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UPSC Current Affairs 2017: News Analysis

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Category: POLITY

1. [SC stays HC verdict on Ganga status](#)

Context:

- Uttarakhand High Court in March 2017 accorded the status of "legal persons" to rivers Ganga and Yamuna.
- **Uttarakhand High Court's observation:** Rights of the two major rivers shall be equivalent to the rights of human beings and the injury/harm caused to these bodies shall be treated as harm/injury caused to the human beings.
- The High Court had ordered the Director, Namami Gange project, for cleaning and rejuvenating the river, the Chief Secretary and the Advocate General of Uttarakhand to act as "legal parents" of the holy rivers and work as a human face to protect, conserve and preserve them and their tributaries.

In news:

- The Supreme Court has frozen the status of "legal persons" accorded to rivers Ganga and Yamuna by the Uttarakhand High Court.

2. [Call for law to end mob killings](#)

In news:

- **The National Campaign Against Mob Lynchings (NCAML)** released a draft law of the **Manav Suraksha Kanoon** to tackle such killings and asked the Modi government to get it passed by Parliament in the upcoming monsoon session.
- The NCAML was launched last month. The move comes in the wake of alleged government indifference to mob killings in different parts of the country.

Draft Law:

- The draft law includes a definition of ‘mob’ and ‘lynching’, suggests that lynching be made a non-bailable offence, recommends immediate suspension of the SHO of the area until a time-bound judicial probe takes place and mandates life imprisonment for those convicted under mob lynching.
- The draft also has India-specific provisions stating how mobs are created, with technology being used for rumour-mongering.
- It states that a peaceful protest against leaders, policies etc. cannot be termed as a mob.
- Under the draft law, videographic evidence of survivors statements would also act as evidence.
- It also has provisions for a time-bound judicial enquiry, which should not take more than six months.
- Even compensation and rehabilitation has been recommended for the victims’ families.

3. [India’s tough anti-hijacking law comes into force](#)

Context:

- The country’s new anti-hijacking law, which prescribes capital punishment in the event of death of ‘any person’, has come into force

In News:

- The 2016 Anti-Hijacking Act replaces a 1982-vintage law

What are the provisions of the new law?

- Hijackers could be tried for death penalty only in the event of death of hostages, such as flight crew, passengers and security personnel
- Definition has been expanded to include death of ‘security personnel on board’ or ‘ground support staff’ as well.
- In other cases of hijacking, guilty will be punished with imprisonment for life and fine, besides confiscation of movable and immovable property held by him or her.
- Making a threat, attempts or abetment to commit the offence were included in the definition of hijacking
- Those who organise or direct others to commit such offence will also be considered to have committed the offence of hijacking
- It mandates central government to confer powers of investigation, arrest and prosecution on any officer of the **central government** or **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**

4. [Don’t undermine our powers, southern State backward classes commission chiefs tell Centre](#)

Context:

- The Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes had convened a meeting to discuss the implications of the Centre’s move to provide constitutional backing to the **National Commission for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (NCSEBC)**.
- Meeting was attended by commission heads of Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Kerala.

Highlights of the meeting:

- The chairpersons of backward classes commissions of southern States resolved to urge the Centre against ‘interfering with the acts of inclusion into or exclusion from the list of socially backward classes for the purpose reservation in any State’.
- The Bill that seeks to give constitution status to the NCSEBC, they argued, had provisions that were contrary to the **federal structure and undermined their powers**.
- The commission heads collectively urged the Centre against interfering in the process of extending any benefit of reservation and other welfare measures within the State.
- They sought a review of all provisions that centralise the functions aimed at the welfare of socially and educationally backward classes.
- **12 resolutions passed in the meeting:** In one of the resolutions, they objected to clauses which empower the NCSEBC to make it mandatory for every State government to consult the national commission on all major policy matters.
- They demanded constitutional status for the State commissions on a par with the NCSEBC and the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

5. [63% of school dropouts in Karnataka in 11 to 13 age group: Survey](#)

Statistics

Total number of out-of-school children (OOSC) identified this year **8,318**

Children who dropped out of school **7,807**

Children who have never enrolled in school **511**

Districts with the highest number of OOSC

Bengaluru Urban **1,793**

Kalaburagi **1,389**

Yadgir **635**

Districts with the lowest number of OOSC

Vijayapura **7**

Dakshina Kannada **20**

Udupi **36**

Highlights of the survey

- conducted by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) to identify “out-of-school” children across Karnataka ahead of the 2017-18 academic year.
- Nearly 63% of children who dropped out of school prior to the commencement of this academic year are between the ages of 11 and 13, indicating that most leave the education system after completing lower primary classes.
- The SSA identified 7,807 children between the ages of seven and 13 who had dropped out before the start of the academic year. Another 511 are children who never enrolled in school. This brings the total number of children in the State who have either dropped out of school or not enrolled in one to 8,318.
- About 49% of the 7,807 children are those belonging to the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes category; 48.9% are from minority communities and other backward classes. The maximum number of out-of-school children are from Bengaluru Urban (1,739), followed by Kalaburagi (1,389). Vijayapura district has the best record, reporting only seven such children.
- The fact that children are not completing their education has been in focus since April 2013 after the High Court took suo motu cognisance of the issue.
- Last year, the Education Department identified 9,468 out-of-school children.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Modi targets Pakistan at G20](#)

