• MONDAY, DECEMBER 08, 2025 •

VOL. 91

Daily News Analysis ePaper

THE PALA CIVIL TIMES

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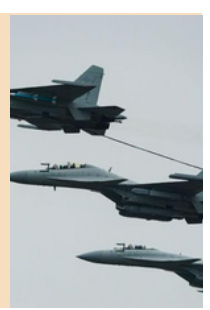

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After Wagner, Russia's Africa Corps accused of committing atrocities in Mali

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New U.S. security strategy aligns with our vision, says the Kremlin

Russia has welcomed changes in the U.S. National Security Strategy, saying the adjustments that marked a radical departure from Washington's previous policy were "largely consistent" with Moscow's vision. Washington's new National Security Strategy, published on Friday, took aim at allies in Europe, calling them over-regulated, lacking in "self-confidence" and facing "civilisational erasure" due to immigration.

It stated that the U.S. would prevent other powers from dominating but added: "This does not mean wasting blood and treasure to curtail the influence of all the world's great and middle powers." Commenting on the development, the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the current U.S. administration was "fundamentally different from the previous ones". The publication of the updated security strategy came as officials from Kyiv held talks in Florida with Mr. Trump's envoys on the U.S.-drafted plan to end the near four-year war in Ukraine. Three days of talks produced no apparent breakthrough. President Volodymyr Zelensky committed to further negotiations to ward "real peace" as Russia in the early hours of Saturday launched another series of drone and missile strikes at Ukraine. Zelensky is due to meet with European leaders — French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz — in London on Monday to take stock of the negotiations. "President Trump is currently strong in terms of domestic political positions. And this gives him the opportunity to adjust the concept to suit his vision," Mr. Peskov added.

Luminaries Assemble

The 2025 Nobel Laureates pose for a group photo before the signing of the Nobel Chairs at the Nobel Museum in Sweden.

A massive fire erupted at a nightclub in north Goa just before midnight on Saturday, leaving 25 people dead. The absence of emergency exit doors in the nightclub resulted in the space turning into a death trap. The nightclub was operating without licences and permissions. The owners, managers, and event managers have been charged with culpable homicide and causing death due to negligence, among other charges. 5 lakh will be paid to the kin of the deceased and 50,000 will be given to the injured by the State.

Top agricultural research body urges varsities to start courses in natural farming

- **Natural farming has been elevated to a subject of national importance in India's agricultural education policy, and ICAR is pushing universities to institutionalise it through full-fledged UG and PG programmes rather than treating it as a peripheral elective.**

ICAR's directive and its significance

- The ICAR Director-General M.L. Jat has written to Vice-Chancellors of all State and Central agricultural universities, as well as general universities with agriculture departments, asking them to start undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes specifically in natural farming.
- This marks the first formal system-wide push from ICAR to embed natural farming in core curricula, signalling that the government now sees it as integral to long-term agricultural strategy rather than a niche or NGO-driven practice.

Policy alignment and NEP framework

- By tying natural farming to NEP-2020's emphasis on multidisciplinary, practice-oriented education, ICAR uses the larger curriculum reform process as a lever to standardise content, credits and learning outcomes around sustainable agriculture.
- Some universities have already introduced the B.Sc. (Hons.) natural farming course from the 2023–24 academic year, which ICAR describes as a transformative milestone in agricultural higher education.
- The DG expresses an expectation that all remaining agricultural universities will start such courses by the next academic session, effectively creating a nationwide network of natural-farming-trained graduates within a few years.
- Rationale: sustainability and "chemical-free" systems
- This links natural farming education to broader national priorities: sustainable agriculture, farmer welfare, chemical-free food systems, resilient agro-ecosystems, soil-health restoration and low-emission farming, which are also central objectives of the National Mission on Natural Farming.
- Training students in these approaches is meant to generate a cadre of professionals who can design and manage low-input, climate-resilient production systems, potentially reducing dependence on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides and lowering farmers' costs.

Postgraduate education and research implications

- Beyond undergraduate degrees, ICAR encourages universities to launch postgraduate programmes and advanced research on natural farming, including allied domains such as soil biology, on-farm input production, and agro-ecological design.
- This can shift research priorities within the National Agricultural Research System towards field-based validation of natural-farming packages, impact assessment on yields and incomes, and integration with digital advisory and extension systems.
- There is also a policy challenge of balancing natural farming with other sustainable approaches (integrated nutrient management, precision agriculture, organic farming), ensuring that curriculum design remains evidence-based and region-specific rather than ideologically driven.

