

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) — HOW COFFEE RESHAPED THE MODERN WORLD (HISTORY / SOCIETY)

Q1-5

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

Few commodities have shaped the texture of modern life as quietly as coffee. The plant is thought to have been first cultivated in the highlands of Ethiopia and Yemen, where, by the fifteenth century, Sufi mystics were brewing it to stay alert through long nights of prayer. From the ports of the Red Sea the drink travelled across the Ottoman world, and by the sixteenth century the coffeehouse had become a fixture of urban life from Cairo to Istanbul.

When coffee reached Europe in the seventeenth century, it arrived into societies whose principal social lubricant had long been alcohol. The contrast was striking. Where the tavern dulled the senses, the coffeehouse sharpened them. London's coffeehouses came to be nicknamed 'penny universities': for the price of a single cup, a visitor could read the latest pamphlets, argue politics, and exchange commercial intelligence. Lloyd's, the great insurance market, grew out of one such establishment frequented by merchants and ship-owners.

Historians have linked the coffeehouse to the emergence of what is sometimes called the public sphere — a space, neither court nor church, in which private individuals could reason together about matters of common concern. Rulers were not always comfortable with this. Coffeehouses were periodically suspected of breeding sedition, and more than one monarch attempted, without lasting success, to suppress them.

Yet the same drink that nourished rational debate in Europe rested on a far less rational foundation abroad. As demand grew, coffee became a plantation crop, cultivated in distant colonies under systems of coerced and enslaved labour that bore no resemblance to the genteel conversation of the metropolitan coffeehouse. The aroma in the cup and the conditions of its production belonged to two very different worlds.

To trace the history of coffee, then, is to hold two truths at once. The drink helped to build networks of commerce and habits of public reasoning that we still inhabit; it was also an instrument of an exploitative global economy. The ordinary morning cup carries both legacies, whether or not the drinker pauses to taste them.

1. As used in the passage, the phrase 'principal social lubricant' most nearly refers to:

- A. The main source of public revenue in early modern European societies of the period
- B. The substance that most commonly eased and accompanied social interaction in those societies
- C. The principal cause of public disorder and crime in seventeenth-century European towns
- D. The chief commodity that was bought and sold in the open public markets of early modern European cities

2. Which of the following best captures the central idea of the passage?

- A. Coffee replaced alcohol as the single dominant beverage in every single society that it reached anywhere across the world
- B. The European coffeehouse was clearly the most important single cause of both the Enlightenment and of modern democracy
- C. Coffee shaped modern life in a double-edged way, fostering commerce and public reasoning while resting on an exploitative colonial economy
- D. The long history of coffee is essentially a sustained record of repeated attempts by assorted monarchs and rulers to suppress political dissent

3. Which of the following can be most reasonably inferred from the passage?

- A. The social atmosphere encouraged by the coffeehouse differed markedly from that of the tavern it competed with
- B. Coffee began to be consumed in Europe earlier than it was consumed anywhere in the Ottoman world
- C. Lloyd's of London was established directly by a reigning English monarch who was seeking to regulate the growing marine insurance trade
- D. Sufi mystics first cultivated coffee chiefly in order to sell it to European merchants for a profit

4. Which of the following best describes the author's attitude towards the history of coffee?

- A. Celebratory, treating coffee throughout the essay as an unambiguous and uncomplicated force for human progress and enlightenment
- B. Dismissive, regarding the cultural importance of coffee as having been greatly exaggerated by historians
- C. Alarmed, warning the reader that the consumption of coffee poses a serious threat to modern society
- D. Balanced, recognising coffee's contribution to public life while acknowledging its exploitative conditions of production

5. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the author's suggestion that the coffeehouse helped to create a space of shared public reasoning?

- A. Coffee continues to be cultivated today in many former colonies across Asia, Africa and Latin America
- B. Surviving records show that early coffeehouses were frequented almost solely by men already powerful enough to shape opinion privately
- C. Several European monarchs at different times issued formal edicts that attempted to close down all the coffeehouses within their own territories
- D. Lloyd's eventually moved out of its original coffeehouse premises into a separate dedicated commercial building

PASSAGE 2 (RC) — THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF FACIAL RECOGNITION (TECHNOLOGY / SOCIETY)

Q6-10

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

Facial-recognition technology has moved, within a single decade, from the realm of science fiction into the ordinary infrastructure of daily life. Unlocking a phone with a glance, passing through an automated immigration gate, or being tagged automatically in a photograph all rely on the same underlying capability: converting the geometry of a human face into a numerical signature that can be matched against a database. The promise is convenience and security; the peril lies in the uses to which that same capability can be put.

