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Current Affairs

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Pakistan opens a route for flights out of India

Why in news?

In a partial relief to airlines, Pakistan has opened one route for west-bound flights from India more than a month after it shut its airspace for all civilian flights following the Indian Air Force's strikes at Balakot.

Partial Entry:

- Pakistan opened a route for west-bound flights around 5 p.m. on Thursday. The impact of this announcement is yet to be assessed, said the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- A decision on opening a passage for flights overflying Pakistan and entering India is yet to be taken.
- The route that has been opened passes from near Mumbai and enters southern Pakistan. This is only one of the 11 exit and entry points between India and Pakistan, according to the official.

Hike in operational costs:

- Since the ban by Pakistan on the use of its airspace, several flights within Asia, between Asia and West Asia or Europe or the U.S. were forced to take a longer route, entailing an increase in flight duration and sometimes a halt for refuelling.
- This led to an increase in operational costs, forcing many airlines to cancel flights or hike fares.
- Air India's flights to the U.S. and Europe used the route restored by Pakistan.
- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said, we urge

Pakistan to open the airspace as soon as possible.

- IATA's spokesperson for Asia Pacific regions Albert Tjoeng said 220 flights were directly affected because of the airspace closure.
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U.S. count of Pak. F-16 reveals none are missing

Why in news?

Two U.S. officials have said they counted the F-16 aircraft in Pakistan and found none missing, throwing doubts on the Indian government's claim that it had shot down an F-16 during an aerial engagement with Pakistan on February 27. The officials' comments were made to U.S. magazine Foreign Policy.

India's Claim:

- The dogfight of February 27 resulted in an Indian aircraft being downed, and its pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman parachuting into the Pakistani territory, leading to his capture (and eventual release).
- Indian Air Force officials had said Wing Commander Varthaman had downed an F-16, based on his debriefing, when he was eventually released and returned to India.
- Various Indian government officials, including Defence Minister, also repeated the claim that an F-16 was downed.

Findings of the report:

- The findings directly contradict the account of Indian Air Force officials, who said that Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman managed to shoot down a Pakistani F-16 before his own plane was downed by a Pakistani missile," the report said.
- The report also adding that it was possible that Wing Commander Varthaman, in the heat of combat, flying a vintage MiG-21 Bison, got a lock on the Pakistani F-16, fired, and genuinely believed he scored a hit.
- Wing Commander Varthaman has not directly and publicly said that he downed an F-16, the information was gleaned through IAF reports

of his debrief.

AAMRAAM evidence:

- Following the engagement, India had presented evidence of an AAMRAAM air-to-air missile a device that can only be fired by an F-16, following the skirmish, saying that it proved that Pakistan had used the aircraft.
- Pakistan had denied both that an F-16 was used and that it was downed.
- The AAMRAAM evidence casts serious doubt on Pakistan's claim that an F-16 was not used and the Foreign Policy story casts serious doubt on the Indian government's claim that an F-16 was downed.
- One senior official said Pakistan had invited U.S. officials to count its F-16s but some of the aircraft were not available at the time because of the conflict, the Foreign Policy report says.
- However, the count had now been completed and all aircraft were present and accounted for, the official told the magazine.

Electronic signatures confirm F-16 hit: IAF

- During the aerial engagement on February 27, a Mig-21 Bison of the Indian Air Force (IAF) shot down a Pakistan Air Force (PAF) jet in the Nowshera sector and electronic signatures confirm it as an F-16, the IAF said.
- The clarification comes amid reports that no F-16 was downed and all PAF F-16s were accounted for.
- Indian forces have confirmed sighting ejections at two different places on that day. The two sightings were at places separated by at least 8-10km. One was an IAF Mig-21 Bison and the other a PAF aircraft. Electronic signatures gathered by us indicate that PAF aircraft was an F-16," the IAF said in a statement.
- In addition to electronic signatures, radio transmissions of their ground forces intercepted by the Army also confirm that the PAF jet shot was an F-16, official sources said.

