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Supreme Court Rules Scheduled Caste Status Limited to Hindus, Buddhists & Sikhs

Why in News?

- On **18 March 2026**, the Supreme Court delivered a significant judgment clarifying that **Scheduled Caste (SC) status** is available only to persons professing **Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sikhism**.
- The Court held that conversion to any other religion (such as Christianity or Islam) results in the **immediate and complete loss** of SC benefits, including reservation in education/jobs and protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- The ruling came in the case of **Chinthada Anand**, a person from the Hindu-Madiga community who converted to Christianity and claimed SC/ST Atrocities Act protection. The Supreme Court upheld the Andhra Pradesh High Court's decision that he could no longer avail SC benefits after conversion.
- verdict has reignited the debate on religion-based reservation, conversion, reconversion, and the intersection of caste and faith in India's social justice framework.

Key Details of the Supreme Court Judgment

- **Core Ruling**
 - Clause 3 of the **Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950** is "categorical and absolute".
 - A person professing a religion different from Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sikhism **cannot** be deemed a member of a Scheduled Caste.
 - Conversion leads to **immediate and complete loss** of SC status from the moment of conversion, irrespective of birth.
- **Interpretation of "Profess"**
 - The term "profess" means publicly declaring or practising a religion.
 - It is not merely a question of private belief but requires an outward manifestation.
- **Reconversion Clause**
 - A person who converts back to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sikhism can claim SC benefits **only if** they provide "credible and unimpeachable evidence" of bona fide reconversion and acceptance back into the original caste community.
- **Scheduled Tribes Order**
 - The Court also clarified that complete renunciation of tribal customs, rituals, and practices may lead to loss of Scheduled Tribe status.



Background: Legal Framework on SC Status & Religion

- **Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950**
 - Originally limited SC status to Hindus.
 - Amended in **1956** to include Sikhs.
 - Amended in **1990** to include Buddhists.
 - No provision for Christians or Muslims.
- **Judicial Precedents**
 - The ruling reinforces earlier observations that SC status is not purely based on birth but is linked to the social and religious framework under the 1950 Order.
- **Current Case**
 - Chinthada Anand (born Hindu-Madiga SC) converted to Christianity → claimed protection under SC/ST Atrocities Act → High Court rejected → Supreme Court upheld.

Implications

- **Legal & Constitutional**
 - Reinforces that SC status is **religion-specific** under the 1950 Order.
 - Strengthens the link between SC benefits and Hindu/Sikh/Buddhist identity.
 - May encourage reconversion movements.
- **Social Justice**
 - Affects millions of Dalit Christians and Muslims who continue to face caste-based discrimination despite conversion.
 - Raises questions on equality (Article 14), religious freedom (Article 25), and substantive equality.
- **Political & Policy**
 - Intensifies demands for extending SC benefits to Dalit Christians and Muslims.
 - Impacts reservation in jobs, education, and political representation.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, Clause 3, SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, Reconversion
- Data: Amendments (1956 for Sikhs, 1990 for Buddhists)

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- Related: Articles 14, 15, 16, 25; Fifth Schedule

GS-1 (Society)

- Caste, religion, and social justice
- Dalit rights and conversion issues

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial interpretation of constitutional orders
- Reservation policy and affirmative action

GS-2 (Social Justice)

- Rights of marginalised communities and religion-based exclusions

Essay / Interview

- “Scheduled Caste Status and Religious Conversion: Balancing Social Justice with Constitutional Identity”
- “Religion, Caste and Reservation: The Supreme Court’s Verdict and the Future of Social Justice in India”

MCQs

1. With reference to the Supreme Court judgment on Scheduled Caste status (March 2026), consider the following statements:
2. Scheduled Caste status is available only to persons professing Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sikhism.
3. Conversion to Christianity or Islam leads to immediate loss of SC benefits.
4. The judgment was delivered in the case of Chinthada Anand.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. Clause 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 was amended in 1990 to include:
 - (a) Sikhs
 - (b) Buddhists
 - (c) Christians



(d) Jains

Answer: (b)

3. The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 provides protection to:

(a) Only Hindus

(b) Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

(c) Only religious minorities

(d) All citizens

Answer: (b)

4. Which Article of the Constitution guarantees the right to equality invoked in the judgment?

(a) Article 15

(b) Article 14

(c) Article 21

(d) Article 25

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. "The Supreme Court's March 2026 judgment on Scheduled Caste status reaffirms the religion-specific nature of reservation benefits." Critically examine its constitutional basis and social implications. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Discuss the tension between religious freedom (Article 25) and protective discrimination under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 in light of the recent Supreme Court verdict. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Reservation policy in India must balance social justice with constitutional identity." Analyse this statement with reference to the Supreme Court ruling on SC status and conversion. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Religion, Caste and Reservation: The Supreme Court's Verdict and the Future of Social Justice in India."



Supreme Court Upholds Permanent Commission & Pensionary Benefits for Women Short Service Commission Officers in Armed Forces

Why in News?

- In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court has upheld the right of **Women Short Service Commission Officers (SSCWOs)** to **Permanent Commission (PC)** and associated **pensionary benefits**, while strongly highlighting **systemic gender bias** in the evaluation and promotion processes within the Indian Armed Forces.
- The Court observed that long-held presumptions about women's career prospects, casual grading in Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs), denial of career-enhancing courses, and unequal opportunity structures have created structural discrimination.
- The ruling applies across the Army, Navy, and Air Force and builds upon previous judgments promoting gender equality in the military.

Key Details of the Supreme Court Judgment

- **Core Ruling**
 - Women SSC officers who meet the eligibility criteria are entitled to **Permanent Commission**.
 - Inclusion in the consideration zone for PC is a **constitutional obligation**, not a matter of discretion.
- **Pensionary Benefits**
 - Women officers who were denied PC and released from service will be deemed to have completed **20 years of service**.
 - They are entitled to full pension and all consequential benefits.
- **Rejection of Vacancy Cap Argument**
 - The Court held that **limited vacancies** cannot be used as a ground to deny equality.
 - Structural disadvantages must be addressed to ensure substantive equality.
- **Observations on Systemic Bias**
 - ACRs of women officers were often graded casually or lower than deserved.
 - Higher grades were informally reserved for male officers eligible for PC.
 - Women were not encouraged for career-enhancing courses or key appointments.
 - This created an "unequal opportunity structure" within the Armed Forces.



Background: Women in the Indian Armed Forces

- **Entry Routes**
 - Women were historically inducted mainly through the **Short Service Commission (SSC)** route (10-14 years tenure).
 - Permanent Commission offers a full career with promotions and pension benefits.
- **2017-2020 Developments**
 - Supreme Court judgments progressively opened combat roles and granted PC in non-combat branches.
 - Despite these rulings, implementation gaps and institutional biases persisted in evaluation and promotion processes.
- **Current Status**
 - Women now serve in various branches, but challenges remain in achieving full parity in career progression and leadership roles.

