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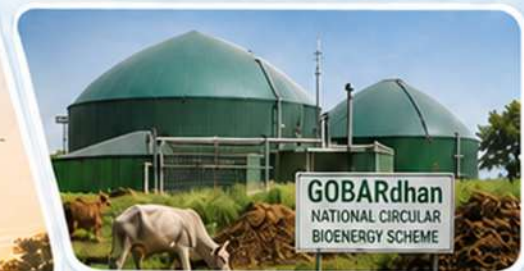
Weekly
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Compilation
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Guiding Dreams, Empowering Future
By **DR. V. RAM PRASATH MANOHAR, IAS**



EXCLUSIVE CURRENT AFFAIRS BULLETIN

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INDEX

- Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA)
- Heatwaves and Lightning Included as Notified Natural Calamities
- Indigenous African Swine Fever Vaccine Developed by ICAR
- RBI to Resume Licensing of Urban Cooperative Banks
- GOBARDHAN: National Circular Bioenergy Scheme
- Agni-4 Ballistic Missile: Successful Test-Fire
- 10 Years of Government e-Marketplace (GeM)
- Nauru Renamed as Republic of Naoero
- Agasthyamalai Evictions and the Forest Rights Act, 2006

Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA)



Why in News?

- Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan signed the Makkah/Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August 2026 in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.
- The pact provides that an armed attack on one member will be treated as an attack on all three.
- It represents a new trilateral security arrangement amid continuing instability in West Asia.

Important Features

- Members: Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan.
- Collective defence: An attack on one signatory is considered an attack on all three.
- Purpose: Strengthen deterrence, defence cooperation and regional security.
- Coordination: The framework envisages closer military coordination, training, exercises and intelligence cooperation.
- Nature: The members describe it as defensive and not directed against any particular country.
- Important caution: It resembles NATO Article 5 in principle, but it is not NATO. Detailed operational obligations remain limited in the public domain.

Background

- The MJDA expands the Saudi Arabia–

Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement signed on 17 September 2025.

- The 2025 bilateral pact stated that aggression against either Saudi Arabia or Pakistan would be treated as aggression against both.
- Turkey's entry in 2026 converted the bilateral arrangement into a trilateral framework.
- Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have long-standing defence links, while Turkey has strong military and defence-industrial relations with both countries.

Why Was the Agreement Formed?

- Regional insecurity: Missile, drone and maritime threats have increased security concerns in West Asia.
- Strategic autonomy: The members seek stronger regional capabilities beyond exclusive dependence on the United States security umbrella.
- Saudi interests: Protection of energy infrastructure, trade routes and Vision 2030 investments.
- Turkey's interests: Greater strategic influence and wider markets for its defence industry.
- Pakistan's interests: Stronger defence, economic and energy ties with Gulf countries and a larger role in West Asia.

Combined Strengths

- Saudi Arabia: Financial resources, energy power and a strategic Gulf location.
- Turkey: Large armed forces, NATO experience, drones, aerospace and defence technology.
- Pakistan: Large military, nuclear capability and long-standing defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia.
- Together, the three countries seek stronger deterrence and greater strategic autonomy.

Possible Implications for India

- Pakistan may gain greater diplomatic and strategic influence in West Asia.
- Saudi finance and Turkish defence technology could support Pakistan's military modernisation.
- Closer coordination among the three countries may affect security dynamics in the Western Indian Ocean.
- Turkey may become a stronger competitor in Gulf defence markets where India is seeking exports.
- The collective-defence clause creates uncertainty about the response of Saudi Arabia and Turkey during a future India–Pakistan crisis.
- However, India–Saudi relations have independent foundations in energy,

trade, investment, technology and the Strategic Partnership Council.

- No publicly confirmed nuclear guarantee by Pakistan to Saudi Arabia should be assumed from the agreement.

Way Forward

- Maintain strong and balanced relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman and Qatar.
- Deepen maritime security and defence cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean.
- Continue engagement through the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor and I2U2.
- Protect long-term connectivity interests in Chabahar Port and the International North–South Transport Corridor.
- Accelerate indigenous capabilities in drones, counter-drone systems, elec-

tronic warfare and air defence. Use the Indian Ocean Rim Association to promote inclusive and transparent regional security cooperation.

Conclusion

The MJDA is an important shift towards regionally driven collective security in West Asia. It combines Saudi financial strength, Turkish defence technology and Pakistan's military capability. For India, the appropriate response is balanced diplomacy, diversified Gulf partnerships, stronger maritime engagement and faster indigenous defence modernisation.

Previous Year

Question (Prelims 2023)

Q. Consider the following statements:
Statement I: Israel has established

diplomatic relations with some Arab countries.

Statement II: The Arab Peace Initiative mediated by Saudi Arabia has been signed by both Israel and the Arab League.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II is the correct explanation of Statement I
- (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II is not the correct explanation of Statement I
- (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect
- (d) Statement I is incorrect but Statement II is correct

Answer: (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is incorrect.

Heatwaves & Lightning Included as Notified Natural Calamities



Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs included heatwaves and lightning as notified natural calamities under SDRF and NDRF guidelines for the 2026–31 award period.
- The decision follows the 16th Finance Commission recommendation because extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change.

- Minister Nityanand Rai informed the Lok Sabha through a written reply.

16th Finance Commission Rationale

- Hot days and warm nights have increased significantly, especially during the last decade.
- Lightning has become a growing threat and mainly affects vulnerable people.
- Both events can exceed the coping

capacity of communities and need national-level recognition.

- The 15th Finance Commission had earlier not supported their inclusion.

