

P2. NATIONAL



**River-linking is not the solution-** Once projected as a solution to India’s water imbalance, river inter-linking continues to face ecological concerns, implementation challenges and inter-State disputes

P3 NATIONAL



**Maternity leave can’t lead to loss of role or career prospects, says Delhi HC -** SC notes that a woman’s return from maternity leave cannot become a pathway to professional disadvantage.

P6. WORLD



**‘Early Harvest’ — larger but not necessarily safer-** The proposed “Early Harvest” approach to the India-China boundary seeks progress in relatively less contentious sectors, but raises questions over reciprocity among involved nations.

P7. ECONOMICS



**Decoding Russia’s reliance on Indian petroleum products :** India’s effort to extend social security to gig workers is constrained by the difficulty of accurately identifying and counting this rapidly growing workforce.

Editor’s Note

In this edition of the Pala Civil Times, we turn our attention to policy choices and institutional approaches across a wide spectrum.

To begin with, our National page examines how river inter-linking may not be the panacea it was once considered to be, with its implementation continuing to face complex inter-State disputes. We also look at the serious problem of women facing professional disadvantage after maternity leave, and examine the curious case of repeated petitions concerning the citizenship of Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

Our Decoded Editorials take us deeper into two very different questions: the constitutional limits of the Supreme Court’s power to do “complete justice” under Article 142, and the absence of a stable, long-term policy framework to manage the recurring fluctuations in onion prices.

The International section focuses on the evolving “Early Harvest” approach in India-China boundary negotiations and the strategic concerns surrounding it. Meanwhile, our Economics page explores the changing India-Russia energy relationship, particularly the growing significance of Russian crude and India’s exports of refined petroleum products.

Together, these stories go beyond the headlines to offer a layered understanding of the constitutional, economic, environmental and geopolitical concepts shaping contemporary affairs. So, we hope you give this edition a thoughtful read and engage with the ideas behind the news,

Happy Reading!

Editorials Decoded

THE HINDU

Many layers : Onion Price



Recurring swings in onion prices expose the difficulty of balancing farmer incomes and consumer affordability when environmental shocks and unpredictable policy interventions disrupt agricultural markets.

The Indian EXPRESS

Thank you for quashing the FIRs, but there’s a question



The quashing of FIRs against NEET protesters brings the constitutional right to peaceful dissent into focus while raising questions about selective relief and the Supreme Court’s extraordinary power to do “complete justice.”



## River-linking is not the solution

India's experience with river linking projects shows that river interlinking may redistribute water, but it cannot by itself resolve India's deeper problems of water governance, inter-State disputes, groundwater depletion and inefficient demand.

### River Linking: Promise and Concerns

**Objective:** River interlinking seeks to transfer water from relatively surplus basins to water-deficit regions to improve irrigation and water security.

**Linking:** Proponents argue that projects would divert only surplus water without disturbing the natural flow of rivers.

**Ecology:** Critics warn that altering natural river flows could affect downstream ecosystems, wetlands and the availability of water for existing users.

**Expanding Demand:** Regions receiving transferred water may eventually demand guaranteed supplies even during water shortages, potentially affecting the rights of original beneficiaries.



### Why Water Sharing Remains Difficult

**Pennaiyar:** Tamil Nadu's demand for a tribunal over the Pennaiyar dispute remains unresolved despite Supreme Court directions, highlighting delays in settling inter-State water conflicts.

**Mekedatu:** Tamil Nadu's demand for a tribunal over Karnataka's proposed Mekedatu dam on the Cauvery also remains pending before the Centre.

**Mahadayi:** The Centre's suggestion to refer the Pennaiyar dispute to the Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal has raised legal concerns because the two disputes are unrelated and the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 does not provide for such a transfer.

Continued delays in constituting tribunals suggest that resolving existing water disputes remains difficult even before undertaking large-scale river-linking projects.

### Key Projects: Experience and Resistance

**Precedents:** India has implemented only a limited number of inter-basin transfers, including the Mullaperiyar, Parambikulam–Aliyar, Krishna Water Supply and Indira Gandhi Canal projects.

**Ken–Betwa:** The ₹44,000-crore Ken–Betwa Link Project represents a major recent push for river interlinking but has also faced resistance from tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh.

