



# PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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## **CJI tears into Assam move on detenus**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court lashed out at the Assam government's **proposal to conditionally release and monitor declared foreigners languishing in its detention centres** for over five years, saying the court will not be a party to such a move which is both illegal and violative of the Constitution.

### **Official chastised:**

- Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi said the proposed measure reflects the government's failure to deport declared foreigners.
  - You have no right to continue in office after authoring such an affidavit... This court will not be part to such an unheard of arrangement. You have 900 detainees when lakhs of illegal foreigners have already intermingled with the local population. Most of these foreigners are in the voters' list and are taking part in the political system of this country. All you have is 900 people kept in sub-human conditions in your detention centres," Chief Justice Gogoi rebuked Assam Chief Secretary Alok Kumar, who was present in the court.
  - The Assam government's affidavit proposed a measure to release foreigners who have completed five years in detention centres subject to furnishing a security of Rs. 5 lakh, verification of address, collection of their biometrics, etc.
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## **Former Supreme Court judge to probe 'conspiracy' against CJI**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court appointed its former judge, **Justice A.K. Patnaik**, to probe the affidavits filed by a young lawyer that a larger conspiracy hatched by a powerful lobby of fixers, disgruntled court employees and corporate figures is at work to compromise the functioning of the highest judiciary.

### **Focus Areas:**

- Justice Patnaik's inquiry would focus on the material and affidavits provided by advocate Utsav Singh Bains, who claimed that **a plot was on to target the judiciary**, including Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi.
- The Bench said Mr. Bains could not withhold any information from Justice Patnaik by claiming privilege. He had to come clean.
- Justice Patnaik would test Mr. Bains' claim that he was approached by a person called 'Ajay' in early April. He was offered up to Rs. 1.5 crore to file a false case against the CJI.
- This man, the lawyer said, claimed to be a relative of the former Supreme Court staffer who has since levelled sexual harassment allegations against the Chief Justice.
- The Bench repeatedly clarified that the probe into the existence of a larger conspiracy would not eclipse the allegations of sexual harassment raised by the former employee, which are being examined separately by an in-house inquiry committee of three judges.
- This is with respect to the contents of the affidavits, whether the affidavits are correct or not. We again reiterate that the outcome of the inquiry shall not affect the in-house procedure/inquiry, which is pending in the administrative side, in any manner whatsoever," the Special Bench clarified.
- The clarification was in response to submissions by senior advocate Indira Jaising that such a probe ordered by the Bench should not prejudice the in-house inquiry into the woman's allegations or deny her defence.

- This Bench will not enquire into her allegations. Our job is to find out if somebody approached Utsav Bains to file a false case, whether they are two former Supreme Court employees or others; whether there are fixers involved; whether a conspiracy was hatched after Bench-fixing attempt failed,” Justice Mishra said
  - The Bench ordered the chiefs of the CBI, Intelligence Bureau and the Delhi Police to assist Justice Patnaik in his endeavour. The retired judge has to file his report in a sealed cover before the Bench. The case would be taken after the court receives Justice Patnaik’s report.
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## **Justice Ramana steps down from Bobde panel**

### **Why in news?**

In his recusal letter to his fellow judges of the Supreme Court, Justice Ramana wrote, It is true that justice must not only be done, but also manifestly seem to be done.

### **Justice Ramana’s stand:**

- Let me also caution, at this stage, that it is also equally true that no one who approaches the Court should have the power to determine the forum and subvert the processes of justice. Let not my recusal in the instant matter be taken to mean, even in the slightest of measures, that we have transgressed either of these principles.
- Referring to the woman’s complaint that the judge had already pre-judged her complaint in a speech given by him in Hyderabad, Justice Ramana said the topic of the speech was “Judicial Journey — The Road Ahead”.
- The topic was decided at least two weeks prior to the receipt of the woman’s complaint. He had spoken about personal attacks against members of the judiciary seeking to cast aspersions on their ability to render impartial judgments.
- If anything, the implicit assumption of that portion of my speech was that our conduct as judges ought to be exemplary so as to protect the dignity of the judicial institution from these frequent attacks. Judges,

therefore, ought not to be cowed down in upholding the dignity of the judiciary.

