

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**Draft EPR Notification: Plastic Packaging Waste**

Recently, the Union Environment Ministry has come out with a draft notification for regulation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) under Plastic Waste Management rules 2016.

The draft specifies the quantity of waste that will have to be managed by producers, importers and brand owners who generate plastic packaging waste in India.

Earlier, the Ministry had notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021. These rules prohibit specific single-use plastic items which have “low utility and high littering potential” by 2022.

Key Points**Producers' Mandate:**

- It mandates producers of plastic packaging material to collect all of their produce by 2024 and ensure that a minimum percentage of it be recycled as well as used in subsequent supply.
- Producers of plastic will be obliged to declare to the government, via a centralised website, how much plastic they produce annually.

EPR Certificates :

- It has also specified a system whereby makers and users of plastic packaging can collect certificates — called EPR certificates — and trade in them.
- EPR means the responsibility of a producer for the environmentally sound management of the product (plastic packaging) until the end of its life.
- The certificates will help organisations in making up for their shortfall from other organisations that have used recycled content in excess of their obligation.

End-of-Life Disposal:

- Only a fraction of plastic that cannot be recycled — such as multi-layered multi-material plastics — will be eligible to be sent for end-of-life disposal such as road construction, waste to energy, waste to oil and cement kilns.
- The methods only prescribed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will be permitted for their disposal.

Categorization of Plastic Packaging:**Rigid Plastic:**

- They are plastic products that do not give easily when squeezed. Many are large, bulky items like lawn chairs, buckets, toddler toys etc.

Flexible Plastic:

- It includes packaging of single layer or multilayer (more than one layer with different types of plastic), plastic sheets and covers made of plastic sheet, carry bags (including carry bags made of compostable plastics), plastic sachet or pouches.

Multi-Layered Plastic Packaging:

- They are the plastics which have at least one layer of plastic and at least one layer of material other than plastic.

Targets:

Companies will have to collect at least :

- 35% of the target in 2021-22.
- 70% of the target by 2022-23.
- **100% of the target by 2024.**
- In 2024, a minimum 50% of their rigid plastic will have to be recycled as will 30% of their category 2 and 3 plastic.
- Every year will see progressively higher targets and after 2026-27, 80% of their category 1 and 60% of the other two categories will need to be recycled.
- There are similar targets, with slight variations, for companies that use packaging material as well as import them.

Buying EPR Certificates:

- If entities cannot fulfil their obligations, they will on a “case by case basis” be permitted to buy certificates.
- The CPCB will develop a mechanism for such exchanges on a centralised online portal.

Non Compliance:

- Non-compliance, however, will not invite a traditional fine. Instead an environmental compensation will be levied, though the rules do not specify how much this compensation will be.

Fine:

- Entities that do not meet their targets or do not purchase enough credits to meet their annual target must pay a fine.

- Were they to meet their targets within three years, they stand to get a 40% refund. Beyond that, however, the money will be forfeited.
- Funds collected in this way will be put in an escrow account and can be used in collection and recycling/end of life disposal of uncollected and non-recycled/ non-end of life disposal of plastic packaging waste on which the environmental compensation is levied.

Banning Plastics:

- From July 2022, the manufacture of a range of plastic products will be banned. The list includes: Earbuds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks etc.

INDIAN ECONOMY**PM Gati Shakti Scheme**

Recently, the government of India has launched the ambitious Gati Shakti scheme or National Master Plan for multi-modal connectivity plan, with the aim of coordinated planning and execution of infrastructure projects to bring down logistics costs.

Key Points

Aim: To ensure integrated planning and implementation of infrastructure projects in the next four years, with focus on expediting works on the ground, saving costs and creating jobs.

The Gati Shakti scheme will subsume the Rs 110 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline that was launched in 2019.

Besides cutting logistics costs, the scheme is also aimed at increasing cargo handling capacity and reducing the turnaround time at ports to boost trade.

