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Fire and Sound

Recent explosions in Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu) and Thrissur (Kerala) highlight a pattern of recurring accidents in India's pyrotechnic sector. Judicial interventions, including directions by the Madras High Court and inquiries after incidents like the Puttingal temple fireworks accident, point to systemic failures rather than isolated lapses. High casualty figures, involvement of untrained labour, and frequent violations of safety norms underline the gravity of the issue.

Scientific Basis: How Fireworks Function

Fireworks operate through a chemical reaction involving four components such as oxidisers (nitrates, perchlorates), fuels (black powder), 'stars' (metal salts for colours), and binders. Ignition triggers a sequence: lift charge propels the shell, followed by a timed burst charge that ignites stars. This process involves highly volatile chemicals and exothermic reactions, making manufacturing, storage, and handling inherently hazardous, especially when safety protocols are weak.



Climatic and Environmental Risk Factors

Climatic conditions significantly influence firework safety. Hot and dry environments increase static electricity accumulation, which can ignite chemical dust. Conversely, moisture infiltration followed by rapid heating can destabilise compounds, leading to spontaneous combustion. Regions like Virudhunagar, lying in rain-shadow zones of the Western Ghats, face high temperatures and fluctuating humidity which are conditions that heighten explosion risks during mixing and drying processes.

A sustainable solution lies in balancing cultural practices with modern safety standards. Strengthening institutional accountability, ensuring continuous monitoring, and promoting safer technologies can transform the sector. Ultimately, shifting from a reactive approach (post-disaster compensation) to a preventive, safety-first framework is essential to protect lives while preserving livelihoods and traditions.

Socio-Economic Dimension

The primary drivers of disasters are human and systemic failures. A piece-rate wage system encourages speed over safety, leading to negligence in handling volatile materials. Regulatory gaps, especially weak enforcement of the Explosives Act, 2008 shall result in unsafe practices such as stockpiling excess chemicals, poor ventilation, and employment of untrained workers. Political and cultural factors, particularly during festivals like Thrissur Pooram, further dilute enforcement due to public and electoral pressures.

Governance and Policy Gaps

Despite existing guidelines on licensing, storage, and safe distances, compliance remains poor. Investigations reveal lack of coordination between local authorities, police, and regulatory bodies. Judicial commissions have recommended stricter norms, but implementation has been inconsistent. Compensation-based responses dominate post-disaster governance, rather than preventive regulation and accountability mechanisms.

Measures for Prevention: A Multi-Pronged Approach

Preventing future tragedies requires strict regulatory enforcement and systemic reforms. This includes mandatory compliance audits, scientific storage and handling protocols, and involvement of technical experts in licensing and monitoring. Worker safety must be prioritised through training, protective equipment, and compulsory insurance coverage. Equally important is depoliticising safety enforcement during festivals and ensuring that public safety is not compromised for cultural or electoral considerations. Adoption of safer alternatives, such as low-risk or "cold spark" technologies, can reduce dependence on hazardous fireworks.

Extreme events could impact 36% of land animal habitats by 2085, says new study

A recent study published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* highlights the growing threat of climate-driven extreme weather events to global biodiversity. Conducted by researchers from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the study analysed nearly 34,000 terrestrial vertebrate species under a medium-high emission scenario (SSP3-7.0), using climate projections and species distribution data.

Key Findings: Rising Exposure to Extreme Events

The study finds that extreme heatwaves will be the most widespread threat, with 74% of animal habitats exposed by 2050, followed by wildfires (16%), droughts (8%), and floods (3%). By 2085, 36% of species' habitats could face multiple extreme events simultaneously, indicating compounded ecological stress. Biodiversity-rich regions such as the Amazon, tropical Africa, and Southeast Asia are expected to be the most affected.

