

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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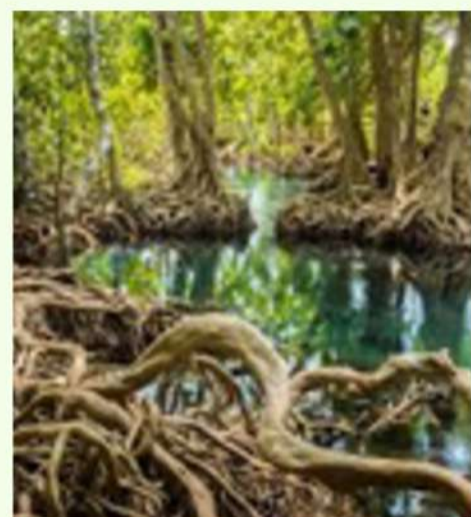
## P2. NATIONAL



### Services commanders' spend power doubled to fast-track procurement -

Defence Ministry expands financial powers of armed forces to speed up procurement

## P8. ECOLOGY



### The power of mangroves over seawalls -

Ecosystem-based Adaptation offers a sustainable approach to managing coastal climate risks

## P4. INTERNATIONAL



### Energy tie-up tops bilateral agenda as Modi meets Delcy -

India and Venezuela deepen a strategically complementary energy partnership amid global supply disruptions.

## Editor's Note

In today's edition of the Pala Civil Times, we track a range of significant developments unfolding across national and international arenas. India is decentralising defence procurement powers to enhance military readiness and advance self-reliance. The Supreme Court has proposed safeguards to ensure that artificial intelligence remains an aid to, rather than a substitute for, human judicial discretion. On the international front, India-Venezuela relations take centre stage as both countries deepen cooperation in energy security and resource partnerships.

As the world marks World Environment Day, our focus turns to making renewable energy more sustainable through solar panel recycling. We also examine how ecosystem-based adaptation can strengthen climate resilience while preserving ecological sustainability. Our decoded editorials explore how weak fire-safety compliance continues to endanger urban centres, why IRDAI's customer-centric reforms have sparked debate over regulatory overreach, and how India must carefully navigate the challenges posed by Trump's evolving trade agenda. So readers, buckle up and dive into these stories to form your own informed and objective opinions.

## Editorials Decoded

THE HINDU

### Fire and furore



India's recurring fire accidents expose deep structural and governance failures

The Indian EXPRESS

### Trump tariff saga goes on, India must find way



The USTR's latest tariff proposal reflects the Trump administration's determination to preserve its aggressive trade policy framework.

BusinessLine

### Regulatory overreach



IRDAI's customer-centric reforms are welcome, but regulatory overreach must be avoided.



## Services commanders' spend power doubled to fast-track procurement

The Ministry of Defence has significantly enhanced the financial powers of the Army, Navy, and Air Force under the revised Delegation of Financial Powers for the Defence Services (DFPDS) Rules. The reform seeks to reduce bureaucratic delays and improve operational readiness by allowing the armed forces to directly clear a majority of defence revenue procurement contracts. Representing the first major revision since 2021, the measure is expected to expedite procurement decisions and improve the responsiveness of the military to emerging operational requirements.

### Nature and Scope of the Reform

The revised framework primarily concerns revenue procurement, which includes recurring expenditures, inventories, maintenance requirements, and services necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the armed forces. Financial limits across various levels of military leadership have been increased, in some cases by up to 100 per cent. The reform decentralises decision-making and enables the Services to approve an estimated 80–90 per cent of procurement contracts without requiring clearance from the Ministry of Defence. However, capital procurement remains outside its scope.

### Enhanced Financial Autonomy

The new framework grants greater financial autonomy to senior military officers. The financial powers of the Army Vice Chief and other key authorities have been substantially increased for both indigenous and foreign procurement. Additional Directors General and newly designated competent financial authorities have also received expanded spending powers. Significantly, officials such as the Director General Ordnance have been granted independent procurement authority for the first time. Similar powers have been extended across the Army, Navy, and Air Force to facilitate faster and decentralised decision-making.