Expansion of the Notified List

- The notified list has increased from 12 to 14 categories.
- Existing categories: Cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami,

- hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloud-burst, pest attack, frost and cold wave.
- New categories: Heatwaves and lightning.
- States can now use SDRF funds for relief. NDRF can provide additional support when required.
- Heatwave mitigation projects are eligible under Disaster Mitigation Funds.

Financial Implications

- Earlier, states could use only up to 10% of the annual SDRF allocation for heatwave relief under the "local disaster" provision. This restriction is now removed.
- The 16th Finance Commission recommended ₹2.04 lakh crore for states, compared with ₹1.6 lakh crore earlier.
- The Centre-State sharing formula remains 75:25.
- The notification makes about USD 30 billion available for all disasters during 2026–31.

Understanding Heatwaves

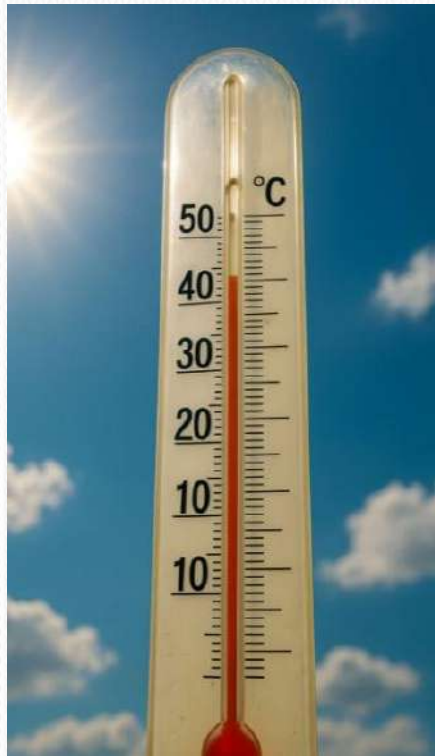
- A heatwave is a prolonged period of abnormally high temperature.
- In India, heatwaves mainly occur from March to June and usually peak in May.
- IMD declares heatwaves using region-specific temperature limits.
- About 23 of 36 states and Union Territories are heatwave-prone.
- Heatwaves were earlier called "invisible killers".

Understanding Lightning

- Lightning is a rapid electrical discharge in the atmosphere.
- It can occur within a cloud, between clouds, or between a cloud and the ground.
- It follows the path of least resistance and may strike the nearest object with high electrical potential.
- A lightning rod is a copper conductor installed on buildings to carry the electric current safely into the ground.

Significance of the Move

- Strengthens India's disaster-risk financing system.
- Brings heatwaves and lightning under the same framework as cyclones, floods and landslides.
- Recognises them as serious disasters rather than only weather events.
- Addresses the long-pending demand of states.



- Earlier, 11 states had notified heatwaves and 16 states had notified lightning as state-specific disasters.

Government Initiatives

- NPCCHH: Heat-health measures under the National Action Plan on Heat-Related Illness.
- NHRIDS: Active in more than 51,000 reporting units, including PHCs and hospitals.
- Heat Action Plans: NDMA issued guidelines for heatwave-prone states and Union Territories.
- Colour-coded health advisories are issued based on IMD warnings.

Challenges & Way Forward

- Rising humidity and warmer nights are creating new health risks.
- Very warm nights have increased in cities such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chennai and Bengaluru.
- Heat affects people with heart, respiratory, kidney, diabetes and mental-health conditions.
- Elderly people, children below six years and pregnant women are highly vulnerable.
- Heat reduces worker productivity and puts outdoor workers at risk.
- Cooling shelters, drinking-water facilities and heat-sensitive urban planning are needed.
- Special attention is required for

informal and outdoor workers.

Conclusion

- The inclusion of heatwaves and lightning expands India's notified disaster list to 14 categories. It allows states to use more disaster-response and mitigation funds. Effective implementation should focus on cooling shelters, better urban planning, early warning systems and protection of vulnerable people, especially informal outdoor workers.

Preliminary Examination Question

Q. With reference to notified natural calamities in India, consider the following statements:

Heatwaves and lightning have been recently added to the notified list under SDRF and NDRF guidelines. The 16th Finance Commission recommended this inclusion because extreme weather events are increasing.

Before this, states could use up to 50% of SDRF allocation for heatwave relief under the "local disaster" provision.

Which statements are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 2 only.

Why in News?

- ICAR-National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (ICAR-NIHSAD), Bhopal, developed India's first indigenous vaccine against African Swine Fever (ASF).
- The Union Agriculture Minister launched the vaccine nationwide on 4 August 2026, coinciding with ICAR's Foundation Day.
- African Swine Fever (ASF): Key Facts
Cause: African Swine Fever Virus (ASFV).
Affected animals: Domestic pigs and wild boars.
- Symptoms: High fever, internal bleeding and skin lesions.
- Mortality: Can approach 100% in infected herds.
- Human risk: ASF is not zoonotic and does not infect humans.
- Humans can mechanically carry the virus through contaminated clothes, footwear, vehicles, equipment and pork products.
- ASF is a notifiable disease under the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

Global Spread

- First detected in Kenya in 1921.
- After reaching Georgia in 2007, ASF spread across Europe, Asia, Oceania and parts of the Caribbean.
- Only a few countries have commercial ASF vaccines.
- Vietnam became the first country to commercialise an ASF vaccine in 2022.

ASF in India

- First reported in India in 2020.
- It later spread to several states and

Union Territories.

- The North-Eastern states are the worst affected because pig farming supports livelihoods and food security.
- Assam suffered an estimated loss of about ₹276 crore during 2020–21.
- In Mizoram, 11,382 families were affected and losses reached about ₹982 crore up to 2025.