**Pamba:** Kerala opposes the Pamba–Achankovil–Vaippar link over concerns about its potential impact on the Vembanad wetland system.

Despite the Union government's Special Committee on Interlinking of Rivers holding numerous meetings since 2014, progress across the wider river-linking programme has remained limited.

### Way forward : from transfer to conservation

**Supply:** River linking primarily represents a supply-side response that seeks to address water scarcity by physically transferring water between river basins.

**Conservation:** India should instead prioritise demand-side management through efficient irrigation, water conservation and better utilisation of existing resources.

**Groundwater:** Indiscriminate groundwater extraction, encouraged in some States by subsidised or free agricultural electricity, is creating long-term ecological risks.

## PYQ Compass



Q. "Disputes between the- riparian states on sharing of river waters in post- Independence India are becoming increasingly complex." Objectively analyse the major disputes in this connection, with special reference to the Southern States. (GS I - 2010)

## Maternity leave can't lead to loss of role or career prospects, says Delhi HC

In *Rakhi Bisht v. Union of India & Anr.*, a Chartered Accountant with about 14 years of experience challenged her reassignment after returning from maternity leave. Consequently, The Delhi High Court examined whether Section 12 of the Maternity Benefit Act protects a woman only from dismissal or loss of wages, or also from professional disadvantage after maternity leave.

### Latest Judgement

**Protection:** The Court held that maternity protection extends to a woman's professional status, responsibilities, authority and prospects of career advancement, not merely employment and salary.

**Equivalence:** A woman returning from maternity leave is ordinarily entitled to the same post or, if genuinely unavailable, a substantially equivalent position in status, responsibilities, authority and promotional prospects.

**Directions:** The Centre was directed to frame measures on return-to-work protection, workplace accommodation, lactation support, crèche functionality, grievance redressal and protection against retaliation.



### Constitutional Principle

**Article 42:** The Directive Principles require the State to secure just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

**Equality:** The Court linked maternity protection with Articles 14, 15 and 21, recognising equality, non-discrimination, dignity and reproductive autonomy as relevant constitutional guarantees.

The judgement reinforces that maternity cannot become a source of professional disadvantage, making workplace maternity protection part of the broader constitutional commitment to equality and dignity.

## HC dismisses plea challenging Rahul Gandhi's citizenship

The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court dismissed a petition challenging Rahul Gandhi's Indian citizenship and eligibility to remain a Member of Parliament.

**Allegation:** The petitioner claimed that Rahul Gandhi had declared himself a British national while associated with a UK-based company, Backops Limited.

**Evidence:** The Court found that the petitioner failed to produce documentary evidence to establish British citizenship.

### Court's Ruling

**Jurisdiction:** The Court noted that questions concerning termination of Indian citizenship under Section 9(2) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 fall within the statutory domain of the Central Government.

**Significance:** The case reinforces that allegations affecting citizenship and parliamentary eligibility must be supported by credible evidence and addressed through the legally prescribed mechanism.

### Citizenship Framework

**Acquisition:** The Citizenship Act, 1955 provides for citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and incorporation of territory.

**Loss:** Citizenship may be lost through renunciation, termination or deprivation under the Act.

**Privileges:** Citizenship carries important political rights, including the right to vote and contest elections, besides eligibility for specified constitutional offices and protections under Articles 15, 16, 19, 29 and 30.

## PYQ Compass



Q. 1. Women's social capital complements in advancing empowerment and gender equity. Explain. (Answer in 150 words) (GS II - 2025)





## Thank you for quashing the FIRs, but there's a question (I.E 03-09-2026)

Recent instances of protest in India highlight a deeper constitutional challenge: how to balance the citizen's right to dissent with the State's responsibility to maintain public order. The contrasting treatment of protesters in cases ranging from the NEET protests to workers', farmers' and citizenship-law protests raises an important question — whether the protection of peaceful protest is being applied consistently, or selectively depending on who is protesting.

### Right to Protest: Freedom and Its Limits

**Freedom to protest:** Peaceful protest is an expression of the constitutional freedom of speech and expression, enabling citizens to dissent, question government action and demand accountability.

**Protection against state :** The State may regulate unlawful conduct during a protest, but peaceful dissent should not be criminalised merely because it is critical of those in power.