Implications

- **For Gender Justice**
 - Reinforces **substantive equality** (beyond formal equality) under Articles 14 and 16.
 - Recognises that systemic barriers must be dismantled for real inclusion.
- **For Armed Forces**
 - Requires reform in performance evaluation (ACRs), access to training, and promotion policies.
 - Promotes a more inclusive and merit-based institutional culture.
- **Broader Societal Impact**
 - Strengthens the case for greater participation of women in defence services.
 - Sets a precedent for addressing gender bias in other uniformed services and public institutions.
- **Policy Direction**
 - The judgment may accelerate moves towards a formal framework for **paternity leave** and shared parenting responsibilities.



UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Short Service Commission (SSC), Permanent Commission (PC), Article 14, Article 16, Systemic Gender Bias
- Data: Women SSC officers now eligible for PC with pension benefits after 20 years of deemed service
- Related: Gender Equality in Armed Forces, Supreme Court Judgments on Women's Rights

GS-1 (Society)

- Gender justice and women's empowerment
- Changing role of women in traditionally male-dominated institutions

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial intervention for enforcement of fundamental rights
- Equality and non-discrimination under Articles 14 and 16

Essay / Interview

- "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Gender Parity in India's Armed Forces"
- "From Exclusion to Inclusion: The Evolving Role of Women in Defence and Public Institutions"

MCQs

1. With reference to the recent Supreme Court judgment on women officers in the Armed Forces, consider the following statements:
2. Women Short Service Commission Officers are entitled to Permanent Commission if they meet eligibility criteria.
3. The Court held that women denied PC will be deemed to have completed 20 years of service for pension benefits.
4. The judgment applies only to the Indian Army.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b)



2. The principle of “substantive equality” highlighted in the judgment is primarily derived from which Article of the Constitution?
- (a) Article 14
 - (b) Article 15
 - (c) Article 16
 - (d) Article 21

Answer: (a)

3. Which of the following was NOT cited by the Supreme Court as evidence of systemic bias against women officers?
- (a) Casual grading in Annual Confidential Reports
 - (b) Denial of career-enhancing courses
 - (c) Reservation of higher grades for male officers
 - (d) Lower physical fitness standards for women

Answer: (d)

4. Permanent Commission in the Armed Forces primarily provides:
- (a) Short-term service of 5-7 years
 - (b) Full career with promotion and pension benefits
 - (c) Only combat roles
 - (d) Civilian administrative posts

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

1. “The Supreme Court’s judgment on Permanent Commission for women officers is a landmark step towards gender justice in the Armed Forces.” Discuss the key observations of the Court and the reforms needed for true inclusion. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the evolution of women’s participation in the Indian Armed Forces and the persistent structural challenges they face. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Substantive equality requires addressing systemic bias, not just formal equality.” Analyse this statement in the context of the recent Supreme Court ruling on women in the Armed Forces. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Breaking Barriers: The Journey of Women towards Equality and Leadership in India’s Defence Forces.”



CJI Surya Kant Recuses from Hearing Petitions Challenging CEC Appointment Act, 2023

Why in News?

- Chief Justice of India **Surya Kant** has recused himself from hearing petitions challenging the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**.
- The 2023 Act replaced the Chief Justice of India with a Union Cabinet Minister on the selection panel for appointing Election Commissioners, superseding the Supreme Court's 2023 interim arrangement (Anoop Baranwal case).
- CJI Surya Kant cited potential conflict of interest and directed that the case (**Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Union of India, 2024**) be listed before a bench comprising judges **not in the line of succession** to the office of CJI. This is the **second consecutive recusal** – CJI Sanjiv Khanna had similarly stepped aside in 2024.
- The development has sparked debate on the doctrine of recusal, the doctrine of necessity, and the need for a codified framework for judicial recusal in India.

Key Details of the Case & Recusal

- **Legislation in Question**
 - The 2023 Act altered the selection committee for Election Commissioners by replacing the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister.
 - Petitioners argue it undermines judicial independence and the neutrality of the Election Commission.
- **CJI's Recusal**
 - CJI Surya Kant recused citing potential conflict of interest as he is part of the line of succession.
 - Directed the case to be listed before judges **not in the line of succession** to the office of CJI.
- **Precedent**
 - Similar recusal by CJI Sanjiv Khanna in 2024 on the same matter.

Doctrine of Recusal: Legal Foundations

- **Core Principle**
 - Rooted in the maxim **"Nemo iudex in causa sua"** – "No one shall be a judge in their own cause".

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- Ensures justice is not only done but is **seen to be done**, free from bias or reasonable apprehension of bias.
- **Evolution in India**
 - **Manak Lal v. Dr. Prem Chand (1957)**: Strict disqualification for pecuniary interest.
 - **Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India (1987)**: Shifted to the test of “reasonable apprehension of bias” in the mind of a reasonable person.
- **Who Decides Recusal?**
 - The decision rests solely on the **judge’s own conscience**.
 - No party can compel a judge to recuse.
 - India has **no statute** codifying recusal standards or procedure.

Comparison with NJAC Precedent (2015)

- **NJAC Case Context**
 - A Constitution Bench was hearing the challenge to the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014.
 - Recusal was sought against Justice J.S. Khehar (then in line to become CJI).
- **Court’s Stand**
 - Justice Khehar refused recusal on two grounds:
 - **Universal conflict**: Every judge on the bench faced the same conflict (benefit from Collegium or subjection to NJAC).
 - **Doctrine of Necessity**: When the only available forum itself faces a disqualifying conflict, institutional obligation overrides individual disqualification.
 - Justice Kurian Joseph emphasised that a judge who recuses has a **constitutional duty of transparency** and must state reasons.
- **Contrast with Current Case**
 - The same logic of “universal conflict” appears to apply here, as every sitting Supreme Court judge is a potential future CJI.
 - Critics argue the CJI’s recusal and direction to exclude judges in the line of succession represent a departure from the NJAC precedent.

Issues Raised by the Recusal

- **Binding Future Judges**
 - Recusal is an act of **individual judicial conscience**.
 - A predecessor CJI directing a future bench composition raises questions about separation of powers and judicial independence.



- **Master of the Roster**
 - Even after recusal, the CJI continues to exercise administrative power as Master of the Roster to constitute the bench.
 - This creates an incongruity that requires clearer guidelines.
- **Need for Codification**
 - India lacks a statute or binding code on judicial recusal.
 - Contrast with the US model (Section 455, Title 28 USC), which provides objective standards for disqualification.
 - The current vacuum leads to inconsistency and institutional concerns.

