

VOL-197

Weekly Current Affairs



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National

A online channel for transgenders launched

- The Hyderabad-based transwoman activist, who holds two post-graduate degrees, decided to launch the first YouTube channel in India conceptualised and actualised by transgender individuals.
- The channel, according to its makers, will provide accurate and scientific socio-cultural, religious, economic and political information relevant to them.
- Trans-vision will produce its web series in three languages — Telugu, Kannada and Dakhni, an Urdu dialect spoken in certain parts of the Deccan Plateau, including Hyderabad.
- The channel's programming, which includes launch videos that were released in the first week of September, reveals a rich palette of ideas executed by transgender people.
- Pilot episodes of the channel, which already has over 1,000 followers on Facebook and 261 on YouTube before its official launch, will be relayed in Telugu, with English subtitles.

Women's tech park at Harohalli

- The women's tech park at Harohalli, Bengaluru which was first announced during the Invest Karnataka Meeting in February 2016, is expected to be inaugurated by November. From automobile sector to food processing and garments, the park is, in its core, a display of the power of women in the industry.
- The park in Harohalli, which will accommodate at least 90 entrepreneurs, may open by November
- Currently, nearly 20 employees work out of a 1,100 sq. ft workspace churning out sugar confectioneries that are sold across India and even exported.
- From automobile sector to food processing and garments, the park is, in its core, a display of the power of women in the industry.
- The tech park was first announced during the Invest Karnataka Meeting in February 2016, with the hope of completing it within the end of the year.



- While 300 acres in Harohalli Phase III on the outskirts of the city have been earmarked for the women's tech park, nearly 106 acres have been developed so far. Layout formation, roads and other infrastructure work are nearing completion.
- From designing crèches and playschools to incorporating a natural lake to add aesthetics, the designing of the industrial area involved a lot of feedback from women entrepreneurs themselves.

Xafecopy Trojan' new malware alert

- A new malware 'Xafecopy Trojan' has been detected in India which would steal money through mobile phones, cyber security firm Kaspersky said.
- Around 40% of target of the malware had been detected in India. Xafecopy Trojan is disguised as apps like BatteryMaster, and secretly loads malicious code on the phone.

All women crew to circumnavigate the world

- Skippered by Lt. Cdr. Vartika Joshi, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, the all-women team has Lt. Cdr. Pratibha Jamwal of Kullu, Himachal Pradesh; Lt. Cdr. Swathi P. of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh; Lt. Aishwarya Boddapati of Hyderabad, Telangana; Lt. Sh Vijaya Devi of Manipur and Lt. Payal Gupta of Uttarakhand as crew members.
- Among other things, the crew will collate and update Meteorological/Ocean/Wave data on a daily basis for subsequent analysis by research and development organisations. They will also monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas.
- The first Indian solo circumnavigation was undertaken by Capt. Dilip Donde, SC (Retd) from August 19, 2009 to May 19, 2010 on board the Indian built vessel, INSV Mhadei.
- The first Indian non-stop solo circumnavigation was undertaken by Cdr. Abhilash Tomy, KC from November 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013.
- Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman hailed the global circumnavigation being attempted by an all-women Indian Navy crew of 'Navika Sagar Parikrama.'
- 'Navika Sagar Parikrama,' perhaps the first-ever attempt by an all-women crew to circumnavigate the globe, will have stopovers at four ports Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands) and Cape town (South Africa) for replenishments and repairs. It will return to Goa in April next year.



- The crew has sailed approximately 20,000 Nm on board INSV Mhadei and Tarini as part of training, which included two expeditions to Mauritius (in 2016 and 2017) and a voyage from Goa to Cape Town in December 2016.
- The project is seen as essential for promoting ocean sailing activities in the Navy, while highlighting Government of India's thrust for Nari Shakti.
- The Indian Navy said the project would help to discard societal attitudes and mind-set towards women.
- Among other things, the crew will collate and update Meteorological/ Ocean/ Wave data on a daily basis for subsequent analysis by research and development organisations. They will also monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas

Refugees challenging Article 35A

- 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.
- The petition said 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.
- 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.
- Earlier, a Kashmiri Pandit woman, Charu Wali Khanna, had approached the court challenging the provision.
- Petitioners Kali Das, his son Sanjay Kumar and one other, in their plea, said they were raising issues seeking conferment of basic natural and human rights.

Bonda Tribes migration

- The Bonda Development Agency (BDA) has started an inquiry and survey in the remote Bonda-inhabited villages in Malkangiri district of Odisha following reports that these primitive tribals are migrating to other States in search of employment and that some of their women are being sexually exploited.
- As allegations are rife about mass migration of Bonda tribals from Odisha in search of livelihood, the administration has taken the issue seriously.
- Officials of the BDA have started an on-the-spot inquiry and survey relating to migration and



alleged sexual harassment of Bonda women outside the State.

- Some Bondas undertake seasonal migration after the end of the kharif season and return by Durga Puja to start agricultural work.
- Through the on-the-spot inquiry and enumeration, the BDA plans to prepare a proper data base about Bonda migration and realise the reasons behind it.
- Bondas are considered to be one of most primitive tribes in the world.
- As per an official survey in 2015, around 8,000 Bonda tribals live in 32 villages of four panchayats under Khairaput block. Their villages are located in remote and isolated hilly region north-west of the Machhkund river. Their habitat in Khairaput block is called the Bonda valley.

Tussle regarding regulating drones

- 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.
- The Director-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has told the Home Ministry that licensing and safety of all aircraft manned or unmanned was their domain.
- Recently, 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 DGCA put out draft guidelines for obtaining unique identification numbers for citizens to use drones in the public domain.
- 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.
- A senior Home Ministry official said the 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.
- The DGCA has the capacity to detect aircraft of a particular size and [which] fly at a certain altitude. It has radars to detect their presence. The unmanned objects, if they fly low, cannot be detected by any radar. It has security and privacy issues.

Maha Pushkaram

- All is set for Maha Pushkaram in the Cauvery when thousands of devotees are expected to congregate at the focal point of Thula Kattam at Mayiladuthurai in Nagapattinam district.

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Blue Whale challenge

- The Supreme Court agreed to hear a petition for an immediate directive to the government to ban Blue Whale, an online game which may be behind the deaths or attempted suicides of teenagers and young adults hooked to it.
- A Bench, led by the Chief Justice of India, heard an urgent mention by advocate C.R. Jaya Sukin, representing another lawyer N.S. Ponnaiah, who urged the government to take immediate measures to spread awareness of the dangers of the game and curb its availability online.
- Mr. Sukin argued that the government had not taken sufficient steps even after the cases of self-inflicted injuries and suicides increased.
- The game had spread across the cities, enticing even school students. The game “goads young people into killing themselves. It encourages people to take part in increasingly dangerous dares that culminate in instructions to kill themselves.

Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe, will lay the groundwork for the next level of collaboration during the annual summit meeting to be held in Gandhinagar.
- The Ministry said the high point of the visit was likely to be the joint inauguration of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project and bilateral security dialogue.
- The two leaders will review the recent progress in the multifaceted cooperation between India and Japan under the framework of their ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’ and will set its future direction.
- Mr. Abe begins a two-day visit on September 13 during which he and Mr. Modi will hold wide-ranging bilateral discussions covering bilateral and global issues. This will be the fourth annual summit between them.
- The leaders would jointly participate in the ground-breaking ceremony for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project using Japanese Shinkansen technology — also known as the bullet train project — in Gandhinagar.
- Through a video-link, they will participate in the ground-breaking ceremony of the High Speed Railway Training Institute to be set up in Vadodara.



- Mr. Abe will visit the memorial dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi at Dandi Kutir. However the focus of Mr. Abe's visit is likely to be the bilateral discussion on security issues, especially on North Korea and China.
- India-Japan ties are at a crucial phase in a range of areas, including defence and security.
- In their annual defence dialogue last week, the two countries had resolved to collaborate closely in defence production, including on dual-use technologies.

Could Hybrid electoral system be a solution

- Two Congress representatives, Rajya Sabha member Vivek Tankha and former Union Minister Mukul Wasnik, argued that "majority aspirations" and the "actual will of the people" is not getting reflected in election results.
- Mr. Tankha told the committee that the first-past-the-post system had worked well in the beginning because there was one-party domination (the Congress winning a plurality of the seats by securing close to a majority of the votes).
- The voting percentage was also very high. But now because of a division of votes, a party with even a 20% share does not get a single seat, while a party with a 28% share can get a disproportionately large number of seats.
- Whoever gets elected does not truly represent the majority aspirations. And a true democracy cannot exist without reflection of the majority aspirations.
- Mr. Tankha also suggested a dual system where separate votes for a candidate and a party could be considered. This system is followed by various European countries.
- From the CPI(M), Polit Bureau member S. Ramachandran Pillai pointed out that in the 2009 elections, the BJP had 18.1% votes but 116 seats in the Lok Sabha. While, in the previous elections, the Congress got 19.35% votes but only 44 seats. Parties together polling almost 50% of the votes were totally excluded. This fact has been repeatedly flagged by CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury.
- The recommendations of the Law Commission's 170th and 255th report should be implemented. A mix of both first-past-the-post and proportional representation should be tried. Both the reports had suggested that 25% or 136 more seats should be added to the Lok Sabha and be filled by proportional representation.

Mandatory 'Cooling off' period to go

- '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.

- Once 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. Marriage is a sacrament in Hinduism.
- The waiting period was for them to have enough time to think through their decision to separate.
- Divorce was granted only after the ‘cooling off’ period and once the court found there was no further chance for reconciliation.
- “The waiting period will only prolong their agony,” a Bench of Justices A.K. Goel and U.U. Lalit observed in their judgment.
- 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, the court observed.

‘Institutions of eminence’ status to give freedom from regulatory mechanisms

- The University Grants Commission announced the beginning of a 90-day application process for universities public and private to seek the status of institutions of eminence, which will provide them freedom from the regular regulatory mechanisms.
- Twenty institutions 10 public and 10 private will be given this status with the aim to give them freedom to become world-class institutions.
- The 10 state-run institutions will have an additional benefit provision of Rs. 10,000 crore over a

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period of 10 years, over and above the regular grants.

- The aim of the scheme is to help institutions break into the top 500 global rankings in 10 years, and then break into the top 100 over time.
- By March-April 2018, the chosen institutions will be accorded the status of “Institutions of Eminence” with a mandate to achieve world-class status over 10 years.
- The institutions which can apply are divided into three categories existing government educational institutions, existing private higher educational institutions and sponsoring organisation for setting up of private institutions.
- Institutions in the top 50 of the National Institute Ranking Framework rankings or those who have secured ranking among top 500 of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, QS University Rankings or Shanghai Ranking Academic Ranking of World Universities are eligible to apply.
- The HRD Ministry will set up an empowered expert committee to process the applications.

A “graded approach” to prohibition of fireworks

- The Supreme Court modified its November 2016 ban on the sale of firecrackers in the National Capital Region (NCR), noting that a complete ban is “too radical a step.”
- The apex court lifted its suspension of valid permanent licences in the NCR, which encompasses the entire National Capital Territory of Delhi, including New Delhi as well as urban areas surrounding it in the neighbouring States of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- On November 11, 2016, the Supreme Court had ordered the suspension of all licences permitting the sale of fireworks, wholesale and retail within the NCR till further orders.
- It had banned the grant or renewal of firecracker licences on a slew of petitions seeking a ban on the use of fireworks. Further, the air quality had worsened manifold after Deepavali in 2016.
- In a paradigm shift from its stand last year, the court struck a balance between its primary concern to protect the “human right to breathe good quality air” and the commercial interests of the fireworks industry. It has now opted for a “graded approach” to prohibition of fireworks.
- The modification is a big relief to Sivakasi fireworks manufacturers, who had challenged the

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2016 ban. They contended the ban had left 821 fireworks industries and five lakh employees in dire straits.

- Consequently, a complete ban on the sale of fireworks would be an extreme step that might not be fully warranted by the facts available to us. There is, therefore, some justification for modifying the interim order passed on November 11, 2016 and lifting the suspension of the permanent licences. It is necessary to ensure that injustice is not caused to those who have already been granted a valid permanent licence to possess and sell fireworks in Delhi and the NCR.

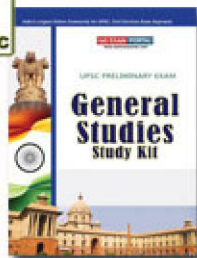
‘90-90-90’ target by UNAIDS tardy in Odisha

- A large number of HIV positive persons don't know their infection status
- Experiences in Ganjam, the most HIV-infection prone district in Odisha, have hinted that progress on the '90-90-90' target set by the United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) has been tardy in the State.
- As per the '90-90-90' target, 90% of all HIV infected persons should get diagnosed and know their HIV positive status. Ninety per cent of these diagnosed HIV positive persons are to be provided regular Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), and 90% of people taking ART should show signs of viral suppression, which reduces their scope of infection.
- Only a small section of HIV-infection prone people have got themselves tested. It means that a large number of HIV-positive persons do not know their HIV infection status.
- As per a study, at any time of the year over five lakh rural males of reproductive age from Ganjam stay away from their families as migrant labourers outside Odisha.
- But the total number of persons tested in Ganjam in a year is around 90,000,
- It means most migrant labourers, who have chances of bringing back HIV infection to their homes in Ganjam, do not get tested.

Chakmas to get citizenship status

- As the Union government remains undecided on the procedure to deport the Rohingya, it is all set to give citizenship to over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindus who fled to India in the 1960s to escape religious persecution in the Chittagong Hill area of Bangladesh





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(undivided Pakistan then).

- Home Minister Rajnath Singh will chair a meeting where a final decision to grant citizenship to the Chakma-Hajongs will be taken.
- Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu will be present at the meeting.
- They would be granted citizenship but will not have any land ownership rights in Arunachal Pradesh, a predominantly tribal State. The Arunachalis have opposed giving any rights to Chakma-Hajongs.
- They would be free to buy land anywhere else in India but not in Arunachal Pradesh. They could continue to live in the transit camps where they have been housed since 1964-65.
- Any procedure on deportation of Rohingya will be an extrapolation of the existing policy on Bangladesh. First step is to identify them as most of them claim they are Indians. The number of Rohingya living in India is an estimate by the intelligence agencies. Identifying an undocumented citizen was a long process.
- The police will have to enquire if the person is not an Indian citizen. Then he or she will be declared a foreigner. A foreigner not having a document is an illegal immigrant. A communication will be sent to Myanmar to verify their address. Deporting them will be the last step and the process has not been finalised yet.

56-year-old dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha came to an end

- **The 56-year-old dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Odisha over construction of a barrage at Neradi across the Vamsadhara River in Srikakulam district has come to a close with the Vamsadhara Water Disputes Tribunal (VWDT) granting permission for its construction. It also ordered the setting up of a supervisory committee to implement its decision.**
- The tribunal, in its “final order and decision” issued in New Delhi, permitted Andhra Pradesh to construct the Neradi barrage and gave specifics about the right and left head sluices.
- The right head sluice should have a design capacity of 8,000 cusecs for meeting the requirements of Andhra Pradesh and the left head sluice for meeting the requirements of Odisha below Neradi Barrage.
- The order said that the capacity of the left head sluice should be intimated to Odisha and the cost of construction of the sluice should be borne by the beneficiary State.



- If in future Odisha decides to increase its ayacut, the cost of the proposed barrage should be shared between both the States, the tribunal ordered, in accordance with the agreement reached by the two States in 1962.
- The three-member tribunal with Justice Mukundakam Sharma declared the yield of the river at Gotta Barrage as 115 tmcft and said that both the States should share it equally.
- The tribunal also permitted Andhra Pradesh to construct a side weir (dam) , but put several conditions on the quantity and duration of drawal of water.
- Vamsadhara is an inter-State river originating in the Eastern Ghats near Lanjigarh of Kalahandi district in Odisha.
- The river forms a common boundary between the two States for 29 km and flows for 82 km in Andhra Pradesh until it empties into the Bay of Bengal at Kalingapatnam.
- The total catchment area of the basin is 10,830 square kilometres, with 8,926 sq km (82 %) in Odisha and the rest in Andhra Pradesh.
- Andhra Pradesh had proposed a barrage at Neradi entailing acquisition of 106 acres of land in Odisha territory in 1961.
- Odisha agreed to provide the land at that time.
- The tribunal ordered Odisha to acquire the required land and hand over the same to A.P.

The Hindu wins best news website award

- The Hindu Group has been awarded two golds and a silver at the South Asian Digital Media Awards at the WAN-IFRA (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers) India 2017 conference in Chennai.
- www.thehindu.com won the gold award for the Best News Website. The Hindu 's site, India's oldest newspaper website, is fully responsive, adapting seamlessly to different devices and screen sizes.

Workers to get unique number

- Every worker in the unorganised and organised sector will get a unique identification number that will make it easier for them to get benefits under different social schemes, the Union Minister for Labour and Employment, Santosh Gangwar
- The idea of introducing a specific number for more than 40 crore workers of the unorganised sector was part of the labour reforms the NDA government had announced soon after it came to power. All the prominent labour unions have been invited to Delhi for consultations on labour reforms, he added.



- The idea of a unique number to workers sounds good on paper but there should be some basis to a proposal like this. The government already has sufficient data about the 4.15 crore subscribers of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation. But so far it has been unable to allot unique numbers to all of them. How then does it plan to go about providing unique numbers to the 45 crore workers in the unorganised sector? This does not sound like a sincere.
- The ministry is working towards compressing 44 labour laws into four codes – one each for wages, industrial relations, social security, and one for occupational safety, health, and working conditions.

NGOs on strict vigilance

- The Home Ministry has sent notices to over 1,200 NGOs, asking them to validate the designated bank accounts in which they receive foreign contribution, failure of which will invite punitive action.
- The list includes Sri Ramakrishna Math, Ramakrishna Mission, Indore Cancer Foundation Charitable Trust, Coimbatore Christian Charitable Trust, Delhi School Of Social Work Society, Hindu Anath Ashram and Madani Darut Tarbiyat.
- In a circular, the Ministry said all NGOs registered under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) should receive foreign donations in a single designated bank account.
- A number of such organisations have not validated their foreign contribution designated accounts, causing problems for the banks to comply with the FCRA provisions that they [banks] report to the Central government within 48 hours of such receipt or utilisation of foreign contribution.
- These associations are required to validate their foreign designated accounts and also the utilisation accounts immediately and send the details, including the bank branch, code, account number, IFSC code and so on through FC 6 form which is available on <https://fcraonline.nic.in>,
- Non-compliance may lead to penal actions as per FCRA 2010.
- The Modi government, which has tightened the rules for NGOs, has already cancelled the registration of more than 10,000 of them in the past three years for alleged non-filing of annual returns as mandated in the FCRA.



- In addition, licences of more than 1,300 NGOs were not renewed or were closed in the recent past for allegedly violating various provisions of the FCRA.
- Nearly 6,000 NGOs have been asked to open their accounts in banks having core banking facilities.

