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India thanks Switzerland for support in global fora{IR}

News:

- India thanked Switzerland for its support in global multilateral organisations.
- Sought greater cooperation to ensure bilateral financial transparency and thanked the Swiss government for its support to India's membership bid for the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).



Beyond these, Note down following:-

Important achievements

1. Swift recognition of Indian independence,
2. Treaty of friendship,
3. Diplomatic supports,
4. Trade & economic co-operation being 3rd largest from asia & largest trading partner,
5. Switzerland's investments like 11th largest investor & associated job creation..etc

Future scope

1. tourism,
2. Automatic exchange of financial accounts information,
3. Co-operation in Climate change,
4. Development in railway system..etc

GDP growth boards slow train at 5.7%{Indian Economy}

News:

- India's GDP grew at 5.7% between April to June this year — the slowest pace recorded in 13 quarters or since the NDA government assumed office in May 2014 — led by a sharp decline in industrial activity out of the rollout of GST from July 1.

Beyond News:

- GDP growth in the last quarter of 2016-17 was 6.1%, marking a steady decline from the 7.9% clocked in the April to June quarter.
- The gross value added (GVA) in the economy grew at 5.6%, same as the previous quarter but sharply lower than the 7.6% growth in the first quarter of the last year.
- Economist Ajit Ranade pointed out that this is the sixth continuous quarter marking a decline in growth.

39 successes later, PSLV launch fails{Science and Technology}

- In a double whammy to the Indian space programme, the PSLV-C39 mission carrying the replacement navigation satellite IRNSS-1H failed .
- This was the PSLV's first failure — in what was seen as a routine mission — after 39 continuously successful launches and only the second such instance since 1993.

'Indian elephant getting bigger'{International Relations}

- In 20 years, India will be one of the major geopolitical players in Asia, providing some balance to the existing power equations in the region, an Australian envoy has said.
- Barry O'Farrell, the special envoy of New South Wales, the southeastern Australian state, to India, said that India's rise is good news for Australia as well as the Indian Ocean region.
- According to Mr. O'Farrell, both India and Australia are committed to tap this potential.
- "Given India's strengths, its population and trajectory, there's enormous potential for India-Australia relationship."

Is it time to review Section 377?{Rights Issues}

- Section 377, titled “unnatural offences”, was enacted by the British after we lost our First War of Independence in 1857.
- They imposed their religio-cultural values upon us. Prior to that, sexual activities, including amongst homosexuals, were not penalised in India.
- Section 377 penalises non-procreative sexual acts and any act of sexual perversity, as has been interpreted by different courts.
- Though it textually applies to all persons, homosexual and heterosexual, it has been targeted at gay men.

Important judgments regarding:

- The Delhi High Court in Naz Foundation v. Government of Nct of Delhi(2009)rightly held that criminalising sexual activities with consent in private not only impairs the dignity of those persons targeted by the law, but it is also discriminatory and impacts the health of those people.
- Gay men are seen as criminals by the law because of Section 377, and thus by other members of society.
- This judgment lifted the criminal restrictions on gay men. However, it was short-lived as the Supreme Court in Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation(2013) set aside the Delhi High Court judgment.
- The Koushal judgment did not notice that the rape law itself had changed whereby instead of mere restriction on penile-vaginal non-consensual sex, it now includes a range of sexual activities, including digital and object penetration.

Has demonetization achieved its original objectives?{Economic Policy}

- On November 8, 2016, these were tackling corruption, counterfeit currency, and terror funding.
- Thereafter the Prime Minister added reducing dependence on cash.
- Now that we know that 99% of demonetised money has come back, the government’s estimates of how much black money would be extinguished have been proven horribly wrong.
- The Attorney General told the Supreme Court that he expected Rs. 4-5 lakh crore to be “neutralised”.
- In the end, just Rs. 16,000 crore didn’t come back.
- This means previously unbanked money has now been credited to bank accounts.
- As they yield returns, it will be taxed and that’s a clear gain.
- If large proportions are proven to be black, revenues will increase substantially.

A water umpire{Inter-state relations}

- The Cauvery water dispute is eluding closure, with Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala locked in battle in the Supreme Court over their share of water.
- In its statement of objects and reasons for proposing a new inter-State river water disputes law, the Centre lists out the drawbacks in the prevalent Inter-State River Water Disputes Act of 1956.
- The Act provides for tribunals to be constituted for every inter-State river water dispute. The statement, however, notes the reluctance shown by States to accept the decisions of these tribunals.
- With water becoming scarce, the Centre has proposed the Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2017 for early and amicable resolution of disputes. The Bill proposes that the Centre notify an Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal with multiple benches.
- All existing tribunals dealing with inter-State water disputes would stand dissolved on the date of establishment of this tribunal.
- Chairmen and other members of the existing tribunals who are aged 70, on the date of commencement of the 2017 Amendment Act, shall cease to hold office on the expiry of three months from the date of the law coming into existence.
- Disputes already settled by an existing tribunal, prior to the date of commencement of the 2017 Amendment Act, shall not be re-opened.

India, U.S. eye states to boost trade ties{International Relations}

- India and the U.S. are working on establishing a state-level engagement mechanism to widen and deepen bilateral trade and investment ties.
- Towards this objective, the **U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC)**, will unveil within a fortnight a '**State Engagement Task force**' (**SET**) to ensure American and Indian companies align their interests with the priorities of the State governments of both the countries.

Significance:

- The move comes as India and the U.S. are set to carry out a comprehensive review of bilateral trade ties. In that exercise, priority sectors will be defence and energy.
- While the focus in defence would include Lockheed Martin's proposal to make F-16 fighter jets in India and the proposed sale of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. or GA-ASI's 'Guardian Remotely Piloted Aircraft' to India, energy ties would cover exports of U.S. natural gas, transfer of U.S. technology on oil and gas refining, as well as the conclusion of pacts between Nuclear Power Corp. and Westinghouse Electric for six nuclear reactors in India and related project financing.

- Other priority areas would be smart cities (including Ajmer, Allahabad and Visakhapatnam), regional airport development in India through public private partnership, e-commerce, digital payments and medical devices.

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To clear the path ahead {Social issue}

News:

For the first time in Indian history talaq-e-bid'awas specifically debated and set aside by the Supreme Court.

Beyond News:

- In the 2002Shamim Aracase a two-judge bench of the Apex Court had delegitimised this medieval practice only when it was not properly pronounced and preceded by attempts at reconciliation.
- But the latest ruling completely and unconditionally invalidates talaq-e-bid'aand renders it bad in law .
- The Koranic procedure of talaq is the only way by which a Muslim husband will be able to divorce his wife from now on.

Implications of verdict:

- The biggest goal attainment for Muslim women is the realisation that talaq-e-bid'a in any of his manifestations will not dissolve the marriage.
- There is also scope now to amend the 1937 Act, even without designating it as statutory law, to exclude talaq-e-bid'a from the definition of the word "talaq" mentioned in Section 2, and make the Koranic procedure of talaq gender-neutral.
- Indeed all provisions of the Shariah mentioned in the 1937 Act can be similarly redefined to bring them in conformity with the humanitarian teachings of the Koran and the Prophet.
- This judgment will also encourage legally and theologically informed Muslim intellectuals to establish mediation centres across India under the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism to help Muslim couples amicably resolve their marital disputes.
- To echo the feelings of many, this is not the end but the beginning of the process of reforms in the Muslim personal law.

- The biggest challenge, however, would be to inform the Muslim masses that the abolition of talaq-e-bid'a is not against the Shariah but has, on the contrary, brought it closer to the original principles of Islam.

Govt to take steps to promote use of NavIC {Public Policy}

- Defence Research and Development labs including the premier missile and avionics facility — Research Centre Imarat (RCI) — are being able to develop several critical technologies and components for the defence and aerospace sector.
- but they need the industry support to get into the volumes production considering the needs of the armed forces.
- With the future wars to be based on how networked the weapons systems are, the need for various kinds of sensors, navigational systems, avionics, radars, telemetry, telemetry and so on was immense as the armed forces requirement runs into scores of weapons systems.

India to sign 4 pacts during BRICS summit {International Relations}



- A week after the end of Doklam standoff, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Xiamen, China, to address the BRICS summit, where he is likely to take up regional and global issues.
- The External Affairs Ministry has said India will sign four BRICS-level agreements during the summit which will be followed by Mr. Modi's three-day visit to Myanmar.
- "Discussions during the restricted session of BRICS will focus on global economic issues, national security, and development-related issues which will be followed by a plenary session when leaders will discuss practical cooperation and cultural exchanges,"

Calibrating a new standard {International Relations}

In recent years a person questioning the British government's stance on international students was given one of two typical responses.

1. One track focused on reminding her that the drop in numbers in some groups (including Indian students) was largely the result of the crackdown on fake colleges that admitted students under the pretense of study merely to enable them to come to Britain.
 2. The second argument focussed on highlighting the supposedly sizeable number of overstaying students.
- During a heated debate, a senior British official recently suggested that India had little reason to be aggrieved over Britain's visa regime for students (nor any right to expect change) given the large numbers of Indians who overstayed their visas.
 - Theresa may was justifying why students needed to be included in Britain's immigration statistics and therefore one of the groups whose numbers Britain would be aiming to bring down as part of government targets to reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands.

Unending slowdown {Indian Economy}

News:

- India's economy continues to decelerate with the government's estimate for first-quarter gross domestic product pegging growth at a 13-quarter low of 5.7% in April-June.

Beyond News:

- The reasons for the protracted slowdown — a slide of five straight quarters from 9.1% in March 2016 — are many and varied.
- But there is little doubt that the demonetization exercise combined with the uncertainty around the July 1 adoption of the new indirect tax regime served to significantly dampen economic activity.
- A look at the sector-specific trends shows that manufacturing expansion in gross value added (GVA) terms has slackened to a near stall at 1.2%.
- This, from 5.3% in Q4 of the last fiscal and 10.7% a year earlier, is a far from heartening sign.
- With capacity utilization expected to weaken this quarter, according to the RBI, and with surveys suggesting that consumer sentiment has deteriorated steadily in August, the auguries for a demand rebound are far from promising.

'India's growth will rebound to 7%-7.5%'{Economic Development}

News:

- The new Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog Rajiv Kumar on Friday said he was confident that India's growth would rebound to 7%-7.5% in the current quarter after declining for five consecutive quarters.

Beyond News:

- He also categorically dismissed any link between the slowdown in growth and demonetisation.
- As per official data released on Thursday, India's GDP grew at 5.7% between April to June this year, the slowest pace in 13 quarters.
- Citing the surge in private firms lining up for IPOs to raise funds and the buoyancy in the capital markets, Dr. Kumar said that private investment was picking up.
- Terming the revival of private investment his major priority after job creation, he said that India was a country of entrepreneurs and private investors who accounted for 70% to 80% of total investments.
- "We have to make sure that the domestic investor sees this country [as] where his role and contribution is appreciated so that private investment can pick up again."

Switzerland for early India-EFTA pact{International Relations}

- The early conclusion of the proposed Free Trade Agreement(FTA) between India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as well as an investment protection framework would boost economic ties between the two sides.
- EFTA members include Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein.
- On the issue of intellectual property rights (IPR), she said India's IPR regime was in compliance with the global rules and "we shall ensure that the patent, copyrights and trademark rights of any individual or company is respected."
- India was ready to address any questions on IPR or concerns on data security.

General Studies-02

N. Korea tests 'hydrogen' bomb, sparks outrage {IR}

News:

- North Korea tested a 'hydrogen' bomb which it can mount on a missile, declaring its biggest-ever nuclear detonation a "perfect success."

THE WARHEAD REVEALED

■ Chart, appearing to show how the warhead fits inside missile

■ Artist's impression of how the warhead could sit inside the nose cone of the Hwasong-14 missile pictured right

■ Wiring and electronics containing battery, arming controls and circuitry

■ The nuclear warhead

HOW A HYDROGEN BOMB WORKS

Also known as a thermonuclear weapon, the hydrogen bomb is so called because it uses the common element in a process called 'nuclear fusion', in which atoms fuse together. H-bombs are far more powerful and complex than ordinary atomic bombs, which rely on atom-splitting - known as 'fission'.

1. An ordinary high explosive trigger compresses plutonium into a critical state, causing initial reaction known as 'nuclear fission' as atoms are split.

2. This 'primary' explosion detonates the second device within the warhead. A secondary core is ignited by more plutonium. It also includes hydrogen isotopes - atoms which have a different number of neutrons - which begin a 'fusion' reaction. At the same time, a uranium core begins a second 'fission' reaction.

3. Within a split second the resulting explosion releases huge amounts of energy - leading to a devastating blast.

Plutonium fuel, High explosive, Second device, Hydrogen fusion fuel, Plutonium 'spark plug' ignites, Uranium

MISSILES THAT COULD BE USED TO DELIVER THE WARHEAD

HWASONG-14
Estimated range: 6,250 miles

HWASONG-12
Range: 4,350 miles

London, North Korea, Las Vegas, Nairobi

■ Mobile launched

■ Two-stage, liquid-fuelled rocket

■ Single-stage, liquid-fuelled rocket

AMERICA'S RESPONSE: THE B61-12

Precision-guided thermonuclear bomb, described as the most dangerous nuclear device ever produced. It can be deployed by a variety of aircraft, including the iconic 'stealth bomber', the Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit, below

Guidance tail kit: steerable tail fins

Strakes: help guidance system by supporting stability while airborne

Warhead: 0.3, 5, 10, or 50 kilotons

Electronics and radar

An F-15E jet dropped a test weapon over the Nevada desert last month, to test its guidance system. The successful dry-runs showed it is accurate to within 100ft

Beyond News:

- Experts are judging it by the its explosion, and it was appeared to be its most powerful explosion yet.

- This sparked a strong rebuke from U.S. President Donald Trump who slammed the act “dangerous.”
- But world reaction to the country’s sixth nuclear test was swift and angry. China rebuked its ally and began emergency monitoring for radiation at its border with the North.
- Hours before the test, the North released images of leader Kim Jong-un at the Nuclear Weapons Institute, inspecting what it said was a miniaturised H-bomb that could be fitted onto an intercontinental ballistic missile.

No separate labour rights for trans genders {Rights Issues}

News:

The NDA government has dropped plans to recognise transgender persons as the ‘third gender’ in the country’s labour law framework.

Beyond news:

- In 2014, the Supreme Court had for the first time recognised transgender persons as the ‘third gender’ and asked the Centre and the States to give them equal opportunities in education and employment.
- But now this reform, part of the Labour Ministry’s draft law to codify wages and aimed at protecting transgender workers from discrimination, has been shelved following reservations expressed by the Law Ministry.
- The Wages Code Bill was drafted under an exercise to rationalise the country’s 44 labour laws into four codes covering all the regulations pertaining to wages, industrial relations, social security and safety, and health and working conditions.

General Studies-03

Economy outlook still cloudy {Indian Economy}

News:

The government’s move this past week to publish economic data for the April to June quarter of this year needs a look.

Beyond News:

- The real growth of GDP, i.e. after removing the impact of inflation, was only 5.7%, much lower than expected.
- For the past six consecutive quarters, the growth rate has gone down steadily, from 9.2% at the end of the quarter ending March 2016, to 7.9%, 7.5%, 7.0%, 6.1% and now 5.7% at the end of the June quarter.
- This **steady declining trend** in the growth rate is all the more troublesome because the economy otherwise enjoys a rather conducive combination of macroeconomic parameters. Inflation has been moderate, and touched a low of 1.5% recently.

Current scenario:

- Both trade and fiscal deficits are moderate and manageable.
- The interest rate has been cut repeatedly over the past year and a half.
- Even oil prices, the bane of the Indian economy, have been stable and comfortably low.
- Finally, the monsoon has been normal. So despite these favourable macro factors, we have not managed to convert them into a higher growth rate.

Economic Survey:

- As cautioned in the Economic Survey tabled recently in Parliament, it looks as if the growth rate will be below 7% this fiscal year.
- That would be a potential loss of 1% growth, which we can legitimately aspire for.
- In nominal terms, one percentage less of growth translates into a loss of Rs. 1.5 lakh crore of national income.
- This is a notional loss, or is rather what might have been.
- It also signifies millions of jobs not created.

'Give proof of incentivising farmers' {Agriculture}

News:

- The National Green Tribunal has directed the governments of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to submit before it specific cases of small farmers being given incentives to desist them from burning crop residue in a bid to prevent air pollution.

Beyond News:

- A Bench headed by NGT chairman Justice Swatanter Kumar directed the four northern States to submit within three weeks at least 10 such cases.

- It asked the Additional Chief Secretary, Principal Secretaries and Special Secretary of Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to be present and assure the tribunal that within three weeks they would bring at least 10 cases, of preferably marginal farmers, and provide due incentive, help and means to them, so that they do not follow the traditional methodology of crop residue burning in the field s.
- The direction came after a group of farmers alleged that the Punjab government was not taking any effective steps on the issue except passing orders and not providing infrastructure or any kind of benefits to them.

