

## Topics of Discussion:

1. To fund hydel project, NHPC proposed its forest land assets as collateral, Govt said no
2. Why India is not 'dumping' rice in the US as Trump says
3. The Unit – Pilot Gold-Backed Digital Trade Currency (BRICS)
4. How countries like Myanmar and Cambodia turned into hubs of cyber slavery
5. 4 months to go, only 27% of budget used for urban development schemes
6. State should reclaim its role, shape digital markets

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**To fund hydel project, NHPC proposed its forest land assets as collateral, Govt said no**

## Syllabus:

**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance

**Mains Examination: General Studies-I:** Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclones. Etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes

**General Studies-II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

**What's the ongoing story:** The Environment Ministry has turned down a NHPC proposal to use assets located on forest land as collateral to raise funds for the Subansiri Lower hydel project which is facing an over 300% cost escalation. The project is located on the Arunachal Pradesh-Assam border.

## Key Points to Ponder:

- What are the key features of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980?
- Subansiri River is a tributary of which river?
- What are the reasons for the delay in the Subansiri Lower hydel project?

— What is a gravity dam?

— What are the major hydro projects on the Subansiri basin?

### **Key Takeaways:**

— Official records show that “NHPC requested for an NOC for using their assets located on the forest land for collateral purpose for raising funds... from the financial institutions to meet the capital expenditure of Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project” and the Arunachal Pradesh government, subsequently, sought a clarification from the Ministry on the matter.

— The Environment Ministry, according to a letter seen by The [Indian Express](#), examined NHPC’s “proposal to mortgage assets on diverted forest land” and ruled that it is “not tenable” under the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act now known as the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980.

— The Ministry’s October 10 letter to the Arunachal Pradesh government said that “a collateral purpose refers to a secondary purpose beyond the principal object for which the forest land was approved for non-forestry use” under the Act.

— This March, the NHPC board cleared a borrowing plan for raising of debt up to Rs 6,300 crore during FY 2025-26 through secured, redeemable, taxable, non-cumulative, non-convertible corporate bonds, term loans or external commercial borrowings, in suitable tranches and on private placement basis. On August 29, a revised borrowing plan to raise up to Rs 10,000 crore was approved.

— While the first four of the eight units of the 2000-MW Subansiri Lower HEP are expected to be operational this month, a commercial operation date (COD) is yet to be finalised.

— Cleared in 2005, the Subansiri Lower HEP at Gerukamukh on the Arunachal Pradesh-Assam border remained in limbo between 2011 and 2019, stalled by local resistance in Assam and court cases over issues of dam safety and downstream ecological fallout.

### **Do You Know:**

— Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam: Besides being in Hindi, the new name is a reflection of a new focus on afforestation and reforestation activities with the objective of

increasing India's forest cover and fulfilling its international commitment of creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes by 2030.

— The Van Adhiniyam seeks to make land available for developers to meet their legal obligation towards compensatory afforestation in lieu of forest land diverted for development projects.

— The Van Adhiniyam is considered to be violated when forest land is permitted for “de-reservation, non-forest use, lease, or clear felling” without prior approval of the Centre under the law.

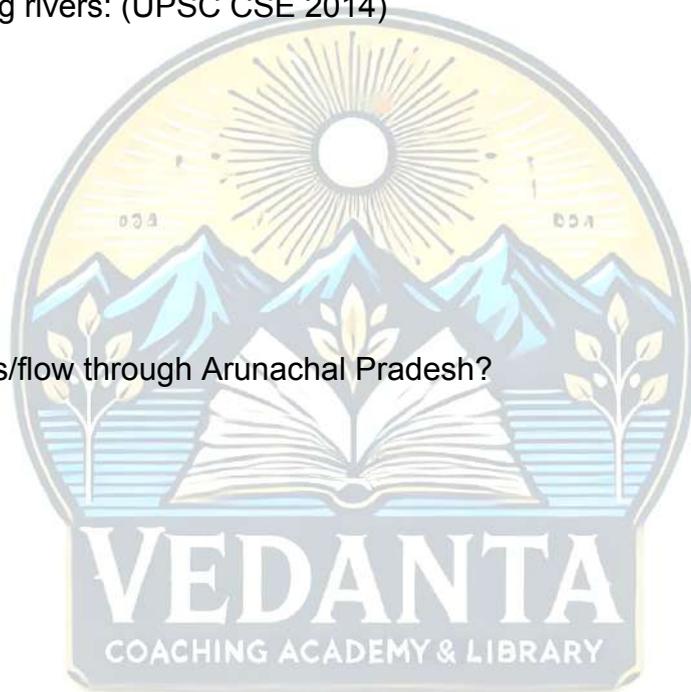
**Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:**

(1) Consider the following rivers: (UPSC CSE 2014)