Vaccine: Technical Details

- Type: Live-attenuated, gene-deleted vaccine.
- Virus strain: Gene-II ASF virus strain. Indian isolate: ASFV/Ind/NIHSAD/Sw-2022/1055.
- Method: Specific genes are deleted to reduce virulence while retaining the ability to produce immunity.
- Cell culture: MA-104 cell line is used for virus growth.
- The MA-104 cell line is widely available and does not depend on expensive patented cell lines.

Safety and Validation

- Laboratory tests covered sterility, purity and safety.
- Genetic stability, immune response and protective effectiveness were tested.
- Reversion-to-virulence studies were completed.
- Field validation was conducted with the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD).

Administration

- Target: Healthy pigs above eight weeks of age.
- Dose: 1 millilitre through intramuscular injection.
- Booster: Given 14 days after the first dose.

Significance

- Reduces pig deaths and financial losses of small and marginal farmers.
- Important for the North-East, where pig rearing supports rural income and nutrition.
- Reduces dependence on culling and strict biosecurity as the only control measures.
- Strengthens livestock health, food security and national biosecurity.
- Improves preparedness against transboundary animal diseases.
- Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat by reducing dependence on imported veterinary vaccines.
- The low-cost MA-104 platform can support affordable mass production and exports.

Indigenous African Swine Fever Vaccine Developed by ICAR

MA-104 cell-based live attenuated African Swine Fever vaccine for pigs



Developed by

ICAR – National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases,
Aasand Nagar, Bhopal



Store at
4–8°C

MA-104: 1ml dose
For intramuscular
injection in neck area
(behind the ear) in pigs

STORE AT 4–8°C
DO NOT FREEZE
For Veterinary use only



- Places India among a small group of countries with indigenous ASF vaccine technology.

Conclusion

- India's first indigenous ASF vaccine is an important achievement in veterinary science. Its affordable gene-deleted platform can protect pig farmers, especially in the North-East, reduce



economic losses, strengthen national biosecurity and support self-reliance in animal-health technology.

Preliminary Examination

Practice Question

With reference to 'African Swine Fever (ASF)', consider the following statements:
It is a viral disease affecting pigs with a mortality rate approaching 100 percent.

It is a zoonotic disease that can be transmitted from pigs to humans through direct contact. Currently, there is no effective vaccine available globally against ASF. Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a) 1 only.

Why Was Licensing Stopped in 2004?

- Liberal licensing during 1993–2001 caused rapid expansion of UCBs.
- Weak supervision, poor management and governance failures made many new banks financially unsound.
- Several bank failures exposed structural weaknesses in the sector.
- The Madhavpura Mercantile Cooperative Bank crisis was an important warning.
- RBI stopped fresh licences until the legal, regulatory and supervisory system became stronger.

Main Eligibility Conditions

- Applicant: A cooperative credit society with at least 10 years of active operations.

RBI to

Resume Licensing of Urban Cooperative Banks

Why in News?

- The RBI announced that it will resume 'on-tap' licensing of Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) after a gap of more than two decades.
- Draft licensing guidelines were released during the August 2026 monetary policy review for public consultation.
- On-tap licensing means eligible applicants can apply throughout the year.
- The Cooperation Ministry encouraged UCBs to join NUCFDC for technology, cybersecurity, training and institutional support.

- Financial record: Positive and improving operating and financial performance during the previous five years.
- Minimum deposits: ₹10,000 crore.
- Minimum net worth: ₹300 crore as on 31 March of the preceding financial year.
- Capital adequacy: CRAR of at least 12%.
- Asset quality: Net NPA must not exceed 3% when the licence is granted.
- Geographical reach: Preference to multi-state cooperative societies with a wider and diversified area of operation.

About Urban Cooperative Banks

- UCBs are cooperative institutions that provide banking services mainly in urban and semi-urban areas.
- They accept deposits and provide loans to members, small businesses, traders and local communities.
- Banking activities are regulated by RBI under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- Registration, incorporation and management are governed by the concerned Registrar of Cooperative Societies or Central Registrar for multi-state societies.
- This creates a system of dual regulation.

National Urban Cooperative Finance & Development Corporation (NUCFDC)

- NUCFDC is an RBI-registered NBFC and an umbrella organisation for UCBs.



- It aims to improve financial strength and depositor confidence in the UCB sector.
- Fund-based support includes liquidity and capital assistance and support for priority-sector loan transactions.
- Non-fund services include common digital technology, cybersecurity, compliance support and employee training.
- It is seeking recognition as a Self-Regulatory Organisation for the UCB sector.
- It supports a network of more than 1,400 UCBs serving over 90 million customers.

Interest Rate

Framework Reform

- RBI also proposed rationalising interest-rate regulations for regulated financial entities.
- The review covers operational aspects of MCLR and External Benchmark Lending Rate frameworks.
- It aims to standardise interest calculation and benchmark-reset practices.
- Expected benefits include transparent loan pricing, stronger monetary-policy transmission and better consumer protection.

Significance

- Ends the long freeze on new UCB licences.
- Allows only large and financially sound credit societies to enter banking.
- Promotes better governance, professional management and financial stability.
- Can strengthen cooperative banking and financial inclusion in urban and semi-urban areas.
- NUCFDC support can improve technology, cybersecurity and regulatory compliance.
- Stronger supervision and liquidity support can improve depositor confidence.

Challenges

- High capital and deposit requirements may exclude small credit societies.
- Dual regulation between RBI and cooperative authorities may continue to cause coordination problems.
- Monitoring compliance across many UCBs will be difficult.
- Smaller UCBs may struggle with the cost of technology and cybersecurity.

