PROGRESS TEST	
ENGLISH HOME **Class ID: IELTS 4.0-5.0+** Date: ……/09/2026 Student's name:.....	Reading: ……..…… Time: 60 minutes

PASSAGE 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 1–13, which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

Saving the saiga

The saiga, a species of antelope native to Central Asia, once roamed the vast grasslands of this region in enormous herds, many millions strong. Regrettably, such spectacular sights are a thing of the past. Today, the saiga is largely confined to a single country: Kazakhstan. This country is estimated to be home to well over 90% of the global saiga population, with Russia, Mongolia and Uzbekistan accounting for the rest.

The saiga is perfectly adapted to the tough conditions of the remote wilderness of the steppes of Central Asia. One such adaptation is its bizarre bulbous nose, which enables the animal to survive the extreme seasonal temperature swings of the region. The swollen nostrils of the nose serve several purposes: they filter out dust and cool the blood during hot, dry summers, and they warm the cold air before it enters the saiga's lungs in winter. Other seasonal adaptations include a heavy winter coat that the saiga sheds when the weather warms up.

Despite these superb adaptations to harsh conditions, the saiga has no defence against the threats posed by humans. It was almost driven to extinction by hunters in the 19th century. Legal protection ensured its survival for a while, and numbers steadily recovered throughout most of the 20th century. But the respite was only temporary. In the ten years following the break-up of the former Soviet Union in 1991, over 95% of the global population was lost – one of the fastest examples of species loss ever recorded for a mammal.

The dramatic decline during this decade was due to illegal poaching on an industrial scale. Male saiga are a particular target, because their horns are highly prized by traditional medicine practitioners. Poaching reached epidemic levels after misguided conservationists tried to relieve the pressure on threatened African rhinos by actively encouraging the use of saiga horns in traditional medicine as an alternative to those of rhinos. Male saiga were almost wiped out, leading to a population crash from which the species has been struggling to recover ever since.

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Another threat to the survival of the saiga is loss of habitat, as a result of agricultural expansion and human settlement. Physical barriers such as railways, pipelines and fences can block the seasonal migration routes of this transboundary species. In the worst cases, herds may starve to death after being trapped.

Then there is the risk of disease. In 2015, an outbreak of haemorrhagic septicaemia, caused by the normally harmless bacterium Pasteurella multocida, killed over 75% of the global adult saiga population in just three weeks. In 2017, 60% of the Mongolian saiga population – a subspecies found nowhere else in the world – was killed by a virus that spilled over from livestock. These so-called mass mortality events represent an unpredictable and serious threat to the species.

Climate change poses a further threat. Although well adapted to cold winters and hot summers, saiga struggle to cope with temperature extremes and unpredictable fluctuations in climate. Experts believe that unusually warm weather may have triggered the 2015 mass mortality event. The steppe region has also become increasingly arid in recent years, and many of the smaller streams that the species normally depended on have dried up and vanished.

Recent efforts to save the saiga have been spearheaded by the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative, a project led by the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, working in partnership with the Kazakh government's Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, Frankfurt Zoological Society and Fauna & Flora, an international conservation charity. Its purpose is to protect and restore Kazakhstan's steppe, semi-desert and desert ecosystems and the many species they support, including the critically endangered saiga. In 2022 the United Nations recognised the initiative as a World Restoration Flagship project, an accolade reserved for the ten best examples of large-scale ecosystem restoration around the globe.

So, how many saiga are there now? By 2000, the global saiga population had hit an all-time low of just 21,000 individuals. There was some recovery in the first decade of the new millennium but this was then crushed by devastating mass mortality events that saw the loss of hundreds of thousands of the species. But thanks to the intervention of the Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative, the most recent episodes in the ongoing story of the saiga have been relatively uplifting. Three years ago, the Ustyurt Plateau population in Kazakhstan experienced its largest mass birth of saiga calves in many years. An aerial census two years ago recorded an estimated 842,000 saiga across Kazakhstan as a whole, and according to an aerial survey earlier this year, the saiga population in Kazakhstan now exceeds 1.9 million. The world's strangest-looking antelope remains critically endangered, but the direction of travel is positive.

Questions 1–7

Complete the notes below.
Choose ONE WORD ONLY from the passage for each answer.
Write your answers in boxes 1–7 on your answer sheet.

