



**UPSC
Mentorship**
A Unit of Mentorship India

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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SOURCES



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GS I

1. Cook Islands: The tiny nation at the vanguard of mining ocean floor

Source: IE, Page 2

Prelims: Cook Island, Seabed Mining

Mains: Distribution of Key Natural Resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent)

News: The Cook Islands, blessed with vast reserves of marine polymetallic nodules (rich in minerals like cobalt, manganese, and nickel) on their seabed, face a critical decision – to mine or not to mine.

About Cook Island

- The Cook Islands is an island country in Polynesia, part of Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean.
- It consists of 15 islands. Avarua is its capital.
- It was once a colony of New Zealand but has been self-governing since 1965.
- After independence, international research vessels began exploring the country's territorial waters, of about 756,000 square miles, roughly comparable to Mexico's landmass.



About Seabed Mining

- Deep sea mining involves removing mineral deposits and metals from the ocean's seabed.
- These deposit-rich polymetallic nodules off the ocean floor contain materials, such as nickel, rare earths, cobalt etc.
- They are needed for batteries and other materials used in tapping Renewable Energy and also for everyday technology like cellphones and computers.

Deciding factors for Cook Island

Advantages	Disadvantages
Economic Boost: Seabed mining can significantly increase revenue for the Cook Islands, supporting clean energy technologies and creating jobs.	Environmental Uncertainty: Mining may disrupt marine ecosystems, posing unknown risks like habitat disturbance and pollution
Infrastructure Development: Mining requires improved infrastructure, benefiting various sectors and enhancing connectivity.	Tourism Risk: Negative impacts on the environment could harm the Cook Islands' reputation as an ecotourism destination, impacting tourism income.



GS II

2. Reservation within Constitutional bounds

Source: The Hindu, Page 10

Prelims: Constitutional Articles related to the issue

Mains: Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

News: A political fistfight has emerged over the reservation issues within political parties.

Constitutional Provisions (Affirmative Actions)

- Reservation is affirmative action meant to balance the historical discrimination faced by OBC, SC and ST communities.
- Articles 15 and 16 guarantee equality to all citizens in any action by the state (including admissions to educational institutions) and public employment respectively.
- To achieve social justice, they also enable the state to make special provisions for the advancement of OBC, SC and ST. Thus, the reservation percentages vary from State to State.

About Other Backward Castes (OBCs)

- OBC is a collective term to classify socially and educationally backward castes. Many States also classify certain castes as the Most Backward Classes (MBC).
- In the Indra Sawhney case (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the 27% reservation for OBC.
- The court also provided for excluding the creamy layer from OBC with an income limit currently at ₹8 lakhs per annum. Children of parents, either of whom entered the government service (Centre or State) as Group A/Class I officers and children of parents, both of whom entered as Group B/Class II officers are also excluded.
- To uphold the basic structure of equality, SC fixed a cap of 50% for reservations unless there were exceptional circumstances. The reservation of OBC (27%), SC (15%) and ST (7.5%) resulted in a total reservation of 49.5%. In 2019, the Government gave an extra 10% reservation to EWS.
- In the Janhit Abhiyan case (2022), the court by a majority of 3:2 upheld the constitutional validity of the EWS reservation. It held that economic criteria could be a basis for reservation.

Year	Key development
1950 & 1951	Commencement of Constitution and First Amendment - Enabling provisions in Articles 15 and 16 to make special provisions for advancement of OBC, SC and ST
1982	Reservation for SC and ST fixed at 15% and 7.5% respectively, in central educational institutions and public sector undertakings
1990	27% reservation for OBC in central government employment introduced based on the recommendation of the Mandal Commission
2005	93rd Constitutional amendment inserted Article 15(5) that enabled reservation for OBC, SC and ST in educational institutions including private institutions
2019	103rd Constitutional amendment inserted Articles 15(6) and 16(6) that enabled up to 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the unreserved category in educational institutions and public employment

Current Debate (Religion in Reservation)

- The Constitution guarantees the prohibition of discrimination only based on religion under Articles 15 and 16. Muslim and Christian communities are provided reservations under the OBC/MBC category because the term used in the Constitution is 'socially and educationally backward classes' and could encompass backward communities from all religions.



