



## **Current Affairs Dated On Sep 15<sup>th</sup> to sep 30<sup>th</sup> 2018**

### UNESCO site status

#### Why in News?

Geological Survey of India has chosen heritage locations in Maharashtra and Karnataka for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status.

The Geopark tag is akin to that of a 'World Heritage Site' for historical monuments that can bring India's famed geological features to the global stage.

The sites chosen are- Lonar Lake in Maharashtra and St. Mary's Island and Malpe beach in coastal Karnataka are the GSI's candidates for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status.

#### Global Geopark:

- UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.
- Their bottom-up approach of combining conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities is becoming increasingly popular. At present, there are 140 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 38 countries.
- An aspiring Global Geopark must have a dedicated website, a corporate identity, comprehensive management plan, protection plans, finance, and partnerships for it to be accepted.

#### Once a UNESCO Global Geopark, always a UNESCO Global Geopark?

No, a UNESCO Global Geopark is given this designation for a period of four years after which the functioning and quality of each UNESCO Global Geopark is thoroughly re-examined during a revalidation process.

- As part of the revalidation process, the UNESCO Global Geopark under review has to prepare a progress report and a field mission will be undertaken by two evaluators to revalidate the quality of the UNESCO Global Geopark. If, on the basis of the field evaluation report, the UNESCO Global Geopark continues to fulfil the criteria the area will continue as a UNESCO Global Geopark for a further four-year period (so-called "green card").



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- If the area no longer fulfils the criteria, the management body will be informed to take appropriate steps within a two-year period (so-called “yellow card”). Should the UNESCO Global Geopark not fulfil the criteria within two years after receiving a “yellow card”, the area will lose its status as a UNESCO Global Geopark (so-called “red card”).

### **What is the Global Geoparks Network?**

The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), of which membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks, is a legally constituted not-for-profit organisation with an annual membership fee.

The GGN was founded in 2004 and is a dynamic network where members are committed to work together and exchange ideas of best practise and join in common projects to raise the quality standards of all products and practises of a UNESCO Global Geopark.

While the GGN as a whole comes together every two years, it functions through the operation of regional networks, such as the European Geoparks Network that meets twice a year to develop and promote joint activities.

Difference between UNESCO Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites:

UNESCO Global Geoparks, together with the other two UNESCO site designations Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites, give a complete picture of celebrating our heritage while at the same time conserving the world’s cultural, biological and geological diversity, and promoting sustainable economic development.

- While Biosphere Reserves focus on the harmonised management of biological and cultural diversity and World Heritage Sites promote the conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value, UNESCO Global Geoparks give international recognition for sites that promote the importance and significance of protecting the Earth’s geodiversity through actively engaging with the local communities.
- In case an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark includes a World Heritage Site or Biosphere Reserve, a clear justification and evidence has to be provided on



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how UNESCO Global Geopark status will add value by being both independently branded and in synergy with the other designations.

#### **Key facts:**

- Lonar lake is an ancient circular lake created by a meteorite strike in Maharashtra. It is the only known meteorite crater in basaltic rock. Lonar crater became a geo-heritage site in 1979. It is relatively young geologically, at just 50,000 years old.
- Mary's Island, declared a national geo-heritage site in 1975, is estimated to be an 88-million-year-old formation that goes back to a time when Greater India broke away from Madagascar.

#### **Triple talaq Ordinance**

##### **Why in News?**

The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance making instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat a punishable offence carrying a jail term of up to three years. The step was taken after the government failed to pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, in the Rajya Sabha during the recent monsoon session.

##### **Provisions of Bill:**

- Triple talaq remains cognizable with a maximum of three years imprisonment and a fine.
- Triple talaq will be recognised as a crime only when a woman or her blood relative files a complaint with the police.
- A compromise can be achieved only when the woman is willing and says so to a magistrate. A magistrate can grant bail only after the wife's consent.
- The custody of children from the marriage will go to the woman.
- The mother is entitled to maintenance determined by a magistrate.
- The law doesn't affect Jammu and Kashmir.

##### **About Triple talaq:**

- Instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat is a practice that was challenged in the court.



