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Top Stories of The Day

- *Indian Navy Inducts Four Indigenous Naval Platforms to Strengthen Maritime Defence Under **Aatmanirbhar Bharat***
- ***Ukraine and Nine European Nations** Launch Coalition for Integrated Ballistic Missile Defence Architecture*
- *Indian-Origin NASA **Astronaut Anil Menon** Begins First Eight-Month Mission to the International Space Station*
- *MeitY Launches **NIDAR 2.0** to Promote Indigenous Drone Development Using Indian-Made VEGA Processors*
- *Delhi Government Renames Mahila Samriddhi Yojana as **Delhi Lakshmi Yojana** for Women's Financial Empowerment*
- *US, UK and Twelve Nations Reaffirm 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling Against **China's Maritime Claims***
- *Ahmedabad Creates Guinness World Record by **Planting 3.61 Lakh Saplings** in One Hour Using Miyawaki Method*
- *PM Narendra Modi Receives Traditional **Māori Haka Welcome** During Historic Visit to New Zealand*
- ***Aditya Birla Group** to Acquire Shell's Sprng Energy in \$1.8 Billion Renewable Energy Deal*
- *CCI Imposes **₹126.87 Crore Penalty on HP India** for Bid-Rigging in Government e-Marketplace Tenders*

Four Indigenous Naval Platforms Join Indian Navy Within One Month



- The Indian Navy has inducted four new-generation indigenous naval platforms within a span of one month, significantly strengthening India's maritime defence capabilities under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- The latest addition is INS Mahendragiri, the sixth Project 17A (Nilgiri-class) stealth frigate, commissioned at Visakhapatnam.
- Earlier, the Navy inducted INS Dunagiri (Project 17A stealth frigate), INS Sanshodhak (Survey Vessel Large), and INS Agray (Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft).
- These inductions mark a major milestone in India's indigenous warship-building programme and enhance the Navy's operational readiness across multiple maritime roles.

Newly Inducted Naval Platforms:

- INS Mahendragiri – Project 17A (Nilgiri-class) Stealth Guided Missile Frigate.
- INS Dunagiri – Project 17A Stealth Guided Missile Frigate.
- INS Sanshodhak – Survey Vessel (Large).
- INS Agray – Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC).

About Project 17A:

- Project 17A is the follow-on programme to Project 17 (Shivalik-class) stealth frigates.
- It involves the construction of seven advanced stealth-guided missile frigates.

The ships are being built by:

- Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai
- Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata

The frigates are equipped with:

- Advanced stealth features
- BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles
- Barak-8 surface-to-air missile system
- Modern radar and electronic warfare systems
- Indigenous combat management systems.

About INS Mahendragiri:

• Class: Nilgiri-class (Project 17A).
• Type: Stealth Guided Missile Frigate.
• Commissioned: 11 July 2026.
• Commissioned At: Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam.
• Commissioned By: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.
• It is the sixth indigenously designed Project 17A frigate and incorporates enhanced automation, survivability, and stealth technology.

About INS Sanshodhak:

A Survey Vessel (Large) designed for:

- Hydrographic surveys
- Coastal and deep-sea mapping
- Oceanographic data collection
- Support to safe navigation and maritime infrastructure development.

About INS Agray:

- An Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC).

Designed to:

- Detect and neutralise enemy submarines in coastal waters.

- Conduct low-intensity maritime operations.
- Protect ports and offshore assets.

About the Indian Navy:

- Established: 26 January 1950 (modern Indian Navy).
- Headquarters: New Delhi.
- Motto: Shaṁ No Varunaḥ ("May the Lord of the Oceans be auspicious unto us").
- Chief of the Naval Staff: Admiral Krishna Swaminathan

- The Indian Navy is responsible for safeguarding India's maritime interests and ensuring security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Additional Key Facts:

- Project 17A is one of India's flagship indigenous warship-building programmes aimed at enhancing stealth, survivability, and network-centric warfare capabilities.
- The Nilgiri-class frigates are among the most advanced warships built in India and are equipped with indigenous and modern weapon systems.
- GRSE (Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers) and MDL (Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited) are two major Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) engaged in indigenous warship construction.

- India follows the vision of becoming a Blue Water Navy, capable of operating across the deep waters of the Indian Ocean and beyond.
- The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is strategically important as it carries a significant share of global maritime trade and energy shipments.

