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Guiding Dreams, Empowering Future
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80th Independence Day: 'Sapt Dhara' Framework for Viksit Bharat 2047

What is the Prime Minister's 'Sapt Dhara' (Seven Streams of Strength) Framework?
The Sapt Dhara framework represents a strategic shift towards accelerated reforms over the next five to seven years. It involves transformative changes in policies, institutions, work culture, and a significant scaling up of national ambition to achieve the Viksit Bharat goal by 2047. The seven streams are:

1. Reform Express: A broader push for rapid and deep-rooted reforms across all sectors to create a conducive environment for growth and development.

2. Manufacturing:

- **Focus:** Building the entire domestic value chain, from components to finished products.
- **Goal:** To make India a trusted hub of global supply chains, emphasising zero-defect, precision manufacturing, competitive factories, and stronger global brand value.
- **Instruments:** Make in India, Swadeshi, and Vocal for Local are positioned as instruments of Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India).
- **Trade Integration:** India has entered into Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with nearly 40 countries since 2014, creating opportunities for MSMEs in global markets.

3. Agriculture and Food Production:

- **Focus:** Emphasising food processing, value addition, and integrating farmers with global export markets.
- **Quality:** Greater emphasis on chemical-free farming to meet rising global demand and international quality standards.
- **Farmer Support:** Highlighted the provision of affordable fertilisers like Urea and DAP at substantially lower prices than global market rates.

4. Technology and Innovation:

- **Youth Focus:** To address the aspirations and anxieties of Gen Z and India's youth.
- **Global Leadership:** Positioning India as a global innovation hub in AI, quantum technology, space, robotics, data centres, next-generation communication, and semiconductor self-reliance.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Highlighted



Why in News?

- **Historic 80th Independence Day:** For the first time during Independence Day celebrations, the full version of India's National Song, 'Vande Mataram', was rendered at the Red Fort on 15th August 2026, commemorating its 150th anniversary.
- **Visionary Address:** The Prime Minister addressed the nation from the Red Fort and outlined the 'Sapt Dhara' (Seven Streams of Strength) framework to accelerate India's capabilities and advance the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047.
- **Connection to Panch Pran:** This initiative builds upon the Panch Pran (Five Resolves) articulated in the 2022 Independence Day address, which provide the broader guiding principles for this transformative journey.
- **progress in UPI and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).**
- **Future Tech:** Mentioned the Bharat 6G Vision, indigenous 6G R&D, and the National Drone Policy.
- **Skilling & Talent:** Initiatives like Atal Tinkering Labs, the RDI Scheme, AI skilling for 1 crore youth within one year, and free online coaching through DPI.
- **Sports:** A nationwide sports talent hunt for children aged 5–15 years to support India's 2036 Olympic ambitions.

5. Gati Shakti:

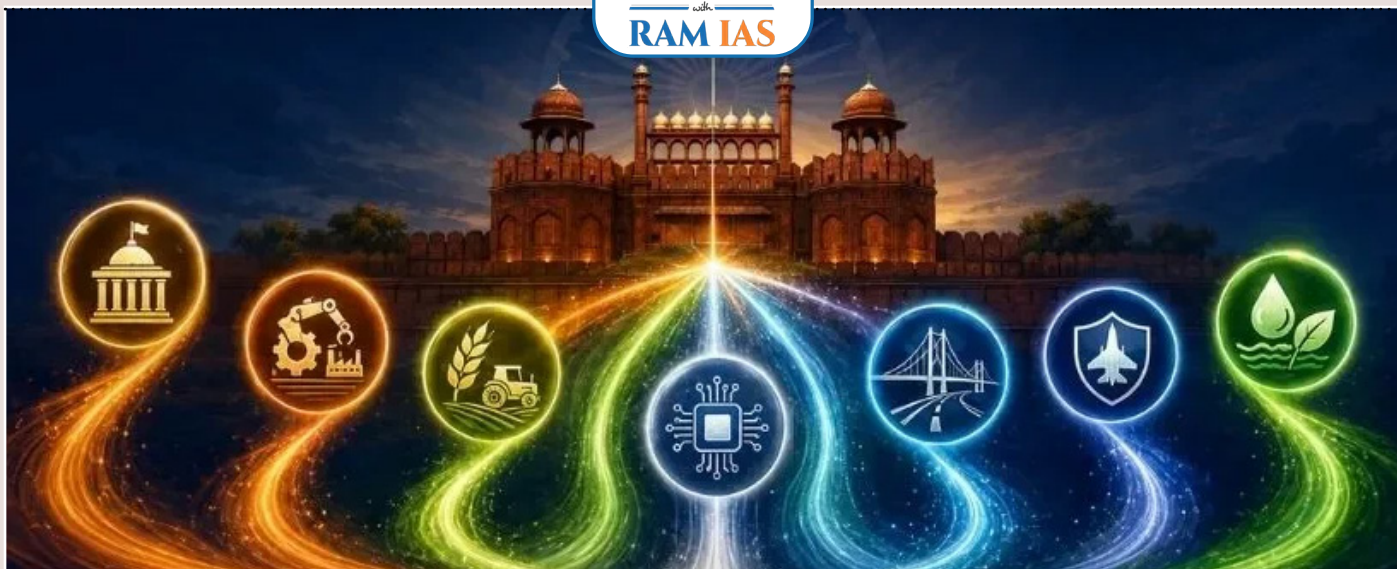
- **Connectivity:** Focus on seamless and fast multimodal connectivity through high-speed rail, modern highways, inland waterways, airports, and multimodal logistics.
- **Railway Modernisation:** Coach production has increased 21-fold, and railway electrification has expanded from around 30% to near-total, reducing diesel dependence. A hydrogen-powered train reflects the integration of clean energy.
- **Port-led Development:** Ports are being developed to leverage opportunities in the blue economy.

