



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

Posted at: 20/04/2019

Cross-LoC trade suspended

Why in news?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) suspended the cross-Line of Control (LoC) trade in Jammu and Kashmir, citing “funneling of illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency” as reasons.

MHA Statement:

- The move will immediately impact around 300 traders, and over 1,200 people who are directly and indirectly associated with the trade on this side.
- The action has been taken after reports that the cross-LoC trade routes are being **misused by Pakistan-based elements for funneling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency, etc.,**” said MHA spokesman.
- He said there were reports that the misuse was “on a very large scale.”
- The trade has changed its character to mostly third-party trade and products from other regions, including foreign countries, are finding their way through this route.
- Unscrupulous and anti-national elements are using the route as a conduit for **hawala money, drugs and weapons**, under the garb of this trade,” the MHA order said.

Terror Financing:

- A probe by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the MHA said, suggested that a significant number of concerns engaged in the trade

are being operated by persons closely associated with banned terrorist organisations.

- It also pointed out that the Government of India after the Pulwama attack withdrew the **Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan** and “inputs suggested that in order to evade the consequent higher duty, the LoC trade was likely to be misused to a much larger extent.”
 - In a major confidence building measure, **cross-LoC trade was started in 2008** by setting up two Trade Facilitation Centres located at Uri’s Salamabad in Baramulla, and Chakkan-da-Bagh in Poonch.
 - The trade took place four days a week. **It was based on barter system and zero duty basis.**
 - The move was made without any intimation to the traders. Around 300 traders, 1000 truck drivers and 200 labourers are directly involved. They will lose their livelihood immediately.
-

Genome sequencing to map population diversity

Why in news?

In an indigenous genetic mapping effort, nearly 1,000 rural youth from the length and breadth of India will have their genomes sequenced by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The project aims at educating a generation of students on the “usefulness” of genomics.

About the Project:

- Globally, many countries have undertaken genome sequencing of a sample of their citizens to determine unique genetic traits, susceptibility (and resilience) to disease. This is the first time that such a large sample of Indians will be recruited for a detailed study.
- The project is an adjunct to a much larger government-led programme, still in the works, to sequence at least 10,000 Indian genomes.
- Typically, those recruited as part of genome-sample collections are representative of the country’s population diversity.
- In this case, the bulk of them will be college students, both men and

women, and pursuing degrees in the life sciences or biology.

- This will not be an exercise to merely collect samples from people. CSIR will be reaching out to a lot of collegians, educating them about genomics and putting a system in place that allows them to access information revealed by their genome.
- Because genomics is largely confined to a rich urban demographic in India, this exercise would make such information ubiquitous even to villages.

Methodology:

- Genomes will be sequenced based on a blood sample and the scientists plan to hold at least 30 camps covering most States.
- Every person whose genomes are sequenced will be given a report. The participants would be told if they carry gene variants that make them less responsive to certain classes of medicines.
- For instance, having a certain gene makes some people less responsive to clopidogrel, a key drug that prevents strokes and heart attack.
- The project would involve the Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and cost ₹18 crore, with the sequencing to be done at the IGIB and the CCMB.

Impact:

- The project would prove India's capabilities at executing whole-genome sequencing.
- The **human genome has about 3.2 billion base pairs** and just 10 years ago cost about 10,000 dollars. Now prices have fallen to a tenth.
- We can establish a baseline Indian population and ask novel questions. For instance, in developed countries diarrhoeal infections are rarer than in India. Do genes have a role? We can follow people over long periods and track health changes," CSIR officials said.
- Ever since the **human genome was first sequenced in 2003**, it opened a fresh perspective on the link between disease and the unique genetic make-up of each individual.
- Nearly 10,000 diseases including cystic fibrosis, thalassemia are known to be the result of a single gene malfunctioning.
- While genes may render some insensitive to certain drugs, genome

sequencing has shown that cancer too can be understood from the viewpoint of genetics, rather than being seen as a disease of certain organs.

Right to travel abroad is a basic human right

Why in news?

The right to travel abroad is a genuine and basic human right like marriage and family, the Supreme Court has observed in a recent order.

