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Guiding Dreams, Empowering Future
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Growing Vulnerability of the Himalayan Region.

Why in News?

- **Catastrophic Flash Floods in Nepal:** Recently, severe flash floods in Nepal resulted in over 150 fatalities, hundreds missing, and extensive damage to critical infrastructure.
- **Probable Triggers:** Scientists suspect that an ice-rock avalanche, possibly interacting with an anomalous Western Disturbance, triggered the sudden and devastating flood event.
- **Transboundary Risk for India:** Rivers like the Bhote Koshi, Gandak, and Karnali originate in or pass through the Himalayan region in Nepal before entering India. Consequently, floods in Nepal create significant downstream risks for India.
- **Broader Concern:** This disaster highlights the growing vulnerability of the entire Himalayan region to compound hazards such as glacier instability, landslides, and flash floods.

Factors Driving the Growing Vulnerability of the Himalayan Region

The increasing frequency of disasters is driven by a combination of natural fragility and human-induced amplification.

A. Geological & Climatic Drivers (Natural Fragility)

- **Tectonic Stress:** The Himalayas are young, continuously uplifting fold mountains traversed by highly active thrust faults—the Main Central Thrust (MCT), Main Boundary Thrust (MBT), and Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT).
- **Seismic Vulnerability:** Most of the Indian Himalayan Region falls in Seismic Zone V. Historical "seismic gaps" (segments without major earthquakes for over a century) store immense unreleased energy, and fractured rocks make the region highly susceptible to mass

wasting.

- **Climate Amplification:** Elevation-Dependent Warming (EDW) is accelerating permafrost thaw, removing the "ice-cement" that holds rocks together. This process expands moraine-dammed glacial lakes, severely increasing the risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) and massive ice-rock avalanches.
- **Recent Disasters as Evidence:**
 - The 2021 Chamoli disaster (Uttarakhand) was triggered by a massive hanging glacier and rock face collapse due to permafrost thaw.
 - The 2023 South Lhonak Lake disaster (Sikkim) was a catastrophic GLOF where a moraine-dam breached, washing away downstream towns.
- **Hydrological Extremes:** Shifting monsoons cause localized cloudbursts. Combined with steep river gradients, this generates violent, high-velocity flash floods and debris flows that grade

riverbeds and shift channels. The 2013 Kedarnath disaster was heavily amplified by a cloudburst and the breaching of Chorabari Lake.

B. Anthropogenic Drivers (Human Amplification)

• Reckless Infrastructure:

• **Vertical Toe-Cutting:** Cutting slopes vertically without retaining walls destabilizes the mountainside. Mass tourism has driven heavy concrete urbanization on top of unconsolidated debris and active floodplains.

• **Char Dham Pariyojana:** The highway widening project has triggered recurring, massive landslides (like at Lambagarh) due to unscientific vertical hill-cutting. The Supreme Court-appointed High Powered Committee (HPC) noted that this project could destabilize the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

• **Hydrogeological Destruction:** Subterranean tunneling and blasting for run-of-the-river hydropower projects puncture deep aquifers. This drains perched water tables, altering pore-water pressure and causing severe ground subsidence, as witnessed in the Joshimath crisis.

• **Debris Mismanagement:** Excavated muck from tunneling and road widening is routinely dumped directly into riverbeds. This transforms high-discharge floods into lethal debris torrents that destroy downstream dams (e.g., Teesta-III).

C. Barrier Lakes & Flood Threat for Nepal Why Barrier Lakes are Dangerous (Mechanism)

Rapid infill: Meltwater + runoff quickly raise lake level behind weak debris dam. Triggers for breach: Overtopping, internal erosion, new landslide, earthquake, heavy rain, icefall.

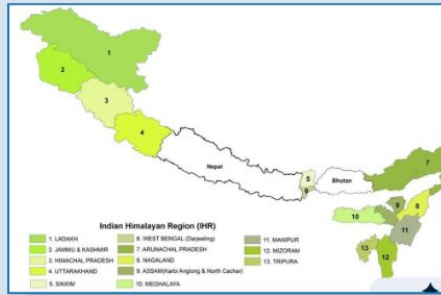
Impact: Sudden release high-energy debris flood, destroying settlements, roads, bridges, hydropower tunnels, and endangering rescue teams.

D. Governance & Regulatory Failures

• **Piecemeal Clearances:** The dilution of the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) framework, along with project-wise assessments, overlooks the cumulative environmental impacts of multiple infrastructure projects in fragile river basins. Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) remain limited.

• **Non-Enforcement on Floodplains:** Despite the 2016 Ganga Authorities Order, states fail to restrict illegal multi-story construction on active river terraces and "No-Development Zones".

• **Dilution of Protections:** Relaxations to



the Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone and exemptions under the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act 2023 allow large-scale strategic and linear projects to bypass critical ecological scrutiny and slope-stability assessments.

Recommendations of Committees for Disaster Management

• **Mishra Committee (1976):** Investigated the sinking of Joshimath. Recommended restricting construction in unstable and landslide-prone zones pending detailed site investigations and advised against indiscriminate tree cutting and boulder removal.

• **J.C. Pant Committee (1999):** Classified 31 disasters into five categories and recommended:

- Integrating disaster management into the Seventh Schedule and enacting national and State disaster laws.
- Stronger enforcement of building codes and safety standards.
- Establishing dedicated institutional mechanisms for disaster management and coordination.
- Creating specialised institutions for disaster training and capacity building.
- Strengthening disaster financing for response and prevention.
- Promoting a culture of preparedness through risk assessment, training, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Measures to Mitigate Disaster Risks in the Indian Himalayan Region

• **Enforcing Ecological Carrying Capacity:** Legally mandate Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) and landscape-level cumulative impact assessments before approving major linear or hydel infrastructure.

• **River Regulation Zones (RRZ):** Strictly implement RRZ to prohibit permanent construction on active river floodplains.

• **Springshed Management:** Scale up the Eight-Step Springshed Management Methodology (endorsed by NITI Aayog) using hydrogeological mapping to demarcate spring recharge areas and prevent artificial tunneling in recharge zones.

