SC asks govt. to consider plea to treat 'racial slur' as a hate crime

The Supreme Court rejected the idea of categorizing crimes by race or region, warning it could deepen societal polarization. A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant emphasized treating all crimes with equal severity, regardless of victims' identities, to foster unity 75 years post-Independence.

The court heard a petition by advocate Anoop Prakash Awasthi seeking guidelines to recognize "racial slur" as a distinct hate crime category. It directed Attorney-General R. Venkataramani to review and refer the matter to authorities. The plea arose from the brutal attack on Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura, killed on December 27, 2025, in Uttarakhand after resisting racial heckling while shopping.

Chakma's dying words—"We are Indians. What certificate should we show to prove that?"—highlighted identity-based violence. Awasthi argued that new laws like Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita fail to address hate crimes, racial discrimination, and attacks on northeastern citizens. He cited Chakma's murder as part of a pattern, including Nido Taniam's 2014 death and assaults on migrant students and workers, despite parliamentary acknowledgments.

Currently, racial offenses remain ordinary crimes without specialized mechanisms. The petition urges systemic reforms to ensure justice and prevent shrugging off mob violence against marginalized Indians.

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

"classifying crime on the basis of the identity of the victim may run the danger of dividing society when the nation, after 75 years of Independence, has to find unity in treating its diverse subjects equally"

Justice Surya Kant
Chief Justice of India

Maharashtra govt scraps 2014 policy on Muslim quota

The Maharashtra government scrapped a 2014 Government Resolution that enabled 50 identified Muslim communities to seek caste verification under Special Backward Category-A (SBC-A) for educational reservations. This closes the final administrative path to the proposed 5% Muslim quota, sparking accusations of anti-minority bias from Opposition.

The demand for Muslim reservation in Maharashtra took institutional shape in 2008 when the then Congress-NCP government set up a committee under retired IAS officer Mehmood ur Rahman to study the socio-economic condition of Muslims in the state. The committee report highlighted Muslim poverty (60% of the community below poverty line), low job representation (4.4%), and graduate rates (2.2%) and recommended 8% reservation. It led to a 2014 Congress-NCP ordinance granting 5% reservation to backward Muslim groups like weavers and fisherfolk. The Bombay High Court upheld this 5% exceedance of the 50% ceiling for education in 2014, citing compelling circumstances to mainstream disadvantaged youth.

However, the ordinance lapsed in December 2014, and no permanent law followed despite brief 2020 MVA revival attempts. This means there is now no active 5 per cent reservation for Muslims under SEBC or any special category in Maharashtra, including in the education sector. Social Justice Minister Sanjay Shirsat defended revocation, stressing due process over announcements. At the same time, political leaders from the opposition has also said that Muslims were not receiving the benefits of reservation in any case; so this order is unlikely to have much impact on ground.

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Woman, baby burnt alive over 'witchcraft' charge in Jharkhand

A 32-year-old woman, Jyoti Sinku, and her two-month-old baby were allegedly burned alive by a mob in Kalaiya village, West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand, late Tuesday night. The attackers branded her a witch after a relative's death from prolonged illness, which they attributed to her supposed sorcery.

The incident unfolded when a relative accused Jyoti of witchcraft, drawing a crowd of about a dozen men and women to their courtyard. The family offered to resolve the dispute via panchayat the next morning, but the mob doused his wife—holding the baby—and set them ablaze with kerosene. Police confirmed two deaths and arrested four suspects. Preliminary findings point to witchcraft allegations as the motive, with investigations ongoing to uncover further details. This horrific lynching underscores persistent superstition-driven violence in rural India, where witch-hunting claims lives despite legal bans. the National Crime Record Bureau data from 2019 revealed an overall rise in witch-hunting cases, with Chhattisgarh witnessing 22-witch-hunt related deaths in 2018 alone. Witch-hunting and broader superstition related crimes violate basic fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 14,15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. Such acts also violate several provisions of various International legislations to which India is a signatory, such as the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948', 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966', and 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979'.