Implications

- **For Judicial Independence**
 - Highlights the delicate balance between individual conscience and institutional necessity.
 - Raises questions about transparency and accountability in recusal decisions.
- **For Election Commission Appointments**
 - The case questions the constitutional validity of replacing the CJI with a Union Minister in the selection panel.
 - Outcome will have far-reaching consequences for the independence of the Election Commission.
- **For Broader Governance**
 - Underscores the need for a codified recusal framework to bring consistency, transparency, and public confidence in the judiciary.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Doctrine of Recusal, Nemo judex in causa sua, Doctrine of Necessity, Master of the Roster, CEC Appointment Act 2023
- Data: Successive recusals by CJI Sanjiv Khanna (2024) and CJI Surya Kant (2026)
- Related: NJAC Judgment 2015, Collegium System, Article 124-147 (Supreme Court)

GS-2 (Polity & Governance)

- Judicial independence, recusal norms, and separation of powers
- Appointment of constitutional functionaries (Election Commissioners)



GS-2 (Constitutional Law)

- Evolution of recusal jurisprudence and the doctrine of necessity

Essay / Interview

- “Judicial Recusal: Between Individual Conscience and Institutional Necessity”
- “Transparency and Accountability in the Higher Judiciary: The Recusal Debate”

MCQs

1. With reference to the recent recusal by CJI Surya Kant, consider the following statements:
2. The case involves a challenge to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment) Act, 2023.
3. The CJI directed the case to be listed before judges not in the line of succession to the office of CJI.
4. This is the first instance of recusal by a CJI in this matter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (b)

2. The Latin maxim “Nemo iudex in causa sua” means:
 - (a) Justice delayed is justice denied
 - (b) No one shall be a judge in their own cause
 - (c) Audi alteram partem
 - (d) Actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea

Answer: (b)

3. In the NJAC judgment (2015), Justice J.S. Khehar refused recusal primarily on the grounds of:
 - (a) Doctrine of Necessity and universal conflict
 - (b) Pecuniary interest
 - (c) Personal bias
 - (d) Political pressure

Answer: (a)

4. Which of the following is NOT a key issue raised by the recent recusal controversy?



- (a) Role of the Master of the Roster after recusal
- (b) Binding future judges through administrative directions
- (c) Need for a codified recusal framework
- (d) Appointment of High Court judges

Answer: (d)

Mains Questions

1. "Judicial recusal is an essential safeguard for impartiality, but its application must balance individual conscience with institutional necessity." Discuss with reference to the recent CJI recusal and the NJAC precedent. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the constitutional concerns arising from successive recusals by Chief Justices in the challenge to the CEC Appointment Act, 2023. What reforms are needed in India's recusal jurisprudence? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Transparency in judicial processes, including recusal decisions, is vital for maintaining public confidence in the judiciary." Analyse this statement in the context of the ongoing controversy. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Recusal, Necessity and the Master of the Roster: Strengthening Judicial Accountability in a Constitutional Democracy."

National Biodiversity Authority Launches Short-Term Internship Programme for Students

Why in News?

- The **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** has launched a **short-term Internship Programme** (up to 3 months) targeted at students pursuing graduation or post-graduation.
- The initiative aims to provide hands-on exposure to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of biological resources, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits.
- It is expected to build a pool of young professionals equipped with practical knowledge in biodiversity governance and policy implementation.

Key Details of the Internship Programme

- **Duration & Eligibility**
 - Short-term programme lasting **up to 3 months**.

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- Open to students currently undergoing graduation or post-graduation in relevant fields (biology, environmental science, law, policy, etc.).
- **Objectives**
 - To familiarise students with the functioning of the NBA and its mandate under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
 - To promote understanding of conservation, sustainable use, and benefit-sharing mechanisms.
 - To encourage youth participation in biodiversity-related research and policy.

About the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)

- **Establishment & Status**
 - Statutory body established under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**.
 - Formally set up in **2003**.
 - Headquarters: **Chennai, Tamil Nadu**.
- **Functions**
 - **Facilitative**: Supports implementation of the Act at national level.
 - **Regulatory**: Grants approvals for access to biological resources and traditional knowledge.
 - **Advisory**: Provides expert advice to the Government of India on matters relating to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit-sharing.
- **Composition**
 - **Chairperson**: An eminent person with proven knowledge and experience in biodiversity conservation.
 - **10 Ex-officio Members**: Senior representatives from various ministries of the Government of India for inter-ministerial coordination.
 - **5 Non-Official Members**: Experts and professionals from diverse fields related to biodiversity management.
- **Administrative Structure**
 - **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)**: Function at the state level to regulate access within their jurisdiction.
 - **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)**: Established at local (village/panchayat) level for grassroots conservation and documentation of biological resources and traditional knowledge.



Significance of the Initiative

- **Capacity Building**
 - Creates awareness and practical exposure among young students.
 - Helps develop a future workforce for biodiversity conservation and policy implementation.
- **Broader Goals**
 - Strengthens implementation of the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** and India's commitments under the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**.
 - Supports the **National Biodiversity Action Plan** and sustainable development objectives.
- **Youth Engagement**
 - Encourages young minds to contribute to environmental governance and conservation efforts.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), Biological Diversity Act 2002, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs), Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)
- Data: Established 2003, Headquarters Chennai, Internship duration up to 3 months
- Related: Convention on Biological Diversity, Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), Nagoya Protocol

GS-3 (Environment & Biodiversity)

- Institutional framework for biodiversity conservation
- Role of statutory bodies in implementing environmental laws

GS-2 (Governance)

- Decentralised environmental governance (BMCs and SBBs)
- Youth participation in policy and conservation

Essay / Interview

- "Building the Next Generation of Biodiversity Stewards: The Role of Initiatives like NBA's Internship Programme"
- "From Legislation to Implementation: Strengthening India's Biodiversity Governance Architecture"



MCQs

1. With reference to the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), consider the following statements:
2. It is a statutory body established under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
3. It is headquartered in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
4. It has recently launched a short-term internship programme for students.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) are established at which level?
 - (a) National level
 - (b) State level
 - (c) Local (village/panchayat) level
 - (d) International level

Answer: (c)

3. The NBA primarily performs which of the following functions?
 - (a) Only regulatory
 - (b) Facilitative, regulatory, and advisory
 - (c) Only punitive
 - (d) Only research funding

Answer: (b)

4. The NBA functions under which ministry?
 - (a) Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
 - (b) Ministry of Science and Technology
 - (c) Ministry of Agriculture
 - (d) Ministry of Earth Sciences

Answer: (a)



Mains Questions

1. “The National Biodiversity Authority plays a pivotal role in implementing the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.” Discuss its structure, functions, and the significance of initiatives like the recent internship programme. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the importance of decentralised biodiversity governance through State Biodiversity Boards and Biodiversity Management Committees in India. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Youth engagement is crucial for long-term biodiversity conservation.” Analyse this statement in the context of the NBA’s short-term internship programme and broader environmental governance. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “From Policy to Practice: Strengthening India’s Biodiversity Conservation through Institutional and Youth Participation.”

Helium Supply Concerns for India’s Semiconductor & PCB Industry After Iran’s Strike on Qatar’s Ras Laffan LNG Hub

Why in News?

- India’s semiconductor and printed circuit board (PCB) manufacturing sectors are facing potential disruption in **helium supplies** following Iran’s missile attack on Qatar’s **Ras Laffan LNG hub** – the world’s largest LNG facility.
- Helium, a critical industrial gas used in semiconductor fabrication and high-tech manufacturing, is facing supply chain risks due to the escalating West Asia conflict.
- This development has highlighted India’s heavy dependence on imported helium and the urgency of developing domestic sources, including the helium-rich **Rajmahal Volcanic Basin** in Jharkhand.

