

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS

JANUARY 2026 : WEEK-4

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Contents

1. Kaziranga Elevated Corridor aims to curb animal deaths in the National Park	3
2. NITI Aayog Releases Report On Enhancing MSME Sector Efficiency through Scheme Convergence	8
3. India's First Open-Sea Marine Fish Farming Project at North Bay, Andaman Sea	12
4. NITI Aayog Releases Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024	15
5. International Year of Cooperatives 2025	19
6. Machado presents the Nobel to Donald Trump, can the Peace Prize be transferred	23
7. China, Russia, Iran start 'BRICS Plus' naval exercises in South African waters	27
8. Chagos Islands	32
Answer Key and Explanation.....	35

1. Kaziranga Elevated Corridor aims to curb animal deaths in the National Park



- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to flag off a 34.5-km elevated wildlife corridor in Kaziranga, Assam.
- The project costs Rs. 6,950 crore and is part of the widening of National Highway 715 (earlier NH-37).
- Aims to provide a long-term solution to wildlife deaths caused by highway traffic.

Why the Corridor Matters

- NH-715 runs along the southern boundary of Kaziranga National Park, cutting across natural animal migration routes.
- During annual Brahmaputra floods, animals move to the Karbi Anglong hills for safety, crossing the highway in the process.
- Heavy traffic has led to frequent and often fatal animal-vehicle collisions.

Scale of the Problem

- Average daily traffic on this stretch: 13,800 vehicles.
- A 2022 study recorded 6,036 animal deaths due to roadkills in one year (2016–17).
- 63.6% of these deaths occurred during the flood season (April–September).
- Species killed included high-profile wildlife such as the Indian leopard.

Project Features

- Elevation allows animals to move freely underneath the highway.

Includes:

- Upgrading 30.22 km of existing roads
- 21 km of greenfield bypasses around Jakhalabandha and Bokakhat
- Designed to decongest traffic, improve safety, and enhance connectivity between Guwahati, Kaziranga, and Numaligarh.

Expert and Forest Department Views

- Wildlife experts stress that animal habitats are continuous, while park boundaries are human-defined.
- Forest officials say rising traffic has made traditional mitigation measures insufficient.
- Existing steps like animal sensor systems help regulate traffic but are limited in scope.

Concerns and Challenges

- Some activist's worry that large-scale construction in a sensitive ecological zone could disturb wildlife.
- Authorities maintain that the elevated corridor is the most sustainable long-term mitigation measure.

Kaziranga Bird Census

- Conducted between March 18 and May 25 in 2025.
- Focused on grassland birds, key indicators of ecosystem health.
- Covered 29 locations using passive acoustic monitoring.
- **Key Findings**
 - 43 grassland bird species recorded, including:
 - 1 Critically Endangered
 - 2 Endangered
 - 6 Vulnerable species (IUCN Red List)
- Priority species included Bengal Florican, Finn's Weaver, and Black-breasted Parrotbill.

Scientific Innovation

- Used acoustic recorders and AI tools like Birdnet to identify shy, camouflaged species.
- Spectrogram analysis helped identify unclear calls.

Major Discovery

- Identification of a breeding colony of the endangered Finn's Weaver with over 85 nests—a first for Kaziranga.

Threats to Grassland Birds

- Assam has lost around 70% of its grasslands in four decades.
- **Causes include:**
 - Overgrazing
 - Agricultural expansion
 - Natural ecological succession
 - Climate change
- Declining sightings of species like the Bengal Florican raise serious conservation concerns.

Vande Bharat Sleeper Train

- India's first-ever Vande Bharat Sleeper Train — a long-distance, air-conditioned, semi-high-speed overnight service — has begun operations.
- It was officially flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 17 January 2026, running between Howrah (Kolkata) and Guwahati (Assam).

Route:

- Howrah (West Bengal) ↔ Kamakhya / Guwahati (Assam) overnight service.

Distance & Time:

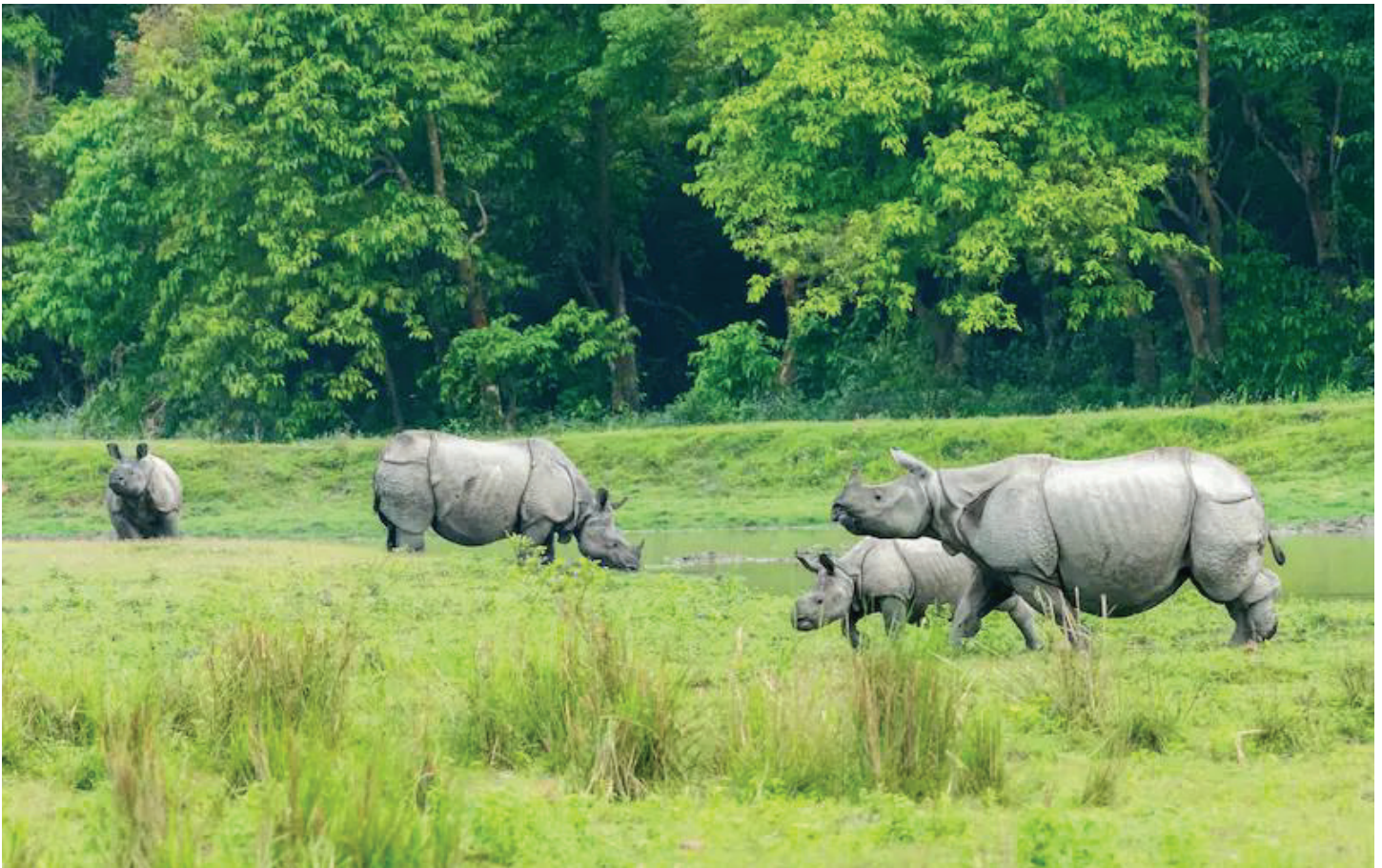
- The approximate distance is ~966 km.
- The journey takes around 14–14½ hours, significantly faster than conventional overnight trains on this route.

Speed & Performance

- Designed to run at up to 180 km/h in trials and certified for passenger service.
- Operational speeds vary based on track sections, generally around 110–130 km/h on parts of the route.
- **The Vande Bharat Sleeper is significant because it:**
 - Expands India's semi-high-speed rail network into overnight, long-distance travel.
 - Offers a premium alternative to Rajdhani and conventional express trains.
 - Combines speed, comfort, and modern technology on routes spanning multiple states.