**Recent Cases:** The contrasting experiences of NEET protesters, Noida workers, citizenship-law protesters and farmers' protesters show how FIRs, detention and prolonged litigation can affect the exercise of this right.

**Equality in prosecution :** The larger concern is whether protest rights and legal relief are applied uniformly, or whether protesters perceived as politically acceptable receive quicker protection while cases against others become a form of prolonged punishment.

### PYQ Compass



Q. With reference to the Constitution of India prohibitions or limitations or provisions contained in ordinary laws cannot act as prohibitions or limitations on the constitutional powers under Article 142. It could mean which one of the following (2019)

- The decisions taken by the Election Commission of India while discharging its duties cannot be challenged in any court of law.
- The Supreme Court of India is not constrained in the exercise of its powers by the laws made by Parliament.
- In the event of a grave financial crisis in the country, the President of India can declare a Financial Emergency without the counsel from the Cabinet.
- State Legislatures cannot make laws on certain matters without the concurrence of the Union Legislature.

### Article 142: Power to Do Complete Justice

**Scope:** Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass orders necessary to secure "complete justice" in matters before it, with such orders enforceable throughout India.

**Application:** The provision has enabled the Court, in appropriate cases, to go beyond ordinary procedural limitations, including quashing criminal proceedings where necessary to secure justice.

**Precedent:** Prem Chand Garg established that Article 142 cannot produce an outcome inconsistent with the Constitution, while Union Carbide recognised its broad constitutional character.

**Evolution:** Supreme Court Bar Association described Article 142 as a curative and supplementary power, while Shilpa Sailesh clarified that exceptional departure from statutory procedure may be permitted to achieve complete justice.



### Complete Justice, Not Unlimited Power

**Constitution:** Article 142 cannot be used to override fundamental rights or other constitutional provisions, making constitutional supremacy its outer boundary.

**Statutes:** The Court can supplement existing law but ordinarily cannot supplant substantive statutory provisions or assume powers specifically assigned by legislation.

**Natural Justice:** High Court Bar Association, Allahabad reiterated that Article 142 should ordinarily operate between parties before the Court and cannot adversely affect persons who were not given an opportunity to be heard.

**Balance:** Article 142 is therefore an exceptional constitutional remedy to secure justice, not a general licence to bypass established legal procedures.

## Many layers : Onion Price Volatility (The Hindu : 03-09-2026)

India's food inflation trends highlight a deeper challenge: the absence of a clear and long-term policy framework to manage the environmental, market and policy factors that repeatedly cause sharp fluctuations in food prices. The recent rise in onion prices, alongside changing export policies, provides a useful lens to understand this persistent consumption dilemma.



### Context: Why Onion Prices Matter

**Prices:** India's average onion price reached about ₹49.59/kg on September 1, 2026, over 74% higher than ₹28.48/kg a year earlier.

**Production:** Despite estimated 2025–26 production of around 307.37 lakh tonnes, delayed rains and harvesting in Maharashtra reduced the availability of good-quality onions.

**Volatility:** Onion prices typically rise during August–September due to seasonal demand, weather conditions and supply-chain movements, but the current increase has been aggravated by quality and storage-related constraints.

**Farmer–Consumer Gap:** The price rise has not necessarily benefited farmers, with some producers reportedly forced to sell at as little as ₹1/kg, exposing the disconnect between retail prices and farm-gate returns.

### Structural Challenge: The Farmer–Consumer Dilemma

**Striking Balance:** India is facing the challenge of keeping essential food affordable for consumers while ensuring remunerative prices for farmers.

**Policy Timing:** Government intervention often comes after farmers have already made production decisions or after prices have collapsed, limiting its ability to protect farm incomes.

**Storage:** Onions are highly vulnerable to post-harvest losses, making inadequate storage a major source of both farmer distress during gluts and consumer inflation during shortages.

A more predictable trade regime, stronger storage infrastructure, efficient inter-State movement and timely procurement are needed to reduce repeated price shocks.

### Way Forward: From Price Control to Market Stability

**Intervention:** The Centre is releasing buffer stocks and transporting onions from surplus-producing regions to consumption centres, while Tamil Nadu is distributing about 1,000 tonnes through the PDS at ₹35/kg to provide targeted consumer relief.

**Trade:** Repeated changes in export policy, from the 2023–24 export ban to export duties and their eventual removal in 2025, highlight the need for a more predictable trade regime that does not disrupt farmers' production decisions.

