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Current Affairs

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Grafting

- Graft, in horticulture, the joining together of plant parts by means of tissue regeneration. Grafting is the act of placing a portion of one plant (bud or scion) into or on a stem, root, or branch of another (stock) in such a way that a union will be formed and the partners will continue to grow.
- The part of the combination that provides the root is called the stock; the added piece is called the scion. When more than two parts are involved, the middle piece is called the interstock.
- When the scion consists of a single bud, the process is called budding. Grafting and budding are the most widely used vegetative propagation methods.
- The principles involved in grafting are based on the matching of scion and stock cambiums (meristematic tissue, the cells of which are undifferentiated and capable of frequent cell division).
- Cambial tissue in most woody trees and shrubs is an inconspicuous single cell layer covering the central core of wood and lying directly beneath the bark.

Uses:

- In modern horticulture grafting is used for a variety of purposes: to repair injured trees, to produce dwarf trees and shrubs, to strengthen plants' resistance to certain diseases, to retain varietal characteristics, to adapt varieties to adverse soil or climatic conditions, to ensure pollination, to produce multifruited or multiflowered plants, and to propagate certain species (such as hybrid roses) that can be propagated in no other way.

- The interaction of rootstocks may affect the performance of the stock through dwarfing or invigoration and, in some cases, may affect quality. Further, the use of more than one component can affect the disease resistance and hardiness of the combination.
 - Grafting as a means of growth control is used extensively with fruit trees and ornamentals such as roses and junipers. Fruit trees are normally composed of a scion grafted onto a rootstock. Sometimes an interstock is included between the scion and stock.
 - The rootstock may be grown from seed (seedling rootstock) or asexually propagated (clonal rootstock). In the apple, a great many clonal rootstocks are available to give a complete range of dwarfing; rootstocks are also available to invigorate growth of the scion cultivar.
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Supreme Court gives RBI 'last chance' to alter disclosure policy

Why in news?

The Supreme Court gave the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) “a last opportunity” to withdraw a **November 2016 Disclosure Policy** to the extent to which it stonewalls revelation of every other kind of information under the Right to Information Act, including the list of wilful defaulters and annual inspection reports.

SC Directions:

- A Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and M.R. Shah found the policy of the central bank to be **directly contrary to the court's judgment of December 2015 that the Reserve Bank could not withhold information sought under the RTI Act.**
- The Bench was hearing contempt petitions filed against the RBI for not complying with the 2015 judgment.
- We give them a last opportunity to withdraw the disclosure policy insofar as it contains exemptions which are contrary to the directions issued by this court,” Justice Rao said, giving an ultimatum in the 12-

page verdict.

- The **2015 judgment had rejected the RBI's argument that it could refuse information** sought under the RTI on the grounds of economic interest, commercial confidence, fiduciary relationship or public interest.

No fiduciary ties:

- The court had observed that there was “no fiduciary relationship between the RBI and the financial institutions”.
- The court, in 2015, reminded the **RBI that it had the statutory duty to uphold the interests of the public at large**, the depositors, the economy and the banking sector.
- This court was also of the opinion that the RBI should act with transparency and not hide information that might embarrass the individual banks,” Justice Rao wrote.
- The RBI is duty-bound to comply with the provisions of the RTI Act and disclose the information. The submission made on behalf of the RBI that the disclosure would hurt the economic interests of the country was found to be totally misconceived,” Justice Rao wrote.

Matters of national economic interest:

- The court however said some matters of national economic interest like disclosure of information about currency or exchange rates, interest rates, taxes, the regulation or supervision of banking, insurance and other financial institutions, proposals for expenditure or borrowing and foreign investments could harm the national economy, particularly, if released prematurely.
 - However, lower-level economic and financial information like contracts and departmental budgets should not be withheld under this exemption,” Justice Rao wrote, referring to the 2015 verdict of the apex court.
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Let Bobde panel finish probe first, says ex-judge Patnaik

Why in news?

Justice A.K. Patnaik, the retired Supreme Court judge appointed by the court to check a lawyer's claim of a "larger conspiracy" against Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, said that he would not begin his assignment until the in-house inquiry into a former court staffer's complaint of sexual harassment against the Chief Justice was completed.

