

Daily Reading Comprehension & Critical Reasoning

Two RC passages (English-as-Language) and two CR passages (Argumentation). Read each carefully and answer based on what is stated or implied.

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PASSAGE 1 (RC) — THE CONTESTED FRONTIER OF DEEP-SEA MINING (SCIENCE / ENVIRONMENT / GOVERNANCE)

Q1-5

READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q1-5 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

Beneath the open ocean, far from any nation's coastline, lie vast plains of the seabed studded with polymetallic nodules — potato-sized lumps rich in manganese, nickel, cobalt and copper. These metals are central to the batteries that power electric vehicles and store renewable energy, and as terrestrial reserves come under strain, attention has turned to the deep. The International Seabed Authority, an autonomous body established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, governs mineral activity in this region, designated the 'common heritage of mankind'. For decades the Authority has issued exploration licences while painstakingly negotiating a 'mining code' to regulate commercial extraction. That code remains unfinished, yet the pressure to begin mining is intensifying.

Proponents argue that the seabed offers metals at a lower social cost than terrestrial mines, which displace communities and scar landscapes. They contend that the energy transition cannot wait, and that a regulated international regime is preferable to a scramble of unilateral action. Critics respond that the deep ocean is among the least understood ecosystems on Earth. The nodules themselves take millions of years to form and serve as habitat for organisms found nowhere else; sediment plumes stirred up by mining machinery could smother life across enormous areas, and the long-term consequences are simply unknown.

A further tension is procedural. A clause in the governing convention allowed any state sponsoring a mining contractor to trigger a two-year deadline, after which applications might be considered even without a finalised code. When that deadline lapsed, the Authority found itself caught between its mandate to develop the seabed's resources for the benefit of all and its parallel duty to protect the marine environment. A growing coalition of states has called for a precautionary pause or outright moratorium until the science matures. The episode illustrates a recurring dilemma of global commons governance: how to allocate resources that belong to no one and everyone, when the costs of error may be irreversible and the beneficiaries of caution are future generations who cannot vote.

1. According to the passage, polymetallic nodules are valuable primarily because they contain metals used in:

- A. Construction-grade steel and cement
- B. Batteries for electric vehicles and renewable energy storage
- C. Pharmaceutical manufacturing
- D. Semiconductor fabrication

2. The phrase 'common heritage of mankind' is used in the passage to describe:

- A. All coastal waters of member states
- B. Terrestrial mineral reserves
- C. The international seabed area beyond national jurisdiction
- D. The atmosphere above the oceans

3. Which of the following best captures the 'procedural tension' the author identifies?

- A. A treaty clause could permit applications before the mining code is finalised
- B. Member states refused to fund the Authority
- C. Contractors ignored their exploration licences
- D. The Authority lacked any legal mandate over the seabed

4. The author's attitude towards immediate commercial deep-sea mining is best described as:

- A. Enthusiastically supportive
- B. Wholly indifferent
- C. Cautious, emphasising scientific uncertainty and irreversibility
- D. Dismissive of any environmental concern

5. The closing reference to 'future generations who cannot vote' is intended to highlight:

- A. A proposal to lower the voting age
- B. The difficulty of representing those who bear the long-term costs of present decisions
- C. The Authority's electoral procedures
- D. A demographic decline in coastal states

PASSAGE 2 (RC) — INDIA'S GIG ECONOMY AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL SECURITY (ECONOMICS / LABOUR / SOCIETY)

Q6-10

READ CAREFULLY AND ANSWER Q6-10 BASED ONLY ON THE PASSAGE.

The delivery rider weaving through evening traffic and the cab driver responding to an app's ping have become emblematic figures of urban India. They are part of a rapidly expanding 'gig and platform' workforce — workers who take on income-earning activities outside a traditional employer-employee relationship, mediated by digital platforms. Estimates place this workforce in the tens of millions and projected to grow several-fold within the decade. The model promises flexibility: workers choose their hours, and platforms scale labour up and down with demand. Yet this flexibility comes wrapped in a profound ambiguity about status.

In law, the rights and protections a worker enjoys have long depended on a binary classification: one is either an 'employee', entitled to minimum wages, paid leave, provident fund contributions and protection against unfair dismissal, or one is 'self-employed', bearing one's own risks and enjoying none of these. Platform workers sit awkwardly between the two. They are economically dependent on the platform, which sets prices and can deactivate them at will, yet they are formally treated as independent contractors. The result is a workforce that absorbs the volatility of the market without the cushion of the protections designed for it.

India's response has been to craft a distinct legal category. A new labour code recognises 'gig workers' and 'platform workers' as groups deserving of social security, and contemplates a welfare fund financed partly by contributions from the aggregators themselves. The design is innovative — it sidesteps the sterile debate over whether platform workers are 'really' employees and instead attaches benefits to the work itself. But implementation raises hard questions. How should contributions be calculated when a worker toggles between several apps? Who verifies entitlements? And will benefits keep pace with the precarity they are meant to address? The gig economy thus poses, in microcosm, the central labour question of the age: how to extend the security of the old industrial bargain to forms of work the industrial era never imagined.