It also aims to have 11 industrial corridors and two new defence corridors - one in Tamil Nadu and other in Uttar Pradesh. Extending 4G connectivity to all villages is another aim. Adding 17,000 kms to the gas pipeline network is being planned.

It will help in fulfilling the ambitious targets set by the government for 2024-25, including expanding the length of the national highway network to 2 lakh kms, creation of more than 200 new airports, heliports and water aerodromes.

Integrated Approach: It intends to bring together 16 infrastructure related Ministries.

This will help in removing long-standing issues such as disjointed planning, lack of standardisation, problems with clearances, and timely creation and utilisation of infrastructure capacities.

Gati Shakti Digital Platform: It involves the creation of a common umbrella platform through which infrastructure projects can be planned and implemented in an efficacious manner by way of coordination between various ministries/departments on a real-time basis.

Expected Outcomes

The scheme will help mapping the existing and proposed connectivity projects.

Also, there will be immense clarity on how different regions and industrial hubs in the country are linked, particularly for last mile connectivity.

A holistic and integrated transport connectivity strategy will greatly support Make in India and integrate different modes of transport.

It will help India become the business capital of the world.

Need for Integrated Infrastructure Development:

There exists a wide gap between macro planning and micro implementation due to the lack of coordination and advanced information sharing as departments think and work in silos.

According to a study, the logistical cost in India is about 13% of GDP, which is higher than developed countries.

Due to this high logistical cost, the competitiveness of India's exports is greatly reduced.

It is globally accepted that the creation of quality infrastructure for Sustainable Development is a proven way, which gives rise to many economic activities and creates employment on a large scale.

The scheme is in synergy with the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP).

The NMP has been announced to provide a clear framework for monetisation and give potential investors a ready list of assets to generate investment interest.

Associated Concerns

Low Credit Off-take: Although the government had taken up 'strong' banking sector reforms and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code had yielded about Rs. 2.4 lakh crore of recoveries on bad loans, there are concerns about declining credit off-take trends.

Banks give credit off-takes to help businesses acquire financing for future projects through the promise of future income and proof of an existing market.

Lack of Demand: In the post-Covid-19 scenario, there is a lack of private demand and investment demand.

Structural Problems: Due to land acquisition delays and litigation issues, the rate of implementation of projects is very slow on global standards.

Getting approvals is very difficult in terms of land access, environmental clearances; also impending litigation in court delays the infrastructure projects.

Way Forward

PM Gati Shakti is a step in the right direction. However, it needs to address structural and macroeconomic stability concerns, emanating from high public expenditure.