Proponents point to genuine benefits. Police forces have used the technology to identify suspects from crowd footage and to find missing children. Airports deploy it to speed passengers through borders. Banks use it to deter fraud. In each case the appeal is the same — a fast, contactless and apparently objective means of confirming who someone is.

Critics, however, raise three connected concerns. The first is accuracy. Independent testing has repeatedly shown that many systems perform less reliably on women and on people with darker skin, so that the burden of false matches falls unevenly. The second is consent. Unlike a fingerprint, a face can be captured at a distance, in public, without the subject's knowledge, which makes meaningful consent difficult to obtain. The third is function creep: a system installed for one narrow purpose — say, finding a wanted criminal — can quietly be repurposed for the routine surveillance of lawful behaviour, such as monitoring who attends a protest.

What makes the debate genuinely hard is that these are not arguments between progress and backwardness. A technology that can reunite a lost child with her family can also build a map of every citizen's movements. The same accuracy that makes the tool useful makes its errors consequential, and the same ubiquity that makes it convenient makes it intrusive. The question facing legislators is therefore not whether facial recognition works, but under what rules, with what oversight, and within what limits a society is prepared to let it operate.

6. As used in the passage, the term 'function creep' most nearly means:

- A. The gradual repurposing of a system from its original narrow use to broader and unintended uses
- B. The slow decline in a system's accuracy as the hardware running it grows older over time
- C. The tendency of a new technology to spread quickly across many different countries at once
- D. The deliberate concealment by a national government of the true purpose behind a state surveillance programme

7. Which of the following can be most reasonably inferred from the passage?

- A. Facial-recognition systems are now more accurate than fingerprint identification in every respect
- B. The author believes that facial-recognition technology should be banned outright in all public settings
- C. Most governments have already enacted comprehensive laws that fully regulate facial-recognition technology
- D. A face can be recorded without its owner's awareness in a way that a fingerprint typically cannot be

8. Which of the following best captures the central argument of the passage?

- A. Facial recognition is a deeply flawed technology whose considerable risks will always clearly outweigh any of the benefits it might offer
- B. Facial recognition is essentially harmless, and public anxiety about the technology is largely unfounded
- C. Facial recognition offers real benefits and real dangers, so the key question is how, not whether, it should be allowed to operate
- D. Facial recognition will inevitably be used for mass surveillance regardless of any laws that may be passed

9. Which of the following best describes the tone of the passage?

- A. Enthusiastic and promotional, urging the widest possible adoption of the new technology
- B. Measured and analytical, weighing competing considerations without dismissing either of the two sides
- C. Fearful and alarmist, presenting the new technology as an entirely unstoppable threat to individual human freedom
- D. Indifferent and detached, treating the entire debate as unimportant to most ordinary people

10. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the critics' concern about the accuracy of facial-recognition systems?

- A. A large independent study finds that several widely deployed systems misidentify darker-skinned women several times more often than lighter-skinned men
- B. Several busy international airports report that their automated facial-recognition gates have noticeably reduced the average waiting time for passengers
- C. A major retail bank announces that its new facial-recognition login feature has measurably increased its overall customer-satisfaction scores this year
- D. Police in one large city say that facial recognition recently helped them locate a missing, distressed child within a few hours

PASSAGE 3 (CR) — SHOULD INDIA BAN PRIVATE CRYPTOCURRENCIES? (ECONOMICS / REGULATION)

Q11-15

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q11-15.

A recurring proposal in Indian financial policy is that private cryptocurrencies — privately issued digital tokens such as Bitcoin — should be comprehensively banned. The argument for prohibition, as advanced by its supporters, proceeds along the following lines.

The supporters begin with monetary sovereignty. A modern state, they argue, must retain control over its currency in order to conduct monetary policy — to manage inflation, set interest rates, and act as a lender of last resort in a crisis. Private cryptocurrencies, circulating outside the central bank's control, erode that capacity. If a significant share of transactions migrated to such tokens, the supporters contend, the central bank's levers over the economy would be correspondingly blunted.

The second strand of the argument is the protection of retail investors. Cryptocurrency prices, the supporters observe, are extraordinarily volatile, and ordinary savers — drawn in by the promise of quick gains — have repeatedly suffered heavy losses when valuations have collapsed. A responsible state, they say, should not permit an asset class that systematically transfers wealth from unsophisticated households to a handful of early and well-informed holders.