6. Defence Power:

- **Self-Reliance:** Strengthen Aatmanirbharta in defence and position India as a global defence supplier.
- **Modernisation:** Focus on drones, counter-drone systems, hypersonic defence technologies, and cybersecurity.
- **Initiatives:** Mentioned Mission Sudarshan Chakra and next-generation defence technologies.
- **Civil Defence:** A vibrant civil defence network to prepare citizens for emerging warfare and security threats.
- **Internal Security:** Stated that armed Naxalism has been effectively countered, while warning against "dimagi Naxals" seeking to revive violence.

7. Green and Blue Economy:

- **Green Leadership:** India aims for global leadership in green hydrogen, renewable energy, energy storage, green mobility, and green manufacturing.



- **Nuclear Energy:** The SHANTI Act 2025 paved the way for expanding nuclear energy, with a target of 100 GW nuclear power capacity by 2047. The Nuclear Energy Mission aims to develop and operationalise at least five indigenous SMRs by 2033.
- **Technology:** Emphasised Fast Breeder Reactor technology.
- **Mineral Security:** The National Critical Minerals Mission and Critical Minerals Corridor aim to secure minerals for the clean-energy transition.
- **Blue Economy:** Focus on fisheries, coastal tourism, ocean technology, and port-led development. Electric vehicle sales reached 25 lakh in 2025-26, compared with 1.5 lakh in 2009-10.
- **Energy Access:** Piped gas distribution has expanded from 70 cities to 700 cities, reaching around 1.75 crore households.

What is the Soft Power Stream?

- **Leveraging Strengths:** India's soft power is to be leveraged through Yoga, Ayurveda, culture, tourism, handicrafts, films, VFX, animation, gaming, and digital content.
- **Heal in India:** This initiative can take India's healthcare and Ayurveda capabilities to the world.
- **Tourism & Events:** Wildlife resources, national parks, sports, and the growing concert economy can strengthen tourism-led soft power.
- **Global Platform:** The WAVES Summit provided a platform to showcase India's creative economy and audio-visual capabilities globally.

What are the Panch Pran (Five Resolves)?

The Panch Pran, announced on the 76th

Independence Day in 2022, provide the ideological and civic foundation for the journey to Viksit Bharat.

- **Resolve for a Developed India (Viksit Bharat):** Focus on large-scale economic growth, high living standards, and transforming India into a global powerhouse.
- **Removal of Colonial Mindset:** Eliminate colonial mentality from institutions, systems, and social thinking, and develop confidence in India's own capabilities.
- **Pride in Heritage:** Take pride in India's roots, culture, traditions, and heritage while carrying these strengths forward in a modern, globally connected India.
- **Unity and Integrity:** Emphasise national unity, transcending differences of caste, region, language, and other social divisions.
- **Sense of Duty (Kartavya):** Stress the sense of duty among citizens, institutions, and public representatives, making responsible citizenship essential to nation-building.

Panch Pran vs. Sapt Dhara: A Comparative Overview

Parameter Panch Pran (Five Resolves)
Sapt Dhara (Seven Streams)
Origin & Timeline 76th Independence Day, 2022 80th Independence Day, 2026
Strategic Focus Ideological, psychological, and civic transformation Sectoral, economic, technological, and strategic acceleration
Core Theme Mindset and Ethos: Decolonisation, cultural pride, and duty-bound citizenry Execution and Capacity Building: Supply chains, deep tech, and self-reliance
Role in Nation-Building Provides the moral and civic foundation Provides the economic and strategic blueprint
Governance Approach Jan Bhagidari (citizen participation) Whole-of-Government ap-

proach and coordinated policy action.

Conclusion

The 'Sapt Dhara' framework, unveiled on the 80th Independence Day, provides a concrete, sectoral blueprint for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. While the Panch Pran lay the ideological and moral foundation, Sapt Dhara translates this vision into actionable streams of strength—from manufacturing and technology to defence and green energy—aiming to transform India into a developed, self-reliant and globally competitive nation.

UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination Question

Consider the following statements regarding the 'Sapt Dhara' framework announced on India's 80th Independence Day:

1. It consists of seven streams of strength, including Manufacturing, Technology and Innovation and Gati Shakti.
2. The framework is a replacement for the Panch Pran (Five Resolves) announced in 2022.
3. One of its streams focuses on positioning India as a global innovation hub in areas like AI, quantum technology, and semiconductors.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only

Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS)

Why in News?

India's expanding trade and manufacturing ambitions have increased the need to develop a strong domestic container manufacturing ecosystem and reduce dependence on imported containers. In this context, the Government has proposed the Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS) as part of broader efforts to strengthen India's maritime, shipping and logistics capabilities.

What are Shipping Containers?

