

1. How is the Aravalli Range to be Protected?

1.1 Why is this in News?

- In **November 2025**, the **Supreme Court of India** issued a significant order:
 - It finalised a **uniform definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges**.
 - It imposed a **pause on granting fresh mining leases** across **Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat**.
- The order followed:
 - Decades of **illegal and excessive mining activities**.
 - **Conflicting State-wise definitions** that allowed regulatory loopholes and evasion.
- The issue is also linked to:
 - India's international commitments under the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.
 - The Centre's **Aravalli Green Wall Project**, announced in **June 2025**.

1.2 Relevance

GS II

- Judicial role of the Supreme Court in **environmental governance**.
- Federal dimensions involving **Centre-State coordination** in regulating natural resources.

GS III

- Environmental and ecological concerns such as **land degradation** and mining-related impacts.
- Climate change adaptation strategies and India's commitments under **UNCCD**.

1.3 What are the Aravalli Hills?

- Geological age:
 - Approximately **2 billion years old**, making them the **oldest mountain range in India**.
- Geographical extent:
 - Stretching nearly **650 km** from **Delhi through Haryana and Rajasthan to Gujarat**.
- Hydrological importance:
 - Source and recharge zones for rivers such as **Chambal, Sabarmati, and Luni**.
- Mineral wealth:
 - Sandstone, limestone, marble, and granite.
 - Metallic and non-metallic minerals including **lead, zinc, copper, gold, and tungsten**.

1.4 Ecological Significance

- Natural climatic barrier:
 - Prevents the **eastward expansion of the Thar Desert**.
- Groundwater recharge:
 - Functions as a major **aquifer recharge zone** for north-western India.
- Air quality regulation:
 - Reduces **dust storms and particulate matter** affecting the NCR.
- Biodiversity conservation:
 - Supports wildlife corridors, scrub forests, and semi-arid ecosystems.
- Food and water security:
 - Safeguards the **Indo-Gangetic agricultural belt**.

1.5 How Do the Aravallis Prevent Desertification of the Indo-Gangetic Plain?

- Topographic barrier:
 - Obstructs desert winds and sand movement toward the east.
- Rainfall modulation:
 - Enhances local convection and moisture retention.
- Vegetative anchoring:
 - Forests and scrub vegetation stabilise soil and curb erosion.
- Hydrological role:
 - Recharge of shallow and deep aquifers limits aridification.
- Climate buffering:
 - Moderates temperature extremes and reduces land degradation.

1.6 Problem: Mining and Ecological Degradation

- Since the **1980s**:
 - Extensive quarrying for stone and sand has intensified.
- Environmental consequences:
 - Depletion of groundwater.
 - Severe air pollution from stone-crushing activities.
 - Fragmentation of wildlife habitats.
 - Growth of illegal mining networks.
- Regulatory failure:
 - Environmental rules framed by MoEFCC since the 1990s were frequently violated.

1.7 Why Was a Uniform Definition Necessary?

- State-level manipulation:
 - Varied criteria were used to exclude regions from environmental protection.
- Conflicting expert interpretations:
 - The **Forest Survey of India (2010)** relied on slope, buffers, and valley width.
- Regulatory arbitrage:
 - Enabled selective approvals for mining operations.
- Judicial necessity:
 - Uniformity was essential for effective enforcement, mapping, and EIA consistency.

1.8 What Definition Did the Supreme Court Settle On?

- Aravalli hills defined as:
 - All land elevations **above 100 metres**.
- Points of debate:
 - **Amicus Curiae** argued it was too narrow and could fragment ecosystems.
 - The Centre contended that the FSI definition would exclude even larger areas.
- Court's rationale:
 - The 100-metre criterion was seen as **more inclusive** and **administratively workable**.

