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## Trump invites Modi to join Board of Peace to oversee Gaza

The US President Donald Trump has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join the proposed Board of Peace for Gaza as part of a new Gaza peace plan. In a letter dated January 16, Trump described the initiative as a historic effort to stabilise peace in the Middle East and to adopt a new approach to resolving the conflict that has been ongoing since October 7, 2023. The stated objectives of the initiative are to de-radicalise Gaza by eliminating the Hamas threat, rebuild and develop the Gaza Strip, and enable a transition from conflict to peace and development.



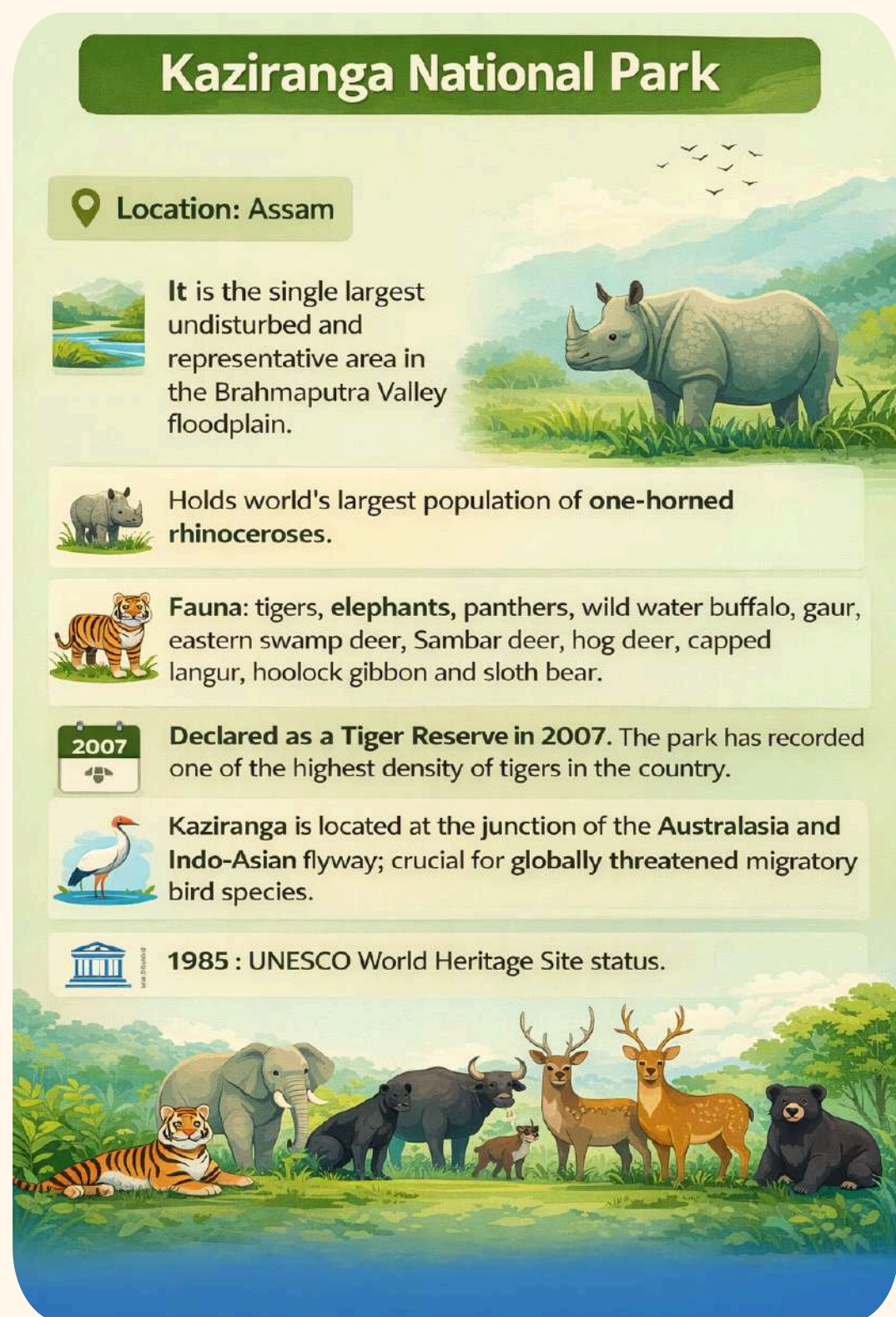
The proposed mechanism has a defined institutional structure. The Executive Committee will be chaired by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and will include former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, US special envoy Steve Bittcoff, Jared Kushner, World Bank President Ajay Banga, the CEO of Apollo Global Management, and the US National Security Adviser. Below this, an administrative body called the National Committee for Administration of Gaza (NCAG) will function as a second tier and will handle services such as water supply, power, and education.

