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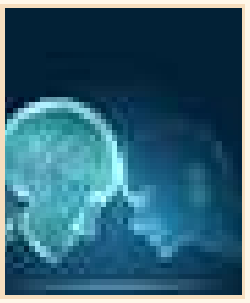

SC differs on sanction to try public servants

The Supreme Court's recent split verdict on the constitutional validity of Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 has reopened a fundamental debate at the heart of India's governance framework: how to reconcile the need for fearless administration with the imperative of probity in public life. Section 17 A of the corruption prevention Act requires prior sanction before any enquiry or investigation into acts done by a public servant in the discharge of official duties.

While Justice B.V. Nagarathna held the clause to be unconstitutional for shielding effective investigation and weakening the rule of law, Justice Viswanathan defended it by cautioning that the mere possibility of misuse cannot invalidate a law as it would be akin to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater". On the one hand, unchecked prior sanction risks shielding corruption, enabling executive interference, delaying inquiries and undermining the principle that all are equal before law. On the other, the absence of any protective filter could expose honest officers to frivolous complaints, encourage a "play-it-safe" bureaucracy, and lead to policy paralysis in a system that already struggles with risk-averse decision-making.

The answer, therefore, lies neither in absolute insulation nor in unrestrained prosecution, but in building credible, independent institutional safeguards — such as preliminary scrutiny by bodies like the Lokpal or Lokayukta — to separate genuine cases from mala fide ones

Delhi govt. unveils Carbon Credit Monetisation Framework

The Delhi government's approval of a Carbon Credit Monetisation Framework marks an important shift towards linking environmental action with fiscal sustainability. By enabling the scientific measurement of emission reductions from initiatives such as electric buses, solar energy promotion, plantation drives, and improved waste management, the city will be able to convert these verified gains into tradable carbon credits in national and international markets. This transforms climate action from being merely a cost-intensive obligation into a potential revenue-generating public good.

What makes the initiative particularly significant is its governance design. The revenue generated from the sale of carbon credits will be deposited into the Consolidated Fund of the State and used for public welfare and development projects, creating a virtuous cycle where green policies finance inclusive growth.

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Uttarakhand seeks IAF's help as forest fire rages in Valley of Flowers

With forest fire raging in the Valley of Flowers, a UNESCO heritage site, for the last five days, the Uttarakhand Disaster Management Department has sought the Indian Air Force's (IAF) help to bring the situation under control.

The forest fire in the Valley of Flowers, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Uttarakhand, is not just a disaster response issue but a warning for India's fragile mountain ecology. Home to over 600 alpine plant species, this high-altitude ecosystem recovers very slowly, and the need for even Indian Air Force support highlights the growing gap between ecological vulnerability and response capacity in Himalayan regions.

