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Index

Polity and Social Issues

1. Supreme Court proposes 3 tier right to privacy.....	01
2. Supreme Court refuses to stay NOTA in Rajya Sabha elections.....	01
3. Aadhar mandatory for Death Certificate.....	04
4. Despite Doklam standoff tensions prevail at Nathula Pass.....	05
5. Child friendly court in Bengaluru.....	06
6. High Courts to oppose All India Judicial Service.....	07
7. Swachh Survekshan Gramin.....	08
8. Special status of Jammu and Kashmir State.....	09
9. Central Government likely to differ on Article 35A.....	11
10. Assam, Manipur can now decide on AFSPA.....	12
11. NRIs can now vote through proxy.....	13
12. New Rating System for Bureaucrats.....	14

Geography, Ecology & Biodiversity

1. GM Mustard roll out will be monitored carefully.....	15
2. GI is the need of hour for Chirala Silks.....	16
3. Kali Tiger Reserve in trouble.....	18
4. Seven Species of Grass hoppers found.....	20
5. Coconut palm declared as state tree of Goa.....	22
6. Pangolin scales found smuggled to Southeast Asian countries.....	23
7. Nandankan Zoo to get 12 vultures.....	24
8. Biosphere reserves in India.....	26

9. Himalayas losing rare fossils to souvenir hunters.....	27
10. Black Carbon a threat to Ozone.....	28
11. Elephant census reveals only 27312 jumbos left in India.....	30

Economy

1. Logistics data bank project to expand to South India.....	31
2. E-toll lanes at all National Highway plazas.....	32
3. NITI Aayog to launch Mentor India Campaign.....	34

Science and technology

1. ISRO to develop new imaging satellite.....	36
2. GIS enabled portal maps for Land Information.....	37
3. Water as propellant in CubeSats.....	38
4. Five chemicals banned from fire crackers.....	39
5. Methanol a cleaner, cheaper fuel.....	40
6. Measles-Rubella campaign in India.....	42

Government Schemes and Initiatives

1. Make in India yet to spur manufacturing, says panel.....	44
2. Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY).....	45
3. Aajeevika Grameen Express Yojana.....	46
4. Madhyamin and Uchchatar Shiksha Kosh (MUSK).....	47

International relations

1. India to revive TAPI Gas pipeline.....	48
2. Exploration of Polymetallic Nodules from Central Indian Ocean.....	49

Defence and Internal Security

1. India, China to join Indian Ocean exercise.....	51
2. Army to get 6 Apache Helicopters.....	51
3. BRO to get more Financial Powers.....	53
4. Navy gets Amphibious Landing Craft.....	54

Point Blank (facts for prelims)

1. Bengaluru to witness first heli taxi in India.....	56
2. Jaguars still fly without autopilot.....	56
3. Greenfield International Airport at Mopa.....	56
4. e-Shakti initiative.....	56
5. Lingayats.....	57
6. Operation All Out (OAO).....	57
7. Navroz festival.....	57
8. Gobindobhog rice gets geographical indication status.....	58
9. Agri Undaan.....	58
10. Pangong Tso Lake.....	58
11. Project Brainwave.....	59

Polity and Social Issues



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AUGUST 2017



1. Supreme Court proposes 3 tier right to privacy

What is the issue?

- The SC, during its hearing on whether privacy is a fundamental right, has formulated a three-tier approach to the question by classifying privacy into intimate, private and public.

How are the 3 zones different from one another?

- The 'intimate' zone is concerned with aspects like marriage and sexuality, where the state has minimal right of interference. Though the state has minimal right of interference, it can still intrude into this under extraordinary circumstances
- The second zone would be the private zone, which involved parting of personal data+ by use of credit card, social networking platforms, income tax declarations. In this sphere, sharing of personal data by an individual will be used only for the purpose for which it is shared by an individual.
- The third is the public zone where privacy protection requires minimal regulation. Here, the personal data shared will not mean the right to privacy is surrendered.

2. Supreme Court refuses to stay NOTA in Rajya Sabha elections

What is the issue?

- The Supreme Court of India allowed the use of the 'None of the Above" (NOTA) option in the upcoming poll for three Rajya Sabha seats in Gujarat. Earlier, the Election Commission has issued circular mentioning about use of NOTA in Rajya Sabha elections.

What was the EC notification?

