

Prelims Exam Topics

'OOR PARE' PREHISTORIC SITE

Context

Researchers from the Yaakai Heritage Trust have rediscovered a significant prehistoric rock art site named 'Oor Pare' in the Nilgiris.

About 'Oor Pare' Prehistoric Site

- **Location:** Situated northwest of the famous Vellarikombai village in Kotagiri, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. It lies at an elevation of approximately 1,100 metres above sea level.
- **Indigenous Significance:** The site is considered sacred by the **Irula and Kurumba** tribal communities.
- **Paintings at Oor Pare:**
 - Executed in red ochre, a natural earth pigment used extensively in prehistoric art.
 - Figures: 30 types—anthropomorphic (conical headgear), elongated “ladder-like” forms, and dotted rectangular ritual symbols.

Petroglyphs vs. Pictographs: While "Oor Pare" features **pictographs** (paintings on rock), **petroglyphs** are images created by carving or incising the rock surface (prominent in the Konkan region).

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

Context

To overcome the biological hurdle of Gujarat's surviving wild Great Indian Bustards (GIB) being exclusively female, conservationists successfully deployed the 'Jumpstart Method' to produce the first chick in the state in over a decade.

About Jumpstart Method

- The technique "jumpstarts" the local population by introducing new life into a stagnant group without the need for immediate translocation of adult birds.
- A fertile egg is taken from a captive breeding center (such as Jaisalmer, Rajasthan) and transported to the wild habitat.
- The fertile egg is swapped into the nest of a wild female, who unknowingly incubates it in place of her own infertile egg.
- By allowing a wild mother to hatch the egg, the chick learns essential survival skills and behaviors in its natural environment rather than in a lab.

About Great Indian Bustard

<p>Great Indian Bustard IUCN: Critically Endangered. CITES: Appendix I WPA: Schedule I CMS: Appendix I</p>	<p>Distribution: Primarily found in the arid grasslands of Rajasthan (Desert National Park), which holds the last viable breeding population; also found in small pockets of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, as well as parts of Pakistan.</p> <p>Features: Among the heaviest flying birds in the world, often compared to an ostrich in appearance; it is an omnivorous ground-dweller (locally known as Godawan) that serves as an indicator species for the health of the grassland ecosystem.</p>
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	<p>Conservation Efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project Great Indian Bustard by the Rajasthan Government. ● Included under the "Recovery Programme for Critically Endangered Species" by the Ministry of Environment. ● Supreme Court Intervention: Mandatory installation of bird diverters on power lines to prevent electrocution—the biggest threat to their survival. ● State Bird of Rajasthan.
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Sam Grasslands: Situated in the Jaisalmer district, within the Desert National Park (DNP). It houses a sophisticated Captive Breeding Centre, where eggs are collected from the wild, incubated, and hatched under scientific supervision.

Naliya Grasslands: Located in the Kutch district of Gujarat, specifically within the Lala-Parjan sanctuary area.

COAL MINE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS WITH UNDERGROUND COAL GASIFICATION (UCG)

Context

The Ministry of Coal has signed **Coal Mine/Block Production and Development Agreements (CMDPAs)** for four coal mines under the **14th round of commercial coal auctions with embedded Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) provisions.**

- Coal Mine/Block Production and Development Agreements (CMDPAs) are formal agreements signed between the Ministry of Coal and successful bidders for the development and production of commercial coal blocks.

Objective

- To maximize the utilization of deep, thin, and otherwise uneconomical coal reserves through advanced UCG technology.
- To strengthen India's energy self-reliance by reducing dependence on imported fuels, fertilizers, and petrochemical feedstocks.

Key Features

- **First-Ever UCG Integration:** Four coal mines: **Recherla, Chintalpudi Sector A1, Dip Extension of Belpahar, and Tangardihi East** include embedded UCG provisions under the 14th auction round.
- **Cleaner Coal Utilization:** UCG converts in-situ coal into syngas, reducing the need for physical extraction and enabling more efficient and relatively cleaner energy generation.
- **Strategic Industrial Feedstock:** The syngas can be used for domestic production of urea, ammonia, methanol, dimethyl ether (DME), and synthetic fuels, reducing import dependence.