- **Standardised Freight Units:** Shipping containers are standardised steel boxes designed to move cargo seamlessly across ships, railways and road vehicles without unloading and repacking goods during transit.
- **ISO-Based Interoperability:** They are manufactured according to internationally recognised ISO specifications, enabling efficient intermodal transport across global logistics networks.

- **Common Sizes:** The most widely used containers are 20-foot and 40-foot units, with capacity commonly expressed in Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs).
- **What is the Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme (CMAS)?**
- **Budget Announcement:** CMAS was announced in the Union Budget 2026–27 as a targeted initiative to develop a competitive domestic container manufacturing industry through financial and institutional support.
- **Financial Outlay:** The proposed scheme has an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over five years to promote domestic manufacturing, investment and technology development across the container ecosystem.

Components of Financial Support

- **Capital Assistance:** For setting up new Greenfield manufacturing facilities
- **Expansion Support:** For expansion of existing Brownfield manufacturing units
- **Operational Assistance:** To improve the competitiveness of domestic

manufacturers

- **Ecosystem Development:** Support for testing infrastructure, skilling initiatives and capacity building to strengthen the overall container manufacturing value chain.

Expected Outcomes and Benefits

- **Job Creation:** The scheme is expected to generate around 3,000 direct jobs and more than 50,000 indirect jobs across container manufacturing and allied sectors
- **Market Value:** According to initial estimates, the scheme could generate a market value of around ₹80,000 crore over its life, implying a leverage of roughly eight times the budgeted outlay
- **Ancillary Industry Growth:** The scheme will catalyse growth across several ancillary industries such as corner castings, wooden frames and Corten steel
- **Foreign Exchange Savings:** Reducing reliance on imports will conserve foreign exchange
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Strengthening domestic manufacturing will help reduce vulnerabilities arising from global supply-chain disruptions and freight-rate volatility.

Other Maritime Reforms:

- Merchant Shipping Act, 2025
- Coastal Shipping Act, 2025
- Indian Ports Act, 2025
- Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Package of ₹70,000 crore

- Digital Initiatives: One Nation One Port Process, Maritime Single Window, e-Samudra

Challenges and Way Forward

- Cost Competitiveness: Indian containers are currently 30-40% costlier than Chinese counterparts. The scheme must effectively bridge this cost differential
- Global Competition: China currently dominates global container manufacturing. India needs to achieve economies of scale to compete effectively
- Technology and Skilling: The scheme's success depends on developing testing infrastructure and skilling initiatives to build a robust value chain
- Integrated Approach: Coordination between CMAS, BCSL and other maritime initiatives is essential for creating a holistic ecosystem

Conclusion

The Container Manufacturing Assistance Scheme represents a strategic intervention to address India's heavy dependence on imported shipping containers, which currently stands at nearly 2 million TEUs annually. With a ₹10,000 crore outlay over five years, the scheme aims to achieve a tenfold increase in domestic manufacturing capacity to 7.5 lakh TEUs, generate over 53,000 jobs, reducing foreign exchange outflows, and supporting India's long-term trade competitiveness under the Make in India and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 frameworks.

Prelims Practice Question

Consider the following statements regarding the Container Manufacturing



Assistance Scheme (CMAS):

1. It was announced in the Union Budget 2026-27 with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over five years.

2. The scheme aims to increase India's annual domestic container manufacturing capacity to approximately 7.5 lakh Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs).

3. India currently imports nearly 2 million empty containers annually to meet domestic requirements.

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: (d) 1, 2 and 3.

Black Sea

Why in News?

- Escalating Attacks on Shipping: Russian attacks on Ukraine's Black Sea ports and shipping infrastructure have severely disrupted agricultural exports. Attacks on shipping have shut down more than 97 per cent of Russia and Ukraine's grain export capacity in the Azov and Black Sea basin, cutting off a major source of low-cost supplies and helping to drive up global prices.
- Peak Harvest Season Disruption: These disruptions have come at a time when Ukraine's wheat harvest is at its peak and the corn harvest is approaching.
- Overwhelming Reliance on Sea Route: Around 90% of Ukraine's exports of wheat, corn, and sunflower seeds are transported through the Black Sea.
- Global Food Security at Risk: The halt in exports threatens to trigger a severe phase of a global grain crisis, as Ukraine is a major supplier of staple foods to many parts of the world, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

About the Black Sea

- Historical Name: Historically known as the Euxine Sea (Pontus Euxinus).
- Type of Water Body: It is a major inland sea and a marginal sea of the Atlantic Ocean, located between Eastern Europe and Western Asia.
- Unique Feature: It is the world's largest meromictic basin, meaning the deep waters do not mix with the upper layers, leading to anoxic (oxygen-free) conditions below a certain depth.



Bordering Countries and Strategic Location

- **Bordering Countries (6):** It is bordered by Ukraine to the north and northwest, Russia and Georgia to the east, Türkiye to the south, and Bulgaria and Romania to the west.
- **Mnemonic:** The six bordering countries can be remembered as BURGeR-T — Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Romania and Türkiye.

