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Category: POLITY

1. [Deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar to govt schemes extended to March 31, 2018: Centre to SC](#)

Context:

- Aadhaar linking to avail benefits of government schemes.

Deadline extended:

- The deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar to avail benefits of government schemes has been postponed to March 31, 2018, the Centre informed the Supreme Court.
- Union government will take no coercive action against those who do not have Aadhaar and they will not be denied social welfare scheme benefits till March 31.

Key Fact:

- Aadhaar is a 12-digit biometric identity.
- **Coverage:** As many as 135 schemes (of 35 ministries) including the free cooking gas (LPG) to poor women, kerosene and fertilizer subsidy, targeted public distribution system (PDS) and MGNREGA will be covered by the extension.

Petitions pending before the Supreme Court:

- Challenges the constitutional validity of the decision to make linking of mobile numbers and bank accounts with Aadhaar a must.

Contention raised:

- The issue of mandatory linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts and mobile number is illegal.
- Non-linking of Aadhaar with bank account would make citizens liable for prosecution under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.
- Supreme Court is still hearing a petition to make the unique ID mandatory for availing of government benefits.

2. [Going back to the basics](#)

Highlights of a report by The World Bank: "Learning to Realize Education's Promise"

- **Main theme:** focus on education

- **Important highlights:**

First: The report makes a moral case for education

- It does it with a rights-based approach
- And sub-sections titled “Education as freedom”; “Education improves individual freedoms”; “Education benefits all of society”

Second: Early childhood development

- One of the most important sections is not about education but about early childhood development
- The report discusses the far-reaching impact of poverty and chronic malnutrition on the physical and mental development of children
- The effects of stunting in the early years on physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development prevent children from learning well in later years
- The report points out that in low-income countries, stunting rates among children under-five are almost three times higher than in the richest
- Reduction of child stunting should be one of the major moral imperatives before nations today

Third: Role of technology

- It is good to see that technology is not regarded as a panacea in itself
- But as something that has the potential to enhance learning and that the teacher-learner relationship is at the centre of learning

Fourth: issue of public vs private schools

- The report acknowledges firmly that on the issue of public vs private schools, the results are still mixed
- There is no consistent evidence that private schools deliver better learning outcomes than public schools, or the opposite

Fifth: Shortage of teachers

- While school enrolments have increased significantly, massive teacher shortages persist

Sixth: Other related issues behind learning crisis

Beyond reading and arithmetic, any meaningful assessment of learning should also consider aspects such as comprehension, problem solving, critical thinking, and innovation

Beyond merely increasing assessment it is equally important to fund

- (1) The sector better;
- (2) improve teacher training;
- (3) support the continuing professional development of teachers;
- (4) And help teachers to help the poorest children to learn

The way forward

One would have liked to see greater focus on the continuing problems of access and equity, which are still the biggest problems in education. If there is one aspect of education which needs to be quantified and measured in order to make our education systems function better for all children, it is equity

Category:Â INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. [U.S. makes H-1B visa renewals tougher](#)

Context:

- Fresh changes in rules notified by the **S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)** for **renewal of non-immigrant visas** will severely impact **H-1B visa holders**.
- Increasing restrictions on H-1B visa programme remains a point of concern in the India-US relations, as a majority of these guest workers are Indians.

New rules notified:

- “The updated guidance instructs officers to apply the same level of scrutiny when reviewing nonimmigrant visa extension requests even where the petitioner, beneficiary and underlying facts are unchanged from a previously approved petition. While adjudicators may ultimately reach the same conclusion as in a prior decision, they are not compelled to do so as a default starting point as the burden of proof to establish eligibility for an immigration benefit always lies with the petitioner.”

Key Points:

- Updated guidance provides clear direction to help advance policies that protect the interests of U.S. workers.
- The new rules are in line with the Donald Trump administration’s **Buy American, Hire American policy**.

Three types of status updates issued by USCIS:

- An H-1B worker goes to the USCIS for three types of changes to his status – amendment, transfer and renewal.
 - Amendments are sought when an H-1B employee changes the location within the same company;
 - transfer is sought when he moves from one company to another, and
 - A renewal is sought at the expiry of the visa, which is usually issued for three years at the beginning.
- Adjudicators must thoroughly review the petition and supporting evidence to determine eligibility for the benefit sought
- The previous policy – which has been in force for 13 years – instructed officers to give deference to the findings of a previously approved petition, as long as the key elements were unchanged and there was no evidence of a material error or fraud related to the prior determination.

