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## Category: POLITY

1. [Government drops plan to protect transgender labour rights](#)

### In news:

- The Union government has dropped plans to **recognise transgender** persons as the **"third gender"** in the country's labour law framework.
- The Wages Code Bill was drafted under an exercise to rationalise the country's 44 labour laws into four codes covering all the regulations pertaining to wages, industrial relations, social security and safety, and health and working conditions.

### Background:

- In 2014, the Supreme Court had for the first time recognised transgender persons as the **"third gender"** and asked the Centre and the States to give them **equal opportunities in education and employment**.

### Objections raised:

- **Labour Ministry's proposal:** proposed inserting clauses for recognising the rights of transgender workers in all the four labour codes.
- **Law Ministry's objection:** the Law Ministry objected, citing the **General Clauses Act of 1897**, according to which "transgenders" fall within the definition of "person". It was then decided that there was no need to add a separate clause for them.

### Transgender rights activist opinion:

- Dropping the separate clauses protecting transgender persons is a hypocritical move by the Union government, as it is well known that we face discrimination at the workplace.
- The dignity of our body needs to be protected at the workplace as well, with basic facilities such as restrooms and equal wages,

### Factories Act and Government proposal:

#### Proposal:

- The government's proposed amendments to the Factories Act, 1948 in 2015 had also proposed special protections for transgender workers.
- **Proposal:** "Every transgender worker shall have equal right to work opportunities in a factory. The state government may make rules providing to secure the rights of transgender workers to ensure respect for inherent dignity, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of transgender persons as part of human diversity and humanity."

**Dropped:** in the case of the Factories Act, too, the clause pertaining to transgenders has been dropped in the latest draft amendments.

## Key Statistics:

- **Fifth Annual Employment-Unemployment Survey** conducted by the **Labour Bureau in 2015-16**: 48% of transgender were either working or were available for work, as against 23.7% females, and 75% males.

## 2. [India a major stakeholder in global peace, says Vice-President](#)

### In news:

- 78th session of the International Institute of Law
- **Location:** Nalsar University of Law, Hyderabad.
- **Objective:** The week-long session would create greater awareness on the importance of the international law and encourage young lawyers and students to develop an aptitude for it.
- **Note:** first time, India is hosting this global legal meeting.

### Topic for discussions:

- Judicial review of the decisions of the U.N. Security Council
- The legal issues concerning international migration
- Provisional measures in connection with the private international law and
- International investment disputes.

### Basic Information:

- The International Institute of Law or Institute De Droit International was founded in 1873 in the Ghent Town Hall in Belgium by 11 international lawyers.
- It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1904 for its efforts to promote settlement of disputes among States through peaceful means.
- The institute selects 132 lawyers from different countries to act independently towards international legal measures.

## Category:Â BILATERAL ISSUES

### 1. [N. Korea tests â€˜hydrogenâ€™ bomb, sparks outrage](#)

### In news:

- **North Korea:** tested a â€˜hydrogenâ€™ bomb .This bomb can be mounted on a missile, declaring its **biggest-ever nuclear detonation a â€œperfect success.â€**
- **S. President Donald Trump response:** termed it as a very dangerous act.
- **China an ally of N. Korea, response:** expressed sharp disapproval and began emergency monitoring for radiation at its border with the North.
- **Japanâ€™s response:** Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described it as â€œabsolutely unacceptableâ€
- **Russiaâ€™s** Foreign Ministry expressed the â€œstrongest condemnationâ€.
- **Korea:** President Moon Jae-in called for new United Nations sanctions to â€œcompletely isolate North Koreaâ€, and said the South would discuss deploying â€œthe strongest strategic assets of the U.S. military.â€

### Basic Information:

### Difference between a Hydrogen bomb and Atom bomb:

- The hydrogen bomb, also called a thermonuclear bomb, uses fusion â€œ or atomic nuclei coming together â€œ to produce explosive energy. Stars also produce energy through Atomic fusion.
- Atomic bombs rely on fission, or atom-splitting, just as nuclear power plants do.
- The technology of the hydrogen bomb is more sophisticated, and once attained, it is a greater threat. It can also be made small enough to fit on a head of an ICBM.

