

THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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balancing short-term aviation fuel price stability with long-term energy security

Editor's Note

In today's edition of Pala Civil Times, readers are taken through a diverse set of issues spanning national security, governance, trade, agriculture, energy and constitutional law. India's evolving trade relations with the United States occupy centre stage, as negotiations on an interim trade agreement continue even while a proposed U.S. tariff under Section 301 investigations introduces fresh uncertainties. On the security front, the arrival of the fourth S-400 squadron highlights the growing strength of India's multi-layered air defence architecture and its preparedness against emerging aerial threats. The edition also examines the Census 2027 exercise, where discrepancies between field data and administrative records have reignited discussions on data accuracy In the economic sphere, concerns over a deficient monsoon forecast underscore potential risks to kharif production, food inflation and broader policy planning. The aviation sector faces its own challenges as the government introduces a fuel price stabilisation mechanism to maintain costs. The editorial discussions focus on the constitutional balance between the right to be forgotten and the principle of open justice, and on the strategic significance of India-Myanmar relations amid Myanmar's continuing political instability. These developments merit close attention for their far-reaching implications on policy, governance and India's future trajectory.

Editorials Decoded

THE HINDU

Preserving the record



The challenge lies in balancing open judicial records with an individual's right to informational privacy.

The Indian EXPRESS

India, Myanmar and a shifting balance



With the latest presidential visit, India-Myanmar relations are back in the spotlight, as both countries seek to balance strategic, security and economic interests amid Myanmar's continuing instability.

BusinessLine

Prepare the ground



IMD forecasts a below-normal monsoon, raising concerns over agricultural production and food security..



Re-check ordered over 'discrepancies' in Census 2027 data

During the ongoing Census 2027 exercise, census authorities have directed field officials to verify and recheck certain data entries after discrepancies were detected through the **Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS)**. In a recent communication, officials were instructed to revisit households and ensure that the information recorded accurately reflects field conditions. The exercise aims to improve data quality and remove ambiguities before the finalisation of census records to strengthen the reliability of the collected information.

What Discrepancies Have Emerged?

The discrepancies largely relate to indicators such as **open defecation, sources of drinking water, cooking fuel, electricity access and internet connectivity**. For instance, households with LPG connections were reported as continuing to use traditional fuels, while access to treated tap water, lighting facilities and digital connectivity was sometimes recorded differently from official coverage data. These issues prompted the decision to undertake additional verification.

The Broader Challenge of Data Accuracy

Large-scale enumeration exercises often encounter differences between administrative records and actual household conditions. Access to a government facility does not always imply regular usage, while local circumstances may influence how respondents answer questions. Communication gaps, varying interpretations of survey categories and difficulties in capturing complex ground realities can also affect data quality. As a result, careful field verification becomes essential for producing credible and reliable statistics.



Key Issues Under Examination

Enumerators have reported several operational challenges during the exercise. Some stated that households were reluctant to share information due to concerns about the possible impact on welfare benefits. Others noted that residents often expected assistance in accessing government schemes and services. Field workers have also highlighted practical difficulties such as **poor mobile connectivity, limited digital support, heavy workloads and the challenge of balancing census duties with their regular responsibilities**. These factors have added to the complexity of data collection.

The Road Ahead

Going forward, the verification process is expected to improve the consistency and reliability of Census 2027 data. Census authorities have emphasised that final records should accurately represent field realities and not be affected by misunderstanding or ambiguity. Reliable census information is critical for evidence-based policymaking, welfare planning and resource allocation. Therefore, continued monitoring, transparent verification procedures and adequate support for field staff will be important to ensure the credibility and usefulness of the final census results.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) 'To ensure effective implementation of policies addressing water, sanitation and hygiene needs, the identification of beneficiary segments is to be synchronized with the anticipated outcomes'. Examine the statement in the context of the WASH scheme. (GS II - 2017)

RELEVANCE

GS II : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Russia delivers fourth squadron of the S-400 air defence system

India has received the fourth squadron of the Russian-made S-400 air defence system under the 2018 agreement for five regimental units. The delivery, delayed earlier due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, has now restored the supply schedule, with the final squadron expected in 2027. The S-400 will also be integrated with AI-enabled decision-support tools to improve threat assessment and target prioritisation while retaining human control over engagement decisions. The induction further strengthens India's long-range air defence capability.