Key Details of the Issue

- **Trigger**
 - Iranian strikes on Ras Laffan (Qatar) have raised fears of disruption in global LNG and associated helium production.
 - Helium is often extracted as a by-product during natural gas processing.
- **Impact on India**
 - Semiconductor and PCB industries are highly dependent on high-purity helium for processes like wafer manufacturing, cooling systems, and leak detection.



- Any shortage could delay production, increase costs, and affect India's ambitions under the **India Semiconductor Mission**.

About Helium

• Basic Properties

- Inert (noble) gas that does not react with other substances or combust.
- Atomic number: **2** – second lightest element after hydrogen.
- Extremely low boiling point: **-268.9°C** – remains gaseous even in super-cold environments.
- Non-toxic but cannot support respiration (displaces oxygen).
- Unique property: The **only element** that cannot be solidified by sufficient cooling at normal atmospheric pressure.

• Discovery

- Discovered in 1868 by Jules Janssen and Norman Lockyer through a yellow spectral line observed during a solar eclipse.
- Named after the Greek word "**Helios**" meaning Sun.

• Global Reserves

- Largest reserves: **United States, Algeria, and Russia**.

• Indian Reserves

- Significant helium reservoir discovered in the **Rajmahal Volcanic Basin**, Jharkhand – trapped for billions of years.

Applications of Helium

• Semiconductor & Electronics

- Used for cooling, pressurising, and creating inert atmospheres during chip fabrication.
- Essential for leak detection and plasma etching processes.

• Space & Defence

- Pressurising fuel tanks in rockets to ensure uninterrupted fuel flow.
- Cooling systems in rockets and satellites.

• Medical & Scientific

- MRI machines (superconducting magnets require liquid helium).
- Cryogenics, research, and balloon inflation.



Implications

- **For India**
 - Vulnerability of critical sectors (semiconductors, electronics, space) to global supply shocks.
 - Accelerates the need to commercialise domestic helium extraction from Rajmahal and other potential sites.
 - Reinforces the importance of strategic mineral and gas resource security.
- **Global Context**
 - West Asia conflict is affecting energy and industrial gas supply chains.
 - Highlights the strategic nature of helium as a critical input for high-tech industries.
- **Policy Direction**
 - India needs to diversify import sources, invest in domestic exploration, and develop recycling technologies for helium.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Helium, Rajmahal Volcanic Basin, Semiconductor Mission, Inert Gas, Ras Laffan LNG Hub
- Data: Atomic number 2, Boiling point -268.9°C , Major global reserves (US, Algeria, Russia)
- Related: Critical Minerals, India Semiconductor Mission, West Asia Conflict 2026

GS-3 (Science & Technology)

- Strategic materials for semiconductors and space technology

GS-3 (Economy & Security)

- Supply chain vulnerabilities and resource security

Essay / Interview

- “Critical Minerals and Gases in the Era of Geopolitical Uncertainty: The Case of Helium”
- “From Import Dependence to Strategic Self-Reliance: Securing Helium Supplies for India’s High-Tech Ambitions”

MCQs

1. With reference to Helium, consider the following statements:
2. It is the second lightest element and an inert gas.



3. India has significant helium reserves in the Rajmahal Volcanic Basin in Jharkhand.
4. Helium is primarily used in semiconductor fabrication and rocket fuel tank pressurisation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. Helium was discovered through a yellow spectral line observed during a solar eclipse by:
 - (a) Rutherford and Bohr
 - (b) Jules Janssen and Norman Lockyer
 - (c) Marie Curie and Pierre Curie
 - (d) Hubble and Einstein

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT a major global reserve holder of Helium?
 - (a) United States
 - (b) Algeria
 - (c) Russia
 - (d) India (as primary producer)

Answer: (d)

4. The recent concern regarding helium supply in India is linked to:
 - (a) Iran's attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG hub
 - (b) Closure of US helium plants
 - (c) Ban on exports by Russia
 - (d) Discovery of new reserves in Jharkhand

Answer: (a)

Mains Questions

1. "Disruptions in critical industrial gas supplies like helium due to geopolitical conflicts highlight the vulnerability of India's high-tech sectors." Discuss the strategic importance of helium and measures India should take for supply security. (15 marks / 250 words)



2. Examine the applications of helium in semiconductor manufacturing and space technology. Why is domestic exploration and production of helium critical for India? (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Resource nationalism and geopolitical tensions are reshaping global supply chains of critical materials.” Analyse this statement with reference to helium and its implications for India’s semiconductor ambitions. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Securing the Invisible: Critical Gases, Minerals and India’s Quest for Technological Self-Reliance.”

Assam Rifles Raising Day: Union Home Minister Extends Greetings to the ‘Sentinels of the North East’

Why in News?

1. The Union Home Minister recently extended **Raising Day greetings** to the personnel of the **Assam Rifles**, praising their courage, professionalism, and invaluable contribution to national security in India’s North-Eastern region. The force, often called the “Sentinels of the North East”, continues to play a pivotal role in counter-insurgency operations, border management, and maintaining peace in the region. This year’s greetings come at a time when the Assam Rifles is actively involved in maintaining internal security and supporting development activities in the North-Eastern states.

Key Details about Assam Rifles

- **Status**
 - One of the **six Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)** under the administrative control of the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
 - Oldest paramilitary force of India.
- **Primary Functions**
 - Conducts **counter-insurgency operations** in North-Eastern India.
 - Assists in border management along the Indo-Myanmar border.
 - Performs law and order duties and aids civil authorities during natural calamities and elections.
- **Headquarters**
 - Director-General of Assam Rifles (DGAR) is headquartered in **Shillong, Meghalaya**.

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Historical Evolution & Major Contributions

- **Origins**
 - Raised in **1835** as the '**Cachar Levy**' to protect British tea estates from tribal raids.
 - Later evolved into the '**Frontier Force**' and conducted punitive expeditions across Assam's borders.
- **19th-20th Century**
 - In 1870, reorganized into three **Assam Military Police Battalions**.
 - Sent over 3,000 men to Europe and West Asia during World War I.
 - Renamed **Assam Rifles** in **1917**.
- **Post-Independence Role**
 - Participated in the **Sino-Indian War of 1962**.
 - Part of the **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)** in Sri Lanka (1987).
 - Played a key role in counter-insurgency operations across North-Eastern states.
 - Continues to support civic action programmes, disaster relief, and development activities in the region.

Significance

- **Strategic Importance**
 - Acts as the first line of defence along the Indo-Myanmar border.
 - Maintains internal security in insurgency-affected areas of the North East.
- **Unique Status**
 - The only CAPF under MHA that also performs military-like roles in active counter-insurgency theatres.
 - Often described as a "hybrid" force combining police and military characteristics.
- **Current Challenges**
 - Insurgency remnants, border management issues, and drug trafficking along the Indo-Myanmar border.
 - Need for modernisation, better infrastructure, and enhanced coordination with the Army.



UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Assam Rifles, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), Cachar Levy, Frontier Force, Sentinels of the North East
- Data: Raised in 1835, Renamed in 1917, Headquarters - Shillong
- Related: Indo-Myanmar Border, North-Eastern Insurgency, IPKF

GS-3 (Internal Security)

- Role of CAPFs in counter-insurgency and border management
- Challenges in North-Eastern security architecture

GS-2 (Governance)

- Administrative control of paramilitary forces under MHA

Essay / Interview

- “Assam Rifles: The Silent Sentinels of India’s North-Eastern Frontier”
- “Hybrid Security Forces in India: Balancing Military Efficiency with Police Accountability”

MCQs

1. With reference to the Assam Rifles, consider the following statements:
2. It is one of the Central Armed Police Forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
3. It was originally raised as the ‘Cachar Levy’ in 1835.
4. Its headquarters is located in Shillong, Meghalaya.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The Assam Rifles was renamed in which year?
 - (a) 1835
 - (b) 1870
 - (c) 1917
 - (d) 1947

Answer: (c)



3. Which of the following best describes the primary role of the Assam Rifles?
- Coastal security
 - Counter-insurgency and border management in North-Eastern India
 - Airport security
 - Protection of vital installations in metropolitan cities

Answer: (b)

4. The Assam Rifles participated in which of the following operations?
- Operation Vijay (Goa)
 - Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka
 - Operation Blue Star
 - Kargil War (as primary force)

Answer: (b)

Mains Questions

- “The Assam Rifles has evolved from a colonial-era militia into a vital component of India’s internal security architecture in the North East.” Discuss its historical evolution and contemporary role. (15 marks / 250 words)
- Examine the unique hybrid character of the Assam Rifles and the challenges it faces in balancing counter-insurgency duties with civic responsibilities. (10 marks / 150 words)
- “Effective border management and counter-insurgency in the North-Eastern region require close coordination between the Army and Central Armed Police Forces like the Assam Rifles.” Analyse this statement. (15 marks / 250 words)
- Essay (250 marks)** “Sentinels of the North East: The Enduring Legacy and Future Role of the Assam Rifles in India’s Security Framework.”

Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) Initiative

Why in News?

- The Minister of State for Commerce & Industry recently informed the Lok Sabha about the progress of the **Districts as Export Hubs (DEH)** Initiative.
- Launched in **August 2019** by the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** under the Department of Commerce, the initiative aims to identify, brand, and promote district-specific products and services for both domestic and international markets.



- It seeks to decentralise export promotion activities, making districts active stakeholders in India's export growth and fostering balanced regional development across all 734 districts of the country.

Key Features of the DEH Initiative

- **Objective**
 - To transform districts into export-oriented hubs by leveraging their unique strengths in products and services.
 - Promote local manufacturing, agriculture, GI-tagged products, toy clusters, and other potential sectors for global markets.
- **Institutional Mechanism**
 - **State Export Promotion Committee (SEPC)** at the state/UT level.
 - **District Export Promotion Committee (DEPC)** at the district level.
 - These committees identify export-potential products, prepare action plans, and address supply-chain bottlenecks.
- **District Export Action Plans (DEAP)**
 - Detailed plans for each district that identify existing bottlenecks and suggest interventions to boost exports.
 - Focus on sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, GI products, toys, and services.
- **Coverage**
 - Covers all **734 districts** across India.
 - Special emphasis on GI-tagged products, agricultural clusters, and toy clusters.

Significance of the Initiative

- **Economic**
 - Promotes balanced regional development by tapping the export potential of every district.
 - Reduces dependence on a few traditional export centres and encourages inclusive growth.
 - Supports MSMEs, artisans, and farmers by connecting them to global markets.
- **Policy Alignment**
 - Complements flagship schemes like **Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India, PLI schemes, and Vocal for Local.**
 - Strengthens India's target of reaching **\$2 trillion in exports** by 2030.
- **Decentralisation**



- Shifts export promotion from a top-down approach to a bottom-up, district-driven model.
- Enhances ownership and accountability at the local level.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Districts as Export Hubs (DEH), District Export Promotion Committee (DEPC), State Export Promotion Committee (SEPC), District Export Action Plan (DEAP)
- Data: Launched in August 2019 by DGFT, Covers 734 districts
- Related: Atmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India, GI Tags, Export Promotion

GS-3 (Economy)

- Export promotion strategies and decentralised economic development
- Role of districts in achieving national export targets

GS-2 (Governance)

- Decentralisation and bottom-up planning in economic policy

Essay / Interview

- “Districts as Engines of Export Growth: Transforming India’s Economic Landscape”
- “From Centralised to Decentralised Export Promotion: The Vision and Challenges of the DEH Initiative”

MCQs (Prelims Standard)

1. With reference to the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) Initiative, consider the following statements:
2. It was launched in August 2019 by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.
3. It aims to identify and promote district-specific products for export.
4. It has set up District Export Promotion Committees (DEPCs) at the district level.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)



2. The DEH Initiative is an initiative of which organisation?

- (a) NITI Aayog
- (b) Directorate General of Foreign Trade
- (c) Ministry of MSME
- (d) Export Promotion Council

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT a component of the institutional mechanism under DEH?

- (a) State Export Promotion Committee (SEPC)
- (b) District Export Promotion Committee (DEPC)
- (c) District Export Action Plan (DEAP)
- (d) National Export Promotion Board

Answer: (d)

4. The DEH Initiative primarily aims to achieve:

- (a) Balanced regional development through district-level export promotion
- (b) Centralised control over all exports
- (c) Only agricultural exports
- (d) Reduction in imports

Answer: (a)

Mains Questions

1. "The Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) Initiative represents a paradigm shift from centralised to decentralised export promotion in India." Discuss its objectives, institutional framework, and potential impact on regional development. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine how the DEH Initiative can empower MSMEs, artisans, and farmers in India's districts to participate in global value chains. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Achieving \$2 trillion in exports requires tapping the export potential of every district." Analyse this statement in the context of the DEH Initiative and suggest measures for its effective implementation. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Districts to Global Markets: Unleashing India's Export Potential through Decentralised Economic Governance."



Government Restores Rates & Value Caps under RoDTEP Scheme for All Eligible Export Products

Why in News?

- The Government of India has decided to **restore the rates and value caps** under the **Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP)** Scheme for all eligible export products. This move comes after industry representations highlighting that the earlier reduction in rates had impacted export competitiveness.
- The restoration is expected to provide significant relief to exporters, improve cost competitiveness, and support India's target of reaching **\$2 trillion in exports** by 2030.

Key Details of the RoDTEP Scheme

- **Objective**
 - To refund embedded duties and taxes that are not refunded under any other export promotion scheme (such as GST refunds or duty drawback).
 - To make Indian exports zero-rated and globally competitive by neutralising the incidence of taxes at the local, state, and central levels.
- **Coverage**
 - Applies to all goods exported from India (with some exceptions notified by the government).
 - Covers duties/taxes on inputs like electricity, fuel, VAT on fuel, mandi tax, stamp duty, etc., that were not covered under GST or other schemes.
- **Recent Development**
 - The government has restored the original **rates and value caps** for all eligible products.
 - This reverses the earlier rationalisation that had lowered rates for several sectors.

Background & Evolution

- **Launch**
 - Introduced in **2021** through an amendment to the **Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20**.
 - Replaced the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) to comply with WTO rules (which had ruled MEIS as non-compliant).
- **Implementation**
 - Operated as a **WTO-compliant** scheme that provides rebates in the form of duty credits scrips.