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- It is different from the practice of “talaq-ul-sunnat”, which is considered to be the ideal form of dissolution of marriage contract among Muslims.
  - Under the latter form, once the husband pronounces talaq, the wife has to observe a three-month iddat period covering three menstrual cycles during which the husband can arbitrate and re-conciliate with the wife. In case of cohabitation between the couple, during these three months, the talaq is revoked. However, when the period of iddat expires and the husband does not revoke the talaq either expressly or by consummation, the talaq is irrevocable and final.
  - In the practice of talaq-e-biddat, when a man pronounces talaq thrice in a sitting, or through phone, or writes in a talaqnama or a text message, the divorce is considered immediate and irrevocable, even if the man later wishes to re-conciliate.

#### **Status in neighbouring countries:**

India and 22 other countries have banned triple talaq. India’s neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are among the countries that have banned the practice of instant triple talaq prevalent among Muslims for divorce.

- In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the law requires the man who wishes to divorce his wife to give the ‘arbitration council’ a written notice of his having done so, and supply a copy of the same to his wife.
- In Pakistan, triple talaq was abolished when it issued its Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961, according to Geo News. In Afghanistan, divorce through three pronouncements made in only one sitting is considered to be invalid. Sri Lanka’s Marriage and Divorce (Muslim) Act, 1951, amended up to 2006, also prohibits triple talaq.

#### **Aspirational Districts Program**

##### **Why in News?:**

In a bid to understand and address the challenges faced by the district administrations in implementing skill programs and help develop capacities, the government has approved a plan for visits of the senior officers of the Ministry of Skill



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Development and Entrepreneurships to the 'Aspirational Districts' between October 2, 2018 and January 26, 2019.

#### **About Aspirational Districts Programme:**

- Launched in January this year, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan.
- With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

#### **Focus of the programme:**

To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focuses closely on improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy. Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure are this programme's core areas of focus.

#### **Significance of the scheme:**

- If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous improvement in the internal security environment of the country.
- If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country

#### **International Court of Justice**

##### **Why in News?**

International Court of Justice has ordered the United States to lift sanctions on Iran that affect imports of humanitarian goods and products and services linked to the



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safety of civil aviation. The ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is legally binding.

#### **Reasoning Behind decision:**

The U.S. sanctions “have the potential to endanger civil aviation safety” in Iran and sanctions limiting sales of goods required for humanitarian needs such as food, medicines and medical devices “may have a serious detrimental impact on the health and lives of individuals on the territory of Iran.”

#### **About ICJ:**

- The **International Court of Justice** (abbreviated **ICJ**)<sup>[1]</sup> is the principal judicial organ of the [United Nations](#) (UN).
- It settles legal disputes between member [states](#) and gives advisory opinions to authorized UN organs and specialized agencies.

#### **Members of the Court:**

- The International Court of Justice is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. These organs vote simultaneously but separately.
- In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies. In order to ensure a measure of continuity, one third of the Court is elected every three years. Judges are eligible for re-election.

#### **Qualifications of ICJ judges**

- A judge should have a high moral character.
- A judge should fit to the qualifications of appointment of highest judicial officers as prescribed by their respective states or.
- A judge should be a juriconsult of recognized competence in international law.

The 15 judges of the Court are distributed as per the regions:

- Three from Africa.
- Two from Latin America and Caribbean.
- Three from Asia.