Context: G20 Summit, City of Hamburg, Germany

In news:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi speech highlights:

- Some countries were using terror as a tool to achieve political objectives and pressed for “deterrent” action collectively by the G20 members against such nations.
- He equated the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, as also the Haqqani network to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, saying their names may be different but their ideology is the same.
- He regretted that the international response to terrorism was weak, and said more cooperation was needed to fight the menace.
- Pitched in for a **11-point “Action Agenda”**: for exchange of lists of terrorists among G20 nations, easing and expediting of legal processes like extradition and concrete steps to choke funds and weapon supply to the terrorists.
- **The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** and other mechanisms to choke sources of funds to terrorists should be strengthened.
- **Explosives Action Task Force (EATF)** : On the pattern of FATF, an Explosives Action Task Force (EATF) should be constituted- to choke the sources of deadly arms reaching the terrorists can be ended.

Basic Information:

G20:

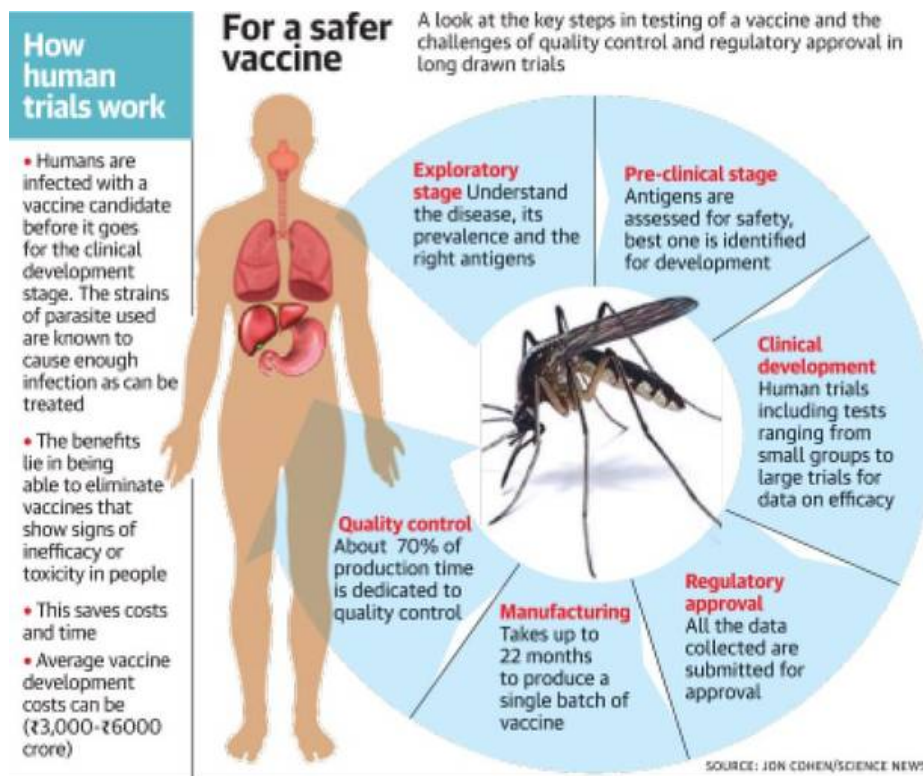
- The G20 (or G-20 or Group of Twenty) is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.
- Founded in 1999, the G20 aims to discuss policy issues pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability.
- It seeks to address issues that go beyond the responsibilities of any one organization.
- The G20 heads of government or heads of state have periodically conferred at summits since their initial meeting in 2008, and the group also hosts separate meetings of finance ministers and foreign ministers due to the expansion of its agenda in recent years.
- Membership of the G20 consists of 19 individual countries plus the European Union (EU).

FATF:

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in July 1989 by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop measures to combat money laundering.
- In October 2001, the FATF expanded its mandate to incorporate efforts to combat terrorist financing, in addition to money laundering.
- **The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.**
- The FATF is therefore a “policy-making body” which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas.
- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.

Category: HEALTH ISSUES

1. [Central labs moot “human first” approach to test malaria vaccine](#)



Context: What if a potential vaccine for malaria was to be first tested in humans before mice and animals?

In news:

- This November, experts at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and labs affiliated to the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), will have a first-of-its kind “ethics meeting” here to discuss the feasibility of conducting these so-called “human challenge” trials in India.
- Meeting also to discuss testing two vaccine-candidates “one that causes falciparum malaria and the milder-but-more-prevalent vivax” developed at the New Delhi-based International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology.