1.9 Central Empowered Committee (CEC): Key Recommendations

- Scientific mapping of the entire Aravalli range across States.
- Conduct of a **macro-level Environmental Impact Assessment**.
- Zonation strategy:
 - Absolute no-mining zones including:
 - Protected forests.
 - Water bodies.
 - Tiger corridors.
 - Aquifer recharge zones.
 - NCR areas.
 - Limited and tightly regulated mining in remaining areas.
- Suspension of new leases and renewals until mapping and EIAs are completed.
- Strict regulation of stone-crushing units.
- Mandatory restoration and rehabilitation plans.
- Assessment of cumulative ecological carrying capacity.

1.10 Has the Supreme Court Completely Banned Mining?

- No comprehensive prohibition imposed.
- A calibrated approach adopted:
 - Existing legal mining may continue under strict oversight.
 - Fresh mining halted until a scientific management plan is finalised.
 - Ecologically sensitive zones permanently protected.
- Rationale:
 - Absolute bans often encourage illegal mining and sand mafias.

1.11 Government Initiative: Aravalli Green Wall Project (2025)

- Coverage:
 - A **5 km buffer** around the Aravalli range.
 - Spanning **29 districts** across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi.
- Objective:
 - Restoration of **26 million hectares** of degraded land by **2030**.
- Alignment:
 - UNCCD targets.
 - India's land degradation neutrality commitments.

1.12 Way Forward

- Prioritise science-based environmental regulation over ad-hoc prohibitions.
- Use uniform definitions as instruments of ecological justice.
- Balance livelihood concerns with irreversible ecosystem damage.
- Recognise the Aravallis as a **national ecological security asset**, not a fragmented State resource.

2. Preah Vihear Temple and the Thailand–Cambodia Border Dispute

2.1 Why is this in News?

- In **December 2025**, tensions escalated when:
 - Thailand conducted airstrikes inside Cambodian territory following renewed border clashes.
- Both countries accused each other of breaching a **U.S.-brokered ceasefire** reached in **October 2025**.
- After direct communication with both leaders, **U.S. President Donald Trump** announced a ceasefire on **December 12**.
- The episode marked the most severe escalation since **July 2025**, which resulted in:

- Dozens of fatalities.
- Displacement of over **three lakh civilians**.

2.2 Relevance

GS II

- International relations involving border disputes and ICJ judgments.
- Role of ASEAN and external powers, particularly U.S. mediation.

GS III

- Regional instability and internal security spillovers.

2.3 Basics: Thailand–Cambodia Border

- Total length:
 - Approximately **817 km**.
- Physical nature:
 - Partially demarcated.
 - Densely forested and mountainous.
- Origins of dispute:
 - Colonial-era treaties of **1904 and 1907**.
- Strategic and cultural sensitivity:
 - Presence of ancient Khmer temples, especially **Preah Vihear**.

2.4 What is the Border Dispute About?

- Core disagreement:
 - Sovereignty over stretches of the undemarcated boundary.
- Colonial legacy:
 - Agreements between **France (Cambodia)** and **Siam (Thailand)**.
- Intended boundary:
 - Watershed line of the Dangrek Mountains.
- Cartographic controversy:
 - French maps placed key temples on Cambodia's side.
- Divergent positions:
 - Thailand challenges the validity of maps.
 - Cambodia relies on them to assert sovereignty.

2.5 Centrality of Preah Vihear Temple

- Temple description:

- An **11th-century Hindu (Shaivite) temple**, symbolising Khmer civilisation.
- Historical development:
 - Construction began in the **9th century**.
 - Major expansions in the **11th and 12th centuries** under **Suryavarman I and II**.
- Architectural uniqueness:
 - Oriented along a **north–south axis** across **800 metres**.
 - Comprises sanctuaries, pavements, staircases, and intricate stone carvings.
- ICJ decisions:
 - **1962**: Temple awarded to Cambodia.
 - **2013**: Clarified Cambodian sovereignty over most surrounding land.
- Continuing tensions:
 - Thailand accepts the temple ruling but contests adjoining territory.
- Nationalist dimensions:
 - Cambodia emphasises cultural heritage and post-colonial sovereignty.
 - Thailand stresses territorial integrity and resistance to perceived loss.