NIRF ranking exercise from next year

- The Centre has set the ball rolling for a more comprehensive ranking of higher educational institutions in the next round of the National Institutional Ranking Framework in 2018.
- The idea: instead of institutions choosing to take part in the exercise, they are being auto-registered through a large online database the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) portal of institutions available with the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- The institutions, however, have to provide details like patents, publications, research projects and campus placements that are not available on the portal.
- The NIRF begun in 2016 ranks higher educational institutions in India on the basis of a variety of parameters. The idea is to be able to gauge their relative standing and also help students make informed career choices.
- The 2016 and 2017 NIRF lists reflected the ranks of only those institutions that had taken part in the exercise. The number was about 3,300 in 2017.
- Among universities, Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore was ranked first and Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi was second.
- Miranda House in Delhi was ranked India's best college. Many top colleges like St. Stephens College, Delhi; Hindu College, Delhi; Delhi School of Economics; Ramjas College, Delhi; and Hansraj College, Delhi, did not take part in the exercise. With the changed process, such institutions will be part of the next year's list.
- With this, the number of institutions that will figure in the NIRF exercise is expected to jump three-fold to at least 10,000

Income limit raised for creamy layer

- The 'creamy layer' ceiling for OBC reservation has been raised to Rs. 8 lakh per year.
- It has now been decided to raise the income limit from Rs. 6 lakh to Rs. 8 lakh per annum for determining the creamy layer among the Other Backward Classes.



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- 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.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had on August 23 announced that the Union Cabinet had been formally apprised of the decision to increase the limit for Central government jobs.
- Mr. Jaitley had said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had hinted in Assam that the bar defining creamy layer would be raised.
- These measures are part of the government's efforts to ensure greater social justice and inclusion for members of the Other Backward Classes

Chakma-Hajong issue

- The government would grant citizenship to over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindu refugees who came to India from the Chittagong Hill Area in undivided Pakistan in the 1960s.
- As per the constitutional provisions and various regulations, the Chakma-Hajongs "cannot be equated with the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh
- A "middle ground" would be chosen so the 2015 Supreme Court order to grant citizenship could be honoured and the rights of the local population would not be diluted.
- The Supreme Court order has to be honoured. Chakmas are settled in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964. But ST status and indigenous people's rights won't be diluted.
- Several organisations and the civil society in Arunachal Pradesh have been opposing citizenship to the Chakma and Hajong refugees saying it would change the demography of the State.
- The Central government is trying to find a workable solution by proposing that the refugees will not be given rights, including land ownership, enjoyed by the Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in erstwhile East Pakistan who left their homeland when it was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s.
- The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and Hajongs, who are Hindus, also allegedly faced religious persecution and entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now



Mizoram).

High speed railway link to Ahmedabad

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe laid the foundation stone in Ahmedabad for the country's first Rs. 1,10,000 crore, 508 km high-speed rail project between Mumbai and Ahmedabad.
- The ambitious project is being implemented with nearly 90% financial support and technology from Japan.
- To be built on elevated corridor with a seven-km undersea tunnel in Mumbai, the project will be based on the famed Japanese Shinkansen high-speed railway system with a record of zero casualties in its 50 years of operation.
- The Narendra Modi government has set an ambitious deadline to complete the project on August 15, 2022 when India marks 75 years of Independence. The project will be executed through a special purpose vehicle, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd.
- The bullet train project will take care of high speed, high growth and high-end technology describing it as "a symbol of New India" that his government wants to build by 2022.
- The bullet train project will be "humanity friendly" and "eco-friendly" and will usher in the next generation economic growth along the corridor between the two cities.
- India-Japan partnership is special, strategic and global and Japan is committed to support 'Make in India' and Japanese industries were working with the country to boost the manufacturing base in India.
- India's Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd will tie up for manufacturing the rolling stock for bullet train project.
- Stressing on the strong Indo-Japan partnership, Mr. Abe said, "A strong India is in favour of Japan and a strong Japan is in favour of India."
- As part of the project, a training centre in Vadodara is being set up to train over 4,000 employees who will be responsible for execution, operation and maintenance of the bullet train.
- The project will cover 12 stations — Mumbai, Thane, Virar, Boisar, Vapi, Bilimora, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Ahmedabad and Sabarmati — and once operational, the train is expected to service 1.5 crore travellers a year.



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Survey of street vendors in Bengaluru

- Street vendors in the city Bengaluru have won a long battle for official recognition. The first ever survey of street vendors, which will eventually give them an official ID card.
- The survey aims to enrol an estimated two lakh street vendors by September 25.

After Aadhar -Pan card link now Centre plans for Aadhar-driving licence link

- It will help check the menace of multiple licences
- 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.
- Aadhaar was a safe and secure tool for good governance and empowerment. Aadhaar represented digital identity, not physical identity, and that digital identity confirmed physical identity, Mr. Prasad said, adding that the government had linked Aadhaar to PAN card to stop money laundering.
- Reiterating the commitment of the Union government towards providing affordable and inclusive technology to the masses, Mr. Prasad said digital India must help create an inclusive society.

Rohingya issue

- Assam and Manipur have placed their forces on alert
- The Centre is yet to spell out its stand on undocumented Rohingya but State governments in Assam and Manipur have asked their police, especially in the border districts, to “push back anyone who tries to cross the border.”
- While Assam shares a 262 km border with Bangladesh, three other northeastern States — Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland are also front-line States. The governments in Assam and Manipur have issued “alerts to mount extra vigil in the border areas.”
- Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal is believed to have conveyed to the Border Security Force (BSF) personnel and top officials of the State police to “push back if any Rohingya family tried to cross over the Bangladesh border, seeking refuge.”
- The Manipur government, too has instructed the police to crack down in borders towns like Moreh that

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routinely see brisk cross-border trading. It is not uncommon to find Myanmar traders residing in these areas on a temporary basis.

- The Rohingya a minority Muslim community in the Rakhine state of Myanmar on the border with Bangladesh have been forced to flee the country following periodic ethnic clashes and crackdown by Myanmar's Army. The latest bout of violence erupted last month, following an attack on a police post.
- Around 3,00,000 Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh since the August 25 crackdown on their settlements.

Institutions created by Act of Parliament do not need FCRA licence

- The HRD Ministry clarified that the institutions created through an Act of Parliament do not need an FCRA licence to receive foreign funds.
- The Home Ministry has cancelled the FCRA licences of several hundred organisations, including the Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and IIT Delhi, for failing to file annual returns for five consecutive years.
- Institutions created through an Act of Parliament are exempted from filing returns as they are covered under the annual government audit.
- Citing Section 50 of FCRA 2010, the official said the statutory bodies created through Central or state Acts are exempt.

States to pay compensation to the kin of those died unnatural jail death

- The Supreme Court directed the Chief Justices of all High Courts to register petitions suo motu to identify the kin of prisoners who died unnatural deaths from 2012 and order the States to award them compensation.
- It is important for the Centre and the State governments to realise that persons who suffer an unnatural death in a prison are also victims sometimes of a crime and sometimes of negligence and apathy or both. There is no reason at all to exclude their kin from receiving compensation only because the victim is a criminal," a Bench of Justices Madan B. Lokur and Dipak Gupta observed.
- Normally, the National and State Human Rights Commissions award compensations in cases of custodial torture and deaths. However, compliance by State governments is low as these commissions do not exercise any power of contempt.



- Besides, the States go for a long-drawn appeal in the High Courts and later on in the Supreme Court, if necessary.
- This judgment is significant as the High Court will now directly award compensation and ensure compliance by the States.
- The Supreme Court referred to its judgment as a voice of the victims and an end to the silence of the dead.
- The payment from the year 2012 was chosen because National Crime Records Bureau has records of unnatural deaths only from that year. The judgment came on a letter addressed to the apex court in 2013 by its former Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti on the deplorable conditions of 1,382 prisons in the country.
- The court put the Union Women and Child Development Ministry on a December 31 deadline to formulate procedures for tabulating children who died unnatural deaths in custody or in child care institutions.



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INDIA AND WORLD

India-U.S. C17 deal

- India is in talks with the U.S. for buying another Boeing C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft to be added to its fleet of 10.
- Since induction in 2013, the aircraft has become the mainstay of India's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.
- The validity of the Letter of Acceptance for the sale expires in mid-October and India has to conclude the deal before that or ask the U.S. for an extension.
- The aircraft, along with associated equipment, technical support and warranty, is estimated to cost \$366.2 million.
- The aircraft will be handed over within a month of the contract having been signed after some routine checks and maintenance. The handover will be done in the U.S. itself, and it will be flown to India by Indian pilots.
- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) gave its approval for the purchase in December last.
- The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet the current and future strategic airlift requirements. India lies in a region prone to natural disasters and will use the additional capability [aircraft] for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
- In 2011, India purchased 10 C-17s under the Foreign Military Sales programme worth \$4.1 billion, which had a follow-on clause for six more aircraft.
- However, the delay in decision-making in the Defence Ministry meant the IAF missed out on the opportunity. The last C-17 aircraft left Boeing's Long Beach plant in California in 2015.
- While the C-17 assembly line was shut down, Boeing made 10 additional aircraft without any order and offered them to all existing customers, including India. New Delhi's silence meant nine pieces were picked by the existing users and one is left with Boeing.

INDIA-BANGLADESH

- After Bangladesh High Commissioner Syed Muazzem Ali had sought a meeting with Mr. Jaishankar, the MEA issued another statement, clarifying that India "remains deeply concerned" about the situation in Rakhine and "the outflow of refugees from that region," the first such reference since the outbreak of violence in August.



- The MEA did not reply to requests for a comment on the issue, but Indian and Bangladeshi officials acknowledged the shift in the Indian position, which they said was “welcomed” and “well received” in Dhaka.
- Bangladesh and India both see the refugee problem as a national security concern given Rohingya terror groups that are operating. That is why Bangladesh conveyed the need for India to join in putting pressure on the Myanmar government to stem the flow.
- Former Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tariq Karim also warned that “the Rohingya issue could throw a spanner in the India-Bangladesh relationship, as PM Sheikh Hasina is under severe pressure on the issue of the violence in Myanmar that has forced out Rohingya.”
- India’s support to Myanmar is seen as encouraging the Burmese security forces to crack down more on the Rohingya, causing a humanitarian crisis.
- Experts say India’s bid to strengthen ties with Myanmar comes amid China’s growing presence in that Country.
- India’s stand to support Suu Kyi is also in line with our tough stand on terrorism, as well as on refusing to interfere in Myanmar’s domestic politics.
- India’s shift in position on the Myanmar issue, where it expressed concerns about the outflow of Rohingya refugees for the first time in recent months, was prompted by a series of requests from the Bangladesh government “at the highest levels”.

India-Afghanistan

- 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, even as Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister suggested a larger role for India in regional diplomacy.
- Afghanistan hope also that India, as a good friend of other countries in the region like Russia and Iran, can convince those countries to work with the Afghan government to support the peace process in Afghanistan.
- At the conclusion of the Partnership Council meeting, 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, where he 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.



Sheikh Hasina urges to end violence against Rohingyas

- Describing the atrocities on Rohingyas as “violation of human rights”, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged Myanmar to safely take their nationals back to their land.
- “Stop violence against innocent people,” Ms. Hasina said, adding that though Bangladesh would provide refuge to those coming in on humanitarian grounds, they would eventually have to go back to their country.
- Visiting the biggest Rohingya refugee camp in Ukhia’s Kutupalang Ms. Hasina categorically said what was happening in Myanmar was “inhuman, a violation of human rights.”
- Before distributing relief materials to the refugees who arrived in droves since the Myanmar military allegedly began an offensive, Ms. Hasina said Bangladesh only wanted “peace and good relations” with its neighbours, however, that it could not accept “unjust acts” the Myanmar government was committing.

Balzan Prizes

- Two U.S. scientists whose work has contributed to creating immunological treatments for cancer are among the winners of this year’s Balzan Prizes, recognising scholarly and scientific achievements.
- Another winner is economist Bina Agarwal, a professor at the University of Manchester, who was recognised in the gender studies category for her “heroic” work studying women’s contributions to agriculture in India.
- James Allison of the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and Robert Schreiber of the Washington University School of Medicine were cited for their work on antibody treatments that has increased the survival of patients with metastatic melanoma.
- The Balzan Foundation awards two prizes in the sciences and two in the humanities each year, rotating specialities to highlight new or emerging areas of research and sustain fields that might be overlooked elsewhere.
- Recipients receive 750,000 Swiss francs (Rs. 5 crore), half of which must be used for research, preferably by young scholars or scientists.
- Nobel Prize-winner Jules Hoffman, a presenter of the awards, said the work focusing on using the immune system to fight cancer, expanding from the traditional treatments of removal,



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radiation and chemotherapy, has already had success in 25 to 30% of melanoma patients in a study who had previously gone through the traditional battery of treatments. It is now being developed for small cell lung cancer and rectal cancer.

- This year, the Balzan Foundation also awarded a fifth prize, in international relations, which was deferred from last year after the committee failed to reach agreement on a winner. It went to Robert O. Keohane of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, best known for his influential 1984 book *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*.
- Prizes will be awarded in Bern, Switzerland.

US wants India to minimise the trade imbalance between them

- The rising imbalance in trade with India is a concern for America and India must open its market to more American companies, U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said.
- Mr. Ross said India must also take more effective measures to protect innovation by improving its intellectual property protections.
- The Commerce Secretary was addressing a gathering at the U.S.-India Business Council on the forthcoming Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) in Hyderabad in November.
- “[U.S.] President [Donald] Trump and Prime Minister [Narendra Modi] have announced to co-host this year’s GES in Hyderabad and [they] reiterated the importance of close relations between our two growing economies.
- Annual bilateral trade between the U.S. and India has doubled over the last decade and was \$114 billion in 2016. Unfortunately, over the same period, trade deficit tripled, now at \$27 billion.
- The imbalance was visible in investments as well. While India’s investors invested \$12.1 billion in the U.S. last year, U.S. investors invested \$32.9 billion in India. That only 1.5 % of U.S. exports were to India, while only 6.3 % of Indian exports goes to America.
- India and the U.S have decided to move to the 2+2 format of engagement involving the Secretaries of Defence and State Departments from the American side and Ministers for Defence and External Affairs Ministers from the Indian side.
- The Strategic and Commercial Dialogue between the two countries is being discontinued from



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this year.

India -Japan

- Displaying strategic convergence, India and Japan asked North Korea to shut down its nuclear and missile programmes.
- Both sides also hinted at Pakistan's past involvement with North Korean nuclear and missile programmes and sought accountability of "all parties" who helped Pyongyang acquire nuclear technology even as Japan promised to help India deal with cross-border terrorism.
- Japan and India will take firm steps against the challenges that have emanated from North Korea. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, elaborated on the country's concerns over the recent test of a hydrogen bomb by Pyongyang, which also fired a long-range missile over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido on August 29.
- Mr. Abe's speech, draws 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.
- In a significant move, Japan also stated its interest in the strategically important northeastern region of the country. Japan, at present, has two infrastructure projects in Meghalaya and Mizoram and more projects are likely to be added to the list after feasibility studies, said Mr. Maruyama.
- Both the points about North Korea and the reference to Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy – developed to deal with the Chinese influence – are significant in view of the now-resolved Doklam crisis that erupted between India and China.
- The two leaders also pointed out that maritime cooperation between the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) and the Indian Navy had expanded to include 'anti-submarine aspects' and acknowledged the need for greater maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific Region. Both sides also agreed to support small islands in the region as part of their common strategy.
- The joint statement emphasised expansion of joint exercises in areas of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism, which will also include joint field exercises between the Japanese and Indian land forces next year. It further stated.
- India, Japan ink 3 MoUs in science & technology

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- India and Japan signed three agreements in the science and technology sector to prepare an exchange programme for their scientists and promote joint research. The first pact is for an exchange programme between Japan's iTHEMS and India's Simons-NCBS, Bengaluru. The other two MoUs are on promoting research collaborations.

'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'

- 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.
- Japan government's overarching nature of the new concept, "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.
- 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 would be Japan aim
- Japan will expand infrastructure, development, trade and investment, and enhance business environment and human development from East Asia as a starting point, to the Middle East and Africa.
- The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' rests on "two oceans" — Indian and Pacific — and "two continents" — Africa and Asia. It is understood that Japan is quietly challenging China's aggressive plans in the South China Sea that pose a threat to the energy lane that sustains Japanese economy.
- The government of Shinzo Abe believes that 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'.



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INTERNATIONAL

U.S. policies are shadowing Afghan talks

- Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani will arrive in Delhi to attend the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council meeting that has been delayed for years. The Minister is also expected to discuss new avenues for cooperation within the India-U.S.-Afghanistan grouping.
- However, officials said no new decisions on defence supplies or security cooperation were likely during the talks which will end with a joint statement.
- All eyes will be on talks to discuss the way forward weeks after U.S. President Trump unveiled his "new policy" for Afghanistan, where he proposed a larger role for India in development assistance to Afghanistan.
- Later this month, Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and a senior U.S. trade or commerce official will travel to India for the first India-U.S.-Afghanistan trade expo, funded by USAID.
- Senior Afghan diplomats said the emphasis of the Partnership Council talks would be on "capacity building" for Afghan security forces in training and enhancing existing cooperation as well as about 287 "small development projects (SDPs)" that India is committing funding for including small dams, road and highway construction, agriculture, education and health in the SDP-Phase III that were signed in 2012.
- The two sides will also discuss enhancing trade, especially the "air corridor" for freight that was inaugurated in June to circumvent Pakistan, and has faced teething troubles due to non-availability of cargo aircraft.
- However, the Afghan government has recently engaged private airline Kam Airways to carry freight, and officials said they would like to connect more Indian and Afghan cities including Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Herat for trade in cotton, fruit and dry fruit from Afghanistan and medical and electrical equipment from India.
- The air corridor agreement could be signed during Dr. Abdullah's visit.
- In addition, Mr. Rabbani and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will witness the signing of

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two agreements: the Motor Vehicles agreement, announced in 2014, and an agreement on Orbit Frequency Coordination for the South Asia satellite launched in May this year.

- Mr. Rabbani will also raise the problems of Afghans travelling to India for medical care and students face in obtaining a visa as the process requires repeated visits to the Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRRO). The minister is likely to request longer duration visas for them.
- According to the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed by President Hamid Karzai and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2011, the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council was supposed to meet annually.
- The Afghan Foreign Minister will be accompanied by four deputy ministers who head joint working groups on Trade and Economic Cooperation, Capacity Development and Education, and Social, Cultural, Civil Society and people-to-people contacts, and will meet with Ms Swaraj for talks.
- Mr. Rabbani is also the head of the Jamiat-e-Islami party that is part of the National Unity Government in Kabul, and officials said he would call on Mr. Modi and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi during his visit.

Prominent historian of Afghan culture dead

- American historian Nancy Hatch Dupree, who dedicated most of her life to preserving Afghanistan's heritage, died in a Kabul hospital aged 89.
- Ms. Dupree first arrived in the Afghan capital in 1962 as the wife of a diplomat.
- Over the next five decades she travelled throughout the country, wrote five guidebooks and documented the war-torn nation's past.
- With the help of the new government, Ms. Dupree created a centre to preserve the couple's priceless collection of records for researchers.
- The Afghanistan Center houses more than 1,00,000 documents in the country's two official languages, Dari and Pashto, as well as English and other European languages.
- The centre also provides reading materials to hundreds of libraries around the country, a reflection of Ms. Dupree's belief that knowledge was key to Afghanistan's recovery from decades of conflict.



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China follows the route of France and Britain

- China is joining France and Britain in announcing plans to end sales of gasoline and diesel cars.
- China's Industry Ministry is developing a timetable to end production and sale of traditional fuel cars and will promote development of electric technology,
- The reports gave no possible target date, but Beijing is stepping up pressure on automakers to accelerate development of electrics.
- China is the biggest auto market by number of vehicles sold, giving any policy changes outsize importance for the global industry.
- France and Britain announced in July that they will stop sales of gasoline and diesel automobiles by 2040 as part of efforts to reduce pollution and carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.

