NAMAN SHARMA
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Offline Centre Location:
SCO 173-174, Sector 17C, Chandigarh

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Aiming for an era of 'biohappiness' in India

Why in the News

On a recent visit to Arunachal Pradesh, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan - Chairperson of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation - highlighted the need to revive India's rich agrobiodiversity and traditional knowledge systems to achieve what Professor M.S. Swaminathan once envisioned as "Biohappiness." Her call comes at a time when India's agrobiodiversity is under threat, yet it offers a transformative solution to tackle multiple crises- malnutrition, climate change, and ecological degradation.

Background

- India is home to nearly 8% of the world's recorded species, although it occupies just 2% of the global landmass. It is recognised as one of the 17 megadiverse countries, covering four of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots: the Himalayas, Indo-Burma region, Western Ghats, and Sundaland.
- Despite this, modern agricultural practices since the Green Revolution have focused on a narrow band of crops - primarily rice, wheat, and maize, which now supply over 50% of the world's plant-based calories.
- While these crops contributed significantly to food security, they have led to the loss of crop diversity, nutrient-poor diets, and ecosystem degradation.
- The concept of "Biohappiness", coined by Prof. Swaminathan, refers to the sustainable use of biodiversity to ensure health, nutrition, income, and ecological security.
- It envisions a future where agrobiodiversity, traditional crops, and community-led ecological knowledge play a central role in India's development model.

Features of Biohappiness and Biodiversity-Centric Development

Agrobiodiversity and nutrition protection

The stem and rural population of India consumes different types of wild edible things, less millet, legumes, yama and green leafy vegetables.
Such foods are dense with nutrition, which are rich in micronutrients, and help prevent non-infectious diseases such as diabetes and obesity. **For example,** the Nyishi and Apatani communities in Arunachal Pradesh have deep knowledge of the medical and nutritional properties of local plants.

Opportunities: From orphans to essential: Codes such as kodo millet, small millet, jackfruit, immortal and yama are classified as neglected and low species (NUS). Now the reverse was "opportunity crops", these are climate-flexible, nutritious and locally adaptable. Their farming reduces the dependence on resource-intensive commercial crops.

Community Innovation: In the Koli locks in Tamil Nadu, MSSRF has enabled farmers, especially women, to document traditional knowledge and revive millet cultivation. The interventions have improved the vitality of the earth, crop diversity, local value chains and revenues.

Policy Support: International Year of Millets and Shree Anna Yojana:
International Year with Millions and Shri Anna Yojana. India's initiative and Mr. Anna Mission during the international millions of years (2023) include:

- Consciousness campaign
- Support for price chains
- Integration of millet into public plans such as the PDS and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme
- Millet assignments at the state-level (Odisha, Karnataka, Telangana) are now actively promoting local millet evidence.

Biodiversity for the Bioeconomy

- BioHappiness is not limited to food. India can be a source of biodiversity:
- Bio Pharmaceuticals
- Biobased energy
- Green jobs in biotechnology, ecotourism, agroporesury and protection

Interdisciplinary Science of Biodiversity

- A new field combining ecology, genomics, nutrition, agriculture, and climate science is emerging.
- India has the scientific infrastructure (ICAR, ICMR, DBT, CSIR, and IITs) to lead this interdisciplinary effort.

Challenges

Decline in Agrobiodiversity

- Monoculture farming and commercial crop incentives have marginalised traditional food systems.
- For instance, Kolli Hills shifted from millet to cash crops like cassava and pepper, leading to biodiversity loss.

Erosion of Traditional Knowledge

- As older generations pass away and youth migrate to cities, oral traditions about wild foods, herbs, and farming practices are vanishing.

Neglect of NUS in Mainstream Policy

- Despite policy talks, limited research funding, market incentives, and extension services are available for NUS.
- Often, high-yield varieties (HYVs) are favoured over indigenous ones.

Weak Value Chains and Marketing Support

- Lack of processing infrastructure, branding, and market access limits farmer returns on NUS.
- Consumers remain unaware of the health benefits of these crops.

