**SECTION – I ENGLISH**

**DIRECTIONS FOR QUESTION (Q.1 TO Q.24):** Read the following passages carefully and answer the questions that follow them.

**PASSAGE – I**

Coal mining in Meghalaya and Assam, once a small-scale practice, expanded dangerously in the 1980s due to industrial demand from West Bengal and Bangladesh. The region’s terrain made mechanised extraction difficult, leading to a proliferation of rat-hole mines. This hazardous method involves digging narrow tunnels that are barely large enough for a person to crawl through, posing significant risks to miners. Rat-hole mining occurs in two forms: side-cutting, which follows coal seams along hill slopes, and box-cutting, where miners dig pits up to 400 feet deep and extract coal horizontally, forming a tunnel network. This technique, prevalent in the north-east, particularly Meghalaya and the borders of Assam, poses significant safety and environmental hazards. The mining period stretches between November and March. Migrant labourers, often trapped in cycles of debt, are lured by ‘Sardars’ (labour agents) under exploitative conditions that amount to bonded labour. Reports highlight that children are trafficked into these mines due to their ability to navigate the narrow tunnels, making them easy targets for abuse. There are approximately 26,000 unclosed mine openings, each employing up to 200 workers in shifts, putting thousands of labourers at daily risk in hazardous conditions.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned rat-hole mining on April 17, 2014, due to environmental degradation and unsafe working conditions. This decision was later upheld by the Supreme Court in *State of Meghalaya v. All Dimasa Students Union* (2019). However, enforcement remains weak, as many illegal mines operate under the influence of powerful bureaucrats and coal mafias. Whistleblowers, including local officials and activists, face threats while authorities fail to hold perpetrators accountable.

Several states indirectly enable rat-hole mining by exploiting regulatory loopholes. They are often under pressure from coal mafias and local politicians who profit from these illegal operations. For instance, the Meghalaya government has attempted to secure an exemption under Schedule 6, Paragraph 12A(b) of the Constitution to regulate coal mining on its own terms, bypassing national laws such as the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act). The State Assembly even passed a resolution seeking this exemption, but the resolution remains unapproved. Economic and political interests drive this effort—coal mining generates revenue and employment—while powerful individuals with stakes in the industry resist enforcement of the ban. However, under Section 23C of the MMDR Act, Meghalaya is obligated to prevent illegal mining. Yet, it has failed to create state-level laws to enforce the 2014 NGT ban. As a result, illegal mining continues.

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from “The Silent Crisis of Rat-Hole Mining”, by Utkarsh Yadav and Alokita, *The Hindu*]

1. Which of the following is the reason for the rapid increase in rat-hole mines in Meghalaya and Assam?

(A) The states’ expertise in rat-hole mining techniques

(B) Unsuitability of mechanised extraction due to the region’s terrain

(C) NGT’s promotion of rat-hole mining

(D) Bonded labour

2.None of the following are true according to the passage, EXCEPT that

(A) narrow tunnels are not risky for miners to crawl through.

(B) whistleblowers reporting on rat-hole mining face no threats.

(C) rat-hole mining contributes to child trafficking.

(D) environmental degradation and safe working conditions are associated with rat-hole mining.

3. The word “bypassing,” as used in the passage, means all the following, EXCEPT

(A) circumventing. (B) avoiding. (C) skirting. (D) complying.

4. Why has Meghalaya failed to enforce the 2014 NGT ban on rat-hole mining?

(A) The state has not created laws to implement the ban.

(B) The Supreme Court overturned the ban in 2019.

(C) The MMDR Act does not apply to Meghalaya.

(D) The NGT ban was temporary and has expired.

5. What role do labour agents play in rat-hole mining operations?

(A) They act as whistleblowers exposing illegal mining.

(B) They regulate safety measures in the mines.

(C) They recruit and exploit labourers under harsh conditions.

(D) They enforce the NGT ban on mining.

6. Why do children become victims of trafficking in rat-hole mining?

(A) They are skilled in operating mining equipment.

(B) They can easily crawl through cramped tunnels.

(C) They are legally employed under labour laws.

(D) They can be paid lower wages than adults.

**PASSAGE – II**

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that by 2050, nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide may experience hearing loss, with over 700 million needing rehabilitation. Around 63 million people, or 6.3% of India’s population live with significant auditory impairment. Despite the scale of the problem however, hearing loss often remains an invisible challenge.

“Hearing impairment doesn’t manifest physically, making it harder to identify and address,” says Mohan Kameswaran, founder-director of the Madras ENT Research Foundation. According to Dr. Kameswaran, while the global average indicates that one in 1,000 newborns is born with significant hearing loss, the number is twice as high in India. Alarmingly, a significant percentage of those affected are children aged 0 to 14 years.

A survey conducted by the Madras ENT Research Foundation among schoolchildren in Chennai a few years ago, revealed that 5% of students had undiagnosed hearing loss, says Dr. Kameswaran. “These children are often thought to be slow learners or as having learning disabilities,” he explains. “In reality, their hearing impairment affects language skills and cognitive development.”

