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Saturday, October 17, 2026

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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

India Calls for Urgent United Nations Reforms and Stronger Global South Representation at 80th General Assembly Session

Recent Developments:

- **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar**, addressing the **80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** in September 2025, called for urgent institutional reforms, stronger multilateral cooperation and decisive international action against terrorism.
- India emphasised that the **United Nations (UN)** must overcome institutional paralysis, address contemporary geopolitical challenges and provide greater representation to developing countries, particularly the **Global South**.
- The **80th UNGA session**, held under the presidency of **Annalena Baerbock of Germany**, adopted the theme **"Better Together: 80 Years and More for Peace, Development and Human Rights."**
- The developments renewed attention to **UN Security Council (UNSC) reform**, equitable global governance, sustainable development and India's demand for permanent UNSC membership.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA):

Composition and Institutional Framework:

- The **UNGA**, established under the **UN Charter (1945)**, is the principal **deliberative, policymaking and representative organ** of the United Nations.
- It comprises all **193 UN member states**, each possessing **one vote**, irrespective of geographical size, population or economic strength.
    - The **Holy See and the State of Palestine** hold permanent observer status without voting rights.
- The Assembly provides a universal platform for discussing **international peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, international law and institutional governance**.
- Its headquarters is located in **New York, United States**, and its presidency rotates among regional groups.

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Sessions and Organisational Structure:

- **Regular Session:** Convened annually in September, with the **General Debate** allowing national leaders to present their positions on international developments.
- **Special Sessions:** Convened to address specific issues, while **Emergency Special Sessions** facilitate urgent consideration of threats to international peace and security.
- **Six Main Committees** examine substantive matters:
    - **First Committee:** Disarmament and International Security.
    - **Second Committee:** Economic and Financial.
    - **Third Committee:** Social, Humanitarian and Cultural.
    - **Fourth Committee:** Special Political and Decolonization.
    - **Fifth Committee:** Administrative and Budgetary.
    - **Sixth Committee:** Legal.
- The **UNGA President**, elected for each annual session, presides over proceedings, facilitates negotiations and coordinates Assembly activities.

Voting and Decision-Making:

- Under **Article 18 of the UN Charter**, important questions require a **two-thirds majority of members present and voting**.
    - These include **peace and security recommendations, admission of new members, budgetary matters and election of non-permanent UNSC members**.
- Other questions generally require a **simple majority of members present and voting**, although many resolutions are adopted through consensus.
- **UNGA resolutions** are generally recommendatory rather than legally binding on member states, although certain internal decisions, including budgetary allocations, have operative institutional effects.
- Unlike the UNSC, the General Assembly has **no permanent-member veto system**.

Powers and Functions of the General Assembly:

Administrative and Institutional Powers:

- **Budgetary Authority:** Approves the UN regular budget and determines the financial contributions assessed upon member states.
- **Electoral Functions:** Elects the **10 non-permanent UNSC members**, members of the Economic and Social Council and judges of the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** jointly with the Security Council.
- **Secretary-General Appointment:** Appoints the UN Secretary-General **on the recommendation of the Security Council**, under **Article 97**.
- **Institutional Development:** Establishes subsidiary organs, initiates studies and promotes international cooperation across political, economic, social and humanitarian fields.

Peace, Security and International Law:

- Under **Articles 10–14**, the Assembly discusses international disputes, promotes peaceful settlement and makes recommendations subject to Charter limitations.
- **Uniting for Peace Resolution (377 A(V), 1950):**
    - Enables the General Assembly to consider collective measures when the Security Council fails to discharge its primary responsibility because of disagreement among permanent members.
    - The Assembly may recommend collective action but **cannot independently impose binding Chapter VII enforcement measures**.
- Under **Article 96**, the UNGA may request **advisory opinions from the ICJ** on legal questions.

Major Historical Contributions:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Established foundational international human-rights principles.
- **Decolonization Declaration (1960):** Advanced the principle of self-determination and independence for colonial territories.
- **Millennium Declaration (2000):** Provided the framework for the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**.
- **2030 Agenda (2015):** Adopted the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and 169 associated targets.

General Debate and the 80th UNGA Session:

Purpose and Proceedings:

- The **General Debate** is the annual high-level diplomatic forum where heads of state, heads of government and ministers articulate national priorities.
- **Brazil traditionally speaks first**, followed by the **United States** as the host country, with subsequent speakers arranged according to established protocol.
- The **80th General Debate**, conducted during **23–29 September 2025**, focused on multilateral cooperation, global conflicts, development challenges and institutional renewal.
- Its theme highlighted the need to strengthen the UN's relevance after **80 years of its establishment in 1945**.

India's Position on United Nations Reforms:

Institutional Credibility and Multilateralism:

- India argued that the UN faces a **crisis of credibility** because its institutional structure and decision-making mechanisms inadequately reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.
- **Security Council deadlock**, inadequate representation and competing national interests have weakened collective responses to international crises.
- India advocated **reformed multilateralism**, emphasising representative institutions, transparent decision-making and equitable participation by developing countries.

International Peace and Security:

- **Ukraine and Middle East conflicts** demonstrate the limitations of existing conflict-resolution mechanisms and the consequences of geopolitical polarisation.
- India emphasised **dialogue, diplomacy and constructive engagement** as essential instruments for peaceful dispute resolution.
- Countries maintaining communication with opposing parties can contribute to mediation, humanitarian assistance and negotiated settlements.

Terrorism and Collective Security:

- India identified **cross-border terrorism, extremist networks and state support for terrorism** as serious threats to international security.
- It demanded stronger international cooperation to:
  - **Disrupt terrorist financing**, strengthen sanctions implementation and prevent safe havens.
  - Improve intelligence cooperation, accountability and coordination against terrorist organisations and their supporters.
- India's approach emphasises **zero tolerance for terrorism**, without differentiating between acceptable and unacceptable terrorist activities.