Climate Change and Habitat Loss

- Biodiversity hotspots like the Western Ghats and North-East India face threats from deforestation, mining, and climate variability.
- These changes alter rainfall, pests, and soil conditions, affecting traditional crops.

Fragmented Policy Landscape

- Biodiversity, nutrition, agriculture, and environment are governed by different ministries with limited coordination.
- India lacks a national strategy for integrating biodiversity into food and health systems.

Way Forward
Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Food Policy
Integrate NUS and local foods into:

- Public Distribution System (PDS)

- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS)
- Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

Encourage urban demand through awareness campaigns and nutrition labels.

Documenting and Digitising Traditional Knowledge

- Use digital tools and community-led platforms to record indigenous ecological knowledge.
- Incentivise knowledge holders, particularly tribal women, through community seed banks and bio-cultural registers.

Research and Development for Opportunity Crops

- Invest in agronomic research, yield improvement, pest resilience, and value addition of orphan crops.
- Promote interdisciplinary fellowships and research centres focused on biohappiness science.

Strengthening Millet Missions

- **Expand beyond ragi, jowar, and bajra to include:**
  - Kodo millet
  - Barnyard millet
  - Little millet
  - Foxtail millet
  - Encourage State-specific biodiversity revival programs with funding from NABARD and the 15th/16th Finance Commission.

Community-Based Natural Resource Management

- Promote community forest rights (CFR) and participatory forest management (PFM).
- Support ecologically sensitive livelihoods like agroforestry, non-timber forest products (NTFP) collection, and forest gardening.

Biodiversity Literacy Campaign

- **Launch a National Biodiversity Literacy Movement involving schools, farmers, and youth clubs to spread awareness on:**
- Forgotten foods
- Local ecosystems
- Sustainable farming practices

India as a Global Biodiversity Knowledge Hub

- Leverage platforms like the G20, CBD, and FAO to champion:
- South-South collaboration on NUS
- Biohappiness as a global framework for development
- Open-access data portals for biodiversity

Bioeconomy Roadmap for India @2047

- Align India's National Bio-Economy Policy with the principles of:
- Decentralisation
- Biodiversity justice

Conclusion

The vision of biohapness is not just an indifferent return in the past, but a scientific, organic and moral imperative. It matches SDGS 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health), 12 (sustainable consumption), 13 (climate action) and 15 (life on land). The incredible wealth of India's biological diversity - in forests, fields and food cultures - should not be regarded as a residue, but as a strategic resource for a healthy and more flexible future.
By reviving traditional food, documenting social knowledge and integrating biodiversity into national planning, India can lead a new development paradigm where welfare and ecological coexistence.

Pro. M.S. With the words from Swaminathan, "The Future is of nations with grain, not weapons." In the goal of Biohapness, India can do well.

Q.. "Reviving agrobiodiversity through community-led innovations is central to achieving an era of 'Biohappiness' in India."

Q. About the concept of "Biohappiness" in the Indian context, consider the following statements:

1. It aims at the sustainable use of biodiversity to enhance human well-being, nutrition, and income.
2. It promotes the replacement of traditional crops with high-yield commercial hybrids to ensure food security.
3. It draws from indigenous ecological knowledge and community participation for biodiversity conservation.
4. It aligns with India's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Answer: B. 1, 3 and 4 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Biohappiness emphasises sustainable biodiversity use for human well-being.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect:** It promotes revival of traditional crops, not replacement with commercial hybrids.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** It includes community knowledge and ecological traditions.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** It supports CBD goals and aligns with SDGs like 2, 3, 13, and 15.

India's next census: Digital leap, throwing calculation and democratic implications

Why in the news?

- On June 5, 2025, the Union Home Ministry announced that India's next census would be conducted in two phases and is scheduled to be completed by March 1, 2027.
- This will be the country's first digital census, as well as the first post-mutual honour, including planned role-herds (SCS) and planning tribes (ST) beyond casting.
- After a 16-year delay, the longest census in India is significant not only for governance and planning but also for its implications regarding delimitation, representation, and sociopolitical equity.