The proposal has triggered criticism as it represents a unilateral US mechanism for international governance. This highlights the concerns surrounding the structure and control of the proposed framework, even as it seeks to address governance and reconstruction issues in Gaza. The proposed Board of Peace is being seen as a new US-led model that challenges the traditional role of the United Nations. It reflects long-standing American dissatisfaction with the UN's structure, efficiency, and decision-making. The initiative fits into a broader approach of reducing dependence on existing multilateral institutions and creating smaller, US-led mechanisms. Although the Board currently derives its authority from a UN Security Council mandate for Gaza, its structure and leadership represent a departure from post-war multilateral norms. If it succeeds, it could gradually shift attention, resources, and influence away from the UN system.



## PM launches ₹6,957-crore Kaziranga corridor work

The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for the ₹26,957 crore Kaziranga Elevated Corridor and flagged off two Amrit Bharat trains from Kaliabor in Assam. The 86-km four-lane highway project includes a 35-km elevated stretch through Kaziranga National Park to improve wildlife movement, road safety, and reduce travel time.



The Kaziranga elevated corridor will allow vehicles to move over a 35-km wildlife stretch while ensuring safe animal movement below, especially during floods. It will reduce accidents, protect rhinos and other wildlife, improve connectivity between Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and support regional development.

## Kakinada will be 'Green Hydrogen Valley of India'

Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh is being developed as a major hub for green hydrogen and green ammonia production with the setting up of a large integrated complex. The project aims to begin producing about 0.5 million tonnes of green ammonia by mid-2027, with a longer-term target of 1.5 million tonnes annually. Most of the output will be exported to Europe, especially Germany, showing India's growing role in clean energy supply chains. The project also includes the deployment of large-scale electrolyser capacity. This development supports India's clean energy transition, promotes green industrial growth, and strengthens its position in emerging global green fuel markets.

### India's Green Hydrogen Production Potential

- India targets 5 MMT of Green Hydrogen production annually by 2030.
- A port-based Green Hydrogen pilot has been commissioned at V.O. Chidambaranar Port, and Deendayal Port Authority, Kandla has commissioned a megawatt-scale, indigenous Green Hydrogen Facility
- Hydrogen mobility pilots launched across 10 routes, involving 37 fuel cell and hydrogen internal combustion engine vehicles.
- The Mission is expected to attract over ₹8 lakh crore in investments and reduce fossil fuel imports by more than ₹1 lakh crore



# INTERNATIONAL

## UAE President arrives today, to hold bilateral talks with PM

The President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, is scheduled to visit New Delhi to strengthen bilateral relations and explore opportunities for deeper strategic cooperation. During the visit, he will hold discussions with the Indian leadership on regional and global issues of mutual interest. This will be his third official visit to India since becoming President and reflects the continuing high-level political engagement between the two countries.

The visit takes place at a time of heightened tensions in West Asia, particularly in Yemen, where rival groups backed by different regional powers are in conflict. India maintains close relations with both major Gulf partners and continues to engage with them amid regional uncertainties. India and the UAE share strong political, economic, and energy ties, supported by frameworks such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, the Local Currency Settlement system, and the Bilateral Investment Treaty. Bilateral trade has crossed \$100 billion in 2024–25, making the UAE one of India's largest trading partners, with cooperation spanning energy, investment, and key export-import sectors.



