

16 FEBRUARY 2019

1. India revokes Pak.'s MFN status day after terrorist strike in J&K

India revoked the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status of Pakistan and warned of more measures in response to its support for terrorist groups targeting India.

While Prime Minister asserted that those responsible for terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir would be given a “befitting reply.”

The suicide car bombing in Pulwama district killed 40 paramilitary personnel, making it one of the worst incidents of violence in the history of the State’s insurgency. The attacker a school dropout who had gone missing last year amid heightened volatility in the State rammed a vehicle loaded with explosives into a convoy of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

As countries around the world shared India’s outrage and condemned the incident, the U.S. put Pakistan in the dock by asking it to “immediately end” all support to terrorist groups.

The Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) has claimed responsibility for the attack.



“Direct” involvement

There is “incontrovertible evidence” of Pakistan’s “direct” involvement in the attack (Cabinet Committee on Security) but Pakistan has denied any involvement and termed the attack “a matter of grave concern.”

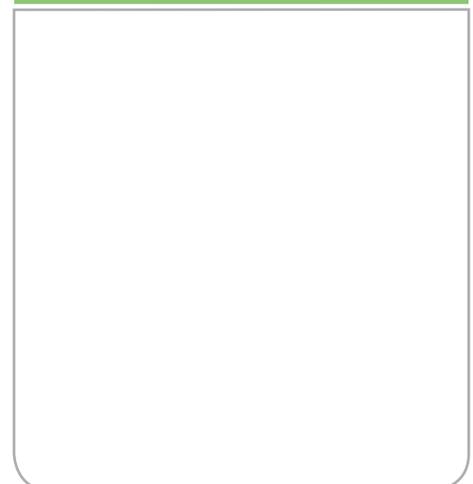
Most Favoured Nation:

Special preference for the country given MFN status, it actually means it would be treated equally as all others. According to the World Trade Organisation rules, countries cannot normally discriminate between their trading partners. If one country is granted a trade concession such as, for example, lower import duties, then all WTO members must be extended the same concessions. This principle is known as the Most Favoured Nation treatment.

Exam Prespect:

- PARA military forces in India
- Most Favoured Nation Status

Note



2. Vande Bharat: India's self-propelled, fastest train takes off

The inaugural trip of India's first semi-high speed train, Vande Bharat Express, was flagged off by Prime Minister. The train, named 'Train 18' at the concept stage, is a plush 16-coach, air-conditioned, self-propelled train set and **doesn't have a locomotive**.

The express will ply between Delhi and Varanasi, with halts at Kanpur and Allahabad. It will complete the 780-km journey in eight hours, slicing off 180 minutes from the current travel time of 11-and-a-half hours. **This is India's fastest train to date, capable of commercial speeds up to 160 km per hour.** On the Delhi-Varanasi route, however, its top speed would be restricted to 130 km per hour.



Make in India

The major systems of this train have been designed and built in India. It meets global standards of performance, safety and passenger comfort at half the global costs. It therefore has the potential to be a game-changer in the global rail business.

Shatabdi Vs Train 18

SHATABDI EXPRESS	TRAIN 18
HAULED BY LOCOMOTIVE	DISTRIBUTED POWER
REVERSAL REQUIREMENT AT TERMINALS	NO REVERSAL REQUIREMENT
SLUGGISH ACCELERATION AND DECELERATION	QUICK ACCELERATION AND DECLARATION
INFERIOR UTILIZATION OF PLATFORM AND ON-BOARD SPACE	BETTER UTILIZATION OF PLATFORM AND ON-BOARD SPACE
CONCENTRATED WEIGHT IN LOCOMOTIVE. HIGHER COUPLER FORCES	UNIFORM WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION. LOWER COUPLER FORCES