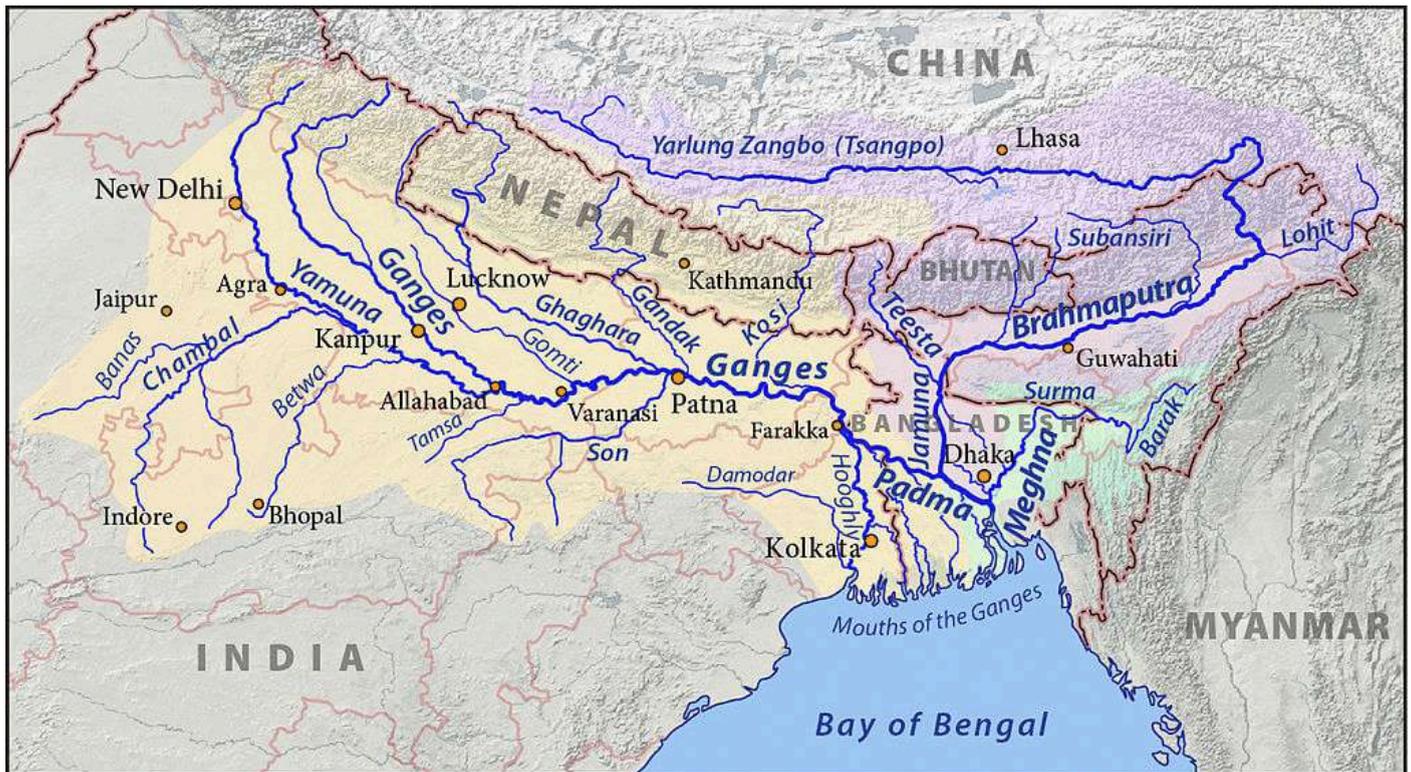
1. Barak
2. Lohit
3. Subansiri

Which of the above flows/flow through Arunachal Pradesh?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only



(d) 1, 2 and 3



- Barak River – Origin: Manipur Hills; Course: Manipur → Mizoram → Nagaland → Assam → Bangladesh (becomes Surma & Kushiya → Meghna); Tributaries: Jiri, Dhaleswari, Singla, Longai, Sonai, Katakhal; India drainage area: 41,723 sq km (1.38%); Hydropower: 2,042 MW; Boundary markers: Barail Range (N), Naga–Lushai Hills (E).
- Lohit River – Origin: Zayal Chu range (E Tibet); Course: Arunachal Pradesh (Mishmi Hills) → joins Siang; Feature: rich alpine & subtropical flora, medicinal plants; Role: forms Brahmaputra headwaters.
- Subansiri River – Origin: Tibet; Course: Arunachal Pradesh → Assam; Status: largest Brahmaputra tributary; Known as “Gold River”; Major project: Lower Subansiri HEP.
- Brahmaputra River – Origin: Chemayungdung glacier (Tibet, Yarlung Tsangpo); Course: Tibet → Arunachal (Siang/Dihang) → Assam → Bangladesh (Jamuna); Length ~2,900 km; Major tributaries: Dibang, Lohit, Subansiri, Manas, Teesta; Feature: high flood/sediment risk.

## Why India is not 'dumping' rice in the US as Trump says

### Syllabus:

**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance

**Mains Examination: General Studies-II:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

**General Studies-III:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

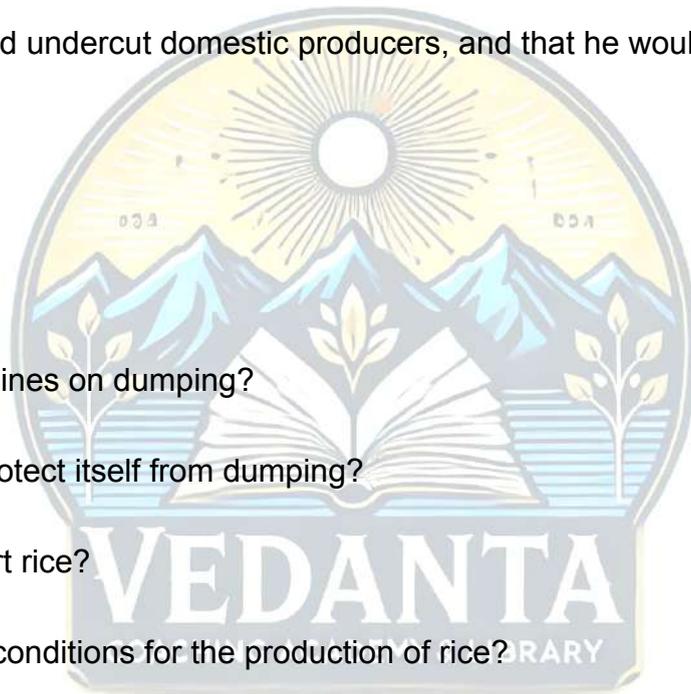
**What's the ongoing story:** US President [Donald Trump](#) has claimed India can't be allowed to "dump" rice in the US and undercut domestic producers, and that he would take care of the problem using tariffs.

### Key Points to Ponder:

- What is dumping?
- What are WTO guidelines on dumping?
- How can a country protect itself from dumping?
- How does India export rice?
- What are favourable conditions for the production of rice?
- How are tariffs from America impacting India's agriculture sector?
- What is the status of India-US trade talks?

### Key Takeaways:

- The truth is that the US isn't a very large rice producer and exports more than what it imports. In 2024-25, the US was ranked 13th with an estimated output of 7.05 million tonnes (mt), which was way below the 150 mt of India, the world's number one producer. Even with its relatively low production, the US exported 3 mt and imported 1.6 mt of rice.