From India's strategic perspective, stability in its relations with Gulf partners remains vital. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE are critical to India's energy security, and New Delhi has important defence cooperation arrangements with both, including a strategically significant defence partnership with Saudi Arabia. At the same time, India's economic engagement with the UAE has grown even deeper in recent years. In this context, maintaining a careful and balanced diplomatic approach, without taking sides in regional rivalries, is essential to protect India's long-term strategic, economic, and energy interests in West Asia. As India's engagement with West Asia deepens, the India–UAE relationship stands out for its consistency, strategic depth and practical outcomes, making it one of the most consequential partnerships in India's external relations today.

*(UPSC GS II PYQ 2022 How will I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and USA) grouping transform India's position in global politics?)*



# ECONOMICS

## Rethinking Food and Fertiliser Subsidies

Agri-GDP growth is expected to fall to 3.1% in FY26 from 4.6% in FY25, even as food inflation remains low mainly due to a sharp fall in crop prices. This has revived the debate on the need to rationalise food and fertiliser subsidies. At the current rate, the food subsidy is likely to reach ₹2.25 trillion and the fertiliser subsidy may go up to ₹2 trillion, which together account for about 8 to 8.5% of the Union Budget.



### Food Subsidy: Problems and Need for Reform

The food subsidy is the gap between the economic cost of procuring, storing and distributing rice and wheat by the Food Corporation of India and the amount recovered from beneficiaries through the public distribution system. The economic cost is around ₹42 per kg for rice and ₹30 per kg for wheat. Under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, about 813 million people, or nearly 56% of the population, receive 5 kg of free foodgrains per month. The total food subsidy is likely to reach ₹2.25 trillion.

However, according to the World Bank, extreme poverty in India was only 5.3% in 2022, and even at a higher poverty line, it was about 24%. This shows that the coverage of free food is much larger than what is strictly required. Even farmers who sell their produce to the government receive free grain. This makes the system fiscally costly and inefficient. Therefore, the coverage should be reduced gradually from 56% to 40%, then to 25% and finally to about 15%.

### Fertiliser Subsidy: Problems and Need for Reform

The fertiliser subsidy, at around ₹2 trillion, is the second largest subsidy in the Union budget and is even larger than the entire budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Excessive subsidy on urea has encouraged its overuse, leading to imbalanced use of nutrients. The excessive use of fertilisers is contaminating groundwater and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, about 20 to 25% of the subsidy is estimated to leak out of the system.

To correct these problems, the subsidy system needs to be reformed. The long-term solution is to move to direct cash transfers to farmers and to decontrol fertiliser pricing. If this is not possible immediately, at least urea should be brought under the nutrient-based subsidy system and given the same treatment as DAP and MOP. The administration of fertiliser subsidy should also be shifted from the Department of Fertilisers to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

Food and fertiliser subsidies together account for about 8 to 8.5% of the Union budget, yet both are operating in a sub-optimal manner and are distorting incentives in agriculture. If these subsidies are rationalised and gradually merged with an expanded PM-Kisan type income support system, it would not only improve fiscal efficiency but also make the government's reform agenda in agriculture more credible and sustainable.