• Maritime Connections:

- **To the Mediterranean Sea:** The Black Sea connects to the Sea of Marmara through the Bosphorus Strait and then to the Aegean Sea (and subsequently the Mediterranean) through the Dardanelles Strait.
- **Turkish Straits System:** The Bosphorus Strait, Sea of Marmara, and Dardanelles Strait together constitute the Turkish Straits system, forming the maritime link between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.
- **To the Sea of Azov:** The Black Sea is connected to the Sea of Azov through the Strait of Kerch.
- **Surrounding Mountains:** It is surrounded by the Pontic Mountains to the south, the Caucasus Mountains to the east, and the Crimean Mountains to the north.
- **Major Inflowing Rivers:** Important rivers draining into the Black Sea include the Danube (the second-longest river in Europe after the Volga), Dnieper, and Dniester.

Economic and Strategic Recent Developments

Importance

- **Critical Trade Route:** The Black Sea is an important maritime route for grain, fertilisers, energy products, and other commodities, giving it significance for global trade and food security.
- **Energy Hub:** It serves as a crucial transit corridor for oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea region and Russia to European markets.
- **Geopolitical Flashpoint:** Control of the Black Sea has remained strategically important in the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Russia seeks to restrict Ukrainian maritime access, while Ukraine has challenged Russian naval capabilities through anti-ship missiles, drones, and other asymmetric methods.
- **Gateway for NATO:** For NATO, the Black Sea is a strategic frontier. The Montreux Convention (1936) governs the passage of warships through the Turkish Straits, giving Türkiye control over access and limiting the naval presence of non-littoral states during wartime.

- **Black Sea Grain Initiative:** A UN-brokered deal signed in Istanbul in 2022 (between Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, and the UN) aimed to ensure a safe sea corridor for grain exports from Ukrainian ports. However, its implementation has been fraught with challenges and suspensions.
- **Escalation in 2026:** Recent attacks have effectively ground grain exports to a halt. Russia has intensified missile barrages

against Ukrainian ports, while Ukraine has used drone attacks on Russian ships and ports.

- **Turkey's Mediation Role:** Türkiye has consistently tried to mediate and may propose creating new security corridors in the Black Sea to revive the grain deal.

Conclusion

The Black Sea is a vital geopolitical and economic waterway, serving as a life-line for global food and energy security. Recent attacks disrupting nearly all grain exports from the region highlight its fragility and the cascading impact on global food prices and supply chains, particularly for vulnerable nations. Its strategic importance is amplified by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, making it a critical focal point for international diplomacy and security.

Prelims Practice Question

Consider the following pairs: (UPSC Prelims 2019)

Sea Bordering Country

1. Adriatic Sea Albania
2. Black Sea Croatia
3. Caspian Sea Kazakhstan
4. Mediterranean Sea Morocco
5. Red Sea Syria

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

- (a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Answer: (b) 1, 3 and 4 only



Why in News?

- **Strong Investor Demand:** India's sovereign green bond market is gaining significant traction, with robust investor demand pushing green bonds to trade at a persistent greenium (green premium) over comparable conventional government securities.
- **Record High Greenium:** The average greenium in the first half of FY27 reached its highest level since India began issuing sovereign green bonds in FY2022-23.
- **Market Absorption Capacity:** This trend indicates that the market may be able to absorb a larger supply of green bonds in the second half of FY27.

What is a Greenium?

- **Definition:** 'Greenium' refers to the lower yield (interest rate) that investors are willing to accept on a green bond that finances environmentally sustainable projects, compared with conventional government securities.
- **Price-Yield Relationship:** Since bond prices and yields move inversely, a lower yield means investors are willing to pay a higher price for green bonds, reflecting their preference for environmentally sustainable investments.

Significance of a Stable Greenium

- **Cost-Effective Climate Action:** It lowers the overall cost of borrowing for the government, allowing it to finance large-scale renewable energy, electric mobility, and adaptation projects need-

ed to meet India's Net Zero by 2070 targets economically.

- **Market Maturation:** A consistent greenium spread demonstrates a maturing domestic green finance ecosystem and sustained investor confidence in the credibility of India's green taxonomies and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) project evaluation.

What is a Sovereign Green Bond?

- **Introduction:** Sovereign Green Bonds (SGrBs) are government debt instruments introduced in the Union Budget 2022-23 to finance projects that support India's transition towards a low-carbon economy.
- **Earmarked Funds:** The funds raised are earmarked exclusively for eligible green projects, promoting transparency and accountability in their utilisation.
- **International Alignment:** The SGrB Framework is aligned with the International Capital Market Association (ICMA) Green Bond Principles (2021), strengthening the credibility and transparency of India's sovereign green bonds.
- **Trading and Eligibility:** SGrBs are issued through a uniform price auction, are eligible for repo transactions, can be traded in the secondary market, and are also eligible for Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) purposes, allowing financial institutions to count them towards their mandatory SLR holdings.
- **Framework and Validation:** The Finance Ministry released India's first SGrB Framework in 2022, specifying

eligible projects. It was validated by Norway-based CICERO, which rated it 'Medium Green' with 'Good Governance', indicating alignment with ICMA standards.