- It is only for being a member of a SC, 'The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) order, 1950' specifies that the person should profess only Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism.
- There is no such requirement for being a member of a Schedule Tribe (ST).
- There is also sub-categorisation within the OBC/MBC quota for Muslim communities in States like Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Way Forward

- It has been estimated that 97% of reserved jobs and seats in educational institutions have been garnered by just around 25% of the OBC castes/sub-castes at the central level.
- While sub-categorisation has been implemented in 11 different States, it has not been carried out at the central level.
- The government has constituted a commission headed by former CJI K. G. Balakrishnan to study the question of extending SC reservation to Dalits who have converted to religions other than Sikhism and Buddhism.
- Increasing the reservation limit beyond 50%, sub-categorisation among reserved categories, introducing appropriate creamy layers for SC and ST, and extending SC reservations to Dalit Christians and Muslims are some of the sensitive issues that need to be addressed.

3. Niti Aayog report finds 'huge gap' in cancer screening at Ayushman centres

Source: IE, Page 3

Prelims: About Ayushman Bharat Scheme - components, Data & Statistics

Mains: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

News: The NITI Aayog Report flagged reports of inability of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) under Ayushman Bharat Scheme in screening the most common cancers in coming patients.

In Detail:

- Report is based on visits of three-member teams of NITI Aayog across a total of 93 HWCs across 37 districts in 12 states and one Union Territory over a period of four months in 2023.
- Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) offer annual screening for those 30 years or older for Non Communicable Diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and three of the most common cancers in India - oral, breast and cervical.
- Reasons for gap in screening:
 - Low levels of awareness and lack of capacities in HWCs.
 - Improper training of Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANMs), Medical Officers and Staff nurses.
 - Inability in educating beneficiaries to undertake self-examination.



Ayushman Bharat - Health Wellness Centres (HWCs)

PROGRESS SO FAR

- ❑ First HWC was launched in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh on 18th April 2018.
- ❑ More than 80,764 HWCs are operational as on 14th December 2021.
- ❑ So far, approvals for more than 1,50,000 HWCs have been accorded.

"Ayushman Bharat is an attempt to move from a selective approach to health care to deliver comprehensive range of services spanning preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care."

Ayushman Bharat has 2 pillars:

- ✓ AB-HWCs: for primary and secondary healthcare
- ✓ AB-PMJAY: for tertiary healthcare



GS III

4. SC stops grant of fresh mining leases in the Aravalli range

Source: The Hindu, Page 4

Prelims: Aravalli Range Landscape, Illegal Mining Statistics

Mains: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

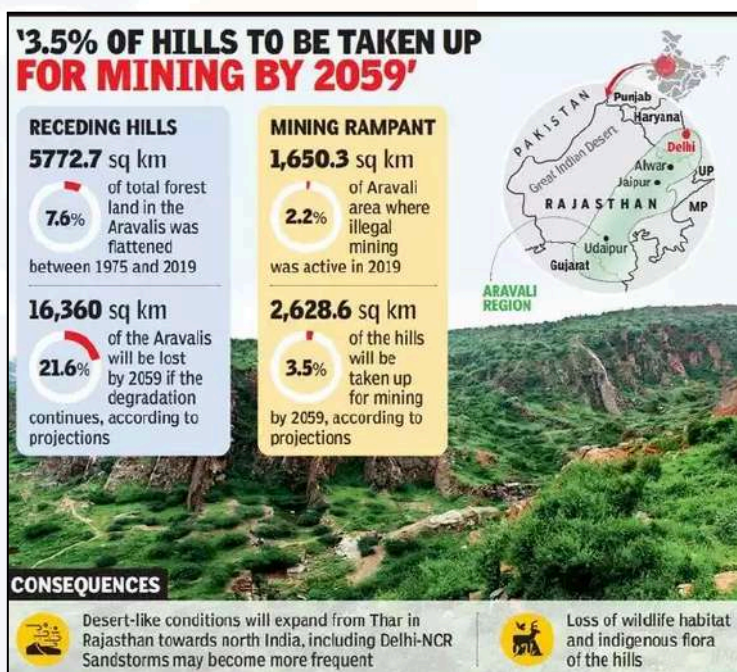
News: The Supreme Court stopped the grant of fresh mining leases and renewals in Aravalli Range.