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Category: ECONOMICS

1. [MRP to be sole price decider from Jan. 1](#)

Context:

From January 1, 2018, the price of a packaged good would be same, whether it is a local kirana store, a mall, a five-star hotel or an airport

In News:

The Consumer Affairs Ministry has amended the rules that govern packaged commodities to this effect.

What the amended law says?

- Retail sale price shall be the maximum retail price (MRP) inclusive of all taxes, with the provision to round off the price to the nearest rupee or 50 paise.
- No person shall declare different MRPs on an identical pre-packed commodity.
- Require sellers to enhance the size of letters and numerals for making declarations such as “best before date, month and year” to indicate shelf life, for making it easier for consumers to read vital information.

E-Commerce

- For e-commerce marketplaces, declaring the month and year in which a commodity is manufactured or packed is not mandatory
- And if they fulfill certain conditions, they will not be held liable for whether the declarations were correct or incorrect.

2. [Loan waivers: State government borrowings may jump to 5.30 lakh Cr](#)

In News:

- Farm loan waivers announced by several states will push up borrowings by at least Rs 1,50,000 crore and raise the cost of funds for states, rating agencies have said
- Full funding of announced crop loan waivers through state development loans (SDL) could push up fresh issuance to Rs 5,30,000 crore in FY18 from Rs 3,80,000 crore in FY17

Mode of funding not clear:

- It is unclear whether the loan waivers would be funded through issuance of State Development Loans (SDL) or other modes of financing, such as loans from banks to the state governments or bonds issued by the latter to the banks
- If the funding of the announced waivers of Rs 88,170 crore is done entirely through SDL in FY2018 (which is unlikely), the issuance of fresh SDL could rise to Rs 5,30,000 crore in FY18

Effects of SDL issuance:

- The rise in SDL issuance would firm up their yields and widen their spread relative to Central Government securities (G-sec) to above 100 bps during second half of FY2018
- The expected increase in SDL issuance is likely to contribute to crowding out the private sector from accessing the bond markets at competitive rates

Do states have desired fiscal capacity for farm loan waivers?

- Punjab government lacks the fiscal space to accommodate the full funding of the loan waiver in FY18
- Uttar Pradesh would have to curtail its budgeted capital expenditure by more than 70 per cent to accommodate loan waiver
- Karnataka government appears to have the fiscal space to fully fund the crop loan waiver in FY18
- Maharashtra state government may lack the space to raise borrowings to fund the entire loan waiver of Rs 34,000 crore in FY18, which may be on account of other spending that is not fully budgeted

Basic Information:

State Development loans

- State Development Loans (SDLs) are dated securities issued by states for meeting their market borrowings requirements. In effect, the SDL are similar to the dated securities issued by the central government.
- Purpose of issuing State Development Loans is to meet the budgetary needs of state governments. Each state can borrow upto a set limit through State Development Loans.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [Should we grow GM crops?](#)

Context:

Â PIL has been filed against GM crops in the Supreme Court of India

Issues associated with GMO

- GMOs carry risks of “unintended” effects and toxicity and long term, health impacts such as cancer.
- GMOs are self-replicating organisms and genetic contamination of the environment, of non-GM crops and wild species through gene flow
- It cannot be contained, reversed, remedied or quantified.
- Our seed stock will be contaminated at the molecular level.
- The traits for disease, saline and drought resistance, yield, etc. are found in nature, not biotech labs.
- California reaffirmed glyphosate, included in a list of chemicals labelled as “cancer-causing”

What is Glyphosate?

- Glyphosate is one of the most widely used herbicides in the United States and considered the safest herbicide.

Issues associated with Glyphosate

- Glyphosate is an endocrine (hormone) disruptor.
- But no regulatory agency regulates for endocrine disruption despite evidences from Argentina that it causes birth defects because of glyphosate used herbicide-tolerant (HT)soybeans

Concerns with GMOs in India?

- Bayer’s glufosinate, the herbicide linked with Indian HT mustard, is an acknowledged neurotoxin banned in the EU.
- The Supreme Court-appointed technical expert committee recommended a ban on any HT crop in India
- The myths with GM crop technology that it “will feed the world” are fast dissolving.
- The current GMOs, Bt cotton and HT on empirical evidence are proven unsustainable technologies.
- There are promises of GMOs with traits for disease, drought etc, but these are complex, multi-gene traits and remain futuristic.

Where India lacks?

- Serious lack of expertise in risk assessment, and we are sitting on an agri-biosecurity danger situation.
- We have moved from dismal regulation in Bt cotton in 2002 to outright delinquency in commercialising HT mustard.
- The regulation is subterranean, unconstitutional and also in contempt of Supreme Court orders pertaining to Bt brinjal/mustard.

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