- The Election Commission had issued a circular in January 2014 that the provisions of NOTA be included in the Rajya Sabha elections too, after it was included as one of the options in the Electronic Voting Machines in 2013.

- From 2014 onwards, biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha have been held in 16 States, and 25 bye-elections to the Rajya Sabha have been held, according to the EC circular issued on August 2, 2017. In all these elections, instructions regarding NOTA have been applicable.

How does the NOTA work in RS elections?

- In Rajya Sabha polls, the MLAs have to show their ballot paper to an authorised party agent before putting it in ballot box.
- If a voter (MLA) defies the party directive and votes for someone else or uses NOTA option, he cannot be disqualified as a legislator.
- But the party is free to take disciplinary action including expulsion. The defiant voter can continue to be an MLA and his vote can also not be invalidated for defying party directions, the EC rules say.

What is NOTA?

- The Supreme Court upheld the right of voters to reject all candidates contesting the elections, saying it would go a long way in cleansing the political system of the country.
- The apex court directed the Election Commission to have an option of 'None Of The Above' (NOTA) on the electronic voting machines (EVMs) and ballot papers in a major electoral reform.

How is a NOTA vote cast?

- The EVMs have the NOTA option at the end of the candidates' list. Earlier, in order to cast a negative ballot, a voter had to inform the presiding officer at the polling booth.
- A NOTA vote doesn't require the involvement of the presiding officer.

When was NOTA first used in India; how did it fare?

- The NOTA option was first used in the assembly elections held in five states last year. More than 15 lakh people exercised the option in the states polls.

Is there such provision before NOTA?

- Before the NOTA option came in existence, people casting negative votes were required to enter their names in a register and cast their vote on a separate paper ballot.
- Under Section 49 (O) of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, a voter could enter his electoral serial number in Form 17A and cast a negative vote. The presiding officer would then put a remark in the form and get it signed by the voter. This was done to prevent fraud or misuse of votes.
- This provision was, however, deemed unconstitutional by the SC as it did not protect the identity of the voter.

Why have NOTA if there's 'no electoral value'?

- The SC said negative voting would even encourage people who are not satisfied with any of the candidates to turn up to express their opinion and reject all contestants.
- "Negative voting will lead to a systemic change in polls and political parties will be forced to project clean candidates.
- If the right to vote is a statutory right, then the right to reject a candidate is a fundamental right of speech and expression under the Constitution," said a bench headed by then Chief Justice of India, P Sathasivam.

How are 49(O) and NOTA different?

- The Section 49 (O) stood annulled after the SC cleared the NOTA provision. It gave the poll officials a chance to find out the reason behind the rejection of a candidate through the voter's remarks in Form 17A.
- Through NOTA, the officials cannot find out the reason for the rejection. Moreover, it protects the identity of a voter, thus keeping the concept of secret balloting intact.

Which other countries allow NOTA?

- Colombia, Ukraine, Brazil, Bangladesh, Finland, Spain, Sweden, Chile, France, Belgium and Greece allow their voters to cast NOTA votes.
- The US also allows it in a few cases. The state of Texas in the US permits the provision since 1975. The option, however, has faced opposition there.

3. Aadhar mandatory for Death Certificate

What is the issue?

- Government of India made Aadhar number a pre-requisite for issuing death certificates to residents of all states excluding Meghalaya, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir

Key points:

- In order to curb identity fraud, the government has made Aadhar number compulsory for issuing death certificate and the order comes into effect from October 1st 2018.
- If a person applying for the death certificate is not aware of the Aadhaar number or Aadhaar enrolment ID Number (EID) of the deceased, he or she would be required to provide a certificate stating that the deceased person does not possess an Aadhaar number to the best of her or his knowledge
- If an applicant is not aware of the Aadhaar number or Enrolment ID Number (EID) of the deceased, he or she will be required to provide a certificate that the deceased person did not possess Aadhaar number to the best of their knowledge.
- If any false declaration was given by the applicant that would be treated as offence as per the provisions of Aadhar act 2016 and also under the Registration of Birth and Death Act, 1969
- The applicant's Aadhar number shall also be collected

What does Aadhar act say?

- Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act 2016 permits the use of Aadhaar number for establishing the identity of an individual for any purpose pursuant to any law or any contract to this effect.
- The registration of births and deaths are being done under the provisions of Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 and the corresponding Rules made by State governments.