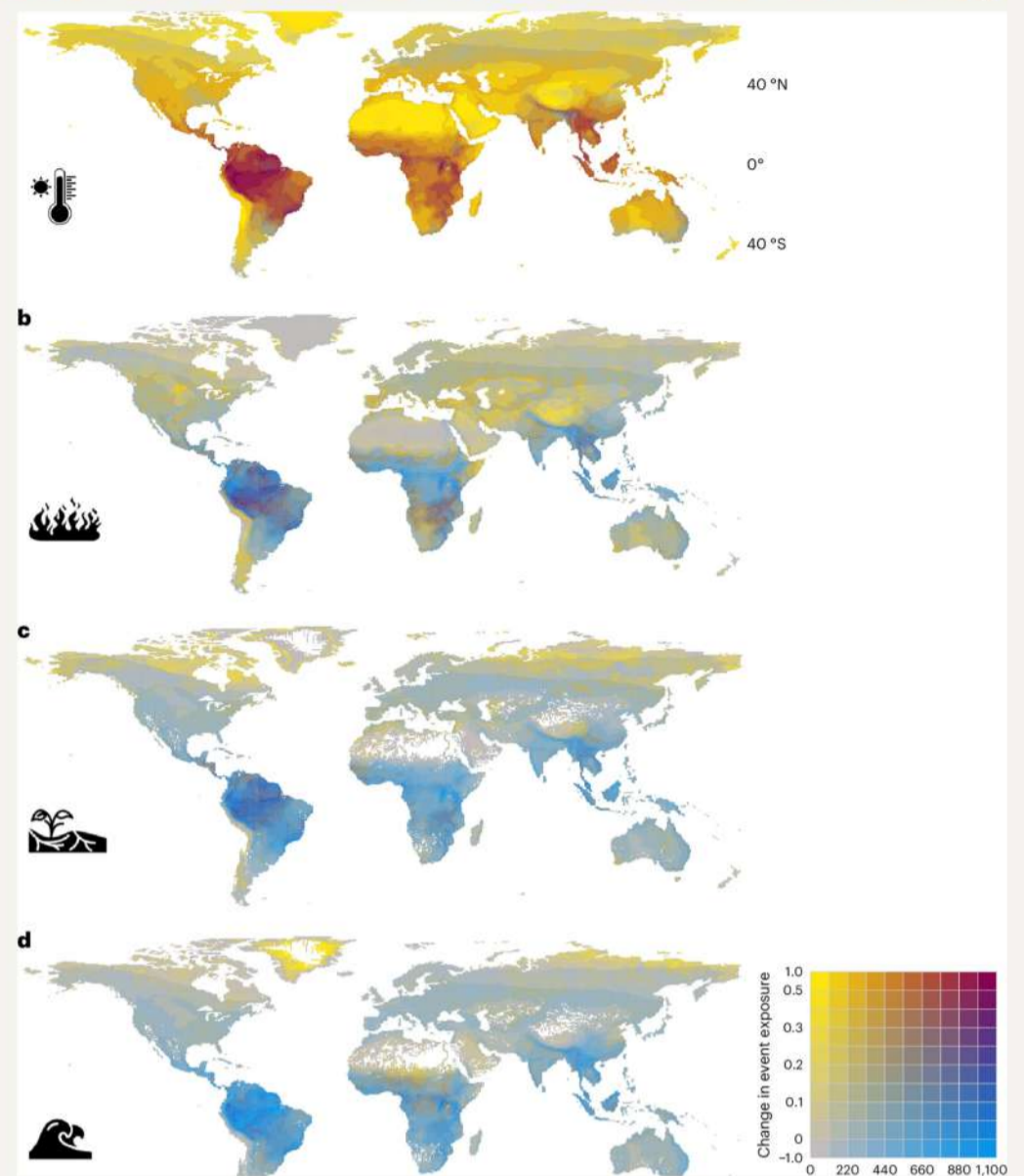
Compounding Impacts on Biodiversity

Extreme events do not act in isolation; their cumulative occurrence significantly amplifies damage. For instance, heatwaves and wildfires can lead to mass mortality events, disrupt reproduction, and reduce species survival. Past examples include large-scale wildlife deaths during Australian heatwaves and South American wildfires, illustrating how sudden events can devastate ecosystems.

Scientific Insight: Vulnerability Factors

The study emphasises that species vulnerability depends on three factors: exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. While exposure to extreme events is increasing, many species lack the ability to adapt quickly to rapid and repeated climatic shocks. Importantly, conservation planning has traditionally underestimated the role of such extreme events.

The findings underline the urgent need to integrate extreme climate events into biodiversity conservation strategies. Achieving net-zero emissions could significantly reduce exposure risks and prevent large-scale habitat loss. Future conservation efforts must adopt a multi-hazard, ecosystem-based approach, focusing on resilience-building and adaptive capacity of species to ensure long-term ecological stability.