SC observations:

- The right to travel abroad is an important basic human right for it nourishes independent and self-determining creative character of the individual, not only by extending his freedoms of action, but also by extending the scope of his experience.
- The court was hearing an appeal filed by an IPS officer who was refused permission to take a private trip abroad to visit relatives as he had a departmental enquiry pending against him.
- Satish Chandra Verma, Inspector General of Police/Principal, Central Training College, Central Reserve Police Force at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu said he was denied permission despite the fact that he had no criminal case against him.
- Yet both the Central Administrative Tribunal, Chennai Bench, and the Madras High Court denied him his right. The High Court upheld the tribunal's position that he cannot travel abroad without vigilance clearance.
- Setting aside the order, the Supreme Court referred to its **Maneka Gandhi judgment** upholding the right to travel and the landmark **U.S. Supreme Court case of 1958 Kent vs Dulles**.
- The Bench quoted the majority opinion of Justice William O. Douglas in the latter case which said "**freedom to go abroad has much social value and represents the basic human right of great significance**".
- The court said that this basic human right "also extends to private

life; marriage, family and friendship”. These are part of human nature which can be “rarely affected through a refusal of freedom to go abroad”.

A struggle to breathe

Why in news?

In this election season, it is imperative for political parties to talk about pollution.

Background:

- The National Capital Region’s pollution levels make it to the headlines every year.
- Every October to December, stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana, smog arising from industries, and motor vehicle emissions increase the **air quality index** (AQI) of Delhi to the hazardous level of 450.
- In the remaining months, the AQI goes back to the level of 101-200 (unhealthy for sensitive groups).
- The **economic loss for India** in the last five years due to the exposure to crop burning is about **1.7% of the country’s GDP**.
- Annually, this exposure to pollution costs Delhi, Haryana and Punjab around ₹2 lakh crore.

Absence of Comprehensive Plan:

- Despite this alarming level of pollution, neither the Union government nor the Delhi government has taken significant steps to plan out a long-term solution.
- Even the interim Budget took no significant step to tackle this issue.
- The **odd-even scheme**, which was launched some years ago to curb pollution, failed to achieve its objective.
- A study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water found that the average number of vehicles plying on the roads daily increased by 10% during the odd-even period in January 2016 compared to the last

week of December 2015.

- This increase was mainly due to a 17% increase in two-wheelers, 12% increase in three-wheelers, 22% increase in taxis and 138% rise in the number of private buses.
- Another study published in Current Science found that the odd-even scheme led to an increase in emissions as the median concentration of 13 out of the 16 gases measured were higher in the morning hours and afternoon hours on days when the scheme was enforced.

Radical Steps needed:

- Clearly, the government needs to take more radical steps to curb pollution.
- It should: find **alternatives to stubble** burning and impose strict sanctions in case of contravention of any ban on the practice.
- Impose a blanket ban on firecrackers.
- Impose a blanket ban on all vehicles exceeding prescribed tailgate emission standards.
- Legislate stricter norms for fuels.
- Open toll roads where trucks should be excluded and high-occupancy vehicles exempted from the toll.
- Provide separate bus lanes to reduce congestion.
- Create a separate fund in the Budget to specifically deal with this crisis.
- Provide agricultural subsidies to farmers to disincentivise crop burning.
- Improve the drainage system.
- Incentivise the use of renewable energy.

Way forward:

- Apart from the courts, none of the other organs of the state has shown any readiness to deal with the pollution crisis.
- Meanwhile, until the government responds, NGOs and social workers should step in to tackle this issue through their own programmes and campaigns.
- In this election season, it is imperative for political parties to make this issue a priority, for pollution doesn't only affect us but our children, the generations to come, and our planet.

Need to address growth challenges

Why in news?

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das highlighted the need to address growth challenges as the inflation outlook remained benign, at the meeting of the monetary policy committee earlier this month.

