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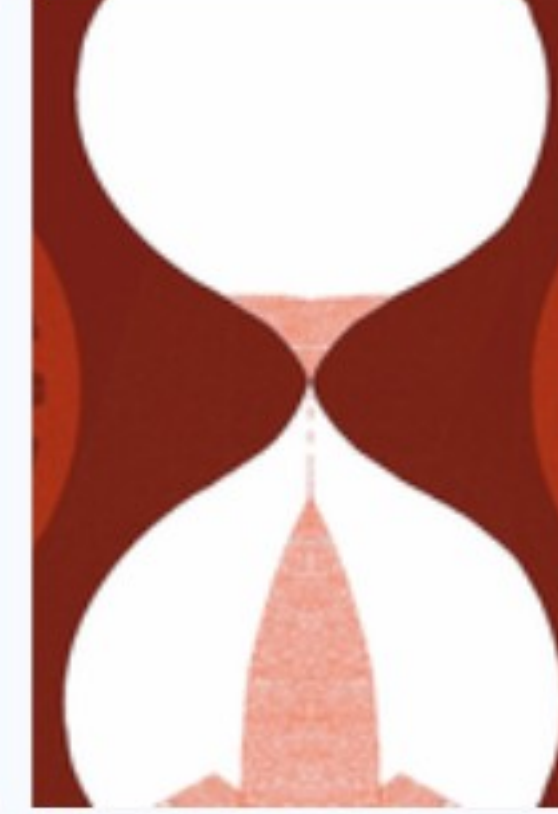
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War and Hunger Collide: World Food Programme Raises Alarm Over Lebanon's Food Crisis

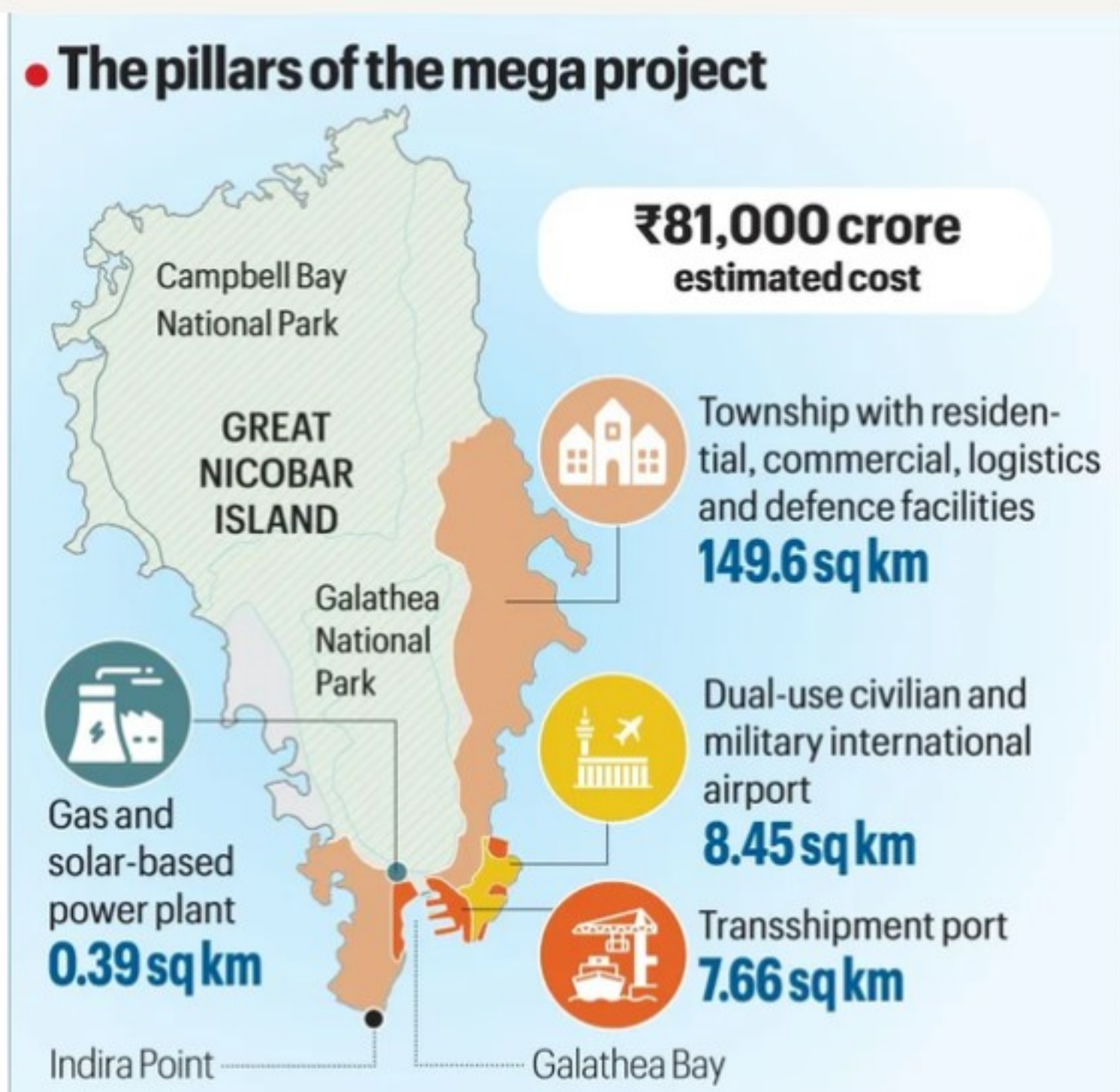
Amid escalating Israeli strikes, Lebanon is witnessing a deepening humanitarian crisis that is rapidly turning into a food emergency. The World Food Programme warns that large-scale displacement, rising food prices, and disrupted supply routes are making basic necessities increasingly unaffordable. Extensive damage to critical infrastructure, including key bridges over the Litani River, has further constrained food distribution to affected regions. As conflict intensifies, the convergence of war, displacement, and economic strain is pushing vulnerable populations toward acute food insecurity.