Methodology and Scope

The research integrates climate models, impact simulations, and global species distribution datasets (including IUCN data) to assess risks across 794 ecoregions. It uniquely incorporates multiple event types such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, and wildfires rather than focusing on single hazards.

Results of the study

- Under low emission scenario (SSP1-2.6), about **63%** of species' habitats will face heatwaves by **2050**.
- Under the medium-high emission scenario, **74%** of habitats will be exposed to heatwaves by **2050**.
- By **2085**, heatwave exposure could rise to as high as **93%** of species' habitats.
- Thousands of species across groups—**birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles**—will have over half their range affected by heatwaves by **2050**.
- Regions like the **Amazon, tropical Africa, and Southeast Asia** will face especially high exposure.
- Southeast Asia emerges as a major hotspot for threatened species under rising heat stress.

BRICS-MENA envoys express concern over war in West Asia

A meeting of BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys with counterparts from the MENA region reflected deep concern over the ongoing West Asia conflict involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran, but stopped short of issuing a unified position. As Chair, India—through the Ministry of External Affairs—acknowledged that members expressed varied assessments, highlighting the absence of consensus. The discussions also covered the Palestine issue, Gaza humanitarian situation, aid delivery, the role of UNRWA, and a zero-tolerance stance on terrorism.

Divergence Within BRICS

The lack of a joint statement underscores growing internal heterogeneity within BRICS. With the expansion of membership to include countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, geopolitical alignments have become more complex, as these nations often find themselves on opposing sides of regional conflicts. The bilateral relationships of these member states with major powers like the U.S. and Israel further shape differing strategic priorities, making consensus on sensitive security issues difficult.

Implications for Global Governance and BRICS Credibility

This divergence raises questions about BRICS' ability to function as a cohesive alternative to Western-led global governance structures. While the grouping has expanded its geopolitical footprint, the inability to articulate unified positions on major conflicts weakens its normative influence and diplomatic weight in crisis situations.

India's Role and Strategic Balancing

As the upcoming Chair of BRICS for 2026, India faces the challenge of balancing strategic autonomy with leadership responsibilities. India's approach, which emphasises dialogue, neutrality, and issue-based consensus, reflects its broader foreign policy doctrine. However, steering a diverse grouping toward coordinated positions will test India's diplomatic capacity.



About BRICS and India's 2026 Chairship Vision

BRICS, now comprising eleven members including Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and newly inducted countries like Egypt, Iran, and the UAE, operates across three pillars: political-security, economic-financial, and people-to-people cooperation. India's 2026 Chairship, under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability," aims to strengthen institutional resilience, promote technological innovation, deepen multilateral cooperation, and advance sustainable development.

The episode highlights a key transition in global geopolitics, from cohesive blocs to plural, interest-driven coalitions. For BRICS to remain relevant, it must evolve mechanisms for managing internal differences while maintaining collective purpose. For India, the focus will likely be on functional cooperation, especially in areas such as trade, technology, and development finance, rather than contentious geopolitical alignment, thereby preserving both the grouping's utility and its own strategic flexibility.

The Indian EXPRESS

Mythos challenge: Delhi needs say in AI regulation

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, exemplified by models like Mythos developed by Anthropic, highlights both transformative potential and significant security risks, particularly its ability to autonomously detect and exploit “zero-day” vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. While limited early access to select global firms such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and JPMorgan Chase aims to strengthen cybersecurity preparedness, it raises concerns about concentration of control, transparency, and accountability in AI deployment. The emergence of such high-risk technologies underscores the inadequacy of fragmented, national-level responses and the need for robust, cross-border regulatory frameworks. For India, the implications extend beyond financial systems to broader critical sectors, necessitating proactive risk assessment and institutional preparedness. Given its large digital user base and growing role in global technology ecosystems, India must actively participate in shaping international AI governance norms to balance innovation with security, ethical standards, and strategic autonomy.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence have amplified both opportunities and systemic risks. In this context, examine India's role in shaping an effective international regulatory framework for AI?



