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MCQs

THE HINDU

Donald Trump in the Persian labyrinth

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Why in Focus?

- The ongoing **U.S.–Iran conflict (2026)** highlights the limits of military power and risks of escalation in **West Asia (Middle East)**.

Key Highlights:

- The **U.S. and Israel** launched a war against Iran with multiple objectives such as destroying its **nuclear programme**, weakening its **missile capabilities**, ending support to proxy groups, and ultimately achieving **regime change**.
- Among these, **regime change remained the central goal**, as other objectives depended on it.
- The U.S. mainly relied on **air strikes**, avoiding deployment of ground troops and lacking a strong local ally to challenge Iran internally.
- In response, Iran adopted a **three-fold strategy**- it focused on preserving its regime, expanding the conflict regionally, and increasing the **economic costs** for its opponents.
- A major turning point came when Iran **closed the Strait of Hormuz**, through which nearly **20% of global seaborne oil trade** passes, thereby altering the dynamics of the conflict.
- The war gradually expanded through **proxy actors** such as **Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis (Ansar Allah), and Hashd al-Shaabi**, leading to wider regional involvement.
- Despite suffering damage to its infrastructure and economy, Iran demonstrated **strategic resilience**, forcing the U.S. to shift its focus from regime change to reopening critical trade routes.

Implications:

- The closure of the Strait of Hormuz poses a serious **threat to global energy security**, leading to oil price volatility and inflationary pressures.
- The expansion of the conflict to countries like **Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Gulf nations** has increased **regional instability**.
- The conflict shows the **limitations of conventional military power**, as air strikes alone could not achieve political objectives like regime change.
- The growing use of **asymmetric warfare**, including proxies and economic disruption, challenges traditional military superiority.
- The situation indicates a **shift in global power balance**, with reduced U.S. dominance and a more assertive Iran in the region.



- Prolonged conflict also leads to **economic disruptions**, affecting global trade, infrastructure, and markets.

Way Forward:

- There is a need for renewed **diplomatic engagement** through multilateral platforms such as the United Nations to resolve the conflict peacefully.
- Efforts must be made to establish **ceasefire agreements and de-escalation mechanisms** to prevent further expansion.
- Countries should focus on **energy diversification** to reduce dependence on critical chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.
- Strengthening adherence to **international maritime law**, especially **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)**, is essential to ensure freedom of navigation.
- A **regional security framework** involving Gulf countries can help build long-term stability.
- For India, adopting a **balanced foreign policy** is crucial to protect its energy security and the safety of its diaspora in the region.

Mains Question:

“The ongoing U.S.–Iran conflict highlights the limitations of conventional military power in achieving political objectives. Examine in the context of recent developments and discuss its implications for global energy security and regional stability.” (15 Marks, 250 words)

Handloom — weaving India's heritage into global growth

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 1

Salient features of Indian heritage and culture, traditional crafts, and GI-tagged textiles

Why in Focus?

- On the **occasion of the 12th National Handloom Day (August 7)**, India's handloom sector is not merely a cultural legacy

but a **strategic driver of Viksit Bharat 2047**, promoting sustainability and global competitiveness.

Key Highlights

- India's **handloom tradition dates back to the Indus Valley Civilisation**, while iconic weaves such as **Bengal Muslin, Banarasi Silk, Kanchipuram Silk and Pochampally Ikat** established India as a global textile leader.
- Handloom is **India's largest cottage industry**, supporting the livelihoods of over **35 lakh weavers and allied workers**, nearly **72% of whom are women**.
- Government initiatives include the **Raw Material Supply Scheme**, support for GI-tagged products and the Handloom Mark to strengthen the handloom sector.

Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS): A Ministry of Textiles scheme that supplies cotton, silk, wool, and jute yarn to eligible handloom weavers at mill-gate prices, with freight reimbursement to ensure affordable access to raw materials.

- 29 Weavers' Service Centres and 11 **Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (IIHTs)** provide training, design support, technology upgradation and market linkages to strengthen the sector.
- The **proposed National Handloom and Handicraft Programme** aims to strengthen **1,800 clusters across more than 500 districts**.
- Technological innovations such as the **Ambar Charkha, Maina Loom (Assam), Chitranjan Handloom (Sivasagar, Assam)**, the Centre of Excellence for Handloom Technology, Handloom 4.0, and the **VisionNXT platform** seek to improve productivity, quality, design forecasting and global market access without replacing artisans.