Minutes of the MPC meeting:

- Four out of six MPC members had voted for a reduction in interest rate from 6.25% to 6% during the first bimonthly policy review of 2019-20.
- In the previous policy review in February too, the RBI had cut the interest rate by 25 basis points (bps).
- With the **inflation outlook looking benign and headline inflation expected to remain below target** in the current year, it becomes necessary to address the challenges to sustained growth of the Indian economy," Mr. Das said, explaining why he voted for a rate reduction.
- The RBI Governor also flagged the idea of **departing from the conventional rate revision in multiples of 25 bps**, during the MPC meeting, an issue on which he elaborated in a speech on the side-lines of the Fund-Bank Spring Meetings in Washington DC last week.
- I would like to state here that there is a need to consider interest rate adjustments, not necessarily in the conventional way of 25 bps or multiples thereof," he had said during the MPC deliberations.

Stubborn core inflation:

- Deputy Governor Viral Acharya, who is also a member of the MPC, voted for status quo for the second consecutive occasion, and highlighted the risks of stubborn core inflation.
- Inflation excluding food and fuel remains uncomfortably close to 5.5%, i.e., at elevated levels through most of the past 12 months," Dr.

Acharya said.

- Observing that February had already shown some seasonal uptick in prices of several food items, Dr. Acharya argued that soft food inflation may not persist for long a scenario in which the elevated level of inflation, excluding food and fuel, would steer the headline inflation away from the target rate of 4%.
 - This can risk hardening of inflation expectations of households," he added.
-

Simbakubwa kutokaafrika

Why in news?

When Ohio University integrative biologist Nancy Stevens peered into a drawer in the wooden cabinets on the top floor of a Nairobi museum in 2010, she saw a chunk of rock containing massive teeth and knew she had come across something important.

Largest meat-eating mammal:

- The overlooked fossils stored at the National Museums of Kenya belonged to one of the largest meat-eating mammals ever to walk the Earth, a beast called Simbakubwa kutokaafrika **that stalked Africa 22 million years ago**, according to researchers
- Bigger than any carnivorous land mammal alive today even a polar bear Simbakubwa's skull was the size of a rhino's, its eight-inch (20-cm) canine teeth as large as bananas.
- It weighed about a tonne and was 8 feet long (2-1/2 metres) snout to rump.
- According to the research published in the Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology, the **fossils were excavated around 1980 in western Kenya**.
- The specimen had been collected decades before, and the team that discovered this fossil was more focused on other parts of the fauna, particularly primates," Stevens said.
- Simbakubwa was a member of a group called hyaenodonts that

appeared 62 million years ago, 4 million years after the extinction of the dinosaurs paved the way for mammalian dominance, and **went extinct 9 million years ago.**

Top U.K. honour for Indian scientist

Why in news?

Scientist and businessman Yusuf Hamied is among a host of Indian-origin experts honoured in the 2019 list of new **fellows of the U.K.'s Royal Society.**

About the Award:

- The 82-year-old chairman of pharmaceutical major Cipla has been made an honorary fellow of the prestigious body, comprising of many of the world's most eminent scientists.
- The **Royal Society is an independent scientific academy** of the U.K. and the Commonwealth, dedicated to promoting excellence in science.
- His honorary fellowship of the **world's oldest scientific academy** came alongside 51 new fellows and 10 new foreign members as part of the 2019 cohort unveiled earlier this week.

For progress:

- Over the course of the Royal Society's vast history, it is our Fellowship that has remained a constant thread and the substance from which our purpose has been realised: to use science for the benefit of humanity, said Venki Ramakrishnan, the Nobel Prize-winning Indian-origin president of the Royal Society.
- Among the Indian-origin scientists elected as fellows this year are microbiologist Gurdyal Besra, mathematicians Manjul Bhargava and Akshay Venkatesh and health experts Gagandeep Kang and Anant Parekh.
- The fellows this year come from across the U.K. and Commonwealth,

as well as international institutions in Argentina, Israel, and the Netherlands.

Tendered Votes

Why in news?

It was a repeat of a scene in actor Vijay's recent movie Sarkar in some parts of Chennai and its fringes on Thursday as voters were shocked to discover their votes had already been cast. But they were not left disappointed and had a chance to cast a 'tendered' vote.

What is tendered vote?

- According to the **Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961**, a voter is allowed to cast a 'tendered vote' where someone else representing to be a particular voter has already cast that vote.
 - The presiding officer may allow the actual voter to vote, if the person is able to prove his or her identity.
 - They would be provided a ballot paper to mark symbol and it would be placed in a cover specially kept for the purpose.
-
-

