



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

29th July 2026



Cities Becoming Death Traps



CONTEXT: Urban neglect, political apathy, and corruption continue to claim lives across India.

Present Status

- **Lucknow (June 2026):** 15 people died
- **Delhi (Malviya Nagar):** Fire in an illegally modified building
- **Bhiwadi (Rajasthan):** Illegal firecracker unit
- **Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu):** Illegal cracker factory

Alarming Trend

- 13,000–15,000 fire-related deaths
- Delhi alone – 39 fire deaths
- Aggravated – INTENSE HEAT WAVES

Major Issues / Challenges

A. Illegal Urban Development

- Unauthorized commercial activities – residential areas.
- Illegal constructions violating building bye-laws.
- Absence of emergency exits and fire safety systems.

B. Weak Enforcement

- Fire safety norms exist but compliance is poor.
- Illegal structures continue despite demolition notices.
- Anti-encroachment drives lack continuity.

C. Corruption & Political Patronage

- Regulatory violations ignored – corruption.
- Political interference prevents action
- Culture of impunity encourages repeated violations.

D. Fragmented Urban Governance

- Responsibilities divided among:
 - Municipal Corporations
 - Development Authorities
 - Water Boards
 - PWD
 - Fire Departments
- Creates an **accountability vacuum**.

E. Weak Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

- Despite the **74th Constitutional Amendment**
 - ULBs remain financially and administratively weak.
- Responsibility without adequate authority.

F. Reactive Rather than Preventive Governance

- Focus on inquiries after disasters instead of prevention.
- Committees are formed but systemic reforms remain limited.

G. Underutilisation of Technology

Available technologies such as:

- GIS
- Satellite imagery
- Drones
- AI
- Digital property databases

are not effectively used for enforcement.

What are the Key Fire Safety Regulations in India?

- **National Building Code:** BIS – 1970, 3rd edition in 2016.
 - Primary Standard – fire safety
 - State governments – local bylaws.
- **Model Building Bye Laws 2016:** Use of fire-resistant materials for construction, installation of fire alarms and detection systems, etc.
- **STATE SPECIFIC – Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Act, 2005**
- **Model Building Bye-Laws (MoHUA)**
- **Scheme for Expansion and Modernization of Fire Services in the States 2023**
- **Fire Safety Week:** Union Health Ministry – ‘Fire Safety Week’ from 21st to 25th April – Awareness
- **NDMA Guidelines:** homes, schools, and hospitals.



Cities Becoming Death Traps



CONTEXT: Urban neglect, political apathy, and corruption continue to claim lives across India.

Way Forward

Strengthen Urban Governance

- Empower Urban Local Bodies – **74th Constitutional Amendment**.
- Clearly define **institutional responsibilities**.

Ensure Strict Enforcement

- Mandatory periodic fire safety audits.
- Zero tolerance for illegal constructions.
- Accountability of officials for regulatory failures.

Technology-Based Monitoring

- GIS mapping of illegal structures.
- AI-based compliance monitoring.
- Digital property records and real-time dashboards.

Professional Urban Management

- Independent urban planning and fire safety authorities.
- Regular structural safety inspections.

Improve Disaster Preparedness

- Fire safety awareness.
- Emergency evacuation plans.
- Mock drills in schools, hospitals and commercial buildings.

Governance Reforms

- Fix responsibility for negligence.
- Performance-based evaluation of civic authorities.
- Transparent citizen grievance systems.

Global Best Practices

- **Singapore:** Strict building code enforcement and digital compliance.
- **Tokyo:** Regular mandatory fire drills and earthquake/fire-resilient buildings.
- **Seoul:** Smart GIS-based urban management.

Indian Best Practices

- **Surat:** GIS-enabled municipal governance and disaster resilience.
- **Indore:** Integrated command-and-control centre for urban management.
- **Ahmedabad:** Town Planning Schemes for planned urban development.

Mains Practise Question

Despite having adequate laws and building regulations, urban fire accidents continue to claim lives in India. Analyse the reasons and suggest institutional reforms to improve urban safety.

