

STATE

Assam Minister and tribal body meet amid row over ST tag for 6 communities

- The Assam government has tabled an interim report of a Group of Ministers (GoM) recommending ST status for six non-tribal communities: Adivasi/“Tea Tribes”, Chutia, Koch-Rajbongshi, Matak, Moran and Tai Ahom.
- This proposal comes against the backdrop of Assam already having 14 recognized ST communities, with the Bodos being the largest tribal group in the region.
- Existing tribal bodies, including CCTOA and the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), fear that adding numerically large and relatively “advanced” communities will dilute their political and economic safeguards.
- Tribal organisations demand a clear guarantee that the rights, reservations, and welfare benefits of current STs will not be encroached upon if the six communities are added.
- The GoM report suggests a three-tier ST structure for Assam: ST (Plains), ST (Hills), and a new ST (Valley) category to house the six proposed communities.
- The stated intent is that ST (Plains) and ST (Hills) will continue to enjoy their current rights and quotas, while ST (Valley) will be a separate category so that recognition of new groups does not formally reduce the protections of existing STs.
- The controversy reflects the tension between two equity claims: long-standing ST groups seeking to preserve hard-won safeguards versus historically marginalized non-ST communities demanding comparable recognition.
- It also underlines how constitutional categories like “Scheduled Tribe” have become politically salient tools for access to reservations in jobs, education, and political representation, making any expansion of the list highly contentious.
- The language used by tribal bodies (“you cannot differentiate the tribals,” “advanced people are imposed”) hints at fears of relative deprivation and competition within the affirmative action framework rather than opposition to the idea of inclusion per se.
- If not managed carefully, the move could deepen inter-community mistrust, provoke protests from both existing and aspiring ST groups, and create pressure on the overall reservation framework in Assam.

Probe ordered into ‘gas leak’ from mines in Jharkhand

- The reported event is a “poisonous gas leak” from underground mines in the Kendua (or Kenduadih) Basti area of Dhanbad district.
- One woman is stated to have died and about 12 people reportedly fell sick, allegedly due to exposure to what officials suspect is carbon monoxide.
- The Dhanbad district administration has ordered a formal probe into the leak and its causes, reflecting the seriousness of the incident and potential negligence.
- Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), which operates the mines, shifted around 1,000 residents from affected or “danger zone” localities to safer locations as a precautionary measure.
- multi-agency coordination suggests that authorities see the issue as both a mine safety failure and a public health and disaster management concern, not just an isolated industrial mishap.
- The area has been described as a declared “danger zone” due to underground mine fires, and the company pasted notices on houses asking residents to vacate immediately, highlighting chronic environmental risks in Dhanbad’s coal belt.
- Officials were directed to set up a control room, arrange alternative shelters, and ensure basic facilities for evacuated residents, illustrating an attempt to combine evacuation with relief, though the article implies these are emergency rather than long-term solutions.
- The incident underscores persistent hazards associated with underground coal mining in Jharkhand, especially gas build-up, fires, and subsidence near inhabited areas.
- It also exposes a structural problem: people continue to live in notified “danger zones,” making each industrial failure or natural leakage a potential public health disaster, and raising questions about the effectiveness of rehabilitation and risk mitigation policies.



Powers to EC to conduct simultaneous polls not excessive, says law panel

- The Law Commission has told a parliamentary committee that empowering the ECI through a new legal framework to hold simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies does not amount to “excessive delegation” of power.
- In its legal opinion, the Commission asserts there is “not even an iota of doubt” about the constitutionality of the provision that authorises the ECI to recommend postponement of elections for synchronising polls.

Context: Bill and parliamentary scrutiny

- The briefing was given to the Joint Committee of Parliament examining the set of Bills that aim to enable “One Nation, One Election” by synchronising Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls.
- Members were also informed that the proposed constitutional amendment in the Bill does not require ratification by at least half of the State legislatures, implying it is being framed as a non-federal amendment under Article 368.