India's BMD Programme

The latest addition comes amid growing recognition of the importance of air defence in modern warfare. **India's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)** programme was initiated in **1995** and accelerated after the Kargil War and regional missile developments. The programme aims to intercept hostile ballistic missiles before they strike Indian territory. Phase I focuses on threats from Pakistan through endo-atmospheric interception, while Phase II seeks to address longer-range missile threats through exo-atmospheric interception, thereby expanding India's strategic defensive capabilities.



India's Multi-Layered Air Defence Shield

India follows a multi-layered air defence architecture designed to intercept threats at different ranges and altitudes. At the top layer, the S-400 provides long-range protection against aircraft, drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles up to 400 km away. Medium-range protection is provided by systems such as Barak-8 and MRSAM. The Akash and SPYDER systems cover short-range threats, while QRSAM is under development. Very short-range systems such as Iгла, Tunguska and VSHORADS protect troops and critical assets from low-flying aerial threats.

RELEVANCE

GS III : Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.
Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Detection, Monitoring and Command Systems

An effective air defence network depends not only on missiles but also on detection and coordination systems. India employs long-range tracking radars such as Green Pine and Swordfish to detect incoming threats at great distances. Airborne surveillance platforms, including Netra AEW&C and Phalcon AWACS, provide real-time monitoring of airspace. These sensors feed information into command-and-control networks such as the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) and the Army's Akashteer system, enabling a coordinated and rapid response to threats.

Way Forward

Overall, India's air defence network combines imported, jointly developed and indigenous technologies into an integrated defensive shield. Missile interceptors, surveillance radars, airborne warning systems and command networks work together to provide layered protection against a wide range of aerial threats. The induction of the fourth S-400 squadron strengthens the outermost layer of this shield and enhances India's deterrence capability. Continued integration of AI-enabled tools, indigenous systems and inter-service networks is expected to further improve national air defence preparedness in the coming years.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) India has a long and troubled border with China and Pakistan fraught with contentious issues. Examine the conflicting issues and security challenges along the border. Also give out the development Programme (BADP) and Border Infrastructure and Management (BM) Scheme. (GS III - Internal Security - 2023)

U.S. moots 12.5% tariff for 'forced labour' on India, 53 other nations

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has proposed a 12.5% tariff on imports from India and several other countries following a Section 301 investigation into forced-labour-related trade practices. The proposal is part of a broader review covering multiple economies and is not yet final. Countries affected by the measure have been invited to participate in consultations and public hearings before a final decision is taken. India has stated that it remains engaged with the United States on the issue while continuing discussions on an interim trade agreement.

Why India Has Been Included

The investigation does not allege that Indian exports are produced using forced labour. Instead, the U.S. argues that India has not sufficiently imposed or enforced restrictions on the import of goods that may have been produced using forced labour in third countries. Based on this assessment, **India has been included among 54 economies identified in the investigation.** The proposed action therefore concerns India's import-control framework rather than the production practices of Indian exporters themselves.



India's Response and Concerns

India has adopted a cautious response and continues to participate in the consultation process. Trade experts have argued that the proposed measure may extend beyond the intended scope of **Section 301 investigations.** Some have contended that concerns relating to forced labour are often limited to specific products or supply chains and may not justify broad country-wide tariff actions. Others view the proposal as part of a wider U.S. effort to gain leverage during ongoing trade negotiations with key economic partners, including India.

What Lies Ahead

The proposal has now entered the consultation stage, with hearings and stakeholder submissions scheduled in the coming weeks. A final decision is expected later this year, and any approved tariffs could take effect soon thereafter. Until then, the measure remains under review and subject to modification. The outcome will be closely watched by both governments, as it could influence future market access, trade negotiations and the broader trajectory of India-U.S. economic relations.

Trade and Strategic Implications

The proposal carries important trade implications because India has been placed in the same tariff category as several of its export competitors, including China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. If implemented, the additional tariff could affect the competitiveness of Indian products in the U.S. market. The development is particularly significant because it comes at a time when India and the United States are engaged in negotiations aimed at expanding bilateral trade and strengthening economic cooperation.