3. KAVACH Anti-Collision System

3.1 Why is this in News?

- In **December 2025**, the Union Railway Minister informed the Lok Sabha that:
 - **KAVACH** has been fully commissioned across **more than 2,000 km** of railway tracks.
 - Consequential train accidents declined by nearly **90%**, from **135 in 2014 to 11 currently**.
- The update comes amid:
 - Recurrent public concern regarding rail safety.
 - A policy push for indigenous, technology-driven accident prevention.
- Expansion aligns with:
 - **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
 - **Viksit Bharat** vision.

3.2 Relevance

GS III

- Railway infrastructure and public safety systems.

- Indigenous technological innovation and Automatic Train Protection (ATP) systems.

3.3 What is KAVACH?

- KAVACH is India's **indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection system**.
- Objective:
 - Prevent train collisions arising from human error.
- Developed by:
 - **Research Designs & Standards Organisation (RDSO)**.
 - In collaboration with Indian industry.
- Comparable global systems:
 - **ETCS** (Europe).
 - **PTC** (USA).
- Distinction:
 - Significantly more cost-effective.

3.4 What Problems Does KAVACH Address?

- Human errors involving:
 - Loco pilots.
 - Station masters.
 - Signal interpretation.
- High-risk situations:
 - Signal Passed At Danger (SPAD).
 - Head-on collisions.
 - Rear-end collisions.
 - Overspeeding.
- Limitations of legacy signalling infrastructure.

3.5 How Does KAVACH Work?

- A real-time, fail-safe system based on continuous communication.

Five Core Components

- On-board unit:
 - Installed on locomotives.
 - Applies automatic braking.
- Track-side equipment:
 - Relays movement authority.

- Station KAVACH:
 - Integrated with signalling and interlocking.
- Telecom network:
 - Optical Fibre Cable.
 - Telecom towers.
- Central systems:
 - Real-time monitoring and diagnostics.

3.6 Operational Features

- Automatic braking triggered when:
 - Signals are overshot.
 - Collision risk is detected.
 - Speed limits are exceeded.
- Continuous loco-to-loco and loco-to-station communication.
- Operable in:
 - Fog.
 - Low visibility.
- Designed for:
 - High-density mixed traffic.

3.7 Implementation Status

- Over **2,000 km** commissioned.
- **7,129 km** OFC laid.
- **860 telecom towers** installed.
- **767 stations** connected.
- **3,413 km** trackside equipment deployed.
- **4,154 locomotives** fitted.
- Nearly **40,000 personnel** trained.
- Expansion pace described as rapid.

3.8 Strategic Importance

- Major safety dividend.
- Indigenous technology reduces import dependence.
- Cost-effective at around **₹50 lakh per km**.
- Scalable for India's vast network.

- Generates employment and technical skills.

3.9 Challenges and Limitations

- High upfront capital requirement.
- Dependence on dense telecom infrastructure.
- Need for precise calibration and mapping.
- Integration across varied signalling systems.
- Not yet universal across all routes and locomotives.

3.10 Governance Perspective

- Linked with initiatives such as the **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme**.
- Governance challenge:
 - Upgrading safety while maintaining uninterrupted operations.
- India transports around **7.5 crore passengers daily**.
- Railways cannot be shut down for prolonged upgrades.

3.11 Conclusion

- KAVACH represents India's indigenous, real-time ATP solution that has substantially reduced collisions while strengthening technological self-reliance.

4. Desert Cyclone-II

4.1 Why is this in News?

- In **December 2025**, an **Indian Army contingent** departed for the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** to participate in **DESERT CYCLONE-II**.
- The bilateral military exercise is scheduled to be conducted in **Abu Dhabi** from **December 18 to December 30, 2025**.
- The exercise forms part of India's expanding **defence diplomacy in West Asia**.

4.2 Relevance

GS II

- India-UAE relations.
- Defence diplomacy in West Asia.

GS III

- National security.
- Military preparedness, joint exercises, and interoperability.

4.3 What is DESERT CYCLONE?

- Nature:
 - A **bilateral joint military exercise**.