Background: Development of the census in India

With the first synchronous census held by India from 1872 to 1881, after independence, it has been held every ten years without interruption. The census of 2021, which was held between April 2020 and February 2021, was kept from the ancestors. The upcoming census in 2027 will thus be held after a unique 16-year difference under the Census Act, 1948, and the legal framework for the Census rules, 1990. In particular, it comes at a time when India is undergoing significant technical, demographic and political changes, it is one of the most recent.

Key Features of the 2027 Census

First Digital Census

The 2027 Census will be conducted through a mobile application, replacing traditional pen-and-paper methods. Enumerators will collect data using tablets or smartphones, increasing speed, efficiency, and real-time verification.

Two-Phase Enumeration

The Census will be conducted in two phases:

- **Phase I:** House Listing and Housing Census
- **Phase II:** Population Enumeration

This dual-phased approach will take place over 11 months, starting in April 2026 and concluding by February 28, 2027. The reference date for the population count will be 12 a.m., March 1, 2027, except for snow-bound regions (J&K, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand), where it will be October 1, 2026.

Caste Enumeration for the First Time Since 1931: The government has approved a comprehensive caste enumeration in the 2027 Census. While SCs and STs have been counted since 1951, this will be the first time that OBCs and other castes will be officially enumerated since the colonial Census of 1931.

A new caste data field is expected to be introduced in the digital format, possibly as an additional drop-down box next to existing SC/ST fields.

- **Self-enumeration Feature:** The Census may allow citizen-led digital self-enumeration, subject to the condition that the household has updated information in the National Population Register (NPR). A self-enumeration portal, developed during the stalled 2021 Census, is expected to be reused and upgraded.
- Massive Enumerator Training: Around 30 lakh enumerators, including many government school teachers, will be trained in the new digital methodology. Training modules will be updated to include caste enumeration protocols.
- **Linkage with NPR and NRIC:** The NPR updation, which was to occur during the first phase of the 2021 Census, remains unconfirmed. However, its underlying database of 119 crore individuals is likely to form a foundational layer for cross-verification.
- As per Citizenship Rules, 2003, the NPR is the first step towards the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC/NRC), a politically sensitive subject in recent years.

Delimitation and political representation

The Constitution said that the first census after 2026 will form the basis for the delimitation of the Lok Sabha and state assembly orders.

The current boundary is based on the figures from 1971, and updating it with 2027 figures will have major effects, especially in the context of the north-south representation balance.

Reservation of women: The 128th constitutional amendment for 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies is random on the new census and delimitation. The census of 2027 is an essential prerequisite to implement this historical reform by 2029.

Throw-based policy and positive action: Counting of other backwards classes (OBC) and other caste groups can open the policy for reservation, welfare schemes and development indicators, which provide data-driven insights into caste-based inequalities.

Evidence-based scheme: Since India wants to become an economy of $ 5 trillion, current data on data has disturbed resource allocation, infrastructure scheme, urban policy and poverty estimate. The new census will bridge this data and enable more targeted welfare distribution.

Challenges

- **Privacy and data security:** Digital census causes serious concerns about data security, civil privacy and potential abuse. There is no dedicated data protection law by mid-2025, which increases vulnerability.
- **Political sensitivity:** Counting throwing is politically controversial. Critics claim that it can increase the identity of throwing and leading competing populistism, while supporters are essential to social justice.
- **Administrative and Technological Readiness:** Training 30 lakh enumerators on digital platforms, ensuring device reliability, and conducting operations across diverse terrains and populations is a monumental logistical challenge. Connectivity issues in rural and remote areas can hinder real-time data entry.

- **Non-cooperation or Misinformation:** In the context of citizenship debates (e.g., NRC, NPR), a section of the population may fear participating or may deliberately provide inaccurate data. Awareness and trust-building are crucial.
- Absence of NPR Update Notification: The government's silence on the updating of the NPR, which was to be done in the 2021 cycle, leaves questions about its status and integration with the Census. The link between NPR and NRIC remains a source of civil society concern and litigation.
- **Impact on Federal Balance:** Delimitation based on the updated Census may disproportionately benefit northern states due to higher fertility rates, while southern states, which have invested in population control, may lose parliamentary representation, raising federalism concerns.

