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Don't shoot the messenger

News:

- More than 15 whistle-blowers have been murdered in India in the past three years.
- Parliament may have passed the Whistle Blowers Protection (WBP) Act in 2014, but this did not help save their lives as the government has doggedly refused to operationalise the law.
- The Act aims to protect people who bring to the notice of the authorities concerned allegations of corruption, wilful misuse of power or commission of a criminal offence against a public servant.

What next?

Table 1: Comparison of the provisions of the Whistleblowers Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2015 with that of the 2013 proposed amendments

Whistleblowers Protection Act, 2014	Official amendments- August 2013	Whistleblowers Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2015
Grounds on which public interest disclosure cannot be made		
<p>Section 4(1): The Act states that any person, including a public servant or NGO, may make a public interest disclosure before a Competent Authority.</p> <p>This would apply, irrespective of the provisions of the Official Secrets Act, 1923.</p>	<p>No public interest disclosure may be if it contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Information likely to prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state, relations with foreign state, or lead to incitement of an offence; ii) Information that involves the disclosure of cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, secretaries and other officers except as provided for under the Right to Information Act, 2005. 	<p>No public interest disclosure may be if it contains :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Information likely to prejudicially affect the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state, relations with foreign state, or lead to incitement of an offence; ii) Cabinet papers including records of deliberations of the Council of Ministers, secretaries and other officers except as provided for under the Right to Information Act, 2005. iii) The information has been expressly forbidden to be published by a court or tribunal, or if the disclosure of information may result in contempt of court; iv) The information would cause a breach of privilege of Parliament or state legislature;

Chemical from turmeric helps treat cancer in children (S & T)

- Scientists in the U.S. have found yet another use for curcumin, the bioactive component of turmeric that is widely used in Indian cuisine, this time to treat cancer in children.
- Researchers at Nemours Children's Hospital and the University of Central Florida (UCF) have found that nano particles loaded with curcumin can target and destroy neuroblastoma tumour cells.
- Children aged five or less are most commonly affected.
- In their study, the researchers attached curcumin to cerium oxide nano-particles and tested the nano-curcumin formulation in cell lines of a high-risk form of neuroblastoma.

(In million hectares)

Global Area of Biotech Crops				
	2010	2011	2012	Crops
US	66.8	69	69.5	Maize, Soyabean, Cotton, Sugarbeet, Papaya, Squash
Brazil	25.4	30.3	36.6	Soyabean, Maize, Cotton
Argentina	22.9	23.7	23.9	Soyabean, Maize, Cotton
Canada	8.8	10.4	11.6	Canola, Maize, Soyabean, Sugarbeet
India	9.4	10.6	10.8	Cotton
China	3.5	3.9	4	Cotton, Papaya, Poplar, Tomato, Sweet pepper
Total*	148	160	170.3	

*Includes 22 other countries such as Paraguay, South Africa, Pakistan and Uruguay.
Source: Cive James

Roll-out of GM mustard will be challenged: SC

- The Supreme Court on Monday said a government decision favoring a commercial roll-out of genetically modified (GM) mustard seeds will not go unchallenged.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India J.S. Khehar prima facie noted that the court would hear pleas highlighting the health hazards involved in case the government frames a policy favoring the release of GM mustard seeds into the market.
- In short, such a policy would have to survive judicial scrutiny.

The Manila envelope

- In a significant development, India has decided to provide a financial assistance of \$5,00,000 (Rs. 3.2 crore) to the Philippines to aid its fight against the Islamic State (IS)-affiliated terror groups in the troubled Mindanao province.
- This is the first time India is sending aid to another nation to help it fight terrorism, thereby becoming an important marker in New Delhi's attempts to burnish its credentials as an emerging security provider to the wider Asian region.
- For a long time, India has been trying to convince the world that it remains one of the worst victims of terrorism. But its focus has largely been on Pakistan's use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

- In this context, India's support to Manila shows a new-found sense of urgency in standing shoulder to shoulder with other victims of terror, even when the source of the problem is different.

SBI cuts savings deposit rate by 50 bps to 3.5%

- For the first time since savings account interest rates were deregulated in 2011, State Bank of India has decided to revise the rate downward by 50 basis points to 3.5%, for deposits of less than Rs. 1 crore.
- Deposits of Rs. 1 crore and above will continue to earn 4%.
- About 90% of SBI's savings account holders will be impacted due to the move.
- SBI has a savings account base of Rs. 9 lakh crore.

Minor transgression by China (IR)

- Even as the Indian and Chinese troops are in a standoff along the Sikkim border, Indian officials have reported a transgression by the Chinese border troops along the Uttarakhand border.
- According to officials, on July 25, Chinese border guards came almost a kilometre inside the Indian territory, from the border claimed by New Delhi in the Barahoti area of Chamoli district

What next? Go to the root of issue.

- ✓ Not accepting India's entry into NSG (Nuclear Suppliers group).
- ✓ China has taken over India's land in the northern part (near Leh) and named it as Aksai chin.
- ✓ China claiming Arunachal Pradesh as their own land.
- ✓ Supplying weapons to Pakistan and making Jammu Kashmir unstable.
- ✓ Introducing CPEC (China-Pakistan economic corridor) through Indian land.
- ✓ Blocking India's move to ban Masood Azhar at UN.
- ✓ China putting an eye on Indian ocean with their submarine presence and increasing its presence in Pakistan and Arabian sea.
- ✓ Both are fast-growing economies, but India is a step ahead in economic growth and the Chinese not able to digest and it's creating new disputes with India.
- ✓ Disturbing ties in between India and Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, SriLanka.

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(opinion-Ed) Victim in the dock

- ✓ Its all about a criticism on recent judgement on Section-498A by the SC.

- Demanded for the monitoring the genuineness of petition.

|=> No Automatic Arrest in 498-A Cases, SC Issues Strict guidelines to Police and Magistrates, Non Compliance will Attract Disciplinary & Contempt Proceedings .

"A Supreme Court bench has now ruled that a family welfare committee in every district will scrutinize dowry harassment cases before the local police can arrest the accused"

What next?

Section 498A in The Indian Penal Code:

Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty.—Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation.—For the purpose of this section, “cruelty” means—

- (a) any willful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health (whether mental or physical) of the woman; or
- (b) harassment of the woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security or is on account of failure by her or any person related to her to meet such demand.

Beyond these>>

India’s top court has had a catharsis with a series of pro-women judicial decisions. Be it the *Mary Roy* case(1986, when the Supreme Court upheld Christian women’s inheritance rights), the *Shah Bano* case (1986, upholding Muslim women’s right to maintenance on divorce), the *Rupan Deol Bajaj* case (1988, in favour of women co-employees’ right against sexual harassment), the Vishakha judgement (1996, listing guidelines on workplace sexual harassment), the *Gurmit Singh* case (1996, ruling that the sole testimony of a woman is sufficient to convict a rapist), or the *Githa Hariharan* case (1999, granting a mother’s right to be a guardian) – the top court has been emphatic about its gender sensitivity.

Panel to draft data protection Bill:SC

- Highlighting the need for a comprehensive law on data protection, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) informed a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on Tuesday that the Centre has constituted a committee of experts, led by former Supreme Court judge, Justice B.N. Srikrishna, to identify “key data protection issues” and suggest a draft data protection Bill.

- Appearing before the Bench led by Chief Justice of India J.S. Khehar hearing the question whether privacy is a fundamental right, UIDAI, the nodal agency for implementation of Aadhaar, said privacy is not a fundamental right; privacy is subjective and dependent on human behavior.
- Any attempt by the court to robe it in the status of a fundamental right would damage the nation and stymie the government's efforts for good governance.

GST Anti-profiteering mechanism soon: FM

- The Goods and Services Tax Council will finalize the machinery to implement the anti-profiteering provisions in the GST law at its next meeting.
- The GST Council, will now meet every month to ascertain 'where the shoe pinches' and make suitable adjustments in the new indirect tax regime.

Water conservation scheme a big success [Environment, Conservation]

- ✚ The Rajasthan government's flagship water conservation program has turned out to be a success in Pratapgarh district.

What next?

Jal Swavalamban Abhiyan (JSA)

- It is the Rajasthan government's flagship water conservation program.
- The groundwater table has increased, green agricultural fields have expanded and no tankers with drinking water had to be sent to as many as 94 villages this year.

Rising temperatures drive up farmer suicides in India: U.S. study

- Climate change may have led to over 59,000 farmer suicides over the last 30 years in India, argues a research report from the University of California, Berkeley in US.
- Even a 1°C increase in temperature above 20° C in a single day during the crop growing season results in about 70 suicides on average.
- The increase in temperature during the cropping season reduces crop yields, resulting in increased suicides, according to a study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences .

A clear failure of TN government

- Its handling of the challenge posed by the new norm that all medical college admissions should be based solely on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test has been a disaster.

What next to learn?

- It failed to prepare students under its school education board for the demanding common entrance test conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education, and it could not defend before the judiciary its controversial decision to block 85% of medical seats for State board students.
- In the process, it has completely let down aspiring doctors from the State. The admission scene for professional courses has been beset by uncertainty, confusion and all-round despair.
- The national admission policy was undoubtedly thrust on an unwilling State government by the Supreme Court and the Centre.
- Yet, despite knowing that the State cannot remain insulated from the policy, the Tamil Nadu government did not respond with a concrete plan to upgrade its syllabus and prepare students for the task ahead.
- On the contrary, it misled students into believing that they would get an exemption from NEET. It may have been justified in passing two Bills to exempt the State from NEET and send them to the Centre to secure the President's assent.
- But meanwhile it should have told students to be ready for NEET if the assent did not come. The Centre is obviously reluctant to advise the President to give his assent, as granting exemption to one State may lead to similar demands from other States; and, the legislation may not survive the Supreme Court's scrutiny.

NOD for Jharkhand religious Bill

- The Jharkhand Cabinet gave its approval to the Jharkhand Religious Independence Bill, 2017.

What next?

- Section 3 of the Bill prohibits forceful conversion.
- In the event of violation of the Section, there will be up to three years imprisonment or Rs. 50,000 penalty or both.
- If the crime involved a minor, a woman or a person from the SC/ST community, the prison term would be up to four years and a penalty of Rs. 1 lakh.

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RBI cuts repo rate by 25 bps to 6% {economy}

- As some of the upside risks to inflation have not materialized, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to cut the key policy rate or repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6%, taking it to its lowest in six-and-a-half years.

- The action was in line with expectations, even as the RBI continued its neutral stance, saying future action would depend on incoming data.

What next?