Exam Focus Points:

- Organisation: Indian Navy.
- Achievement: Four indigenous naval platforms inducted within one month.
- Latest Induction: INS Mahendragiri.
- Class: Project 17A (Nilgiri-class) Stealth Frigate.
- Other Platforms: INS Dunagiri, INS Sanshodhak, INS Agray.
- Programme: Project 17A.
- Shipbuilders: Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) and Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE).
- Objective: Strengthen indigenous naval capability and maritime security.
- Initiative: Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- Indian Navy Headquarters: New Delhi.
- Chief of the Naval Staff: Admiral Krishna Swaminathan

Ukraine and Nine European Nations Form Coalition for Europe's Ballistic Missile Defence



- Ukraine and nine European countries have announced the formation of a Coalition for

Europe's Ballistic Missile Defence to strengthen the continent's protection against the growing threat of ballistic missile attacks.

- The announcement was made during a high-level meeting in Paris, France, attended by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the leaders of Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
- The coalition aims to develop an integrated European anti-ballistic missile defence

architecture by combining technological innovation, industrial cooperation, and Ukraine's battlefield experience in countering missile attacks.

Participating Countries:

• Ukraine
• Denmark
• France
• Germany
• Italy
• Netherlands
• Norway
• Spain
• Sweden
• United Kingdom.

About Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD):

- A Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system is designed to detect, track, intercept, and destroy ballistic missiles during different phases of their flight.

A typical BMD system consists of:

• Early warning radars
• Satellites and surveillance systems
• Command and control networks
• Interceptor missiles

- Ballistic missiles travel at very high speeds and follow a ballistic trajectory, making them more difficult to intercept than cruise missiles. Successful BMD requires layered and integrated air defence systems.

About NATO Ballistic Missile Defence:

- NATO operates a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system to protect member countries from ballistic missile threats originating outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

It integrates:

• Ground-based interceptors
• Radar systems
• Naval assets
• Command and control infrastructure

- The new coalition is intended to complement Europe's defence capabilities rather than replace existing national or NATO systems.

About Ukraine:

• Capital: Kyiv.
• Currency: Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH).
• President: Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
• Ukraine has been defending itself against Russia's full-scale invasion since 2022, gaining extensive operational experience in air and missile defence.

Additional Key Facts:

- Ballistic missiles are powered during the initial launch phase and then follow a ballistic trajectory under gravity.
- Cruise missiles fly at lower altitudes using onboard propulsion and are generally more manoeuvrable than ballistic missiles.
- Europe is also pursuing the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), a separate multinational project aimed at developing an integrated ground-based air and missile defence system involving several European countries.
- Modern missile defence systems include technologies such as the Patriot, SAMP/T, Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense, THAAD, and Arrow systems, depending on the country's defence architecture.
- Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) combines surveillance, interception, command and control, and multiple layers of defence against aircraft, drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles.

Exam Focus Points:

Countries Involved: Ukraine, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.	Threat Addressed: Ballistic missiles.
Initiative: Coalition for Europe's Ballistic Missile Defence.	Ukrainian President: Volodymyr Zelenskyy.
Announcement Venue: Paris, France.	Related European Initiative: European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI).
Objective: Develop a shared anti-ballistic missile defence capability for Europe.	Ukraine Capital: Kyiv.
Focus: Integrated European missile defence architecture.	Ukraine Currency: Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH).

Indian-Origin NASA Astronaut Anil Menon Begins First Eight-Month Mission to the International Space Station (ISS)



Indian-origin NASA astronaut Anil Menon has embarked on his first space mission to the International Space Station (ISS) aboard the Roscosmos Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan.	Military Service: Colonel, U.S. Space Force.
The mission is expected to last about eight months, during which Menon will serve as a Flight Engineer as part of Expeditions 74 and 75.	He also worked with NASA's Human Research Program and contributed to the medical support of commercial spaceflight missions. Menon's father is of Indian origin, while his mother is of Ukrainian origin.
He is accompanied by Roscosmos cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina. During the mission, the crew will conduct scientific research, technology demonstrations, and medical experiments to support future human missions to the Moon and Mars.	About the International Space Station (ISS): - The International Space Station (ISS) is the world's largest habitable artificial satellite and serves as a permanently crewed space laboratory. - It orbits Earth at an average altitude of about 400 km and completes one orbit roughly every 90 minutes. The ISS is a collaborative project involving:

About Anil Menon:

Nationality: American (of Indian origin).
Profession: NASA Astronaut, Emergency Medicine Physician, Mechanical Engineer.
Selected as NASA Astronaut: 2021.
Former Role: SpaceX's First Flight Surgeon.

- The station supports research in biology, medicine, physics, Earth observation, and space technology.