- Rates are notified sector-wise and product-wise, with value caps in some cases.
- **Significance**
 - Ensures that Indian exporters do not carry the burden of embedded taxes, making them price-competitive in international markets.
 - Supports MSMEs and labour-intensive sectors that were earlier benefiting under MEIS.

Implications of Restoration

- **For Exporters**
 - Improved liquidity and reduced cost of production.
 - Better competitiveness in global markets, especially for sectors like textiles, engineering goods, chemicals, and agriculture.
- **For Economy**
 - Boost to overall export performance and foreign exchange earnings.
 - Supports employment generation in export-oriented industries.
- **Policy Continuity**
 - Signals the government's commitment to a stable and supportive export policy environment.
 - Aligns with the broader goal of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and **Viksit Bharat**.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: RoDTEP Scheme, Duty Credit Scrips, Foreign Trade Policy, Zero-Rated Exports
- Data: Launched in 2021, Replaced MEIS, Recent restoration of rates & value caps
- Related: Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS), WTO Compliance, Export Promotion

GS-3 (Economy)

- Export promotion schemes and their impact on trade competitiveness
- Government measures to support MSME and labour-intensive sectors

GS-2 (Governance)

- Implementation of Foreign Trade Policy and inter-ministerial coordination

Essay / Interview

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- “Export Promotion in a WTO-Compliant Regime: The Role of Schemes like RoDTEP”
- “From MEIS to RoDTEP: Ensuring Zero-Rated Exports and Global Competitiveness for Indian Products”

MCQs

1. With reference to the RoDTEP Scheme, consider the following statements:
2. It was introduced to replace the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).
3. It provides remission of embedded duties and taxes on exported products.
4. The government has recently restored the rates and value caps for all eligible products.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The RoDTEP Scheme was launched in which year?
 - (a) 2015
 - (b) 2019
 - (c) 2021
 - (d) 2024

Answer: (c)

3. Which of the following best describes the objective of the RoDTEP Scheme?
 - (a) To provide direct cash subsidy to exporters
 - (b) To make Indian exports zero-rated by refunding embedded taxes
 - (c) To promote only agricultural exports
 - (d) To regulate imports

Answer: (b)

4. The RoDTEP Scheme is implemented by:
 - (a) Ministry of Finance
 - (b) Directorate General of Foreign Trade
 - (c) NITI Aayog
 - (d) Ministry of MSME

Answer: (b)



Mains Questions

1. "The RoDTEP Scheme is a WTO-compliant mechanism to support Indian exports by neutralising embedded taxes." Discuss its significance and the impact of the recent restoration of rates and value caps. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Compare the RoDTEP Scheme with the earlier MEIS and evaluate how it addresses the challenges of export competitiveness for Indian MSMEs. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Export promotion schemes must evolve in line with global trade rules while supporting domestic industry." Analyse this statement in the context of the RoDTEP Scheme. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "From Subsidies to Remission: Reforming India's Export Promotion Architecture for a \$2 Trillion Export Economy."

Magnitude 7.6 Earthquake Strikes Near Tonga in South Pacific Ocean

Why in News?

- A strong preliminary **magnitude 7.6 earthquake** struck near **Tonga** in the South Pacific Ocean recently. The quake occurred in a seismically active region along the Pacific Ring of Fire.
- No immediate reports of major damage or casualties have been confirmed, but the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued alerts for possible tsunami waves in the surrounding areas.
- The event has once again highlighted the high seismic vulnerability of small island developing states (SIDS) like Tonga and the importance of disaster preparedness in the Pacific.

Key Details of the Earthquake

- **Magnitude & Location**
 - Preliminary magnitude: **7.6**.
 - Epicentre: Near the archipelago of Tonga in the South Pacific Ocean.
- **Immediate Response**
 - Tsunami warnings were issued for coastal areas in Tonga and neighbouring islands.
 - Authorities urged residents to move to higher ground as a precautionary measure.
- **Regional Context**



- Tonga lies on the **Pacific Ring of Fire**, one of the most seismically active zones in the world.
- The region frequently experiences earthquakes and volcanic activity due to the subduction of the Pacific Plate under the Australian Plate.

About Tonga

- **Geographical Profile**
 - Sovereign country in **Polynesia**, consisting of an **archipelago of 169 islands**.
 - Located in the **South Pacific Ocean**.
 - Neighbouring countries: **Fiji** (west), **Cook Islands** (east), and **Samoa** (north).
- **Island Groups**
 - Divided into three main groups:
 - **Tongatapu** (south) – most populous and contains the capital.
 - **Ha'apai** (centre).
 - **Vava'u** (north).
- **Terrain & Geology**
 - Western islands are of **volcanic origin** (part of the Tongan Volcanic Arc).
 - Eastern islands are **non-volcanic**, composed of **coral limestone and sand**.
 - Mostly flat terrain with limestone and coral formations.
 - Highest point: **Kao Island** in the Ha'apai group.
- **Capital**
 - **Nuku'alofa**, situated on the northern shore of Tongatapu Island.
- **Environmental & International Engagement**
 - Member of the **Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance** and **Marine Protected Areas Action Groups**.
 - Highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Implications of the Earthquake

- **For Tonga & Pacific Islands**
 - Small island nations like Tonga are particularly vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis due to their geography and limited resources.
 - Highlights the need for robust early warning systems, disaster risk reduction, and resilient infrastructure.
- **Regional & Global**



- The Pacific Ring of Fire accounts for a large percentage of the world's earthquakes and volcanic activity.
- Reinforces the importance of international cooperation in disaster response and humanitarian assistance.
- **For India**
 - India has been strengthening its engagement with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) through initiatives like **Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIIC)**.
 - Indian assistance in disaster relief and capacity building in the region has been significant in the past (e.g., after the 2022 Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption).

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Tonga, Pacific Ring of Fire, Tongan Volcanic Arc, Nuku'alofa, Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance
- Data: Archipelago of 169 islands, Capital - Nuku'alofa (Tongatapu), Highest point - Kao Island
- Related: Pacific Island Countries, Disaster Risk Reduction, Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIIC)

GS-1 (Geography)

- Physical geography of the Pacific Ocean and island nations
- Seismic zones and the Pacific Ring of Fire

GS-3 (Disaster Management)

- Earthquake and tsunami risk management in small island developing states

GS-2 (IR)

- India's engagement with Pacific Island Countries

Essay / Interview

- "Small Island Developing States in a Changing Climate and Seismic Landscape: The Case of Tonga"
- "Disaster Diplomacy: India's Role in Supporting Pacific Island Nations"



MCQs

1. With reference to the recent earthquake near Tonga, consider the following statements:
2. Tonga is an archipelago of 169 islands located in the South Pacific Ocean.
3. The capital of Tonga is Nuku'alofa, situated on Tongatapu Island.
4. Tonga lies on the Pacific Ring of Fire, making it highly prone to seismic activity.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The western islands of Tonga are primarily of what geological origin?