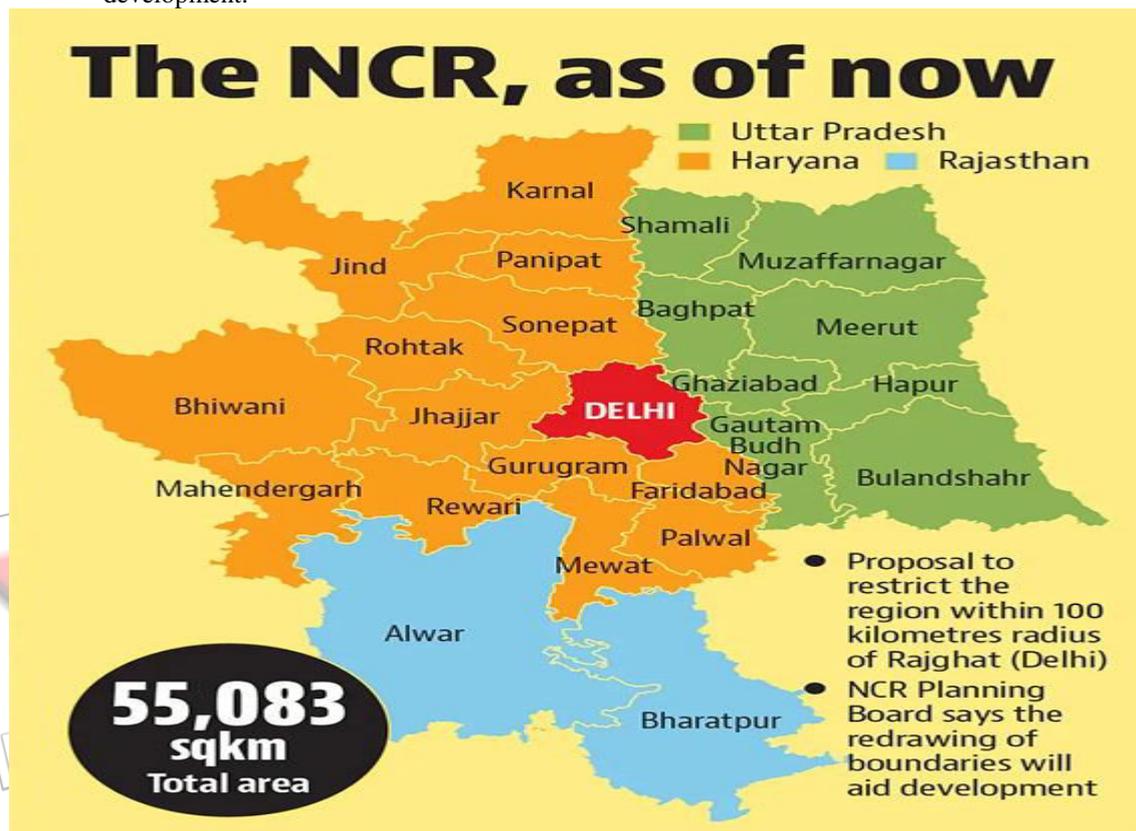
Thus, it is imperative that this initiative is underpinned by a stable and predictable regulatory and institutional framework.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Draft Regional Plan 2041: NCR

The National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) has recently approved the 'Draft Regional Plan 2041' according to which the National Capital Region (NCR) is likely to reduce in size.

- NCRPB was set up in 1985, to promote balanced development of the NCR and to avoid haphazard development.



Key Points

New Boundary

The geographical size of the region will be a contiguous circular region of 100km radius from Rajghat (Delhi). The area in the 100km radius can be developed as a core area.

NCR is a region envisaged in 1985 for coordinated urban development in and around Delhi.

Beyond 100 km radius and up to the existing NCR boundary, all notified cities/towns along with a corridor of one km on either side of connecting expressways/national highways/state highways/Regional Rapid Transit System will be included.

Currently, the NCR consists of 24 districts in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan and entire Delhi, spread across an area of 55,083 square kilometres.

Name of Natural Conservation Zones

- The name of natural conservation zones, as introduced in the Regional Plan-2021 will be changed to “natural zones” in the upcoming Regional Plan-2041.

Empowering States

- States will be empowered to decide whether tehsils that fall partly inside the NCR boundary should remain in it or not.

Slum-free NCR

- The DRP 2041 Plan will pave the way for a future-ready, slum-free National Capital Region with an air ambulance facility and high-speed connectivity through helitaxis, road, rail, and inland waterways.

Improved Rail Connectivity

- The Plan proposes to explore the feasibility of a 30-minute Mass Transit Rail System (MTRS) from the nearest NCR boundaries to Delhi.

Implications of the Move

- If implemented, parts of Panipat in Haryana and Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh will be dropped from the new NCR map.
- The idea is to have a compact area so that the development can be planned in a better manner.
- It will benefit the rural areas, as the state governments can plan for their development in a better manner.

Issues Involved

- The NCR currently spans around 150-175 kilometres, covering entire districts and their rural areas. But with the approval of Regional Plan 2041, areas beyond 100 km are not likely to be the main part of the NCR.
- Lack of access to basic services of water and sanitation and other facilities in the region.
- Other issues included legality of some of the properties, narrow access roads, congestion, conflicts between commercial and residential uses, quality of drinking water and water logging.
- Vulnerability and risks related to disasters such as fire, earthquakes, etc.
- Lack of coordination between multiplicity of agencies like DDA, Delhi Jal Board, Flood and Irrigation Department, and various municipal corporations.