- Participants:
 - **India:** 45 personnel, primarily from the **Mechanised Infantry Regiment**.
 - **UAE:** 53 personnel from a **Mechanised Infantry Battalion**.
- Edition:
 - Second edition (**DESERT CYCLONE–II**).
- Domain:
 - Land forces, with focus on mechanised infantry operations.

4.4 Objectives of DESERT CYCLONE–II

- Enhance interoperability between:
 - Indian Army.
 - UAE Land Forces.
- Improve joint operational preparedness in:
 - Mechanised warfare.
 - Desert and semi-desert terrain.
- Strengthen defence cooperation and mutual trust.
- Facilitate exchange of:
 - Best practices.
 - Tactical doctrines.
 - Operational procedures.

4.5 Strategic Significance of UAE for India

- UAE as a key West Asian partner for:
 - Energy security.
 - Indian diaspora (approximately **3.5 million** Indians).
- Defence cooperation pillars include:
 - Joint military exercises across army, navy, and air force.
 - Defence industrial collaboration.
 - Maritime security cooperation in the **Arabian Sea and Gulf region**.
- UAE ranks among India's closest strategic partners in the Gulf.

4.6 Why Mechanised Infantry is Important

- Mechanised infantry is a critical arm for:
 - Rapid mobility.
 - Combined arms operations.

- High relevance for:
 - Desert warfare.
 - High-intensity conventional conflicts.
- UAE terrain offers a realistic environment for operational training.

4.7 Place in India's Defence Diplomacy

- Complements other bilateral and multilateral exercises such as:
 - **AL NAGAH** (India–Oman).
 - **YUDH ABHYAS** (India–USA).
 - **DUSTLIK** (India–Uzbekistan).
- Reflects India's evolving focus on:
 - Theatre-level readiness.
 - Interoperable coalition operations.
- Supports India's **Act West policy** and the broader **Indo-Pacific–West Asia strategic continuum**.

4.8 Takeaway

- DESERT CYCLONE–II highlights India's emphasis on **practical military cooperation** rather than symbolic engagement.
- Enhances India's capability to operate alongside friendly foreign forces in diverse operational environments.
- Reinforces India's position as a **net security partner in West Asia**.

4.9 Conclusion

- DESERT CYCLONE–II is a bilateral mechanised infantry exercise between India and the UAE, aimed at strengthening interoperability and deepening defence cooperation in desert warfare conditions.

5. India–Oman Free Trade Agreement

5.1 Why is this in News?

- In **December 2025**, India and Oman announced plans to sign a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**, formally termed a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**.
- The announcement was made by the **Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal**, at the **India–Oman Business Forum in Muscat**.
- The agreement marks:
 - India's **first bilateral FTA with a Gulf country outside the UAE model**.
 - A significant step in strengthening India's **Act West strategy**.

5.2 Relevance

GS II

- International relations.
- Act West policy.
- India–Gulf relations.

GS III

- External trade and economic diplomacy.
- FTAs and CEPAs.
- Energy transition and logistics.

5.3 What is an FTA / CEPA?

- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):**
 - Reduces or eliminates tariffs on traded goods.
 - Improves market access between partner countries.
- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA):**
 - Extends beyond goods trade.
 - Covers:
 - Trade in services.
 - Investment protection and facilitation.
 - Customs cooperation.
 - Standards.
 - Mobility of professionals.
- India–Oman CEPA negotiations:
 - Initiated in **2023**.
 - Conducted amid India's renewed emphasis on trade diversification.

5.4 India–Oman Economic Snapshot

- Bilateral trade (2023–24):
 - Approximately **\$12 billion**.
- India's exports to Oman include:
 - Refined petroleum products.
 - Iron and steel.
 - Machinery.
 - Textiles.



- Gems and jewellery.
- India's imports from Oman include:
 - Crude oil.
 - LNG.
 - Fertilisers.
 - Chemicals.
- Indian diaspora in Oman:
 - Around **7.8 lakh**, among the largest expatriate communities.
- Oman's strategic geography:
 - Located outside the **Strait of Hormuz choke point**.
 - Major ports include **Duqm, Sohar, and Salalah**.