About NASA:

Full Form: National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

- Established: 1958.
- Headquarters: Washington, D.C., United States.
- NASA is the United States' civilian space agency responsible for space exploration, aeronautics research, and scientific missions.

About Roscosmos:

- Official Name: Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities.
- Country: Russia.
- Headquarters: Moscow, Russia.
- Roscosmos is responsible for Russia's civil space programme and international human spaceflight missions.

Additional Key Facts:

- Soyuz is Russia's longest-running and one of the world's most reliable human spaceflight programmes.
- The Baikonur Cosmodrome, located in Kazakhstan, is the world's first and largest operational space launch facility. It was from here that Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space, launched in 1961.
- The ISS has been continuously inhabited since November 2000, making it the longest continuously occupied human outpost in space.

- Long-duration ISS missions provide critical data for future Artemis lunar missions and eventual human exploration of Mars.
- India is also preparing for its first indigenous human spaceflight mission, Gaganyaan, being developed by ISRO.

Exam Focus Points:

- Person in News: Anil Menon.
- Organisation: NASA.
- Mission: Soyuz MS-29.
- Destination: International Space Station (ISS).
- Mission Duration: About 8 months.
- ISS Expeditions: 74 and 75.
- Launch Site: Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan.
- Co-Crew Members: Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina (Roscosmos).
- NASA Established: 1958.
- NASA Headquarters: Washington, D.C., USA.
- ISS Partner Agencies: NASA, Roscosmos, ESA, JAXA, CSA.
- Related Indian Mission: Gaganyaan.

MeitY Launches NIDAR 2.0 to Develop Drones Powered by Indian-Made Chips



- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in collaboration with the Drone Federation India (DFI), has launched the second edition of the National Innovation

Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR 2.0) under the SwaYaan Initiative.

- The programme aims to encourage college students, researchers, and innovators to develop autonomous drones powered by India's indigenous VEGA processor, promoting self-reliance in drone electronics and semiconductor technologies.
- NIDAR 2.0 offers a prize pool of over ₹65 lakh, along with startup incubation, cloud credits, software support, and industry internships for participating teams.

Key Features:

- Participants will build autonomous drone systems using the VEGA processor, an indigenous RISC-V-based microprocessor.

The challenge includes real-world problem statements such as:

- Search and rescue during disasters.
- Autonomous swarm drone operations.
- Precision agriculture and smart monitoring.

Winning teams will receive:

- Startup incubation support.
- Cloud computing credits.
- Software development tools.
- Corporate internships.
- Mentorship from industry experts.

About NIDAR 2.0:

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| • Full Form: National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research. |
| • Organised under the SwaYaan Initiative of MeitY. |
| • Focuses on developing indigenous autonomous drone technologies using Indian-designed processors. |
| • Promotes collaboration among academia, industry, and startups to build next-generation drone solutions. |

About the SwaYaan Initiative:

- Launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- Aims to build a robust indigenous drone ecosystem through innovation, research, skilling, and semiconductor-based drone technologies.
- Supports India's vision of becoming a global hub for drone design and manufacturing.

About VEGA Processor:

- Developed under the Digital India RISC-V (DIR-V) Programme.

- Designed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
- Based on the open-source RISC-V Instruction Set Architecture (ISA).
- Represents India's effort to build indigenous semiconductor and embedded computing technologies.

About Drone Federation India (DFI):

- India's leading industry body representing the drone ecosystem.
- Works to promote drone manufacturing, innovation, policy advocacy, and skill development.
- Collaborates with government, industry, startups, and academia to strengthen India's drone sector.
- Chairperson: Vipul Singh
- President: Smit Shah

Additional Key Facts:

- RISC-V is an open-standard Instruction Set Architecture (ISA) that enables countries to design processors without proprietary licensing.
- India launched the Drone Rules, 2021 to simplify regulations and promote drone manufacturing and innovation.
- The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Drones and Drone Components was launched in 2021 to boost domestic manufacturing.
- The Drone Shakti initiative was announced in the Union Budget 2022–23 to promote drones as a service (Drone-as-a-Service) through startups.
- Drones are increasingly used in precision agriculture, disaster management, infrastructure inspection, defence, logistics, healthcare, mining, and surveying.

