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➤ North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP)

1. The North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP) has empowered the poor and improved the lives of people in about 3 lakh rural households in Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.
2. NERLP is World Bank aided multi-state livelihood project under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The project was launched in 2012.
3. The project aims to improve rural livelihoods especially that of women, unemployed youth and the most disadvantaged in four North Eastern States.
4. The project has focused on five development strategies namely (a) social empowerment (b) economic empowerment (c) partnership development (d) project management and (e) livelihood & value chain developments.
5. The project also works in partnerships with expert organizations to focus on cluster development through value chain.

➤ National Lab Directory

1. Union Minister of Consumer Affairs has launched the National Laboratory Directory.
2. The National Lab Directory is an online platform created by the National Standards Body of India, Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS).
3. It is a one-stop-shop for all testing needs of the industries, academia, researchers and other stakeholders who need to get their testing facilities accredited / certified / recognized.
4. This directory will benefit all stakeholders in identifying the test facilities that are required for assessing the conformity of relevant products or in testing for the purpose of research and development.

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5. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the National Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.
6. BIS was established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986. The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.

➤ 10 years of H1N1 influenza: outbreaks in India, infection trends in the states

1. Researchers from the National Centre for Disease Control data (NCDC) has published a study titled 'Influenza a (H1N1) in India – changing epidemiology and its implications'.
2. The study has said that the first case of influenza A H1N1 virus also known as Swine flu was reported in Mexico in April, 2009.
3. Later the infection spread and a total of 214 countries were affected by the Swine flu worldwide. Ten years since, Swine flu has become a seasonal virus.
4. The study has shown that in India, the past decade (2009-2019) saw as many as 1.58 lakh persons being infected by the virus and over 10,000 succumbing to it.
5. Maharashtra has reported the highest number of cases and deaths since pandemic influenza struck in 2009.
6. H1N1 influenza or swine flu is a highly contagious acute respiratory disease of pigs caused by type an influenza virus. It is called swine flu because it was known in the past to occur in people who had been in the vicinity of pigs.
7. The symptoms of Swine flu include fever, body aches, loss of appetite, sore throat, vomiting among others. Most people with flu including swine flu require only symptom relief. Medications do not cure the illness but they may shorten the duration and make symptoms less severe.

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➤ Government unveils mega bank mergers

1. Government has announced a merger of ten public sector banks (PSBs) into four larger entities. Now, the total number of PSBs after consolidation will come down to 12 from 27 in 2017.
2. The banks which are merged are (a) Punjab National Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India to merge to form the country's second-largest lender (b) Canara Bank and Syndicate Bank (c) Union Bank of India to acquire Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank and (c) Indian Bank to merge with Allahabad Bank.
3. The consolidation of PSBs will help in strengthening the PSBs presence globally, nationally and regionally. It will also lead to operational efficiency gains which will reduce their cost of lending.
4. However, the banks that are getting merged are expected to see a slowdown in decision making at the top level as senior officials of such banks would put all the decisions on the back-burner and it will lead to a drop in credit delivery in the system.
5. Further, a complex merger with a weaker and under-capitalized PSB would stall the bank's recovery efforts as the weaknesses of one bank may get transferred and the merged entity may become weak.

➤ CBDT constitutes Start-up Cell for redressal of grievances related to Start-ups

1. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has constituted a dedicated start up cell for addressing the specific problems related to Start-ups.
2. The startup cell will be a five-member board which will be headed by the member (Income Tax and Computerization) of the board.
3. The cell will work towards redressal of grievances and mitigate tax-related issues in case of startup entities with respect to administration of Income-tax Act, 1961.

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4. Recently, the finance minister has also announced that angel tax will not be applicable on startups that are registered with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).
5. Angel Tax is a 30% tax that is levied on the funding received by startups from an Angel investor. However, this tax is levied when startups receive angel funding at a valuation higher than its 'fair market value'. It is counted as income to the company and is taxed.

➤ Explained: What a skull tells us about human evolution

1. Scientists have announced the discovery of a nearly complete skull of an early human ancestor called MRD in Ethiopia.
2. The fossil is being considered as the face of the oldest known species that is part of the human evolutionary tree.
3. The skull belongs to the species Australopithecus anamensis which first appeared roughly 4.2 million years ago.
4. This species is also considered the direct ancestor of the species Australopithecus afarensis nicknamed Lucy, which was discovered in 1974 in Ethiopia.
5. Scientists have said that MRD's species were bipedal means using only two legs for walking. But they may also have been able to move around in trees and were much smaller than modern humans.
6. Further, the dating of the skull also reveals that Anamensis and its descendent species, Lucy may have coexisted for a period of at least 100,000 years.
7. This discovery also challenges the long-held notion of linear evolution in which one species disappears and is replaced by a new one.