Pakistani author made it to Man Booker shortlist

- Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* was not among the six finalists for the top literary award
- A tale on the global migration crisis by Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid has made it to the Man Booker Prize shortlist, alongside works by American authors Paul Auster (*4321*), Emily Fridlund (*History of Wolves*) and George Saunders (*Lincoln in the Bardo*), and British authors Ali Smith (*Autumn*) and Fiona Mozley (*Elmet*).
- *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* , Arundhati Roy's first novel in 20 years, that was on the Booker longlist is out of the race.
- The authors who made it to the shortlist include some of literature's biggest names alongside newcomers such as Ms. Mozley, whose powerful book on a family's struggle to "retain its self-sufficiency as the old ways succumb to the bland greed of the new normality" made it a "timeless" and "timely" tale in the view of the judges.
- From its inception, the prize was only open to Commonwealth, Irish, and South African, and, later, Zimbabwean citizens; in 2014, the eligibility was widened to writers of any English language novel.
- Three South Asian writers Ms. Roy, Mr. Hamid and Kamila Shamsie had made it to the long list announced in July. At the time, the judges described *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* , which made the long list twenty years after Ms. Roy's *The God of Small Things* won the award, as a "rich and vital book" that came from the "bowels of India".
- Born in Lahore, Mr. Hamid is the author of three other novels, *Moth Smoke* , *The Reluctant*



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Fundamentalism and How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia, as well as a collection of essays Discontent and Its Civilizations.

U.S. to extend sanctions relief to Iran

- The U.S. was to extend wide sanctions relief for Iran under the 2015 nuclear deal, sources familiar with the matter said, but no decision on whether to preserve the deal itself has yet been made.
- At the same time, the U.S. Treasury announced new cyber-related sanctions on about a dozen Iranian individuals or entities.
- Under the law, these sanctions can be waived for a maximum of 120 days, forcing the U.S. government to revisit the issue every four months. Sources familiar with the matter stressed that the wider U.S. policy toward Iran has yet to be decided.

Trump administration is fairly close to deal on immigrants

- U.S. President Donald Trump said he was “fairly close” to finalising a deal with Democrats in Congress on allowing young immigrants to stay in the United States.
- They have been in our country for many years through no fault of their own — brought in by parents at young age,” he said.
- Mr. Trump’s predecessor Barack Obama protected the so-called “Dreamers” through his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) order. But Mr. Trump rescinded that executive order, and urged Congress to craft a legal solution within the next six months.
- There was no final deal, but... we agreed that the President would support enshrining DACA protections into law, and encourage the House (of Representatives) and Senate to act.
- Instead, a draft border security package could include using new technology, drones, air support, sensors and rebuilding roads, the congressional Democrats said. “The WALL, which is already under construction in the form of new renovation of old and existing fences and walls, will continue to be built.

UN resolution are ‘heinous’-N.Korea

- A North Korean organisation demanded that the U.S. be “beaten to death” like a “rabid dog” for spearheading fresh UN sanctions on Pyongyang over its latest nuclear test, adding ally Japan should be “sunken into the sea”.
- The UN Security Council unanimously imposed an eighth set of sanctions on the North on

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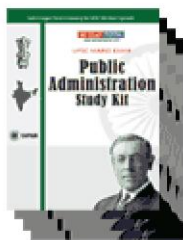


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Monday, banning it from trading in textiles and restricting its oil imports, a week after Pyongyang tested what it said was a hydrogen bomb small enough to fit onto a missile.

- North's Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee (KAPPC) denounced the "heinous sanctions resolution" and said there were mounting calls for strong retaliation against the U.S. and its allies.
- "Now is the time to annihilate the U.S. imperialist aggressors. Let's reduce the U.S. mainland into ashes and darkness," he said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency.
- According to the South's unification ministry, the KAPPC acts as "a window for improving relations with countries like the U.S. and Japan... while campaigning to change North Korea's closed and negative image".

Terror attack in London

- Terror attack with IED during rush hour triggers mass panic at railway station
- Britain faced its fifth terrorism incident in 2017 as an improvised explosive device triggered an explosion on a rush-hour tube train at Parsons Green in southwest London injuring at least 22 people and triggering mass panic at the station. Unconfirmed reports said 29 people were injured.
- Prime Minister Theresa May chaired a meeting of the emergency COBRA committee, as Britain's terror threat remained at severe, meaning a terror attack was highly likely.
- The Metropolitan police urged members of the public to remain calm and alert and for those who had images of the scene to upload them on a police website.
- The explosion took place at around 8.20 in the morning when the device on the district line tube train, travelling from southwest London to Paddington went off, creating what witnesses on the train described as a "fireball."
- Images circulating on social media appeared to show a white bucket within a supermarket bag. One witness, who suffered burns on his scalp, spoke of others who were badly burnt, while others spoke of the panic that ensued after the incident as, after the doors were quickly opened, people attempted to exit the station through its single narrow stairwell.
- Blast on the London Tube highlights the challenge facing large metropolitan centres
- blast at London Tube that injured at least 22 people highlighted the challenge facing large metropolitan centres, amid a new wave of terror attacks, some of which appear to be carried out by lone agents, often using low-tech weapons such as vehicles, knives or home made devices.



- The incident, fifth terror attack this year in Britain, is also likely to reignite the domestic debate regarding funding of emergency services in the country, amid austerity cutbacks to resources and constraints on pay — issues that were raised by the Labour Party following previous attacks.
- This attack comes 12 years after 52 people were killed on terrorist bombings on London buses and tubes, and after the March attack on Westminster Bridge and outside the Houses of Parliament that killed five people.
- Less than a month after the attack on the Ariana Grande Concert in Manchester in May, 11 people were killed in another attack around London Bridge station. In June, a man was killed outside the Finsbury Park Mosque in north London. Nineteen terrorist plots have been foiled in Britain since June 2013, while 379 people were arrested for terrorism related offences across the country in the twelve months to June.

Nawaz Sharif's review plea dismissed by Pakistan Supreme Court

- The Supreme Court of Pakistan dismissed the review petition filed by ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif against his disqualification.
- A five-member bench headed by Justice Asif Saeed Khosa rejected the arguments of the lawyers for Mr. Sharif and his children Hussain, Hassan and Maryam Nawaz that the earlier judgment of July 28 by the court was based on grounds that were not raised by the petitioners.
- Mr. Sharif was declared disqualified for “not being truthful and honest” and for concealing information about a Dubai-based company Capital FZE owned by his son Mr. Hussain.
- He was the chairman of the board of directors but denied receiving any financial benefits.
- The Supreme Court also asked top anti-corruption body, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), to file corruption cases against the former ruling family.
- Subsequently, the NAB filed four cases against the Sharifs in the accountability court in Islamabad. The court has also issued summons to them to appear on September 19.
- The Sharifs are now facing charges of failing to produce paper trail of their assets allegedly stashed abroad.
- The assets, which include four expensive apartments in Central London, were purchased through money which was allegedly laundered from Pakistan.
- Panama papers released last year claimed that the former Prime Minister's family used offshore

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accounts to purchase the property.

North Korea fires a ballistic missile over Japan

- 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.
- 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.
- In New York, the Security Council called an emergency meeting and UN chief Antonio Guterres said talks on the crisis would be held on the sidelines of the General Assembly next week.
- The U.S. Pacific Command confirmed that 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.
- Millions of Japanese were jolted awake by blaring sirens and emergency text message alerts.
- The missile was said to have overflowed the U.S. ally for around two minutes.
- Beijing condemned the launch but said it was not to blame for the crisis.
- In response to the launch, South Korea's military immediately carried out a ballistic missile drill of its own, with the defence ministry saying it took place while the North's rocket was still airborne.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ultra-thin spacecraft that can remove space debris

- Scientists are developing an ultra-thin spacecraft that can remove space debris which potentially threatens satellites or astronauts by enveloping junk in the Earth's orbit and dragging it through the atmosphere, causing it to burn up.
- The Brane Craft, being developed by U.S.-based Aerospace Corporation, is flexible and measures less than half the thickness of a human hair.
- It has to be bullet-proof, because a five-micron diameter particle can penetrate the main structural sheet, which is only 10 microns thick.
- The spacecraft's microprocessor and digital electronics are fabricated in such a way that if one component gets damaged, the others will continue to work.

Cement material that is eco friendly being tested for use in industry

- A research collaboration between India and Switzerland on a new cement material that can reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the manufacturing process is set to take off into implementation.
- The construction sector is a major contributor to global carbon dioxide emissions. Though this is known, it appears difficult to reduce the scale of construction, especially as it is a route to establishing more equitable conditions in developing countries like India. One way of mitigating the emissions factor is the use of Limestone Calcined Clay Cement or the LC3 technology.
- Traditional processes that manufacture cement from clinker-limestone or clinker-calcined clay combinations are well known. LC3 effects a synergy between these processes.
- The combination of the new method and the material properties effectively reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 30% as compared to the traditional way of manufacturing cement.
- In manufacturing portland cement, limestone and materials like clay are heated together in huge kilns to high temperatures (approximately 1,450 degrees C), so that they fuse without melting to give clinker.



- This is the most CO₂-intensive part of the whole process. The carbon dioxide comes both from the burning of the fuel needed to create that temperature and due to the breakdown of limestone into calcium oxide and carbon dioxide. The latter part accounts for 60% of the CO₂ emissions in manufacture of cement.
- The best thing to do would be to substitute CO₂-intensive clinker with a different material.
- In India, fly ash a waste produced in the burning of coal for producing energy is used in the manufacture of blended cement. However this is used in a lower proportions and only where available; therefore, for effectively reducing emissions, more clinker is to be substituted with calcined clay and limestone. This reduces emissions by 30% with respect to portland cement.

Skin bacterium with antimicrobial activity discovered

- Bacteria found on the skin are known to harbour a large repertoire of antimicrobial agents. A new bacterial strain of *Staphylococcus capitis* identified by scientists at Delhi's CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) has a strong antibacterial activity against Gram-positive bacteria, including *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- The work reconfirms the growing understanding that bacteria found on the skin may be a "rich source" of novel antimicrobial molecules. The results of the study were published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.
- The bacteria were isolated from the skin surface of a healthy human foot; the bacteria are specifically found near the toes. Different bacteria are found in different niches of the skin. For instance, bacteria found in the arm pit are different from those found on the feet.
- The antimicrobial activity helps the bacteria to secure their niche environment by preventing other bacteria, including pathogenic bacteria, from colonising.
- The new bacterial strain identified are closely related and can thrive in the same niche on the skin. And this drives the competition between the two bacteria.
- *Staphylococci* are common colonisers of human skin and the third largest genera identified in human skin microbiome.
- In all, the new strain of bacteria has nine antimicrobial peptides, of which two (epidermin and gallidermin) have already been characterised from other bacteria. The other seven new peptides have been found to have antimicrobial activity.
- Synthetic peptides with sequences identical to the natural ones isolated from the bacteria were synthesised by the team. The synthetic peptides were found to possess antibacterial activity, opening the window to developing new antimicrobial compounds.



- Since the purified synthetic peptides are inhibitory, it not only confirms the antimicrobial activity but also shows that the synthetic peptides can be used directly without actually culturing the microbes.
- The team has been isolating bacteria from the skin and studying their roles. The researchers had earlier reported another bacteria from human skin with antimicrobial activity. And in a paper published in May this year, they reported the discovery of a new Gram-positive bacterial genus — *Auricoccus indicus*. The bacteria were isolated from the external ear lobe of a healthy individual.

Does total darkness or light alter the body clock?

- Will living in complete darkness or being in light for 24 hours for the rest of our lives affect our circadian rhythm (sleep–wake cycles)? Probably not, at least in the case of fruit flies.
- Experiments carried out on 330 generations of drosophila (fruit flies) confirmed that circadian rhythm was persistent in flies that were kept in complete darkness or complete light 24 hours a day for over 19 years. This may be due to the intrinsic value of the body's time-keeping system in coordinating our internal physiological functions.
- This was the finding of a study by a group of scientists led by Prof. Vijay Kumar Sharma at the Chronobiology Lab (where study of the biological clock is carried out) at Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru; Prof. Sharma passed away last year after the completion of the work.
- Using drosophila activity monitors, locomotor activity patterns of flies kept in the three different conditions (total darkness, total light, and normal day–night conditions) were monitored.
- Interestingly, the flies maintained in complete darkness exhibited a relatively better sleep–wake cycle than the ones in complete light. The control group had cues of day and night in the form of 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness, while the flies in the other two groups which were not exposed to such cues also maintained circadian rhythms over several hundred generations.
- The results of the study help dispel the notion that continuous darkness may regress the body's biological clock and show that absence of light may have caused the evolution of a more robust clock in flies. The results were recently published in Chronobiology International.
- The time at which flies emerge as adults from pupae and the time when adult females laid eggs



were examined, since appropriate timing of adult emergence and oviposition (egg-laying) behaviours are thought to be important for survival and reproduction.

- For the experiment, a few flies taken from the group kept in complete darkness and complete light were exposed to normal cycle of 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness. They found that flies which were taken from the group exposed to complete light tend to lay eggs at the time of dusk when exposed to normal light and darkness cycle. On the other hand, flies taken from the group exposed to complete darkness tend to lay eggs at about noon.
- In nature, a high temperature during the day may increase the risk of drying of eggs, which may be the reason why egg-laying mostly takes place in the evenings. Since the flies in complete darkness have not been exposed to light for several generations they may have slowly lost this ability of restricting egg-laying to the evenings.
- The most interesting find of the study was that the circadian rhythm did not degenerate over 19 years. Complete regression of the circadian clock is very unlikely because of the several other functions of the core circadian genes.

Flower colour can be altered by Gene-Editing

- In a world-first, Japanese scientists have used the CRISPR gene-editing tool to change the colour of ornamental morning glory flowers from violet to white by tweaking a single gene.
- Japanese morning glory, or Asagao, was chosen for this study as it is one of two traditional horticultural model plants in the National BioResource Project in Japan (NBRP).
- Extensive genetic studies of this plant have already been performed, its genome sequenced and DNA transfer methods established.
- As public concern with genetic technologies such as CRISPR/Cas9 is currently a social issue in Japan, studies using this popular and widely-grown plant may help to educate the public on this topic, researchers said.
- Researchers from the University of Tsukuba, the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization (NARO) and Yokohama City University in Japan targeted a single gene DFR-B, encoding an enzyme responsible for the colour of the plant's stems, leaves and flowers.
- Two other very closely related genes (DFR-A and DRF-C) sit side-by-side, next to DFR-B. Therefore, the challenge was to specifically and accurately target the DFR-B gene without altering the other genes. The CRISPR/Cas9 system was used as it is currently the most precise

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method of gene editing.

- The CRISPR/Cas9 system is based on a bacterial defence mechanism.
- It is composed of two molecules that alter the DNA sequence. Cas9, an enzyme, cuts the two strands of DNA in a precise location so that DNA can be added or removed.
- Cas9 is guided to the correct location by gRNA, or guide RNA, a small piece of RNA that has been designed to be complementary to the target DNA sequence.
- Cas9 cuts the two strands of DNA at the target location, allowing DNA to be removed and/or added.
- This technology is also extremely useful in confirming the function of genes.

Organic waste as a substitute for petroleum

- Scientists have developed a way to extract sugars from wood chips and organic forest waste, which may serve as a cheaper substitute for petroleum a raw material for fuel.
- The key to the technology is the use of a concentrated solution of an inorganic salt in the presence of a small amount of mineral acid, researchers said.
- The team integrated the process with another step, which converts the sugars to furans and enables the salt solution to be recycled. Furans are compounds used to make speciality chemicals.

GM mustard varieties

- 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.
- That 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.



- Contrary to GM basher's propaganda that very high diversity is available in Indian mustard scientific analysis has shown that the Indian gene pool of mustard is very narrow as a consequence, in spite of extensive efforts by our plant breeders there is very little impact of pure-line breeding on mustard yields in recent years says a report by the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS), a 600-member body of agricultural scientists.
- 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.
- Though there were wild-related species, these were largely untenable for commercially extracting oil, he added. 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.

Cloaking technology that can make opaque materials invisible

- Scientists have developed a cloaking technology that can make opaque materials invisible by using light waves from lasers, paving the way for novel ways of camouflaging objects.
- A completely opaque material is irradiated from above with a specific wave pattern with the effect that light waves from the left can pass through the material without any obstruction.
- The technique can be applied to different kinds of waves, and should work with sound waves just as well as with light waves, researchers said.
- Complex materials such as a sugar cube are opaque, because light waves inside them are scattered multiple times.
- A light wave can enter and exit the object, but will never pass through the medium on a straight line. Instead, it is scattered into all possible directions.
- For years many different attempts have been made to outwit this kind of scattering, creating a "cloak of invisibility". Special materials have been worked out, for example, which are able to



guide light waves around an object. Alternatively, also experiments have been performed with objects that can emit light by themselves.

- When an electronic display sends out exactly the same light as it absorbs in the back, it can appear invisible, at least when looked at in the right angle.
- Original light wave was guided through the object, as if the object was not there at all. To make the laser shine, energy has to be supplied by means of a pump beam. Otherwise, the laser material behaves just like any other material it absorbs part of the incident light.
- The crucial point is to pump energy into the material in a spatially tailored way such that light is amplified in exactly the right places, while allowing for absorption at other parts of the material.
- If this pattern perfectly corresponds to the inner irregularities of the material which usually scatter the light, then the projection from above can effectively switch off the scattering, and another beam of light travelling through the material from one side can pass without any obstruction.

The 20-year journey of NASA's Cassini comes to an end

- The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's \$3.9-billion Cassini spacecraft ended its 20-year-long ground-breaking journey with 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. No spacecraft has ever ventured so close to the planet before, NASA said.
- After 20 years in space, NASA's famed Cassini spacecraft made its final death plunge into Saturn, ending a storied mission that scientists say taught us nearly everything we know about Saturn today and transformed the way we think about life elsewhere in the solar system.
- Cassini, an international project that cost \$3.9 billion and included scientists from 27 nations, disintegrated as it dove into Saturn's atmosphere at a speed of 1,20,700 kmph.
- Cassini's final contact with Earth came at 7:55 am EDT (5:25 p.m. in India). Its descent into Saturn's atmosphere began about an hour and a half earlier, but the signal took that long to reach Earth because of the vast distance.
- Cassini's plunge into the ringed gas giant the furthest planet visible from Earth with the naked



eye came after the spacecraft ran out of rocket fuel after a journey of some 7.9 billion km.

- Its well-planned demise was a way to prevent any damage to Saturn's ocean-bearing moons Titan and Enceladus, which scientists want to keep pristine for future exploration because they may contain some form of life.
- Three other spacecraft have flown by Saturn Pioneer 11 in 1979, followed by Voyager 1 and 2 in the 1980s.
- But none have studied Saturn in such detail as Cassini, named after the French-Italian astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini, who discovered in the 17th century that Saturn had several moons and a gap between its rings.
- Cassini's discovery of ocean worlds at Titan and Enceladus changed everything, shaking views to the core about surprising places to search for potential life beyond Earth."
- Cassini launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida in 1997, then spent seven years in transit followed by 13 years orbiting Saturn.
- In that time, it discovered six more moons around Saturn, three-dimensional structures towering above Saturn's rings, and a giant storm that raged across the planet for nearly a year.
- In 2005, the Cassini orbiter released a lander called Huygens on Titan, marking the first and only such landing in the outer solar system, on a celestial body beyond the asteroid belt.
- The spacecraft is also credited with discovering icy geysers erupting from Enceladus, and eerie hydrocarbon lakes made of ethane and methane on Saturn's largest moon, Titan. Huygens was a joint project of the European Space Agency, Italian Space Agency and NASA.