Draft master plan for Great Nicobar Island projects tourism as primary growth driver

The Centre's ₹92,000-crore mega-infrastructure project for Great Nicobar Island aims to transform the island into a major economic and strategic hub. The draft master plan identifies tourism as the primary driver of growth and envisions large-scale infrastructure and population expansion.

Key Features of the Master Plan

The project includes development of an international container transshipment port, an airport, power plants, and an integrated township. The island is proposed to be developed across multiple clusters, including administrative zones near Campbell Bay, logistics hubs near Galathea Bay, and tourism-oriented zones along the eastern coast.



Structural Causes: Land, Identity, and Demography

Tourism is positioned as the central pillar of economic activity, with projections of over one million annual tourists by 2055. The plan outlines diverse tourism models such as beach tourism, wellness tourism, adventure tourism, biodiversity tourism, business tourism, and entertainment hubs including theme parks.

The Great Nicobar project represents an ambitious push for strategic and economic expansion through tourism and infrastructure. However, its long-term success will depend on addressing environmental risks, ensuring tribal rights, and achieving a balanced and inclusive development model.

Population Projections and Settlement Plans

The master plan projects a population of 3.36 lakh by 2055, driven largely by job creation and migration. In contrast, the indigenous Nicobarese population is expected to grow modestly from about 7,500 to 11,500, raising concerns about demographic imbalance.



Land Use and Environmental Concerns

The project spans approximately 166.10 sq. km, with around 40.8% designated as urbanisable land. A significant portion—121.86 sq. km—is proposed to be diverted from forest areas, raising environmental concerns given the island's fragile ecosystem and biodiversity.

Tribal Issues and Legal Challenges

The project has faced resistance from local Nicobarese communities, who withdrew consent citing unresolved forest rights issues. There are also conflicting proposals regarding tribal settlements and relocation. The matter is currently under judicial scrutiny in the Calcutta High Court.

Governance and Planning Concerns

The draft plan has been released for public consultation, though concerns remain about transparency, including lack of clarity on the timeline of its notification. The scale and nature of development raise questions about balancing economic growth with ecological sustainability and indigenous rights.

A modest plea for constitutional morality

Recent submissions in the Supreme Court of India in the Sabarimala case have questioned the judicial use of the term “constitutional morality.” This has revived a broader debate on its relevance, meaning, and role in judicial decision-making.



Meaning and Conceptual Understanding

“Constitutional morality” is not a strict legal standard but refers to core constitutional values such as self-restraint, respect for plurality, adherence to due process, and openness to criticism. It represents a guiding constitutional sensibility rather than a rigid rule for adjudication.

Critique of the Concept

Critics argue that constitutional morality is vague and indeterminate, often contrasted with “societal morality.” It is seen by some as a judicial tool to override socially evolved norms and expand judicial authority, raising concerns of judicial overreach and weakening of parliamentary sovereignty.