- The dignity of the judiciary, first and foremost, flows from the capacity of judges to render impartial justice. The fact that this assertion, on the need to protect the dignity of the judiciary, is now being used to allege bias is a sad reflection of the state of affairs,” Justice Ramana said.

### **Second aspect:**

- On the second aspect of the woman’s complaint that he was a “close friend” and like a family member to the CJI, Justice Ramana said apex court judges attend official meetings at the residence office of the CJI. Judges meet each other regularly. “In fact, we call ourselves a ‘family’ to encapsulate that fraternity and collegiality,” Justice Ramana wrote.
  - The Chief Justice of India is primus inter pares, who allots a variety of administrative duties and responsibilities to the Judge. My visits to the residence of Chief Justice of India cannot, therefore, suggest any proximity than what is absolutely normal under the circumstances. Thus, the apprehension expressed by the complainant is wholly misconceived,” Justice Ramana said.
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## **Near-normal monsoon may boost foodgrain production**

### **Why in news?**

This summer’s foodgrain production is likely to be higher than last year’s, according to the Agriculture Ministry targets for the kharif season, riding on the back of the Indian Meteorological Department’s forecast of a “near-normal” monsoon.

### **Prediction for Kharif:**

- Rice production this summer is expected to hit 102 million tonnes, while total foodgrain production is being pegged at 147.9 million tonnes, according to the Ministry’s presentation at its annual Kharif Conference.

- These targets for kharif 2019 are higher than last year's targets, as well as the actual output in 2018.
- Second advance estimates show foodgrain production touching 142.24 million tonnes in the 2018 kharif season, with rice output of 101.96 MT.

### **Rabi Prediction:**

- The Ministry is also targeting a higher rabi or winter season harvest in 2019, with foodgrain production set at 143.2 MT.
  - The wheat production target is marginally higher than last year's target at 100.5 MT.
  - Sugarcane production is likely to set a new record again this year, with the Ministry projecting a harvest of 385.5 MT, a jump from last year's target of 355 MT.
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## **Low pressure area formation likely over Bay of Bengal**

### **Why in news?**

A low-pressure area is likely to develop over central parts of south Bay of Bengal on Thursday and it is expected to intensify into a cyclonic storm by Sunday or Monday, according to meteorology department officials.

### **System Movement:**

- The system that may move north-westwards towards the Tamil Nadu coast and bring rainfall around Sunday and Monday in the State, they said.
- The system may either cross along the coast, parallel to the coast or away from the coast.
- The possibility of rainfall depended on how close the system would be from the coast and the location of the crossing point.

### **Cyclones in April:**

- While it is not usual for cyclones to form in April, Mr. Balachandran

from IMD, recalled that the State had witnessed cyclones in April 1962 and April 1966. Both systems crossed near Cuddalore.

- The department has said there was a probability of rainfall in up to 75% of the weather stations across the State on Sunday and its continuation on Monday.
  - Rains due to convective activity is expected to lash one or two places in interior parts of Tamil Nadu till Saturday. On Wednesday too, Valparai recorded a rainfall of 4 cm, followed by Kodaikanal and Udhagamandalam till 5.30 p.m.
  - However, the scale of thunderstorm activity would decrease from Thursday, officials said.
  - The Met department has forecast that the maximum temperature over Chennai will be around 36 degrees Celsius till Friday.
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## **Khasi 'kingdoms' to revisit 1947 agreements**

### **Why in news?**

A federation of 25 **Himas or Khasi kingdoms** that have a cosmetic existence today, plan to revisit the 1948 agreements that made present-day Meghalaya a part of India.