Investing in the ecosystem {Environment}

- In April 2016, while inaugurating the third Asia ministerial conference on tiger conservation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to nature.
- Invoking the Buddha, he said, “The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness. It affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axe-man who destroys it.”
- Natural resources are a critical yet often ignored part of our country’s national infrastructure.
- Boasting 11% of the world’s floral and faunal species, India is one of the 17 most ecologically diverse countries.
- These biomes directly contribute **billions of dollars to the Indian economy**, annually.
- The financial value of India’s forests, for example, which encompass economic services such as timber and fuel wood, and ecological services such as carbon sequestration, is estimated to be \$1.7 trillion.

‘Earth Overshoot Day’, a figurative calendar date when humanity’s total annual resource consumption for the year overshoots the earth’s capacity to regenerate it, has advanced every year at an alarming rate. This year it was observed on August 2.

- As we approach the limits of natural capital stocks, we need to rethink the cascading effects that this would have on the economy, the environment and society.
- Scientists have identified nine earth system processes to have boundaries which mark the safe zones, beyond which there is a risk of ‘irreversible and abrupt environmental change’.

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General Studies-01

Who were the first settlers of India?

- When did our species, Homo sapiens, first set foot in India? There are two competing versions of the answer: let's call them the 'early version' and the 'late version'.

What is early version?

- The 'early version' says they arrived 74,000 to 120,000 years ago from Africa through the Arabian peninsula with Middle Stone Age tools such as scrapers and points that helped them hunt their prey, gather food, or make clothes.

What is late version?

- The 'late version' says they arrived much later, around 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, with upgraded technology such as microlithic (tiny stone) tools that might have been used to give sharp tips to arrows and spears.

Difference between early & late versions:

- A geological event separates the two versions: the supervolcanic eruption at Toba in Sumatra, Indonesia, about 74,000 years ago, dumped tonnes of ash all over South-east Asia and South Asia, causing much stress to all life in the region.
- The 'early version' says migrants reached India before Toba; the 'late version' says the opposite.

General Studies-02

BRICS declares Lashkar, Jaish as global terror groups

News:

- The Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping unequivocally named Pakistan-based groups — Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) — as terror organisations, removing a key irritant in ties between New Delhi and Beijing and stepping up the fight against global extremism.

Beyond News:

- A joint communiqué released at the BRICS summit expressed concern about the regional security situation and listed the Taliban, IS/Daesh, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP and Hizb-ut-Tahrir as sources of violence.
- Stressing that the formulation adopted at the ninth BRICS summit would strengthen the fight for banning terrorists and terror groups at the UN..

China, U.S. investing in Nepal

- Indicating the growing importance of the Himalayan region in global politics, a new round of competition has begun in Nepal among the great powers.
- Nepal concluded one of the biggest infrastructure-related deals with China even as reports came of a big grant of funds by the U.S.
- Agreement on a cement venture was between the Investment Board of Nepal and Hongshi-Shivam Cement, a Nepal-China venture.
- The deal is likely to boost the infrastructure sector in Nepal, which is drawing international investment.
- The timing of the agreement is important as it came just four days before Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara will hold talks in Beijing on Nepal's place in China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) scheme.

Sabre-rattling

News:

- North Korea tested what it claims was a “hydrogen bomb”, its sixth nuclear weapons test, cocking a snook at non-proliferation and international test ban laws, as well as at U.S. President Donald Trump.

Beyond News:

- North Korea’s adventurism continues unabated.
- Even as the tests drew global condemnation, this was clearly a response to Mr. Trump’s sabre-rattling rhetoric claiming that the U.S. would rain “fire and fury” over the country and implying that its nuclear weapons were “locked and loaded” to respond to any threat from North Korea.
- In response to the exacerbated tensions in the region, South Korea and Japan have significantly enhanced their defence capabilities, including spending on missile defence.
- South Korea’s new President Moon Jae-in, who is in favour of talks, has now accepted the U.S.’s missile defence system, THAAD, which is opposed locally by many South Koreans.

Why is significant?

This is not first test by Nkorea. Last one was on January 2016. But recent is significant because of :

-Closeness to actual expected output

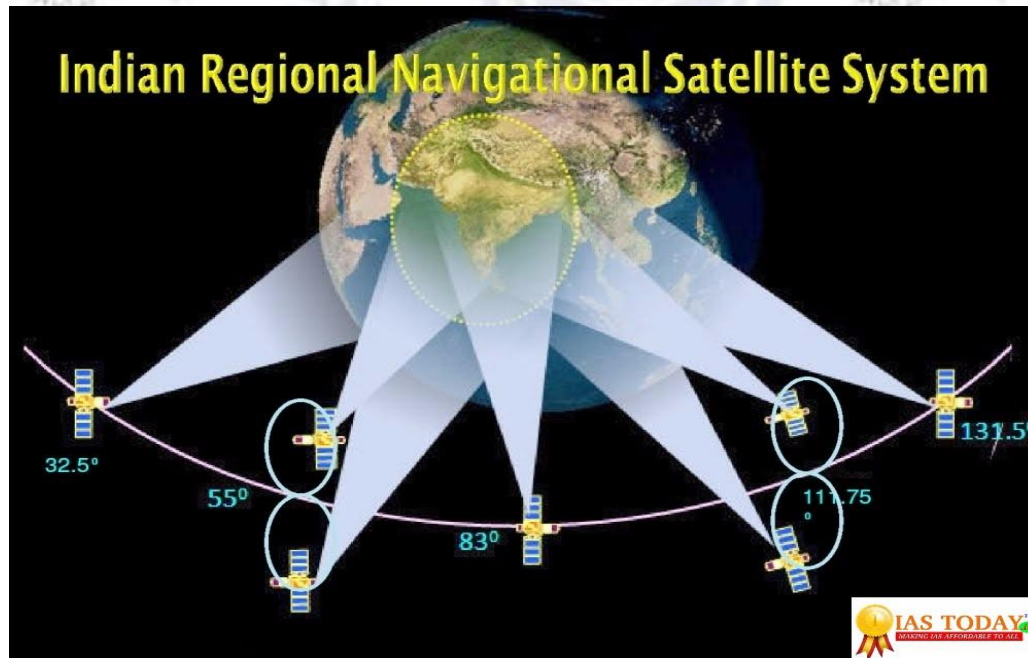
-Uncontrolled rapid progress in Nuclear field.

-Reading together with ballistic missiles reaching USA.

-Chance of total destruction .

-Worsening attitude of ruler.

Down but not out{Science and Technology}



- After 39 consecutive successful launches, the Indian Space Research Organisation had almost made it appear that launching satellites was indeed child's play when it used its workhorse rocket, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.
- But the PSLV, which has been placing satellites in their respective orbits for the past 24 years, faced a setback on August 31.
- The PSLV-C39 rocket carrying the eighth satellite of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) had a normal lift-off and flight events but ended in an unsuccessful mission.

Previous failures:

- This is just the second instance when the PSLV has had an unsuccessful mission in all of its 41 launches; the first setback was back in 1993.
- The failed mission serves as a reminder that utmost care and scrutiny are required before every single launch.
- The failure of the mission is particularly disheartening as the IRNSS-1H satellite was jointly assembled and tested by ISRO and a Bengaluru-based private company, the first time a single private company, rather than a consortium, was involved in building a satellite.

Previous achievements:

- Over the years, the PSLV has played a pivotal role in ISRO's programme, and this February it set a world record by launching 104 satellites in one go. This is especially so as the lift-off and the stage separation of the first and second stages, which are the most challenging parts of the mission, went off smoothly.

Significance:

- The IRNSS-1H satellite was launched as a replacement for the IRNSS-1A satellite, which became inoperational in terms of surveillance following the failure of all three atomic clocks.
- As only six of the seven satellites are operational, there are gaps in the navigation data sent by the IRNSS.
- With the failure of this mission, India will have to wait for some more time before the next mission to send a replacement for the IRNSS-1A satellite is ready.
- The IRNSS was created so that the country would not need to rely on American-based GPS data — the encrypted, accurate positioning and navigation information provided by the system will make Indian military operations self-reliant.

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General Studies-01

Journalist Gauri Lankesh shot dead.

News:

- Nationally renowned journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh, 55, known for her firebrand writing on social issues, was shot dead by unidentified assailants, right outside her residence in Rajarajeshwari Nagar in west Bengaluru.

Beyond News:

- Earlier she was punished for defaming a political leader (6 months & 10,000 fine).
- She got bail from higher court recently.
- 2 years ago, another writer MM kalburae killed in a similar way near his house.

- The police are analyzing footage from two CCTV cameras installed at her house and believed that they may hold vital clues. They said that she had neither complained to the police of any threats to her life nor sought security.

General Studies-02

Modi's 10 'noble commitments' for BRICS

News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday pitched for a coordinated action on counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and disaster management, as he suggested 10 “noble commitments” through which BRICS could achieve leadership in global transformation.

Beyond News:

- At the BRICS Emerging Markets and Developing Countries Dialogue organised by China on the sidelines of the 9th BRICS Summit as an outreach exercise, Mr. Modi said India had a long tradition of partnerships with fellow developing countries, while pursuing its own aspirations for growth.

10 Noble Commitments:



1. Creating a safer world by “organised and coordinated action on at least three issues: counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and disaster management.”
2. creating a greener world,
3. creating an enabled world,
4. creating an inclusive world,
5. creating a digital world,
6. creating a skilled world,
7. creating a healthier world,
8. creating an equitable world,
9. creating a connected world
10. creating a harmonious world.

Section 377: SC to start hearing

- The Supreme Court is likely to hear curative petitions against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a colonial-era provision criminalizing consensual sexual acts of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) adults in private.
- On February 2 last year, a Bench led by the then Chief Justice of India, T.S. Thakur, indicated that the petitions needed to be referred to a five-judge Constitution Bench for a possible back-to-roots, in-depth hearing.
- The three-judge Bench of CJI Thakur and Justices Anil R. Dave and J.S. Khehar gave credence to arguments that the threat imposed by Section 377 amounted to denial of the rights to privacy and dignity, and resulted in gross miscarriage of justice.

India, Egypt to bolster bilateral ties

News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and held talks on ways to strengthen bilateral ties.

Beyond News:

- Earlier, during his address at the BRICS Emerging Markets and Developing Countries Dialogue, which was attended by Egypt, Mexico, Guinea, Thailand and Tajikistan on China's invitation as part of “BRICS Plus” outreach exercise, Mr. Modi described these countries as “close and valued” partners of India.
- India and Egypt have a strong economic relationship and cooperation in areas of security and counter-terrorism.
- India is the sixth largest trading partner of Egypt. India's imports from Egypt were worth \$1.74 billion during the 2014-15. (With ANI inputs)

India to flag worry on pace of services talks at RCEP

News:

- At the forthcoming ministerial-level meeting on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) involving 16 Asia-Pacific nations, India will raise concerns regarding the 'slow' pace of negotiations on services trade liberalisation as opposed to 'higher priority' being accorded to commitments to open up goods trade in the region.

Beyond News:

- The mega-FTA is known in official parlance as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- It involves the 10-member ASEAN bloc and its six FTA partners including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
- India is learnt to be upset that other RCEP nations seem to be focused more on "extracting as much (binding commitments) as possible on eliminating tariffs to open up goods trade".

There is a Rohingya in all of us

- In the Supreme Court this week the Centre refused to revise its stand on deporting Rohingya immigrants in India.
- It was in effect adhering to its position taken on August 9, when the Minister of State for Home Affairs informed Parliament that 40,000 Rohingya were to be deported.
- With that, the idea of India, the India of democracy and hospitality disappeared in a single stroke. A dream of India disappeared in a single moment.
- The Government of India has returned to an idea of hard state, dropping its dreams of compassion, care and civility.

In many ways, the Rohingya represent "the last man" of international society that Gandhi talked about.

- They are the world's most persecuted minority.
- They are Muslims, belonging to the Sunni sect, scattered mainly over the Rakhine state of Myanmar.
- Harassed by the Myanmar Army and forced to serve as slave labour, they have also been systematically persecuted by the Buddhist majority.
- The persecution of the Rohingya also highlights the silence of Aung San Suu Kyi, destroying another myth of ethics and human rights.
- A woman whose campaign for human rights won her the Peace Nobel now stands embarrassingly silent in case her broader political strategies are affected.
- The dispensability of the Rohingya is clear and so is the callousness of the nation state.
- India can no longer criticise the West for being hostile to Syrian and Sudanese refugees.

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General Studies-02

Attacks by cow vigilantes must stop, SC tells States

News:

Attacks on innocents by cow vigilantes must stop, the Supreme Court said.

Beyond News:

- It ordered the States and the Union Territories to appoint nodal police officers in every district to crack down on such groups.
- BJP-ruled Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat accepted the apex court's suggestion to appoint dedicated officers in the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police to prevent 'gau rakshaks,' as they call themselves, from taking the law into their own hands or becoming a law unto themselves.

Context:

- A three-judge Bench of Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices Amitava Roy and A.M. Khanwilkar was hearing an intervention by Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Tushar Gandhi, about the lack of responsibility and accountability shown by the Centre and State administrations as vigilante groups wreaked havoc and resorted to murder in broad daylight in the name of the cow.
- The court directed the Centre to respond to a submission by senior advocate Indira Jaising, for Mr. Gandhi, that the government cannot wash its hands of its constitutional responsibility under Article 256.
- The Centre should reply to this argument in the spirit of "co-operative federalism."

Modi gives call to respect Myanmar's integrity

- Mr. Modi's first bilateral visit comes at a time when the Myanmar government, led by Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, is facing international pressure over the 1,25,000 Rohingya Muslims who have poured into Bangladesh in just two weeks after Myanmar's military launched a crackdown in Rakhine.

India's stand:

- Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said Rohingyas are illegal immigrants and will be deported from India.
- Mr. Rijiju had asserted that nobody should preach to India on the issue as the country has absorbed the maximum number of refugees in the world.
- 11 agreements were signed between the two sides in areas like maritime security, strengthening democratic institutions in Myanmar, health and information technology.
- Mr. Modi, in his statement, stressed on scaling up security cooperation, saying that being neighbours, the two countries have similar security concerns.

India, Japan to diversify defence ties

News:

India and Japan on Wednesday agreed on a range of initiatives to diversify and deepen their defence cooperation.

These include anti-submarine warfare, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and technological cooperation.

Beyond news:

- "The Ministers exchanged views and ideas with the aim of further strengthening defence and security cooperation under the framework of the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership,"
- On naval cooperation, the two Ministers noted the successful conclusion of the Malabar trilateral exercises including the U.S. in July.

'District-wise plan to help boost manufacturing'

News:

The new commerce and industry minister Suresh Prabhu on Wednesday outlined his priorities including firming up a district-wise industrial investment plan to help boost the share of manufacturing in the country's GDP, as well as improving India's economic diplomacy to spur exports and investments.

Beyond News:

- His priorities also include addressing challenges being faced by exporters owing to the Goods and Services Tax, integrating India's exports into the global supply chain, improving logistics to reduce transaction costs of exporters and bringing out an agricultural export policy.
- Recently held a meeting with 'Invest India' (the government's investment promotion and facilitation arm), and sought a district-wise plan for boosting investments in manufacturing and other sectors.
- There would also be a re-evaluation of the 'Make In India' initiative to find out more ways to revitalise manufacturing.
- Laying emphasis will not only on the 'Make in India' initiative but also on 'Design In India' for attracting investments.

Testing times in the Korean peninsula

News:

The sixth nuclear test by North Korea on Sunday has provoked a predictable chorus of condemnation and hand wringing in capitals around the world. The test was anticipated, given the shrill rhetoric accompanying North Korea's missile tests.

Beyond News:

- Measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, this test indicates an explosive yield of approximately 120 kilotons, six times bigger than the Hiroshima bomb.
- The North Koreans described it as a successful hydrogen bomb test and also released a photograph of 'Supreme Leader' Kim Jong-un posing with a hydrogen bomb.
- In August, reports had appeared in the U.S. based on intelligence estimates that North Korea had succeeded in producing a miniature warhead that could be mated with its missiles.

Background/history:

- This is 6th test by north korea in this category.
- Four of the six nuclear tests have been conducted after he took over in 2011; the earlier two were conducted in 2006 and 2009.
- Missile development began earlier but while Kim Jong-il conducted 16 missile tests during his rule from 1994 to 2011, his son and successor Kim Jong-un has undertaken more than 80 missile tests.
- Longer range and solid fuel missiles have been tested and North Korea's fissile material stockpile is enough for 25 devices.
- On July 4, North Korea tested Hwasong-14, described as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.
- Tested in a lofted trajectory, it reached a height of 2,800 km and travelled a distance of 933 km, implying a range of 6,500 km in a normal trajectory, bringing mainland America within range.
- It was described as a 'game changer', something that U.S. President Donald Trump had vowed he would prevent by doing 'whatever was necessary'.

General Studies-03

A case for universal medical care

- The purpose of medical education is to train medical personnel to handle the medical care needs of the country.
- It is obvious that any democratic government will try to elucidate what these needs are and tailor the education system to fulfil what is required.

Previous committees:

- Right from the Bhore Committee (1946) to the Mudaliar Committee (1962) and the Shrivastav Committee (1975) to the Bajaj Committee (1986) and including the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage (2011), the question of what type of medical personnel the country should train has been examined.
- All these committees are unanimous in their opinion that the country needs a large number of basic doctors. It is not sufficient to state what type of doctors should be trained.
- It is necessary also to define where they will be employed and who will pay the bills.