Own decision:

- The former judge said a scrutiny of the conspiracy claim could wait as he was not on a deadline.
- The decision to wait seems to be Justice Patnaik's own as there is no specific direction from the court. On the other hand, the Special Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra, which appointed Justice Patnaik on April 25, said a probe into the "larger plot" would not queer the inquiry into the sexual harassment complaint.
- The priority, Justice Patnaik said, is now the in-house inquiry into her complaint. The Justice Bobde panel, also comprising Justices Indu Malhotra and Indira Banerjee, heard the complainant on April 26.
- Justice Patnaik's words address apprehensions in legal and public quarters that a "parallel" probe may jeopardise whatever defence the woman may put up before the Justice Bobde Committee. Despite the Bench's assurances, Justice Patnaik pushed the pause button so the complainant would have no reason to fear prejudice.

Claims of Conspiracy:

- The retired judge has been tasked by the Special Bench to examine the claims made by a young lawyer, Utsav Singh Bains, that a powerful lobby of fixers, disgruntled apex court employees and corporate figures are targeting the CJI and the highest judiciary.
- Mr. Bains has even claimed in his affidavit that a man claiming to be the complainant-woman's relative offered him up to Rs. 1.5 crore to file a false case against the CJI.

PepsiCo goes easy as case turns a hot potato

Why in news?

Facing boycott calls after it sued four Gujarati potato farmers for Rs. 4.2 crore, food and beverages giant PepsiCo has offered to settle the case if the farmers stop growing the registered potato variety used in its Lays chips. Farmer groups across the political spectrum have joined a growing chorus of outrage on social media to demand that PepsiCo withdraw its rights infringement case.

Ready for settlement:

- In an Ahmedabad civil court on Friday, PepsiCo's lawyer offered a settlement on these terms: the farmers must give an undertaking that they will not use its registered variety and surrender their existing stocks, or must enter **PepsiCo's collaborative farming programme** where farmers buy seeds from the company and sell produce back to it.
- The lawyer for the farmers said they would need time to consider the offer and to reply to the court. The next hearing is on June 12.

'Last resort:

- A company spokesperson said PepsiCo India had proposed to amicably settle with people who were unlawfully using seeds of its registered variety.
- The company was compelled to take the judicial recourse as a last resort to safeguard the larger interest of thousands of farmers that are engaged with its collaborative potato farming programme.
- PepsiCo has invoked Section 64 of the **Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001** to claim infringement of its rights.
- However, farmers' groups cite Section 39 of the same Act, which says that a farmer is allowed "to save, use, sow, resow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce, including seed of a variety protected under this Act," so long as he does not sell "branded seed."
- Farmers' groups as well as the corporate farming industry see the case as a precedent that could have a far-reaching effect on how other food crops are developed, sown and sold.

U.K. optimistic China will turn on Azhar

Why in news?

The United Kingdom is “optimistic” that China will allow the UN Security Council terror listing of Masood Azhar, British High Commissioner to India Dominic Asquith said.

Optimistic hopes:

- We are waiting to see whether the country which has been resisting the listing will lift that objection,” said Mr. Asquith.
- The issue is likely to be discussed during the upcoming visit of top U.K. diplomat and head of the Foreign and Commonwealth office Simon McDonald, who will meet Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale here on May 10.
- **After the Pulwama attack, the U.K., U.S. and France pursued** the listing of the Jaish-e-Mohammad leader, first ensuring a UNSC statement was issued condemning JeM specifically, and then followed it up with a **proposal to designate Azhar as a terrorist at the UNSC 1267 Taliban Sanctions Committee.**
- After China placed a hold on the designation on March 13, the three countries had tried to take a tougher line, **threatening China** with bringing the proposal to the full UN Security Council, and “publicly shaming” the Chinese government into agreeing to the proposal.