Management & Audit:

- Proceeds are deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India and managed by the Public Debt Management Cell of the Ministry of Finance through mechanisms such as the Green Register.
- Project selection and evaluation involve the Green Finance Working Committee (GFWC), chaired by the Chief Economic Adviser.
- Allocation and utilisation are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

Types of Sustainable Finance Instruments

Bond Type	Primary Objective	Use of Proceeds	Distinction
Green Bonds	Positive environmental impact	Strictly ring-fenced for specific green projects	Focuses exclusively on climate and environmental benefits
Social Bonds	Positive social outcomes	Strictly ring-fenced for specific social projects	Targets vulnerable, marginalized, or underserved populations
Sustainability Bonds	Combined environmental and social impact	Strictly ring-fenced for a mix of green and social projects	Hybrid instrument financing both green and social initiatives
Sustainability-Linked Bonds (SLBs)	Achieving institution-wide sustainability		

targets General corporate purposes; not tied to specific projects Financial terms linked to sustainability performance targets

Current Status of India's SGrB Market

- **Outstanding Issuance:** India has ₹877 billion of sovereign green bonds outstanding, with 30-year green bonds emerging as the dominant segment and outstanding issuance crossing ₹500 billion.
- **Demand Recovery:** Some early issuances were cancelled or reduced due to insufficient investor demand at yields acceptable to the government, but demand has since improved, particularly with the focus on longer-maturity green bonds.

Drivers of Demand for Sovereign Green Bonds

- **Insurers' Investment Needs:** Insurance companies need long-term assets to match their long-term liabilities.
- **Infrastructure Status:** Green bonds are treated as infrastructure investments,

offering insurers greater flexibility in asset allocation.

- **ALM Requirements:** Long-term instruments perfectly match the strict Asset-Liability Management (ALM) requirements of insurers and pension funds, leading to sustained demand for 30-year maturities.

Eligible Project Categories

The SGrB Framework covers nine categories of eligible projects, including:

- Renewable energy
- Clean transportation
- Energy efficiency
- Climate adaptation
- Sustainable water management
- Biodiversity conservation

Conclusion

The rising greenium in India's sovereign green bond market reflects growing investor confidence and a maturing green finance ecosystem. This trend lowers the government's borrowing costs for climate action, supporting India's Net Zero 2070 target. With robust demand from insurers

and pension funds for long-term instruments, the market is poised for further expansion, strengthening India's sustainable finance landscape.

Prelims Practice Question

Consider the following statements regarding Sovereign Green Bonds (SGrBs) in India:

1. They were introduced in the Union Budget 2022-23 to finance projects supporting India's transition to a low-carbon economy.
2. The proceeds from SGrBs are deposited into the Consolidated Fund of India and audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).
3. SGrBs are not eligible for Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) purposes.

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: (b) 1 and 2 only

Supreme Court Directs Nationwide Protection of ELEPHANT CORRIDORS



Why in News?

- **Landmark Supreme Court Ruling:** On August 17, 2026, the Supreme Court of India delivered a significant judgment directing the Central Government to conduct a fresh nationwide survey of elephant corridors and ensure the right of passage for elephant herds across state borders.
- **Crop Damage No Justification:** The Court firmly ruled that no State can block elephant corridors merely on the ground of crop damage, stating that wildlife movement cannot be impeded for such reasons.
- **Ban on Barbaric Practices:** The Court ordered strict implementation of its 2018 directions to remove spikes and desist from using fireballs, mashaals (torches), and firearms to drive away elephants.
- **Inter-State Nature of Corridors:** The Supreme Court held that elephant corridors are not State-specific, as elephant herds naturally move across multiple

States, requiring inter-State coordination for conservation.

What are Elephant Corridors?

- **Definition:** Elephant corridors are critical strips of natural habitat that connect fragmented forest areas, enabling the safe movement of elephant herds between different habitats.
- **Ecological Functions:**
 - **Maintaining Genetic Diversity:** They allow gene flow between isolated elephant populations, preventing inbreeding and ensuring long-term population viability.
 - **Reducing Human-Elephant Conflict:** By providing elephants with designated routes away from human settlements and agricultural fields, corridors help minimise damaging encounters between humans and elephants.
 - **Facilitating Seasonal Migration:** Elephants follow traditional migratory routes in search of food, water, and mates, and corridors

- enable these natural movements.
- **Connectivity Across Borders:** Elephant corridors include both inter-State corridors within India and international transboundary corridors connecting India with neighbouring countries like Nepal.

Legal and Conservation Status of Elephants in India

- **Schedule I Protection:** Elephants are classified as Schedule I animals under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, granting them the highest level of statutory protection. Offences committed against these species attract the highest punishments prescribed under the Act.
- **IUCN Status:** The Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, indicating a very high risk of extinction in the wild.
- **National Heritage Icon:** India has designated the Asian elephant as the National Heritage Icon, reflecting its cultural and ecological significance.
- **Global Significance:** India supports more than 60% of the world's remaining wild Asian elephant population, making it the global stronghold for the species.

Elephant Population and Habitat in India

- **Population Estimate:** The Synchronous All India Population Estimation of Elephants (SAIEE) 2021–25 estimates India's wild elephant population at 22,446.
- **Elephant Reserves:** Elephants are protected through 33 Elephant Reserves covering 80,777 sq. km across 14 major elephant-range States.
- **Elephant Landscapes:** These reserves are spread across 11 elephant landscapes in four distinct regions—North Eastern, East Central, Northern, and Southern regions.

Elephant Corridors of India, 2023 Report

- **Report Details:** The report, titled "Elephant Corridors of India, 2023", was supported by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and released under Project Elephant.
- **Total Corridors Identified:** The report identified 150 validated elephant corridors across 15 States.
- **State-wise Distribution:** West Bengal has the highest number of corridors with 26, followed by other elephant-range States.