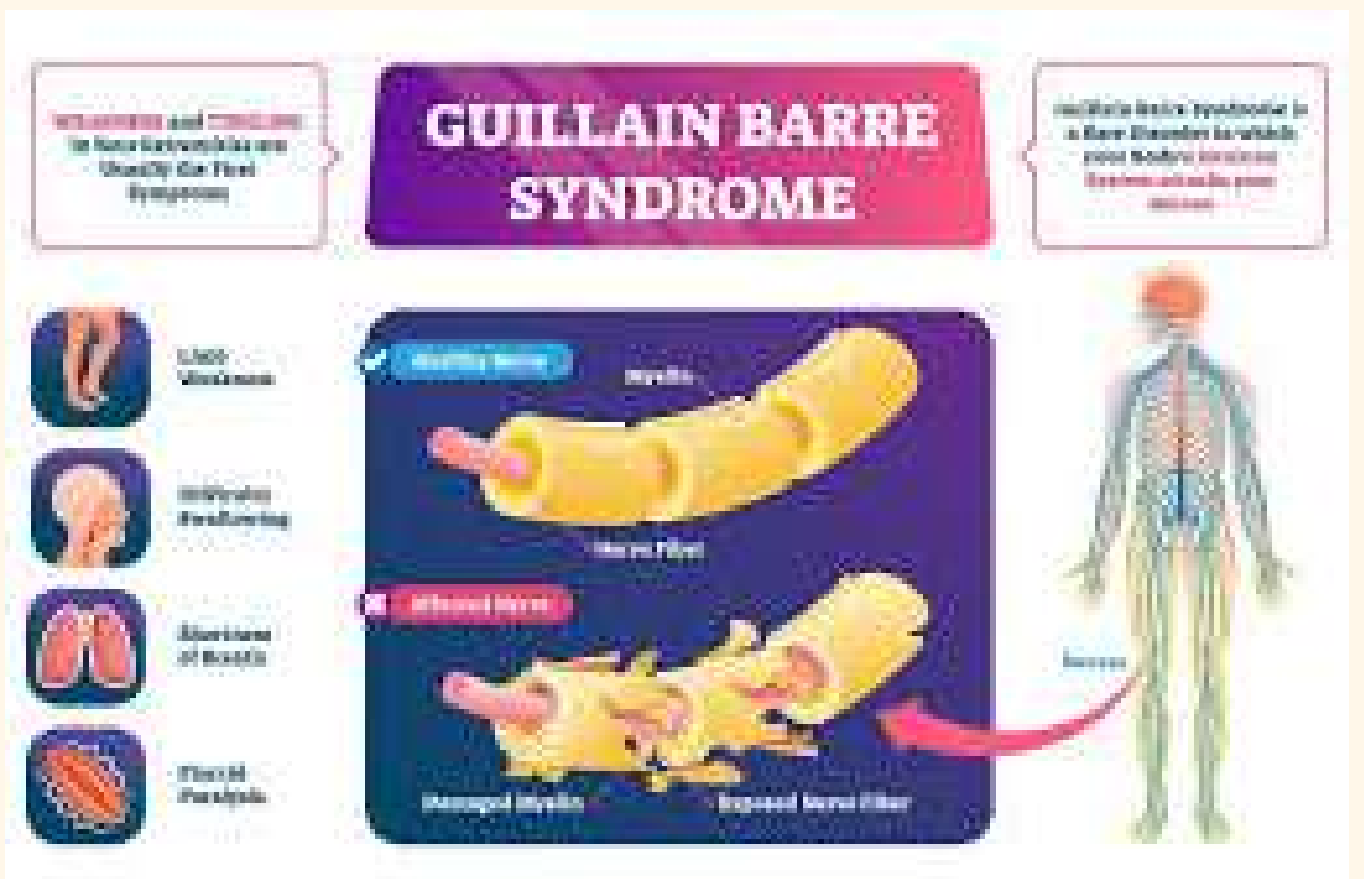
# HEALTH

## GBS outbreak claims 2 lives in M.P.

**What happened?** Two children died of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district, prompting authorities to step up emergency measures. Eighteen cases have been reported so far, including nine confirmed and nine suspected cases, with patients undergoing treatment in various hospitals. A special ward has been set up at the Manasa Civil Hospital, while serious cases have been referred to bigger hospitals. The State government is bearing the treatment costs. Samples of water, blood, and food have been sent for testing to national institutes, and a central outbreak response team is expected to investigate the source.

### Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)

- A rare but potentially life-threatening condition in which the immune system attacks peripheral nerves.
- More common in adults and in males.
- Usually has a high recovery rate.
- Severe cases are rare but may cause near-total paralysis and breathing difficulty.



### Causes

- Most cases follow a viral or bacterial infection that triggers the immune system to attack the body's own nerves.
- Infection with *Campylobacter jejuni* (causing gastroenteritis) is one of the most common risk factors.
- GBS may also follow flu or other viral infections such as cytomegalovirus, Epstein-Barr virus, and Zika virus.

### Symptoms and Effects

- Affects nerves that control muscle movement and those transmitting pain, temperature, and touch.
- Leads to muscle weakness, loss of sensation in the legs and/or arms, and difficulty in swallowing or breathing.
- Initial symptoms include weakness or tingling sensations.
- Symptoms usually start in the legs and spread to the arms and face.
- In severe cases, it can lead to paralysis of the legs, arms, or facial muscles.
- In about one-third of patients, chest muscles are affected, causing breathing difficulty.
- In critical cases, paralysis of breathing muscles and complications like blood infection, lung clots, or cardiac arrest can be fatal.