Kaziranga National Park



Location

- Assam, India (Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur & Biswanath districts)
- Situated along the floodplains of the Brahmaputra River

Established

- Declared a Reserved Forest in 1908
- Became a National Park in 1974
- Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985

Area

- ~430 sq. km (core area; larger including buffer zones)

Landscape & Habitat

- Vast alluvial floodplains
- Tall elephant grass, marshlands, wetlands (beels)
- Tropical moist deciduous forests
- Seasonal flooding shapes its ecology and biodiversity

1. Home to the One-Horned Rhinoceros

- Hosts about two-thirds of the world's population of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros
- This is Kaziranga's most iconic and defining feature

2. Big Five of Kaziranga

- **Kaziranga is one of the few parks where you can find:**
 - One-horned rhinoceros
 - Bengal tiger
 - Asian elephant
 - Wild water buffalo
 - Swamp deer (barasingha)

3. Tiger Reserve with High Density

- Declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006
- Known for one of the highest tiger densities in the world (though sightings are rarer due to tall grass)

4. Birdwatcher's Paradise

- Over 480 species of birds
- Important habitat for migratory birds
- Recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA)

5. Strong Conservation Success Story

- **Globally admired for:**
 - Anti-poaching measures
 - Rhino population recovery
 - Community-based conservation efforts

6. Dynamic Flood Ecology

- **Annual Brahmaputra floods may seem destructive but:**
 - Renew soil fertility
 - Maintain grassland ecosystems
 - Support rich food chains

QUESTIONS

1. Which one of the following **does NOT** pass through **Kaziranga National Park**?

- A. The Brahmaputra River
- B. The Diphlu River
- C. National Highway No. 37 or 715
- D. Railway track of Indian Railway

2. Consider the following pairs:

National Park : River Flowing

- 1. Corbett National Park : Ganga
- 2. Kaziranga National Park : Manas
- 3. Silent Valley National Park : Kaveri

Which of the above pairs is/are correctly matched?

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 3 only
- C. 1 and 3
- D. None

3. Consider the following statements regarding **Kaziranga National Park**:

- 1. It is located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River.
- 2. National Highway-715 passes through the park, disrupting the natural animal corridor to the Karbi Anglong hills.
- 3. The park is recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International.
- 4. It is the only habitat of the Eastern Swamp Deer (Barasingha) in India.

How many of the above statements are correct?

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

4. Which of the following river/s flow through **Kaziranga National Park**?

- 1. Diphlu
- 2. Mora Dhansiri
- 3. Brahmaputra

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. None

5. Consider the following statements regarding **Kaziranga National Park**:

- 1. Kaziranga National Park is located in the districts of Golaghat, Sonitpur, Biswanath, and Nagaon in Assam.
- 2. The park hosts two-thirds of the world's population of the Indian rhinoceros.

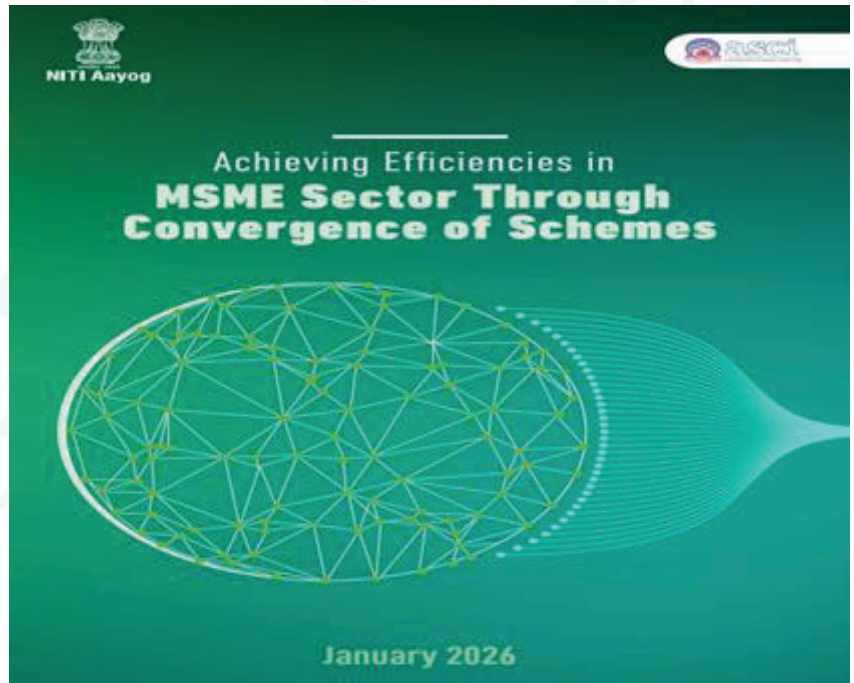
3. Kaziranga was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006.
4. The park is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for its avifaunal species conservation.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

2. NITI Aayog Releases Report On Enhancing MSME Sector Efficiency through Scheme Convergence

- NITI Aayog released a report titled Achieving Efficiencies in the MSME Sector through Convergence of Schemes.
- The report was launched by NITI Aayog CEO B V R Subrahmanyam in New Delhi.
- The report outlined a strategic roadmap to strengthen the effectiveness of government support for the country's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- The Aayog informed that the report evaluates existing government schemes and programmes for the MSME sector and assesses the current level of convergence among them.
- Mr Subrahmanyam said that the report highlights that schemes with similar target groups can be converged.
- He added that the report further recommends the convergence of skill development part of different schemes.
- The NITI Aayog CEO highlighted that the report also suggests the creation of a centralised portal for integrating MSME schemes.
- The event was also attended by Secretary of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, S C L Das.
- Mr Das said that the Ministry will take this agenda forward and called the initiative of NITI Aayog helpful for the MSME sector and the government.



NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India)

- NITI Aayog is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India. It was established on 1 January 2015, replacing the Planning Commission (set up in 1950).
- Its aim is to promote cooperative and competitive federalism and provide strategic and technical advice to the Centre and States.

Objectives of NITI Aayog

- Foster cooperative federalism between the Centre and States
- Formulate long-term national development strategies
- Promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and best practices
- Act as a policy think tank rather than a fund-allocating body
- Monitor and evaluate government programs

Composition of NITI Aayog

1. Chairperson

- Prime Minister of India

2. Vice-Chairperson

- Appointed by the Prime Minister
- Enjoys the rank of a Cabinet Minister

3. Governing Council

- Chief Ministers of all States
- Chief Ministers of Union Territories with legislatures
- Lieutenant Governors of other Union Territories

4. Regional Councils

- Formed for specific issues involving multiple states or regions
- Chaired by the Prime Minister or his nominee

5. Full-Time Members

- Usually up to 5
- Experts in economics, public policy, and governance

6. Part-Time Members

- Maximum of 2
- Drawn from leading universities, research institutions, or industry

7. Ex-Officio Members

- Maximum of 4
- Union Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister

8. Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- Appointed by the Prime Minister
- Holds the rank of Secretary to the Government of India
- Responsible for administration and implementation

MSME Sector

- The MSME sector (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) is a key driver of economic growth, employment, and innovation in many countries.

What is the MSME Sector?

- MSMEs are businesses classified based on investment size and/or annual turnover (criteria vary by country). They typically include:
 - Manufacturing enterprises
 - Trade and allied activities
 - Service enterprises

Why MSMEs are Important

- **Employment generation** – major source of non-agricultural jobs
- **GDP contribution** – significant share in national output
- **Exports** – strong role in export growth
- **Entrepreneurship & innovation** – low entry barriers encourage startups
- **Regional development** – promotes balanced economic growth
- **Typical Classification (Example)** (Illustrative – exact limits depend on the country)
- **Micro enterprises** – very small investment/turnover
- **Small enterprises** – moderate investment/turnover
- **Medium enterprises** – higher investment but below large enterprises
 - Common Challenges Faced
 - Limited access to finance
 - Technology gaps
 - Skilled manpower shortage
 - Regulatory compliance burden
 - Market access and competition

Government Support (Usually Includes)

- Credit and loan guarantee schemes
- Subsidies and tax benefits
- Skill development programs
- Digitalization and technology upgradation support
- Export promotion schemes

QUESTIONS

6. Which of the following is the **correct function of NITI Aayog**?
1. NITI Aayog was established to replace the Planning Commission and follow a **bottom-up approach** to policy making.
 2. NITI Aayog promotes **cooperative federalism** and **economic development**.
 3. The NITI Aayog **Governing Council** includes the **Prime Minister** as its member.
 4. The main purpose of NITI Aayog is to promote **centralized governance**.

Which of the above statements given above are correct?

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

7. Who is the **Chairperson** of NITI Aayog?

- A. Prime Minister of India
- B. Vice President of India
- C. President of India
- D. Finance Minister of India

8. Which of the following is/are the members of the **Governing Council** of NITI Aayog?

- 1. Chief Ministers of all States and Union Territories with legislatures.
- 2. Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories.
- 3. The full-time members of NITI Aayog.
- 4. The President of India.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

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

9. Consider the following statements regarding the **revised MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) classification** effective from **April 1, 2025**:

- 1. The new MSME definition increases the investment and turnover thresholds for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises to foster growth.
- 2. The revised thresholds apply only to the manufacturing sector.
- 3. A **Micro Enterprise** is defined as an enterprise with investment up to Rs. 2.5 crore and turnover up to Rs. 10 crore.
- 4. A **Medium Enterprise** is defined as an enterprise with investment up to Rs. 125 crore and turnover up to Rs. 500 crore.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

3. India's First Open-Sea Marine Fish Farming Project at North Bay, Andaman Sea

- **Historic Launch:** Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh launched India's first open-sea Marine Fish Farming project at North Bay, Sri Vijaya Puram, in the Andaman Sea.
- **Boost to Blue Economy:** The initiative marks a major step toward realizing the Blue Economy vision championed by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, leveraging India's vast ocean resources for sustainable growth.