The way forward

- **Legal and ethical security measures:** A strong data protection law should be implemented before the census begins. In order to secure citizens' confidence, clear protocols should be promoted for data Benami, encryption and third-party access.
- Decentralised plan and capacity building: States and districts should be equipped with the technical infrastructure and trained personnel necessary for the digital census. Special provisions should be made for the stem, border and hilly areas.
- **Public awareness and trust campaign:** The government must start a large-scale IEC (information, education, communication) campaign to educate the purpose of the census and instil confidence in the citizens, privacy and benefits.
- **Federal Counselling System:** Given the implication of representation, federalism and distribution of resources, the census process must be supported through forums such as the Inter-State Council or Niti Aayog of Bipartite and the state consultation.
- **Census-npr-separation:** To overcome the possibility of exclusion and abuse of data, the government should remove NPR from the census or publish the minimum NPR rules, security measures and goals and publish their potential link with NRIC/NRC.

Conclusion

India's next census, to be completed by March 2027, is not just a common statistical practice - it is a difference in water in Indian democracy and governance. Along with including the digital format and throwing data, it has the opportunity to change the distribution of resources, social justice and political representation.

Main Question:

How can the emerging science of exposomics transform environmental health policy and disease prevention strategies in India, and what challenges must be overcome to mainstream it within public health systems?

Question: The upcoming 2027 Census in India is being described as a "watershed moment" not merely due to its digital transformation, but because of its deep

implications for federalism, representation, and social justice. In this context, which of the following inferences can be logically drawn from the available information?

1. The shift to digital enumeration will ensure real-time, error-free data and eliminate the need for manual verification.
2. Enumeration of caste groups, including OBCs, is likely to trigger both demands for expanded reservation and debates on the utility of caste-based welfare.
3. The population data from the 2027 Census can be directly used for delimiting Lok Sabha constituencies without requiring any constitutional or legal amendment.
4. Absence of updated NPR notification and clarity over NRIC linkage poses both an operational risk and a public trust deficit for the Census exercise.
5. Southern states may face a relative decline in parliamentary representation post-delimitation, despite better demographic performance.

Select the correct answer using the code below:
(a) 2, 4 and 5 only
(b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 1, 3 and 5 only
(d) 2, 3 and 4 only

Answer: (a)

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Digital tools increase efficiency but do not eliminate all errors or the need for manual verification in edge cases or remote areas.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Caste data will likely revive both reservation debates and policy expansion demands.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** While the Constitution allows for delimitation after the first Census post-2026, a Delimitation Commission needs to be constituted; it's not automatic.
- **Statement 4 is correct:** No update on NPR, coupled with concerns about its linkage with NRIC/NRC, can undermine trust and operational smoothness.
- **Statement 5 is correct:** Southern states, with lower fertility rates, may lose representation, creating federal equity concerns.

Exposomics for better environmental health

Why in the news?

On June 5, 2025, World Environment Day gave global attention to the question of plastic pollution. In India, observation came with considerable pressure on understanding the burden of extensive environmental disease. Dean (research) at the Shri Ramchaandra Institute of Higher Education and Research. Kalpana Balakrishnan emphasised a large scientific border - the exposomics field. How this new science changes chemical, physical, biological and social risks throughout life promises to change our understanding. At a time when India has about a quarter of the burden of global environmental disease, exposomics can be a game changer for integrated evaluation of environmental health and policy formulation.

Background: Environmental health and global references in India

- Environmental risk factors such as air and water pollution, toxic chemical risk and inadequate hygiene are the most important contributors to the disease worldwide.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) began determining the environmental impact of the disease in 2000 and has refined the process since the Global Burden (GBD) study.
- In its 2021 cycle, it was found that the risk factor for the environment and commercial (OEH) was responsible for 12.8 million deaths globally and 14.4% of all DALYs (disabled life years).