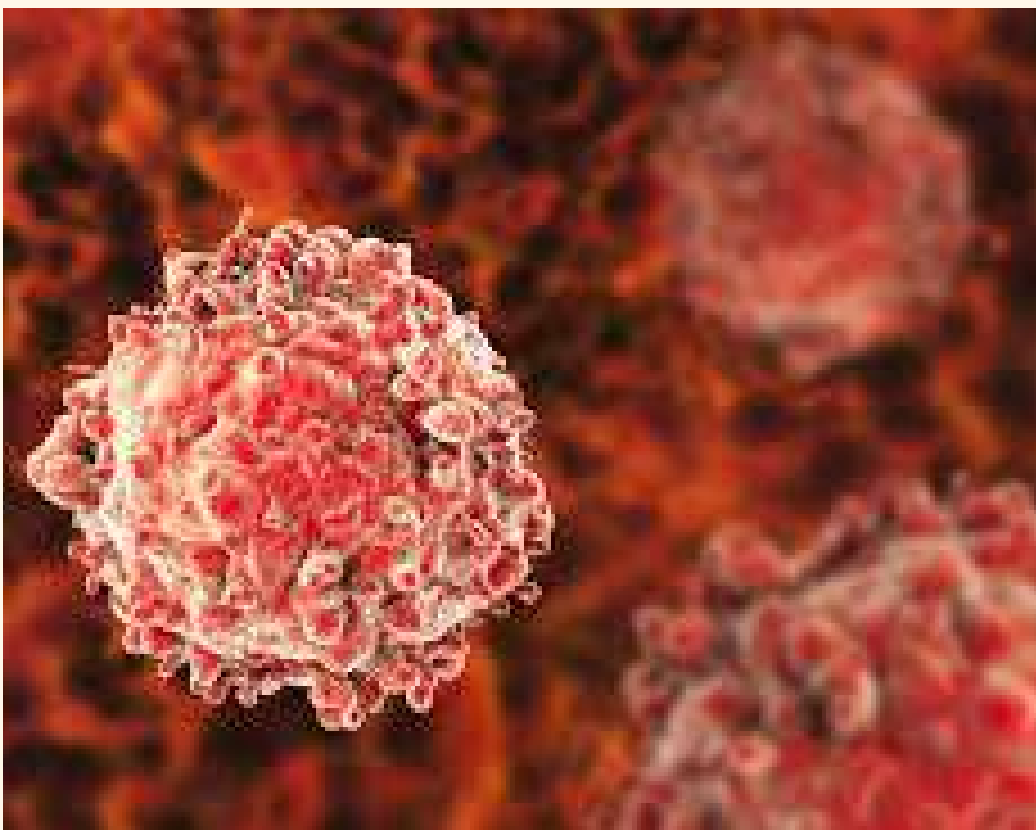
Containment of Guillain-Barré syndrome is necessary in India because the recent cluster of cases and associated deaths in Madhya Pradesh highlights the risk of rapid spread following infections, overwhelming local health systems and causing severe neurological complications, including paralysis and respiratory failure.

## AI spots abnormal blood cells

A new artificial intelligence system named CytoDiffusion is set to significantly improve the diagnosis of blood-related diseases such as leukemia. Developed by researchers, the system analyses the shape and structural features of blood cells with greater accuracy and consistency than human specialists. Unlike conventional tools that focus only on obvious abnormalities, CytoDiffusion uses generative AI to study subtle microscopic variations in cell appearance.

In trials, the system identified leukemia cells with much higher sensitivity than existing diagnostic methods, helping reduce missed or uncertain diagnoses. This makes it particularly valuable for early-stage disease detection, where minor cellular changes are often difficult to identify.

The technology also holds promise in standardising pathology assessments across laboratories, ensuring uniform diagnostic quality. Its applications include improving diagnostic accuracy in haematological malignancies, enabling screening in resource-limited settings, and strengthening quality control in medical diagnosis. Overall, CytoDiffusion represents a major step forward in AI-assisted medical diagnostics.