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THE SAIGA

Adaptations

- has a large bulbous nose with swollen nostrils that
  - keep **1** ..... out
  - lower the temperature of its **2** ..... in summer
  - warm the air entering its lungs in winter
- grows a thick **3** ..... in winter, which it loses in spring

Reasons for population decline

- poaching, especially for the **4** ..... of male saiga
- expansion of farms and settlements, causing
  - reduction in the size of the saiga's **5** .....
  - loss of access to the **6** ..... which they use for migration
- various forms of disease, leading to mass mortality events
- climate change, causing the disappearance of **7** ..... which the saiga relied on

Questions 8–13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?
In boxes 8–13 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE	if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN	if there is no information on this

8. Today, numbers of saiga are distributed evenly across four nations in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia and Uzbekistan.

9. For most of the 20th century, the population of saiga were falling.

10. Efforts to protect rhinos in Africa had a significant effect on saiga populations.

11. Unpredictable fluctuations in climate are threatening the wildlife of Central Asia more than in other parts of the world.

12. The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative was formed for the benefit of a number of different animals.

13. The Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative's recognition as a World Restoration Flagship project attracted additional international funding for the scheme.

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PASSAGE 2

*You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 14–26**, which are based on Reading Passage 2 below.*

Mapungubwe

Located in southern Africa just below the Limpopo River, the kingdom of Mapungubwe, flourished between the 11th and 13th century CE

A Mapungubwe, which was one of the first states in southern Africa, was formed by Bantu-speaking peoples who were farmers. The area controlled by the rulers of Mapungubwe had at its heart a large sandstone plateau, which was easily defended due to its inaccessibility. As with other kingdoms in the region of southern Africa, cattle herding and other types of farming brought plenty of food and a surplus that could be traded for needed goods. Archaeology has revealed extensive layers of bones and manure, which indicate that from the 9th century CE there were large cattle herds, the traditional source of political power in southern African communities. The archaeological record for the 10th century shows a marked increase in the number of domesticated cattle in the area as well as cotton cultivation and weaving, as indicated by abundant finds of spindle whorls.

B The total population of Mapungubwe at its peak in the mid-13th century was around 5,000 people. The chief or king of Mapungubwe was likely the wealthiest individual in the society, and would have owned more cattle and precious materials than anyone else. The king and his advisers dwelt in a stone enclosure composed of stone walls and housing built on the highest level of the community's territory, a natural sandstone hill which is some 30 metres high and 100 metres in length. Occupation on the hill dates from the 11th century and the entire complex was surrounded by a wooden palisade*, as indicated by postholes made in the rock. The rest of the community lived in mud and thatch housing spread out below the hill, although there is one stone structure here. This settlement, known as Bandandyanalo, covers around 5 hectares (12.3 acres) and predates the hilltop structures.

C The kings of Mapungubwe were buried at the top of the hill site in a demarcated area away from the dwellings, while other members of the community were buried at the surrounding valley level. A wooden staircase connected the two levels, the sockets for the steps being clearly visible in the sandstone cliff face. There were some grander residences dotted around the outskirts of Babandyanalo, and these probably belonged to male relatives of the king. There are many other smaller but still impressive sites across the Mapungubwe plateau, which are located anywhere from 15 to 100 kilometres from the major hill site. Containing stone residences and walls, they likely belonged to local chiefs who acted as servants to the king.

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D The Mapungubwe plateau has a very high number of carnivore animal remains and ivory splinters, suggesting that the skins of these large animals and ivory elephant tusks were accumulated, probably for trade with coastal areas reached by the Limpopo River. The presence of glass beads, almost certainly from India, indicate there was trade of some sort with other states on the coast who, in turn, traded with merchants travelling from India by sea. Mapungubwe also benefitted from locally-sourced copper and the gold trade as it passed from the kingdom of Great Zimbabwe (12-15th century), situated to the north of Mapungubwe, to the coastal city of Kosala. It is likely that trade links led to a strengthening of political authority in order to control and even monopolise these lucrative interregional connections.

E Archaeological discoveries reveal that pottery was produced on a scale large enough to suggest the presence of professional potters, and is another indicator of the prosperity of Mapungubwe society. Archaeological finds include spherical vessels with short necks, beakers, and bowls, many of which have decorative stamps. There are also ceramic discs, and whistles. In addition, cattle, sheep, and goat figurines, and small figures of highly stylised humans with elongated bodies and short limbs have been found. The figures may have been used in ceremonies as offerings to ancestors, but their precise function is not known. Other discoveries include small jewellery items made from locally sourced copper.