India faces an external challenge:

- More than 3 million deaths and 100 million DALYs are attributed to OEH risk.

- Environmental risk is responsible for more than 50% of non-infectious disease burden, such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and chronic kidney disease.
- Lead exposure for children under five has serious developmental damage, contributing 20% of 154 million lost IQ points, or 20% of the global total.

Features: What is Exposomics?

From Genome to Exposome

- The sequencing of the Human Genome Project (1990–2003) revolutionised our understanding of genetics. Yet, it became clear that genes alone cannot explain many common diseases. For example, genetics accounts for less than half of heart disease risk.
- This led to the birth of exposomics, the comprehensive study of all environmental exposures (external and internal) throughout a person's lifetime and their impact on health. While the genome is fixed, the exposome is dynamic and reflects a person's interaction with their environment.

Components of the Human Exposome

- **The exposome includes three domains:**
- General external exposures (climate, pollution, socioeconomic conditions)
- Specific external exposures (diet, infections, lifestyle, drugs, radiation)

- Internal exposures (metabolism, inflammation, gut microbiota, oxidative stress)
- By capturing how these exposures interact with genetic, physiological, and psychosocial factors, exposomics offers a life-course perspective on disease development.

Technologies Enabling Exposomics

- The field relies on a suite of cutting-edge interdisciplinary technologies:
- Sensor-based personal monitoring: Wearable devices that track real-time exposure to pollutants.
- Untargeted chemical analysis: Using mass spectrometry to analyze thousands of environmental chemicals in biological samples.
- Organs-on-a-chip: Micro-physiological systems that mimic human organs to test responses to chemicals.
- Big data and AI: Integration and analysis of vast datasets to identify exposure-disease linkages (Exposome-Wide Association Studies or EWAS).

Challenges: Why Current Approaches Are Insufficient

Fragmented Policy and Data Silos

India's environmental health management remains fractured across ministries and sectors — health, environment, water, agriculture, and urban development. This results in disjointed data collection, poor surveillance, and inconsistent regulation.

Moreover, human exposure data is limited to a narrow range of factors like PM2.5 or arsenic in water.

Large data gaps exist in:

- Noise pollution
- Heavy metals beyond lead
- Endocrine-disrupting chemicals
- Microplastics
- Compound exposures and mixture effects

Incomplete Risk Estimations

Current GBD estimates under-report environmental risks because:

- Only ~11 risk categories are included due to a lack of exposure data.
- Risk estimation models usually evaluate single exposures, ignoring the cumulative and interacting effects of multiple hazards over a lifetime.
- Interactions with genetics, diet, stress, behaviour, and socio-economic status are insufficiently modelled.

This hampers the prioritisation of preventive strategies and obscures health inequities, especially in vulnerable populations.

Climate Change Multipliers

Environmental exposures are being magnified by climate change. Examples include:

- Heatwaves intensifying the health impacts of air pollution
- Flooding is increasing disease transmission.
- Crop failures affecting nutrition
- Wildfires releasing toxins

Climate-sensitive risks often co-occur and interact, creating compound events. These synergistic hazards are hard to quantify with existing tools.

Infrastructure and Institutional Barriers

India lacks a centralised exposomics initiative or a dedicated national centre for environmental health research.

Additionally:

- Surveillance systems are weak or absent in many states.
- Public health laboratories are not equipped for exposomic monitoring.
- There is a severe shortage of trained personnel, interdisciplinary researchers, and funding.