— In value terms, US exports of rice stood at \$2,456 million in 2024 and \$1,303.8 million in January-August 2025. Imports were valued at \$1,497.8 million in 2024 and \$1,078.9 million in January-August 2025. The imports were mostly from Thailand (\$802.5 million in 2024 and \$626.8 million in January-August 2025) and India (\$391.2 million in 2024 and \$263.9 million in January-August 2025).

— Neither Thailand nor India export low-value rice to the US. The bulk of what the latter imports from these two comprises aromatic varieties, fetching high prices.

— Fragrant Thai Hom Mali and Jasmine rice are now quoting at around \$1,125 and \$690-700 per tonne respectively, while the price is \$880-900 for Indian basmati with 2% broken grains content. These are higher than the export prices of \$560-570 per tonne for 4% broken white rice and \$670-675 for 4% broken parboiled rice from the US.

— A country that exports more than imports cannot really complain of “dumping”. The argument holds even more so when the imports are mainly of premium aromatic rice varieties.

— India is the world’s largest producer as well as exporter of rice. According to the US Department of Agriculture, India’s total rice exports in 2024-25 were at 22.5 mt. For the 2025-26 marketing year (October-September), the agency has projected its exports at 25 mt. The share of the US in India’s rice exports is, however, quite small.

**BASMATI EXPORTS (\$ MILLION)**

	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26 (APR-OCT)</b>
Saudi Arabia	1203.67	533.56
Iraq	850.08	382.7
Iran	753.2	436.51
UAE	364.55	180.17
Yemen	358.34	168.13
<b>US</b>	<b>337.1</b>	<b>177.41</b>
UK	190.93	132.37
Kuwait	180.39	112.44
Oman	144.73	67.07
Qatar	122.93	34.72
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>5,944.49</b>	<b>3,138.01</b>

— A major chunk of basmati exports go to West Asia, with the likes of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and the United Arab Emirates being bigger markets than the US... In the case of non-basmati rice, the

biggest market for Indian grain is Africa — especially countries in the western part of the continent, like Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Senegal.

— As US negotiators headed to India for two days of talks to try and seal a trade deal, President Donald Trump threatened fresh tariffs on Indian rice citing concerns over rice dumping in the US market.

— In a statement, Prem Garg, National President of the Indian Rice Exporters Federation (IREF), said Trump's remarks add another layer of uncertainty at a time when bilateral trade negotiations are already facing unusual delays.

— Garg emphasised that India's rice exports to the US comply fully with World Trade Organisation rules and established bilateral guidelines. He said India exports only basmati rice and its varieties to the US, and that even after the imposition of 50 per cent tariffs, there has been no impact on India's rice exports and no loss to Indian farmers, as these exports are limited to ethnic basmati varieties.

— Trump's comment on the case in the US Supreme Court comes at a time when the court is deciding if he has overstepped his powers granted under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose sweeping reciprocal tariffs.

— If the administration loses the case, the reciprocal tariffs will be declared invalid, and the Trump administration may have to initiate refunds to the tune of \$100 billion to US importers.

**Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:**

(2) Among the following, which one is the largest exporter of rice in the world in the last five years?  
(UPSC CSE 2019)

(a) China

(b) India

(c) Myanmar

(d) Vietnam

## The Unit – Pilot Gold-Backed Digital Trade Currency (BRICS)

### Concept Summary

- What It Is:

A proposed *gold-backed digital settlement currency* for intra-BRICS trade, titled “The Unit.” It operates on a *blockchain network* and is designed for *cross-border settlement*, not for domestic circulation.

- Purpose:

To lessen the BRICS nations’ dependence on the U.S. dollar, offering a *stable and neutral* medium of exchange tied to *physical gold and member currencies*.

- Developer:

Conceived as a *pilot initiative* by the International Research Institute for Advanced Systems (IRIAS), with *informal participation* from BRICS countries.

- Backing Mechanism:

The Unit derives its value from a 40% gold reserve and a 60% basket of BRICS currencies, balancing commodity stability with monetary diversity.

- Operational Design:

- Dynamic valuation: Adjusts daily based on gold prices and currency fluctuations.
- Blockchain network: Built on a *permissioned Cardano blockchain* for secure, transparent, and tamper-proof transactions.
- Not a fiat substitute: Its use is restricted to trade settlement; domestic monetary independence remains intact.

- Governance Model:

Managed by an AI-regulated Unit Foundation, which oversees transparency and ensures politically neutral, automated decision-making.



- **Gold Sovereignty:**

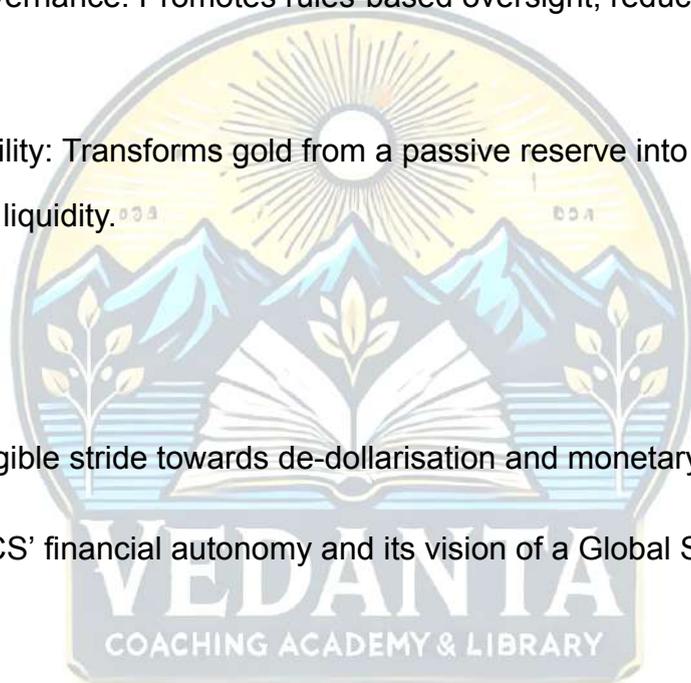
Each participating nation retains its gold reserves within national boundaries—enhancing trust and avoiding centralised reserve pooling risk.