- **Inter-State and International Corridors:** The network includes 19 inter-State corridors and 6 international transboundary corridors connecting India and Nepal.
- **Trend Analysis:** The report highlighted a surge of 62 new corridors, marking a 40% increase since 2010. The intensity of elephant use has increased in 59 corridors, remained stable in 29, and decreased in 29 others.
- **Critical Evaluation:** Critics have pointed out discrepancies in the report, arguing that the definition of corridors has been diluted, with any area where elephants move being labelled as a corridor. This expansion might escalate human-elephant conflicts and increase elephant deaths due to electrocution and falling into wells.

Project Elephant: The Flagship Conservation Programme

- **Launch and Nature:** The Government of India launched "Project Elephant" in 1991-92 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Objectives:**
 - Provide financial and technical support to elephant-range States for the protection of elephants, their habitats, and corridors.
 - Address the issue of human-animal conflict.
 - Promote the welfare of captive elephants.
- **Technology-Based Conservation:** The programme promotes AI-enabled monitoring, radio-collaring, genetic databases, and early warning systems for better decision-making in conflict mitigation.
- **Elephant Cell at WII:** The Ministry has established the "Elephant Cell" at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, as a technical wing of Project Elephant to provide technical inputs for strengthening conservation efforts.

Supreme Court's Directives: Detailed Analysis

- **Nationwide Fresh Survey:** The Court directed the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to conduct a fresh, comprehensive survey of elephant corridors across all States and submit a detailed status report.
- **Report Content:** The status report must detail:

- Measures already taken to identify and remove existing obstructions.
- Steps proposed to prevent similar disruptions in the future.
- The position regarding the use of firearms, fireballs, mashaals, or any other coercive action against elephants.
- **Timeline:** The report is to be submitted within six weeks.
- **Ban on Coercive Practices:** The Court barred the use of any kind of fireballs, mashaals, spikes, and firearms to chase away elephants and asked State authorities to strictly implement its 2018 directions.
- **No State-Specific Corridors:** The Court emphasised that elephant corridors are not State-specific and that conservation requires inter-State coordination, citing examples of herds traveling from Nepal through West Bengal to Jharkhand, and from Yamuna Nagar in Haryana to Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Human-Elephant Conflict: The Underlying Challenge

- **Root Causes:** Expansion of human settlements and agricultural fields has resulted in widespread loss of elephant habitat, degraded forage, and reduced landscape connectivity.
- **Forced Proximity:** As their habitats shrink, elephants are progressively forced into closer contact with people, resulting in more frequent and severe conflict over space and resources.
- **Consequences:** Conflict ranges from crop raiding to reciprocal loss of human and elephant lives.
- **Aggravating Factors:** The use of fireballs, spikes, and mob-like chasing (hulla parties) only aggravates the problem rather than solving it.

Way Forward

- **Strict Implementation of SC Directives:** States must comply with the Supreme Court's orders and remove all obstructions from elephant corridors.
- **Strengthening Project Elephant:** Enhanced financial and technical support to States under Project Elephant is essential for effective corridor management.
- **Sustainable Land-Use Planning:** The 2010 Elephant Task Force recommended declaring the entire Elephant Reserve area as Ecologically Sensitive under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, potentially restricting mining and devel-

opment across 46,000 sq km.

• **Community Participation:** Involving local communities in conservation efforts and providing adequate compensation for crop damage can reduce hostility towards elephants.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's directive for nationwide protection of elephant corridors marks a watershed moment in India's wildlife conservation jurisprudence. By ruling that crop damage cannot justify blocking elephant pathways and banning barbaric practices like fireballs and spikes, the Court has reaffirmed the primacy of wildlife conservation over narrow economic interests. With India harbouring

over 60% of the world's Asian elephants and 150 identified corridors across 15 States, this judgment provides a robust legal framework for ensuring the long-term survival of this endangered species while promoting sustainable coexistence between humans and elephants.

Prelims Practice Question

Consider the following statements regarding elephant conservation in India:

1. The Asian elephant is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. The "Elephant Corridors of India, 2023" report identified 150 validated

elephant corridors across 15 States, with West Bengal having the highest number.

3. Project Elephant was launched in 1991-92 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide financial and technical support to elephant-range States.

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: (d) 1, 2 and 3

Exercise MAITREE-XV



Why in News?

- **15th Edition Underway:** The 15th edition of the India-Thailand Joint Military Exercise, MAITREE-XV, commenced on 18 August 2026 and will continue until 31 August 2026.
- **Location:** The exercise is being conducted at Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp, Surat Thani, Thailand.
- **Indian Contingent Departs:** The Indian Army contingent, comprising 85 person-

nel, departed for Thailand on 17 August 2026 to participate in the exercise.

About Exercise MAITREE

- **Bilateral Nature:** It is a bilateral military exercise between the Indian Army and the Royal Thai Army.
- **Primary Aim:** The exercise aims to foster military cooperation, enhance interoperability, and strengthen mutual trust and camaraderie between the two forces.

Evolution:

- The exercise was instituted in 2006 as the Thai-Indian Cooperation Field Exercise (TICAFE).
- It was renamed MAITREE, meaning "Friendship" in Thai, in 2013.
- **Hosting Pattern:** The exercise is hosted alternately by India and Thailand.