Focus area : UPSC GS I Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.
UPSC PYQ GS 1 2020 : Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism. Do you agree? (Answer in 250 words)

SC forms panel to guide judges about sensitivity, compassion

The Supreme Court assigned retired Justice Aniruddha Bose, Director of the National Judicial Academy, to formulate guidelines promoting sensitivity and compassion among judges in vulnerable cases, particularly sexual assault involving minors. A three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant directed an expert committee including legal practitioners, academics, and social workers to produce a comprehensive report in simple, jargon-free language. The court also mandated translations into regional languages to ensure victims comprehend its protections.
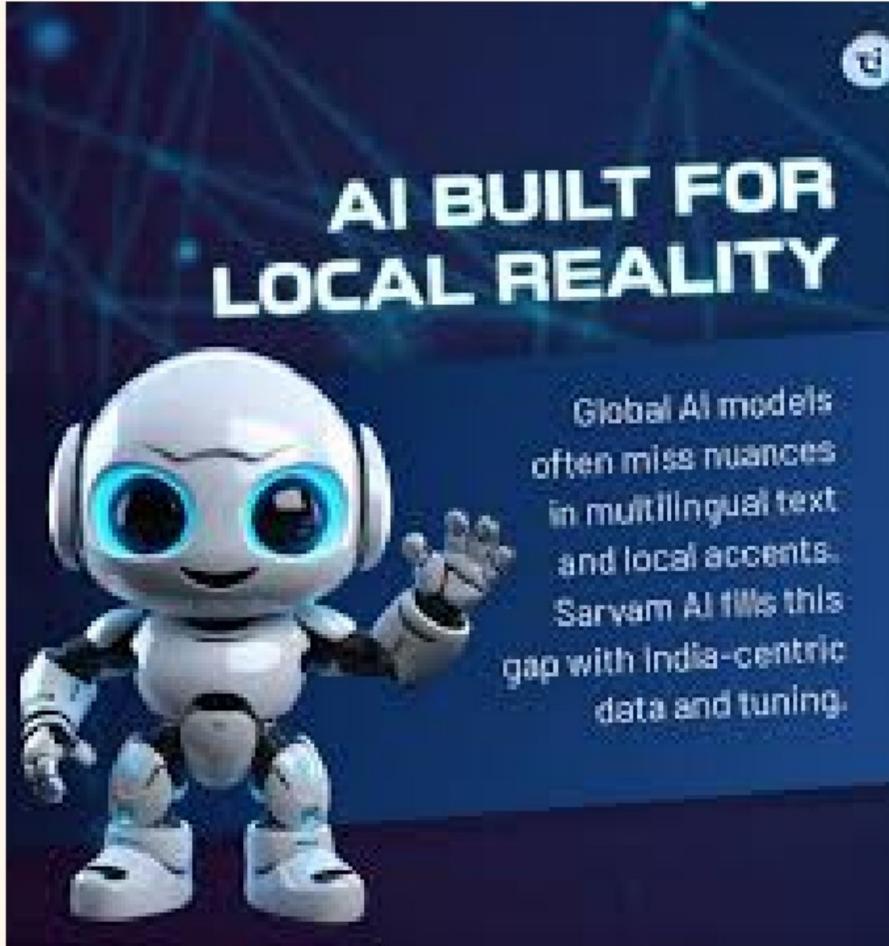
This initiative responds to a March 17, 2025, Allahabad High Court order that used explicit language to describe a minor girl's sexual assault, quashing POCSO summons against two accused by deeming "pulling down pyjama string" mere disrobing under IPC Section 354B, not attempted rape. The Supreme Court overturned this, restoring the Special Judge's June 2023 summons, and took suo motu cognizance to address judges' frequent lack of empathy in such matters.

The Bench highlighted casual societal use of offensive dialect words, which constitute penal offenses and hinder victims' trauma narratives. It urged the committee to compile such expressions across languages, empowering complainants. Triggered by NGO 'We the Women of India' and advocates like Shobha Gupta, the judgment stresses awareness to uphold victims' rights and judicial accountability.