1. Monetary Policy Committee is an executive body of 6 members.
2. Three members are from RBI while three other members are nominated by the Central Government.
3. Each member has one vote. In case of a tie, the RBI governor has casting vote to break the tie

HOW MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEES FUNCTION

Chart 1: Who has the authority?

A majority of central banks use boards to make monetary policy decisions; however, the governor has the sole responsibility of the management of the central bank.

(% of 47 central banks)	Governor	Board	Euro-area NCB*
Goal or target autonomy	6	45	23
Instrument autonomy	6	17	0
Limited autonomy	2	0	0
Total	15	62	23

Note: The classification by type of authority is based on Lybek and Morris (2004), updated and amended by the Bank of International Settlements (BIS). Lybek and Morris define goal autonomy as the independent authority to determine primary objectives from among the several included in the central bank law, and target autonomy as the independent authority to determine the policy target against the background of a single legal primary objective. They define instrument autonomy as central bank authority to select and set policy instruments against the background on government or legislature involvement in setting the policy target. Figures may not add up due to rounding off.

*Euro area National Central Bank

Chart 2: How many boards do central banks have?

Around two out of every three central banks in the BIS survey had a monetary policy committee.

Board function specified in the law	Per cent of central banks	Median no. of board members
Supervisory	66	10
Monetary policy	64	8
Other policy	43	7
Management	66	7
Advisory	17	11

Note 1: Data are drawn from a survey of the central banks in the Central Bank Governance Network (CBGN). The 12 national central banks of the Eurosystem which are in the Network are not counted as having monetary policy boards, given the centralized nature of decision-making in the euro area, nor are those 12 central banks counted as having a formal advisory role on monetary policy.

Note 2: The data pertains to just one board of the type; some banks have multiple supervisory and management boards.

Chart 3: What's the composition of central bank boards?

If the policy objectives are not clearly articulated in the bank's or policy group's mandate, diversity can be a disruptive force, says BIS.

(% of boards in the sample)

	With majority of internals	With majority of externals	With external ex officio members		With part-time external members
			Who vote	Who observe	
Policy boards	63	31	23	37	43
Supervisory boards	9	91	39	27	79

Notes: 1) Based on a sample of 47 central banks covering members of the Central Bank Governance Network. The sample contains 35 policy boards (including policy boards with mixed functions) and 23 oversight boards. 2) External members are defined as limited-term non-executive members selected from outside the central bank. 3) Ex officio members serve on the board by virtue of their occupation of a specific office.

Chart 4: What's the qualification criteria for policy board members?

Professional qualifications matter the most.

Note: CBGN refers to the Central Bank Governance Network.

Graphic by Naveen Kumar Saini/Wint

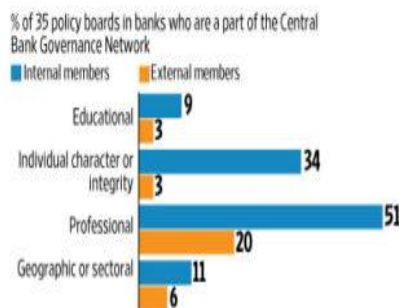
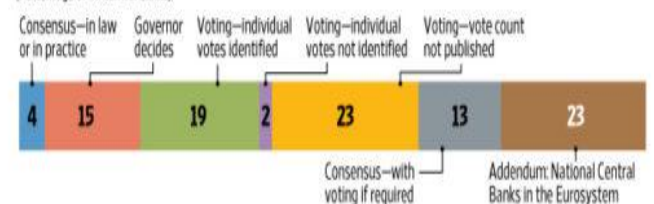


Chart 5: How are the decisions made?

Collective decisions—whether determined by private voting or consensus—are strongly favoured. (Percentage of 47 central banks)



Source: 'Issues in the Governance of Central Banks', a report from the Central Bank Governance Group of the Bank of International Settlements, 2009

Seven species of grasshoppers found [Not much important]

- A small-granulated dark black and brown colored pygmy grasshopper measuring about 9.07 mm revealed itself to the world in the forests of Chhattisgarh last month.

- Collected from moist deciduous forests in Korba district, the species was named *Coptotettix korbensis*.
- *Coptotettix korbensis* and *Epistaurus tinsensis* are two new discoveries in 2017, but what is interesting is that seven species of grasshoppers have been discovered in the forests of Chhattisgarh in a span of just 20 months.
- *Heteropternis raipurensis*, a species of short-horned grasshopper, was discovered from Raipur district.

Coasting towards trouble

News: The regional media in Karnataka has resorted to highly suggestive terms to describe the recurrent pattern of communal outburst in coastal Karnataka, particularly in the outlying areas of Mangaluru city, in recent months.

What next?

- ‘Republic of coastal Karnataka’ - where communal bands rule the roost and the state enjoys little clout as sovereign,
- ‘Republic of Bellary’ - similar one where, a few years ago, the writ of the mining barons ran.

It is important to distinguish between ideological and social communalism mounted in coastal Karnataka on the one hand and political communalism elsewhere in the State, largely occasioned by the electoral calculations at work, on the other.

What is political communalism?

- Political communalism employs an event, a monument, a syncretic space or a social cleavage to pit a large group of people against the other.
- It does not sever all ties of people forged around social division of labour, linguistic affinities, folklore.

What is Social & ideological communalism?

- Social and ideological communalism as in coastal Karnataka attempts to sever communities from all social ties and employs every possible resource to subserve this end. At the same time, such communalism operates in a context of growing sociality.
- It marks off a people from the rest when their adherents are akin to one another by invoking religious divide as its justification.

Clearing the confusion over NEET

- The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test is a common entrance test for aspiring students, based on which they will be allotted seats in undergraduate medical and dental colleges in India, both in the government and private sector.

What next?

- The test is conducted by the CBSE and is now available in many regional languages.
- It is also conducted to regulate entry in postgraduate medical courses.
- NEET was conceived by the Medical Council of India in 2010 as a means of raising the quality of students being admitted to medical and dental colleges and thereby graduates.
- Several States including Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat objected to the proposal on various grounds, including the fact that CBSE students would have an unfair advantage as the test would be based on that board's syllabus.

Beyond these:

- The test was conducted in 2013 before it ran into rough weather.
- The Supreme Court, hearing a batch of over 170 petitions contesting various aspects of the test, struck it down, declaring it illegal and unconstitutional.
- However, in 2016, a five-judge Bench recalled the judgment, and gave the go-ahead to conduct a single common medical entrance test.
- NEET was conducted in 2016, but a one-time exemption was given for undergraduate admissions.
- In 2017, NEET was conducted with no exceptions.

Banks should reduce rates for existing borrowers too: RBI

- With commercial banks having a tendency to reduce interest rates only for prospective customers in order to push new business, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel said he expected lenders to pass on lower loan costs to borrowers who had not received the full benefit of the reductions in the policy rate.
- RBI cut the policy repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6%. A percentage point comprises 100 bps.
- The banking regulator noted that banks mainly reduced rates for segments where competition was high as in the case of home loans and personal loans.

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[Op-Ed](hindu) It's time to enact an anti-lynching law

Author is expressing the concerns on increasing lynching in a civilized society like India.

Background:

- The data website India Spend has compiled instances of cow-linked violence from 2010 to 2017.

Statistics:

- ❖ It found that during this period, 28 people were killed in 63 such incidents.
- ❖ An overwhelming 97% of these attacks took place after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government came to power in May 2014.
- ❖ About 86% of those killed were Muslims. In 21% of the cases, the police filed cases against the victims/survivors.
- ❖ Cow-related lynchings rose sharply in 2017, with 20 attacks in the first six months. This marks a 75% increase over 2016, which had been the worst year for mob lynchings since 2010.

What next?

- The groundswell of public disgust at the lynchings crystallised under the banner of the National Campaign Against Mob Lynching (NCAML), which has initiated a campaign for a law against mob lynching.
- Also known as 'Masuka', short for Manav Suraksha Kanoon (law to protect humans), a draft of the proposed legislation is currently up on the Internet, awaiting suggestions from the public.

India Post catches up with wildlife smugglers

- The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) recently found that smugglers are using the postal service to sell parts of endangered animals. They stumbled upon feathers of the grey jungle fowl being smuggled out by the hundreds.
- These feathers with eye spots are used as fishing lures and were being sent to certain European countries.

What next?

- Earlier this year, another case came to light: Pangolin scales were smuggled to Southeast Asian countries, using the services of India Post.
- In an attempt to formulate a strategy to check such crimes in West Bengal and neighboring states of Jharkhand and Odisha, an inter-agency co-ordination meeting was organised by the WCCB.
- Representatives of more than a dozen investigating and law enforcement agencies, border security forces and forest departments of the different eastern states participated.

{PIB} Big Mac index

- This is an index used to compare the price of a good across countries.
- The law of one price states that the price of a good sold internationally should converge as entrepreneurs try to profit from any price discrepancy.

The purpose of the Big Mac index,

- To establish the purchasing power parity between currencies by comparison of the price of the Big Mac burger across countries.
- It has been published by the British magazine The Economist since 1986.

Drawbacks

- ❖ Goods that look physically similar to each other may not necessarily be similar in their economic nature.

Evicting unauthorized VIP occupants

- ❖ Report about increased unauthorized occupants of government residential accommodations

What next?

- The Supreme Court once said there is no law to “entirely control the act of disobedience” of powerful but unauthorized occupants of government residential accommodations.
- In S.D. Bandi versus Divisional Traffic Officer (2013), a Supreme Court Bench led by Justice P. Sathasivam observed that unauthorised occupants of public property should realise that “their act of overstaying in the premise directly infringes the right of another”.

- The Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act of 1971, which prescribes eviction of unauthorized occupants from public premises, has proved largely ineffective before VIP tenants of government residences.

'Make In India' yet to spur manufacturing, says panel

- The Parliament's Standing Committee on Commerce has questioned the country's low manufacturing growth despite initiatives such as Make In India, Startup India and FDI reforms that are now more than two years old.

What next?

- The committee, led by BJP MP Bhupender Yadav, had expressed concerns about manufacturing growth averaging just 1.6% in the five years till 2015-16 and a 0.5% contraction in the sector in the first 9 months of FY17, in a report tabled in Parliament this March.
- In an action taken report tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP), under the ministry of commerce and industry, has listed out the several measures taken by the government to promote manufacturing and ease the business environment.

India's first private missile production facility unveiled

- India's first private sector missile sub-systems manufacturing facility, a joint venture between the \$2.5 billion Kalyani Group and Israel's Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Ltd., was inaugurated near Hyderabad on Thursday.
- To begin with, the Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems (KRAS) plant will make anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) Spike and the production is expected to begin in a few weeks, Kalyani Group chairman Baba N. Kalyani said.
- Besides supplying to the Indian Army, the plan is to export to South East Asian countries, he added.