Conclusion

The return of on-tap licensing marks an

important change in cooperative banking regulation. Strict financial conditions seek to prevent weak institutions from becoming banks, while NUCFDC can provide technology, liquidity and compliance support. The success of the reform will depend on sound governance, effective supervision and better coordination under the dual-regulation system.

Preliminary Examination Practice Question

Q. With reference to 'Urban Cooperative Banks' in India, consider the following statements: They are supervised and regulated by local boards set up by the State Governments.

They can issue equity shares and preference shares. They were brought under the purview of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 through an amendment in 1966.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only.

GOBARdhan: National Circular Bioenergy Scheme

Why in News?

The Union Cabinet approved GOBARdhan as the National Circular Bioenergy Scheme on 6 August 2026.

It creates a unified national framework to convert organic waste into clean energy and promote rural prosperity.

The scheme has a total outlay of ₹23,731 crore for ten years.

About GOBARdhan

- Full form: Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan.
- Purpose: Convert cattle dung, crop residue, kitchen waste and market waste into Compressed Biogas (CBG) and bio-slurry.
- Original launch: 30 April 2018 under Swachh Bharat Mission–Gramin; it was later included in SBM-G Phase II.
- New framework: Approved in 2026 as a unified national circular-bioenergy scheme.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- Period: FY 2026–27 to FY 2035–36.
- Outlay: ₹23,731 crore.

Why Is the Scheme Needed?

- India imports nearly half of its natural-gas requirement.
- A large share of India's LNG imports passes through the Strait of Hormuz, creating supply risks during geopolitical disruptions.
- The CBG sector faces irregular feedstock supply, high initial cost, weak distribution infrastructure and uncertain offtake.
- A unified framework is needed to create a stable market and attract investment.

What is Compressed Biogas (CBG)?

- Raw biogas contains about 55–65% methane, 35–44% carbon dioxide and traces of other gases.
- Biogas is purified to high methane content and compressed at high pressure to produce CBG.
- CBG is similar to natural gas in composition and energy value.
- It can replace or blend with CNG and can be used in transport, industry and commercial establishments.

Six Growth Engines

- Assured offtake: City Gas Distribution entities must procure CBG—3% in FY 2026–27, 4% in FY 2027–28 and 5% from FY 2028–29 in CNG-Transport and PNG-Domestic segments.
- Stable pricing: Administered price of ₹2,110 per MMBTU, about ₹105 per kg, with a minimum ten-year horizon.
- Capital assistance: Up to ₹2 crore per tonne per day of installed capacity for eligible greenfield projects; eligible brownfield expansion is also covered.
- Pipeline support: Assistance for cluster and standalone pipelines connecting CBG plants with trunk pipelines and city-gas networks.
- Credit guarantee: Up to 85% guarantee on eligible loans for MSME-based CBG projects.
- Ecosystem Challenge Fund: Supports feedstock mapping, aggregation, district planning, technology and capacity building.

Expected Outcomes

- Nearly ten-fold rise in domestic CBG production.
- Large private investment through assured demand, stable pricing and capital support.
- More than ₹75,000 crore contribution to GDP over ten years.
- More than 1.5 lakh jobs.
- Reduction of over 40 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

- Around 250 million metric tonnes of organic fertiliser.
- As of 6 August 2026, 1,908 plants were registered; 217 were commissioned and 339 were under construction.

Related Government Initiatives

- SATAT: Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation; provided the initial policy push for CBG.
- Market Development Assistance: ₹1,500 per metric tonne for Fermented Organic Manure, Liquid FOM and Phosphate-Rich Organic Manure.
- Biomass Aggregation Machinery Scheme: Supports purchase of biomass-collection equipment; outlay of ₹564.75 crore.
- Development of Pipeline Infrastructure Scheme: Supports CBG evacuation and pipeline connectivity.
- National Bioenergy Programme: Provides Central Financial Assistance for eligible bioenergy projects.
- GOBARDhan Unified Registration Portal: Gives CBG and Bio-CNG plants a registration number to access government support.

How the

New Framework Differs

- Earlier, SATAT, MDA, machinery support, pipeline support and financial assistance operated as separate initiatives.
- The 2026 scheme brings the complete CBG value chain under one national framework.
- Its six growth engines cover demand, pricing, capital, pipelines, credit and local ecosystem development.

Significance for India

- Energy security: Reduces dependence on imported natural gas.
- Circular economy: Converts cattle dung, farm residue and municipal organic waste into energy and fertiliser.

- Rural prosperity: Creates income opportunities for farmers, cooperatives and rural entrepreneurs.
- Waste management: Reduces unmanaged waste, crop-residue burning and landfill disposal.
- Climate action: Replaces fossil fuel and prevents methane emissions from decomposing organic waste.
- Atmanirbhar Bharat: Promotes domestic clean-energy production and lowers the import bill.
- Viksit Bharat: Supports clean growth, employment and rural development.

Conclusion

- GOBARDhan brings demand assurance, stable pricing, capital support, pipeline connectivity and credit assistance under one framework. It can turn organic waste into clean energy, strengthen energy security, raise rural income, create jobs and support India's circular-economy and climate goals.

Previous Year

Question (Prelims 2020)

Q. According to India's National Policy on Biofuels, which of the following can be used as raw materials for the production of biofuels?

Cassava

Damaged wheat grains

Groundnut seeds

Horse gram

Rotten potatoes

Sugar beet

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1, 2, 5 and 6 only

(b) 1, 3, 4 and 6 only

(c) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only

(d) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Answer: (a) 1, 2, 5 and 6 only.



Why in News?