• **Modernizing Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS):** Integrate InSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar), satellite telemetry, high-altitude Automated Weather Stations (AWS), and Doppler radars to extend real-time warning windows for downstream communities.

• **Sustainable Mountain Tourism Governance:** Shift from high-density, unregulated tourism to regulated, high-value low-impact eco-tourism, enforced through pre-registration caps, mandatory waste buy-back mechanisms, and tourist taxation earmarked for local conservation.

• **Mainstreaming Climate and Disaster Resilience:** Developmental projects in the IHR must integrate disaster risk reduction as per the Sendai Framework and climate adaptation to prevent increasing hazard exposure, especially in infrastructure and urban planning.

Conclusion

The recurring Himalayan disasters expose a profound mismatch between development and governance, where fragile geology and the impacts of climate change are being dangerously compounded by infrastructure projects that ignore ecological limits. The challenge is not to halt development, but to fundamentally realign it with the Himalayas' carrying capacity, cumulative risks, and geological, hydrological, and cryospheric limits. Ensuring that disaster resilience becomes an integral, non-negotiable part of development planning is the only sustainable path forward.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following pairs: (2020) Peak Mountains

1. Namcha Barwa Garhwal Himalaya
2. Nanda Devi Kumaon Himalaya
3. Nokrek Sikkim Himalaya

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 3 only

Answer: (b)



India–Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership

Why in News?

- **State Visit & 15th Anniversary:** The Prime Minister undertook a State Visit to Uzbekistan to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the India-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership (established in 2011).
- **Elevation of Ties:** During the visit, both nations formally elevated their bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, broadening long-term engagement across strategic, economic, and technological domains.
- **Geopolitical Context:** The visit comes amid shifting geopolitical dynamics, with India actively seeking to reset and deepen its ties with Central Asian countries.
- **Highest Civilian Honour:** The Prime Minister was conferred with the "Oliy Darajali Do'stlik" Order, Uzbekistan's highest state honour.

Why is Uzbekistan Strategically Important to India?

- **Geopolitical Pivot of Central Asia:** Uz-

bekistan is at the "heart" of Central Asia, sharing borders with all other Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) as well as Afghanistan. It acts as the linchpin for India's "Connect Central Asia Policy".

- **Energy and Mineral Security:** Beyond uranium for nuclear energy, Uzbekistan possesses abundant reserves of gold, natural gas, and critical minerals essential for India's transition to clean energy technologies.
- **Countering Regional Threats:** The Taliban takeover in neighbouring Afghanistan has heightened the shared risk of radicalisation, drug trafficking, and cross-border terrorism. Collaborative intelligence sharing and joint exercises (like Exercise Dustlik) act as a buffer against these threats.
- **Balancing China's Influence:** Through infrastructure investments and digital diplomacy (like UPI integration), India is offering a transparent, capacity-building alternative to China's debt-heavy Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region.

- **Unlocking Connectivity:** Since India lacks direct land access to Central Asia, partnering with Uzbekistan is crucial for operationalising trade transit routes, notably the Chabahar Port (Iran) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

India–Uzbekistan Relations: Historical & Existing Framework

- **Historical & Cultural Ties:** Relations have roots in the Silk Route, with the spread of Buddhism to Central Asia and historical links through Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire, who originated from the Fergana Valley in modern-day Uzbekistan.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** India established diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan in March 1992.
- **Strategic Partnership (2011):** Bilateral ties were upgraded to a Strategic Partnership in 2011.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Both countries

conduct Exercise DUSTLIK to enhance military interoperability, particularly in counter-terrorism operations.

- **Trade & Investment (2024):** Trade volume reached USD 980 million in 2024, with Indian exports led by pharmaceuticals, machinery, auto components, and mobile phones, while imports consist mainly of fruit/vegetable products, fertilizers, and lubricants.
- **State-to-Region Cooperation:** Gujarat has partnered with Uzbekistan's Samarkand region, reflecting growing sub-national diplomacy.
- **Development Partnership:** India supports Uzbekistan through High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), including healthcare, IT and education initiatives.

What are the Key Outcomes of the PM Visit?

A. Defence, Security & Counter-Terrorism

- Adopted a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism and called for action against terror financing, safe havens and perpetrators.
- Agreed to expand defence-industrial cooperation through the Joint Working Group on Military Cooperation.
- Welcomed the successful Dustlik military exercise, held in Uzbekistan in April 2026.

B. Trade, Investment & Economic Integration

- **Trade Target:** Set a bilateral trade target of USD 5 billion by 2030, up from the current volume of over USD 1 billion.
- **Coordination Council:** Established a Coordination Council led by Foreign Ministers to oversee bilateral cooperation and upgraded the existing Joint Commission from the secretarial to the ministerial level.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers:** Created a Joint Working Group to address trade and investment barriers in sectors such as engineering, automobiles, electrical goods and pharmaceuticals.
- **Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** Both sides agreed to take time-bound steps towards an India-Uzbekistan PTA.
- **WTO Support:** India reaffirmed its support for Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- **Investment Promotion:** Cooperation between Invest India and Uzbekistan's Investment Promotion Agency will promote two-way investment flows.

C. Critical Minerals, Energy & Nuclear

Cooperation

- **Critical Minerals Supply Chain:** Agreed to implement joint ventures in geological exploration, mining, processing, value addition, and recycling of critical minerals.
- **Uranium Supply:** Established a framework for the long-term supply of uranium from Uzbekistan to India to meet the fuel requirements of India's civil nuclear energy programme.
- **Civil Nuclear & Clean Energy:** Explored avenues for extended cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, modernisation of energy grids, and renewable energy infrastructure.

D. Digital Transformation

- **Startup & IT Collaboration:** Decided to scale up partnerships between startups, tech incubators, and IT parks, building on the success of the Tashkent IT Park (established in 2019 with Software Technology Parks of India assistance).
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Agreed to collaborate on developing secure and trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems for economic development and societal problem-solving.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):** An agreement between NPCI International Payments Ltd and Uzbekistan's National Interbank Processing Centre will allow Indian UPI apps to scan Uzbekistan's UZQR national codes, boosting digital connectivity.