GANGA EXPRESSWAY

Context

The Ganga Expressway is one of India's most ambitious infrastructure projects, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 29, 2026 in Uttar Pradesh. This mega corridor stretches 594 kilometres, connecting Meerut

to Prayagraj, and is designed to transform connectivity, industrial growth, and economic development across the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Ganga Expressway Features

- This expressway, connecting the state from east to west, will **traverse 518 villages across 12 districts, significantly reducing travel time between Meerut and Prayagraj.**
- It is designed to accommodate **six lanes** initially, expandable to eight lanes, boasting a **maximum speed of 120 kilometers per hour.**
- Another important feature includes two long bridges spanning the Ganga and Ramganga rivers, allowing even big planes to land. **A 3.50-kilometer airstrip near Jalalabad tehsil in Shahjahanpur** adds to the project's versatility.
- To enhance public convenience, nine public amenities complexes are planned along the expressway, with main toll **plazas at Meerut and Prayagraj, and ramp toll plazas at 15 locations.**

Industrial & Economic Development

The Ganga Expressway is not just a road, it is a catalyst for economic transformation:

- Will help develop industrial and logistical hubs in 27 regions along the route
- **Integrated manufacturing clusters featuring:**
 - Warehouses for storage and supply chain management
 - Cold storage facilities to support agriculture and food supply
 - Food processing units to add value to farm produce
- Expected to create substantial employment opportunities across the state
- Supports Uttar Pradesh's ambitious goal of becoming a trillion-dollar economy

UAE EXIT FROM OPEC

Context:

- The United Arab Emirates has decided to exit OPEC marking a significant change in global oil dynamics amid the ongoing West Asia conflict.

What is OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries)

- **Formed:** 1960 in Baghdad
- **Founding Members:** Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela
- **Objective:** Coordinate and unify petroleum policies among member countries to stabilize oil markets, ensure fair prices for producers, and a regular supply to consumers.
- **Current Members (12 countries)** include: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, UAE, Venezuela, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo and Gabon
 - **Angola withdrew its membership** effective 1 January 2024.
- **Contribution to oil Production:** account for 38 percent of global oil production, according to a 2022 report
- **HQ:** Vienna, Austria

What is OPEC+?

OPEC+ is an expanded alliance formed in **2016**, consisting of **OPEC + 10 non-OPEC oil-producing countries**.

- **Major Non-OPEC members:** Russia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Oman, etc.
- **Reason for Formation:** To counter falling oil prices by coordinating production cuts or increases globally.
- **Key Role:** Together, OPEC+ controls over 40% of global oil supply and holds significant influence on international oil prices.
- Countries like **Kazakhstan and the UAE** are increasing production, risking friction with leaders like **Saudi Arabia**.

UAE and OPEC

- UAE, OPEC's third-largest producer, joined the oil-producing cartel in 1967

Reasons for UAE Exit

- **Production Freedom vs OPEC Quotas:** OPEC quotas restricted UAE despite its capacity to expand production to ~5 million barrels/day by 2027).
- UAE aims to monetise reserves quickly (e.g. producing more now rather than saving for long-term high prices).
- **Saudi-UAE Differences:** Tensions have been simmering between UAE and Saudi for a while, but were partially covered by their shared anger with Tehran. However fragile consensus break in their response to Iran war:
 - **Response Against Iran:** Abu Dhabi has been pushing Saudi Arabia and Qatar to launch joint counterattacks against Iran. But Riyadh was urging the US to defeat Iran.
 - **Geopolitical Tensions:** Differences over regional conflicts (e.g. disagreements in Yemen, Sudan and response to Iran attacks) weakened UAE-Saudi Relation.
 - **Approach in Yemen:** Saudi Arabia wants a **united and stable Yemen under one government** to protect its border, while United Arab Emirates supports **local groups and separatists** to gain influence in southern regions and ports.
 - **Difference in Sudan:** Saudi Arabia supports **ceasefire and negotiations** (e.g. hosting Jeddah peace talks to stop fighting), while United Arab Emirates is seen as backing **one faction (RSF)** to secure influence on ground.
 - **Saudi-Pakistan Factor:** UAE dissatisfaction with Pakistan's alignment with Saudi Arabia (e.g. Pakistan's neutral mediation between U.S.-Iran seen as weak by UAE).
 - **Leadership Rivalry:** Saudi Arabia wants to remain the main leader in the Gulf, while UAE is trying to act independently and increase its global influence.
- **Frustration with Lack of Support:** UAE faced major drone and missile attacks but lacked strong regional backing (e.g. over 2,200 attacks on UAE during Iran conflict, yet no unified Gulf response)
- **Closer Alignment with U.S.:** Exit may improve ties with U.S. (e.g. aligning with Donald Trump who has criticised OPEC).

