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Thrissur Pooram

Why in news?

Lakhs of people made a beeline to the Thekkinkadu Maidan and Swaraj Round to witness the festivities of annual extravaganza. The sounds of trumpets and tolling bells were everywhere. The effort showed in the splendour with which Thrissur Pooram unfurled on Monday.

Powered by Rubicon Project:

- The pooram signifies the meeting of deities of 10 temples in the region. The 36-hour-long festivities began with the arrival of Kanimangalam Sastha by 7.30 a.m.
- It was followed by processions from Panamukkumpally Sastha, Karamukku Bhagavathy, Lalur Bhagavathy, Naithalakkavu Bhagavathy, Choorakkattukavu Bhagavathy, Ayyanthole Karthyayani and Chembukkavu Karthyayani temples.
- Accompanied by percussion ensembles, these deities were brought on caparisoned elephants to the **Sree Vadakkunnathan temple**.
- The festival is synonymous with elephants and the ban on popular tusker Thechikkottukavu Ramachandran had created such a furore that the Collector had to give permission to parade the animal for an hour.
- Around 90 elephants participated in various functions of pooram. One could find elephants on every street. The entire city smelt of jumbos.
- The Thekke Gopura Nada was teeming with people for Kudamattom, a parade of richly caparisoned elephants with ornamental umbrellas.
- People hooted and waved as umpteen parasols were changed in a

friendly competition between Devaswoms.

- Pyrotechnic wizards will leave a riot of colour on the sky on Tuesday morning. Pakal pooram, called Thattakathe Pooram, will be celebrated on Tuesday.
 - Processions, elephants, percussion ensembles, and fireworks there was something for everyone. The balmy weather, sweat, and dust did nothing to dampen the spirit of pooram fans.
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China hits back, imposes tariff hike on U.S. goods

Why in news?

China said it will raise tariffs on \$60 billion worth of U.S. goods from June 1, in retaliation to the latest round of U.S. tariff hikes and Washington's plans to target almost all Chinese imports.

Tariff Retaliation:

- The announcement came after the latest round of U.S.-China trade negotiations ended on Friday without a deal, and after Washington increased tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods.
- U.S. President Donald Trump had also ordered the start of a process to impose new duties on another \$300 billion worth of Chinese items.

Time for resolution:

- Despite the retaliation, Beijing appeared to give time to find a resolution by setting the June 1 date
- The new rates will target a number of American imports with tariffs ranging from 5% to 25%, according to a statement by the Tariff Policy Commission of the State Council China's Cabinet.
- The Chinese response was announced soon after Mr. Trump warned Beijing not to retaliate.
- China should not retaliate-will only get worse the U.S. President wrote in a series of tweets on trade.
- But Beijing appeared to dig in. China will never surrender to external pressure, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said.

Other measures:

- In addition to tariff hikes, China could also use other measures to hit back at the U.S., as it imports fewer U.S. products which limits its ability to match tariffs dollar-for-dollar.
 - **China may stop purchasing U.S. agricultural products and energy**, reduce Boeing orders and restrict U.S. service trade with China.
 - Many Chinese scholars are discussing the possibility of **dumping U.S. Treasuries** and how to do it specifically.
 - Both sides have indicated that talks will continue, with Beijing's top trade negotiator, Liu He, saying that they would take place in the Chinese capital at an unspecified date.
 - In a previous round of tit-for-tat moves, the U.S. imposed 10% tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese imports in September.
 - Beijing announced shortly after that it was hitting over 5,000 categories of U.S. products with tariffs of 5 to 10%.
 - White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told U.S. media that Mr. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping could meet next month on the sidelines of the G20 summit to hash out their differences on trade, although no new talks are scheduled.
 - The two Presidents maintain contact through various means," the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said, without confirming a possible meeting between the two leaders.
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Discourse on WTO reform lacks balance

Why in news?

The reforms being promoted in the World Trade Organization (WTO) are not in favour of the developing countries, the Ministry of Commerce said.