6. The 'profound ambiguity about status' referred to in the passage arises because platform workers:

- A. Refuse to register with any platform
- B. Are economically dependent on platforms yet treated as independent contractors
- C. Are simultaneously employees of several governments
- D. Work only seasonally

7. According to the passage, the traditional legal binary classifies workers as either:

- A. 'Skilled' or 'unskilled'
- B. 'Permanent' or 'temporary'
- C. 'Employee' or 'self-employed'
- D. 'Formal' or 'informal'

8. India's legislative response, as described, is notable because it:

- A. Bans gig work outright
- B. Creates a distinct category and attaches benefits to the work itself
- C. Classifies all gig workers as full employees
- D. Leaves gig workers entirely outside any law

9. Which of the following is identified as an implementation challenge for the welfare fund?

- A. A shortage of delivery riders
- B. The absence of smartphones among workers
- C. Calculating contributions when a worker uses several apps
- D. Excessive minimum wages

10. The phrase 'the old industrial bargain' most nearly refers to:

- A. A historic trade agreement between nations
- B. The package of protections traditionally tied to stable factory-style employment
- C. The price of industrial commodities
- D. A defunct collective-bargaining statute

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — SHOULD INDIA CRIMINALISE THE CREATION OF NON-CONSENSUAL DEEPFAKES? (TECHNOLOGY / LAW / ETHICS)

Q11-15

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11-15.

Synthetic media generated by artificial intelligence — 'deepfakes' — can now place a person's face and voice into footage they never recorded, with unsettling realism. A campaign has emerged to enact a specific criminal offence targeting the creation and distribution of non-consensual deepfakes, particularly those that are sexual or that impersonate public figures to spread falsehoods.

The argument for criminalisation rests on harm and deterrence. Victims of deepfaked intimate imagery suffer reputational devastation and psychological trauma; existing defamation and obscenity laws, drafted for an analogue age, capture the conduct only awkwardly and after the fact. A bespoke offence, supporters say, would name the wrong precisely, signal society's condemnation, and give police and platforms a clear basis to act swiftly. They note that several jurisdictions have moved in this direction, and that the technology's accessibility means the harm will only multiply without a deterrent.

Those urging caution do not deny the harm but question whether a new crime is the right instrument. Criminal law, they argue, is a blunt tool; a poorly drafted offence could sweep in satire, parody, political commentary and legitimate artistic uses, chilling protected speech. They point out that the real difficulty is not the absence of a law but the practical impossibility of identifying anonymous creators operating across borders, and that enforcement effort might be better spent on rapid takedown obligations for platforms and on civil remedies that compensate victims. There is also the risk that a high-profile statute lulls the public into believing the problem is solved while doing little in practice.

The debate forces a familiar choice. When a new technology enables an old wrong at unprecedented scale, should the law respond with a new prohibition that expresses moral clarity but may overreach, or with incremental adaptation of existing tools that is narrower but perhaps slower and less visible? The answer turns on how one weighs expressive condemnation against the dangers of over-criminalisation.

11. Which of the following, if true, most strengthens the case for a specific criminal offence against deepfakes?

- A. Deepfake technology is becoming cheaper every year
- B. Existing laws have repeatedly failed to secure timely relief for victims of deepfaked imagery
- C. Some artists use deepfakes for legitimate film work
- D. Several countries have debated the issue

12. The principal objection raised by those urging caution is that a new offence might:

- A. Be too expensive to draft
- B. Reduce the number of deepfakes to zero
- C. Sweep in protected speech such as satire and political commentary
- D. Apply only to public figures

13. Which assumption underlies the supporters' claim that a bespoke offence would deter wrongdoers?

- A. Potential offenders can be identified and meaningfully threatened with punishment
- B. Deepfakes are always sexual in nature
- C. Civil remedies are unavailable
- D. Platforms will refuse to cooperate

14. The cautious camp suggests enforcement effort might be better directed at:

- A. Banning artificial intelligence entirely
- B. Lowering the standard of proof in all criminal trials
- C. Rapid platform takedown duties and civil remedies for victims
- D. Abolishing defamation law

15. The author frames the core dilemma as a choice between:

- A. State regulation versus complete deregulation
- B. A morally clear new prohibition that may overreach and narrower adaptation of existing tools
- C. Federal versus state jurisdiction
- D. Civil law versus common law systems

PASSAGE 4 (CR) — SHOULD INDIAN METROS INTRODUCE A CONGESTION CHARGE? (URBAN POLICY / ECONOMICS / ENVIRONMENT)

Q16-20

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16-20.

