

UPSC 2017: Comprehensive News Analysis – July 17

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UPSC Current Affairs 2017: News Analysis

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Category: **POLITY**

1. [The past catches up](#)

Context

- By ordering an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation into more than 80 cases of suspected extra-judicial killings in Manipur, the Supreme Court has reiterated the principle of accountability as an essential part of the rule of law.
- These cases involved either suspected fake encounters or the use of excessive or retaliatory force.
- Even after this ruling on petitions demanding an inquiry into 1,528 deaths in counter-insurgency operations in Manipur, the Attorney General had argued against the court ordering an investigation into some specific instances.

What the SC has said?

- The court has rightly rebuffed an attempt by the government to stall any probe into these deaths on the ground that they were too old to be raked up now.
- It has taken the view that the killing of a person who was possibly innocent cannot be overlooked owing to mere lapse of time.
- The state cannot take advantage of its own inaction and scuttle a probe by citing the delay as a reason.
- Last year, the court had ruled that the armed forces cannot escape investigation for excesses even in places where they enjoy special powers, and that the legal protection provided by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, will have to yield to the principles of human rights.

Centre's argument

- AG had come up with the unpalatable argument that inquiries conducted by the authorities in Manipur were biased in favour of the citizens owing to local pressure and the ground situation.

Court's response

- The court stood firm in its assessment, deprecating the suggestion that all inquiries were biased and motivated.
- The court's order is yet another reminder that AFSPA has contributed to the climate of impunity in States where it is in force, especially in Manipur, and this may trigger a fresh demand for its repeal.

National Human Rights Commission as "toothless tiger"

- Another worrying aspect in the domain of human rights is that the National Human Rights Commission has been reduced to a "toothless tiger".
- It is grossly understaffed despite its increasing workload, and many State governments show little respect for its guidelines and instructions.
- The court's directive that the Centre take note of the NHRC's concerns and remedy the situation could not have come a day too soon.

Category: HEALTH ISSUES

1. [A looming threat: on the TB crisis](#)

In news

- About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis, 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB), highlighting the silent spread of the disease.
- About 5,500 of over 76,000 children tested in nine Indian cities have been diagnosed with tuberculosis, 9% of them with multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB), highlighting the silent spread of the disease.
- Though the actual prevalence of MDR-TB among children in India is not known, the results from a limited number of children tested in this sample, under the Revised National TB Control Programme, is worrying.

Statistics

- According to a 2015 study, of the over 600 children who had tested positive for TB in four cities, about 10% showed resistance to Rifampicin, a first-line drug.

WHO Guidelines

- In line with World Health Organisation guidelines, the RNTCP requires all household contacts, particularly children, of a newly diagnosed pulmonary TB patient to be tested and started on treatment if needed.
- Children below six years of age in the household of a newly diagnosed patient are required to be given the drug Isoniazid as a prophylactic even when they do not have the disease.

Measures to be taken

- A proactive approach to testing helps in early and correct diagnosis of all contacts and in cutting the transmission chain.
- Unfortunately, as several studies have shown, the RNTCP guidelines on contact screening are heeded mostly in the breach.
- The results from this limited study should now compel the government to take up contact screening more urgently.
- In 2010, WHO had revised the dosage of certain TB drugs for children. Fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs that take into account the revised dosages for children were finally made available in late 2015.
- The FDCs are meant for treating children with drug-susceptible TB and cannot be used to treat children who require second-line drugs or who have MDR-TB. After more than a year's delay, a few months ago India finally introduced FDCs in six States.
- The remaining States will be covered by the end of this year. Adherence to treatment will improve, and correct dosage for children weighing less than 25 kg will become easier when child-friendly FDCs become available throughout the country.
- Using the Xpert molecular diagnostic test to screen children with TB is a positive step and should be welcomed, but all the diagnosed children should be guaranteed paediatric FDCs. It would be unethical to deny them this lifeline.

C. GS3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Plea in SC seeks curbs on cryptocurrencies](#)

In news

- The Supreme Court has asked the Reserve Bank of India to consider the issues raised by a PIL petitioner seeking urgent steps to restrain the sale and purchase of illegal cryptocurrencies or "Virtual Currency" (VCs) like bitcoins.

PIL was filed in SC to seek curb on [cryptocurrencies](#) on following grounds

- Virtual currency was being traded anonymously over the Internet and used for a host of anti-national and illegal activities, from terror funding to illicit trade of arms and drugs and so on.
- The use of the parallel currency is having a negative impact on Indian currency.
- The online use of this currency, was without any border restrictions or geographical constraints, resulting in danger to the integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

2. [IBBI notifies rules for bankruptcy probe](#)

In news

- IBBI, which is implementing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), has notified the regulations for inspection and investigation of service providers registered with it.