Strong Resistance from China:

- While none of the tacks appear to have moved Beijing thus far, MEA officials say they are more optimistic after Mr. Gokhale’s visit to Beijing last week, where he raised the subject.
- In a press statement on April 22, MEA spokesperson Raveesh Kumar had said that Mr. Gokhale had “shared with China all evidence of terrorist activities of Jaish-e-Mohammad and its leader Masood Azhar,” and now awaited the decision of the 1267 Sanctions Committee as well as of “other authorised bodies of the UN.”

- According to UNSC rules, China has until September 2019 to lift the hold or ask for another extension of three months to decide on the Azhar listing, which it has vetoed on several occasions in the past decade.
 - Officials say they are keen to see movement on the issue before the next summit-level meeting of the Prime Minister with Chinese President Xi Jinping in India, being planned in the months following the elections.
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Zahran Hashim spent time in south India'

Why in news?

Investigators identified Hashim as the leader of the National Thowheed Jamaath, which they said executed the highly coordinated blasts.

IS Claim:

- Over 250 people, including 45 children and 40 foreign nationals, were killed in the deadly explosions.
- Two days later, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks and subsequently released an image of eight suspected bombers. The man seen standing at the centre is believed to be Hashim. The other jihadists had covered their faces with a scarf.
- Sri Lankan investigators, however, have identified nine suicide bombers, including a woman.
- "We are looking into the IS angle. We also suspect that some of those radical youth were indoctrinated and trained in India, possibly Tamil Nadu," the senior official said
- Indian officials would not comment on the report that Hashim travelled to India but pointed to evidence of virtual links he maintained with youth believed to be of Indian origin.
- More than 100 followers of Hashim's Facebook page are being investigated, said an official, who asked not to be named.
- The first hints of Hashim's doctrinal videos, to likely radicalise youth, emerged when Indian authorities interrogated seven members of a

group whose leader, officials found, was a follower of Hashim.

- The men where IS sympathisers and arrested in September 2018 in Coimbatore, on suspicion that they were plotting the assassination of certain political and religious leaders in India, the official said.
- Sri Lankan authorities, who have so far not named any of the nine suicide bombers or suspects officially, on 26th April confirmed Hashim was one of the two suicide bombers who carried out the explosions at hotel Shangri-La, on Colombo's sea-facing Galle Road.

Denies charges:

- In the wake of reports that terror suspects from Coimbatore had links with the IS and played a role in the Sri Lankan blasts, one of the suspects now on bail, Ashiq from the Marakkadai area in Coimbatore, has denied the allegations.
 - Ashiq was one of the seven arrested by the police in September last year on charges of plotting to kill Hindu outfit leaders and subsequently the case was transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).
 - The NIA had claimed to have seized incriminating digital evidence from the premises of the suspects.
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BRI has entered a new era of transparency

Why in news?

China announced that the financial model for funding projects under its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) had been revamped, countering criticism that its mega-connectivity undertaking was opening “**debt traps**” for enhancing its geopolitical influence.

New Principles:

- We have also formulated guiding principles of financing the development of the Belt and Road and published **debt sustainability framework** for participating countries to provide guidance for BRI

financing cooperation,” Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his keynote address at the second Belt and Road Forum (BRF).

- Mr. Xi’s opening remarks highlighted the subtext of rivalry with the U.S. in setting the global agenda.
- In the presence of 37 country heads, chief of the International Monetary Fund Christine Lagarde and Secretary-General of the UN Antonio Guterres, as well as representatives of scores of nations, he docked the BRI with a new phase of globalisation, anchored by China and its partners.
- **India has decided to skip the BRF in opposition to the BRI’s China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).** New Delhi has noted that it is an infringement of its sovereignty.

Addressing concerns:

- Mr. Xi stressed that China “will work with others” to write new rules of international trade within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Rules and credibility underpin the effective functioning of the international governance system.
- China is an active supporter and participant of the WTO and will work with others to develop international economic and trade rules of higher standard, he said.
- China has been **accused of funding unsustainable projects under BRI**, which could be leveraged for extending Beijing’s political influence in geopolitically sensitive countries such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives, which skirt important shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean.