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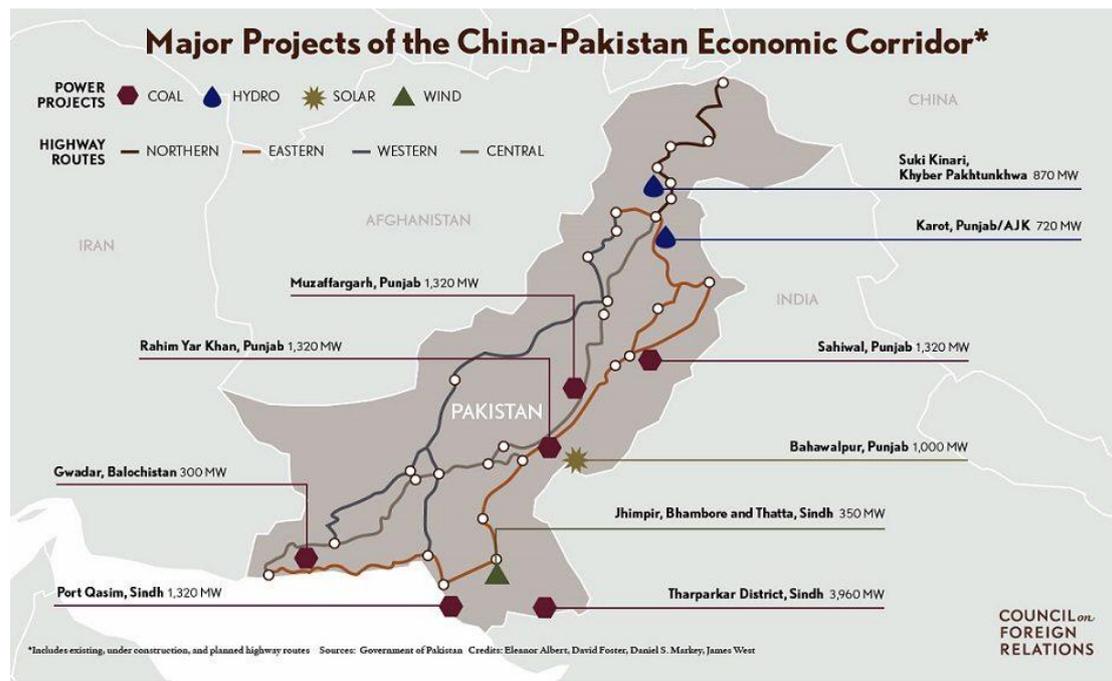
- Five from Western Europe and other states.
- Two from Eastern Europe.

### China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

#### Why in News?

Pakistan has invited Saudi Arabia to join the CPEC as the third “strategic partner”. Saudi participation in this mega project will ensure huge investment in Pakistan through this platform.

#### About CPEC:



- The CPEC is the flagship project of the multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, aimed at enhancing Beijing’s influence around the world through China-funded infrastructure projects.
- The 3,000 km-long China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) consisting of highways, railways, and pipelines is the latest irritant in the India–China relationship.



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- CPEC eventually aims at linking the city of Gwadar in South Western Pakistan to China's North Western region Xinjiang through a vast network of highways and railways.
- The proposed project will be financed by heavily-subsidised loans, that will be disbursed to the Government of Pakistan by Chinese banking giants such as Exim Bank of China, China Development Bank, and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

#### **But, why is India concerned?**

- Many experts are not in favour of India supporting CPEC. This is so because any Indian participation would inextricably be linked to the country's legitimate claims on PoK.
- CPEC rests on a Chinese plan to secure and shorten its supply lines through Gwadar with an enhanced presence in the Indian Ocean. Hence, it is widely believed that upon CPEC's fruition, an extensive Chinese presence will undermine India's influence in the Indian Ocean.
- It is also being contended that if CPEC were to successfully transform the Pakistan economy that could be a "red rag" for India which will remain at the receiving end of a wealthier and stronger Pakistan.
- Besides, India shares a great deal of trust deficit with China and Pakistan and has a history of conflict with both. As a result, even though suggestions to re-approach the project pragmatically have been made, no advocate has overruled the principle strands of contention that continue to mar India's equations with China and Pakistan.

#### **IAEA safeguards**

#### **Why in News?**

India has decided to place four more reactors under the IAEA safeguards. Accordingly, two Russian-designed Pressurised Light Water Reactors and two Pressurised Heavy Reactors being built with Indian technology will be covered.

- With this, a total of 26 Indian nuclear facilities will be under the international nuclear energy watchdog.



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### **IAEA safeguards:**

#### **What are they?**

Safeguards are a set of technical measures applied by the IAEA on nuclear material and activities, through which the Agency seeks to independently verify that nuclear facilities are not misused and nuclear material not diverted from peaceful uses. States accept these measures through the conclusion of safeguards agreements.

#### **Need and implementation:**

IAEA safeguards are an essential component of the international security system. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the centrepiece of global efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons. Under the Treaty's Article 3, each Non-Nuclear Weapon State is required to conclude a safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

#### **Significance:**

Within the world's nuclear non-proliferation regime, the IAEA's safeguards system functions as a confidence-building measure, an early warning mechanism, and the trigger that sets in motion other responses by the international community if and when the need arises. Over the past decade, IAEA safeguards have been strengthened in key areas.

#### **About IAEA:**

- The IAEA is the world's centre for cooperation in the nuclear field. It was set up as the world's "Atoms for Peace" organization in 1957 within the United Nations family. The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.
- It seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to inhibit its use for any military purpose, including nuclear weapons.
- IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.
- The IAEA has its headquarters in Vienna, Austria.