F Beautifully decorated artefacts made of gold have also been found at Mapungubwe. A type of decoration, found nowhere else except Great Zimbabwe, involved the crafting of gold into small rectangular sheets and carving geometrical patterns into it. These sheets were then used to cover wooden objects (which have not survived) using small tacks, also made of gold. One such object that has been discovered may have been a sceptre, while additional evidence of local gold-working is a rhinoceros figurine made from small hammered sheets, and thousands of small gold beads. These objects were all found at the royal burial site and date to c. 1150. They are the first known indicators that gold had an intrinsic value of its own (as opposed to that of a currency) in southern Africa.

G The kingdom of Mapungubwe was already in decline by the late 13th century, probably because overpopulation placed too much stress on local resources, a situation that may have been brought to a crisis point by a series of droughts. Trade routes may also have shifted northwards. Certainly, the areas that now prospered were to the north, such as Great Zimbabwe.

Questions 14–19

Reading Passage 2 has seven paragraphs, **A–G**. Which paragraph contains the following information? *Write the correct letter, **A–G**, in boxes 14–19 on your answer sheet.*

14 a mention of the uncertainty regarding the purpose of certain objects

15 the likelihood that a climatic factor increased the problems Mapungubwe faced

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16 a mention of the location where members of the king's family are thought to have lived

17 a reference to people who brought goods by ship

18 an estimate of the size to which the Mapungubwe community grew

19 a mention of agricultural produce being exchanged for other items

Questions 20 and 21

Choose ***TWO*** letters, ***A–E***. *Write the correct letters in boxes 20 and 21 on your answer sheet.* The archaeological record reveals information about gold and the kingdom of Mapungubwe. Which **TWO** pieces of information are mentioned by the writer?

A Not everyone in Mapungubwe used gold as a form of payment.

B Items of gold were placed close to where Mapungubwe kings were buried.

C The most valuable item discovered in Mapungubwe was a sceptre made of gold.

D The way gold was decorated in Mapungubwe was also practised in another kingdom.

E Working with gold was a respected occupation in the Mapungubwe community.

Questions 22–26

Complete the summary below.

Choose ***ONE WORD ONLY*** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 22–26 on your answer sheet.

Archaeological discoveries

The Mapungubwe community's **22** ..... is indicated by the amount of professionally made pottery discovered at the site. Many of these objects, such as beakers and bowls, are highly decorated and have been marked with stamps. Other finds include round ceramic objects, **23** ..... and figures of various animals, as well as models of people with stretched **24** ..... It is possible that these had a role in ceremonies to honour **25** ..... In addition, pieces of **26** ..... made from a local metal have been found at the site.

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PASSAGE 3

*You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 27–40**, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.*

Conquering Earth's space junk problem

Satellites, rocket shards and collision debris are creating major traffic risks in orbit around the planet. Researchers are working to reduce these threats

A Last year, commercial companies, military and civil departments and amateurs sent more than 400 satellites into orbit, over four times the yearly average in the previous decade. Numbers could rise even more sharply if leading space companies follow through on plans to deploy hundreds to thousands of large constellations of satellites to space in the next few years.

All that traffic can lead to disaster. Ten years ago, a US commercial Iridium satellite smashed into an inactive Russian communications satellite called Cosmos-2251, creating thousands of new pieces of space shrapnel that now threaten other satellites in low Earth orbit – the zone stretching up to 2,000 kilometres in altitude. Altogether, there are roughly 20,000 human-made objects in orbit, from working satellites to small rocket pieces. And satellite operators can't steer away from every potential crash, because each move consumes time and fuel that could otherwise be used for the spacecraft's main job.

B Concern about space junk goes back to the beginning of the satellite era, but the number of objects in orbit is rising so rapidly that researchers are investigating new ways of attacking the problem. Several teams are trying to improve methods for assessing what is in orbit, so that satellite operators can work more efficiently in ever-more-crowded space. Some researchers are now starting to compile a massive data set that includes the best possible information on where everything is in orbit. Others are developing taxonomies of space debris – working on measuring properties such as the shape and size of an object, so that satellite operators know how much to worry about what's coming their way.