In short, medical education is the beginning of a process to produce a cadre of personnel who need to be deployed rationally to achieve the health goals of the country.

- The piecemeal approach to the problem of providing medical care in India, treating medical education as though it can be separated from medical employment, is responsible for the continuing crisis in medical services and admissions to medical colleges.
- Numerous commentators have remarked upon the skewed distribution of medical personnel with over 75% of doctors in urban areas where only a third of the people live.
- A large number of post-graduate doctors and super specialists are underemployed. The problem starts right at the stage of medical admission.

Taking WiFi public



- Recent moves by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to pilot public open WiFi hotspots through a nationwide model of pay as you go public data offices (PDOs) is a concerted bid to make cheap, fast, and reliable Internet affordable and accessible.
- According to the 'Public WiFi Open Pilot' document released by TRAI, the PDOs are encouraged to be the kind of spaces where "consumption of data for the average Indian becomes as common as consuming a cup of hot chai."

Targets:

- In its plans to swiftly facilitate and scale WiFi infrastructure, TRAI is drawing inspiration from the public call office (PCO) telephone booths that spawned a communication revolution in India.

- TRAI harbors similar aspirations for PDOs as infrastructural hubs of Internet-related services.
- It hopes to achieve it by championing an open architecture based WiFi Access Network Interface (WANI) that would allow any entity to easily set up a WiFi access point and sell Internet data in small denominations to interested customers.
- Adopting a sachet size strategy, WiFi Dabba, a start-up in Bengaluru, has already roped in several bakeries and chaiwallahs in the city to retail its pre-paid tokens ranging from Rs. 2/100 MB to Rs. 20/1GB.
- This makes it worthwhile to interrogate the kind of spaces where PDOs are currently being deployed and their claims to being 'public'.

Keep politics out of education

- The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) has come under huge criticism after the death of 17-year-old student S. Anitha from Tamil Nadu, who failed to clear the examination.

Arguments against:

- People against NEET argue that the exam imposes unreasonable demands on students from rural areas who follow a lighter syllabus.

Arguments for:

- Its supporters, on the other hand, say that NEET is a welcome push to improve the quality of school education in the State.

Interestingly, both sides agree that the government has a crucial role to play in education. It's just that one group wants the Centre to be in charge, while others prefer the State government. This consensus among both sides is alarming because the root cause of the present crisis, which has distressed thousands of students in the State, lies in the politicisation of education.

Possible solutions:

- The only real solution in the long run is to keep politicians out of the business of education.
- Colleges need to be freed from the control of the government, which will naturally also free them from its populist diktats.
- They should be allowed to choose the tests, or other criteria, based on which they will admit students. Such a vibrant market for education, marked by free competition, will improve both the quality and the accessibility of education to the poor.

Concerns:

- Many, fear that in the absence of a central regulator, colleges will admit students without sufficient screening, which in turn calls for an all-India exam such as NEET.
- This is untrue. Colleges which have their reputation on the line will care more than the government about the quality of students they admit, which will reflect in their screening methods.

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General Studies-02

U.S. backs sale of fighters to India

News:

- The Trump administration has told the U.S. Congress that it “strongly supports” the sale of F-18 and F-16 fighter planes to India.



Beyond news:

- These are built by American companies Boeing and Lockheed Martin respectively.
- Both companies have offered to assemble these planes in India, should New Delhi decide to buy them.
- U.S. lawmakers and bureaucrats, in general, have been enthusiastic supporters of proposals to sell these fighters to India, and are now presenting them as deals that could reduce America's trade deficit with India and create more jobs in America than they relocate — issues that are on top of Mr. Trump's agenda.

F-16 and Gripen

- Built by Swedish company Saab, are competing for the proposed single engine fighter acquisition for the IAF.
- French Rafale and Boeing's F/A-18 are competing for the contract for the Navy's twin engine fleet for its aircraft carriers.
- Lockheed Martin and Tata have formed a joint venture to make F-16, while Saab announced a JV with the Adani group last week for Gripen.

India keeps off 'Bali Declaration'

- In a show of solidarity with Myanmar, India refused to be a part of a declaration adopted at an international conference here in Indonesia as it carried "inappropriate" reference to the violence in Rakhine State from where 1,25,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh.
- An Indian Parliamentary delegation, led by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, dissociated itself from the 'Bali Declaration' adopted at the 'World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development' held here.
- This was in view of the fact that the declaration, which was to be adopted at the conclusion of the Forum, was not in line with the agreed global principles of 'sustainable development.
- India reiterated its stance that the purpose of convening the Parliamentary forum was to arrive at a mutual consensus for implementation of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which required inclusive and broad-based development processes.

State laws repugnant to IBC are void: SC

News:

- The Supreme Court held that, Provisions of State enactments which hinder the country's new bankruptcy law, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), meant to protect the interests of shareholders, creditors and workmen against entrenched managements unable to dig their way out of their debts, will be declared void.

Beyond News:

- Court also held that the erstwhile management of a company cannot represent it in court once insolvency resolution process has been admitted in the National Company Law Tribunal and the management transferred to an insolvency professional.
- The judgment dismissed an appeal by Innoventive Industries, represented by senior advocate A.M. Singhvi and advocate Shikhil Suri, against insolvency proceedings under the IBC by lender ICICI Bank.
- The company invoked the Maharashtra Relief Undertakings (Special Provisions Act) of 1958 against the insolvency resolution process under Section 7 of the IBC.

General Studies-03

Where Kerala's birds go for higher studies

- Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) campus is famous for its biodiversity. A four-year survey found that it is home to a third of the State's 509 bird species, suggesting that such areas could be important refugia for biodiversity.
- A refugium is an area where species can survive through a period of unfavourable conditions. The results, published in the Journal of Threatened Taxa, showed the presence of 172 bird species on the campus.
- These included the secretive Watercock, the threatened Oriental darter, and the migratory Common sandpiper. Two species endemic to the Western Ghats, the Malabar grey hornbill and the Crimson-backed sunbird, occur here.
- The campus also supports 11 species (including the Hill myna and the Indian peafowl) listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Demonetisation: now a proven failure?

Its a discussion with different views. Nothing New; All the points are covered in previous days.

For a robust data protection regime

News:

On July 31, the government set up a five-member committee chaired by former Supreme Court judge, Justice (retd.) B.N. Srikrishna, to draw up a draft Data Protection Bill.

Beyond News:

- The Bill, if made law, will be India's first exclusive statute providing protection to online users' personal data from breach by state and non-state players.
- Both the government and the court have agreed that this would be the "conceptual foundation for legislation protecting privacy" in the form of the new Data Protection Bill.

Salient features:

The new Bill would be based on five salient features:

1. technological neutrality and interoperability with international standards;
2. multi-dimensional privacy;
3. horizontal applicability to state and non-state entities;
4. conformity with privacy principles;
5. a co-regulatory enforcement regime.

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General Studies-01

Marriage most foul

- Case of 'Arab nikah', a type of Muslim marriage is known in Hyderabad under different names & forms.

Modus operandi

- Detailed conversations with multiple sources in the police and the community reveal the sad picture of how a group of dalals (touts) persuade vulnerable, impoverished families with three or four minor daughters with a story of how sheikhs hold the promise of altering their lives for the better.
- In some cases, they say this is a 'short-term marriage of convenience' in exchange for money.
- Once convinced, the family pressures their young daughters.
- Touts produce documents to show the girl as an adult and her signature is taken on blank bond papers, to come in useful later in the case of a divorce.

What happens to those girls:

- In most cases, the sheikh spends some time with the little girl and leaves for home after divorcing her.
- In the last seven years, over a dozen such child marriages to wealthy Arabs have been performed, at least two to three a year, most of these marriages lasting from a few days to a few months.
- Such marriages have become public largely on account of cases registered in five police station limits in Hyderabad.
- Many more may have escaped the radar, such as the case of a 17-year-old girl who had approached the Santoshnagar Police Station stating that her parents and touts were trying to perform her marriage for the sixth time in January 2014.
- Her five marriages in the previous two years had ended in divorce, she had said in her statement.

General Studies-02

MEA scuppers Kerala Minister's China visit

News:

- The one-word “denial” was communicated to the office of the Tourism Minister .The efforts of the State government to find out the reason for denial of permission to Mr. Surendran to attend the six-day event through Kerala’s Liaison Officer in New Delhi did not succeed.

Beyond News:

- The agenda of China to promote the “Belt and Road initiative” (Silk route) at the UNWTO platform had resulted in the denial of permission.
- The Joint Secretary, Tourism, Suman Billa, an IAS officer of Kerala on Central deputation, will represent the country.
- The Tourism Minister said the denial of permission was a ‘political decision” and he will petition Prime Minister.

Bali action puts India on other side of debate.

News:

- India’s decision to reject a joint statement by the World Parliamentary Forum in Indonesia, that included references to human rights in Myanmar in its ‘Bali declaration’, was a major show of support for the Suu Kyi government just hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ended his bilateral visit there.

Beyond News:

- The move, has put India on the other side of the Rohingya refugee debate from Myanmar’s other neighbours and countries in the region.
- Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were all among countries that joined the Bali declaration , that India disassociated from, according to Indonesian officials.

In their explanation, the Indian delegation headed by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan had said the reference to Myanmar had been “proposed at the eleventh hour” and was unjustified as the Parliamentary forum was meant to focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and not a particular country.

- In two separate paragraphs, the Bali Declaration that was eventually made by 49 countries, expressed concern about the recent violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, where the UN says at least 1,000 Rohingya Muslims have been killed, and 2,70,000 have fled, mainly to Bangladesh, in the past two weeks.

General Studies-03

Indicators that matter

News:

- The deaths of more than 70 children in one hospital in Gorakhpur and 49 in Farrukhabad, both in Uttar Pradesh recently, reflect the appalling state of public health in India.

Beyond News:

- It needs to be remembered that India’s public health-care sector has been ailing for decades.
- According to the latest Global Burden of Disease Study, India has the 154th rank, much below China, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
- Though ‘health’ is a State subject, States have been reducing their health-care spending efforts in relation to total government spending.

Statistics:

- In 2013-14, the per capita public expenditure on health in U.P was Rs. 452.
- The number of primary health centres, went down from 3,808 in 2002 to 3,497 in 2015.
- The gravity of the situation is understood better when we juxtapose this with the 25-30% increase in the State’s population during the same period.
- These statistics show that health has never been a political priority in the State.

Episodic justice

- The serial blasts that rocked Mumbai on March 12, 1993, occupy a special place in the history of **terrorism in India**.
- Planned abroad and executed with chilling precision in a dozen chosen spots, the crime altered the country's understanding and perceptions of security.
- it inflicted near-permanent damage to inter-community relations in society.
- It warranted resolute action to render justice to the 257 people who died and over 700 people injured in the blasts.
- The trial that began with the accused available at that time took about 14 years to end, with a hundred suspects being convicted.
- Misgivings, may turn around the fact that the trial took place under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, which allows confessions made to senior police officers to be admissible evidence.

'Income inequality in India at its highest level since 1922'

News:

- According to our benchmark estimates, the share of national income accruing to the top 1% income earners is now at its highest level since the creation of the Indian Income Tax [Act] in 1922.



Beyond News:

- The top 1% of earners captured less than 21% of total income in the late 1930s, before dropping to 6% in the early 1980s and rising to 22% today.
- Over the 1951-1980 period, the bottom 50% group captured 28% of total growth and incomes of this group grew faster than the average, while the top 0.1% incomes decreased.
- Over the 1980-2014 period, the situation was reversed; the top 0.1% of earners captured a higher share of total growth than the bottom 50% (12% versus 11%), while the top 1% received a higher share of total growth than the middle 40% (29% vs. 23%).
- These findings suggest that much can be done to promote more inclusive growth in India.
- Since the 1980s, India did not only open-up and liberalise its economy, it did it in a way that was very favorable to top income earners and capital owners.
- Top tax rates which were very high in the 1970s (up to 98%) decreased to 30% in the 1980s. Wages set by governments in government enterprises were liberalised after privatisations and the dispersion increased.
- On the other hand, growth at the bottom of the distribution was notably lower than average growth rates since the 1980s.

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General Studies-02

The disaster next door

- In a span of two weeks, almost 300,000 Rohingya have crossed over to Bangladesh from the northern Rakhine state in Myanmar.
- This puts Bangladesh under immense strain and compelling the refugees to find shelter in squalid, unsanitary camps scattered along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border.
- Excluded from the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups, the Rohingya have been harassed and hounded by the Myanmar authorities for decades.

Current scenario:

- The latest surge follows attacks on police posts by an extremist Rohingya group in late August and military action.
- While the Myanmar authorities claim that 400 lives have been lost, advocates cite double this number.
- The flight of the Rohingya has quickened in the past two weeks, but Rohingya refugees have been trying to find a home outside their native Rakhine for years now, braving human traffickers and fraught conditions on rickety, overcrowded boats.

Rohingyas & India:

- The Rohingya have sought refuge in India where they have been shunned, denied basic public services and deemed by authorities as 'the undesirables'.
- While the government has called them to be illegal immigrants and trespassers.

Indias Attitude towards refugees:

- Throughout its history, India has been generously accommodative towards refugees in the neighbourhood fleeing persecution, which includes Parsis, Tibetans, Afghans, Sri Lankan Tamils, and Bangladeshis during the war of liberation in 1971.
- India has prided itself in its tradition of Atithi Devo Bhava (the guest is equivalent to god).

Refugees go to SC against Article 35A

News:

A petition filed quoting nearly 3 lakh refugees had arrived from West Pakistan, but those settled in Jammu and Kashmir had been denied the rights guaranteed under Article 35A.

Beyond News:

- Some refugees from West Pakistan, who had migrated to India during Partition, have moved the Supreme Court challenging Article 35A of the Constitution relating to special rights and privileges of permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir.
- A Bench of Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud tagged the plea of the refugees, who are settled in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, with similar matters pending before it.
- The court had, on the request of the Jammu and Kashmir government, posted the matters challenging the Article for hearing after the Deepavali holidays.

Rohingya militants declare ceasefire

News:

- Rohingya militants in Myanmar, whose raids sparked an Army crackdown that has seen nearly 300,000 Muslim Rohingya flee to Bangladesh, declared a unilateral ceasefire but the government declared it would not negotiate with “terrorists”.

Beyond News:

- The UN said 2,94,000 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh since the militants’ attacks on Myanmar security forces in neighbouring Rakhine state on August 25 sparked a major military backlash.
- In addition to Rohingya, some 27,000 ethnic Rakhine Buddhists as well as Hindus have also fled violence in the northern part of Rakhine state.
- ARSA called on Myanmar to “reciprocate this humanitarian pause” in fighting.
- Myanmar, which has previously labelled ARSA as “terrorists”, appeared to reject the overture.
- Rohingya refugees claims that Army operations against ARSA led to mass killing of civilians and the burning of hundreds of villages, sending them across the border.

General Studies-03

‘NPAs: challenge is to avoid delays’

News:

- In the last week of August, RBI sent banks another list comprising 26 accounts, which they must resolve by December 31, failing which those cases have to be taken up for bankruptcy as well.

Beyond News:

- On June 13, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) came up with an advisory asking banks to file insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings for 12 loan accounts, in which banks had an exposure of more than Rs. 5,000 crore each.
- This constituted about 25% of the system's bad loans whose total is estimated at Rs. 7 lakh crore.
- The central bank had asked banks to file bankruptcy cases with the National Companies Law Tribunal (NCLT) within June 30.
- The RBI had also advised banks to make higher provisions for these accounts to be referred to the Tribunal under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).
- According to RBI deputy governor Viral Acharya, the move was intended to improve bank provision coverage ratios and to ensure that banks are fully protected against likely losses in the resolution process.

A forest policy on today's terms

This article claims that there is no official definition for the term 'forest' yet, despite ministries and government departments being named after it

- In order to couch the laudable goals of the 1988 National Forest Policy, in valid terms, we would first need to define the term 'forest'.
- Since a forest is a self-sown and self-regenerating community of plants that supports a community of creatures dependent on those plants, and on each other, for food and shelter.

India's Context:

- The 'self-sown' bit is important in the Indian context, since vast amounts of public money have been spent on 'planting forests', which is an oxymoron.
- Naturally there are no results to show for these 'planted forests'.
- Haryana has recently shown the way by practically stopping 'forest plantation' in favour of protecting and permitting existing vegetation to grow.

Primary aim of 1988 National Forest policy:

- "Maintenance of a healthy natural environment through preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the original natural ecosystems that have been adversely affected by over-exploitation of the forests and other natural resources of the country."

Search for quality

Issue:

- Credit rating agencies may be in for a tough ride as the Securities and Exchange Board of India continues to tighten the screws on them.

Whats new?

- The market regulator has released a consultation paper seeking feedback on a new set of rules drafted to improve "market efficiency" and enhance "the governance, accountability and functioning of credit rating agencies".



Key aspects in Consultation paper:

- Provisions to restrict cross-shareholding between rating agencies without regulatory approval to 10%,
- Increase the minimum net worth requirement for existing and new agencies from Rs. 5 crore to Rs. 50 crore.
- Mandates at least five years' experience for promoters of rating agencies.
- Proposed disclosure norms to improve investor awareness about the operations of rating agencies.