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Now, Aadhaar required for death certificates

News: Government Made Aadhaar numbers a pre-requisite for issuing death certificates to residents of all States.

Why this move?

- Terming it a move to curb identity fraud,

- Barring Jammu & Kashmir, Meghalaya and Assam, in order to establish the identity of the deceased, with effect from October 1, 2017.

What next?

- If the person applying for the death certificate is not aware of the Aadhaar number or the Aadhaar enrollment ID number of the deceased, she or he would be required to provide a certificate that the deceased person does not possess Aadhaar number to the best of her or his knowledge.
- Moreover, applicants will be required to provide their own Aadhaar number along with that of the applicant's spouse or parents.

What if wrong declaration made?

- The Ministry has warned that any false declaration given by the applicant in this regard will be treated as an offence under the Aadhaar Act, 2016 and Registration of Birth and Death Act, 1969.

ISRO set to launch satellite with corrected clocks

- Indian Space Research Organisation will soon launch a replacement navigation satellite fitted with corrected atomic clocks to make up for the crippled satellite, IRNSS-1A.
- ISRO completed putting the seventh and last regional navigation spacecraft, 1G, in orbit in April last year. The first one was put in orbit in July 2013.
- The Rs. 1,420-crore fleet, now called NAViC or Navigation Indian Constellation, is India's own GPS-like system to give accurate information about location and time of persons or objects — in the same way as the older U.S. Global Positioning System or Russia's GLONASS.

Why its important?

Positional details are vital for civil and military aviation, defense needs, ATMs and individual users, besides transport on land, sea or air.

New Bill to allow States to drop no-detention policy

News:

- With some Bills pertaining to education already passing muster in either House of Parliament this session, the Ministry of Human Resource Development is looking to introduce a Bill to amend the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, to enable States to do away with the no-detention policy if they wish.

Beyond these:

- The Cabinet has cleared the introduction of the Bill and the Ministry wants it introduced in this session itself and passed in the next session.
- Twenty-five States had recently agreed with the idea of doing away with or tweaking the no-detention policy — wherein a child is not detained till Class 8 — to give a boost to levels of learning.
- Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra did not ask for a rollback of the policy, however.

Some Provisions of bill:

- The Bill is expected to permit States to introduce exams in Classes 5 and 8.
- Students who fail in the exams — to be held in March — will be given remedial training and offered another chance to pass in May.
- Those who still fail will be detained in the same class.

SC for centralised system to select judicial officers

- The Supreme Court indicated a favorable attitude towards a centralized selection mechanism for appointment of judicial officers in the subordinate judiciary.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India J.S. Khehar said the court was even ready for a day-long hearing on the issue on August 22 to amicably resolve the objections of various States and High Courts to the proposal.
- The Bench tried to assuage the concern of various States and High Courts, saying there would be no breach and interference in the federal structure.

Punishing the victims

Rajesh Sharma & Ors vs State of U.P. & Anr :

- Dealt another punishing blow to what has become a toothless anti-dowry law.
- When first enacted in 1961, the law sought to protect women from being killed or tortured in their marital homes by greedy husbands and in-laws.
- Thereafter, passionate advocacy by women's rights activists resulted in the insertion of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code.

Section 498A

- Made the offence of dowry harassment cognizable and non-bailable.
- thereby bringing enormous relief to women who face virtually insurmountable obstacles in the public space, especially when taking complaints to the police or facing long-winded judicial proceedings.

- In a sense, Section 498A sought to level the playing field and further ensure the safety of women. However, as with all laws relating to women, the patriarchal, self-fulfilling argument that Section 498A had created a bunch of monstrous, disgruntled women determined to destroy family values and drag innocent husbands and in-laws to jail for their own nefarious purposes began to dominate the discourse.

Wages of being a legislator

- The Tamil Nadu Assembly recently voted to double the salaries of its legislators.
- It is in the backdrop of a group of farmers from the State who are still on protest in New Delhi demanding that the Centre announce a drought relief package and loan waiver for farmers from the State.

What next?

- India paid Rs. 2.7 lakh a month, which includes salaries and expenses, to every Member of Parliament in 2015.
- Maharashtra's Assembly passed a Bill in 2016 that raised the monthly salary of its MLAs to above that of the President (Rs. 1.5 lakh per month).
- Proposals to raise the salaries of ministers to Rs. 3.6 lakh per month and MLAs to Rs. 2.1 lakh a month have been passed by the Delhi Assembly.

[Op-Ed] Editing ourselves

News: Scientists have for the first time managed to edit genes in a human embryo to repair a genetic mutation, fueling hopes that such procedures may one day be available outside laboratory conditions.



- Scientists fixed a mutation that thickens the heart muscle, a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

What is its significance?

- The cardiac disease causes sudden death in otherwise healthy young athletes and affects about one in 500 people overall.
- It is caused by a mutation in a particular gene and a child will suffer from the condition even if it inherits only one copy of the mutated gene.
- Correcting the mutation in the gene would not only ensure that the child is healthy but it would also prevent the mutation from being passed on to future generations

.For further reading:

- In an attempt to remove the small portion of mutation, the researchers injected sperm of a man affected by hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and the gene-editing tool called CRISPR-Cas9, that cuts the DNA near the position of the mutation, into the egg at the same time.
- The gene-editing tool cut the DNA at the correct position in all embryos and 42 out of the 58 embryos did not carry the mutation.
- Even research on embryos using federal funding is not permitted in the U.S., where the research was carried out. The embryos were produced with the clear intention of using them solely for research and not for implanting them in women.

Future scope:

- While several diseases can potentially be prevented by using this technique, including some cancers, the announcement has also revived fears about designer babies being within the realm of possibility.

Concerns:

- In February this year, the U.S. National Academies of Sciences and Medicine allowed scientists to use the tool for research and said the technique to edit embryos will become acceptable for clinical use.
- But for that to happen, rigorous research involving multiple locations has to be carried out to address all safety concerns and ethical issues.
- To that end, the researchers have already addressed an inherent problem of producing embryos containing a mosaic of unrepaired and repaired cells by introducing the gene-editing tool and the sperm together into the egg.

Price of rapacity

News: In ordering that lease-holders should pay compensation to the extent of 100% of the price of the quantum of minerals they had illegally extracted, the Supreme Court has gone beyond a mere affirmation of the 'polluter pays' principle.

What next?

- It has also set a significant benchmark for stringent action against those who indulge in mining without environmental or forest clearance.
- Even the Central Empowered Committee had recommended compensation to the extent of 30% of the value of the iron ore and manganese ore illegally mined in Odisha, but the court has been firm about not compromising on the quantum of compensation.
- It is impossible to dispute the court's reasoning that the defaulter or violator should bear the consequences of the illegality, and therefore cannot be allowed the benefit of "pocketing 70% of the illegally mined ore".
- The mining companies tried every possible means of avoiding the tag that they had illegally mined iron or manganese ore.

What minors say:

- Some of them argued that they did not require environmental clearance as they had started operations prior to 1994, when the Environmental Impact Assessment Notification was first issued, and that unless there was an expansion, they did not require environmental clearance.

AUGUST 6 & 7 2017

Venkaiah sweeps V-P polls with 516 votes

- M. Venkaiah Naidu elected as the 13th Vice-President of India .
- Mr. Naidu polled a massive 516 of the total 760 votes, aided by cross-voting by Opposition MPs in the 15th vice-presidential elections.
- Opposition candidate Gopalkrishna Gandhi polled 244 votes. The elections saw the highest polling percentage at 98.12%, with 14 MPs failing to turn up to vote.

What next?

Powers and Functions of the Vice President

The Vice President of India, after the President, is the highest dignitary of India, and certain powers are attached to the office of the Vice President. These are:

- The Vice President shall discharge the functions of the President during the temporary absence of the President due to illness or any other cause due to which the President is unable to carry out his functions.
- The Vice President shall act as the President, in case of any vacancy in the office of the President by reason of his death, resignation, removal through impeachment or otherwise. The Vice President shall take over the duties of the President until a new President is elected and resumes office.
- The Vice President is the ex-officio Chairman of the Council of States.
- When the Vice President acts as, or discharges the functions of the President, he or she immediately ceases to perform the normal functions of being the Chairman of the Council of States.

GST Council approves e-Way billing

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council decided to implement the e-Way bill system for the transport of goods across the country.

What next?

- The Council also decided to reduce the tax rate for job work for all forms of textile work to 5% from 18%.
- The Council reviewed the progress of the implementation of the new indirect tax regime since July 1, and approved the changes made by its implementation committee.
- e-Way bills will be necessary for the transport of goods worth more than Rs. 50,000, and over a distance of more than 10 km. It will not apply for goods exempt from GST.

Skill-linked immigration Bill may favour Indian applicants

President Donald Trump is championing a new piece of legislation that proposes to change America's immigration system to give preference to skills than family links, but the fractious nature of the debate over the move suggests that it is far from becoming a law.

What next?

- Two Republican senators (Lindsey Graham and Ron Johnson) and the Democrats have already declared their opposition to the proposed Bill.
- RAISE or Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy Act, sponsored by Republican Senators David Perdue and Tom Cotton, also proposes to cut immigration by 41% in the first year and by 50% by the 10th year.

Whats this bill?

- People with English proficiency will be preferred, and the number of refugees admitted annually will be reduced by half to 50,000.
- The lottery system to promote diversity in America, which allows people from less represented countries such as Nepal and Ethiopia, will be ended.

Subsidise rail losses: PMO

- The Prime Minister's Office has directed the Ministry of Finance to fund the losses incurred by the Indian Railways in operating non-profitable trains on strategic lines and backward areas.

Fund crunch



- **Indian Railways operates non-remunerative strategic lines near border areas and in hilly, coastal and backward areas**
- **The Finance Ministry reimburses the losses incurred by the Railways on these routes**
- **PMO directs Finance Ministry to pay ₹1,200 crore for reimbursing losses on strategic lines for 2017-18**
- **Ministry has provided ₹4,400 crore to the Railways since 2011 for funding strategic line losses**

- The decision comes as a relief for the Railways which feels that the social service obligation borne by it in running non-profitable lines of national and strategic importance should be funded by the Central government.