- **Unlocking Ocean Potential:** Dr. Singh emphasized that India's marine resources remained underutilized for nearly 70 years, with a decisive shift since 2014 recognizing oceans as equal drivers of economic development.
- **Regional Ocean Diversity:** The Minister highlighted the unique economic and ecological characteristics of India's western, southern, and eastern seabords, each contributing differently to national growth.

Collaborative Implementation:

- Executed by the Ministry of Earth Sciences
- Technical support by National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)
- In partnership with the Andaman & Nicobar Islands UT Administration

Focus Areas of the Pilot Project:

- Open-sea finfish farming using NIOT-developed cage systems
- Deep-water seaweed cultivation in natural ocean conditions
- Integration of scientific innovation with livelihood generation

Livelihood-Oriented Interventions:

- Distribution of seaweed seeds to local fishing communities
- Provision of finfish seeds for cage-based open-sea aquaculture

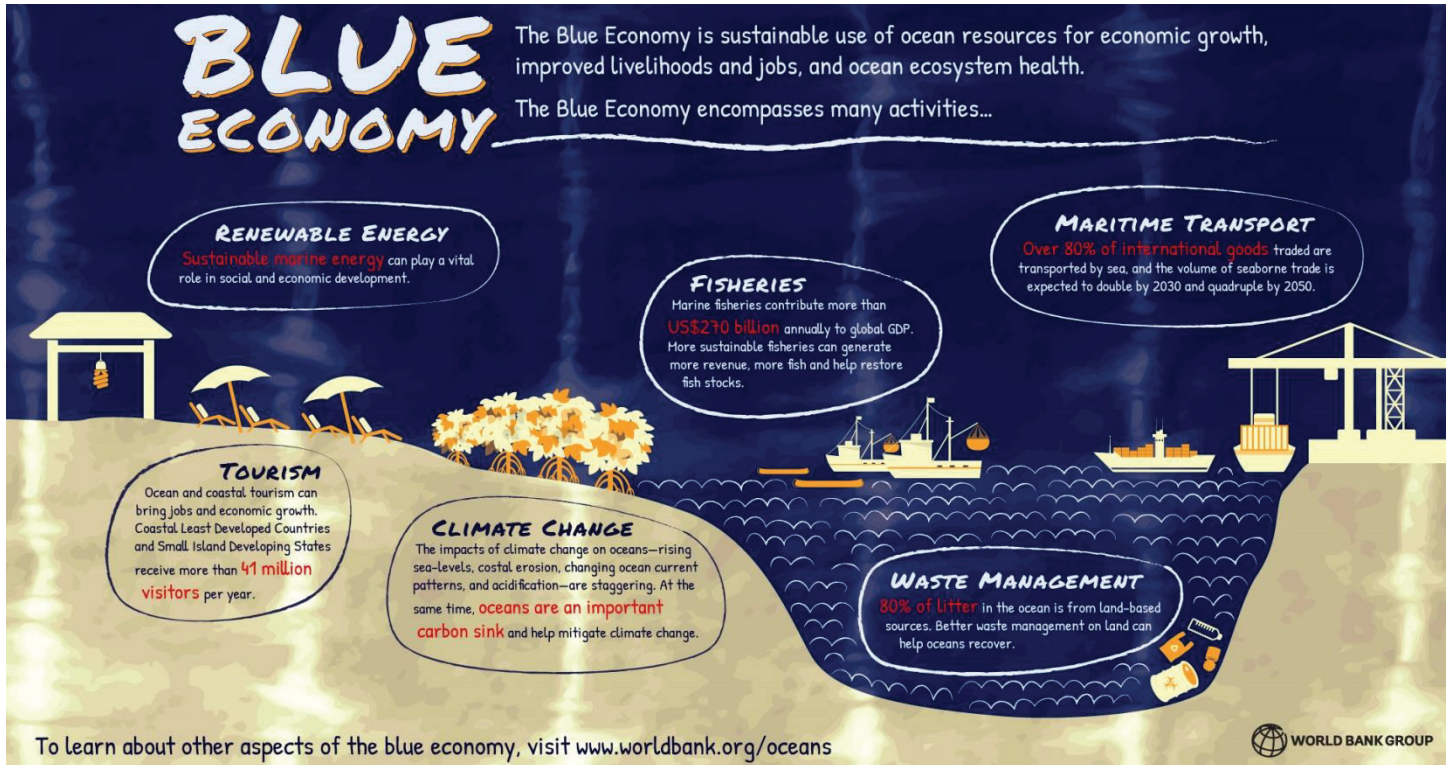
Future Expansion:

- The Minister indicated potential scaling through public-private partnerships
- Aimed at expanding livelihoods, accelerating adoption, and strengthening India's Blue Economy ecosystem

Visit to Marine National Park:

- Dr. Singh visited Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (Wandoor)

- Observed rich marine biodiversity including coral reefs, mangroves, turtles, and diverse fish species
- Reaffirmed commitment to balancing conservation with sustainable use



Government's Commitment:

- The launch reflects the Government's resolve to take science and technology directly to the field
- Ensures coastal and island communities are active partners in ocean-led economic growth

Blue Economy

- The Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean, sea, and coastal resources for economic growth, livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of marine ecosystems.
 - **Fisheries & Aquaculture** – sustainable fishing, fish farming
 - **Maritime Transport & Ports** – shipping, logistics, shipbuilding
 - **Coastal & Marine Tourism** – eco-tourism, cruises, beach tourism
 - **Renewable Ocean Energy** – offshore wind, tidal, wave energy
 - **Marine Biotechnology** – medicines, cosmetics, bio-products
 - **Seabed Resources** – minerals (with strict environmental safeguards)
 - **Coastal Infrastructure** – resilient ports, coastal protection

Why the Blue Economy Matters

- Supports food security and livelihoods for millions
- Creates jobs and economic growth, especially for coastal states
- Promotes climate resilience and carbon sequestration (mangroves, seagrass)
- Protects marine biodiversity through sustainable practices

Key Principles

- **Sustainability** – use resources without degrading ecosystems

- **Inclusivity** – benefits for local and coastal communities
- **Innovation** – science, technology, and data-driven management
- **Good Governance** – strong laws, monitoring, and international cooperation

Challenges

- Overfishing and illegal fishing
- Marine pollution (plastics, oil spills)
- Climate change (ocean warming, acidification, sea-level rise)
- Weak regulation and enforcement in some regions

Blue Economy vs. Ocean Economy

- **Ocean Economy:** all economic activities linked to oceans
- **Blue Economy:** only those activities those are environmentally sustainable

QUESTIONS

10. Consider the following statements regarding India's **First Open-Sea Marine Fish Farming Project**:
1. The project is located at **North Bay**, Sri Vijaya Puram, in the **Andaman Sea**.
 2. The project is part of India's broader vision for **Blue Economy**, aiming for sustainable use of marine resources.
 3. The project is solely executed by the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**.
 4. The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) is providing technical support for this initiative.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

11. Which of the following focus areas are part of India's **first open-sea marine fish farming project**?
1. **Open-sea finfish farming** using **NIOT-developed cage systems**.
 2. **Deep-water seaweed cultivation** in natural ocean conditions.
 3. **Integration of scientific innovation with livelihood generation** through **seaweed and finfish seed distribution**.
 4. **Artificial marine ecosystem creation** for biodiversity restoration.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

12. What is **blue carbon**?
- A. Carbon captured by oceans and coastal ecosystems
 - B. Carbon sequestered in forest biomass and agricultural soils
 - C. Carbon contained in petroleum and natural gas
 - D. Carbon present in the atmosphere

4. NITI Aayog Releases Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024

- NITI Aayog released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024, a comprehensive assessment of export readiness across India's States and Union Territories (UTs).
- The Index recognises the diversity of subnational economic structures and their critical role in advancing India's global trade ambitions.
- The first edition of the EPI was published in August 2020 and this is the 4th edition.
- Aligned with India's objective of achieving USD 1 trillion in merchandise exports by 2030 and the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, the Export Preparedness Index provides an evidence-based framework to evaluate the strength, resilience, and inclusiveness of subnational export ecosystems.
- The Index identifies key structural challenges, growth levers, and policy opportunities for enhancing export competitiveness at the State and district levels.