Way Forward: Operationalising Exposomics in India

- Establish a National Exposome Program
- India should launch a National Human Exposome Project under the joint leadership of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Environment, and DST/DBT. Key priorities would include:
- Establishing regional centres of excellence
- Creating a national exposome database
- Linking environmental and health surveillance data
- Encouraging public-private partnerships for technology development
- Integrate Exposomics in Public Health Planning

Exposomics should inform the design of:

- Disease forecasting models
- Health impact assessments (HIA)
- Targeted interventions for vulnerable populations
- Urban planning, sanitation, and waste management policies
- It must also feed into precision public health, where interventions are customised by area, exposure, and population subgroup.
- Build Capacity and Infrastructure

Strategic investments are required in:

- Wearable monitoring and remote sensing technologies
- AI-enabled analytics and bioinformatics
- Interoperable data repositories
- Human biomonitoring labs with high-throughput capability
- India must also create multi-disciplinary educational programs combining public health, environmental science, data science, and toxicology.

Harmonise Regulations and Data Sharing

- Legal and policy reforms are essential to:
- Standardise environmental monitoring protocols
- Mandate real-time emissions and pollution disclosures
- Enable data sharing across ministries and with research institutions
- Encourage citizen science through participatory monitoring

Mobilise Communities and Youth

- Public awareness about environmental health is still low. National campaigns should:
- Promote individual-level behaviour change (e.g. reducing plastic use, avoiding open burning)
- Involve schools, colleges, and RWAs in participatory exposomic projects
- Leverage platforms like Poshan Abhiyan, Swachh Bharat Mission, and Ayushman Bharat for integration.

Case Study: Exposing capacity in handling diabetes and air pollution

- A fresh Lancet study showed how air pollution contributes significantly to diabetes. In Indian cities such as Delhi and Kanpur, where the level of PM2.5 is chronically high, researchers can perform exposure research:

- Track the first biomarker in the exposed population
- Determine the amount of cumulative risk from traffic, cook smoke and commercial sources
- Difference between genetic and environmental contribution
- Inform urban plans for urban health
- Such evidence-based policy settings can reduce health costs and the incidence of the disease.

Conclusions: India's growing environmental disease burden requires a paradigm shift for general, life-based environmental health strategies due to fragmented intervention. Exposic provides a revolutionary framework for understanding and addressing exposure, complicated and cumulative risks hidden by Indians, from the fetus to the elderly. The Human Genome Project changed the material, and now the Human Exposure Project can change public health. While we are at the intersection of environmental crisis and health emergency conditions, hugging is not just a time - this is necessary.

Main question

"The concept of exposures marks a paradigm change in understanding the complex relationship between environment and health. Seriously, check how exposures can change environmental health policy in India. Discuss researchers, infrastructure and challenges in implementing an exposure-based public health structure."

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Exposomics:

- Exposomics examines the impact of only physical and chemical environmental exposures on human health over a lifespan.
- The exposome includes internal biological responses such as oxidative stress and inflammation.
- Exposomics research aims to replace genome-wide association studies (GWAS) with exposure-wide association studies (EWAS).
- In India, exposomic data is already integrated into the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) estimations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

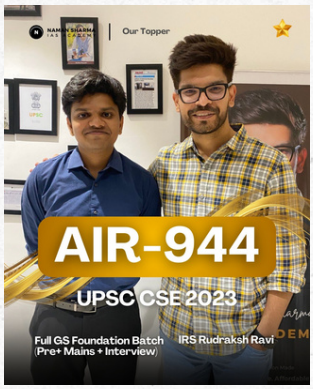
A. 2 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 4 only
D. 1, 3 and 4 only

