rebellion and the 1857 Revolt.
- Statement 4 is incorrect: It was written as a Hindu nationalist song, not a Buddhist hymn.

27. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The INC adopted Vande Mataram in **1905**.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** It was widely sung during the **Swadeshi** and **Non-Cooperation** movements.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** On the contrary, the song had **strong emotional and ideological appeal**.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** It served as a **symbol of unity and resistance**.

28. B Only two

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** **Jana Gana Mana**, not Vande Mataram, is the National Anthem.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Rajendra Prasad affirmed **equal honour**, not equal legal status.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** Article 51A(a) refers to the **National Anthem**, not the National Song.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Vande Mataram is revered but lacks statutory protection.

29. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct:** The National Anthem is protected under **Article 51A** and the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** There are **no statutory penalties** related to Vande Mataram.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Jana Gana Mana was chosen for its **inclusive, secular message**.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** Vande Mataram embodies **spiritual and cultural nationalism**.

30. C Both 1 and 2

- **Statement 1 is correct.**

On **24 January 1950**, the Constituent Assembly formally adopted **Jana Gana Mana** as the **National Anthem of India**, just two days before the Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950.

- **Statement 2 is correct.**

Vande Mataram was sung for the first time at a political gathering during the **1896 session of the Indian National Congress**, marking its emergence as a powerful symbol of the Indian national movement.

31. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct.**

- Indians constitute **over 70% of approved H-1B petitions**, with about 72% in FY2023.

- **Statement 2 is correct.**

- A **\$100,000 annual fee** on first-time H-1B applications has been announced under protectionist measures.

- **Statement 3 is correct.**

- Countries like **Germany and China** are actively introducing visa mechanisms to attract skilled professionals impacted by U.S. restrictions.

- **Statement 4 is incorrect.**

- On the contrary, **GCCs in India have expanded**, with over **1,600 centres employing more than 2 million professionals**.

32. A Canada and the United States of America

- The **Canada–United States border** is the **longest international land border in the world**, stretching approximately **8,893 kilometres**.

- This border consists of two major segments:

- The border between **continental United States and Canada**
- The border between the **U.S. state of Alaska and northern Canada**

- It remains the longest **peaceful and demilitarised** international boundary globally.

33. C Only three

- **Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct.** Deepavali has been newly inscribed, the decision was taken during a UNESCO meeting at the Red Fort, and India is hosting the ICH committee session. **Statement 3 is incorrect** because several Indian traditions (such as Ramlila, Garba, Vedic chanting, etc.) were already inscribed earlier.

34. B Only two

- **Statements 1 and 3 are correct.** The List focuses on living traditions and aims to promote awareness and cooperation.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect** because the List is not a legally binding protection mechanism.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect** because even relatively recent cultural practices can be inscribed.

35. C Only three

- **Statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct.** The list includes theatre, dance, ritual singing, and craftsmanship traditions.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect** because Buddhist chanting of Ladakh and other non-Hindu traditions are also included.

36. C Only two

- In **2023**, UNESCO added **two Indian properties** to its World Heritage List:
 - **Shantiniketan** – Inscribed in 2023 as a cultural property associated with Rabindranath Tagore's educational and philosophical vision.
 - **Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas** – Inscribed in 2023, comprising the Hoysala temples at Belur, Halebidu, and Somanathapura.
- The other two properties were inscribed earlier:
 - **Rani-ki-Vav** – Inscribed in **2014**.
 - **Mahabodhi Bodhgaya Temple Complex** – Inscribed in **2002**.

Hence, **only two** of the listed properties were included in **2023**.

37. C China and Japan

- The main disputed islands between Japan and China are the Senkaku Islands (Japan) / Diaoyu Islands (China) in the East China Sea, an uninhabited chain crucial for shipping lanes, fishing, and potential oil/gas, with Japan administering them but China and Taiwan claiming sovereignty, leading to frequent standoffs between coast guards and heightened tensions.

38. B Russia and Japan

- Kuril Islands primarily focus on the Russia-Japan territorial dispute over the four southernmost islands (Iturup, Kunashir, Shikotan, Habomai), their geographical location (between Sea of Okhotsk & Pacific, part of Ring of Fire), geological significance (volcanic chain), and the historical context (Soviet seizure post-WWII, lack of peace treaty).