Development, Climate and Economic Governance:

- **SDG Implementation:** Slow progress, inadequate development financing and unequal access to technology threaten achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Climate Justice:** Developed countries must demonstrate credible climate commitments, provide financial and technological support and recognise **common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)**.

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- **Economic Fragmentation:** Tariff barriers, technology restrictions, supply-chain concentration and constraints on labour mobility undermine inclusive globalisation.
- India called for **equitable economic cooperation**, resilient supply chains and greater policy space for developing economies.

United Nations Security Council Reform:

Existing Structure and Representation Deficit:

- The **UNSC** consists of **15 members**, including **five permanent members (P5)**—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States—and **10 elected non-permanent members** serving two-year terms.
- The **P5 possess veto power** over substantive decisions, while non-permanent members do not.
- Its permanent membership largely reflects the **post-Second World War power structure**, creating representation gaps for **Africa, Latin America and developing Asia**.

India's Reform Demands:

- **Membership Expansion:** Increase both permanent and non-permanent seats to reflect contemporary geopolitical and demographic realities.
- **Equitable Representation:** Ensure stronger participation of **Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Global South** in global security decisions.
- **Working-Methods Reform:** Improve transparency, accountability and consultation with countries affected by Council decisions.
- **Veto Reform:** Address the unequal distribution and use of veto power, which can obstruct collective action during major crises.
- India supports **text-based negotiations** within the UN's **Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN)** framework.

India's Claim to Permanent Membership:

- **Demographic Significance:** India represents a substantial proportion of the world's population and the developing world's interests.
- **Peacekeeping Contributions:** India has a long history of participation in **UN peacekeeping operations**.
- **International Responsibilities:** India contributes to humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, development partnerships and maritime security.
- **Diplomatic Engagement:** India's role in the **G20, BRICS, G4 and Global South initiatives** strengthens its claim to greater institutional responsibility.

Challenges and Way Forward:

Obstacles to Reform:

- **P5 Resistance:** Permanent members differ over proposed changes affecting Council composition, influence and veto arrangements.
- **Regional Disagreements:** Competing proposals regarding permanent membership, regional representation and tenure complicate negotiations.
- **Charter Amendment:** Under **Article 108**, amendments require approval by two-thirds of UNGA members and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, **including all five permanent UNSC members**.

Priority Reform Measures:

- **Representative Security Council:** Expand membership while safeguarding institutional effectiveness and decision-making capacity.
- **Stronger General Assembly:** Improve implementation monitoring, transparency and coordination with other UN organs.
- **Development-Centred Multilateralism:** Strengthen financing, technology access, climate adaptation and SDG delivery.
- **Effective Collective Security:** Improve conflict prevention, peacebuilding, counterterrorism cooperation and humanitarian responses.
- **Global South Participation:** Increase developing countries' influence in international financial, technological and security governance.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important UN Charter Provisions:

- **Article 10:** General Assembly's general discussion and recommendation powers.
- **Article 18:** Voting procedures and majority requirements.
- **Article 22:** Establishment of subsidiary organs.
- **Article 24:** Primary responsibility of the UNSC for international peace and security.
- **Article 27:** Security Council voting procedures, including permanent-member concurrence for substantive decisions.
- **Article 96:** Authority to request ICJ advisory opinions.
- **Article 108:** Procedure for amending the UN Charter.

Important Reform Initiatives and Groupings:

- **G4 Countries:** India, Brazil, Germany and Japan support expansion of permanent and non-permanent UNSC membership.
- **L.69 Group:** A cross-regional grouping of developing countries advocating comprehensive Security Council reform.
- **African Common Position:** Expressed through the **Ezulwini Consensus (2005)** and **Sirte Declaration (2005)**, seeking at least two permanent and five non-permanent African seats in an expanded Council.
- **Uniting for Consensus Group:** Opposes the creation of additional individual permanent seats and favours alternative elected-membership arrangements.
- **Pact for the Future (2024):** Adopted at the **UN Summit of the Future**, committing member states to revitalise multilateral cooperation and advance Security Council reform.
- **UN80 Initiative (2025):** A UN reform initiative aimed at improving institutional efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness.

UPSC Mains Relevance:

- **Key Analytical Dimension:** The central challenge is balancing **representativeness, sovereign equality, institutional effectiveness and geopolitical realities** while reforming the United Nations.

Kigali Amendment Completes Ten Years as India Faces Rising Cooling Demand and Urgent Climate Mitigation Challenges

Recent Developments:

- The **Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol** completed **10 years on 15 October 2026**, marking a decade of international efforts to reduce **hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)** used in refrigeration and air-conditioning.
- Full implementation could prevent approximately **0.3°C–0.5°C of global warming by 2100**, contributing to the temperature goals of the **Paris Agreement (2015)**.
- According to the **International Energy Agency (IEA)**, India's cooling demand could **more than double by 2035**, making refrigerant transition and energy-efficient cooling critical climate priorities.
- The anniversary highlights the importance of **low-global-warming-potential refrigerants, appliance efficiency, refrigerant recovery and international climate finance**.

Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol:

Background and Objectives:

- The **Montreal Protocol (1987)** is a legally binding international agreement designed to phase out **ozone-depleting substances (ODS)**, including chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons.
- **Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs)** emerged as alternatives because they do not significantly deplete stratospheric ozone, but many possess extremely high **global warming potential (GWP)**.
- **Micronesia and Mauritius** proposed international HFC controls in 2009, helping initiate negotiations under the Montreal Protocol.
- The **Kigali Amendment**, adopted on **15 October 2016 in Kigali, Rwanda**, entered into force on **1 January 2019**.
- It establishes legally binding schedules to **phase down HFC production and consumption**, rather than requiring their complete elimination.

Climate Significance:

- Many HFCs have **hundreds to thousands of times greater warming potential than carbon dioxide**, measured over a 100-year period.
- The amendment addresses **climate change**, whereas the original Montreal Protocol primarily addressed **stratospheric ozone depletion**.
- Combining HFC reductions with **energy-efficient cooling technologies** could approximately double the climate benefits compared with refrigerant transition alone.
- Its implementation supports the Paris Agreement's objective of limiting global temperature rise to **well below 2°C**, while pursuing efforts towards **1.5°C**.