### **Safeguarding tribal customs and traditions:**

- The revisiting in consultation with legal experts and academicians is aimed at safeguarding tribal customs and traditions from Central laws in force or could be enacted, such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.
- The bill is one of the factors in our move to strengthen the Federation of Khasi States that were **ruled by a Syiem** (king-like head of a Hima). But things are at an initial stage. We will be holding a series of meetings to come to a conclusion on how best to insulate our customs and traditions from overriding central rules and policies," Pynshngaiñ N Syiem, chairman of the Advisory Legal Committee to discuss the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement.
- Mr. Syiem is also the chairman of the **Khasi Hills Autonomous**



## **District Council.**

### **Accession into India:**

- The 25 Khasi states had signed **the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement** with the Dominion of India between December 15, 1947, and March 19, 1948.
  - The conditional treaty with these states was signed by Governor General Chakravarty Rajagopalachari on August 17, 1948.
  - The Khasi states, though, did not sign the Instrument of Merger unlike most other states in India.
  - During the British rule, the Khasi domain was divided into the Khasi states and British territories. At that time, the British government had no territorial right on the Khasi states and they had to approach the chiefs of these states if they needed land for any purpose.
  - After independence, the British territories became part of the Indian dominion but the Khasi states had to sign documents beginning with the Standstill Agreement that provided a few rights to the states.
  - Though the Constitution has provided self-rule to a considerable extent through tribal councils, there has been an increasing demand for giving more teeth to the Khasi states.
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## **Bt brinjal being grown in Haryana**

### **Why in news?**

Genetically modified (GM) brinjal is being illegally grown in the Fatehabad district of Haryana, according to anti-GM activists.

### **Immediate action:**

- Activists demanded that Central and State regulatory agencies immediately take action to stop the cultivation, investigate the spread of the illegal variety and destroy all such crops, seeds and saplings as dangerous biohazards entering the food chain.
- Punitive action must be taken against seed suppliers, as well as the

company which developed the GM variety, said the activists.

### **What is Bt Brinjal?**

- Brinjal has been genetically modified by inserting a **protein gene from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*** to give protection against certain pests.
- Bt Brinjal, which was developed in India by Maharashtra-based seed company **Mahyco**, was on the verge of becoming **India's first GM food crop**, when the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee cleared it for commercialisation in 2009**, before doubts about the long-term impact on consumer health and plant biodiversity led the then Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh, to slap an **indefinite moratorium** on the crop.
- Bt Cotton was developed and sold in India by a **joint venture between Mahyco and global GM giant Monsanto**, which also developed HT cotton until the trial stage before withdrawing it from India in 2016.
- A Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (India) spokesperson told The Hindu that it has complained repeatedly to GEAC about the spread of illegal HT cotton in India.
- When asked about the reports of illegal cultivation of Bt Brinjal in Haryana, a Mahyco spokesperson said the company could not respond until Friday.

### **Biohazard contamination:**

- This is a biohazard contamination and must be treated seriously," said Rajinder Chaudhary, an activist with the KudartiKhetiAbhiyan, Haryana, detailing how the Bt Brinjal was found on a half-acre plot in Fatehabad, a few hours drive from the national capital.
- He demonstrated the strip test that showed the vegetable has been genetically modified and added that samples have been shown to the Agriculture and Horticulture departments of the Haryana government and sent to the GEAC as well.
- This is clearly a failure of concerned government agencies that illegal Bt brinjal is being cultivated in the country. GEAC is full of vested interests and behaves as a promotional body rather than a regulator," said Kapil Shah, an activist associated with the Coalition for a GM-Free India.



- He pointed out that regulators have previously turned a blind eye to the illegal cultivation of GM cotton and soyabean and demanded that Mahyco be held responsible for any leakage of seeds.
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## **Brain implant translates thought to speech**

### **Why in news?**

Now, scientists are reporting that they have developed a **virtual prosthetic voice**, a system that decodes the brain's vocal intentions and translates them into mostly understandable speech, with no need to move a muscle, even those in the mouth.