In detail

- The bench also constituted a committee to devise a definition of what constitutes Aravali to facilitate drafting of a uniform policy to protect the range that serves as a barrier against the spread of Thar desert to the northern plains.
- Since 1985, the court has been concerned about Aravali's destruction when it created a special forest bench.
- It had on many occasions banned stone quarrying, sand mining, commercial activities and ordered removal of encroachments from the hilly forested terrain.
- But illegal activities continued to exist after these years.
- The bench, however, said a complete ban on mining always proves counterproductive.

About Aravali Range

- It is among the world's oldest folded mountains.
- It begins close to Delhi, travels 670 km (430 mi) in a southwesterly direction across southern Haryana and Rajasthan, and ends in Gujarat.
- At 1,722 metres (5,650 feet), Guru Shikhar is the tallest summit. Guru is a summit in Rajasthan's Arbuda Mountains.
- The Aravalli is the source of three main rivers and their tributaries: the Luni River empties into the Rann of Kutch, while the Banas and Sahibi rivers are Yamuna's tributaries.
- It is separated into two parts: the taller Sambhar-Sirohi ranges, which include Guru Shikhar; and the Sambhar-Khetri ranges, which are made up of three discontinuous ridges.
- Mineral resources such as marble, copper, zinc, and lead are abundant throughout the range.



5. Export-Import in agri sector

Source: IE, Page 12

Prelims: Data and Statistics regarding Agricultural Exports

Mains: Storage, Transport and Marketing of Agricultural Produce and Issues and Related Constraints

News: India's Agricultural exports fell 8.2% in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024 on the back of shipment curbs on a host of commodities, from cereals and sugar to onions.

India's TOP Agri Export Items (in \$millions)			
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Marine products	7,772.36	8,077.98	7,372.00
Basmati rice	3,537.49	4,787.65	5,843.30
Non-basmati rice	6,133.63	6,356.71	4,573.40
Spices	3,896.03	3,785.36	4,249.36
Buffalo meat	3,303.78	3,193.69	3,743.26

India's TOP Agri Import Items (in \$millions)			
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Vegetable oils	18,991.62	20,837.70	14,871.66
Fresh fruits	2,460.33	2,483.95	2,734.97
Pulses	2,228.95	1,943.89	3,746.78
Spices	1,299.38	1,336.65	1,455.57
Cashew	1,255.46	1,805.67	1,431.39

Reasons for fall in Exports

- Crash in global agri-commodity prices: Low international prices reduced the cost competitiveness of the country's exports, while also making it more vulnerable to imports.
- Concerns over domestic availability and food inflation triggered a ban on exports of all white non-basmati rice from July 2023.
- Export restrictions on Wheat and Onion on account of domestic shortage in 2022.

Drivers of Import

- Dip in imports in 2023-24 as compared to 2022-23, majorly due to decrease in imports in edible oils. This was the year after the Russia-Ukraine war.
- Even Though, the import in pulses nearly doubled during this period.

Policies Takeaways

- When the government resorts to banning an export, they usually do it in the interests of consumers rather than producers.
- Instead, a more predictable and rules based policy like introducing temporary tariffs instead of bans or quantitative restrictions is recommended.
- The zero/low tariffs on imports are against the government's own objective to promote crop diversification - taking away farmers from rice, wheat and sugarcane cultivation.
- A more rational export-import policy, balancing interests of producers and consumers as well as the short-and long-term goals for the farm sector is the need of the hour.



Editorials, Opinions and Ideas

6. An AI-infused world needs matching cybersecurity

Source: The Hindu, Page 8

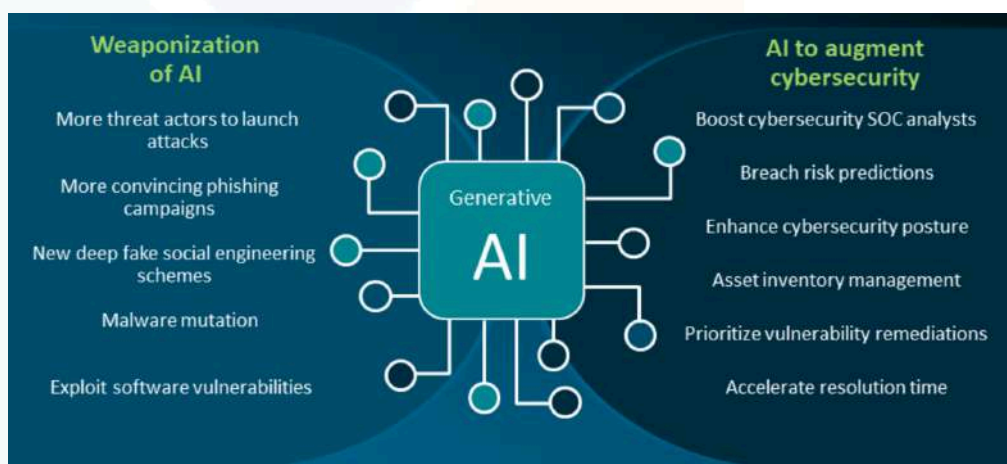
The article talks about cyber threats posed by Generative AI in the present times amidst its growing usage among people. It forms an important topic for your GS III part under 'Basics of Cyber Security'.