## Visibility of light



In weather science, visibility is technically referred to as the Meteorological Optical Range (MOR). It is defined as the distance a beam of light travels in the atmosphere before its intensity is reduced to 5% of its original value due to scattering and absorption by particles such as fog, dust, or smog. This definition gives visibility a precise and measurable scientific meaning rather than a subjective visual estimate.

Earlier, visibility was estimated through human observation. However, modern methods rely on instrument-based measurement.

In the direct method, a transmitter sends a laser beam to a receiver, and the reduction in received light intensity is measured to calculate the MOR. In the indirect method, the transmitter projects light beyond the receiver, and the instrument measures the amount of scattered light, especially from fog or dust particles.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) classifies visibility based on intensity. For example, shallow fog corresponds to 500–1,000 metres, poor visibility ranges from 50–200 metres, while very dense fog is defined as visibility of less than 50 metres. This scientific framework allows standardized reporting of atmospheric conditions.



## **PRELIMS CORNER :**

1) Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. In tropical regions, Zika virus disease is transmitted by the same mosquito that transmits dengue.
2. Sexual transmission of Zika virus disease is possible.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

2) Which of the following are the reasons for the occurrence of multi-drug resistance in microbial pathogens in India? (2019)

1. Genetic predisposition of some people
2. Taking incorrect doses of antibiotics to cure diseases
3. Using antibiotics in livestock farming
4. Multiple chronic diseases in some people

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 3 and 4
- d) 2, 3 and 4

## **Case study**

### **Himanshu Nagpal IAS**



While working as Chief Development Officer (CDO) in Varanasi, Himanshu Nagpal observed that many private companies were extracting groundwater without adequately replenishing it, threatening long-term water security. The district administration directed such companies to install rooftop rainwater harvesting (RWH) systems, but many cited lack of space as a constraint. Instead of resorting to penalties, Mr. Nagpal proposed an innovative solution: allowing these companies to install RWH structures on the rooftops of public buildings such as schools and colleges. This not only solved the space constraint but also addressed the problem of waterlogging on campuses while recharging groundwater. The initiative transformed a regulatory conflict into a collaborative model of governance. As a result, nearly 70% of government buildings now have RWH systems installed by private entities, reflecting ethical, pragmatic and environmentally responsible administration.



# Prelims Corner: Explanations

## 1) Answer is option C

1. In tropical regions, Zika virus disease is transmitted by the same mosquito that transmits dengue.

This statement is **Correct**: Zika virus is primarily transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the same mosquito responsible for spreading dengue, chikungunya, and yellow fever, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions.

Sexual transmission of Zika virus disease is possible.

This statement is **Correct**: In addition to being transmitted by mosquitoes, Zika virus can also be spread through sexual contact. This has been well documented, and individuals with Zika should take precautions to prevent sexual transmission, especially if they are in areas where the virus is prevalent.

## 2) Answer is option b

The occurrence of multi-drug resistance (MDR) in microbial pathogens, especially in India, is influenced by several factors, with the following being significant contributors:

1. Genetic predisposition of some people. This statement is **Incorrect**: While genetic factors can influence how an individual responds to infections or antibiotics, genetic predisposition is not a major direct cause of multi-drug resistance in microbial pathogens.

2. Taking incorrect doses of antibiotics to cure diseases: This statement is **Correct**: One of the primary causes of MDR is the misuse and overuse of antibiotics. Taking incomplete or incorrect doses leads to the survival of partially resistant bacteria, which can develop resistance to multiple drugs over time.

3. Using antibiotics in livestock farming: This statement is **Correct**: The widespread use of antibiotics in livestock farming, often for growth promotion or disease prevention, contributes to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. These resistant bacteria can then transfer to humans through consumption of meat or contaminated water.

4. Multiple chronic diseases in some people: This statement is **Incorrect**: While chronic diseases can increase the need for antibiotics, they are not a direct cause of the development of multi-drug resistance. It is the misuse or overuse of antibiotics that leads to resistance.

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