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India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

India's Sarvam AI brings out large language model Vikram

AI BUILT FOR LOCAL REALITY

Global AI models often miss nuances in multilingual text and local accents. Sarvam AI fills this gap with India-centric data and tuning.

Bengaluru-based Sarvam AI unveiled two large language models named Vikram at the AI Impact Summit, marking a significant milestone in India's AI development. This launch follows the Centre's announcement months earlier to create homegrown models akin to ChatGPT and China's DeepSeek.

The Vikram models—a 35-billion parameter version and a 105-billion parameter version—are open-source and outperform global peers on industry benchmarks, according to co-founder Pratyush Kumar's keynote. Training these required massive computational power from graphics processing units (GPUs) at data centers, supported by over $50 million from investors like Peak XV and Khosla Ventures, plus subsidized access via the IndiaAI Mission's common compute program. A key strength lies in superior handling of Indian languages, which most AI models struggle with due to limited training data. Kumar demonstrated real-time English-to-Indian language translations, showcasing practical utility. While not yet public-facing, Sarvam's website promises a chat feature soon.

Nvidia, OpenAI announce partnerships with Indian rms, educational institutes

U.S. tech giants Nvidia and OpenAI announced key partnerships with Indian firms and academia at the AI Impact Summit to boost AI infrastructure and education. Nvidia teamed up with Yotta, L&T, and E2E Networks to host AI workloads in India's cloud data centers. These centers will support model training, fine-tuning, and high-scale inference while manufacturing intelligence.

Nvidia reserves datacentre capacity for startups, researchers, enterprises, and model builders in India. It provides access for Indian partners to the open-source Nemo family of large language models (LLMs) and NeMo software suite for managing AI agents. Graphics processing units (GPUs) from Nvidia power most AI models, making this collaboration vital for India's AI growth.

OpenAI, creators of ChatGPT, partnered with universities like IIT-Delhi, IIM-Ahmedabad, AIIMS New Delhi, Manipal Academy, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, and Pearl Academy. The goal is to integrate AI tools, training, and research into campuses, equipping students with essential skills for an AI-driven world. OpenAI's India education head, Raghav Gupta, emphasized preparing learners to thrive amid rapid AI adoption.

OpenAI also collaborates with ed-tech platforms such as PhysicsWallah, upGrad, and HCL GUVI. These deals will benefit one lakh students and staff, fostering widespread AI literacy from classrooms to professional training.
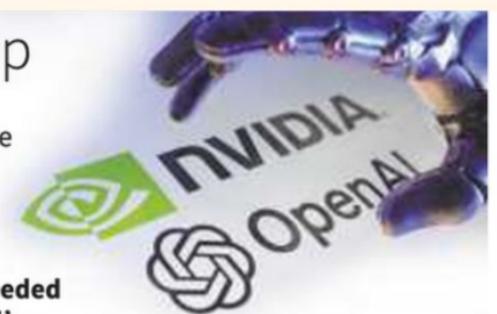

Technical tie-up

Chip maker Nvidia will work with three firms while OpenAI has signed on with multiple universities

OpenAI seeks to 'equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a world with AI'

PARTNERS ■ IIT-Delhi
■ IIM-Ahmedabad
■ AIIMS New Delhi
■ Manipal Academy of Higher Education ■ Pearl Academy
■ University of Petroleum and Energy Studies

Nvidia to provide firms access to Nemotron, a family of open source LLMs and and NeMo, a software suite for managing AI agents

PARTNERS ■ Yotta ■ L&T
■ E2E Networks

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In Munich, Rubio lays bare plan for a new world

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared the "old world" order ended, urging a re-examination of geopolitics at the Munich Security Conference. He praised five centuries of Western "expansion" through missionaries, explorers, and empires until 1945, when war devastation, communist revolutions, and anti-colonial uprisings triggered a "managed decline."

Rubio blamed this decline on mass migration eroding social cohesion and dogmatic free trade benefiting adversaries like China. He criticized international institutions like the UN for failing conflicts such as Gaza, advocating American unilateralism over "abstractions" like global law. Sovereignty of nations like Iran and Venezuela holds little value in his view, while Palestinian rights remain marginal.