E. Environment, Health & Culture

- **Aral Sea Ecological Restoration:** India announced a USD 1 million grant under its Grant-in-Aid framework to support afforestation and ecological rehabilitation in the fragile Aral Sea region, linking Uzbekistan's "Yashil Makon" with India's "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam".
- **Pharmaceuticals & Healthcare:** Agreed to utilise the Tashkent Pharma Park cluster for joint manufacturing, technology transfer, and establishing Indian medical laboratories and research centres in Uzbekistan.
- **Heritage Preservation:** Signed a Letter of Intent to conserve and restore the ancient Buddhist heritage sites of Fayaz Tepa and Karatepa, along with a Cultural Exchange Program (2026–2030).
- **Education & Traditional Knowledge:** Announced the Lal Bahadur Shastri

Scholarship for Hindi language learning in Uzbekistan and signed an MoU for cooperation in traditional medicines (AYUSH).

F. Multilateral & Regional Alignment

- **UNSC Reform:** Uzbekistan reaffirmed its support for India's candidature for permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council.
- **ISA & IBCA:** Uzbekistan expressed its intent to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA).
- **BRICS & NAM:** Uzbekistan backed India's 2026 BRICS Chairship, while India pledged support for Uzbekistan's upcoming Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Chairship (2027–2030).
- **SCO Cooperation:** Both reaffirmed cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Central Asia–India framework.

What are the Key Challenges in India–Uzbekistan Relations?

- **Connectivity Deficit:** India has no direct overland access to Uzbekistan due to Pakistan's transit constraints, while Uzbekistan itself is doubly landlocked. Routes through Chabahar Port and INSTC increase transit time and freight costs.
- **Uranium Transit Risks:** Transporting nuclear material through Central Asia and Iran involves complex logistics, safety requirements and transit risks.
- **Banking & Payment Barriers:** Limited direct banking and correspondent banking links and the thinly traded Uzbek Som increase currency-conversion and settlement costs, particularly affecting Indian SMEs.
- **China's Economic Dominance:** China is Uzbekistan's largest trading partner and major infrastructure financier through the BRI. The China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan (CKU) railway could further improve China's logistical advantage over India.
- **Regional Security Risks:** Instability in Afghanistan, including radicalisation, drug trafficking and threats from extremist groups such as ISIS-K, creates security concerns for trade and connectivity



projects.

- **Non-Tariff & Regulatory Barriers:** Bureaucratic procedures, language barriers and complex non-tariff barriers restrict market access.

What Measures are Needed to Strengthen Relations?

- **Subsidising Freight & Air Corridors:** Establish subsidised "Air Freight Corridors" (similar to the one with Afghanistan) specifically for high-value, low-volume goods like pharmaceuticals, IT components, and agricultural produce.
- **Fast-Tracking the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA):** An early conclusion of a PTA is vital to lower tariffs on core Indian exports (medicines, textiles, engineering goods) and Uzbek exports (fertilizers, fruits, lubricants).
- **Tackling Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs):** A Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for product standards—especially in pharmaceuticals and agricultural phytosanitary checks—is urgently required.
- **Green Energy Investments:** Indian solar companies should leverage the International Solar Alliance (ISA) frame-



work to bid for utility-scale solar projects in the Uzbek desert regions.

- **Real-time Intelligence Sharing:** The Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism must establish secure communication channels for real-time intelligence sharing on terror financing, cyber threats, and cross-border narco-trafficking networks originating from the Af-Pak region.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan is a pivotal partner in India's "Connect Central Asia" policy, offering strategic depth, energy security, and a gateway to the broader Eurasian region. The elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership marks a significant milestone, but its success will depend on timely implementation of projects, lever-

aging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), deepening critical mineral cooperation, and operationalising connectivity through Chabahar. By addressing connectivity bottlenecks, regulatory barriers, and security challenges proactively, India can emerge as a reliable, transparent and stabilising development partner in Central Asia, effectively balancing the growing influence of other major powers in the region.

Prelims Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Consider the following countries: (2023)

1. Kazakhstan
2. Kyrgyzstan
3. Tajikistan
4. Turkmenistan
5. Uzbekistan

How many of the above countries are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?

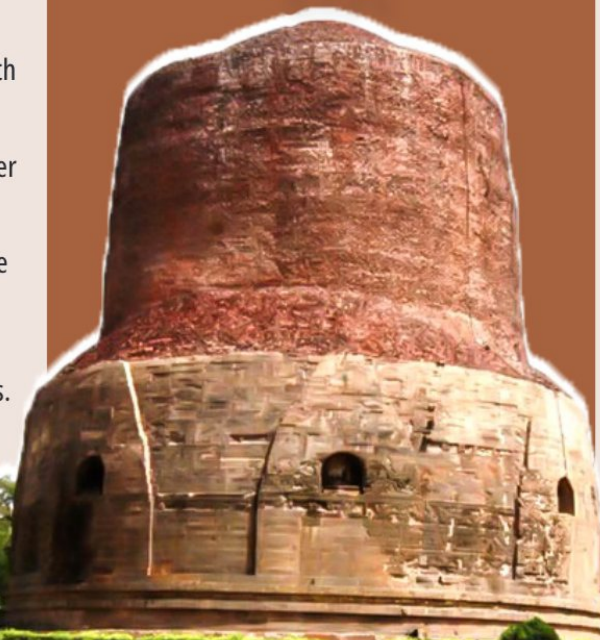
- (a) Only 2
- (b) Only 3
- (c) Only 4
- (d) All 5

Answer: (d) – All 5.

Why in News?

- **Official UNESCO Inscription:** The Ancient Buddhist Site of Sarnath, located in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, has been officially inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- **Decision Venue:** The decision was taken during the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Busan, South Korea.
- **India's Milestone:** With this inscription, India's total number of UNESCO World Heritage sites rises to 45, making India sixth globally and second in the Asia-Pacific region.
- **Long Wait:** Sarnath had been on India's Tentative List since 1998, ending a wait of 28 years.