➤ GDP growth down to 6-year low in Q1 of 2019-20 financial year

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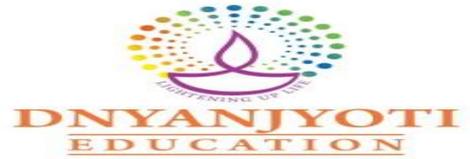
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1. According to data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for April-June 2019 has declined to a six year low of 5%.
2. The slowdown in growth has been attributed to (a) sharp deceleration in the manufacturing sector (b) low agriculture output (c) low consumption demand and (d) decreased private investment.
3. Recently, the annual report of the RBI has also said that the economic slowdown could be cyclical in nature rather than a deep structural one.
4. The report has also said that a broad-based cyclical downturn is underway in several sectors such as manufacturing, trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting, construction and agriculture.
5. Besides, the government had also come out with several measures to tackle the slowdown which includes (a)reduction of taxes (b) improvement of liquidity in the banking sector (c)increased government spending on auto and infrastructure and (d)accelerated refunds of goods and services tax(GST).

➤ West Bengal passes bill to prevent, punish mob lynching

1. The West Bengal Assembly has passed the West Bengal (Prevention of Lynching) Bill, 2019.
2. The bill proposes three categories of punishment: a) maximum three-year jail and a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh if the act leads to the victim "suffering hurt"; b) 10 years and up to Rs 3 lakh in case of "grievous hurt"; and c) "rigorous imprisonment for life and fine not less than Rs 1 lakh and up to Rs 5 lakh" in case of death.
3. The Bill also proposes a maximum one-year jail term and a fine up to Rs 50,000 for those who spread or publish or communicate "offensive material". It also proposes a jail term of maximum of three years and fine up to Rs 1 lakh for those who create "a hostile environment for a person or a group of persons".

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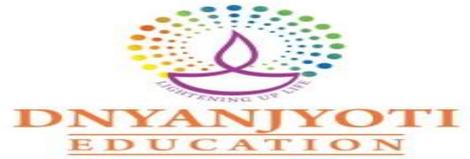
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4. The bill further states that the state will provide protection to victims, who can also choose any advocate from the legal aid panel under the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987. The state will also provide free medical treatment and provide compensation as per the Compensation Scheme.
5. It states that cases of lynching will only be investigated by police officers above the rank of inspector, except under “special circumstances”.
6. It also proposes to set up a special task force with a state co-ordinator not below IG-rank and nodal officers to prevent incidents of lynching.
7. Recently, the Rajasthan government had passed a mob lynching law- Rajasthan Protection from Lynching Bill, 2019.

➤ Himachal passes Bill against ‘forced conversion’

1. The Himachal Pradesh Assembly has passed the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2019. The Bill seeks to repeal the Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2006.
2. The aims to check forced religious conversions. It prohibits conversion by misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, inducement, marriage or any fraudulent means. The bill says that any marriage for the sole purpose of conversion will also be declared null and void under Section 5 of the bill.
3. It proposes stringent punishments -up to seven years in jail compared to the three years under the existing law.
4. As per the Bill, anyone seeking to convert will need to give a month’s notice to the district magistrate, stating that the person is converting on his/her own. The priest who performs conversion ceremony will also give a month’s notice in advance. However, this condition would not apply to those re-converting to their parent religion.
5. The bill further states that no person or organisation violating the provisions will be allowed to accept any donation or contribution of any kind from within or outside the country.

➤ Australia downgrades Great Barrier Reef to very poor status

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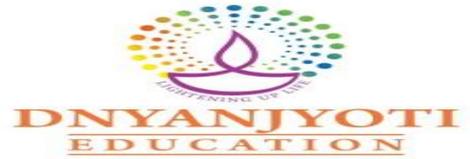
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1. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has released Outlook Report 2019 that examines the Great Barrier Reef's health, pressures, and likely future.
2. The long-term outlook of the reef has been downgraded to "very poor" for the first time.
3. According to the report, the greatest threat to the Reef is climate change. The other main threats are associated with coastal development, land-based runoff, and direct human use (such as illegal fishing).
4. The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest and longest coral reef system. The reef is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia. It stretches for 2,300km from the tip of Cape York in the north to Bundaberg in the south in Australia. It is home to 400 types of coral, 1500 species of fish and 4000 types of molluscs. It also holds great scientific interest as the habitat of species such as the dugong and the large green turtle, which are threatened with extinction.
5. It is a World Heritage Area since 1981 (the world's first reef ecosystem to be recognised by UNESCO)
6. The Australian government in 2018, announced its largest-ever investment in the coral reef: over half a billion Australian dollars (\$378 million). The money is to be used to **counter** water pollution, combat coral-eating starfish, increase public awareness, boost reef monitoring, and improve the environmental impact of surrounding businesses

➤ UK joins France and Germany to express concern over South China Sea tensions

1. UK, France and Germany have expressed concern over prevailing South China Sea situation.
2. This statement came after Chinese and Vietnamese coast guard vessels are engaged in a standoff in South China sea over a lucrative oil blocks claimed by Vietnam near its coast.

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3. The three countries have also said that the legal framework set out by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) granting the countries sovereign rights to the waters must be carried out.
4. South China Sea is a portion of the Pacific Ocean which is bordered by some of the ASEAN countries and China. The dispute involves contesting claims on the islands in the region by 7 countries which are Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.
5. In 2016, a Permanent Court of Arbitration constituted under the UNCLOS had rejected China's claim to own the entire South China Sea. However, China had rejected the ruling and has built military bases on both sides of the sea to enforce its claim.
6. The law of the Sea Treaty formally known as United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over the ocean areas. India became a signatory to the UNCLOS in 1982.
7. The Law of the Sea Convention defines the rights and responsibilities of nations with respect to their use of the world's oceans, establishing guidelines for businesses, the environment and the management of marine natural resources.