## Category:Â ECONOMICS

### 1. [Banksâ€™ cuppa to brew with mergers](#)

### Issues with Bank Merger:

- Various governments has highlighted the need for large-sized banks to fund the huge infrastructure requirements of the country as well as compete with global lenders
- **But a serious question arises:** â€œWhich chief executive will propose to merge his bank with another and lose his job?â€™

### Move by the current government

- Present government has no intention to make it â€œvoluntaryâ€™ for the board of a bank to decide on a merger
- It is evident from the fact that government has wrote letters to banks to kick start the process of mergers and get their respective boardsâ€™ approval
- This may be the first time in recent history that an official communication has been made by the government to the banks asking them to act on mergers

### Alternative Mechanism

- The government has also set up an â€œAlternative Mechanismâ€™
- It would comprise a ministerial group, to oversee proposals for mergers among banks
- A framework had been conceived in which a bankâ€™s board would first clear the decision to merge

- And then send the proposal to the “Alternative Mechanism” for its in-principle approval
- After the in-principle approval comes through, the bank will take steps in accordance with law and SEBI’s requirements
- The final scheme will be notified by the government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

### **No need of CCI permission, now**

- Some hurdles have been removed to expedite the process
- For example, approval requirement from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has been done away with

### **Post Merger Issues**

- The merger would create a lot of complexities in terms of branch rationalisation and reduction in human resources productivity for the merged entity
- At present, we’ve an example of the merger of SBI with associate banks
- Bhartiya Mahila Bank; post merger, the merged entity fundamentals have weakened significantly
- Also, after its merger, SBI has seen NPAs rising significantly, from Rs. 1.01 lakh crore (6.94%) to Rs. 1.88 lakh crore (9.97%)

## **2. Investing in the ecosystem**

**Context:** the natural capital and how it can maximize the benefits of economic growth and development.

### **Natural Capital:**

- Natural capital can be defined as the world’s stocks of natural assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things
- It is from this natural capital that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible

### **Value of the Indian Natural Capital:**

- With 11% of the world’s floral and faunal species, India is one of the 17 most ecologically diverse countries
- India is blessed with every major ecosystem, these biomes directly contribute billions of dollars to the Indian economy, annually
- The financial value of India’s forests, for example, which encompass economic services such as timber and fuel wood, and ecological services such as carbon sequestration, is estimated to be \$1.7 trillion

### **Boundaries:**

- Scientists have identified nine earth system processes to have boundaries
- These boundaries mark the safe zones, beyond which there is a risk of “irreversible and abrupt environmental change”
- Four of these boundaries have now been crossed

(1) climate change

(2) loss of biosphere integrity

(3) land system change

(4) biogeochemical cycles, such as phosphorus and nitrogen cycles

- This means that human activity has already altered the balance of a few delicate equilibriums
- The effects of these alterations are reflected by changing weather patterns, accelerated extinction events for both flora and fauna, and global warming
- This stresses the need for a comprehensive evaluation system that takes these undesirable side-effects of economic activities into account

### **Way forward**

- Unlike the economic value of goods and services, the intangible nature of natural assets is mostly invisible and hence remains unaccounted for
- While it may be difficult to put a price tag on nature, unchecked exploitation of scarce natural resources and an inadequate response to India’s unique climate challenges can be a very costly mistake
- Integrating natural capital assessment and valuation into our economic system is critical to usher in a truly sustainable future for India

## **Category: ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND ECOLOGY**

### **1. “Give proof of incentivising farmers”**

#### **Context:**

#### **NGT’s earlier directives:**

- The National Green Tribunal had earlier rapped the four northern States- **Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan** , for not submitting action plans to prevent pollution emanating from crop burning after the harvest season.
- It had directed the governments of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan to show how the field staff of the

departments concerned and the State pollution control boards were going to control pollution caused by crop residue burning.

- **Penalty** : The NGT had earlier fixed the environment penalty amounts per incident of crop burning to be paid by **small land owners** having less than two acres of land at Rs. **2,500** , **medium land owners** holding over two acres and less than five acres at **5,000** and those **owning over five acres** at Rs. **15,000** .
- **Punitive action**: It had also directed the State governments to take coercive and punitive action against persistent defaulters and asked them to withdraw the assistance provided to such farmers.

#### **In news:**

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

## **2. [Air pollution throws shade on India's solar success](#)**

#### **In news:**

- **Expert opinion**: Air pollution is diminishing India's capacity to harness power from the sun.
- **New study by Scientists**: S. and Indian scientists measured how man-made particles floating in the air and deposited as grime on solar panels combined to seriously impair sunlight from converting to energy.
- **Findings**:
  - Sand and dust that sickens millions across India every year is also sapping solar power generation by more than 25 percent.
  - This interference causes steep drops in power generation
  - At present levels in India, it could amount to roughly 3,900 MW of lost energy – six times the capacity of its largest solar farm, a gigantic field of 2.5 million panels.

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### **F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam**

### **G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions**

#### **GS Paper II**

1. "Prescription of generic drugs would bring down out of pocket expenditure." Evaluate? What other steps need to be taken in order to bring down out of pocket expenditure?

#### **GS Paper III**

1.
  1. Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee recently approved the GM mustard seeds for commercial production. In light of this analyze the various issues raised by the opponents of GM crops and DO you think passing of Biotechnology Regulator Bill, 2008 would take care of the issues raised by the opponents?