### **A great help:**

- This could help thousands of people who are reduced to painstaking means of communication as a result of injuries suffered in accidents or combat, of strokes, or of **neurodegenerative disorders** like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, that disable the ability to speak.
- It's formidable work, and it moves us up another level toward restoring speech.
- Researchers have developed other virtual speech aids. Those work by decoding the brain signals responsible for recognising letters and words. But those approaches lack the speed and fluidity of natural speaking.

### **Motor commands:**

- The new system, described in the journal Nature, **decipher the brain's motor commands guiding vocal movement during speech** the tap of the tongue, the narrowing of the lips and generates intelligible sentences that approximate a speaker's natural cadence.
- Experts said the new work represented a "proof of principle," a preview of what may be possible after further experimentation and refinement.
- The system was tested on people who speak normally; it has not been

tested in people whose neurological conditions or injuries, like common strokes, could make the decoding difficult or impossible.

### **New Trials:**

- For the new trial, scientists at the University of California, San Francisco, and UC Berkeley recruited five people who were in the hospital being evaluated for epilepsy surgery.
- Many people with **epilepsy** do poorly on medication and opt to undergo brain surgery. Before operating, doctors must first locate the **“hot spot” in each person’s brain where the seizures originate**; this is done with electrodes that are placed in the brain, or on its surface, and listen for tell-tale electrical storms.
- Pinpointing this location can take weeks. In the interim, patients go through their days with electrodes implanted in or near brain regions that are involved in movement and auditory signalling. These patients often consent to additional experiments that piggyback on those implants.
- The five such patients at UCSF agreed to test the virtual voice generator. Each had been implanted with one or two electrode arrays: stamp-size pads, containing hundreds of tiny electrodes, that were placed on the surface of the brain.

### **When neurons fire:**

- As each participant recited hundreds of sentences, the electrodes recorded the firing patterns of neurons in the motor cortex.
- The researchers associated those patterns with the subtle movements of the patient’s lips, tongue, larynx and jaw that occur during natural speech. The team then translated those movements into spoken sentences.
- Native English speakers were asked to listen to the sentences to test the fluency of the virtual voices. As much as 70% of what was spoken by the virtual system was intelligible, the study found.
- Previous implant-based communication systems have produced about eight words a minute. The new program generates about 150 words a minute, the pace of natural speech.

### **Synthesized voice system:**

- The researchers also found that a synthesized voice system based on

one person's brain activity could be used, and adapted, by someone else an indication that off-the-shelf virtual systems could be available one day.

- The team is planning to move to clinical trials to further test the system.
  - The biggest clinical challenge may be finding suitable patients: strokes that disable a person's speech often also damage or wipe out the areas of the brain that support speech articulation.
  - Still, the field of **brain-machine interface technology**, as it is known, is advancing rapidly, with teams around the world adding refinements that might be tailored to specific injuries.
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## **WHO says one in 10 children did not get vaccinated in 2016**

### **Why in news?**

Despite immunisation being one of the most successful and cost-effective means to help children grow into healthy adults, worldwide 12.9 million infants nearly 1 in 10 did not receive any vaccination in 2016.

### **Findings of the Who report:**

- The figures released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) during the ongoing immunisation week added that this means infants missed the first dose of **diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccine** putting them at serious risk of these potentially fatal diseases.
- What is worrying, says WHO, is the fact that "**global vaccination coverage remains at 85%**, with no significant changes during the past few years.
- An **additional 1.5 million deaths could be avoided** if global immunisation coverage improves.
- Over the years, the positive trend "has been the increasing uptake of new and underused vaccines".
- In fact, according to WHO in 2017, the number of children immunised 116.2 million was the highest-ever reported.