He called for reforming cooperative systems, positioning America against the West's decline. Rubio envisioned a renewed Western civilization alliance with Europe, rooted in shared Christian faith, heritage, and history—not mere geopolitics. America rejects polite caretaking of decline, seeking instead to revitalize this "greatest civilization" for a new prosperity era.

The speech signals a shift from liberal policies toward civilizational solidarity, dismissing multilateralism. portrayal of five centuries of Western expansion—from missionaries and explorers crossing oceans to building global empires—presents colonial history primarily as a narrative of civilizational outreach and achievement.

Focus area : GS II - International Relations - Neo Royalism; breakdown of multilateral world order

India stays out of statement criticising Israel's actions

India abstained from a joint UN statement signed by 85 countries, including the League of Arab States, EU, BRICS founders (Russia, China, Brazil, South Africa), Quad partners (Australia, Japan), and neighbors like Bangladesh and Pakistan. The statement, read by Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour, strongly condemned Israel's unilateral measures to expand control over the West Bank, including Areas A and B under Palestinian Authority per Oslo Accords (1993-95). It opposed land acquisition by outsiders, documentation checks, annexation, and changes to demographic composition or status of occupied territories since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as violations of international law undermining peace.

Staying out of the joint statement marks a departure from India's recent positions as India had criticized Israel's illegal annexation of Palestinian territory during the October 2025 UN vote and the January 31, 2026 Delhi Declaration supporting a Palestinian state on 1967 borders. The External Affairs Ministry declined comment on reasons for the abstinence. Observers link the shift to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled February 25-26 Israel visit, ahead of a UN meeting and U.S.-led Board of Peace session.

Former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Menon Rao questioned if it shrinks India's moral vocabulary, turning strategic autonomy into hedging rather than principled independence. The move drew social media backlash from diplomats, highlighting tensions in India's Israel-Palestine balancing act.

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Why Yuvraj Mehta's death was not an accident

Yuvraj Mehta's tragic death poignantly highlights the deadly cost of neglected urban safety measures across Indian cities. On January 16, 2026, this 27-year-old tech professional was driving at night when his car veered off a sharp turn in Greater Noida's Sector 150 and plunged into an unguarded, water-filled construction pit. Although authorities quickly labeled it an "accident," this incident actually exposes deeper systemic governance failures, where cities tend to produce such preventable risks rather than proactively eliminate them.

Everyday Dangers Become Normalized - India unfortunately records around 1.73 lakh road accident deaths every year according to NCRB 2023 data, and urban areas contribute a significant 32% of these cases despite having much smaller populations, which translates to a higher per capita risk compared to rural zones. Common hazards such as poor roads, exposed wiring, unguarded construction sites, flooded basements, and collapsing utilities are routinely documented through countless civic complaints and official audits year after year. However, the reality remains troubling since 70% of cities still lack functional drainage audits as per the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which directly allows these dangers to persist unchecked over time. As a result, ordinary citizens have no choice but to adapt by carefully avoiding monsoon-flooded stretches or slowing down considerably, thereby shifting the essential burden of safety away from responsible institutions onto individuals themselves.

Governance Priorities Fail the 74th Amendment - The 74th Constitutional Amendment was originally designed to empower Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) by devolving as many as 18 key functions to them, yet in practice, only four of these have been effectively transferred even after decades. Consequently, cities continue to prioritize highly visible and photogenic projects like grand flyovers, expressways, and metro corridors, while essential but less glamorous infrastructure such as footpaths, drainage networks, and electrical safety systems receives far less attention and funding. This skewed approach becomes especially evident in aspiration-driven hubs like Delhi's Karol Bagh, where in 2024, three students tragically drowned in a flooded basement library that had already been flagged multiple times in Municipal Corporation audits, even though such spaces remain illegal yet widely tolerated. Therefore, these incidents are not mere seasonal mishaps but clear outcomes of sustained regulatory indifference and misplaced priorities.