Revealed: 4,000-year-old bone jewels

- Ancient jewellery and decoration has a new meaning, with the discovery of bone ornaments in Telangana that go back about 4,000 years.
- In a find that has excited archaeologists, 50 pieces of bone ornaments have been found in a hamlet of Narmetta, an agricultural village on the outskirts of Hyderabad.
- Shaped precisely like a rhombus with round holes in the middle and circular indentations, these are thought to have been used as jewellery.
- Samples of the artefacts are being analysed at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad.
- Historian Prof. K.P. Rao, who led the 2005 Gachibowli megalithic excavation that dated the earliest megalithic site to 2200 BC .

Beijing sets terms for talks on sea feud code

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the start of talks for a “code of conduct” in the disputed waters may be announced by the heads of state of China and the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), when they meet at an annual summit in the Philippines in November if Beijing’s conditions are met.
- Mr. Wang said those conditions include non-interference by “outside parties”, apparently referring to the United States, which Beijing has frequently accused of meddling in what it says is an Asian dispute that should be resolved only by the countries involved.
- China’s territorial disputes in the strategic and potentially oil-and gas-rich waterway with five other governments intensified after it built islands in disputed waters and reportedly started to install a missile defence system on them, alarming rival claimant states, the U.S. and other Western governments.

India team helps IBM create technology to battle hackers

- IBM, one of the world’s largest technology companies said that it had achieved a breakthrough in security technology that would allow enterprises from banks to health care companies to retailers to encrypt their customer data at a large scale.

Why its important?

- The New York-based technology major said its system makes it possible **for the first time** to ‘pervasively encrypt’ every level of a network, from applications to cloud services and databases and prevent theft of information.
- This has been made possible by IBM Z (z14).

IBM Z(Z14)

- A next-generation mainframe unveiled by the company.
- It is capable of running more than 12 billion encrypted transactions per day.

Role of indian's

- IBM, which reported a revenue of \$79.9 billion in 2016, said that its India hardware and firmware team had made significant contributions to the z14 system and microprocessor development.
- It said that more than 100 engineers from its India labs worked on key components of both the core and the processor in the areas of logic design, verification, custom circuit design and tool development.
- The team has also contributed to the base firmware development, next-generation input/output enablement and in building newer virtualisation management capabilities.

AUGUST 8 2017

Stricter anti-racism law

- The Home Ministry’s proposal to amend the law to insert two stricter anti-racial discrimination provisions in the Indian Penal Code has got a lukewarm response from the States.

What next?

- Only four – Uttar Pradesh, apart from Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram in the northeast – have given their assent to the proposed law.
- Three Union Territories – Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Lakshwadeep – have also agreed to the Centre’s proposal.
- Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijju informed the Rajya Sabha that the Ministry proposed to amend the IPC “to deal with the racially motivated crimes.”

List of anti-discrimination acts in india.

- Article 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of Constitution of India
- Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850
- Hindu Succession Act, 1956 - Abolished the "limited owner" status of women who owned property, amended in 2004 to give daughters equal inheritance rights with sons.
- Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

Letting go of instant triple talaq

- All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), through its counsel Kapil Sibal, informed the Supreme Court that it was considering reforms and the gradual giving up of instant talaq but wanted time for it.

What next?

- One of the “reforms” mentioned was a circular from the board asking all qazis to advise the husbands, while finalizing the marriage contract, not to resort to instant divorce (talaq-e-bid’a) unless under compelling circumstances.
- The “compelling circumstances”, however, were not defined.
- This is not the first time the AIMPLB has tried to illude Muslim women with the talk of reforms.
- In July 2004, in its executive committee meeting in Kanpur, the board was widely expected to outlaw instant talaq. But nothing came of it.
- Muslim women were let down once again in May 2005 when the board’s much-hyped ‘model nikahnama’ released in Bhopal turned out to be a damp squib.

{Op-Ed}A gathering crisis[the need for groundwater regulation]

- This deal with increasing water crisis & Groundwater (Sustainable Management) Bill, 2017 and its provisions.

Key points:

- The water crisis India faces is of such a magnitude that urgent measures are necessary to address it.
- Yet, while the crisis is often discussed, law and policy measures to address it remain insufficient.

- This is partly due to the fact that the primary source of domestic water and irrigation is groundwater but the media and policymakers still and often focus on surface water.
- This needs to change as water tables have been falling rapidly in many parts of the country, indicating that use generally exceeds replenishment.

Reasons:

- One of the underlying reasons for excessive use of groundwater is the legal framework governing access to the resource.
- This was first introduced in the mid-19th century when judges decided that the easiest way to regulate this 'invisible' substance was to give landowners what amounts to a right to access groundwater found under their land, even if in the process they also used water found under their neighbors land.
- Over the following decades, this led to a framework whereby landowners see groundwater as their own and as a resource they can exploit without considering the need to protect and replenish it since there are no immediate consequences for over-exploiting it.
- Access to a source of groundwater has progressively become a source of power and economic gain. The latter has become increasingly visible in recent decades with the propagation of mechanical pumps, which allows big landowners to sell water to others.

Groundwater (Sustainable Management) Bill, 2017

1. Builds on the decentralization mandate that is already enshrined in general legislation but has not been implemented effectively as far as groundwater is concerned.
2. Seeks to give regulatory control over groundwater to local users.
3. Recognition that water is a public trust (groundwater is a common pool resource), the recognition of the fundamental right to water and the introduction of protection principles, including the precautionary principle, that are currently absent from water legislation.

Profit petroleum may be exempt from levy of GST

- The oil and gas exploration and production business is likely to get a boost following a proposal to exempt the profit petroleum paid to the Centre from the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- The production sharing contracts (PSCs) signed for exploration and development of oil fields require operators to pay a pre-determined share of the surplus petroleum output to the Centre as a form of royalty.
- Currently, such profit petroleum is subject to GST as it has been construed as a payment made by firms for a service.
- Though profit petroleum is legally taxable, the levy of GST doesn't appear to be in sync with the PSCs signed under the New Exploration Licensing Policy or NELP.

Raging rupee

Background:

- The Indian rupee has turned out to be one of the best-performing currencies in the world with a gain of well over 6% against the U.S. dollar this year to date.
- In fact, the currency hit a two-year high of 63.60 last Wednesday, supported by strong inflows of foreign capital.

What next?

- Around the beginning of 2017, analysts were bearish on the rupee, predicting that it would breach the 70-mark by the end of the year. But strong capital inflow has managed to turn the tide.
- According to the Reserve Bank of India, foreign portfolio investors invested \$15.2 billion in India's equity and debt markets this year until the end of July.
- Another major contributor to the rupee's strength is the RBI's hawkish stance, which has pushed down domestic retail inflation to a record low of just around 2%.
- This has spilled over to influence the external value of the rupee as well. Oil prices remaining stable at around the \$50 mark too has helped as Indians have had to shell out fewer rupees on oil imports.
- This is reflected in the improved current account deficit, which stood at 0.7% of GDP in 2016-17 compared to almost 4.8% in 2012-13.

ASEAN, 50 years on

Background:

50th anniversary of ASEAN's founding day.

What next?

- The realistic move away from the original policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Such caution may have been the pragmatic course to adopt during the 1960s, with a view to advance the larger common interest.
- Founder members Singapore and Malaysia had just concluded the former's independence agreement. Similarly, the conflict between Thailand and the Philippines had been barely resolved.
- But over the years, there has been growing appreciation that non-interference, if perceived as indifference, entails political cost, impeding more substantial engagement.

- There has been recognition that the bloc's expansion to cover ten countries, with highly diverse economic, political and cultural moorings, calls for a greater convergence of policies and more coordinated action.
- China and India's emergence as major economic powers has lent greater urgency to trade liberalisation.

WHAT IS ASEAN?

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) is a regional grouping that promotes economic, political, and security cooperation among its ten members: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam

Why was the ASEAN created?

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) is a regional grouping **founded** on 8 August 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines to promote economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the Southeast Asian region through multilateral cooperation.

Where is the Asean Secretariat?

The ASEAN Secretariat was set up in February 1976 by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN. It was then housed at the Department of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia in **Jakarta**. The existing ASEAN Secretariat at **70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja, Jakarta** was established and officiated in 1981 by the then President of Indonesia.

AUGUST 9 2017

It is not "our business" to check what is being taught in schools:
SC

News: The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition for a direction to the government to make yoga education a compulsory part of the syllabus for Classes one to eight.

What did court said?

- "We are nobody to say what is to be taught in schools," a Bench, led by Justice Madan B. Lokur, orally observed.

- The Bench denied any relief to petitioner and advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, saying it was for the government to take the call on such issues.
- His petition had sought a direction to the government to frame a National Yoga Policy, saying that right to health was part of the right to lead a dignified life under Article 21.
- The plea, that cited the HRD Ministry, the NCERT, the NCTE and the CBSE as parties, sought a direction to “provide standard textbooks of ‘Yoga and Health Education’ for students of class one to eight”.

Why yoga?

(UNESCO) has formally inscribed Yoga in its representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

About UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

- The UNESCO’s coveted list is made up of those intangible heritage elements that help demonstrate diversity of cultural heritage and raise awareness about its importance.
- It was established in 2008 after Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003 came into effect.
- It compiles two lists viz. Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.
- Now, the list includes 814 cultural sites, 203 natural and 35 with both cultural and natural qualities.

List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity from India

1. Koodiyattam: Sanskrit Theatre of Kerala.
2. Mudiyaattam: theatre ritual of Kerala. Tradition of Vedic Chanting.
3. Kalbelia: folk songs and dances of Rajasthan.
4. Ramlila: Traditional Performance of the Ramayana.
5. Sankirtana: singing, drumming and dancing ritual of Manipur.
6. Ramman: religious festival and ritual theatre of Garhwal Himalayas.
7. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil of Thatheras: Punjab.
8. Chhau dance: classical Indian dance originated in the eastern Indian states.
9. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Dipak Misra to be 45th Chief Justice of India

- The Centre cleared the file for appointment of Justice Dipak Misra as the 45th Chief Justice of India with effect from August 28.

About New CJI

- Justice Misra, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court after the present Chief Justice J.S. Khehar, who is retiring on August 27, will have a tenure of about 14 months till October 2, 2018.
- Justice Misra was elevated to the Supreme Court on October 10, 2011.
- He enrolled as a lawyer on February 14, 1977 and was appointed Additional Judge of the Orissa High Court in 1996.
- After a stint in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, he became a Permanent Judge in December 1997 before assuming charge as the Chief Justice of Patna High Court in 2009 and, later on, served as Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

Border meeting with China on I-Day

- Even as the border standoff between India and China is close to completing two months, officials said the ceremonial border personnel meetings to mark Independence Day will go ahead between the two militaries as planned on Tuesday.
- Such meetings are usually held on ceremonial occasions, but there were doubts if it would happen this time.
- There are five meeting points at Bum La and Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh, Daulat Beg Oldi and Chushul in Ladakh and Nathu La in Sikkim.
- However, there is still no clarity on the annual bilateral military training exercise Hand-in-Hand.

