

P2. NATIONAL



Centre concedes to States' demands on Higher Education Bill - Proposed higher education regulatory reforms balancing national academic standards with State autonomy and cooperative federalism.

P3. NATIONAL



Supreme Court to examine plea for recognition of intersex persons as a distinct class - SC's consideration of distinct legal recognition for intersex persons highlights constitutional equality, dignity and bodily autonomy.

P4. HEALTH



Wegovy approved for fatty liver in India - India's first GLP-1 therapy approved for treating metabolic fatty liver disease, reflecting advances in preventive and metabolic healthcare.

Editor's Note

In this edition of the Pala Civil Times, we explore developments that reflect the evolving constitutional, economic, technological and public health landscape of India. The proposed changes to the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 highlight the importance of cooperative federalism in higher education, while the Supreme Court's consideration of legal recognition for intersex persons reinforces the values of equality, dignity and inclusive governance. On the economic front, the Reserve Bank of India's move towards polymer currency notes marks an important step in modernising currency management through enhanced durability and security. Our Decoded Editorials examine two emerging policy themes—healthy sleep as a public health challenge in the face of climate change and urbanisation, and Semicon India Programme 2.0, which reflects India's growing ambitions in strategic technology and semiconductor manufacturing. We also discuss the approval of Wegovy, India's first GLP-1 therapy for MASH, highlighting advances in preventive healthcare and metabolic disease management. Together, these topics encourage a multidimensional understanding of governance, policy and development—an essential perspective for every UPSC aspirant. Happy Reading!

Editorials Decoded

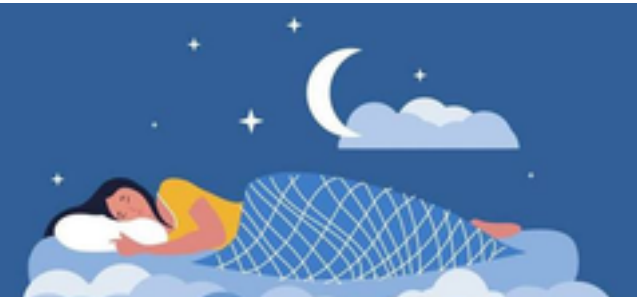
P7. ECONOMICS



RBI to trial polymer currency notes, subsidiary floats global tender - RBI's move to modernise India's currency through more durable, secure and cost-efficient polymer banknotes.

The Indian EXPRESS

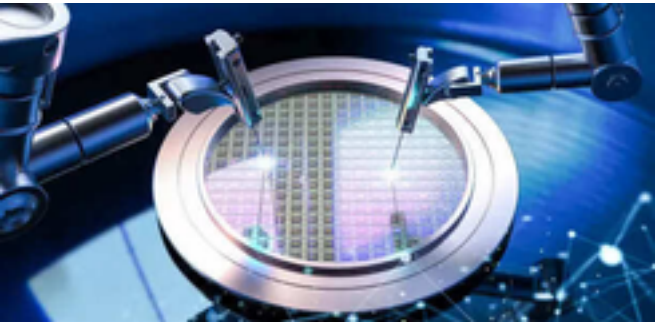
Heat islands, sleepless nights and a public challenge



Climate change and lifestyle transitions are making healthy sleep an emerging determinant of public health and human productivity.

THE HINDU

Promise of chips



India's expanded semiconductor strategy to build an end-to-end domestic chip manufacturing ecosystem and enhance technological self-reliance.

Centre concedes to States' demands on Higher Education Bill

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 has undergone significant revisions after the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) accepted several recommendations aimed at addressing concerns over excessive centralisation. Responding to objections raised by Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and other stakeholders, the Union Education Ministry has agreed to amend key provisions relating to the powers of the proposed Regulatory Council. The changes seek to reinforce cooperative federalism by providing greater autonomy to State governments and State universities while retaining the objective of maintaining uniform standards in higher education.