Opposition’s constitutional concerns

- Opposition MPs questioned Law Commission officials on whether vesting such discretion in the ECI to recommend postponement of elections could violate federalism and the constitutional scheme of fixed terms and independent State mandates.
- They also raised issues about the effect on democratic accountability, arguing that regular, staggered elections act as an important check on the executive and a continuous mechanism for gauging public opinion.

Law Commission’s legal reasoning

- The panel’s interpretation is that the proposed Article 82A(5) of the Bill does not confer arbitrary or unfettered powers on the ECI, but merely operationalises its existing plenary constitutional mandate under Article 324 to supervise and control elections.
- From this perspective, allowing the ECI to recommend rescheduling elections to achieve simultaneity is portrayed as a logical extension of its supervisory power, not a novel or extra-constitutional authority.

Democratic and federal implications

- This highlights an underlying tension: while the government and the Law Commission emphasize administrative efficiency and stable governance through simultaneous polls, critics worry about concentrating too much control over electoral timing in one constitutional body.
- It also indicates that the choice to avoid State ratification could itself become politically contentious, as States may view a nationally imposed synchronisation of their election cycles as an encroachment on their political autonomy, even if it passes the technical tests of constitutionality.

Wildlife body BNHS to release 6 critically endangered vultures in Assam in 2026

Plan and locations

- BNHS will release three male and three female vultures (slender-billed and white-rumped), aged between two and three years, in Assam’s Kamrup and Biswanath districts.
- These birds were bred at the BNHS Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre in Rani, Kamrup, and the chosen release locations already have small wild vulture populations, including proximity to Kaziranga, which should aid their adaptation.

Soft release strategy

- The vultures will first be kept in a large pre-release aviary for at least three months so they can experience surrounding conditions, observe wild conspecifics and scavengers, and learn to forage.
- This “acclimatisation” is especially important because the birds have grown up in captivity, and this phase acts as a bridge between a controlled environment and true wilderness.

Species status and ecology

- India currently supports around 20,000 vultures belonging to nine species, including bearded vulture, griffon vulture and cinereous vulture.
- Endangered species listed include the Egyptian vulture and Himalayan griffon, while the critically endangered group covers red-headed, white-rumped, long-billed and slender-billed vultures, which have suffered catastrophic population crashes over recent decades.

Biology and conservation value

- Vultures live in flocks, reach maturity around five years of age, and can survive up to 50–60 years, making each successfully reared and released individual a long-term contributor to population recovery.
- They possess strong immunity and rarely contract infections, which, combined with their scavenging role, makes them crucial for ecosystem health and carcass disposal.

Source populations and preparatory work

- The founder stock for these particular vultures was collected from different parts of Assam, especially areas where slender-billed vultures still survive, to maintain local genetic diversity.
- BNHS, in collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Assam Forest Department, has been preparing for more than 15 years, including securing safe habitats and establishing breeding infrastructure.

Community engagement and long-term outlook

- Scientists are working closely with local communities to ensure that villagers understand the ecological value of vultures and refrain from practices that might endanger them, such as using toxic veterinary drugs or poisoning carcasses.
- Large-scale awareness meetings and education campaigns aim to create social support so that when the birds are finally released in 2026, the surrounding human landscape is as safe and vulture-friendly as possible.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1.The term “Auramine” recently seen in news is?

- (a) A dormant Volcano
- (b) Nuclear Submarine
- (c) Malware used in cyberattacks
- (d) A banned hazardous dye used as food additive

2.According to the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the expression “Scheduled Areas” means such areas as declared by:

- (a) President
- (b) Parliament
- (c) Governor of a state
- (d) State legislature

3.Hayli Gubbi volcano recently seen in news located at?

- (a) Ethiopia
- (b) Eritrea
- (c) Kenya
- (d) Tanzania

4.The Changthang plateau of Ladakh region is known for the production of:

- (a) Saffron
- (b) Pashmina Wool
- (c) Golden Silk
- (d) Wheat

DETAILED ANSWER KEY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE CHRONICLE PAGE

Postal department considers UPI-like ‘labels’ for addresses

India’s Department of Posts is proposing a UPI-style “smart address label” system called DHRUVA, built on a digital addressing layer named DIGIPIN, to make sharing and verifying addresses interoperable, consent-based, and precise across platforms.