Astra -BVRAAM

- Astra, the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air missile (BVRAAM), moved one step closer to induction into the Air Force after successfully completing development trials.
- The final development flight trials of Astra BVRAAM were successfully conducted over the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of Chandipur in Odisha during September 11-14. A total of seven trials were conducted against Pilotless Target Aircraft (PTA) successfully.
- The missile was tested in various missions and all sub-systems, including the indigenous radio frequency seeker, and met all parameters. Two missiles were also launched in combat configuration with warhead and the targets were neutralised.



ISRO expects to resume with launches in Nov.-Dec.

- The Indian Space Research Organisation expects to resume launch of satellites in a couple of months once its failure analysis committee releases its report. The committee is conducting tests on why the PSLV-C39 mission of August 31 failed to release a back-up navigation satellite into space.
- ISRO Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar said the committee would release its report "very soon". The launches would be resumed in November or December after necessary steps are taken. He was speaking on the sidelines of an event to mark 25 years of the formation of Antrix Corporation, which markets ISRO's products and services.
- On the loss of IRNSS-1H in the launch, Mr. Kiran Kumar said the existing fleet of six spacecraft met all required specifications and there was no urgency for a replacement.
- 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.

The advanced towed artillery gun system (ATAGS) sets new record in range

- The advanced towed artillery gun system (ATAGS), which is being jointly developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the private sector, has set a world record in range by hitting targets at a distance of 48 km.
- During trial firings at Pokhran ATAGS registered the longest ever distance of 48.074 km, surpassing the maximum ranges of 35-40 km fired by any artillery gun system in this category.
- ATAGS is a 155mm, 52 calibre towed artillery gun being developed in mission mode by DRDO as a part of the Army's artillery modernisation programme. The record was achieved with special ammunition, "high explosive – base bleed" (HE – BB) by the ATAGS variant developed by Kalyani Group.
- The development is being done through a consortium based model, similar to that adopted for the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launch system. It was designed by DRDO's Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE) in Pune.
- In addition, Bharat Forge Limited of Kalyani Group, Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division and Mahindra Defence Naval System are involved in a big way, along with the Ordnance Factory Board. For instance, the barrel and breech mechanism, on both variants of ATAGS, was developed at Kalyani Group.



- The gun has several significant features, including an all-electric drive, high mobility, quick deployability, auxiliary power mode, advanced communication system, and an automated command and control system. It has a six round magazine, instead of a standard three round one. Also, the gun weighs slightly more than normal due to the larger chamber.
- The Army has not inducted any new artillery gun since the Bofors in the 1980s.

CULTURE

Golden throne assembled ahead of Dasara

- The throne is brought out only during Dasara and assembled in the Amba Vilas section for khas durbar
- In the run-up to the Navaratri festival to be celebrated by members of the Wadiyar family, the golden throne which plays a significant part in their ceremonies, was assembled.
- The throne, which is dismantled and placed in the strongroom under security throughout the year, is brought out only during Dasara and assembled in the Amba Vilas section for khas durbar.
- It was out under the supervision of the priests and entailed the involvement of 15 persons from Gejjagalli, who are traditionally engaged for this task.
- The throne comprises three parts, including the main seat, a staircase, and the golden umbrella.
- There are various theories about the origin of the throne and as per one legend, it belonged to the Pandavas of the Mahabharata fame. It was brought from Hastinapura to Penugonda and was lost to posterity until it was retrieved in 1336 A.D. by Vidyananya who was the royal preceptor to the founders of the Vijayanagar empire.
- It was transferred to the Wadiyars who were the governors to the Vijayanagar rulers after the fall of the empire. But as per historical accounts, it was gifted to Chikkadevaraja Wadiyar in 1700 A.D. by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.
- The golden throne is open to the public only during the Dasara and is shifted to the strongroom after the completion of the festivities.



ENVIRONMENT

Sundarbans is a home for rich flora and fauna

- Zoological Survey of India produces first exhaustive compendium of animal diversity in the Sundarban islands and the threats it faces
- In a first, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has published an compendium of animal species in the Indian Sundarbans, estimating that there are 2,626 of them in the fragile island ecosystem. The listing includes a diverse 25 phyla, as they are biologically classified.
- The Indian segment of the Sundarbans, part of a UNESCO World Heritage site, forms part of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta across 9,630 sq. km, distributed among 104 islands.
- The region hosts 2,487 species that come under the zoological kingdom of Animalia, and 140 under the more primitive Protista.
- The publication titled Fauna of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve is the first consolidated and updated information of the faunal diversity of the Sundarbans. It lists over 2,600 species, including the new species described from the mangrove ecosystem as well as threats faced by them due to climate change.
- The publication catalogues the entire faunal diversity of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve covering 9,630 sq. km spread over 19 blocks in South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas of West Bengal.
- The researchers document the famous tigers of these islands, which have adapted to aquatic conditions around, the human-tiger conflict, and behaviour of the big cat.
- The fortunes of 50 mammalian species including the Asian small-clawed Otter, Gangetic Dolphin, Grey and Marsh Mongoose and the wild Rhesus Monkey, the only primate here, are also documented.



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- Due to pressure on habitat from people and natural threats that have shrunk the mangrove swamp habitat, mammal numbers are declining.
- Two Rhinos, Swamp deer, Barking deer and Hog deer and Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo are not found in Sundarbans anymore.

Hector's dolphin numbers fall by 80%

- The populations of the Hector's dolphin, living only in the waters off New Zealand, has decreased by 80% in the last 50 years.
- A large number of these dolphins die from being trapped in fishing nets as they are unable to swim up to the ocean surface to breath. It is estimated that there are currently only some 9,000 Hector's dolphins left, after a drastic decrease from the 50,000 estimated in 1970.

Cause of Recurring' cyclones rains reduced in August across India

- A strange pattern of tropical cyclones (TC) in the Western Pacific appear to be the reason for the drying up of monsoon rains in August across India.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted normal monsoon rains in August, typically the second most bountiful monsoon month after July.
- During the monsoon months, cyclones in the Western Pacific move westwards towards India and aid rain-bearing systems over the sub-continent. But during some years they 'recurve', or start to swing north-east, and do not give as much of a push to the rains as they do in the good monsoon years.
- This re-curving frequently happens during the El Nino years but this time it inexplicably occurred when an El Nino hasn't yet taken shape.
- El Nino years are those when sea surface temperatures in the east equatorial Pacific rise, and often dampen the monsoon. While several international meteorological agencies had raised concerns about a likely El Nino forming in August or September this year, it didn't happen.
- In April, the IMD had said that India would get 96% of the normal rainfall during July-September. In August, it updated its forecast to 98%. Since August, however, rainfall across central India and north India was much lower than expected, and as of today, monsoon rains are 6% short of what they should have been for this time of the year.
- Nearly 22% of the country faces drought-like conditions. IMD Director-General K.J. Ramesh said



that phenomena such as unfavourable cyclone activity in the Pacific were “transient” and couldn’t be captured in early forecasts.

- These are apparent, at the most, 10 days ahead, and can’t be known, say, like the El Nino, months in advance. However, the monsoon hasn’t withdrawn yet, and we expect heavy rains after September 20

Snow leopard upgraded to ‘vulnerable’ status

- Snow leopard upgraded to ‘vulnerable’ status
- The elusive snow leopard long considered an “endangered” species has been upgraded to “vulnerable” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. But experts warned that the new classification does not mean they are safe.

Oldest tree species on earth in danger

- The bristlecone pine tree, famous for its wind-beaten, gnarly limbs and having the longest lifespan on Earth, is losing a race to the top of mountains throughout the Western United States, putting future generations in peril, researchers said.
- Driven by climate change, a cousin of the tree, the limber pine, is leapfrogging up mountainsides, taking root in warmer, more favorable temperatures and leaving little room for the late-coming bristlecone, a study finds.
- Researchers compare the competing tree species to a pair of old men in a slow-motion race up a mountainside taking thousands of years, and climate change is the starting gun.
- The bristlecone pine can live 5,000 years, making it the oldest individually growing organism on the planet.
- Forests of the diminutive bristlecone pines are found in eastern California, Nevada and Utah. They thrive in desolate limestone soil that is inhospitable to most trees. They grow at high elevation, hammered by wind and extreme temperatures.
- The punishing conditions give shape to their twisted limbs. To survive long dry spells, parts of



the tree dies and sheds its bark appearing dead, except for small spouts of green pine needles, signaling life.

- Among the oldest and most famous is Methuselah standing in the White Mountains of eastern California. It remains unmarked among its grove, so vandals cannot find it.

In the hope of restoring extinct tortoise

- Scientists in Ecuador's Galapagos islands are hoping to restore a tortoise species believed extinct since the 1800s.
- The Chelonoidis elephantopus lived on Floreana Island and was captured by seamen in large numbers for food during long journeys across the Pacific.
- The species is thought to have disappeared shortly after Charles Darwin's celebrated visit to the treasured archipelago.
- But a group of international scientists who collected 1,700 blood samples from tortoises on Isabel Island farther north during a research expedition in 2012 made a surprising discovery – 80 had genetic traces of the lost species.
- This is a species that was considered extinct for 160 years. Researchers with the Galapagos Conservancy and the Galapagos National Park are now trying to restore the species by selecting 20 specimens with higher amounts of the Floreana tortoise in its DNA to reproduce.
- Scientists believe sailors who caught Floreana tortoises for food sometimes dropped them off on Isabel Island in order to lighten a ship's load before crossing the ocean. Isabel Island was typically the last stop before setting sail.
- The scientists travelling to Isabel Island five years ago didn't originally set out to research the Floreana species and were surprised when their samples revealed such high quantities of the extinct tortoise's DNA.
- The 20 tortoises identified as having the highest amounts of Floreana DNA have been placed in corrals containing three females and two males each in hopes of one day repopulating the island with close copies of the extinct species.

Ig Nobel

- Scientists who discovered that old men really do have big ears, that playing the didgeridoo helps



relieve sleep apnea and that handling crocodiles can influence gambling decisions are among this year's recipients of the Ig Nobel, the prize for absurd scientific achievement.

- The 27th annual awards were announced at Harvard University. The ceremony featured a traditional barrage of paper airplanes, a world premiere opera and real Nobel laureates handing out the 10 prizes.
- The awards are sponsored by the science humour magazine Annals of Improbable Research, the Harvard-Radcliffe Science Fiction Association and the Harvard-Radcliffe Society of Physics Students.
- This year's winners who each received \$10 trillion cash prizes in virtually worthless Zimbabwean money also included scientists who used fluid dynamics to determine whether cats are solid or liquid; researchers who tried to figure out why some people are disgusted by cheese; and psychologists who found that many identical twins cannot tell themselves apart in visual images. When he asked why old men have such big ears, half his colleagues agreed with his observation; the others scoffed.
- The economics prize went to a pair of Australians who found that if you want to limit your gambling losses, don't have a close encounter with a crocodile.
- Matthew Rockloff, head of the Population Research Laboratory at Central Queensland University in Bundaberg, and research assistant Nancy Greer, plunked a saltwater crocodile its mouth safely taped into the arms of people about to gamble and watched what happened.
- The excitement caused by handling a dangerous reptile caused people with pre-existing problems to "gamble higher amounts, which over the long term will lead to greater gambling losses.



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BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

SUVs will be charged extra 7% cess while small cars are exempted

- Bringing some relief to firms struggling to file Goods and Services Tax (GST) returns due to glitches on the GST Network, the GST Council on Saturday decided to extend the deadline for filing returns.
- The Council also decided to set up a ministerial group to assess and fix the IT challenges. The Council also decided to bring some relief to consumers by reducing the GST rate on about 30 items of common use including idli and dosa batter, oilcakes, raincoats, rubber bands, roasted peanuts, 'dhoop agarbattis' and dried tamarind.
- The Council also spared small cars from a cess hike in the range of 2% to 7% that has been imposed on mid-size, luxury and sports utility vehicles (SUVs).
- The meeting has taken voluminous decisions on wide-ranging issues brought before by the fitment panel after thoroughly examining the proposals, objections and concerns put forward by States with the help of experts.
- The GST Council has also decided to constitute a Group of Ministers to monitor and resolve the technology challenges faced during GST implementation.
- The Council also extended the deadlines for filing returns for the first month of GST (July) up to October 31. The deadline would now be October 10 for GSTR-1, October 31 for GSTR-2, November 10 for GSTR-3 and October 18 for GSTR-4, the Finance Ministry said.

To balance bilateral trade deficit India seeks more Chinese investments

- In a bid to reduce the huge bilateral trade deficit with China, which, in the last fiscal, was a whopping \$51 billion, the Centre has now sought greater investments from Chinese firms including in India's export-focused Special Economic Zones (SEZ).
- In a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Zhong Shan on the sidelines of the ongoing ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (and related meetings) in Manila, Indian commerce minister Suresh Prabhu called for greater Chinese investments in India and "offered facilitating measures including in SEZs".
- Mr. Prabhu's immediate predecessor Nirmala Sitharaman had informed Rajya Sabha in July 2014 that "trade deficit can be reduced to sustainable levels through more exports from India to

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China, as well as by China's investing in building manufacturing capacities in India."

- The aim, was to then increase shipments from such manufacturing facilities in India to China by catering to specific demand in that country.
- However, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China in India between April 2000 and June 2017 was worth only \$1.67 billion or a minuscule 0.49% of the total FDI inflows of \$342 billion during that period.
- Mr. Prabhu and Mr. Zhong Shan have agreed on holding a (bilateral) Joint Economic Group (JEG) Meeting soon. Instructions have been given to the concerned officials of both the countries to do the ground work prior. In this regard, both ministers "agreed to set up product/sector specific Joint Working Groups to promote exports and bilateral trade."
- In September 2014, during the India visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Joint Statement had stated that the Chinese side announced the establishment of two industrial parks in India, one in Gujarat and another in Maharashtra.
- The Chinese side would also endeavour to realise an investment of \$20 billion in India in the next five years in various industrial and infrastructure development projects. India welcomes Chinese enterprises to participate in its manufacturing and infrastructure projects.
- The Centre had informed Rajya Sabha in November 2016 that to invite Chinese investment in India, an MoU was inked between India and China in June 2014 on 'Cooperation on Industrial Parks in India' with a view to provide a platform for cluster-type development of the enterprises of both countries.
- In this regard, subsequently, MoUs were signed by Indian State Government Agencies and Chinese investors. These include the MoU between Maharashtra government and BeiqiFoton Motors, China for Auto Industrial Park in Pune, the MoU between Industrial Extension Bureau (iNDEXTb), Gujarat government and China Development Bank Corporation for supporting the setting up of Industrial Parks in Gujarat, as well as the MoU between iNDEXTb and China Small and Medium Enterprises (Chengdu) Investment Limited to set-up multi-purpose Chinese Industrial Park in Gujarat.
- Besides, there is an MoU between HSIIDC (Haryana Government) and Dalian Wanda Group to develop an integrated Entertainment Park-cum-Industrial township in Haryana as well as an MoU between HSIIDC and China Fortune Land Development to set up an Industrial Park in Haryana.



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GST hike divides auto manufacturers

- With the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council taking the “middle path” in increasing cess on mid-size cars by 2%, on luxury cars by 5% and on SUVs by 7%, the automobile industry is divided over the impact of the move on the sector, coming as it does in the middle of the festive season.
- The Council did not go for across-the-board increase in cess to 25%. The hike in cess will bring car prices to almost pre-GST levels, so it will be a no-loss, no-gain situation.
- While the price reduction in mid-size cars due to GST implementation will be almost nullified with the increase in cess, SUVs will be slightly better off with an advantage of about 3% from pre-GST levels, whereas the benefit for luxury cars will be marginal.
- The Council had very thoughtfully not raised the cess to the maximum level that had been enabled by the ordinance, and restored pre-GST relative excise duty differentials between various categories of vehicles.

GDP of India in the slowest pace

- As per the estimates released by the Central Statistics Office on August 31, India's economy, as measured by the gross domestic product (GDP), grew by 5.7% in the first quarter of 2017-18, compared with 7.9% in the same quarter a year ago.
- This is the slowest pace of GDP growth recorded since the NDA came to power in May 2014. India grew by a strong 9.1% in the quarter from January 2016 to March 2016. The growth recorded in the subsequent quarters was 7.9%, 7.5%, 7% and 6.1%.
- So this is the fifth quarter in a row that the growth has slipped, with the pace of decline picking up momentum in the last two quarters.
- The gross value-added (GVA) in the economy grew at 5.6% between April and June, the same pace as the previous quarter, but sharply lower than the 7.6% growth in the first quarter of the last year.
- Most economists didn't expect a sharp uptick from the tepid 6.1% mark recorded in the January-March quarter this year, yet few anticipated a decline to 5.7%. The government has sought to divorce the growth trend from the impact of its decision to demonetise Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 currency notes last November, but economists believe the lingering effects continue to jolt sentiment.



- Growth, the government has argued, had begun to slow even before the move to suck out 86% of the currency notes in circulation. With the currency levels reverting close to the pre-demonetisation 'normal,' the bigger disruptive force affecting the latest GDP growth numbers was the introduction of the Goods and Service Tax (GST) from July 1.
- Businesses nationwide whittled down production in the April-June quarter and focussed on off-loading the existing stock, thanks to the uncertainty about how the new indirect tax regime will treat earlier tax credits on inputs.
- This also impacted GVA numbers, as a lot of the inventory that was off-loaded had already been accounted for in the value of production in the earlier periods.
- Moreover, while firms saw a healthy growth in sales, their margins were dented by a spurt in commodity prices spiking input costs. Lastly, wholesale price inflation turned negative at this time last year, so growth numbers appeared higher as a result of their statistical impact, which is no longer the case, the government has argued.
- The manufacturing sector, as a sub-set of industry, led the growth tumble, expanding by just 1.2% in the quarter, compared with 5.3% in the previous quarter and 10.7% a year ago. This was the worst quarter for Indian manufacturing in five years. Overall industrial output also collapsed to 1.6% growth from 7.4% a year ago and 3.1% in the previous quarter.
- The construction sector that has been the bulwark of job creation grew by just 2% (in GVA terms) as it grapples with the headwinds of a new regulatory regime (RERA), the GST and leveraged balance sheets of developers. Mining GVA shrank by 0.7%, compared with a 0.9% dip last year.
- The services sector offered some semblance of stability, growing at 8.7% compared with 9% in the same quarter last year, but a deeper look suggests this was driven by a rise in trade-related GVA to 11.1% (from 8.9%). This is proof of sorts that the destocking in manufacturing was reflected in higher volumes (often discount-driven) in the trade segment. Agriculture GVA dipped from 2.5% in the first quarter of last year to 2.3%, though crop output increased healthily. Low prices for crops apart, it appears that other agriculture-related activities, such as animal husbandry, have dragged down the sector's overall growth.
- The Statistics Office hopes that growth will rebound in the current quarter, "subject to how efficiently companies adapt themselves to the GST."
- The new NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar said growth would return to 7%-7.5% between July and September.
- Analysts are reworking their growth hopes for the full year rating agency Crisil has curbed it from 7.4% to 7%. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has admitted that the latest growth print poses a challenge for the economy and the government needs to work harder in the coming quarters to spruce up growth. Watch out for policy actions to spur investment and job creation.



