Xtracts
Daily Current Affairs · 4 Issues · PYQ Connections

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Mission X for UPSC

ISSUE 01 GS-I Indian Heritage & Culture

Supreme Court Allows Green Crackers for Diwali as Festival of Lights Meets a Pollution Deadline

Diwali, one of India's oldest pan-Indian festivals, was observed on 8 November 2026 under a temporary Supreme Court-ordered relaxation permitting only CSIR-NEERI-certified "green" firecrackers in Delhi-NCR for two days, before the year-round firecracker ban automatically returns.

Nov 7–8	300m	Nov 9	Dec 14	NEERI
RELAXATION WINDOW	NO-CRACKER ZONE RADIUS	YEAR-ROUND BAN RESUMES	AQI AFFIDAVIT DEADLINE	GREEN CRACKER CERTIFIER

PRELIMS RELEVANCE	MAINS RELEVANCE	ETHICS RELEVANCE
★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★

PRELIMS TRIGGER

- Case: *Arjun Gopal v. Union of India*; Bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Prasanna B. Varale.
- Only CSIR-NEERI-certified "green" crackers allowed; joined "ladis", garlands and barium-based crackers remain banned.
- Bursting hours: 6 AM–8 PM on Nov 7 and 7 AM–10 PM on Nov 8 only.
- "No-Cracker Zones": within 300m of hospitals, old-age homes, silence zones and schools.
- CPCB and State Pollution Control Boards must file AQI compliance affidavits by 14 December 2026.

MAINS CONNECTION

GS-I GS-III

Diwali's annual observance puts India's cultural calendar in direct tension with Article 21's guarantee of a healthy environment, forcing courts to repeatedly recalibrate a "temporary relaxation" doctrine that balances tradition against precaution.

GS-III | Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation: the Court invoked the Precautionary Principle rather than waiting for post-Diwali pollution data to accumulate — a shift from reactive to anticipatory environmental governance.

Key themes: festivals and governance of public celebrations, precautionary principle in environmental jurisprudence, Centre-State coordination via District Magistrates, judicial balancing of Article 25 against Article 21.

ETHICS LENS

"Should a government ever permit a known public-health harm for the sake of cultural continuity?" Diwali's firecrackers are tied to identity, community and commerce, yet Delhi's air quality was already "precarious" before this two-day relaxation — raising how much weight courts should give an inherited practice against present and future harm to children, the elderly and outdoor workers who cannot opt out of the air they breathe. ***GS-IV Value: Non-maleficence*** *— the duty to avoid imposing foreseeable harm on others, especially those with no voice in the decision to burst a cracker next door.*

Issue 01 ⟹ **PYQ Connect** UPSC CSE 2018

How is the National Green Tribunal (NGT) different from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)?
1. The NGT has been established by an Act whereas the CPCB has been created by an executive order of the Government.
2. The NGT provides environmental justice and helps reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts whereas the CPCB promotes cleanliness of streams and wells, and aims to improve the quality of air in the country.
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

Answer: (c). NGT (NGT Act, 2010) adjudicates environmental disputes like this week's firecracker litigation; CPCB (Water Act, 1974 / EPA, 1986) sets pollution standards and monitors the very AQI compliance this order now demands — the twin-track machinery behind every Diwali cracker order.

ISSUE 02 GS-II Welfare Schemes & Social Justice

Cabinet Extends Fast Track Special Courts for Rape & POCSO Cases Till 2031 With ₹3,788 Crore Push

The Union Cabinet approved a five-year extension (FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31) of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Fast Track Special Courts, expanding coverage from 779 to 850 courts dedicated to rape and POCSO Act trials, jointly funded by the Centre's Nirbhaya Fund and the states.