Parliament to take up debate on electoral reforms this week

- **Parliament has scheduled a structured discussion on electoral reforms, anchored in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, alongside a high-profile debate on the 150th anniversary of the national song Vande Mataram led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Lok Sabha.**

Structure and timing of debates

- The Lok Sabha will first hold a day-long, 10-hour debate on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, to be initiated by the Prime Minister, with key speakers from both the ruling party and the Opposition including leaders such as Gaurav Gogoi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.
- Separate debates on electoral reforms will follow in both Houses: the Lok Sabha is slated to take it up early in the week, while the Rajya Sabha will hold its discussion on subsequent days, with Union ministers like Kiren Rijiju, Amit Shah and J.P. Nadda among the main speakers.

Political context and logjam

- The decision to schedule these debates comes after a prolonged standoff in the Monsoon and early Winter Sessions, during which the Opposition repeatedly disrupted proceedings demanding a dedicated discussion on the SIR of electoral rolls.
- The government had earlier argued that the Election Commission is a constitutional body whose functioning should not be debated in Parliament, but mounting Opposition pressure, combined with near-washout of the first two Winter Session days, pushed both sides towards a compromise.

Link with SIR of electoral rolls

- The "electoral reforms" rubric is effectively a political vehicle to air concerns about the ongoing SIR in 12 states and Union Territories, where Opposition parties allege mass deletions, unexplained additions and targeted disenfranchisement of certain voter groups.
- This indicates that all aspects of electoral reforms will be open for discussion, allowing the Opposition to raise issues such as irregularities in roll revision, alleged voter fraud, and reported stress-related deaths and suicides of booth-level officers engaged in the SIR exercise.

Government and Opposition strategies

- For the government, foregrounding the Vande Mataram anniversary before the electoral reforms debate serves a dual purpose: it projects a unifying, patriotic theme while also asserting control over the sequencing of parliamentary business after having resisted an SIR-specific discussion.
- The Opposition, having secured commitment to a time-bound, 10-hour debate, is likely to frame electoral reforms around democratic integrity—focusing on alleged manipulation of rolls, institutional accountability of the Election Commission, and the broader implications for free and fair elections.

Institutional and democratic implications

- Holding a structured, high-visibility debate on electoral reforms marks a rare moment when Parliament turns its attention from routine legislation to the mechanics of elections, opening space to scrutinise voter registration processes, transparency norms and safeguards against disenfranchisement.
- However, because the discussion is framed broadly rather than as a binding motion on SIR, concrete outcomes—such as statutory changes, directives to the Election Commission, or an independent inquiry into roll revisions—will depend on whether the government is willing to translate debate into reform, or treats it primarily as damage control to end the session's logjam.

"Multi-polar world, case for deeper multilateralism, says Jaishankar"

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's addressed the opening ceremony of the 20th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), being hosted for the first time by India at the Red Fort, New Delhi, from December 8–13.
- Jaishankar's central argument is that as the world becomes more multi-polar, there is a stronger need for "deeper multilateralism" based on mutual respect and understanding, with cultural heritage—especially intangible heritage—playing a key role in shaping such a cooperative order.

India's positioning and foreign-policy narrative

- He uses the UNESCO platform to project India as both an ancient civilisation and a modern pluralistic democracy that has long experience of preserving diverse languages, traditions, rituals, arts and customs, and now seeks to share that experience globally.
- This highlights his claim that safeguarding intangible heritage is now an integral part of India's foreign policy toolkit, with India undertaking conservation projects at home and abroad and supporting UNESCO processes as part of its soft-power strategy.

Heritage, decolonisation and cultural rebalancing

- Jaishankar links present debates on heritage to a historical critique of domination and "cultural assault", arguing that attempts to marginalise or erase non-Western cultures over the last few centuries have left deep scars that are still visible.
- He frames decolonisation not just as political independence but as an ongoing "cultural rebalancing" in which previously suppressed voices and traditions reassert themselves, and insists that genuine multilateralism must accommodate this plurality rather than impose uniformity.

Normative vision of multilateralism

- The minister contends that prosperity in a multi-polar world requires a multilateral system attentive to cultural diversity, where global rules and institutions respect different civilisational experiences instead of privileging a single historical or geographic perspective.
- In this view, safeguarding ICH—languages, performing arts, festivals, knowledge systems—is not merely about preservation but about ensuring that the benefits of globalisation and rule-making are shared more equitably, especially with the Global South.