(10 Marks, 150 words)



Western Ghats Eco-Zone Notification

CONTEXT: Move comes amid the continuing differences with six States over the areas to be included in the ESA

Why in News?

The Union MoEFCC has **reissued the draft notification (7th time since 2014)** proposing an **ESA** in the Western Ghats after the previous notification lapsed without finalisation.

Status: Where Does the Issue Stand? - Fresh Draft Notification (2026)

- **Proposed ESA Area: 56,825.7 sq. km** (unchanged from previous draft).
- **Final notification yet to be issued** due to disagreement with States.

Background of the ESA Debate

(A) Gadgil Committee (2011) - Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)
chaired by **Prof. Madhav Gadgil**

Recommendations

- Entire Western Ghats (**1,29,037 sq. km**) - Ecologically Sensitive.
- Divide region into **ESZ-1, ESZ-2 and ESZ-3**.
- Strong restrictions - *mining and environmentally destructive activities*.
- Decentralised decision-making involving **Gram Sabhas**.

(B) Kasturirangan Committee (2013) - High-Level Working Group (HLWG)
chaired by **Dr. K. Kasturirangan**

Recommendations

- Protect only **37% of Western Ghats**
- ESA of **59,940 sq. km**
- Focus protection mainly on **natural landscapes**, while excluding most human settlements and plantations.
- Balance conservation with development.

Kerala's Modification

- Reduced ESA from **13,108 sq. km** to **9,993.7 sq. km** after field verification.

The process began in **2010** with the **Madhav Gadgil Committee**, which recommended protecting the entire Western Ghats region.

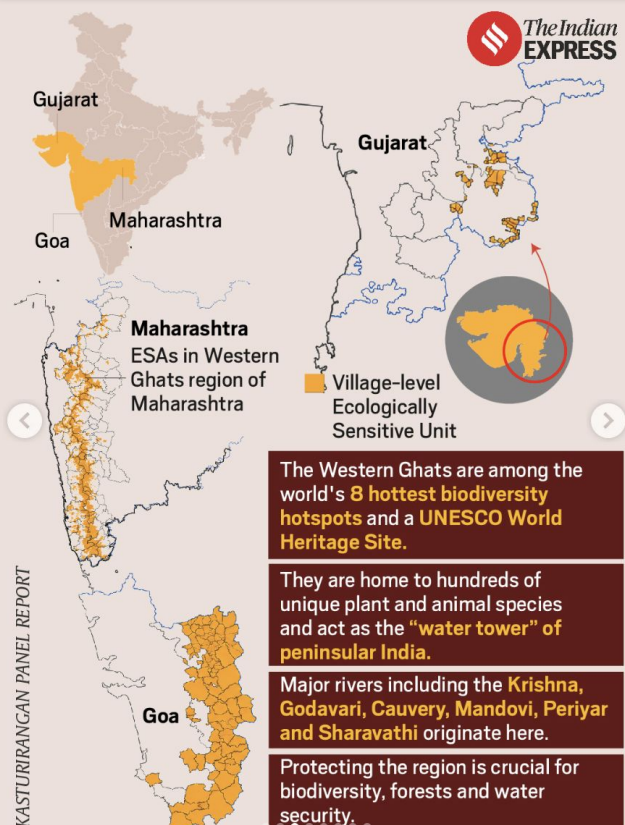
The **Gadgil Committee** recommended that the **entire Western Ghats region** — about **1.29 lakh sq km** — be declared an **Ecologically Sensitive Area**, with different levels of protection based on ecological fragility.

However, states opposed the proposal, arguing that it would affect livelihoods, agriculture, mining and development activities.

The Centre then appointed the **K Kasturirangan Committee** in 2012.

After a ground-truthing exercise, it reduced the proposed ESA area to about **60,000 sq km**, focusing mainly on **natural landscapes** while excluding many areas dominated by human settlements, plantations and agriculture.

Since then, **disagreements between the Centre and states have delayed** a final notification for over a decade.