- 1.Core idea: UPI-like address labels
 - Instead of repeatedly typing or sharing long physical addresses, users would share a short, standardised label in the format “name@entity”, analogous to UPI IDs, which would act as a proxy for their actual address.
 - Firms (such as e-commerce and gig platforms) would use this label to access the underlying address and geolocation data, subject to user consent and time-bound authorisation.
- 2.DHRUVA and DIGIPIN architecture
 - DHRUVA stands for Digital Hub for Reference and Unique Virtual Address and requires an underlying geocoded grid called DIGIPIN, which the government rolled out earlier in the year.
 - DIGIPIN is described as a 10-character alphanumeric code that represents roughly a 14 square metre patch of land using latitude–longitude, enabling precise location mapping even in rural or unplanned areas where textual addresses are ambiguous.
- 3.Role of address service providers and Section 8 entity
 - Labels will be issued by “address service providers,” while the consent architecture and address data will be managed by specialised address information agents (AIAs).
 - A new Section 8 not-for-profit company under government oversight, similar in role to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) for UPI, is proposed to run the interoperable smart address ecosystem.
- 4.Consent-based, time-limited access
 - Users will explicitly authorise companies to access their address for a specified period, after which the label must be re-authorised, giving them granular control over who sees their location and for how long.
 - The system is intended to reduce data misuse risk compared to sharing raw addresses directly, as access is mediated, logged, and revocable, though the article implies details of safeguards are still being worked out.
- 5.Policy context and private participation
 - The initiative is framed as part of a broader push to build digital public infrastructure for addressing, on the lines of UPI for payments, with open standards and the possibility of multiple private players joining.
 - The Department of Posts has released a draft amendment to the Post Office Act, 2023, and is consulting stakeholders, hoping that once the framework is in place, firms will find it compelling to adopt DHRUVA for address management across sectors.
- 6.Advantages and potential challenges
 - For citizens, the system promises convenience (one reusable label across services), better delivery accuracy, and the ability to manage multiple addresses (home, work, temporary) more easily.
 - However, the success of DHRUVA will depend on interoperability, strong privacy protections, widespread adoption by logistics and platform companies, and ensuring that digitally excluded populations can still access postal and delivery services without being disadvantaged by the shift to virtual addressing.

China’s story of rural revitalisation

China presents its rural revitalisation campaign as the next phase after official “poverty eradication”, using targeted state programmes, industrial upgrading, and local participation to narrow the rural–urban divide before 2035.

Political framing and objectives

- Rural revitalisation is framed as a central goal of Xi Jinping’s leadership, linked to the Chinese Communist Party’s long-term plan to achieve “socialist modernisation” by 2035 and build a “modern socialist country” by 2049.
- The leadership claims to have ended “absolute poverty” by 2021 and now portrays revitalisation as consolidating those gains by improving living standards, public services, and rural governance.

Rural–urban divide and structural challenges

- Despite rapid growth, China still faces stark disparities between prosperous coastal/urban regions and lagging inland/rural areas, reflected in income gaps, unequal access to healthcare and education, and limited non-farm jobs.
- The article notes that earlier industrialisation often extracted resources and labour from the countryside to fuel urban growth, deepening this dual structure and making rural revitalisation both an economic and political imperative.

Evolution of poverty programmes

- From the 1980s, China experimented with area-based poverty relief, later shifting to more finely targeted, household-level identification using national poverty databases and village cadres.
- These programmes combined fiscal transfers, infrastructure building, relocation from remote places, and support for local industries such as specialty agriculture, tourism, and small manufacturing.