India successfully test-fired the nuclear-capable Agni-4 ballistic missile on 6 August 2026. The launch took place from the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur, Odisha. It was conducted under the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). The trial validated all operational and technical parameters.

Agni-4: Key Facts

- Type: Surface-to-surface ballistic missile.
- Official Indian classification: Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM).
- Range: About 4,000 km.
- Developer: Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- Length: About 20 metres.
- Launch weight: Around 17 tonnes.
- Payload: About one tonne; capable of carrying nuclear or conventional warheads.
- Propulsion: Two-stage solid-fuel system.
- Mobility: Road-mobile launch system.
- Earlier name: Agni-II Prime.

Major Technologies

- Two-stage solid propulsion enables quicker launch preparation and easier storage than liquid-fuel systems.
- Ring Laser Gyro-based inertial navigation guides the missile without continuous dependence on external signals.
- Thrust-vector control helps correct the missile's flight path.
- Advanced re-entry heat protection shields the warhead and onboard electronics from extreme heat.
- Composite materials reduce weight and improve range and performance.
- Compact avionics with redundant systems improve reliability.

About the User Trial

- A user trial is conducted by the armed forces to check the operational readiness of an inducted weapon system.
- The 2026 launch was supervised by the Strategic Forces Command.
- Radars, telemetry systems and electro-optical tracking stations monitored the flight.
- Successful validation confirmed the reliability of the missile and its supporting systems.

Strategic Forces Command

- The Strategic Forces Command manages India's land-based and air-delivered strategic nuclear forces and works under the Nuclear Command Authority.
- It conducts training and user trials of operational strategic missile systems.

Agni-4

Ballistic Missile:

Successful Test-Fire

Significance

- Operational readiness: Confirms that Agni-4 and its supporting systems are ready for use.
- Strategic deterrence: Strengthens India's credible minimum deterrence posture.
- Range coverage: Fills the range gap between shorter-range Agni systems and Agni-5.
- Survivability: Road mobility allows deployment from different locations and makes detection more difficult.
- Second-strike capability: A survivable land-based missile force supports assured retaliation under India's nuclear doctrine.
- Indigenous capability: Demonstrates India's progress in solid propulsion, guidance, composites and re-entry technology.

Agni Missile Family:

Exam Points

- Agni-I: Short-range ballistic missile; about 700–1,200 km.
- Agni-Prime: New-generation, two-stage, canisterised missile; about 1,000–2,000 km.
- Agni-II: About 2,000–2,500 km.
- Agni-III: About 3,000–3,500 km.
- Agni-IV: About 4,000 km; two-stage and road-mobile.
- Agni-V: Long-range, three-stage, canisterised missile; more than 5,000 km.
- MIRV technology has been demonstrated on an advanced Agni missile/Agni-V platform.

Ballistic Missile Classification

Short-Range Ballistic Missile (SRBM): Below 1,000 km.

- Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM): 1,000–3,000 km.
- Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM): 3,000–5,500 km.
- Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM): More than 5,500 km.
- Exam note: India officially describes Agni-4 as an MRBM, while its 4,000-km range falls in the IRBM band under commonly used global classification.



Strategic Context

- Agni-4 forms part of the land-based leg of India's nuclear triad.
- The Agni programme grew out of the

Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).

- It strengthens strategic autonomy through indigenous missile design and production.
- India follows a doctrine of credible minimum deterrence and has declared a No First Use policy.

Conclusion

The successful Agni-4 user trial confirms the reliability and operational readiness of India's 4,000-km-range strategic missile. Its solid-fuel propulsion, advanced navigation and road mobility strengthen the survivability of India's land-based nuclear deterrent and support credible minimum deterrence.

Previous Year Question (Prelims 2014)

Q. With reference to Agni-IV Missile, which of the following statements is/are correct?

It is a surface-to-surface missile. It is fuelled by liquid propellant only. It can deliver one-tonne nuclear warheads about 7,500 km away. Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a) 1 only.

10 YEARS OF GOVERNMENT E-MARKETPLACE (GEM)

Why in News?

- Government e-Marketplace completed 10 years of operations on 9 August 2026.
- It was launched on 9 August 2016 to transform public procurement through digital technology.
- During the decade, GeM facilitated cumulative transactions worth more than ₹20 lakh crore through over 3.78 crore orders.

What is Government e-Marketplace?

- About: A unified, end-to-end digital platform for paperless, cashless, contactless, transparent and competitive public procurement.
- Launch date: 9 August 2016.
- Nodal authority: Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- Governing entity: GeM SPV, a 100% government-owned Section 8 not-for-profit company, operates and maintains the platform.
- Purpose: It applies digital technology, standardised procedures and public-procurement best practices to simplify government

purchasing.

- Coverage: Central and State Ministries and Departments, public sector undertakings, autonomous bodies, local bodies, Panchayats and cooperatives can use the platform.

Key Features of GeM

- End-to-end procurement: Digitises seller registration, product or service listing, bidding, contract award, order fulfilment and payment.
- Transparency and competition: Supports direct purchase, comparison, electronic bidding and reverse auctions. Digital records, automated workflows and real-time monitoring reduce discretion and improve accountability.
- Data-driven procurement: GeM Availability Report, Past Transaction Summary,



Last Purchase Price and price-trend analytics help buyers assess supply and price reasonableness.

- **Integration:** Integration with the Central Public Procurement Portal, Indian Railway Electronic Procurement System and Defence Public Procurement Portal aims to create a more unified public-procurement ecosystem.
- **Procurement modes:** Offers direct purchase, comparison, electronic bidding, reverse auctions and Rate Contracts for recurring requirements.
- **Forward Auction Module:** Enables transparent, rule-based disposal of e-waste, machinery, vehicles, properties and other public assets.