Nepal to stay neutral

- Nepal said it intended to maintain neutrality in the India-China standoff.
- “Nepal doesn’t take sides on the issue. India and China both have not asked or pressured Nepal seeking favour.
- We don’t see possibility of a war,” said Foreign Minister of Nepal Krishna Bahadur Mahara in Kathmandu.
- Mr. Mahara’s statement has set the stage for a crucial week when Nepal will host key Indian and Chinese dignitaries.

U.S. government report warns of drastic impact of climate change

Whats in news?

- The average temperature in the United States has risen rapidly and drastically since 1980, and recent decades have been the warmest of the past 1,500 years, according to a sweeping federal climate change report awaiting approval by the Trump administration.

Whats next?

- The draft report by scientists from 13 federal agencies, which has not yet been made public, concludes that Americans are feeling the effects of climate change right now.
- It directly contradicts claims by President Donald Trump and members of his Cabinet who say that the human contribution to climate change is uncertain, and that the ability to predict the effects is limited.
- The report concludes that even if humans immediately stopped emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the world would still feel at least an additional 0.30 degrees Celsius of warming over this century compared with today.
- The projected actual rise will be as much as 2 degrees Celsius. A small difference in global temperatures can make a big difference in the climate: the difference between a rise in global temperatures of 1.5 degrees Celsius and one of 2 degrees Celsius, for example, could mean longer heat waves, more intense rainstorms and the faster disintegration of coral reefs.

Food for action

News?

Centre has been asked by the Supreme Court (Swaraj Abhiyan case) to ensure that States implement key aspects of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

whats next?

- The directives in the Swaraj Abhiyan case underscore the depressing reality that several State governments have not met key requirements in the legislation which empower the common person in securing subsidised food.
- Sections 14, 15 and 16, which require the setting up of a grievance redress mechanism and a State Food Commission with responsibility to monitor the implementation of the law, have been heeded only in name, as in Haryana, or not at all.
- As the court has pointed out, Article 256, which casts a responsibility on the States and the Union to ensure compliance with laws made by Parliament, also provides the remedy, as it can be invoked by the Centre to set things right.
- Unfortunately, the NFSA, which is vital for social security through the Public Distribution System and child welfare schemes, has suffered due to a lack of political will.
- There is great merit in providing highly subsidised foodgrains to targeted households chosen by the State governments, with a ceiling of 75% of the population in rural areas and 50% in urban areas.
- Food Ministry data presented to Parliament show that the present system does not reflect the true scale of public grievances, with a mere 1,106 complaints received from beneficiaries nationwide in 2016, including those reported in the media.
- The court's intervention is wholly welcome to make the NFSA meaningful.

Transparency Provisions of NFSA

1. Placing all PDS-related records in the public domain and keeping them open for inspection to the public
2. Conducting periodic social audits of the PDS and other welfare schemes;
3. Using information and communication technology (including end-to-end computerisation of the PDS) “to ensure transparent recording of transactions at all levels”
4. Setting up vigilance committees at state, district, block and fair price shop levels to supervise all schemes under the act.

AUGUST 10 2017

Reignite the spirit of 1942: PM

News:

- The Lok Sabha marked the 75th anniversary of the Quit India movement with a special sitting.

What next?

- Narendra Modi called for special initiatives to end poverty, illiteracy and graft and Congress president Sonia Gandhi sounded a warning over “secular, democratic, liberal values being endangered.”
- Terming poverty, lack of education and malnutrition the greatest challenges, Mr. Modi called for their eradication in the next five years with the pledge of Karenge aur kar ke rahenge (We will do and surely do).
- Citizens were breaking even basic laws, like crossing red-lights or littering, with impunity and without a sense of duty to the rule of law and the freedoms that make a democratic polity possible.

India, China war unlikely: Dalai Lama

News:

- The standoff between India and China at the Doklam plateau, near the trijunction with Bhutan, is unlikely to lead to a ‘big war’, said Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama.

What next?

- Speaking at a public event, the Tibetan spiritual leader described India and China as close neighbours but cautioned against “harsh words.” “This issue (Doklam standoff) is not serious.”
- The Dalai Lama also praised India’s role in ensuring safety for the Tibetan refugees who have been living in exile since the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1950.

History:

- India and China have historically been neighbours and even in 1962, China withdrew from Indian territories after the war.
- This shows that there is unlikely to be a big war between the two.

ISRO to develop full-fledged earth observation satellite

News:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) says it plans to launch a full-fledged niche earth observation (EO) satellite — called the Hyper spectral Imaging Satellite or HySIS — using a critical chip it has developed.

What next?

- A new set of future satellites called hyper spectral imaging satellites is set to add teeth to the way India will be seen from about 600 km in space.
- The new chip, technically called an “optical imaging detector array”
- ISRO is endeavoring to enter the domain of operational hyper spectral imaging from earth orbit with a satellite that can see in 55 spectral or colour bands from 630 km above ground.
- It said it decided to develop the chip that suited Indian requirements.
- Hyperspectral or hypspx imaging is said to be an earth observation trend that is being experimented globally.
- Adding a new dimension to plain-vanilla optical imagers, it can be used for a range of activities from monitoring the environment, crops, looking for oil and minerals all the way up to military surveillance — all of which need images that show a high level of differentiation of the object or scene.

SC seeks details of convictions under Child Marriage Act

- As the Centre said Parliament must have thought it ‘pragmatic’ to reduce the age of consent for sexual relations for married girls from 18 to 15 as the child marriage system still exists in the country,

- the Supreme Court asked the government to provide details of the number of child marriage prohibition officers and prosecutions initiated under the Child Marriage Act in the past three years.

Whats next?

- A Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur and Deepak Gupta is hearing a petition filed by NGO Independent Thought challenging the Exception 2 to Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code, which permits “intrusive sexual intercourse with a girl aged between 15 and 18 only on the ground that she is married.”
- The NGO, represented by advocate Gaurav Agarwal, submitted that this statutory exception to rape was violative of right to life, liberty, equality and was discriminatory.
- The Exception is part of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 and is contrary to the anti-child sex abuse law, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO).

Discriminatory law

1. Statutory exception to rape was violative of right to life, liberty, equality and was discriminatory.
2. The Exception is part of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 and is contrary to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO).
3. Law “violates the health of not only the girl child concerned, but also generations to come
4. A girl under 18 as a child in POCSO, but once she is married, she is no more a child under the Exception 2 to Section 375 of the IPC. This is totally inconsistent.

New therapy for brain degeneration

News:

- A single injection of a fragment of a life-extending protein hormone could improve cognition in those with neurodegenerative illnesses.
- The klotho protein was found to enhance cognitive and physical performance in ageing or impaired mice.

What next?

- But researchers said clinical studies would be necessary to determine the safety and effectiveness of injecting klotho in humans.
- The body naturally produces the complex hormone that is involved in multiple cellular processes, and is linked to prolonging life in worms, mice and humans.
- In model organisms as well as in humans, klotho levels decrease with age, chronic stress, cerebral aging and neurodegenerative illnesses.
- Prior studies had found that life-long exposure to elevated levels of klotho boost mental functions, but it remained unclear whether short-term treatment using the hormone could quickly improve cognition.

Castles in the air?

News:

- Two months after the India-Afghanistan air corridor was inaugurated with great expectations, news that it has been hit by a shortage of cargo planes is a cause for concern.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ashraf Ghani had agreed on the project during the Heart of Asia summit in Amritsar in December 2016, as a gamechanger to get around Pakistan's obstructionist behaviour in delaying truck shipments from Afghanistan to the Wagah border.

What next?

- Ghani himself developed the plan, which allowed traders to pay what they would have to transport their goods by road with the Afghan government underwriting the rest, showed Kabul's commitment to securing its trade links with India.
- Delhi too affirmed the importance it placed on the trade route: for instance, when the first cargo flight under the arrangement landed in Delhi .
- It is therefore surprising that the initiative has been hit by logistical problems within weeks, leaving traders in Afghanistan with tonnes of perishable produce only because a chartered aircraft line wasn't secured in advance.
- Officials argue that these are just teething troubles that will be resolved at the earliest.

Gujarat election

News:

- BJP decided to make an open secret of coveting the third seat by luring away Opposition MLAs and banking on cross-voting.
- Ultimately, Ahmed Patel, won the seat in the first round itself, getting the required 44 votes.
- With two votes declared invalid by the Election Commission, the required votes came down from 45 to 44.

ECI:

- The EC demonstrated independence and institutional strength amidst tremendous pressure mounted on it by both parties.
- It passed a clear order on sound legal grounds to invalidate the votes of two Congress MLAs, who had voted for the BJP, for showing their ballots to persons not authorised to see them.
- There is a precedent recorded last year in Haryana for violation of the secrecy clause, but the vote was then rejected by the Returning Officer on the spot, whereas in this case the paper was placed in the ballot box.
- The EC invoked statutory rules on voting procedure as well as its plenary powers under the Constitution to direct the Returning Officer to segregate the two votes and count the rest.

The Maduro muddle

- Venezuela, a country with more oil than Saudi Arabia, currently faces rapidly declining foreign exchange reserves, poverty and hyperinflation — projected at 720% this year and 2069% next, according to the International Monetary Fund.
- Under President Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela has been experiencing an acute shortage of food, medicine and other vital supplies.
- Venezuela is in the throes of a political crisis that is inextricably linked to its untenable economic situation.

AUGUST 11 2017

It's time to focus on the toxic air we breathe

News: Niti Aayog released the draft National Energy Policy.

What next?

- An important aspect that the draft policy **ignores is public health**, especially in the context of the energy mix envisaged under the NITI Ambition Scenario.
- The Ambition Scenario is a tool to arrive at a range of possible energy futures for the energy sector till 2040.
- The range presents the scenarios which India may follow if it were to follow a business-as-usual path versus if it were to transition to an ambitious pathway which is cleaner and more sustainable.

Draft in detail:

- In the document, there are 14 references to health, of which only five relate to public health in the context of household cooking fuel.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that air pollution is the number one environmental health risk.
- In 2012, about three million premature deaths were attributable to ambient air pollution. The cumulative toll in terms of illness and impairment is likely to be greater.
- The WHO's initial findings from an expert consultation on Health Indicators of Sustainable Energy provide a good outline to kick-start a similar exercise in India.
- The core indicators address issues related to health equity where health impact assessments become an integral part of energy policy design and implementation.