Why the Changes Matter

The proposed amendments seek to balance national quality standards with India's federal structure. By strengthening the role of State governments in decisions affecting State-funded institutions, the revisions promote institutional autonomy and reduce concerns over excessive regulatory centralisation. The Committee also recommended limiting the new framework strictly to the "coordination and determination of standards", consistent with **Entry 66 of the Union List**, instead of creating a broader regulatory regime that could encroach upon State powers over universities under the constitutional distribution of legislative responsibilities.

The Way Forward

The JPC's recommendations reflect an effort to build consensus on higher education reforms by accommodating legitimate concerns of States while preserving the objective of improving academic standards. The proposed amendments clarify the limits of the Centre's regulatory authority, reinforce cooperative federalism, and reduce ambiguity in the Bill's implementation. As the legislation moves forward, the focus will shift to whether the final law successfully creates a transparent, accountable and nationally coordinated higher education framework without weakening the constitutional autonomy and administrative responsibilities of State governments and universities.

Original Provisions and Proposed Changes

- Clause 11(4) empowered the proposed Regulatory Council to authorise colleges affiliated with State universities to award degrees, even without the State government's approval. The JPC has recommended making a State Government NOC mandatory before such approval is granted.
- Clause 12 required all universities, including State universities, to obtain the Regulatory Council's approval before establishing constituent colleges, off-campus centres or multiple campuses. The revised proposal exempts State universities, allowing them to continue functioning under their respective State laws.
- Clause 47 empowered the Central Government to suspend or supersede the proposed regulatory bodies. The JPC has recommended restricting this power to exceptional situations, making it transparent, time-bound and a measure of last resort.
- Clause 4 referred to establishing a national "system of regulation." The Committee has recommended limiting the framework's role strictly to the coordination and determination of standards, removing references suggesting wider regulatory powers.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. What changes has the Union Government recently introduced in the domain of Centre-State relations? Suggest measures to be adopted to build the trust between the Centre and the States and for strengthening federalism. (GS II – Centre state relations – Indian Polity – 2024)

RELEVANCE

GS II : Indian Polity

Supreme Court to examine plea for recognition of intersex persons as a distinct class

The Supreme Court of India has sought responses from the Union and State Governments on a petition seeking legal recognition of intersex persons as a distinct category deserving separate constitutional and statutory protection. The petition argues that persons born with congenital variations in sex characteristics constitute a biologically identifiable class that is different from individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth. It seeks a comprehensive legal and policy framework to safeguard the dignity, bodily autonomy and equal rights of intersex persons.



Understanding Intersex Persons and Their Distinct Challenges

Intersex persons are individuals born with congenital variations in sex characteristics, such as atypical chromosomes, reproductive organs, gonads or external genitalia, resulting in biological characteristics that do not fit typical male or female classifications. Unlike transgender persons, whose gender identity may differ from the sex assigned at birth, intersex status is a biological condition present from birth. Many intersex children face medically unnecessary surgeries during infancy, social stigma, discrimination, identity-related difficulties, and exclusion from education, inheritance, healthcare and employment due to binary legal and administrative systems.

Constitutional and Legal Issues Involved

The petition argues that the absence of distinct legal recognition violates several constitutional guarantees.

- Article 14 ensures equality before the law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination and supports equal access to opportunities.
- Article 21 protects dignity, privacy, bodily autonomy and personal identity.

The petitioner also emphasises that forced, irreversible medical interventions without informed consent violate bodily integrity and individual autonomy. The case therefore raises broader questions regarding constitutional morality, human dignity and the protection of vulnerable groups under India's transformative Constitution.

RELEVANCE

GS II : Indian Polity - Judiciary

Reliefs Sought and Their Significance

The petition seeks a comprehensive framework for protecting the rights of intersex persons. It requests separate statutory recognition, affirmative measures in education and public employment, clearer inheritance rights, and inclusion in birth registration and identity documents. It also seeks the establishment of a National Medical Protocol Committee for Intersex Care and a nationwide prohibition on medically unnecessary surgical or hormonal interventions on intersex infants unless required to address life-threatening conditions. These measures aim to shift healthcare towards informed consent, rights-based protection and child-centred decision-making.