Incremental change

The proposed CAFE-III norms (2027–2032) aim to reduce vehicular emissions from about 113 g CO₂/km to 77 g/km, signalling an ambitious shift in India's transport decarbonisation strategy. However, despite removing the earlier carve-out for small cars, the framework introduces multiple flexible compliance pathways—such as credits for higher ethanol blending, incremental efficiency technologies, and super-credits for electric vehicles—that may dilute actual emissions reduction. Provisions like credit trading, banking, and three-year compliance averaging further weaken immediate accountability and allow manufacturers to meet targets without a structural transition to electric mobility. While these measures ease industry concerns and promote gradual adaptation, they risk prioritising procedural compliance over substantive decarbonisation. Given that the transport sector is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and energy vulnerability, the current framework may fall short of driving meaningful technological transformation, highlighting the need for stronger regulatory signals and incentives aligned with long-term climate and energy security goals.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Critically examine the effectiveness of India's proposed Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE-III) norms in achieving transport sector decarbonisation. To what extent do flexible compliance mechanisms dilute their intended environmental outcomes?

thehindu**businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

Job well done

Tim Cook's tenure at Apple marks a shift from founder-led innovation under Steve Jobs to institutionalised, process-driven leadership focused on scale, stability, and ecosystem consolidation. During this period, Apple evolved into a highly predictable, cash-generating enterprise with significant growth in revenues, margins, and market valuation, though critics argue that breakthrough innovation declined, with incremental products like wearables and chips strengthening the ecosystem rather than redefining markets. Strategically, Apple's pivot towards India—as both a manufacturing hub and emerging consumer base—reflects supply chain diversification and geopolitical risk mitigation, highlighting India's growing role in global value chains. The transition to John Ternus signals a possible renewed focus on product innovation amid technological shifts such as artificial intelligence. Apple's relatively cautious AI approach, centred on privacy and on-device processing, contrasts with data-driven models of rivals, indicating an alternative paradigm where trust, regulation, and ethical technology governance may become central to competitive advantage.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Global supply chain realignments are reshaping manufacturing geographies. In this context, examine how companies like Apple are positioning India as a key manufacturing hub. What opportunities and challenges does this present for India's manufacturing sector?

Net FDI hits 45-month high in February

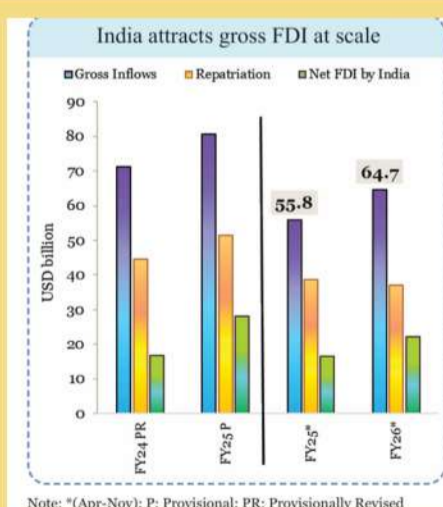
According to data from the Reserve Bank of India, India's net foreign direct investment (FDI) turned positive in February 2026 after six months of negative flows. Net FDI stood at \$4.6 billion, the highest level since May 2022, driven by a sharp rise in inflows and a simultaneous decline in outflows.

Source and Destination Patterns

Key source countries for FDI into India were Singapore, the United States, Mauritius, Japan, and the Netherlands, accounting for nearly three-fourths of total inflows. On the other hand, outward FDI from India was mainly directed toward Singapore, the UAE, and the UK.

Key Drivers of the Turnaround

Gross FDI inflows surged 61.6% to nearly \$9 billion, marking a seven-month high, while outflows dropped to a 27-month low of \$4.4 billion. This decline in outflows was largely due to reduced repatriation and disinvestment by foreign companies, along with a contraction in outward investments by Indian firms. Major sectors attracting inflows included manufacturing, computer services, financial services, and communication services.



Mixed Signals: Greenfield Investment Trends

While India continues to be viewed as an attractive destination for greenfield investments, data indicates an 11% decline in project announcements (April–January 2026). This suggests that despite strong inflows, long-term investment sentiment may face global or domestic headwinds.

Next step is deepening investment

Following factors create a window for India to plug into reconfigured GVCs & move up the value-addition ladder

Global FDI Reorientation
 Geopolitics, tariffs & industrial policy shifts are re-routing global supply chains.



India's Structural Strengths

Strong growth, macro stability, large markets, deepening digital & manufacturing base attract long-term capital.

Strategic Sector Momentum
 Digital, semiconductors, data centres & advanced manufacturing.