India's Concerns:

- Addressing the inaugural session of the WTO ministerial meeting, Commerce Secretary Anup Wadhawan said the **existential**

challenges to the multilateral rules-based trading system were manifest in a spate of unilateral measures and counter measures, deadlock in key areas of negotiations and the impasse in the appellate body.

- The situation in the WTO has spurred a strong discourse for reforming the WTO, which, unfortunately, is characterised by a complete lack of balance,” a Commerce Ministry statement quoted him as saying at the inaugural session of the meeting.
- The reform agenda being promoted **does not address the concerns of the developing countries**,” the Commerce Secretary added.
- Mr. Wadhawan said that the meeting would provide a chance to reaffirm the resolve to keep development at the centre of the reform agenda.

Reforms needed:

- The **reform initiatives must promote inclusiveness and non-discrimination**, build trust and address the inequalities and glaring asymmetries in existing agreements,” Mr. Wadhawan said.
- These asymmetries are against the interest of developing countries including LDCs[least developed countries]. There is a need to work together to put issues of importance for developing countries and their priorities in the reform agenda.
- The fundamentals of the global multilateral trade system were being tested through a **tide of protectionism around the world** that was vitiating the global economic environment, Mr. Wadhawan said. This was not a situation that boded well for developing countries and LDCs, he added.
- **India believes that developing countries need to work together to protect their interests in the WTO negotiations** through preservation of the core fundamental principles of the WTO,” he said.
- The two-day meet gives an opportunity to the participating countries of developing a shared WTO reform proposal on issues of priority and interest for developing countries.

CPI inflation rose to six-month high

Why in news?

Retail inflation **quicken**ed to a six-month high of 2.92% in April, driven in large part by accelerating **food and fuel inflation**, according to official data released.

Rising Trend:

- Growth in the consumer price index (CPI) quickened in April from 2.86% in March.
- Within the index, growth in the **food and beverages segment accelerated** to 1.38% in April compared with 0.66% in March.
- Similarly, the **fuel and light segment saw inflation quickening** to 2.56% from 2.34% over the same period.

Core inflation:

- CPI headline inflation came slightly below expectations, with core inflation seeing a welcome downside surprise, which is in tandem with the growing slack in the economy.
- Moreover, food inflation continued to rise with sustained upward momentum in fruits and vegetables. We expect this trend to continue over the summer months.
- Inflation in the pan, tobacco and intoxicants eased to 4.27% in April from 4.61% in March.
- Similarly, the clothing and footwear segment saw inflation slowing to 2.01% from 2.52% over the same period.
- The housing segment saw inflation slowing to 4.76% in April from 4.93% in March.
- Based on this reading and the slowdown visible in industrial production, we maintain our call of another rate cut in the August policy, with the action being dependent on realised outcomes of monsoons and trajectory of oil prices.

CTBTO invites India to be an observer

Why in news?

The executive secretary of the **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)**, Lassina Zerbo, has invited India to be an observer in the CTBT.

As an Observer:

- I'm not asking India to ratify the treaty, I know that is not possible now but I think giving India the opportunity to join as an observer could be a good starting point," he said.
- He was speaking to a group of Indian journalists at the CTBTO in Vienna.
- He spoke of the changes in the organisation, which has moved from being more confined in **CTBT and International Monitoring System (IMS)**.
- This is because we are making the data available to people which is not traditional. This wasn't possible at the beginning of the organisation. We had what was called the 'task leader for data confidentiality', which does not exist any more," he said.
- **Being an observer would give India access to data from the IMS**, a network which when complete will consist of 337 facilities (321 monitoring stations and 16 radionuclide labs) located in 89 countries.
- **This system can detect even small nuclear explosions using seismology**, hydroacoustics, infrasound and radionuclide technology.
- I think India will gain a lot with data that you don't have access to now, it is clear to everyone that the IMS is the system that can provide this level of data. Nowhere can you get this quality of data necessary for earthquake monitoring and following the radioisotope dispersion," said Mr. Zerbo.