SEBI's proposed move to impose further quality requirements on rating agencies is unlikely to change things for the better, or raise further barriers.

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General Studies-02

Aviation, Home Ministries spar over regulating drones

Source: TH

News:

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has raised a few objections to the Home Ministry's bid to frame a new law to regulate unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), loosely referred to as drones.



Beyond News:

- The Home Ministry circulated a draft law to regulate the low-flying objects for inter-ministerial consultations.
- The regulations were circulated more than a year after the Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) put out draft guidelines for obtaining unique identification numbers for citizens to use drones in the public domain.

Issues Behind the move:

- Last month, operations at the IGI airport in Delhi were held up for two hours after an Air Asia pilot spotted a low-flying object while landing.
- Civil aviation officials informed the Home Ministry that as per International Civil Aviation Organisation guidelines, aircraft, whether manned or unmanned, does not affect its status as an aircraft and the safety oversight is the responsibility of the DGCA.
- Need for a new law arose after it received representations from a couple of industrial houses who wanted to use UAVs to monitor oil pipelines and coalfields.

India to further aid Afghan troops

Source: TH

- India agreed to enhance existing assistance to Afghan security forces, including in capacity building and training of Afghan soldiers in India, during a Partnership Council meeting.
- Afghanistan's Foreign Minister suggested a larger role for India in regional diplomacy.
- This was done during the second such meeting since the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in 2011, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said the strategic relationship is an "article of faith".
- The meeting was the first high-level engagement between India and Afghanistan since the announcement of a new 'South Asia policy for Afghanistan' by U.S. President Donald Trump.
- Trump recently vowed to take tough action against Pakistan if it fails to crackdown on terror groups, a policy that was welcomed in both Kabul and New Delhi.

[Op-Ed] New strategy, old game

Source: TH

This is all about trumps afghan policy which were covered several times in current affairs.Refer previous dates if you are new.

A textbook example of ethnic cleansing: UN rights head.

Source: TH

News:

- The situation in Myanmar is a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, the United Nations rights chief said on Monday, as the number of Rohingya Muslims fleeing the country for Bangladesh topped 3,00,000.

Beyond News:

- The UN warning came as it emerged the Dalai Lama had written to Aung San Suu Kyi urging her to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.
- UN human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein accused Myanmar of waging a “systematic attack” on the Rohingya and warned that “ethnic cleansing” seemed to be under way.

Some statistics:

- latest violence may have left more than 1,000 dead, most of them Rohingya.
- A further 27,000 ethnic Rakhine Buddhists as well as Hindus have also fled violence that has gripped northern Rakhine, where international aid programmes have been severely curtailed.

General Studies-03

Deadline for bullet train advanced by a year

Source: IE

News:

- The NDA government is aiming to advance the date of rolling out the first bullet train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai by about a year to August 2022.

Beyond News:

- The official deadline set in consultation with the Japanese side is 2023 but we would like to complete it by 2022.
- Reason is that ,The Prime Minister believes the country's engineers and workmen have it in them to complete the project a year in advance.

Background:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with visiting Japanese PM Shinzo Abe will lay the foundation stone of the project at a function in Ahmedabad on Thursday.
- The year 2022 coincides with 75 years of India's Independence and Modi is likely to mention that in his speech while declaring the intent of advancing the completion date.
- The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project is being financed through a "soft loan" from Japan International Cooperation Agency with around 80 per cent of the Rs 1.08 lakh crore total cost.
- The 50-year-period loan is being given to India at 0.1 per cent.

In the air

Source: TH

- This is all about the Centre's decision to put unruly air passengers on a no-fly list ranging from three months to a lifetime, depending upon the gravity of the offence.

Important provisions:

- The list will be maintained by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, and be put in the public domain.

- The quantum of punishment is to be decided by an internal committee of the airline in question based on evidence produced by both the airline and the passenger within 30 days, during which time the passenger would not be allowed to fly.
- No compensation will be offered to the passenger in case the allegations of the airline are proven wrong.
- Aggrieved passengers can appeal within 60 days to an appellate committee. Other airlines will not, however, be bound by one airline's no-fly ban.
- The no-fly list provisions look stringent, empowering airlines to impose strict penalties in case of alleged misbehavior or graver offences by passengers.

But in the case of India, these appear necessary in particular because of a widespread culture of entitlement, especially among 'VIPs', and growing incidents of air rage.

Background:

- The new rules are, specifically, a response to the recent case of unruly and violent behaviour by Shiv Sena MP Ravindra Gaikwad on board an Air India plane six months ago.
- There have been other recent incidents of 'VIP' misbehavior with airline staff — both in the air and on the ground.
- In Mr. Gaikwad's case, Air India had imposed a temporary no-fly ban, which was subsequently withdrawn after a grudging apology from him.
- Existing guidelines and rules on unruly behavior did not have provisions for a no-fly ban, necessitating these rules.

General Studies-04

Death of a student

Source: IE

News:

- Ryan International School, Gurgaon, failed to follow several safety guidelines issued by the city's police department which resulted in death of seven-year-old was killed within the precincts of an upmarket Gurgaon school.

Core issue:

- The bus conductor who allegedly murdered Thakur, used the same washroom as the students. This is in clear violation of the Gurgaon Police's Guidelines for Safety of Children in Schools.
- It allowed the alleged murderer to bring a knife into the school premises.

Guidelines:

- "For bus drivers and conductors, whether employed by the school or contracted out, access area must be limited to just the bus area, and specific instructions must be given to them on which areas are out of bound for them".

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General Studies-02

'Cooling off' period in Hindu divorce can go: SC

News:

Hindu couples who have mutually agreed to separate need not wait anymore for the mandatory "cooling off" period of six months before divorce, the Supreme Court held on Tuesday.

What is cool off period:

- Earlier, when a couple moves a court of law for divorce under the Hindu Marriage Act, they have to wait for a minimum period of six months.
- Divorce by mutual consent was introduced as an amendment to the Hindu Marriage Act in 1976.
- The waiting period under Section 13B was mandated to prevent couples from taking any hasty decision to end their marriage.

Important aspects of verdict:

- The court held that the waiting period should be done away with in cases where there is no way to save the marriage and all efforts at mediation and conciliation have run their course; where parties have genuinely settled their differences including alimony, custody of child, etc, between themselves; and already a year and a half has passed since their first motion for separation.
- The application for waiver of waiting period can be filed in court within a week of their first motion for separation.
- The proceedings can be done through video-conferencing.

Kerala priest freed 1 year after his kidnap in Yemen.

Nb:Its not much important as such.

News:

- Father Tom Uzhunnalil, a priest from Kottayam in Kerala who was kidnapped by Yemeni militants from a charity home in Aden, has been released, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj announced.

Beyond News:

- MEA proclaimed efforts from government towards the release. But MEA declined to add any details of the priest's release or condition at present.
- Official statement from the Omani government said that the priest was recovering in Muscat after being rescued, as per the request of the Vatican.

[Op Ed]Slow creep

- This is all about the issues of daily petrol price variation scheme.



It says that:

- Normally there are **anger & criticism** to government when petrol & diesel price hikes.
- But in new scheme, Even though Petrol and diesel prices are increasing slowly over the last three months it is getting un noticed.
- he price of petrol in Delhi, for instance, has **cumulatively increased by almost Rs. 5** since the introduction of the daily pricing policy on June 16 this year.
- Daily pricing is now being seen by many as a ploy to increase prices while allowing the government to escape any political backlash.

Some facts to prove the idea:

- Based on average cost of gasoline and foreign exchange rate, it costs Rs 28.75 to produce a liter of petrol at refineries. But it reach customers above Rs.70
- In 2012, when India purchased a barrel of crude for around \$120, a litre of petrol was sold at around Rs. 65 in retail fuel stations.
- Today, when the Indian crude basket price has dropped to around \$50, the retail price of petrol is well over the Rs. 70 mark.

In fact, about half the price paid by the Indian end-consumer for petrol goes towards paying these taxes.

Who is actually benefited:

- The government's excise duty collection, for instance, has more than doubled during the period 2014-17, from Rs. 99,184 crore to Rs. 2,42,691 crore.
- This suggests quite clearly that the government, not the consumer, has been the biggest beneficiary of lower crude oil prices since 2014.

Time for course correction

News:

- About a week ago, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) released the estimates of the gross domestic product (GDP) for the first quarter (April-June) of 2017-18.

Important statistics:

The numbers showed that in Q1 of 2017-18, GDP grew by 5.7%.

Gross value added (GVA) at basic prices grew by 5.6%.

Whichever measure you take, the growth rate has fallen below 6%.

In the corresponding quarter of the previous year, GDP grew at 7.9% and GVA at 7.6%.

What accounts for the decline in growth rate by almost 2 percentage points?

1. Demonetization must have had a negative impact.
2. The destocking of goods which might have happened prior to the introduction of goods and services tax (GST) must have also had a negative impact.

However, it might be inappropriate to attribute the entire decline of 2 percentage points to the two factors.

- The most disappointing aspect of the first quarter numbers is the steep fall in the growth rate of manufacturing to 1.2%.
- Because of the good monsoon, agriculture will do better.

- Since agricultural growth rate last year was also good, the increase may not be that much.

An alliance on track

News:

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad this week.

Beyond News:

- The bilateral agenda will range from issues of maritime security to nuclear energy and trade.
- The centrepiece of their summitry will be the inauguration of India's first high-speed rail corridor from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, to be developed using Japanese technology and financing.
- The image of the platypus-snouted blue and white Shinkansen streaking past a snow-topped Mount Fuji has become as synonymous with Japan as sushi.

Background:

- Since October 1964, when the first bullet trains collapsed the time it took to cover the 552 km between Tokyo and the commercial centre of Osaka to four hours (today it is down to 2 hours, 22 minutes).
- The Shinkansen has emerged as the symbol of Japan's post-World War II ascent to economic superpowerdom.
- It encapsulates the archipelago's engineering might and almost preternatural standards of safety and punctuality.
- Japan's Shinkansen have carried over 10 billion passengers to date, without a single accident or casualty and an average delay of less than one minute.

Significance for japan:

- The Mumbai-Ahmedabad contract has been hard-won.
- It entails a loan worth \$12 billion, at 0.1% interest, to be paid back over 50 years, taking care of over 80% of the project's estimated costs.
- Japan will also supplement the financing with a generous package of technical assistance and training.

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General Studies-02

Equality for what?

- Hegel suggests that poverty is a social phenomenon.

Hegal Arguments:

1. Society is complicit in the creation and recreation of poverty. Destitution, that is, is the outcome of a skewed economy.
2. Poverty breeds unfortunate consequences, such as suffering, which seriously demoralizes human beings.
3. The existence of large numbers of the poor pose a direct threat to the social order, simply because the poor are (justly) resentful of their exclusion from the benefits of society.

Official references:

- In a paper aptly titled ‘Indian income inequality, 1922-2014: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?’, they conclude that income inequality in India is at the highest level since 1922, when the country’s income tax law was conceived, and that the top 1% earners corner 22% of income.
- There is more to the proposition that some persons are poor beyond belief, and others are rich beyond belief in India.

There is urgent need, in the face of government inaction and insensitivity towards people trapped in inequality as a social relation to invoke the collective conscience of Indian citizens.

What if right to equality violated:

- If the right violated, citizens should be exercised or agitated about this violation.
- But for this to occur, for society to feel deeply about the right on offer, we have to incorporate the right to equality into political thinking, into our values, and into political vocabularies.
- The project requires the harnessing of creative imagination and courage on the one hand, and careful reasoning, persuasion, and dialogue on the other.
- The task also demands the investment of rather high degrees of energy and time.

[Op-Ed] Sub nationalism not a threat

- Along with the rhetoric of nationalism, India is also witnessing the re-emergence of subnationalism as a political idea.
- This is emerging most strongly from **Karnataka**, which is neither ruled by a regional party nor has shown any significant separatist or secessionist tendencies in the past.

Core issues:

- The key issue of contention is regarding a separate State flag for Karnataka.

Karnataka has had an unofficial yellow-and-red flag for almost 50 years.

The government is now considering adopting an official State flag.

- The other issue is the protest against the imposition of Hindi, most notably on the signboards of Namma Metro stations in Bengaluru.

Political stand:

- Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has strongly come out in support of the State flag and against the use of Hindi signboards in the Metro.
- Even if the narrative around Kannadiga pride is impelled by the government with an eye on the upcoming Assembly polls, the larger questions around identity it raises cannot be ignored.
- The counter-narrative hence brings into question the place of linguistic and cultural rights in a plural society with a federal Constitution.

Indo-Russian war games in Oct.

News:

- India and Russia have begun discussions to work out the modalities for their first tri-service military exercise to be held in October.
-



Why its important?

- It will be India's first bilateral military exercise with any country involving all three services.
- In April, the two countries decided to upgrade Indra from an individual service exercise into an integrated tri-service.

Beyond News:

- The Army will send about 350 soldiers from the infantry, artillery and armoured streams.
 - While the soldiers will take with them infantry weapons, ammunition, radio sets and related equipment, the issue of taking T-72 tanks and other heavy equipment will be decided in the FPC.
 - The Navy is fielding two ships, a stealth frigate, INS Satpura , and an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) corvette, INS Kadmatt , along with two on-board helicopters.
 - The naval component is likely to include an ASW component, the details of which are awaited.
 - The Air Force, which flies a large number of Russian aircraft, is likely to share fighter jets of the host.
-

General Studies-03

Income limit raised for creamy layer

News:

- The 'creamy layer' ceiling for OBC reservation has been raised to Rs. 8 lakh per year, according to an official order issued on Wednesday.

Beyond News:

- In 1993, the limit was kept at Rs. 1 lakh.
- It was raised thrice — to Rs. 2.5 lakh in 2004, Rs. 4.5 lakh in 2008 and Rs. 6 lakh in 2013.

India has 'narrow' pool of mustard varieties

News:

Slamming activists for spreading “misinformation” on genetically-modified (GM) mustard, India’s premier association of agricultural scientists has said that India has a “narrow” pool of mustard varieties.

Beyond News:

- India had over 9,000 varieties of mustard and was the “centre of origin and diversity (of mustard)” was among the key arguments made by Prashant Bhushan in the Supreme Court, as part of a petition by activist Aruna Rodrigues.
- Earlier a Supreme Court-appointed Technical Advisory Committee had also recommended a stay on GM mustard citing the breadth of India’s genetic diversity in mustard and that introducing it would lead to “irreversible” contamination.
- In June, a 230-member quorum of the NAAS had passed a resolution unanimously supporting the commercial release of Dhara Mustard Hybrid 11 (DMH-11), a transgenic food crop that had been cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) for commercial release.

Why its important?

- Unlike in wheat, for instance, where the male and female can be crossed to make a wide genetic range of hybrid seeds, mustard is a self-pollinating plant that isn't amenable to such crossings.
- DMH-11 uses a combination of genes from a soil bacterium that makes mustard amenable to hybridisation.
- The NAAS also refuted claims that non-GM varieties of rapeseed (a sister species of mustard and an oilseed) in Europe out-yielded GM varieties grown in Canada.
- In a rejoinder, a coalition of activists slammed the NAAS report and accused it of being a "public relations" agent.

An elusive recovery

News:

- Growth in industrial output, according to the Index of Industrial Production released by the Central Statistics Office on Tuesday, has slumped to 1.2% in July as against a much higher rate of 4.5% recorded during the same month last year.

Beyond News:

- July's industrial output growth is still higher than the growth rate of -0.2% witnessed in June.
- Retail price inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, rose to a five-month high of 3.36% in August as compared to 2.36% in July.
- These numbers follow the slowdown reported earlier this month in the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) during the first quarter of 2017-18.

RBI is not comfortable with bitcoins.

News:

The Reserve Bank is uncomfortable with "non-fiat" cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, the central bank's executive director Sudarshan Sen said on Wednesday.



cryptocurrency:

- Bitcoins for example. That's a private cryptocurrency.
- The fiat cryptocurrency was a digital currency which would be issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in place of the physical one at present, adding that the central bank was studying this aspect at present.
- The RBI has been repeatedly cautioning everyone about the usage of cryptocurrencies, flagging a slew of concerns.
- It had stated that Bitcoins posed potential risks.

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General Studies-02

N. Korea: Japan draws in India

News:

- Displaying strategic convergence, India and Japan on Thursday asked North Korea to shut down its nuclear and missile programmes.



Beyond News:

- Both sides also hinted at Pakistan's past involvement with North Korean nuclear and missile programmes

- Sought accountability of “all parties” who helped Pyongyang acquire nuclear technology even as Japan promised to help India deal with cross-border terrorism.
- It highlights entry of India into the escalating crisis over North Korean nuclear tests, reflects India’s growing “aspiration” to play a role befitting New Delhi’s rising status.
- Both sides also pledged to mount pressure on North Korea.
- A joint statement issued after the summit sought the implementation of Resolution 1267 of the UN Security Council to counter cross-border terrorism.

CBSE issues new safety guidelines

News:

After two incidents of gruesome crimes against children were reported in the National Capital Region last week, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has issued new safety and security guidelines for all schools.

Background:

- On September 8, a seven-year-old boy was found murdered inside a school in Gurugram
- The next day a five-year-old girl was raped in a school in east Delhi.