Analytical takeaways and implications

- Conceptually, this shows how India is tying together three strands—multipolarity, decolonisation, and cultural heritage—to argue for reforms in global governance that expand voice and representation rather than just redistribute economic power.
- Diplomatically, it signals that New Delhi will continue to use UNESCO and similar forums to push a narrative of "civilisational multilateralism", where protecting intangible heritage becomes both a moral claim (correcting past cultural injustices) and a strategic tool to enhance India's influence among developing countries.

National intelligence grid gains traction as Central agencies, police scour for information

- NATGRID has evolved into a key back-end infrastructure for law-enforcement and intelligence agencies in India, now handling around 45,000 data requests a month and gradually becoming integral to routine investigations by Central and State agencies.
- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) is designed as a secure platform through which authorised security and investigating agencies can access multiple government and private databases—such as immigration, banking, telecom, travel and identification records—in near real time.
- Access has been extended not just to elite Central agencies (IB, NIA, R&AW, CBI, ED, DRI, etc.) but also to State police forces, with the Union Home Ministry asking States to use the platform liberally for all investigations to draw on details like driving licences, Aadhaar data, airline bookings, bank records and relevant social-media information.
- Though conceptualised after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks and formally approved over a decade ago, NATGRID became fully operational only recently, gaining momentum under Home Minister Amit Shah, who pushed to resolve inter-agency differences and standardise data-sharing protocols.
- Several State police officials reported that, despite the platform's promise of real-time data, logging in and retrieving information can be time-consuming, with some officers needing multiple attempts or long waits to obtain the desired datasets.
- These usability issues suggest constraints around interface design, authentication layers, or network capacity, which could deter beat-level or district-level officers from fully integrating NATGRID into time-critical investigations unless processes are further streamlined.
- The government stresses that it is strengthening cybersecurity measures and data-sanctity protocols for NATGRID, particularly after a surge in cyberattacks on critical infrastructure; India recorded over 20.41 lakh cybersecurity-related incidents in 2024, the highest since 2020.
- Officials emphasise that the identity of users is recorded, and an FIR is not required to query the system, which helps "join the dots" in pre-emptive intelligence work but also raises questions about audit trails, proportionality of access and privacy safeguards for ordinary citizens whose data is pooled on the platform.
- NATGRID is portrayed as a one-stop information hub, replacing the older model where agencies had to send multiple requests to different data holders; this can dramatically shorten investigation cycles in terrorism, organised crime, financial fraud and cyber offences.
- As the system gains traction, it effectively deepens the state's capacity for mass data correlation and surveillance, making robust oversight, clear legal frameworks, and independent review mechanisms critical to prevent mission creep, bias in targeting, and misuse of integrated databases by individual officials or agencies.

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

Rajnath unveils border infrastructure projects

- **Rajnath Singh's inauguration of 125 Border Roads Organisation (BRO) projects represents a major step in hardening India's border infrastructure while simultaneously projecting development and connectivity for remote frontier regions.**

Scale, spread and nature of projects

- **The 125 projects, worth about ₹5,000 crore, include 28 roads, 93 bridges and four other key facilities, making this the largest single-day dedication of BRO assets to the nation.**
- **They span the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir and seven States—Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Mizoram—covering almost the entire arc of India's northern and northeastern borders.**

Strategic Shyok Tunnel and mobility gains

- **The highlight is the 920-metre Shyok Tunnel on the Darbuk–Shyok–Daulat Beg Oldie (DS-DBO) road in eastern Ladakh, providing all-weather connectivity to one of India's most sensitive sectors abutting the Line of Actual Control with China.**
- **By reducing weather-related closures and enabling faster movement of troops, equipment and supplies, the tunnel and associated roads significantly enhance operational readiness during extreme winters, when avalanches and heavy snowfall often cripple traditional routes.**

Broader security, logistics and socio-economic impact

- **Singh frames the projects as part of a multi-dimensional approach to robust border connectivity that strengthens national security, improves logistics and enables rapid deployment while reinforcing people's faith in development in far-flung areas.**
- **Enhanced roads and bridges are expected to boost tourism, local trade and employment opportunities in high-altitude and difficult terrains, helping integrate border communities more closely with the national economy and reducing their sense of isolation.**

Symbolism: Galwan Memorial and "unique identity"