5.5 Why Oman Matters Strategically for India

- Gateway economy:
 - Provides access to GCC markets, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and Africa.
- Logistics hub potential:
 - Duqm port linked with India's western coastline.
- Energy partnership:
 - LNG supplies.
 - Collaboration in **green hydrogen** initiatives.
- Geopolitical reliability:
 - Stable monarchy.
 - Neutral and balanced foreign policy.

5.6 Strategic Economic Gains for India

- Market diversification:
 - Reduces reliance on traditional export destinations.
- Value-chain integration:
 - Enables Indian firms to plug into Gulf–Africa trade routes.
- Services exports expansion:
 - IT.
 - Logistics.
 - Fintech.
 - Consultancy services.

- Investment inflows:
 - Omani sovereign and private capital into India.
- MSME benefits:
 - Preferential access to new markets.

5.7 Strategic Economic Gains for Oman

- Economic diversification beyond hydrocarbons.
- Improved access to:
 - India's vast consumer market.
 - Skilled manpower.
 - Digital services.
- Positioning Oman as:
 - A regional trade and logistics hub.
- Partnership opportunities in:
 - Green hydrogen exports.
 - Food security arrangements.

5.8 How This Fits India's FTA Strategy

- Part of India's **FTA 2.0 approach**, which prioritises:
 - Quality over quantity.
 - Trusted and strategic partners.
- Builds upon:
 - India–UAE CEPA.
 - India–Australia ECTA.
- Supports:
 - **Atmanirbhar Bharat** through export-led growth.
 - **Viksit Bharat 2047** trade vision.

5.9 Risks and Challenges

- Past Indian experience:
 - FTAs contributing to import surges (e.g., electronics sector).
- Need for:
 - Robust rules of origin.
 - Safeguards for MSMEs.
- Infrastructure constraints:

- Logistics costs remain around **13–14% of GDP**.
- Services mobility:
 - Visa regimes and labour norms require clarity.

5.10 Analytical Takeaway

- The India–Oman CEPA is not merely a trade arrangement but a **geo-economic bridge**.
- Oman’s geography transforms market access into strategic leverage.
- Success depends on:
 - Effective implementation.
 - Using Oman as a regional hub rather than only a bilateral partner.

5.11 Conclusion

- The India–Oman CEPA seeks to deepen trade, investment, and energy cooperation while positioning Oman as India’s gateway to the GCC, Central Asia, and Africa under the Act West strategy.

6. UNEA-7 (United Nations Environment Assembly–7)

6.1 Why is this in News?

- UNEA-7 concluded on **December 12, 2025**, in **Nairobi, Kenya**.
- Outcome:
 - **11 resolutions adopted** out of **15 draft proposals**.
- Several key draft resolutions were dropped, including:
 - A proposal on strengthening the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- Civil society and environmental groups criticised the outcome for:
 - Weak ambition.
 - Inadequate action on deep-sea protection.
 - Insufficient measures against environmental crime.

6.2 Relevance

GS III

- Environmental governance.
- Mineral governance.
- Chemicals and waste management.
- Marine ecology.

6.3 What is UNEA?

- UNEA is the **highest global decision-making body on environmental matters**.
- Functions under the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- Meets:
 - Biennially.
- Membership:
 - All **193 UN member states**.
- Core functions:
 - Setting the global environmental agenda.
 - Providing policy direction.
 - Strengthening international environmental governance.

6.4 UNEA-7 at a Glance

- Implicit theme:
 - Responding to escalating global environmental crises.
- Duration:
 - Approximately **two weeks** of negotiations.
- Venue:
 - Nairobi (UNEP headquarters).
- Outcome:
 - Adoption of 11 resolutions.
 - Persistence of North–South divides and ambition gaps.

6.5 Key Resolutions Adopted

- **Minerals and metals:**
 - Promotion of sustainable value chains.
 - Management of mining waste.
 - Capacity-building initiatives.
- **Coral reefs:**
 - Enhancing climate resilience.
 - Protection of ecosystems supporting around **25% of marine biodiversity**.
- **Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs):**
 - Improved coordination.
 - Reduction of policy and reporting overlaps.
- **Chemicals and waste:**



- Strengthened governance under the **Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions**.