- At the release, CEO, NITI Aayog, highlighted that India's export trajectory is increasingly shaped by the preparedness of States and districts.
- Emphasis was placed on strengthening export infrastructure, improving cost competitiveness, building robust institutions, and fostering predictable and transparent policy environments.
- Enhancing export readiness at the subnational level was noted as essential for sustaining long-term growth, employment generation, reduction of regional disparities, and deeper integration into global value chains amid heightened global volatility.
- Dr. Arvind Virmani, Member, emphasized on the role of the states and UTs in sustaining and amplifying this momentum by identifying strengths, addressing structural gaps, and designing strategies to leverage new trade opportunities. Dr. Virmani further reiterated PM's call for the quality of products for competitiveness.

1. Pillars and Coverage of EPI 2024

Table 1: Pillars, Sub-Pillars and Weightages

Pillar	Weightage	Sub-Pillars Covered
Export Infrastructure	20%	Trade & logistics infrastructure, Connectivity & utilities, Industrial infrastructure
Business Ecosystem	40%	Macroeconomy, Cost competitiveness, Human capital, Finance & credit accessibility, MSME ecosystem, Industrial & innovation environment
Policy & Governance	20%	State export policy, Regulatory environment & compliance, Institutional capacity, Trade facilitation
Export Performance	20%	Export outcomes, Export diversification, Global integration, Market access & promotion

2. Classification of States and Union Territories

- For meaningful peer comparison and targeted policy learning, States and UTs are grouped into Large States, Small States, North Eastern States, and Union Territories. Each group is further classified based on export preparedness levels.

Table 2: Performance Categories under EPI 2024

Category	Description
Leaders	States/UTs demonstrating high export preparedness with strong infrastructure, policy support, and performance
Challengers	States/UTs showing moderate preparedness with clear potential for improvement
Aspirers	States/UTs at early stages of export ecosystem development
	This classification encourages peer learning, targeted interventions, and realistic benchmarking across comparable regions.

3. Methodology and Data Sources

- The EPI 2024 adopts a robust indicator-based methodology, using official data from Central Ministries, State Governments, and public institutions.
- Indicators are:**
 - Normalised for comparability
 - Aggregated using sound statistical techniques
 - Weighted to reflect their relative contribution to export preparedness
 - Balanced weightages across pillars ensure no single dimension dominates the index, maintaining a holistic assessment of export readiness.

4. Why EPI 2024 Matters

- Enables evidence-based policymaking at State and district levels
- Identifies structural gaps in infrastructure, finance, skills, and governance
- Aligns national export goals with localised, actionable strategies
- Strengthens India's integration into global value chains

V. Top Performing States and Union Territories

- Based on the overall assessment under EPI 2024, the following States and UTs have emerged as leading performers in their respective categories:

Leading Performers – Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024

- Large States**
 - Maharashtra
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Gujarat
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - Andhra Pradesh
- Small States, North Eastern States & Union Territories**
 - Uttarakhand
 - Jammu and Kashmir
 - Nagaland
 - Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu
 - Goa

QUESTIONS

13. Which of the following States is/are among the **leading performers** in the **Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024** under the **Large States** category?

- Maharashtra
- Tamil Nadu
- Uttar Pradesh
- Madhya Pradesh

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

14. Which of the following Union Territories and Small States are leading performers in the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024?

- Jammu and Kashmir
- Goa
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu
- Lakshadweep

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

15. Consider the following statements regarding the **Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024**:

- The EPI 2024 evaluates export preparedness based on four pillars: Export Infrastructure, Business Ecosystem, Policy & Governance, and Export Performance.
- The Index includes **macroeconomic stability** as one of the main pillars to assess export readiness.

3. India aims to achieve **USD 1 trillion in merchandise exports** by 2030, with the EPI being a key tool to help achieve this target.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

16. Consider the following statements regarding the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024:

1. The EPI 2024 is based on 13 sub-pillars and 70 indicators.
2. The classification of states and Union Territories in the EPI includes three categories: Leaders, Challengers, and Aspirers.
3. The **Governing Council** of NITI Aayog is responsible for publishing the Export Preparedness Index.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

17. Consider the following statements regarding the EPI 2024's focus areas:

1. The **Human Capital** sub-pillar is part of the **Business Ecosystem** pillar.
2. **Export Diversification** is included as a sub-pillar under the **Export Performance** pillar.
3. The **MSME Ecosystem** is part of the **Policy & Governance** pillar.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

18. Consider the following statements regarding the methodology of the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024:

1. The EPI uses a **data-driven, indicator-based methodology** to assess export preparedness.
2. The **weightages** assigned to each pillar and sub-pillar are equally distributed.
3. **Balanced statistical techniques** are used to normalise and aggregate the data from various indicators.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

19. Consider the following statements regarding the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024:

1. The Index is designed to evaluate the export preparedness of **states and districts** in India.
2. **District-level export strategies** are being emphasized for the first time in EPI 2024 to support **local capabilities**.

3. The **Regional Councils** are formed to address specific regional challenges and consist of **Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors**.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

5. International Year of Cooperatives 2025

1. Scale and Reach of the Cooperative Ecosystem

- Over 8.5 lakh cooperatives registered nationwide; 6.6 lakh functional
- Serving 32 crore members across 30 sectors
- Coverage extends to ~98% of rural India
- Nearly 10 crore women integrated through Self-Help Groups (SHGs)
- India hosts over one-fourth of the world's cooperatives



International Year of Cooperatives

Cooperatives Build
a Better World

2. Institutional Strengthening and Policy Framework

- Dedicated Ministry of Cooperation established (6 July 2021)
- National Cooperation Policy (NCP) 2025 launched, aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047 and Sahkar Se Samriddhi
- Creation of National Cooperative Database (NCD) with real-time data on all cooperatives
- Cooperative Ranking Framework introduced for transparency and performance benchmarking
- **Tax relief measures:** lower MAT, reduced surcharge, higher cash transaction limits for PACS

3. Modernisation and Digital Transformation of PACS

- 79,630 PACS approved for computerisation under a Rs. 2,925.39 crore project
- 59,261 PACS actively using ERP software
- 65,151 PACS provided with hardware support
- 42,730 PACS completed online audits

- 32,119 PACS operational as e-PACS
- 34.94 crore digital transactions processed across 22 ERP modules
- Software available in 14 regional languages

4. Expansion of Multipurpose Cooperatives

- 32,009 new cooperatives (PACS, dairy, fisheries) registered
- PACS presence in 2.55 lakh Gram Panchayats
- Dairy cooperatives in 87,159 GPs; fisheries cooperatives in 29,964 GPs
- Model Bye-laws adopted by 32 States/UTs, enabling over 25 business activities per PACS with enhanced inclusion of women and SC/ST members

5. PACS as Village-Level Service Delivery Hubs

- 38,190 PACS functioning as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhi Kendras
- 51,836 PACS operating as Common Service Centres (CSCs) delivering 300+ e-services
- 812 PACS operational as Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Kendras
- 394 PACS/LAMPS applied for petrol/diesel dealerships; 59 commissioned
- 962 PACS identified as Paani Samitis for rural water supply O&M
- Eligibility for LPG distributorships and fuel retail outlets

6. Farmer Collectivisation and Market Linkages

- 1,863 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) formed in the cooperative sector
- 1,117 FPOs created by strengthening PACS
- 1,070 Fish Farmer Producer Organisations (FFPOs) formed

Total disbursement:

- Rs. 206 crore for FPOs
- Rs. 98 crore for FFPOs

7. Financial Inclusion and Credit Expansion

- Bank Mitra model enabling doorstep banking through cooperatives
- 12,219 Bank Mitras and 12,624 Micro-ATMs in Gujarat alone
- **RuPay Kisan Credit Card pilot:**
 - 22 lakh KCCs issued
 - Rs. 10,000+ crore loans disbursed
 - Nationwide rollout planned

8. World's Largest Decentralised Grain Storage Plan

- Pilot launched in May 2023
- 112 PACS completed godowns
- 68,702 MT storage capacity created
- Integrated with AIF, AMI, SMAM, and PMFME schemes
- Expanded beyond PACS to all cooperative societies

9. Sector-Specific Growth Initiatives

White Revolution 2.0

- **Target:** 50% increase in milk procurement in 5 years
- 20,070 new Dairy Cooperative Societies registered
- Strong focus on women-led dairy livelihoods
- Atmanirbharta Abhiyan (Pulses & Maize)
- 56,673 PACS/FPOs and 54.74 lakh farmers onboarded
- **Procurement achieved:**
 - 9.08 LMT pulses
 - 45,105 MT maize

10. New National-Level Cooperative Institutions

BBSSL (Seeds)

- 31,605 cooperatives enrolled

“Bharat Beej” brand launched

NCOL (Organic Farming)

- 10,035 cooperatives as members
- 28 certified organic products under “Bharat Organics”

NCEL (Exports)

- 13,890 member cooperatives
- 13.77 LMT exports worth Rs. 5,556 crore to 28 countries
- 20% dividend distributed to members