- **Alongside the infrastructure launch, the Defence Minister inaugurated the Galwan War Memorial in Ladakh, explicitly honouring the soldiers who died in the 2020 clash with Chinese troops and linking current construction to sacrifice and deterrence.**
- **He described border residents as embodying a "unique identity" of courage and resilience, and highlighted the BRO's humanitarian role in disaster relief and evacuations in Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Jammu & Kashmir, thereby framing BRO as both a strategic and people-centric institution.**

Institutional strengthening of BRO

- **This cites BRO's record expenditure of about ₹16,690 crore in FY 2024-25 and an even higher target of around ₹18,700 crore for FY 2025-26, reflecting expanded responsibilities and growing governmental confidence in its capacity.**
- **Over the last two years, BRO has completed 356 projects across high-altitude, desert, flood-prone and forested regions, and the Union Budget 2025-26 further increased its allocation, consolidating its role as the primary instrument for strategic surface connectivity along contested and remote frontiers.**

Grassland soils, not trees, anchor India's climate resilience

Grassland ecosystems and their soils, not tree plantations, are portrayed as critical yet neglected anchors of India's climate resilience, especially in semi-arid and savanna landscapes that support millions of pastoralists and store vast amounts of carbon below ground.

Policy bias and ecological misunderstanding

- **This argues that colonial forestry and post-Independence policies have long favoured trees and "wasteland" conversion, leading to large-scale planting of woody species and treating grasslands, scrub and savannas as degraded lands in need of afforestation or industrial use.**
- **This tree-centric bias, reinforced by current climate and carbon policies, ignores the unique biodiversity, grazing-based livelihoods and soil-carbon potential of grasslands, and often ends up degrading these systems by introducing inappropriate plantations and invasive species.**

Grasslands' role in carbon and climate

- **Grasslands store most of their biomass and carbon below ground, making their soil organic carbon (SOC) more stable than forest biomass, which is vulnerable to fires, pests and harvest; studies show grasslands can be more reliable carbon sinks in drought-prone, warming climates.**
- **In India, semi-arid grasslands like the Banni in Kutch hold tens of millions of tonnes of SOC, rival forest carbon stocks, and maintain this storage even under grazing and periodic fires, yet they are rarely counted in official carbon-sink planning for net-zero targets.**

Restoration evidence from Banni and other sites

- **This cites restoration experiments where degraded grassland plots, managed with community-led grazing regulation and removal of invasive Prosopis instead of tree plantations, showed SOC increases of around a quarter within two years and roughly 50% more SOC than untreated control plots by the third year.**
- **These findings suggest that low-disturbance restoration focused on native grasses and traditional pastoral use can rapidly rebuild soil carbon, improve fodder availability and enhance resilience to extreme weather, offering a cost-effective climate-mitigation strategy.**

Socio-economic dimensions and pastoralist knowledge

- **India's grasslands underpin the livelihoods of millions of pastoralists (such as the Maldharis in Banni), providing fodder, milk and meat economies that are central to local cultures and food security in arid regions.**
- **This emphasises that successful restoration and climate outcomes depend on recognising customary grazing rights, incorporating herders' knowledge of rotational use and seasonal movement, and avoiding top-down enclosure or plantation schemes that displace communities.**

Rethinking climate and land-use policy

- **For climate policy, the authors argue that counting only forests as "green cover" or carbon sinks leads to perverse incentives—tree planting in inappropriate grassland habitats, undervaluation of rangeland SOC, and neglect of dryland resilience in India's long-term low-carbon strategy.**
- **They call for explicit grassland-centric policies: mapping and legally recognising rangelands, integrating SOC from grasslands into India's climate accounting, redirecting afforestation funds away from tree planting on natural grasslands, and funding community-based restoration as a mainstream mitigation and adaptation tool.**

Tokyo protests after Chinese military aircraft 'locks radar' on Japanese jets

Japan says Chinese J-15 fighters twice locked their fire-control radar on Japanese F-15s near Okinawa, an act it calls dangerous and unprecedented between the two air forces, while Beijing denies the allegation and accuses Tokyo of slander.

What happened in the air

- According to Japan's Defence Ministry, J-15s operating from the carrier Liaoning intermittently directed fire-control radar at Japanese jets over international waters southeast of Okinawa in two episodes on Saturday—one lasting around three minutes and another involving intermittent locking for about 30 minutes.
- There was no violation of Japanese airspace and no damage or injuries, but Tokyo argues that using targeting radar goes beyond routine tracking and simulates weapons employment, creating a risk of miscalculation or unintended escalation.