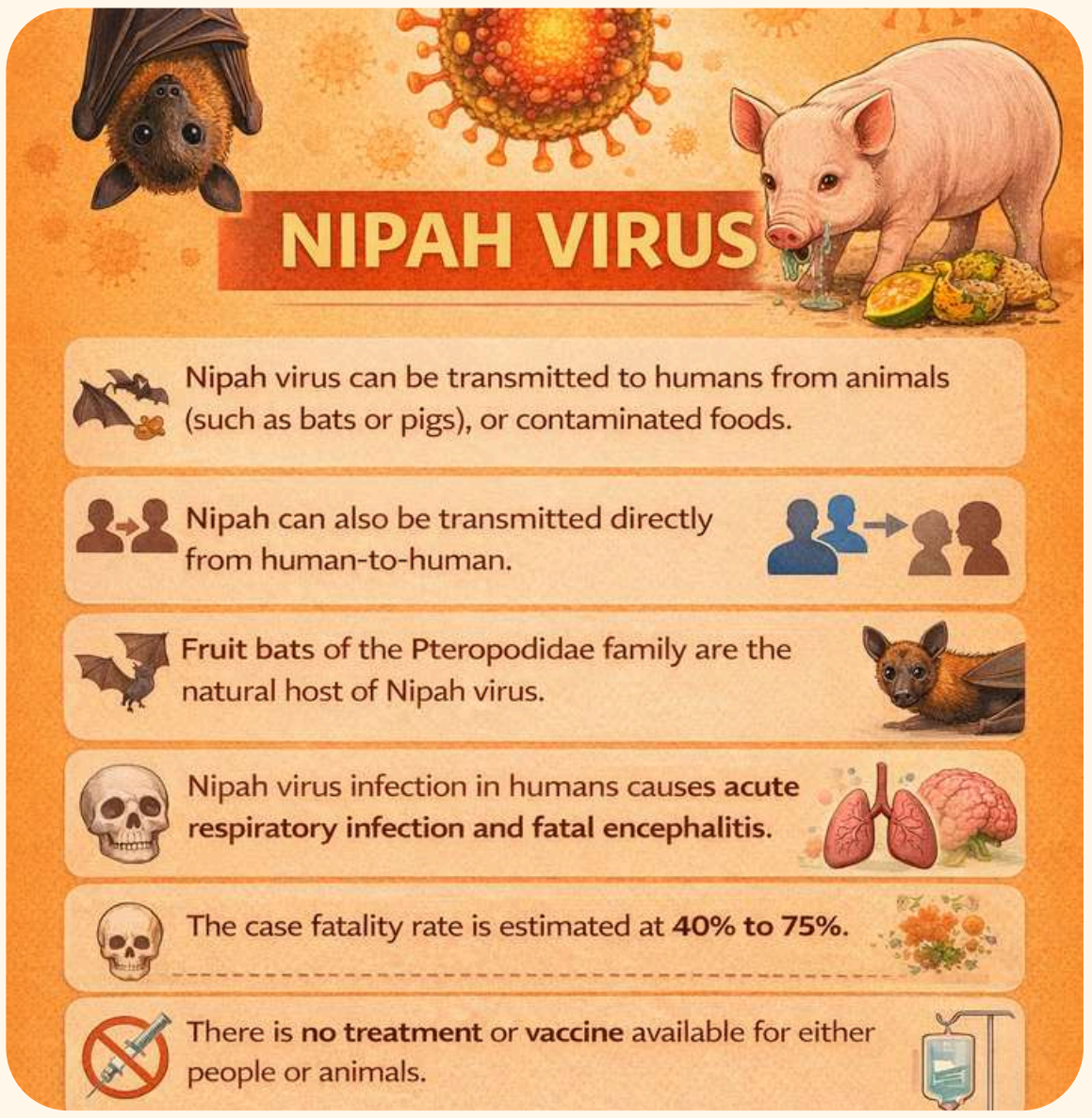
More alarming is the timing. With over 1,100 forest fire alerts in 2025, fires are now occurring as early as January due to declining and erratic snowfall, which normally keeps forest floors moist. This links the crisis directly to climate change and turns forest fires into near year-round risks. In biodiversity hotspots like this, fires destroy not just trees but seed banks, insects, pollinators and entire micro-habitats. The real tragedy is the silent loss of wildlife. Alpine species have limited migration options, and repeated fires mean not only habitat loss but the gradual erosion of entire ecological relationships built over centuries.

Two with suspected Nipah infection in West Bengal

The recent detection of suspected Nipah virus cases in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal highlights the importance of India's outbreak response mechanisms. The two patients, both healthcare workers from the same hospital in Barasat, were admitted in critical condition, with one reported to have tested positive and the other awaiting confirmation from the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune.

In response, the state activated key public health measures. Dedicated treatment facilities were prepared at the Infectious Diseases and Beleghata General Hospital (IDBGH), while contact tracing was initiated across North 24 Parganas, Purba Bardhaman, and Nadia districts due to the patients' recent travel history. The government also constituted an expert committee, issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) for hospitals, and launched helpline numbers to ensure coordination and public communication.

These steps reflect the standard outbreak control strategy in India: early detection, isolation, contact tracing, and administrative coordination. The incident shows that post-COVID, states are better prepared to respond quickly to emerging infectious threats.



In a first, Rajasthan panchayat gets certified for going fully organic

Rajasthan's Bamanwas Kankar panchayat becoming the first fully organic panchayat in the State marks an important milestone in India's journey towards sustainable agriculture. The transition was driven by community concerns over soil degradation, falling groundwater levels, rising input costs, and health issues caused by chemical-based farming.