Implication for India

- **Lower Oil Prices (Positive):** Increased UAE production may reduce global oil prices (e.g. easing India's import bill and inflation pressure).

- **Energy Security Benefits:** More supply flexibility (e.g. India can access cheaper and diversified oil sources).

50 YEARS OF SIKKIM'S STATEHOOD

Context

The Prime Minister visited Gangtok to attend the concluding ceremony of Sikkim's year-long celebrations marking 50 years of statehood.

About the 50th Statehood Celebrations of Sikkim

The celebrations, launched in May 2025, mark five decades since Sikkim became a part of the Indian Union in 1975. The occasion reflects upon Sikkim's journey from a Himalayan monarchy to a state known for environmental sustainability and inclusive development.

Historical Background of Sikkim

- **Formation of the Kingdom:** The Kingdom of Sikkim was founded in 1642 under the leadership of Phuntsong Namgyal, who became the first Chogyal, or monarch, of the kingdom.
- **British Protectorate:** Under the Treaty of Tumlong signed in 1861, Sikkim came under British protection and functioned as a strategic buffer between China and Nepal.
- **Position After Indian Independence:** Following India's independence in 1947, Sikkim did not merge immediately with India. Instead, the Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 made it an Indian protectorate. India assumed responsibility for defence, foreign affairs, and communications, while Sikkim retained internal self-governance.

Developments That Led to Statehood

- **Rise of Democratic Demands:** During the 1960s and 1970s, popular movements demanding democratic reforms and stronger integration with India gained momentum. Political organisations such as the Sikkim National Congress played a major role in these developments.
- **Tripartite Agreement of 1973:** Widespread protests against monarchical rule led to the signing of a tripartite agreement in 1973 involving the Chogyal, the Government of India, and key political parties. The agreement aimed to introduce political reforms and ensure greater democratic participation.
- **Referendum of 1975:** In April 1975, a referendum was conducted in which an overwhelming majority of voters supported the abolition of the monarchy and favoured integration with India.
- **Constitutional Recognition:** After the referendum, Parliament enacted the 36th Amendment Act, through which Sikkim officially became the 22nd state of India on May 16, 1975.

Mains Exam Topics

RTE ACT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Context

Recently, the Supreme Court of India reiterated the significance of Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act, 2009, describing it as an expression of the constitutional ideals of equality and inclusive education under Articles 14 and 21A. The Court emphasised that the provision is not merely a welfare initiative but a constitutional mechanism aimed at social integration.

About the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 was enacted to implement Article 21A of the Constitution, which was introduced through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002. It guarantees free and compulsory education to children between 6 and 14 years of age.

The Act marked a transition from a charity-based approach to education towards a rights-oriented framework.

Objectives of the RTE Act

- To achieve universal elementary education
- To encourage equality and social inclusion in schooling
- To improve educational quality and learning standards
- To reduce dropout rates and educational disparities

Constitutional and Policy Significance

- **Article 21A:** Provides every child between 6–14 years the right to free and compulsory education.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:** Articles 38, 39, and 46 direct the State to promote social justice, reduce inequalities, and protect weaker sections of society.
- **Role of Section 12(1)(c):** This provision translates constitutional goals into practice by promoting diversity and inclusiveness within educational institutions.

Key Features of the RTE Act

- **Free and Compulsory Education:** Children aged 6–14 years cannot be charged fees or denied schooling. The government is responsible for ensuring enrolment, attendance, and completion of elementary education.
- **No Detention Policy:** Initially, students could not be failed or expelled up to Class 8. The policy was later modified in 2019 to permit examinations in Classes 5 and 8.
- **Standards for Schools:** The Act lays down norms regarding:
 - Pupil-teacher ratio
 - Basic infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, and drinking water
 - Teacher qualifications prescribed by the National Council for Teacher Education
- **Ban on Discrimination:** Schools cannot conduct screening procedures for admissions or subject children to corporal punishment or mental harassment.
- **School Management Committees (SMCs):** Committees involving parents and local representatives oversee school functioning and development plans.