### Alignment with Indigenous Defence Production

The reform complements India's broader push for self-reliance in defence under the Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives. Defence production reached a record ₹1.27 lakh crore in FY 2023-24, representing a sharp increase from ₹46,429 crore in 2014-15. A growing domestic ecosystem comprising Defence Public Sector Undertakings, private manufacturers, and thousands of MSMEs has strengthened indigenous capabilities. Enhanced procurement autonomy can further accelerate the acquisition of domestically produced equipment and support the expansion of India's defence industrial base.

### The Road Ahead

The decentralisation of financial powers is expected to improve procurement efficiency, operational preparedness, and institutional flexibility within the armed forces. Faster approvals can reduce delays in acquiring critical supplies and enable quicker responses to security challenges. At the same time, greater autonomy must be accompanied by strong accountability, transparency, and audit mechanisms. Combined with rising indigenous production capabilities, the reform represents an important step towards creating a more agile, self-reliant, and technologically advanced defence ecosystem capable of meeting India's evolving security needs.

## PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Which of the following is/are correctly matched in terms of equivalent rank in the three services of Indian Defence forces ?

<b>Army</b>	<b>Airforce</b>	<b>Navy</b>
1. Brigadier	Air Commodore	Commander
2. Major General	Air Vice Marshal	Vice Admiral
3. Major	Squadron Leader	Lieutenant Commander
4. Lieutenant Colonel	Group Captain	Captain

Select the correct answer using the code given below :  
 a) 1 and 4 b) 1 and 3 c) 2, 3 and 4 d) 3 only

## RELEVANCE

**GS III : Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.**  
**Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.**

## Draft SC rules prohibit use of AI for judicial outcomes, witness profiling

The Supreme Court AI Committee chaired by **Justice P.S. Narasimha** has released the preliminary draft of the 'Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Courts, 2026', inviting public comments before finalisation. The move follows growing concerns over the use of AI in judicial processes, including a recent instance where a trial court relied on non-existent judgments generated through AI. Emphasising that AI cannot determine judicial outcomes, the draft seeks to establish a regulatory framework that ensures technology supports, rather than supplants, judicial reasoning and decision-making.

### Core Philosophy of the Regulations

The draft regulations are founded on the principle that **AI systems must function only in an assistive capacity** and remain strictly subordinate to human judgment and judicial authority. They seek to preserve fairness, accountability, transparency, and due process within the justice system. The framework also requires compliance with the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, and prohibits AI systems from **introducing or amplifying discrimination on grounds such as caste, religion, gender, disability, language, or economic status**, thereby aligning technological adoption with constitutional values.



### Permitted and Prohibited Uses of AI

The regulations draw a clear distinction between administrative and adjudicatory functions. AI may be used for case management, scheduling hearings, preparing cause lists, transcribing court proceedings, and translating judgments. However, it is expressly barred from functions that directly influence judicial outcomes. **Courts cannot employ AI for sentencing decisions, risk scoring, predicting recidivism, evaluating bail eligibility, determining witness credibility, profiling litigants, or using opaque and unexplainable systems** whose reasoning cannot be independently verified and scrutinised.

### RELEVANCE

**GS II : Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary**

### Human-in-the-Loop

A central feature of the framework is the 'human-in-the-loop' approach, which mandates meaningful human oversight in matters affecting personal liberty, legal rights, and judicial outcomes. High-risk AI applications must be subject to enhanced safeguards and independent supervision. The draft also stresses that technological adoption should not widen existing digital divides. AI-enabled judicial systems must remain accessible to rural populations, economically disadvantaged groups, and linguistically diverse communities while ensuring that automated tools do not undermine equality before the law.