RELEVANCE :

GS II : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



PYQ
COMPASS

Q.) "What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy which would satisfy India's national self-esteem and ambitions." Explain with examples (GS II - 2019)



Preserving the record (The Hindu : 04-06-2026)

The debate over the 'right to be forgotten' highlights a tension between two important constitutional principles. The **principle of open justice** requires court proceedings and judicial records to remain accessible to the public. This promotes transparency, public understanding of the law and accountability in the administration of justice. At the same time, the Supreme Court's judgment in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)** recognised informational privacy as a fundamental right. The recent Delhi High Court ruling illustrates how these two rights can sometimes come into conflict in the digital age.

Individual Rights & Constitutional balance

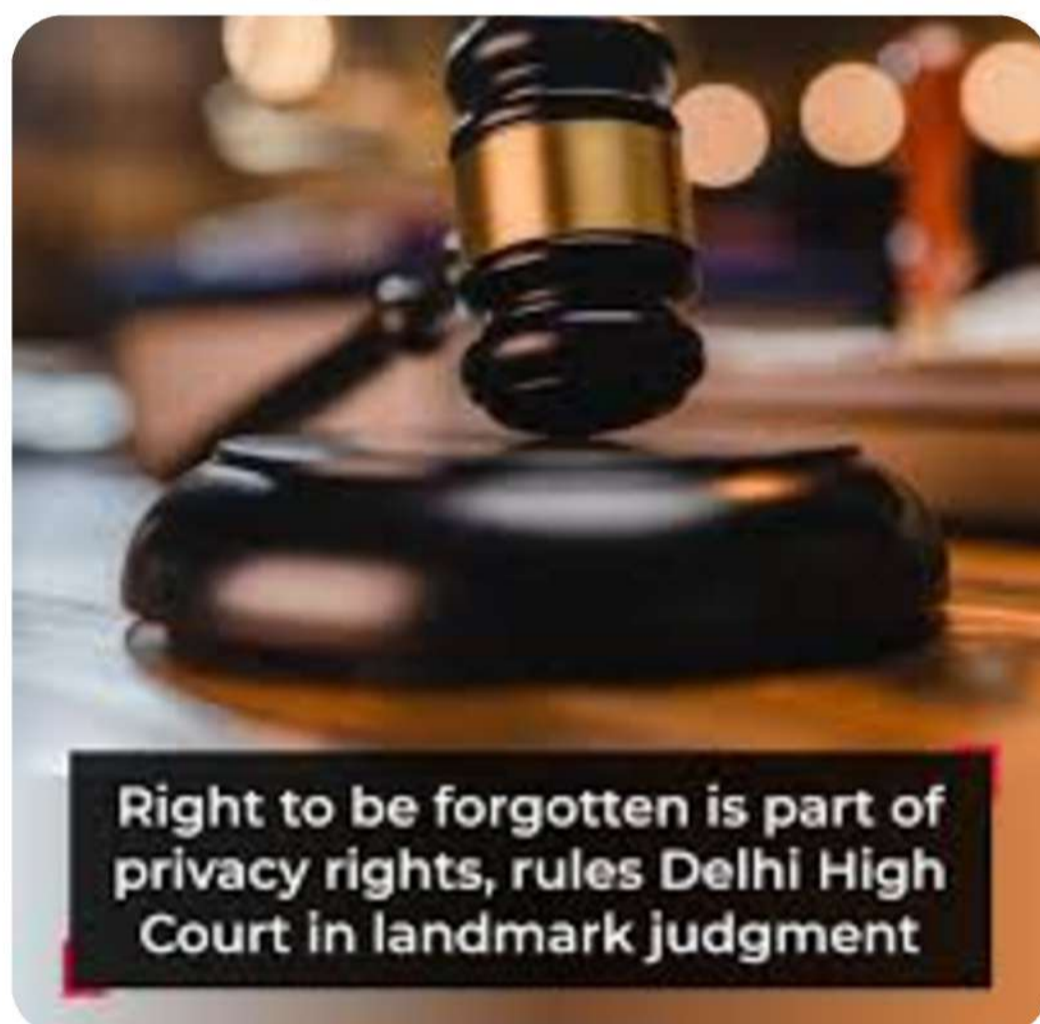
This conflict has become more significant because of the digitisation of court records. Earlier, judicial records were difficult to access and had limited public reach. Today, court judgments can be easily searched, copied and archived online. Search engines and digital platforms can preserve information indefinitely and make it instantly available to anyone. As a result, accusations or past legal proceedings can continue to affect individuals long after the events have concluded. This challenge gave rise to the concept of the '**right to be forgotten**' in many jurisdictions.