In Tamil Nadu especially, the burden is even higher than the Indian average, he says, with six in every 1,000 newborns affected. “Congenital infections like rubella, neonatal complications such as low birth weight, and birth injuries contribute to this.”

As children grow, the issue becomes more complex. Treatable conditions like fluid buildup in the ears due to recurring colds or chronic infections often go unchecked. Without timely treatment, these seemingly small issues can evolve into long-term hearing problems.

For young adults, hearing loss stems less from birth-related causes and also from lifestyle choices. There is a growing risk posed by “electronic pollution”, the overuse of headphones, Bluetooth devices, and mobile phones. “There’s a simple rule, the 60-60 rule,” says Dr. Kameswaran. “Listen at 60% volume for no more than 60 minutes at a time. Most people don’t follow this, though.”

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from “[This World Hearing Day, Experts Stress the Need for Equitable Hearing Care](https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/this-world-hearing-day-experts-stress-the-need-for-equitable-hearing-care/article69289244.ece)”, by Athira Elssa Johnson, *The Hindu*]

7. Why is hearing loss deemed an invisible challenge?

(A) It primarily affects only older individuals, so it is often overlooked.

(B) It can be easily misdiagnosed as a cognitive or learning disability.

(C) It is only a minor issue compared to other health concerns.

(D) It does not have visible physical symptoms, making it harder to detect.

8. The above passage is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in nature.

(A) analytical (B) persuasive (C) expository (D) narrative

9. How does hearing loss contribute to learning difficulties?

(A) It primarily affects a child's ability to memorise information.

(B) It disrupts language acquisition and cognitive development.

(C) It prevents children from engaging in physical activities.

(D) It leads to immediate and complete loss of communication skills.

10.Which of the following is synonymous with the word “evolve”?

(A) Deteriorate (B) Develop (C) Stagnate (D) Regress

11. All the following contribute to hearing loss, EXCEPT:

(A) Using headphones at 50% volume (B) Overusing Bluetooth devices

(C) Excessive phone usage (D) Prolonged use of headphones

12. Dr. Kameswaran’s tone, when explaining the 60-60 rule, can be deemed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(A) indifferent (B) optimistic (C) dismissive (D) cautionary

**PASSAGE – III**

This is a story about love and country, and I will tell it to you how I remember it, in strands that took me years to untangle and then thread together. I became an American on a sweltering day in 2000, a day when the marine layer over Los Angeles cleared off before breakfast. The exact date had been circled on my wall calendar with the same blue Sharpie I used to mark holidays, and I thought of it as an equally festive occasion, the culmination of a journey that had begun when I came to the United States as a foreign student eight years earlier. Over the course of those years, I had adopted, almost without realising it, two of the more emblematic trappings of that particular era: I worked for a technology startup company and drove an SUV for which I had no discernible need. The deregulation of banks and the war in the Balkans were in the past. The NASDAQ was at a record high; unemployment was at a record low.

The citizenship ceremony was held at the Pomona Fairplex, a 487-acre facility best known for hosting the Los Angeles County Fair every summer. I remember wearing a sleeveless dress, a silver necklace my mother had given me, and a pair of new shoes that blistered my feet. My husband was in the same black suit and tie he had worn at our wedding. Ushers directed us to Building Four, a large, grey hall where I turned in my alien-registration card and was handed a miniature flag in return. Folding chairs had been set up in two columns: those who were to be sworn in had to sit on the left side of the aisle, their guests on the right.

At precisely 9:00 a.m., the first few notes of “The Star-Spangled Banner” played on the loudspeaker, and a hush fell over the audience. The air smelled of fresh roses and heavy cologne, but the mix could not fully disguise the scent of three thousand people gathered in a windowless hall in ninety-eight-degree weather. The presiding judge, an elderly man in wirerimmed glasses, came to the lectern and delivered a homily about the rights and responsibilities that awaited us. Citizenship was a privilege we had earned, he said, and we were to honour it by participating in civic life—voting in elections, serving on juries, even running for office. He had kindly eyes and a warm demeanour; it seemed impossible that he would ever pass a cruel or unfair sentence on anyone in his courtroom. After his speech, he moved to the centre of the stage and asked us to stand so that we could recite the oath of allegiance. I raised my right hand.

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from [*Conditional Citizens: On Belonging in America*](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/articles/conditional-citizens-excerpt/), by Laila Lalami, Vintage Books, 2021.]

13. What does the narrator mean by “in strands that took me years to untangle and then thread together”?

(A) She struggled with learning the English language before becoming a citizen.

(B) Her r experiences were fragmented and took time to make sense of.

(C) Her journey to citizenship was primarily a legal process with many formalities.

(D) Shehad to abandon her cultural identity to fully integrate into American society.