Counter-Argument: Limits of ‘Societal Morality’

The critique is challenged on the ground that “societal morality” is even more ambiguous and often used to shield existing social practices from scrutiny, as it relies on prevailing norms that may themselves be unequal or exclusionary. Unlike constitutional morality, which encourages reasoned evaluation of liberty, equality, and institutional autonomy, societal morality tends to shut down debate rather than engage with it, thereby preventing critical examination and reform of entrenched social practices.

Role in Judicial Reasoning and Key Cases

Constitutional morality helps frame critical questions in cases involving rights and social practices, such as reconciling equality with institutional autonomy. It has been significant in cases like **Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India**, where constitutional values were used to challenge entrenched social norms.

Concerns Over Judicial Functioning

The debate also reflects deeper anxieties about the judiciary itself, including **perceived arbitrariness, inconsistency in decisions, and erosion of procedural discipline**. Issues such as handling of textbook controversies and alleged voter disenfranchisement raise concerns about unpredictability and weakening constitutional safeguards.

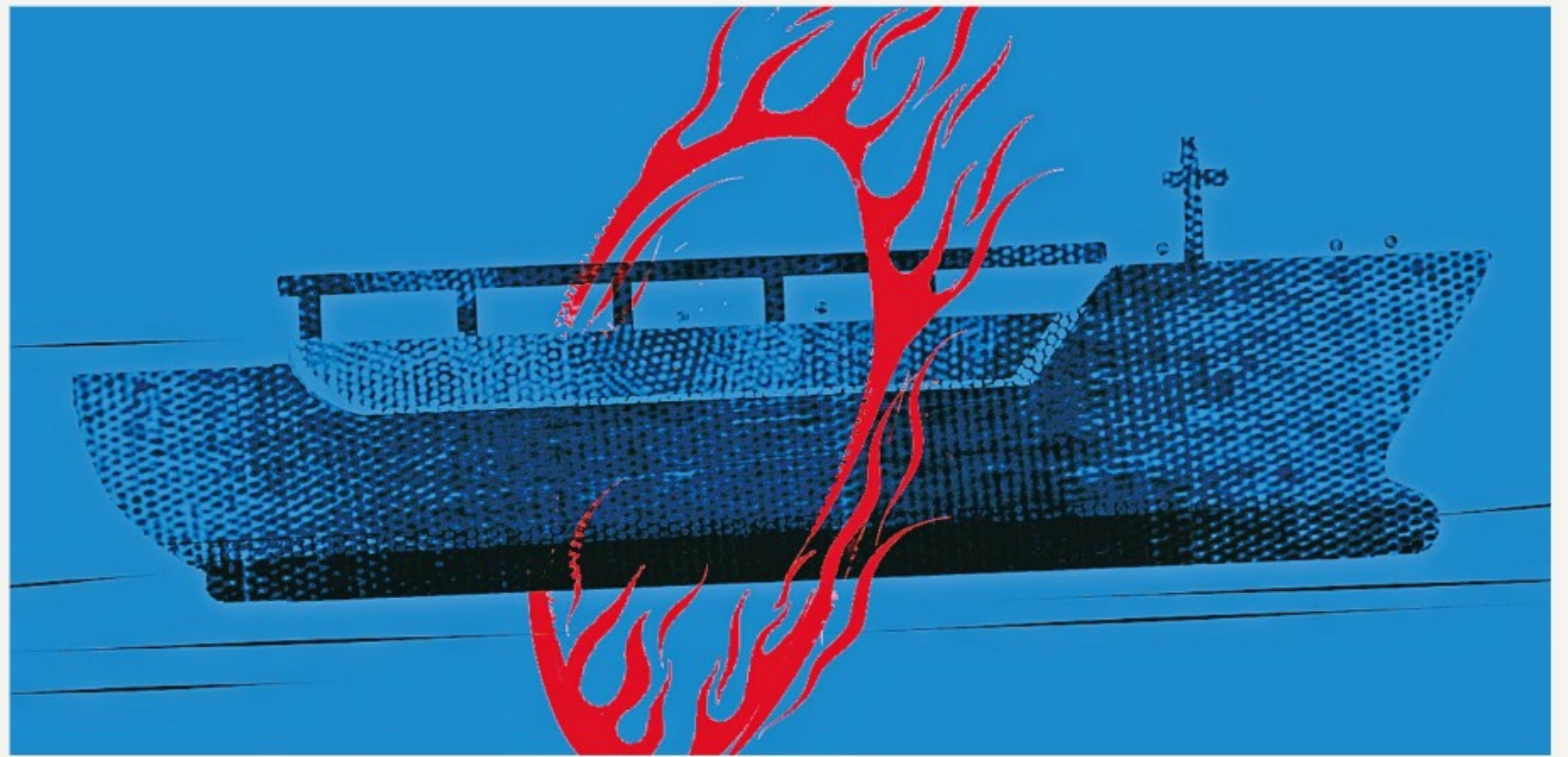
Broader Implications for Constitutional Governance

The rejection of constitutional morality may indicate a broader attempt to dilute constitutional values and accountability. While the concept may not provide definitive answers, it serves as a diagnostic tool to identify arbitrariness, protect fundamental rights, and ensure that governance remains anchored in constitutional principles.