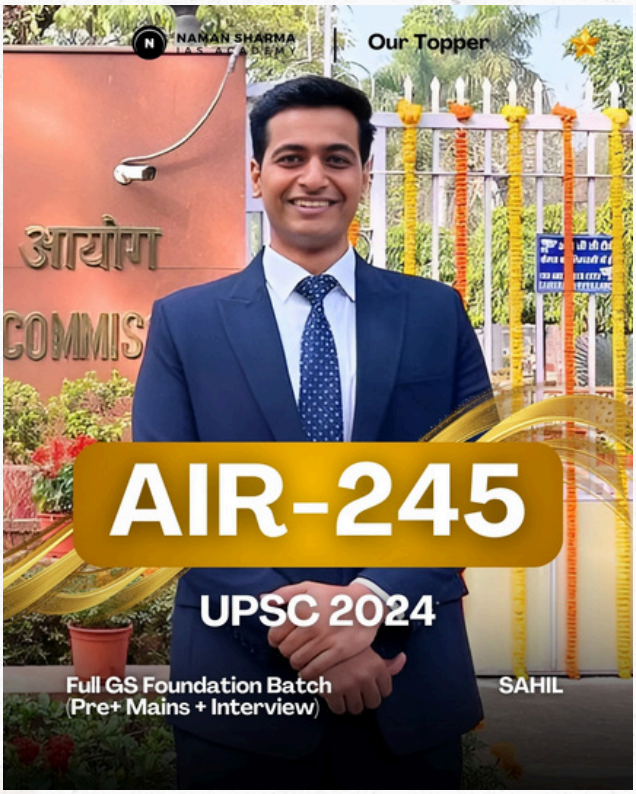
Correct Answer: A. 2 only

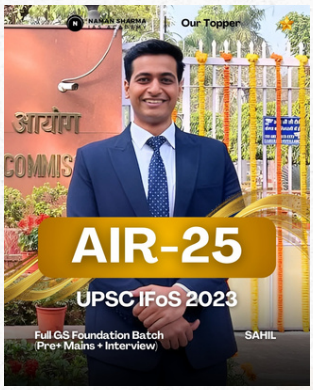
Explanation:

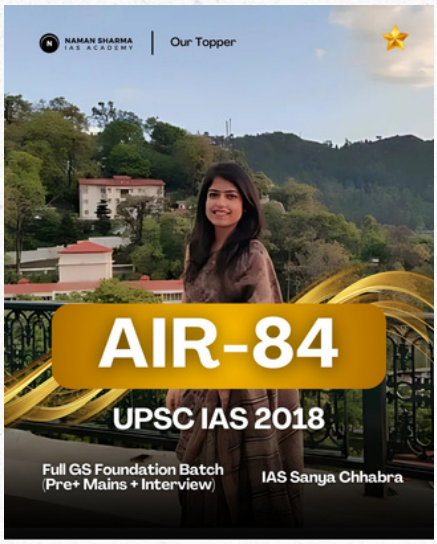
- Statement 1 is incorrect: Exposomics includes physical, chemical, biological, and psycho-social exposures, not just physical and chemical ones.
- Statement 2 is correct: The exposome includes internal exposures such as oxidative stress, inflammation, and gut microbiota.
- Statement 3 is incorrect: EWAS are intended to complement GWAS, not replace them.
- Statement 4 is incorrect: Exposomic data is not yet integrated into the GBD due to a lack of widespread human exposure data in India.

Our Recent Toppers









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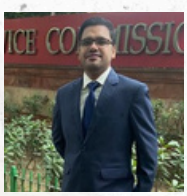

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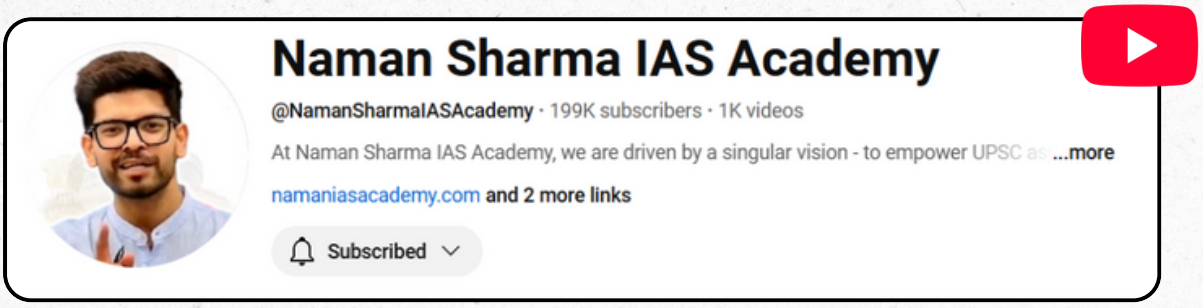

