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Category: POLITY

1. [Kerala HC on “love jihad”: Bust institutions indulging in forcible religious conversion or re-conversion](#)

Main observation by Kerala High Court: The court, while condemning any kind of violence against couples of inter-faith marriages, said, “This is a free democratic country and once a person becomes a major, he or she can marry whoever he/she likes.”

Key points:

- The Kerala High Court ordered the state police to bust any institution that indulges in forcible religious conversion or re-conversion of an individual.
- The court additionally said inter-religious marriages must be encouraged and that love cannot be bound by religion.
- “We caution that every case of inter-religious marriage shall not be portrayed on a religious canvass and create fissures in the communal harmony otherwise existing in the God’s own country “ Kerala.”

What is the case all about?

- The High Court bench was hearing a habeas corpus petition filed by Anees Hameed, a Muslim man from Kannur, who had alleged that his wife Sruthi, a Hindu, was forcibly confined and tortured at a yoga centre near Kochi.
- Sruthi had openly testified in court that the people who ran the yoga centre tried to force her to abandon her marriage to Anees, whom she had met while studying at a college in Kannur.
- The couple had fallen in love and got married against the wishes of the girl’s parents.
- The court allowed the couple to decide their future course of action without interference from their parents.

2. [Punjab approves hike in OBC income limit](#)

In news:

- Punjab government has approved an increase in the gross annual income limit for the creamy layer of the Other Backward Classes and Backward Classes from ₹16 lakh to 8 lakh.
- The decision is in line with the Central government’s directive to ensure greater social justice and inclusion of members of the Other Backward Classes and Backward Classes in the matter of reservation.
- The Union Cabinet had, in August this year, decided to raise the income limit from ₹16 lakh to ₹18 lakh per annum for determining the creamy layer among the Other Backward Classes.
- **Fourth revision:** This was the fourth revision of the creamy layer, which was fixed at ₹11 lakh in 1993 and subsequently hiked to ₹15 lakh in 2004, ₹14.5 lakh in 2008 and ₹16 lakh in 2013.
- The move is reported to be aimed at ensuring more equitable distribution of reservation benefits among the OBCs.

3. [Do all women have a right to enter Sabarimala?](#)

Context:

- The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly struck down discriminatory religious practices, the latest of which is the triple talaq (in Shayara Bano v. Union of India, 2017)
- Reference of the Sabarimala entry row to a five-member Constitution Bench is in itself a radical judicial move

Violation of rights in Sabarimala temple issue

- Preventing women's entry to the Sabarimala temple with an irrational and obsolete notion of 'purity' clearly offends the equality clauses in the Constitution
- It denotes a patriarchal and partisan approach
- The entry prohibition takes away the woman's right against discrimination guaranteed under Article 15(1) of the Constitution
- It curtails her religious freedom assured by Article 25(1)
- Prohibition of women's entry to the shrine solely on the basis of womanhood and the biological features associated with womanhood is derogatory to women, which Article 51A(e) aims to renounce
- The classification based on age is, in essence, an act of discrimination based on sex

How did the age bar start at Sabarimala temple?

- The practice rests on a fragile rule and an equally fragile judgment of the Kerala High Court (S. Mahendran v. The Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board, 1991)
- There is no unanimity on whether the Sabarimala temple bar is 'age-old'

Rules for facilitating temple entry and contradictory clause

- The very purpose of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act, 1965 is to ensure entry of all Hindus to temples without being discriminatory
- Rule 3(b), which instigates obstruction to women's entry on the ground of menstruation, apparently runs counter to the very object of the parent enactment and is therefore untenable

View of the framers of constitution, judiciary, and international jurists

- R. Ambedkar famously said that public temples, like public roads and schools, are places meant for public access and so the question of entry is, essentially, a question of equality
- The managerial rights of religious authorities under Article 26(b) of the Constitution cannot override the individual woman's religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25(1)
- The former is intended to safeguard, not annihilate, the latter
- Liberty is tested at the individual level, for individuals alone can constitute the public in a republic
- In S.R. Bommai (1994), the Supreme Court said that 'secularism operates as a bridge' for the country to move on from 'tradition to modernity.'
- As American jurist Ronald Dworkin opined, political morality is to be brought into the heart of constitutional law

Not just about individual freedom

- It is erroneous to conceive of the issue only as one involving a fissure between individual freedom and gender justice on the one hand and religious practice on the other
- It also reflects a conflict among believers themselves
- It is essential to prevent monopolisation of religious rights by a few under the guise of management of religious institutions
- Article 25(2)(b) enables the state 'to provide) for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of the Hindus.'