The panchayat, comprising seven hamlets, has eliminated the use of chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilisers in both agriculture and animal husbandry, adopting an integrated and ecologically conscious farming model. The shift was community-led, supported by COFED, showing that sustainable agriculture can succeed when farmers themselves take ownership of change.

Farmers are already reporting improved soil health, higher biodiversity, and better livestock health, while organic certification has opened access to premium markets and reduced dependence on costly inputs. This improves both farm incomes and food safety.

At a broader level, the Bamanwas Kankar model demonstrates how grassroots institutions like panchayats can lead climate-resilient, health-oriented agricultural transitions.

Governor's Rule in Mizoram tribal council extended

The recent extension of Governor's Rule in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Mizoram, despite claims of a stable majority by the Zoram People's Movement, has once again brought attention to the delicate balance between constitutional supervision and democratic autonomy of local self-governing institutions in India.

India's Constitution provides for autonomous councils in tribal areas under the Sixth Schedule to protect tribal identity, ensure self-governance, and enable local communities to manage their own affairs. Similarly, at the state level, the Constitution allows the imposition of President's or Governor's Rule in exceptional situations to deal with breakdown of constitutional machinery.

Left behind in AI race, Apple turns to Google to power its models

Apple and Google have announced a multi-year AI partnership that will see Google's Gemini AI technology power the next generation of the Siri voice assistant on apple devices.

Apple missed the early generative AI wave after ChatGPT's launch in 2022, while rivals like Microsoft, Meta, and Amazon invested heavily in their own AI infrastructure. Apple's own AI transformation has been slow, and key Siri upgrades are now delayed to 2025–26. As a result, Apple has signed a deal to pay about $1 billion a year to Google, making Google its main AI provider. This is a major shift because Apple, which once promoted strong privacy and independence, is now depending on another company for a core future technology.

Economically, this deal is significant because it further strengthens Google's position in the AI market and increases concentration of power in one company. It gives Google a steady, large revenue stream and deeper influence over the AI ecosystem, while showing that even a giant like Apple is becoming dependent instead of self-reliant. This may reduce competition in the long run and raise concerns about market dominance, pricing power, and control over future digital technologies.

Human + AI will define the future of work by 2027: study

Human + AI will define the future of work and nearly all HR leaders (97%) anticipate that by 2027, the nature of work will be shaped by humans working along-side AI rather than engaging with it only intermittently, showed Nasscom-Indeed study titled WORK REIMAGINED: The Rise of Human–AI Collaboration.

As per the study, this trend signalled a shift from AI being a supplementary tool to becoming an integral part of everyday roles, workflows and decision-making processes.

Key highlights of the study :