VisionNXT: VisionNXT is India's first AI- and data-driven fashion trend forecasting initiative, launched by the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) to support the textile and apparel industry.

Ambar Charkha: Ambar Charkha is a multi-spindle spinning wheel developed to increase yarn production and improve the efficiency of khadi spinning.

Maina Loom (Assam): Maina Loom is a traditional handloom of Assam designed for faster and more efficient weaving of indigenous textiles such as mekhela chador.

Implications

- **Competition from powerlooms and cheaper machine-made** textiles.
- **Inadequate technology adoption and productivity** in traditional weaving.
- **Weak branding, value addition and limited access** to global markets.
- **Low and unstable incomes discourage youth** from entering the sector.
- Balancing technological modernization with preservation of traditional craftsmanship.

Way Forward

- **Expand cluster-based development** under the National Handloom and Handicraft Programme.
- **Scale up Handloom 4.0, VisionNXT**, and looms to boost productivity.
- **Strengthen branding through GI tags, Handloom Mark**, and India Handmade certification.
- **Promote high-value products using premium silk**, natural and sustainable fibres.
- **Invest in skills, design innovation and entrepreneurship** to achieve Viksit Bharat 2047.

Mains Question

“Discuss the role of India’s handloom sector in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. How can technology, policy support and market integration transform handloom into a globally competitive and sustainable industry?” (250 Words)

Why are households pledging gold instead of selling it?

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 3

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in Focus

- The editorial **analyses the changing pattern of gold demand in India**, where rising prices and global uncertainties are shifting preferences from jewellery to investment instruments and gold-backed lending.

Key Highlights

- India’s **overall gold demand rose 2% Year-on-Year (YoY) to 282 tonnes in the First Half (H1) of 2026**, driven by strong investment demand.
- **Jewellery demand declined 17.1% YoY to 141.2 tonnes**, while Gold Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) recorded a net inflow of 20 tonnes in H1, reflecting strong investor participation.
- **Bars and coins demand surged by 21.3% (volume) and 105.5% (value) in H1 2026**, highlighting the **shift towards investment gold**.
- **Gold prices have risen more than fivefold over the last decade**, making ETFs, bars and coins increasingly attractive, especially among urban and younger investors.
- **RBI’s gold purchases and household gold investments helped reduce the impact of rupee depreciation** and strengthened India’s external sector stability.
- The **Gold Monetisation Scheme (2015) sought to mobilise idle household gold** but saw limited success due to taxation concerns and procedural complexities.

Gold Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF): A Gold ETF is a market-traded investment fund that tracks the price of gold, allowing investors to invest in gold without owning physical gold.

Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS): Launched in 2015, the Gold Monetisation Scheme allows individuals and institutions to deposit idle gold with banks and earn interest, reducing gold imports and mobilising domestic gold holdings.

- **Gold-backed loans increased as households increasingly pledged their gold** instead of selling it during times of financial need.



Implications

- **High gold prices have reduced** jewellery affordability.
- **Limited success of the Gold Monetisation Scheme** keeps large private gold stocks idle.
- Rapid growth in gold-backed lending **may increase financial vulnerabilities**.
- **Continued dependence** on gold imports puts pressure on **the Current Account Deficit (CAD)**.

Current Account Deficit (CAD): A Current Account Deficit (CAD) occurs when a country's imports of goods, services and transfers exceed its exports, resulting in a net outflow of foreign exchange.

Way Forward

- **Revamp the Gold Monetisation Scheme** through simpler procedures and better incentives.
- **Promote financial gold instruments such as Gold ETFs, digital gold** and other regulated investment products.
- **Strengthen regulation and monitoring of gold-backed lending** to ensure financial stability.
- **Encourage gold recycling, financial innovation** and digital transparency to unlock idle household gold.
- **Reduce import dependence by transforming household gold** into a productive financial asset.

Mains Question

- "India's gold market is witnessing a structural shift from jewellery consumption to financial investment. Examine the reasons for this transition and discuss its implications for India's economy and financial system." (250 Words)

How will the Supreme Court order impact mining around Ramsar wetland sites?

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 3

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- **The Supreme Court extended the 2024 Asan Wetland mining safeguards** to all Wetland Conservation Reserves.
- The Supreme Court strengthened judicial protection of wetlands by requiring prior approval for mining within a **10-km radius** of **Wetland Conservation Reserves**.