Cooling Sector and Climate Change:

Sources of Cooling-Related Emissions:

- **Direct Emissions:** Refrigerant leakage during equipment operation, servicing and disposal releases high-GWP gases into the atmosphere.
- **Indirect Emissions:** Electricity consumption by air conditioners, refrigerators and cooling systems generates emissions when power is produced from fossil fuels.

- **Integrated Mitigation:** Low-GWP refrigerants reduce direct emissions, while efficient equipment, better building design and cleaner electricity reduce indirect emissions.

India's Growing Cooling Demand:

- According to the **IEA (2026)**, cooling accounts for **slightly more than 10% of India's annual electricity consumption**.
- During extremely hot summer nights, **air conditioners may account for nearly one-third of electricity consumption**, creating substantial pressure on power infrastructure.
- Under existing policy settings, India's cooling demand is projected to **more than double by 2035**, driven by urbanisation, rising incomes and increasing temperatures.
- **Urban heat islands**, rising nighttime temperatures and expanding air-conditioner ownership intensify electricity demand and grid-management challenges.
- Greater cooling efficiency can reduce **peak electricity demand, household expenditure, generation-capacity requirements and greenhouse gas emissions**.

India's Commitments Under the Kigali Amendment:

Ratification and Phase-Down Schedule:

- India approved ratification on **18 August 2021** and formally ratified the amendment on **27 September 2021**.
- India follows a differentiated schedule recognising the development needs of countries with growing cooling requirements.
- **2028:** Freeze HFC production and consumption at the agreed baseline.
- **2032:** Reduce HFC production and consumption by **10%** below the baseline.
- **2037:** Achieve a **20% reduction**, followed by **30% in 2042** and **85% by 2047**.
- The **baseline** for India's HFC phase-down is calculated using average HFC consumption during **2024–2026**, with an additional allowance linked to the hydrochlorofluorocarbon baseline.

Policy and Industrial Implications:

- Cooling equipment purchased before the initial reductions may remain operational for decades, making **early efficiency improvements** economically and environmentally important.
- Manufacturers must adopt **alternative refrigerants, redesigned equipment, improved servicing practices and trained technicians**.
- Stronger **minimum energy performance standards** can prevent inefficient appliances from entering domestic markets and creating long-term electricity costs.
- Transition planning must consider **affordability, refrigerant safety, technological availability and industrial competitiveness**.

India's Cooling Action Plan:

Objectives and Implementation:

- The **India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)**, launched in **2019** by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**, provides a long-term framework for sustainable cooling.
- Its principal objectives, using the **2017–18 baseline**, include:
    - Reducing **cooling demand across sectors by 20–25% by 2037–38**.
    - Reducing **refrigerant demand by 25–30% by 2037–38**.
    - Reducing **cooling energy requirements by 25–40% by 2037–38**.

- Training and certifying **100,000 refrigeration and air-conditioning servicing technicians by 2022–23**.

- The plan promotes **passive cooling, energy-efficient buildings, improved cold chains, research and development, and alternative refrigerants**.
- The **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** supports efficient cooling through **Standards and Labelling**, including star ratings for appliances.

Implementation Challenges and Climate Finance:

Major Challenges:

- **Incomplete Participation:** Universal ratification remains necessary to ensure comprehensive global HFC controls and prevent regulatory gaps.
- **Refrigerant Banks:** HFCs contained in existing equipment can escape during servicing or disposal, requiring recovery, recycling, reclamation and safe destruction.
- **Technological Constraints:** Alternative refrigerants may involve higher initial costs, flammability concerns or specialised equipment requirements.
- **Cooling Inequality:** Sustainable cooling policies must preserve access to thermal comfort, food storage and medical refrigeration for vulnerable populations.

Multilateral Fund and Financial Support:

- The **Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol**, established in **1990** and operational since **1991**, assists eligible developing countries in meeting agreed incremental compliance costs.
- It is financed by developed-country parties and supports **technology conversion, capacity building, institutional strengthening and technical assistance**.
- The Fund also facilitates the **HFC phase-down**, helping manufacturers transition towards climate-friendly refrigerants.
- Strengthening financing and technology transfer is essential for equitable implementation across developing economies.

Montreal Protocol: Success and Future Lessons:

Reasons for Its Effectiveness:

- **Binding Reduction Schedules:** Predictable deadlines encouraged industries to develop and commercialise safer substitutes.
- **Scientific Assessment:** Expert panels periodically evaluate environmental impacts, technological alternatives and economic feasibility.
- **Differentiated Responsibilities:** Developing countries receive longer compliance timelines and financial assistance.
- **Progressive Strengthening:** Controls became more stringent as scientific evidence improved and alternative technologies emerged.
- Global action has eliminated approximately **99% of controlled ozone-depleting substances**, supporting the gradual recovery of the ozone layer.

Applicability to Other Climate Pollutants:

- The principal **short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs)** include **methane, black carbon, HFCs and tropospheric ozone**, which contribute significantly to near-term warming.

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- **Methane**, with an atmospheric lifetime of approximately **12 years**, can be reduced through leak detection, equipment improvements and restrictions on routine venting and flaring.
- **Black Carbon:** Reductions require cleaner household fuels, improved diesel-engine emission controls and measures against incomplete combustion.
- **India's Challenge:** Methane mitigation in livestock and agriculture must balance climate objectives with **farmers' livelihoods, food security and technological feasibility**.
- A Montreal-style framework could offer lessons for other pollutants, although differences in emission sources, monitoring and economic impacts require **sector-specific approaches**.