Western Ghats Eco-Zone Notification



CONTEXT: Move comes amid the continuing differences with six States over the areas to be included in the ESA

Why Has the Notification Been Delayed for More Than a Decade?

A. Opposition from States – States argue that:

- Restrictions will hurt farmers and plantation owners.
- Infrastructure development will slow.
- Mining revenues will decline.
- Tourism and local livelihoods may suffer.
- Village boundaries proposed by the Centre are disputed.

B. Difficulty in Balancing Ecology and Development

Major challenge: *How to protect biodiversity without adversely affecting livelihoods of millions living in the Western Ghats?*

C. Administrative Challenges

- Boundary demarcation disputes.
- Repeated consultations.
- Political resistance.
- Multiple ministries and States involved.

According to officials, **Gujarat, Goa and Maharashtra** are closest to an agreement.

Gujarat has already given its **final consent**.

Maharashtra's proposal is being **finalised**.

Goa has sought **exclusion of 21 villages**.

The biggest disagreements remain with:

Karnataka, which formally **rejected** the Kasturirangan report in 2024.

Kerala, which wants its **ESA area reduced** further, especially in parts of **Idukki and Wayanad**.

Why is the Western Ghats So Important?

A. Global Biodiversity Hotspot

- One of the **36 Biodiversity Hotspots** in the world.
- UNESCO World Heritage Site (39 serial sites).

B. Water Security – Origin of major rivers:

- Godavari
- Krishna
- Kaveri
- Tungabhadra
- Periyar

Supports water needs of nearly **250 million people**.

C. Climate Regulator

- Influences Southwest Monsoon.
- Carbon sink; Prevents soil erosion; Controls floods.

D. Biodiversity

- Over **7,400 species** of flowering plants.
- More than **500 bird species**.
- Around **330 globally threatened species**.

Major Concerns if Protection is Delayed

Ecological

- Deforestation
- Habitat fragmentation
- Biodiversity loss
- Wildlife conflicts

Disaster Risk – Unscientific development increases:

- Landslides
- Flash floods
- Soil erosion

Examples

- Kerala floods (2018); Wayanad landslides (2019, 2024)

Climate Change

- Reduced carbon sequestration
- Greater vulnerability to extreme weather events

Unsustainable Mining

- Forest degradation
- River pollution
- Groundwater depletion



Western Ghats Eco-Zone Notification



CONTEXT: Move comes amid the continuing differences with six States over the areas to be included in the ESA

Way Forward

- A. **Adopt a Balanced Conservation Model** – Protect ecologically fragile areas while safeguarding legitimate livelihoods.
- B. **Scientific Mapping** – Use GIS, remote sensing and ground verification for accurate ESA boundaries.
- C. **Cooperative Federalism** – Greater consultation with States, local bodies and communities.
- D. **Community-Based Conservation**
 - Involve Gram Sabhas and local communities.
 - Promote eco-tourism and sustainable livelihoods.
- E. **Differential Regulation** – Focus restrictions on highly fragile ecosystems instead of blanket bans.
- F. **Strong Monitoring**
 - Satellite monitoring of illegal mining.
 - Independent ecological audits.
 - Strict compliance mechanisms.

Mains Practise Question

The prolonged delay in notifying the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) in the Western Ghats reflects the challenge of balancing environmental conservation with developmental aspirations. Discuss.

(10 Marks, 150 words)



Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No :**



The police beat

The Status of Policing in India 2025 report offers glimpses into the institutional attitude of the police in the country and the need for reforms. The charts below show the responses of the police personnel surveyed for the report for the questions mentioned in the respective charts

Brutality of power: Police personnel carry out a lathi charge on protesters during the "Chalo Sansad" march from Jantar Mantar to Parliament against the NEET paper leak, in New Delhi on July 20.