➤ Delhi needs to cut pollution level by 65% to meet air quality standard: CSE

1. Environmental NGO, Centre for Science and Environment has released new results from its on-going analysis of air quality trends in Delhi to highlight Delhi's struggle with air pollution and what it takes to control pollution.
2. The CSE has noted that after the launch of comprehensive clean air action plan and graded response action plan, there are early signs of stabilization and reduction in pollution level in Delhi.
3. However, CSE has warned that even after reduction and stabilization of pollution levels, Delhi needs to cut pollution level by 65% to meet the air quality standards.

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4. In pursuant with Supreme Court's order in the M. C. Mehta vs. Union of India (2016) regarding air quality in National Capital Region of Delhi, a Graded Response Action Plan was notified by MoEFCC. Under GRAP, there are 4 stages of pollution – Moderate to Poor, Very Poor, Severe and Severe+ or Emergency and action are listed that need to be undertaken as the levels are breached.
5. In February 2017, The Supreme Court directed Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) to work on a comprehensive action plan (CAP) for air pollution control. CAP lists medium and long-term actions for all pollution sources for Delhi and NCR.
6. In 2019, National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) has been launched for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution in India. It is a five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year.
7. It aims at 20%–30% reduction of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ concentration by 2024, taking 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.
8. The programme targets 102 non-attainment cities which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.
9. Non-attainment cities are those which have been consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Delhi is one of the non-attainment cities.

➤ Govt. plans drive to restrict plastic use

1. A committee headed by Indian Prime Minister has decided that a major initiative on restricting the use of plastic, eliminating single use plastic and handling of plastic waste will be launched on October 2, 2019
2. Between September 11 and October 2, the government has planned a plastic use and waste awareness campaign across 4,000 towns and 6 lakh villages.
3. On October 2, a nationwide 'shramdaan' for plastic waste will be organised in all gram panchayats, urban local bodies, schools and highways.

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4. The Committee also decided that a 'grand function' will be held at Sabarmati riverfront during which a commemorative coin and postage stamps will be released.
5. The October 2 campaign will be followed by a larger campaign till Diwali (October 27) on the segregation, transportation and recycling/disposal of waste.

➤ Fiscal deficit crosses 77% of annual target in July

1. According to data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA), India's fiscal deficit has reached 77% of the annual target for 2019-20 in July.
2. Fiscal deficit is the amount of money that the government needs to borrow in a given year because their expenses were more than their revenues.
3. In Union Budget 2019, India has set a fiscal deficit target of 3.3% of the Gross domestic product (GDP) for 2019-20.

➤ Apache attack helicopters to be inducted into IAF at Pathankot on 3 September

1. Union Defence Minister and Punjab Chief Minister will jointly induct four US-made Apache AH-64E (I) helicopters into the Indian Air Force at Pathankot on 3rd September.
2. The AH-64E Apache is one of the world's most advanced multi-role combat helicopters, and is flown by the US Army.
3. The IAF had signed a multi-billion dollar contract with the US government and Boeing Ltd in September 2015 for 22 Apache helicopters.
4. Further, the Defence Ministry in 2017 approved the procurement of six Apache helicopters along with weapons systems from Boeing. This will be its first fleet of attack choppers.
5. The IAF currently operates Soviet-origin Mi-25 and Mi-35 helicopter gunships.

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6. The Apache choppers will be the second US-built helicopters to join the air force fleet. IAF inducted Boeing CH-47F (I) Chinook heavy-lift helicopters in March 2019

➤ Health Ministry explores AI for combating tuberculosis

1. The Central tuberculosis (TB) Division of the health ministry has signed a MoU with the Wadhvani Institute for Artificial Intelligence to explore the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in its fight against the TB disease.
2. The areas that AI based applications can support are in vulnerability and hot-spot mapping, modelling novel methods of screening and diagnostics apart from supporting the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTCP) in adoption of other AI technologies.
3. TB is an infectious airborne bacterial disease caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis. As per the 2018 annual report of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the incidence of TB in India was nearly 2.8 million annually and the total number of deaths by TB was over 5 lakhs.
4. India contributes 27% of the global TB burden which is the highest share globally. In this background, the central government had committed itself to eliminating TB by 2025.
5. Artificial Intelligence is a way of making a computer, computer-controlled robot or software performs human-like tasks. It refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making.

➤ US launches command for space warfare

1. USA has launched a new command called Spacecom. It has been established as the 11th Unified Combatant Command of the American armed forces.
2. It is a re-establishment of the US Space Command, which existed between 1985 and 2002.

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3. It is dedicated to warfare in space. The command will focus on defending American interests in space. It comes in the backdrop of increasing militarization of space by China and Russia.
4. The United States Space Force as the sixth branch of the United States Armed Forces will be established soon.



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