Way Forward:

Priority Measures:

- **Accelerate Refrigerant Transition:** Promote low-GWP alternatives while ensuring technical safety and affordability.
- **Improve Cooling Efficiency:** Strengthen appliance standards, passive cooling infrastructure and building energy codes.
- **Manage Refrigerant Banks:** Establish recovery, recycling and environmentally sound disposal systems.
- **Expand Climate Finance:** Improve access to affordable technology, technical assistance and industrial-transition funding.
- **Strengthen Electricity Planning:** Integrate cooling-demand forecasts with renewable energy, storage and demand-side management.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important International Agreements:

- **Vienna Convention (1985):** Framework for international cooperation to protect the ozone layer.
- **Montreal Protocol (1987):** Legally binding agreement controlling ozone-depleting substances; entered into force in **1989**.
- **Kigali Amendment (2016):** Introduced HFC phase-down obligations; entered into force in **2019**.
- **Paris Agreement (2015):** International climate agreement under the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**.

Important Concepts and Distinctions:

- **Ozone Depletion Potential (ODP):** Measures a substance's capacity to destroy stratospheric ozone relative to a reference substance.
- **Global Warming Potential (GWP):** Compares the heat-trapping effect of a greenhouse gas with carbon dioxide over a specified period.
- **CFCs and HCFCs:** Ozone-depleting refrigerants controlled under the Montreal Protocol; many also contribute to global warming.
- **HFCs:** Generally have negligible ozone-depletion potential but may possess high global warming potential.
- **Natural Refrigerants:** Include **ammonia, carbon dioxide and hydrocarbons**, whose suitability depends on application-specific safety and engineering requirements.
- **Phase-Out versus Phase-Down:** Phase-out targets elimination of controlled uses, whereas phase-down requires progressive reductions without necessarily reaching zero.

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UPSC Examination Relevance:

- **GS Paper II:** International environmental agreements, multilateral institutions and global environmental governance.
- **GS Paper III:** Climate change, environmental conservation, energy efficiency, sustainable industrial development and technological adaptation.
- **Prelims Focus:** Adoption and enforcement dates, HFC characteristics, India's reduction schedule, Multilateral Fund and India Cooling Action Plan.
- **Mains Analytical Dimension:** Integrating **refrigerant transition, energy efficiency, climate finance and equitable access to cooling** is essential for climate-resilient development.

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India Launches Public Portal to Examine Demographic Changes Amid Border Security and Population Governance Concerns

Recent Developments:

- On **14 October 2026**, the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** launched a public portal for the **High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes (HLCDC)** to collect information from government departments, state governments, non-governmental organisations, institutions and individuals.
- The portal invites evidence concerning demographic changes, their underlying causes and abnormal settlement patterns, preferably using data from **2011 onwards**.
- The committee was constituted on **26 May 2026**, under the chairpersonship of **Justice Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar (Retd.)**, to examine demographic changes associated with illegal immigration and other factors.
- The initiative connects **border management, migration governance, population stabilisation, national security and evidence-based policymaking**.

High-Level Committee on Demographic Changes:

Constitution and Mandate:

- The Union Government constituted the **HLCDC** following the announcement of a **High-powered Demography Mission** on 15 August 2025 and subsequent approval of the proposal by the Union Cabinet.
- The committee includes the **Census Commissioner**, former civil servants and police officials, and economist **Dr. Shamika Ravi**.
- Its principal terms of reference include:
    - **Assessment of demographic changes:** Examine changes arising from illegal immigration, fertility variations, cross-border movements, economic opportunities and socio-environmental factors.
    - **Identification of underlying causes:** Investigate abnormal settlement patterns, planned migration and other factors contributing to local demographic changes.
    - **Institutional recommendations:** Propose mechanisms for border management, population stabilisation and identification systems.
    - **Immigration management:** Recommend a lawful, fair and time-bound system for identifying, detaining and deporting illegal immigrants.
- The committee is expected to provide an evidence-based assessment that can guide administrative, legislative and policy responses.

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Public Consultation Portal:

- The portal enables **central ministries, state and Union Territory governments, NGOs, institutions and individuals** to submit relevant information.
- Its intended contribution is to improve the availability of local-level evidence and identify demographic changes that may not be adequately captured by national averages.
- Effective assessment requires **transparent methodologies, reliable data, privacy safeguards and verification of submitted information**.

Demographic Trends in India:

Fertility and Birth Rates:

- **Total Fertility Rate (TFR):** The fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), conducted during 2019–2021, recorded India's TFR at approximately **2.0 children per woman**, below the conventional replacement level of **2.1**.
    - This indicates that India has reached below-replacement fertility at the national level, although substantial differences remain among states and population groups.
- **Crude Birth Rate:** The Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2024 recorded a decline in India's crude birth rate from **21 births per 1,000 population in 2014 to 18.3 in 2024**.
    - Urbanisation, women's education, delayed marriage, improved healthcare and access to family planning contribute to changing fertility and birth patterns.
- **Population Stabilisation:** Below-replacement fertility does not imply immediate population decline because population momentum, age structure, mortality and migration continue to influence population growth.

Census and Demographic Data:

- India's last completed decennial population census was conducted in **2011**, while the next census is scheduled for **2027**.
- The **Census 2027** exercise is being conducted in two phases, with the first phase covering house listing and housing census and the second covering population enumeration.
- The absence of a recently completed decennial census has increased the importance of alternative sources, including the SRS, civil registration data and administrative records.
- These sources have different coverage and purposes and cannot independently replace a comprehensive population census.

Border-Related Demographic Challenges:

India–Bangladesh Border:

- India shares a **4,096.7 km international border** with Bangladesh across West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The long border, riverine terrain, densely populated settlements and cross-border social and economic connections create complex requirements for surveillance and legitimate movement management.
- The **Assam Movement (1979–1985)** was a major popular movement led by the All Assam Students' Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad against illegal immigration and in support of identifying foreign nationals.

India–Myanmar Border:

- India shares a **1,643 km border** with Myanmar across Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram.
- Political instability following the **2021 Myanmar military coup** contributed to refugee movements into India's northeastern states, particularly Manipur and Mizoram.
- The situation requires balancing border security with humanitarian considerations, refugee protection, local stability and the management of undocumented cross-border movements.

