

CIVIL SERVICE DIGEST (CSD-Daily)

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“Self-defence’ Theory Was Brought in to Cover up Tigress Avni’s Pre-meditated Killing, Probe Reveals

- The committee constituted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to enquire into the death of tiger T-1 (the official name of the tigress known as Avni) in Pandharkawada on November 2, has concluded that the dart shot to immobilise the big cat had been used about 56 hours after it was prepared, well past the recommended 24 hours.
- The probe panel also faulted the planning and conduct of the operation that resulted in the tigress being shot and killed.



National Tiger Conservation Authority

- NTCA is a statutory body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change.
- It was provided statutory status by the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 which had amended Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It addresses the administrative as well as ecological concerns for conserving tigers, by providing a statutory basis for protection of tiger reserves.
- It also provides strengthened institutional mechanisms for the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and endangered species.
- It ensures enforcing of guidelines for tiger conservation and monitoring compliance of the same.
- It also places motivated and trained officers having good track record as Field Directors of tiger reserves.

Related Concept – Project Tiger

- Aims at conserving India's national animal i.e. Tiger.
- Launched in 1973
- Currently there are 50 tiger reserves
- The tiger reserves are constituted on a core/buffer strategy.
- The core areas have the legal status of a national park or a sanctuary, whereas the buffer or peripheral areas are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.
- The Project Tiger aims to foster an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas of tiger reserves, with an inclusive people oriented agenda in the buffer.

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change providing central assistance to the tiger States for tiger conservation in designated tiger reserves.
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body of the Ministry, with an overarching supervisory / coordination role, performing functions as provided in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Wild tigers are found in 18 States in India.
- The All India tiger estimation is carried out once in every four years.

MHRD removes Kashmiri language from BhashaSangam portal

Context

- Kashmir-based literary bodies are up in arms against a move by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to withdraw Kashmiri translations from its language-promoting portal, BhashaSangam, after Kashmiri Pandits objected to the “regional script” of the language.
- The MHRD website, BhashaSangam, took down the Persian script, which is written from right to left like Urdu, and is widely used by the Muslim population of Jammu and Kashmir. However, Pandits prefer the Sharda script, which was in vogue around the 8th Century and is influenced by Sanskrit.
- Writer M.K. Kaw was the first Kashmiri Pandit to push a proposal in 2005 before the HRD Minister to change the script. However, it was opposed in Kashmir and the proposal was shelved.

BhashaSangam

- The government has launched a unique initiative called BhashaSangam to introduce school students to 22 Indian languages.
- The initiative under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat; BhashaSangam is a programme for schools and educational institutions to provide multilingual exposure to students in Indian languages.
- Another objective of BhashaSangam is to enhance linguistic tolerance and respect and promote national integration.
- There are 22 languages listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution but most students are familiar with only one or two languages.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

- Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat was announced on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of SardarVallabhbai Patel on 31st October (Ekta Divas).
- Through this innovative measure, the knowledge of the culture, traditions and practices of different states & UTs will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between the states, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India.

The Broad Objectives of the initiative are

- To celebrate the unity in diversity of our nation and to maintain and strengthen the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people of our country
- To promote the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all states and union territories through a year-long planned engagement between states.
- To showcase the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of either state for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity.

- To create an environment which promotes learning between states by sharing best practices and experiences.

Current account deficit widens to 2.9% of GDP in Q2

- Current account deficit (CA) widened to 2.9% of GDP for the July-September quarter due to higher trade deficit compared with 1.1% during the same period of the previous year, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.
- “The deficit widened due to sharp rise in oil prices. But now prices have corrected 31% from peak levels. Exports also picked up after rupee weakened against the dollar.
- The central bank had intervened in the currency market by selling dollars to arrest the sharp fall in rupee. In 2018 till October, the rupee had weakened 15% against the dollar but reversed trend in November as oil prices softened. Latest data released on Friday showed foreign exchange reserves increased by \$ 932.8 million to \$393.718 billion in the week to November 30.
- Overall, the country’s balance of payments was in deficit of \$1.9 billion in the July-September quarter as compared with a surplus of \$9.5 billion in the year ago period.

Widening gap
Current account deficit as % of GDP

QUARTER ENDED	Sept 2018	2.9
	June 2018	2.4
	March 2018	1.9
	Dec. 2017	2.0
	Sept. 2017	1.1
FISCAL YEAR	2017-18	1.9
	2016-17	0.6
	2015-16	1.1
	2014-15	1.3
	2013-14	1.7

Balance of Payments (BOP)

- Countries trade with one another to buy and sell the goods. With the advent of globalization, investment to and from have also increased many fold. A country's trade and other economic exchanges with the world are recorded on its external account in the form of balance of payment (BoP) transactions.
- There are two components of BoP – Current Account and Capital Account

Current Account

- It deals with current, ongoing, short term transactions like trade in goods, services (invisible) etc. It reflects the nation's net income.

The components of Current Account

- Goods – trade in goods
- Services (invisible) – trade in services e.g. tourism
- Income – investment income
- Current unilateral transfers – donations, gifts, grants, remittances Note that grants might appear as component of capital account but are included in current

account as they are unilateral, create no liability. Recipient does not have to give anything back in return.

Capital Account

- It deals with capital transactions i.e. those transactions which create assets or liabilities. It reflects the net changes in the ownership of national assets.

Components of Capital Account

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
- Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)
- External Borrowings such as ECB
- Reserve Account with the Central Bank

The foreign investment is under capital account but dividends and income from investment comes under current account in the category income from abroad as dividend is transferred periodically, does not result in creation of asset or liability.

Combined guided weapons firing exercise of Surface to Air Missile

Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa PVSM AVSM YSM VM ADC, Chief of the Air Staff arrived at Air Force Station Suryalankla on 07 Dec 18 on a two day visit to witness the combined guided weapons firing exercise of Surface to Air Missile.