Note: GVCs: Global Value Chains

Role of FDI in Economic Growth

FDI plays a crucial role in India's development by providing non-debt capital, technology transfer, and employment generation. Government initiatives such as Make in India, GST reforms, and liberalised FDI policies have strengthened investor confidence and improved the business ecosystem.

Structural Drivers of FDI Growth

India's improving global competitiveness and innovation capacity—reflected in rankings like the Global Innovation Index and competitiveness indices—have enhanced its investment appeal. Additionally, reforms such as easing regulatory frameworks, expanding sectors under the automatic route, and tax rationalisation (including removal of angel tax) have made India a more investor-friendly destination.

Way Forward

To maintain FDI momentum, India must focus on policy stability, ease of doing business, and boosting greenfield investments. Addressing global uncertainties while strengthening domestic manufacturing and innovation ecosystems will be key to sustaining long-term investment inflows and economic growth.

CSIP SCHOLARSHIP GUIDE

This is your chance to turn preparation into opportunity—attempt these questions seriously and prepare for exciting scholarships that can support your civil service journey.

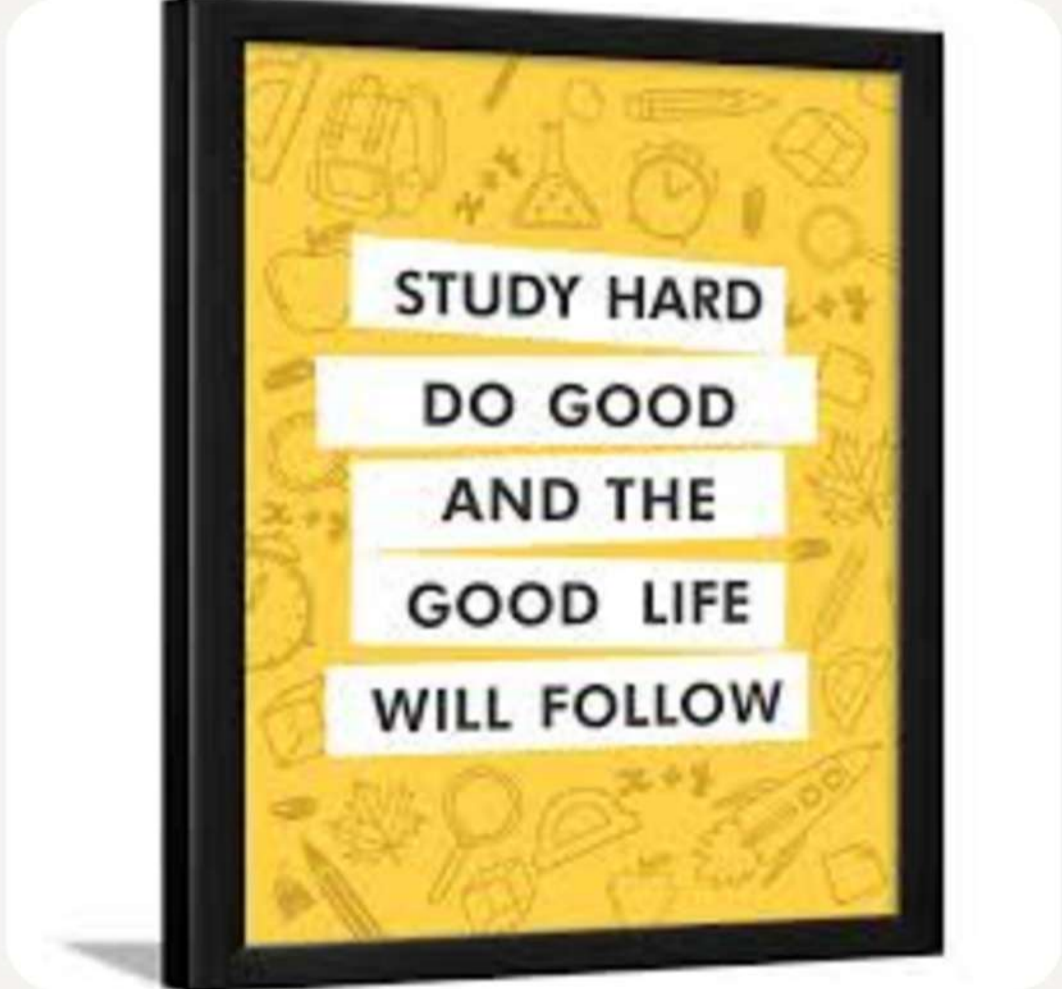
6 Days to go - 6 model questions

1. 'Doctrine of Basic Structure' of the Constitution was propounded in which case?
2. 'Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)' recently seen in news is associated with:
3. The 'Kessler Syndrome' is associated with:
4. The 'Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)' Treaty deals with:
5. 'Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)' is primarily used for:
6. The term 'Stagflation' refers to a situation of:



Answers to the Previous Day's Questions

1. Article 76
2. Manila
3. Planning Commission
4. Madhya Pradesh
5. Ripon
6. 2003
7. Hazardous waste



PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Consider the following countries:

- I. Austria
- II. Bulgaria
- III. Croatia
- IV. Serbia
- V. Sweden
- VI. North Macedonia

How many of the above are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization?

- (a) Only three
- (b) Only four
- (c) Only five
- (d) All the six

2) Consider the following countries:

- I. United Kingdom
- II. Denmark
- III. New Zealand
- IV. Australia
- V. Brazil

How many of the above countries have more than four time zones?

- (a) All the five
- (b) Only four
- (c) Only three
- (d) Only two



Thrissur Pooram: The Symphony of Tradition, Unity, and Spectacle



Thrissur Pooram stands as one of Kerala's most iconic cultural spectacles, celebrated annually at the Vadakkunnathan Temple during the Malayalam month of Medam. Conceived by Sakthan Thampuran, the festival emerged as a response to the exclusion of local temples from the Arattupuzha Pooram, transforming adversity into a grand, inclusive celebration. The Maharaja organized participating temples into two groups—Eastern and Western—laying the foundation for the festival's signature competitive yet harmonious display. Over time, Thrissur Pooram has evolved into a magnificent showcase of Kerala's temple traditions, marked by ornate elephant processions, rhythmic percussion ensembles, vibrant parasols, and dazzling fireworks. Beyond its visual grandeur, Thrissur Pooram embodies a deeper social and cultural significance. It transcends barriers of caste, religion, and community, fostering a shared cultural identity and communal harmony.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option b

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established in 1949 with 12 founding members from Europe and North America, and has since expanded through multiple rounds of enlargement. Membership is open to European states that can contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area, with decisions taken unanimously by the North Atlantic Council.

Among the countries listed, Bulgaria, Croatia, Sweden, and North Macedonia are members of NATO. Bulgaria joined during the major 2004 enlargement, which was the largest expansion in the Alliance's history. Croatia became a member in 2009 after signing accession protocols in 2008. North Macedonia joined in 2020, becoming the 30th member after resolving its naming dispute. Sweden is the most recent entrant, joining in 2024 as the 32nd member following its strategic shift in security policy. On the other hand, Austria and Serbia are not NATO members. Austria follows a policy of neutrality and is not part of the Alliance, though it cooperates through partnership frameworks. Serbia, while engaging with NATO under the Partnership for Peace programme, has not pursued full membership.



2) Answer is option C

1. **United Kingdom** : The UK itself(mainland) uses one time zone. However, due to overseas territories (like Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Falkland Islands, Pitcairn Islands, etc.), the UK spans across 9 time zones.

2. **Denmark** : Mainland Denmark Adheres to a single time zone, Central European Summer Time, through most year. Faroe Islands and Greenland which are part of the Danish realm have separate time zones. Faroe has one distinct time zone and Greenland has three time zones. Hence, it has more than four time zones.

3. **New Zealand** : New Zealand has three time zones. New Zealand's two main islands, North Island and South Island, both lie in the same time zone. The Chatham Islands, located about 860 kilometers (534 miles) east of Christchurch, have a separate time zone, which is 45 minutes ahead of mainland New Zealand. Tokelau, an archipelago in the Pacific and a dependency of New Zealand, brings the total to three time zones.

4. **Australia** : There are 6 time zones in Australia. Adding the country's 3 dependencies brings the total to 9 time zones. Australia's mainland states and territories are divided into 5 standard time zones. As Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory don't use Daylight Saving Time (DST), there are only 3 corresponding DST time zones.

5. **Brazil** : There are four standard time zones in Brazil. They are, from west to east: Acre Time (ACT), Amazon Time (AMT), Brasília Time (BRT), and Fernando de Noronha Time (FNT). Hence, option (c) is the correct answer.