Ten Years of GeM:

Scale and Growth

- Annual Gross Merchandise Value increased from ₹422 crore in FY 2016–17 to more than ₹5 lakh crore in each of FY 2024–25 and FY 2025–26.
- GMV reached ₹1.47 lakh crore in the first four months of FY 2026–27.
- Cumulative procurement crossed ₹20 lakh crore during the decade.
- More than 3.78 crore orders were executed.
- Registered sellers increased from 3,339 at launch to nearly 25 lakh.
- Buyer organisations increased from 1,707 to more than 1.37 lakh.
- The platform offers over 10,660 product categories and more than 350 service categories.

Defence Procurement

on GeM

- The defence sector is a major user of GeM.
- The Department of Military Affairs crossed ₹1.35 lakh crore in cumulative GMV as of 6 August 2026.

Inclusivity and

Empowerment

- **Micro and Small Enterprises:** More than 11 lakh registered MSEs executed over 51 lakh orders worth more than ₹2.36 lakh crore in FY 2025–26. Cumulatively, MSEs fulfilled orders worth over ₹9.07 lakh crore and accounted for about 45.6% of total GMV.
- **Women-led enterprises:** More than 2.1 lakh registered women-led MSEs secured procurement exceeding ₹28,000 crore, supported by Womaniya and

partnerships including UN Women.

- **SC/ST enterprises:** Procurement from SC/ST enterprises crossed ₹6,000 crore, with nearly 28% annual growth.
- **Startups:** Procurement from startups crossed ₹19,000 crore, with growth of more than 36%.

Inclusive Initiatives

under GeM

- **SWAYATT:** Startups, Women and Youth Advantage through e-Transactions promotes the participation of startups, women entrepreneurs, MSEs and Self-Help Groups. It was launched on 19 February 2019.
- **Womaniya:** Promotes products made by women entrepreneurs and women Self-Help Groups.
- **SARAS Collection:** Connects rural Self-Help Groups with government buyers.
- **Startup Runway 2.0:** Provides startups with a dedicated space to display innovative products and services.

Seller Support & Financing

- **GeM Sahay:** Allows eligible proprietorship sellers to obtain instant, collateral-free and paperless working-capital loans for fulfilling government orders without requiring buyer consent. Loan amounts range from ₹5,000 to ₹10 lakh.
- **GeM Sahay 2.0:** A mobile-based inclusive lending platform through which sellers can obtain loans up to ₹10 lakh after acceptance of an order.
- **GeM Suvidha Kendras:** Under a June 2026 partnership with CSC-SPV, 50 pilot centres assist sellers with registration, vendor assessment, catalogue creation, training and grievance redressal.
- **Capacity building:** Partnerships with AJNIFM, CareEdge Ratings, the National Centre for Good Governance and the Indian Institute of Public Administration support training, research and policy development.
- **EPFO integration:** Linkage with the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation strengthens labour-law and social-security compliance in manpower outsourcing services.

Innovation &

Emerging Technologies

- **IN-SPACE:** Partnership for procurement of space-technology products and services.
- **Drone Federation India:** A partnership

initiated in April 2025 to expand government access to drones and related technology.

Alignment with

National Initiatives

- **Digital India:** Advances paperless, cashless and contactless procurement.
- **Make in India:** Creates procurement opportunities for domestically manufactured goods.
- **Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** Supports self-reliance by promoting domestic suppliers and production.
- **Vocal for Local:** Encourages government buyers to procure local goods and services.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Simplifies government contracting through online processes, digitally generated contracts and removal of caution-money requirements in relevant cases.

Future Roadmap:

GeM's Second Decade

- **Artificial Intelligence:** Use AI more deeply for price intelligence, price sanity, fraud detection and marketplace integrity.
- **Last-mile access:** Expand GeM Suvidha Kendras for registration, catalogue support, training and grievance redressal across districts.
- **Sustainable procurement:** Integrate green and sustainable purchasing practices into public procurement.
- **State integration:** Strengthen participation and integration of States, public enterprises and Panchayats.
- **Credit access:** Improve access to working capital and institutional credit for sellers.

Significance for India

- **Transparency:** Digital records, automated workflows and real-time monitoring reduce discretion, information gaps and opportunities for corruption.
- **Efficiency:** Shorter procurement cycles, wider supplier choice and competitive price discovery produce cost and time savings.
- **Inclusivity:** Government demand becomes more accessible to MSEs, women entrepreneurs, SC/ST enterprises, startups and SHGs.
- **Ease of Doing Business:** Online registration, bidding, contracts, payments and seller-support services simplify participation in government procurement.

- Digital governance: GeM is a leading example of technology-enabled governance and digital public infrastructure.
- Aatmanirbhar Bharat: Domestic sourcing supports local manufacturing, innovation and self-reliance.

Conclusion

In ten years, GeM has grown from a small procurement platform with annual GMV of ₹422 crore into a national marketplace with cumulative transactions exceeding ₹20 lakh crore. Its transparent digital processes, large buyer and seller network, and inclusive programmes have reshaped

public procurement. As GeM enters its second decade, greater use of artificial intelligence, wider last-mile support, sustainable procurement, deeper State integration and easier credit can further strengthen efficient and inclusive governance.

Civil Services Prelims

Practice Question

- With reference to the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), consider the following statements:
- It is an initiative of the Ministry of

Electronics and Information Technology.

- It is a one-stop portal for procurement of goods and services by the Central Government only.
- It aims to ensure transparency and efficiency in public procurement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 3 only.

Agasthyamalai Evictions and the FOREST RIGHTS ACT, 2006



Why in News?