The Rise of Human AI Collaboration

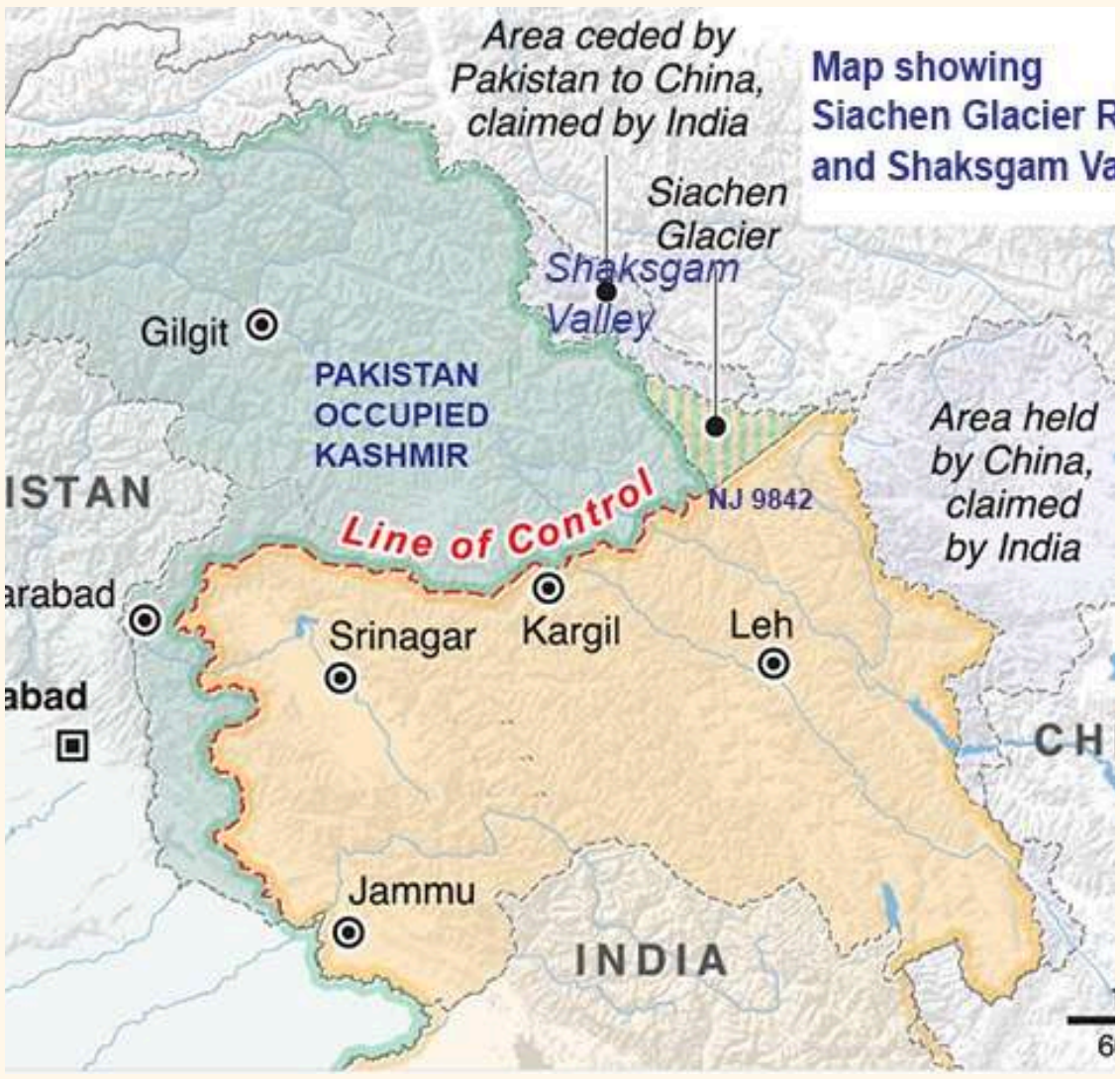
- **20-40% of the work across Indian technology organisation is being sone through AI across functions**
- **Top KPIs for AI Usage – Customer Satisfaction and Employee Productivity**
- **95%+ using or planning to use AI Agents**

India's assertion, Pakistan's cession : How China took Shaksgam Valley

China has recently reaffirmed its claim over the Shaksgam Valley, citing the 1963 China–Pakistan boundary agreement, in response to India's objections over Chinese infrastructure activity under CPEC in Pakistan-occupied territories. India has categorically rejected this position, stating that Shaksgam Valley is Indian territory, that it has never recognised the 1963 agreement, and that both the agreement and CPEC are illegal since they pass through Indian territory under Pakistan's forcible and illegal occupation.

The issue reinforces the China–Pakistan strategic nexus against India and adds a third dimension to the Kashmir and Ladakh disputes. With China continuing to occupy about 38,000 sq km of Indian territory and claiming Shaksgam through Pakistan's cession of 5,180 sq km, the dispute complicates border negotiations, challenges India's sovereignty claims, and keeps the region geopolitically volatile, especially as infrastructure development increases the strategic and military salience of the area.

Location - Shaksgam Valley



Shaksgam Valley (Trans-Karakoram Tract)

- **Location & Size: North of the Siachen Glacier, part of the Hunza-Gilgit region; area >5,000 sq km.**
- **Geography & Habitation: Rugged terrain and harsh climate make it largely uninhabitable.**
- **Sovereignty & Claims:**
  - **India: Claims Shaksgam Valley as part of its territory.**
  - **Pakistan: Exercised control until 1963.**
  - **China: Asserted strategic interest in the broader region; constructed a highway in the 1950s connecting Tibet with Xinjiang via Aksai Chin, overlapping India's territorial claims.**

Historical context:

The 1963 China–Pakistan agreement was signed when their strategic ties were deepening, soon after the 1962 India–China war. India strongly protested, with Prime Minister Nehru arguing that China was interfering in Indo-Pak relations and exploiting the Kashmir dispute for its expansionist aims. He also felt the timing was meant to prejudice India–Pakistan talks on Kashmir. The talks later collapsed, and India has consistently maintained that the agreement has no legal validity.

