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Q1. With reference to “Jeypore Ground Gecko” consider the following statements:

1. It is a reptile endemic to India.
 2. It is included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- Select the correct statements using the codes given below:

- [A] 1 only
[B] 2 only
[C] Both 1 and 2
[D] Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C

Q2. Consider the following statements about NASA’s PUFFINS mission:

1. It aims to study the polarization of ultraviolet starlight affected by interstellar dust.
2. It is designed to study the magnetic-field alignment of interstellar dust grains.
3. It is a mission to explore the surface of Mars.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

Articles

- Gandikota's landscape faces modern-day pressures
- AI agents accessed data of Indian entities, says CERT-In
- NGT takes note of The Hindu report on toxic water
- L&T-built INS Samarthak inducted into Indian Navy

AI agents accessed data of Indian entities, says CERT-In

Agency says it received 'multiple voluntary disclosures from AI model providers' stating that their tools, during research and evaluation activity, had reached live systems of Indian organisations

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-In) said on Thursday that several Indian organisations had been targeted by Artificial Intelligence agents that were undergoing testing.

AI agents – which are pieces of code that act autonomously when given certain instructions unlike a chat-response back-and-forth with a chatbot – have been taking advantage of weaknesses across Indian organisations' cloud and web assets, and were accessing information they did not need, and should not have access to, CERT-In said.

Prone to exploitation

While CERT-In's disclosure does not name any affected organisation, the revelation is nonetheless significant, as it implies that Indian firms and government organisations' cybersecurity posture are now susceptible to be exploited if any vulnerability can be inferred by an agent. In other words, what a hu-



The affected organisations could not detect the unauthorised access on their own, said CERT-In. REUTERS

man security researcher may find in a manual review of an organisation's cybersecurity posture, could now be programmatically identified and exploited by agents.

CERT-In, which operates under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) and is exempt from the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, reveals little about data breach cases that are mandatory to report to the body under directions it issued in 2022. The organisation said it was sent "multiple volun-

tary disclosures from AI model providers stating that their models, during research and evaluation activity on the Internet, had reached the live systems of Indian organisations".

Model providers

CERT-In did not reveal who the model providers are. OpenAI, Anthropic and Google, which make some of the main U.S.-based AI models like ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini, have each publicly disclosed details of advanced agents running amok and hacking

public websites, like the coding repository HuggingFace.

The agents' subsequent behaviour entailed "reading business records, including personal data and confidential material, through credentials and connection settings exposed in application configuration, public code repositories and permissive cloud service roles," CERT-In said in its note.

But, CERT-In noted, many of the weaknesses these organisations had displayed were "conventional", meaning that these were known vulnerabilities for which cybersecurity professionals already carry out a hygiene check, if all goes well. "In the incidents observed, AI found and exploited these conventional weaknesses faster, more exhaustively and at greater scale than human attackers," CERT-In noted.

"The affected organisations could not detect the unauthorised access on their own," CERT-In said, noting that its own proactive hunt for such behaviour and model providers' reports are what led to this disclosure.

Context:

The Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-In) said on Thursday that several Indian organisations had been targeted by Artificial Intelligence agents that were undergoing testing.

What are AI agents?

AI agents are AI-powered systems that can autonomously perform tasks based on instructions and predefined objectives. They can plan actions, use software tools, interact with websites and execute multiple steps with limited human intervention.

Unlike ordinary chatbots, AI agents may take actions beyond generating text.

How did the incident occur?



Why are AI agents a cybersecurity concern?

- Speed and scale: AI agents can examine many systems and vulnerabilities rapidly.
- Autonomy: They may execute multiple steps without continuous human supervision.
- Data exposure: Weak access controls may expose personal and business information.
- Difficult detection: Conventional security systems may fail to identify unusual agent behaviour.
- Cloud vulnerabilities: Misconfigured cloud services and excessive permissions increase risks.
- Dual-use nature: The same capabilities can support legitimate security testing or be misused for cyberattacks.
- Accountability: Determining responsibility among AI developers, deploying organisations and users can be difficult.