Exam Focus Points:

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| • Programme: NIDAR 2.0 (National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research). |
| • Ministry: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). |

• Partner: Drone Federation India (DFI). • Initiative: SwaYaan. • Launch Date: 13 July 2026. • Prize Pool: Over ₹65 lakh. • Technology Used: Indigenous VEGA processor. • Processor Architecture: RISC-V. • Processor Developer: C-DAC.	• Objective: Develop autonomous drones powered by Indian-made chips. • Related Initiative: Digital India RISC-V (DIR-V) Programme. • Supporting Vision: Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Semiconductor Mission.
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Delhi Government Renames Mahila Samriddhi Yojana as Delhi Lakshmi Yojana



- The Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi has officially renamed its flagship Mahila Samriddhi Yojana as the Delhi Lakshmi Yojana.
- The scheme aims to provide ₹2,500 per month through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to eligible women from economically weaker sections to promote financial security and women's empowerment. The Delhi Government plans to roll out the scheme around Raksha Bandhan after completing beneficiary verification and administrative formalities.

Likely Eligibility Criteria:

- Women aged 21–60 years.
- Permanent resident of Delhi for the prescribed period.
- Annual family income within the notified limit.
- Only one eligible woman per family.
- Applicant or family members should not have a criminal record.
- Other detailed eligibility conditions will be notified by the Delhi Government.

About Delhi Lakshmi Yojana:

- It is the renamed version of the Mahila Samriddhi Yojana.
- Provides monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500 to eligible women through DBT.
- The scheme is intended to strengthen women's economic participation and improve household financial security.
- Implementation will be overseen by the Government of NCT of Delhi through the concerned departments.

About Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT):

- Launched by the Government of India in 2013.
- Transfers welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts.
- Reduces leakages, duplication, and delays in subsidy delivery.

Linked with the JAM Trinity:

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| • Jan Dhan Accounts |
| • Aadhaar |
| • Mobile |
- DBT is a key component of Digital India and promotes transparency and efficient delivery of government benefits.

About the Government of NCT of Delhi:

- Status: National Capital Territory (NCT).
- Constitutional Provision: Article 239AA of the Constitution (inserted by the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991).
- Delhi has a Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister, while public order, police, and land remain under the Union Government through the Lieutenant Governor.

Additional Key Facts:

- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) aims to ensure targeted and transparent transfer of welfare benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts.
- The JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile) forms the backbone of India's digital welfare delivery system.
- Article 239AA grants special constitutional status to the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- The 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991 created the Legislative Assembly for Delhi and the office of the Chief Minister.
- Women-centric DBT schemes are increasingly being adopted by states to improve financial

inclusion and strengthen women's economic empowerment.

Exam Focus Points:

• Scheme: Delhi Lakshmi Yojana.
• Former Name: Mahila Samridhi Yojana.
• State/UT: Delhi (NCT).
• Benefit: ₹2,500 per month.
• Transfer Mode: Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
• Beneficiaries: Eligible women from economically weaker sections.
• Objective: Women's financial empowerment and social security.
• Launch Target: Around Raksha Bandhan 2026.
• Related Initiative: JAM Trinity.
• Constitutional Provision for Delhi: Article 239AA.
• Relevant Constitutional Amendment: 69th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1991.

US, UK and 12 Other Nations Reaffirm 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling Against China's Maritime Claims



- The United States, United Kingdom, and 12 other countries have jointly reaffirmed the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Award, stating that China's expansive maritime claims have no legal basis under international law.
- The joint statement was issued on the 10th anniversary of the landmark ruling delivered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), The

Hague, in a case brought by the Philippines under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

- The participating countries urged the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law and opposed coercive actions that threaten regional peace, maritime security, and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. China, however, reiterated that it does not recognise or accept the 2016 ruling.

Countries Supporting the Joint Statement:

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| • United States |
| • United Kingdom |
| • Australia |
| • Canada |

- Czech Republic
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Japan
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Philippines
- Denmark
- Lithuania

- The European Union (EU) also issued a separate statement reaffirming the 2016 arbitral award.

Objectives:

- Reaffirm the authority of the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Award.
- Support the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.
- Uphold the principles of UNCLOS.
- Ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in international waters.
- Promote peace, stability, and a rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

Significance:

- Reinforces international support for the rules-based maritime order.
- Highlights the importance of international arbitration in resolving maritime disputes.
- Reflects growing international concern over tensions in the South China Sea.
- Strengthens diplomatic backing for the Philippines and other claimant states.

About the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Award:

- Delivered on 12 July 2016 by a tribunal constituted under Annex VII of UNCLOS.
- The case was initiated by the Philippines against China in 2013.