1. GM Mustard roll out will be monitored carefully

What is the Issue?

- The Supreme Court said that a government decision favoring a commercial roll-out of genetically modified (GM) mustard seeds will not go unchallenged.

What is the procedure for allowing GM crops in India?

- GM crops are permitted for environmental release and cultivation only after undergoing elaborate food and environmental safety assessment following regulatory guidelines and standard operating procedures under Rules 1989 of EPA-1986 and no GM crop is allowed for cultivation, if it poses any risk to the environment including human and animal health.
- So far, only GM Mustard and Bt Brinjal have been recommended by GEAC to Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India for consideration for environmental release and cultivation.
- The safety aspects of genetically modified crops are assessed by the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBSCs), Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) and Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) constituted under Rules 1989 of Environment Protection Act (EPA) – 1986 based on Biosafety Guidelines and the Standard Operating Procedures.
- The only GM crop permitted for cultivation in the country by the Central Government is Bt cotton.

Mustard crop in India:

- Mustard is one of the important rabi crops. It yields an edible which is used for cooking in India
- Mustard is grown in Sub-tropical climate and it requires a temperature between 10°C to 25°C.
- It also requires a rainfall of 625-1000mm and this crop does not tolerate frost

GM Mustard:

- The GM mustard, developed by a Delhi University institution, is only the second food crop which got its clearance from the central regulator.
- DMH (Dhara Mustard Hybrid)-11 is genetically modified variety of mustard developed by Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants at Delhi University
- In February 2016, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GMEC) had allowed the commercial production of another GM crop viz. Mustard DMH-11
- The GEAC had itself rejected a similar HT (Herbicide tolerant GM mustard proposal by Bayer in 2002 because herbicide-tolerant crop promotes constant exposure to a single herbicide — which eventually results in weeds becoming resistant. Over 20 species of weeds in the U.S. are now resistant to Monsanto's glyphosate-based herbicide.
- The highest yields in mustard are from the five countries which do not grow GM mustard — U.K., France, Poland, Germany and Czech Republic — and not from the GM-growing U.S. or Canada

2. GI is the need of hour for Chirala Silks

What is the issue?

- Weavers of Chirala in the State feel a Geographical Indication (GI) tag for their impressive silk sari can help them compete better and survive in the era of globalization

About Chirala Silks:

- Chirala gets the name from word 'Chira' (Sari).
- Chirala is a Coastal town situated in Prakasam District in the state of Andhra Pradesh
- The main occupation of this village is handloom and paddy cultivation.
- The Chirala weavers inherit centuries-old rich artistic legacy

- Italian traveller Marco Polo's travelogue stands testimony to their weaving skills.
- Chirala weavers are credited with manufacturing saris that can be folded and kept in matchboxes.
- The saris cannot be reproduced by computer-aided design and embroidery units, says a group of weavers

GI tag:

What are Geographical Indications?

- GI is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- The name of the product should convey an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to its origin in that defined geographical locality.

Why are GIs important to India?

- Integral part of India's rich culture and collective intellectual heritage.
- Boost for India's Make in India campaign.
- Strengthen the informal sector by according protection to a number of handmade and manufactured products.
- GI products benefit the rural economy in remote areas, by supplementing the incomes of artisans, farmers, weavers and craftsmen.
- Help in protecting the knowledge of traditional practices and methods, passed down from generation to generation which needs to be protected and promoted.

International Agreements under which GIs are recognized

- Articles 1(2) and 10 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.
- Articles 22 to 24 of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement (Uruguay round of GATT negotiations)

- India as a member of World Trade Organisation (WTO) enacted the GI of good Act 1999 which came into force in September 2003

Benefits of GI tag

- Confers legal protection
- Prevents unauthorised use of a Registered GI tag by other
- Legal protection to Indian GIs which boosts exports
- Promotes economic prosperity of producers of goods produced in a geographical territory

Examples of GI

- Udupi saree - Karnataka
- Udayagiri wooden cutlery - Andhra Pradesh
- Dharwad Peda - Karnataka
- Pokkali rice – Kerala

1. ISRO to develop new imaging satellite

What is the issue?

- ISRO plans to launch a full-fledged earth observation satellite called Hyper spectral imaging satellite

What is Hyperspectral Imaging Satellite?