Instructions by CBSE:

- Safety audits of schools must be done by their respective local police stations,
- installation of CCTV cameras at all vulnerable areas inside schools
- limiting the entry of outsiders.
- Ensure that support staff was employed only from authorised agencies and proper records are maintained.
- Schools must constitute separate committees for redressal of grievances of the public, staff, parents and students.
- Schools need to constitute an internal complaints committee for complaints regarding sexual harassment and committees under Protection of Children from Sexual Offence Act, 2012.

The schools will face de-recognition if they don't follow the guidelines.

Japan calls for 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'

News:

- Japan's diplomacy with India during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's latest visit, highlighted the country's intensifying focus on the Indo-Pacific region and Tokyo's evolving foreign policy.

Beyond News:

- "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" that aims to prepare Japan to deal with the fast changing global and regional order and threats from China and North Korea.
- The strategy aims to create a "free and open" Asia-Pacific region which connects parts of eastern Africa, south Asia and southeast Asia with the western Pacific Ocean region and Japan.
- Connectivity between Asia and Africa through a free and open Indo-Pacific, is expected to support stability and prosperity of the region as a whole.
- Interestingly, a joint statement issued at the end of the visit did not mention 'South China Sea'.

General Studies-03

[Op-Ed]Creating corridors of certainty

- India has more than 60% of the global wild tiger population.



Ranthambore tiger reserve

- Ranthambore in Rajasthan is arguably India's most well-known tiger reserve, aglow with bold tigers posing for the camera.
- It has a fierce conservation ethic, a success story with few parallels.
- It is estimated that there are over 60 tigers in this relatively small tiger reserve.
- A genetic study suggests that Ranthambore's tigers suffer from low genetic diversity and isolation.
- The Ranthambore population has the least genetic diversity and may suffer from isolation.

Mains issues in Ranthambore:

- There are two issues here: populations require genetic flow to remain robust; securing healthy tiger numbers are not enough for tiger health. Second, we are in an age of active management. When tigers go extinct in an area, they are flown in or carried in from other areas — as was done in the case of Panna (Madhya Pradesh) and Sariska (Rajasthan).
- It appears, prima facie, that the problem is solved.

Tigers in india:

- Based on a study of samples from tiger post-mortems and collection from live tigers, a new study, has found that India has three distinct and genetically connected tiger populations.
- These are in: south India; central India, the Terai and north-east India; and in Ranthambore.
- Rajasthan recently created the Mukundra tiger reserve for Ranthambore's 'spillover' tigers.
- Apart from moving tigers with human intervention, the corridor between the two reserves should be strengthened too.
- Other States need to start restoring corridors or stepping stones between forests.

The new highways

Current scenario:

- As acquisition of land for national and State highways becomes scarce and the cost of construction of roads, flyovers and bridges goes up, the government is now exploring using water as a means of public transportation.
- With the enactment of the National Waterways Act, 2016, the total number of national waterways is now 111.

- But providing infrastructure such as jetties, terminals, and navigational channels continues to pose a challenge.

Amendments as a Solution:

- The government has proposed an amendment to the Central Road Fund Act, 2000.
- The Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017 implants 'national waterways' into the 2000 Act.
- The Bill proposes using a part of the cess collected on high-speed diesel and petrol for the upkeep of the national and State highways for maintaining the infrastructure of the national waterways.
- It has proposed to provide 2.5% of the cess on high-speed diesel and petrol for the development and maintenance of national waterways.
- This would accelerate the development of national waterways by utilizing the funds generated by way of cess.
- It also offers incentives and certainty for the private sector to invest in the inland waterways transport sector.

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General Studies-02

Aadhaar to be linked to driving licence

News:

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad announced that after linking Aadhaar to PAN cards, the Union government would now link it with driving licences as well.

Aadhar Driving licence Linking



Beyond news:

- PAN aadhar Linking claims to have prevented black money & money laundering.
- New attempt aims to reduce chances of having multiple driving licence by individuals.
- Aadhaar is considered as a safe and secure tool for good governance and empowerment.

‘Anti-superstition Bill will be tabled in winter session’

News:

- A watered-down and much-delayed anti-superstition Bill is likely to be introduced during the winter session of the State legislature in November-December in Belagavi.

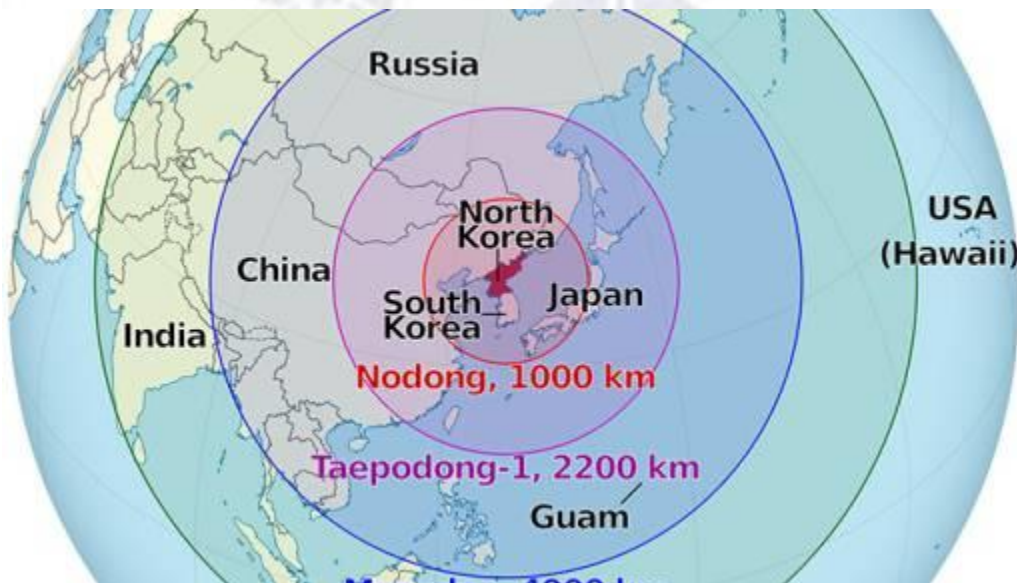
Beyond News:

- Following protests, the authorities have amended the intended Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill.

N. Korea fires missile over Japan

News:

- North Korea fired a ballistic missile over Japan and into the Pacific, responding to new UN sanctions with its furthest-ever missile flight in what analysts called a demonstration of its ability to target Guam.



Beyond News:

- The launch, from near Pyongyang, came after the United Nations Security Council imposed an eighth set of measures on the isolated country following its sixth nuclear test earlier this month.
- The blast was by far its largest to date and Pyongyang said it was a hydrogen bomb small enough to fit onto a missile.

Official explanations:

- The **U.S. Pacific Command** confirmed that Friday's rocket was an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) and said it did not pose a threat to North America or to the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam, which Pyongyang has threatened to bracket with "enveloping fire."
- **Seoul's Defence Ministry** said it probably travelled around 3,700 km and reached a maximum altitude of 770 km.

General Studies-03

ISRO to be back with launches in Nov.-Dec.

News:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation expects to resume launch of satellites in a couple of months once its failure analysis committee releases its report.

Beyond News:

- The committee is conducting tests on why the PSLV-C39 mission of August 31 failed to release a back-up navigation satellite into space.
- According to ISRO Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar - Antrix Corporation had made the PSLV rocket a globally famous and reliable space launch vehicle; it had lifted more than 200 small foreign satellites over years. It could now help Indian industry gain credibility in the \$339 billion world space market.
- The market had evolved fast to challenge established government-run agencies.

NASA's Cassini spacecraft ends 20-year journey.

News:

- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's \$3.9-billion Cassini spacecraft ended its 20-year-long ground-breaking journey.



Beyond News:

- No spacecraft has ever ventured so close to the planet before.
- The journey reached an end by a fiery plunge into the Saturn's crushing atmosphere, beaming back never-before-seen images of the ringed planet and its mysterious moons until the last moment.
- Operators deliberately made Cassini dive into the gas giant to ensure that the planet's moons remain pristine for future exploration.

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General Studies-02

Narmada dam built despite attempts to stop it- PM

News:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday dedicated the Narmada dam project to the nation on his birthday, calling it Gujarat's lifeline that has been completed despite many hurdles.

Beyond News:

- Inaugurating the dam for which the foundation was laid by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr. Modi recalled the contribution of Sardar Patel, in whose memory the project has been named, and B.R. Ambedkar, who had propagated the benefits of irrigation.
- There was, however, no mention of Jawaharlal Nehru in his speech at Dabhoi, 55 km from the dam site, in Vadodara.

Why its important:

- The Narmada is the second biggest concrete gravity dam by volume after the Grand Coulee Dam in the U.S. and has faced many hurdles, including the World Bank's refusal to fund it on grounds of environmental damage and displacement of tribal people in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

India under U.S. pressure to scale down ties with North Korea

- U.S. officials have asked India to cut down ties with Pyongyang as war clouds gathered over the Korean peninsula following the North Korean missile tests.
- American pressure on the issue has been rising over the last few months even as India joined Japan last week in describing North Korea as a common threat.
- An India-Japan joint statement issued at the end of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit last week called upon North Korea to roll back its nuclear and missile programmes.

Confrontational path

- Bangladesh's Parliament raised the stakes in a stand-off against the judiciary last week by passing a unanimous resolution to take "proper legal steps" over a Supreme Court verdict nullifying the Constitution's 16th amendment.

What is 16th amendment?

- The amendment, passed in 2014, had empowered Parliament to remove judges of the Supreme Court found incompetent or guilty of misconduct, based on a two-thirds majority.
- This amendment had in a way restored the power of Parliament to impeach judges and was in line with the original Constitution of 1972.

Supreme courts stand:

- The Supreme Court had in July this year scrapped the amendment, suggesting that it was antithetical to the independence of the judiciary and restored the Supreme Judicial Council, headed by the Chief Justice, with powers to remove errant judges.
- The Parliament, dominated by the Awami League, not only resolved to reverse the Supreme Court's decision, but also found fault with Chief Justice S.K. Sinha's comments in this regard.

'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' has helped sex ratio'

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said

- the 'Beti Bachao—Beti Padhao' campaign has helped improve the State's sex ratio which crossed the 950 girls per 1,000 boys mark.

- “The sex ratios in districts such as Sonipat and Panipat were quite low, but now it has crossed the mark of 950 girls per 1,000 boys,”

U.S. not to soften stance on Paris pact

- The White House pushed back at a European suggestion it was softening its stance on the Paris climate accord, insisting Washington will withdraw from the agreement unless it can re-enter on more favorable terms.
- The remark came as Environment Ministers from some 30 countries gathered in Montreal seeking headway on the Paris climate accord, which President Donald Trump had pulled out of in June.
- The White House insisted that the U.S. would withdraw from the Paris climate accord without more favorable terms.

Irrationalism in city planning

News:

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has reportedly sought further improvements to the design by the international architectural firm Foster + Partners for the Amaravati start-up area.



Beyond News:

- There are two issues in the Amaravati city project – one of professional integrity and the other of public interest.
- Both are important, and the reason that they are interlinked in this article is that the lack of the former has made possible irresponsible and improper administrative action of major public expense and serious consequence.
- To summarise the murky happenings of the Amaravati city project: In March 2016, Maki and Associates were declared as winners of an invited competition for the Amaravati capital complex.
- The competition was adjudged by a jury of professionals but the jury's report on shortcomings or strengths of the winning design has not been made public.
- Complaining to the Council of Architecture (CoA) in December 2016, the principal architect of the firm, Fumihiko Maki, a Pritzker Architecture Prize winner, questioned the motivations of the Andhra Pradesh government committee, alleging unfair practice, a lack of transparency and his firm's 'fraudulent' removal from the project.

General Studies-03

Modi predicts 'green revolution' in his home State

News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who inaugurated the Sardar Sarovar Dam on Sunday, said that with the project's completion, Gujarat would see a green revolution as farmers in the parched northern and Saurashtra regions would have their lands irrigated.

Beyond News:

- Though the dam has been completed in Narmada district of south Gujarat, the massive and sprawling canal network remains woefully incomplete.
- Its potential benefits to the farmers will, therefore, not be realised for many years, till the canal network is in place.
- The project was delayed by a strong movement by the Narmada Bachao Andolan, led by social activist Medha Patkar, who opposed the dam on the ground that it displaced thousands of families in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where thousands of hectares of forest land was submerged.
- A sustained campaign by the activists had also led to the World Bank's withdrawal from funding the multi-purpose project, which is often described as the lifeline of drought-prone Gujarat.

Time for caution

News:

- Last week, the current account deficit (CAD) widened to a four-year high of \$14.3 billion in the first quarter of the current financial year, standing at 2.4% of gross domestic product, compared to 0.1% last year.

Beyond News:

- The widening CAD was driven by a greater increase in merchandise imports than exports.
- Compared to last year, net FDI almost doubled to \$7.2 billion in the first quarter, while net portfolio investment jumped about six times to \$12.5 billion.
- Forex reserves were at an all-time high of \$400.7 billion for the week ending September 8, while the rupee has appreciated by over 6% against the dollar this year.
- Low global oil prices over the last two years have also helped contain a good portion of its import bills.
- Further, India's total external debt declined by 2.7% during the financial year 2016-17, standing at \$471.9 billion, driven by a fall in external commercial borrowings and deposits by non-resident Indians.
- According to a report by India Ratings & Research earlier this year, a 10% depreciation of the rupee combined with a 50 basis point interest rate hike can severely affect most Indian borrowers.
- It added that as much as 65% of foreign debt exposure of Indian companies may be unhedged.
- As the world looks to withdraw from an era of historically low interest rates, it would be wise for India's policymakers to be ready with an emergency plan to tackle a period of significant volatility.

GST Composition Scheme registration open till Sept. 30

- The Goods and Services Tax Network announced the opening of the registration window for the Composition Scheme again till September 30.
- Under the Scheme, small taxpayers with a turnover of Rs. 75 lakh can file quarterly returns instead of the normal monthly returns.

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General Studies-02

Re imagining the OBC quota

News:

- Regardless of the political impulse that led the government to announce creation of a committee to look into sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes (OBC), it provides an opening to ensure social justice in an efficient manner.



Beyond News:

- The biggest challenge India faces is that the groups perceived to be disadvantaged consist of a very large segment of Indian society, while public policies are highly limited in scope.

Some illustrative statistics are eye-opening:

- The National Sample Survey (NSS) data from 2011-12 show that about 19% of the sample claims to be Dalit, 9% Adivasi, and 44% OBC.
- While some of these claims may be aspirational rather than real, this totals a whopping 72%. Among the population aged 25-49, less than 7% have a college degree.
- By most estimates, less than 3% of the whole population is employed in government and public-sector jobs. A vast proportion of the population eligible for reservations must still compete for a tiny number of reserved and non-reserved category jobs.
- While the Supreme Court would not allow reservations to exceed 50%, frankly it does not matter.
- Whether available public sector jobs cover 1.5% of the population or 3%, these will only offer opportunities to a minuscule fraction of individuals in reserved categories.
- Hence, the only viable option is to reduce the size of the eligible population, possibly along the lines of sub-categorization proposed by the government.

The encephalitis challenge

- It is a fact that U.P. has a problem: many of the children who died were being treated for acute encephalitis syndrome (AES), including Japanese encephalitis (JE).
- The BRD Medical College, with around 800 beds, provides tertiary health-care services to Gorakhpur and adjoining districts.
- It is the only tertiary hospital within a 300-km radius.

Background:

- On September 4, 2016, it was reported that 224 children had died of encephalitis in the hospital that year.
- This hardly made national news.
- The shocking fact is that if there was no alleged disruption of oxygen supply, the national media and policy experts would not be discussing Gorakhpur now.

India, Japan and U.S. present common front

News:

- At a trilateral meeting in New York on Monday, Foreign Ministers of India, Japan and the U.S. endorsed one another's position on key strategic issues in Asia.

Beyond News:

- While India stood with the U.S. and Japan on the question of North Korea's nuclear posture, it received support from the two on its position on the China-led One Belt, One Road project, a press release indicated.
- India's Permanent Representative to the U.S. Syed Akbaruddin said climate change, terrorism, people-centric migration and peacekeeping will among the focus areas for India this year.

Gauging the status quo

- The recent BRICS Summit in Xiamen (China) suggests that BRICS may be going the way of quite a few other organisations.
- Little of consequence appears to have happened, or to have emerged, from the latest summit.
- *Considering that this meeting was taking place in the shadow of significant global events, notably North Korea's nuclear provocations and the U.S. response, other serious developments in Asia, including Afghanistan and West Asia, apart from issues of consequence elsewhere, the absence of any reference to these events in the Summit Declaration suggests that BRICS is clearly out of sync with current realities.*
- Absence of any mention of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — even though Beijing sets such great store by it — is one.

General Studies-03

Questions about the GST cess

News:

- As part of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms, a new levy called the GST Compensation Cess has been introduced to make good apprehended losses to States in the first five years of GST implementation.

Beyond News:

- The Cess has been introduced through the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 and is levied on inter- and intra-State supply of notified goods such as aerated drinks, coal, tobacco, automobiles and the ambiguous category of 'other supplies'.
- The proceeds of the cess will be distributed to loss-incurring States on the basis of a prescribed formula.
- The schedule to the Act mentions the maximum rates of the cess, which extend to 290%.