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U.S. environmental agency to ban agricultural herbicide

- The U.S. environmental agency is considering banning spraying of the agricultural herbicide dicamba after a set deadline next year, according to state officials advising the agency on its response to crop damage linked to the weed killer.
- Setting a cut-off date, possibly sometime in the first half of 2018, would aim to protect plants vulnerable to dicamba, after growers across the U.S. farm belt reported the chemical drifted from where it was sprayed this summer, damaging millions of acres of soybeans and other crops.
- A ban could hurt sales by Monsanto Co. and DuPont which sell dicamba weed killers and soybean seeds with Monsanto's dicamba-tolerant Xtend trait. BASF also sells a dicamba herbicide.
- It is not yet known how damage attributed to the herbicides, used on Xtend soybeans and cotton, will affect yields of soybeans unable to withstand dicamba because the crops have not been harvested.
- The Environmental Protection Agency discussed a deadline for next year's sprayings on a call with state officials that addressed steps the agency could take to prevent a repeat of the damage, four participants on the call told Reuters.
- A cut-off date for usage in spring or early summer could protect vulnerable plants by only allowing farmers to spray fields before soybeans emerge from the ground, according to weed and pesticide specialists.
- Tighter usage limits could discourage cash-strapped growers from buying Monsanto's more expensive dicamba-resistant Xtend soybean seeds.
- Dicamba-tolerant soybeans cost about \$64 a bag, compared with about \$28 a bag for Monsanto's Roundup Ready soybeans and about \$50 a bag for soybeans resistant to Bayer's Liberty herbicide. Already, a task force in Arkansas has advised the state to bar dicamba sprayings after April 15 next year.
- 'Catastrophic for Xtend'
- "If the EPA imposed an April 15 cut-off date for dicamba spraying, that would be catastrophic for Xtend — it invalidates the entire point of planting it," said Jonas Oxgaard, analyst for investment management firm Bernstein.
- Monsanto has projected its Xtend crop system would return a \$5 to \$10 premium per acre over soybeans with glyphosate resistance alone, creating a \$400-\$800 million opportunity for the

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company once the seeds are planted on an expected 80 million acres in the U.S., according to Mr. Oxgaard.

- By 2019, Monsanto predicts U.S. farmers will plant Xtend soybeans on 55 million acres, or more than 60% of the total planted this year. About 3.1 million acres of soybeans vulnerable to dicamba were hurt by sprayings this summer, accounting for 3.5% of U.S. plantings, according to the University of Missouri.
- Chemical companies have blamed the crop damage on farmers misusing the herbicides. Specialists, though, say the weed killers are also risky because they have a tendency to vaporise and drift across fields, referred to as volatility.

Manufacturing sector giving major thrust to economic growth

- India's manufacturing sector gives a major thrust to economic growth, contributing to the GDP, creating employment opportunities and attracting foreign investments.
- The Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, known as the economic constitution of India, laid down the structure of the manufacturing sector. Subsequent policies have continued to give importance to the sector.
- The share of manufacturing in the GDP was 16% at the beginning of the 12th Five Year Plan. While the service sector's share is predominant, it is pertinent to note that the manufacturing sector is a major consumer of services.
- Till recently, the manufacturing sector was burdened with multiple indirect taxes viz. central excise, service tax and VAT.
- In addition, non-availability of tax credit for central sales tax increased the cost. Introduction of GST, in the backdrop of the 'Make in India' initiative, does away with multi-layered taxation.
- For major sectors, tax rates are mostly in line with the present effective tax incidence. Sectors such as consumer durables, construction material and FMCG, GST rates have seen a marginal difference.
- State-border check posts, established to scrutinise documents and location-based compliance, adversely impacted the overall production and logistics time, which reduced the efficiency of Indian manufacturers.



- These check-posts have been abolished with the introduction of GST. The new tax regime will unify the Indian market and help smooth the flow of goods within the country. Prior to GST, the inter-state sale was subjected to 2% CST without input credit, whereas GST on inter-state supply is available for input credit. This would lead to removal of an extra level of warehousing in the supply chain resulting in cost benefits.
- GST contemplates input credit of tax on supply of goods or services. The GST Act provides a list of services for which input credit is not available. Thus the system intends to provide seamless input credit. This welcome change helps businesses plan well on product pricing and estimating cash flows.
- Anti-Profiteering rules mandate that any reduction in the tax rate or the benefit of input tax credit needs to be passed on by way of commensurate price reduction. Standing committees, both at the Central and State levels, will examine complaints and refer cases for investigation based on merit.
- The authority, which has a sunset period of two years, has powers to debar an assessee from conducting business, to levy penalty, or to enforce refund of proportionate price reduction.
- The GST system excludes certain petroleum products. Natural gas, a clean fuel, is one of them. Certain industries which use them as key input were allowed input credit under the erstwhile VAT system.
- Keeping natural gas out of the GST system would increase the production cost. The GST Council, which is considering this aspect, has to take quick, positive action in this regard to avoid cost increases.
- Another important issue is how exemptions and incentives granted under the erstwhile excise and VAT system would be continued under the GST regime. Central and State governments are yet to come out with a concrete proposal. It has to be ensured that what was intended, while granting the incentive, is continued under the GST system.
- The GST System contemplates seamless input credit. Administrative machinery has to ensure this is implemented in letter and spirit. The GST Council has to constantly watch developments and give suitable directions to achieving the objective of seamless input credit.
- The Council should also ensure that actions taken by the anti-profiteering committee are genuine and not arbitrary. This will boost the confidence of the industry in the GST system and



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embolden them to concentrate on business development.

- The Council has to take a pragmatic view in making changes to the tax rate for certain goods and services about which select industries are concerned.
- Both the Central and State governments have to be congratulated for implementing the GST system in a smooth manner, without disrupting businesses. The manufacturing sector has always extended its support to the initiatives taken by the Government. Now too, this sector has accepted the GST system and is working well with the governments.

After Jio now it is Bharti Airtel offering low cost smartphone

- India's largest telecom operator Bharti Airtel is in talks with multiple handset makers to bring a 4G smartphone for a price as low as Rs. 2,500—Rs. 2,700 to take on Reliance Jio.
- While Mukesh Ambani led Jio has announced plans to offer Internet—enabled feature phone for a refundable deposit of Rs. 1,500, Airtel is placing its bet on a full fledged smartphone as it believes people would be ready to shell out a little more to get a loaded handset.
- A source familiar with the development said the new 4G smartphone — that will debut around Diwali — will come bundled with Airtel's 4G connection and “attractive” data and voice plan to woo mass market customers.
- The planned dual SIM 4G smartphone will sport a four-inch display, dual camera, VoLTE calling and a longer battery life. The Android handset will come with 1 GB RAM, said the source who wished not to be named.
- Reliance Jio had, in July, announced that formal bookings for Jio Phone would open on August 24, while the phone itself is expected to be available from September. While details such as the name of the handset makers that Airtel is negotiating with and the exact offers on anvil are still under the wraps, it is learnt that the Sunil Mittal company will co—promote the 4G smartphone with the manufacturers.
- State—owned BSNL is betting on national roll-out of 4G VoLTE services, even as it begins preparatory work on 5G to stay future-ready, a top official has said.

NPAs: challenge is to avoid delays'

- 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.
- 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.
- NCLT is expected to admit or reject a case within 14 days of a case being filed. However, bankers said the time taken by NCLT in some of the cases was beyond 14 days.
- It is still early days, but the number of bankruptcy cases which have been filed by operational as well as financial creditors is encouraging. Many cases have been admitted and the 180-day clock (extensible by a further 90 days) for these cases to resolve has already started.
- The IBC, 2016 — which Mr. Patel describes as a watershed towards improving the credit culture of the country — was aimed at time bound resolution (or liquidation) of stressed assets.
- The NCLT was constituted on June 1, 2016 with 10 benches and one principal bench. More than 1,000 cases have already been filed with the NCLT, of which more than 220 cases have been admitted. Over 900 insolvency professionals (IPs) have registered with the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
- One of the key aspects of time-bound resolution is the infrastructure of the NCLT. Bankers and insolvency professionals said there is a need to beef up the infrastructure of NCLT as many cases apart from bankruptcy are also being filed at NCLT.
- Bench is under pressure because there are not enough number of Judges. The same bench will be hearing IBC matters, other company law matters, other merger matters, conversion of private limited company to public limited company — all issues are going to the same bench,” he said.



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- According to Mr. Srivastava, a separate bench for insolvency and bankruptcy cases is the need of the hour.
- Among sectors, metals and mining is at the top with over 50 cases, followed by engineering and construction (35), food, beverage and hospitality (27), power and electricity (20) and healthcare (7).
- Observing that 'a major challenge foreseen for the Code was the tidal flow of cases to the NCLT', the report said, "In addition to new cases filed for resolution under IBC, there was a significant backlog of cases that were transferred from the CLB. Also, winding up cases with high courts, corporate recovery cases with the debt recovery tribunals (DRTs) and rehabilitation cases with the BIFR [Board for Industrial & Financial Reconstruction] were transferred to the NCLT."
- There are discussions currently to increase the number of benches and change single-member benches to double-member benches.
- The important question is whether the stakeholders will find a resolution within the required time frame, that is within six months plus another three months after the case has been admitted. If time-bound resolution does not happen, companies will go for liquidation. Most companies going into liquidation is a scenario that no one wants.

Bandhan appoints lead managers

- Bandhan Bank has appointed Goldman Sachs Group Inc., JP Morgan Chase & Co., Axis Bank, JM Financial and Kotak Mahindra Bank as lead managers to manage its proposed initial public offering (IPO).
- The lender said that the appointment had been cleared by the bank's board, although the size of the share sale, its timing and all other related aspects had not yet been finalised.
- The final decision on the IPO would be subject to obtaining all regulatory approvals. The bank had posted Rs. 1,111.95 crore net profit for 2017-18.
- It reported a 35% rise in its net profit for the quarter ended June 30, 2017 .

Coal India planning to diversify its activities



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- Coal India Ltd. is planning to enter metals mining, according to a top official. CIL is also open to making an overseas acquisition if there is an opportunity.
- “This is a proposal. The segments we are looking at include iron ore, bauxite, copper and nickel.”
- CIL’s core competence was mining and this was a diversification move as part of its shift from a coal producing firm to an energy producing one. If techno-economic feasibility studies supported the move it could be done. CIL had recently mandated KPMG to prepare its 2030 vision document.
- With government’s efforts to push renewable energy due to international conventions on climate change, increase in carbon cess and other initiatives for lesser use of coal, there is a need for Vision 2030 for the coal sector, which takes into account the environmental factors such as reduction of carbon footprint.

If data is misused stringent actions will be taken

- Pitching for use of big data analytics for inclusive growth, IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said any unauthorised use of data would be dealt with an “iron-hand to ensure that nothing comes in the way of making data analytics a national movement.”
- The government is committed to making the best use of big data in establishing rule of precision governance. While doing so, every care would be taken to strictly ensure that privacy rights of individuals are protected.
- The inauguration of a 24-hour Hackathon, wherein participants will use government data platform to make applications and infographics on themes such as Drinking Water and Sanitation, Transport, Education and Crime and Health.

To meet Basel III norms banks will need \$65 billion extra capital by FY19

- Indian banks will need about \$65 billion additional capital to meet the new Basel-III norms that will be fully implemented by end March 2019, rating agency Fitch said..
- While capital needs have fallen from the ratings agency’s earlier estimate of \$90 billion due to asset rationalisation and weaker-than-expected loan growth, state-run banks which accounted for 95% of the



estimated capital requirement, have limited options to raise the capital, Fitch said.

- Prospects for internal capital generation are weak and low investor confidence impedes access to the equity capital market. State banks are likely to be dependent on the state to meet core capital requirements.
- Fitch said the government will have to pump in more than double, even on a bare minimum basis and excluding buffers, to raise loan growth, address weak provision cover, and aid in effective bad loan resolution. The gross non-performing loan ratio has reached 9.7% in FY17, up from 7.8% in FY16.
- The government is committed to investing only another \$3 billion in fresh equity for 21 State banks over FY18 and FY19, having already provided most of the originally budgeted \$11 billion. On cases that have filed for bankruptcy, Fitch said most banks do not expect haircuts to exceed 60%.
- However, those loss assumptions may look optimistic considering the first resolution of corporate debt under the government's new insolvency code produced a recovery rate of just 6%. Banks argue this cannot be extrapolated to the other exposures, which they say are backed by more productive assets.

Actions to break the network of shell companies

- Action follows cancellation of registration of 2.1 lakh defaulting companies
- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MoCA) has said it has identified 1.06 lakh directors of 'shell companies' for disqualification under the relevant provisions of the Companies Act, 2013. This is part of actions to break the network of 'shell companies' and the fight against black money/money laundering activities.
- Professionals including Chartered Accountants, Company Secretaries and Cost Accountants associated with such defaulting firms and involved in illegal activities have been identified in certain cases and the action by professional institutes such as ICAI, ICSI and ICoAI is being monitored.
- There is the possibility of using the shell companies for laundering black money. By the end of this month, MoCA would be ready with the relevant details of all defaulting Directors of these shell companies. This whole exercise shall go a long way in creating an atmosphere of confidence and faith in the system paving the way for ease of doing business in India.
- The move is pursuant to the MoCA's action of cancellation of registration of around 2.10 lakh defaulting



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companies and subsequent direction of the finance ministry to banks to restrict operations of bank accounts of such companies by the directors of such companies or their authorized representatives, the MoCA said.

CPI inflation quickens to 3.36%, IIP rises 1.2%

- Retail inflation accelerated to a five-month high of 3.36% in August, spurred by sharper increases in the prices of food items particularly vegetables and fruits.
- Price gains measured by the Consumer Price Index quickened from July's 2.36%, as the food and beverages segment posted a growth of 1.96% in August, compared with the 0.43% uptick in July.
- Separately, industrial output as gauged by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) witnessed a growth of 1.2% in July, rebounding from a contraction of 0.1% in June. Improvements in performance at the mining and electricity sectors buoyed the index, with expansion in the mining sector at 4.8%, up from 0.4% in June.
- The electricity sector grew 6.5% in July, accelerating from 2.1% in the previous month.
- Manufacturing, however, grew only 0.1%. Still, this was an improvement from June's 0.4% contraction.
- Although the IIP has improved compared to the previous month, the level is still very low, so it cannot be taken as a symptom of a turnaround in the economy. The electricity and mining sectors are largely driven by the government's own demand. Some improvement was expected because of the government's own expenditure.
- With retail inflation now edging closer to the Reserve Bank of India's upper bound for price gains, economists see reduced prospects for any immediate interest rate cut by the central bank.
- With August headline inflation on the higher end of the central bank's 2-3.5% target for the first half of the current fiscal year, any lingering expectations for an October rate cut were likely to be doused.
- Prices of various vegetables such as tomatoes and, to a smaller extent, potatoes, have eased in month-on-month terms so far in September 2017, which would contain the uptick in food inflation in the current month.
- The fuel and light segment witnessed a marginal quickening: at 4.94% from 4.86% in July. The housing segment saw an acceleration in inflation to 5.58% from 4.98%.



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- The staggered impact on the housing index of the CPI, of the revision in HRA (house rent allowance) of central government employees, is likely to continue to push up housing inflation further over the coming year.
- While the overall primary goods category of IIP grew 2.3% in July, rebounding from a contraction of 0.2% in June, the capital goods sector continued to contract, shrinking by 1% in July following June's 6.8% contraction. Consumer durables, too, contracted in July, by 1.3%, compared with a contraction of 2.1% in June.
- Investment demand remains weak as capital goods production continued to contract. While the festival season could see some demand revival, "any meaningful recovery may take longer to take hold."

BPCL is mulling a merger with GAIL, Oil India

- Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), India's second largest state-owned oil marketer is mulling a merger with GAIL (India), India's largest gas distributor, and Oil India, the country's second largest explorer, to create an integrated energy giant after the Centre approved the merger of rival Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd. (HPCL) with ONGC.
- BPCL, which got Maharatna status, has written to the petroleum ministry about its ambitious plan and is waiting to hear back from the government.
- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had set the ball rolling on the merger of state owned oil firms in his 2017 budget speech when he set out the government's intent to create integrated public sector 'oil majors' to match the performance of global oil firms and domestic private sector firms.
- BPCL plans to invest Rs. 1.08 lakh crore over the next five years, of which Rs. 45,000 is aimed at investments in petrochemicals alone to get better margins.
- While BPCL's market capitalisation was Rs. 1,08,538 crore, GAIL and Oil India had market capitalisation of Rs. 34,456 crore and Rs. 24,483 crore respectively.
- ONGC with revenue of Rs. 77,908 crore and profit of Rs. 17,890 crore in the last financial year would, post its merger with HPCL, end up as an entity with revenue of about Rs. 2.9 lakh crore.

Translate app updated by Google to break language barrier

- Google unveiled several updates to its Translate App in an effort to bring down language barriers. It said users in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi can

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experience offline translations and instant visual translation in their preferred language.

- Google Translate has also added support for conversation mode in regional languages including Tamil and Bengali. This feature lets users have a bilingual conversation with someone, simply by talking to the Google Translate app.
- India is among the top four countries globally using Google Translate which translates over 140 billion words every day. More than 400 million people in India used the Internet. But the vast majority of India's online content is in English, which only 20% of the country's population speaks.
- The Translate app already lets the user use camera mode to snap a photo of English text and get a translation for it in these languages. Now, with Word Lens feature, Google has taken it to the next level, letting users instantly translate text using their camera.
- The company said now it was way easier for speakers of local Indian languages to understand English street signs in the city or decide what to order from a restaurant menu.
- Word Lens is powered by machine learning, using computer vision to distinguish between letters on an image. The company said with Google Translate, users can easily turn their phone into a powerful translation tool, whether for studies, business, travel or work. Offline support enables Indian language users to translate a word or sentence

Advisers required for AI disinvestment

- The Union government on Thursday floated an expression of interest (EOI) to appoint two financial advisers and one legal adviser for strategic disinvestment of Air India, taking forward the process to shed a stake in the ailing national carrier.
- The Government of India has in-principle decided to consider the disinvestment of the AI Group as a whole or its constituents fully or part thereof through strategic sale with transfer of management control.
- The government has invited applications by October 12 from reputed investment bankers, merchant bankers, financial institutions and banks for providing advisory services and managing the strategic disinvestment process.
- The Union Cabinet on June 28 gave an in-principle nod to go for strategic disinvestment of Air India and its subsidiaries and formed a Group of Ministers (GoM) led by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to draw the roadmap. The decision to appoint advisers to steer forward the disinvestment process was taken by the GoM.

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Revenue Secretary headed panel to review GST issues

- A government panel headed by the Revenue Secretary will meet on September 19 to resolve a '\$10 billion-problem' troubling India's exporters and its potential adverse impact on jobs.
- Revenue Secretary-led 'Committee on Exports' set up on September 12 to address exporters' concerns over the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime would, among other things, take up the issue of "inordinate delay in refund of GST to exporters" and the consequent blockage of working capital that is severely affecting exporters' liquidity and enhancing their tax burden.
- exporters would have to wait till around December (considering 15 days for issuance of acknowledgement and another seven days for getting provisional refund of 90% of the total refund claim) for availing refund of the GST on exports, it would mean that they would have to arrange funds from their own sources to pay GST for the July-October period. The blocked amount for the four months time is estimated to be about \$10 billion.

Rs. 6,000 cr. relief due to GST on coal to power sector

- CIL's net turnover to remain the same due to 'inverted tax'
- Changes in the tax structure on coal following the introduction of GST would translate to a Rs. 6,000 crore relief to the power sector.
- Coal, which had earlier attracted 6% excise and 11% VAT, was now taxed 5% GST. However, the inputs that it provided had a tax rate varying between 18% to 28% which would be refunded to CIL.
- "It is an inverted tax" which works out to a Rs. 6,000 crore annualised relief for power sector, Mr. Dey said. "While CIL's gross turnover will be impacted due to this, its net turnover will remain the same," he added.
- Earlier, CIL Chairman Gopal Singh said increased output over the last three years, had led to foreign exchange savings of Rs. 25,900 crore. Despatch to power utilities grew by 3% in 2016-17 and would have been higher but for regulated intake by generating firms, he added.