- A nation's energy policy can have a huge bearing on society and health. It is thus important to ensure that policies directed at energy security are compatible with public health goals.

No more vehicle insurance without pollution certificate

- In a decision with far-reaching consequences, the Supreme Court directed that vehicles without valid pollution under control (PUC) certificates would not be eligible for the annual insurance.
- A Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur and Deepak Gupta accepted the recommendations of the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) for mandatory linking of PUC certificates with annual insurance.

Amended Banking Regulation Bill gets elders' nod

News:

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Bill, which empowers the Reserve Bank of India to issue instructions to the banks to act against major defaulters.

What next?

- The Bill, earlier passed by the Lok Sabha, will replace the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said there was nothing wrong in banks giving out loans and trying to recover them.
- It was only on the strength of the banking finance that businesses expanded, jobs were created and the economy moved on.
- Only in cases of normal commercial transactions were the names not made public.

Towards a clean-up

- The Swachh Bharat Mission is a high-profile national programme enjoying extraordinary political and budgetary support.
- With its subsidy-based mass toilet-building programme, it has put up millions of individual house latrines in rural areas: a government-commissioned survey estimates that the coverage now extends to 62.45% of households, up from 39% in 2014.
- Among these households, nearly 92% of people who have access actually use the toilets.
- The most important of these is reduced stress for women, who suffer silently in its absence.

Well-known gains to public health as well.

- Success can be measured, however, only through a rigorous assessment of how the new facilities fare over time.
- There is data from undivided Andhra Pradesh to show that household latrines built before the current Swachh programme lapsed into disuse because many rural households did not have a water source.
- The newer ones may meet the same fate without access to water.
- Rural housing also needs stronger policy support, without which it cannot wipe out the deficit of about 60 million units that are needed to plan for universal toilet access.

Failing India's children

News:

The government's proposal to amend the Right to Education Act and allow States to drop the no-detention policy at the primary and middle school levels will have far-reaching consequences for the education scenario.

What next?

- The proposal, which will give States the choice to detain children in classes 5 and 8, does not consider socio-economic factors and the state's limitations in providing education, especially for the weaker sections.
- According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the dropout rate in elementary school was about 4% in 2014-2015.
- Detaining children on the basis of examinations will lead to an increase in the dropout rate. Parents may feel the child will be better off going to work as he/she can help bring additional income to the family and learn a skill for survival.
- Economically disadvantaged groups do not have access to private tuitions to train their children to perform better the following year in the same class.
- This will mean more youngsters out of school with no prospects of a productive future.
- The RTE should not be curtailed for any reason.
- Many children from weaker sections have benefited from this right. Taking away the guarantee the Act offers up to the middle school level is retrograde.

Confusion in the case of cross-voting

- The Rajya Sabha election in Gujarat highlighted the procedural matrix of the 'open ballot' system under Rule 39AA of the Conduct of Election Rules of 1961.

- This says that a voter may show his/her marked ballot paper to the authorised representative of his/her political party before dropping it into the ballot box.
- The question of law which cropped up was whether this kind of an 'open' election process had any secrecy of vote involved at all.

What next?

- 'Instructions to the voters for casting vote in the Rajya Sabha elections', an official communication dated August 1 sent by the Assistant Election Officer and Deputy Secretary of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly to the MLAs, confirms that their votes, even though cast in an open ballot system, are secret.
- On four separate occasions, the instructions invoke Rule 39AA to remind the MLAs that their marked votes are to be shown only to the authorised representative of their political party before being dropped into the ballot box, and any transgression will amount to their votes being declared invalid.

Note ban dents RBI income

News:

Costs incurred due to the demonetisation exercise dented the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) income resulting in the central bank transferring less than half the funds (surplus) to the government compared with the previous year.

Statistics:

- For the 12 months ended June 30, 2017, the RBI will transfer a surplus of Rs. 30,659 crore to the Government of India, sharply lower than the previous year's Rs. 65,876 crore.
- The RBI's central board, approved the amount to be transferred.
- This is the lowest-ever surplus transfer by the RBI to the Centre since 2011-12 when it transferred Rs. 16,010 crore.
- RBI transferred about 80% of its income as surplus in the previous three years.

AUGUST 12 2017

'Unstable power, a big barrier in India'

News:

- Japan said unstable power supply was among the biggest investment barriers in India.

Background:

- The comment comes ahead of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's India visit next month during which bilateral discussions on cooperation in energy sector would get priority.

What next?

- Japan had committed to develop mega-industrial corridors and high-speed rail network in India through financial aid and technology transfer.
- These projects would require uninterrupted power supply.

Proposed Solution:

- the Japanese system using solar cells and micro-grid control technology could provide solution to this.

Push for law to ensure transparency rules

News:

The government could consider introducing a new law to ensure transparency of rules, the Economic Survey has recommended, stressing that the 'opaque mesh' of regulations prevalent in India not only make life difficult for citizens who cannot feign ignorance of the rules as a valid defence, but also act as a magnet for corruption and endless litigation.

Beyond news:

- India would benefit enormously if the average citizen could easily access the latest rules and regulations in a comprehensible format.
- the survey suggests a Transparency of Rules Act (TORA) as a possible solution.

The cyber con artists of Jamtara

Overview:

- The quiet railway station in the heart of Karmatar draws its name from one of the country's greatest social reformers, but today hardly anyone seems to be aware of the connection of this place to **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**.

Beyond news:

- Only a few hundred metres from Vidyasagar railway station is the place where he lived for 18 years, taught girls in a thatched school, and distributed medicines from a home clinic.
- Some of the articles used by him are still lying here but the place which should have been a tourist destination does not get any visitors these days.
- Instead, this nondescript little town in Jharkhand's Jamtara district is often frequented by police from different States: it has emerged as one of the biggest hubs of cybercrime in the country.

Statistics:

- Records at the Karmatar police station reveal that between April 2015 and March 2017, police teams from 12 different States have visited the station 23 times and arrested around 38 accused.
- Over 80 cases have been registered suo motu by the Jamtara district police between July 2014 and July 2017 against 330 residents of the area.
- At Karmatar police station alone, the number of arrests in 2017 has crossed 100.

No level playing field

Overview:

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 was enacted with the intention of improving the ease of doing business in India, a country perceived to have a weak insolvency framework and where defaulting debtors abuse the law.

Proposed AIM:

At the outset, the Code appears to have the interests of business at heart: it aims

1. to overhaul laws relating to reorganisation and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms, and individuals;
2. attempts to ease the process of recovery of money by operational and financial creditors in a timely manner;
3. places the onus on professionals to put forth resolution plans within 180 days.
4. It seeks to ensure that there is neither scope for any further claims by the creditors, except through the Code's mechanisms, nor for the corporate debtor to challenge the claims made by the creditor.

In reality, however, the Code has enough loopholes to close down businesses instead of assisting entrepreneurs.

Issues:

- it fails to provide adequate safeguards to protect the rights of the company before handing over the management in its entirety to the resolution professional.
- The entourage of appeals before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, and writ petitions before numerous High Courts, in a short span begs the question: Is the Code truly poised to meet the ends it proclaims?

Slow injustice.

Overview:

The wholesale acquittal of all 10 persons arrested in connection with a blast at the Police Task Force office at Begumpet in Hyderabad in 2005 must occasion serious introspection on the prevailing gulf between crime and justice.

beyond news:

- There have been quite a few instances, in recent times, of those arrested for alleged involvement in terrorism incidents being released after years in prison.
- In December 2016, the National Investigation Agency managed to get Yasin Bhatkal, founder of the Indian Mujahideen, and four others convicted and sentenced to death in connection with the 2013 twin blasts in Hyderabad, but it is a rare instance of a successful prosecution and a relatively quick trial.

Examples:

- Examples include Nisar-ud-din Ahmad, who spent 23 years in prison in connection with several train blasts, before the Supreme Court ordered his release last year.
- Aligarh Muslim University research scholar Gulzar Mohammed Wani spent 16 years in jail on suspicion of being a member of the Hizbul Mujahideen before he was acquitted due to lack of evidence.
- Exoneration from one or two charges cannot be adequate recompense for the loss of liberty and the trauma of the trial.

AUGUST 13 & 14 2017

ISRO chief Nair met Antrix CEO twice

News: Former ISRO chairman G. Madhavan Nair, had met alleged U.S.-based mastermind in the Antrix-Devas deal Ramachandra Vishwanathan twice before the agreement got the final government approval, the CBI said.

Beyond news:

- The CBI already has sanction for the prosecution of Mr. Nair, apart from former ISRO director A. Bhaskar Narayana Rao and former Antrix executive director K.R. Sridhara Murthi.
- Incidentally, the Bengaluru-based Devas Multimedia was incorporated in December 2004 with a capital of just Rs. 1 lakh.
- Devas Multimedia is being treated by the CBI as a **shell company**.
- It had received investments to the tune of \$130 million from four companies, three based in Mauritius and one in Singapore.
- The agency has identified the investors as Columbia Capital Devas Mauritius Limited, Telecom Devas Mauritius Limited, Devas Employees Mauritius Private Limited and Deutsche Telekom Asia Ltd, Singapore.

What next?

Learn about shell company

"Shell company is a non-trading company used as a vehicle for various financial manoeuvres or kept dormant for future use in some other capacity." & is not illegal unless they themselves indulge in illegal activities.



India, China to join Indian Ocean exercise

News:

Despite growing tensions with China, official sources said the Indian Navy would join the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy in a maiden maritime search and rescue exercise to be chaired by Bangladesh at the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in November this year.

Beyond news:

- Bangladesh, the current Chair, is scheduling a maiden International Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise (IMMSAREX) in November in the Bay of Bengal to be attended by ships and aircraft of the members and observers of the IONS..
- The IONS is a regional forum of Indian Ocean littoral states, represented by their Navy chiefs, launched by India in February 2008.
- It presently has 23 members and nine observers.

Beauty and the regulatory beast

News: Baby designing

Beyond news:

- Within the realm of modern science, we now have the impending threat of designer babies, stemming from a revolutionary technique entailing the editing of our genes by bacterial DNA scissors called CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats).
- The gene editing technique using such DNA scissors is titled "CRIPSR/Cas9" and was the subject of an intense patent battle between the University of California, Berkeley and MIT/Broad Institute.
- The verdict was somewhat Solomonic, splitting the patent pie between these two rivals. Since its evolution, CRISPR/Cas9 has been tested across an array of domains, such as human health (gene-based therapy) and agro biotech (pest-resistant crops).
- In fact, trials for gene-based therapies are already under way, with scientists successfully editing out genetic mutations that code for disorders such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (a functional impairment of the heart) and retinitis pigmentosa (a degenerative disorder of the eye).
- It is this scary spectre of a new age eugenics that forms the starting point for this piece.