Way Forward

The challenge of multiplicity of agencies needs to be dealt with by the government. This will increase coordination and cooperation among these agencies.

There must be a strict adherence to plans for cleaning of water bodies and drains which has been a challenge for agencies in Delhi for years. Dumping of waste in the Yamuna river also needs to be strictly regulated.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**CICA 6th Foreign Ministers Meeting**

Recently, the External Affairs Minister addressed the 6th Ministerial (2021) meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures (CICA) in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

Last year, Kazakhstan assumed the chairmanship of CICA.

The 5th Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CICA was held in Beijing in the year 2016.

Key Points**On Vaccine Maitri:**

- India's internationalism (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) drives its Vaccine Maitri.
- In January 2021, India launched the Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) initiative – a major diplomatic effort to gift and supply made-in-India vaccines to low-income and developing countries globally.

On Cross Border Terrorism:

- Advised the forum to strengthen collective resolve to tackle terrorism, arms trafficking, narcotics trade, and other forms of trans-national crimes.

On Multilateralism:

- Asia especially, but also Africa and Latin America, are inadequately represented in United Nations' (UN) decision-making.
- The limitations of the multilateral response to the Covid pandemic were starkly evident. This only makes a case for reformed multilateralism more urgent with each passing day.

On Afghanistan:

- India underscored the importance of the Taliban regime meeting the expectations of the international community as elaborated in the UN Security Council Resolution 2593.
- The UNSC resolution 2593 unequivocally demands that Afghan territory not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts; and specifically refers to terrorist individuals proscribed by the UN Security Council, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

On Connectivity:

- Connectivity must respect the most basic principle of international relations-respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- An apparent reference to India's objection to China's ambitious infrastructure development plans in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through PoK.

About CICA

- The CICA is an intergovernmental forum aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and ensuring peace, security, and stability in Asia.
- The idea of creating the organization was first voiced by Kazakhstan's First President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1992 at the 47th session of the United Nations General Assembly, while the first CICA summit was held in June of 2002.
- The highest decision making organ of CICA is the Meeting of the CICA Heads of State and Government (Summit). The CICA Summit is convened every four years in order to conduct consultations, review the progress of, and set priorities for CICA activities.
- The Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs is required to be held every two years.
- CICA members include 27 Asian countries, including Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Russia, South Korea, and Turkey, nine observer states, and five international organizations.
- India co-chairs two CICA CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) on 'Development of Secure and Effective Systems of Transportation Corridors,' and 'Energy Security'.
- The CICA Secretariat has been located in Almaty (Kazakhstan) since June 2006.

ENVIRONMENT AND BIODIVERSITY**Kunming Declaration on Biodiversity**

Recently, the Kunming Declaration was adopted by over 100 countries at the ongoing 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in China.

The adoption of the declaration will create momentum for a new global biodiversity pact.

In a previous agreement, Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, signed in Aichi, Japan, in 2010, governments agreed on 20 targets to try to slow biodiversity loss and protect habitats by 2020.

Key Points

- It calls for urgent and integrated action to reflect biodiversity considerations in all sectors of the global economy but crucial issues - like funding conservation in poorer countries and committing to biodiversity-friendly supply chains have been left to discuss later.
- It is not a binding international agreement.
- It calls upon the parties to mainstream biodiversity protection in decision-making and recognise the importance of conservation in protecting human health.
- The theme of the declaration is Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth.
- By adopting this, the nations have committed themselves to support the development, adoption and implementation of an effective post-2020 implementation plan, a capacity building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety.
- The Protocol seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.
- As per the declaration the signatory nations will ensure that the post-pandemic recovery policies, programmes and plans contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

30 by 30 Target

- The declaration made a reference to the '30 by 30' target which is a key proposal being debated at the COP15, that would afford 30% of the Earth's land and oceans protected status by 2030.
- Apart from this, the goal to halve the use of chemicals in agriculture and stop creating plastic waste is also being debated.