Rural revitalisation policy toolkit

- The current revitalisation drive scales up earlier tools but adds new elements: improving rural public services, promoting digital connectivity, and investing in green industries and ecotourism that leverage local landscapes.
- The central government pushes provinces and counties to align plans with national benchmarks while allowing experimentation in land-use reforms, cooperative farming, and village enterprises to raise productivity and incomes.

Role of local governments and people’s participation

- County and village officials are tasked with translating broad targets into concrete projects, often using performance indicators tied to income growth, infrastructure coverage, and environmental outcomes.
- The article highlights how local participation—through cooperatives, village committees, and returning migrants starting businesses—is presented as essential, though there remain questions about how much genuine bottom-up decision-making occurs in a highly centralised political system.

Environmental and cultural dimensions

- Rural revitalisation is explicitly linked to China’s “ecological civilisation” narrative, encouraging renewable energy, restoration of degraded land, and conservation-based tourism in scenic rural areas.
- At the same time, the campaign seeks to preserve and commodify “rural culture” (traditional houses, festivals, crafts) as assets for tourism and local branding, which can bring income but may also standardise or commercialise local traditions.

Strategic implications and critiques

- Internationally, Beijing uses the poverty-alleviation and revitalisation story as proof of the efficacy of its governance model, showcasing it in global South–South cooperation and development forums.
- Critics, however, point to risks of rising local debt, uneven implementation, and the possibility that once central attention shifts, poorer regions could struggle to sustain investments and services needed to prevent a slide back into poverty.



BUSINESS

Rupee recovers from record low on RBI intervention, ends at 89.9/USD

Immediate market movement

- After a six-day losing streak, the rupee rebounded sharply from an intraday record low of 90.43 per US dollar to close at 89.90, a gain of 29 paise from the previous close.
- The reversal is described as a correction from extreme weakness rather than a full trend change, with the rupee still trading near historically weak levels.

Role of RBI intervention

- The turnaround is primarily attributed to likely intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the spot foreign-exchange market around the 90.30–90.40 zone, where aggressive dollar selling by the central bank appears to have occurred.
- Market participants also inferred support from recent comments by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on the rupee, which traders viewed as a signal that the central bank would act to curb excessive volatility.

Impact on market sentiment and volatility

- RBI’s action, along with the use of foreign-exchange reserves, helped smooth intraday volatility and reassured traders that the authority would not allow disorderly depreciation.
- The rupee’s recovery lifted some pressure in interest-rate and credit markets, but forward premiums and hedging demand remained elevated, indicating persistent caution.

External environment and dollar dynamics

- This notes that the US dollar index (DXY) weakened slightly as global markets priced in a possible US Federal Reserve rate cut in early 2025, which softened the dollar and offered some relief to emerging-market currencies like the rupee.
- However, safe-haven flows into the dollar and US assets remain strong due to global growth concerns and geopolitical risks, keeping the external backdrop challenging for the rupee.

Foreign portfolio flows and trade factors

- On the same day, foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of Indian equities, offloading several thousand crore rupees worth of shares, which normally exerts downward pressure on the currency.
- The rupee also continues to face headwinds from a wide trade deficit and sustained foreign-currency outflows, suggesting that without continued support or improving fundamentals, depreciation pressures could re-emerge.

Broader implications

- The episode underscores the RBI’s active role in managing the rupee’s path rather than any specific level, intervening to prevent sharp, speculative moves that could destabilise markets.
- For businesses and investors, the article signals that currency risk will likely stay high in the near term, making hedging and careful management of dollar exposure critical despite temporary relief from the latest bounce.

National Security Cess not on essential goods, says FM

- The proposed Health and National Security Cess Bill, 2025 aims to levy a cess only on specific “demerit” goods (like pan masala and certain related products), not on essential commodities, with the Union Finance Minister insisting it will fund health and security without burdening basic consumption.

Purpose and design of the cess

- The Bill seeks to create a “dedicated and predictable” revenue stream for two areas framed as nationally critical: public health and national security, with the proceeds to be shared with States for health schemes.
- The cess is described as being imposed on machine-linked production of demerit goods, capacity- and production-based rather than on consumption, to act as a deterrent by raising the cost of these high-risk products.

