

1. PROTECTING THE BARRIER ECOSYSTEM

- ❑ Australia has announced a cull of coral-eating starfish that have been destroying the Great Barrier Reef, as part of a £35 million rescue package for the 1,500-mile stretch of delicate coast.
- ❑ The reef, off the north-east coast of the state of Queensland, has faced heavy coral damage in recent years from bleaching and warmer water temperatures as well as coastal development, agricultural and industrial pollution, storms and the starfish.
- ❑ Surveys by the Australian Institute of Marine Science found that coral cover declined by about 50 per cent between 1985 and 2012, and that crown-of-thorns starfish were responsible for almost half of this decline.
- ❑ The plan includes £21 million to prevent pollution from entering the reef, particularly from surrounding farms, as well as £6 million for an “all-out assault on coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish” and £3.5 million for research into improving the resilience of coral.
- ❑ The coral-eating starfish are naturally occurring but have proliferated due to pollution and agricultural run-off at the struggling reef.

2. CHINA IS LISTENING IN NEAR GUAM

- ❑ China has planted powerful listening devices in two strategic seabeds deep in the waters near Guam, America’s biggest military base in the Western Pacific.
- ❑ The cutting-edge acoustic sensors – some of which have a listening range of more than 1,000km – are being used for scientific research such as studying earthquakes, typhoons and whales, according to the Chinese government.
- ❑ But security experts say the sensors can also track the movement of submarines in the South China Sea and intercept underwater signals between the submarines and their command base.
- ❑ One of the acoustic sensors is located in the Challenger Deep of the Mariana Trench – the deepest place on Earth at 10,916 metres beneath sea level – and another is near Yap, an island in the Federated States of Micronesia.
- ❑ The Challenger Deep and Yap are respectively about 300km and 500km southwest of Guam, between Guam and Palau.
- ❑ Guam is home to the United States’ biggest military base in the Western Pacific and it is also an important resupply and maintenance centre for the submarines of other US naval forces in the Pacific region. Palau is one of the main entry points to the South China Sea for US naval vessels.

3. INTERNATIONAL DAM SAFETY CONFERENCE

India will be hosting the International Dam Safety Conference - 2018 at Thiruvananthapuram on January 23-24.

Dam safety conferences are organized as an annual event under the **Dam Safety Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) project** being run by the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD & GR) in the seven states of Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand. Launched in the year 2012 with a financial outlay of Rs. 2100 Crores, this **World Bank aided project** aims at the rehabilitation of old dams in the country that may be experiencing distress and are in need of attention for ensuring their structural safety and operational efficiency. The project also aims to strengthen the institutional capacity and project management in this area. As part of this exercise, DRIP has been engaged in bringing greater awareness on dam safety issues and finding novel solutions to address them by pooling the best technologies, knowledge and experience available around the world. In this direction, Dam Safety Conferences are being organized as annual events in the different DRIP states. Dam professionals, academicians, scientists, as well as industries assemble to deliberate on the problems associated with the dam safety and share the concepts, techniques, instruments, materials etc. available to address the design and construction of new dams, and also for monitoring, surveillance, operation, maintenance, rehabilitation along with disaster mitigation measures for existing dams.

A software programme - **Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring Application(DHARMA)**- will also be launched during the conference. DHARMA is a web tool to digitize all dam related data effectively. It will help to document authentic asset and health information pertaining to the large dams in the country, enabling appropriate actions to ensure need based rehabilitation. It is a new stride in asset management aspect by India.

The project DRIP consists of **three main components**; Component I: Rehabilitation of selected dams and their appurtenances; Component II: Institutional Strengthening; and Component III: Project Management. Institutional Strengthening includes capacity building in the DRIP Implementing Agencies through national and international training, equipping selected premier academic institutions in dam safety areas so that their expertise can be utilized to provide solutions to dam safety issues, assisting in the development of Emergency Action Plans (EAP) for dams, developing the software tool 'Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring Application (DHARMA)', Seismic Hazard Mapping for the entire Country and development of Seismic Hazard Assessment Information System (SHAISYS), preparation of Guidelines and Manuals, strengthening of Dam Safety Organisations etc.

Prelims bit

Gommateshwara Statue is a 57-foot (17 m) high monolithic statue located on Vindygiri Hill at Shravanbelagola in the Indian state of Karnataka.