What is cess?

- A cess is a levy for a specific purpose.
- The quintessential feature of a cess is that it is levied for a 'specific purpose' and the proceeds are earmarked as such.
- Under Article 270 of the Constitution, a cess tax has special privilege as the proceeds can be retained exclusively by the Union and need not be shared with States.
- The object of granting this special status is to ensure expenditure for a specific purpose, as is evident from the Fourth Finance Commission Report.

How robots can save an ageing world

- Many doomsayers have argued that an ageing population poses a huge threat to economic growth.
- They believe that rich countries in the West are headed towards secular stagnation as the size of their young, working-age population shrinks rapidly due to low fertility rates.
- On the other hand, countries like China and India are predicted to enjoy much higher economic growth in the coming decades as more young people get added to their workforce due to favourable demographics.

Worries about ageing world:

The authors study data from 1990 to 2015 to gauge the impact of ageing on per capita gross domestic product. They find no evidence to confirm the commonly assumed negative relationship between an ageing population and per capita income.

- As a greater share of the population turns old and lives longer, fewer young people will be available to work and serve the needs of a larger population, which will depress per capita income.
- Economies with an ageing population actually witnessed an increase in per capita income.

Proposed solutions:

- So, even when a country's population ages and the size of its young, working population shrinks rapidly, it can compensate for the loss by adopting better technology.
- Technology improves productivity by allowing countries to do the same work using a smaller workforce, thus overcoming the effects of ageing.

The legal status of animals

- In 2015, a lawsuit brought by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) claimed that Naruto, an Indonesian crested black macaque, should be entitled to the rights of a self-portrait which the animal had accidentally clicked with the camera of David Slater, a nature photographer.
- In 2016, a federal court in San Francisco held that while protection under the law may be extended to animals, the same could not be said of copyright laws in which lie vested rights and ownership.
- PETA's legal team said it would appeal the decision.

Current updates:

- On September 12, 2017, both the parties decided to settle the matter, with Mr. Slater agreeing to donate 25% of any future revenue from Naruto's images to charities dedicated to the conservation of crested macaques in Indonesia.
- The federal court in the Naruto case has merely mirrored the premise that animals can only be objects or properties, but questions regarding the legal standing or legal personality of non-human persons remain unanswered.
- Ironically, the imperative of granting legal recognition through legal personality reveals both the obscurity and absurdity of extending identities to animals.

- Even if the courts were to accept limited person hood, we are still left with the reality that the process of recognition is confined to our communities and legal structures. The notion of autonomy and agency of animals will continue to fail.
- However, the case has pushed us to think over uncharted territories of human/non-human subjectivity in law.

SEPTEMBER 20 2017

General Studies-02

‘Finalise body for Cauvery water sharing’

News:

- The Tamil Nadu government insisted on Tuesday that the Supreme Court itself should finally appoint an authority and frame a scheme for sharing and management of Cauvery river waters among Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry, and not leave the responsibility to the Centre.

Beyond News:

- It has for the past 25 years had a frictional relationship with Karnataka over Cauvery, and had often to make the journey to the Supreme Court for release of water.
- The day-long hearing saw the court chide the Centre for not implementing the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal in 2007.
- The court questioned the reluctance shown by the Centre to set up of the Cauvery Management Board and frame a scheme for implementation of the tribunal award despite it having been notified in 2013.

25 new judges for two HCs

News:

In a move towards reducing the large number of vacancies in the higher judiciary, President Ram Nath Kovind on Tuesday cleared the appointment of 25 judges in two High Courts.

Beyond News:

- **Issuing separate notifications**, the Law Ministry notified the appointment of 19 additional judges in the Allahabad High Court and six in the Calcutta High Court.
- The Allahabad High Court, the largest in terms of Bench strength, has an approved strength of 160 judges. But until Tuesday's appointment, it was functioning with 91 judges.
- The Calcutta High Court, India's oldest, too has a shortage as the court, until now, has been functioning with 31 judges against an approved strength of 72.

General Studies-03

Portion of canal in Bihar collapses a day before inauguration by CM.

News:

A portion of a canal, which was to be inaugurated on Wednesday by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, in Bhagalpur district of Bihar collapsed on Tuesday.

Nb: A project costs Rs.828 Cr getting collapsed before inauguration is an important aspect.



Beyond News:

- The 11-km long Bateshwarsthan Ganga Pump Nahar Priyojna (Bateshwarstahn Ganga Canal Project) took 40 years for completion at a cost of Rs.828 crore.
- The Bateshwarsthan Ganga Pump Nahar Pariyojna is a “lift irrigation project” in which water from the Ganga is to be lifted with the help of pumps and released into the canal to irrigate agricultural areas of Kahalgaon in Bhagalpur and adjoining district of Godda in Jharkhand.
- Started in 1977 with an initial investment of ₹13.88 crore, the project was to irrigate 23,000 hectares However, the project was expanded and the estimated cost shot up to ₹828 crore.

Scholars, activists urge India to act against forced labour

News:

- A group of over 40 activists and academics from different parts of the world have released a signed, 25-point statement urging India to ensure a more effective implementation of labour law protections to eliminate modern slavery and forced labour in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Beyond News:

- This comes inline with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) new global estimates of modern slavery.
- A multi-pronged strategy that responds to the needs of all affected constituencies, including bonded labourers, contract workers, domestic workers, intra- and inter-state as well as international migrant workers, and sex workers is necessary in order to achieve SDG 8.7.

SEPTEMBER 21 2017

General Studies-02

[Op-ed]Nuclear deal in danger – on Trump's UNGA address

- According to U.S. law, the administration must certify the Iran deal every 90 days.
- The Trump administration has twice done so, and the next deadline is October 15.
- Mr. Trump has already signalled that he would withdraw the certification next time. If he does so, it would be the beginning of the unravelling of an agreement that was forged after months of intense negotiation.

Failure of the U.S. to respect an international agreement it's a signatory to would set a dangerous precedent. For all its shortcomings, the Iran nuclear deal is a multilateral agreement.

- International agencies have repeatedly certified that Iran is fully compliant with the terms of the agreement, which means the country is not pursuing any nuclear weapons programme.

Is Nuclear deal a success?

- In plain terms, the deal is a success as it prevented a country with potential nuclear capabilities from developing weapons, and all this without a shot being fired.
- If the U.S. is serious about non-proliferation, it should use the Iran deal to resolve other complex international conflicts.
- Mr. Trump's continued attack on the Iran deal pleases hard-line supporters at home as well as Arab allies and Israel in West Asia. But it is undermining the global non-proliferation regime and international institutions.
- Should the U.S. pull out of the Iran deal, it would be a great setback for rules-based multilateral mechanisms.

No floor test, no by poll for 18 constituencies in T.N.: HC

News: The Madras High Court on Wednesday extended its stay on conducting a floor test in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly until further orders and also restrained authorities from conducting by-elections to 18 constituencies, which were declared vacant, pursuant to the disqualification of dissident AIADMK MLAs.

Beyond News:

- Earlier, when the judge wanted to know whether such an order could be passed without the Election Commission being a party before the court and especially when the Assembly Secretary had declared all the 18 seats vacant, Mr. Sundaram replied in the affirmative.
- Counsel for Governor, Chief Minister and the petitioners consented to it.
- The judge passed the order after senior counsel Aryama Sundaram, representing Mr. Dhanapal, sought time till October 4 for filing a counter affidavit.

SC reserves Cauvery verdict

News:

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its judgment on the appeals filed by Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala against the final award of the Cauvery Tribunal in 2007 on the allocation of the river water to the three States.

Beyond News:

- Tamil Nadu submitted that the court should not leave the dispute open for Karnataka to take advantage of. Though the Centre argued that it is Parliament which has to finalise the scheme under the Inter-State Water Disputes Act of 1956, the court responded that it does also have a right.
- The Centre had argued that Section 6 (2) of the 1956 Act empowered the government to frame a scheme for implementation of the tribunal award.
- The court has been of the consistent opinion that the Centre should not have let a vacuum remain for so long – the tribunal award was notified in 2013 – in the Cauvery dispute as regards the setting up of the Cauvery Management Board and a scheme for sharing of water.

A time of strategic partnerships

- The India-Japan “**Special Strategic and Global Partnership**” – a designation and status New Delhi accords to no other partner – has reached new heights under the stewardship of the two leaders.
- The India-Japan synergy has two key elements. Japan is investing heavily in strengthening its critical infrastructure to enhance its **economic and potential defence capabilities**.

- On defence matters, Japan and India have agreed to establish regular consultations in the “**2+2**” **format** of their defence and foreign ministries. Their navies exercise regularly together with the U.S. Navy.
- **Negotiations on arms sales** – notably, the ShinMaywa US-2i amphibious aircraft – are on. Japanese
- investment in the strategically placed Andaman and Nicobar Islands is likely to help New Delhi establish a major security sentinel in the eastern Indian Ocean.
- India’s two main strategic partnerships, with the U.S. and Japan, are dovetailing nicely.

Japan, in the meantime, is becoming its primary collaborator in developing its economic sinews and for building a geostrategic network that offers Indian Ocean states an alternative to dependence on China.

General Studies-03

‘Chunk of GST claims ineligible for refunds’

News: A “large part” of the Rs. 65,000 crore of transitional credit claims received by the government under the Goods and Services Tax regime are ineligible for refunds, a senior Finance Ministry official.

Beyond News:

- Firms can claim transitional credits for inputs bought and taxes paid before GST rollout.
- Even where claims were accepted, refunds would be done in a staggered manner over months, and not as a single lump sum.
- This was because the accumulated credit was more than what could be claimed on manufacturing output in a single month.

India joins quantum computing race

News:

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is planning to fund a project to develop quantum computers.

Beyond News:

- A quantum computer, still largely a theoretical entity, employs the principles of quantum mechanics to store information in ‘qubits’ instead of the typical ‘bits’ of 1 and 0.
- Qubits work faster because of the way such circuits are designed, and their promise is that they can do intensive number-crunching tasks much more efficiently than the fastest comparable computers.
- For instance, to sort a billion numbers, a quantum computer would require 3.5 million fewer steps than a traditional machine, and would find the solution in only 31,623 steps.
- Solving other problems, many having to do with computing physics, becomes possible on quantum machines, whereas they might never be possible on traditional computers.

[Op-ed] A big broom — On crackdown on shell companies

Op-Ed deals with shell companies & issues behind unions decision to disqualify 1.06 lakh directors

- While the underlying motive for this action, as cited by the ministry, of “breaking the network of shell companies” in the government’s fight against black money is laudable, there is a real danger of inadvertently tainting genuine firms and individuals.
- This was in evidence when the Securities Appellate Tribunal recently gave relief to some entities over trading curbs hastily imposed on them by SEBI.
- The sheer scale of the task at hand, with the ministry identifying more than 1.06 lakh directors for disqualification, it is imperative that there be great care and diligence to ensure that the authorities do not penalise anyone who for non-mala fide reasons failed to comply with the relevant provisions of the Companies Act.

The solutions, therefore, need to be targeted at addressing the deep-rooted maladies rather than just the symptoms, making it easier for entrepreneurs to deregister and/or delist a company.

- A simplified process, possibly online, to dissolve or delist would usher in significant benefits, including improved governance, and ensure that all stakeholders from small retail investors to corporate promoters have an enabling atmosphere to operate freely by remaining compliant with the law or risk facing stringent penal action.

SEPTEMBER 22 2017

General Studies-02

The conclusion of quantitative easing in the U.S. could affect investment flows into India.

- The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) has, marginally raised its median projection for U.S. real GDP growth in 2017 to 2.4%, from the 2.2% estimated in June, and signalled that it is on course to raise the federal funds rate one more time this year after leaving interest rates unchanged for now.
- Given that monetary authorities in the U.S. are focused on reflatting the economy by supporting “further strengthening” in the labour market through an accommodative stance, the central bank has to remain vigilant in warding off any let-up in expansionary momentum.

Impact to india:

- For Indian policymakers, there are both positive and not-so-welcome cues.
- While the ongoing moderate expansion in the U.S. bodes well for the country’s struggling exporters, the end of easy money conditions could augur a slowdown in investment inflows from abroad and resultant pressure on the current account deficit.
- The Reserve Bank of India, though, should welcome the clarity in messaging from its U.S. counterpart.

Turn the page to a new chapter

News:

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met at Xiamen city of China, first after the Dong Lang (Doklam) stand-off.

Beyond News:

- The outcomes were beyond expectations.

- Both leaders agreed to start a new chapter.
- An important consensus has been reached to enhance mutual trust, focus on cooperation, and manage differences.
- Both leaders also agreed to conduct closer high-level exchanges, revitalise a series of dialogues and mechanisms, as well as promote youth and educational cooperation.

The meeting was originally scheduled for half an hour but lasted for an hour and 25 minutes. This shows that both sides are willing to devote enough time to conducting a comprehensive and in-depth exchange of views.

General Studies-03

Animal monitoring goes real time in Periyar reserve

News:

- Monitoring of wild animals and forest terrains is unfolding real time in the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR).

Beyond News:

- A cost-effective '**video surveillance-cum-communication enhancer intranet network**,' which can monitor animal movements and forest areas real time, has been installed in the reserve.
- Microwave antennas and towers are used to set up the network.
- Visuals of elephants, sambar, gaur, porcupine, wild boar, sloth bear, wild dogs and birds visiting a marshy field have been recorded though tigers have evaded the camera eyes so far.

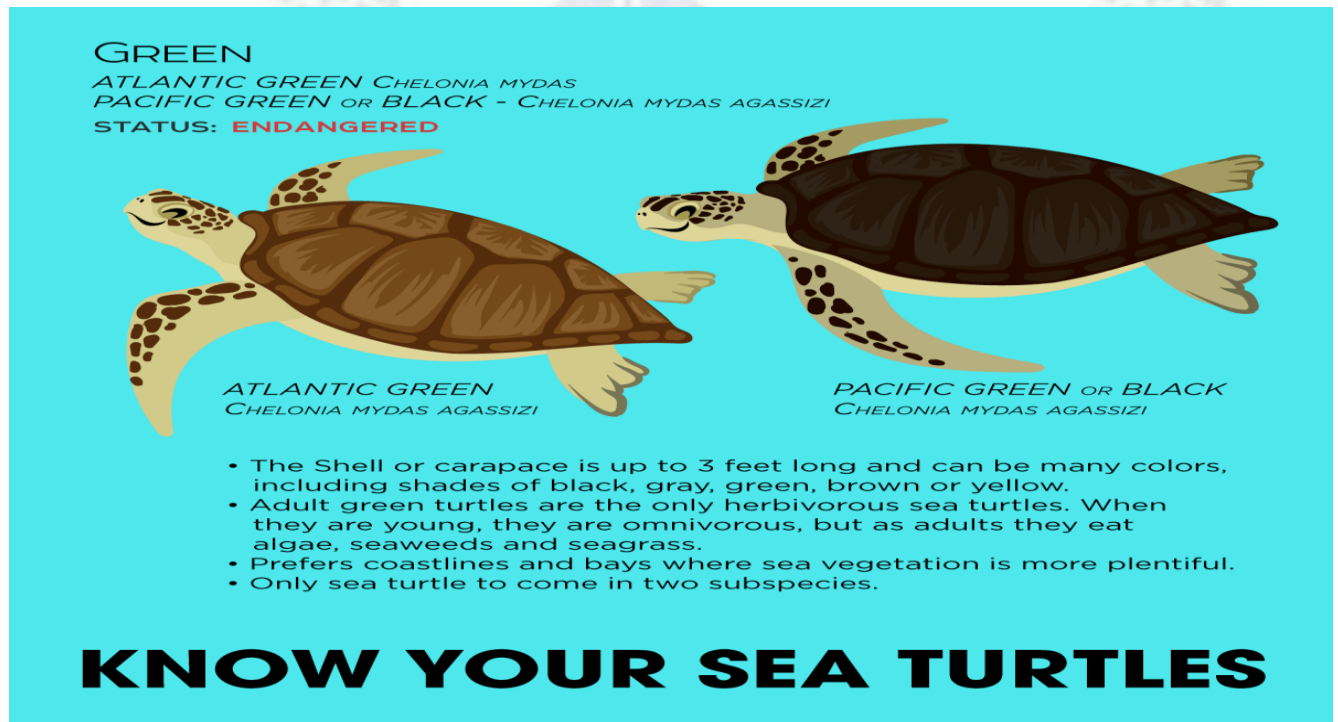
Advantages:

- The system allows the designated officers to watch animal movements and inaccessible terrains real time using their smartphones from anywhere in the world. The initiative came from the the **Periyar Tiger Conservation Foundation**.
- The system can be used for anti-poaching operations, behaviour studies of animals in their natural habitats and videoconferencing with the field staff out in the forest.
- If all the anti-poaching camp sheds established in the interior forests are linked to the network, surveillance could be made effective.

Sea turtles are bouncing back

News:

- Antonios Mazaris, an ecologist at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece and a team of researchers found that globally, most populations of sea turtles are bouncing back after historical declines.