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The IAEA serves as an intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear technology and nuclear power worldwide.

#### **Country Partnership Framework**

##### **Why in News?:**

The World Bank Group (WBG) Board of Executive Directors has endorsed a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for India.

##### **Significance:**

- The CPF aims to support India's transition to a higher middle-income country by addressing some of its key development priorities — resource efficient and inclusive growth, job creation and building its human capital.
- The India CPF represents the largest country programme of the WBG, reflecting the strong collaboration between India and the Group's institutions — The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). The WBG expects to deliver \$25-30 billion during this CPF period, ending in FY22.

##### **Potential:**

With a fast growing economy, global stature, and its unique experience of lifting the highest number of poor out of poverty in the past decades, India is well-positioned to become a high middle-income country by 2030.

##### **Need of the hour:**

- The future of India lies in the States of India.
- The country's transition to high middle-income status will be determined in large part by the effectiveness of India's federal compact.
- In this context, an important focus of the CPF will be to deepen engagement with India's States and invest in the institutions and capabilities of the states and local governments to address their development priorities.



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### **What is Country Partnership Framework (CPF)?**

- The World Bank Group's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) aims to make our country-driven model more systematic, evidence-based, selective, and focused on the Bank's twin goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.
- The CPF replaces the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). Used in conjunction with a Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), the CPF guides the World Bank Group's (WBG) support to a member country.

### **Floods in Kerala:**

#### **Why in News?**

A recent study has found that a combination of four factors led to extreme flooding across Kerala this year. Union government had declared the Kerala floods a "calamity of severe nature".

#### **Causes of Flood:**

Above normal seasonal (May-August) rainfall: The summer monsoon rainfall in Kerala from May to August this year was 2,290 mm, which was 53% above normal. The average rainfall during the summer monsoon period (June-September) is about 1,619 mm. This makes 2018 Kerala's third wettest year in the last 118 years (1901-2018); 1924 and 1961 were the wettest years with about 3,600 mm of annual rainfall.

Extreme rainfall events occurring almost across the State during the season: Till August 21, the State witnessed few extreme rainfall events covering almost the entire State. These extreme rainfall events have very low probability of recurrence in any given year.

Over 90% reservoir storage even before the onset of extreme rainfall events: Kerala received 1634.5 mm rainfall during the period May 1 to August 7, which is more than the average rainfall (1619.37 mm) during the summer monsoon period (June-September). As a result, six of the seven major reservoirs in the State had over 90% storage before August 8, well before Kerala received the unprecedented extreme rainfall events.



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Unprecedented extreme rainfall in the catchment areas of major reservoirs in the State: The catchment areas of major reservoirs in the State received extreme rainfall never before witnessed in the State. The role of other factors such as changes in how infrastructure has grown at the expense of vegetation and drainage remains to be studied.

#### **Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA)**

##### **Why in News?**

Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA) has allowed individuals in a live-in relationship to adopt children from and within India.

##### **Exception:**

CARA has barred applicants in a live-in relationship from adopting a child on the ground that “the Authority would like the children to be placed only with a stable family and individuals in a live-in relationship cannot be considered as stable family.”

##### **Eligibility:**

The eligibility criteria under Adoption Regulations, 2017, permit single women to adopt a child of any gender, while single men can adopt only boys. When a married couple seeks to adopt a child, it needs to give its consent for adoption and should be stable marriage for at least two years. Applicants have to be physically, mentally and financially stable to raise a child.

##### **About CARA:**

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003.
- CARA primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognised adoption agencies.



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### **Sabarimala temple opens to women of all ages**

#### **Why in News?:**

Condemning the prohibition as hegemonic patriarchy, the Supreme Court has lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala.

#### **What's the issue?**

The legend has it that the temple deity Ayyappa followed celibacy all through his life. Therefore, women devotees of menstruating age are considered "impure" by supporters of the ban and are prohibited from entering the temple, on the pretext that they would disturb the celibacy of the deity.

#### **Views of the court:**

- On one side we pray to goddesses; on the other, women of a certain age are considered 'impure'. This dualistic approach is nothing but patriarchy practised in religion.
- Exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was therefore unconstitutional as it is violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.
- Hence, Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, ultra vires the Constitution. The Rule violated the fundamental right of a Hindu woman to offer worship at a place of her choice. Right to worship is equally available to men and women.