Way Forward

The case highlights the need for laws and institutions to recognise biological diversity while ensuring equal constitutional protection for all citizens. A rights-based approach requires balancing medical ethics, bodily autonomy, child welfare and social inclusion. Going forward, India may need dedicated legislation, standard medical protocols, public awareness campaigns and administrative reforms to eliminate discrimination against intersex persons. Distinct legal recognition, combined with accessible healthcare and inclusive governance, would strengthen India's commitment to equality, dignity and substantive justice for every individual, irrespective of biological differences.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has to address the challenges faced by children in the digital era. Examine the existing policies and suggest measures the Commission can initiate to tackle the issue. (GS II – Social Justice – 2025)

HEALTH

Wegovy approved for fatty liver in India

India has approved Wegovy (semaglutide 2.4 mg), developed by Novo Nordisk, for the treatment of Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis (MASH), a severe form of fatty liver disease. Approved by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), it is the first injectable GLP-1 receptor agonist in India specifically indicated for MASH, in addition to obesity. The approval is based on evidence from the global ESSENCE trial, marking a significant advancement in the management of liver disease by expanding treatment options beyond lifestyle modification and supportive care.



Understanding MASH and How Wegovy Works

MASH develops when excess fat accumulates in the liver, leading to persistent inflammation, fibrosis (scarring), and, in advanced stages, cirrhosis or liver cancer. It is often called a "silent disease" because symptoms usually appear only after significant liver damage has occurred. **Wegovy belongs to the GLP-1 receptor agonist class of medicines**, which mimic a natural gut hormone that regulates blood sugar, suppresses appetite, and slows digestion. Clinical studies also show that semaglutide directly reduces liver fat, inflammation, and fibrosis, improving liver health beyond its weight-loss effects.

Why This Approval Is Significant for India

India faces a rapidly growing burden of metabolic disorders and fatty liver disease. Experts estimate that **nearly 38-40% of Indians have fatty liver disease**, with around one-third progressing to MASH. Among these patients, many eventually develop cirrhosis or liver cancer, making early intervention crucial. Since obesity, diabetes, and insulin resistance are increasing across the country, an effective treatment targeting these interconnected conditions could substantially reduce future liver-related complications and improve long-term public health outcomes.

Clinical Evidence and Expert Assessment

The approval is supported by the ESSENCE trial, where 63% of patients experienced resolution of MASH without worsening liver scarring, while 37% showed improvement in liver fibrosis. These findings indicate that semaglutide can slow or even reverse disease progression in many patients. Indian clinicians have also reported encouraging real-world outcomes, with substantial improvement observed among patients receiving GLP-1 therapies. Experts believe the medicine represents an important breakthrough because it addresses both the underlying metabolic dysfunction and the progressive liver damage associated with MASH.

The Way Forward

Although Wegovy provides an important new therapeutic option, it is not a substitute for healthy living. Experts emphasise that sustained lifestyle modification remains essential to prevent recurrence of liver disease and maintain long-term benefits. A balanced diet, calorie control, reduced consumption of ultra-processed foods and excess sugars, adequate protein intake, regular physical activity, and effective management of obesity and diabetes remain the foundation of treatment. Combining medical therapy with preventive healthcare, early diagnosis, and public awareness can significantly reduce India's growing burden of fatty liver disease and its complications.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. In a crucial domain like the public healthcare system, the Indian State should play a vital role in containing the adverse impact of the marketisation of the system. Suggest measures through which the State can enhance the reach of public healthcare at the grassroots level. (GS II – Social services – 2025)

RELEVANCE

GS II : Social Services - Healthcare

Heat islands, sleepless nights and a public challenge (Indian Express : 18-07-2026)

A recent global study found that rising night-time temperatures caused the average person to lose nearly 56 hours of sleep annually (2020–2025), with around 10% of the loss directly linked to climate change. Indian cities recorded even higher sleep loss, including Chennai (93 hours), Mumbai (84 hours), and Delhi (67 hours). The findings highlight that inadequate sleep is no longer merely an individual lifestyle concern but an emerging public health challenge, shaped by climate change, urbanisation, changing lifestyles, and environmental conditions.