Constitutional morality, despite its ambiguity, remains essential for sustaining reasoned adjudication and safeguarding core values like liberty and equality. Undermining it risks weakening constitutional governance and fostering uncertainty in the rule of law.

The strait of high stakes, where law and leverage collide

The Strait of Hormuz has emerged as the epicentre of a global maritime and economic crisis following US-Israel attacks on Iran. The region is now effectively a “war zone,” disrupting nearly 20% of global oil and 25% of LNG trade, marking the most severe energy supply shock since the 1970s.



Strategic Importance of Maritime Choke Points

Maritime choke points are narrow sea routes critical for global trade, concentrating shipping traffic due to geographic constraints. Historically, control over such points—seen during World War I and under Pax Britannica—has enhanced geopolitical power by turning geography into a strategic asset.

Current Disruptions and Economic Impact

Iran’s use of coastal missiles, drones, and sea mines has severely restricted shipping movement. Insurance premiums have surged by 400–600%, and Iran’s imposition of transit tolls has increased costs. These disruptions threaten global energy markets and supply chains, creating widespread economic uncertainty.

Legal Framework: UNCLOS and Freedom of Navigation

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) governs maritime navigation. It distinguishes between:

- Innocent Passage: Limited transit under coastal state control
- Transit Passage: Unrestricted movement through international straits

The Strait of Hormuz qualifies for transit passage, but Iran’s enforcement of innocent passage norms challenges international law and risks violating global maritime norms.

UPSC Model question : “Maritime choke points have historically shaped global power dynamics and continue to influence contemporary geopolitical conflicts.” Discuss the strategic and legal significance of maritime choke points with reference to the Strait of Hormuz. In this context, examine the implications of disruptions in such regions for global trade and India’s economic and security interests.

Geopolitical and Strategic Dimensions

The crisis reflects broader geopolitical competition involving major powers like the United States, China, and Russia, where control of choke points is increasingly critical. Iran, facing economic and military pressure, is leveraging the strait as a strategic tool to extract concessions.

Implications for India

For India, the Strait of Hormuz is a critical energy lifeline, with a majority of oil and gas imports passing through it. Disruptions pose risks to energy security, inflation, and economic stability. India’s cautious diplomatic stance highlights its preference for quiet engagement despite having leverage as a potential mediator.

Way Forward

The crisis underscores the need for adherence to international maritime law and cooperative security frameworks. Diplomatic engagement, de-escalation, and respect for UNCLOS provisions are essential to ensure uninterrupted global trade and prevent escalation into a broader regional or nuclear conflict.

The Strait of Hormuz crisis highlights the intersection of geopolitics, law, and global trade, demonstrating how control over strategic waterways can shape international stability. Sustained diplomacy and rule-based order remain crucial to preventing long-term economic and security disruptions.

The Indian EXPRESS

A new measure reframes heat crisis

While humans can tolerate high temperatures through sweat evaporation, increased moisture levels reduce this capacity, intensifying physiological stress. The wet-bulb temperature metric captures this interaction, with earlier estimates placing the survival threshold at 35°C. However, recent findings suggest that even lower levels, around 31°C, can be dangerous, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly and outdoor workers. This calls for a reassessment of heat-related risk frameworks, especially in countries like India experiencing frequent extreme weather conditions.

India's urban and social context further aggravates heat stress. Urban heat islands, inadequate green cover, and poor ventilation increase exposure, while occupational vulnerabilities heighten risks for informal workers. Addressing this challenge requires integrating heat and humidity metrics, improving urban planning, and adopting targeted interventions to enhance resilience against climate-induced heat stress.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"Rising temperatures combined with humidity are redefining the nature of heat stress in India." Examine the limitations of current heat action strategies and suggest measures to enhance resilience against climate-induced heat risks.



Rebuilding ties

India's recent diplomatic re-engagement with Turkiye and Azerbaijan marks a shift from the strained relations that followed their perceived support to Pakistan during the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. Earlier tensions led to reduced diplomatic engagement, economic interactions, and public calls for boycotts, alongside emerging alignments involving competing regional groupings. The revival of Foreign Office Consultations and renewed dialogue indicate a mutual recognition of the importance of stabilising bilateral ties despite strategic differences.