How the RTE Act Promotes Social Inclusion

- **25% Reservation in Private Schools:** Under Section 12(1)(c), private unaided schools must reserve 25% of seats for children belonging to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and disadvantaged groups. This encourages interaction among children from diverse social backgrounds.
- **Neighbourhood School Principle:** The Act promotes local schooling, helping reduce segregation based on class or geography.
- **Inclusive Learning Environment:** Schools are prohibited from discriminating against students on social or economic grounds and must provide equal access to facilities and activities.

Impact of Social Integration under RTE

- **Positive Educational and Social Outcomes**
 - Research and implementation experiences indicate:
 - Decline in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes among children
 - Greater empathy and social cooperation
 - Better access to peer networks and opportunities for disadvantaged students
 - Increased confidence and aspirations among marginalised children
- **Wider Social Benefits:** The policy contributes to:
 - Inclusive citizenship
 - Reduction in intergenerational inequality
 - Strengthening of democratic and national values
- **Implementation Evidence**
 - More than five million children have reportedly benefited under the provision, with several states recording high retention rates. Cities such as Delhi and Ahmedabad have witnessed growing acceptance of integrated classrooms.
 - Several states including Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi have adopted digital admission systems and monitoring mechanisms to improve transparency and reduce administrative discretion.

Associated challenges

- **Hidden Forms of Segregation:** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may still experience stigma, labelling, or subtle exclusion within schools.
- **Unequal Participation:** Economic and cultural barriers such as language differences, transport expenses, and additional educational costs continue to affect participation.
- **Institutional Resistance:** Some private schools have shown reluctance in implementing inclusion-related provisions effectively.
- **Administrative Weaknesses:** Key concerns include:
 - Delayed reimbursements to schools
 - Weak grievance redress systems
 - Uneven implementation across states

Way Forward

- Strengthen public education systems alongside RTE implementation

- Ensure timely reimbursement to private schools
- Eliminate hidden educational costs for disadvantaged students
- Improve grievance redress mechanisms
- Increase awareness among weaker sections regarding their rights
- Monitor schools to prevent discriminatory practices within classrooms

RECUSAL PLEAS

Context

The recent decision of the Delhi High Court has reaffirmed that judges should not yield to recusal demands aimed at influencing the composition of benches or encouraging “forum shopping.” While safeguarding judicial independence, the judgment also underlines the importance of transparency and institutional reforms to preserve public confidence in an increasingly politicised legal environment.

What is Judicial Recusal?

- Judicial recusal refers to the process by which a judge withdraws from hearing a case due to a possible conflict of interest or likelihood of bias. The objective is to ensure that justice is delivered impartially and without any personal influence.
- The principle is based on the legal maxim: “**Nemo debet esse judex in propria causa**” - meaning no individual should act as a judge in their own matter.

Constitutional Basis of Recusal

- **Concept in the Constitution:** Although the Indian Constitution does not expressly mention the term “recusal,” the concept flows from constitutional morality and principles of natural justice.
- **Oath of Office:** Under the Third Schedule of the Constitution, judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts pledge to perform their duties without fear, favour, affection, or ill will.
- **Articles 14 and 21:** The right to equality and fair procedure under Articles 14 and 21 includes the right to a fair hearing before an impartial adjudicating authority.
- **Restatement of Judicial Values:** In 1997, the Supreme Court of India adopted the “Restatement of Values of Judicial Life,” which advises judges to avoid hearing cases involving relatives, close associates, or personal acquaintances.

Grounds for Judicial Recusal

- **Financial or Pecuniary Interest:** Recusal becomes necessary if the judge or their family has a monetary interest in the dispute, such as ownership of shares in a company involved in litigation.
- **Personal Bias:** A judge may withdraw where there is a personal relationship with a litigant or lawyer, or if the judge had earlier represented one of the parties in a professional capacity.
- **Subject-Matter Bias:** Recusal may also arise when a judge has publicly expressed strong views on the legal issue under consideration, potentially affecting impartiality.

Procedure of Recusal in India

- **Voluntary Recusal:** A judge may independently withdraw upon recognising a direct conflict of interest.
- **Recusal on Request:** Parties involved in litigation can seek recusal by filing an application. However, the final decision rests entirely with the concerned judge.

- **Absence of Codified Rules:** India currently lacks a detailed statutory framework governing judicial recusal. The practice is guided mainly by constitutional conventions and judicial precedents.