- Since 2010, 113 countries have introduced new vaccines, and more than 20 million additional children have been vaccinated.
  - But despite gains, all of the targets for disease elimination including **measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus, are behind schedule**, and over the last two years, the world has seen multiple outbreaks of measles, diphtheria and various other vaccine-preventable diseases.
  - Most of the children missing out are those **living in the poorest, marginalised and conflict-affected communities**,” it warned.
  - Immunisation prevents illness, disability and death from vaccine-preventable diseases including cervical cancer, diphtheria, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), pneumonia, polio, rotavirus diarrhoea, rubella and tetanus.
  - An estimated 169 million children missed out on the first dose of the measles vaccine between 2010 and 2017, UNICEF said.
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## **Scientists track Indian Ocean's plastic**

### **Why in news?**

The Indian Ocean is the **world's biggest dumping ground for plastic waste**, but where the trash ultimately ends up has remained a mystery, scientists say.

### **Findings of the Study:**

- According to researchers from the University of Western Australia (UWA), little research had been done to **measure and track plastic waste in the Indian Ocean**.
- The team found that the unique characteristics of the southern Indian Ocean pushes floating plastics towards the western side of the ocean, where it leaks past South Africa into the South Atlantic Ocean.
- Because of the **Asian monsoon system**, the southeast trade winds in the southern Indian Ocean are stronger than the trade winds in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans
- In the **northern Indian Ocean**, the simulations showed that there

may be an **accumulation in the Bay of Bengal**.

- It is also most likely that floating plastics will **ultimately end up on beaches**, transported by the reversing monsoon winds and currents, researchers said.
  - Our study shows that the atmospheric and oceanic attributes of the Indian Ocean are different to other ocean basins and that there may not be a concentrated garbage patch.
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## **World's forests in emergency room**

### **Why in news?**

The **world lost 12 million hectares** (30 million acres) of tropical tree cover last year, researchers said, warning the planet's health was at stake.

#### **Global Forest Watch:**

Global Forest Watch is an open-source web application to monitor global forests in near real-time. GFW is an initiative of the **World Resources Institute**, with partners including Google, USAID, the University of Maryland, Esri, Vizzuality and many other academic, non-profit, public, and private organizations.

### **Serious Concern:**

- It was the fourth highest annual decline since records began in 2001, according to new data from **Global Forest Watch**, which uses satellite imagery and remote sensing to monitor tree cover losses from Brazil to Ghana.
- The world's forests are now in the emergency room. It's death by a thousand cuts the health of the planet is at stake and band aid responses are not enough.
- The data represented "heart-breaking losses in real places," with **indigenous communities most vulnerable** to losing their homes and livelihoods through deforestation.
- The loss of huge swathes of forest around the world also has **major implications for climate change** as they absorb a third of the

planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions produced globally.

- Forests are our greatest defence against climate change and biodiversity loss, but deforestation is getting worse.
- Bold action is needed to tackle this global crisis including restoring lost forests. But unless we stop them being destroyed in the first place, we're just chasing our tail.
- The study found much of the loss occurred in primary rainforest mature trees that absorb more carbon and are harder to replace.

### **Deforestation Hotspots:**

- The rate of destruction in 2018 was lower than in the two previous years. It peaked in 2016 when about 17 million hectares of tropical forest were lost due partly to rampant forest fires, according to the WRI.
  - The study highlighted new deforestation hotspots, particularly in Africa, **where illegal mining, small-scale forest clearing and the expansion of cocoa farms** led to an increase in tree loss in countries such as Ghana and the Ivory Coast.
  - Indonesia was a rare bright spot, with primary forest loss slowing for two years running, after the government imposed a moratorium on forest-clearing.
  - Indonesia has the world's third largest total area of tropical forest and is also the biggest producer of palm oil. **Environmentalists blame much of the forest destruction on land clearance for oil-palm plantations.**
  - Last year, leading philanthropists pledged a \$459 million commitment to rescue shrinking tropical forests that suck heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere at a Global Climate Action Summit in California.
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