## **Key Features**

- **Gold-linked stability:** Reduces exposure to fiat currency volatility by anchoring value in physical gold.
- **Blockchain transparency:** Immutable records bolster trust among member economies.
- **AI-supervised governance:** Promotes rules-based oversight, reducing human or political interference.
- **Enhanced gold utility:** Transforms gold from a passive reserve into a live trade asset, improving market liquidity.

## **Significance**

- Represents a tangible stride towards de-dollarisation and monetary multipolarity.
- Strengthens BRICS' financial autonomy and its vision of a Global South-centric architecture.
- If scaled successfully, it could become the first major gold-backed blockchain settlement system.



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## **UPSC Prelims Pointers**

- Initiative by: International Research Institute for Advanced Systems (IRIAS).
- Backing Ratio: 40% gold + 60% BRICS currency basket.
- Technology Base: Permissioned *Cardano blockchain*.

- Purpose: Cross-border trade settlement among BRICS economies.
- Governance: AI-led Unit Foundation.
- Significance: Step toward de-dollarisation; enhances BRICS' financial sovereignty.

## How countries like Myanmar and Cambodia turned into hubs of cyber slavery

### Syllabus:

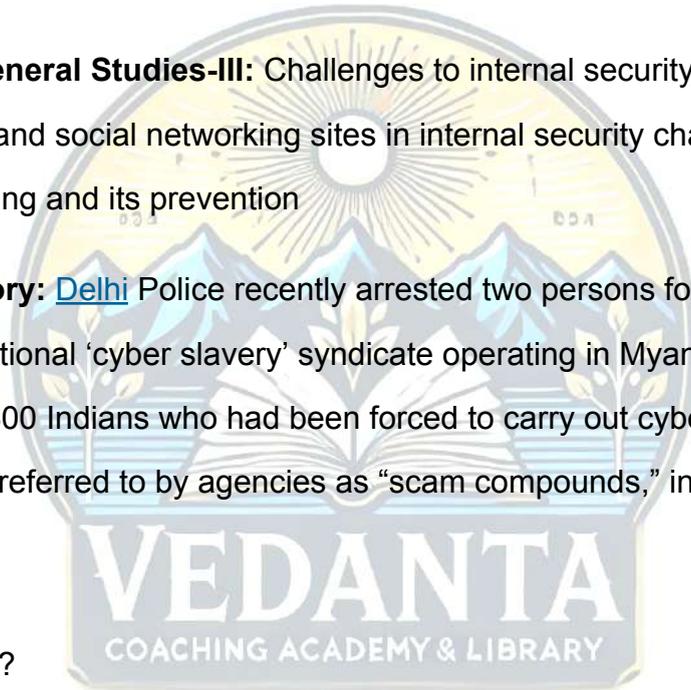
**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance.

**Mains Examination: General Studies-III:** Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention

**What's the ongoing story:** [Delhi](#) Police recently arrested two persons for their alleged involvement in a transnational 'cyber slavery' syndicate operating in Myanmar. The arrests came after the repatriation of 300 Indians who had been forced to carry out cyber frauds in call-centre-style setups, referred to by agencies as "scam compounds," in Myawaddy, Myanmar.

### Key Points to Ponder:

- What is cyber slavery?
- What is the role and function of Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)?
- What factors have contributed to the increase in cyber slavery cases involving Indians in Southeast Asia?
- What legal frameworks exist at the national and global levels to combat human trafficking and cyber slavery?
- What measures have been taken by the government to address the issue of cyber slavery?
- What are the initiatives taken by the government to tackle cyber crimes in India?



## Key Takeaways:

— Myanmar and Cambodia are home to several rebel groups that are opposed to the government, who have resorted to illegal activities such as human trafficking and running cyber-scam centres in a bid to survive.

— Given the widespread corruption and the visa-on-arrival policies, syndicate members can lure job-seekers from South Asian countries. Additionally, betting and casinos are legal in these countries. After [Covid-19](#), many of them were converted into scam centres following the global jobs crisis.

— All these conditions helped shape the scamming industry as we know it today: victims from South Asian countries are lured in by lucrative IT or data entry job offers in Thailand promising monthly salaries of Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh. However, upon arrival in Thailand, their passports and identification documents are seized by agents of this syndicate at the airport, after which they are transported to scam centres.

— The issue was first flagged by [Tamil Nadu](#) Chief Minister M K Stalin in September 2022. He noted that several IT professionals from the state had been lured by job openings posted on social media and were stranded in Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries.

— Indian embassies in these countries, including Thailand, are working on a large scale to conduct raids on such call centres and cyber-scam compounds and initiate the repatriation of victims. The Ministry of External Affairs is closely monitoring the situation and has made Indian Air Force aircraft available to return the trapped people to India. Once the individuals land in their respective states, the state police, with the help of the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) and I4C, will pursue further investigations.

## Do You Know:

— Launched in 2020, I4C aims to combat Cybercrime in the country and strengthen the overall security apparatus to fight against Cybercrime. In September 2024, four I4C platforms — **Cyber Fraud Mitigation Centre (CFMC), the 'Samanvaya' platform, a Cyber Commandos programme and a Suspect Registry**— were launched. It provides a framework for law enforcement agencies to deal with cybercrime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

— According to the report, 'Crime in India', the number of cases registered under the cybercrimes category rose to 86,420 in 2023 from 65,893 cases recorded in 2022. The crime rate under this category increased from 4.8% in 2022 to 6.2% in 2023.

— According to the data compiled by the National Cyber Reporting Platform (NCRP), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, a massive surge in cybercrime incidents was reported in India with fraudsters cheating people of Rs 33,165 crore in the last four years, including Rs 22,812 crore in 2024.