#### **Dissenting views:**

- Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion. She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints.
- She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion. It was a matter of personal faith. Constitutional morality in



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a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.

- Harmonization of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs. Therefore, the Judge held that there were strong, plausible reasons to show that Ayyappa devotees had attributes of a religious denomination.
- They have distinct names, properties. Besides, the Sabarimala temple was not funded out of the Consolidated Fund.

#### **Significance of the verdict:**

- The Supreme Court's ruling establishes the legal principle that individual freedom prevails over purported group rights, even in matters of religion. Devotees of Lord Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination and that the prohibition on women is not an essential part of Hindu religion.
- Beyond the legality of the practice, the court has also sought to grapple with the stigmatisation of women devotees based on a medieval view of menstruation as symbolising impurity and pollution.
- The decision reaffirms the Constitution's transformative character and derives strength from the centrality it accords to fundamental rights.

#### **Appointment of Lokpal**

##### **Why in News?**

Government has constituted eight-member search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for posts of Lokpal chairperson and members. The selection process of Lokpal is underway as per guidelines of laid down in Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

##### **Committee's Terms of Reference:**

The search committee will start functioning soon. It will recommend names for Lokpal chairperson and members. It can also consider names other than those recommended by the search committee.



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### **Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:**

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

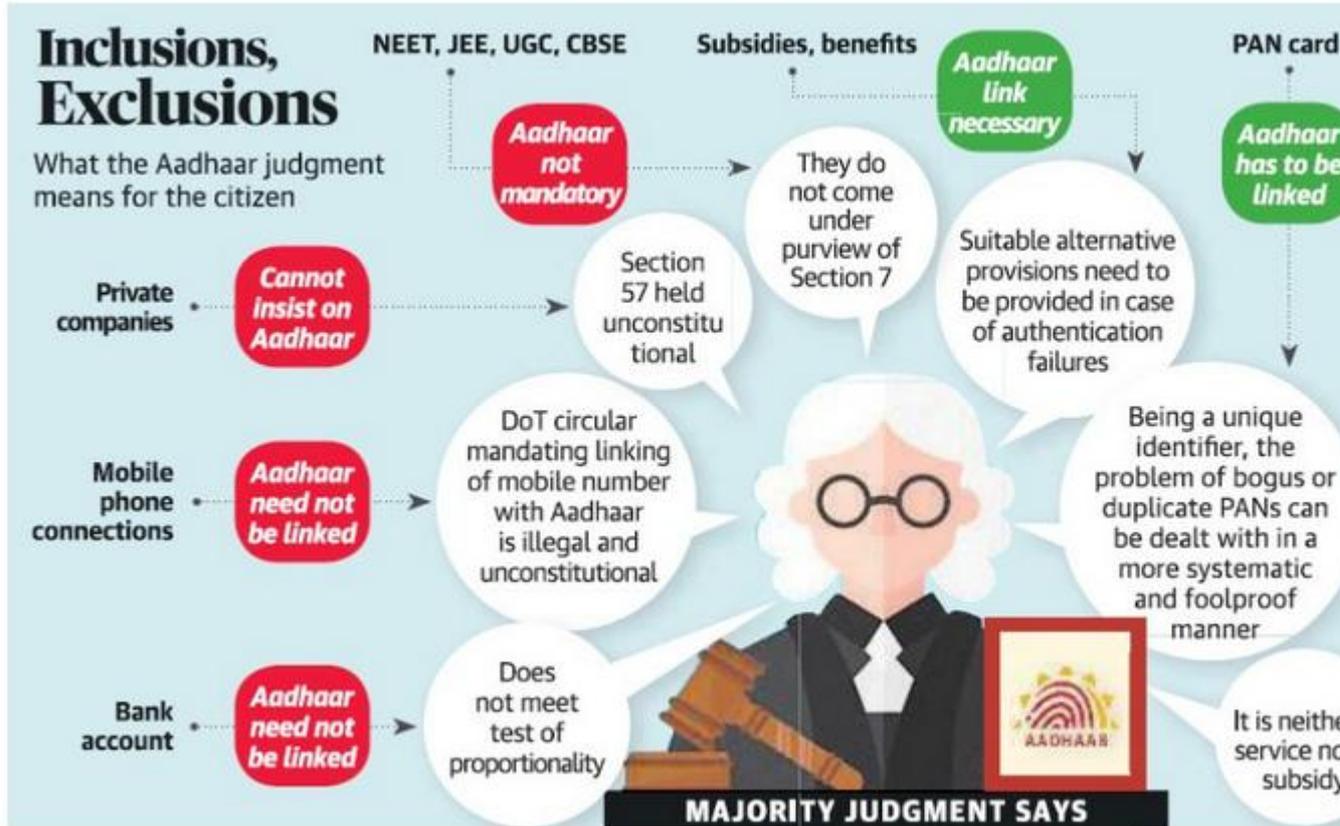
### **Powers:**

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.
- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