Generative AI Industry and Significance

- The Generative AI industry is projected to increase global GDP by as much as \$7 to \$10 trillion.
- It has significantly impacted productivity across the industrial realm with 70% of professionals reporting increased productivity.

Sophisticated Cyber Threats

- According to a recently published report, there has been a 1,265% increase in phishing incidents/emails, along with a 967% increase in credential phishing from 2023.
- As per a study conducted by Deep Instinct, around 75% of professionals witnessed an upsurge in cyberattacks in the past year alone.
- As generative AI continues to mature, newer, more complex threats have arisen:
 - Cognitive behavioural manipulation techniques like voice-activation toys and gadgets encourage dangerous behaviours in children.
 - Remote and real-time biometric identification systems jeopardise the right to privacy.
 - AI models being leveraged for translating and identifying coding errors to maximise the impact of cyberattacks.



Safeguarding against this Cyber Challenges

- It becomes imperative now, more than ever, to develop solutions through collaborative avenues to safeguard confidential information, identities, and even human rights.
- Recent signing of the Bletchley Declaration at the AI Safety Summit is a welcome step.
- In order to further strengthen the design of these rules, institutional and industry stakeholders may need to work together to improve and execute a realistic, practical, and effective framework. Public feedback may also be necessary during this process.



InBrief

7. Temples in Kerala will not use oleander

Source: The Hindu, Page 3

News: The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) and the Malabar Devaswom Board (MDB) announced their discontinuation of the use of Arali flowers (oleander) in most rituals conducted at temples due to its toxic nature.

About Arali Flowers

- The Arali, or oleander, flower is renowned for its striking beauty and resilience.
- Arali flowers come in a variety of colours, including pink, red, white, and yellow.
- It thrives in diverse climatic conditions, from arid regions to tropical climates, making it a versatile and adaptable ornamental plant.
- In India, the Arali flower is widely cultivated and cherished for its aesthetic value.
- However, it's essential to note that the Arali flower and its foliage contain toxic compounds, including cardiac glycosides, which can be harmful if ingested.



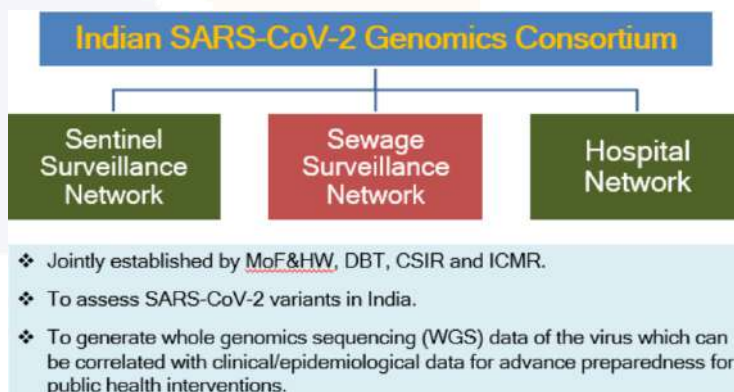
8. All about FLiRT, the new COVID-19 variants

Source: The Hindu, Page 7

News: There are new COVID-19 variations in circulation- named FLiRT Variants.

About FLiRT

- Two new variants - KP.2 and KP1.1 are dubbed 'FLiRT' variants, and are descendants of the Omicron JN.1 which spread globally in 2023.
- The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) has detected 238 cases of KP.2 and 30 cases of KP1.1 circulating in India.