A full antibiotics course

News: A single analysis piece published in the The BMJ journal has done more harm than good to antibiotics stewardship.

Beyond news:

- The authors say that patients who are not admitted in hospitals “might be best advised to stop treatment when they feel better”.
- The bone of contention is the WHO’s advice to patients to “always complete the full prescription, even if you feel better, because stopping treatment early promotes the growth of drug-resistant bacteria”.
- According to the authors of The BMJ article, this advice is not evidence-based and is incorrect. As per the available evidence, patients cannot stop antibiotics when they feel better.
- Antibiotics misuse such as inappropriate use (for viral infections), over medication, self-medication, and stopping treatment midway are already leading to problems.
- Asking patients to stop medication when they feel better can be dangerous, especially in the case of TB.
- One of the main reasons why drug-resistant TB strains have emerged is because patients discontinue medication mid-course when they feel better, much like what the authors are advocating.
- The BMJ article has failed to clarify upfront that its suggestion is restricted to common bacterial infections.

GIS-enabled portal maps land-related information

News:

In a little over six months beginning February, the Centre has brought out an online database of more than half a million hectares of land assisting industry.

Beyond news:

- The Geographic Information System-enabled database also has details of close to 3,000 industrial parks/clusters, as well as area-wise availability of agricultural/horticultural crops, and mineral production.
- The portal will soon incorporate information on warehouses, power-grid and financial institutions as well as the demand for industrial infrastructure captured on the basis of applications from entrepreneurs for projects.
- The exercise is to eliminate the information asymmetry that is currently adversely affecting the country’s industrial policy-making and investments in the manufacturing sector.

- The development comes in the backdrop of the Centre firming up a new industrial and manufacturing policy to push up the contribution of the manufacturing sector in India's GDP to 25% by 2020 from the current level of about 16%.

The aim is to make India a global manufacturing hub and in the process generate employment locally. The details on the database about government-approved technical institutions will indicate the availability of skilled and semi-skilled talent.

Data is available on agricultural crops such as fibre crops, food grains, oilseeds, plantation crops, pulses and spices, and horticultural crops, including most fruits and vegetables. Also available are the details of mineral production including that of agate, apatite, bauxite, chromite, copper, diamond, flint stone, fluorite, garnet, gold, graphite, iron ore, kyanite, lead and zinc ore, lead, limeshell, limestone, magnesite, manganese ore, moulding sand, phosphorite, selenite, sillimanite, silver, sulphur, tin, vermiculite, wollastonite and zinc.

AUGUST 15 2017

Centre likely to differ with J&K on Article 35A.

News:

- The Centre is likely to take a divergent opinion from that of the Jammu and Kashmir government on Article 35A, on the grounds that it discriminates against women who marry outside the State from applying for jobs or buying property, which is in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

Article 14:

- "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India."

Article 35A:

Article 35A of the Indian Constitution is an article that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define "permanent residents" of the state and provide special rights and privileges to those permanent residents. It is added to the Constitution through a Presidential Order, i.e., The Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954 - issued by the President of India, "in exercise of the powers conferred by" clause (1) of Article 370 of the Constitution, with the concurrence of the Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

What next?

- A senior government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there were apprehensions that any adverse order against the provision could give the separatists a chance to stoke violence in the Valley.
- The Supreme Court is hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition challenging the constitutional validity of Article 35A, which prohibits a non-Jammu and Kashmir resident from buying property in the State and ensures job reservation for residents.

Largest volcanic region on earth lies in Antarctica

- The largest volcanic region on Earth — with nearly 100 volcanoes — has been discovered two km below the surface of the vast ice sheet in west Antarctica.
- Researchers from the University of Edinburgh in Britain found a staggering 91 previously unknown volcanoes, adding to the 47 others that had been discovered over the previous century of exploring the region.
- The height of these newly discovered volcanoes range from 100 to 3,850 metres, with the highest almost as tall as Switzerland's 3,970-metre Eiger mountain.
- These active peaks are concentrated in a region known as the west Antarctic rift system — which stretches 3,500 km from Antarctica's Ross ice shelf to the Antarctic peninsula.
- Geologists say this huge region is likely to dwarf east Africa's volcanic ridge — currently rated as the densest concentration of volcanoes in the world.

A great divide

News:

- The incidents of protests and violence by tribal bodies in Nagaland earlier this year over 33% reservations for women in urban local bodies have once again highlighted the issue of women and representation. In this context, it is interesting to look at the case of Haryana which conducted elections to rural panchayat bodies in January last year.

Beyond news:

- The State amended the State Panchayati Raj Act, even including criteria such as educational qualifications and standards for candidates to meet while seeking election to panchayat bodies.
- Academically, men from the general category had to be matriculates, women and Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates had to have passed out of middle school, while SC women should have passed standard five.

- This raised criticism as it disqualified 68% of SC women and 41% of SC men. But quite interestingly, women's representation increased to an average of 42% across all levels in comparison to 36% in the fourth panchayat election held in 2010.

The child's right to dignity

News:

Recently, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court heard a petition on the constitutionality of the marital rape exception in the IPC (Exception 2 to Section 375).

beyond news:

- The petitioners pointed to the contradictions between the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), which defines "child" as a person below 18 years, and the marital rape exception in the IPC, which states that sexual intercourse between a man and his wife (who is not under 15 years) is not rape.
- The Bench apparently inquired whether the court must intervene to provide protection to married girls between 15 and 18 years from sexual exploitation by their spouse, given the legislative intention to exempt marital rape from prosecution.
- The technicality is easily answered because the POCSO Act does not carve out any exception in favor of marriage.
- The legislative intention is also evident from Section 42A of the POCSO Act, which provides that in case of inconsistency with the provisions of any other law, the POCSO Act will override.

Retail, WPI inflation accelerate

News:

Retail inflation as measured by the consumer price index (CPI) accelerated to 2.36% in July after easing for three straight months.

Behind news:

- The gains in retail prices were driven by a hardening of prices in sugar and confectionery items, pan, tobacco and intoxicants.
 - However, there was disinflation in the food basket.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which factors in CPI for arriving at its monetary policy, had earlier this month slashed the key interest rate (repo rate) by 25 basis points to 6%.

- Separately, skyrocketing tomato prices propelled inflation at the wholesale level to 1.88% in July from 0.9% in June, with the food category overall contributing significantly to the uptick in WPI terms.
- Inflation in the food segment of the primary articles category in July came in at 2.15%, snapping a two-month contraction.
- Within this, the fruits and vegetables segment contributed the most, with inflation coming in at 29%.

AUGUST 16 2017

How Artificial Intelligence is reshaping art and music

News:

- The project is part of a growing effort to generate art through a set of AI techniques that have only recently come of age. Called deep neural networks, these complex mathematical systems allow machines to learn specific behavior by analyzing vast amounts of data.



Logic Behind AI:

- By looking for common patterns in millions of bicycle photos, for instance, a neural network can learn to recognise a bike.
- This is how Facebook identifies faces in online photos, how Android phones recognise commands spoken into phones, and how Microsoft Skype translates one language into another.

What next?

- These complex systems can also create art. By analysing a set of songs, for instance, they can learn to build similar sounds.
- As Mr. Eck says, these systems are at least approaching the point — still many, many years away — when a machine can instantly build a new Beatles song or perhaps trillions of new Beatles songs, each sounding a lot like the music the Beatles themselves recorded, but also a little different.

India did not act against cow vigilantes, says U.S.

News:

India has recorded a spike in violence related to religious intolerance in 2016 and the authorities have routinely refused to take action against cow vigilantes, the U.S. State Department noted in its annual International Religious Freedom Report released on Tuesday.

Beyond news: Whats in report?

- The report cited the spread of laws and campaigns for cow protection and against religious conversion among reasons for the increase in violence.
- It noted that 24 of the 29 States have “imposed full to partial restrictions and penalties on the slaughter of bovines,” and six out of 29 State governments enforce anti-conversion laws.
- The State Department also cited the restrictions imposed on American Christian NGO Compassion International’s operations in India.
- There was an increase in violent incidents by cow protection groups against mostly Muslim victims, including killings, mob violence, assaults, and intimidation.
- Hindus threatened and assaulted Muslims and Christians and destroyed their property. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), there were more than 300 incidents targeting Christians during the year, compared with 177 in 2015.
- Incidents included assaults on missionaries, forced conversions of non-Hindus, and attacks on churches, schools, and private property.

Aeroplanes may be affecting ozone, monsoon

News: As per the latest reports, Aeroplanes play role in affecting monsoon

Beyond News:

- Aeroplanes may be ejecting significant amounts of black carbon (BC) – a pollutant known to aggravate breathing disorders, upset the monsoon and quicken glacier melt – and may be depleting the ozone layer, according to a study by climate researchers from multiple institutions in the country.
- Though airborne, BC is known to dissipate and settle down in a few months under the influence of rain and wind and is unlikely to travel upward of 4 km.
- Now have evidence of such particles existing up to 18 km into the stratosphere and there are about 10,000 of them in every cubic centimetre.
- Given the shape and location of these particles, they argue, it could only derive from emissions from aviation fuel and they pose a problem because these black carbon particles can linger long enough to provide a fertile ground for other chemical reactions that can deplete the ozone layer.

Caution from a sobering Survey

News: Breaking traditions in presenting Economic survey

Beyond News:

- By tradition the Economic Survey used to be presented to Parliament on the eve of the Union Budget. But then, the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is known to break with tradition.
- For instance, it advanced the presentation of the Budget by one month; it has done away with a separate Railways Budget; and it has merged the two categories of “plan” and “non-plan” spending.
- These are significant breaks from the past. The big one, of course, is the winding down of the Planning Commission itself. So also, in a break from tradition, this year, the full Survey was not presented at the beginning of the Budget session.
- Only Part I was presented. This is the part which is policy oriented and future looking.
- It reads like a doctoral thesis, with many conceptual ideas and analytical pieces.
- It covers various topics: the puzzle of lack of convergence in growth of States, the challenge of governance of cities, a new fiscal framework for India, etc.
- It also presents a much-awaited longish piece on demonetisation (without giving away precise quantitative estimates of its impact). Such is the impression of the scholarly tome on the research community, that the University of Mumbai has adopted it as a textbook in its economics courses.