### **Aadhaar Judgement:**



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### Why in News?:

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Supreme court Judge, who wrote the **lone dissenting opinion** declaring Aadhaar unconstitutional, held that the unique identity scheme reduces a person to a 12-digit number.

Justice Chandrachud observed, "If the requirement of Aadhaar is made mandatory for every benefit or service which the government provides, it is impossible to live in contemporary India **without Aadhaar.**"

Today, Aadhaar is the world's largest biometric and identity database with 122.56 Cr numbers issued to Indian citizens or persons living in India for **more than 180 days**. These have been used for around 2,322 Cr authentications.

Sections of the Aadhaar Act that the Supreme Court struck down: (Sections 33(1), 33(2), 47, 57):



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**Section 33(1)** which allows disclosure of information, including identity and authentication records, if ordered by a court not inferior to that of a District Judge. Individuals should be given the opportunity of a hearing.

**Section 33(2)** which allowed **identity and authentication data** to be disclosed in the **interest of national security** on direction of an officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India.

A Judicial Officer (preferably a sitting High Court Judge) should be associated with it and that the government should bring in legislation to this effect.

**Section 47** which referred to cognizance of offences. Under this Section, no individual was allowed to file a complaint if he/she felt their data was leaked or misused.

The law only allowed the court to take cognizance of a complaint filed by UIDAI or anyone authorised by it.

Any individual will now be allowed to file a complaint if he/she feels their data has been compromised.

**Section 57** refers to the use of Aadhaar data by any “body corporate or person” to establish the identity of an individual. It gives statutory support to mobile companies, private service providers to seek individuals’ Aadhaars for identification purposes.

Justice Sikri, in his judgment, found this section to be unconstitutional. It was under this provision that private companies like **Paytm and Airtel Payments Bank** sought Aadhaar details from customers.

The judgment **narrows the scope of Aadhaar**, but provides a framework within which it can work.

The majority judgment also says Aadhaar Act passes the “triple test” laid down by the ‘Privacy’ judgment, under which there ought to be a law, a legitimate state interest and an element of proportionality in any law that seeks to abridge the Right to Privacy.

#### Karnataka Good Samaritan Bill

#### Why in News?



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The president has given his assent to the Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation during Emergency Situations) Bill, 2016.

#### **About the Bill:**

- The legislation aims to give protection to good samaritans and ensure immediate medical assistance for road accident victims within the 'golden hour' and encourage people to offer first aid to victims without fear of harassment in the hands of police and investigations.
- Under the new law, the Karnataka government will provide financial help to good samaritans who help victims in a timely manner, they will be exempted from repeated attendance in courts and police stations, in case attendance is mandatory, expenses of such "running around to courts and police stations" will be taken care through the proposed 'Good Samaritan Fund'.
- After admitting the accident victim to the hospital, the good samaritan can leave immediately, all government as well as private hospitals are bound to give first aid to the accident victims.

#### **Significance:**

- With this, Karnataka has become the first state to give legal protection to good samaritans through a legislation amidst the rising incidents of accidental deaths in India, which saw 1,50,785 people getting killed in road accidents in 2016.
- In medical terms, the 'golden hour' is the first hour after a traumatic injury when emergency treatment is very crucial.

#### **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

#### **Why in News?**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a \$150 Million Loan to finance continued improvements to road connectivity and efficiency of the International Trade Corridor in West Bengal and North-Eastern Region of India.

- South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation Road Connectivity Investment Program, approved in 2014, aims to expand about 500 kilometers of roads in



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India's North Bengal and North-Eastern Region that will enable efficient and safe transport within India and regionally with other SASEC member countries.

- The Program is an important initiative in Regional Connectivity aimed at increasing domestic and regional trade through North Bengal-North East Region International Trade corridor by upgrading key roads.