Flawed way:

- When asked for an opinion, Rakesh Sood, who was formerly a special envoy on disarmament, said: "The CTBT will never see the light of day. Because of the flawed way in which it was dealt with, we need not give it any legitimacy by considering this."
- Mr. Sood has served as India's Permanent Representative to the

Conference on Disarmament at the UN in Geneva.

- Mr. Zerbo also said he was urging China to take up leadership in this field. The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on whether the CTBTO proposal was under consideration.
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No evidence of Easter attacks suspects having travelled to India

Why in news?

There is no evidence of suspects linked to the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka having travelled to Indian cities in recent years, according to official Indian sources.

Lack of information:

- Last week, Sri Lanka's Army Commander said Zahran Hashim, the alleged mastermind of the Easter Sunday terror attacks in Sri Lanka, likely transited Tamil Nadu when he travelled to other Indian cities.
- Top security officials also said they believe Hashim and some other suspects travelled to Bengaluru, Kashmir and parts of Kerala in late 2018.
- However, official Indian sources said the Army Commander had not shared any information with them.
- We are seeking further information to probe the angle, a source said, asking not to be identified due to the sensitivity of ongoing investigations.
- The reference to suspects travelling to India recently was at best "speculative", the source added.
- However, Indian records have revealed that two of the suicide bombers, Insaf Ibrahim and Ilham Ibrahim, visited India in 2012 on a business visa.
- The two are sons of a prominent Sri Lankan spice exporter who, according to sources close the family, has had long-standing trade links with India, especially Kerala.
- Following the April 21 Easter attacks, which Sri Lankan authorities

said were carried out by two local radical Islamist groups, investigators are probing how they might have come in contact with the IS, which has also claimed the attacks.

- Serial blasts rocked Colombo, nearby Negombo and Batticaloa on the island's east coast, killing over 250 people, including 45 children.
 - Nine suicide bombers, allegedly led by Zahran Hashim of Batticaloa, and including a woman, were identified by officials as chiefly responsible.
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Collegium recommends Chief Justices to four HCs

Why in news?

The Supreme Court Collegium has recommended names of four High Court judges for appointment as chief justices of the High Courts of Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Telangana.

Recommendations:

- As per the May 10 resolutions on the Supreme Court website, a **three-member Collegium**, headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, recommended the name of Justice D.N. Patel as the chief justice of the Delhi High Court.
- Similarly, the Collegium has recommended names of Justices A.A. Kureshi, V. Ramasubramanian and R.S. Chauhan for their appointment as chief justices of high courts of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Telangana respectively.
- Office of the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court would be falling vacant, consequent upon retirement of Justice Rajendra Menon, Chief Justice of that high court. Therefore, appointment to that office is required," the Collegium, also comprising Justices S.A. Bobde and N.V. Ramana, said.
- Recommending the name of Justice Ramasubramanian, the Collegium said it has considered the fact that at present there is only one chief justice from the Madras High Court

DNA database for Indian rhino

Why in news?

The Environment Ministry has embarked on a project to create DNA profiles of all rhinos in the country.

About the Project:

- By 2021, the **Indian rhino could be the first wild animal species in India to have all its members DNA-sequenced.**
- The project's proponents, including the World Wildlife Fund for Nature-India (**WWF-India**) and the **Centre-funded Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**, said the exercise would be useful in curbing poaching and gathering evidence in wildlife crimes involving rhinos.
- There are **about 2,600 rhinos in India, with over 90% of the population concentrated in Assam's Kaziranga National Park.**
- Around 60 samples of tissue have been collected so far from some rhinos living outside Kaziranga.

Experts ask NIN to withdraw report favouring Akshaya Patra

Why in news?