National Critical Minerals Mission

Critical minerals are those minerals that are essential for economic development and national security. They are indispensable for clean energy technologies, high-tech electronics, telecommunications, transport and defence.

Critical Minerals of India : In 2023, the Ministry of Mines, released a list of 30 critical minerals for India. These minerals are Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.

In January 2025, India launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM), for a period of seven years from 2024-25 to 2030-31.

- Proposed expenditure - Rs.16,300 crore
- Expected investment - Rs.18,000 crore by Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and other stakeholders.
- Focus points - secure energy security, drive industrial growth, and cement technological independence.

Objectives :

- 1000 patents by 2030 - accelerate the development and commercialization of homegrown technologies vital for India's energy transition.
- 7 centres of excellence - 4 IITs and 3 research laboratories to drive cutting-edge research and innovation in the sector.
- 1500 crore incentive scheme - to boost India's recycling capacity for critical minerals.

In this backdrop, the National Critical Minerals Mission assumes strategic significance as a key enabler of India's clean energy transition, supporting its 2030 climate commitments and strengthening the foundation for achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

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NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK - SPECIAL FEATURE

INDIA'S BOOMING GIG

INDIAN CONTEXT

In 2020-21, 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers were engaged in the gig economy.
The gig workforce is expected to expand to 2.35 crore (23.5 million) workers by 2029-30.

Key Issues

- **Flexibility vs. Stability: Gig work allows autonomy but lacks job security.**
- **Income Uncertainty: Earnings fluctuate; no guaranteed minimum.**
- **Social Security Gap: Health insurance, pensions are not automatically covered.**
- **Aspirations: Young demographic choose gig work for skill-building or independence.**

Distribution of gig workers in sectors (2020)

Legal recognition, portable social security benefits, a dedicated welfare fund, and a national registration framework provide essential safeguards for gig and platform workers.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to 'Scheduled Areas' in India, consider the following statements: (2023)

1. Within a State, the notification of an area as Scheduled Area takes place through an Order of the President.

2. The largest administrative unit forming the Scheduled Area is the District and the lowest is the cluster of villages in the Block.

3. The Chief Ministers of the concerned States are required to submit annual reports to the Union Home Ministry on the administration of Scheduled Areas in the States.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one
b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