- In *A. John Kennedy and Others v. State of Tamil Nadu and Others*, the Supreme Court ordered a time-bound removal of encroachments from protected forests in the Agasthyamalai ecological landscape.
- The judgment was delivered on 29 May 2026 by a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta in Civil Appeal Nos. 6395-6397 of 2025; it is reported as 2026 INSC 605.
- The Court acted after Central Empowered Committee reports recorded extensive

forest occupation, illegal structures, weak enforcement and continuing ecological damage.

- The decision has renewed debate on how forest and wildlife protection must be balanced with the statutory rights of eligible Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Background of the Case

- The appeals initially involved workers displaced from tea estates of the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited in

the Singampatti area and their claims for rehabilitation.

- The proceedings expanded into a wider examination of encroachments, non-forestry activities and degradation across the Agasthyamalai landscape.
- On 24 March 2025, the Supreme Court directed the Central Empowered Committee to survey the landscape and identify activities violating forest and wildlife laws.
- The survey covered important areas such as the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger

Reserve, Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve, Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining protected forests; the wider landscape also connects with protected areas in Kerala.

- Satellite imagery, geo-mapping, official land records and field inspections were used to assess changes in forest cover, encroachments and illegal infrastructure.

Major Findings Placed Before the Supreme Court

- Official records indicated about 4,601 encroachers occupying approximately 5,072.653 hectares of reserved forest land in Theni district, mainly within the Srivilliputhur-Megamalai landscape.
- Only about 1.8% of the identified encroached forest land had reportedly been reclaimed.
- As many as 118 alleged encroachers were serving or retired government employees drawn from departments and services such as the Army, Police, CRPF, Forest, Revenue, Electricity Board, School Education and Panchayats.
- Around 116 government or public-utility structures had been constructed on forest land without the required approval under the forest-conservation law.
- Illegal resorts, tourism facilities, plantations, buildings, roads, electricity lines and other non-forestry activities contributed to habitat fragmentation.
- The Court observed that welfare services and public infrastructure were sometimes continued in encroached settlements, which risked giving unlawful occupation an appearance of legitimacy.
- The Srivilliputhur-Megamalai forests form the upper catchment of the Vaigai River and are important for water security, wildlife movement and ecological stability in downstream districts.

Supreme Court's Main Directions

- Eviction plan: Tamil Nadu must prepare and implement a division-wise, time-bound eviction plan with measurable milestones and clearly identified officer-level responsibility.
- Comprehensive approach: The plan must cover removal of encroachments, rehabilitation wherever legally applicable, proceedings against wilful violators and ecological restoration of recovered land.
- Special task force: District-level Forest Protection and Encroachment Eviction

Task Forces are to function with the support of the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police.

- Government employees: Disciplinary and legal action must be initiated against the 118 identified serving or retired government servants found to be encroachers.
- Official accountability: Officials who began, approved, facilitated or permitted illegal infrastructure in forest areas may face disciplinary, penal and criminal proceedings.
- Restoration liability: Environmental restitution and restoration charges may be recovered from responsible persons and deposited in the State CAMPA fund.
- Commercial encroachments: Illegal resorts, commercial establishments and

be used to postpone environmental compliance indefinitely. Rehabilitation must proceed together with lawful eviction and restoration.

Forest Rights Act, 2006: Basic Facts

- Official name: Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.
- It is Act No. 2 of 2007, received presidential assent on 29 December 2006 and came into force on 31 December 2007.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, not the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Purpose: To recognise pre-existing forest rights that could not be recorded and to



tourism infrastructure in Megamalai and other forest areas must be closed, disconnected from unauthorised electricity supply and dismantled.

Court's Constitutional Reasoning

- Article 21 has been judicially interpreted to include the right to a clean and healthy environment.
- Article 48A directs the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife.
- Article 51A(g) makes protection of the natural environment a fundamental duty of every citizen.
- The Court held that conserving ecologically sensitive forests and wildlife habitats is both a statutory and constitutional obligation.
- Humanitarian and rehabilitation concerns are genuine, but they cannot

correct the "historical injustice" caused by colonial and post-colonial forest administration.

- The Act combines livelihood security, food security, cultural protection and community-based conservation.
- Its protection extends to forest land of different legal categories, including reserved forests, protected forests, unclassified or deemed forests, Sanctuaries and National Parks, subject to the Act's safeguards.

Who Can Claim Rights?

- Forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribe: A member of a Scheduled Tribe who primarily resides in and depends on the forest or forest land for bona fide livelihood needs, including eligible pastoral communities.
- Other Traditional Forest Dweller: A person or community that primarily resided in and depended on forest or forest land



for bona fide livelihood needs for at least three generations before 13 December 2005.

- One generation is treated as 25 years; therefore, the OTFD requirement generally means 75 years before the cut-off date.
- For both categories, occupation or dependence must relate to the period before 13 December 2005. FRA does not authorise fresh encroachment after the cut-off date.
- The evidentiary process must accept the range of evidence permitted by the Act and Rules; authorities should not reject genuine claims merely because a particular documentary record is unavailable.

Important Conditions Attached to Forest Rights

- Individual title is limited to land under actual occupation and cannot exceed four hectares; FRA does not grant new forest land.
- The title is heritable but not alienable or transferable, protecting the land from sale to outsiders.
- It is generally registered jointly in the names of both spouses, or in the name of the single head where appropriate.
- Rights holders and Gram Sabhas must protect wildlife, forests, biodiversity, water sources, catchments and ecologically sensitive areas.
- Gram Sabha decisions regulating access to community forest resources and preventing destructive activity must be followed.