Government’s assurances

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasises that essential commodities are excluded and that the cess will not be added on top of existing GST rates for such goods, arguing it therefore does not make everyday items more expensive.
- She also stresses that the proposal is limited to a narrow set of products associated with significant health risks, such as pan masala, and that the system will not revive the old “inspector raj” because it relies on automated tracking of production, not intrusive physical inspections.

Opposition’s criticisms

- Opposition MPs contend that the new cess could increase compliance burdens and discretionary powers of officials, especially for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) engaged in manufacturing or packaging the targeted products.
- Critics argue that repeated resort to cesses sidelines the spirit of cooperative federalism by reducing the shareable tax pool, and some MPs question whether a production-based cess will actually curb harmful consumption or simply raise prices.

Fiscal and policy context

- The Bill is presented as augmenting resources for health and security without altering GST’s basic design as a destination-based consumption tax, though it effectively adds another levy atop GST on selected items.
- Supporters in the ruling party defend the measure as transparent and purpose-linked, claiming it clearly shows citizens where money collected from demerit goods will be spent, unlike earlier, more general revenue-raising measures.

Political and sectoral implications

- For the pan masala and related industries, the cess could raise production costs and potentially compress margins, with MSME manufacturers possibly hit harder than large firms that can absorb or pass on the costs.
- Politically, the debate reflects a wider clash over the government’s reliance on cesses and surcharges, its approach to sin taxes as instruments of public health policy, and the balance between revenue generation, regulatory overreach, and federal tax-sharing norms.



In Turkiye, recently unearthed carved faces shed new light on Neolithic society

- The newly unearthed carved human faces and sculptures at Karahantepe in southeastern Türkiye are reshaping scholarly understanding of early Neolithic society, suggesting complex symbolism, religion and social organisation nearly 11,000 years ago.

Key discoveries and context

- Archaeologists at Karahantepe, part of Türkiye’s broader “Stone Hills” project in Sanliurfa province, have found stone figures with distinct carved faces, a black serpent-like head with expressive features on both sides, and statues placed around a T-shaped pillar.
- These finds complement earlier discoveries at nearby UNESCO-listed Gobekli Tepe, another monumental Neolithic site, and together they form one of the oldest known megalithic landscapes in Upper Mesopotamia.

Interpreting the human imagery

- Excavators argue that as communities settled and became more sedentary, they “domesticated” themselves by symbolically placing human figures and faces at the centre of ritual spaces, indicating a new self-awareness and perhaps ancestor or deity worship.
- The growing number of human sculptures is seen as evidence of a shift from purely animal symbolism to a system in which human identity, status and possibly emotion were central to belief and ritual life.

Implications for Neolithic social structure

- The layout of buildings and communal structures suggests a highly organised society with specialised spaces, communal gathering areas and shared symbolic codes rather than small, simple farming hamlets.
- Researchers argue that these sites overturn older views of early farmers as “primitive”, instead pointing to an elaborate social order capable of coordinating large construction projects and complex ritual performances.

Methodological limits and ongoing questions

- Archaeologists emphasise that there are no written records for this period, making precise interpretation difficult; each new statue or carved face slightly changes hypotheses about meaning and function.
- They caution that, while patterns can be compared across sites and statues, fully identifying what the figures represent—gods, ancestors, communal roles or mythic beings—remains speculative and will depend on further finds.

Transforming regional historical narratives

- The discoveries contribute to a broader re-evaluation of southeastern Türkiye, long known mainly as the biblical landscape linked to Abraham, by foregrounding its much older Neolithic heritage.
- Local guides and scholars note that tourism and public interest, previously centred on later religious traditions, are increasingly shifting towards the deep prehistory revealed by the Stone Hills excavations.

Ukraine facing growing demographic crisis: who will rebuild after the war?