The development highlights the need for a more calibrated and pragmatic foreign policy approach in an increasingly volatile global environment. A sustained emphasis on engagement, strategic autonomy, and avoidance of rigid geopolitical alignments remains essential for maintaining stable international partnerships.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"India's foreign policy increasingly requires balancing strategic interests with diplomatic pragmatism in a complex global environment." Discuss the significance of India's recent diplomatic re-engagement with countries having close ties with Pakistan, and examine the challenges in maintaining strategic autonomy while managing such relationships.

thehindu **businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

Fair deal

SEBI's proposal to reintroduce open market share buybacks marks a shift towards facilitating capital efficiency in India's securities market. Earlier restrictions were based on concerns of inequity among shareholders and tax arbitrage, but these have been partly addressed through advance disclosure norms and alignment of buyback taxation with capital gains. Regulatory safeguards—such as limits on daily purchase volumes, restrictions on promoter participation, and price controls—aim to prevent market manipulation, making open market buybacks a more balanced mechanism.

The move has broader economic and market implications. With many companies holding surplus cash and showing limited investment appetite, buybacks can enable efficient capital redistribution to investors, who may reinvest in productive avenues. Additionally, buybacks can improve financial metrics like earnings per share and help correct valuation imbalances. In the context of sustained foreign investor outflows and excess supply in equity markets, such measures may also support market stability and investor confidence.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"Share buybacks play an important role in capital allocation and market efficiency." Discuss the rationale behind reintroducing open market share buybacks in India and examine their implications for investors, corporate governance, and financial markets.

Govt. examining compliance burden on MSMEs due to war

The ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia have significantly disrupted India's export ecosystem, prompting the government to hold inter-ministerial meetings involving stakeholders such as port authorities, shipping agencies, and export promotion councils. The crisis has created uncertainty in global trade routes, affecting shipment timelines and increasing logistical complexities. This uncertainty makes it difficult for exporters to plan costs and delivery schedules, thereby weakening trade efficiency.

Impact on MSMEs: Structural Vulnerabilities

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the most affected due to limited financial and institutional capacity. Unlike large firms, MSMEs lack dedicated compliance teams and advanced systems, forcing entrepreneurs themselves to handle regulatory requirements. This leads to higher operational stress, increased costs, and delays. In simple terms, compliance burden refers to the effort, time, and cost required to follow government rules, which becomes overwhelming for smaller businesses.

Compliance Burden and Cost Uncertainty

Frequent rerouting and delays have increased uncertainty regarding duties, tariffs, and penalties, making it difficult to calculate the "landed cost" (total cost of a product including shipping, taxes, and handling charges). MSMEs often rely on basic tools like spreadsheets instead of integrated software, making tracking changes inefficient and error-prone. This results in compliance risks and financial unpredictability, reducing their competitiveness in global markets.

The government has initiated consultations to address these challenges, indicating recognition of the issue at the policy level. However, the evolving nature of the crisis requires dynamic solutions such as simplified compliance procedures, logistical support, and financial relief measures. Strengthening institutional support for MSMEs is essential to help them navigate such external shocks. The West Asia crisis highlights the vulnerability of India's MSME-driven export sector to global disruptions. Addressing compliance complexity, improving logistical resilience, and providing targeted policy support will be crucial to sustain export competitiveness.

Triple whammy

There are three different types of disruptions MSMEs face due to the West Asia conflict



- When a cargo is diverted back, it has to be stored in a warehouse or taken back to the factory
- When shipments get routed to a different port, it is left to the exporter to figure out the next step
- Many destinations have tariff quotas for particular products which get filled within the first day itself

Types of Export Disruptions

Exporters are facing three major types of disruptions:

Cargo return to India: Shipments sent back require storage or reprocessing through the "back-to-town" procedure, which involves re-importing goods to factories and complying with additional regulations, adding time and cost.

Diversion to alternate ports: Shipping companies reroute cargo due to safety concerns, but exporters must independently manage further transportation, increasing logistical burden and expenses.

Tariff quota delays: Many countries impose tariff quotas (limits on imports at lower tax rates). If shipments miss these windows, exporters must wait for the next cycle (often 90 days), leading to warehousing costs and delayed revenue.