- (a) Coral limestone
- (b) Volcanic
- (c) Sedimentary
- (d) Glacial

Answer: (b)

3. Which of the following is NOT a neighbouring country of Tonga?

- (a) Fiji
- (b) Samoa
- (c) Cook Islands
- (d) New Zealand

Answer: (d)

4. Tonga is a member of which of the following alliances?

- (a) Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance
- (b) QUAD
- (c) ASEAN
- (d) SAARC

Answer: (a)



Mains Questions

1. "Small Island Developing States like Tonga are disproportionately vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis." Discuss the geographical reasons and the measures needed for disaster risk reduction in the Pacific region. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine India's engagement with Pacific Island Countries and how it can contribute to their disaster preparedness and resilience. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "The Pacific Ring of Fire shapes both the opportunities and risks for nations in the region." Analyse this statement with special reference to Tonga and recent seismic events. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Vulnerable Yet Resilient: The Future of Small Island Developing States in an Era of Climate Change and Seismic Threats."

Researchers Discover Massive Freshwater Reservoir Beneath Utah's Great Salt Lake

Why in News?

- Researchers at the **University of Utah** have made a significant discovery: **freshwater saturates the rock and sediment** beneath the **Great Salt Lake** to depths of up to **13,000 feet** (approximately 4 km).
- This finding suggests the existence of a vast underground freshwater reservoir in an otherwise highly saline environment.
- The discovery has important implications for water security in the arid western United States, especially amid ongoing concerns about shrinking lake levels, drought, and climate change.

Key Details of the Discovery

- **Findings**
 - Freshwater is present in the subsurface rock and sediment layers beneath the Great Salt Lake.
 - The freshwater extends to depths of up to **13,000 feet**.
 - The reservoir is trapped in porous geological formations below the hypersaline lake.
- **Significance**
 - Challenges the previous understanding that the area beneath the lake is entirely saline.
 - Opens possibilities for sustainable groundwater management in the region.

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- Could help mitigate the impacts of declining surface water levels in the Great Salt Lake.

About the Great Salt Lake

- **Location & Geography**
 - Located in northern **Utah**, United States.
 - Largest **inland body of salt water** in the Western Hemisphere.
 - One of the most saline inland water bodies in the world.
- **Hydrology**
 - Fed by three major rivers: **Bear, Weber, and Jordan**.
 - Has **no outlet** – it is an endorheic (closed) basin.
 - Water levels fluctuate significantly depending on river inflow and evaporation rates.
- **Salinity & Formation**
 - Highly saline due to high evaporation rates in an arid environment.
 - Chemical characteristics similar to oceans, but with **much greater salinity**.
 - Surrounded by sand, salt flats, and marshes, giving it an isolated appearance.
- **Biodiversity**
 - Supports unique avian species including **American avocet, Wilson's phalarope, California gull, black-necked stilt, American white pelican, peregrine falcon, and marbled godwit**.
 - The lake and its surrounding wetlands are critical stopover sites for migratory birds.

Implications of the Discovery

- **Water Security**
 - Potential new source of freshwater in a water-stressed region.
 - Could help address declining lake levels and support agriculture, industry, and municipal needs.
- **Environmental**
 - Better understanding of the lake's hydrogeology may aid in conservation efforts.
 - Raises questions about sustainable extraction without affecting the lake's fragile ecosystem.
- **Scientific**
 - Challenges existing models of subsurface salinity in endorheic basins.
 - Opens new avenues for geophysical and hydrogeological research.



UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Great Salt Lake, Endorheic Basin, Hypersaline Lake, University of Utah Discovery
- Data: Depth of freshwater reservoir (up to 13,000 feet), Fed by Bear, Weber, and Jordan rivers
- Related: Saline Lakes, Water Security in Arid Regions, Migratory Bird Habitats

GS-1 (Geography)

- Physical geography of the United States and endorheic basins
- Lakes and their hydrological characteristics

GS-3 (Environment)

- Water resource management and climate change impacts on inland water bodies

Essay / Interview

- “Hidden Water Resources Beneath Saline Lakes: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Development”
- “Climate Change and Water Security: Lessons from the Great Salt Lake”

MCQs

1. With reference to the recent discovery beneath the Great Salt Lake, consider the following statements:
2. Freshwater has been found saturating the rock and sediment to depths of up to 13,000 feet.
3. The Great Salt Lake is fed by the Bear, Weber, and Jordan rivers.
4. It is the largest inland body of salt water in the Western Hemisphere.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The Great Salt Lake is located in which US state?
(a) California



- (b) Utah
- (c) Nevada
- (d) Arizona

Answer: (b)

3. The Great Salt Lake is an example of:

- (a) Open ocean-connected lake
- (b) Endorheic (closed) basin
- (c) Glacial lake
- (d) Rift valley lake

Answer: (b)

4. Which of the following is NOT a major river feeding the Great Salt Lake?

- (a) Bear River
- (b) Weber River
- (c) Jordan River
- (d) Colorado River

Answer: (d)

Mains Questions

1. "The discovery of a vast freshwater reservoir beneath the Great Salt Lake highlights the hidden potential of subsurface water resources in arid regions." Discuss the significance of this finding and the challenges associated with its sustainable use. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the hydrological and ecological characteristics of the Great Salt Lake and the threats it faces due to climate change and human activities. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Inland saline lakes like the Great Salt Lake play a critical role in regional ecology and water balance." Analyse this statement and suggest measures for their conservation. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Beneath the Surface: Unlocking Subsurface Water Resources for a Water-Stressed World."



Sperm Whales Caught Headbutting on Camera for the First Time by University of St Andrews Researchers

Why in News?

- Researchers from the **University of St Andrews**, United Kingdom, have for the first time captured on camera **sperm whales headbutting** each other.
- The rare footage provides new insights into the social behaviour, aggression patterns, and communication of one of the ocean's most enigmatic marine mammals.
- This discovery adds to our understanding of the complex social structures and interactions within sperm whale pods, which are known for their advanced echolocation and sophisticated vocalisations (codas).

Key Details of the Observation

- **Behaviour Recorded**
 - Direct headbutting between sperm whales, a previously undocumented aggressive or competitive interaction in visual records.
 - The behaviour was observed in the wild and captured through advanced underwater filming techniques.
- **Scientific Significance**
 - Helps researchers understand dominance displays, competition for resources, or social hierarchy within pods.
 - Complements existing knowledge of sperm whale communication through codas (distinctive click patterns).

About the Sperm Whale

- **Physical Characteristics**
 - Largest of the toothed whales, easily recognised by its **enormous square head** and narrow lower jaw.
 - Possesses the **largest brain** of any animal on the planet.
 - Dark blue-grey or brownish body with white patches on the belly.
 - Small paddle-like flippers and a series of rounded humps on its back.
- **Unique Features**
 - Named after the waxy substance **spermaceti** found in its head – an oil sac that helps focus sound for echolocation.
 - Spermaceti was historically used in oil lamps, lubricants, and candles.

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- Produces **ambergris**, a valuable substance formed in the intestines around undigested matter (often squid beaks).
- **Distribution & Habitat**
 - One of the widest global distributions of any marine mammal.
 - Found in all deep oceans, from the equator to the edges of pack ice in the Arctic and Antarctic.
- **Social Behaviour**
 - Highly social mammals that live in pods.
 - Communicate using a series of clicks called **codas**, each with a distinct purpose.
 - Lifespan: Up to **60 years**.