Sarnath's Path to the World Heritage List



- **Fourth Site for Uttar Pradesh:** Sarnath becomes the fourth World Heritage site in Uttar Pradesh, after the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri.

UNESCO World Heritage List

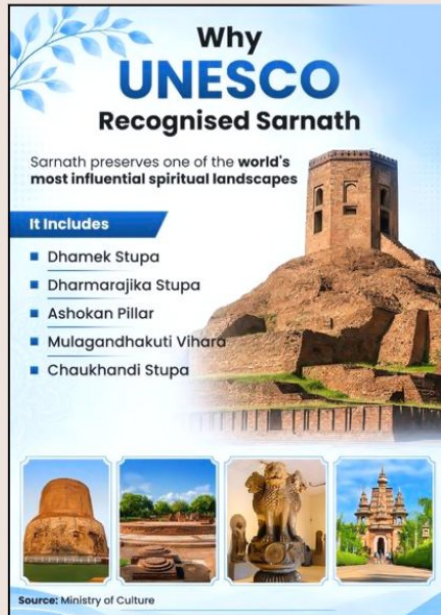
- **About the List:** UNESCO aims to identify, protect, and preserve cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value under the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.
- **Global Status (July 2026):** The List includes 1,273 properties across 173 countries, comprising 991 cultural, 240 natural, and 42 mixed sites.
- **Convention Members:** The World Heritage Convention has been ratified by 196 state parties, making it one of the most widely accepted international

heritage protection frameworks within the UN system.

- **India's World Heritage (2026):** India's 45 sites include 37 cultural, 7 natural, and 1 mixed property.

Essential Facts about Sarnath

- **Location:** Sarnath is in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and is one of the four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites.
- **Historical Significance:** It is the place where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. In Buddhist texts, it is also known as Rishipatana, Ishipatana, and Mrigadava (Deer Park).
- **First Sermon:** Buddha preached the Dharmachakra Pravartana (Turning of the Wheel of Dharma) here, which marked the establishment of the Buddhist Sangha (monastic order) and the propagation of the Eightfold Path.
- **Components of the Site:** The UNESCO inscription includes two components – the Chaukhandi Stupa and the Archaeological Remains at Sarnath.
- **Chaukhandi Stupa:** Marks the spot where Buddha met his first five disciples. It has an octagonal Mughal brick tower built by Akbar in 1588 on top, making it a rare Buddhist-Mughal composite monument.
- **Archaeological Remains:** Include several significant structures like the Dhamek Stupa, Dharmarajika Stupa, Mulagandhakuti Vihara, and the Ashokan Pillar.
- **Dhamek Stupa:** 39 metres high and 28 metres in diameter, it marks the exact location of Buddha's first sermon. It dates back to the Ashokan period (c. 249 BCE).
- **Ashokan Pillar:** Erected by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. Its Lion Capital now forms the National Emblem of India. The 32-spoked wheel (Dharma Chakra) below the capital was adopted into the Indian national flag.
- **Architectural and Cultural Evolution:** The site reflects nearly 16 centuries of continuous development, with monuments dating from the pre-Mauryan period (4th-3rd century BCE) to the 12th century CE.
- **Decline and Rediscovery:** The site declined and was destroyed after the 12th century. It was rediscovered in the 18th century when Jagat Singh, a local ruler of the Benares estate, carried out excavations in 1794.



- **Archaeological Museum:** The Sarnath Archaeological Museum (established in 1904) is one of the earliest site museums in India, housing the Lion Capital and a 5th-century sandstone statue of Buddha preaching.

Nomination Process

- **Tentative List Inclusion (1998):** Sarnath was placed on India's UNESCO Tentative List on 3 July 1998.
- **Formal Nomination (January 2025):** India submitted the formal nomination dossier titled "Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath" to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in January 2025.
- **Evaluation Process (18 months):** The nomination underwent an evaluation process lasting about 18 months, which included technical meetings with UNESCO's advisory bodies and an evaluation mission by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites).
- **Final Decision (July 2026):** The evaluation culminated in the final decision at the 48th World Heritage Committee session in Busan, South Korea, which led to Sarnath's inscription.

UNESCO Criteria for Inscription

Sarnath was inscribed under Criteria (iii) and (vi) of the UNESCO World Heritage List:

- **Criterion (iii):** It recognises the enduring spiritual importance of Sarnath as one of the four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites. The numerous religious buildings and monuments constructed and reconstructed at the site over centuries reflect

this continuing significance.

- **Criterion (vi):** It recognises the site's direct and tangible association with pivotal events in the life of Buddha, including his first sermon and his meeting with the first five disciples, which hold outstanding significance for the Buddhist community.

Significance of the Inscription For India:

- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Strengthens India's identity as the birthplace of Buddhism and its commitment to preserving heritage of Outstanding Universal Value.
- **Heritage Protection:** Acknowledges India's rich cultural traditions, diverse architectural styles, and long history.
- **Tourism Potential:** Expected to boost the Buddhist circuit in Uttar Pradesh, enhancing its standing on the international tourism and cultural heritage map. Sarnath is strategically located just 10 km from Varanasi.

For Buddhism

- **Global Recognition:** Elevates Sarnath to a global platform, cementing its status as one of the holiest sites for Buddhism.
- **Pilgrimage Circuit:** Of the four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites, now three – Lumbini (Nepal), Bodh Gaya (India), and Sarnath (India) – are World Heritage listed. Only Kushinagar (India) remains to be inscribed.
- **For the World Heritage List:**
 - The inscription enriches the cultural diversity of the list and recognises Buddhism's significant contribution to world culture.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Despite this milestone, Sarnath's journey highlights several challenges:

- **Lengthy Waiting Period:** A 28-year wait on the Tentative List indicates a slow and cautious nomination process. It also reflects possible delays or hesitancy in India's preparation and submission of robust dossiers.
- **Balancing Development & Protection:** As an archaeological park protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), strict restrictions exist on development and any ritualistic activities within and around the park. While essential for heritage protection, this has limited local tourism-led economic growth, leading to

what is termed as development deprivation in Sarnath.