Chart 1: "To properly fulfil their responsibilities, police should be allowed to use force without any fear of punishment" (Values in %)

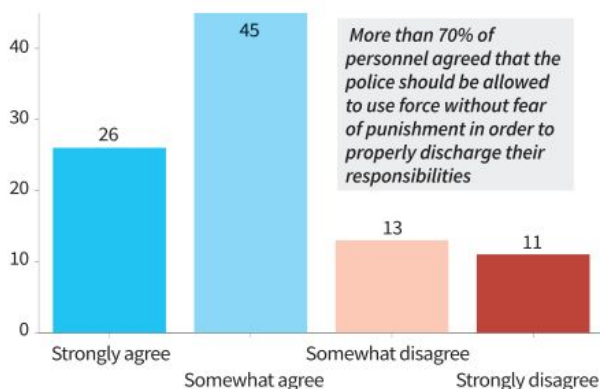
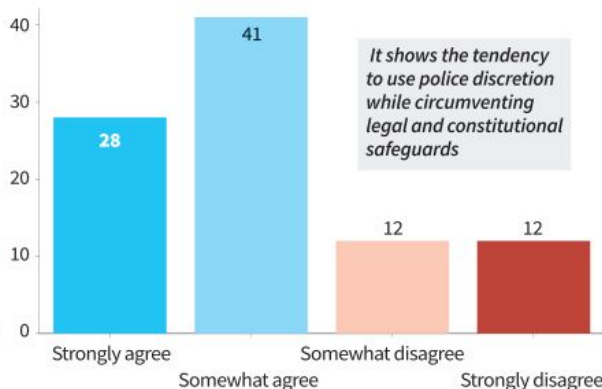


Chart 2: "Should the police be allowed to arrest and detain suspects without court investigation?" (Values in %)



Very important (dark red), Somewhat important (light red), Not much important (light blue), Not at all important – police should be a friendly force, no need to instil fear (dark blue)

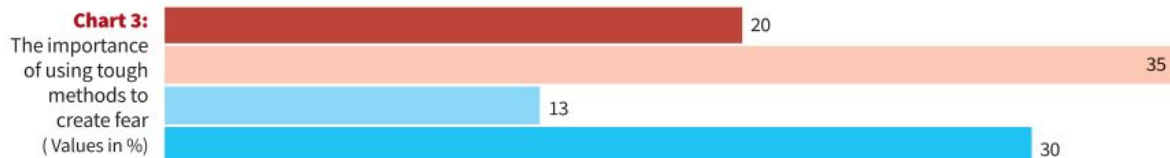


Table 1: Police personnel's views on the usefulness of various crime-control measures (Values in %)

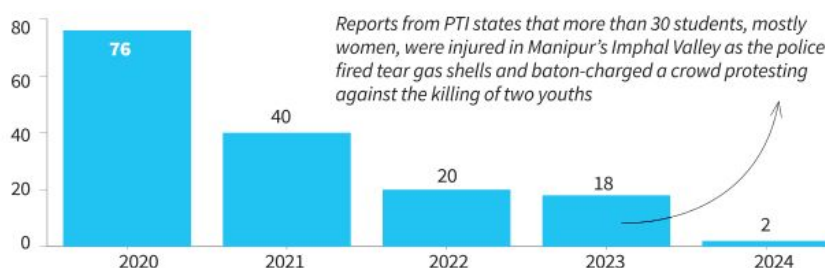
Measures for crime control	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not much useful	Not at all useful
Increasing the presence of beat police and /or patrolling or the number of police stations/chowkis	64	25	7	2
Recruiting more women into the police	58	26	10	5
More preventive arrests of "anti-social elements"	48	36	10	5
Forming special squads that can detain people indefinitely	43	28	15	12

Police personnel who strongly support legitimate measures are also the most likely to support the use of coercive actions, This reveals the inconsistencies in police perceptions

Chart 4: Civilians injured during riots due to police firing and lathi charge in India as per NCRB

Source: The Status of Policing in India Report 2025 is the sixth report in the Status of Policing in India (SPIR) series brought out by Common Cause and the Lokniti programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

(Gandla Sneha is interning with The Hindu's Data Team)



SYLLABUS: Prelims: Environment
Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No : 7**