New regulation

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has powers to start probe against service providers registered with it without intimating them.
- As per the regulations, the investigation authority has to serve a notice intimating the entity concerned about the probe at least ten days in advance.
- However, the requirement could be done away with on grounds such as apprehensions that the records of the particular service provider might be destroyed before the probe starts.
- Insolvency professional agencies, professionals, entities and information utility are considered as service providers under the Code.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [Super-flexible and strong artificial silk developed](#)

In news

- Scientists from the University of Cambridge have developed super-stretchy and strong artificial silk, composed almost entirely of water, which may be used to make eco-friendly textiles and sensors.
- The fibres, which resemble miniature bungee cords as they can absorb large amounts of energy, are sustainable, non-toxic and can be made at room temperature.
- The fibres are spun from a soupy material called a hydrogel, which is 98% water.
- The remaining 2% of the hydrogel is made of silica and cellulose, both naturally available materials, held together in a network by barrel-shaped molecular "handcuffs" known as cucurbiturils. The chemical interactions between the different components enable long fibres to be pulled from the gel, said the researchers.

These fibres are Non-toxic

- Although these fibres are not as strong as the strongest spider silks, they can support stresses in the range of 100 to 150 megapascals, which is similar to other synthetic and natural silks. However, these fibres are non-toxic and far less energy-intensive to make.

2. [3D-printed, functional heart made](#)

In news:

- Scientists have developed a 3D-printed soft silicone heart that closely resembles and functions like the human organ, and could help save lives of people who suffer from cardiac failure.
- About 26 million people worldwide suffer from heart failure. The soft artificial heart weighs 390 grams and has a volume of 679 cubic centimetres.
- It is a silicone monoblock with complex inner structure.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Safe haven for endangered Egyptian vultures](#)

In news:

- Breeding of the rare and threatened Egyptian vultures in a human habitat at the Punjabi University campus in Patiala has come as a pleasant surprise for birding enthusiasts.

Egyptian vulture

- The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), one among the globally threatened vulture species found in India, is classified under the "Endangered" (EN) red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The species is popularly known as safed giddh (white vulture) in Hindi.
- According to BirdLife International, a global partnership of organisations working for the conservation of birds, the present global breeding population of the Egyptian vulture is estimated to be 12,000 to 38,000 individuals.

Habitat Niche

- Egyptian vultures usually build their nests on the cliffs of mountains, roofs of buildings and on tree-tops.

Food Niche of the species

- The species rarely hunt its food " the birds mostly feed on dead carcasses of animals, birds and reptiles. They eat eggs and sometimes, in the absence of animal carcasses, switch over to household solid waste like rotten fruits and vegetables.

2. [GM mustard release faces another hurdle](#)

In news

- Dissent has crept in among agricultural scientists of the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) over the possible release of genetically modified mustard.

Background

- In May, NAAS President wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, endorsing DMH-11, a variety of mustard developed by Deepak Pental of Delhi University, a NAAS Fellow, that employs genes from soil bacterium.
- If approved, it would be the first transgenic edible crop to be grown in Indian fields.
- The plant had gone through adequate tests and was declared "safe" and passed regulatory muster.

A dissent note by a member

- However, P.C. Kesavan, also a Fellow of the NAAS, wrote that he disagreed with this endorsement.
- According to him, the resolution of the NAAS is neither scientifically valid, nor ethical, and therefore not maintainable.

Counter arguments to GM Mustard

- **DMH-11** is a hybrid variety of mustard developed by crossing a traditional variety of mustard, called Varuna, and an East European variety.
- DMH-11 did not perform as well as several other varieties and mustard hybrids and that the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the Environment Ministry body that cleared DMH-11, was riddled by a "conflict of interest."
- Using genetically-modified technology to produce hybrid seed varieties was a "failed experiment" as evidenced by the experience of Bt cotton.
- Though the latter occupied 95% of India's acreage, its yields were on the decline since 2006, largely due to insect resistance, and that it nearly tripled the cost of producing cotton between 2006-2013.

Bodies associated

- The **NAAS** " a 625-member body of agricultural scientists " had about 200 scientists in its quorum when it passed a resolution endorsing the GEAC's decision to clear DMH-11 for commercial field trials.
- The **GEAC** , India's apex regulator for genetically modified seeds, had cleared GM mustard for environmental release and use in farmer fields on May 11 this year.

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[PIB Articles Editorials Roundup](#)

E. Concepts-in-News: Related Concepts to Revise/Learn

PRELIMS WORTHY FACTUAL INFORMATION

BirdLife International

- BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation) is a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.
- It is the world's largest partnership of conservation organisations, with over 120 partner organisations.
- Bombay Natural History Society is India's partner.

F. Bills/Acts/Schemes/Orgs in News

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