Why Sleep Matters for Health

Healthy sleep is essential for maintaining physical, mental and cognitive well-being. During sleep, the body undergoes cellular repair, strengthens immune function, regulates hormones, and controls inflammatory responses. Adequate sleep also supports memory, learning, emotional stability and metabolic balance. Chronic sleep deprivation has been associated with hypertension, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, weakened immunity, anxiety, depression and cognitive decline. Beyond individual health, poor sleep reduces workplace productivity, impairs decision-making, increases the risk of road and occupational accidents, and imposes significant social and economic costs.

Factors Responsible for Growing Sleep Deprivation in India

Sleep deprivation in India is driven by multiple interacting environmental and lifestyle factors.

- Climate change has increased night-time temperatures, making restorative sleep difficult.
- **Urban heat islands** trap heat in densely populated cities, prolonging night-time discomfort.
- **Excessive screen time and social media use** delay sleep onset and reduce sleep quality.
- Shift work, irregular eating habits and changing lifestyles disrupt natural circadian rhythms.
- **Rapid urbanisation**, noise pollution, overcrowded housing and inadequate cooling infrastructure further reduce opportunities for healthy sleep, particularly among economically vulnerable populations.

Why It Has Become a Public Health Concern

The growing prevalence of sleep disorders has implications that extend far beyond individual well-being. Poor sleep contributes to the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), increases healthcare expenditure and weakens workforce productivity. Climate-induced sleep disruption also illustrates how climate change affects health through indirect pathways rather than only extreme weather events. Since vulnerable populations often lack access to adequate housing and cooling facilities, sleep deprivation also reflects broader issues of environmental justice, urban planning and health equity, making it an important governance and development challenge.

Way Forward

Addressing sleep deprivation requires integrating sleep health into public health and climate adaptation strategies. Heat Action Plans should include measures to mitigate dangerous night-time temperatures through better urban design, green spaces, cool roofs and affordable cooling solutions. Public health campaigns should promote healthy sleep habits by reducing excessive screen exposure and encouraging regular routines. Improving housing quality, strengthening occupational health policies for shift workers and recognising sleep as a determinant of public health can reduce the long-term burden of lifestyle diseases and improve national productivity.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. How do you account for the growing fast food industries given that there are increased health concerns in modern society? Illustrate your answer with the Indian experience (GS I – Indian Society – 2025)

RELEVANCE

GS I : Indian Society

Promise of chips (The Hindu : 18-07-2026)

The Semicon India Programme 2.0 marks a significant expansion of India's semiconductor strategy, moving beyond establishing fabrication units to developing a comprehensive electronics manufacturing ecosystem. With an outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore, substantially larger than the first phase, the mission seeks to strengthen domestic chip manufacturing, semiconductor design, advanced packaging, component production, and skilled human resources. By broadening both financial support and policy scope, the programme aims to position India as a trusted and strategically important hub in global semiconductor value chains.

Key Highlights of Semicon India Programme 2.0

The programme provides ₹1.27 lakh crore to accelerate semiconductor and electronics manufacturing through capital subsidies, manufacturing-linked incentives, and additional support for products using domestically developed components and technologies. It seeks to attract investments across the semiconductor value chain while promoting research, innovation, intellectual property creation, and workforce development. The mission also aims to deepen domestic capabilities in chip fabrication, assembly, testing, packaging, and design, enabling India to emerge as a reliable destination for advanced electronics manufacturing.

How Semicon India 2.0 Expands Beyond Previous Missions

Unlike the first phase, which largely focused on attracting semiconductor fabrication and packaging projects, Semicon India 2.0 adopts a broader ecosystem approach. It extends support beyond manufacturing facilities to include component ecosystems, domestic value addition, advanced electronics production, innovation, and talent development. The programme also introduces incentive boosters for products leveraging indigenous technologies while placing greater emphasis on building intellectual property and strengthening India's long-term position in strategically important segments of the semiconductor supply chain rather than merely creating manufacturing capacity.