Key Takeaways

- **India's Tiger Conservation Success:** India has emerged as the global leader in tiger conservation, with **3,682 tigers (2022)**, accounting for **over 70% of the world's wild tiger population**.
- **Expansion of Protected Areas:** Since **Project Tiger (1973)**, tiger reserves have increased from **9 to 58**, covering **84,488 sq. km (2.6% of India's land area)**.
- **New Conservation Challenge:** Around **35–40% of India's tigers now live outside Tiger Reserves**, increasing interactions with humans.
- **Launch of TOTR Initiative:** The **Tigers Outside Tiger Reserves (TOTR)** initiative aims to conserve tigers in shared landscapes while reducing human-tiger conflict.
- **Pilot-Based Implementation:** The programme will initially cover **40 forest divisions across 9 States**, based on the **All India Tiger Estimation (2022)**.
- **Two-Pillar Strategy:** (i) Conflict mitigation through rapid response, surveillance and rescue infrastructure; (ii) Long-term coexistence through community participation, awareness and timely compensation.
- **Technology-Driven Conservation:** Use of **camera traps, drones, GPS tracking and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** for monitoring and early warning.
- **Governance Focus:** Success depends not only on technology but also on **trained forest personnel, institutional capacity and community trust**.

Value Addition

Important Reports & Institutions

- **NTCA** – Statutory body under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (amended in 2006).
- **All India Tiger Estimation (AITE)** – Conducted every **4 years**; regarded as the **world's largest camera-trap wildlife survey**.
- **Global Tiger Forum (GTF)** – India is a founding member; the only intergovernmental body dedicated to tiger conservation.

Global Status

- India hosts **over 70% of the world's wild tigers**.
- The **Global Tiger Recovery Program (TX2)** aimed to double global tiger numbers by 2022; **India achieved this target ahead of schedule**.

Project Tiger

- Launched in **1973** with **9 Tiger Reserves**.
- Today, India has **58 Tiger Reserves** across **18 States**.

Tiger Landscape

- Tigers have been recorded in **212 forest divisions** (All India Tiger Estimation 2022), indicating expansion beyond protected areas.

Flagship Success Stories

- **Panna Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh):** Tiger population restored through successful reintroduction after local extinction.
- **Sariska Tiger Reserve (Rajasthan):** One of the world's first successful tiger translocation programmes.
- **Kaziranga (Assam):** Emerging as a major tiger landscape alongside rhino conservation.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 48A:** Protection and improvement of the environment.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental duty to protect wildlife and forests.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** – Principal legislation for wildlife conservation.

International Commitments

- **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).**
- **CITES (Appendix I):** International commercial trade in tigers is prohibited.
- **Global Tiger Initiative (GTI).**

Value Addition

- Shift from **"Protected Area-centric Conservation"** to **"Landscape-level Conservation"**.
- Conservation is increasingly based on the **One Health** approach, recognising the interdependence of **wildlife, humans and ecosystems**.
- **Wildlife corridors** (e.g., Kanha–Pench, Nilgiri, Terai Arc Landscape) are crucial for genetic exchange and reducing habitat fragmentation.

Best Practice

- **Maharashtra's AI-enabled early warning system** and **Karnataka's camera trap network** have improved conflict monitoring in several tiger landscapes.
- **Timely compensation** and community participation (Eco-Development Committees) have proven effective in reducing local hostility toward wildlife conservation.



US Begins Review of NATO

SYLLABUS: Prelims: IR

Newspaper : The Hindu, Page No : 14

The foundations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were officially laid down on 4 April 1949 with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, more popularly known as the Washington Treaty.

- The Washington Treaty – or North Atlantic Treaty – forms the basis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – or NATO.
- The Treaty was signed in Washington D.C. on 4 April 1949 by 12 founding members.
- The Treaty derives its authority from Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which reaffirms the inherent right of independent states to individual or collective defence.
- Collective defence is at the heart of the Treaty and is enshrined in Article 5. It commits members to protect each other and sets a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance.
- The Treaty is short – containing only 14 articles – and provides for in-built flexibility on all fronts.
- Despite the changing security environment, the original Treaty has never had to be modified and each Ally has the possibility to implement the text in accordance with its capabilities and circumstances.