No Accountability, Dispersed Blame - Whenever such deaths unfortunately occur, responsibility quickly fragments across multiple agencies including the Noida Authority, police, fire services, and private contractors, making it difficult to pinpoint true accountability. For instance, response delays as long as 90 minutes in Mehta's case only compounded the tragedy further. Typically, junior officials end up facing suspensions while formal inquiries tend to fizzle out without real outcomes, and even Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports reveal how broader systemic failures consistently evade scrutiny at senior levels.

Vulnerability Cuts Across Classes - Even professionals with stable jobs are not spared from these urban risks, as white-collar workers enduring long hours and exam-aspiring students crammed in basements all navigate the very same hazardous environments daily. While public grief often sparks immediate announcements like re-inspections of sites, without fundamental structural changes, this mourning simply evolves into a repetitive ritual that absorbs failures rather than truly questioning them.

Way Forward

To address this effectively, India urgently needs to mandate RTI-linked urban risk registers that connect citizen complaints to strict 30-day mitigation deadlines, implement quarterly CAG-style audits specifically targeting preventable urban deaths with clear ministerial accountability, and establish independent urban safety commissions empowered under the 74th Amendment to enforce uniform binding standards across all states and municipalities.

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India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

A 'Third Way' for AI governance

The AI Impact Summit in Delhi convenes world leaders and tech experts to address AI governance amid global confusion over balancing innovation with risks. India positions itself as offering a "Third Way," distinct from the EU's compliance-heavy model, the U.S.'s hands-off approach, and China's centralized control. These frameworks fail to suit the Global South's contexts, prompting India's agile governance strategy.

In November 2025, India released AI guidelines prioritizing inclusive scaling in healthcare, agriculture, education, and administration via adoption, diffusion, diplomacy, and capacity-building. Recent IT Rules amendments mandate AI-generated content labeling and a three-hour takedown for harmful material—the world's first such requirement. Yet, enforcing this against tech giants while upholding rights demands international coordination.

For the Global South, India's emphasis on strategic autonomy, public-private partnerships, and tailored governance counters investment concentration and proprietary risks. As a middle power with robust AI infrastructure, India can lead shared safety frameworks, research networks, and risk assessment pooling.

However, gaps persist: accelerating adoption without worker protections, transparency mandates, whistleblower safeguards, or public awareness undermines balance. The Summit offers a chance to forge equitable public-private partnerships across the AI stack, establishing India as a hub for middle-power coordination.

Military AI and urgency of guardrails

India abstained from signing the 'Pathways to Action' declaration at the third Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain 9REAIM) summit, joining the US and China among non-signatories, as only 35 of 85 countries committed for AI regulation in military applications—down from 60 previously. This reflects growing challenges in governing military AI. At present AI is considered as a dual-use technology blending civilian and military applications, which complicates verification and compliance. States hesitate on regulations due to AI's perceived strategic advantages in logistics, combat, and beyond, especially for heavily invested nations unwilling to curb R&D.

Central controversies surround Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), lacking any international definition. Technologically advanced countries favor looser thresholds for autonomy to preserve flexibility, while others push restrictive binding instruments. India deems such treaties premature amid neighborhood security threats, prioritizing development over moral bans, which lack strong norms.

India's stance balances economic AI ambitions with defense needs, aligning rhetorically with 'responsible' use but avoiding commitments like the 2024 Korea blueprint. Opportunities exist for non-binding measures: prohibiting AI in nuclear decision-making, voluntary confidence-building via data-sharing on military AI, and establishing a risk hierarchy for use cases to guide national frameworks.

India should champion such guardrails, leveraging its position to foster transparency and accountability. As AI militarization accelerates, non-binding norms offer essential first steps toward future binding agreements, ensuring safe deployment without stifling innovation. With military AI inevitable, prioritizing ethical boundaries now prevents unchecked escalation.

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PRELIMS CORNER :

Q) Consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Agricultural soils release nitrogen oxides into the environment.
2. Cattle release ammonia into the environment.
3. The poultry industry releases reactive nitrogen compounds.