The third strand concerns illicit finance. Because cryptocurrency transactions can be conducted pseudonymously and across borders, the supporters argue, they furnish an ideal channel for money laundering, terror financing and the evasion of capital controls. A ban, they conclude, would close that channel.

From these three considerations — monetary sovereignty, investor protection and the prevention of illicit finance — the supporters draw their conclusion: India should impose a comprehensive ban on private cryptocurrencies rather than attempt to regulate them. Regulation, they suggest, would be costly, slow and easily outpaced by technological change, whereas a clean prohibition would settle the matter at once. The state, on this view, has both the authority and the duty to act decisively before private digital money becomes too entrenched to remove.

11. Which of the following best captures the conclusion of the supporters' argument?

- A. Private cryptocurrencies are technologically superior to the currency that is issued by the central bank
- B. India should impose a comprehensive ban on private cryptocurrencies rather than attempt to regulate them
- C. Cryptocurrency prices are too volatile for any retail investor to participate in the market with safety
- D. The central bank should itself issue an official digital currency in order to compete with private tokens

12. Which of the following is an unstated assumption on which the supporters' monetary-sovereignty argument depends?

- A. A significant share of economic transactions could realistically migrate to private cryptocurrencies if they were left legally permitted
- B. Private cryptocurrencies are already being widely used by a clear majority of ordinary Indian households for almost all of their everyday purchases
- C. The central bank is at present unable to influence inflation or interest rates through any of its existing policy tools
- D. Every country that has so far permitted cryptocurrencies has already lost control of its monetary policy entirely

13. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the supporters' argument for a comprehensive ban?

- A. The price of several major cryptocurrencies happened to rise really quite sharply during the whole of the most recent calendar year
- B. Some of the larger cryptocurrency exchanges charge their users fairly substantial fees for executing even ordinary transactions
- C. A small number of wealthy early investors have earned very large financial returns from holding cryptocurrencies over many years
- D. Comparative evidence shows that regulation reduces fraud and illicit use as effectively as a ban while preserving lawful innovation

14. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the supporters' illicit-finance argument?

- A. Many cryptocurrency holders say that they keep their tokens mainly as a long-term store of value
- B. The total market value of all cryptocurrencies remains small relative to the size of the world economy
- C. A series of independent investigations finds that cross-border ransomware and terror-financing payments are routinely settled in pseudonymous cryptocurrencies
- D. Several large multinational technology companies have very recently begun openly accepting various selected cryptocurrencies as payment for their everyday consumer products

15. Which of the following most fairly identifies a weakness in the supporters' investor-protection argument?

- A. It assumes a ban would protect savers, ignoring that prohibition may push them towards unregulated markets offering even less protection
- B. It relies entirely on the opinions of professional economists rather than on the actual views of the ordinary retail investors themselves
- C. It wrongly claims that no retail investor anywhere has ever managed to make any profit at all from trading cryptocurrencies
- D. It assumes that every available form of financial investment must carry exactly the same degree of risk to ordinary savers

PASSAGE 4 (CR) — SHOULD CAPITAL PUNISHMENT BE ABOLISHED? (LAW / ETHICS)

Q16–20

READ THE ARGUMENT AND ANSWER Q16–20.

Those who argue for the abolition of the death penalty in India build their case on four main pillars.

The first is the risk of irreversible error. No criminal-justice system, the abolitionists observe, is free from mistake: witnesses are mistaken, evidence is misread, and confessions are sometimes coerced. Most wrongful convictions can, in principle, be corrected on appeal — but an execution cannot be undone. Since the possibility of executing an innocent person can never be reduced to zero, they argue, a punishment that forecloses all correction should not be retained.

The second pillar is the absence of a unique deterrent effect. The abolitionists point to a large body of comparative research which, they contend, has failed to show that the death penalty deters serious crime more effectively than long terms of imprisonment. If capital punishment saves no more lives than the alternative, they argue, the state has no compelling reason to take a life.

The third pillar is arbitrariness. In practice, the abolitionists observe, the death sentence falls disproportionately on the poor and the poorly represented, who cannot afford skilled counsel. A punishment so unevenly applied, they say, cannot claim to embody equal justice under law.