• **Governance and Infrastructure:**

Administratively, Sarnath falls under the Varanasi Municipal Corporation and is managed only as a constituency, lacking an independent governance structure. This has caused its development to be overshadowed by Varanasi, a major Hindu pilgrimage city. Tourists typically spend only half a day at Sarnath, devoting more time to Varanasi.

• **Correction of Historical Narrative:**

During the nomination process, the ASI replaced the site's plaque to credit the local ruler Jagat Singh for the site's discovery, instead of the previously credited British archaeologist. This reflects a revision of colonial-era historical narratives.

sion of colonial-era historical narratives.

Conclusion

The inscription of Sarnath on the UNESCO World Heritage List is a well-deserved recognition of its unparalleled historical and spiritual significance as the site of Buddha's first sermon, coming after nearly three decades of patient waiting. This status not only elevates India's cultural credibility and tourism appeal but also reaffirms Buddhism's enduring global legacy.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India, consider the

following statements:

1. Sarnath is the 45th site from India to be inscribed on the list.
2. All four principal Buddhist pilgrimage sites are now UNESCO World Heritage sites.
3. The Lion Capital of the Ashokan pillar at Sarnath is the source of India's national emblem.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) – 1 and 3 only.

NATIONAL ANIMAL DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAMME (NADCP)

Why in News?

- **Programme's Success Highlighted:** The Government has showcased the achievements of the National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP) in strengthening India's livestock health ecosystem.
- **Vaccination Milestone:** The programme has administered 147.16 crore FMD vaccine doses, benefiting 8.04 crore farmers.
- **Decline in Disease Outbreaks:**
 - **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD):** Outbreaks dropped from 132 in 2019 to 40 in 2025.
 - **Brucellosis:** Outbreaks reduced from 22 in 2019 to 15 in 2025.

What is the National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP)?

- **Launch & Nature:** It is a flagship Central Sector Scheme launched in September 2019.
- **Primary Objective:** To control and eradicate Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis through nationwide vaccination.
- **Funding Pattern:** It is a 100% centrally funded scheme, with the Central Government providing all financial assistance to States and Union Territories.



What are the Major Livestock Diseases Targeted?

- **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD):**
 - Nature: A highly contagious viral disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals (cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs).
 - Impact: Causes reduced milk yield, slower growth, reproductive problems, and leads to international trade restrictions.
- **Brucellosis:**
 - Nature: A bacterial reproductive disease caused by *Brucella abortus*.
 - Impact: Affects fertility, lactation, and overall productivity of cattle and buffaloes. Vaccination is the key preventive measure.

What are the Key Components of NADCP?

- **Vaccination Targets:**
 - 100% vaccination of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, and pig populations against FMD.
 - 100% vaccination of female bovine calves aged 4–8 months against Brucellosis.
- **Disease Eradication Goal:** FMD outbreaks have declined by more than 60% compared to the pre-NADCP period. India aims to achieve FMD eradication by 2030 through vaccination, surveillance, animal identification, and disease monitoring.
- **Disease Surveillance & Monitoring:** Includes sero-surveillance, sero-monitoring, outbreak investigation, virus identification, and impact assessment to track disease prevalence and vaccination effectiveness.
- **Animal Identification & Data Management:** Livestock are ear-tagged with a unique 12-digit Tag ID and digitally recorded on the Bharat Pashudhan Portal for effective monitoring and disease management.
- **Strengthening Delivery Systems:** Supports vaccine procurement, cold-chain infrastructure, awareness campaigns, training, animal movement regulation, and quarantine measures.
- **Financial Support for Vaccinators:** Provides remuneration with a minimum support of ₹3 per vaccination dose to ensure effective field-level implementation.
- **Integrated Livestock Health Framework:** Under the revised Livestock Health and Disease Control



Programme (LHDCP), NADCP, the Livestock Health & Disease Control (LH&DC) component, and the Pashu Aushadhi initiative have been brought under one umbrella. The 2026–27 budget allocation for LHDCP is ₹2,010 crore.

How is India Strengthening Institutional and Infrastructure Support?

- **Research and Surveillance Support:** Financial assistance is provided to ICAR institutions for controlling FMD and Brucellosis. This supports vaccine research, quality testing, disease surveillance, sero-surveillance, disease modelling, and State-wise sampling.
- **Centralised Vaccine Procurement and Private-Sector Engagement:** States receive assistance to procure vaccination accessories and strengthen cold-chain infrastructure. The Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) supports private companies in establishing veterinary vaccine and drug-manufacturing facilities.
- **Veterinary Infrastructure and Service Delivery:**
 - Veterinary facilities and Mobile Veterinary Units (MVUs) are being expanded to provide doorstep animal healthcare.
 - Currently, 4,019 MVUs are operational across 29 States and Union Territories, benefiting 136 lakh farmers and providing treatment to 276 lakh animals.
 - Services can be accessed through the toll-free number 1962.

- **Bharat Pashudhan Portal:** By July 2026, over 39 crore livestock were registered on the portal, enabling real-time disease surveillance and data-driven livestock management.
- **Awareness and Farmer Engagement:**
 - Multi-Purpose Artificial Insemination Technicians in Rural India (MAITRIs) facilitate farmer outreach and doorstep livestock services.
 - So far, 39,810 MAITRIs have been trained with financial assistance.

National One Health Mission

- **One Health Approach:** Recognises the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, promoting coordinated action to address emerging health challenges.
- **National One Health Mission:** Approved by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) in July 2022. It is a cross-ministerial initiative aimed at coordinating and strengthening existing One Health activities in India.
- **NDDB's Brucellosis Control Model:** Highlights the importance of vaccination, safe disposal of animal waste, strong biosecurity measures, public awareness, and inter-departmental coordination.