As traffic in India's largest cities thickens into near-permanent gridlock, planners have revived a proposal long used abroad: a congestion charge, levying a fee on vehicles entering the busiest central zones during peak hours. The idea is to make drivers confront the true social cost of adding one more car to a crowded road — the delay imposed on everyone else, the foul air, the wasted fuel — and thereby to nudge some journeys onto public transport, off-peak hours, or out of the centre altogether.

Advocates marshal both economic and environmental arguments. A congestion charge, they say, is the textbook remedy for a negative externality: prices that ignore social costs lead to overuse, and a well-set charge restores efficiency while raising revenue that can be ploughed back into buses and metros. Cities abroad that adopted such schemes saw measurable falls in traffic and pollution. With Indian metros choking on particulate matter, the case for action seems compelling.

Sceptics raise questions of fairness and feasibility. A flat charge, they argue, is regressive: it barely registers for the wealthy but bites hard on the lower-middle-class commuter with no realistic alternative, since public transport in many Indian cities is overstretched, unreliable or simply absent on key routes. To charge people off the roads before providing a viable substitute, they contend, is to penalise them for the state's own failure to build capacity. Others doubt the administrative machinery — the cameras, the enforcement, the exemptions — can function without leakage and corruption. And there is a sequencing argument: invest first in transit, and congestion may ease without coercion.

Ultimately the disagreement is less about whether congestion is a problem than about the order of operations and the distribution of burden. Is the charge a precondition that funds better transit, or a punishment imposed before alternatives exist? One's answer depends on whether one trusts the state to recycle the revenue fairly and to build the promised infrastructure.

16. The economic rationale for a congestion charge, as presented, treats traffic congestion as an example of:

- A. A natural monopoly
- B. A public good that cannot be priced
- C. A negative externality that pricing can correct
- D. A progressive tax base

17. Which of the following, if true, most weakens the advocates' position?

- A. In the target cities, public transport is unavailable on most routes used by commuters
- B. Some commuters prefer driving for comfort
- C. The charge would raise substantial revenue
- D. Cities abroad reduced traffic with similar schemes

18. The sceptics call the flat charge 'regressive' because it:

- A. Increases automatically with inflation
- B. Imposes a proportionally heavier burden on lower-income commuters
- C. Applies only to luxury vehicles
- D. Is collected once a year

19. The 'sequencing argument' referred to in the passage holds that:

- A. Charges should rise gradually each year
- B. Cameras should be installed before exemptions are decided
- C. Transit capacity should be built before drivers are charged off the roads
- D. Congestion should be measured before any policy is adopted

20. According to the final paragraph, one's verdict on the charge ultimately depends on:

- A. The exact rupee value of the charge
- B. The number of cameras installed
- C. Whether one trusts the state to recycle revenue fairly and build promised transit
- D. Whether other countries succeeded

Standalone questions on current affairs, static GK, vocabulary in context and idiom usage. No passage required.

21. The International Seabed Authority operates under which international treaty?

- A. The Paris Agreement
- B. UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- C. The Kyoto Protocol
- D. The Antarctic Treaty

22. Which Indian labour code consolidates provisions on social security, including for gig and platform workers?

- A. The Industrial Disputes Act, 1947
- B. The Factories Act, 1948
- C. The Code on Social Security, 2020
- D. The Trade Unions Act, 1926

23. 'Particulate matter PM2.5' refers to particles with a diameter less than:

- A. 2.5 millimetres
- B. 2.5 micrometres
- C. 2.5 nanometres
- D. 25 micrometres

24. Congestion charging in central zones is most famously associated with which two cities that adopted it early?

- A. Tokyo and Seoul
- B. London and Singapore
- C. Paris and Berlin
- D. New York and Chicago

25. The term 'externality' in economics refers to:

- A. A tax levied on imports
- B. A subsidy given to exporters
- C. A cost or benefit affecting a third party not involved in the transaction
- D. The external debt of a nation

26. In an argument, a 'premise' is best described as:

- A. The final claim being argued for
- B. A statement offered in support of a conclusion
- C. An irrelevant aside
- D. A rhetorical question

27. A logical flaw in which an arguer attacks the person rather than the argument is called:

- A. Straw man
- B. Slippery slope
- C. Ad hominem
- D. False dichotomy

28. The body that administers India's National Air Quality Index is the:

- A. Indian Meteorological Department
- B. Central Pollution Control Board
- C. NITI Aayog
- D. Bureau of Indian Standards

29. 'Polymetallic nodules' are found primarily on the:

- A. Continental shelf beaches
- B. Riverbeds of the Himalayas
- C. Deep-ocean seabed
- D. Surface of glaciers

30. Which of the following best defines a 'moratorium'?

- A. A permanent ban enforced by treaty
- B. A temporary prohibition or suspension of an activity
- C. A financial penalty
- D. A binding arbitration award