14. The word “emblematic,” as used in the passage, means

(A) anomalous. (B) peripheral. (C) transient. (D) quintessential.

15. Which of the following statements from the passage highlight the significance of the citizenship ceremony for the narrator?

I. The narrator marked the date on the calendar and compared it to a holiday.

II. The narrator wore a special outfit, including a silver necklace from their mother.

III. The event followed a structured protocol.

(A) Only I and II (B) Only II and III (C) Only I and III (D) I, II, and III

16. Which of the following figures of speech appears in the first paragraph of the excerpt?

(A) Hyperbole (B) Metaphor (C) Personification (D) Simile

17. What is the purpose of the judge’s speech before administering the oath of allegiance?

(A) To explain the legal implications of renouncing prior nationalities

(B) To recount his own experiences as an immigrant

(C) To emphasise the responsibilities that come with citizenship

(D) To highlight the economic benefits of becoming a citizen

18. The tone of the narrator throughout the passage can be deemed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(A) indifferent and detached (B) nostalgic and reflective

(C) bitter and resentful (D) sarcastic and dismissive

**PASSAGE – IV**

As a subclass of e-commerce, quick commerce (Q-commerce) entails rapid delivery, typically in 10 to 20 minutes, of products to the customer’s doorstep. This is facilitated by an elaborate network of dark stores and/or distribution centres. Dark stores refer to warehouses used by the platforms solely to fulfil online orders, with no in-person shopping. The idea is to be in close proximity to the consumer to facilitate faster deliveries.

Additionally, unlike a traditional retail store or modern retail (super or hyper markets), quick commerce based around a mobile app benefits from customer data to create a feedback loop. This helps them provide a customised shopping experience in addition to planning their inventory and responding better to the demand of a product (and categories). An example could be estimating when to stock up a certain product that has a seasonal demand or an abrupt demographic influence, among others.

According to a paper by the Centre for Transportation and Logistics of IIM Ahmedabad, quick commerce is beneficial to retailers owing to the prospect of enhanced brand awareness among consumers citing their proliferation. Angshuman Bhattacharya, Partner and National Leader for Consumer Product and Retail Sector at EY-Parthenon, observed that the availability of low-cost employable manpower, of a certain age and economic profile, has been among the crucial factors for the uptick and efficiency of quick commerce in India. The other aspect is about abundant choice. Scale also enables supply side advantages to quick commerce platforms. “If an individual company has to distribute a frozen or chilled product, they could be required to place a freezer in a kirana store, which is very expensive,” he noted.

A Deloitte consumer survey (2024) also observed consumers’ preference for quick commerce over traditional e-commerce for purchasing food and beverages. It held this was because these were often “impulse purchases or immediate needs”. In contrast, the survey illustrated, e-commerce was preferred for home, beauty, and personal care products which are generally more planned purchases. Modern trade however retained a consistent higher preference across all categories of products for consumers’ liking for the availability of large pack sizes for monthly groceries, better prices, and discounts.

The other determining aspect relates to the minimum cart value for availing free deliveries. According to Mr. Bhattacharya, so long as the convenience fee is not excessive, customers would not mind. “Retail shops usually close around 8 p.m. Now, should a customer require something at 10 p.m., quick commerce is the only option. Else, there lies an unaddressed demand,” he said.

[Extracted, with edits and revisions, from “[What Is Behind the Rise of Quick Commerce?](https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/what-is-behind-the-rise-of-quick-commerce-explained/article69314852.ece)”, by Saptaparno Ghosh, *The Hindu*]

19. According to the passage, Q-commerce entails

(A) delivery in 10-20 minutes, facilitated by dark web and distribution centres.

(B) delivery in 10-20 minutes, facilitated by dark stores and distribution centres.

(C) delivery in exactly 10 minutes, facilitated by dark stores and distribution centres.

(D) delivery in 10-20 minutes, facilitated by retail stores and distribution centres.

20.How does a feedback loop help quick commerce platforms?

(A) It enables them to manage inventory and anticipate demand more effectively.

(B) It helps them reduce delivery times by expanding their store locations.

(C) It ensures that customers always purchase the same products repeatedly.

(D) It prevents them from offering discounts and promotions to customers.

21. Which of the following has played a crucial role in the rise and efficiency of quick commerce platforms in India?

(A) Affordable labour of a suitable age and economic profile

(B) Vast product range

(C) Impulse purchasing

(D) All of the above

22. The word “entails” means all the following, EXCEPT

(A) requires. (B) involves. (C) excludes. (D) necessitates.

23. Why do consumers prefer quick commerce over traditional e-commerce for food and beverage purchases?

(A) Quick commerce offers better discounts and larger pack sizes.

(B) Food and beverages are often impulse purchases or immediate needs.

(C) Traditional e-commerce lacks availability of these products.

(D) Quick commerce provides fresher products than traditional retail stores.

24.Which of the following categories best describes this passage?

(A) Descriptive (B) Persuasive (C) Analytical (D) Speculative