Contribution to Nation Building

A stronger semiconductor ecosystem can enhance India's technological sovereignty and reduce dependence on vulnerable global supply chains. It strengthens national security by ensuring access to critical chips required for defence, telecommunications, artificial intelligence, and digital infrastructure. The mission is also expected to generate high-value employment for engineers and researchers, encourage advanced manufacturing, attract global investments, and foster innovation. Over time, these capabilities can support sustained industrial growth, improve export competitiveness, and enable India to occupy a larger share of the global semiconductor value chain.

Conclusion

Semicon India Programme 2.0 reflects the government's recognition that semiconductor capability is a long-term strategic investment rather than a short-term industrial initiative. The next challenge lies in successfully implementing approved projects, nurturing skilled talent, strengthening research institutions, and gradually moving towards frontier technologies. If sustained through consistent policy support and global partnerships, the mission can transform India from a major semiconductor design talent pool into an integrated manufacturing and innovation hub, strengthening both economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. Which of the following statements about DHRUV64 is/are correct?

1. It is the third chip fabricated under the DIR-V Programme with an overall aim to enable the creation of microprocessors for India.
2. It is India's first homegrown 1.0 GHz, 64 bit dual-core microprocessor.

Select the answer using the code given below:

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

RELEVANCE

GS II : International Relations

RBI to trial polymer currency notes, subsidiary floats global tender

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revived its long-pending proposal to introduce polymer (plastic) currency notes by initiating field trials through its subsidiary, Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited (BRBNMPL). Global bids have been invited for supplying specialised polymer substrates with embedded security features, marking the most concrete step towards implementation since the proposal was first mooted in 2009. If successful, the trial could pave the way for introducing polymer banknotes across selected denominations, modernising India's currency management and strengthening the security of physical cash.

Understanding Polymer Notes and India's Currency Printing System

Polymer banknotes are printed on biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP) instead of conventional cotton-paper substrates. They are more durable, resistant to moisture, difficult to counterfeit, and can remain in circulation 2.5–4 times longer than paper notes. In India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issues currency, while its wholly-owned subsidiary BRBNMPL and the Government-owned Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India (SPMCIL) undertake banknote printing. The present trial involves both organisations and is intended to evaluate the feasibility of adopting polymer notes under Indian conditions.

Why Polymer Notes Are Being Considered

Polymer notes offer several operational and security advantages. Their longer lifespan reduces the frequency of replacing worn-out notes, particularly lower denominations such as ₹10 and ₹20 that experience heavy circulation. They incorporate advanced security features, making counterfeiting significantly more difficult, while also remaining cleaner and recyclable. Studies indicate that although polymer notes have a higher manufacturing cost, their extended durability can reduce lifecycle expenditure and lower the overall environmental footprint by decreasing the number of notes that need to be produced, transported and destroyed over time.

Challenges and the Indian Context

Despite these benefits, adopting polymer currency presents important economic and strategic challenges. Polymer notes typically cost 30–60% more to manufacture and require specialised polypropylene, a significant share of which India currently imports. Additional expenditure would be needed to recalibrate ATMs, currency sorting systems and cash-handling infrastructure. Moreover, India's rapidly expanding digital payment ecosystem, led by UPI, raises questions about the long-term demand for physical cash. Nevertheless, currency in circulation has continued to grow beyond ₹41 lakh crore, reflecting sustained cash usage alongside digital payments.

Way Forward

The proposed field trials will determine whether polymer banknotes are economically viable and operationally suitable for India's diverse conditions. Future decisions must balance durability, security, environmental sustainability, production costs and evolving payment behaviour. While digital transactions will continue expanding, cash remains indispensable for financial inclusion and the informal economy. A calibrated introduction of polymer notes in selected high-circulation denominations, supported by domestic manufacturing capabilities and secure supply chains, could strengthen India's currency management while complementing broader efforts towards a modern, resilient and efficient payment ecosystem.

PYQ Compass

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



Q. Which of the following is a most likely consequence of implementing the 'Unified Payments Interface (UPI)'? (2017)

- Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.
- Digital currency will totally replace the physical currency in about two decades.
- FDI inflows will drastically increase.
- Direct transfer of subsidies to poor people will become very effective.