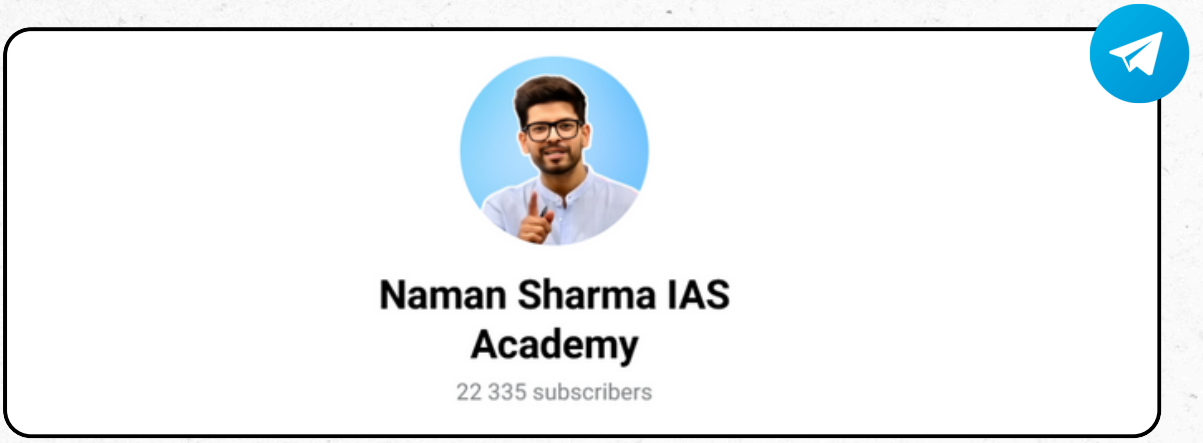

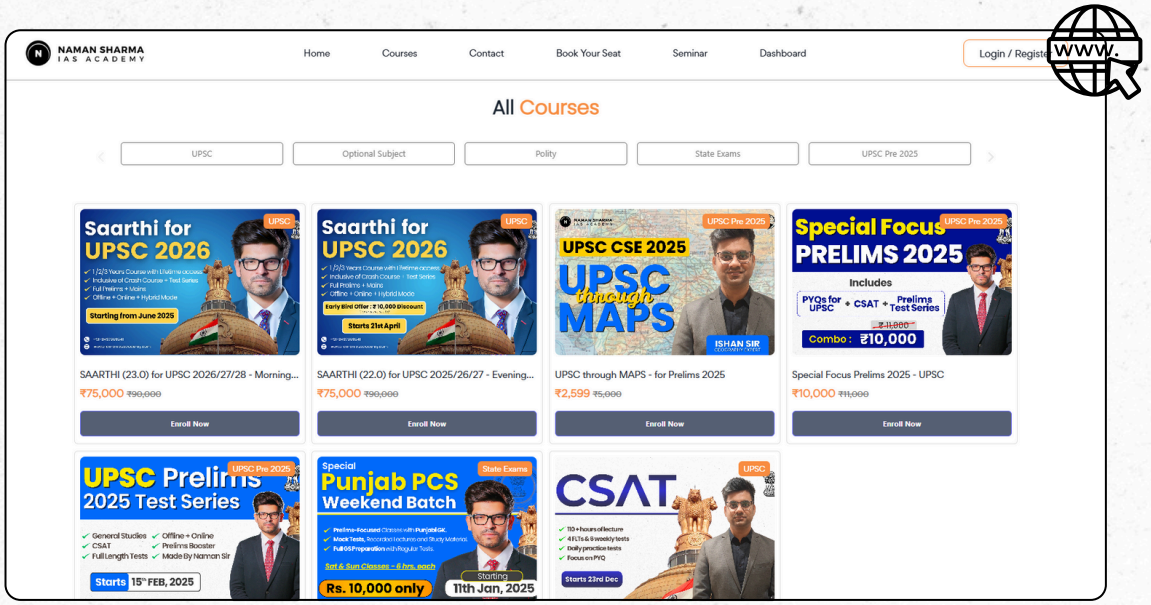

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