Category:Â INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. [US firms approach USTR against India's medical price control measures](#)

Context:

- Recent reports indicate that the lowering of prices on medical devices which are only one component of overall procedure costs are not being passed along to patients.

Contentions of American Companies:

- American companies producing medical devices and health information systems have approached the US Trade Representative against India's move to implement price controls on coronary stents and knee replacement implants that they say denying them equitable market access.
- In a petition, the Advanced Medical Technology Association (AdvaMed) requested the US Trade Representative (USTR) to suspend or withdraw India's benefits under Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).
- They are deeply concerned about recently implemented price controls on coronary stents and knee replacement implants in India that have slashed prices by as much as 85 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively, followed by signals that price caps for additional life-saving and life-improving medical devices may be forthcoming.
- The intention of the American companies was not for India to lose the benefits of GSP, but rather to advance engagement and meaningful discussions on restoring market access for medtech in India while keeping patients' interests at the center of all discussions.

Impact of price control by India on various medical devices

- Recent reports indicate that the lowering of prices on medical devices which are only one component of overall procedure costs are not being passed along to patients, which needs to be corrected.
- Price controls may also block innovations and limit patient access to the best available care.
- The failure to implement a mutually acceptable alternative could deter global organisations from making their latest products available to India's health care providers and patients, make Indian innovators less competitive in global markets, negatively impact future investment in India, and ultimately harm patients.

What India needed?

- India's focus on controlling prices of high-quality medical devices, without any attempt to address the larger picture and correct inefficiencies
- A stable and predictable market environment is key to driving investments in R&D, manufacturing, and other services to grow the medical technology industry in India, and meet the current and future needs of all of India's people.

Category: ECONOMICS

1. [MPC minutes spotlight risks to inflation; signal RBI may stay on hold](#)

MPC Meeting:

- A majority of the members of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy committee flagged an increase in inflation risks.
- The central bank held its key policy interest rate at 6%.
- It also observed that a deceleration in retail inflation had been temporary as headline inflation.

Headline inflation close to 4%:

- It is important to recognise near and medium-term risks to the inflation outlook
- There is a need to be vigilant on account of uncertainties on the external and fiscal fronts; this calls for a cautious approach.

The inflation outlook for the coming months

- It is time to be in readiness to raise the policy rate to suppress the underlying drivers of inflation if they strengthen further
- CPI inflation was likely to moderate to about 3% in October.
- But this would be driven by food prices, while core inflation was likely to stay above 4% amid rising risks of fiscal slippage.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Air quality nosedives in spite of a quieter Deepavali](#)

Context:

- This year's Deepavali was the quietest in recent history, but the low-key celebrations across the country didn't stop pollution levels from spiking sharply.

Key Facts:

- In Chennai pollution levels inched up to that of Delhi, a city where smog and pollution touch toxic highs during this season.
- Other cities in the south, such as Bengaluru and Hyderabad, also witnessed a sharp rise in air pollution.
- The **Air Quality Index (AQI)**, a six-rung classification scale that rates air quality from 'good' to 'severe', downgraded air quality in Chennai from 'satisfactory' on to 'poor' and 'very poor' in the days leading up to Deepavali.
- The primary pollutant in both cities was **PM 2.5**, or particles that are smaller than **5 microns** and linked to respiratory illnesses.
- Reasons:** Experts suggest that the weather conditions, which slowed the speed of winds in the Bay of Bengal, resulted in the high levels of pollutants enveloping Chennai.