About: This was a first of its kind Exercise undertaken by the Indian Air Force in which firing of four different class of missiles – AKASH, SPYDER, OSA-AK-M and IGLA was successfully carried out during day and night in an integrated networked environment.

AKASH:

- Akash (means sky in English) is a mid-range surface-to-air missile (SAM). It is medium range nuclear capable supersonic missile. It has been indigenously developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) under Integrated Guided-Missile Development Programme (IGMDP).
- It is multi target, multi directional, all weather air-defence missile system consisting of surveillance and tracking radars for defending vulnerable areas against medium range air targets penetrating from low, medium and high altitudes. It has supersonic speeds ranging from Mach 2.8 to 3.5.
- It has capability to carry 55- kg fragmentation warhead that is triggered by proximity fuse. It can engage aerial targets up to range of approximately 25 kms. It can reach high altitude of 18 kms and as low as 30 meters.

Spyder:

- Spyder (Surface-to-air PYthon and DERby) is an acquired missile system from Israel which is a short-range, quick reaction surface-to-air missile.
- It comprises two missiles- Python and Derby, with an active onboard radar which makes the Spyder system more lethal. Both the missiles are smokeless which makes it harder to detect them visually.
- It can neutralise enemy targets up to a distance of 15 km and at heights between 20 and 9000 metres.
- Besides aircraft and UAVs, it can also neutralise low-level cruise missiles.
- It is an all-weather missile which has an automatic process of engaging an aggressive aircraft or missile.
- Spyder is shorter than India's indigenously developed surface-to-air 'Akash' missile, which has a strike range of 25 km.

M.S. Swaminathan calls GM crops a failure

Context

- A research paper co-authored by leading agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan, which describes **Bt cotton as a ‘failure,’** was criticised by India’s Principal Scientific Adviser as ‘deeply flawed’.

Findings:

- The article is a **review of crop development in India and transgenic crops** — particularly Bt cotton, the **stalled Btbrinjal as well as DMH-11, a transgenic mustard hybrid.**
- It states that the precautionary principle (PP) has been done away with and no science-based and rigorous biosafety protocols and evaluation of GM crops are in place.
- BT crops have failed as a sustainable agriculture technology and have, therefore, also **failed to provide livelihood security for cotton farmers** who are mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers.

Not sustainable

Arguments raised by P.C. Kesavan and M. S. Swaminathan in their paper:

- Mutations and natural selection are the predominant evolutionary mechanisms to induce variations in flowering plants

- In r-DNA technology (Genetic Engineering or GE) all the molecular and cellular events which are triggered with the insertion of 'exogenous DNA', are not precisely understood

- Since cost of GE seeds and inputs as in Bt Cotton are exorbitant, small farmers are unable to withstand crop losses

- The site of a gene's insertion is not controllable, and health concerns from unintended effects



have been raised

- Precautionary principle has been done away with in India and no rigorous biosafety protocols and evaluation of GM crops are in place

- Bt cotton in India failed to live up to promises in 10 years, on high yields from

pest resistance and reduction in insecticide use

- Huge socio-economic cost is borne by farmers from hybrids in Bt cotton

- Bt cotton farmers are asked to revert to traditional pest management, displaying failure of Bollgard II cotton

THE CONTEXT

- Bt cotton occupies greater than 95% of India's cotton acreage

- Yields have stagnated at around 500 kg/ha (lower than yields in China and Egypt)

- Bt Brinjal was cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee but was put on a moratorium by the UPA government

- DMH-11, or GE mustard developed by Delhi University was cleared by the GEAC, but later it was withdrawn

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

- Genetically Modified Organisms, are the ones in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in such a way as to get the required quality.
- The technology is often called 'gene technology', or 'recombinant DNA technology' or 'genetic engineering' and the resulting organism is said to be 'genetically modified', 'genetically engineered' or 'transgenic'.

Advantages of GM crops

- Crop Protection: The initial objective for developing GM plants was to improve crop protection. GM crops have improved resistance to diseases, pest, insects and herbicides. They also have improved tolerance to cold/heat, drought and salinity.

- Insect resistance is achieved by incorporating into the food plant the gene for toxin production from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt).
- Virus resistance is achieved through the introduction of a gene from certain viruses which cause disease in plants.
- Herbicide tolerance is achieved through the introduction of a gene from a bacterium conveying resistance to some herbicides.
- Economic benefits: GM crops can increase yield and thus income.
- Genetically modified foods have a longer shelf life. This improves how long they last and stay fresh during transportation and storage.
- Food Security: Given the increased growth of global population and increased urbanisation, GM crops offer one of the promising solutions to meet the world's food security needs.

Issues with GM crops

- Human Health Risks – Potential impact on human health including allergens and transfer of antibiotic resistance markers
- Environmental concerns: They can reduce species diversity. For example, Insect-resistant plants might harm insects that are not their intended target and thus result in destruction of that particular species.
- GM technology could also allow the transfer of genes from one crop to another, creating “super weeds”, which will be immune to common control methods.
- Viral genes added to crops to confer resistance might be transferred to other viral pathogens, which can lead to new and more virulent virus strains.
- Economic Concerns: Introduction of a GM crop to market is a lengthy and costly process.
- It does not result in high yields as promised. For instance, the highest yields in mustard are from the five countries which do not grow GM mustard — U.K.,

France, Poland, Germany and Czech Republic — and not from the GM-growing U.S. or Canada.

- Critics claim that patent laws give developers of the GM crops a dangerous degree of control over the food supply. The concern is over domination of world food production by a few companies.
- Ethical Concerns: Violation of natural organisms' intrinsic values by mixing among species There have also been objections to consuming animal genes in plants.