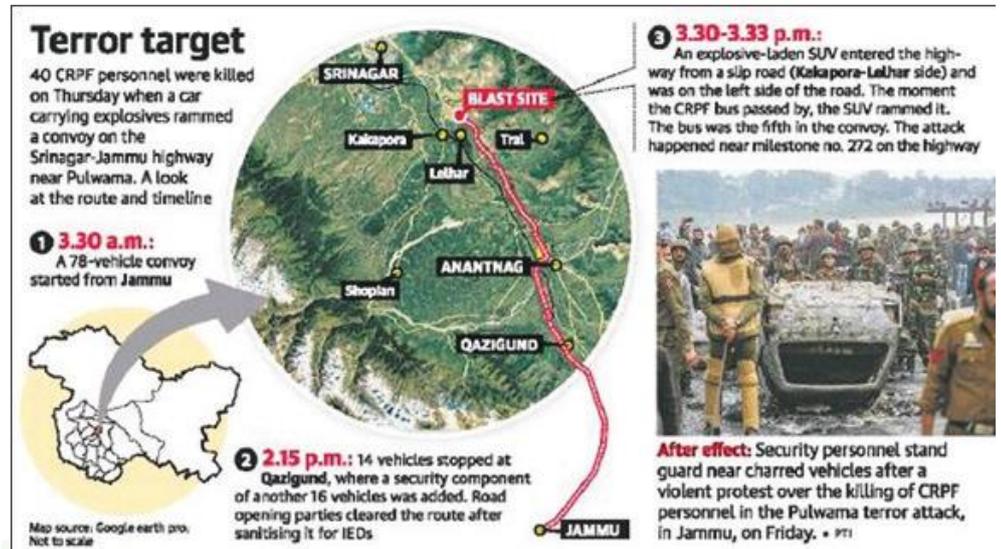
Note



3. Suicide bomber set off a huge cache of RDX

A post-blast analysis conducted by the National Security Guard at the scene of attack in Pulwama has established that the SUV driven by the suicide bomber was packed with RDX. The preliminary investigations suggested that 100-150 kg of RDX was used in the attack on the CRPF convoy.

Adil Ahmed Dar, the Jaish-e-Mohammed suicide bomber, rammed a bus in the convoy, killing 40 personnel near Pulwama, 30 km from Srinagar. The CRPF had been moving such convoys, comprising more than 2,500 personnel each, on the Srinagar-Jammu highway. In the past fortnight, two such convoys had moved from Jammu to Srinagar.



The militant entered the highway from a slip road (from the Kakapora-Lelhar side), hitting the CRPF bus.

The convoys ran smoothly during summers but were irregular during winters and the monsoon because of snowfall and landslips. Hence, CRPF personnel get stranded in Jammu for days. As the transit camp has a limited capacity to accommodate only 1,000 personnel at a time, the number of stranded transients exceed 3,000-4,000.

Since there is no facility for transporting them by air so they have to depend on the road to move from Jammu to Srinagar and back.

As the number of personnel at the transit camps always remains high, buses are used for transportation. These buses have thin metallic plates which offer no protection from bullets or IEDs. Firing being the main threat, improvised plating has been arranged in a few vehicles but there is no safety against IEDs.

The troops have been sensitised for stand-off firing and IEDs planted conventionally but were caught off guard by this kind of suicide attack.

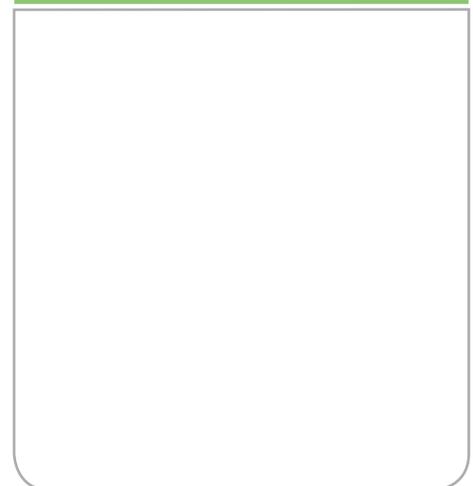
4. Inter-State frictions are back in the Northeast

Inter-State frictions have resurfaced in the northeast after a show of unity by the region's constituent States over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

After the Centre's failure in getting the Bill passed in Rajya Sabha triggered celebrations across the north-eastern States, several people, including women, were injured during a clash between the Assam police and people of Umwali village in Meghalaya.

The village is near Langpih, a disputed place on the Assam-Meghalaya border, about 40 km west of Guwahati. While Assam says the village is in the State's Kamrup district, Meghalaya claims it falls in its West Khasi Hills district.

Note



Official speak

The assault by the Assam police was unprovoked. The Khasi Students' Union, which had joined hands with its Assam counterpart to fight the Citizenship Bill, condemned the action of the police and demanded compensation for the Meghalaya villagers assaulted.