Kunming Biodiversity Fund

- China has also pledged to inject USD 233 million into a new fund to protect biodiversity in developing countries. The fund is being referred to by China as Kunming Biodiversity Fund.
- It is the right step in this direction. However, some countries have reservations regarding this fund.
- Some countries have called this fund as "a drop in the bucket" given that China is the world's biggest polluter.
- Further, some rich country donors say a new fund for conservation is unnecessary because the United Nations' Global Environment Facility already helps developing nations finance green projects.

Global Initiatives to Save Biodiversity

- Convention on Biological Diversity
- It is a legally binding treaty to conserve biodiversity that has been in force since 1993.
- India is a party to the convention.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora:

It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

India is a member of the convention.

World Wide Fund for Nature

It is an international non-governmental organisation for the conservation, research and restoration of the natural environment..

Global Biodiversity Assessment

It is an independent, critical, peer reviewed scientific analysis of the current issues, theories and views regarding the main aspects of biodiversity.

Man and the Biosphere Program

It was launched in 1970 and has initiated programmes and activities focusing on the diversity and the resources provided by nature, humans' impacts on biodiversity, as well as how biodiversity affects human activities.

Climate Financing

Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing—drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing—that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.

Some Global Climate Funds

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

It was established to limit or reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in developing countries and to help vulnerable societies adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Adaptation Fund (AF)

It was established under the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 and has committed USD 532 million to climate adaptation and resilience activities.

Global Environment Fund (GEF)

GEF has served as an operating entity of the financial mechanism since the Convention came into force in 1994.

It is a private equity fund focused on seeking long term financial returns by investments in clean energy under climate change.

Additional Funds: In addition to providing guidance to the GEF and the GCF, parties have established two special funds:

The Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) and the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF).

Both funds are managed by the GEF.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

'Maharatna' Status to Power Finance Corporation

Recently, the government has accorded the 'Maharatna' status to state-owned Power Finance Corporation (PFC).

- An order to this effect was issued by the Department of Public Enterprises, under the Ministry of Finance.
- PFC has become the 11th public sector enterprise to get the 'Maharatna' status in the country and joins the ranks of other such companies like ONGC, Indian Oil Corporation, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) and BHEL among others.

Key Points

Maharatna" Status

- The Maharatna dispensation was ushered in by the Union government for mega Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to become global giants (introduced in 2010).
- CPSEs are those companies in which the direct holding of the Central Government or other CPSEs is 51% or more.
- "Maharatna" status is granted to a company which has recorded more than Rs. 5,000 crore of net profit for three consecutive years, an average annual turnover of Rs. 25,000 crore for three years or should have an average annual net worth of Rs. 15,000 crore for three years. It should also have global operations or footprints.
- A CPSE should also have a Navratna status, be listed on an Indian stock exchange.
- The Government has laid down criteria for grant of Maharatna, Navratna and Miniratna status to CPSEs.

Power Finance Corporation (PFC)

- Incorporated in 1986, PFC is the largest infrastructure finance company dedicated to the power sector under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power.

Significance of the Recognition

Greater Financial and Operational Efficiency:

- PFC can invest up to Rs. 5,000 crore, or 15% of its net worth, in a single project apart from being granted enhanced powers by the government for undertaking mergers and acquisitions.
- Navratna and Miniratna CPSEs can invest up to Rs. 1,000 crore and Rs. 500 crore, respectively.
- The PFC Board can also structure and implement schemes relating to personnel and human resource management and training.

Offer Competitive Financing

- Enable PFC to offer competitive financing for the power sector, which will go a long way in making available affordable & reliable 'Power For All 24x7'.

Push Government Agenda

- The enhanced powers that come with Maharatna Status will also help PFC in pushing the government's agenda of funding under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, national commitment of 40% green energy by 2030 and effective monitoring and implementation of the new revamped distribution sector scheme with an outlay of more than Rs. 3-lakh crore.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. The bank nationalization in 1969 did India more harm than good. Critically examine. (250 words) Ans.