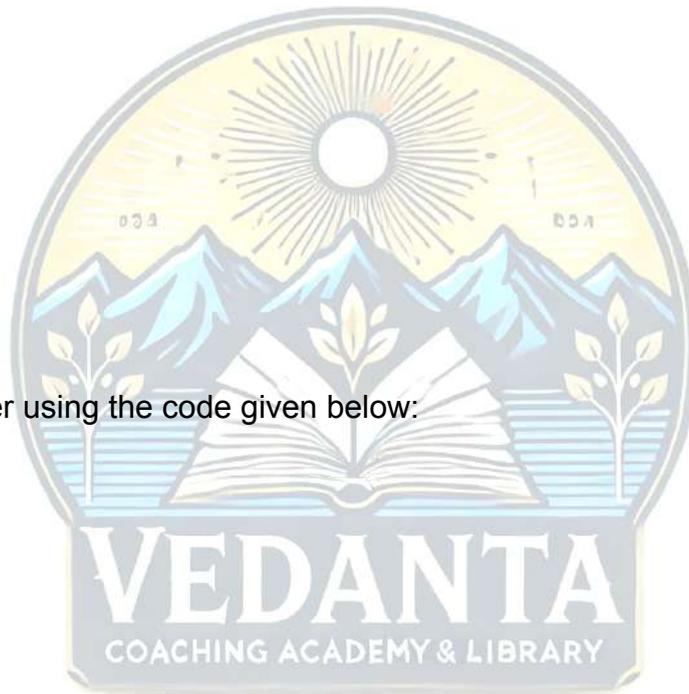
**Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:**

(3) In India, it is legally mandatory for which of the following to report on cyber security incidents?  
(UPSC CSE 2017)

1. Service providers
2. Data centres
3. Body corporate

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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



**4 months to go, only 27% of budget used for urban development schemes**

**Syllabus:**

**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance

**Mains Examination: General Studies-II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

**What's the ongoing story:** With under four months left to the end of the financial year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) has spent just 27.90 per cent of its [budget](#) on Central sector schemes for urban areas, including the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), The [Indian Express](#) has learnt.

**Key Points to Ponder:**

- What are the major schemes of the government for the urban landscape?
- What is the Urban Challenge Fund?
- How significant is the role of the Finance commission in recommending funds for various sectors?
- What is the difference between central sector schemes and central sponsored schemes?
- Know about these schemes: Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), PM-SVANidhi, National Urban Digital Mission, and the Scheme for Industrial Housing
- What are the challenges faced by the urban landscape in India?

**Key Takeaways:**

- The ministry was allocated Rs 92,743 crore for Central sector schemes in the Budget Estimates (BE) for 2025-2026. As discussed at a recent review meeting held by the Ministry of Finance, MoHUA's expenditure as of December 2 stood at Rs 25,878 crore, or 27.90 per cent of the allocated amount for Central sector schemes.
- Apart from spending on PM-SVANidhi, the scheme for small working capital loans for street vendors, and construction of general pool accommodation, which includes the Central Vista redevelopment project, all other schemes had less than 50 per cent expenditure, it is learnt.
- The highest amount spent so far has been on the mass rapid transit system and Metro projects (Rs 14,811 crore), accounting for 42.55 per cent of the budget allocated to the scheme.
- Key ministry schemes, including the Swachh Bharat Mission and PMAY, have seen less than a quarter of their budgets spent so far. For Swachh Bharat Mission, the ministry has so far spent Rs 829 crore of the Rs 5,000 crore allocated, or 16.58 per cent.

— Under PMAY, only 14.75 per cent (or Rs 3,435 crore) of the allocated budget of Rs 23,294 crore has been spent so far. Also, three schemes — the National Urban Digital Mission, the Urban Challenge Fund, and the Scheme for Industrial Housing — included in the budget have not yet been implemented, with no expenditures recorded as of December 2.

— Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the setting up of the Urban Challenge Fund in her Budget 2025-26 speech this year.

— The 15th Finance Commission's five-year cycle is ending, and the 16th Finance Commission's recommendations are set to be implemented from the next financial year. As per the guidelines, the Finance Commission can recommend allocations up to 5.5 times a ministry's average annual spending for the next five-year cycle.

### **Do You Know:**

— The [Urban Challenge Fund](#) is designed to address three aspects. First, to make cities productive and efficient centres of economic growth (cities as growth hubs); second, to develop and redevelop them in a creative way (creative redevelopment of cities), and third, to improve infrastructure. (Water and sanitation).

— Urbanisation is the process of transformation that occurs as a society evolves from predominantly rural to predominantly urban areas. It involves the increase in the proportion of a country's population residing in urban areas, leading to the expansion and growth of cities and towns. Additionally, it encompasses not only the physical expansion of cities but also their social, economic, and cultural transformations.

— Launched in 2021, SBM-Urban 2.0 focuses on garbage-free cities, faecal sludge, plastic waste, capacity building, and greywater management. The mission is being extended for a period of 5 (five) years, from 1st October 2021 to 1st October 2026.

### **Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:**

(4) [As per the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016](#) in India, which one of the following statements is correct? (UPSC CSE 2019)

(a) Waste generator has to segregate waste into five categories.

(b) The Rules are applicable to notified urban local bodies, notified towns and all industrial townships only

(c) The Rules provide for exact and elaborate criteria for the identification of sites for landfills and waste processing facilities.

(d) It is mandatory on the part of the waste generator that the waste generated in one district cannot be moved to another district.

**Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:**

How could social influence and persuasion contribute to the success of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan?  
(UPSC CSE 2016)

**What Indians eat, and how being unhealthy is easier and cheaper**

**Syllabus:**

**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance

**Mains Examination: General Studies-II:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

**What's the ongoing story: Soumya Swaminathan, Vartika Singh, and Sowmiyaa**

**Subramaniam wrote:** From a famine-hit nation in the 1970s, India is one of the world's leading food exporters today. However, based on the findings of NSSO's latest quintennial survey, its journey to nutrition security is incomplete.

**Key Points to Ponder:**

- What is obesity?
- What is the role of diet in obesity?
- What are the reasons for the increasing obesity in India?
- What are the government initiatives for obesity prevention?
- How does an unbalanced diet lead to obesity?