Eviction and Critical Wildlife Habitats

- General safeguard: Section 4(5) bars

eviction of eligible forest dwellers until the complete recognition and verification process is over.

- Limited exception: Forest rights may be modified or resettled in a Critical Wildlife Habitat within a National Park or Sanctuary only after strict conditions under Section 4(2) are satisfied.
- All forest rights in the proposed area must first be recognised and vested.
- Scientific and objective evidence must show that the presence or activities of rights holders cause irreversible damage and threaten wildlife or habitat.
- The authorities must establish that reasonable options for coexistence are unavailable.
- A secure rehabilitation or alternative package must be prepared and communicated to the affected individuals and communities.
- The free and informed consent of the concerned Gram Sabhas must be obtained in writing.
- Relocation cannot take place until land allocation and facilities at the rehabilitation site are complete.
- A Critical Wildlife Habitat vacated through this process cannot later be diverted for another purpose.

Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve: Prelims Facts

- Location: Located in the southernmost part of the Western Ghats across Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- Extent: Area: About 3,500.36 square kilometres.
- Recognition: Notified by India in 2001 and included in UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 2016.
- Name and relief: Named after Agasthyar-

koodam or Agastya Mala peak; peaks in the reserve reach about 1,868 metres.

- Protected areas: Important protected areas include Shendurney, Peppara and Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuaries and the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve; the wider ecological landscape connects additional sanctuaries and tiger reserves.
- Flora: The reserve is dominated by tropical forests and contains around 2,254 higher-plant species, including about 400 endemic species, according to UNESCO.
- Crop diversity: It is an important genetic reservoir for cardamom, jamun, nutmeg, pepper, plantain and medicinal plants.
- Fauna: Important fauna include tiger, Asian elephant, lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri tahr, Nilgiri marten, gaur, sloth bear and great hornbill.
- Ecological importance: The landscape supports major catchments and wildlife corridors and forms part of the Western Ghats-Sri Lanka global biodiversity hotspot.
- People: Indigenous communities, especially the Kani, depend on local biological resources and possess valuable medicinal-plant knowledge.

Kani Tribe & Conservation

- The Kani are an indigenous Scheduled Tribe associated with the Agasthyamala forests of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- Their traditional knowledge covers medicinal plants, forest foods, seasonal resource use and sustainable collection practices.
- The well-known development of the herbal product "Jeevani" from knowledge relating to the Arogyapacha plant became an important Indian example of access and benefit-sharing from traditional knowledge.

- In the Papanasam area, official case records distinguished Kani families who received FRA titles from other occupants who rejected repeated offers of alternative land. This shows why claim-by-claim legal classification is essential.
- Community participation can improve fire prevention, biodiversity monitoring, restoration and protection against commercial encroachment when recognised rights and responsibilities work together.

Conservation and Rights: Not Opposite Goals

- FRA is not merely a land-title law; Section 5 empowers rights holders and Gram Sabhas to protect wildlife, forests, biodiversity, water sources and cultural habitats.
- Community Forest Resource rights create local responsibility and authority for sustainable management rather than open access or uncontrolled exploitation.
- Secure tenure can encourage long-term conservation because communities gain a direct interest in preventing destructive mining, logging, resorts and outside encroachments.
- Conservation becomes unjust when genuine forest dwellers are displaced without recognition of rights, consent, rehabilitation and due process.
- Rights protection becomes unsustainable when FRA is misused to defend recent,

commercial or post-cut-off encroachments. The law requires both social justice and ecological responsibility.

Major Implementation Challenges

- Slow settlement of individual, community and Community Forest Resource claims creates uncertainty and increases the risk of wrongful eviction.
- Genuine claimants may lack written records even when oral history, community testimony, physical features and other legally permitted evidence are available.
- Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare Departments often maintain different maps and records, causing delay and conflict.
- Community rights and habitat rights frequently receive less attention than individual cultivation claims.
- Commercial encroachers can hide behind the language of livelihood, while genuine forest dwellers may be wrongly grouped with illegal occupants.
- Weak post-eviction restoration and boundary protection can allow recovered forest land to be occupied again.
- Relocation packages sometimes fail to provide secure land, housing, livelihood, education, health care and cultural continuity.
- Climate change, forest fires, invasive species, tourism pressure and fragmented wildlife corridors add to the ecological

stress in the southern Western Ghats.

Way Forward

- Rights-first verification: Complete all pending FRA claims and appeals through transparent, claim-specific decisions before eviction of eligible forest dwellers.
- Reliable land records: Use participatory mapping that combines satellite imagery and official records with Gram Sabha knowledge and ground verification.
- Legal differentiation: Classify occupants into recognised rights holders, pending claimants, rehabilitation-eligible families, recent encroachers, commercial entities and public officials.
- Targeted enforcement: Remove illegal resorts, commercial structures and wilful post-cut-off encroachments on priority while protecting due process.
- Humane rehabilitation: Provide complete rehabilitation before relocation, including secure tenure, housing, livelihood, drinking water, health care, education and transport.

Conclusion

- The Agasthyamalai case shows that environmental protection and forest-dweller rights must be enforced together. Illegal resorts, official complicity, recent encroachments and unauthorised structures require firm removal and ecological restoration. At the same time, eligible Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest dwellers cannot be displaced before their rights and appeals are fully examined under the Forest Rights Act. The durable solution is lawful classification of occupants, transparent Gram Sabha-based verification, humane rehabilitation and community-led conservation of the southern Western Ghats.

Previous Year Question (Prelims 2021)

Q. At the national level, which ministry is the nodal agency to ensure effective implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006?

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- Ministry of Rural Development
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs

Answer: (d) Ministry of Tribal Affairs.



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