Way forward

- AI governance: Establish clear rules for testing and deploying autonomous AI agents.
- Least-privilege access: Give AI agents only the permissions necessary for their tasks.
- Human oversight: Require approval for sensitive operations and access to critical systems.
- Continuous monitoring: Use real-time logging and anomaly detection to identify suspicious activity.
- Secure testing: Conduct AI evaluations in isolated sandbox environments instead of exposing live systems.
- Data protection: Strengthen encryption, access controls and protection of personal data.
- Institutional preparedness: Improve cybersecurity audits, incident reporting and employee awareness.
- International cooperation: Develop common standards for AI safety and cross-border cyber incident response.

CERT-In: Important facts

- Full form: Indian Computer Emergency Response Team.
- Nodal agency: National agency for responding to cybersecurity incidents in India.
- Administrative ministry: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- Legal basis: Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Key functions:

- Collecting and analysing cybersecurity incident information.
- Issuing alerts, advisories and security guidelines.
- Coordinating responses to cybersecurity incidents.
- Supporting incident prevention and mitigation.

Gandikota's landscape faces modern-day pressures

The government's efforts to recognise Gandikota's tourism potential has put this geologically significant site back in the spotlight. However, with renewed activity, it is experiencing poor waste management that takes a toll on the environment. Furthermore, it continues to struggle with heavy foot traffic, natural weathering, systemic neglect



An aerial shot of the Gandikota gorge, widely known as Grand Canyon of India, in Kadapa district.

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CHITTOOR

In 1968, a radio engineer and his wife walked through the shallow waters of the Penna River, deep inside the Gandikota gorge. Standing before its towering cliffs, they offered prayers at the nearby Vijayanagara temples, hoping for a child. A year later, they welcomed a baby boy. Decades later, that family memory continues to draw their son, A. Kumaraswamy, back to Gandikota, connecting a man who now lives in Austin, the United States, to the rugged landscape of Rayalaseema.

A native of Tirupati, Mr. Kumaraswamy first visited Gandikota, in Jammalamadugu mandal of Kadapa district, in 1995, the year he moved to the U.S. to work as an IT professional. "Though I have visited America's Grand Canyon several times, our Rayalaseema gorge is what truly pulls me back. Gandikota isn't just a picturesque landscape. It's a sacred ground my father believed brought me into the world," he says.

While personal anecdotes lend the place an intimate significance, Gandikota's legacy extends far beyond individual lives. Its landscape bears the imprint of geological processes spanning an estimated 1.2 billion years.

About 300 feet below the rim, the Penna River winds its way through rugged walls of deep red sandstone and quartzite. Widely known as the Grand Canyon of India, Gandikota is among Andhra Pradesh's distinctive natural landmarks.

Nestled within the ancient Cuddapah Basin, the magnificent gorge tells a story of

sedimentation and tectonic shifts spanning hundreds of millions of years.

For outdoor enthusiasts, it's an absolute treat for photography, trekking, and camping; for geologists, it acts as a sprawling open-air classroom to study rock structures and erosion patterns.

Beyond its geological significance, Gandikota holds a rich historical legacy. The 12th-century fort, tied to the Kakatiyas and the Vijayanagara Empire, brings an entirely distinct layer of intrigue. It boasts massive defensive walls and ancient temples that whisper tales of ancient political power and strategic dominance.

For all its historical and geological significance, Gandikota is finding itself in the spotlight once again, as the Andhra Pradesh government pushes hard to transform the area into a major tourism hub. The Union government's iconic tourism development scheme recently sanctioned ₹77.91 crore under a project titled "Enriching the Fort and Gorge Experience in Gandikota."

Recognising its tourism potential, the government earlier this year organised the Gandikota festival, which drew large crowds that celebrated the local culture. The festival gave a major financial boost to local guides, transport drivers, and artisans. Yet it left many wondering whether tourism can support local livelihoods without tearing apart the landscape that started it all. These concerns have strengthened calls for Gandikota to be recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site and for dedicated conservation funds. "It is a completely separate path from trying to obtain a UNESCO Global Geopark label. It requires an entirely different focus, completely

centred on geological preservation," says a senior official of the Central Archaeology Department.

However, the growing popularity of the site has brought its own challenges, with people—weekend campers, shutterbugs, social media crews, and thrill-seekers—leaving behind litter. Plastic water bottles, snack wrappers, haphazard camping setups, and rushed constructions for budding tourism activities threaten to ruin the site.

"Gandikota clearly needs more than a marketing campaign or a few extra picnic tables. It needs a thoughtful master plan that treats the gorge, the river, the fort, and the surrounding villages as a single, living heritage ecosystem," says Dr. P. Ravi Raju, president of Walkers International and a practicing doctor at Puttur in Tirupati district.