An event known as **Mahamastakabhisheka** attracts devotees from all over the world.^[2] The Mahamastakabhisheka festival is held once in 12 years, when the Gommateshwara statue is anointed with milk, saffron, ghee, etc. to maintain its freshness.^[1] The next abhisheka will be in February 2018.

Less nationalism, more connectivity: ASEAN leader-Less nationalism, more connectivity: ASEAN leader

- On Monday, an ASEAN-India Business and Investment Meet and Expo brought Trade and Economy Ministers along with business delegations from ASEAN including Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines.
- Several officials will also travel to Assam and other northeastern States to inspect the possibilities for industry and trade, which would connect to South East Asia through projects in the pipeline like the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan multi-modal transport corridor expected to be completed in the next few years.
- However, Mr. Gongsakdi warned that unless India and ASEAN work out their reservations on free trade, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, they won't benefit from the infrastructure.
- Over the past few years, the RCEP negotiations have floundered largely over Indian concerns on unfettered Chinese entry into Indian markets through free trade with the ASEAN countries.

Editorial analysis

The colour of inequity-The government should rethink its decision to issue orange passports for those requiring emigration checks

Changes:

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Who gets orange passport

- ECR passport-holders are those who, among other things, have not passed their matriculation examination or are not income tax payees.

Why orange passports

- Data from the Protectorate General of Emigrants shows that a majority are likely to belong to a minority or marginalised community from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- To prevent the exploitation of such unskilled workers when they are employed in certain parts of the world, an ECR stamp is made on their passports

Inequality

By failing to use technology-led solutions to identify ECR passport-holders quickly, and issuing orange passports only to poor and marginalised migrant workers, the administration is creating a situation where some citizens will proudly carry the dark blue document while others will carry one that is an evidence of the failure of the state to provide education and income opportunities to all.

Way forward

1. Technology can be used to solve the issue in airports
2. Exploitation can be stopped in rural packets through awareness

Differentiating its people is not the way in democracy to make the system function.

The perilous march of Hindistan-The project to replace English with Hindi and other Indian languages is reaching an inflection point

The three-language policy

Parliament passed the Official Language Resolution in 1968, stipulating that a "modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages", be studied in Hindi-speaking areas (along with Hindi and English) and that Hindi be studied in areas where it is not spoken (along with the regional languages and English).

Effect of 3 language policy

- The three-language policy was meant for the entire country

- While non-Hindi-speaking States (except Tamil Nadu) adhered to the three-language policy, Hindi-speaking States took a U-turn: they not only gave up on teaching a non-Hindi language in their schools but effectively delegitimised English.
- Though the CPOL was created in 1976 “to review the progress made in the use of Hindi for the official purposes... of the Union” and make recommendations on the same, its current mandate is much more

Recommendations accepted by state

- It says that students in colleges and universities in non-Hindi-speaking States will henceforth have the option of taking exams and interviews in Hindi. It asks that government advertisements in Hindi newspapers be of “bigger size” and “at starting pages”, while those in English newspapers be of “relatively smaller size” and “in middle or ending pages”.
- In order to end the dominance of English (not its use), such schools should not be given recognition by the government which do not impart education in Hindi or mother tongue

Hindi made official language in UN

The move to make Hindi an official language at the UN was a recommendation that the Committee of Parliament on Official Language (CPOL) made in 2011.

State of Hindi

- Broadly, two factors are relevant to our language policy. One, English has become a global language and a certain fluency in it is taken as a given for mobility as well as for access to global knowledge. Hindi possesses no such advantages.
- Two, many non-Hindi Indian languages are older than Hindi and their speakers are justly proud of their rich cultural and literary heritage. They strive to make their respective languages prominent in governance and education, while keeping English for what it is. These States lack both the desire and the need to learn Hindi.

India finds itself sandwiched between a relentlessness that assumes semi-religious overtones to banish English and a vehemence with latent subnationalism to reject Hindi.

Refer

- **Getting back on the democratic path**
- **Trump quotes Modi to support Afghanistan stand**

Prelims mcq

1.Gommateshwara Statue

1. Placed in karnataka
2. Depicts bahubali
3. Part of Jainism

Select the correct answer

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 & 2 only
- c. 1,2 and 3 only
- d. None

Mains mcq

1. India gave itself a great system of democracy but now does not seem to know how to keep it up to standard. Comment.