India–Pakistan Border:

- India shares a **3,323 km border** with Pakistan, extending across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.
- Cross-border infiltration, terrorism, arms smuggling and other security threats necessitate coordinated surveillance, intelligence sharing and effective border infrastructure.

Major Concerns Associated with Demographic Change:

National Security and Social Cohesion:

- **National security:** Unauthorised cross-border movement may create risks involving infiltration, trafficking, organised crime and border instability, although these risks must be assessed through verified evidence.
- **Social harmony:** Changes in population composition may intensify identity-based political mobilisation and competition over land, employment and public resources.
- **Indigenous and tribal communities:** Communities in northeastern India have expressed concerns regarding cultural identity, land rights and political representation.
- **Resource allocation:** Rapid population changes can increase demand for housing, healthcare, education, welfare services and employment, particularly in districts with limited infrastructure.

Distinguishing Demographic Change from Migration:

- Demographic change may result from **fertility, mortality, ageing, internal migration, international migration and changes in population distribution**.
- An observed increase in a community's population does not, by itself, establish illegal immigration or a deliberate demographic alteration.
- Reliable analysis must distinguish natural population growth from migration and account for changes in registration, enumeration, geographic boundaries and data quality.

Constitutional and Administrative Challenges:

Data Reliability and Federal Coordination:

- **Data limitations:** Incomplete population records and differences between administrative datasets may complicate district-level demographic comparisons.
- **Federal coordination:** The Union and state governments must coordinate immigration enforcement, census operations, civil registration and local development planning.
- **Border management:** Difficult terrain, riverine stretches and unfenced sections require a combination of physical infrastructure, surveillance technology and intelligence-based monitoring.

Human Rights and Constitutional Safeguards:

- **Article 14** guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to every person within India's territory.
- **Article 21** protects life and personal liberty, requiring that any deprivation follow a procedure established by law.
- **Article 19** provides specified freedoms to citizens, subject to constitutional restrictions.
- Identification, detention and deportation must comply with applicable immigration laws, procedural safeguards and judicial oversight.
- **Privacy and data protection** are essential when collecting sensitive information about individuals, households, ethnicity, religion or migration status.

Way Forward:

Evidence-Based and Inclusive Governance:

- **Strengthen data systems:** Integrate census findings, civil registration records and verified administrative information while maintaining clear standards for data quality.
- **Improve border infrastructure:** Expand appropriate fencing, surveillance, border roads, floodlighting and inter-agency coordination, particularly in vulnerable stretches.
- **Ensure lawful immigration management:** Establish transparent identification procedures, verification mechanisms and time-bound decisions consistent with applicable law.
- **Protect vulnerable communities:** Strengthen land-rights enforcement, access to essential services and consultation with indigenous and tribal communities.
- **Promote population stabilisation:** Prioritise women's education, reproductive healthcare, voluntary family planning and public awareness rather than coercive population-control measures.
- **Strengthen public consultation:** Use the committee's portal to gather verifiable local evidence while preventing misinformation, discriminatory profiling and unsupported allegations.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Facts and Constitutional Provisions:

- **National Family Health Survey-5:** Recorded India's total fertility rate at approximately **2.0** during 2019–2021.
- **Sample Registration System 2024:** Recorded a crude birth rate of **18.3 per 1,000 population**.
- **Census 2027:** The next decennial census is scheduled for 2027, following the last completed census in 2011.
- **Article 14:** Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty.
- **Article 246 and the Seventh Schedule:** Provide the constitutional framework for legislative distribution of powers, including relevant Union and State responsibilities.
- **Assam Accord (1985):** An important political agreement addressing the issue of foreigners in Assam, with provisions relating to the identification of persons entering the state during specified periods.

UPSC Examination Relevance:

- **Essay:** Migration, national identity, social cohesion and the balance between security and human rights.
- **Core analytical argument:** Effective demographic governance requires **reliable data, lawful immigration management, cooperative federalism and protection of constitutional rights**, rather than conclusions based solely on changes in population composition.

FAO's State of the World's Forests 2026 Urges Landscape Restoration to Tackle Degradation, Biodiversity Loss and Climate Risks

Recent Developments:

- The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** released the *State of the World's Forests (SOFO) 2026* report on 28 September 2026 during the 28th Session of the Committee on Forestry and the 10th World Forest Week.
- The report, titled **"Restoring Forests and Landscapes: The Way Forward for a Sustainable Future,"** examines how large-scale restoration can support biodiversity conservation, climate action, food security, rural livelihoods and sustainable development.
- It identifies four mutually reinforcing pathways for accelerating restoration: strengthening people's rights, planning at the landscape scale, mobilising suitable finance and developing coherent policies and institutions.

About the State of the World's Forests Report:

Nature and Scope:

- **SOFO** is FAO's biennial flagship publication examining global forest conditions, management, governance and their environmental, social and economic contributions.
- The 2026 edition focuses on **Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR)**, moving beyond isolated tree-planting programmes towards the recovery of interconnected ecosystems, including forests, agricultural land, grasslands and watersheds.
- It draws on evidence from the **Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2025**, which tracks changes in forest resources between 1990 and 2025, alongside international restoration commitments and country experiences.

Forest and Landscape Restoration:

- **Forest and Landscape Restoration** is the process of reversing land degradation while improving ecological functions, biodiversity, productivity and human well-being across entire landscapes.
- Restoration may involve natural regeneration, assisted regeneration, native-species planting, agroforestry, soil and water conservation, mangrove recovery and sustainable forest management.
- Unlike conventional afforestation, FLR does not treat tree-cover expansion as the sole objective; it seeks to recover ecosystem functions while balancing conservation, livelihoods and productive land use.