11. Capacity Building and Human Resource Development

- Tribhuvan Sahkari University established (April 2025)
- 4,389 training programmes conducted by NCCT (2024–25)
- 3.15 lakh individuals trained, including PACS leadership and staff
- Youth engagement and awareness drives nationwide

12. Financial Support through NCDC

- Rs. 95,183 crore disbursed in FY 2024–25
- Rs. 95,000 crore disbursed so far in FY 2025–26
- Permission to issue Rs. 2,000 crore government-guaranteed bonds
- Targeted schemes for women, youth, SC/ST and startups

13. Innovation and New-Age Cooperatives

- Sahakar Taxi Cooperative Limited
- India’s first cooperative-led mobility platform
- 1.5 lakh drivers and 2 lakh users registered
- Nationwide rollout planned by 2029

- GeM Portal Integration
- 721 cooperatives registered as buyers
- Rs. 396.77 crore worth transactions completed

14. Revival of Cooperative Sugar Mills

- Rs. 46,000+ crore tax relief since 2016
- Rs. 10,005 crore disbursed to 56 cooperative sugar mills
- Equal footing with private mills in ethanol procurement
- GST on molasses reduced from 28% to 5%
- Revival of key mills improving farmer incomes

QUESTIONS

20. Which of the following provisions were introduced by the **97th Constitutional Amendment Act 2011** with regard to cooperative societies?

1. It established the right to form cooperative societies as a fundamental right under Article 19.
2. It added a new Directive Principle of State Policy on the promotion of cooperative societies under Article 43-B.
3. It included multi-state cooperative societies (MSCS) under the jurisdiction of state legislatures.
4. A new Part IX-B was added to the Constitution, titled “The Cooperative Societies” (Articles 243-ZH to 243-ZT).

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

21. Which of the following statements about the **Ministry of Cooperation** in India is/are correct?

1. The Ministry of Cooperation was created in July 2021 under the Government of India.
2. Prior to the formation of the Ministry of Cooperation, its responsibilities were handled by the Ministry of Agriculture.
3. Amit Shah is the first and current Minister of Cooperation since 2021.
4. The Ministry of Cooperation handles only the promotion of cooperative societies in India.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

22. The **97th Constitutional Amendment Act 2011** introduced significant changes for cooperative societies. Which of the following was the key impact of this amendment?

1. The right to form cooperative societies became a fundamental right for individuals.
2. It established a centralized framework for the regulation of cooperative societies across India.
3. State legislatures are authorized to legislate on multi-state cooperative societies (MSCS).

4. A new Part IX-B of the Constitution deals with cooperative societies, outlining their governance and regulation.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

23. Which of the following is/are objectives of the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 as highlighted by the Government of India?

1. Strengthening cooperative ecosystems and increasing their contribution to India's **Blue Economy**.
2. **Expansion of multipurpose cooperatives**, including fisheries and dairy.
3. Providing **tax relief measures** to cooperative sugar mills and improving farmer incomes.
4. **Integration of cooperatives** with **GeM Portal** for e-commerce.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

24. Which of the following **financial inclusion and credit expansion** initiatives have been implemented under India's cooperative model as per the details provided for **International Year of Cooperatives 2025**?

1. Bank Mitra model enabling doorstep banking through cooperatives.
2. Issuance of **RuPay Kisan Credit Cards (KCC)** to farmers.
3. Expansion of **micro-ATMs** across Gujarat.
4. Disbursement of Rs. **10,000 crore loans** under the KCC scheme.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

6. Machado presents the Nobel to Donald Trump, can the Peace Prize be transferred

- Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado, the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, met US President Donald Trump.
- The meeting followed the US military's removal of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro earlier this month.

- Machado presented Trump with her Nobel Peace Prize medal or a symbolic representation of it.



Trump's Reaction

- Trump shared the encounter on Truth Social, calling it a “great honor”.
- He framed the gesture as recognition of his role in ending conflicts and promoting peace during his presidency.

Can the Nobel Peace Prize Be Transferred?

No. The Norwegian Nobel Committee has clearly stated:

- Nobel Prizes cannot be officially transferred to another person.
- Once awarded, the decision is final and non-appealable under the Statutes of the Nobel Foundation.
- Laureates may personally choose what to do with their medal, but this has no legal or official effect.

Historical Precedents

Symbolic gestures involving Nobel medals are rare but not unprecedented:

- **Ernest Hemingway (1954 Literature Prize)** entrusted his medal to a Catholic church in Cuba.
- **Jean-Paul Sartre (1964 Literature Prize)** refused the award, rejecting institutional honours.
- **Le Duc Tho (1973 Peace Prize)** declined the prize due to ongoing war in Vietnam, while co-laureate Henry Kissinger later attempted unsuccessfully to return his.

- Machado likened her act to Marquis de Lafayette's 1825 symbolic gift to Simón Bolívar, representing solidarity between nations.

Political Motivation behind Machado's Gesture

- The move is widely seen as a strategic appeal to US power in post-Maduro Venezuela.
- The US currently engages with Acting President Delcy Rodríguez, not Machado.
- Reports indicate Trump previously viewed Machado as lacking popular support.

Symbolism over Substance

- The "presentation" was symbolic, not an official transfer.
- Trump was photographed holding a framed tribute, praising his "Extraordinary Leadership" and crediting him for helping "secure a free Venezuela".
- The medal was described as a personal symbol of gratitude, not a legal reassignment of the Nobel Prize.
- The Nobel Peace Prize cannot be transferred, regardless of public gestures or political symbolism.
- Machado's action was political and symbolic, aimed at influencing US support during a critical moment in Venezuela's future.

Marquis de Lafayette's 1825 symbolic gift to Simón Bolívar

- In 1825, during his famous "farewell" tour of the United States and shortly before returning to France, the French Revolutionary hero the Marquis de Lafayette sent a symbolic gift to Simón Bolívar—one of the leading figures in Latin America's wars of independence.
- Lafayette admired Bolívar as "the George Washington of Latin America" and, at the request of the family of George Washington, presented Bolívar with a package of relics celebrating Washington and the American Revolution.
- **The most notable items in this gift were:**
 - A pair of ornate pistols crafted by the famed French gunsmith Nicolas-Noël Boutet, given as a personal gift from Lafayette to Bolívar.
 - A portrait of George Washington, symbolizing Bolívar's ideological connection to the American struggle for liberty.
 - A lock of George Washington's hair and a medal struck with Washington's likeness—presented on behalf of Washington's family.
- These items were meant to honor Bolívar's leadership in liberating several South American nations from Spanish rule and to place his achievements in the broader Atlantic tradition of republican liberty that Washington and Lafayette helped to inaugurate.

Nobel Peace Prize 2025

- The 2025 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to María Corina Machado, a Venezuelan opposition leader.

Why she won

- Machado received the award "for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy."
- The Norwegian Nobel Committee praised her as a symbol of civilian courage and a unifying figure in Venezuela's pro-democracy movement.

Announcement & Ceremony

- The Nobel Committee announced the laureate on 10 October 2025, and the formal award ceremony took place on 10 December 2025 in Oslo, Norway.

- Machado's award underlines the Nobel Peace Prize's focus on human rights and democratic principles as foundations for peace — especially significant given global concerns about authoritarianism and conflict.

QUESTIONS

25. Which of the following is true about the **Nobel Peace Prize**?

1. It was first awarded in 1901 to Henry Dunant and Frederic Passy.
2. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by a committee appointed by the **Swedish Parliament**.
3. The Nobel Peace Prize cannot be awarded to organizations or institutions.
4. The Nobel Peace Prize is always presented in Oslo, Norway, on December 10th, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

26. Which of the following organizations has won the **Nobel Peace Prize** for their efforts in global peace-building and humanitarian work?

1. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
2. Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders)
3. The World Health Organization (WHO)
4. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

27. Consider the following statements about the **Nobel Peace Prize 2025**:

1. The Nobel Peace Prize 2025 was awarded to María Corina Machado for her work promoting **democracy and peaceful transition** in Venezuela.
2. The award was officially presented to Machado in **Oslo, Norway** on **10 December 2025**.
3. María Corina Machado's Nobel Peace Prize status can be legally **transferred to another individual** through symbolic gestures.
4. Machado presented her Nobel Peace Prize medal to **Donald Trump** as a symbolic gesture in January 2026.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

28. Who among the following **Indian individuals** have been awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** for their contributions to **humanitarian causes**?

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. Kailash Satyarthi | 2. Mahatma Gandhi | 3. Mother Teresa |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only

- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

29. Which of the following **organizations** has been awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize multiple times** for their humanitarian efforts?