### Way Forward

To oversee AI adoption within the judiciary, the draft proposes the establishment of a permanent apex body at the Supreme Court level. The body would include Supreme Court and High Court judges, technology experts, cybersecurity specialists, financial professionals, and government representatives. It would guide policy formulation, standard-setting, oversight, and implementation of AI systems in courts. Through public consultation and institutional safeguards, the proposed framework seeks to balance technological innovation with judicial independence, transparency, accountability, and public trust in the justice system.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Describe the context and salient features of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. (GS III – 2024)

## Energy tie-up tops bilateral agenda as Modi meets Delcy

India and Venezuela have reaffirmed their partnership during the visit of Acting President Delcy Rodríguez to India, with both sides emphasizing its importance for the Global South. Discussions covered cooperation in energy, critical minerals, technology, agriculture, health, and people-to-people exchanges. The engagement reflects a shared commitment to strengthening South-South cooperation and advancing mutually beneficial economic and strategic interests in an evolving global environment.

### Nature of the Energy Partnership

Energy security remains the cornerstone of bilateral relations. Venezuela, home to the world's largest proven oil reserves, has emerged as an important supplier of crude oil to India. The partnership is strengthened by India's sophisticated refining capacity, which is well suited to process Venezuela's heavy crude. This natural complementarity has encouraged both countries to explore deeper collaboration across the energy value chain.

### Benefits for India

For India, closer ties with Venezuela support the objective of diversifying energy sources and reducing dependence on traditional suppliers. Geopolitical uncertainties and disruptions in global oil markets have highlighted the need for a broader import basket. The sharp rise in Venezuelan crude imports during April-May 2026 demonstrates the growing significance of this relationship in enhancing India's long-term energy security and supply resilience.

**India's total investment in Venezuela's oil sector stands at approximately USD 1 billion in the San Cristóbal and Petrocarabobo-1 projects located in the Orinoco Belt.**

### Benefits for Venezuela

For Venezuela, India offers a large and reliable market for energy exports, helping generate revenue and support economic transformation. Beyond oil trade, expanded cooperation in mining, technology, agriculture, and infrastructure can attract investment and create new avenues for growth. India is increasingly viewed by Venezuela as a trusted partner capable of contributing to its economic modernization and international engagement.



### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Consider the following statements :  
 Statement-I : Recently, Venezuela has achieved a rapid recovery from its economic crisis and succeeded in preventing its people from fleeing/emigrating to other countries.  
 Statement-II : Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves.  
 Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements ?  
 a) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II explains Statement-I  
 b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct, but Statement-II does not explain Statement I  
 c) Statement-I is correct, but Statement-II is incorrect  
 d) Statement-I is incorrect, but Statement-II is correct

### Future Outlook and Broader Implications

The partnership also rests on a strong foundation of Indian investments in Venezuela's energy sector, including projects in the **Orinoco Belt**. As both countries seek greater economic cooperation, the relationship is expected to evolve beyond crude oil trade into a broader strategic partnership. By combining India's energy needs with Venezuela's resource potential, the partnership offers long-term benefits for both nations while reinforcing the role of developing countries in shaping global economic cooperation.

### RELEVANCE

**GS III : Energy; GS II : International Relations**

## Preserving the record (The Hindu : 05-06-2026)

The frequent fire incidents in the country highlight a persistent pattern of urban fire disasters in India. Over the last two decades, several tragedies have shared common features such as **overcrowding, blocked exits, unauthorized structural modifications, poor compliance with safety norms, and weak regulatory enforcement**. Despite repeated inquiries, judicial interventions, and promises of reform, similar incidents continue to occur, exposing deep-rooted deficiencies in urban governance and public safety systems.

### Recurring incidents

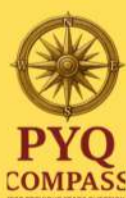
The recent Delhi B&B fire illustrates how unsafe establishments often operate despite clear violations of regulations. Investigations revealed the absence of mandatory fire clearances, multiple breaches of safety norms, and excessive room capacity beyond permitted limits. The facility reportedly exploited regulatory exemptions and circumvented municipal requirements designed to ensure emergency access. Such cases demonstrate not only non-compliance by private operators but also systemic weaknesses in monitoring, inspections, and enforcement by local authorities responsible for ensuring public safety.