Forex reserves hit \$400 billion

- The country's foreign exchange reserves have touched \$400 billion for the first time. Four years after the rupee hit a historic low, the RBI's forex kitty has swelled by more than \$125 billion. The reserves act as a buffer to be used in challenging times.
- Data showed foreign exchange reserves rose by \$2.6 billion from the previous week to \$400.7 billion in the week ended September 8. Foreign currency assets mainly contributed to the increase in the period.

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Rupee, gold widen current account deficit

- A stronger rupee, in addition to gold imports before the Goods and Services Tax regime kicked in, has led to a sharp widening of the current account deficit (CAD) to \$14.3 billion in the April-June period, which was 2.4% of the GDP. In the year earlier period, the CAD was \$0.4 billion, which was 0.1% of GDP.
- The current account deficit was \$3.4 billion or 0.6% of GDP, in the January-March period. According to latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India, the widening of the CAD on a year-on-year basis was primarily on account of a higher trade deficit (\$41.2 billion) brought about by a larger increase in merchandise imports relative to exports.
- The lagged impact of the rupee appreciation was partly responsible for a faster rise in non-oil non-gold imports relative to exports, bloating the goods trade deficit.

Tata Sons plans to go private

- Close to a year after Tata Sons ousted Cyrus Mistry as chairman, the group's holding company will seek shareholders' approval at the AGM on September 21 to amend the Articles of Association (AoA) to transform from a public limited company to a private one.
- The move has drawn strong opposition from the Shapoorji Pallonji Group investment firms of Mr. Mistry's family, which together own 18.4% in Tata Sons and have already filed a lawsuit at the National Company Law Tribunal alleging oppression of 'minority shareholders'.
- The proposal to convert Tata Sons from a public company to a private company constitutes yet another act of oppression of the minority shareholders of Tata Sons at the hands of the majority shareholders; the real motive behind convening the proposed AGM is malafide and for an ulterior purpose and the proposed resolutions are not in the interests of Tata Sons as a whole or at all," Cyrus Investments Pvt. Ltd., one of the investment firms, wrote in a letter addressed to the Tata Sons board and made available to The Hindu.
- Taking a public company private requires the approval of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

External debt decline 2.7% to \$471.9 bn as NRI deposits fall

- Total external debt for the financial year 2016-17 stood at \$471.9 billion, declining 2.7% from the previous year's level, according to official figures released.
- India's external debt stock stood at \$471.9 billion at end-March 2017, decreasing by \$13.1 billion

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(2.7%) over the level at end-March 2016, the government said in a release.

- The decline in external debt was due to the decrease in long-term debt particularly NRI deposits and commercial borrowings.
- At end-March 2017, long-term external debt was \$383.9 billion, showing a decrease of 4.4% over the level at end-March 2016.
- Long-term external debt accounted for 81.4% of total external debt... as compared to 82.8% at end-March 2016.
- Short-term external debt increased by 5.5% to \$88 billion as of the end of March 2017. This, the release said, was due to the increase in trade related credits.
- An inter-country comparison based on 'International Debt Statistics 2017' of the World Bank, which presents the debt data for 2015, shows that India continues to be among the less vulnerable countries with its external debt indicators comparing well with other indebted developing countries.
- The ratio of India's external debt stock to gross national income at 23.4% was the fifth lowest and in terms of the cover provided by foreign exchange reserves to external debt, India's position was sixth highest at 69.7% in 2015.

After 5-month slowdown exports climb 10.3%

- India's merchandise exports grew 10.3% year-on-year to \$23.8 billion in August, reversing a declining trend witnessed for five straight months, data released by the Commerce Ministry showed. The jump in shipments was driven mainly by engineering goods, petroleum products and chemicals as well as an improvement in demand in overseas markets.
- However, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said it was worried about future growth as the order booking position from October was not encouraging — owing to rising global uncertainties, rupee volatility and challenges on the domestic front including those stemming from the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- While 26 out of 30 major product groups were in positive growth territory in August, labour intensive sectors such as gems and jewellery, leather, apparel and handicraft either posted negative growth or modest growth, which is a worrisome sign, said G. K. Gupta, president of FIEO, the apex body for the country's exporters.
- Meanwhile, goods imports grew 21.02% during August to \$35.46 billion. This resulted in the trade deficit widening to \$11.6 billion, from \$7.7 billion in August 2016. However, the shortfall was lower than the \$11.45 billion seen in July.
- In August 2017, the major commodity groups of exports showing positive growth over the corresponding month of last year were — engineering goods (19.53%), petroleum

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products (36.56%), organic and inorganic chemicals (32.41%), drugs and pharmaceuticals (4.21%), and ready-made garments of all textiles (0.56%). Non-petroleum and non gems & jewelry exports rose 14.47% to \$17.74 billion, the Commerce Ministry said. Major commodity group of imports showing high growth in August 2017 were — petroleum, crude & products (14.22%), electronic goods (27.44%), machinery, electrical & non-electrical (18.35%), gold (68.90%) and pearls, precious & semi-precious stones (30.88%). Oil imports during August jumped 14.22% to \$7.75 billion, while non-oil imports during the month rose 23.07% to \$27.7 billion

Discussion on Code on Industrial Relations Bill

- Labour Ministry to discuss five proposals in the Code on Industrial Relations Bill with trade unions
- Central trade unions continue to oppose the government's plans to ease retrenchment norms and to restrict trade union membership under the Industrial Disputes Act, reiterating their stand at a meeting held by new Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Gangwar to discuss the contentious proposals.
- A Group of Ministers on labour reforms led by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley asked the Labour Ministry to discuss five contentious proposals in the Code on Industrial Relations Bill with central trade unions.
- Those included allowing bigger companies to retrench workers without the government's permission, increasing the severance pay by three times, restricting outsiders' role in trade union leadership, changing the definition of 'workers' and procedure for recognition of trade unions.
- The meeting on the proposed Industrial Relations Code was Mr. Gangwar's first meeting with representatives from ten central trade unions after taking charge recently.
- The government should discuss the industrial relations Bill in full detail. It should not interfere [with] the trade union composition and [not] allow lesser factories to retrench workers without the government's nod.
- With the Centre's plans to amend the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 taking time, States are going ahead with their own labour law changes to ease retrenchment norms in a bid to attract business locally with Assam joining the race recently.
- Since labour is a concurrent subject, the Assam Assembly passed amendments to the Industrial Disputes Act to allow companies with a staff of up to 300 to retrench workers without government permission, up from the present requirement of up to 100 workers – giving industries with large workforce more flexibility in retrenchment. However, the Assam government's approved Bill will need the Centre's nod to become a law.
- The Central government has proposed similar provisions in the Code on Industrial Relations Bill.

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The proposed Bill will combine the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, into a single code.

- Till date, apart from Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand have allowed larger firms to retrench workers without seeking its permission by bringing their own amendments to the Industrial Disputes Act.

MCQ's

Ques) Siddi Sayyid Mosque (16th century mosque) famous for its “ tree of life” intricate stone lattice works on its walls is located in

- a) Ahmedabad
- b) Jaipur
- c) Hyderabad
- d) Lucknow

Ans a

Ques) Which of the following statements are correct regarding Thalassaemia

- a) It is a fatal inherited blood disorder
- b) It is caused by a defect in gene
- c) This disease severely affected haemoglobin production
- d) It is contagious disease

- 1) a,b
- 2) c,d
- 3) a,b,c
- 4) All

Ans 3



Ques) Which of the following statements regarding National Company Law Tribunal correct

- a) It is a quasi-judicial body Constituted under Sec 408 of Companies Act 2013
 - b) Has power to adjudicate Pending before the [Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction](#) (BIFR).
- 1) a only
 - 2) b only
 - 3) both a and b
 - 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) Which of the following statements correct?

- a) launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida in 1997
 - b) Saturn is the furthest planet visible from Earth with the naked eye
- 1) a only
 - 2) b only
 - 3) both a and b
 - 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) The Foreign exchange reserves of India consists of ?

- a) Foreign Currency Asset
 - b) Gold
 - c) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)
 - d) Reserve Tranche Position in the IMF
- 1) a,b,c
 - 2) b,c,d
 - 3) b,c



4) a,b,c,d

Ans 4

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding Golden Throne Mysore is correct

- a) it is kept for public viewing only during Dasara festival.
- b) It was gifted to Chikkadevaraja Wadiyar in 1700 A.D. by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.
- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding Basel III correct

- a) Minimum Capital Requirement, Supervisory review Process and Market Discipline are its three pillars
- b) **Internal Capital Adequacy Assessment Process(ICAAP)** conducted by RBI – Supervisory Review and Evaluation Process(SERP) conducted By banks themselves.
- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 1

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding Chakma tribe correct

- a) they profess Theravada Buddhism
- b) they were originally residents of Chittagong Hill Tracts



- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) a) Divorce by mutual consent was introduced as an amendment to the Hindu Marriage Act in 1976.

b) Hindu Marriage Act is applicable to a person who is a Buddhist, Sikh, Jain or Parsi by religion

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 1

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding Swami Vivekananda correct?

- a)** He subscribed to the vedanta
- b)** Strived to bridge gap between paramartha(service) and vyavahara (behavior)

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b



ans 3

Ques) which of the following statements regarding Estimates Committee correct?

- a) Rajya Sabha has no representation
- b) Term of office is 2 years
- c) Chairman is appointed by lok sabha speaker
- d) A minister cannot be appointed as member
- e) It has 30 members

- 1) a,b,c,d,e
- 2) a,c,d,e
- 3) b,e
- 4) b,c

ans 2

Ques) Russia has a border with which of the following water bodies

- a) Caspian sea
- b) Arctic ocean
- c) Black sea
- d) Aral sea
- e) Sea of Okhotsk

- 1) a,b,c,d,e
- 2) a,b,c,d,
- 3) d,e
- 4) a,b,c,e

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding CRISPR/Cas9 correct?

- a) key step in editing an organism's genome is selective targeting of a specific sequence of DNA



b) Two biological macromolecules, the Cas9 protein and guide RNA, interact to form a complex that can identify target sequences with high selectivity.

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) Bonda tribe are found in

- 1) Andhra Pradesh
- 2) Odisha
- 3) Chattisgarh
- 4) Jammu and Kashmir

- a) 1,4
- b) 3,4
- c) 2,4
- d) 1,2,3

Ans d

Ques) Xafecopy recently seen in news is related to?

- a) Malware



- b) Gene editing
- c) Cancer drug
- d) None of the above

Ans a

Ques) which of the following statements incorrect

- a) wild life Institute is located in Leh
- b) Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology is in Bengaluru

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b
- 4) neither a nor b

Ans 3

Ques) Which of the following statements correct?

- a) India is a signatory to 1951 UN Convention rising to Status of Refugees
- b) Principle of non-refoulement which is articulated in Article 33 of 1951 UN convention is applicable to India

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) both a and b



4) neither a nor b

Ans D

Ques) Which of the following statements regarding cloaking device is correct

- a) can cause objects, such as spaceships or individuals, to be partially or wholly invisible to parts of the electromagnetic (EM) spectrum.
- b) It is possible to cloak acoustics for certain frequencies as well as touching in mechanics

- 1) a only
- 2) b only
- 3) neither a nor b
- 4) both a and b

Ans 4



IMPORTANT ARTICLES FROM VARIOUS ARTICLES

Shifting ties (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s visit to Myanmar marked 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Over the last 25 years, New Delhi has shifted uncomfortably in a bid to square a complicated relationship. On the side of high principle and [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) to begin with, New Delhi next wooed the Myanmar junta which had imprisoned her for nearly two decades.

After Suu Kyi was released and Myanmar transitioned to democracy, India had to make another shift. While Suu Kyi is now the super-president and de facto foreign minister in her role as State Counsellor, the Myanmar army continues to play a huge overt role in domestic and foreign policy, but the generals are more comfortable doing business with China. That influence is visible in mega Chinese investments such as an already operational oil and gas pipeline from Myanmar to China, port projects, Myanmar-China railway projects, mining, hydropower projects among others.

Indian reflexes have been much slower despite the big talk about Look East. The Kaladan multi-modal project to connect Northeastern states to the rest of India via Myanmar is still to be completed, contracts for the remaining work on an ambitious trilateral highway connecting Moreh in Manipur to Thailand through Myanmar are yet to be awarded, and despite the passage of five years, the offtake of the \$500 credit line for development projects given in 2012 is sluggish.

But cultural diplomacy has become an important arm of India's outreach in the neighbourhood. During PM Modi's visit, perhaps the most significant agreement was India's offer to assist in the restoration and conservation of 92 ancient pagodas and structures in the ancient city of Bagan through the Archaeological Survey of India. The two countries have finalised an MoU on this. India also announced free visas to Myanmar citizens.

With the political and military establishment in Myanmar more or less on the same page on the



Rohingya question, PM Modi's reiteration of the Rohingya as primarily a security issue rather than a human rights issue of a stateless and persecuted minority, must have been a welcome respite to both sides of the Myanmar leadership, beleaguered as they are by the blunt international criticism on this front.

Modi condemned the "terrorist" incidents in the Rakhine, and voiced praise for military operations there, becoming the first country to do so, even though it is this that sends the Rohingya fleeing across the border to Bangladesh and to India. The joint statement notes that the problem in Rakhine is also one of lack of economic development, and India has promised assistance. It is no surprise that the main problem in the Rakhine, the deprivation of citizenship to the Rohingya, found no mention in the statement.

Star trek (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

On Friday, the Cassini probe will plunge to self-styled doom in Saturn's atmosphere. Since its launch 20 years ago, the joint mission between NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) has travelled a distance of 7.9 billion km, discovered six named moons. The vast volumes of data it has collected have spawned nearly 4,000 scientific papers. For the first time in a long while, the world is celebrating a triumph of technology: A 22-feet high machine is not part of a dystopian narrative, its intelligence (and of the man behind it) is from a time when machines represented the ingenuity of intellectual labour, not its demise.

The Cassini-Huygens Mission was conceived in the late 1980s — at the height of "star wars" — by NASA, the ESA and the Italian space agency. Its launch in 1997, though, was well after the fall of the Berlin Wall and yet its bold "mission to go where no man has gone before" would have made Gene Roddenberry (the liberal, pluralist creator of Star Trek) proud. It represents all that the European Enlightenment held dear, without the baggage that came with it — exploration without colonialism, a pursuit of knowledge made possible by the wealth of nations but not directly for commercial gain. Today, technology and the discourses around it are not so optimistic. The machine will not free us, lead

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us to new frontiers. AI will take over, and scientists warn of doomsday caused by climate change.

It is Cassini's celestial partner — Saturn's largest moon, Titan — that will cause its final demise. The probe has used Titan's gravity to slingshot around Saturn to gather information, and that force will now be used to direct the probe to a safe destruction, away from moons that hold water, and hence the possibility of life. At least near the ends of our Solar System, technology and life still care for each other.

Special friends (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

Few of India's bilateral relations have advanced as much in the 21st century as the ties with Japan. Central to that progress has been the annual summitry between the prime ministers that helped set a new agenda of cooperation and push the famously slow bureaucracies in Delhi and Tokyo to move. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Ahmedabad for this year's summit is about acknowledging the progress made across a broad front as well as thinking more boldly about the future. That the meeting is taking place in Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s home state, Gujarat, indicates how the personal and political have come together in making Japan a critical actor in the modernisation of India's infrastructure, revitalising its regional economic policy, and rediscovering Tokyo's centrality for peace and stability in Asia.

If PM Modi's special interest in Japan grew out of his "economic diplomacy" during the stewardship of Gujarat, PM Abe's focus on India emerged out of the tales he heard from his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who served as Japan's Prime Minister in the 1950s and was deeply touched by [Jawaharlal Nehru](#)'s refusal to isolate Tokyo after World War II. The foundation stone that Modi and Abe will lay for the high speed railway link between Ahmedabad and Mumbai is an important testimony to the personal energy they have brought to the partnership. Without Modi's badgering, the Indian Railways would have never bought into the project. Without the very generous financing package that Abe put together, India's first high speed rail link would never have taken off. If the new link heralds a potentially dramatic transformation of Indian Railways, Abe's success in getting parliamentary approval for the controversial

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civil nuclear agreement with India opens the door for Tokyo's participation in India's atomic energy programme.

Modi and Abe are expected to unveil a joint vision for bilateral strategic economic cooperation in the Subcontinent, and more broadly the Indo-Pacific littoral. At a moment when China is dazzling the region with its Belt and Road Initiative, Modi and Abe are likely to offer an alternative model for infrastructure development that is more sustainable over the long term. Bilateral defence cooperation, including a closure to the long stalled talks on the Indian purchase of Japanese amphibious aircraft, is likely to figure prominently in the talks between the two leaders. Even more importantly, the two leaders are likely to deliberate upon the unfolding geopolitical change in Asia and the need for deeper security cooperation between India and Japan for promoting stability and equilibrium in Asia. A stronger partnership between Delhi and Tokyo has become a critical imperative amid Beijing's assertiveness and the growing political dysfunction in Washington.

Going digital (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

The Supreme Court has declared the Right to Privacy a fundamental right, albeit subject to reasonable restrictions in legitimate state interest. In this context, the role of Aadhaar in transforming India will surely be debated. India has embarked on a major revolution towards a transparent economy through digital payments. Digital payment, thus far, has been the exclusive privilege of a few who could afford debit or credit cards and could handle pins, passwords, OTPs and so on. India's cash-to-GDP ratio is around 12 per cent, among the highest in the world. The share of digital payments is said to be about five per cent of total personal consumption or even lower at two per cent of total transactions, which are among the lowest in the world. Now with 1.17 billion Aadhaar cards and an equal number of mobile phones, we have the opportunity to take digital payment to the masses.

Aadhaar will help India leapfrog traditional payment systems such as cheques, drafts, debit cards, POS (point-of-sale) devices and transition to modes of digital payments not seen even in the most advanced countries. BHIM with UPI was launched by the prime minister on December 30, 2016. UPI will have a far-reaching impact because it is India's own internet of digital payments. UPI is real time and fully interoperable across all banks. There are 350 million smartphone users in India, who can use UPI to



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make digital payments up to Rs 1 lakh without any card or POS device. Merchants can also use the Bharat QR Code to receive payments.

There are 300 million Indians living in rural and urban areas, who do not have credit cards, debit cards, smartphones or feature phones or who are not financially literate to handle PINs, passwords etc. How do they pay digitally? For them, BHIM-Aadhaar, launched by the prime minister on April 14, will prove to be convenient. In this mode, a retail corner shop would not need an expensive POS device such as a debit or credit card swipe machine. He can use his own smartphone with a fingerprint scanner, which costs around Rs 2,000, install the BHIM-Aadhaar app and link it to his bank account. Customers can pay small amounts upto Rs 2,000 without needing a debit or credit card. Upon Aadhaar authentication of the fingerprint, the money will be debited from the Aadhaar-linked bank account of the customer and credited to the merchant's account. Each one of the more than 700 million people who have linked their Aadhaar with their bank accounts, can now use her or his fingerprint to make payments.

However, beneficiaries of the cash economy as well as traditional payments systems oppose using Aadhaar in digital payments by raising concerns about the Aadhaar database being insecure, fingerprints being vulnerable to hackers etc., as if the payment systems based on physical signatures, cheques, debit cards, ATM cards, PIN etc. were absolutely safe and had no vulnerabilities. They circulate stories showing how unsafe biometrics are, how a silicon replica of a fingerprint was used to hack into an iPhone etc, and thereby create a phobia against new technologies. They conveniently forget that people have been writing cheques and putting their physical signatures on documents for ages, knowing fully well how easy it is to forge a signature. Similarly, we read about frauds in ATMs, debit cards and internet banking through cloning, scheming, spoofing, phishing etc., and yet we have not stopped using them. Every technology is vulnerable and subject to risks. What is needed is mitigation of risks, not abrogation of technology.