The alternative, many say, is unthinkable. Just a few uncontrolled space crashes could generate enough debris to set off a runaway cascade of fragments, rendering near-Earth space unusable. 'If we go on like this, we will reach a point of no return,' says Carolin Frueh, an astrodynamical researcher at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

C Even as our ability to monitor space objects increases, so too does the total number of items in orbit. That means companies, governments and other players in space are collaborating in new ways to avoid a shared threat. International groups such as the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee have developed guidelines on space sustainability. Those include inactivating satellites at the end of their useful life by venting pressurised materials or leftover fuel that might lead to explosions. The intergovernmental groups also advise lowering satellites deep enough into the atmosphere that they will burn up or disintegrate within 25 years. But so far, only about half of all missions have abided

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by this 25-year goal, says Holger Krag, head of the European Space Agency's space-debris office in Darmstadt, Germany. Operators of the planned large constellations of satellites say they will be responsible stewards in their enterprises in space, but Krag worries that problems could increase, despite their best intentions. 'What happens to those that fall or go bankrupt?' he asks. 'They are probably not going to spend money to remove their satellites from space.'

D In theory, given the vastness of space, satellite operators should have plenty of room for all these missions to fly safely without ever nearing another object. So some scientists are tackling the problem of space junk by trying to find out where all the debris is to a high degree of precision. That would alleviate the need for many of the unnecessary manoeuvres that are carried out to avoid potential collisions. 'If you knew precisely where everything was, you would almost never have a problem,' says Marlon Sorge, a space-debris specialist at the Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo, California.

E The field is called space traffic management, because it's similar to managing traffic on the roads or in the air. Think about a busy day at an airport, says Moriba Jah, an astrodynamicist at the University of Texas at Austin: planes line up in the sky, landing and taking off close to one another in a carefully choreographed routine. Air-traffic controllers know the location of the planes down to one metre in accuracy. The same can't be said for space debris. Not all objects in orbit are known, and even those included in databases are not tracked consistently.

F An additional problem is that there is no authoritative catalogue that accurately lists the orbits of all known space debris. Jah illustrates this with a web-based database that he has developed. It draws on several sources, such as catalogues maintained by the US and Russian governments, to visualise where objects are in space. When he types in an identifier for a particular space object, the database draws a purple line to designate its orbit. Only this doesn't quite work for a number of objects, such as a Russian rocket body designated in the database as object number 32280. When Jah enters that number, the database draws two purple lines: the US and Russian sources contain two completely different orbits for the same object. Jah says that it is almost impossible to tell which is correct, unless a third source of information made it possible to cross-correlate.

Jah describes himself as a space environmentalist: 'I want to make space a place that is safe to operate, that is free and useful for generations to come.' Until that happens, he argues, the space community will continue devolving into a tragedy in which all spaceflight operators are polluting a common resource.

Questions 27–31

Reading Passage 3 has six sections, **A–F**. Which section contains the following information?

*Write the correct letter, **A–F**, in boxes 27–31 on your answer sheet.*

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27 a reference to the cooperation that takes place to try and minimise risk

28 an explanation of a person's aims

29 a description of a major collision that occurred in space

30 a comparison between tracking objects in space and the efficiency of a transportation system

31 a reference to efforts to classify space junk

Questions 32–35

Complete the summary below. Choose ***ONE WORD ONLY*** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 32–35 on your answer sheet.

The Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee

The committee gives advice on how the **32** ..... of space can be achieved. The committee advises that when satellites are no longer active, any unused **33** ..... or pressurised material that could cause **34** ..... should be removed.

Although operators of large satellite constellations accept that they have obligations as stewards of space, Holger Krag points out that the operators that become **35** ..... are unlikely to prioritise removing their satellites from space.

Questions 36–40

*Look at the following statements (Questions 36–40) and the list of people below. Match each statement with the correct person, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.*

*Write the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**, in boxes 36–40 on your answer sheet. **NB** You may use any letter more than once.*

36 Knowing the exact location of space junk would help prevent any possible danger.

37 Space should be available to everyone and should be preserved for the future.

38 A recommendation regarding satellites is widely ignored.

39 There is conflicting information about where some satellites are in space.

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40 There is a risk we will not be able to undo the damage that occurs in space

List of People

- **A** Carolin Frueh
- **B** Holger Krag
- **C** Marlon Sorge
- **D** Moriba Jah

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