Which of the statements given above is/arc correct?

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

Q) What is blue carbon? (2021)

a) Carbon captured by oceans and coastal ecosystems
b) Carbon sequestered in forest biomass and agricultural soils
c) Carbon contained in petroleum and natural gas
d) Carbon present in atmosphere

ECOSYSTEM
LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE

The leatherback sea turtle (Dermochelys coriacea) stands as the world's largest turtle, distinguished by its unique leathery skin instead of scales or a hard shell. This ancient reptile, existing since the dinosaur age, lacks bony plates and relies on a tough, rubbery carapace. Highly migratory, leatherbacks travel over 10,000 miles annually between nesting and foraging grounds, and they dive deeper than most marine mammals—reaching nearly 4,000 feet.

Boasting the widest global reptile distribution across tropical oceans (excluding polar regions), leatherbacks nest primarily on wide, sandy subtropical beaches. Once abundant everywhere, their populations now face rapid decline due to bycatch in fishing gear, egg harvesting, hunting, and habitat loss. Pacific leatherbacks, in particular, teeter on extinction's edge, prompting urgent conservation like NOAA's Species in the Spotlight initiative.

In India, leatherbacks were sighted in mainland waters as early as the 1900s, with the last confirmed mainland nest in Calicut, Kerala (1956). Nesting now confines to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where pioneer Satish Bhaskar reported the first nest in 1978 on Little Andaman. Significant nesting clusters on just three islands: Little Andaman, Little Nicobar, and Great Nicobar, accounting for 94% of nests in recent surveys.

This Indian Ocean population shows remarkable resilience to natural calamities, thriving with minimal intervention. However, permanent threats to pristine beaches could reverse gains. Protecting these undisturbed sites remains crucial for the species' survival, highlighting the need for sustained monitoring and habitat conservation worldwide.

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Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option d

Statement 1: Agricultural soils release nitrogen oxides into the environment.

This statement is correct: Agricultural soils release nitrogen oxides (NOx) primarily due to the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers. Microbial processes like nitrification and denitrification in the soil convert nitrates into nitrogen oxides, which are potent greenhouse gases and contribute to air pollution.

Statement 2: Cattle release ammonia into the environment.

This statement is Correct: Cattle release ammonia (NH_3) through their waste. During the decomposition of urea in urine and manure, ammonia is volatilized and released into the atmosphere. This contributes to air pollution and can lead to the formation of secondary particulate matter.

Statement 3: The poultry industry releases reactive nitrogen compounds.

This is correct. The poultry industry emits reactive nitrogen compounds such as ammonia. These emissions arise from the breakdown of nitrogen-rich waste (manure). High ammonia levels from poultry farms can cause environmental and health issues, including eutrophication of water bodies and respiratory problems.

Sources of Nitrogen Emissions: Agricultural soils, Cattle, Poultry industry.

2) Answer is option a

Blue carbon refers to the carbon captured by the world's oceans and coastal ecosystems, particularly through the processes of sequestration and storage in marine and coastal habitats. These ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes, are incredibly efficient at absorbing carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere and storing it in the soil or biomass for long periods, making them crucial in mitigating climate change.

Coastal ecosystems like mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in their biomass and soil. These ecosystems are vital in climate change mitigation because they capture and store large amounts of carbon for long periods.

Green Carbon - Carbon sequestered in forest biomass and agricultural soils. This refers to terrestrial carbon sequestration, which is related to green carbon, not blue carbon. Forests and agricultural soils are important carbon sinks but are not part of the blue carbon ecosystem.

Fossil Carbon - Carbon contained in petroleum and natural gas. This is fossil carbon, which is stored in geological formations. While fossil fuels release carbon into the atmosphere when burned, they are not considered blue carbon.

Atmospheric Carbon - Carbon present in the atmosphere. It includes the carbon dioxide (CO_2) present in the Earth's atmosphere. While atmospheric carbon is a part of the carbon cycle, it is not blue carbon.

UPSC PRELIMS 2026
COUNTDOWN
94 DAYS TO GO