Recent Editions:

- The last edition (14th) was conducted in

September 2025 at the Foreign Training Node, Umroi, Meghalaya.

- The 2026 edition marks 20 years since the exercise was first launched.

Participation and Strength

- **Personnel Strength:** Both countries are fielding 85 personnel each.
- **Indian Contingent:** The Indian Army contingent is represented primarily by troops from the 9 Gorkha Rifles.
- **Thai Contingent:** The Royal Thai Army contingent comprises personnel from the 3rd Battalion, 25th Infantry Brigade, 5th Division.
- **Operational Level:** The exercise involves company-level joint training.

Operational Focus and

Training Activities

- **Core Focus:** The exercise focuses on joint Counter-Insurgency (CI) and Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations.
- **Terrain:** Training is conducted in jungle and semi-urban/suburban environments.
- **UN Mandate:** The exercise is conducted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which pertains to action with respect to threats to peace, breaches of peace, and acts of aggression.
- **Training Modules:** The comprehensive training schedule includes:
 - Field exercises
 - Combat discussions
 - Lectures and demonstrations
 - A culminating validation exercise
- **Exchange of Best Practices:** The contingents will exchange operational experiences and showcase contemporary equipment and technologies employed during joint operations.

Significance of the Exercise

- **Strengthening Bilateral Ties:** MAITREE-XV is an important platform for reinforcing the longstanding defence and strategic partnership between India and Thailand.
- **Enhancing Interoperability:** It improves the two armies' ability to conduct joint operations by familiarising them with each other's operational procedures and tactical approaches.
- **Platform for Cooperation:** Instituted in 2006, the exercise has emerged as a vital platform for sharing best practices and deepening defence cooperation.

India-Thailand Defence Relations: A Broader Context



Exercise (Ex-Ayutthaya) .

- **Economic & Cultural Links:** The relationship is further strengthened by strong economic ties, cultural linkages, and people-to-people contacts.

Conclusion

Exercise MAITREE-XV represents a significant milestone in India-Thailand defence relations, marking 20 years of this important military partnership. By focusing on counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in jungle and semi-urban terrain under the UN Charter, the exercise enhances the interoperability and combined capabilities of the two armies, while also serving as a key pillar of India's Act East Policy and its broader strategic engagement with Southeast Asia.

Prelims Practice Question

Consider the following pairs regarding bilateral military exercises between India and Thailand:

Exercise Participating Forces

1. MAITREE Indian Army and Royal Thai Army
2. SIAM BHARAT Indian Air Force and Royal Thai Air Force
3. AYUTTHAYA Indian Navy and Royal Thai Navy

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

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

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

- **Act East Policy:** Thailand is a maritime neighbour in the Andaman Sea and a partner in India's Act East Policy.
- **Defence Dialogue:** Both countries have established institutional mechanisms for defence dialogue, including the India-Thailand Defence Dialogue.
- **Maritime Cooperation:** They cooperate in the maritime domain, including through the India-Thailand Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) in the Andaman Sea.
- **Other Exercises:** Besides MAITREE, the two countries also conduct the India-Thailand Air Force Exercise (Siam Bharat) and the India-Thailand Navy

India's 1st Guide to Grasslands & Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)

Why in News?

- **Historic Launch:** India launched its first-ever "Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) of India" on 17 August 2026.
- **Global Platform:** The Guide was launched at the 17th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.
- **Video Message:** Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav addressed the side event virtually, stressing the need for science-based conservation of open ecosystems alongside forests.

What are Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)?

- **Definition:** ONEs are non-forested natural landscapes that include grasslands, savannas, deserts, scrublands, ravines, rocky plateaus, and coastal ecosystems.
- **Distinct Identity:** They are naturally occurring ecosystems with sparse or no tree cover, adapted to seasonal droughts, grazing, and fires.
- **Not Wastelands:** The Guide stresses that these ecosystems should not be judged merely by their lack of tree cover, as they are distinct, naturally occurring ecosystems with high ecological and socio-economic value.
- **Colonial Legacy:** India's administrative frameworks have been influenced by colonial land-use classifications that designated extensive open natural

ecosystems as "wastelands", leading to their under-recognition in conservation and land-use planning.

About the Guide: Coverage and Content

- **Ecosystems Covered:** The Guide documents a wide variety of landscapes across India, including:
 - Himalayan and Terai grasslands
 - Thar and Banni landscapes
 - Deccan savannas
 - Aravalli scrublands
 - Yamuna-Chambal ravines
 - Western Ghats rocky plateaus
 - Central Nicobar grasslands
 - Tamil Nadu's Theri Kaadu
 - Coastal ecosystems and desert environments
- **Thematic Sections:** The Guide contains thematic sections on pastoralism, fire ecology, and carbon sequestration.
- **Comprehensive Documentation:** It brings together information on major ONEs across India, covering their geographical settings, ecological characteristics, biodiversity, and the communities and tribes associated with them.
- **Target Audience:** The Guide is expected to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, conservation practitioners, development agencies, and communities.