{Op-Ed}No case for an all India judicial service

Key aspect: Author is trying to convince the layers of debate over AIJS

Beyond that:

- The proposal to create an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS) along the lines of the All India Services (AIS) is one that has been endlessly debated since the idea was first mooted by the Law Commission in the 1950s.
- It has never really moved forward as the same arguments both for and against it have been made over and over again.
- There are no neat lines which can be drawn between those who favour and oppose it as there have been disagreements within the judiciary, the government and the Bar over its necessity and desirability.
- The debate has once again come to the fore with a fresh move to implement it and nine High Courts expressing their disapproval.

'Why can't the government provide a higher income for farmers?'

There are two major challenges before Indian agriculture today:

1. ecological challenges
2. economical challenges

The conservation of our basic agricultural assets such as land, water, and biodiversity is a major challenge.

How to make agriculture sustainable is the challenge?

- Increasing productivity in perpetuity without ecological harm is the need of the hour. In Punjab, and in other Green Revolution States, the water table has gone down and become saline.
- Further, during the Green Revolution the population was about 400-500 million; now it is 1,300 million and it is predicted to be 1.5 billion by 2030. The growing population pressure has made it pertinent to increase crop yield.
- The economics of farming will have to be made profitable to address the current situation. We have to devise ways to lower the cost of production and reduce the risks involved in agriculture such as pests, pathogens, and weeds.
- Today, the expected return in agriculture is adverse to farmers. That's why they are unable to repay loans.
- **Addressing the ecological challenge** requires more technology while the economics requires more public policy interventions.

Authors Suggestion:

- Author had recommended a formula for calculating Minimum Support Price In his 2006 report, $C_2 + 50\%$ (50% more than the weighted average cost of production, classified as C_2 by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices). This would raise the current MSP and has now become the clamour of farmers and the nightmare of policymakers.

Friend, foe, poacher, watcher

News:

In the Nilgiris lies Gudalur taluk, a region dotted with patches of seemingly pristine rainforest and grassland. Given the astonishing variety of plants and wildlife in the area, conserving these forest patches is a key objective for the forest department and conservationists.

Beyond news:

- In this region you can also find, after many arduous treks, hamlets where tribal communities, including the Kattunaickers and Paniyas, live.
- These communities still remain marginalised, with access to these hamlets limited.
- Many of them can be reached only after traversing farmlands, trails, and leech-infested swamps.

Centre's eBiz initiative stutters

News:

The ambitious eBiz portal project unveiled by the Centre in 2013 to serve as an online, single-window entry point for investors looking to set up a business anywhere in the country, is still struggling to become fully operational.

Beyond News:

- Even services that were available on the portal, such as registrations with the Corporate Affairs Ministry and the Employees' Provident Fund, have been 'impacted' due to technical issues.
- While State governments have not come on board for critical components of the eBiz project, technical glitches have arisen in the plan to integrate all clearances onto a single system owing to government departments opting for different technology platforms.
- Testing the integration of individual services with the eBiz portal also added to delays, the DIPP told the parliamentary standing committee on commerce, citing 'dependency on multiple stakeholders' such as NSDG, banks and state treasuries.
- The DIPP said it had 'taken up the matter at appropriate levels in partner departments to take necessary measures in speeding up integration with the portal.'
- More than two years after discussions began with the States to devise a state-level composite application form (CAF) for investors that would integrate about 14 state government services and permits, this key component of the eBiz portal is also stuck with no takers, except Delhi, so far.

AUGUST 17 2017

Gorakhpur deaths not due to lack of oxygen, says panel.

News:

- The deaths of children and others at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College Hospital in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, were not caused by a shortage of oxygen supply, a three-member Central government committee said on Wednesday.

Beyond news:

- The Central government panel visited the hospital, amid allegations that a private contractor stopped supplying oxygen, resulting in the death of many children.
- The team looked at deaths between August 1 and 6 and then between August 7 and 12. The BRD Hospital had previously maintained that of the 34 babies who died at the neo-natal intensive care unit, 12 died of encephalitis.
- The hospital, in its statement, said there had been a “drop in pressure in the supply of liquid oxygen” , but added that cylinders were procured from other suppliers.

Smartphones under govt. scanner

News:

- Concerned about instances of Indian mobile phone users’ contact lists, details and text messages being leaked to other countries, including China, the Central government has asked all firms selling smartphone handsets in the country to share details of the processes they follow to ensure there is no possibility of data thefts or leakages from their devices.

Beyond news:

- The government is concerned not just about the security features of the handsets being sold, but also of the embedded programmes that are a part of the user experience, such as the operating system, browser and pre-loaded applications.
- The move comes in the wake of a review meeting on cyber security concerns held by Electronics and Information Technology Minister, where specific instructions were given to officials to see to it that data leakages from handsets are prevented.

Union Cabinet approves new metro rail policy



News:

- The Union Cabinet has approved a new policy for expanding and regulating metro rail services in cities across India.

Beyond News:

- This is the first such policy document prepared by the Centre since metro rail operations began in Delhi in 2002.
- The 14-page document approved on Wednesday has seven key points, of which the most significant is the one on funding pattern.
- The policy gives a big boost to private players by making private participation mandatory for all the three funding options – be it a public-private partnership (PPP) model with central assistance under the Viability Gap Funding scheme of the Finance Ministry, a grant from the Centre under which 10% of the project cost would be given as a lump sum, or a 50:50 equity sharing model between the Central and State governments.

Where robots work in harmony with humans

News:

- It would be hard to find a culture that celebrates robots more than Japan, evident in the popularity of companion robots for consumers, sold by the Internet company Soft Bank and Toyota Motor Corp, among others.

Beyond News:

- Japan, where birth rates have been sinking for decades and have raised fears of a labour shortage, forged a big push toward robotics starting in the 1990s.
- It leads the world in robots per 10,000 workers in the automobile sector – 1,562, compared with 1,091 in the U.S. and 1,133 in Germany, according to a White House report.
- Japan was also ahead in sectors outside automobiles at 219 robots per 10,000 workers, compared with 76 for the U.S. and 147 for Germany.
- One factor in Japan's different take on automation is the "lifetime employment" system.
- Major Japanese companies generally retain workers, even if their abilities become outdated, and retrain them for other tasks.

Hizbul Mujahideen labelled a 'terror group'

News:

- The U.S. on Wednesday designated militant outfit Hizbul Mujahideen as a “foreign terrorist organisation”, nearly two months after declaring the group’s chief Syed Salahuddin as a global terrorist.

Beyond News:

- The designation, which slaps a series of U.S. sanctions on the outfit, came against the backdrop of an upsurge in terror activities by the militant group in Kashmir in recent months.
- All of Hizbul Mujahideen’s property and interests subject to U.S. jurisdiction are blocked, and people in the U.S. are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with the group.
- The decision marks a severe blow to Pakistan which has been projecting the militant group as a voice of the Kashmiri people.

Reading Kim Jong-un’s mind

Every discussion around the North Korean nuclear crisis could eventually settle around this basic question.

1. If he is an irrational, crazy and impulsive leader, it’s difficult to reach a diplomatic settlement with him. A military solution to the North Korean issue is even more difficult and risky as Mr. Kim could use the country’s nuclear arsenal in retaliation. That’s a cul-de-sac.
2. On the other hand, if there’s a strategy behind Mr. Kim’s perceived madness, it at least opens avenues for further engagement.

Beyond News:

- Most accounts of the Korean crisis are written from the perspective of Pyongyang’s rivals where an erratic, despotic regime is portrayed as relentlessly pursuing dangerous weapons in defiance of international public opinion and sanctions.
- But if one looks at the whole issue from a North Korean security point of view, it is not hard to find a method behind the North’s actions.
- It’s a country that’s been technically at war with its neighbour for almost seven decades. There are also multiple U.S. bases in South Korea, the Philippines, Japan, Guam Island and a naval presence in the East China Sea and the Pacific, in the vicinity of North Korea.
- In terms of conventional military might, the impoverished North knows that it’s no match for the U.S. This has forced it to make extreme choices to overcome the asymmetry in capabilities.

The health checklist

News:

The frail nature of rural India's health systems and the extraordinary patient load on a few referral hospitals have become even more evident from the crisis at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College in Gorakhpur.

Beyond News:

- The institution has come under the spotlight after reports emerged of the death of several children over a short period, although epidemics and a high mortality level are chronic features here.
- Medical infrastructure in several surrounding districts and even neighbouring States is so weak that a large number of very sick patients are sent to such apex hospitals as a last resort.
- The dysfunctional aspects of the system are evident from the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on reproductive and child health under the National Rural Health Mission for the year ended March 2016.

CAG Finding:

- Even if the audit objections on financial administration were to be ignored, the picture that emerges in several States is one of inability to absorb the funds allocated, shortage of staff at primary health centres (PHCs), community health centres (CHCs) and district hospitals, lack of essential medicines, broken-down equipment and unfilled doctor vacancies.
- In the case of Uttar Pradesh, the CAG found that about 50% of the PHCs it audited did not have a doctor, while 13 States had significant levels of vacancies.
- Basic facilities in the form of health sub-centres, PHCs and CHCs met only half the need in Bihar, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and West Bengal, putting pressure on a handful of referral institutions such as the Gorakhpur hospital.

The private route.

News:

NITI Aayog's recent proposal for the partial privatisation of district-level government hospitals has been criticised for commercialising health care.

Beyond news:

- Under the proposal, private hospitals will be allowed to bid for 30-year leases that give them control over portions of government hospitals dedicated to treating non-communicable diseases.
- Critics argue that private hospitals focussed on profits will do no good to the poor who can't pay for their services, so the government must step in to provide free health care.
- Affordability is indeed the major issue preventing poor Indians from getting proper health care. Free health care provided by the government, however, is not the real solution to the problem.
- Governments often have very little incentive to provide quality health care to many citizens. This is because, in politics, it is the interests of powerful groups that get the most leverage.
- The poor, for various reasons related to electoral politics, often get left out of the race to influence their governments.
- In the marketplace, on the other hand, private hospitals have huge monetary incentives to proactively cater to the demands of their customers. Each consumer's currency note holds equal weight to a private hospital that seeks profit.
- This makes market-based health care a fundamentally superior way to deliver health services to the poor.

India aims to widen oil import sources

News:

Indian Oil Corporation placed India's first ever shale oil order two days ago with the U.S., according to company Chairman Sanjiv Singh, who said that the prices from the U.S. were very competitive even when compared with those from Gulf nations.

Beyond news:

- Regardless of the current tensions between India and China on the border, China was showing keen interest in maintaining business relations between the two countries.
- The increasing oil imports from new sources such as the U.S. was also putting pressure on OPEC countries to reduce the 'Asian premium' on oil prices they charge Asian countries, including India.

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