The tribunal ruled that:

- China's "Nine-Dash Line" claim has no legal basis under UNCLOS.
- China has no historic rights over resources beyond the maritime zones recognised by UNCLOS.
- Several disputed maritime features in the Spratly Islands are legally "rocks" or low-tide elevations and are not entitled to a 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- China's large-scale land reclamation activities caused environmental damage to coral reefs.

- The tribunal did not decide questions of sovereignty over islands or delimit maritime boundaries. China rejected the award as "null and void."

About the South China Sea:

- A strategically important semi-enclosed sea in the western Pacific Ocean.

Bordered by:

- China
- Taiwan
- Philippines
- Vietnam
- Malaysia
- Brunei
- Indonesia

- The region is rich in fisheries, hydrocarbons, and is one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes, with nearly one-third of global maritime trade passing through it annually.

About UNCLOS:

- Full Form: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Adopted: 1982.
- Entered into Force: 1994.
- Known as the "Constitution of the Oceans."

Defines:

• Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles)
• Contiguous Zone (24 nautical miles)
• Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (200 nautical miles)
• Continental Shelf
• Rights and responsibilities of coastal and maritime states.

- India supports the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with UNCLOS and advocates freedom of navigation, overflight, and unimpeded commerce in the Indo-Pacific.
- The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extends up to 200 nautical miles from a coastal state's baseline, within which the coastal state has sovereign rights over natural resources.

Exam Focus Points:

About the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA):

- Established: 1899.
- Headquarters: The Hague, Netherlands.
- Provides arbitration and dispute resolution services between states, international organisations, and private parties.
- The PCA administered the South China Sea arbitration proceedings under UNCLOS.

Additional Key Facts:

- The "Nine-Dash Line" is China's demarcation line covering nearly 90% of the South China Sea, which overlaps with the EEZs of several Southeast Asian countries.
- The South China Sea contains the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Scarborough Shoal, and Pratas Islands, all of which are strategically significant.
- Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) are conducted by several countries, including the United States, to challenge excessive maritime claims.

• Issue: South China Sea Dispute.
• Joint Statement By: US, UK, and 12 other countries.
• Legal Basis: 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Award.
• Arbitration Body: Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), The Hague.
• Convention: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
• Case Filed By: Philippines (2013).
• Award Delivered: 12 July 2016.
• Key Finding: China's Nine-Dash Line has no legal basis under UNCLOS.
• China's Position: Rejects and does not recognise the ruling.
• PCA Headquarters: The Hague, Netherlands.
• UNCLOS Adopted: 1982.
• UNCLOS Came into Force: 1994.
• Strategic Water Body: South China Sea.

Ahmedabad Sets Guinness World Record by Planting 3.61 Lakh Saplings in One Hour

- The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has created a Guinness World Record by planting 3.61 lakh (361,000) saplings in just one hour using the Miyawaki afforestation method.
- The mega plantation drive was conducted on 12 July 2026 at Bhadaj on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, with the participation of

over 25,000 volunteers, including students, municipal staff, NGOs, NCC cadets, and citizens. The campaign surpassed the previous Guinness World Record of 3,31,929 saplings, set by the Assam Forest Department in 2023. Around 35 indigenous tree species were planted over an area of nearly 76,000 square metres,

creating what is expected to become one of Ahmedabad's largest urban forests.



About the Miyawaki Method:

- Developed by Dr. Akira Miyawaki, a Japanese botanist.
- A dense afforestation technique that uses native plant species planted close together.
- Creates forests that grow up to 10 times faster and become around 30 times denser than conventional plantations.
- Requires comparatively less maintenance after the initial growth phase.
- Widely used for urban afforestation, biodiversity restoration, and carbon sequestration.

About Guinness World Records:

- Founded in 1955.
- Headquarters: London, United Kingdom.
- Recognises and verifies outstanding human achievements and natural records across the world.

About Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC):

- The urban local body responsible for the administration of Ahmedabad city.
- Responsible for civic infrastructure, sanitation, urban planning, public health, and environmental conservation initiatives.
- The plantation drive forms part of a broader initiative to increase green cover across

Ahmedabad and the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha constituency.

Additional Key Facts:

- The previous Guinness World Record for planting the highest number of saplings in one hour was held by the Assam Forest Department, which planted 3,31,929 saplings on 15 September 2023.
- The plantation drive is linked to the "Hariyali Lok Sabha" initiative to expand green cover in the Gandhinagar parliamentary constituency.
- Indigenous (native) species are better adapted to local climatic conditions, require less maintenance, and support local biodiversity.
- Urban forests help reduce the urban heat island effect, improve groundwater recharge, reduce dust pollution, and provide habitat for birds and insects.
- The Miyawaki method is increasingly being adopted in Indian cities for restoring degraded urban land and improving ecological resilience.