Diplomatic responses from Tokyo and Beijing

- Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi called the radar lock "dangerous" and "extremely regrettable", lodged a strong protest, and warned that such behaviour exceeds what is necessary for safe aircraft operations, while Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi also condemned the incident.
- China's Navy rejected the account as "completely inconsistent with the facts", summoned Japan's ambassador to complain about "slandering and smearing", and claimed Japanese fighters had instead disrupted normal Chinese training.

Broader context: Taiwan and East China Sea tensions

- This incident adds to the already souring ties, aggravated by Takaichi's earlier comments suggesting Japan might intervene militarily if China attacks Taiwan, which Beijing has strongly criticised.
- The radar-lock confrontation occurred near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands area, where China regularly challenges Japan's control with aircraft and coast-guard patrols, and which forms part of a wider pattern of Chinese pressure across the East and South China Seas.

Role of Australia and regional security concerns

- Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles, in Tokyo for talks, said he was "deeply concerned" by China's actions over the previous 24 hours and stressed that interactions must be safe and professional, reflecting allied anxiety about PLA risk-taking in regional air and sea encounters.
- Japan and Australia simultaneously used the episode to reaffirm plans for deeper defence cooperation and joint leadership of multilateral security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, signalling that such incidents strengthen, rather than deter, security balancing against China.
- Radar lock-ons are widely treated as hostile signalling because they are the last step before a potential missile launch, so repeated use in peacetime can normalise higher-risk behaviour and raise chances of crisis or accident, especially where mistrust is high.
- This confrontation reinforces a trend in which tactical encounters (radar locks, close intercepts, unsafe manoeuvres) become tools of strategic messaging in the China–Japan rivalry, increasing pressure for crisis-management mechanisms and clearer rules of engagement in contested airspace.

After Wagner, Russia's Africa Corps accused of committing atrocities in Mali

Russia's new Africa Corps, which formally replaced the Wagner Group in Mali, is accused of continuing and intensifying Wagner-style atrocities against civilians as it partners with Mali's junta to fight jihadist groups in the Sahel.

- Nature of alleged abuses and tactics
- Refugees who fled to Mauritania describe scorched-earth operations: villages burned, indiscriminate shootings of anyone encountered, rapes, beheadings, abductions, and cases where bodies were found with organs removed, echoing abuses earlier attributed to Wagner.
- Witnesses say Africa Corps fighters, often referred to as "white men", operate with Malian troops against suspected extremists, but in practice target civilians in contested areas, turning the Sahel—already the world's deadliest region for terrorism—into an even more brutal battlespace.

Continuity from Wagner to Africa Corps

- Africa Corps emerged after Wagner's leader Yevgeny Prigozhin died in 2023 and the Kremlin moved to bring informal African operations directly under the Defence Ministry; Mali had previously paid roughly 10 million dollars a month for Wagner's support.
- Refugees and analysts say there is "no difference" between Wagner and Africa Corps in personnel or methods, with many of the same fighters, commanders and tactics simply rebranded, meaning abuses documented under Wagner have effectively continued under a new name.

Legal responsibility and international implications

- Because Africa Corps is now integrated into Russia's state chain of command rather than operating as a deniable private company, legal experts argue that alleged war crimes are directly attributable to the Russian government under international law.
- This notes that this strengthens calls for mechanisms such as International Criminal Court investigations or targeted sanctions, since Moscow can no longer plausibly distance itself from atrocities committed by its forces in Mali.

Impact on civilians and regional security

- Civilians caught between jihadist groups (notably JNIM and Islamic State affiliates) and joint Malian–Russian operations face killings, disappearances, and sexual violence from both sides, driving mass displacement toward Mauritania and other neighbours.
- The brutality risks deepening grievances, feeding extremist recruitment, and further destabilising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—states that have expelled Western forces and now rely heavily on Russia for security support in an already volatile Sahel theatre.