Pandemic Fund Project

- **Launch & Support:** In 2024, the Government launched the Pandemic Fund Project on "Animal Health Security Strengthening in India for Pandemic Preparedness and Response." It is a US\$25 million initiative supported by the G20 Pandemic Fund.
- **Partners:** Implemented in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Bank.
- **Objective:** Complements the NADCP by strengthening animal health systems to improve pandemic preparedness. It enhances disease surveillance, including genomic and environmental surveillance, upgrades laboratory infrastructure, and promotes cross-border collaboration.
- **Released Documents:**
 - **Standard Veterinary Treatment Guidelines (SVTG):** A framework promoting scientific veterinary practices, rational medicine use, and antimicrobial stewardship. It supports the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance.

- **Crisis Management Plan (CMP) for Animal Diseases:** A national framework to strengthen preparedness and guide rapid response during disease outbreaks.

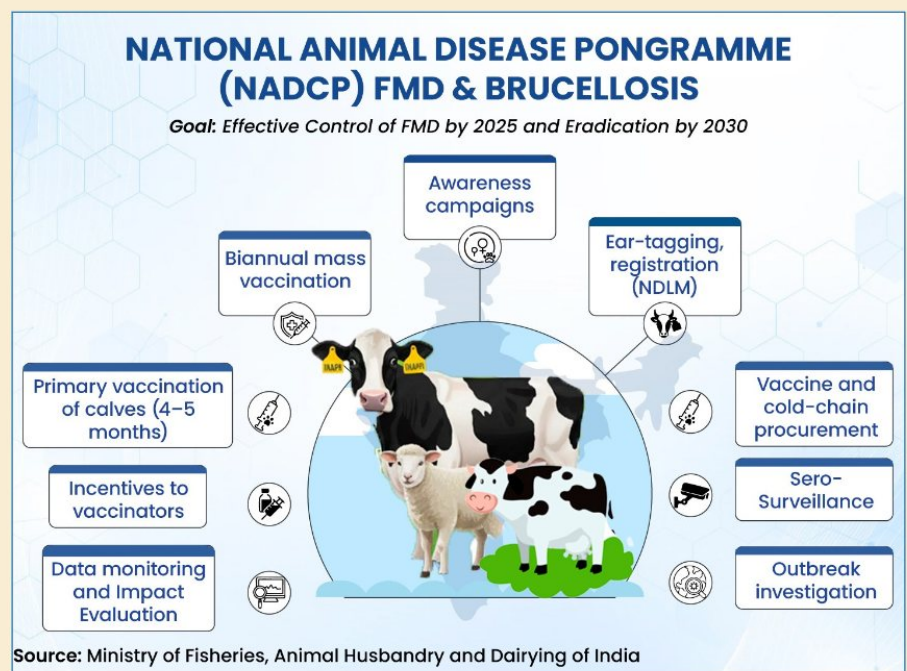
Conclusion

The National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP) has redefined India's livestock landscape by curtailing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis through mass vaccination, digital tracking, and robust veterinary infrastructure directly boosting farmer incomes, food security, and pandemic readiness. Looking ahead to Viksit Bharat 2047, embedding a One Health framework, AI-driven monitoring, genomic surveillance, and global safety standards will be pivotal to building a resilient, world-class livestock economy.

Prelims Previous Year Question. PYQ

Q. As per the NSSO 70th Round "Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households", consider the following statements: (2018)

1. Rajasthan has the highest percentage share of agricultural house-



holds among its rural households.
2. Out of the total agricultural households in the country, a little over 60 percent belong to OBCs.
3. In Kerala, a little over 60 percent of agricultural households reported to have received maximum income from sources other than agricultural

activities.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 2 and 3 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3
Answer: (c).

India Signs Deal for 60 US Javelin Anti-Tank Missiles

Why in News?

- **Government-to-Government Deal Signed:** India has signed a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) with the United States for the procurement of the Javelin anti-tank guided missile system for the Indian Army.
- **Procurement Route:** The deal is executed through the US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme, a government-to-government channel for defence acquisitions.
- **Emergency Procurement:** The acquisition is carried out under the 6th tranche of Emergency Procurement (EP-6), which empowers the armed forces to fast-track purchases up to a ceiling of Rs 300 crore per equipment category without Ministry of Defence clearance.

- **Operational Context:** The deal aims to plug critical anti-armour and bunker-busting operational gaps in forward sectors, following Operation Sindoor in May 2025.
- **Deliveries:** The missiles are expected to begin delivery by the end of fiscal year 2026-27.

Deal Details and Package Composition

- **Financial Value:** The deal is valued at approximately Rs 292 crore (around USD 45.7 million)
- **Missile Quantity:** Reports indicate the procurement covers around 60 to 100 Javelin missile rounds, along with 25 Lightweight Command Launch Units (LwCLUs).
- **Additional Equipment:** The package includes one fly-to-buy missile for evaluation, training equipment, missile simulation rounds, battery coolant units, technical manuals, lifecycle support, spare parts, and systems integration and testing.
- **Limitation:** Emergency procurement powers restrict purchases to Rs 300 crore per equipment category, hence the acquisition is in limited numbers.
- **Background Approval:** The US State Department had approved the possible sale in November 2025, following which the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) delivered the required certification to the US Congress.

What is the Javelin Missile System?

- **System Type:** It is a man-portable, shoulder-fired, medium-range anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) designed for individual or dismounted infantry use.
- **Manufacturer:** Jointly produced by the Javelin Joint Venture (JJV), a partnership between US defence majors Lockheed Martin and RTX Corporation (formerly Raytheon).
- **Service History:** First entered service with the US military in 1996 and has been extensively battle-tested in global conflicts including Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Russia-Ukraine war.
- **Production Scale:** The programme has produced more than 55,000 Javelin missiles and over 12,000 reusable Command Launch Units to date.