6.6 Resolutions Dropped or Diluted

- Deep-sea protection:
 - Absence of strong safeguards for deep-sea mining.
- Environmental crime:
 - No enhanced global enforcement framework.
- Strengthening UNEP:
 - Resolution removed from the final outcome.

6.7 Leadership Transition

- President of UNEA-7:
 - **Abdullah bin Ali Al-Amri (Oman)**.
- President-elect for **UNEA-8 (December 2026)**:
 - **Matthew Samuda (Jamaica)**.
- Stated leadership priorities:
 - Inclusivity.
 - Stronger science-policy interface.
 - Scaling finance for adaptation and resilience.

6.8 Analytical Assessment

Achievements

- Sustained multilateral engagement despite geopolitical tensions.
- Elevated mineral governance within global environmental discourse.
- Incremental progress on:
 - Coral reefs.
 - Chemicals and waste.
 - MEA coordination.

Shortcomings

- Avoidance of binding commitments.
- Weak response to global commons challenges such as deep-sea ecosystems.
- Institutional reluctance to empower UNEP.

6.9 Global Significance

- Highlights the limits of consensus-based multilateralism in an era marked by:

- Climate urgency.
- Resource geopolitics.
- Reflects growing tension between:
 - Environmental ambition.
 - Political feasibility.

6.10 Way Forward

- Shift from dialogue-driven outcomes to rule-based global standards, particularly for:
 - Minerals.
 - Ocean governance.
- Strengthen UNEP's:
 - Mandate.
 - Financial resources.
 - Coordinating authority.
- Integrate:
 - Environmental justice considerations.
 - Finance and capacity-building for developing nations.
- Ensure **UNEA-8** prioritises implementation rather than extended negotiations.

6.11 Conclusion

- UNEA-7 adopted 11 resolutions advancing cooperation on minerals, coral reefs, and chemicals, yet persistent divisions on deep-sea protection, environmental crime, and UNEP's authority revealed the constraints of contemporary global environmental governance.

19th December 2025: Daily MCQs

Q1. With reference to the Aravalli range, consider the following statements:

1. The Aravalli range is older than the Himalayas and is among the oldest mountain systems in the world.
2. The Aravalli range acts as a climatic barrier that prevents the westward spread of the Thar Desert.
3. The Aravallis play a significant role in groundwater recharge in north-western India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 2 and 3 only

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Correct ✓**
The Aravallis are ~2 billion years old and far older than the Himalayas (young fold mountains).
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect ✗ (classic UPSC trap)**
Aravallis prevent **eastward expansion** of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains, **not westward**.
- **Statement 3 – Correct ✓**
The range is a major **aquifer recharge zone** for north-western India.

📖 UPSC often tests **directional errors** (east vs west).

Q2. The Supreme Court's recent intervention regarding the Aravalli hills is significant primarily because it:

- A. Completely banned mining activities across all Aravalli States
- B. Established a uniform definition to prevent regulatory arbitrage
- C. Declared the Aravalli range a National Park
- D. Transferred regulatory powers exclusively to the Union Government

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Option A ✗** : No blanket ban; only **fresh mining paused**.
- **Option B ✓** : Core issue was **different State definitions** enabling mining approvals.
- **Option C ✗** : No national park declaration.
- **Option D ✗** : Regulation still involves States; Court focused on **clarity and enforcement**, not centralisation.

📖 Keyword tested: **"regulatory arbitrage"** (very UPSC-oriented).

Q3. With reference to the Preah Vihear Temple dispute, consider the following statements:

1. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in 1962 that the temple belongs to Cambodia.
2. Thailand disputes both the temple ownership and the surrounding territory.
3. The dispute originates from colonial-era boundary maps drawn during French rule in Cambodia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Correct ✓**
ICJ (1962) awarded the temple to Cambodia.
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect ✗**
Thailand accepts temple ownership but disputes **adjacent land**, not the temple itself.
- **Statement 3 – Correct ✓**
Dispute arises from **French colonial maps** (1904–07).