Exam Focus Points:

- Achievement: Guinness World Record for plantation.
- City: Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
- Organising Agency: Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).
- Date: 12 July 2026.
- Saplings Planted: 3.61 lakh in one hour.
- Participants: Over 25,000 volunteers.
- Method Used: Miyawaki Method.
- Developer of Miyawaki Method: Dr. Akira Miyawaki (Japan).
- Species Planted: Around 35 indigenous species.
- Previous Record Holder: Assam Forest Department (2023).
- Guinness World Records Headquarters: London, United Kingdom.

**PM Modi Receives Traditional Māori Haka Welcome in New Zealand;
Spotlight on Māori Culture and India's Martial Art Traditions**



- Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a traditional Māori Haka ceremonial welcome during his visit to Auckland, New Zealand, marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to New Zealand in 40 years.
- The Haka performance highlighted the cultural heritage of the Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and symbolised respect, unity, strength, and hospitality.
- The visit also witnessed India and New Zealand agreeing to elevate their ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- The event has renewed interest in traditional martial and cultural performance traditions, including India's indigenous martial arts.

About the Māori Haka:

- The Haka is a traditional ceremonial performance of the Māori, the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand.
- Originally performed before battles to display courage and unity, it is now used to:
- Welcome distinguished guests.
- Celebrate important occasions.
- Honour achievements and ancestors.
- Express collective identity, respect, grief, or celebration.

The Haka combines:

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| • Rhythmic chanting. |
| • Forceful body movements. |
| • Foot stamping. |

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| • Hand gestures. |
| • Intense facial expressions and eye movements. |

Significance:

- Promotes and preserves Māori cultural heritage.
- Represents courage, unity, identity, and community spirit.
- Serves as an important symbol of New Zealand's indigenous traditions.
- Widely recognised through New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team, which performs the Haka before international matches.

Major Traditional Martial Arts of India:

Kalaripayattu (Kerala):

- One of the world's oldest martial arts.
- Combines armed and unarmed combat, flexibility, yoga, and Ayurveda.
- Traditionally attributed to Parasurama.

Silambam (Tamil Nadu):

- Ancient staff-based martial art.
- Mentioned in Sangam literature.
- Uses bamboo staff (Silambam) as the primary weapon.

Thang-Ta (Manipur):

- Traditional Manipuri martial art.
- Involves sword (Thang) and spear (Ta) techniques.
- Closely associated with Manipuri culture and rituals.

Gatka (Punjab):

- Traditional Sikh martial art.
- Developed during the Sikh Gurus' period.
- Demonstrates swordsmanship, stick fighting, and self-defence.

Mardani Khel (Maharashtra):

- Traditional Maratha martial art.
- Focuses on swordsmanship, horse riding, and battlefield combat.

Paika Akhada (Odisha):

- Traditional martial art of the Paika warrior community.
- Combines weapon training with acrobatic movements and dance.

Musti Yuddha (Uttar Pradesh):

- Ancient Indian unarmed combat system.
- Emphasises punches, kicks, grappling, and physical conditioning.

About the Māori:

- The Māori are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand (Aotearoa).
- They arrived in New Zealand between the 13th and 14th centuries CE.
- Their culture is based on strong community values, oral traditions, language (Te Reo Māori), carving, weaving, and ceremonial performances such as the Haka.

About New Zealand:

- Capital: Wellington.
- Largest City: Auckland.
- Currency: New Zealand Dollar (NZD).
- Prime Minister: Christopher Luxon.
- Official Languages: English, Māori (Te Reo Māori), and New Zealand Sign Language.

- The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) is regarded as the founding document of modern New Zealand, signed between the British Crown and Māori chiefs.
- Te Reo Māori is one of New Zealand's three official languages.
- The All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team, have performed the Haka before international matches for over a century.
- Traditional Indian martial arts evolved for warfare, self-defence, physical fitness, and spiritual discipline, and many incorporate elements of Yoga and Ayurveda.
- Martial arts such as Kalaripayattu, Silambam, and Thang-Ta are included in the Ministry of Culture's Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage of India.