Category: ECONOMICS

1. [BharatMala will put more freight on roads](#)

Positive impacts of the newly launched BharatMala initiative:

- The road construction programme, BharatMala, will connect 550 districts to national highways against 300 districts at present.
- Around 50 economic corridors to be constructed against the existing six.
- 70-80% total freight will move on national highways against 40% freight at present.
- BharatMala is a biggest infrastructure programme that will give priority to tribal and backward areas and border regions.

2. [Capital infusion to be credit positive for public sector banks, says Moody's](#)

Moody's remark on government's decision to recapitalize Public Sector Banks:

- The Centre's decision to infuse ₹11 lakh crore into public sector banks will be credit positive and the amount is large enough to comprehensively address their weak capital profile.

Key Fact:

- For the 11 rated public sector banks by Moody's, the rating agency estimates that their external capital requirements over the next two years would be about ₹170,000 crore to ₹195,000 crore.
- This estimate factors in the capital requirements for compliance with Basel-III norms and for conservative recognition and provisioning of their asset quality problems.

3. [Centre to aid offshore e-commerce play](#)

In news:

Indian e-commerce sector expansion:

- The Union government is working on a new policy to expand the footprint of the Indian e-commerce sector to tap potential markets outside the country, including **Africa and Southeast Asia**.
- This is part of efforts to achieve the target of making India a trillion-dollar digital economy in the next seven years.
- Currently, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is looking at tapping markets such as **Southeast Asia, West Asia, SAARC countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and BRICS partners (Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa)**.
- **Key Fact:** The e-commerce economy is currently pegged at \$30 billion, and the government expects it to grow at \$150 billion by 2024-25.

New plans on the anvil:

- The government is also working on a strategy to make India a hub for data analytics, cloud computing and financial technology, besides encouraging development of Internet of Things, to push the digital economy.
- **Data Protection Act:** the Data Protection Act, the draft of which is likely to be ready by December 2017, will provide a policy framework on digital economy, including social media.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [Come 2019, the kilogram will get a new measure](#)

Key Points:

- **Reference used at present:** For 125 years, a salt-shaker-sized cylinder housed at the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM), Paris and weighing exactly a kilogram served as the definition of the measure. The cylinder is made of 90% platinum and 10% iridium
- However, an international conference of heads of metrology institutes decided, on October 19 in Sevres, France, that the kilogram will no longer be pegged to this cylinder.

No more artefacts

- In essence, the units were freed from being defined on the basis of artefacts, as these being objects, were subject to wear and tear and sources of eventual error.
- The new artefacts, according to the International Committee for Weights and Measures, ought to derive from the constants of nature that are all interdependent.
- These include constants such as the Planck constant – the ratio of the electromagnetic radiation from a photon to

its frequency “ and the charge of an electron.

- Until this month, the kilogram was the only one among the units still pegged to a real object and now “ after a formal vote in 2018 “ the world is set to redefine the kilogram in terms of the Planck constant, the second and the metre.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [“Fish-lizard” fossil from Kutch is a Jurassic first](#)

New Discovery:

- A near-complete Jurassic-era fossil of an intriguing animal that looks like a mashup of a dolphin and lizard, and lived during the twilight of the dinosaurs, has been unearthed in **Kutch, Gujarat** .
- **Ichthyosaurs, or “fish- lizards”** in Greek, were large reptiles that lived at the same time as dinosaurs.
- **Key Fact:**
- While many ichthyosaur fossils have been found in **North America and Europe** , the fossil record in the Southern Hemisphere has mostly been limited to **South America and Australia** .
- It is the first Jurassic ichthyosaur found in India.
- Discovery throws light on the evolution and diversity of ichthyosaurs in the **Indo-Madagascan region** of the former Gondwanaland and India’s biological connectivity with other continents in the Jurassic.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. [Best defence technology offered](#)

In news:

- S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that his country would provide India the **best technologies** for its **military modernisation** , which include offers to supply **F-16 and F-18 fighter jets** .
- Statement issued by Mr. Tillerson: “The U.S. supports India’s emergence as a leading power and will continue to contribute to the Indian capability to provide security throughout the region,”.

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F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper I

1. To what extent globalisation has influenced the core of cultural diversity in India? Explain.

GS Paper II

1. Indo-Pacific region has assumed great geopolitical significance in the present context. Comment.