**Infrastructure:** Strengthening scientific storage, reducing post-harvest losses, improving inter-State movement and ensuring timely procurement by NAFED and NCCF can address both distress sales by farmers and sudden consumer-price spikes.

**Balance:** Long-term stability requires moving beyond reactive price controls towards efficient supply-chain and demand management, protecting farmers from price crashes and consumers from inflation without distorting market incentives.

### PYQ COMPASS



- Q. In India, markets in agricultural products are regulated under the (2015)
- Essential Commodities Act, 1955
  - Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act enacted by States
  - Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act, 1937
  - Food Products Order, 1956 and Meat and Food Products Order, 1973

- Q. The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane is approved by the (2015)
- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
  - Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices
  - Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture
  - Agricultural Produce Market Committee



## India–China–Bhutan: The “Early Harvest” Question

India–China relations remain fragile, with the latest developments on border delimitation raising important questions about the future direction of the boundary negotiations. The issue also has implications for Bhutan, whose territorial dispute with China intersects with India’s security concerns around the Doklam–Siliguri Corridor region.



**Relations:** Bhutan shares close ties with India but has no diplomatic relations with China and has a long-running boundary dispute with Beijing across its northern, western and eastern sectors.

**Doklam:** The Western Sector is particularly important for India because it includes the Doklam Plateau, located near the India–Bhutan–China trijunction.

**Trijunction position:** India and Bhutan identify **Batang La** as the trijunction, while China claims **Gipmochi**, making the precise location strategically significant for access towards the Jampheri Ridge.

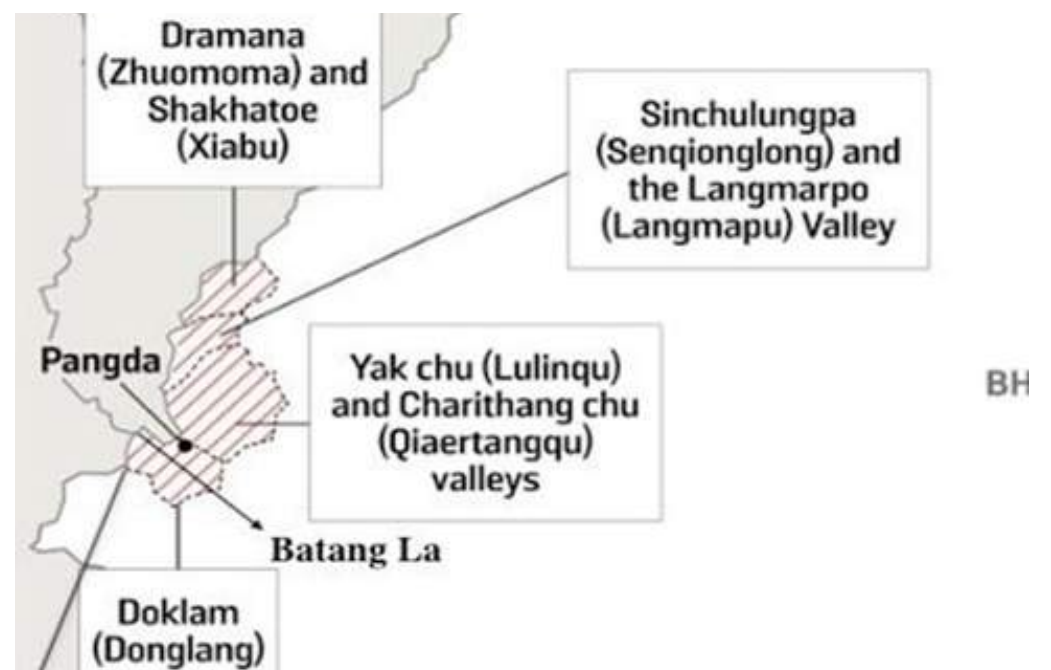
**Corridor security:** Greater Chinese strategic access towards the Jampheri Ridge could increase pressure on the **Siliguri Corridor**, the narrow land link connecting mainland India with its northeastern states.

### Evolution: From Doklam to Early Harvest

**Sikkim question:** In 2012, India and China agreed on the **Sikkim alignment** and that trijunctions involving third countries would require their consultation.