The Aadhaar-based payment system has been robust and secure, which is evident from the track record of the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS). The AEPS provides doorstep banking through more than 1,30,000 banking correspondents to people living in remote villages and enables them to withdraw or deposit money using their fingerprints on Aadhaar-based micro-ATMs. In

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the last four years, more than 700 million transactions have been carried out without a single case of financial loss due to fraud or identity theft. Besides, Aadhaar continuously reviews emerging threats and takes measures to counter them and minimise risk.

Further, three major reforms happened in the last six months, which would make UPI and Aadhaar-based payment systems even more secure. First, in February 2017, Parliament amended the Income Tax Act to mandatorily link PAN with Aadhaar. Second, the Supreme Court in the Lokniti Foundation case has required that more than 100 crore existing mobile SIM cards be biometrically verified with Aadhaar by February 2018. Third, the government amended the Prevention of Money Laundering Rules in June this year to require every bank account to be verified and linked with Aadhaar and PAN by December 31, 2017. In BHIM-Aadhaar and UPI, since the bank accounts and mobile numbers of the sender and receiver of the payment are linked to their Aadhaar and PAN cards, the transactions will undoubtedly be safer. In the worst case, if there is an unauthorised transfer from an account, the beneficiary can be identified through Aadhaar.

India has set an ambitious target of achieving 2,500 crore of digital payment transactions this year. Efforts are on to bring down transaction costs so that consumers are not at a disadvantage for choosing to pay digitally. The US in 2010 undertook reforms to protect consumers of digital transactions. The EU also passed regulations in 2015 to rationalise and reduce transaction fees. Similar steps are necessary in India to ensure mass adoption of digital payments.

Democratisation of digital payments through UPI and BHIM-Aadhaar will lead to a less cash economy, rid the country of black money and tax evasion and bring large numbers into the financial mainstream.

Bite the bullet (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

The appointment of Nirmala Sitharaman as India's defence minister created ripples on more counts than one. She is the first full-time woman minister who occupies the hallowed office. Her appointment confirmed the resolve of Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) to respect merit and performance, more so as she is a relatively junior politician. In the hype that indirectly reinforces Modi's commitment

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towards women's empowerment and gender equality, I read urgency in seeking a "hands-on commitment" for addressing the challenges faced by the armed forces. Progress on this front, a focus area of the present government, has been slow. The government made the right noises and initiated baby steps to mitigate the existing deficiencies in ammunition and shortfall/upgrade of critical weapon systems. It also took steps to facilitate a vibrant "defence ecosystem", a pre-requisite for achieving self-sufficiency in the manufacture of big ticket items, including guns, submarines and aircraft. The previous defence minister did a great job despite his political compulsions. But good intentions were subsumed by archaic procurement processes, apathy and a lack of understanding in the bureaucracy.

The apprehensions voiced regarding a woman steering the tradition-steeped and formal armed forces are totally misplaced. History is replete with examples of unprecedented military successes achieved with women at the helm. In our case, we have the success story of the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. Yes, the armed forces will take some time to get used to a woman defence minister. The minister too has her task cut out. Going by the ethos of the armed forces, she will have to take the first step and prepare the environment for interactions with the uniformed fraternity. Seeing her frank and free approach to discussion, however, I see this issue being resolved amicably.

What needs to be looked at more closely are the challenges she is likely to face in running the defence ministry. Her methodical approach, perseverance and capacity for hard work, reflected in her handling of the commerce ministry, are a big plus. Her real task, however, will be to appreciate the complexities of the three services and the interplay of OFB-DPSUs-DRDO (Ordnance Factories Board-Defence Public Sector Units-Defence Research and Development Organisation) in India's quest for self-reliance and indigenisation in weaponry.

The focus on the MoD is such that decisions taken or not taken could go viral on social or visual media and create pressures. The defence minister will have to retain the dexterity and informality to be empowered by periodic briefings on evolving situations along the active borders with Pakistan and China, internal security commitments in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, and so on. The TRP-driven visual media will create emergencies across myriad spectrums. Unfortunately, a majority of the senior bureaucrats in the MoD, including the defence secretary, are also recent inductees. This may



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have a bearing on the time taken by the new minister in settling into her job.

Unlike in other ministries, experience in dealing with matters military is necessary for bureaucrats to develop trust and appreciate the nuances in the functioning of the armed forces. If they differ on perceptions regarding priorities, it could cause impediments in the smooth running of the ministry. Structural and procedural issues already plaguing the ministry could also have a negative impact. The reforms announced by the outgoing defence minister amount to a new paradigm. They have financial overtones and their implementation may be time consuming. Therefore, changes must be initiated only after workable alternatives are found.

Hopefully, a minister whose sole responsibility is the running of the defence ministry will ensure that issues are addressed in a holistic and timely manner. Patience and an eye for detail are necessary to review the existing procurement processes and measures to give shape to the “Make in India” initiative. There is a need to be disruptive in thought and action as the efforts in this direction till now have been sub-optimal. Simultaneously, the private sector needs to be re-assured that there is space and place for them in nation-building: The government must convey its resolve that a level-playing field will be provided to them vis a vis the DPSUs. She will have to be dogged in both intention and attitude to break the existing barriers and accelerate the changes promised by the government. The importance of the defence industry needs no emphasis for it will enhance our security imperatives, provide jobs and inject a feeling of national pride.

Embrace the Rohingya (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

The recent statement by Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju that the Indian government will detect and deport the Rohingya back to Myanmar marks a low in India’s otherwise long-recognised impeccable track record in hosting asylum-seekers. His subsequent clarification that he merely wanted them “pushed back” — not thrown into the ocean or shot — further belies India’s image as a benevolent host. While such assurances from the minister might have come as a huge relief to the 40,000-odd beleaguered Rohingya currently in India, it does not portend well for an aspiring “major



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power”.

Rijiju’s wrath against all “illegal immigrants” — including 14,000 Rohingya who have been issued valid registration certificates by the UNHCR, New Delhi — is sought to be justified on the grounds that they are “susceptible” to recruitment by “terror” groups, and that they “not only infringe on the rights of Indian citizens but also pose grave security challenges”. Also, the junior minister forcefully argued that the Rohingya must be deported “to ensure the demographic pattern of India is not disturbed”. The minister’s avowed threat to do so notwithstanding, any proposal to deport them would not only be legally untenable and morally indefensible but also politically inexpedient.

The choice of the expression — “illegal immigrants” over “refugees” — by Rijiju appears deliberate and also in sync with the BJP’s long-held ideological stance on immigrants: They are illegal immigrants if Muslims and refugees when Hindus. For example, the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016, whereby all groups of persecuted non-Muslim minorities — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians — from neighbouring countries would be more than welcome to their “natural home”, clearly illustrates this bias towards Muslims.

What makes the purported deportation of the Rohingya from India legally untenable is that the Indian government, like any other in the world, is bound by customary international law to respect the principle of non-refoulement. No government, as per this law, can forcibly push back asylum-seekers to the country they have fled to escape violence, as it might endanger their very survival. Not being a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol is no excuse to abdicate India’s responsibility to provide much-needed succour to people under duress and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

India has for too long abstained from being a party to the 1951 international convention, despite the fact that the context has dramatically changed in the aftermath of the recent refugee crisis in Europe. Whether or not India chooses to ratify the 1951 convention, there are several Supreme Court verdicts which disallow the Indian government from arbitrarily and summarily deporting refugees from its territory. The courts in India have traditionally upheld the rights of refugees facing deportation or forced eviction in different contexts by taking recourse to what is called the “canon of construction” or a



“shadow of refugee law”. For example, the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has been so interpreted by the SC that it can be extended to anyone living in India irrespective of her nationality.

The apex court is scheduled to hear a petition on the Rohingya issue on September 18. It is unlikely to deviate from its own precedent.

On a moral plane, the Indian government can hardly hope to defend its stand given the fact that the Rohingya face an imminent threat to their lives in the wake of the ongoing “ethnic-cleansing” drives in the Rakhine State, Myanmar. The flight of nearly 3,00,000 Rohingya to neighbouring Bangladesh is a testimony to the wretchedness of their condition. Various reports — by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch etc — point to the Rohingya undergoing gross human rights violations at the hands of Myanmar’s armed forces in the name of counter-insurgency operations. These suggest a genocide. Such operations are being carried out under the rubric of “Lockdown Zones” and “Clearance Operations”. Penny Green, a professor of law at Queen Mary University, London, concluded after a 12-month long investigation in the Rakhine State that since October 9, 2016, “the Rohingya are facing a terrifying new phase in the genocide: Mass killings, rapes, village clearings and the razing of whole communities, committed with impunity by the Myanmar military and security forces”.

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)’s decision to underplay the impending refugee crisis by choosing instead to express solidarity with Myanmar’s “extremist concerns” on his maiden visit there could only be described as politically naïve. This is further evidenced by India’s refusal to sign the subsequent “Bali Declaration” which unequivocally condemned the unfolding refugee crisis in the Rakhine State. The preference for a studied silence by Asia’s most experienced democracy in the wake of a fast deteriorating humanitarian crisis does not bode well for the future of human rights in the region. It might only embolden the Myanmarese security forces to further intensify the crackdown on the hapless Rohingya. Further, this was clearly not the moment for PM Modi to give priority to trade ties with Naypyidaw in order to counter the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar. It is time India rises to the occasion by transcending the politics of pragmatism and embraces the Rohingya refugees.



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Articles Of Faith (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

The Supreme Court judgment in State of Gujarat v Islamic Relief Committee was explained by Satish Jha in 'Behind SC verdict on places of worship, Article on taxpayers' money and religion' (IE, September 3). The reference was to Article 27 of the Constitution of India, discussed in the judgment at length. There is, however, more to the judgment than meets the eye. I have no bone to pick with the operative part of the judgment but am concerned with the court's rather far-fetched interpretation of Article 27 and the omission of any reference to another highly relevant provision of the Constitution.

Under appeal before the apex court was the Gujarat High Court's directive to the state government to repair religious places damaged during the communal frenzy in 2002 and recovering its costs from those guilty of the devastation. The state government came in appeal to the SC and filed before it a scheme for awarding a small compensatory contribution to the trustees of each of the damaged properties. The scheme was based on the report of a local committee which it had set up to examine the matter. The respondents in the appeal called it a "travesty of justice" but the SC approved the scheme with an observation that a "substantial part of taxpayers' money cannot be granted for repairing religious structures".

Placed in Part III of the Constitution relating to fundamental rights under the "Right to Freedom of Religion", Article 27 proclaims: "No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination." Its location in the Constitution and words are clear enough to understand that it is a part of individuals' religious liberty and restrains the state from collecting any special tax for promoting or maintaining a particular religion.

I fail to understand how getting a damaged religious place repaired and realising its cost from those who had damaged it can be seen as "promotion or maintenance" of religion. And if it does, then the quantum of expenditure involved — be it substantial or meagre — must be irrelevant.



There is nothing in the language of Article 27 suggesting that the prohibition applies only if the amount spent is “substantial”. Who will determine, and by what criteria, whether an amount is substantial or trivial? Will the decisive voice in the matter be of the government of the day?

Another provision in the Constitution seems to be lending its weight to the SC’s conditional reading of Article 27. This is Article 290A, which says: “A sum of forty-six lakhs and fifty thousand rupees shall be charged on, and paid out of, the Consolidated Fund of the State of Kerala every year to the Travancore Devaswom Fund; and a sum of thirteen lakhs and fifty thousand rupees shall be charged on, and paid out of, the Consolidated Fund of the State of Tamil Nadu every year to the Devaswom Fund established in that State for the maintenance of Hindu temples and shrines in the territories transferred to that State on the 1st day of November, 1956, from the State of Travancore-Cochin.”

This was a religious obligation independent India had inherited from the two erstwhile princely states referred to in the Article as a precondition for their joining the Indian Union. The provision clearly clashes with the general principle of Article 27 but perhaps the payable amount, aggregating to Rs 6 million, does not qualify as a “substantial part of tax-payers’ money.”

Be it Article 290A or Article 48 — which mandates that the state protect the cow and its progeny — these provisions of the Constitution determine the nature and parameters of secularism in our country which is not absolute but restricted. This constitutional philosophy of a qualified secularism has to be accepted by us.

Our courts must, however, apply it uniformly. Deciding some cases on the basis of our concept of qualified secularism but invoking the ideal of absolute secularism in some others amounts to a judicial selectivity that does not stand to reason.

Like Cold War (THE INDIAN EXPRESS)

US President Donald Trump’s challenge to a “double-dealing” Pakistan has provoked commentators in the country to invoke the threat of a Cold War-like confrontation between America and China — with



Pakistan safely operating on the Chinese side while India draws closer to the US. But Pakistan needs to be realistic. The 2008 Mumbai attack issue is still not resolved and Pakistan continues to prevent the UN from subjecting its main accused, Hafiz Saeed, to trial. China, which supports the UN call to apprehend Saeed, has repeated its charge in a veiled manner at the recent meeting of BRICS countries — a group that includes India — in Xiamen. Beijing has since tried to defend Pakistan against the charge of “safe havens” of terror on its soil.

The media in Pakistan has gone berserk and is cursing the country's PML(N) government for not responding “in kind” to Trump's threats while thanking China for standing up for Pakistan. After Trump encouraged India to raise its stakes in Afghanistan and up the ante against Pakistan, TV anchors in Pakistan invoked the familiar “two-nation” nationalism and asked people in the country to rise and confront the “cowardly” enemy. Used to Cold War bipolarity, it was easy for them to embrace the presumed US-versus-China square-off in South Asia, with India on the American side.

In some ways, Pakistan is preparing to sever its old association with the US and join the camp led by China in the new Cold War. The underlying reasons for the calls being made to bid goodbye to a “dying superpower” is the new equation America has found with India — the neighbour that shapes Pakistan's outlook on world politics. The madrasas and the religious parties are very clear about how Pakistan should disassociate with the US: Send the American ambassador packing and break diplomatic relations. The religious parties know that under Pakistan's new Afghan policy, they will play a central role while the political parties become marginal, once again. The politicians are going along with extremist anti-American slogans so as not to look irrelevant in the media. Pakistan, like India, was once a British colony absorbing many humanist values that were alien to it from Britain. The English language is the civilisational vector that has set Pakistan apart from its neighbouring Muslim states like Iran and Afghanistan.

During the Cold War, the “ideological” Sparta of Pakistan incongruously sided with America while the Athens of India incongruously embraced the “ideological” Soviet Union. As Pakistan chafed under the value-laden “conditionalities” of the relationship, India kept its intellectual links with America intact while siding with the Soviet Union as a “Non-Aligned Nation”.

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As 70-year old Pakistan toughens ideologically, it feels like breaking-off the intellectual link with America where its gifted youth go for higher education and where resident Pakistanis are the seventh fastest-growing community. Pakistan has no intellectual connection with China, and language is a barrier, not a vector. India didn't suffer from the strategic disconnect of the Cold War. By aggressively disconnecting itself from America, Pakistan will not find a similar counterweight in China.

The Opposition in Pakistan pretends to be greatly worked up by "Trump's insult" and the country's leaders are heaping counter-insults on America, perhaps hoping that the PMLN government will be lured into issuing a stupid, warlike message to Washington. It was not the finest hour for Pakistan's semi-literate TV anchors, either, who actually encouraged the politicians to run-off at the mouth.

Will India take Trump's bait and step into Afghanistan? C. Raja Mohan has talked of the red line that India is likely to follow while engaging with Afghanistan: "India must ramp up its economic diplomacy in Afghanistan to bring immediate benefits to Kabul amidst the deteriorating conditions in the country. Second, Delhi must step up security cooperation with Afghanistan, especially in the training of its police and armed forces and intelligence sharing. Third, on the diplomatic front, India must counter the emerging argument that Trump's new approach will intensify the Indo-Pak rivalry in Afghanistan and the old one that Kashmir holds the key to peace in Afghanistan" ('The Trump discontinuity', IE, August 24)

Pakistan can't get rid of its strategic depth doctrine when it comes to India. In the coming years, Indian projects in Afghanistan are likely to be targeted by Taliban while Pakistan will continue to issue tiresome denials about giving sanctuary to the outfit. India will likely go on unwisely squeezing Pakistan with mortar-fire on the country's eastern border and endangering China's projects in Pakistan through the Pakistani Taliban, hooked on bribes just like Afghan Taliban.

The new Cold War will shabbily proceed through non-state actors while nuclear weapons nestle dangerously in South Asian arsenals. It is almost certain that India will decide against deploying troops in Afghanistan to protect its projects being targeted by the Taliban and non-state actors. On the other hand, once Indian presence in Afghanistan becomes substantial, Pakistan will take recourse to reflex



that its conditioned to: It will produce terrorists even in institutions of higher education.

Indicators that matter (THE HINDU)

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. However, 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. 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. The patterns of public expenditure on health show that the provisioning of curative care through hospitals received disproportionate policy significance, ignoring overwhelming evidence that it is preventive health care and public health actions that have brought down periodic episodes of infectious disease outbreaks or epidemics. Scientific discoveries, technological improvements and government efforts to improve sanitation and hygiene have successfully controlled infectious diseases globally. The government's lack of understanding of the importance of public health has played the most important part in U.P.'s health predicament.

While the under-provisioning of health care including public health services continues in some States that were directly under the control of the British Raj, those that were once princely states such as Kerala and had outstanding health achievements have not been providing enough resources to health since the late 1980s. It is no wonder then that the situation has deteriorated. Health care continues to be treated like any other private good in this country, although it has certain features that make it on a par with a public good. That is why instead of leaving it to the 'invisible hand' of the market, governments around the world became deeply involved in health care. After World War II, most governments in Europe became extensively involved in health care. A notable example is the National Health Service, a publicly funded health-care system in the U.K., set up in 1948. Government health spending now accounts for 80-90% of total health expenditure in most countries of the European Union; public expenditure contributes to less than 30% of the total health expenditure in India.

As public health-care provisioning becomes more limited and the quality of services deteriorates, people are left with no option but to seek services from private providers, knowing well that the end result could be financially ruinous. Every year, around 60 million people become impoverished through



paying health-care bills in India. Worse, more than a fifth of people do not seek health care, despite being unwell, because of their inability to pay for it.

The health indicators of Cuba are similar to that of developed countries. With an infant mortality rate of 4.2 per thousand births, this socialist country is among the top three performers in the world. But this was not the scenario five decades ago. In 1959, the infant mortality rate in rural areas was 100 per thousand live births and half of Cuba's doctors and hospital beds were in Havana. The rural areas had all the problems that U.P. and other underdeveloped States in India still have. However, Cuba's health-care system has become a model for other countries. This was made possible as the country's leadership recognised the importance of public health and developing a health-care system based on preventive medicine and not curative care.

If we want the people of this country to enjoy a health status that is commensurate with that of their counterparts from other middle-income countries and in the region, not only should there be more resources available for health, but also the government's approach towards health needs to be radically changed.

All that data that Aadhaar captures (THE HINDU)

Predictably enough, the recent Supreme Court order affirming that privacy is a fundamental right sent Aadhaar's public-relations machine into damage control mode. After denying the right to privacy for years, the government promptly changed gear and welcomed the judgment. Ajay Bhushan Pandey, CEO of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), suddenly asserted, "The Aadhaar Act is based on the premise that privacy is a fundamental right." He also clarified that the judgment would not affect Aadhaar as the required safeguards were already in place.

There is a common perception that the main privacy concern with Aadhaar is the confidentiality of the Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR). This is misleading for two reasons. One is that the CIDR is not supposed to be inaccessible. On the contrary, the Aadhaar Act 2016 puts in place a framework for sharing most of the CIDR information. The second reason is that the biggest danger, in any case, lies elsewhere.