Also, unprecedented construction activity too close to the cliff edges risks destabilising the terrain, while careless wandering near steep drops invites accidents. Additionally, poor waste management takes a heavy toll on the surrounding environment, and the historic fort struggles with natural weathering, neglect, and heavy foot traffic.

P. Venkataratnam, a 58-year-old real estate agent in Kadapa, says authorities must implement clearly marked walking trails, strict building bans in sensitive zones, proper trash collection, and reliable public restrooms.

"Gandikota has a golden opportunity to become a shining example of responsible tourism in Rayalaseema," concludes Vijay Kumar, a popular mimicry artist and motivational speaker in Tirupati.

Why is Gandikota in the news?

Gandikota's tourism potential has gained attention because of its unique geological landscape and historic fort.

The article highlights growing concerns over poor waste management, heavy tourist footfall, natural weathering and administrative neglect.

Sustainable tourism and conservation of its natural and cultural heritage are essential for protecting the site.

Geographical and geological significance

- Pennar River: Flows through the deep gorge, creating a spectacular landscape.
- Rock formations: The gorge features rugged walls of deep-red sandstone and quartzite.
- Cuddapah Basin: Gandikota lies within the ancient Cuddapah Basin, known for its important geological formations.
- Geological history: The landscape reflects geological processes spanning an estimated 1.2 billion years, as highlighted in the article.
- Educational value: It serves as a natural classroom for studying rock structures, erosion, sedimentation and tectonic changes.

Historical significance

- Gandikota Fort dates back to the medieval period and is associated with different South Indian ruling powers.
- The fort is linked to the Kakatiyas and the Vijayanagara Empire.
- It contains massive defensive walls and ancient temples.
- Its strategic location near the gorge provided natural defensive advantages.
- It reflects the region's military architecture and historical importance.

Major challenges facing Gandikota

Challenge	Impact
Poor waste management	Pollution of the natural environment
Heavy tourist footfall	Pressure on local infrastructure and ecosystems
Natural weathering	Gradual deterioration of rock formations and monuments
Unregulated construction	Risks to cliff stability and the landscape
Unsafe walking areas	Accidents and tourist safety concerns
Lack of basic facilities	Inadequate toilets, waste collection and visitor management
Systemic neglect	Threat to long-term heritage conservation

Way forward: Sustainable tourism

- Establish designated walking trails and enforce building restrictions near sensitive cliff edges.
- Improve waste collection, segregation and disposal facilities.
- Carry out scientific conservation of the fort and temples.
- Regulate visitor numbers in ecologically sensitive areas where necessary.
- Promote local employment through guides, transport services and handicrafts.
- Conduct geological risk assessments and monitor cliff stability.
- Prepare an integrated management plan covering the gorge, river, fort and surrounding villages.
- Explore appropriate heritage recognition and conservation partnerships.

Q1. Consider the following statements about Gandikota:

1. It is located in Andhra Pradesh's Kadapa district.
2. The Pennar River has carved the famous gorge at Gandikota.
3. Gandikota is located within the ancient Cuddapah Basin.
4. Gandikota is already a designated UNESCO Global Geopark.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

L&T-built *INS Samarthak* inducted into Indian Navy

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy on Friday commissioned *INS Samarthak*, the first of two multi-purpose vessels being built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T), strengthening its capability to test and evaluate indigenously developed sensors and weapons amid an evolving maritime security environment.

Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan presided over the commissioning ceremony in the presence of Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, and senior naval and Defence officials in Karwar.

According to the Indian Navy, *INS Samarthak* marks a significant milestone in India's indigenous shipbuilding efforts, highlighting the growing role of the private sector in developing platforms for the armed forces. The vessel has over 75% indigenous



The indigenous multi-purpose vessel *INS Samarthak*. PTI

content, according to the Navy.

Conceived primarily as a versatile platform for trials and evaluation, the ship will support the testing and training of new sensors and weapons developed by domestic industry. Its induction is expected to strengthen the Navy's ability to validate indigenous technologies before wider deployment, it added.

Named *Samarthak*, meaning 'the proponent', the vessel has been de-

signed to undertake a range of operational and developmental tasks. Besides supporting trials and evaluation, it can carry out maritime surveillance and reconnaissance, offshore patrolling and disaster relief operations.