Key Global Findings:

Forest Cover and Ecological Importance:

- Global forests cover approximately **4.14 billion hectares**, equivalent to around **32% of the Earth's land area**, store nearly **714 gigatonnes of carbon** and support up to **80% of terrestrial biodiversity**.
- Forests also support food security and livelihoods, with a substantial share of the global population depending on forests and trees for food, fuel, materials, income and ecosystem services.

Degradation and Forest Loss:

- Approximately **489 million hectares of forest** were lost through deforestation between 1990 and 2025, while more than **460 million hectares of forest land** are degraded.
- Total degraded terrestrial land is estimated at **1.56 billion hectares**, reflecting pressures from land-use change, resource extraction, agricultural expansion and rising demand for natural resources.
- Naturally regenerating forests remain central to global ecological resilience, but their area has declined substantially over recent decades, weakening habitat connectivity, carbon storage and ecosystem stability.

Climate-Related Disturbances:

- Forest fires affect approximately **127 million hectares annually**, while insects, diseases and extreme weather events cause additional damage.
- Climate change intensifies drought, heat stress and fire risks, creating feedback loops in which forest degradation reduces carbon absorption and increases ecosystem vulnerability.
- The restoration challenge is therefore not limited to expanding tree cover; it also requires protecting existing forests, improving resilience and preventing further degradation.

Economic Significance:

- Under favourable conditions, restoration can generate returns of up to **$30 for every $1 invested**, although actual returns depend on ecosystem type, implementation quality and the time horizon.
- Restoration improves soil fertility, water regulation and biodiversity, while supporting employment, agricultural productivity, rural incomes and climate adaptation.
- The report estimates that failing to restore degraded ecosystems imposes substantial economic costs, whereas restoring degraded land can generate major benefits through healthier ecosystems and more resilient production systems.

India and Forest Restoration:

India's Reported Restoration Efforts:

- India is reported in the supplied FRA 2025 figures as having **9.8 million hectares under active forest restoration**, ahead of China at 7.9 million hectares and Ethiopia at 5.0 million hectares.
- India, China, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Türkiye together account for approximately **70% of the global restoration area** represented in the cited reporting dataset.
- India has also reported **18.9 million hectares of forest and landscape areas under restoration** through its seventh national report to the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**. This figure belongs to a separate reporting framework and should not be directly compared with FRA figures without checking definitions and reporting periods.

Relevance for India:

- Forest restoration supports India's climate commitments, biodiversity conservation, watershed management, land degradation neutrality and livelihood security for forest-dependent communities.
- **Compensatory afforestation, agroforestry, social forestry, community participation and joint forest management** can contribute to restoration when they improve ecological quality rather than merely increasing planted area.
- Restoration must be adapted to India's ecological diversity, including Himalayan forests, dry deciduous landscapes, Western Ghats, mangroves and degraded lands in arid and semi-arid regions.

Major Challenges Identified:

Ecological and Monitoring Gaps:

- **Area-centric measurement** often prioritises hectares planted over survival rates, native biodiversity, soil health, water availability, carbon permanence and community benefits.
- Inconsistent definitions, incomplete national reporting and weak long-term monitoring make it difficult to compare restoration outcomes across countries and ecosystems.
- Plantations of unsuitable or monoculture species may fail to reproduce the ecological functions of natural forests and can create additional risks in water-stressed landscapes.

Governance and Financing Constraints:

- **Insecure land tenure**, conflicting subsidies and competing land uses can discourage local communities from investing in long-term ecosystem stewardship.
- Restoration commitments frequently lack predictable multi-year funding for maintenance, monitoring and adaptive management after planting.
- Poor coordination among forestry, agriculture, infrastructure, water and rural-development agencies can undermine landscape-level planning.

Social and Livelihood Concerns:

- Excluding Indigenous Peoples and local communities from decision-making can create conflicts over access to land, forest products and customary rights.
- Restrictions imposed without alternative livelihood arrangements may disproportionately affect forest-dependent households, women and smallholder farmers.
- Restoration programmes must therefore combine ecological recovery with fair benefit-sharing, participation and respect for community knowledge.

Recommendations and Way Forward:

Implement the Four Enabling Pathways:

- **People pathway:** Secure legitimate land and resource rights, recognise Indigenous and local knowledge, ensure meaningful participation and apply **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** where applicable.
- **Land pathway:** Use landscape-scale planning to integrate natural forests, farms, grasslands, wetlands and watersheds while balancing biodiversity, production and livelihoods.
- **Finance pathway:** Mobilise public finance, private investment and blended-finance models, redirect harmful subsidies and fund long-term maintenance rather than only initial planting.
- **Policy and law pathway:** Improve coordination among ministries and align forestry, agriculture, infrastructure, climate and biodiversity policies with restoration objectives.

Improve Restoration Quality and Accountability:

- Align restoration programmes with the **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030** and its principles of ecological integrity, inclusive governance and locally appropriate implementation.
- Strengthen geospatial monitoring through satellite imagery, field surveys and the **Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM)**, tracking ecological outcomes alongside area restored.
- Prioritise natural regeneration where feasible, use ecologically appropriate native species and protect existing primary and naturally regenerating forests.

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- Develop sustainable value chains for **non-timber forest products, agroforestry and certified timber**, ensuring that local communities receive a fair share of economic benefits.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Relevant International Frameworks:

- **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030):** A global initiative to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation.
- **Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework:** Target 2 calls for at least **30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems** to be under effective restoration by 2030.
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** Restoration directly supports **SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)** and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger).
- **India's policy context:** The **Green India Mission**, **National Afforestation Programme**, **CAMPA**, and **MISHTI** contribute to forest, landscape or mangrove restoration through different institutional mechanisms.

Mains Perspective:

- **Core argument:** Restoration success must be measured by **ecological recovery, long-term resilience and community well-being**, not merely by the number of trees planted or hectares reported.
- **Conclusion:** SOFO 2026 positions forest and landscape restoration as an ecological necessity and a development investment. India's restoration efforts can deliver durable benefits when scientific monitoring, secure community rights, sustained finance and landscape-level planning are integrated into implementation.

Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna Promotes Investment-Ready Industrial Parks to Strengthen Manufacturing, Employment and Economic Competitiveness

Recent Developments:

- The Union Cabinet approved the **Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA)** in March 2026, allocating **₹33,660 crore** to develop **100 plug-and-play industrial parks** across India over 6 years, from **FY 2026–27 to FY 2031–32**.
- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) issued the scheme's implementation guidelines in May 2026, while the BHAVYA digital portal was launched on **8 June 2026** to facilitate competitive project selection and monitoring.
- By October 2026, the initiative had emerged as a major component of India's manufacturing infrastructure strategy, seeking to reduce the time and cost of establishing industrial units and strengthen investment, employment and domestic production capacity.

What Is Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna?

Objectives and Significance:

- **BHAVYA** is a Central Sector Scheme designed to develop investment-ready industrial parks with integrated infrastructure, common facilities and streamlined regulatory approvals.

- Its principal objectives are to strengthen manufacturing capacity, attract domestic and foreign investment, support **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**, generate employment and improve the ease of doing business.
- The scheme seeks to reduce initial investment barriers by providing essential infrastructure before industrial units commence operations, helping businesses move more quickly from investment decisions to production.
- India's manufacturing sector contributes approximately **16–17% of GDP** and employs over **27 million workers**. The **National Manufacturing Mission** aims to increase manufacturing's share of GDP to **25% by 2035**.

Key Features of the Scheme:

- **Financial outlay:** The scheme has a total allocation of ₹33,660 crore, including administrative expenditure, to support the development of 100 industrial parks.
- **Implementation period:** The scheme will operate for 6 years, from FY 2026–27 to FY 2031–32, with projects selected in multiple phases.
- **Financial assistance:** Eligible projects can receive financial assistance of up to **₹1 crore per acre**, subject to scheme guidelines and project-specific conditions. Assistance varies according to the development model and eligible infrastructure.
- **Land requirements:** Industrial parks generally require at least **100 acres in non-hilly States** and **25 acres in eligible hilly States, northeastern States, Union Territories and smaller States**. Selected larger parks may cover up to 1,000 acres.
- **Competitive selection:** Project proposals are evaluated through a challenge-based process considering land availability, connectivity, industrial potential, infrastructure quality, investor demand and implementation readiness.
- **Institutional framework:** The **DPIIT**, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, administers the scheme, while the **National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC)** serves as the Project Management Agency.
- **Public-private participation:** State governments, public development agencies and private developers can participate in developing industrial parks through eligible project structures and dedicated **Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs)**.

Infrastructure and Facilities:

- **Core infrastructure:** Parks will provide internal roads, electricity, water supply, drainage, sewerage, telecommunications and common effluent treatment facilities.
- **Underground utility corridors:** Underground networks will facilitate maintenance and reduce road excavation, minimising disruptions to industrial operations.
- **Ready-to-use facilities:** Factory sheds, built-to-suit industrial units, warehouses, testing facilities and certification services will help enterprises begin operations more quickly.
- **Worker welfare:** Provisions for worker housing, healthcare, skill development and other social amenities can improve labour productivity and living conditions.
- **External connectivity:** Up to **25% of approved funding** may be allocated to eligible external infrastructure, including road, rail and last-mile logistics connectivity.
- **Digital governance:** The BHAVYA portal supports project submission, appraisal, evaluation, implementation and monitoring, improving transparency and coordination among participating institutions.

How Has India's Industrial Infrastructure Policy Evolved?

From Industrial Estates to Integrated Industrial Ecosystems:

- **Industrial estates and Special Economic Zones (SEZs):** Earlier approaches concentrated on providing industrial land, shared infrastructure and regulatory incentives, particularly to promote manufacturing and exports.
- **Industrial corridors:** The **National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP)** expanded the approach by integrating industrial zones with modern utilities, multimodal logistics and urban infrastructure. Examples include Dholera Special Investment Region in Gujarat, Shendra-Bidkin Industrial Area in Maharashtra and Vikram Udyogpuri in Madhya Pradesh.
- **Industrial land information:** The **India Industrial Land Bank (IILB)** improves access to information about industrial plots, infrastructure and available facilities, helping investors identify suitable locations.
- **Plug-and-play development:** BHAVYA builds on these initiatives by promoting investment-ready industrial parks across States, with an emphasis on common infrastructure, faster approvals and coordinated development.

What Are Plug-and-Play Industrial Parks?

- **Meaning:** Plug-and-play industrial parks are pre-developed industrial ecosystems in which land, utilities, roads and common facilities are made available before manufacturing units are established.
- **Trunk infrastructure:** Shared facilities such as main roads, electricity networks, water supply, drainage, sewerage and street lighting support multiple industrial units.
- **Regulatory facilitation:** Single-window clearance systems and coordinated approvals can reduce administrative delays and improve predictability for investors.
- **Economic advantage:** By lowering initial infrastructure costs and reducing the time required to establish factories, these parks can improve industrial productivity and strengthen India's competitiveness in global value chains.

How Can BHAVYA Strengthen India's Manufacturing Sector?

Investment, MSMEs and Employment:

- **Lower entry barriers:** Ready infrastructure can reduce the upfront capital expenditure and operational uncertainty faced by new manufacturing enterprises.
- **MSME integration:** Shared testing laboratories, warehousing, utilities and logistics can help smaller firms overcome infrastructure constraints and participate in larger industrial supply chains.
- **Employment generation:** Industrial park development can create construction jobs, while subsequent manufacturing operations can generate direct employment and opportunities in transport, maintenance and other services.
- **Regional development:** The development of parks beyond established metropolitan industrial centres can attract investment to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and industrially less-developed regions.

Supply Chains and Industrial Competitiveness:

- **Domestic value addition:** Reliable infrastructure can encourage domestic production of intermediate goods, components and finished products, reducing dependence on imports in selected sectors.
- **Global value chains:** Efficient logistics, quality certification and predictable approvals can improve India's attractiveness as a manufacturing and sourcing destination.
- **Technology-intensive industries:** Integrated industrial ecosystems can support advanced manufacturing, research and development, start-ups and innovation-led enterprises.