To understand this, it helps to distinguish between three different types of private information: biometric information, identity information and personal information. The first two are formally defined in the Aadhaar Act, and protected to some extent. Aadhaar's biggest threat to privacy, however, relates to the third type of information.

In the Aadhaar Act, biometric information essentially refers to photograph, fingerprints and iris scan, though it may also extend to "other biological attributes of an individual" specified by the UIDAI. The term "core biometric information" basically means biometric information minus photograph, but it can be modified once again at the discretion of the UIDAI.



Identity information has a wider scope. It includes biometric information but also a person's Aadhaar number as well as the demographic characteristics that are collected at the time of Aadhaar enrolment, such as name, address, date of birth, phone number, and so on.

The term "personal information" (not used in the Act) can be understood in a broader sense, which includes not only identity information but also other information about a person, for instance where she travels, whom she talks to on the phone, how much she earns, what she buys, her Internet browsing history, and so on.

The strongest safeguards in the Act relate to core biometric information. That part of the CIDR, where identity information is stored, is supposed to be inaccessible except for the purpose of biometric authentication. There is a view that, in practice, the biometric database is likely to be hacked sooner or later. Be that as it may, the UIDAI can at least be credited with trying to keep it safe, as it is bound to do under the Act.

That does not apply, however, to identity information as a whole. Far from protecting your identity information, the Aadhaar Act puts in place a framework to share it with "requesting entities". The core of this framework lies in Section 8 of the Act, which deals with authentication. Section 8 underwent a radical change when the draft of the Act was revised. In the initial scheme of things, authentication involved nothing more than a Yes/No response to a query as to whether a person's Aadhaar number matches her fingerprints (or possibly, other biometric or demographic attributes). In the final version of the Act, however, authentication also involves a possible sharing of identity information with the requesting entity. For instance, when you go through Aadhaar-based biometric authentication to buy a SIM card from a telecom company, the company typically gains access to your demographic characteristics from the CIDR. Even biometric information other than core biometric information (which means, as of now, photographs) can be shared with a requesting entity.

Section 8, of course, includes some safeguards against possible misuse of identity information. A requesting entity is supposed to use identity information only with your consent, and only for the purpose mentioned in the consent statement. But who reads the fine print of the terms and conditions before ticking or clicking a consent box?

There is another important loophole: the Aadhaar Act includes a blanket exemption from the safeguards applicable to biometric and identity information on "national security" grounds. Considering the elastic nature of the term, this effectively makes identity information accessible to the government without major restrictions.

Further, this is just the tail of the beast. By the same reasoning, if Aadhaar is made mandatory for SIM cards, the government will have access to your lifetime call records, and it will also be able to link your call records with your travel records. The chain, of course, can be extended to other "Aadhaar-enabled" databases accessible to the government — school records, income-tax records, pension

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records, and so on. Aadhaar enables the government to collect and collate all this personal information with virtually no restrictions.

Thus, Aadhaar is a tool of unprecedented power for the purpose of mining personal information. Nothing in the Aadhaar Act prevents the government from using Aadhaar to link different databases, or from extracting personal information from these databases. Indeed, many State governments (aside from the Central government) are already on the job, under the State Resident Data Hub (SRDH) project, which “integrates all the departmental databases and links them with Aadhaar number”, according to the SRDH websites. The Madhya Pradesh website goes further, and projects SRDH as “the single source of truth for the entire state” — nothing less. The door to state surveillance is wide open.

In short, far from being “based on the premise that privacy is a fundamental right”, Aadhaar is the anti-thesis of the right to privacy. Perhaps further safeguards can be put in place, but Aadhaar’s fundamental power as a tool for mining personal information is bound to be hard to restrain. The very foundation of Aadhaar needs to be reconsidered in the light of the Supreme Court judgment.

Search for quality (THE HINDU)

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. 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”. Among them are provisions to restrict cross-shareholding between rating agencies without regulatory approval to 10%, and increase the minimum net worth requirement for existing and new agencies from Rs. 5 crore to Rs. 50 crore. Another mandates at least five years’ experience for promoters of rating agencies. SEBI has proposed disclosure norms to improve investor awareness about the operations of rating agencies. The spin-off of non-core operations of rating agencies will allow SEBI to focus on regulating just their credit rating operations. SEBI has spelt out its rationale for proposing each of the rules. SEBI’s predominant concern, apart from improving the information available to investors, seems to be to prevent rating agencies from resorting to collusion in reaching decisions. This effort is in line with SEBI’s crackdown on the agencies after the default in 2015 of a highly-rated debt issued by Amtek Auto.

The new rules, if they come into force, may not have any substantial impact on the quality of credit rating in India. Prima facie, the intended effects of the rules sound convincing. What is unclear are their unintended effects on competition in the rating space. Also, how the rules will address the problem of “rating shopping” that plagues the business of credit rating in the country is unknown. The present business model of rating agencies is seen to allow considerable room for issuers of securities to shop for a favourable rating or avoid negative ratings by severing their ties with these agencies.

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Prudential regulation is thus justified to tackle this problem. This criticism, however, ignores the reputational damage these agencies suffer after each corporate default. Repeated failures have not affected the business of rating agencies, primarily due to the lack of alternative service providers who can help out investors. Individual creditors have thus had to trust the ratings of the existing rating agencies at their own peril, even after repeated crises. As is well-known today, the Indian credit rating market is an oligopolistic one due to the high barriers to entry. SEBI's proposed move to impose further quality requirements on rating agencies is unlikely to change things for the better, or raise further barriers. The way forward lies in making it easier for new players to enter the credit rating space and compete against incumbents. This will go a long way towards making credit rating agencies actually serve creditors rather than borrowers.

A forest policy on today's terms (THE HINDU)

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as well as all State Forest Departments are guided by the National Forest Policy, 1988, which states: "The basic objectives that should govern the National Forest Policy are the following: Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the ecological balance that has been adversely disturbed by serious depletion of the forests of the country."

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', and Haryana has recently shown the way by practically stopping 'forest plantation' in favour of protecting and permitting existing vegetation to grow.

Having defined a forest, we can now state the primary aim of the 1988 National Forest Policy in the following valid terms: "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."

It may be noted that the term 'original natural ecosystems' refers to the state of affairs prior to their exploitation by humans. The second point of the policy states: "Conserving the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests with the vast variety of flora and fauna, which represent the remarkable biological diversity and genetic resources of the country."

It does not suggest how this is to be done and why this point fits in, in the policy. Perhaps if it were stated in this way: "Protecting the catchment areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs to enable natural vegetation to grow back unhindered to conserve soil, help groundwater recharge, for mitigating floods and droughts and for retardation of siltation of reservoirs." The justification for this wording is that the

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natural vegetation of an area has evolved over millennia to adjust to the rainfall regime, soil conditions, and the subsurface water systems of an area. In places where catchment areas have untouched natural vegetation, rainfall percolates into the soil and is released over a period of months, resulting in perennial streams and rivers. Where this has been damaged, the streams, rivulets and rivers have become seasonal, as in peninsular India.

The final point that needs modification is 2.2 of 'basic objectives': "The principal aim of Forest Policy must be to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which are vital for sustenance of all lifeforms, human, animal and plant. The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim."

This is a laudable point, but the terms of reference are not valid. Therefore, it might be better to state this in the following terms, so that the spirit of what is being stated is not lost: "The principal aim of Forest Policy must be to ensure a healthy natural environment and the maintenance and healthy functioning of life-support systems, including the water cycle and nutrient cycle, by protecting natural forest and other ecosystems native to the area. The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim since the indirect economic benefit of healthy life-support systems is incalculable."

Couched in these terms, the Forest Policy document develops an overarching responsibility for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change towards restoring and maintaining the health of India's surface and sub-surface water systems, since both are largely governed by forests and other natural ecosystems. The protection of healthy natural ecosystems in catchment areas should be a vital national goal, given the challenges of failing freshwater systems facing the nation at present. The State Forest Departments are the entities that can do the most in this context, by stopping invalid practices like planting forests and instead use that money in sensible ways to directly and indirectly protect natural ecosystems in sensitive areas like watersheds, catchment areas, and coasts, as has already been envisaged in the National Forest Policy, 1988.

What is worrisome, however, is that in the 30 years since it was formulated, no officer of the Indian Forest Service has pointed out these shortcomings. There is clearly an urgent need to review the curriculum of the Indian Forest Service since it seems to rely on concepts that have been discarded more than a century ago.

The track to success (THE HINDU)

Since they were commissioned more than five decades ago, bullet trains have been the symbol of Japan's engineering prowess. This ambitious project demonstrated Japan's significant engineering skill and expertise, and its success transformed the way Japan was viewed by the rest of the world.



Similarly, China has focussed on the development of its high-speed rail network as a symbol of its engineering capabilities.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will arrive in Gujarat later this week to lay the foundation stone for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project — also known as the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train. There is an expectation that similar to the experience for Japan and China, this project could be one of the catalysts in transforming India. India has already experienced success in major projects in the past, which includes building the Golden Quadrilateral and upgrading its national highways, which has added to GDP, created efficiencies in transportation, provided jobs and improved rural development through enhanced connectivity.

This discussion is timely, given the challenges experienced by the Indian Railways due to recent accidents and talk of much-needed upgrades to safety and other infrastructure. This has caused some to question whether the MAHSR is an effective use of resources. However, resourcing is only one of the issues being faced by the Railways. We heard a similar debate about the Indian space programme, which has seen some remarkable achievements.

There are three advantages from the MAHSR project: economic benefits, including infrastructure development and job creation; technological development, in which Indian companies imbibe the new technologies and potentially also become suppliers to HSR contracts worldwide; and cultural transformation through a demonstrated ability to implement large projects and improve safety.

Investment in infrastructure development has always acted as a catalyst in the economic growth of India. This project could provide an important boost to public investment. The soft funding of the project by the Japanese government is an additional advantage, which brings the two countries together and provides significant economic benefits. In addition to creating demand for local industry, the project would also generate significant employment. The HSR system is more energy- and fuel-efficient. Studies show that HSR systems are around three times more fuel-efficient than aeroplanes and five times more fuel-efficient than cars. Given the traffic density in this corridor, this project could lead to a significant reduction in India's carbon footprint.

The success of this project, however, will lie in its execution. Its successful and timely completion could act as a powerful catalyst to create a culture of efficient project implementation in India. Similarly, there should be a focus on leveraging the post-implementation synergies, which could make this a transformational project for India.

The resilience of our liberalism (THE HINDU)

Anchored in constitutional scholarship, history and international law, the celebrated privacy judgment (K.S. Puttaswamy, 2017) attests to the resilience of our dignitarian liberalism. The unanimous

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judgment of nine distinguished judges, who held that privacy is integral to human dignity and not a constitutional largesse to be withdrawn at will by the state, elevates privacy to the pinnacle in the hierarchy of human rights.

“Privacy”, said the court, “ensures the fulfillment of dignity and is a core value which the protection of life and liberty is intended to achieve”. The court explained that “privacy with its attendant values assures dignity to the individual, and it is only when life can be enjoyed with dignity can liberty be of true substance” (per Justice Chandrachud). In reaffirming the coalescence of fundamental rights to life and liberty guaranteed under Articles 14, 19 and 21 following the Constitution Bench judgments in Cooper (1970) and Maneka Gandhi (1978), the court echoed the philosophical wisdom of Justice Krishna Iyer articulated years ago that “cardinal rights in an organic Constitution which makes man ‘human’, have a synthesis”.

Will the compelling logic of the judgment spur meaningful executive and legislative action to redeem its promise, is the question. In particular, the state’s response to queer rights, the right of choice in matters relating to food, health, reproduction and data disclosure, etc. will define the contours of privacy rights. Hopefully, citizens will not be driven to fight endless judicial battles to take what is inherently theirs. As part of meaningful follow-up measures, the government should move forward on the report of the Group of Experts under the chairmanship of Justice A.P. Shah (2012) suggesting a model privacy law referred to by Justice S.K. Kaul in his concurring judgment. The report, which recommended nine fundamental principles as the basis of the proposed privacy law, could be reviewed in the framework of the Puttaswamy decision and can provide credible basis for a comprehensive legal architecture to secure privacy rights. The unsung hero in the battle for privacy is the late Rama Jois, a former judge of Karnataka High Court and member of Rajya Sabha who persistently raised the issue of privacy in relation to Aadhaar. As the then Minister of State for Planning, this writer had to deal with the issue. A resultant offshoot was the constitution by the Planning Commission of an expert group headed by Justice Shah to propose a model privacy law.

In the context of privacy debate, it is necessary to ask whether it was at all necessary to convert the legal challenge to Aadhaar into a privacy or an Aadhaar debate when post Cooper (1970), Maneka Gandhi (1978) and a series of subsequent Supreme Court judgments, the right to privacy stood entrenched in our constitutional jurisprudence as part of the fundamental right to dignity. What is disappointing is that even after the judgment, the Union Law Minister, himself a distinguished lawyer, has chosen to argue in public rather inelegantly that the judgment does not reject the government’s argument on privacy, even as the then Attorney General, who originally argued on behalf of the government that privacy was not a fundamental right, has rightly conceded that the government lost its case in court.

A less noticed but significant feature of the privacy ruling is a disclaimer of judicial power to introduce



new constitutional rights in the exercise of the court's judicial review jurisdiction. Some constitutional scholars have hastened to view the verdict as making the Supreme Court a "co-governor" of the nation (Upendra Baxi, Indian Express, August 30). Unambiguously dispelling such a notion, the court held that "the exercise has been one of interpreting existing rights guaranteed by the Constitution" and "while understanding the core of those rights to determine the ambit of what the right comprehends". It has thus adopted a vocabulary of constitutional discourse that navigates the extremes through self-restraint and has earned a general acceptance of its role as an independent custodian of the constitutional principle. In choosing to remain "within the banks", judges, wiser by experience and disciplined by law, have guarded against encroaching beyond judicial bounds, thereby ensuring a diffusion of constitutional power "in a system of inter-branch equality". The historic verdict which affirms that the idea of human dignity includes the right to be let alone, the equality of human beings and the freedom to will is a sublime oration on human dignity and a vindication of the nation's liberal conscience. It is up to us to live the judgment, to keep faith with the spirit of our age in which the idea of human rights and their preservation as the *raison d'être* of the state has received universal acceptance.

An alliance on track (THE HINDU)

When Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad this week, the bilateral agenda will range from issues of maritime security to nuclear energy and trade. But at 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. 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.

Profitability is a notoriously hard ask for high-speed train networks. Most lines across Europe, for example, are in the red. In Japan, some routes, notably Tokyo-Osaka, are profitable, but to achieve this requires high volumes of passengers and highly priced tickets. It costs around \$130 for a one-way Shinkansen ticket from Tokyo to Osaka. And over 350 trains operate on this line daily, ferrying about 163 million passengers a year. The region served is demographically dense, home to over half of Japan's population. These conditions are not easy to replicate and other high-speed lines in Japan have struggled.



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In 2015, China pipped Japan to the post at the last minute by securing a high-speed rail project in Indonesia that had been considered by Tokyo to be in the bag. One reason Beijing unexpectedly won out was because China offered to finance the line without any recourse to Indonesia's government coffers. In the years since, the project has stalled following land acquisition problems. Nonetheless, China has also beaten Tokyo to becoming Thailand's partner of choice for its first high-speed rail line, permissions for which were finally granted after a two-year delay.

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.

Yet in India, concerns related to costs, safety and misplaced priorities persist. Tomoyuki Nakano, the Director for International Engineering Affairs of Japan's Railway Bureau, remained confident of ironing these out with some tweaks to the Japanese technology taking into account climatic differences, the possibility of electrical blackouts, as well as dust and other environmental conditions in India. He also pointed out that when Japan developed its first Shinkansen lines in the 1960s, it was a poor country as well that had required loans from the World Bank.

Towards war's end in Syria (THE HINDU)

Syria's battlefield is so complex and fast changing that earlier this month, about 300 IS fighters and an equal number of their family members boarded buses at the Lebanese border in western Syria to come to Deir ez-Zor. This was a deal struck by IS, the Syrian government, the Lebanese government, and Hezbollah. A tough campaign by the Lebanese armed forces and Hezbollah managed to eject the IS from the highlands above the Beqaa Valley. These 300 fighters made a deal for safe passage to Deir ez-Zor if they would hand over the bodies of Hezbollah fighters taken in 2014. The convoy of 11 buses carrying these IS troops was stopped in the Syrian desert by U.S. air strikes. Half of them turned back for the Syrian government areas, while the rest attempted to move forward to certain death or capture in the west. The tourist buses of their fighters were stuck — like sitting ducks — underneath the firepower of the U.S. Air Force.

Meanwhile, north of Deir ez-Zor, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) moved under heavy U.S. airpower to seize about 14 out of 22 of Raqqa's neighbourhoods. SDF spokesperson Mustafa Bali said that there are only about 1,000 IS fighters left in the city, which now has one hospital and little other resources for a population that has lived in terror for the past few years. The fight has been going slowly, as the IS has positioned car bombs and mines to slow the entry of the SDF. On Friday, the SDF captured Raqqa University. Its tanks, flying the flag of the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia group, made it clear that this was largely a Syrian Kurdish operation. This continues to rankle Syria's northern neighbour, Turkey, which has moved its troops into Syria (a Turkish military officer said that

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the YPG has been targeting its troops and artillery positions near the Syrian border town of A'zaz).

There is a great deal of psychological warfare at work, with the battlefield shrouded in competing interests and with facts hard to discern through the smoke. Each of the main forces (the Syrian Army, the SDF, the Iranian militias, Hezbollah, the Free Syrian Army, the Turkish army and the U.S. military) claims to be at the forefront of the battle to defeat the IS. That has become the focus. The government of Bashar al-Assad is no longer the target of the major armed powers (Turkey, the U.S. and the Gulf Arabs) that had pledged to remove him from his presidency. Even the Free Syrian Army has turned its guns against the IS, as it recently did in south Daraa, where it defeated the Saifullah al-Maslul group in the villages of al-Abdali and al-Majahid. This is a dramatic turn of affairs.

The UN envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said recently that he hopes that a new UN process for peace will open up in October. Mr. de Mistura is focused on the region around Idlib, in northern Syria, and in pockets of Damascus where the non-IS rebels have congregated for what will be a last stand. The main group here is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is closely linked to al-Qaeda and has been shown to be a beneficiary of Gulf Arab funds and theological assistance. With the Syrian Army and its allies busy with the fight against the IS in Deir ez-Zor, HTS fighters have deepened their hold on Idlib in preparation for the inevitable attack by the Syrian Army. It is this attack which will have major consequences for civilian lives that Mr. de Mistura wishes to circumvent.

It is likely that as soon as the Syrian Army has taken hold of Deir ez-Zor, it will move against the HTS in Idlib. There is no possibility for these fighters to be resupplied, since their regional allies (Turkey and the Gulf Arabs) have largely abandoned them. The lead negotiator for the opposition side — Riad Hijab (a former Syrian Prime Minister) — has refused to come to the talks. His language sounds dated, with the most anachronistic demand being the removal of Mr. Assad. Failure to come to the table leaves Mr. Hijab culpable for the prolongation of a war that should end as soon as possible. The battle for Idlib will be dangerous and bloody, with a hardened and desperate HTS fighting an exhausted Syrian Arab Army and its equally stretched allies.

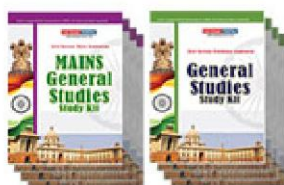


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