Latest development

In its recent ruling, the Delhi High Court gave priority to privacy concerns. The Court observed that search engines often display short excerpts without sufficient context, which may create a misleading impression. The Court also noted that open justice does not necessarily require people to locate case details simply by searching an individual's name. It further observed that even if a person's name is removed from official court records, copies of the same information may continue to circulate on other websites and remain easily accessible.

Deeper Structural Issues

However, the central problem is not the discoverability of information but the incompleteness of information. If a person has been acquitted or discharged, that outcome should be as visible as the original accusation. Restricting access to judicial records may undermine the principle of open justice and weaken the integrity of the public record. Court records are official acts of the State and therefore should remain publicly accessible. The focus should be on ensuring that the records present the complete legal outcome rather than a partial narrative.



Way Forward

In this situation, digital accuracy rather than digital erasure is the appropriate solution. Judicial records should remain public but must be updated to prominently reflect important developments such as acquittals, discharges or final judgments. Courts should also require legal databases, search engines and archival platforms to regularly refresh and update their records. Search results should provide proper context instead of highlighting isolated allegations. Such an approach would protect individual privacy while preserving transparency, public accountability and confidence in the justice system.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Right to privacy is intrinsic to life and personal liberty and is inherently protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. Explain. In this reference, discuss the law relating to DNA testing of a child in the womb to establish its paternity. (GS II – 2024)

RELEVANCE

GS II : Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments

India, Myanmar and a shifting balance (Indian Express : 04-06-2026)

President Min Aung Hlaing concluded a five-day state visit to India, his first official overseas visit since becoming Myanmar's president earlier this year. The visit reflects Myanmar's efforts to reduce the diplomatic isolation it has faced since the 2021 military coup. It also comes at a time when the country remains deeply unstable due to prolonged internal conflict. Against this backdrop, the visit highlights the importance both countries attach to maintaining engagement despite political and security challenges

Political Background in Myanmar

Myanmar's current crisis began with the military coup of February 2021, which removed the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Following the takeover, opposition leaders were arrested and democratic institutions were weakened. Subsequent elections were widely viewed as lacking credibility and helped consolidate the position of the military-backed establishment. Meanwhile, the country has descended into a multi-front civil war involving the military, pro-democracy forces and ethnic armed groups, resulting in prolonged instability and a serious loss of political legitimacy.

Why Myanmar Matters to India

The instability in Myanmar has direct implications for India because the two countries share a long and sensitive border. Discussions during the visit reportedly covered **security, trade, healthcare, connectivity projects and rare earth cooperation**. Security remains particularly important because ethnic ties, militancy and regular cross-border movement link communities on both sides. The ongoing conflict has already pushed thousands of refugees, especially from the Chin community, into Mizoram and Manipur. Myanmar also remains an essential land bridge for India's Act East Policy.

China Factor and Regional Geopolitics

Myanmar's internal conflict has also become a matter of regional geopolitics. While the military regime has faced criticism for actions against the Rohingya community and pro-democracy groups, it continues to control major urban centres and state institutions. At the same time, many Western countries have distanced themselves from the junta. This has created space for China to expand its influence in Myanmar. Beijing has strengthened its engagement with the military leadership to safeguard its strategic and economic interests, including key energy infrastructure projects.