RELEVANCE

GS II : Education, Healthcare

PYQ Compass

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



Q. Which of the following statements about DHRUV64 is/are correct?

1. It is the third chip fabricated under the DIR-V Programme with an overall aim to enable the creation of microprocessors for India.
2. It is India's first homegrown 1.0 GHz, 64 bit dual-core microprocessor.

Select the answer using the code given below:

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

Ans : B

DHRUV64 is an indigenous microprocessor designed by the SHAKTI processor team at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. It was developed under the Digital India RISC-V Programme, an initiative designed to achieve self reliance in semiconductor and microprocessor design. The chip has applications in embedded systems, Internet of Things devices, and secure communications, marking a major milestone for the semiconductor mission of India.

Statement 1 is Correct. DHRUV64 is the third major chip taped out under the DIR-V initiative, which focuses on creating a robust ecosystem for domestic microprocessors.

Statement 2 is Correct. DHRUV64 is designed and fabricated indigenously, it is officially recognized as the first homegrown 64 bit dual-core microprocessor operating at a speed of 1.0 GHz.

Q. Which of the following is a most likely consequence of implementing the 'Unified Payments Interface (UPI)? (2017)

- a) Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.
- b) Digital currency will totally replace the physical currency in about two decades.
- c) FDI inflows will drastically increase.
- d) Direct transfer of subsidies to poor people will become very effective.

Ans : A

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system that enables users to transfer funds directly between bank accounts using a mobile device, eliminating the need to enter bank account details or card credentials for every transaction.

- Option (a) is correct: Since UPI facilitates direct bank-to-bank transfers, it reduces dependence on prepaid mobile wallets for digital payments.
- Option (b) is incorrect: UPI promotes digital payments but does not imply that digital payments will completely replace physical currency.
- Option (c) is incorrect: There is no direct relationship between the introduction of UPI and a significant increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows.
- Option (d) is incorrect: Although UPI improves digital payment infrastructure, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) primarily depends on schemes such as the JAM (Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile) trinity for the direct transfer of subsidies into beneficiaries' bank accounts. UPI itself is not the principal mechanism for delivering subsidies.

Practice Questions and answers

Q. With reference to polymer currency notes, consider the following statements:

1. Australia was the first country to introduce polymer banknotes for general circulation.
2. Polymer banknotes are generally considered to have a lower lifecycle environmental footprint than paper notes because of their longer circulation life.
3. Polymer substrates used for banknotes are primarily manufactured from polypropylene.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: D

All three statements are correct.

- Statement 1 is correct. Australia became the first country to introduce polymer banknotes for general circulation in 1988, pioneering the use of polymer substrates to improve currency durability and security.
- Statement 2 is correct. Although polymer notes require more energy and resources during manufacturing, they generally remain in circulation 2.5–4 times longer than conventional paper notes. Their longer lifespan reduces the frequency of printing, transportation and disposal, resulting in a lower lifecycle environmental footprint.
- Statement 3 is correct. Polymer banknotes are printed on Biaxially Oriented Polypropylene (BOPP), a specialised polymer substrate that provides greater durability and enables advanced anti-counterfeiting security features such as transparent windows.

Q. Which of the following factors have been identified as contributors to sleep deprivation in India?

1. Rising night-time temperatures associated with climate change.
2. Urban Heat Island effect.
3. Excessive screen time and irregular lifestyles.
4. Shift-based work schedules.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans : D

All four factors contribute to sleep deprivation and are increasingly recognised as important public health determinants.

- Statement 1 is correct. Rising night-time temperatures, intensified by climate change, reduce sleep duration and quality by preventing the body from cooling sufficiently during sleep.
- Statement 2 is correct. The Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect causes cities to retain heat after sunset because of dense construction, limited vegetation and paved surfaces, making nights warmer and reducing restorative sleep.
- Statement 3 is correct. Excessive screen time, social media use, irregular meal timings and changing lifestyles disrupt circadian rhythms and delay sleep onset, contributing significantly to poor sleep quality.
- Statement 4 is correct. Shift-based work schedules disturb the body's biological clock by disrupting normal sleep-wake cycles, increasing the risk of chronic sleep deprivation and associated health disorders.