Beyond News:

- Their research helps clarify why some conservation and research groups have reported both increases and decreases for individual nesting sites over the past decade.
- They were surprised to find that with adequate protection, even small populations of turtles have a chance of survival.
- In an area called French Frigate Shoals in Hawaii, for example, green sea turtles increased nest numbers from around 200 in 1973, when the Endangered Species Act was signed, to around 2,000 in 2012.
- This species is now considered of “least concern,” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Hubble spots unique binary asteroid with comet-like features

News:

- An unusual object, discovered in the solar system's asteroid belt, is actually two asteroids orbiting each other, scientists including one of Indian origin have found using the Hubble Space Telescope.

Beyond News:

- The object has comet-like features including a bright halo of material, called a coma, and a long tail of dust.
- Hubble was used to image the asteroid, designated 300163 (2006 VW139), in September 2016 just before the asteroid made its closest approach to the Sun.
- The images revealed that it was actually not one, but two asteroids of almost the same mass and size, orbiting each other at a distance of 96 kilometres.
- Asteroid 300163 (2006 VW139) was discovered by Spacewatch in November 2006 and then the possible cometary activity was seen in November 2011 by Pan-STARRS.
- Both Spacewatch and Pan-STARRS are asteroid survey projects of NASA's Near Earth Object Observations Program.

Update for the online era

- A 31-year-old law, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, has largely proved ineffective in curbing this onslaught on the Internet.
- Though the Act was passed to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner, it pertains only to the print media.

Background:

- In 2012, an amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament to update the law and make punishment stringent; it is still pending.
- The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill record the need for the amendments in the 1986 law.
- It says "technological revolution has resulted in development of new forms of communication, such as, internet and satellite based communication, multi-media messaging, cable television, etc. It has, thus, become necessary to widen the scope of the Act so as to cover the above forms of media."

- The proposed law pushes for an increase in the maximum imprisonment from two years to three years and fine from Rs. 2,000 to a minimum Rs. 50,000, which may be extended to Rs. 1 lakh for the first offence.
- Subsequent offences would invite punishment of a maximum five to seven years and fine up to Rs. 5 lakh. The Bill wants a police officer not less than the rank of inspector to investigate offences under the Act.

SEPTEMBER 23 2017

General Studies-01

From ocean to ozone, the limits of our planet

- The population of vertebrate species on Earth in the wild saw a dramatic fall of about 30% between 1970 and 2006, with the worst effects being in the tropics and in freshwater ecosystems.
- Destruction of species' habitats by pollutants and land-use change are obliterating flora and fauna at unprecedented rates.
- In fact, the ecological footprint of humanity ;the natural habitats, such as water and land, transformed or destroyed as a result of human activity -far exceeds the biological capacity of the earth.
- In an attempt to understand the natural world, its relationships with human societies and limits, in 2009, Johan Rockstrom and others from the Stockholm Environment Institute described elements of the biophysical world that link us together.
- Often regarded as a "safe operating space for humanity", these planetary boundaries include loss of biodiversity, land-use change, changes to nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosols loading, ozone depletion, chemical production, freshwater use and, of course, climate change.

General Studies-02

India plans to train Afghan police officers

News:

- After training Afghan National Army officers and soldiers for four years, India is now planning to train Afghan police officers here as well.

Beyond News:

- The MoU for the proposal, which will be supported by the United Nations Development Programme, is a first, and was discussed as part of enhancing the security partnership between India and Afghanistan during the meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council in Delhi this month.
- There were two separate, high-profile visits to Delhi next week, by U.S. Secretary of Defence James Mattis on Monday, and Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, which are expected to shape the contours of the U.S.'s newly announced Afghanistan policy, in which U.S. President Donald Trump called for greater Indian involvement in development projects in Afghanistan.
- While Mr. Mattis is in Delhi for bilateral talks on the Indo-U.S. defence partnership, he is expected to discuss the security situation in Afghanistan, as well as the U.S.'s declared policy to shut down "safe havens for terror" in Pakistan.

[op-Ed] Hopes and fears

A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR SRI LANKA



Mahipala Siriwardena



Sirisena Bandaranaike



Sir Horrocks



Lord Soulbury

- It is only with a great degree of caution and circumspection that the interim report of the Steering Committee of the Constitutional Assembly of Sri Lanka can be welcomed.
- The panel, chaired by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, has done creditably by producing a forward-looking proposal within 18 months of its first sitting.
- It is thus difficult to see the interim report as the beginning of an irreversible process of constitutional reform.

There is room for both hope and fear.

- There is scope for optimism that Sri Lanka's fractious polity could get its act together and adopt a durable constitution that would protect its unity and stability, distribute powers equitably across ethnic and geographical divisions, and ensure economic prosperity for all.
- The report, which incorporates a framework for key elements of a new constitution, envisages an undivided and indivisible country, with the province as the unit for devolution of power.
- It suggests that the **controversial terms 'unitary' and 'federal' be avoided**, and instead Sinhala and Tamil terms that suggest an undivided country be used to describe the republic.
- On the lines of proposals made since the 1990s, the interim report aims to abolish the executive presidency.
- It introduces the **concept of 'subsidiarity'**, under which whatever function can be performed by the lowest tier of government should be vested in it.
- Other reforms envisaged are a change from the electoral system solely based on **proportional representation** to a mixed method under which 60% of parliamentary members will be elected under the first-past-the-post system, and the creation of a second parliamentary chamber representing the provinces.
- The government has promised that the **pre-eminent status given to Buddhism will remain**, an assurance that may help overcome opposition from the majority.
- The willingness of the **Tamil National Alliance** to accept a founding document arrived at on the basis of a bipartisan consensus is also a good sign.

General Studies-03

Next PSLV launch in November-December

News:

- The next launch of the PSLV will be in November-December, ISRO Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar said here on Friday.

Beyond News:

- There was a real problem in certifying a system or a technology for actual usage.
- This was a problem faced by developing countries. Government agencies and industry partners could design, build, and realise products.
- Technology had to be consistently upgraded so that India was globally competitive & there is a need to accelerate commercialization of technologies we developed.
- The nation faced a major lacuna in terms of design capabilities.

‘Tap services potential to aid world economy’

News:

- Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu, representing India at the ‘Asia-Europe Meeting’ (ASEM) Economic Ministers’ meeting in Seoul, said on Friday Asia and Europe must look at ways to boost services trade, which has a multiplier effect on job creation.

Beyond News:

- India, which has proposed a global pact on ‘Trade Facilitation in Services’ (TFS) has called for tapping the full potential of the services sector to boost the world economy.
- India had submitted to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) a proposal for the TFS, aimed at easing norms, including those related to the movement of skilled workers across borders for short-term work, to boost global services trade growth.
- India is keen that the TFS proposal gains traction before the WTO’s Ministerial Conference in December in Argentina.

SEPTEMBER 24 & 25 2017

General Studies-02

Japan keen on friendship with northeast

News: At the fourth Northeast Connectivity Summit in Kohima from September 22 to 23, a representative of the Embassy of Japan said Tokyo would invest in the region’s infrastructure, education and people-to-people sectors.

Beyond News:

- The next edition of the summit will be held in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China.
- The northeastern region is located at a strategically and economically important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within the Bimstec (Bay of Bengal) community.
- Therefore, Japan has placed a particular importance on the cooperation in the northeastern region, said a press note by the Nagaland government on the summit.

Afghan overture

- President Donald Trump's policy announcement on Afghanistan has clearly set the stage for diverse moves on the geopolitical chessboard.

India's Role in Afghan politics:

- India's plans to expand its security assistance to Afghanistan by training police officers in India as part of a UNDP project must be assessed in this light.
- A welcome step in itself and one that could have a significant impact on the security situation in Afghanistan, it also sends out a loud geopolitical signal.
- By training police officers and hundreds of army cadets and officers, India is taking an important role in capacity building for Afghan security.
- India has also announced this month 116 smaller "new development projects" across Afghanistan, and police forces will be crucial in protecting irrigation, housing and school projects from the Taliban and other terror groups.
- The decision to enhance security training comes coupled with an India-Afghanistan trade fair sponsored by USAID, that will welcome Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and other ministers to Delhi this week.
- India and Afghanistan have lost too much time on each of these plans.

General Studies-03

ISRO working on substitute spacecraft

- Work has begun in Bengaluru to assemble the alternative substitute navigation spacecraft, which became essential after the main back-up was lost in a failed launch on August 31.
- IRNSS-1I was earlier approved as a ground spare, to be sent to space in an emergency.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has been training a team from an industry consortium to assemble this spacecraft and its lost fellow satellite, 1H.
- Should a new back-up be sought and approved, it may be part of another model of outsourcing of its satellites to Indian industry.
- Until now all Indian spacecraft have been assembled at ISAC by its engineers.

The faltering economy

News:

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley last week promised appropriate action to revive the economy without going too much into the details of what could be in store.

Beyond News:

- This comes after the expansion in gross domestic product slowed to a multi-year low of 5.7% in the first quarter of 2017-18, and industrial output growth dropped to 1.2% in July, compared to 4.5% a year earlier.
- In addition, retail price inflation jumped to a five-month high of 3.36% in August from 2.36% in July, further dimming the prospects of a monetary stimulus from the Reserve Bank of India to help boost the economy.
- But, as many have pointed out over the last few months, the economy has been decelerating for the last five quarters. In such a case, demonetization and GST have merely brought to the fore a more fundamental weakness in the economy.
- India's major macroeconomic numbers, despite the recent worsening of the current account deficit, are still quite stable compared to a few years ago.
- The government must rise to the challenge and enact tough structural reforms, instead of finding an easy way out through the fiscal door.

Graded Surveillance Measure

- SEBI may put shares of companies under the measure for suspected price rigging or under the ambit of 'shell companies'.
- The measure would provide a heads up to market participants that they need to be extra cautious and diligent while dealing in such securities put under surveillance.

What if detected a firm identified for surveillance?

- It goes through **six stages** with corresponding surveillance actions and the restrictions on trading in those securities gets higher progressively.
- In the **first stage** the securities are put in the trade-to-trade segment (meaning no speculative trading is allowed and delivery of shares and payment of consideration amount are mandatory). A maximum of 5% movement in share price is allowed.
- In the **second stage**, in addition to the trade-to-trade segment, the buyer of the security has to put 100% of trade value as additional surveillance deposit. The deposit would be retained by the exchanges for a period of five months and refunded in a phased manner.
- In the **third stage**, trading is permitted only once a week ie every Monday, apart from the buyer putting 100% of the trade value as additional surveillance deposit.
- In the **fourth stage**, trading would be allowed once a week and the surveillance deposit increases to 200% of the trade value.
- In the **fifth stage**, trading would be permitted only once a month (first Monday of the month) with additional deposit of 200%.
- In the **sixth** and final stage, there are maximum restrictions.

Trading is permitted only once a month at this stage, with no upward movement allowed in price. Also, the additional surveillance deposit would be 200%.

SEPTEMBER 26 2017

General Studies-02

PM launches 'Saubhagya' plan for household electrification

- It is Rs. 16,000 crore scheme, Saubhagya, under which households across the country that have no access to electricity, will be given **power connections free of cost**.
- Under the PM Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya), every household in the country, whether it is in a village or a city or in a far-flung area, will be given an electricity connection.
- No price will be charged for the poor to get an electricity connection, and the government will go to their houses to give them the connection.

SC refuses more time for medical admissions

News:

- The Supreme Court has refused to extend the deadline for filling up vacant seats in medical super-speciality, post-graduate and MBBS courses.

Beyond News:

- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra refused to extend the September 14 time limit, especially in the case of super-speciality courses.
- In a four-page order on September 22, the Bench referred to the apprehensions raised in the various pleas that many seats remained vacant and there was a need to extend the date for admissions.
- Court dismissed the pleas, saying the concern voiced in them “travels from rational sphere to emotional sphere.”
- It acknowledged the Medical Council of India’s (MCI) stand that discipline was essential in academic admission matters and any extension would result in chaos.
- Ineligible students would benefit from such confusion, leaving the worthy ones in dire straits.

Who were behind this?

- Among the applications was one by 23 doctors from various parts of the country seeking an extended round of counselling for the candidates who had qualified in the NEET-SS examination to fill up vacant seats available in government and private medical colleges.

What is NEET SS?

- NEET-SS is an eligibility-cum-ranking examination prescribed as the single entrance examination to various DM/M.Ch. courses under the Indian Medical Council (Amendment) Act, 2016.

India, S. Korea to upgrade FTA at ‘earliest’

- Even as the India-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be expanded soon to boost bilateral trade and investment, New Delhi has voiced concerns about the low utilisation of the FTA by India due to the ‘complicated’ provisions in the pact as well as South Korea’s regulations.
- The recent bilateral talks in Seoul saw India cite the difficulties being faced by its English teachers in getting permission to teach in South Korea.

- Indian English language teachers should be getting opportunities to teach in primary and secondary schools in South Korea, this is not being implemented effectively in practice.
- This is because the **‘English Program in Korea’ (EPIK)** stipulates that those eligible to teach English in South Korea must “be a citizen of a country where English is the primary language.”

General Studies-03

Solving food challenges with more research

- According to estimates, the global population is likely to exceed 9 billion by 2050, with 5 billion people in Asia alone.
- The capacity to produce enough quality food is falling behind human numbers.
- Food production in the region must keep pace, even as environment sustainability and economic development are ensured.

Solutions for these scenario:

- The answer to these challenges lies in research for sustainable development.
- As the second goal of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals says: “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.”
- India’s fivefold increase in grain production over the past 50 years is largely the result of strong scientific research that has focussed on high-yielding crop varieties, better agronomic practices, and pro-farmer policies.

However, India continues to face challenges such as food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly in rural areas.

Worrying downgrade

Snow leopard downgraded from endangered to vulnerable

- The elusive and charismatic snow leopard has lost its endangered status in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, causing genuine worry among wildlife biologists, who believe this sends out the wrong signal to those working to protect it.

- If the argument for a downgrade to vulnerable status from endangered is that conservation actions have reduced the threat to the cat in its remote habitat in the alpine zones of the Himalayas and trans-Himalayas.

Projects:

- India has worked to protect these animals, and even launched a programme on the lines of Project Tiger for its conservation, covering 128,757 sq. km of habitat in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- An insurance programme in which residents of a part of Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh participated also worked well.
- There is also an upcoming international collaborative effort, the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program, involving the countries that make up the range of this graceful animal.

It is vital that this momentum should not be lost merely on account of the technicality that the estimated numbers have crossed the threshold for an 'endangered' classification, which is 2,500.

Concerns:

- It would be a disservice to conservation if governments shift their focus away from the big challenges to the snow leopard's future: trafficking in live animals in Central Asia, and hostility from communities because of its attacks on livestock.
- New research indicates that even when wild prey is available, the attacks on livestock by snow leopards have cumulatively been on the rise.
- A more fundamental worry is over the likely loss of habitat owing to changing climate patterns.

its recommended to go through various IUCN List & animals from india in those categories. We will provide a detailed article regarding this at the earliest.

Removing toxic metals from tannery waste

News:

- Removing hexavalent chromium from industrial effluents, particularly untreated tannery waste, will become easier and more efficient by the work of a team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology (CSIR-IICB), Kolkata.

Beyond News:

- The heat-dried fungal biomass converts **Cr(VI)** — which is neurotoxic, genotoxic and a carcinogen — to a non-toxic trivalent form of chromium, thus eliminating the problems of disposing Cr(VI)-containing waste.
- Cr(VI) is found in very high concentration in tannery waste.
- In experiments carried out in the lab using potassium dichromate solution, the adsorption capacity of the biomass was found to be as high as over 100 mg per gram of dry weight.
- In the case of untreated tannery waste, the fungal biomass was able to remove over 70% of Cr(VI).
- It can also remove other toxic metals such as **lead and arsenic**, which are normally found in tannery waste.

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General Studies-02

Anti-superstition Bill gets Karnataka Cabinet nod

News:

- The Karnataka Cabinet on Wednesday cleared the much-delayed and debated Karnataka **Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017**, popularly known as the Anti-Superstition Bill.

Beyond News:

- The Bill has proposed to ban made snana (rolling over banana leaves with food left over by Brahmins) at Kukke Subrahmanya temple in Dakshina Kannada district.
- However, it has not banned astrology or vaastu.
- The Bill has been drafted on the lines of the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.
- It has provisions to deal strongly with cruel practices, such as human sacrifice, witchcraft, exorcism, parading women in the naked, and sexual exploitation by invoking supernatural powers.

In major police modernisation scheme, Centre to give big support to States

News:

- The Union government will support the States under a new umbrella police modernisation scheme for three years until 2019-20 and ₹25,060 crore will be allocated for this programme.

Beyond News:

- The Centre will provide 80% of the financing and the State the rest.
- This decision, will take forward internal security, law and order, women's safety, modern weapons' procurement, logistics support, hiring of helicopters, upgrade of police wireless, national supply network and e-prison project.
- It will cover the northeastern States, Jammu and Kashmir and Left-wing extremism affected States.

[Op-Ed] Power problem – On Saubhagya scheme

- The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or the 'Saubhagya' scheme, launched by Mr. Modi aims to make electricity accessible to every household by the end of 2018.
- Under the scheme, expected to cost a little over **₹16,000 crore**, poor households that have no access to electricity will be provided electricity connections free of cost.
- This builds on previous work carried out under the **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana** launched in 2015, and the **Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana** launched by the UPA government in 2005, both of which also aimed to provide free electricity connections to the poor.
- In particular, it hopes to improve electricity access within villages that are already classified as "electrified", according to the criterion that 10% of households enjoy access to electricity.