On the eastern edge of Assam, almost horizontally across the point where Langpih is situated, economic blockades by Assam-based ethnic bodies less than a fortnight ago began haunting the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh again.

Plea For ST status

Organisations of six communities — Adivasi, Deori, Gorkha, Moran, Mising, and Sonowal Kachari mostly inhabiting eastern Assam, have been demanding Scheduled Tribe status for their brethren living in pockets of Arunachal Pradesh.

While these organisations have threatened to relaunch their agitation after a brief lull, the indigenous communities in Arunachal Pradesh want the State government to “forget the plan”.

Exam Prespect:

- Map of North Eastern States (Passes, valleys, International Boundaries, etc)
- Tribes in North East
- Features of Citizenship Bill

5. Why only bureaucrats on information panels, asks SC

The Central Information Commission (CIC) and State Information Commissions, the country's apex bodies entrusted to uphold the citizen's fundamental right to information, have been bastions of government employees and their retired counterparts.

The apex court found that “**official bias**” in favour of bureaucrats and government employees was evident from the very beginning of the process for appointment of Chief Information Commissioners and Information Commissioners. In fact, the selection committee, which shortlists candidates for appointment, is itself composed of government employees.

What RTI Act says

The court said it could not quite fathom how government employees



Note



or retired ones had consistently been found “more competent and more suitable” than eminent persons from other walks of life. **The Right to Information Act of 2005 itself requires people from varied domains to man the Commissions.**

The 2005 law was enacted to ensure accountability in governance. The Commissions are meant to be the law’s eyes and hands to provide information to ordinary people.

The apex court directed the government to look beyond bureaucrats and appoint professionals from “all walks of life,” including eminent persons with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism as Information Commissioners.

‘Choked by pendency’

The Supreme Court concluded that the entire RTI mechanism has been choked by rising pendency and growing number of vacancies of Information Commissioners.

Now, the Supreme Court has, for the first time, put the government on a deadline as far as filling vacancies in the Commissions. The court directed that the process of appointment should commence at least one or two months before the retirement is due.