### Human Cost and Vulnerable Populations

The impact of these failures is especially severe for vulnerable groups. Many victims of the Delhi fire were medical tourists staying near hospitals, while others affected in similar incidents included elderly and infirm individuals with limited ability to escape during emergencies. These tragedies underscore how deficiencies in fire safety disproportionately endanger those least capable of responding to disasters. The loss of life is therefore not merely an accident but the consequence of preventable risks being allowed to persist in densely populated urban environments.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) What is disaster resilience? How is it determined? Describe various elements of a resilience framework. Also mention the global targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030).. (GS III- 2024)

### RELEVANCE

GS III : Disaster and disaster management.

### Accountability and Enforcement Challenges

A recurring concern is the absence of effective accountability. While authorities often place responsibility on owners for unauthorized alterations, regulatory agencies must also answer for permitting unsafe conditions to continue. Criminal proceedings against owners may address immediate culpability, but enforcement failures by municipal bodies, fire departments, and other regulators remain equally significant. Weak deterrence, inconsistent convictions, and inadequate follow-up on court directives contribute to a culture where violations are tolerated until a disaster occurs.



### Way Forward

Addressing urban fire risks requires moving beyond reactive responses after tragedies. Governments must institutionalize a culture of fire safety through regular inspections, strict enforcement, meaningful penalties, and incentives for compliance. Urban planning regulations, land-use permissions, and hospitality-sector exemptions should be reviewed to eliminate loopholes that compromise safety. Sustainable improvement will depend on coordinated action by regulators, businesses, and citizens to ensure that safety becomes an integral component of urban development rather than an afterthought.

## Trump tariff saga goes on, India must find way (Indian Express : 05-06-2026)

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has proposed new tariffs on 60 countries under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974, covering economies that account for almost all American imports. The move comes after a US court challenged the Trump administration's reciprocal tariff policy introduced through emergency powers legislation. With the temporary tariff mechanism under Section 122 approaching its expiry, the new proposal provides an alternative legal pathway for the administration to continue pursuing its trade agenda through higher import duties.

### Basis and Scope of the Proposed Tariffs

The proposed action is linked to allegations concerning inadequate enforcement of prohibitions on imports produced through forced labour. Fifty-four countries, including India, China, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, have been accused of failing to establish or effectively enforce such prohibitions. Another six economies, including the European Union, Canada, Indonesia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Pakistan, face similar scrutiny. The USTR has proposed tariff rates of 10 per cent and 12.5 per cent, with India falling within the higher tariff category.

### Implications for India

For India, the proposed tariffs create uncertainty at a time when bilateral trade negotiations are progressing. Higher duties could affect the competitiveness of Indian exports and complicate efforts to deepen economic engagement with the United States. At the same time, the investigation highlights the increasing importance of compliance-related issues, including labour standards and supply-chain governance, in global trade. India may therefore need to strengthen regulatory frameworks while ensuring that its export sectors remain competitive and resilient.



### Way Forward

India has responded by engaging with the United States while continuing negotiations on a broader trade agreement framework. Recent statements from American officials suggest that discussions are nearing completion, with only a few outstanding issues remaining. However, the evolving tariff proposals demonstrate the unpredictability of US trade policy and the possibility of sudden policy shifts. As negotiations move forward, India will need to balance the pursuit of greater market access with the protection of its economic interests and long-term strategic trade objectives.

21 million people victims of forced labour



### Broader U.S. Trade Strategy

The tariff proposal reflects a broader effort by the Trump administration to strengthen trade barriers despite judicial setbacks. Alongside the forced labour investigation, the United States has launched separate inquiries into structural excess manufacturing capacity in several economies, including India and China. These actions indicate that tariffs and trade enforcement measures will remain central instruments of American trade policy. The developments also underscore the growing tendency to use trade tools to pursue economic, strategic, and regulatory objectives simultaneously.