Economic Implications

These disruptions lead to increased working capital stress, as funds remain locked in delayed or unsold inventory. Higher logistics and compliance costs reduce profit margins and export competitiveness, especially for MSMEs. Over time, this could weaken India's position in global value chains, where timely delivery and cost efficiency are crucial.

Bolstering deterrence through submarine dominance

A recent reference to “Aridhaman” by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has led to speculation about the commissioning of INS Aridhaman, the third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) in India’s Arihant-class programme. This follows the induction of INS Arihant (2016) and INS Arighat (2024), with Aridhaman reportedly in advanced trial stages.



Key Features and Technological Advancements

INS Aridhaman represents a significant upgrade over its predecessors in terms of size and firepower. It is a 7000-tonne submarine capable of carrying up to 24 K-15 Sagarika missiles and 8 long-range K-4 or K-5 nuclear-tipped missiles. This marks a notable enhancement compared to earlier submarines, which had lower missile-carrying capacity, indicating gradual technological progression in India’s SSBN programme.

Nuclear Triad and Strategic Significance

The induction of INS Aridhaman strengthens India’s nuclear triad—its ability to deliver nuclear weapons from land, air, and sea. Sea-based deterrence is considered the most survivable component of this triad. With this development, India joins a select group of countries possessing full triad capability, enhancing its strategic deterrence posture.

Changing Nature of Warfare and Maritime Importance

Modern warfare increasingly involves multiple domains, with rapid spillover between land, air, and sea. Recent global conflicts, including developments in West Asia, highlight the growing importance of maritime routes such as chokepoints. This evolving nature of conflict underscores the need for strong sea-based deterrence capabilities.

Regional Security Concerns

The Indian Ocean region is witnessing increasing strategic competition, particularly due to the presence of foreign research and surveillance vessels with dual-use capabilities. Strengthening naval deterrence is seen as essential to counter potential threats and maintain strategic balance, especially in relation to regional actors.

Self-Reliance and Defence Modernisation

The SSBN programme contributes to India’s push for self-reliance in defence production. Ongoing global conflicts and disruptions in defence supply chains have reinforced the need for indigenous capabilities. Future plans include commissioning additional submarines and developing nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), with long-term timelines extending into the 2030s.

Challenges and Way Forward

Key challenges include balancing financial resources between upgrading existing submarine capabilities and investing in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and autonomous systems. Additionally, maintaining technological and strategic parity with other major naval powers remains a critical priority.

The development of INS Aridhaman reflects India’s evolving defence strategy focused on strengthening deterrence through advanced naval capabilities. As warfare becomes increasingly multidimensional, enhancing sea-based nuclear capabilities and ensuring technological self-reliance will remain central to India’s long-term security planning.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Gandikota canyon of South India was created by which one of the following rivers? (2022)