- **Policy convergence:** BHAVYA complements initiatives such as **Make in India, the National Manufacturing Mission, PM GatiShakti and the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme** by addressing complementary infrastructure and investment constraints.

Major Challenges and the Way Forward:

Implementation and Governance Challenges:

- **Land acquisition and readiness:** Delays arising from disputed ownership, fragmented land parcels and incomplete clearances can undermine the objective of rapid industrial establishment.
- **Uneven State capacity:** Differences in administrative capacity, industrial demand and infrastructure quality may lead to unequal project implementation and investment outcomes.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Industrial parks must incorporate efficient water use, renewable energy, waste management, pollution control and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- **MSME accessibility:** High land prices, rental costs and compliance requirements may prevent smaller enterprises from benefiting unless industrial spaces and common services remain affordable.
- **Infrastructure utilisation:** Parks must attract viable industrial tenants and achieve adequate occupancy; otherwise, public investment may result in underutilised assets and recurring maintenance costs.

Recommended Measures:

- **Strengthen project appraisal:** Prioritise demonstrable investor demand, sectoral suitability, land readiness and realistic implementation schedules rather than selecting projects solely on the basis of proposals submitted.
- **Improve Centre–State coordination:** Establish clear institutional responsibilities, time-bound approvals, transparent monitoring and mechanisms for resolving inter-agency disputes.
- **Adopt green industrial planning:** Integrate renewable energy, water recycling, circular-economy practices, common effluent treatment and pollution monitoring into park design.
- **Support MSME participation:** Provide affordable industrial spaces, shared testing facilities, credit access and targeted skill-development programmes.
- **Measure outcomes:** Track investment mobilised, operational occupancy, jobs created, exports, domestic value addition, MSME participation and environmental performance.

Value Addition for UPSC:

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Relevant Policies and Examination Linkages:

- **National Manufacturing Mission:** Announced in the Union Budget 2025–26, it seeks to strengthen manufacturing through improved ease of doing business, workforce readiness, MSME development, technology access and product quality.
- **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan:** Supports coordinated infrastructure planning and multimodal connectivity, which are important for industrial park development.
- **National Industrial Corridor Development Programme:** Promotes integrated industrial hubs with modern infrastructure and logistics connectivity.

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QUESTIONS

1. With reference to the organs, positions, and institutional mechanisms of the United Nations mentioned in international governance, consider the following terms:

(1) Uniting for Peace Resolution

(2) Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN)

(3) Uniting for Consensus Group

(4) Ezulwini Consensus

(5) UN80 Initiative

How many of the above terms are directly associated with proposals or mechanisms aimed at structural, operational, or Security Council reforms of the United Nations?

(A) Only two

(B) Only three

(C) Only four

(D) All five

2. Consider the following statements regarding the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol and its legal framework:

(1) Unlike the original Montreal Protocol which targeted stratospheric ozone depletion, the Kigali Amendment explicitly targets global warming mitigation through HFC controls.

(2) The Kigali Amendment mandates the complete phase-out and total elimination of Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) across all signatory nations by 2047.

(3) The baseline for calculating India's HFC phase-down is based on the average HFC consumption during 2024–2026 along with an additional allowance linked to the HCFC baseline.

(4) Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) possess high Ozone Depletion Potential (ODP) as well as high Global Warming Potential (GWP).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 2 and 4 only

(C) 1, 2, and 3 only

(D) 1, 3, and 4 only

3. With reference to demography, population governance, and statistical mechanisms in India, consider the following terms and data sources:

(1) Total Fertility Rate (TFR)

(2) Sample Registration System (SRS)

(3) Civil Registration System (CRS)

(4) Decennial Population Census

(5) National Family Health Survey (NFHS)

How many of the above statistical sources or demographic indicators are formally categorized as sample surveys rather than complete universal enumerations of the entire population?

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 2, 3, and 5 only

(C) 2 and 4 only

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(D) 1, 3, and 5 only

4. Consider the following statements regarding the global status of forests, carbon storage, and land degradation based on recent international environmental assessments:

(1) Global forests cover over 50% of the Earth's total land surface and store over 1,000 gigatonnes of carbon.

(2) The process of Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) focuses strictly on expanding closed canopy tree cover and increasing forest area rather than recovering ecosystem functions across agricultural or watershed lands.

(3) Naturally regenerating forests have declined substantially over recent decades, weakening habitat connectivity and long-term carbon permanence.

(4) Unsuitable monoculture plantation drives in water-stressed landscapes can exacerbate ecological risks rather than restore natural forest functions.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(A) 1 and 2 only

(B) 1, 3, and 4 only

(C) 3 and 4 only

(D) 2, 3, and 4 only

5. Under the implementation architecture of the BHAVYA scheme, which of the following mechanisms can be utilized by State Governments and Private Developers to execute plug-and-play industrial park projects?

(1) Establishing dedicated Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) between state development agencies and private infrastructure firms.

(2) Utilizing up to 25% of sanctioned central assistance for developing external rail-road logistics corridors to the park boundary.

(3) Utilizing 100% of the Central financial assistance as a direct non-repayable grant to acquire raw private land for the park.

(4) Deploying digital single-window portals to issue time-bound building and environmental approvals to tenant units.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(A) 1 and 3 only

(B) 1, 2, and 4 only

(C) 2 and 4 only

(D) 1, 2, 3, and 4

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ANSWER KEY

1 – Answer (D), 2 – Answer (A), 3 – Answer (B), 4 – Answer (C), 5 – Answer (B)

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Being well-informed reflects adaptability, awareness, and intellectual curiosity—qualities that are highly valued in a competitive environment. A strong grasp of contemporary issues enhances confidence, widens perspective, and prepares individuals to tackle real-world challenges effectively, ultimately opening the door to better opportunities and long-term personal and career advancement.

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