₹3,788 Cr	850	₹2,353 Cr	2026–31	4.02 Lakh
TOTAL OUTLAY	TARGET FTSC COURTS	CENTRE'S NIRBHAYA FUND SHARE	SCHEME PERIOD	CASES DISPOSED SINCE 2019

PRELIMS RELEVANCE	MAINS RELEVANCE	ETHICS RELEVANCE
★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★

PRELIMS TRIGGER

- Scheme covers rape cases and cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.
- Funding split: Centre ₹2,353.15 Cr (from the Nirbhaya Fund) + States/UTs ₹1,434.89 Cr.
- Originally launched 2 October 2019; covers all 29 States and Union Territories.
- Each Fast Track Special Court gets a dedicated judicial officer, a special public prosecutor and six support staff.
- Performance monitored via an online dashboard maintained by the Department of Justice.

MAINS CONNECTION

GS-II

Delays in trying rape and child sexual abuse cases are a long-standing criticism of India's criminal justice system, and this extension signals the Centre's continued reliance on dedicated fast-track infrastructure — rather than only tougher sentencing laws — to cut pendency.

Key themes: judicial infrastructure and access to justice, Nirbhaya Fund utilisation, victim-centric courtroom design (vulnerable witness deposition rooms, child-friendly facilities), Centre-State cost-sharing in centrally sponsored welfare schemes.

ETHICS LENS

"Does funding more courts fix a justice system that still takes years to convict?" A dedicated judge and prosecutor per court addresses capacity, but without matching reforms in police investigation, forensic backlogs and witness protection, additional courtrooms alone cannot guarantee that "justice delayed" stops being "justice denied" for survivors of sexual violence. ***GS-IV Value: Justice as fairness and timeliness*** *— a remedy delayed long enough to let trauma compound, or evidence fade, is not a full remedy at all.*

Issue 02 ⟹ **PYQ Connect** UPSC CSE 2020

In India, Legal Services Authorities provide free legal services to which of the following types of citizens?
1. Person with an annual income of less than Rs. 1,00,000
2. Transgender with an annual income of less than Rs. 2,00,000
3. Member of Other Backward Classes (OBC) with an annual income of less than Rs. 3,00,000
4. All Senior Citizens
Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only | (b) 3 and 4 only | (c) 2 and 3 only | (d) 1 and 4 only

Answer: (a). Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 entitles low-income persons, transgender persons, women and children (among other groups) to free legal aid — the same access-to-justice architecture (NALSA → State → District Legal Services Authorities) that Fast Track Special Courts lean on for vulnerable-witness support.

ISSUE 03 GS-III Industrial Policy & Infrastructure

Cabinet Clears ₹14,500 Crore Viability Gap Funding for 92 GWh of Grid-Scale Energy Storage

The Union Cabinet approved a Viability Gap Funding scheme to add 92 GWh of grid-scale storage — pumped hydro, batteries and emerging technologies — between FY 2026-27 and FY 2030-31, a capacity increase of roughly 170% over India's existing grid-scale storage.

₹14,500 Cr	92 GWh	60 GWh	₹97,600 Cr	411 GWh
VGF OUTLAY	NEW STORAGE TARGET	PUMPED HYDRO SHARE	TOTAL EST. INVESTMENT	INDIA'S 2031-32 STORAGE NEED

PRELIMS RELEVANCE	MAINS RELEVANCE	ETHICS RELEVANCE
★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★☆☆

PRELIMS TRIGGER

- Capacity split: 60 GWh pumped storage hydro (PSP) + 30 GWh battery energy storage (BESS) + 2 GWh emerging tech.
- Scheme period: FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31; capacity allocated via tariff-based competitive bidding.
- BESS projects require a minimum 40% Domestic Content Requirement (DCR).
- Announced by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw; to be implemented jointly with state governments.
- Aim: meet India's projected 411 GWh grid-scale storage requirement by FY 2031-32.

MAINS CONNECTION

GS-III

India's renewable capacity addition has consistently outpaced its storage capacity, creating curtailment and grid-balancing problems; this VGF scheme is a deliberate bet that scaling storage — not just generation — is now the binding constraint on the energy transition.