100 fishermen to be freed, brought to Wagah

Why in news?

Pakistan will release 100 Indian fishermen, diplomatic sources on both sides have confirmed. According to the sources, Pakistan's officials have intimated India that the fishermen will be released from prison on April 7 and taken to the Wagah border on April 8.

Mutual Release:

- The move comes a few days after India made a special appeal in a Note Verbale sent to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, asking for the release of 385 fishermen and 10 other prisoners.
 - There are 385 Indian fishermen whose nationality has been conveyed to Pakistan and who have been languishing in Pakistan jails.
 - It is requested that urgent and concrete steps be taken to repatriate them to India at the earliest, along with their boats, the Ministry of External Affairs said.
 - According to the sources, India has been intimated about the release of 100 prisoners on Monday, but Pakistan plans to repatriate a total of 360 prisoners in total, including five others, over this month, in weekly batches of 100.
 - The last batch of 60 prisoners would be released by April 29. Activists say this release of fishermen is one of the largest such events.
 - In September 2010, Pakistan had released 442 Indian fishermen.
 - Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials confirmed that arrangements are being made for the first batch of fishermen, many of whom are from the coastal town of Diu.
 - However, officials declined to confirm if India was considering releasing any prisoners in a reciprocal move yet.
 - Pakistan's High Commission has informed that more than 50 Pakistani fishermen and civilians, who have completed their prison terms and formalities, are awaiting repatriation by India.
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Japan probe blasts asteroid to make crater

Why in news?

A Japanese spacecraft, **Hayabusa2**, launched an explosive device at an asteroid, aiming to blast a crater in the surface and scoop up material that could shed light on how the solar system evolved.

About the Mission:

- The mission was risky as the spacecraft had to immediately move away so as to avoid getting hit by flying shards from the blast.
 - Hayabusa2 successfully released the so-called “small carry-on impactor” a cone-shaped device capped with a copper bottom as scheduled, as the probe hovered just 500 metres above the **asteroid Ryugu**.
 - The impactor was programmed to explode 40 minutes later, propelling the copper bottom towards Ryugu, where it should gouge a crater into the surface of the asteroid that spins 300 million kilometres from Earth.
 - Hayabusa2 moved smartly away from the area to avoid being damaged by debris from the explosion or colliding with Ryugu.
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Kerala forests home to new spider species

Why in news?

A group of jumping spiders that mostly occur in Eurasia and Africa, has been spotted for the first time in **Ernakulam's Illithodu** forests by arachnologists from Kochi's Sacred Heart College, Thevara.

New Species:

- The team came across the different-looking spiders six of them, predominantly brownish-black in colour with white and creamy-yellow patches, while conducting a routine survey for ground-dwelling spiders in the Illithodu reserve forests of the Malayattoor forest division.

- Back in their laboratory, they examined the physical features of males and females under a microscope and photographed them.
- They also compared these to similar-looking spider specimens collected earlier from the Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary.

Distinct feature:

- A detailed examination of the spiders' physical features revealed that they belong to the genus **Habrocestum** that has been **recorded mostly in Eurasia and Africa** and never in India, till now.
- Comparisons with studies of European Habrocestum spiders revealed that the spiders from Illithode are a new species altogether, for they had distinctly different reproductive organs.

Single spine:

- The spider also has a single long spine on the underside of both its first legs, and this gave it its scientific name Habrocestum longispinum (after Latin 'longe' meaning long and 'spinae' for spine).
- It measures just around 2 mm and seems to prefer dry habitats, dwelling in forest litter.
- While more detailed ecological studies are required, **threats could include unregulated tourism activities and even climate change** (which could affect the small insects by altering the specific micro-climates that they prefer).
- The study extends the range of these spiders to India. The discovery also lends support to the **continental drift theory** that suggests that the world's continents were one large, contiguous landmass where these creatures thrived many millions of years ago.