Basic Information:

The National Air Quality Index (AQI):

- 'One Number-One Colour-One Description' for the common man to judge the air quality within his vicinity.
- The formulation of the index was a continuation of the initiatives under Swachh Bharat Mission envisioned by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.
- There are six AQI categories, namely Good, Satisfactory, Moderately polluted, Poor, Very Poor, and Severe. The proposed AQI will consider eight pollutants (PM10, PM2.5, NO2, SO2, CO, O3, NH3, and Pb) for which short-term (up to 24-hourly averaging period) National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.
- Based on the measured ambient concentrations, corresponding standards and likely health impact, a sub-index is calculated for each of these pollutants. The worst sub-index reflects overall AQI. Associated likely health impacts for different AQI categories and pollutants have been also been suggested, with primary inputs from the medical expert members of the group. The AQI values and corresponding ambient concentrations (health breakpoints) as well as associated likely health impacts for the identified eight pollutants are as follows:

AQI Category, Pollutants and Health Breakpoints								
AQI Category (Range)	PM ₁₀ 24-hr	PM _{2.5} 24-hr	NO ₂ 24-hr	O ₃ 8-hr	CO 8-hr (mg/m ³)	SO ₂ 24-hr	NH ₃ 24-hr	Pb 24-hr
Good (0-50)	0-50	0-30	0-40	0-50	0-1.0	0-40	0-200	0-0.5
Satisfactory (51-100)	51-100	31-60	41-80	51-100	1.1-2.0	41-80	201-400	0.5-1.0
Moderately polluted (101-200)	101-250	61-90	81-180	101-168	2.1-10	81-380	401-800	1.1-2.0
Poor (201-300)	251-350	91-120	181-280	169-208	10-17	381-800	801-1200	2.1-3.0
Very poor (301-400)	351-430	121-250	281-400	209-743*	17-34	801-1600	1200-1800	3.1-3.5
Severe (401-500)	430+	250+	400+	743+*	34+	1600+	1800+	3.5+

2. [New species of large gecko discovered](#)

Key Fact:

- New Lizard in Eastern Ghats
- A team of scientistsTM has found Geckos(a new species) from the Eastern Ghats
- The Kanger valley rock gecko Hemidactylus kangerensis is the newest addition to IndiaTM's lizard species
- According to a paper published in the taxonomic journal Comptes Rendus Biologies, researchers of the National Centre for Biological Sciences has discovered the gecko from ChhattisgarhTM's Kanger Ghati National Park
- According to the researchers, the discovery highlights the need for dedicated surveys across the Eastern Ghats, where biodiversity has not been quantified too well

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. [India eyes military expansion; Sitharaman to spend Diwali with soldiers in Andaman tri-service command](#)

Key points:

- **IndiaTM's plan of Military expansion**
- India is working on expanding the military effectiveness of its outpost at the juncture of Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea
- This includes creation of military infrastructure for greater naval presence in the islands which dominates the strategically important Malacca Strait

Possible reasons behind these steps

- The military focus is on countering the increasing Chinese presence in the region, which has been a cause of concern
- Chinese submarines have been sighted in the area and have also been docked at bases in Pakistan and Sri Lanka

Extension of airstrip at INAS Baaz

- INAS Baaz is the naval aviation base on Campbell Bay on the Great Nicobar island
- It is currently being extended from 3,050 feet to 10,000 feet
- The extension is scheduled to be completed by 2021
- It will allow the Navy to place its modern P-8I surveillance aircraft at INAS Baaz
- The Navy currently operates its eight P-8I aircraft(procured from the US in 2013) from INS Rajali in Tamil Nadu
- If the P-8I aircraft shift to Campbell Bay, our surveillance reach will get multiplied by thousand miles

Importance of INS BAAZ:

- Baaz gives us that flexibility which will cover South China Sea
- Moreover, Baaz is adjacent to Malacca straits, an area of immense strategic interest to us

Other developments

- The Navy also plans to commission its second Floating Dry Dock Navy (FDDN)
- It will allow more naval ships to be maintained and serviced in the islands
- The Navy is also in the process of constructing three forward operating bases (FOBs) in the islandsTM at Diglipur, Kamorta and at Campbell Bay
- It will allow its Khukri class corvettes to be distributed across various locations in the archipelago

Nothing here for Today!!!

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F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper I

1. "Conventional wisdom suggests that economic reforms succeeding liberalization policy of government in early 1990s should have reduced gender discrimination"but that hasn't really been the case". Discuss?

GS Paper II

1. "Codifying checks and balances in respective police Acts will bring assurance against illegal orders by the political establishment to the police". Discuss.