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
3. World Food Programme (WFP)
4. United Nations (UN)

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 4 only

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

7. China, Russia, Iran start 'BRICS Plus' naval exercises in South African waters

- China, Russia, and Iran have launched a week-long joint naval exercise in South Africa's waters.
- South Africa describes the drills as a "BRICS Plus" operation aimed at ensuring maritime safety and protecting shipping and economic activities.
- The exercise is named "Exercise WILL FOR PEACE 2026."



Purpose of the Naval Exercises

Focus on:

- Joint maritime safety operations
- Interoperability drills between participating navies
- South Africa stated that all BRICS Plus members were invited to participate.

Participating and Observing Countries

Active participants:

- China
- Russia
- Iran
- South Africa (host)

Observers:

- Brazil
- Egypt
- Ethiopia

Geopolitical Context

- The exercises come amid heightened tensions between the U.S. (under President Donald Trump) and several BRICS Plus countries, including:
 - China
 - Iran
 - South Africa
 - Brazil

President Trump has:

- Accused BRICS nations of pursuing “anti-American” policies
- Threatened additional 10% trade tariffs on BRICS members, on top of existing global duties

Domestic Reaction in South Africa

- The Democratic Alliance (DA), South Africa’s second-largest party and part of President Cyril Ramaphosa’s coalition, criticized the exercises:
- Said they contradict South Africa’s stated neutrality
- Claimed BRICS has made South Africa “a pawn in the power games of rogue states”

What is BRICS?

- **Original members (5):**
 - Brazil
 - India
 - South Africa
 - Russia
 - China
- Formed as a political and economic bloc representing major emerging economies.
- Seen by members as a counterweight to U.S. and Western economic dominance.

Focus areas include:

- Economic cooperation
- Development finance
- Political coordination
- Global governance reform

What is BRICS Plus?

- Expanded version of BRICS, aimed at increasing global influence and representation.

Additional members (6):

- Egypt
- Indonesia
- Saudi Arabia
- Ethiopia
- Iran
- United Arab Emirates

Objectives of BRICS Plus:

- Broader Global South representation
- Enhanced economic, political, and security cooperation
- Reduced dependence on Western-led institutions
- Greater strategic coordination, including defense and maritime security

Why This Matters

The naval exercises highlight:

- Growing security cooperation within BRICS Plus
- Increasing strategic assertiveness of non-Western alliances

- South Africa's delicate balancing act between Western relations and BRICS commitments
- The event underscores shifting global power dynamics and rising multipolar competition.

BRICS+

- BRICS+ refers to the expanded BRICS group beyond the original five members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), now including nations such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the UAE, and Indonesia — making it a broader coalition of emerging and Global South economies.

As it expands, BRICS+ is already:

- Representing ~40–45 % of the world's population and a growing portion of global GDP (PPP).
- Increasing participation from countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East seeking closer ties with a multipolar economic bloc.

2. Economic Growth and Global Influence

Economic Projection:

- BRICS+ economies are expected to grow much faster than the G7 over the next several years.
- Some forecasts project BRICS+ GDP share increasing further by 2040, with huge consumer markets and young populations driving demand.

Implications:

- Businesses may increasingly engage markets in BRICS+ for manufacturing, tech, infrastructure, and consumer growth.
- Trade and supply chain dynamics could shift, especially if intra-bloc trade increases and tariff barriers are eased.

3. Financial and Monetary Evolution

A key focus for the future is financial integration:

- Proposals are in motion to create linked central-bank digital currencies (CBDCs) among BRICS nations, which could simplify cross-border trade and reduce USD dependency.
- There's growing interest in reducing reliance on Western-dominated financial infrastructure like SWIFT and the US dollar — though how far this goes will depend on political consensus among members.
- The New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) are key institutions positioning BRICS+ as an alternative development finance source.

4. Geopolitical Role and Multipolarity

- BRICS+ is increasingly seen not just as an economic bloc but as a platform for reshaping global governance:
- Many analysts view it as part of the broad shift toward a multipolar world order, where decisions aren't dominated by Western powers.
- Members coordinate on issues like global health, climate change, technology transfer, energy security, and reforms in global institutions.
- However, keeping unity amid divergent political systems and strategic priorities (e.g., India's multi-alignment approach versus China/Russia's geopolitical stances) remains a challenge.
- India's BRICS Presidency in 2026 highlights its role in shaping priorities like multilateral reform, inclusivity in global institutions, and economic cooperation.

5. Challenges Ahead

- Despite optimism, several key hurdles could shape its future:

Internal Differences

- The group's breadth — from democracies to authoritarian states — complicates building unified policies.

Decision-Making

- Larger membership increases complexity, slowing consensus on major reforms.

Western Relations

- Actions by the US, EU, and others can influence how BRICS+ positions itself — from cooperation to rivalry — especially on financial norms and sanctions.

6. Looking Beyond

A Growing Bloc with Global Reach

- BRICS+ could continue adding members and partners, boosting its representation and influence across continents.

Alternative Financial Architectures

- More robust financial mechanisms (digital currencies, settlement systems outside traditional frameworks) may take shape, though not necessarily replacing existing systems.

Policy and Governance Agenda

- Beyond economics, BRICS+ is positioning itself as a voice for Global South priorities in trade, climate, health, and digital governance.

QUESTIONS

30. Which of the following **financial and monetary mechanisms** are associated with **BRICS Plus**?

1. **Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs)** for cross-border trade.
2. **New Development Bank (NDB)** for alternative development finance.
3. **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)** for emergency liquidity.
4. **SWIFT** for international financial transactions.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

31. The “**Exercise WILL FOR PEACE 2026**” naval exercises are primarily conducted by which of the following countries?

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| 1. China | 3. India |
| 2. Russia | 4. Iran |

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

32. Which of the following **countries** joined the **BRICS bloc after its inaugural summit** in 2009?

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. South Africa | 3. Iran |
| 2. Indonesia | 4. Brazil |

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

33. Which of the following **initiatives** have been implemented by **BRICS** to reform the **global financial system**?

1. New Development Bank
2. BRICS PAY
3. BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement
4. BRICS Statistical Publication

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

34. Which of the following is the correct sequence of events regarding the expansion of BRICS membership?

1. South Africa joined in 2010.
2. Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE joined in 2024.
3. Indonesia joined in early 2025.
4. The bloc was initially founded in 2009 with Brazil, Russia, India, and China.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

35. Which of the following statements about the conceptual origins of BRICS is/are correct?

1. BRICS was conceptualized by Russian foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1998.
2. The term BRICS was originally coined by British economist Jim O'Neill in 2001 to refer to a group of emerging markets.
3. RIC (Russia, India, and China) and IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) were informal forums that contributed to the formation of BRICS.
4. BRICS was initially a formal alliance between Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining later in 2010.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

8. Chagos Islands

Why in NEWS?

- Mauritius has defended its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago and said that the territory has been “unequivocally recognised by international law” in response to US President Donald Trump who criticized the UK’s deal to cede the islands to Mauritius.



Summary:

- Sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago has long been contested between the United Kingdom and Mauritius.
- Mauritius argues the UK’s control violates UN decolonisation principles, while the UK historically claimed sovereignty but promised eventual transfer when the islands were no longer required for defence.

Historic Turning Point (October 3, 2024)

- The UK Labour government announced it would transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius, ending one of Britain’s longest-running colonial disputes.
- A 99-year lease secures the continued operation of the UK–US military base on Diego Garcia.

Strategic Safeguards

- The Diego Garcia base remains legally protected and operational, critical to US and UK military operations in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific.
- The agreement was reached in close coordination with the United States, ensuring long-term security interests.

Financial Arrangement

- Mauritius will receive approximately £9 billion over 99 years as lease payments for the Diego Garcia base.

International Legal Context

- In 2019, the International Court of Justice issued a non-binding advisory opinion supporting Mauritius’s claim.
- The UN General Assembly later voted overwhelmingly to demand the UK end its administration of the islands.

Political Reaction

- The decision has drawn sharp criticism in the UK, with opponents calling it a blow to national prestige.
- Some figures in the Trump administration also opposed the transfer, despite earlier diplomatic efforts failing at the UN.

Impact on Chagossians

- The deal aims to address historical injustices faced by Chagossians displaced in 1965, although full resettlement and compensation issues remain sensitive.

Geopolitical Concerns

- Analysts warn the handover may increase Chinese influence in Mauritius and the wider Indian Ocean through infrastructure investment and trade ties.
- Comparisons have been drawn with Hong Kong's 1997 handover, though experts note major strategic differences.

Regional Balance of Power

- India has welcomed the decision, viewing it as stabilising for Indian Ocean security.
- The UK has stressed the move is unique and does not affect other territories such as the Falklands or Gibraltar.

Broader Significance

- The Chagos settlement highlights the unfinished business of decolonisation, the power of international law, and the shifting dynamics of global strategic competition.