However, the Saubhagya scheme does very little to address the real problem of affordability.

- The **plant load factor (PLF)** of coal and lignite-based plants, an indicator of capacity utilisation of power generation units, has dropped consistently over the decade from 77.5% in 2009-10 to 59.88% in 2016-17, according to data from the Central Electricity Authority.
- This is due to demand for electricity from State distribution companies dropping in tandem with their deteriorating financial status.

- The **Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)**, introduced two years ago to restructure the debt of State distribution agencies, has failed to make enough of a difference to this state of affairs.
- This in turn holds back investment in power generation units. Saubhagya, unfortunately, does very little to address the fundamentals of India's crippling power problem.

Air India ties up with PNB, IndusInd for ₹ 3,250 cr loan

News:

- Air India has tied up with public sector lender Punjab National Bank and private lender IndusInd to secure loans to the tune of over ₹3,000 crore for meeting working capital requirements.

Beyond news:

- Earlier this month, the disinvestment-bound Air India had floated tenders for availing government guarantee backed INR short-term loans totalling up to ₹3,250 crore in the first phase to meet its urgent working capital.
- Banks were asked to submit their financial bids by September 19, indicating the amount of government-guaranteed short-term loans they were willing to offer.

General Studies-03

Army carries out operation against Naga rebels near Myanmar border.

News:

- The Indian Army has inflicted heavy casualties on NSCN(K) cadres in an operation close to the Myanmar border, the Kolkata-based Eastern Army Command has said.

Beyond News:

- In tweets, the Command said the Army suffered no casualties in the operation against the **Naga militant group**.

- The firefight started in the early hours of Wednesday, when an Army patrol was moving along the border with Myanmar.
- In June 2015, Indian troops crossed over into Myanmar to carry out a **surgical strike against NSCN(K)**, a few days after 18 Army jawans were killed by the militant group in Chandel district of Manipur.

C.N.R Rao chosen for international honour for materials research

News:

- Eminent scientist, Professor **C.N.R Rao**, has become the **first Asian** to be chosen for the prestigious Von Hippel Award for his immense contribution in materials research.

Beyond News:

- The award is the US-based Materials Research Society's (MRS) highest honour.
- Mr. Rao's immense work were on novel functional materials, including **nano materials** (having particles of nano scale dimensions), **graphene** (the strongest and thinnest material) and **2D materials, superconductivity, and colossal magneto resistance** (change in electrical resistance of a material in a magnetic field).

These bold key words becomes significant. Go through it in detail.

A step closer to treating oral cancer without surgery

News:

- Researchers in Mumbai have moved a step closer to treating surface tumors such as oral, breast and cervical cancer and other tumors such melanoma and colon cancer through photo thermal ablation **using gold-polymer nano particles and near infrared light.**

Beyond News:

- The researchers from Mumbai's Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay and Tata Memorial Centre have synthesised hybrid polymer-gold nano particles as photo thermal agent to ablate solid tumors.

Key finding:

- The near infrared light heats up the nano particles and the heated nano particles, in turn, can kill the cancer cells.
- Unlike other agents tried out by others, the hybrid nano-particles used by the Mumbai team has no toxicity, is biodegradable and gets cleared from the body through urine.
- The team used a thermoresponsive polymer (poly(N-vinyl caprolactam)) nanoshell which can be loaded with an anticancer drug.
- The polymer nano-shell is coated with gold nano-particles.
- Besides killing the cancer cells through thermal ablation, the polymer degrades at about 43 degree C and releases the drug to completely kill the tumor.
- Cancer cells get killed above 42 degree C.

Dino-killing asteroid's impact on bird evolution

- Human activities could change the pace of evolution, similar to what occurred 66 million years ago when a giant asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs, leaving modern birds as their only descendants.
- That's one conclusion drawn by the authors of a new study published in Systematic Biology.
- Jacob Berv from Cornell University and Daniel Field from University of Bath suggest that the meteor-induced mass extinction (a.k.a. the K-Pg event) led to acceleration in the rate of genetic evolution among its avian survivors.
- These survivors may have been much smaller than their pre-extinction relatives.

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General Studies-02

China orders North Korean business on its soil closed under UN curbs

News:

- China on Thursday ordered North Korean-owned businesses on its soil to close, cutting foreign revenue for the isolated North under U.N. sanctions imposed over its nuclear and missile programs.

Beyond news:

- China is North Korea's main trading partner, making Beijing's cooperation essential to the success of sanctions aimed at stopping the North's pursuit of weapons technology.
- China, long North Korea's diplomatic protector, has gone along with the latest penalties out of growing frustration with leader Kim Jong Un's government.
- North Korean businesses and ventures with Chinese partners must close within 120 days of the U.N. Security Council's September 11 approval of the latest sanctions, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Proposal made to swap Kulbhushan Jadhav for terrorist: Pakistan Foreign Minister.

News:

Pakistan received a proposal to swap Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav for a terrorist who carried out the horrific 2014 Peshawar school attack and is now jailed in Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Khwaja Muhammad Asif has claimed.

Beyond News:

- There is no mention to the name of the terrorist and the National Security Advisor who made the proposal.
- Mr. Jadhav, a 46-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by Pakistan's Field General Court Martial in April for his alleged "involvement in espionage and sabotage activities" against Pakistan.
- India has accused Pakistan of violating the Vienna Convention by repeatedly denying consular access to Mr. Jadhav.
- In a hearing of the case on May 18, a 10-member bench of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) restrained Pakistan from executing Mr. Jadhav.
- Pakistan has said the Indian national would not be executed until he has exhausted his mercy appeals.
- The Pakistan Taliban had claimed responsibility for the gruesome Peshawar school attack in 2014 in which nearly 150 people, mostly school children, were killed.

BHU appoints its first woman chief proctor

News: Chief Proctor of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) O.N. Singh resigned late on Tuesday, taking "moral responsibility" for the lathi charge on students demanding justice for a colleague who was molested on the campus.

Beyond news:

- The incidents on the campus over the last few days has raised questions on the **safety of women students** in one of Asia's largest residential campuses.
- The BHU is spread over a sprawling 1,360 acres.
- Vehicular movement around hostels will now be restricted and better lighting will be provided at night.
- CCTV cameras will be installed at sensitive places within the campus and a mechanism for checking of vehicles will also be implemented.
- Women guards will soon be deployed in girls' hostels while a committee will be formed at the hostel level to provide suggestions to the administration on the safety demands and other necessary issues faced by those staying in the hostels.
- A dedicated helpline number will also be started.

{Op-Ed}Falling off the health-care radar

Key aspect:

- The National Health Policy (NHP), 2017 is unable to see the wood for the trees. Life and death questions are dealt with perfunctorily or simply overlooked.

For example, it overlooks the rapid rise in the share of the old (60 years or more), and associated morbidities, especially sharply rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and disabilities. With rising age, numerous physiological changes occur and the risk of chronic diseases rises. The co-occurrence of chronic diseases and disability elevates the risk of mortality.

Loneliness & isolation:

- Loneliness is a perceived isolation that manifests in the distressing feeling that accompanies discrepancies between one's desired and actual social relationships.
- The link between loneliness and mortality is mediated by unhealthy behaviours and morbidity.
- The fact that loneliness predicts health outcomes even if health behaviours are unchanged suggests that loneliness alters physiology at a more fundamental level.

- Research shows that loneliness increases vascular resistance and diminishes immunity.

From a policy perspective, health systems have to be configured to deal with not one NCD but multiple NCDs to manage them better. The impact of multi-morbidity on an old person's capacity, health-care utilisation and the costs of care are significantly larger than the summed effects of each. Besides, the reconfigured medical system must be complemented by stronger family ties and social networks. This is not as Utopian as it may seem as examples of such complementarities abound.

General Studies-03

Policy flip-flops risk harming 'Make in India' drive.

- General Electric has warned the Indian government it risks losing jobs and having to pay "substantial" penalties if it follows through on a threat to cancel a \$2.6bn contract for railway engines.

Key aspect :

- Surprise policy shifts, such as an apparent U-turn over a locomotive deal with General Electric (GE), risk undermining Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship 'Make in India' initiative, which aims to create millions of jobs and boost growth.

About GE:

- GE won the \$2.6 billion contract in 2015 to supply 1,000 diesel locomotives — the biggest direct investment in India by a U.S. firm and the first deal awarded to a foreign firm after India allowed 100 per cent foreign investment in railways - part of efforts to overhaul its creaking, colonial-era infrastructure.

Railway ministries stand:

- Railway Ministry said last week that it wouldn't need diesel after all — hoping to save on fuel and maintenance costs — and suggested GE might want to make electric engines instead.
- Electric engines are usually used for passenger trains, while diesel is used for freight. Around 25-30 percent of India's locomotives are diesel-engined.

immediate impact:

- The policy shift could cost New Delhi in compensation - GE is already building a factory for the diesel locos - but executives and investors say it is also an important test for a government that needs foreign investment to create jobs and reboot growth ahead of a 2019 general election.
- GE has already shipped its first diesel locomotive to India and is completing the factory.
- It has created around 1,000 jobs at the plant and a maintenance shed, and 5,000 jobs in the supplier network.

The way the wind blows

- Over the past few months, two seemingly conflicting developments have emerged around wind energy in Tamil Nadu.
 1. The first is a milestone for the wind energy sector in the State. On July 11, the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) evacuated more than 5,000 MW of wind power, replacing almost 1,000 MW of thermal power and operating several other plants at half capacity. Wind power accounted for almost a third of the State's electricity demand that day.
 2. Second revolves around the bleak market sentiment for wind developers in the State and across the country. In February this year, India took baby steps towards discovering wind energy tariffs through auctions rather than feed-in tariffs fixed by regulatory commissions.
 - Under the first auctions held for 1,000 MW, wind prices fell to a new low at ₹3.46 per unit from the previous low of ₹4.16 per unit fixed by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission.
 - Tamil Nadu recently announced its plans to procure 500 MW through auctions with a base price of ₹3.46 per unit, but the wind energy companies filed a petition with the Madras High Court opposing the move since they felt that it would cut into their profit margins.
 - The court allowed Tangedco to go ahead with the auctions, which led to another record low price of ₹3.42 per unit.

CCS clears internal security scheme

News: The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹25,000-crore internal security scheme to strengthen the country's law and order mechanism and modernise the police forces, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday.

Beyond news:

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave its approval for the implementation of the umbrella scheme, Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF), for 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- A Central budget outlay of ₹10,132 crore had been earmarked for internal security-related expenditure for Jammu and Kashmir, northeastern States and those affected by left wing extremism (LWE).
- A scheme for special Central assistance (SCA) for 35 districts worst hit by LWE had been introduced with an outlay of ₹3,000 crore to tackle the issue of underdevelopment.
- An outlay of ₹100 crore had been earmarked for police infrastructure upgradation, training institutes, investigation facilities, etc. in the northeastern States.

General Studies-04

Bajrang Dal prevents marriage of Hindu girl with Muslim boy in Meerut

News:

- Workers of the Bajrang Dal on Wednesday prevented the marriage of a Hindu girl with a Muslim boy in Meerut on Wednesday.

Beyond news:

- They accused the police of facilitating "**love jihad.**"
- The Meerut incident comes four days after a **similar one in Hapur**, where sangh parivar workers tried to assault Shoeb Alam and Vidya who got married and were living together in Dev Lok Colony.
- The police told the **Hindutva activists** that it was not a case of "**love jihad**" as Vidya married Shoeb out of her own will and was living with him willingly.

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GENERAL STUDIES-02

Will Swachh Bharat Abhiyan be a success?

LEFTIST VIEW

- The **purpose** of Swachh Bharat is still not clear.
- We have to understand one thing: this entire campaign is to make India clean.
- The society is making **certain communities** from particular castes clean the country
- Those who make Bharat swachh will never be a part of the campaign.
- Its just creating an **illusion** ;The success of illusion depends on how well it is promoted.
- The Prime Minister has already missed the target before he set out to achieve the goal.
- People coming with broom is just a photo opportunity for them.
- The Constitution declaring the **abolition of untouchability** in Article 17, still practise it by perpetuating occupations such as scavenging.
- Every month, there is news about people **dying in manholes** after being ordered to clean them.
- Cleaning India is not a spiritual experience and he should not glorify it.
- In the Indian context, manual scavenging is a misery, drudgery, so one cannot worship it.
- **The cause has not been made clear by the Prime Minister**

Rightist view

- Swachhta (cleanliness) was an idea **first articulated by Mahatma Gandhi**.
- According to hem, sanitation is even more **important than political freedom**.
- A mission as fundamentally transformative as Swachh Bharat will not only result in intended physical outcomes but also a lifestyle and mindset change.

Five States have declared themselves **Open Defecation Free (ODF)** in rural areas: Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Uttarakhand and Haryana.

- He is the **first Prime Minister** to have spoken of sanitation from the ramparts of the Red Fort.
- In his scheme of things, sanitation is social transformation and is as, if not more, important than economic transformation.
- In the short span of three years, about **50 million toilets** have been constructed in rural India, increasing the coverage from 39% to 69% now; another **3.8 million** have sprung up in cities and towns and another 1.4 million are presently under construction.

CENTRE

- The **key problem** with the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is that the government is primarily focussed on promotions and events of a repackaged scheme than its implementation.
- The SBM was earlier known as the **Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan** under the UPA government.
- The overall ratings have gone down on three parameters in the World Bank report dated February 2, 2017:
 1. progress towards achievement of programme development objectives from ‘satisfactory’ to ‘moderately satisfactory’;
 2. overall implementation progress from ‘satisfactory’ to ‘moderately unsatisfactory’;
 3. overall risk rating from ‘nil’ to ‘substantial’.
- For 2017-18, the government has allocated ₹13,948 crore for the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) project; for the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) project, the allocation was merely ₹2,300 crore.
- The focus of the SBM-G should be on behavioral change; the guidelines also require that 8% of the funds be allocated for information, education and communication activities..

General Studies-03

In undated audio, Baghdadi urges Islamic State militants to keep fighting

- Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi exhorted followers on September 29 to stand fast and keep fighting in his first purported audio communication in almost a year during which his jihadist group lost much of its self-proclaimed “caliphate”.
- The audio, partly dedicated to religious scriptures, came after several reports Baghdadi had been killed. His last recording was in November 2016, two weeks after the start of the battle to recapture the city of Mosul from Islamic State (IS).
- The date of the 46-minute recording, released via the al-Furqan news organisation, was not clear.
- But in it, Baghdadi makes an apparent reference to recent events including North Korean threats against Japan and United States and the recapture two months ago of Mosul by U.S.-backed Iraqi forces.
- The U.S. State Department said it’s not in a position to confirm the authenticity of the recording.

'Cards may land banks with a ₹3,800 cr. hole'

- The Centre's digital payments push, mainly card payments through PoS machines, may leave already capital starved banks bleeding by ₹3,800 crore annually, warns a report.
- After November's note-ban, the government has pushed banks into deploying millions of point-of-sale (PoS) machines to encourage online payments.
- This has resulted in increase in debit plus credit cards transactions at PoS from ₹51,900 crore in October 2016 to ₹68,500 crore in July 2017.

NIA focus on 32 Kerala 'conversions'

News:

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) said it was scrutinising over 30 cases in Kerala where Hindu women were allegedly lured, forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men.

Beyond News:

- NIA had asked the Kerala police for details of forced conversions at Therbiyathul Islam Sabha in **Kozhikode**, a religious centre authorised by the Kerala government.
- An NIA official said the State police sent the details of 92 cases but in the initial phase, the agency was concentrating only on 32 cases, which involved Hindu women.
- Supreme Court had last month asked the federal anti-terror agency to investigate the **case of Akhila Asokan alias Hadiya**, a 25-year-old Hindu woman, who converted to Islam and married a Muslim man.
- Akhila's parents had moved the Kerala High Court in 2016 alleging that she was radicalised and converted to Islam and forcibly married to a Muslim man.
- The High Court annulled the marriage and Akhila's husband Shafin Jahan moved the Supreme Court, which in turn asked the NIA to investigate the 'love jihad' case.

[Op-Ed] Hope in Darjeeling – On end of blockade

Back ground:

The announcement on ending the bandh came from Bimal Gurung of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, led the agitation

- With a breakthrough ending the 104-day-long blockade in the Darjeeling hills, the Union and West Bengal governments must move forthwith to consolidate the ‘truce’ and address the setback to livelihoods and the local economy suffered over this period.

The blockade had **severely hit life in the hill districts**, and it is clear that local support for the agitation was waning.

Current situation:

- The Minister did not commit to “**tripartite talks**” on the separate statehood issue as demanded by the GJM, he promised discussions on other issues while impliedly **recognizing the leadership** of the official faction.
- The current impasse is a direct outcome of the failure to substantively devolve power to the GTA as promised.
- The **State government has suggested** that it is not averse to tripartite talks over some of the GJM’s demands, but it is not clear whether Ms. Banerjee will agree to talk to Mr. Gurung. Talks involving the Centre, the State government and the GJM are, however, essential.
- This is the best mechanism to discuss the empowerment of the GTA, which is necessary to address the grievances of the residents of Darjeeling.