Alphabetical list of NATO member countries

 Albania 2009	 Belgium 1949	 Bulgaria 2004	 Canada 1949
 Croatia 2009	 Czechia 1999	 Denmark 1949	 Estonia 2004
 Finland 2023	 France 1949	 Germany 1955	 Greece 1952
 Hungary 1999	 Iceland 1949	 Italy 1949	 Latvia 2004
 Lithuania 2004	 Luxembourg 1949	 Montenegro 2017	 North Macedonia 2020
 Norway 1949	 Poland 1999	 Portugal 1949	 Romania 2004
 Slovakia 2004	 Slovenia 2004	 Spain 1982	 Sweden 2024
 The Netherlands 1949	 Türkiye 1952	 United Kingdom 1949	 United States 1949



SYLLABUS: Prelims: Health
Newspaper : The Hindu, Page No : 5

Key Takeaways

- **New Case Reported:** Kerala's **Kasaragod district** has reported another case of **Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (Amoebic Brain Infection)** in an 18-year-old.
- **Source of Infection:** The infection is suspected to have occurred after **bathing in a freshwater pond**, highlighting the risk associated with stagnant or contaminated water bodies.
- **Severity:** The patient is in **critical condition**, underlining the disease's high fatality rate if not diagnosed and treated early.
- **Immediate Public Health Response:** The **Health Department and police** have prohibited bathing in the pond and issued public advisories to prevent further cases.
- **Public Health Concern:** Though rare, increasing sporadic cases in Kerala necessitate greater awareness, early diagnosis, and preventive measures.

Value Addition

What is Amoebic Meningoencephalitis?

- A **rare but often fatal infection of the brain and its surrounding membranes**, usually caused by **Naegleria fowleri**, popularly known as the "**brain-eating amoeba**."
- It causes **Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM)**.

Causative Organism

- **Naegleria fowleri** – a free-living amoeba found in **warm freshwater bodies** such as ponds, lakes, hot springs, and poorly chlorinated swimming pools.

Mode of Transmission

- Infection occurs when **contaminated water enters the nose**, allowing the amoeba to travel through the olfactory nerve to the brain.
- **It does NOT spread by drinking contaminated water or from person to person.**

Symptoms

- Severe headache
- High fever
- Vomiting
- Neck stiffness
- Altered mental status
- Seizures and coma in advanced stages

Fatality Rate

- **More than 95% case fatality rate**, making it one of the deadliest infectious diseases.

Risk Factors

- Swimming or diving in **warm stagnant freshwater**.
- Poorly maintained swimming pools.
- Hot climatic conditions favour amoeba growth.

Diagnosis

- Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) examination.
- PCR-based molecular testing.
- Neuroimaging (MRI/CT) for supportive evidence.

Treatment

- No universally effective treatment.
- Combination therapy may include:
 - **Amphotericin B**
 - **Miltefosine**
 - Azithromycin
 - Fluconazole
 - Rifampicin (as per clinical protocol)
- **Early diagnosis significantly improves survival chances.**

Prevention

- Avoid swimming in **warm, stagnant freshwater**.
- Use **nose clips** or keep the head above water.
- Ensure proper chlorination of swimming pools.
- Public awareness and surveillance during summer months.

Value Addition

- **Naegleria fowleri** is a **thermophilic (heat-loving), free-living protozoan amoeba**.
- Rising temperatures due to **climate change** may increase the geographical spread of such water-borne pathogens.
- Fits under the **One Health Approach**, integrating **human health, environmental health, and water sanitation**.