Opacity of operations and policy concerns

- Little is known about Africa Corps' exact mandate, troop strength (estimated at around 2,000 fighters), or the terms of its agreement with Mali's junta, complicating external monitoring and accountability.
- This underscores that Western withdrawal has created space for Russia's state-linked mercenary model, but without transparency or human-rights safeguards, raising questions about whether counter-terrorism partnerships that tolerate or enable such abuses can deliver long-term stability.
- Sahel Region is a semiarid transitional zone in western and north-central Africa between the Sahara Desert to the north and the Sudanian Savanna to the south.
- It runs through portions of the countries of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Eritrea.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

Q1. Ans d

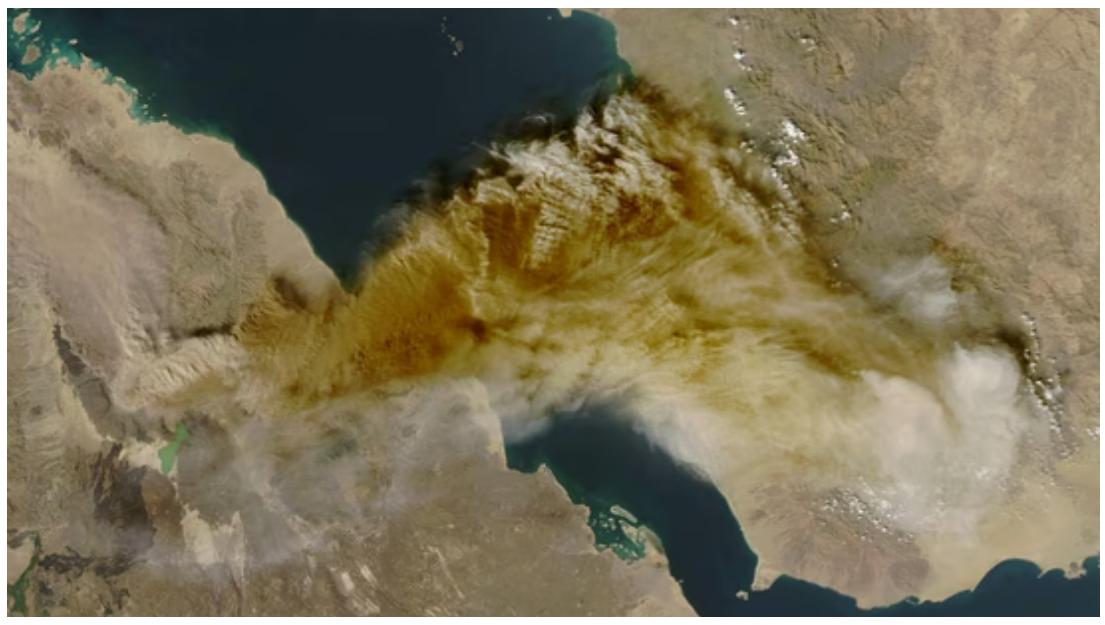
Auramine O – It is a synthetic yellow dye, produced from compounds such as dimethylaniline and formaldehyde. The dye appears as yellow flakes or powder and dissolves easily when mixed with solvents. Used in – Industry, including textile and leather processing, printing inks, paper manufacturing, etc. 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.

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Case Study:

Mining waste taints DR Congo communities

Global powers, notably China and the United States, are in a race to extract strategic minerals in the DRC, which supplies more than 70% of the world's cobalt, essential for making electric batteries and weaponry. But human rights groups say the mining operations are resulting in severe environmental damage in the mineral-rich nation. Carrying her sore-pocked daughter across her decaying field, Helene Mvubu says she is one of thousands to have fallen victim to the toxic waste defiling the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) mining capital. Ms. Mvubu said that she has for years suffered the consequences of flooding from contaminated water discharged by Congo Dongfang International Mining (CDM), a Chinese company that processes copper and cobalt ore in the outskirts of Lubumbashi, capital of the mineral-rich Katanga province in the southeastern DRC. "The food we prepare becomes bitter, our water sources are polluted," said the farmer as she walked across her plot, where the sugarcane has turned yellow with disease. The extent of the pollution is unknown. But when it rains, red water can be seen gushing out from four drainage points under the enclosure. Outrage over the flooding forced Congolese authorities to act by suspending the site's activities and appointing an investigative commission.

McLaren's Lando Norris sobbed tears of joy and relief as he won the Formula One championship for the first time and ended Max Verstappen's four year reign with a nervy third place finish at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday. McLaren, which secured the constructors' championship in October for the second year in a row, won both titles in the same season for the first time since 1998. Red Bull's Verstappen, who ended the campaign with more wins (eight) than any driver, triumphed in the season-ender with McLaren's Oscar Piastri second and 12.5 seconds behind. Norris, Britain's 11th Formula One world champion, took his points tally to 423 with Verstappen on 421 and Piastri third with 410.

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"Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

Helen Keller