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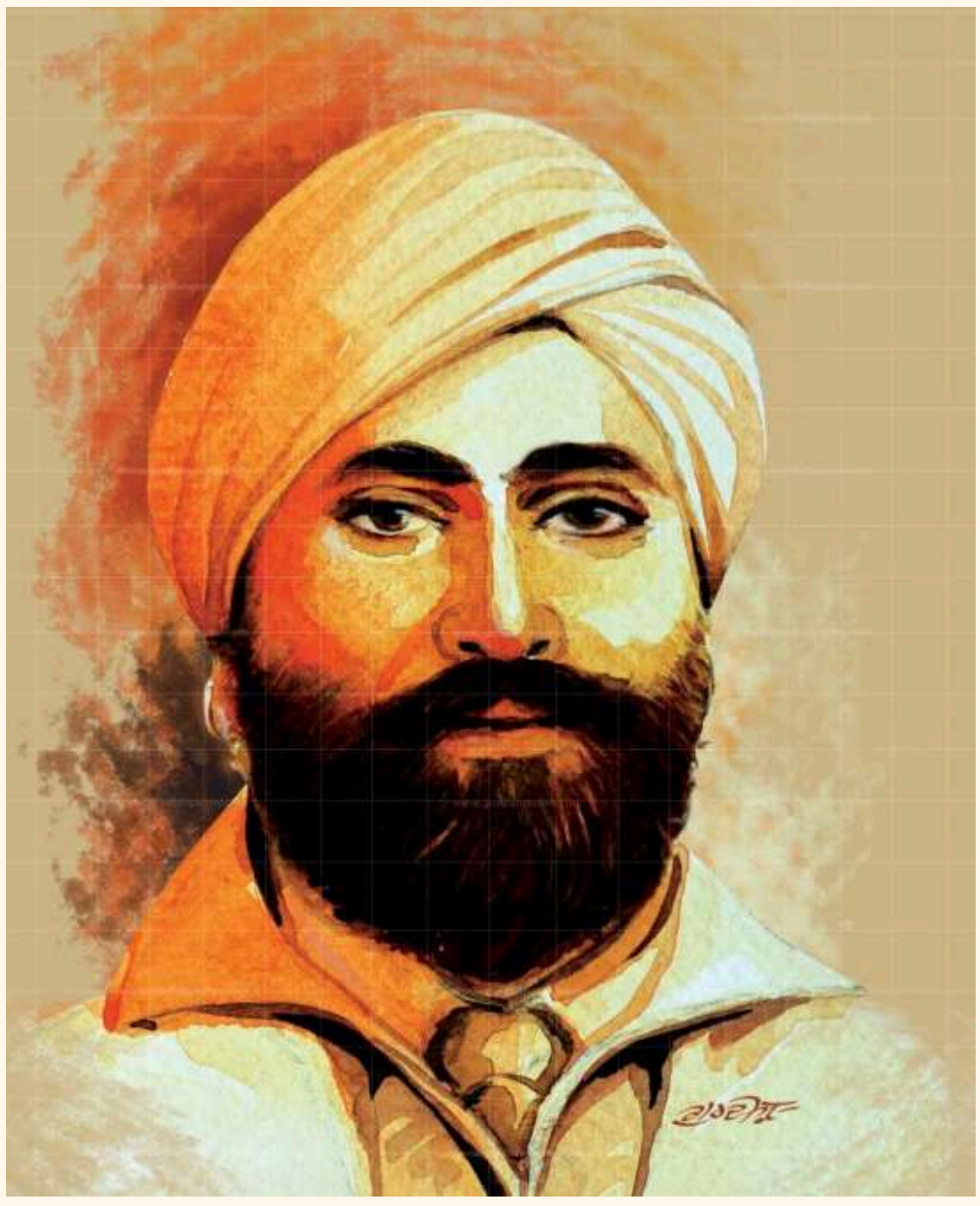
2) Which one of the following words/phrases is most appropriately used to denote "an interoperable network of 3D virtual worlds that can be accessed simultaneously by millions of users, who can exert property rights over virtual items"? (2024)

a) Big data analytics
b) Cryptography
c) Metaverse
d) Virtual matrix

HERITAGE

Shaheed Udham Singh



Shaheed Udham Singh was a great revolutionary who dedicated his life to India's freedom. Born in 1899 in Punjab, he was deeply moved by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and decided to fight injustice. In 1940, he assassinated Michael O'Dwyer to avenge the massacre. He used the name "Ram Mohammad Singh Azad" to show unity among religions. He believed in courage, sacrifice, unity, and resistance against oppression, and became a martyr for the nation. "India celebrated the 126th birth anniversary of this revolutionary hero on 26th December 2025, remembering his courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to justice."