Doctors, researchers and activists addressed an open letter to scientists at the **National Institute of Nutrition (NIN)** asking them to withdraw a report that declared mid-day meals provided without onion and garlic by the **Akshay Patra Foundation (APF)** as compliant with the government's nutritional norms on grounds that the conclusion is not based on empirical evidence.

What is the issue?

- Karnataka government had sought a technical report from NIN **following complaints by the State Food Commission as well as civil society groups** about the foundation's refusal to provide onion and garlic in the food supplied to 2,814 schools in six districts in the State, which was in violation of norms prescribed by the local as well as the Central government.
- The National Institute of Nutrition, to our utter shock and dismay, has made sweeping statements praising Akshay Patra Foundation, without carrying out any systematic scientific study. **No empirical data was collected** on the quantity and quality of ingredients used or amount consumed and amount wasted by children to certify food supplied by APF as nutritionally adequate," says the letter signed by ten organisations and 94 individuals.
- Instead, the signatories say, the entire report had been prepared on the basis of a menu submitted by the Foundation.
- We urge you to withdraw the report immediately pending a systematic field evaluation of the food being supplied by APF, adds the letter.

Major Issues:

- The NIN was asked to look into four major issues **nutritional compliance, food safety measures, taste, and diversity of meals**.
- Earlier, the Karnataka State Food Commission (KSFC), following visits to schools, noted that the **food provided by APF was bland and monotonous**, as a result of which children were consuming less than the prescribed quantity of meals, defeating the purpose of the mid-day meal scheme.
- The letter also highlights how another institute that was asked to look into the matter, **Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI)**, sought "four to six" months to be able to comment on the issue.
- Activists say that following the KSFC's findings, a specific menu was prescribed for contractors, but APF had violated these norms.
- They also say that APF's refusal to provide onion and garlic on religious grounds is a violation of the law.

AI project eyes early stage diabetic retinopathy

Why in news?

In a first for Mumbai, early stage diabetic retinopathy has been detected using artificial intelligence (AI) at civic-run dispensaries.

Unique Project:

- The unique project is being implemented by the Aditya Jyot Foundation for Twinkling Little Eyes (AJFTLE) and, in a span of eight months, nearly 1,300 diabetes patients have been screened on a retinal imaging device attached to a smartphone.
- Commenced in August 2018, the Foundation has screened patients in 18 civic-run dispensaries across the city.
- Till March this year, 92 patients were diagnosed with early stage diabetic retinopathy and referred to municipal hospitals or the Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital for further treatment.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** is tricky because there are no early signs. That's why screening is the only way to detect the complication early and prevent diabetic blindness.

Common cause:

- **Diabetic retinopathy is the commonest diabetic eye disease**; it damages blood vessels in light-sensitive tissue at the back of the retina.
- While some patients may have symptoms like **blurred vision or impaired colour vision**, it's a common cause of blindness in the diabetic population.
- A robust screening programme is thus the need of the hour.
- As a part of the AI project, technicians from the Aditya Jyot Foundation visit civic dispensaries along with Remedio Fundus on Phone, a portable device attached to a smartphone equipped with retinal imaging.
- After the patient's eye images are clicked, the AI on the device

screens them for signs of diabetic retinopathy, and prompts technicians on whether they should be referred to a hospital or not. If the image is unclear, the device also prompts a retake of the picture.

- Besides diabetic retinopathy, 97 patients, who had been referred, were diagnosed with cataract, and 69 had other eye diseases, including retinitis pigmentosa, age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma, of which they were unaware.

Verified by the Doctors:

- The AI diagnosis cannot be termed as the last word. Thus, the diagnosis is verified by an ophthalmologist when the patient is referred further.
- But this is an excellent tool to indicate the risk of retinopathy in patients. Also, the added advantage is that the device does not depend on an Internet network and is completely offline.

A growing challenge:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that diabetes is a growing challenge in India, with an estimated 8.7% diabetic population in the age group of 20 to 70 years.
- There are an estimated **73 million diabetics in the country**. Of these, nearly 25% are at the risk of diabetic retinopathy.