Javelin's Core Features and Specifications



- **Fire-and-Forget Technology:** Utilises a passive Imaging Infrared (IIR) seeker that automatically tracks targets post-launch. This allows troops to immediately relocate and evade counter-fire after firing.
- **Top-Attack Capability:** The missile climbs before diving onto the top of an armoured vehicle, targeting its roof where armour protection is generally thinner and more vulnerable than the heavily protected front and sides.
- **Soft Launch Mechanism:** Ejects the missile using an initial motor before main ignition, minimising exhaust and enabling safe firing from confined spaces like bunkers and buildings.
- **Range:** Offers an effective operational range of 2.5 to 4 km (can engage targets from approximately 65 metres to up to 4 km).
- **Weight:** Complete system weighs approximately 22 kg, ensuring high mobility for infantry units.
- **Warhead:** Equipped with a tandem shaped-charge High-Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) warhead designed to defeat Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA).
- **Dual-Mode Attack:** Can be employed in both top-attack (against tanks) and direct-attack (against fortifications, bunkers, and helicopters) modes.
- **Day/Night Capability:** The reusable Command Launch Unit (CLU) features both day and thermal optics, allowing operations in day, night, and adverse-weather conditions.

Why is India Acquiring the Javelin?

- **Immediate Operational Capability:** Provides an immediately available and proven capability at a time when anti-armour warfare is becoming increasingly decentralised and mobile.
- **Addressing Critical Gaps:** Fills the operational void in forward sectors following Operation Sindoor, particularly for bunker-busting and anti-armour roles.
- **Battle-Proven Credibility:** The Javelin has demonstrated its effectiveness in modern conflicts, most prominently in

Ukraine, where portable anti-tank weapons challenged much larger armoured formations.

Strengthening US-India Defence Partnership:

The deal strengthens the US-India Major Defence Partnership and demonstrates the depth of US support for the Indian Army.

India's Indigenous MPATGM Programme :

- **MPATGM:** The Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) is an indigenously developed third-generation, fire-and-forget ATGM with top-attack capability, intended to replace the ageing Milan-2T and Konkurs systems in the Indian Army.
- **Recent Milestone:** In January 2026, DRDO successfully flight-tested the MPATGM against a moving target at KK Ranges, Ahilya Nagar, Maharashtra.
- **Indigenous Technologies:** The MPATGM incorporates indigenous technologies including an Imaging Infrared (IIR) homing seeker, all-electric control actuation system, fire control system, tandem warhead, propulsion system, and high-performance sighting system.
- **Launch Platforms:** It can be launched from a tripod or military vehicle launcher, and its IIR seeker enables day-and-night operations.
- **Development Partners:** Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) are the Development-Cum-Production Partners (DcPP) for the weapon system.

Strategic Significance

- **Deepening US-India Defence Ties:** The deal comes after India and the US signed a 10-year Defence Framework in October 2025, aimed at strengthening interoperability across land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.
- **Major Defence Partnership:** The Javelin agreement further strengthens the US-India Major Defence Partnership and opens discussions on mutually beneficial co-production.
- **Broader Defence Acquisitions:** India has also acquired several US-made defence platforms, including Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, M777 howitzers, and is procuring Excalibur precision-guided artillery ammunition under emergency procurement.
- **Indo-Pacific Stability:** The collaboration

reinforces a stronger, more stable security architecture across the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

The Javelin anti-tank missile deal marks a significant milestone in India-US defence cooperation, providing the Indian Army with an immediately available, battle-proven capability to address critical operational gaps. While the acquisition strengthens bilateral ties and opens the door for co-production, it also highlights the ongoing tension between immediate

operational requirements and the long-term goal of indigenous defence manufacturing. The Javelin should be viewed not as a replacement for India's MPATGM programme, but as a complementary capability.

Prelims Previous Year

Question : PYQ

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Javelin anti-tank guided missile system:

1. It is a fire-and-forget missile that

uses an imaging infrared seeker for target tracking.

2. It is manufactured by a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

3. It features a soft-launch mechanism that allows firing from confined spaces.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) – 1 and 3 only.

Why in News?

- **A Decade of Transformation:** The Unified Payments Interface (UPI), developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), has completed ten years of transforming India's digital payment ecosystem.
- **Pilot Launch (April 2016):** UPI was launched on a pilot basis in April 2016 with 21 member banks.
- **Public Launch (August 2016):** It was made available to the public in August 2016 through UPI-enabled banking applications. The exact date is 25 August 2016.
- **Global Recognition:** UPI has emerged as a pillar of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and is now recognised as the world's largest real-time payment system.

What is Unified Payments Interface (UPI)?

- **Definition:** UPI is a real-time payment system developed by NPCI that enables users to access multiple bank accounts through a single mobile application.
- **Integrated Platform:** It integrates fund transfers, banking services, and merchant payments on a single platform and enables 24x7 digital transactions.
- **Secure Payments:** UPI ensures secure payments through two-factor authentication and end-to-end encryption.
- **Interoperability:** UPI enables interoperable payments across different banks and payment service providers.

UPI's Growth Trajectory:

Key Statistics

- **Transaction Volume Growth (FY 2016-17 to FY 2025-26):** Annual UPI transaction volume increased from 2 crore transactions to over 24,162 crore

Unified Payments Interface



transactions, registering an approximate 12,000-fold increase.

- **Transaction Value Growth (FY 2016-17 to FY 2025-26):** Annual transaction value increased from ₹0.07 lakh crore to around ₹314 lakh crore, reflecting more than a 4,000-fold increase.
- **Banking Participation (July 2026):** The UPI ecosystem includes 741 live banks, indicating widespread adoption across India's banking sector.
- **Monthly Transaction Scale (July 2026):** UPI processed 2,365.8 crore transactions with a total transaction value of ₹29.87 lakh crore.
- **Record Month (August 2026):** UPI transactions touched a record 24.51 billion, with transaction value reaching ₹29.82 lakh crore.
- **Digital Payment Share:** UPI accounted

for around 70% of India's digital payment transactions in FY 2023-24 and 81% of retail digital payments in FY 2024-25.

- **User Base:** UPI serves 504 million Indians and handles 20 billion monthly transactions.

- **Merchant Network:** UPI reaches 65 million merchants.

- **Geographic Penetration:** UPI's presence now spans 99 per cent of India's more than 19,000 pin codes.