— The root of the obesity crisis also lies in the ecosystem that makes unhealthy choices easier and cheaper. How and what needs to be done to address these?

— Why is India facing an increased burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs)?

### **Key Takeaways:**

— The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 presents information on the monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) on food, consumables and durable goods. Collected periodically over the past 23 years, it offers insights into food expenditure. Overall, food expenditures have risen in real terms.

— Expenditures on protein sources such as dairy, eggs and meat, fruits, vegetables and nuts have risen while expenditures on cereals have dropped, despite recent evidence that shows more than half the plate is composed of carbohydrates.

— While lower expenditure on cereals is consistent with the economic theory of consumption, the quantities consumed appear to be higher. The most recent ICMR-INDIAB Dietary study shows that 62 per cent of total energy in Indian diets comes from low-quality carbohydrates (refined cereals and sugar). This has been identified as the leading cause of the obesity (and other metabolic diseases) epidemic.

— In India, while per capita incomes have shown an exponential increase over the last two decades, and real per capita GDP has more than doubled, spending on cereals has declined by almost half compared to 1999 in both urban and rural areas.

— On average, Indians now spend Rs 40 more than they did on animal-sourced foods, including dairy products. Similarly, for fruits and vegetables, people spend approximately twice as much, driving expenditures away from grains to diverse foods.

— While the National Food Security Act is a key driver of cereal consumption, we find that the top 5 per cent of the rural population spends almost eight times more than the bottom 5 per cent on food, while the top 5 per cent of the urban population spends almost 10 times more. Urban consumers seem to be prioritising quality and variety, reflecting changes in lifestyle and dietary habits and a move away from simple grains.

— Notably, spending on processed or packaged foods shows a steep rise, increasing by 353 per cent in rural areas and 222 per cent in urban areas since 1999. The increase demonstrates shifting consumer preferences for ready-to-eat meals...

— We attribute many key poor-health outcomes in India, including obesity and malnutrition, to this changed dietary behaviour. As per the Global Burden of Disease 2023, India has witnessed an exponential rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the largest number of years of life lost (YLL) is attributed to poor diets. India faces alarming health risks if current dietary trends continue.

— The Indian Council of Medical Research has pointed out that 57 per cent of the total disease burden in India is due to unhealthy diets. A study supported by the Food Systems Economics Commission for India projects that diet-related health risks and weight issues will drive YLL from 50 million to 72 million between 2020 and 2050.

— The World Obesity Atlas 2025 shows that currently, one in eight people globally lives with obesity.

— Studies have shown direct linkages between obesity and malnourishment, with the consumption of high-fat, salty and sugary foods.

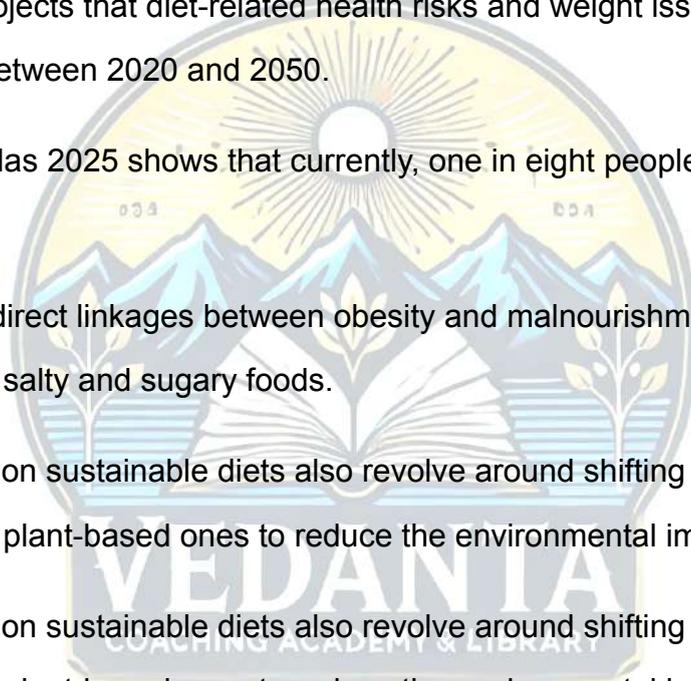
— Global conversations on sustainable diets also revolve around shifting away from animal-sourced foods to plant-based ones to reduce the environmental impact of food production.

— Global conversations on sustainable diets also revolve around shifting away from animal-sourced foods to plant-based ones to reduce the environmental impact of food production.

— Yet, bridging the gap between evidence and action requires confronting hard truths. The root of this crisis lies not merely in what Indians eat, but in the ecosystem that makes unhealthy choices easier and cheaper.

— Fiscal measures like strategic taxation on ultra-processed foods and sugary beverages must work in tandem with front-of-package labelling (FOPL) that empowers consumers to make informed choices. But regulation alone cannot succeed without transforming the supply side.

— Subsidies for harmful fertilisers and pesticides must be repurposed to reward farmers for growing nutritionally dense crops, using regenerative agricultural techniques. Equally critical is



investment in both R&D and scaling of low glycemic, high-protein rice, higher-yielding millet, pulse varieties and expansion of cold storage and processing facilities for fruits and vegetables in rural areas.

— Food companies must invest in affordable, culturally appropriate, healthy products matching Indian tastes and lifestyles. It requires a whole-of-society engagement, including the government, industry, farmers, research agencies, and citizens working together to redesign a food system where the healthy choice becomes the easy choice.

### **Do You Know:**

— In India, the causes of death are shifting from infectious diseases to NCDs. According to the Global Burden of Diseases Report, while in 1990 diarrhoeal diseases were the leading cause of deaths, with the age-standardized mortality rate (ASMR) at 300.53 per lakh population, in 2023, ischaemic heart disease caused maximum deaths — ASMR rate at 127.82 per lakh population.

— According to WHO, Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors.

— The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes NCDs as a major challenge for sustainable development. By 2030, it aims to reduce by one third premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment (SDG target 3.4).