- Hyperspectral or hypspx imaging is said to be an Earth Observation trend that is being experimented globally.
- ISRO has developed the new technology using a critical chip called “optical imaging detector array”.
- With this experiment ISRO is planning to enter the domain of Operational hyperspectral imaging from earth orbit with a satellite that can see colour bands from 630km above ground.
- ‘Hypspx’ imaging is said to enable distinct identification of objects, materials or processes on Earth by reading the spectrum for each pixel of a scene from space.
- It can also be used for a range of activities from monitoring the environment, crops, looking for oil and minerals all the way up to military surveillance all of which need images that show a high level of differentiation of the object or scene.

Earlier Experiments:

- ISRO first tried it out in an 83-kg IMS-1 experimental satellite in May 2008. The same year, a hyperspectral camera was put on Chandrayaan-1 and used to map lunar mineral resources.

2. GIS enabled portal maps for Land Information

What is the issue?

- Central government has brought an online database of more than half a million hectares of land assisting information

What is Geographic Information System (GIS)?

- A geographic information system (GIS) is a computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on Earth's surface
- In general, GIS allows users to search for information about specific geographical areas, analyse spatial information, edit the data and create maps, charts and reports that show users the results in visual forms.
- The Geographic Information System enabled database has details of close to 3,000 industrial parks/clusters, as well as area-wise availability of agricultural/horticultural crops, and mineral production
- It will soon incorporate information on warehouses, power-grid and financial institutions as well as the demand for industrial infrastructure captured on the basis of applications from entrepreneurs for projects
- The database is being developed by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the National e-Governance Division in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as well as the BISAG – an institute for space applications and geo-informatics under the Gujarat Government

Advantages of GIS:

- GIS improves decision making because specific and detailed information is presented about one or more locations
- Reduce costs and increase efficiency – especially regarding maintenance schedules, fleet movements or scheduling timetables.
- Improved communication between any involved organisations or departments as the visual format is easily understood by all.

3. Water as propellant in CubeSats

- Engineers at Purdue University in the US have designed and tested a micro propulsion system that uses liquid water as the propellant for orbital maneuvering of tiny satellites called CubeSats.

What are CubeSats?

- CubeSats are miniature satellites that are commonly used in low Earth orbit for applications such as remote sensing or communications
- CubeSats can reduce launch cost as they typically weigh around 2 kilograms only
- CubeSats are also being considered for flights outside of Earth orbit particularly to locations such as Mars or Jupiter
- However, today's CubeSats cannot totally replace their larger counterparts as they are incapable of changing orbit or performing complex manoeuvres

New Propulsion system:

- The system developed at Purdue uses an innovative design of small thrusters that deliver bursts of water vapor to manoeuvre the spacecraft called FEMTA
- FEMTA (Film-Evaporation MEMS Tunable Array) thruster uses capillaries thinner than human hair through which the propellant water can flow.
- Small heaters located near the ends of the capillaries turn the water into vapor, which, on escape from these tiny tubes, provides the thrust.
- The technology is said to be similar to the inkjet printer, which uses heaters that fire dots of ink at the paper.
- Pure water is chosen as the propellant since it is green, safe, easy to use and free from the risk of contaminating sensitive instruments by the backflow from plumes as in the case of thrusters using chemical propellants.

1. Make in India yet to spur manufacturing, says panel

What is the issue?

- The Parliament's Standing Committee on Commerce has questioned the country's low manufacturing growth despite initiatives such as Make In India, Startup India and FDI reforms
- The committee had expressed concerns about manufacturing growth averaging just 1.6% in the five years till 2015-16 and a 0.5% contraction in the sector in the first 9 months of FY17,

Make in India programme:

- The 'Make in India' programme aims at promoting India as an important investment destination and a global hub for manufacturing, design and innovation.
- The 'Make in India' initiative does not target manufacturing sector alone, but also aims at promoting entrepreneurship in the country.
- The initiative is further aimed at creating a conducive environment for investment, modern and efficient infrastructure, opening up new sectors for foreign investment and forging a partnership between government and industry through positive mindset.
- 25 sectors have been identified under the initiative such as Automobiles, Aviation, Biotechnology, chemicals, construction, Food processing, Mining, tourism and hospitality etc
- The four pillars of Make in India are
 1. New Processes,
 2. New Infrastructure,
 3. New Sectors and
 4. New Mindset.

2. Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PMVVY)

What is the issue?

- Government has launched new scheme to protect elderly persons aged 60 and above

When was the scheme launched?