Zero tolerance:

- But countering the charge of China having a hidden agenda, Mr. Xi said: “In pursuing Belt and Road cooperation, everything should be done in a transparent way. We should have zero tolerance for corruption”.
- He added: “We also need to ensure the commercial and fiscal sustainability of all projects so that they will achieve the intended goals as planned.”
- Mr. Xi stressed that the BRI projects would encourage participation by multilateral and national financial institutions and encourage joint

ventures in third countries.

- They would seek the involvement of “multiple stake holders”, for projects pursuing a “people-centered” approach focused on “job creation” and countering poverty.

Lending scheme:

- We will continue to make a good use of the Belt and Road special lending scheme, the Silk Road Fund and various special investment funds, develop Silk Road themed bonds and support the multilateral cooperation centre for development finance in its operation,” he said.
 - The BRI, he said, would pursue “**high quality**” schemes **attuned to “international rules and standards”** covering the procurement, tendering and bidding processes.
 - **Unveiled in 2013, the BRI is a giant land and maritime connectivity project**, driven to revive the Ancient Silk Road.
 - It covers Eurasia and Africa, building a network of expressways. Ahead of the BRF, **Italy has become the first G-7 country to formally join the BRI.**
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Anti-Muslim riots a possible trigger'

Why in news?

The spate of anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka in recent years could have been a reason for more youth to turn radical and mobilise, according to a top Sri Lankan military intelligence source.

Communal Tensions:

- “While screening records of conversations among the suspects, we found references to the communal tensions in the recent past. They have spoken of the need to retaliate. We believe those tensions could have been a motivation,” the sources said.
- While authorities are probing different angles to the suspects’ possible links to the Islamic State, which has claimed the attacks,

they are simultaneously examining the youths' local context and environment that may have contributed to their veering into a radical path.

- The official, who asked not to be named, was referring to the incidents in **March 2018 around Kandy city in the Central Province**, when violent mobs of reportedly Sinhalese youth identified and attacked several Muslim-owned shops.
- Rows of shops were set ablaze. At least two Muslims were reported dead in the violence, while shop owners reported losses to the tune of millions.
- Despite locals alerting the police, little action was taken to contain the violence or damage, Muslim people and community leaders complained at that time.

Old fears:

- Even as he strongly condemned the “cowardly and barbaric” Easter attacks, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress Leader Raulff Hakeem urged citizens to be mindful of “agents of disharmony and destabilisation”, and not to fall prey to “sinister designs”.
- For many like him, the attacks instantly sparked fears of a backlash, amid fresh memories of targeted attacks in Kandy, just a year ago, and other anti-Muslim attacks in recent years, led and backed by hard-line **Sinhala Buddhist groups**, particularly the **Bodu Bala Sena (BBS)** and its militant monk-leader Gnanasara Thero.

Three years ago:

- The **trend began around 2012**, barely three years after the Sri Lankan armed forces defeated the LTTE, bringing the country's three decade-long war to an end.
- **Reactionary groups among Sinhala Buddhists** campaigned against the Hijab and then sought a ban on Halal certification, forcing shops to stop selling meat labelled according to Islamic guidelines.
- A few Muslim-owned chains were attacked. In 2014, mobs attacked homes and properties of Muslims living in the southern town of Aluthgama.
- Ensuing clashes claimed at least four lives. To many, it seemed that **Muslims who make up about 10% of Sri Lanka's population** had emerged a new adversary to hard-line sections of the majority

Sinhala-Buddhists. The Muslims had not retaliated in any of those instances.

Treading cautiously:

- That is perhaps why some in Sri Lanka are treading this moment, following the ghastly attacks carried out by a radical Islamist organisation, rather cautiously.
 - Several Christian leaders, including the Archbishop of Sri Lanka Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, who have vehemently condemned the attacks have simultaneously called for peace and calm, often explicitly making a distinction between “brothers” in the Muslim community and the attackers.
 - Appreciating the vulnerability of the Muslim community, in the wake of attacks they have faced in the past few years, some leaders are repeatedly pointing to the community’s own disapproval of a section’s radicalisation or violence.
 - Tamil National Leader M.A. Sumanthiran told parliament earlier this week that “the Muslim people, to their credit, have repeatedly complained about these miscreants” to authorities, but to no avail.
 - Religious and civil society organisations too are repeatedly calling for solidarity among different communities.
 - The Women’s Coalition for Disaster Management in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Batticaloa district has said: “We have to work together in order to prevent the already strained ethnic relations from growing into full blown splits between communities that have always coexisted in our region.”
 - A statement by Jaffna-based Christians across denominations said: “We will never place any responsibility on our brothers and sisters of any community for the dastardly and cruel acts of a few.”
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1 million species risk extinction due to humans

Why in news?