Concerns Associated with Judicial Recusal

- **Forum Shopping:** Repeated recusal requests may encourage litigants to avoid certain judges and seek benches perceived as favourable. Courts have cautioned against such “bench hunting.”
- **Balancing Judicial Responsibility:** Judges not only have a duty to withdraw in cases of bias but also a duty to hear cases where no valid conflict exists. Excessive recusals may burden the judiciary and delay justice delivery.
- **Need for Greater Transparency:** Since judges often do not provide elaborate reasons for stepping aside, concerns have emerged regarding the lack of transparency and consistency in recusal decisions.

Way Forward

- **Legal framework:** Judicial recusal remains an essential safeguard for maintaining trust in the justice system and ensuring fairness in adjudication. However, the absence of a formal legal framework continues to create ambiguity.
- **Best practice:** Legal experts have suggested adopting a codified mechanism, similar to practices followed in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, to clearly distinguish genuine concerns of bias from attempts to manipulate judicial proceedings through forum shopping.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DIPLOMACY

Context

- Countries are starting to use AI in foreign policy work, showing how diplomacy is becoming faster and more technology-driven.

Application of AI in Diplomacy

- **Quick Information Access:** AI helps diplomats find old agreements and past decisions instantly.
 - E.g. Singapore’s AI tool stores and recalls past talks like a digital memory).
- **Faster Drafting:** AI can write notes, reports and official statements quickly.
 - E.g. ministries can prepare speeches or agreements in minutes instead of hour).
- **Scenario Simulation:** AI models negotiation outcomes and suggests strategies based on historical data.
 - E.g. During trade or climate negotiations, AI can simulate how different concessions may impact outcomes.
- **Levelling the Playing Field:** AI reduces dependence on large bureaucracies, allowing smaller states to compete diplomatically
 - E.g. a small delegation equipped with AI tools can match the analytical capacity of major powers with large teams.
- **Real-Time Support:** AI integrates diverse inputs (documents, voice notes, images) to provide instant insights.
 - E.g. AI assistants used by diplomats can process incoming communications and generate actionable summaries in real time.
- **Focus on Core Diplomatic Skills:** By automating repetitive tasks, AI allows diplomats to focus on negotiation, persuasion and relationship-building

- E.g. Reducing time spent on paperwork increases engagement in strategic dialogue.

Risks Associated with AI in Diplomacy

- **Erosion of Human Judgment:** Diplomacy depends on empathy, cultural understanding and political intuition, which AI lacks (e.g. AI may fail to interpret subtle diplomatic signals or cultural sensitivities in negotiations)
- **Over-Reliance on Automated Decisions:** Policymakers may begin to depend excessively on AI-generated recommendations (e.g. using AI simulations to decide negotiation positions without sufficient human deliberation could lead to strategic miscalculations).
- **Misinterpretation of Context:** AI can produce flawed analysis due to incorrect pattern recognition (e.g. misreading past treaty obligations or geopolitical contexts, leading to wrong policy advice).
- **Data Security & Confidentiality Risks:** Diplomatic data is highly sensitive and vulnerable to cyber threats (e.g. hacking of AI systems handling negotiation data could expose national strategies).
- **Algorithmic Bias:** AI systems trained on biased data may generate skewed recommendations (e.g. favouring certain geopolitical perspectives embedded in training datasets).
- **Technological Inequality:** Advanced AI capabilities may concentrate power among technologically advanced nations (e.g. developed countries gaining disproportionate diplomatic advantage over developing nations).
- **Reduced Accountability:** AI-driven decisions create ambiguity in responsibility (e.g. unclear whether policymakers or AI systems are accountable for flawed outcomes).

Way Forward

- **Human-Centric Approach:** Maintain human control over final decisions (e.g. AI as advisory tool, not decision-maker in negotiations).
- **Capacity Building:** Train diplomats in AI tools and digital skills (e.g. incorporating AI literacy in foreign service training programmes).
- **Robust Cybersecurity Measures:** Protect sensitive diplomatic data (e.g. secure AI systems against cyberattacks and data breaches).
- **Balanced Integration:** Combine AI efficiency with human judgment (e.g. using AI for analysis while relying on diplomats for negotiation and trust-building).
- **International Cooperation:** Promote multilateral frameworks to regulate AI in global governance (e.g. collaboration through UN and other forums).

AI is transforming diplomacy by enhancing efficiency, analysis and strategic capability, but its effective use depends on preserving the **human core of diplomacy—empathy, judgment and trust—while leveraging technological advantages responsibly.**