**Doklam standing:** In 2017, China proposed an Early Harvest beginning with Sikkim, while its road construction towards **Jampheri Ridge** triggered the **Doklam standoff**.

**Chinese Expansion:** In 2019, India proposed an “Early and Substantial Harvest” covering Sikkim and the Middle Sector.



### What Does “Early Harvest” Mean?

**Concept:** An Early Harvest means settling relatively less contentious portions of the India–China boundary first instead of waiting for agreement on the total disputed boundary.

**India’s stance:** It has linked Sikkim with the entire Middle Sector covering Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

**China’s stance:** China has shown greater interest in a narrower approach focused on Sikkim and selected areas where agreement is considered easier to achieve.

**Question:** The central issue is whether the present “Early and Substantial Harvest” represents a genuine compromise or a narrower, piecemeal settlement that falls short of India’s original formulation.

### Why India Remains Cautious

India risks settling areas where its position is relatively strong without receiving equivalent concessions from China in the Western and Eastern Sectors. India therefore needs an Early Harvest that produces meaningful reciprocal gains rather than merely creating the appearance of progress in the boundary negotiations.



### PYQ Compass

Q. Which one of the following statements best reflects the issue with Senkaku Islands, sometimes mentioned in the news? (2022)

- It is generally believed that they are artificial islands made by a country around the South China Sea.
- China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in the East China Sea.
- A permanent American military base has been set up there to help Taiwan to increase its defense capabilities.
- Though the International Court of Justice declared them as no man’s land, some South-East Asian countries claim them.

## Decoding Russia's reliance on Indian petroleum products

The ongoing global conflicts, especially the Russian-Ukraine war has created a paradox in India-Russia energy relations. India is simultaneously a major importer of Russian crude and an emerging exporter of refined petroleum products to Russia. This reflects India's strength as a refining hub, but also its continuing vulnerability to geopolitical pressure over Russian energy.

### From Crude Dependence to Product Exports

**Disruption:** Ukraine's repeated attacks on Russian oil refineries have disrupted Russia's domestic refining capacity, increasing its need for imported petrol and diesel.

**Exports:** Indian refiners have used the opportunity and supplied around one million barrels to Russia over the last two months.

**Shift in energy sale:** Russia had historically been a negligible destination for Indian petroleum products, but refinery disruptions have now created a significant new market for Indian refiners.

**Opportunity:** India's large refining capacity allows it to convert available crude into refined products and supply markets disrupted by the war.

### Russian Crude: India's Continuing Dependence

**Dependence:** Despite becoming an important exporter of refined products to Russia, India continues to depend heavily on Russia for crude oil, making the two countries deeply connected through the energy trade.

**Share:** Russia accounted for around 31.6% of India's crude-oil imports by June 2026, demonstrating the continued importance of Russian supplies.

**Resumption:** India initially reduced Russian crude purchases after U.S. pressure but subsequently resumed imports at high levels as Russian crude remained commercially attractive and global supply conditions changed.

The relationship has therefore evolved into a mutually beneficial energy arrangement in which India imports discounted or competitive Russian crude while exporting higher-value refined products to global markets, including Russia.



### Energy Geopolitics: Russian Crude and U.S. Pressure

**Dependence:** Russia remains a major source of India's crude imports, accounting for around 31.6% in June 2026, despite earlier efforts to reduce purchases under U.S. pressure.

**Pressure:** The U.S. has used tariffs and other economic measures to discourage India from buying Russian crude, but global energy-security concerns and India's domestic requirements have limited the effectiveness of this pressure.

**Balancing:** India has continued importing Russian crude while managing its relations with the U.S., reflecting its attempt to protect energy security and maintain strategic autonomy amid geopolitical competition.

### Refining Opportunity: From War Disruption to Indian Gains

**Disruption:** Ukrainian attacks have reduced Russian refining capacity, creating domestic fuel shortages while pushing more Russian crude into export markets and increasing demand for imported refined products.

**Opportunity:** India's large refining capacity, particularly its private refineries, has enabled it to convert available crude into petroleum products for the newly emerging Russian market.

**Gains:** Rising refined-product exports can generate foreign-exchange earnings and strengthen India's position as a global refining hub, although continued dependence on Russian crude leaves this opportunity exposed to sanctions and geopolitical disruptions.