#### **About SASEC:**

- The SASEC programme of ADB was formed in 2001 in response to the request of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal to assist in facilitating economic cooperation among them. Sri Lanka and Maldives joined the sub-regional group in 2014.
- As a project-based partnership, SASEC programme has been helping enhance cross-border connectivity, facilitate faster and more efficient trade and promote cross-border power trade.
- The Manila, Philippines-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) serves as the Secretariat for the SASEC member countries.

#### **United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).**

##### **Why in News?**

Canada has agreed to sign a trade deal with the United States and Mexico, revamping the North American Free Trade Agreement after almost a year of negotiations.

The new deal has been named the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

- The trilateral pact is expected to be signed by the three North American countries before the end of November, after which it would be submitted to Congress.

#### **About United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA):**

It's basically NAFTA 2.0, with major changes on cars and new policies on labor and environmental standards, intellectual property protections, and some digital trade provisions. The changes include:



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- Country of origin rules: Automobiles must have 75% of their components manufactured in Mexico, the US, or Canada to qualify for zero tariffs (up from 62.5 percent under NAFTA).
- Labor provisions: 40 to 45 percent of automobile parts have to be made by workers who earn at least \$16 an hour by 2023. Mexico has also agreed to pass laws giving workers the right to union representation, extend labor protections to migrant workers, and protect women from discrimination. The countries can also sanction one another for labor violations.
- US farmers get more access to the Canadian dairy market: The US got Canada to open up its dairy market to US farmers, which was a big issue for Trump.
- Intellectual property and digital trade: The deal extends the terms of copyright to 70 years beyond the life of the author (up from 50). It also extends the period that a pharmaceutical drug can be protected from generic competition.
- It also includes new provisions to deal with the digital economy, including prohibiting duties on things like music and e-books, and protections for internet companies so they're not liable for content their users produce.
- Sunset clause: The agreement puts in a 16-year "sunset" clause — meaning the terms of the agreement expire, or "sunset," after a set period of time. The deal is also subject to a review every six years, at which point the US, Mexico, and Canada can decide to extend USMCA.

### **Objectives of NAFTA?**

- In 1993 the European Union (EU) created a "single market"—one territory without any internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of goods and services. This allowed every country and business in the EU to have access to more than 500 million consumers.
- NAFTA, which was approved that same year, was designed to have a similar effect, providing a way to allow the exchange of goods and services to flow more freely across national borders without the artificial restrictions.
- NAFTA provided for progressive elimination of all tariffs on any goods qualifying as North American. The deal also sought to protect intellectual property, establish dispute-resolution mechanisms, and, through corollary agreements, implement labor and environmental safeguards.

### **Issues in NAFTA :**



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NAFTA was controversial when first proposed, mostly because it was the first [free trade agreement] involving two wealthy, developed countries and a developing country. Some people felt that allowing free trade with a developing country provides an incentive for U.S.-based business to move their operations to that country.

Since its implementation NAFTA has remained a prime target of trade protectionists (those who advocate taking measures such as taxing imports to “protect” domestic industries from foreign competition).

#### **Strategic Policy Group**

##### **Why in News:**

The government has set up Strategic Policy Group or SPG to help the National Security Council, which advises the Prime Minister on matters of national security and strategic interests.

##### **About the Strategic Policy Group (SPG):**

##### **Composition:**

- It will be headed by National Security Advisor. Its members include the NITI Aayog vice chairman, cabinet secretary, the chiefs of the three defence services, the RBI governor, the foreign secretary, the home secretary, the finance secretary and the defence secretary.
- The secretary of the Department of Defence Production and Supplies, the scientific adviser to the defence minister and the secretary, cabinet secretariat will also be members of the panel.
- The other members are secretary, department of revenue; secretary, department of atomic energy; secretary, department of space; director, Intelligence Bureau, and secretary, National Security Council Secretariat.
- Representatives of other ministries and departments will be invited to the meetings of the group as and when necessary.

##### **Functions:**

- It will assist the National Security Council and undertake among other tasks, a long-term strategic review of country's security affairs.



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- It will be the principal mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and integration of relevant inputs in the formulation of national security policies.

#### **Meetings:**

The NSA will convene the meetings of the SPG and the cabinet secretary will coordinate implementation of the group's decisions by union ministries and departments, and state governments.