Way Forward

These developments create a complex policy challenge for India. New Delhi cannot ignore Myanmar because of shared security concerns, economic interests and connectivity goals. At the same time, it must engage not only with the military leadership in Naypyidaw but also with non-state actors who control parts of the border region. A balanced and flexible approach is therefore necessary. Until peace and stability return to Myanmar, India's neighbourhood policy must focus on safeguarding national interests while responding to changing realities on the ground.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) Consider the following pairs:

Community sometimes mentioned in the news In the affairs of

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Kurd | : Bangladesh |
| 2. Madhesi | : Nepal |
| 3. Robingya | : Myanmar |

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- 1 and 2
- 2 only
- 2 and 3
- 3 only

Practice questions

Q.) Chin State, frequently seen in discussions on India–Myanmar border security, is located in which part of Myanmar and shares a border with which Indian state?

- Eastern Myanmar – Arunachal Pradesh
- Northern Myanmar – Nagaland
- Western Myanmar – Mizoram
- Southern Myanmar – Manipur

RELEVANCE

GS II : India and its neighborhood- relations.

Prepare the ground (TH BusinessLine : 04-06-2026)

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has revised its June forecast for the South-West monsoon downward from 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA) in April to 90% now, indicating a likely deficient monsoon rather than a merely sub-normal one. Since the June forecast is generally more accurate, the outlook has become more concerning. Rainfall distribution is also expected to be uneven. While North-East India may receive normal rainfall, Central India, South Peninsular India and North-West India are likely to face below-normal rains. The rain-fed monsoon core zone, crucial for agricultural production, is also expected to receive less than 94% of LPA.

Changing Climate Signals Behind the Forecast

The worsening forecast is linked to changing climatic conditions. In April, IMD expected weak La Niña conditions to continue until June, delaying the arrival of El Niño. There was also hope that a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), which can offset some adverse effects of El Niño, would develop later in the season. However, the latest assessment suggests that neutral IOD conditions are likely to persist. At the same time, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has estimated an 80% probability of a moderate-to-strong El Niño developing between June and August, increasing the risk of weaker monsoon rainfall.

Immediate Agricultural Risks

The weak monsoon outlook has raised concerns for the kharif season. June has already witnessed a patchy monsoon onset along with widespread heat-wave conditions. If such conditions continue into July, the most important sowing month, agricultural output could suffer significantly. Reflecting these risks, the Agriculture Ministry has reduced production targets for key kharif crops. Rice output is projected at 151 million tonnes against 154 million tonnes last year, maize at 52.5 million tonnes against 55.1 million tonnes, and oilseeds at 40 million tonnes compared to 43.1 million tonnes previously. No estimates have yet been released for horticulture crops.

Wider Economic and Policy Implications

A deficient monsoon can have wider economic consequences beyond agricultural production. Lower output of crops such as pulses and vegetables could increase food inflation, as witnessed during previous years of supply shortages. Reduced production of rice and maize may also affect the availability of feedstock for India's ethanol blending programme. Policymakers may face pressure to adopt measures such as export bans or import duty reductions to control prices. However, such actions can adversely affect farmers' incomes and weaken India's reputation as a dependable exporter of agricultural products.



Way Forward

Given the growing uncertainty, both the Centre and States need to prepare in advance rather than respond only after problems emerge. Governments should closely monitor sowing patterns, crop conditions and food prices throughout the season. Agricultural output estimates should remain realistic and be revised as necessary based on field conditions. Contingency measures for irrigation support, procurement and inflation management should be kept ready. A balanced approach that protects consumers, supports farmers and maintains export credibility will be essential if monsoon conditions deteriorate further.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) How is science interwoven deeply with our lives? What are the striking changes in agriculture triggered off by the science-based technologies? (GS III - 2020)

RELEVANCE

GS III : Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country

Cabinet approves ₹10,000 cr. ATF price stabilisation fund

To shield the aviation sector from rising fuel costs caused by the ongoing West Asia conflict, the Union Cabinet has approved a one-time budgetary support of ₹10,000 crore for oil marketing companies (OMCs). The assistance will be provided as interest-free advances under a price stabilisation fund aimed at moderating Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices. The measure seeks to prevent disruptions to airline operations and protect passengers from sudden increases in airfares triggered by geopolitical tensions affecting global energy markets.