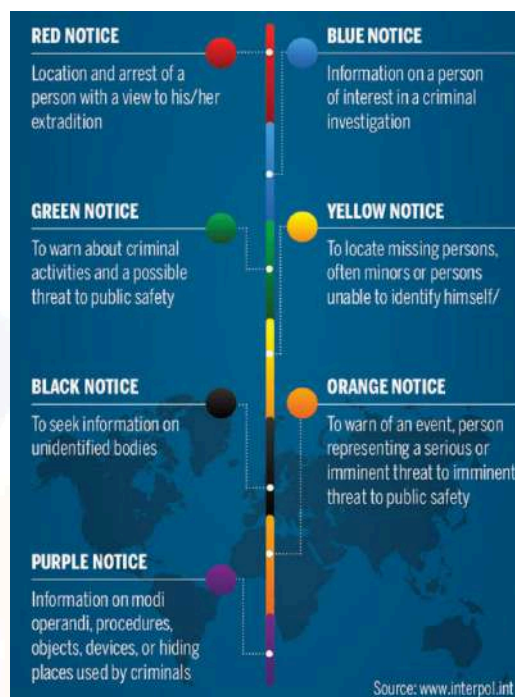
9. Interpol issue a blue corner notice against Prajwal

Source: The Hindu, Page 10

News: The International Criminal Police Organisation, commonly known as Interpol, has issued a blue corner notice against the absconding politician.

About InterPol

- Interpol, formally known as the International Criminal Police Organization, is an intergovernmental organisation with 194 member countries.
- It was founded in 1923 and is headquartered at Lyon, France.
- Its primary objective is to facilitate international cooperation between national police forces in combating transnational crimes.
- India joined Interpol in 1949. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) serves as the National Central Bureau (NCB) for Interpol in India.
- Since its personnel are unable to apprehend criminals, it is not a police force in the conventional sense.
- It functions more as a network for exchanging information, giving national police forces an efficient means of collaborating.



10. HRW flags possibility of 'genocide' in west Darfur

Source: The Hindu, Page 15

News: According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), there are a series of attacks by Sudanese paramilitary forces in the western region of Darfur (Sudan) raising the possibility of "genocide" against non-Arab ethnic communities.

About the conflict:

- On April 15th, 2023, violent clashes erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan.
- A separate unresolved conflict since 2003 remained in the Darfur region in western Sudan.
- In Darfur, the nomadic herders are Arabs. The settled farmers are Africans. At the local level, the conflict is about basic resources – both need land and water.
- The Arab government wants the land from the Africans.
- This Sudan Civil War has resulted in the displacement of more than 8.6 million people.



Daily Quiz

1. "It is an island country in Polynesia. It consists of 15 islands. Avarua is its capital. Once a colony of New Zealand, it has been self-governing since 1965. Recent Researches show that it is blessed with vast reserves of marine polymetallic nodules on their seabed". Identify the island.

- A. Tonga
- B. Cook
- C. Tuvalu
- D. Samoa

2. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: A person belonging to Muslim Community cannot be awarded reservation in a central government job as a Schedule Caste Candidate.

Statement II: A Constitution order specifies that the person seeking reservation from Schedule Caste should profess only Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism.

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 for Statement-I.
- B. Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I.
- C. Statement-I is correct Statement-II is incorrect.
- D. Statement-I is incorrect Statement-II is correct.

3. Recently, there are reports of the inability of Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) in screening the most common cancers. In this respect, consider the following statements:

- 1. Health and Wellness Centers are envisaged to deliver an expanded range of services to address the primary health care needs of the entire population in their area.
- 2. The services at HWCs also include Screening, Prevention, Control and Management of Non-Communicable diseases.
- 3. The services offered at HWCs are universal and free to the users.

How many of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. All are correct.
- D. All are incorrect.

4. Recently, the Supreme Court stopped the grant of fresh mining leases and renewals in Aravalli Range. In this respect, consider the following statements:

- 1. Sabarmati River originates on the western slopes of the Aravalli range.
- 2. Luni River originates from Pushkar valley of the Aravalli Range.
- 3. Banas river originates in the Khamnor Hills of the Aravalli Range.

Which of the above given statements is/are correct?

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



5. Recently, India's Agricultural exports fell 8.2% in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024. In this respect, arrange the following agriculture export commodities in descending order (in Million dollars).