Exam Focus Points:

- Traditional Performance: Māori Haka.
- Country: New Zealand.
- Performed By: Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand).
- Occasion: Welcome ceremony for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- First PM Visit: First Indian Prime Minister to visit New Zealand in 40 years.
- Purpose of Haka: Welcome, celebration, remembrance, and expression of unity and strength.
- Related Treaty: Treaty of Waitangi (1840).
- Major Indian Martial Arts: Kalaripayattu, Silambam, Thang-Ta, Gatka, Mardani Khel, Paika Akhada, Musti Yuddha.
- Capital of New Zealand: Wellington.
- Official Indigenous Language: Te Reo Māori.

Additional Key Facts:

Aditya Birla Group to Acquire Shell's Sprng Energy in \$1.8 Billion Deal

- The Aditya Birla Group, through its renewable energy arm Aditya Birla Renewables Ltd.

(ABRen), has announced the acquisition of Sprng Energy from Shell Overseas Investment

- B.V. in a deal valued at US\$1.8 billion (around ₹17,200 crore), including debt.
- The acquisition is one of the largest renewable energy transactions in India's history and will significantly strengthen the Group's clean energy portfolio.
 - Upon completion, ABRen's total contracted renewable energy capacity will increase to approximately 9.3 GW, making it one of India's largest integrated renewable energy platforms.
 - The transaction is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, subject to regulatory approvals.



About Sprng Energy:

- A leading renewable energy platform in India.
- Develops and operates solar, wind, and hybrid power projects across multiple Indian states.
- Current portfolio includes:
- ~3.3 GW operational renewable energy capacity.
- ~1.7 GW of contracted projects under construction.
- Total contracted portfolio of approximately 5 GW.
- Shell acquired Sprng Energy from Actis in 2022.

About Aditya Birla Renewables (ABRen):

- Renewable energy arm of Grasim Industries Ltd., the flagship company of the Aditya Birla Group.

Focuses on:

- Solar energy
- Wind energy

- Hybrid renewable projects
- Commercial & Industrial (C&I) green energy solutions
- The acquisition significantly accelerates the company's renewable energy expansion strategy.

About Shell plc:

- A multinational energy company headquartered in London, United Kingdom.
- Operates in oil, natural gas, LNG, petrochemicals, and renewable energy.
- As part of its global strategy, Shell is restructuring its portfolio by prioritising higher-return businesses while divesting selected renewable energy assets.

Additional Key Facts:

- India has set a target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based installed electricity capacity by 2030 under its climate commitments.
- Renewable energy sources include solar, wind, hydropower, biomass, and small hydro.
- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) is the nodal ministry responsible for promoting renewable energy in India.

Key Government initiatives supporting renewable energy include:

- National Solar Mission
- PM-KUSUM Scheme
- Green Energy Corridor
- National Green Hydrogen Mission

- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Solar PV Modules
- India is the world's third-largest producer of renewable energy, after China and the United States.
- Major renewable energy companies in India include Adani Green Energy, ReNew Energy

Global, NTPC Green Energy, and Tata Power Renewable Energy.

Exam Focus Points:

- Acquirer: Aditya Birla Renewables Ltd. (ABRen).
- Parent Company: Aditya Birla Group (Grasim Industries Ltd.).
- Target Company: Sprng Energy.
- Seller: Shell Overseas Investment B.V.
- Deal Value: US\$1.8 billion (₹17,200 crore).

- Nature of Business: Renewable Energy (Solar, Wind, Hybrid).
- Post-Acquisition Renewable Portfolio: Approximately 9.3 GW.
- Expected Completion: End of 2026 (subject to regulatory approvals).
- Nodal Ministry for Renewable Energy: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- India's Non-Fossil Capacity Target: 500 GW by 2030.

CCI Imposes ₹126.87 Crore Penalty on HP India for Bid-Rigging in Government e-Marketplace (GeM) Tenders



- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed a penalty of ₹126.87 crore on HP India Sales Pvt. Ltd. for indulging in cartelisation and bid-rigging in government procurement through the Government e-Marketplace (GeM).
- The Commission found that HP India coordinated with its authorised resellers to manipulate bids in GeM tenders for personal system products between 2017 and 2020, thereby violating the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002. In addition to HP India, penalties were also imposed on five authorised resellers and their officials. The companies were directed to cease and desist from such anti-competitive practices.

Findings of the CCI:

- HP India dictated bid prices to its authorised resellers.

- The company manipulated reseller participation by controlling Manufacturer Authorisation Forms (MAFs).
- Resellers coordinated their bids instead of competing independently.
- The conduct restricted fair competition and distorted the government procurement process.