Institutional Collaboration and Development

- **Lead Ministry:** The Guide was devel-

oped under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

- **Publication and Event Organisation:** Organised by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in collaboration with:

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management (CoE-SLM)
- Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)
- Space Applications Centre (SAC), ISRO
- **Multistakeholder Participation:** The launch event brought together representatives from Government, scientific and research institutions, international organisations, and civil society.

Ecological and Biodiversity Significance

- **Rich Biodiversity:** ONEs support rich biodiversity, including species found nowhere else on earth.
- **Flagship Species:** They provide habitats for critically important species such as:
 - Great Indian Bustard
 - Lesser Florican
 - Bengal Florican
 - Indian Wolf
 - Blackbuck
- **Soil and Water Processes:** ONEs contribute to soil and water processes and play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** They store

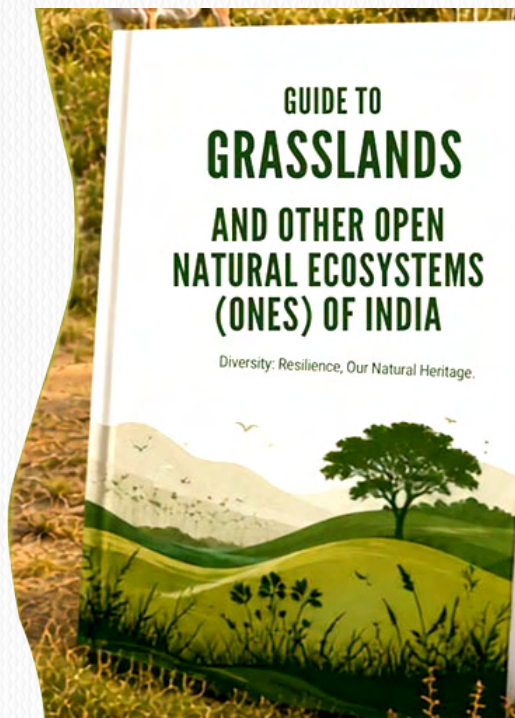
substantial below-ground carbon in their soils, contributing to climate resilience.

- **Extent:** A 2022 high-resolution mapping study estimated that semi-arid ONEs cover around 3.2 lakh sq. km, nearly 10% of India's geographical area, with major extents in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat.
- **Protected Area Gap:** Less than 5% of ONEs are covered under the existing protected area network of India.

Socio-Economic and Livelihood Significance

- **Pastoral Communities:** ONEs sustain pastoral, live-stock-based, and agricultural communities.
- **Traditional Landscapes:** They include traditional landscapes such as Orans and Gauchars, which reflect long-standing community-based management of grazing lands.
- **Interconnection:** Local communities understood that land, herds, and their own lives were closely interconnected.
- **Fodder Resources:** These ecosystems provide important fodder resources for livestock-dependent communities.
- **Cultural Heritage:** They support natural resource-based livelihoods that contribute to India's national economy and cultural heritage.

Science-Based Restoration and Land Degradation Neutrality



- **Call for Scientific Knowledge:** The Guide calls for stronger scientific knowledge, improved land-degradation assessment, and landscape-level planning to conserve and restore ONEs.
- **LDN Targets:** Restoration of grasslands and other ONEs can contribute to India's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets.
- **Landscape-Level Planning:** Presentations and discussions at the launch emphasised the need for comprehensive landscape-level planning for effective conservation and restoration.
- **People-Centred Governance:** The event emphasised people-centred rangeland governance and the role of local communities in sustainable

management.

Global Significance and Platform

- **Showcasing India's Ecosystems:** Launching the Guide at UNCCD COP17 provides India with a platform to showcase its diverse open ecosystems and strengthen their representation in the global discourse on land restoration, rangelands, and Land Degradation Neutrality.
- **Global Conversation:** It positions India's open ecosystems in the global conversation on sustainable land management and climate resilience.
- **Rangelands Recognition:** The Guide contributes to the growing international recognition of the importance of rangelands and open ecosystems in achieving global sustainability goals.

Conclusion

India's first-ever Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems marks a transformative shift in conservation thinking, moving beyond the colonial 'wasteland' to recognise these landscapes as ecologically vital and socio-economically significant. By documenting their biodiversity, carbon storage potential, and pastoral livelihoods, the Guide provides a science-based foundation for their restoration and sustainable management, supporting India's Land Degradation Neutrality targets while showcasing its open ecosystems on the global stage.

Prelims Question

Consider the following statements regarding Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs) in India:

1. ONEs include grasslands, savannas, deserts, scrublands, ravines, and rocky plateaus.
 2. Less than 5% of ONEs are covered under the existing protected area network of India.
 3. The first-ever Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems of India was launched at COP17 to the UNFCCC in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.
- 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: (b) 1 and 2 only

Correcting the 'Wasteland' Perception

- **Personal Connect:** Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, who grew up in Ajmer, Rajasthan, recalled that grazing lands and desert scrub surrounding him were often described as "wasteland".
- **Colonial Legacy:** India's administrative frameworks have been influenced by colonial land-use classifications that designated extensive open natural ecosystems as "wastelands".
- **Under-recognition:** This colonial legacy led to the under-recognition of grasslands, scrublands and ravines in conservation and land-use planning.
- **Paradigm Shift:** The Guide marks a shift from a tree-centric approach to conservation towards recognising grasslands, scrublands, ravines, and other ONEs as distinct ecosystems requiring science-based conservation alongside forests.

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