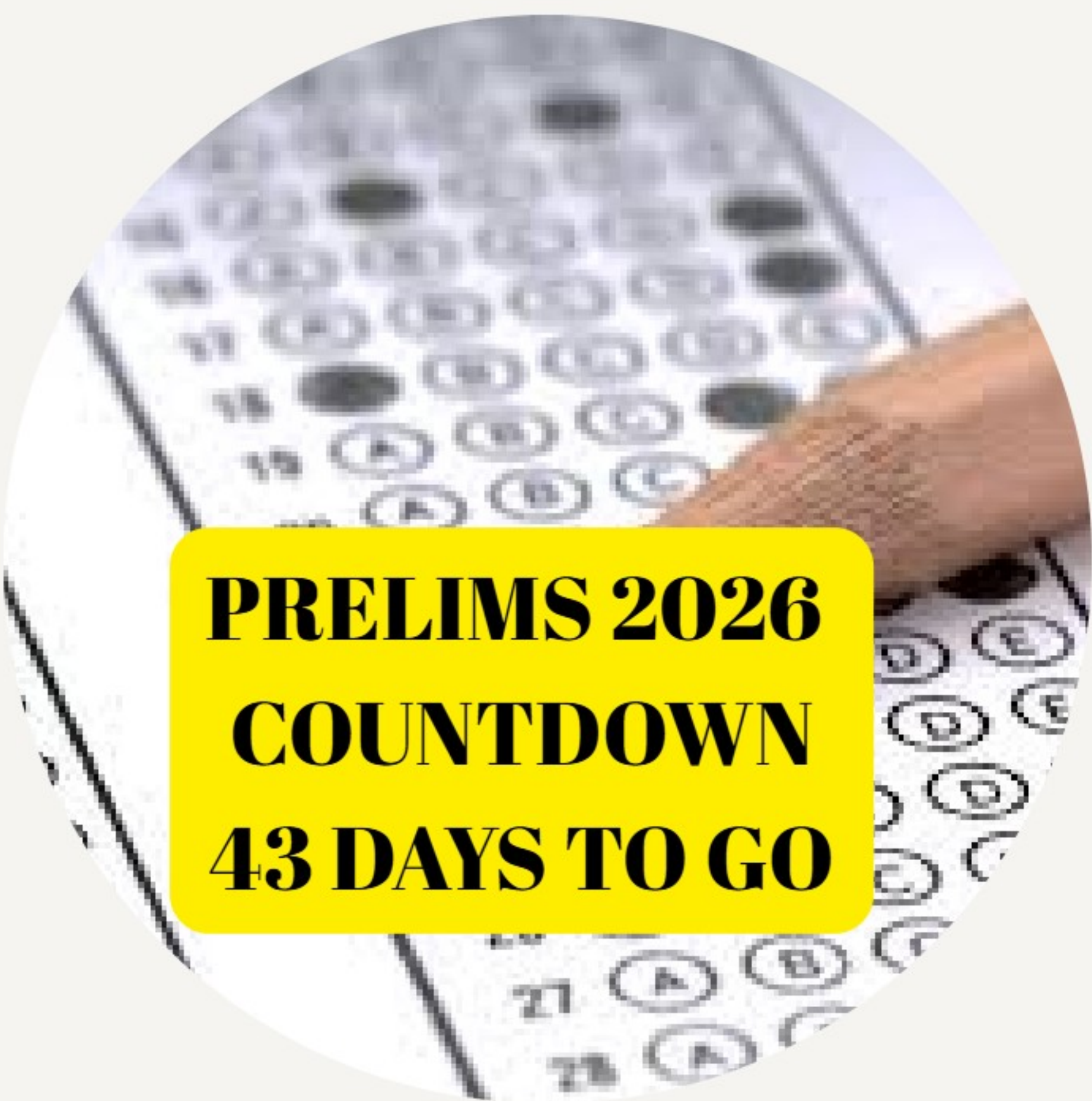
- a) Cauvery
- b) Manjira
- c) Pennar
- d) Tungabhadra

2) Consider the following statements: (2023)

1. Jhelum River passes through Wular Lake.
2. Krishna River directly feeds Kolleru Lake.
3. Meandering of the Gandak River formed Kanwar Lake.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

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



**UPSC Foundation Puzzle Set
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1) Which of the following cities lies on the western coast of India?

- A. Chennai
- B. Visakhapatnam
- C. Kochi
- D. Kolkata

2) Which mountain range acts as a natural barrier between India and China?

- A. Himalayas
- B. Vindhya
- C. Aravalli
- D. Western Ghats

3) The river Ganga originates from:

- A. Arabian Sea
- B. Bay of Bengal
- C. Himalayas
- D. Deccan Plateau

Answers : 1)c 2)a 3)c


Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (C)

Gandikota is a small village in the Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh. The village is majorly known for housing the spectacular gorge which is famously adjudged as the Grand Canyon of India. The stunning gorge has been created by the waters of the famous river Pennar that streams from the Erramala hills. Penna (also known as Pinakini, Pennar, Penner, Penneru (Telugu), Pennai (Tamil)) is a river of southern India. India has always been a popular tourist destination for its historic forts, stunning palaces and dense jungles. Now, a lesser-known gorge in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh is drawing visitors. The gorge is a stunning maze of jagged rocks layered in shades of red. The Penna River meanders through the canyon floor as it cuts through the Erramala hills. The area is known as the Grand Canyon of India because of its resemblance to the famous US landmark. It's also home to two ancient temples and a 12th Century fort that sits atop the hills surrounding the gorge.

BRAIN BOOSTERS #145 31-12-2025

Did You Know?