📌 UPSC tests **partial acceptance vs total rejection**.

Q4. Which of the following best explains why the Thailand–Cambodia dispute remains unresolved despite ICJ rulings?

- A. ICJ judgments are advisory in nature
- B. The dispute involves undefined surrounding territory beyond the temple
- C. ASEAN prohibits judicial settlement of disputes
- D. The dispute involves religious disagreements

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Option A ✗** : ICJ judgments are **binding**, not advisory.
- **Option B ✓** : Temple ownership settled, **border demarcation not fully resolved**.
- **Option C ✗** : ASEAN norms do not prohibit judicial settlements.
- **Option D ✗** : Issue is territorial, not religious.

📌 UPSC tests **legal nuance**, not surface facts.

Q5. With reference to KAVACH, consider the following statements:

1. KAVACH is an indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system.
2. KAVACH requires continuous communication between trains and trackside infrastructure.
3. KAVACH can function only under clear visibility conditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: A

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Correct ✓**
Developed by **RDSO** with Indian industry.
- **Statement 2 – Correct ✓**
Operates through **real-time loco-to-loco and loco-to-station communication**.
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect ✗**
Designed to work in **fog, low visibility, and adverse weather**.

📖 Fog-related elimination = **classic railway UPSC trap**.

Q6. KAVACH is considered strategically important for Indian Railways primarily because it:

- A. Replaces all existing signalling systems
- B. Enables high-speed rail operations exclusively
- C. Reduces accidents while being cost-effective and indigenous
- D. Eliminates the need for human involvement in rail operations

Correct Answer: C

Explanation:

- **Option A ✗** : It integrates with existing systems.
- **Option B ✗** : Not limited to high-speed rail.
- **Option C ✓** : Safety + cost-effectiveness + Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- **Option D ✗** : Human oversight still exists.

Q7. With reference to DESERT CYCLONE–II, consider the following statements:

1. It is a trilateral military exercise involving India, UAE, and Oman.
2. The exercise focuses on mechanised infantry operations in desert terrain.
3. It forms part of India's defence diplomacy in West Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect ✗** : Exercise is **bilateral (India–UAE)**.
- **Statement 2 – Correct ✓**
- **Statement 3 – Correct ✓**

👉 UPSC loves **bilateral vs trilateral** confusion.

Q8. India–Oman CEPA is strategically significant for India mainly because Oman:

- A. Is India's largest trading partner in the Gulf
- B. Lies outside the Strait of Hormuz and offers alternative trade routes
- C. Is a permanent member of OPEC
- D. Controls the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- **Option A ✗** : UAE is larger partner.
 - **Option B ✓** : Oman bypasses Hormuz chokepoint.
 - **Option C ✗** : Oman is not a permanent OPEC heavyweight.
 - **Option D ✗** : Bab-el-Mandeb is controlled by Djibouti–Yemen region.
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Q9. Which of the following correctly differentiates an FTA from a CEPA?

- A. CEPA excludes services trade
- B. CEPA includes investment, services, and mobility provisions
- C. FTA applies only to developing countries
- D. CEPA is restricted to tariff reduction

Correct Answer: B

Explanation:

- CEPA = FTA + services + investment + mobility + standards
 - Others are conceptually incorrect.
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Q10. With reference to UNEA-7, consider the following statements:

1. UNEA is the highest global decision-making body on environmental matters.
2. UNEA-7 adopted binding global rules on deep-sea mining.
3. Strengthening UNEP's institutional authority was among the adopted resolutions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Correct Answer: A

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Correct ✓**
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect ✗** (deep-sea protection dropped)
- **Statement 3 – Incorrect ✗** (UNEP strengthening resolution removed)

Mains: *Judicial intervention has increasingly shaped environmental governance in India.*

Examine the Supreme Court's role in protecting the Aravalli range and discuss the federal challenges involved. (250 words)