Key themes: Viability Gap Funding as a de-risking tool, renewable energy intermittency and grid balancing, domestic manufacturing in battery storage (Make in India), optimising existing transmission capacity through storage.

ETHICS LENS

"Who pays for the energy transition's growing pains?" Viability Gap Funding uses public money to make storage projects bankable for private discoms and developers — easy to justify by long-term climate and reliability benefits, but it still raises distributive questions about using taxpayer funds to de-risk capital that could, over time, generate substantial private returns. ***GS-IV Value: Distributive justice*** *— ensuring public subsidy for strategic infrastructure translates into broadly shared benefits rather than privatised gains from socialised risk.*

Issue 03 ⟹ **PYQ Connect** UPSC CSE 2024

Recently, the term "pumped-storage hydropower" is actually and appropriately discussed in the context of which one of the following?

(a) Irrigation of terraced crop fields
(b) Lift irrigation of cereal crops
(c) Long duration energy storage
(d) Rainwater harvesting system

Answer: (c). Pumped-storage hydropower — the single largest component (60 GWh) of this week's ₹14,500 crore scheme — works as a long-duration energy storage technology, using two reservoirs at different elevations to store and release power on demand.

ISSUE 04 GS-II International Relations

India and the EU Conclude Talks to Join the €93.5 Billion Horizon Europe Research Programme

India and the European Commission concluded negotiations on India's association with Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme, opening direct access for Indian researchers and startups to EU funding once the deal is signed, ratified and takes effect from January 2027.

€93.5 Bn	23	Jan 2027	Feb 2026	2021–27
PROGRAMME BUDGET	EXISTING ASSOCIATED COUNTRIES	EXPECTED EFFECTIVE DATE	EXPLORATORY TALKS BEGAN	PROGRAMME CYCLE

PRELIMS RELEVANCE	MAINS RELEVANCE	ETHICS RELEVANCE
★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★☆☆

PRELIMS TRIGGER

- Horizon Europe = EU's flagship Research & Innovation programme (2021-27), total budget €93.5 billion.
- "Association" is the closest non-EU cooperation tier: direct funding access in exchange for a financial contribution.
- Pillar II ("Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness") covers health, digital, space, climate, energy and the bioeconomy.
- Builds on the 2001 India-EU S&T Cooperation Agreement (renewed to 2030) and the EU-India Strategic Agenda towards 2030 (Jan 2026 Summit).
- Other associated non-EU countries include the UK, Canada, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland.

MAINS CONNECTION

GS-II GS-III

Formal research association with Horizon Europe would let Indian scientists lead and coordinate large EU-funded consortia for the first time, rather than merely participate as junior partners — a structural upgrade in India's role within global science-diplomacy architecture.

GS-III | Science & Technology – indigenous research capacity: direct grant access could deepen India's participation in frontier research on AI, semiconductors and 6G, alongside the parallel EU-India Trade and Technology Council track.

Key themes: science diplomacy and multilateral research funding, the EU's "association" model for non-member states, India's Trade and Technology Council engagement, reciprocal financial contribution to multilateral programmes.

ETHICS LENS

"Does paying to join a club of equals still make you an equal partner?" Horizon Europe association requires India to make a "fair financial contribution" to a programme designed primarily around EU priorities; the arrangement is framed as equal-terms participation, but genuine parity depends on whether Indian-led consortia get real agenda-setting power, not just funded seats at the table. ***GS-IV Value: Reciprocity*** *— a fair partnership rests on comparable voice and benefit for both sides, not merely comparable financial contribution.*

Issue 04 ⟹ **PYQ Connect** UPSC CSE 2017

'Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)' is sometimes seen in the news in the context of negotiations held between India and:

(a) European Union
(b) Gulf Cooperation Council
(c) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
(d) Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Answer: (a). The BTIA — India's long-pending trade and investment negotiation with the EU — sits alongside this week's Horizon Europe research-association talks as one more track of the deepening India-EU Strategic Partnership.