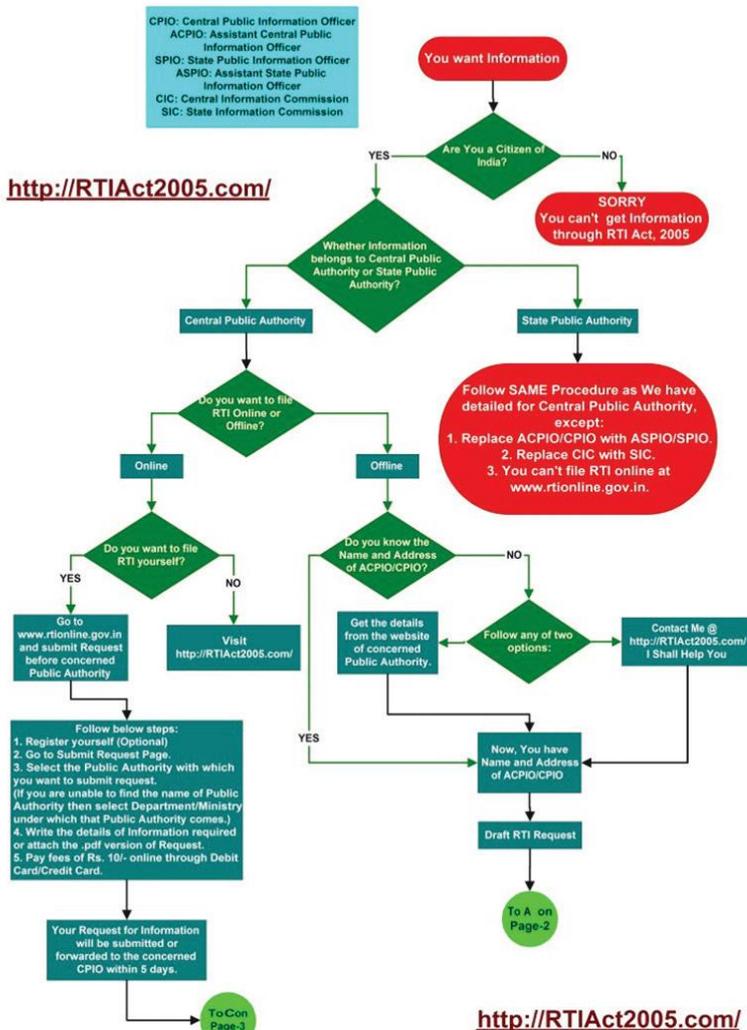
Right to Information Act, 2005

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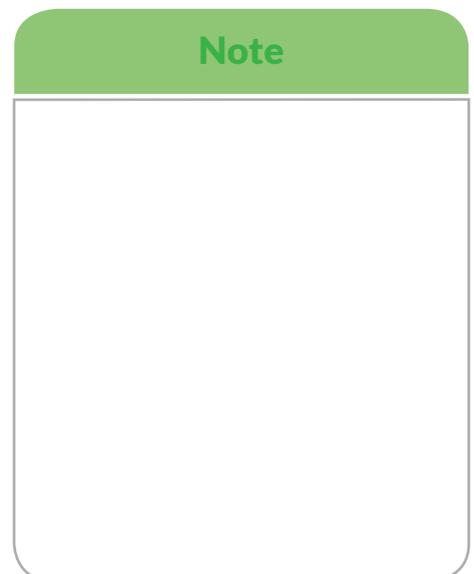
Exam Prespect:

- Central Information Commission / State Information Commission
- RTI, Act 2005
- Other Constitutional Bodies

<http://RTIAct2005.com/>



Note



6. Antibiotic-resistant NDM-1 gene found in pristine Arctic

The recent detection of the antibiotic resistant (AR) gene NDM-1, first isolated in India, in the Arctic region is a further indication of the globalisation of antimicrobial resistance.

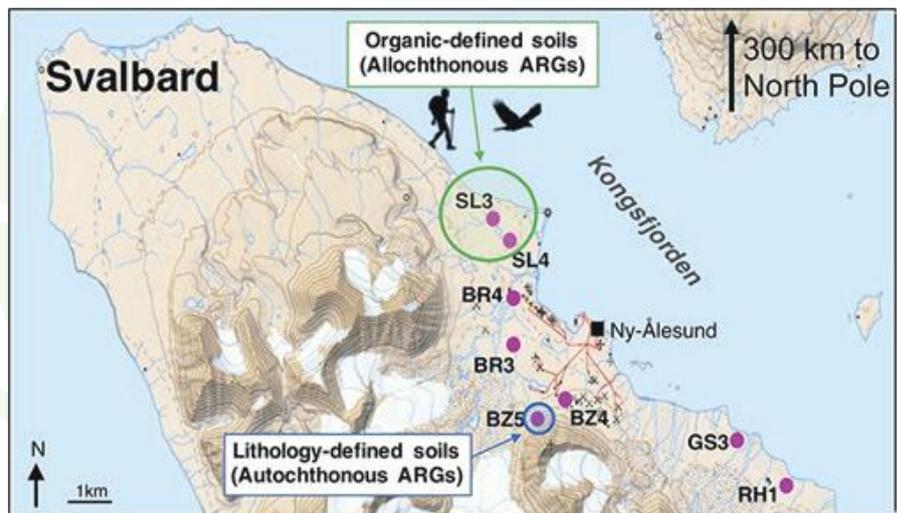
The research was conducted in the High Arctic zone (Kongsfjorden region of Svalbard) and scientists were surprised to find a rather robust presence of NDM-1.

It was not a shock to find AR in the High Arctic. In essence, AR is a natural phenomenon. Most antibiotics are produced by soil microorganisms and over time they have evolved to become resistant to the compounds which they excrete to survive. However, finding NDM-1 in 2013 was a surprise.

Five clusters

It was detected in five out of the eight clusters studied. NDM-1 was first reported in 2007 in a patient admitted to a hospital in New Delhi, but was reported to be present in Germany, the same year.

The NDM-1 gene is present in highest concentrations near fresh water sources where wildlife tend to congregate. Additionally, levels of mobile genetic elements (MGEs), the mechanism by which bacteria 'trade' AR, to mirror NDM-1. MGEs are noteworthy here because they are often associated with 'acquired' resistance and are found at higher levels in human, or animal waste-impacted environments.



The findings point towards the involvement of migratory birds, who could carry the resistance in the gut and transfer it to the Arctic soil through faecal matter.

However, it is also possible that it may have migrated with humans and spread via local wildlife, or it may be a combination of factors.

Exam Prespect:

- What is Antibiotic resistance?
- Arctic Region – Map
- Microbes and their day to day uses

Note