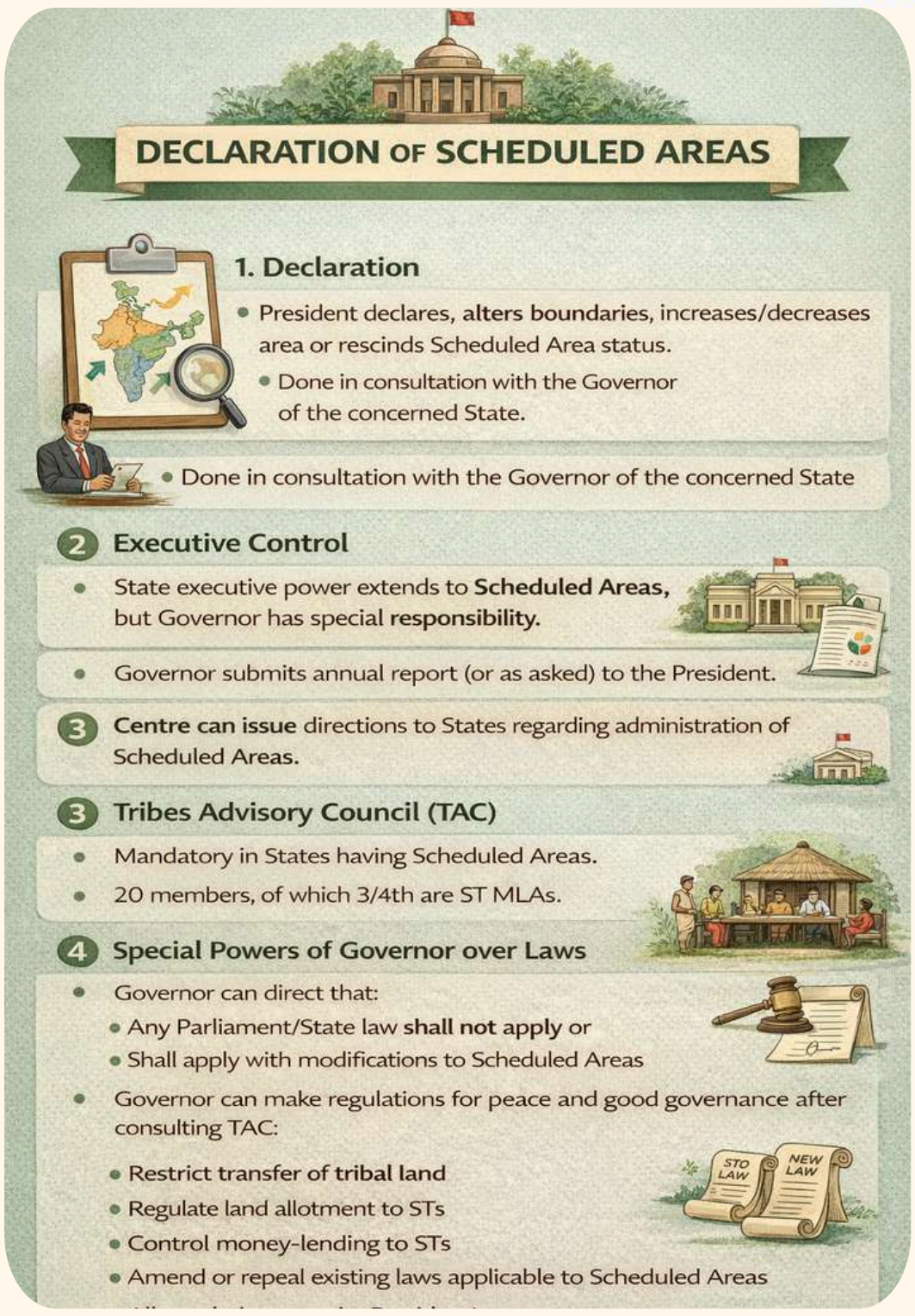
Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option A

Statement 1: This is correct. The notification of an area as a Scheduled Area within a State takes place through an Order of the President under the provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.

Statement 2: This is incorrect. The largest administrative unit forming a Scheduled Area can vary (e.g., a district or a part of a district), and the lowest unit is typically a village or a cluster of villages, not limited to a block.

Statement 3: This is incorrect. The Governor of the concerned state, not the Chief Minister, is required to submit annual reports to the President on the administration of Scheduled Areas.



2) Answer is option C

The Metaverse is a term used to describe a collective virtual shared space, created by the convergence of virtually enhanced physical reality and persistent 3D virtual worlds. It allows millions of users to interact with each other and their environment in real-time, and users can exert property rights over virtual items within this space. The Metaverse encompasses virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and other immersive digital environments where people can socialize, play games, conduct business, and even own virtual properties.

Big data analytics: Refers to the process of analyzing large and complex data sets, often unrelated to virtual worlds or digital spaces like the Metaverse.

Cryptography: Refers to techniques used for securing communication and data in the digital realm, not related to the virtual worlds concept.

Virtual matrix: While it may sound similar, the term "Virtual Matrix" is not a widely recognized or standardized term to describe the concept of interoperable virtual worlds.