Collapsing births and shrinking communities

- A maternity ward in the western town of Hoschcha, which used to be busy, now records just over a hundred births a year, down sharply from more than 400 a decade ago, symbolising the nationwide fall in fertility.
- Local hospitals and schools are closing or downsizing because there are too few children, with some villages that once taught hundreds of pupils now reduced to a few dozen, if that.

War losses, displacement and population decline

- Ukraine’s population, officially 42 million before Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, is estimated to have already dropped below 36 million, factoring in deaths, injuries, occupation of territory, and outmigration.
- Demographers quoted in the piece suggest that the total population could fall to 25 million by 2050 if trends continue, meaning the country would lose roughly 40% of its pre-war population within a generation.

Births versus deaths: demographic imbalance

- The country now combines one of the world’s lowest birth rates with a wartime spike in mortality; current estimates indicate that for every child born, roughly three people die.
- Life expectancy has fallen sharply, with men especially affected due to combat deaths and stress-related illnesses, further worsening the age structure and dependency ratios.

Labour force and reconstruction challenges

- Ukraine’s government projects a labour deficit of millions of workers in the coming decades, especially in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and public services that are critical for rebuilding damaged infrastructure.
- Emigration of younger, educated Ukrainians to EU states since 2014, now intensified by wartime refugee flows, means that many of those best placed to drive reconstruction may settle abroad permanently.

Social fabric, trauma and family decisions

- Interviews with teachers and local officials describe shrinking school classes and parents openly questioning whether it is responsible to have more children amid uncertainty, grief, and economic hardship.
- Widows, families of missing soldiers, and those experiencing repeated displacement express a mix of exhaustion and reluctance to risk raising children in a country still under attack, deepening the fertility decline.

Government strategy and expert warnings

- Official documents acknowledge a looming labour shortage and propose long-term demographic strategies, including incentives for return migration and measures to support families.
- Experts warn that without large-scale return of refugees, active recruitment of immigrants, and robust pro-natalist policies, Ukraine may lack the human capital needed to reconstruct homes, infrastructure, and institutions once the war ends.

Symbolism and uncertainty about the future

- Ultimately, the piece frames Ukraine’s challenge not only as winning the war and regaining territory, but also as recreating a viable, younger society capable of sustaining economic recovery and national life decades from now.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans **d**

Auramine O – It is a synthetic yellow dye, produced from compounds such as dimethylaniline and formaldehyde. The dye appears as yellow flakes or powder and dissolves easily when mixed with solvents. Used in – Industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, etc. Banned for food use – It is bright in colour, easily available and low-cost, yet remains unapproved for use as a food additive. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) – classifies auramine as a substance that is possibly carcinogenic to humans. Commonly found in – Sweets, turmeric powder, and street food snacks, gives a bright yellow hue that looks more appealing to consumers.