Key Highlights

- The **Supreme Court** clarified that its **2024 Asan Wetland** directions apply to **all Wetland Conservation Reserves** across India.
- Mining within a **10-km radius** of a **Wetland Conservation Reserve** requires **prior approval**.
 - ◆ Approval from the **Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** and/or the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.
- **Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve**, located at the confluence of the **Asan** and **Yamuna** rivers in **Uttarakhand**, was designated a **Ramsar Site** in **2020**.
- **Ramsar Sites** are wetlands designated under the **Ramsar Convention (1971)** for their **international ecological importance**.
- **India** became a **Contracting Party** in **1982** and currently has **101 Ramsar Sites**, the highest in **Asia**.
- The **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017** introduced a **decentralised framework** for wetland management.
 - ◆ They **do not prescribe a statutory buffer zone** around wetlands and place primary responsibility on **State Wetland Authorities**.
- The **Wetlands Rules, 2010** contained a detailed list of **prohibited activities** and required approvals for activities affecting wetlands.



- ◆ These provisions were removed under the **2017 Rules**.

- The constitutional validity of the **Wetlands Rules, 2017**, is currently under challenge before the **Supreme Court**.

Implications

- The **2017 Wetlands Rules** removed several safeguards available under the **2010 Rules**, raising concerns over wetland protection.
- Absence of a **statutory buffer zone** around **Ramsar Sites** may increase the risk of ecological degradation from nearby activities.
- Mining and other developmental activities can adversely affect the **ecological character** and **biodiversity** of wetlands.
- Protection of wetlands depends on a combination of **judicial directions**, **environmental laws**, and **State-level implementation**.

Way Forward

- Strengthen the legal framework for **wetland conservation** by ensuring adequate regulatory safeguards.
- Improve coordination among **State Wetland Authorities**, **NBWL**, and **MoEFCC** to ensure effective wetland management.
- Ensure scientific assessment before permitting activities that may affect wetlands.
- Promote the **conservation** and **wise use** of wetlands in line with the **Ramsar Convention**.

Mains Question

“Wetlands are ecologically significant ecosystems that require stronger legal and institutional protection.” Discuss the importance of wetlands and examine the challenges in their conservation in India. (250 Words)

KEYWORDS

GOBARdhan (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan)

- **GOBARdhan** was announced in the **Union Budget 2018** and launched on **30 April 2018** by the **Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation**.
- The scheme aims to **manage and convert cattle dung** and **biodegradable organic waste** into **compost**, **organic fertilizer**, **biogas**, and **bio-CNG**.
- It utilizes **agricultural residue**, **cattle dung**, **press mud**, **municipal organic waste**, and **other biomass resources** to produce **clean energy** and **organic manure**.
- **GOBARdhan** is implemented as a **national priority program** under the **Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) - Phase II**.
- The scheme supports **villages** in the **scientific management** of **cattle** and **biodegradable waste**.
- The **Union Cabinet** has approved the **GOBARdhan - National Circular Bioenergy Scheme** with a total financial outlay of **₹23,731 crore**.
 - ◆ The scheme will be **implemented from FY 2026-27 to FY 2035-36** to promote **Compressed Biogas (CBG)** as a key component of **India's clean energy transition**.

National Handloom Day

- National Handloom Day is **observed on 7 August** to commemorate the **Swadeshi Movement** launched on **7 August 1905**.
- The **observance** was instituted in **2015** to recognise the contribution of **handloom weavers** to India's cultural heritage and rural economy.
- India's handloom **sector supports the livelihoods of over 35 lakh people**, with **women accounting for more than 70%** of the workforce.
- The sector is the second-largest source of rural employment after agriculture,



providing livelihood opportunities across the country.

- The **12th National Handloom Day celebrations include the Sant Kabir Handloom Awards, National Handloom Awards**, exhibitions, and live demonstrations of traditional weaving techniques.

Agni-4

- Agni-4 is an **indigenously** developed, two-stage, solid-fuel, road-mobile **Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)** developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- It has a **range of about 4,000 km** and can carry both nuclear and conventional warheads.
- The missile is **equipped with Inertial Navigation System (INS) and Micro Navigation System (MNS)** for high accuracy.
- Agni-4 forms **part of India's Agni missile series and strengthens India's long-range strategic deterrence capability**.
- Recently **India successfully test-fired the Agni-4 Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, Odisha**, under the Strategic Forces Command.