### RELEVANCE

**GS II : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests**

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q) "With the waning of globalization, post-Cold War world is becoming a site of sovereign nationalism." Elucidate. (GS II - 2025)

## Regulatory overreach (TH BusinessLine : 05-06-2026)

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has issued a circular linking the variable pay of Key Management Persons (KMPs) in insurance companies to customer-centric outcomes. The move aims to improve accountability in a sector that faces persistent customer grievances, particularly in health insurance. While the objective of enhancing customer welfare is widely supported, the measure has sparked debate over the appropriate extent of regulatory intervention in the internal management decisions of insurance companies.

### Latest development

The circular is rooted in genuine concerns regarding customer experience in the insurance sector. Policyholders often face delays in claim settlement, grievance resolution, and lack of transparency in policy terms. Although industry-level indicators such as incurred claim ratios appear satisfactory, significant variations exist across different categories of insurers. These disparities highlight the need for stronger customer-centric performance standards and greater public disclosure of service quality metrics.

### Concerns Over Regulatory Overreach

Linking executive compensation directly to customer metrics amounts to micro-management by the regulator. Decisions regarding salaries and performance incentives traditionally fall within the domain of company boards and shareholders. Moreover, the provision appears to apply mainly to private insurers, while public sector insurers, whose senior management lacks variable pay structures, are not similarly affected. This raises questions regarding consistency, fairness, and regulatory neutrality.

### IRDAI's Mandate and Broader Role

Established under the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, IRDAI functions as the statutory regulator responsible for protecting policyholders and promoting the growth of the insurance sector. Created on the recommendations of the Malhotra Committee, it opened the sector to competition while ensuring transparency and consumer protection. Its dual mandate requires balancing regulation with development, ensuring both accountability among insurers and expansion of insurance coverage across the country.

### Way Forward

Rather than prescribing compensation structures, IRDAI could focus on strengthening disclosures, grievance redressal mechanisms, and customer awareness. Transparent publication of claim settlement ratios, timelines, and complaint-resolution records would empower consumers and encourage competition among insurers. As India's insurance penetration remains relatively low, the sector requires greater investment, innovation, and trust. A regulatory approach that combines transparency, accountability, and market discipline would better support long-term growth and consumer welfare.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. In India, which of the following review the independent regulators in sectors like telecommunications, insurance, electricity, etc.? (2019)

1. Ad Hoc Committees set up by the Parliament
2. Parliamentary Department Related Standing Committees
3. Finance Commission
4. Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission
5. NITI Aayog Select the correct answer using the code given below:
  - (a) 1 and 2 only
  - (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
  - (c) 3, 4 and 5 only
  - (d) 2 and 5 only

### RELEVANCE

**GS III : Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country**

## The power of mangroves over seawalls

India's coastline is increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as sea-level rise, saline intrusion, cyclones, and storm surges. These threats affect nearly 250 million people and place immense pressure on coastal ecosystems and livelihoods. Recent events, including Cyclone Dana near Bhitarkanika, have demonstrated the protective role of natural ecosystems such as mangroves. This has renewed attention on Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), an approach that uses biodiversity and ecosystem services to reduce climate risks while simultaneously supporting ecological health and community resilience.

### Dominance and Limitations of Grey Infrastructure

Despite the proven benefits of natural ecosystems, India's adaptation strategy continues to favour engineered solutions such as seawalls, groynes, embankments, and tetrapods. Public expenditure patterns reflect this preference, with significantly greater investments directed towards hard coastal protection measures than ecosystem restoration programmes. While such infrastructure remains necessary in certain densely populated areas, it is often expensive to maintain and may shift risks rather than eliminate them. Experiences from states such as Kerala illustrate how hard armouring can sometimes intensify erosion and damage in neighbouring regions.



### Ecological and Socio-Economic Benefits of EbA

India possesses significant natural assets for climate adaptation, including mangroves, seagrass meadows, coral reefs, and wetlands. These ecosystems function as natural buffers against coastal hazards while supporting fisheries, agriculture, and tourism. Research identifies India as a global hotspot for coastal EbA, particularly due to the protective value of mangroves. Successful examples, such as mangrove restoration efforts in the Sundarbans, demonstrate how ecosystem restoration can reduce cyclone impacts while generating livelihood opportunities through activities such as honey collection, crab farming, and other local enterprises.