— In 2019, the World Health Assembly extended the WHO Global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs 2013–2020 to 2030 and called for the development of an Implementation Roadmap 2023 to 2030 to accelerate progress on preventing and controlling NCDs.

### **Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:**

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. (UPSC CSE 2025)

## State should reclaim its role, shape digital markets

### Syllabus:

**Preliminary Examination:** Current events of national and international importance

**Mains Examination: General Studies-II:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

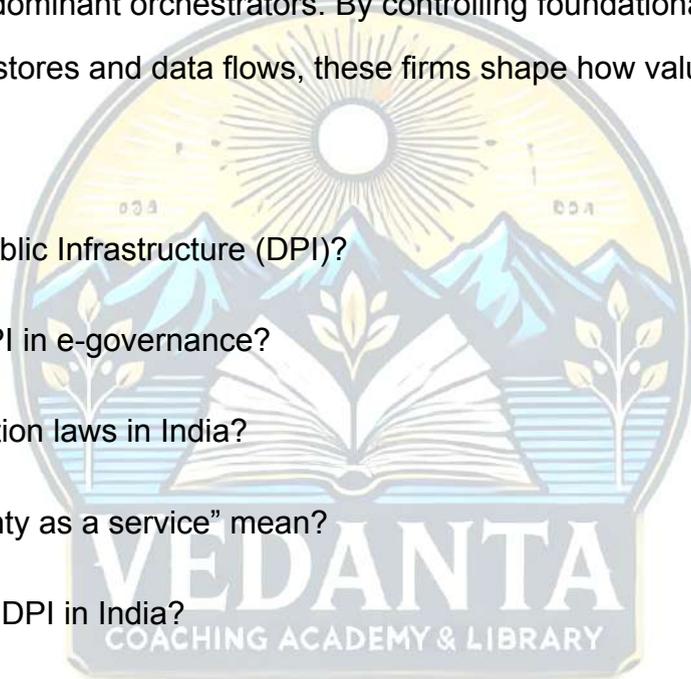
**What's the ongoing story: Payal Malik and Nikita Jain wrote:** Most Indians interact with digital markets shaped by sprawling digital ecosystems. These ecosystems, comprising infrastructure, data, software, and consumer-facing services, have not evolved organically; rather, they are strategically curated by dominant orchestrators. By controlling foundational layers such as operating systems, app stores and data flows, these firms shape how value flows across markets.

### Key Points to Ponder:

- What is the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)?
- What is the role of DPI in e-governance?
- What are data protection laws in India?
- What does “sovereignty as a service” mean?
- What is the impact of DPI in India?
- What are the challenges associated with it?
- What is the Digital India Mission?
- What are the various initiatives taken by the government for accessibility of DPI to all?

### Key Takeaways:

- The presence of multiple such ecosystems may suggest competition, but this is often an illusion. These firms adopt similar exclusionary strategies, such as bundling core services with adjacent ones, controlling access to critical data flows, and limiting interoperability to lock users in. These dynamics are creating markets that are neither neutral nor contestable.



— As digital markets shift from competition to ecosystem control, a question arises: Can the state redesign these markets through institutional architecture rather than regulate them ex post?

— India's embrace of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) presents such a distinct policy response that seeks to create foundational public rails. These building blocks allow multiple service providers to plug in and innovate without dependency on a private ecosystem orchestrator.

— This public infrastructure ethos is reflected in the RBI's recent reaffirmation that UPI will remain a zero-cost rail for users, underscoring the state's commitment to keeping digital infrastructure open and accessible.

— DPI is a market-shaping institution. Experience with the India Stack shows how the state can act as a catalytic anchor client, seeding two-sided markets through early adoption, ensuring institutional continuity via national information utilities like NPCI, and embedding inclusion into infrastructure design.

— Many DPI systems are built through PPPs, where private actors may exert significant control over technical standards, often with limited accountability. These risks require institutional safeguards: Competitive neutrality, auditable openness, purpose-limited data use, and participatory governance models.

— The "public" in DPI must refer not only to state provision but to open and non-discriminatory access governed by transparent rules. Even where infrastructure is public, data generated is often stored with a few private cloud providers, raising concerns about sovereignty, access, and dependencies.

— Studies describe this as "sovereignty as a service", where states appear sovereign but rely structurally on private cloud and AI infrastructures they don't control. This requires solutions such as public ownership of cloud layers, interoperability mandates, or fiduciary clauses within governance frameworks.

— Existing regulatory tools provide partial protection. Data protection laws do not address structural risks such as monetisation of public data or weak oversight within concession agreements.

— India's DPI experience shows that the state can actively shape the architecture of digital markets. It can embed openness, inclusion, and contestability by design. This institutional approach not only counters entrenched monopolies today but also builds the foundations for governing the technologies of tomorrow, like AI.

— By reclaiming its role as a market shaper and commons steward, the state can create an environment where innovation flourishes within boundaries aligned to public purpose. This, however, does not diminish the need for oversight.

### **Do You Know:**

— Successful DPIs in India include Aadhaar, Unified Payment Interface (UPI), and CoWin, which managed the world's largest vaccination programme. Others like Unified Health Interface (UHI), Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), and Open Network for Digital Commerce are in the rollout stage.

— **Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) App:** Launched on 30 December 2016, BHIM is an Indian mobile payment app developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

— **Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN):** The GST portal was launched on 1 July 2017. According to Digital India's official site, "Significant achievement has been made by doubling the number of registered taxpayers to 1.23 crores, more than 44 crore returns filed on this portal in first 34 months with more than 23.84 lakh crores tax having been paid on this portal during this period."

— **Aarogya Setu app:** In 2020, the Government of India launched ArogyaSetu mobile app developed in a public-private partnership to bring the people of India together in a resolute fight against [COVID-19](#). The App joins Digital India for the health and well-being of every Indian.