Up to one million species face extinction due to human influence, according to a **draft UN report** that painstakingly catalogues how

humanity has undermined the natural resources upon which its very survival depends.

Findings of the Report:

- The accelerating loss of clean air, drinkable water, forests, pollinating insects, protein-rich fish and storm-blocking mangroves to name but a few of the dwindling services rendered by Nature poses no less of a threat than climate change, says the report, set to be unveiled on May 6.
- Indeed, biodiversity loss and global warming are closely linked, according to the 44-page summary for policymakers, which distils a 1,800-page UN assessment of scientific literature on the state of Nature.
- Delegates from 130 nations meeting in Paris from April 29 will vet the executive summary line-by-line. Wording may change, but figures lifted from the underlying report cannot be altered.
- We need to recognise that **climate change and loss of Nature are equally important**, not just for the environment, but as development and economic issues as well," said Robert Watson, chair of the UN-mandated body that compiled the report.

Unsustainable methods:

- The way we produce our food and energy is undermining the **regulating services** that we get from Nature," he said, adding that only "transformative change" can stem the damage.
- The report warns of "an imminent rapid acceleration in the global rate of species extinction"
- The pace of loss "is already tens to hundreds of times higher than it has been, on average, over the last 10 million years," it notes. **"Half-a-million to a million species are projected to be threatened with extinction, many within decades."**
- If we're going to have a sustainable planet that provides services to communities around the world, we need to change this trajectory in the next ten years, just as we need to do that with climate," noted WWF chief scientist.
- The direct causes of species loss, in order of importance, are **shrinking habitat and land-use change, hunting for food or**

illicit trade in wildlife body parts, climate change and pollution, the report finds.

Proteins hold key to healthy babies

Why in news?

“Eating for two” is a common way woman look at nourishment all through pregnancy. Now a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition shows that an optimal diet with relatively more protein is needed during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy for proper growth and development of the baby.

Protein requirements:

- To accurately estimate the daily protein requirement in pregnant Indian women, a whole-body potassium counting instrument was built at St. John’s Research Institute in Bengaluru, with financial support from the Centre’s Department of Biotechnology.
- This facility was used to arrive at estimates of protein requirements in 38 urban, well-nourished, middle class Indian pregnant women, who had normal pregnancies and delivered babies of an average birth weight of three kg.
- For a gestational weight gain of 10 kg, pregnant Indian women should eat an additional 7.6 grams and 17.6 grams of protein per day during the second (3 - 6 months) and third trimester (6-9 months) respectively, the researchers found.
- It is clear that the extra food that a pregnant woman must eat should be high quality, in terms of its protein content such as milk and milk products, dals, rice and dal blends, eggs, fish and meat.

Diet check:

- It is important to meet these additional protein requirements during pregnancy directly from the diet, rather than to use high protein supplements, except in special situations where the diet is not able to

meet the requirements for protein.

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development's **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** Scheme provides supplementary nutrition services for children (6 months – 6 years) and pregnant and lactating women.
 - As a part of the service, food supplements of 600 calories and 18-20 grams of protein/day are provided in the form of micro nutrient fortified food and/or take-home ration to the pregnant women.
 - The amount of 600 calories provided may, however, be high for some women and if the pregnant woman does not eat the entire amount allotted to her, it is likely that her protein intake may not be adequate and those requirements will not be met.
 - Rather than focussing on large amounts of cereals and calories, it is important to include combinations of **high protein foods** such as milk, dal and egg in the meals provided to the pregnant women. This can be considered for future programmes.
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