### Policy and Classification Challenges

Despite its potential, Ecosystem-based Adaptation remains underrepresented in India's climate adaptation framework. Fragmented institutional responsibilities, inadequate monitoring systems, and a policy preference for visible infrastructure projects often obscure ecosystem-based interventions. The challenge is compounded by concepts like Nature-based Solutions, Ecosystem-based Coastal Adaptation, and Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction, creating ambiguity about what constitutes EbA. Consequently, many adaptation benefits generated through conservation and restoration programmes are neither explicitly recognised nor systematically measured within climate adaptation planning and reporting mechanisms.

### Way Forward

Clear classification and monitoring systems are essential for identifying adaptation outcomes, evaluating effectiveness, and attracting greater investment. Programmes such as the Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes demonstrate the adaptation value of ecosystem restoration but require stronger recognition within adaptation policy. By institutionalising EbA as a core climate strategy, India can leverage its natural capital to build resilient, equitable, and sustainable coastal communities in the face of growing climate risks.

#### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



- Q.) Which one of the following is the correct sequence of ecosystems in the order of decreasing productivity? (2013)
- Oceans, lakes, grasslands, mangroves
  - Mangroves, oceans, grasslands, lakes
  - Mangroves, grasslands, lakes, oceans
  - Oceans, mangroves, lakes, grasslands

#### RELEVANCE :

**GS III : Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.**

## Solar panel recycling should be next energy priority

India has emerged as one of the world's leading renewable energy markets through sustained investments under initiatives such as the National Solar Mission. Rapid expansion of solar capacity across several states has strengthened the country's clean energy transition. However, as the earliest large-scale solar installations approach the middle and end of their operational lives, a new challenge is emerging. The growing volume of decommissioned solar photovoltaic panels raises important questions about waste management, resource recovery, and the long-term sustainability of India's renewable energy ecosystem

### The Scale and Risks of Solar Waste

Solar photovoltaic panels generally have a lifespan of 25 to 30 years, implying that significant quantities of solar waste will emerge in the coming decades. According to estimates, global solar waste could reach 78 million tonnes by 2050, with India contributing a substantial share due to its ambitious capacity targets. Unlike ordinary waste, solar panels contain complex combinations of glass, metals, silicon, and polymers. Improper disposal can release hazardous substances such as lead and cadmium, posing risks to soil quality, water resources, ecosystems, and public health.



### Regulatory Gaps and International Practices

India has initiated efforts towards a circular economy through the E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022, but solar photovoltaic waste remains inadequately addressed through a dedicated framework. Unlike the European model, which mandates Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for manufacturers, India's policy approach is still evolving. The absence of clear guidelines governing collection, transportation, recycling, and disposal creates uncertainty for industry stakeholders and investors. International initiatives, such as Australia's solar panel recycling programme, demonstrate the importance of proactive planning and structured policy support.

### Way Forward

A comprehensive policy framework is essential to ensure that solar waste does not undermine India's clean energy ambitions. Key measures include mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility, incentives for recycling infrastructure, standardised recovery benchmarks, and digital lifecycle tracking of photovoltaic modules. Research institutions should advance innovative recycling technologies, while start-ups can develop decentralised and AI-enabled recovery solutions. Public-private partnerships can accelerate commercialisation and scaling. By integrating sustainability into the entire solar value chain, India can transform a future waste challenge into an opportunity for resource security and green industrial growth.

### Economic Potential and Recycling Technologies

Decommissioned panels contain recoverable materials such as **high-purity silicon, silver, aluminium, and copper**, which can reduce import dependence and support domestic manufacturing. Various recycling methods are currently employed worldwide. Mechanical processes enable glass recovery, thermal techniques improve material separation through high-temperature treatment, and chemical methods achieve high recovery rates and purity. However, each technology involves trade-offs relating to cost, efficiency, energy consumption, environmental impact, and scalability.

#### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Consider the following statements: (2016)

1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.

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

#### RELEVANCE :

**GS III : Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.**