Why the Intervention Became Necessary

The intervention became necessary because aviation fuel prices have risen sharply in recent months. International ATF prices reportedly increased from about ₹60.5 per litre in March to ₹142 per litre in May. State-run OMCs are currently facing under-recoveries on fuel supplied to domestic airlines, while fuel expenses account for nearly 40% of airline operating costs and can rise further during periods of volatility. The pressure has already led some airlines to reduce flights, raising concerns about higher fares and reduced connectivity.

How the Scheme Will Work

The price stabilisation fund has been designed as a self-sustaining revolving mechanism. Under the scheme, OMCs will receive financial support to absorb a part of the fuel-price shock and continue supplying ATF at moderated rates. Participating airlines will be required to procure fuel from these OMCs under agreed conditions. Once international fuel prices decline, the differential amount will be recovered and returned to the government. The arrangement seeks to balance immediate consumer relief with long-term fiscal prudence and operational sustainability.

The Broader Aviation Fuel Challenge

Alongside addressing short-term price pressures, the government has also taken steps to strengthen the long-term resilience of the aviation fuel sector. It has amended ATF regulations to permit blending with **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)**, a renewable alternative produced from feedstocks such as agricultural residues, ethanol, biomass, waste oils and municipal solid waste. Since SAF is compatible with existing aircraft engines, it offers a practical pathway for reducing greenhouse gas emissions while supporting cleaner and more sustainable aviation operations.

Long-Term Significance

Together, the stabilisation fund and SAF reforms represent a two-pronged strategy for the aviation sector. The former addresses immediate risks arising from fuel-price volatility and geopolitical disruptions, while the latter aims to reduce long-term dependence on imported fossil fuels. India possesses significant potential for SAF production through its biomass resources, ethanol programme and waste-based feedstocks. By combining price stability with cleaner fuel adoption, the government seeks to improve energy security and support airline viability in a sustainable manner.

Practice questions

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the recent Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) price stabilisation measure announced by the Government of India:

1. The measure was introduced in response to the sharp rise in global fuel prices triggered by geopolitical tensions.
2. The government seeks to reduce the impact of fuel-price volatility on airline operations and passenger fares.
3. The scheme aims to permanently fix ATF prices at a predetermined level for all airlines operating in India.

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

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q.) "Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy is the sine qua non to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." Comment on the progress made in India in this regard. (GS III - 2018)

RELEVANCE

GS III : Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways

Practice Questions and answers

Q.) Chin State, frequently seen in discussions on India–Myanmar border security, is located in which part of Myanmar and shares a border with which Indian state?

- A. Eastern Myanmar – Arunachal Pradesh
- B. Northern Myanmar – Nagaland
- C. Western Myanmar – Mizoram
- D. Southern Myanmar – Manipur

Ans : C. Western Myanmar – Mizoram

Chin State is a mountainous region in western Myanmar with its capital at Hakha. It borders India's Mizoram and is inhabited mainly by the Chin people, who share close ethnic and cultural ties with communities in Northeast India. The region is predominantly Christian and has been heavily affected by Myanmar's ongoing civil conflict. Its proximity to India has made it strategically important due to refugee movements, border security concerns, and its role in India's engagement with Myanmar under the Act East Policy.



Q. Consider the following statements regarding the recent Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) price stabilisation measure announced by the Government of India:

- The measure was introduced in response to the sharp rise in global fuel prices triggered by geopolitical tensions.
- The government seeks to reduce the impact of fuel-price volatility on airline operations and passenger fares.
- The scheme aims to permanently fix ATF prices at a predetermined level for all airlines operating in India.

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. 1 and 2 only

Statement 1 is correct. The ₹10,000 crore stabilisation fund was introduced because ATF prices surged following geopolitical tensions and energy market disruptions linked to the West Asia conflict.

Statement 2 is Correct. The objective is to cushion airlines from rising fuel costs, thereby preventing disruption of flight operations and reducing pressure on passenger airfares.

Statement 3 is Incorrect. The scheme does not permanently fix ATF prices. It is a temporary, revolving support mechanism designed to absorb exceptional fuel-price shocks and will be wound down once prices stabilise.