Rise in obesity, vision-related issues in Indian schoolchildren, says study

Why in news?

Obesity, vision and dental issues are the major health problems faced by

school going children in the age group 2 to 17 years across India, according to a report.

About the Report:

- The report, “**Enhancing the Effectiveness and Impact of Schools: Insights from School Health Screening Program**”, released by Jarma Wellness, an organisation working in the area of healthcare consultation, assessed nearly two lakh children belonging to various socio-economic backgrounds from 20 cities.

Preventive healthcare:

- The health screening data shows a clear need for focussed effort to improve health of children and young people through preventive healthcare. A continued failure to act will have serious ramifications for the health of generations to come.

Major issues:

- The report adds that hygiene is a major issue. According to the report, vision screening of 1,55,584 children shows that an overall of 39,674 (25.5%) of children have abnormal vision.
- The number of children with uncorrected myopia/ hyperopia and wearing glasses touches nearly 50% in higher-secondary section, indicating that potentially one in every two children may need glasses.
- Also, 30.4% of all students screened have been found to have abnormal BMI. Of this, 19.1% students have been found to be in the overweight and obese category.
- The report also shows a significant jump from 16% to 23% in the same category as the child moves from pre-primary to primary grades, and goes up to 26% in higher secondary.
- Based on assessment of various dental/oral health parameters presence of cavities, plaque, tartar, gum inflammation, bleeding, oral hygiene and teeth alignment, the report observes that over 50% of all students screened were found to have dental issues and close to 27% of students have cavities.
- While alignment of teeth is more of a cosmetic issue, the other parameters point towards hygiene habits and brushing techniques.

- Interestingly, parental inaction is noticed most when it comes to their child's dental health; not realising that if left untreated, deteriorating oral health can impact the quality of the child's permanent set of teeth.
 - In schools where screenings were done in previous years, the percentage of parents taking action was very high when compared to schools where screening happened for the first time, clearly showing that an aware parent will invest far more in preventive healthcare, noted the report.
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Deaths from C-sections high in developing countries

Why in news?

Maternal deaths following caesarean sections in low and middle-income countries are 100 times higher than that in high-income countries, with up to a third of all babies dying, according to data from 12 million pregnancies. This according to a new review published in The Lancet, which has considered 196 studies from 67 low and middle-income countries.

Findings of the Report:

- Information released by the World Health Organisation under its sexual and reproductive health section further adds from the study that data from 1990 to 2017 show that a quarter of all women who died while giving birth in low and middle-income countries had undergone caesarean section.
- The outcomes for women in low and middle-income countries are far worse than we expected.

Risk of complications:

- The overuse and underuse of caesarean section were a current global concern and the focus of debates and research.
- In many low and middle-income countries, overuse and underuse coexist making it particularly difficult to increase the provision of

caesarean section to those women in need without aggravating the overuse which, in turn, places women at higher risk of complications.

- Every year, 3 lakh women die during childbirth, 99% of whom are from low and middle-income countries.
- Timely access to caesarean section when needed is required for safe childbirth, but 'too little, too late,' or 'too many, too soon' are part of a problem and not a solution, notes the study.
- A third of all deaths following caesarean section were attributed to postpartum haemorrhage (32%), 19% to pre-eclampsia, 22% to sepsis, and 14% to anaesthesia-related causes.

Unjustified reasons:

- The study says that while many women in need of caesarean sections still do not have access to caesarean section particularly in low resource settings, many others undergo the procedure unnecessarily, for reasons which are not medically justified.
- Caesarean sections are the most commonly performed operation worldwide. They are meant to be life saving for both mother and the baby.
- Now the risk factors and countries associated with poor outcomes, we can make a more targeted effort so that timely and safe caesarean sections can be carried out wherever they are needed.
- The authors also highlighted that training is needed in decision making to reduce unnecessary caesarean sections, and in appropriate intrapartum care, including instrumental deliveries to reduce caesarean sections performed in the second stage of labour, which carry greater risk.