Legal Provisions Invoked:

- Section 3(1) of the Competition Act, 2002 prohibits anti-competitive agreements that cause or are likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition.
- Section 3(3)(d) specifically prohibits bid-rigging or collusive bidding among enterprises.
- Section 27 empowers the CCI to impose penalties and issue directions against anti-competitive practices.
- Section 46 provides for a Lesser Penalty (Leniency) Scheme for enterprises that voluntarily disclose cartel activities and cooperate with investigations.
- Section 48 provides for liability of officials responsible for contraventions by companies.

About Government e-Marketplace (GeM):

- Launched in 2016 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- A one-stop online procurement portal for Central and State Government departments, PSUs, autonomous bodies, and local authorities.

Aims to ensure:

- Transparent procurement.
- Competitive pricing.
- Paperless and cashless transactions.
- Greater efficiency and accountability in public procurement.
- GeM is managed by the Government e-Marketplace Special Purpose Vehicle (GeM SPV).

About the Competition Commission of India (CCI):

- Established under the Competition Act, 2002.
- Became operational in 2009.
- Functions under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- Headquarters: New Delhi.
- Chairperson: Ravneet Kaur
- Its objectives are to:
- Prevent anti-competitive practices.
- Promote and sustain competition.
- Protect consumer interests.
- Ensure freedom of trade in Indian markets.

About Cartelisation and Bid-Rigging:

- Cartelisation occurs when competing firms secretly agree to fix prices, divide markets, or limit competition.
- Bid-rigging is a form of cartelisation where bidders collude to manipulate the outcome of a tender, eliminating genuine competition.
- Both practices increase procurement costs and reduce market efficiency.

Additional Key Facts:

- The Competition Act, 2002 replaced the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act, 1969.
- The Competition (Amendment) Act, 2023 introduced changes such as the Settlement and Commitment mechanism and expanded the scope of the Leniency Plus framework.
- The Lesser Penalty (Leniency) Scheme encourages cartel members to voluntarily disclose anti-competitive conduct in exchange for reduced penalties.
- Government e-Marketplace (GeM) is one of the key Digital India initiatives to improve transparency and efficiency in public procurement.
- Bid-rigging and cartelisation are considered among the most serious violations of competition law because they directly undermine fair market competition and increase costs for public procurement.

Exam Focus Points:

- Regulator: Competition Commission of India (CCI).
- Company Penalised: HP India Sales Pvt. Ltd.
- Penalty: ₹126.87 crore.
- Platform: Government e-Marketplace (GeM).
- Violation: Cartelisation and bid-rigging.
- Relevant Law: Competition Act, 2002.
- Relevant Sections: 3(1), 3(3)(d), 27, 46, and 48.
- GeM Launched: 2016.
- Administrative Ministry of GeM: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- CCI Administrative Ministry: Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- CCI Headquarters: New Delhi.
- Competition Act Enacted: 2002.

Lets Revise

- ❖ Which indigenous stealth frigate, commissioned in July 2026, became the sixth warship under India's Project 17A (Nilgiri-class) programme? **INS Mahendragiri.**
- ❖ Which European capital hosted the meeting where Ukraine and nine European countries announced a coalition to develop a shared ballistic missile defence capability? **Paris, France.**
- ❖ Which Indian-origin NASA astronaut began his first eight-month mission to the International Space Station aboard the Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft in July 2026? **Anil Menon.**
- ❖ Which indigenous processor is being used in the NIDAR 2.0 challenge to develop autonomous drones under MeitY's SwaYaan Initiative? **VEGA processor (based on the RISC-V architecture).**
- ❖ Which Delhi Government scheme was officially renamed as the "Delhi Lakshmi Yojana" in 2026? **Mahila Samridhi Yojana.**
- ❖ Which international tribunal ruled in 2016 that China's "Nine-Dash Line" claims in the South China Sea have no legal basis under UNCLOS? **The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), The Hague.**
- ❖ Which afforestation technique was used by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to set the Guinness World Record by planting 3.61 lakh saplings in one hour? **Miyawaki Method.**
- ❖ Which traditional ceremonial performance of the indigenous Māori people was performed to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to New Zealand in 2026? **Māori Haka.**
- ❖ Which renewable energy company is being acquired by the Aditya Birla Group in a US\$1.8 billion deal announced in 2026? **Sprng Energy.**
- ❖ Under which provision of the Competition Act, 2002 is bid-rigging or collusive bidding specifically prohibited? **Section 3(3)(d) of the Competition Act, 2002.**



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IMPORTANCE OF CURRENT AFFAIRS IN UPSC EXAMINATIONS

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