QUESTIONS

36. Which of the following statements about the Chagos Archipelago are correct?

1. Mauritius has asserted its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago based on international law.
2. The UK Labour government announced the transfer of sovereignty to Mauritius in October 2024, ending a long-standing colonial dispute.
3. The Diego Garcia military base is legally protected and operational, crucial for US and UK military operations in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific regions.
4. Mauritius will receive £9 billion as a one-time payment for the transfer of the Chagos Archipelago.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

37. Which of the following international legal actions supported Mauritius's sovereignty claim over the Chagos Archipelago?

1. The International Court of Justice issued a non-binding advisory opinion in 2019 supporting Mauritius's claim.
2. The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to demand that the UK end its administration of the islands.
3. The United Nations recognized the Diego Garcia base as a permanent military installation under international law.
4. The UK and Mauritius signed a bilateral agreement for the permanent military presence on the islands.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

38. Which of the following **Indian strategic naval bases and facilities** are correctly matched with the respective countries?

1. **Oman**: Naval berthing at Duqm Port and listening posts in Ras al Hadd
2. **Mauritius**: Development of a naval facility on **Agaléga Island**
3. **Seychelles**: Joint military facility on **Assumption Island**
4. **Iran**: Operation of **Chabahar Port** for commercial and security purposes
5. **Singapore**: Changi Naval Base providing refueling capabilities and logistical support

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

39. Which of the following statements about **India's presence at Tajikistan's Ayni Airbase** are correct?

1. India stationed **Mi-17 helicopters** at Ayni Airbase and used it for **humanitarian missions** during the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.
2. The Ayni Airbase was India's **first overseas military base** in Tajikistan, established to support the **Northern Alliance** against the Taliban.
3. The **Farkhor base**, India's first base in Tajikistan, was shut down around **2020**.
4. India ended its strategic presence at Ayni Airbase in **2022**, after the collapse of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. D Railway track of Indian Railway

- **The Brahmaputra River** flows along the **northern boundary** of Kaziranga National Park, acting as a natural boundary for the park.
- **The Diphlu River** flows through the park and is one of the important water sources for the region.
- **National Highway No. 37 (RENAMED as -NH-715)** passes through the **southern boundary** of Kaziranga, creating challenges for animal movements, especially during the monsoon.
- However, the **Railway track of Indian Railways does not pass through the park**. The rail tracks are located near the park but do not directly run through it.

Thus, the correct answer is **(D) Railway track of Indian Railway**, as it does not pass through Kaziranga National Park.

2. D None

- **Corbett National Park:** The **Ramganga River** flows through Corbett National Park, not the **Ganga River**. So, the first pair is incorrect.
- **Kaziranga National Park:** The **Brahmaputra River** flows through Kaziranga National Park, not the **Manas River**. So, the second pair is incorrect.
- **Silent Valley National Park:** The **Kaveri River** does not flow through Silent Valley. Instead, it is the **Kunthipuzha River** that flows through Silent Valley National Park. Therefore, the third pair is also incorrect. Since all the pairs are incorrect, the correct answer is **(D) None**.

3. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct.** Kaziranga National Park is located on the **southern bank of the Brahmaputra River**, with the river forming its northern boundary and the Karbi Anglong hills to the south.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** **National Highway-715** runs through the park, **disrupting the animal corridor**. It is particularly problematic during the monsoon when animals like rhinos, elephants, and tigers need to cross the highway to reach higher ground in Karbi Anglong. However, an **Elevated Corridor** is being constructed to mitigate this issue.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** Kaziranga is an **Important Bird Area (IBA)**, home to **significant populations of migratory birds** and threatened species such as the **Bengal Florican**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** Kaziranga has a large population of the **Eastern Swamp Deer (Barasingha)**, but it is **not the only habitat**. The species is also found in **Manas National Park** and **Dudhwa National Park**. Thus, the correct answer is **(C) Only three**.

4. C Only three

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **Diphlu River** flows through the **Kaziranga National Park**, contributing to the park's water system.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The **Mora Dhansiri** also flows through the park, adding to the ecosystem and supporting its biodiversity.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The mighty **Brahmaputra** river flows along the northern boundary of the park and its annual floods are crucial for maintaining the park's ecosystem.

5. C 1, 2, 3 and 4

- **Statement 1 is correct.** Kaziranga National Park is located in the districts of **Golaghat, Sonitpur, Biswanath, and Nagaon** in Assam.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The park hosts **two-thirds** of the world's population of **Indian rhinoceroses**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** Kaziranga was declared a **Tiger Reserve in 2006**.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** The park is recognized as an **Important Bird Area (IBA)** by **BirdLife International** due to its diverse avifaunal species. Thus, all the statements are correct, making the answer (C) 1, 2, 3 and 4.

6. B 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is incorrect.** NITI Aayog follows a **bottom-up approach** to promote **cooperative federalism** and decentralized decision-making.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** NITI Aayog's primary goal is to promote **cooperative federalism** and **economic development**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The **Governing Council** of NITI Aayog comprises **Chief Ministers of States** and **Lieutenant Governors** of Union Territories, with the **Prime Minister** acting as its chair.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** NITI Aayog promotes **decentralized governance**, not centralized governance.

7. A Prime Minister of India

- The **Chairperson** of NITI Aayog is the **Prime Minister of India**, as per the governing structure. The **Vice Chairperson** is appointed by the Prime Minister.

8. B 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **Governing Council** of NITI Aayog comprises **Chief Ministers of States** and **Lieutenant Governors** of Union Territories with legislatures.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** **Lieutenant Governors** of Union Territories are also part of the **Governing Council**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The **full-time members** of NITI Aayog, such as Dr. V.K. Saraswat and Prof. Ramesh Chand, are part of the **Governing Council**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** The **President of India** is not part of the **Governing Council** of NITI Aayog.

9. A 1, 3 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **new MSME definition** increases the thresholds for both **investment** and **turnover** to encourage growth.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** The new classification applies to **both manufacturing and service sectors**, not just manufacturing.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** A **Micro Enterprise** now has an **investment limit of Rs. 2.5 crore** and **turnover limit of Rs. 10 crore**. **Small Enterprise:** Investment does not exceed Rs. 25 crore and turnover does not exceed Rs. 100 crore.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** A **Medium Enterprise** is now defined as having **investment up to Rs. 125 crore** and **turnover up to Rs. 500 crore**. Thus, the correct answer is (A) 1, 3 and 4 only.

10. A 1, 2 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The project is located at **North Bay, Sri Vijaya Puram**, in the **Andaman Sea**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The project is aligned with the **Blue Economy vision**, which aims to leverage **ocean resources for sustainable growth**.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The project is executed by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**, not the **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change**.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** The **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)** is providing **technical support**.

11. A 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The project involves **open-sea finfish farming** with **NIOT-developed cage systems**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The project also includes **deep-water seaweed cultivation** in **natural ocean conditions**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The initiative integrates **scientific innovation** and aims at **livelihood generation**, through **seaweed seed distribution** and **finfish seed provision**.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** The project does not focus on **artificial marine ecosystem creation** but instead emphasizes **sustainable aquaculture** and **livelihood support**.

12. A Carbon captured by oceans and coastal ecosystems

- **Blue carbon** refers to the **carbon captured** and stored by **oceans and coastal ecosystems**, such as **mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes**. These ecosystems act as significant carbon sinks, helping mitigate climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This distinguishes blue carbon from carbon stored in terrestrial ecosystems like forests (which are referred to as “green carbon”).

13. A 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh** are listed as **leading performers** under the **Large States** category.
- **Madhya Pradesh** is **not** listed as a leading performer in the **EPI 2024**.

14. A 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Jammu and Kashmir, Goa, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu** are recognized as **leading performers** among **Small States, North Eastern States & Union Territories** in **EPI 2024**.
- **Lakshadweep** is not listed among the leading performers.

15. A 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The EPI 2024 uses four key pillars for evaluation: **Export Infrastructure, Business Ecosystem, Policy & Governance, and Export Performance**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** While **macroeconomic stability** is a new dimension, it is not considered one of the **four main pillars** but rather part of the analysis.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** **India’s goal** of achieving **USD 1 trillion in exports by 2030** is reflected in the emphasis on **export preparedness** across states.

16. A 1 and 2 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The EPI 2024 is based on **13 sub-pillars and 70 indicators** to assess export readiness.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** States and UTs are categorized into **Leaders, Challengers, and Aspirers** based on their performance.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The **Export Preparedness Index (EPI)** is published by NITI Aayog, but the **Governing Council** does not directly publish the EPI.

17. A 1 and 2 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** **Human Capital** is a sub-pillar under the **Business Ecosystem** pillar.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** **Export Diversification** is part of the **Export Performance** pillar.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The **MSME Ecosystem** is part of the **Business Ecosystem** pillar, not the **Policy & Governance** pillar.

18. B 1 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The EPI uses a **data-driven, indicator-based methodology** for evaluation.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** The **weightages** assigned to pillars and sub-pillars are **not equally distributed**, as some factors (like **business ecosystem**) are more crucial than others.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** **Balanced statistical techniques** are employed for **normalizing and aggregating** data from the indicators.