🧠 Memory Lab

Rapid revision · High-retention formats · Today's key concepts

MONDAY · 09 NOV 2026

✕ XTRACTS IN 30 SECONDS

1. Diwali Firecrackers: SC allowed certified green crackers in Delhi-NCR only on Nov 7–8; the year-round ban returns Nov 9.

2. Fast Track Courts: Cabinet extends FTSCs for rape/POCSO cases to 2031 with ₹3,788 crore; target raised to 850 courts.

3. Energy Storage: ₹14,500 crore VGF scheme to add 92 GWh of grid-scale storage by FY31.

4. Horizon Europe: India and the EU conclude talks on a €93.5 billion research-funding association, effective Jan 2027.

🔥 NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

₹3,788 Cr FTSC OUTLAY FY26-31	**850** TARGET FAST TRACK COURTS	**4.02 Lakh** CASES DISPOSED SINCE 2019
₹14,500 Cr ENERGY STORAGE VGF	**92 GWh** NEW GRID STORAGE TARGET	**₹97,600 Cr** TOTAL STORAGE INVESTMENT
€93.5 Bn HORIZON EUROPE BUDGET	**Jan 2027** INDIA'S EXPECTED ASSOCIATION DATE	**300m** DIWALI NO-CRACKER ZONE RADIUS

🟣 ETHICS QUICK REFERENCE

ISSUE 01 — DIWALI CRACKERS

Balancing cultural tradition against public-health harm. **Value: Non-maleficence**

ISSUE 02 — FAST TRACK COURTS

More courtrooms vs. systemic delay in justice delivery. **Value: Justice (timeliness & fairness)**

ISSUE 03 — ENERGY STORAGE

Public subsidy de-risking private energy infrastructure. **Value: Distributive justice**

ISSUE 04 — HORIZON EUROPE

Paying to join vs. genuine parity in global research. **Value: Reciprocity**

QUICK TERM

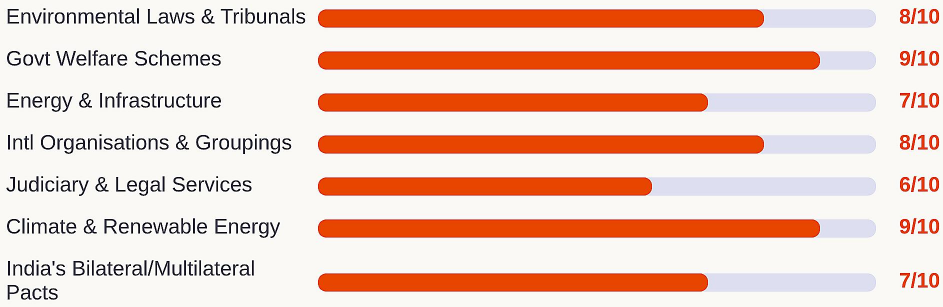
Precautionary Principle

In environmental law, action to prevent harm must precede proof of harm — courts increasingly invoke it before, not after, AQI data confirms damage (as in this week's Diwali cracker order).

◉ QUICK REVISION CHECKLIST

- ☐ SC order case: *Arjun Gopal v. Union of India* — green crackers only, Nov 7–8, Delhi-NCR.
- ☐ FTSC scheme first launched 2 October 2019; now extended to 31 March 2031.
- ☐ Nirbhaya Fund financed ₹2,353.15 Cr of the Centre's FTSC share.
- ☐ Grid storage VGF split: 60 GWh pumped hydro + 30 GWh battery + 2 GWh emerging tech.
- ☐ BESS projects under the VGF scheme need ≥40% Domestic Content Requirement.
- ☐ Horizon Europe is the EU's flagship R&I programme, 2021–27, budget €93.5 billion.
- ☐ India's Horizon Europe association is expected to take effect from January 2027.
- ☐ NALSA, State & District Legal Services Authorities operationalise free legal aid under Article 39A.

📊 PYQ FREQUENCY — 10-YEAR VIEW



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