- The scheme was launched on 8th August 2017

What is the objective of the scheme?

- To provide social security during old age and to protect elderly persons aged 60 and above against future fall in their interest income due to uncertain income conditions

Highlights of the scheme:

- The scheme enables old age income security for senior citizens through provision of assured pension/return linked to the subscription amount based on government guarantee to Life Insurance Corporation of India
- It provides an assured return of 8% per annum payable monthly for 10 years
- The difference between assured return of 8% per annum would be borne by GOI as a subsidy on annual basis
- Pension is payable at the end of each period during the policy tenure of 10 years as per the frequency of monthly/quarterly. half yearly/yearly as chosen by subscriber at the time of purchase
- Minimum purchase price under the scheme is Rs.1,50,000/- for a minimum pension of Rs. 1,000/- per month and the maximum purchase price is Rs.7,50,000/- for a maximum pension of Rs.5,000/- per month.
- The scheme is exempted from Goods and Services Tax.

1. India, China to join Indian Ocean exercise

What is the issue?

- Amid rising tensions between India and China, Indian Navy will join the Chinese People's Liberation Army-Navy for an inaugural maritime search and rescue exercise
- The exercise will occur under aegis of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (INOS) and will involve other participating navies

About Indian Ocean Naval Symposium:

- Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) is a regional forum represented by Navy chiefs launched by India in February 2008.
- An ION is among a handful of regional organizations focusing on the Indian Ocean which incorporates littoral states on the Indian Ocean.
- Indian Ocean littoral states are represented by the heads of their navies and the organization aims to foster military-to-military cooperation.
- It is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues.”
- It presently had 23 member countries and 9 observers
- The IONS has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Information Security and Interoperability and Maritime Security

2. Army to get 6 Apache Helicopters

What is the issue?

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister has cleared proposal for buying six Apache attack choppers at a cost of around Rs 4,168 crore
- The six Apache AH-64E choppers will come with associated equipment which includes spares, training, weapons and ammunition.

Apache choppers:

- The Apache choppers are operated in the armed forces of United States, Israel and The Netherlands among other nations.
- The Boeing-built AH-64E Apache helicopter is the most advanced, multi-role, heavy attack helicopter in the world.
- The Boeing AH-64 Apache can seat a two-man crew and is equipped with nose-mounted sensor suite for target acquisition, night vision systems, four hard points mounted on stub-wing pylons capable of carrying hellfire missiles and Hydra 70 rocket pods.
- The US, which reportedly has more than 800 Apaches in service, first used the chopper during military action in Panama in 1989
- Presently, India operates a mix of Russian Mi-25 and Mi-35 attack helicopters which are with the IAF.

Defence Acquisition Council:

- Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) is Defence Ministry's highest decision making body on defence procurements
- It was chaired by defence minister

Members:

- Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (member secretary), The Minister of State of Defence, The Defence Secretary, The head of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), The Chief of Defence Staff (when appointed), Chiefs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, The Secretary, Defence Production, The Financial Adviser, The Vice-Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS), The Special Secretary (acquisition)

Procurement Process:

- Defence Acquisition Council will give policy guidelines for acquisitions based on long-term procurement plans

1. Bengaluru to witness first heli taxi in India

- Bengaluru is all set to get its first dedicated helicopter-taxi service
- The helicopter services will be operated by Thumbby Aviation Private Limited

2. Jaguars still fly without autopilot

- Jaguar is one of the frontline fighters of the Indian Air Force
- Jaguar is a joint venture project of France and United Kingdom

What is Auto Pilot?

- Autopilot is a mechanical, electrical or hydraulic system used to guide a vehicle without assistance from a human being

3. Greenfield International Airport at Mopa

- The GMR Goa International Airport Limited has signed Concession Agreement with Government of Goa for development and operation of Greenfield International Airport at Mopa
- In infrastructure the projects on the unused lands where there is no need to remodel or demolish an existing structure are called Green Field Projects and projects which are modified or upgraded are called brownfield projects.
- So simply Greenfield airport is a new airport which is constructed on an undeveloped site

4. e-Shakti initiative

- e-Shakti is a pilot project of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for digitization of Self Help Groups (SHGs).

It was initiated to address certain concerns like improving the quality of book keeping of SHGs and to enable banks to take informed credit decisions about the group through a Management Information System (MIS).