On 19 July 1969, Indira Gandhi government decided to nationalize fourteen of India's major private sector banks. It is considered as the most radical change in the history of the banking sector in India.

The decade of 1960-70 was marked with major events like two wars in 1962 with China and in 1965 with Pakistan, and two successive years of drought. The overall economy was in bad shape. In this backdrop, the decision of bank nationalization was taken.

The major causes and objectives of bank nationalization were:

- **Financial inclusion:** Indian rural financial system was dominated by rich landlords, moneylenders and traders. 93% of household debt came from non-institutional sources.
- **Social welfare:** Lack of social protection like insurance facilities, investment options for old age, etc. in the rural areas.
- **Controlling private monopolies:** Private Banks were owned by a limited number of people who dominated the credit market.
- It had a significant impact on the lives of people of lower strata of society.

Major benefits of the bank nationalization move are:

- Branches of the public sector bank India rose to approximately 800% in deposits and advances took a huge jump by 11,000%.
- Government ownership gave the public implicit faith and immense confidence about the sustainability of the banks.
- Indian banking system reached the remotest corners of the country with the advent of Lead Bank Scheme where major banks were allowed to expand and lead a district.
- It had multiplier effects and even led to the success of the Green Revolution. It also promoted rapid growth in agriculture, small industries and export, encouraged new entrepreneurs in backward areas.
- However, many political analysts argue that the move was suited for political gains of the government to show India's socialistic leanings with 'Garibi Hatao' as a household slogan at that time. It had many negative fallouts for the already crisis stricken economy at that time:
- It sowed the seed of the NPA crisis that emerged in 2012. The credit bubble that grew under political patronage emerged out of government's control over Banks.
- It led to an incredibly complex interest rate structure with hundreds of interest rates for different types of loans.
- It increased corruption, bureaucratic inertia and license raj so that loans never reached the needy ones.
- The move was against market fundamentals. It reduced competition among the banks as they were forced to extend loans as per priority sector lending norms.
- Dampened growth in other sectors due to lack of credit to core industries.

Conclusion

- Former RBI governors M Narasimham (as early as the 1990s) and more recently Raghuram Rajan and Urjit Patel have called for governance reforms and asked that the government let go control of some banks, if not all. So the government should consider a couple of state-owned banks to meet social objectives while the rest slowly getting out of government control.
- India's goal of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by 2024 can only be achieved by resolving the ongoing crisis like non-performing assets, the inherent deficiency of public sector banking, the structure of non-banking financial companies and small- and medium-enterprises.

DAILY QUIZ

1. With reference to Silicosis, consider the following statements:

1. It mainly occurs in people engaged in quarrying, manufacturing, and building construction industries.
2. It is an occupational disease or hazard.
3. It is a notified disease under the Mines Act, 1952.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

2. Consider the following statements regarding the Global Climate Risk Index 2021:

1. It is released by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).
2. It ranks countries on the basis of their preparedness against weather-related hazards.
3. India has ranked among the 5 worst affected countries for consecutively two years.
4. The index calculates the impact of weather-related events in terms of both fatalities and economic losses.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 and 4 only
- C. 4 only**
- D. 1, 2 and 3

3. Consider the following statements about 'PM Gati Shakti Scheme':

1. The aim of the scheme is to coordinate planning and execution of infrastructure projects to bring down logistics costs.
2. It aims to develop industrial corridors and extend 4G connectivity to all villages.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2.**
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

4. Consider the following statements:

1. The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures (CICA) Secretariat is located in Almaty.
2. The CICA is an intergovernmental forum aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and ensuring peace, security, and stability in Asia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2**
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

5. Consider the following statements regarding the 'National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)':

1. The chairman and members of commission are appointed by the six-member committee headed by the Prime Minister of India.
2. The chairman and members hold office for a term of three years or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
3. The commission can look into a matter within one year of its occurrence.

Which of the statements given above is/are not correct?

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