Relevant Government Initiatives

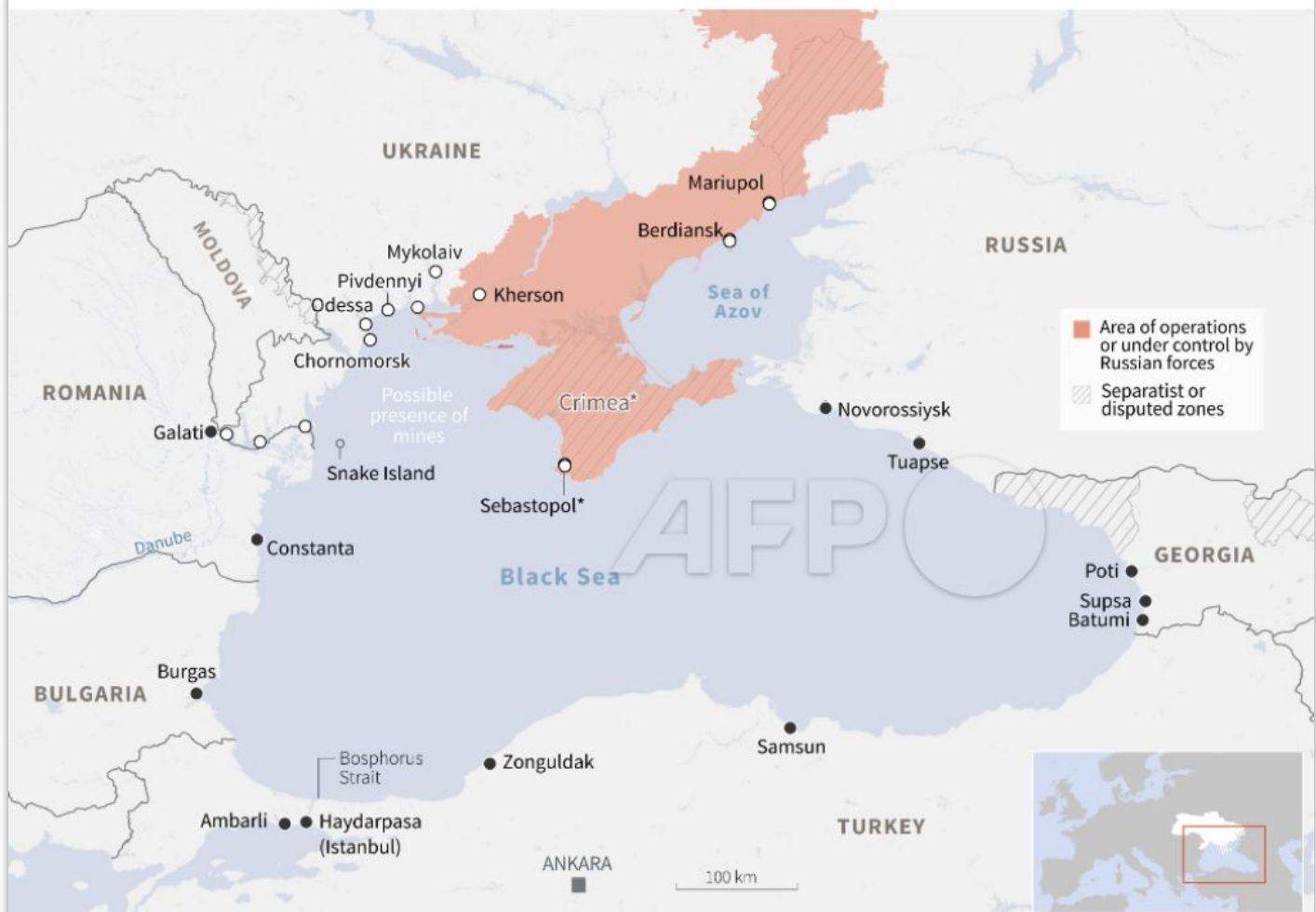
- **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)** – monitors outbreaks of infectious diseases.
- **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)** – provides technical guidance on disease surveillance and outbreak response.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission** and **Swachh Bharat Mission** indirectly strengthen water hygiene and public health.