- Marine products, Basmati rice, Non-basmati rice, Spices, Buffalo meat
- Non-basmati rice, Spices, Marine products, Basmati rice, Buffalo meat
- Basmati rice, Spices, Non-basmati rice, Buffalo meat, Marine products
- Marine products, Basmati rice, Spices, Non-basmati rice, Buffalo meat

6. Sometimes mentioned in the news, 'Bletchley Declaration' is related to which of the following fields?

- Ship Recycling
- Artificial Intelligence
- Climate Change
- Global Health Governance

7. "This flower comes in a variety of colours, including pink, red, white, and yellow. It thrives in diverse climatic conditions, from arid regions to tropical climates.. However, recently, there are reports about its foliage containing toxic compounds which can be harmful if ingested. Many temple boards have announced their discontinuation of the use of these flowers in most rituals." Identify the flower species.

- Azalea
- Dahlia
- Hibiscus
- Oleander

8. Recently in the news, the term "FLiRT" is associated with-

- A generative AI Platform
- A new Virus Variant
- A rocket fuel technology
- A digital currency

9. Consider the following pairs matching various Notices of Interpol with their directives:

- Red Notice - To apprehend a wanted criminal through extradition.
- Yellow Notice - To get information of a person facing criminal investigation.
- Blue Notice - To locate a missing person.

How many of the pairs are correctly matched?

- Only 1
- Only 2
- All are correct.
- All are incorrect.

10. Which of the following countries is recently in the news on accounts of ongoing Civil War between its armed forces and paramilitary forces?

- Mali
- Chad
- Syria
- Sudan



Solutions

Answer 1: B

Solution 1: Cook Island is an island country in Polynesia. It consists of 15 islands. Avarua is its capital. Once a colony of New Zealand, it has been self-governing since 1965. After independence, international research vessels began exploring the country's territorial waters, of about 756,000 square miles, roughly comparable to Mexico's landmass.

Hence, Option B is correct.

Answer 2: A

Solution 2:

- Statement 1 is correct: A person belonging to Muslim Community cannot be awarded reservation in a central government job as a Schedule Caste Candidate.
- Statement 2 is correct: The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) order, 1950 specifies that the person seeking reservation from Schedule Caste should profess only Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism.
- Clearly, Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I.

Hence, Option A is correct.

Answer 3: C

Solution 3:

- Statement 1 is correct: Health and Wellness Centers are envisaged to deliver an expanded range of services to address the primary health care needs of the entire population in their area.
- Statement 2 is correct: The services at HWCs also include Screening, Prevention, Control and Management of Non-Communicable diseases.

- Statement 3 is correct: The services offered at HWCs are universal and free to the users.

Hence, option C is correct.

Answer 4: D

Solution 4:

- Sabarmati River originates on the western slopes of the Aravalli range.
- The Luni River originates from Pushkar valley of the Aravalli Range.
- Banas river originates in the Khamnor Hills of the Aravalli Range.

Hence, option D is correct.

Answer 5: A

Solution 5:

- In 2023-24, India's top agricultural export items are Marine products, Basmati rice, Non-basmati rice, Spices, and Buffalo meat.

Hence, option A is correct.

Answer 6: B

Solution 6:

- The Bletchley Declaration seeks to improve international cooperation on the security of artificial intelligence (AI). Its two main goals are to identify common hazards associated with AI, improve scientific understanding of these risks, and develop international policies to mitigate these risks.

Hence, option B is correct.

Answer 7: D

Solution 7:

- Arali or Oleander flower and its foliage contain toxic compounds, including



cardiac glycosides, which can be harmful if ingested.

- Recently, The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) and the Malabar Devaswom Board (MDB) announced their discontinuation of the use of Arali flowers (oleander) in most rituals conducted at temples due to its toxic nature.

Hence, option D is correct.

Answer 8: B

Solution 8:

- There are new COVID-19 variations in circulation- named FLiRT Variants.
- Recently, The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) has detected 238 cases of KP.2 and 30 cases of KP1.1 circulating in India.

Hence, option B is correct.

Answer 9: A

Solution 9:

- Pair 1 is correct. Red Notice: Issued by a member state to apprehend a wanted criminal through extradition or other lawful means.
- Pair 2 is incorrect. Yellow Notice: Issued to locate a missing person, often minor or who are unable to identify themselves.
- Pair 3 is incorrect. Blue Notice: Referred to as an "enquiry notice," enables police forces in member states to exchange crucial crime-related information.

Hence, Option A is correct.

Answer 10: D

Solution 10:

- A civil war between two rival factions of the military government of Sudan, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) under the Janjaweed leader, Hemedti, began during Ramadan on 15 April 2023.

Hence, option D is correct.





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