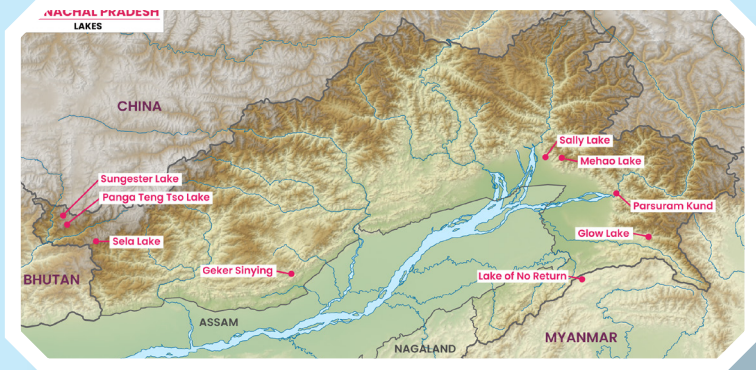
Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

- Launched in **2016**, PMFBY is a flagship **crop insurance scheme** administered by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare** and implemented through **empanelled public and private insurance companies**.
- Farmers pay a **highly subsidized uniform premium (2% for Kharif, 1.5% for Rabi, and 5% for commercial/horticultural crops)**, while the **remaining premium is shared by the Centre and States**.
- The scheme provides coverage at **all stages of farming**, including **prevented sowing and crop damage due to natural calamities (pre-harvest)** and **losses due to unseasonal rainfall for crops left in the field up to 14 days (post-harvest)**.
- Initially **mandatory for loanee farmers**, it was made **completely voluntary in 2020**, leading to **significant participation**, including **over 5 crore non-loanee farmers** and a **high claim settlement ratio (97%)**.
- The scheme is **technology-driven**, using **satellite imagery, drones, YES-TECH, and the DigiClaim portal** to ensure **accurate yield estimation and timely, direct claim settlement** into farmers' bank accounts.

Places in News

Glaw Lake

- **Glaw Lake** is a **freshwater lake** located within the **Kamlang Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary** in **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The lake is **fed by perennial mountain streams** and is surrounded by **dense forests** in the **Eastern Himalayas**.
- The **wetland** and its **catchment area** support over **150 tree species** and **49 orchid species**, making it a **biodiversity hotspot**.
- **Glaw Lake** has been designated as **India's 101st Ramsar Site**, expanding the country's network of **internationally recognized wetlands**.
- It is the **first Ramsar Site** in **Arunachal Pradesh**, giving global recognition to the state's ecologically important **freshwater ecosystem**.



Kerch Strait

- The **Kerch Strait** is currently in the news due to **Ukrainian maritime drone attacks (Operation MoLoChKa)**, which prompted **Russia to suspend navigation**, disrupting **regional oil and cargo shipments**.
- It is a **narrow and strategically important waterway** in **Eastern Europe**, serving as the **only direct maritime link** between the **Black Sea** and the **Sea of Azov**.
- Geographically, it separates the **Kerch Peninsula (Crimea)** in the west from the **Taman Peninsula (Krasnodar Krai, Russia)** in the east.
- The strait is spanned by the **Kerch Strait Bridge (Crimean Bridge)**, a **19-km-long road and rail corridor** built by **Russia to connect its mainland with Crimea**.
- It acts as a **major geopolitical chokepoint**, facilitating the movement of **agricultural goods, industrial cargo, and energy supplies** from **Eastern Europe to global markets**.



Species In News

Nilgiri tahr

- The **Nilgiri tahr** was recently in the news after a **census revealed a significant rise in its population** in the **Varayattumudy hills** of Kerala's **Adimaly forest range**, highlighting the region as an important **natural habitat alongside Eravikulam National Park**.
- Endemic to the **Southern Western Ghats (Kerala and Tamil Nadu)**, the **Nilgiri tahr (*Nilgiritragus hylocrius*)** is the **state animal of Tamil Nadu** and the **only mountain ungulate species (hoofed mammal) in tropical Western Ghats**.
- It primarily inhabits **high-altitude montane grasslands and shola forest ecosystems**, relying on **steep rocky terrain and cliffs** for **predator avoidance and foraging**.
- The species is classified as **Endangered (IUCN Red List)**, protected under **Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, and conserved through **Project Nilgiri Tahr (Tamil Nadu)**.
- Major threats include **habitat fragmentation, climate change, and invasive alien plant species**, which degrade the **shola-grassland ecosystem**.