Conservation Status

- **IUCN Red List: Vulnerable**
- **CITES: Appendix I** (highest level of protection)
- **Major Threats**
 - Historical commercial whaling (significantly reduced populations).
 - entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes, noise pollution, and climate change impacts on prey distribution.

Implications of the Discovery

- **Scientific**
 - Enhances understanding of sperm whale social dynamics and intra-species interactions.
 - Provides valuable data for behavioural ecology and marine mammal research.
- **Conservation**
 - Reinforces the need for continued protection of deep-ocean habitats.
 - Highlights the importance of non-invasive research techniques (camera technology) in studying elusive species.
- **For India**
 - India's long coastline and EEZ host diverse marine mammals.
 - Such studies contribute to global knowledge that can inform India's marine conservation policies and Marine Protected Areas.



UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: Sperm Whale, Spermaceti, Ambergris, Codas, University of St Andrews Discovery
- Data: Largest toothed whale, Largest brain in animal kingdom, IUCN - Vulnerable, CITES Appendix I
- Related: Marine Biodiversity, Deep Ocean Ecosystems, Marine Mammal Conservation

GS-3 (Environment & Biodiversity)

- Marine ecosystem conservation and flagship species protection
- Behavioural ecology of marine mammals

GS-3 (Science & Technology)

- Advances in underwater observation technology for wildlife research

Essay / Interview

- “Unravelling the Mysteries of the Deep: New Insights into Sperm Whale Behaviour”
- “Protecting Marine Megafauna in an Era of Climate Change and Human Activity”

MCQs

1. With reference to the recent observation of sperm whales, consider the following statements:
2. Researchers from the University of St Andrews captured the first footage of sperm whales headbutting.
3. The sperm whale has the largest brain of any animal on the planet.
4. It is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The waxy substance found in the head of the sperm whale, historically used in lamps and candles, is known as:
(a) Ambergris



- (b) Spermaceti
- (c) Blubber
- (d) Baleen

Answer: (b)

3. Sperm whales primarily communicate using:

- (a) Songs
- (b) Series of clicks called codas
- (c) Bioluminescence
- (d) Visual signals

Answer: (b)

4. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of the sperm whale?

- (a) Enormous square head
- (b) Narrow lower jaw
- (c) Paddle-like flippers
- (d) Filter feeding with baleen plates

Answer: (d)

Mains Questions

1. "New behavioural observations of sperm whales highlight the complexity of marine mammal social structures." Discuss the ecological significance of such discoveries and the threats faced by these species. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the importance of non-invasive research techniques in studying deep-ocean species like the sperm whale and their contribution to marine conservation. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. "Marine megafauna such as sperm whales serve as indicators of ocean health." Analyse this statement and suggest measures for their protection in the context of climate change and human activities. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** "Giants of the Deep: Understanding, Conserving and Learning from Sperm Whales in a Changing Ocean."



India Hosts 12th Steering Committee Meeting of GlobE Network in New Delhi

Why in News?

- India successfully hosted the **12th Steering Committee Meeting** of the **Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network)** in New Delhi.
- The meeting brought together senior anti-corruption officials from member countries to discuss enhanced cooperation, capacity building, and strategies to combat transnational corruption.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs is the central authority for the GlobE Network in India, while the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** and the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** serve as its member authorities.

Key Details of the GlobE Network

- **Establishment**
 - Launched under the **Riyadh Initiative** during Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency.
 - Operates under the framework of the **United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)**.
- **Membership**
 - Comprises **135 member countries** and **250 member authorities**.
 - Includes **18 observers**, such as EUROPOL, the World Bank, and the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities.
- **Governance**
 - Governed by a **Steering Committee** consisting of one Chair, one Vice-Chair, and 13 members.
 - Provides strategic leadership and direction to the Network.
 - Supported by the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, which serves as the Network's Secretariat.
- **Core Functions**
 - Facilitates **direct, practitioner-level cooperation** among anti-corruption agencies for investigation, prosecution, and asset recovery.
 - Complements formal legal assistance mechanisms by enabling faster and more flexible agency-to-agency engagement.
 - Focuses on sharing best practices, intelligence, and operational support in combating corruption.

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Significance of the Initiative

- **Global Anti-Corruption Efforts**
 - Strengthens international collaboration against transnational corruption and money laundering.
 - Promotes faster information exchange and joint operations beyond traditional Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs).
- **For India**
 - Enhances India's role as a proactive player in global anti-corruption architecture.
 - Supports the government's zero-tolerance policy on corruption and efforts to recover proceeds of crime.
 - Provides a platform for CBI and ED to build stronger operational ties with international counterparts.
- **Broader Impact**
 - Aligns with India's commitment to UNCAC and G20 anti-corruption agenda.
 - Reinforces the importance of multilateral platforms in addressing cross-border crimes.

UPSC CSE & State Relevance

Prelims

- Key terms: GlobE Network, Riyadh Initiative, UNCAC, Steering Committee, UNODC
- Data: 135 member countries, 250 member authorities, 18 observers; Hosted by India (12th Steering Committee Meeting)
- Related: Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Enforcement Directorate (ED), G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group

GS-2 (IR)

- India's engagement in global anti-corruption mechanisms
- Multilateral cooperation under UNCAC

GS-3 (Internal Security)

- Combating transnational corruption, money laundering, and asset recovery

Essay / Interview

- "Global Cooperation Against Corruption: The Role of Platforms like the GlobE Network"
- "From Domestic Enforcement to International Collaboration: India's Anti-Corruption Strategy"



MCQs

1. With reference to the GlobE Network, consider the following statements:
2. It was established under the Riyadh Initiative during Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency.
3. It operates under the framework of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).
4. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) serves as its Secretariat.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (d)

2. The GlobE Network primarily aims to facilitate:
 - (a) Trade liberalisation among member countries
 - (b) Direct cooperation among anti-corruption law enforcement authorities
 - (c) Climate change mitigation strategies
 - (d) Space research collaboration

Answer: (b)

3. In the context of the GlobE Network, which of the following Indian agencies are member authorities?
 1. Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)
 2. Enforcement Directorate (ED)
 3. Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (b)

4. The Steering Committee of the GlobE Network consists of:
 - (a) One Chair, one Vice-Chair, and 13 members
 - (b) Only the Chair and Secretariat
 - (c) All member countries



(d) Only UNODC representatives

Answer: (a)

Mains Questions

1. “The GlobE Network represents a significant step in strengthening global cooperation against transnational corruption.” Discuss its structure, functions, and relevance for India. (15 marks / 250 words)
2. Examine the role of platforms like the GlobE Network in complementing formal legal assistance mechanisms for asset recovery and anti-corruption enforcement. (10 marks / 150 words)
3. “Effective anti-corruption strategies require both domestic enforcement and international collaboration.” Analyse this statement in the context of India’s participation in the GlobE Network. (15 marks / 250 words)
4. **Essay (250 marks)** “Combating Corruption in a Globalised World: The Imperative of Multilateral Law Enforcement Cooperation.”

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