Evolution of UPI:

Year-Wise Milestones

A. 2016: The Beginning

- **April 2016:** Pilot launch with 21 member banks.
- **August 2016:** Public launch through UPI-enabled banking applications.
- **December 2016:** BHIM application launched to facilitate direct bank-to-bank transactions using UPI.

B. 2017: Merchant Payments Expansion

- Dynamic QR codes introduced, enabling faster merchant payments by automatically including transaction details and reducing manual entry errors.

C. 2018: UPI 2.0

- **Invoice in the Inbox:** Viewing bills before payment authorisation.
- **Signed Intent and QR:** Secure payment approvals.
- **UPI Mandates:** For recurring payments.
- **Overdraft Account Linking:** For UPI transactions.

UPI's Global Footprint

- **Global Leadership in Real-Time Payments:** As of 2024, UPI accounted for around 49% of global real-time payment transaction volume, as highlighted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its report "Growing Retail Digital Payments: The Value of Interoperability" (June



2025).

- **International Presence:** UPI is operational in 11 foreign countries through UPI acceptance and/or cross-border remittance services.
- **List of Countries:** Bhutan, Nepal, Singapore, UAE, France, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Qatar, Cambodia, Greece and Maldives.
- **Latest Additions (2026):**
 - Cambodia (June 2026): NIPL partnered with ACLEDA Bank Plc. to launch UPI acceptance.
 - Greece (June 2026): UPI went live for cross-border remittances through Eurobank.
 - Maldives (July 2026): Cross-border remittances between Maldives' instant payment system 'Favara' and India's UPI became operational.
- **Launch in France:** UPI was launched from the Eiffel Tower in France, marking a

significant milestone in UPI's expansion in Europe.

UPI as a Pillar of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

- **DPI Success Story:** UPI has emerged as one of the most successful pillars of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), providing an interoperable, accessible, and scalable payment framework.
- **Financial Inclusion Driver:** UPI has become the backbone of India's digital payments ecosystem and a critical driver of financial inclusion.
- **Economic Transformation:** Its rapid adoption demonstrates the potential of India's DPI model in promoting financial inclusion and economic transformation.
- **Global Model:** Beyond its national success, UPI is emerging as a global model for secure, interoperable, and scalable digital public infrastructure.

Conclusion

UPI has fundamentally transformed India's payment landscape by making digital transactions instant, secure, interoperable, and inclusive. From a domestic

payment platform launched in 2016, it has evolved into a globally recognised digital payment infrastructure, now operational in 11 countries and accounting for nearly half of global real-time payment volumes. Its journey from 2 crore annual transactions to over 24,162 crore transactions in just a decade exemplifies the power of India's Digital Public Infrastructure model.

Prelims Previous Year Question. PYQ

Q. Which of the following is a most likely consequence of implementing the 'Unified Payments Interface (UPI)'? (UPSC Prelims 2017)

- (a) Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.
- (b) Digital currency will totally replace physical currency in the economy.
- (c) Online payments will be possible only through debit cards and credit cards.
- (d) Interoperability will be achieved among all digital payment systems.

Answer: (a) – Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary:



Why in News?

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary in Jamnagar, Gujarat has emerged as a significant breeding stronghold for the Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), according to a study published in the Journal of Threatened Taxa.

About the Sanctuary

- **Location:** Jamnagar district, Gujarat, along the south coast of Gulf of Kutch
- **Area:** 605 hectares of marshy wetlands

and mangroves

- **Designation:** Declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1981
- **Ramsar Status:** Designated a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site No. 2464) in February 2022
- **Unique Feature:** Combines freshwater and saline habitats
- **Flyway:** Lies along the Central Asian Flyway, supporting both resident and migratory waterbirds
- **Biodiversity:** Records over 312 species

About the Black-necked Stork

- **Scientific Name:** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*
- **Status:** One of India's largest wetland birds
- **Legal Protection:** Listed under Schedule II of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (following the 2022 Amendment)
- **IUCN Status:** Classified as Near Threatened, primarily due to habitat loss and population decline
- **Population Trend:** India has witnessed a long-term decline of -59.56%
- **Distribution:** Resident species across the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia

Research Findings

- **Study Period:** July 2024 – March 2025
- **Conducted By:** Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation
- **Methodology:** 48 georeferenced sampling points across 8 management zones; over 320 hours of observation
- **Nests Found:** 4 active nests within the sanctuary
- **Breeding Success:** Each nest produced two fledglings – total 8 juveniles; 100%

fledging success rate

- **Peak Population:** 21 birds (including 5 non-breeding adults) during the study period
- **Nesting Sites:** All nests built on Neltuma juliflora (formerly Prosopis juliflora, locally called gando baval) at heights of 3–4.5 metres
- **Nesting Characteristics:** Located near shallow wetlands (water depth 0.3–0.7m) with emergent vegetation, open water and elevated ground
- **Parental Care:** Adults attended nests for average 62 minutes per visit; parents swapped in 94% of foraging departures
- **No Mortality:** Zero instances of nest abandonment, predation or chick mortality

Conservation Significance

- **Adaptation to Invasive Species:** Storks traditionally nest on large native trees (acacias, figs) but adapted to structurally suitable invasive trees where natives are limited
- **Habitat Requirements:** Successful breeding depends on availability of suitable feeding areas, aquatic prey, nesting



trees, shallow water, vegetation and low disturbance

- **Management Insights:** Shallow water, emergent vegetation, elevated sites and low disturbance are crucial for sustaining breeding population
- **Conservation Value:** Findings strengthen scientific basis for targeted conservation strategies in Gujarat

Conclusion

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary's emergence as

a key breeding stronghold for the Near Threatened Black-necked Stork underscores the conservation value of Gujarat's Ramsar wetlands. The remarkable 100% fledging success rate, along with the species' ability to adapt nesting to invasive Neltuma juliflora trees, offers critical insights for habitat management.

Prelims Practice Question:

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Black-necked Stork:

1. It is classified as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List.
 2. It is listed under Schedule II of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
 3. Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary in Gujarat has recently emerged as an important breeding site for this species.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**
- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only.

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