### **Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:**

(5) Consider the following: (UPSC CSE 2022)

1. Aarogya Setu
2. CoWIN

3. DigiLocker

4. DIKSHA

Which of the above are built on top of open-source digital platforms?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2, 3 and 4 only

(c) 1, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:**

“The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Digital Revolution) has initiated e-Governance as an integral part of government”. Discuss. (UPSC CSE 2020)

**BOREENDO – Indus Valley Flute Tradition Recognized by UNESCO**

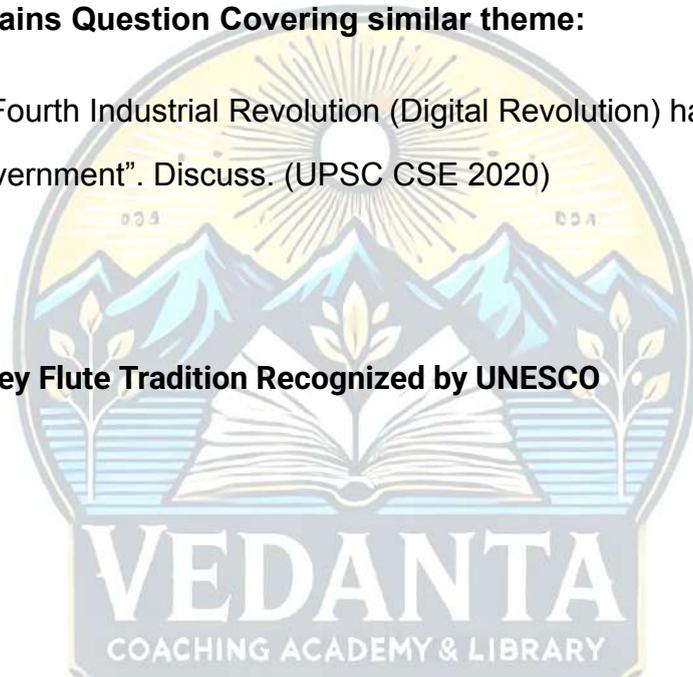
**Concept Summary**

- Recent Update:

In December 2025, UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) placed Pakistan’s Boreendo—a traditional vessel-shaped clay flute—on the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*.

- About Boreendo:

- A spherical terracotta flute (also spelled *Bhorindo* / *Borindo*) from Sindh, Pakistan, particularly the village of *Keti Mir Muhammad Lund*.
- Produces soft, breathy tones once popular in *pastoral songs, folk events, and seasonal gatherings*.



- Craft structure: Egg-shaped clay body, one air inlet, and 3–5 finger holes; pitch controlled by *tilting* rather than complex fingering.
- Cultural craft: Women decorate the flute with local motifs and natural dyes, reflecting Thar’s visual aesthetic.
- Presently, only one musician (Zulfikar Loond) and one potter retain complete traditional knowledge—indicating severe cultural endangerment.
- UNESCO Safeguarding Plan:
  - Apprenticeship training and documentation of songs.
  - Skill development in clay preparation and crafting.
  - Economic revitalization to sustain this ancestral art form.

#### Link to Indus Valley Musical Heritage

- Archaeological sites like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa have yielded *terracotta and bone flutes* sharing structural resemblance with the Boreendo.
- These finds suggest a continuity of sonic culture stretching from the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1300 BCE) to present-day Sindh.
- Musical instruments of similar design have also been recorded in Kutch (Gujarat), highlighting *cross-cultural exchange* between Sindhi and Indian pastoral groups before political borders arose.

#### UPSC Prelims Pointers

Feature	Details
Element name	Boreendo / Bhorindo
Country	Pakistan
Region of origin	Sindh (Thar Desert belt)
Recognized by	UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for ICH (2025)
List	<i>Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding</i>
Composition	Clay vessel-flute; 1 air hole + 3–5 finger holes
Technique	Handmade using terracotta; played by tilting
Cultural link	Indus Valley terracotta flutes (Mohenjo-daro)
Current status	Practiced by only one maestro and one potter

Craft features	Eco-friendly, orally transmitted, communally decorated
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### Do You Know?

India currently has 14 elements inscribed on UNESCO's *Representative List of ICH* (e.g., Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja, Buddhist chanting of Ladakh). Deepavali is India's ongoing nomination (2025 cycle).

### UPSC Mains Angle

#### Relevance:

Demonstrates how *Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)* safeguards living traditions that connect ancient civilizations to modern communities beyond monumental archaeology.

#### Issues & Challenges:

- *Skill erosion* due to lack of practitioners.
- *Market unviability* for traditional crafts.
- *Geopolitical barriers* restricting joint research on shared cultural legacies (e.g., India–Pakistan heritage).

#### Way Forward:

- Promote cross-border cultural cooperation under UNESCO frameworks.
- Support documentation and digital archiving of oral art forms.
- Introduce heritage-linked livelihoods ensuring artisans' sustainability.

#### Broader Significance:

Boreendo's recognition reaffirms the civilizational continuity of South Asia, bridging archaeological antiquity with living intangible heritage, and supports the vision of "*Shared Heritage, Shared Humanity.*"



## ALSO IN NEWS

<p>Australia social media ban on users aged under-16 kicks in</p>	<p>Starting today, Australia will become the first country to enforce a minimum age for social media use, requiring platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Snap to block more than a million accounts of users below the age of 16. The Australian legislation has drawn criticism from tech companies, but support from several parents in the country. It is likely to set a template for a broader global push to tighten regulation of young users' online safety.</p> <p>The 'Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act' states that age-restricted platforms will be expected to take "reasonable" steps to find existing accounts held by those under 16 years of age.</p>
<p>India recommends AI firms to pay creator royalties at rates set by govt panel</p>	<p>In a working paper on balancing AI innovation with copyright, released by a DPIIT-led committee, the Centre has invited feedback on recommendations for a sweeping new framework for AI training that recommends a mandatory blanket licence requiring all AI companies to pay royalties for using copyrighted work to creators. The recommendations suggest that a committee constituted by the government would decide the royalty fee. If implemented, India would become the only country to prescribe a statutory licensing regime for AI developers, with royalty rates prescribed by a government-appointed committee.</p>

## PRELIMS ANSWER KEY

1. (b)    2. (b)    3. (d)    4. (c)    5. (d)