The Navy said the vessel's versatility would also be particularly useful in an unpredictable maritime environment where traditional security challenges are increasingly accompanied by non-traditional threats.

Context:

The Indian Navy on Friday commissioned *INS Samarthak*, the first of two multi-purpose vessels being built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T), strengthening its capability to test and evaluate indigenously developed sensors and weapons amid an evolving maritime security environment.

About *INS Samarthak*

- It is the first of four Multi-Purpose Vessels being inducted into the Indian Navy.
- It is built by M/s Larsen and Toubro Ltd under the Government of India's Make in India initiative.
- Motto: The ship's motto: Victory is Our Sole Aim.
- The ship's crest features an Indian elephant emerging from the waves, symbolising strength, intelligence, and agility.
- Armaments: The ship's integrated combat suite combines indigenous sensors, weapons and electronic systems optimised for operations in challenging maritime conditions.

Functions

- It is designed primarily for maritime surveillance and patrol.
- It is also capable of undertaking Low Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO), Target Deployment & Trials Platform, Unmanned/ autonomous System Mothership, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), conversion to a limited hospital ship and fighting for salvage operations.
- Significance: It will add a new indigenous multi-purpose platform to the Navy's fleet and underline the growing role of domestic shipbuilding in meeting India's maritime security requirements.

NGT takes note of *The Hindu* report on toxic water

Nikhil M. Babu
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken *suo motu* cognisance of issues raised by a report in *The Hindu* on hexavalent chromium contamination in Uttar Pradesh and gaps in the government's efforts to resolve the issue.

Based on the article, the NGT has issued notices to 14 authorities, including the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, as per a recent order.

The NGT noted that the news item 'Groundwater that glows yellow-green' raises "substantial issues" relating to compliance with the environmental norms. "Issue notice to the above respondents for filing their response by way of affidavit before the Tribunal at least one week before the next date of hearing," an order dated October 5 read.

The article talks about how decades of industrial waste dumping have contaminated groundwater with hexavalent chromium across parts of three Uttar Pradesh districts.

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was established on October 18, 2010, under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, to expedite environmental justice in India. As a specialized body, the NGT is dedicated to handling cases related to environmental protection, forest conservation, and the enforcement of legal rights associated with the environment, including compensation for damages to individuals and property from environmental violations. The tribunal also covers issues related to accidental health impacts from environmental causes.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) ensures efficient environmental dispute resolution with expert input, aims to resolve cases within six months, operates independently of the Civil Procedure Code, and has regional benches in New Delhi, Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata, and Chennai.

National Green Tribunal Composition

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) composition is defined by the National Green Tribunal Act of 2010, which outlines as follows:

Chairperson: A retired Supreme Court judge or Chief Justice of a High Court, appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India, serving for five years or until age 70.

Judicial Members: Between 10 to 20 former Supreme Court or High Court judges appointed by the Central Government based on merit, serving for five years or until age 67 (for High Court judges) or 70 (for Supreme Court judges).

Expert Members: Includes 10 to 20 members with a Master's degree in Science, Engineering, or Technology and relevant environmental experience, appointed by the Central Government, serving for five years or until age 65

Strength of the Tribunal:

- Minimum 10 and maximum 20 Judicial Members
- Minimum 10 and maximum 20 Expert Members
- Term of Office: Members are appointed for a term of 5 years
- Non-Reappointment: To ensure unbiased decision-making during their tenure, members are not eligible for re-appointment once their term ends.

What are the powers of NGT?

- **Power of a Civil Court:** It has the same powers as a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC) for summoning witnesses, requiring discovery of documents, and receiving evidence on oath.
- **Power to Grant Relief & Compensation:** It can award monetary damages to victims of pollution and order the restitution of damaged property or restoration of the environment.
- **Regulatory Independence:** It is not strictly bound by the “Indian Evidence Act” or “CPC.” Instead, it is guided by the Principles of Natural Justice, allowing it to be more flexible and faster than regular courts.
- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:** If a person or organization fails to comply with an NGT order, the Tribunal can impose severe punishments like Imprisonment up to 3y, fine (Individual) up to ₹10 crore, fine (Company) up to ₹10 crore.
- **Suo Motu Powers:** The NGT has the unique authority to take up cases on its own based on media reports or public information, even if no formal complaint has been filed by an affected party.