Gandikota Canyon

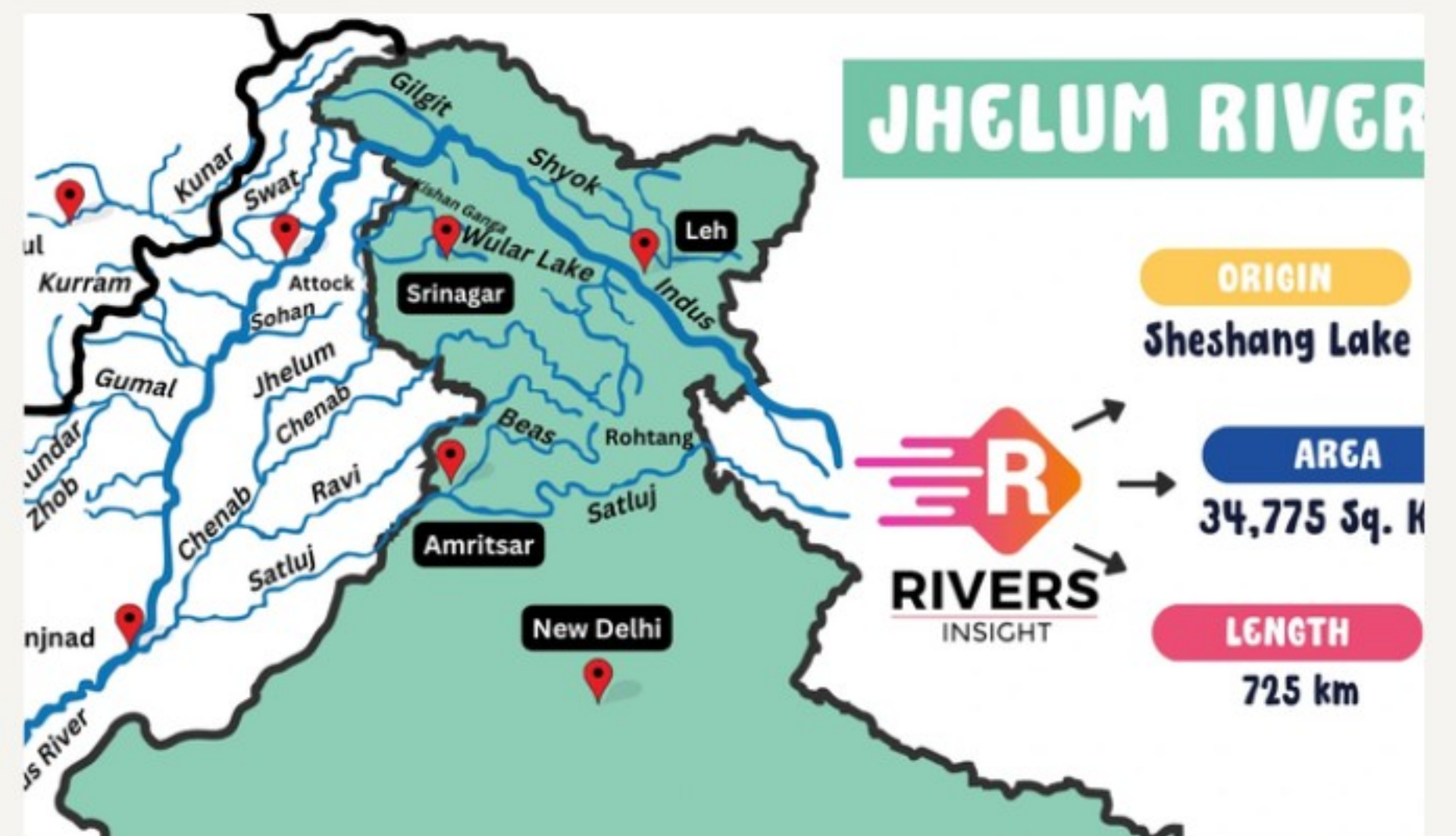
- Gandikota Canyon is a dramatic river gorge carved by the Penna (Pennar) River, often called the "Grand Canyon of India" for its sheer cliffs and striking geological formations.
- Located in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh; Lies within the Erramala Hills.
- The canyon overlooks the Gandikota Fort, dating back to 1123 CE.
- The fort rose to prominence under the Pemmasani Nayaks, feudatories of the Kakatiya dynasty.
- Later ruled by the Vijayanagara Empire, Qutb Shahis of Golconda, Mughals, Nawabs of Kadapa, Kingdom of Mysore, and finally the British.
- Mentioned in historical records like the Mackenzie Kaifiyat and travelogues of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier.
- It is renowned for spectacular geomorphology - steep red sandstone and quartzite cliffs forming a ~200-metre-wide gorge.

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2) The correct answer is (b)

Jhelum River passes through Wular Lake: Correct. Wular Lake, one of the largest freshwater lakes in Asia, is fed by the Jhelum River in Jammu and Kashmir.



Krishna River directly feeds Kolleru Lake: Incorrect. Kolleru Lake, located in Andhra Pradesh, is primarily fed by the Budameru and Tammileru rivers, not the Krishna River.



Meandering of the Gandak River formed Kanwar Lake: Correct. Kanwar Lake in Bihar is formed by the meandering of the Gandak River. Thus, only two statements are correct.





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