19. D 1, 2 and 3

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The EPI evaluates the export preparedness of both **states and districts** in India.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** **District-level export strategies** are now emphasized for better alignment with **local capabilities**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** **Regional Councils** consist of **Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors** to address specific **regional challenges** in export preparedness.

20. A 1, 2 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **97th Amendment** made the **right to form cooperative societies** a **fundamental right** under **Article 19**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** It added **Article 43-B** to promote cooperative societies through **Directive Principles**.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** **MSCS (multi-state cooperative societies)** come under **Parliament's jurisdiction**, not state legislatures.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** **Part IX-B** was added to the Constitution, focusing on **cooperative societies**.

21. A 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **Ministry of Cooperation** was established in **July 2021**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** Before the creation of this ministry, its objectives were managed by the **Ministry of Agriculture**.

- **Statement 3 is correct.** Amit Shah is the **first Minister of Cooperation** since the ministry's formation.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** The **Ministry of Cooperation** handles a broader mandate than just promoting cooperatives, including overseeing **multi-state cooperatives** and policy implementation.

22. C 1, 3 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **right to form cooperative societies** was made a **fundamental right** under **Article 19**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** The framework for **MSCS** remains under the jurisdiction of **Parliament**, not centralized across all cooperatives.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** **State legislatures** handle **non-MSCS cooperatives**, but **MSCS** are handled by **Parliament**.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** The **97th Amendment** introduced **Part IX-B**, dealing with governance and regulation of cooperative societies.

23. D 1, 2, 3, and 4

- The **International Year of Cooperatives 2025** aims to strengthen cooperative ecosystems, focusing on fisheries and dairy. It also promotes tax relief for sugar mills, integrating cooperatives with **GeM Portal**, and aligns with the **Blue Economy**.

24. B 1, 2, and 4 only

- The **Bank Mitra model** enables doorstep banking through cooperatives, and the **Kisan Credit Card (KCC)** scheme has issued loans of over Rs. **10,000 crore**.
- **Micro-ATMs** in Gujarat are also part of the financial inclusion effort.

25. A 1 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The first **Nobel Peace Prize** was awarded in **1901** to **Henry Dunant** (founder of the Red Cross) and **Frédéric Passy** (a leading peace advocate).
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** The **Nobel Peace Prize** is awarded by the **Norwegian Nobel Committee**, not the Swedish Parliament.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The **Nobel Peace Prize** can indeed be awarded to **organizations** (for example, the **United Nations** in 2001 and the **World Food Programme** in 2020).
- **Statement 4 is correct.** The Nobel Peace Prize is always awarded in **Oslo, Norway**, and the ceremony takes place on **December 10th**, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death.

26. D 1, 2, 3 and 4

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** has received the Nobel Peace Prize three times: in **1917, 1944, and 1963**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** **Medecins Sans Frontieres** (Doctors Without Borders) won the Nobel Peace Prize in **1999** for its work in humanitarian aid and medical assistance in conflict zones.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The **World Health Organization (WHO)** was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in **2020** for its contributions to global public health, particularly in combating pandemics.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in **2005** for its efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

27. B 1, 2 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** María Corina Machado won the **2025 Nobel Peace Prize** for her work promoting democratic rights and a peaceful transition in Venezuela.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The award ceremony took place in **Oslo, Norway on 10 December 2025.**
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The Nobel Peace Prize title **cannot be transferred or reassigned**, even if the physical medal is given away. The Nobel Peace Prize **cannot be revoked or reassigned**; the laureate retains the title permanently.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** Machado symbolically presented her **physical Nobel Peace Prize medal to Donald Trump** in January 2026.

28. C 1 and 3 only

- **Kailash Satyarthi** was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2014** for his work in the **fight against child labor** and for the **right of children to education.**
- **Mahatma Gandhi** was **nominated multiple times** for the Nobel Peace Prize but **never won** the award, despite his global influence as a leader of nonviolent resistance.
- **Mother Teresa** received the **Nobel Peace Prize in 1979** for her work with the **Missionaries of Charity**, particularly helping the poor, sick, and dying.

This question tests knowledge of the **Indian recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize** and their significant contributions to **global peace and humanitarian efforts.**

29. A 1 and 2 only

- **UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)** has been awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize twice**, in **1954** and **1981**, for its efforts in aiding displaced persons and refugees.
- **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** has received the Nobel Peace Prize **three times**, in **1917**, **1944**, and **1963**, for its humanitarian work, especially in conflict zones.
- **The World Food Programme (WFP)** was awarded the **2020 Nobel Peace Prize** for its efforts to **combat hunger, its contribution to peace in conflict-affected areas, and its role in preventing the use of hunger as a weapon of war.** As the world's largest humanitarian organization, it was recognized for acting as a **"first responder" to emergencies.**
- **The United Nations (UN)** has received the Nobel Peace Prize, but not **multiple times.** It was awarded in **2001** alongside **Kofi Annan** for peace efforts. Thus, the correct answer is **(A) 1 and 2 only.**

30. A 1, 2 and 3 only

- **BRICS Plus** is working on **central bank digital currencies (CBDCs)**, the **New Development Bank (NDB)**, and the **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)** for alternative financial systems and emergency liquidity.
- **SWIFT** is a Western-led institution and not part of BRICS Plus's alternative financial mechanisms.

31. A 1, 2 and 4 only

- The **Exercise WILL FOR PEACE 2026** naval exercises were conducted by **China, Russia, and Iran** in South Africa's waters, part of the **BRICS Plus** initiative. India did not participate in the "Exercise Will for Peace 2026" naval drills held off South Africa's coast (Jan 9–16, 2026) because the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) clarified they were a South African-led initiative, not an institutionalized BRICS activity.

32. A 1 only

- **South Africa** joined **BRICS** in **2010**, and it became a full member in **2011**.
- **Indonesia, Iran, and Ethiopia** joined later, in **2024** and **2025** respectively.

33. C 1, 2, 3 and 4

- **BRICS** has implemented several initiatives to reform the **global financial system**, including the **New Development Bank, BRICS PAY, Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and Joint Statistical Publication**.

34. B 4, 1, 2, 3

- The **BRICS** bloc was founded in **2009** with **Brazil, Russia, India, and China**.
- **South Africa** joined in **2010**, and **Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE** joined in **2024**.
- **Indonesia** officially joined in **2025**.

35. D 1, 2, 3 and 4

- **Statement 1 is correct.** Yevgeny Primakov first articulated the conceptual basis of what would later become BRICS in **1998**.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** Jim O'Neill coined the term **BRIC** in **2001** to designate emerging economies.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** **RIC (Russia, India, China)** and **IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa)** were informal dialogue groups that helped shape BRICS.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** **BRICS** started with **Brazil, Russia, India, and China**, and **South Africa** joined later in **2010**.

36. D 1, 2 and 3 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** Mauritius has asserted its **sovereignty** over the **Chagos Archipelago** in line with international law.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The **UK Labour government** announced the **sovereignty transfer to Mauritius in October 2024**, settling the colonial dispute.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The **Diego Garcia base** remains operational and is critical to military operations.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** Mauritius will receive approximately **£9 billion** over **99 years** as **lease payments**, not as a one-time payment.

37. A 1 and 2 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** issued an advisory opinion in **2019**, supporting Mauritius's claim to the islands.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** The **UN General Assembly** voted overwhelmingly to demand that the **UK end its administration** of the Chagos Archipelago.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The **United Nations** did not officially recognize **Diego Garcia base** as a permanent military installation.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** The agreement allows the base to remain operational but is not about permanent military installation recognition.

38. B 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** India has secured **access to Duqm Port** and **listening posts in Ras al Hadd** in Oman for naval operations.
- **Statement 2 is correct.** India is developing a **naval facility on Agaléga Island**, Mauritius, with significant strategic capabilities.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** India has a **joint military facility on Assumption Island**, Seychelles, for coastal surveillance.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect.** **Chabahar Port** in Iran is operated by India but is focused on **commercial and logistical** aspects, not purely **security**. It is not primarily a **military outpost**.
- **Statement 5 is correct.** **Changi Naval Base** in Singapore provides crucial **logistical support** and **refueling** for the **Indian Navy**.

39. D 1 and 4 only

- **Statement 1 is correct.** India stationed **Mi-17 helicopters** at Ayni Airbase, and it was used to evacuate **nationals and officials** during the Taliban's return to power in **2021**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** **Ayni Airbase** was India's second overseas base in Tajikistan, and it supported the **Northern Alliance** through logistical and aerial support.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect.** The **Farkhor base** was shut down around **2008**, not **2020**.
- **Statement 4 is correct.** India ended its presence at Ayni in **2022**, following the collapse of the **Northern Alliance** and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.