Chornomorsk Port

SYLLABUS: Prelims: Important Events/IR
Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No : 12**

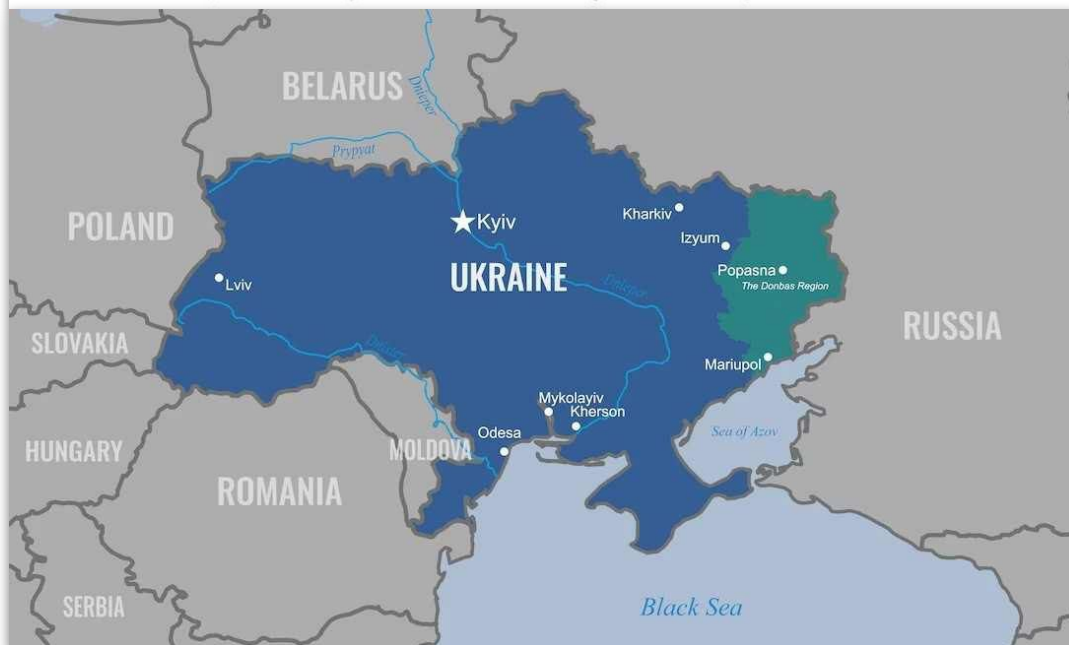
Major ports in the Black Sea and Ukraine



Sources: World Port Source, Institute for the Study of War and AIE's Critical Threats Project

*annexed by Russia in 2014

AFP



Q1. With reference to tiger conservation in India, consider the following statements:

1. India hosts more than 70% of the world's wild tiger population.
2. As per the 2022 estimate, India has 3,682 tigers.
3. Since the launch of Project Tiger in 1973, the number of tiger reserves has increased from 9 to 90.
4. Tigers have been recorded in over 200 forest divisions, indicating expansion beyond protected areas.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) Only Three
- d) All Four

Answer: c

Q2. With reference to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, consider the following statements:

1. NATO is based on the North Atlantic Treaty signed in 1949 in Washington, D.C.
2. The Treaty derives authority from Article 51 of the UN Charter.
3. Collective defence is enshrined in Article 5 of the Treaty.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: d

Q3. With reference to Amoebic Meningoencephalitis, consider the following statements:

1. It is caused by Naegleria fowleri, a free-living amoeba found in warm freshwater.
2. Infection occurs when contaminated water enters through the nose and reaches the brain via the olfactory nerve.
3. It can spread through drinking contaminated water and person-to-person contact.
4. It has a fatality rate exceeding 95%.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) Only Three
- d) All Four

Answer: c

Q4. How many of the following countries share a land boundary with Ukraine?

1. Slovakia
2. Hungary
3. Romania
4. Moldova
5. Lithuania

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) Only Two
- b) Only Three
- c) Only Four
- d) All Five

Answer: c

Q5. Which of the following committees are related to conservation of the Western Ghats?

1. Gadgil Committee
2. Kasturirangan Committee
3. Swaminathan Committee
4. Ranganath Misra Committee

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1, 3 and 4 only
- d) 2, 3 and 4 only

Answer: a





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