The fourth pillar is dignity. The abolitionists argue that the deliberate taking of a human life by the state, however heinous the offence, is incompatible with a constitutional order founded on the inviolable dignity of the person. The state, they say, should not mirror the very act that it condemns.

From these four considerations — the risk of irreversible error, the lack of a unique deterrent, the arbitrariness of its application, and respect for human dignity — the abolitionists conclude that India should abolish the death penalty entirely and replace it with imprisonment. Retaining the penalty, they suggest, secures no benefit that lesser punishments cannot, while exposing the system to an error it can never repair.

16. Which of the following best captures the conclusion of the abolitionists' argument?

- A. The death penalty should be retained but reserved only for the very rarest and most heinous of offences
- B. India should abolish the death penalty entirely and replace it with imprisonment as the maximum punishment
- C. The criminal-justice system should focus chiefly on reducing the number of wrongful convictions on appeal
- D. Skilled legal counsel should be provided free of charge to every person who is accused of a capital offence

17. The abolitionists' deterrence argument depends on which of the following unstated assumptions?

- A. If the death penalty deters serious crime no better than imprisonment, the state lacks a compelling reason to use it
- B. Long terms of imprisonment are quite universally regarded by most offenders as a distinctly harsher punishment than execution itself
- C. Serious crime in India has already been completely eliminated by the existing system of long imprisonment
- D. The primary and only legitimate purpose of any criminal punishment is the deterrence of future crime

18. Which of the following, if true, would most weaken the abolitionists' argument?

- A. Some of the countries that have abolished the death penalty did so several decades ago after long public debate
- B. A few of the prisoners now serving life sentences have expressed deep remorse for the serious crimes they committed
- C. A rigorous study shows that, for one category of serious offence, the death penalty reduces it in a way imprisonment does not
- D. Public-opinion surveys repeatedly indicate that a clear majority of ordinary citizens continue to support retaining the death penalty

19. Which of the following most fairly identifies a possible weakness in the abolitionists' arbitrariness argument?

- A. It assumes, without offering any evidence, that wealthy defendants are never sentenced to death in any case at all
- B. It relies merely on a moral intuition about human dignity rather than on any solid empirical data about actual real sentencing patterns
- C. It mistakenly treats imprisonment and execution as though they were two identical forms of criminal punishment
- D. It shows the penalty is unevenly applied, which argues for fairer procedures rather than necessarily for abolishing the penalty itself

20. Which of the following, if true, would most strengthen the abolitionists' irreversible-error argument?

- A. Several prisoners now on death row have filed repeated mercy petitions with the relevant constitutional authority over the years
- B. A national audit reveals that several persons executed in past decades were later shown by fresh evidence to have been innocent
- C. The number of offences carrying a possible death sentence has gradually increased over the past several years
- D. Executions in the country are now carried out only after the highest court has finally confirmed the sentence

SECTION C — RAPID-FIRE GK & CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q21-30 · 10 Marks

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

21. What is the official currency of Japan?

- A. Won
- B. Yuan
- C. Yen
- D. Ringgit

22. Which Article of the Indian Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to issue writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights?

- A. Article 19
- B. Article 21
- C. Article 226
- D. Article 32

23. Choose the word most nearly similar in meaning to 'METICULOUS':

- A. Painstaking
- B. Careless
- C. Hasty
- D. Indifferent

24. The idiom 'to bury the hatchet' most nearly means:

- A. To hide the evidence of a crime
- B. To make peace and end a quarrel
- C. To abandon a difficult task
- D. To prepare for a coming fight

25. Which landmark case is associated with the 'basic structure doctrine' of the Indian Constitution?

- A. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India
- B. A. K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (1950)
- C. Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala
- D. Minerva Mills v. Union of India

26. Who wrote the book 'The Discovery of India'?

- A. Mahatma Gandhi
- B. Sardar Patel
- C. Rabindranath Tagore
- D. Jawaharlal Nehru

27. Which of the following is the longest river flowing within India?

- A. Ganga
- B. Godavari
- C. Yamuna
- D. Brahmaputra

28. For which sport is the 'Ranji Trophy' awarded in India?

- A. Hockey
- B. Cricket
- C. Football
- D. Badminton

29. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution declares India to be all of the following EXCEPT:

- A. Socialist
- B. Secular
- C. Capitalist
- D. Democratic

30. Where is the headquarters of the Reserve Bank of India located?

- A. New Delhi
- B. Kolkata
- C. Chennai
- D. Mumbai