### PYQ Compass



Q. Explain the key challenges for India's energy security. What measures do you suggest for ensuring energy security along with economic growth and sustainability ? (Answer in 250 words) (GS III - 2026)



## PYQ Compass



Q. With reference to the Constitution of India prohibitions or limitations or provisions contained in ordinary laws cannot act as prohibitions or limitations on the constitutional powers under Article 142. It could mean which one of the following (2019)

- (a) The decisions taken by the Election Commission of India while discharging its duties cannot be challenged in any court of law.
- (b) The Supreme Court of India is not constrained in the exercise of its powers by the laws made by Parliament.
- (c) In the event of a grave financial crisis in the country, the President of India can declare a Financial Emergency without the counsel from the Cabinet.
- (d) State Legislatures cannot make laws on certain matters without the concurrence of the Union Legislature.

Ans : b

Article 142 of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court of India to pass any decree or order necessary to do "complete justice" in any case or matter before it. This provision gives the Court extraordinary powers to ensure justice is served. The phrase in question means that ordinary laws made by Parliament or State Legislatures cannot limit or restrict the Supreme Court's powers under Article 142. The Court's constitutional powers supersede these laws when ensuring justice.

Q. In, India, markets in agricultural products are regulated under the (2015)

- a) Essential Commodities Act, 1955
- b) Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act enacted by States
- c) Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act, 1937
- d) Food Products Order, 1956 and Meat and Food Products Order, 1973

Ans : b

Markets in Agricultural Products in India are regulated under the Agricultural produce market committee (APMC) Act enacted by the States. An agricultural produce market committee is a marketing board established by state governments of India. APMC acts run on two principles: Ensure that intermediaries (and money lenders) do not compel farmers to sell their produce at the farm gate extremely low price so that farmers are not exploited. All food produce should first be brought to the market yard and then be sold through Auction.



## PYQ Compass



Q. The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane is approved by the (2015)

- a) Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
- b) Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices
- c) Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture
- d) Agricultural Produce Market Committee

Ans : a

The cabinet committee on Economic Affairs approves the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane, however, state governments are free to fix their own state advised price (SAP) and millers can offer any price above the FRP.

Q. Which one of the following statements best reflects the issue with Senkaku Islands, sometimes mentioned in the news? (2022)

- a) It is generally believed that they are artificial islands made by a country around the South China Sea.
- b) China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in the East China Sea.
- c) A permanent American military base has been set up there to help Taiwan to increase its defense capabilities.
- d) Though the International Court of Justice declared them as no man's land, some South-East Asian countries claim them.

Ans : b

The Senkaku Islands, located in the East China Sea, are the subject of territorial disputes between China and Japan. These uninhabited islands are controlled by Japan but claimed by China (referred to as Diaoyu) and Taiwan. The issue arises from their strategic location and the potential for natural resource reserves, making them a flashpoint in East Asia.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following projects:

1. Mullaperiyar
2. Parambikulam–Aliyar
3. Krishna Water Supply
4. Indira Gandhi Canal

These projects are notable examples of:

- (a) Inter-basin water transfer
- (b) Inland water transport development
- (c) Multipurpose hydropower generation
- (d) Inter-State river dispute resolution

### (a) Inter-basin water transfer

These projects involve the transfer or diversion of water from one river basin or sub-basin to another to meet irrigation, drinking-water or other water requirements. India has implemented only a limited number of such inter-basin transfers, making these projects important examples of the approach.

Q. With reference to the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court may, in appropriate cases, exercise Article 142 even where an ordinary law does not provide an adequate remedy for achieving complete justice.
2. The power under Article 142 enables the Supreme Court to disregard any statutory provision whenever it considers such departure necessary in the interests of justice.
3. The exercise of Article 142 cannot result in an order that is inconsistent with the Constitution or violates principles of natural justice.
4. Article 142 may be used to supplement existing law, but ordinarily cannot be employed to assume substantive powers specifically vested by statute in another authority.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b) 1, 3 and 4 only

Article 142 is not an unlimited power to disregard statutory law. Supreme Court Bar Association v. Union of India clarified that the power is curative and supplementary and cannot ordinarily be used to supplant substantive law. It can supplement the existing legal framework to achieve complete justice, but it cannot ordinarily take over substantive powers that Parliament has specifically entrusted to another statutory authority.