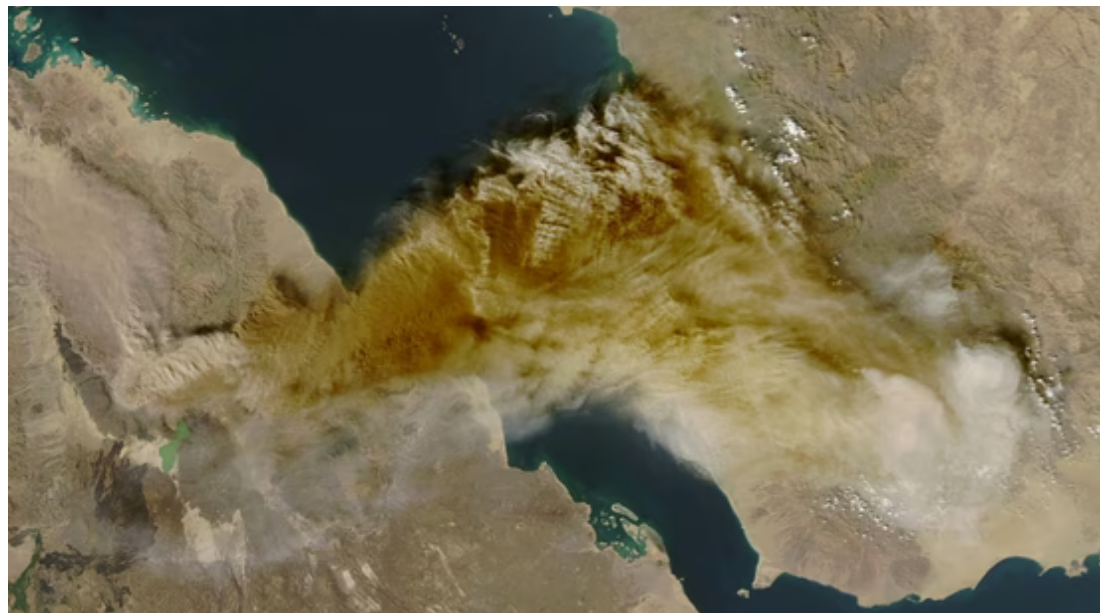


Q2. Ans **a**

Article 244 in Part X of the Constitution of India envisages a special system of administration for certain areas designated as ‘Scheduled Areas’ and ‘Tribal Areas’. In the Constitution of India, the expression “Scheduled Areas” means such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas. The President is empowered to declare an area to be a scheduled area. He can also increase or decrease its area, alter its boundary lines, rescind such designation or make fresh orders for such re designation on an area in consultation with the Governor of the State concerned. Recently, the Supreme Court has held that Parliamentary or State law wouldn’t apply to Scheduled Areas only if the Governor notifies so.

Q3. Ans **a**

Ethiopia's Hayli Gubbi volcano , dormant for over 12,000 years, erupted, sending a massive ash cloud across the Red Sea and South Asia. The thick ash cloud reached India, resulting in the diversion of several flights. Type and Location: Hayli Gubbi is a shield volcano in Afar, Ethiopia, part of the Erta Ale Range. Situated at the edge of the East African Rift, where the African and Arabian plates are slowly diverging. Shield volcanoes are broad, gently sloping, formed by thin, fluid lava flows. Eruptions are usually less explosive, with lava spreading wide like a warrior’s shield.



Q4. Ans **b**

The Changthang plateau of the Ladakh region is primarily known for the production of Pashmina wool. This fine cashmere wool is sourced from the undercoat of a specific breed of goat known as the Changthangi or Changra goat, which is native to the high-altitude region. The local nomadic community, the Changpa tribe, are semi-nomadic pastoralists who have herded these goats, along with sheep and yaks, for centuries. Their livelihood and the regional economy are largely dependent on the trade of this world-class fiber.



Case Study:



Sinai megaproject threatens people of St. Catherine

Atop one of Egypt’s Sinai mountains, near where the three Abrahamic faiths say God spoke with Moses, another unmistakable sound rings out: the incessant drilling of construction work. In the remote, rugged terrain of southern Sinai, Egypt has undertaken the nearly \$300-million “Great Transfiguration” or “Revelation of Saint Catherine” project aimed at drawing mass tourism to the once serene mountain town of Saint Catherine. Heritage experts and locals say the state’s bull dozers have already damaged the nature reserve and UNESCO world heritage site, home to the world’s oldest functioning Christian monastery and Bedouin who fear for their ancestral land. The Jabaliya, whose name derives from the Arabic word for “mountain”, have lived here for 1,500 years, and are said to descend from the Roman soldiers who came to guard the monastery. Each year, they guide hundreds of thousands of worshippers and adventurers, drawn to the sacred sites and the austere but magnificent landscapes. They have for decades called for better services and infrastructure to lift their community out of poverty. Long marginalised, they now fear that rapid development has come at their expense — even disturbing the dead.

The World Soil Day 2025 is celebrated annually on December 5, with the global theme “Healthy soils for healthy cities.” It was established by the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS), gained formal recognition when the FAO endorsed it in 2013, followed by its adoption by the UN General Assembly in the same year. The day raises awareness about soil health, sustainable land management, and the urgent need to prevent soil degradation caused by climate change, pollution, and rapid urban expansion.

