



Daily Current Affairs Dated On 26-Aug-2019

GS-1

Sangam literature

Why in news?

The Sangam literary works, despite being much older than the subject of modern meteorology, have dwelt upon the subject.

Details

- Dr. Balasubramanian, who has put in 38 years of service at the Meteorological Department, says that even though literary works in many other languages have treated the subject like any set of abstract ideas, the Sangam works appear to have better scientific basis.
- Relying on a study undertaken by him, the meteorologist explains how the literature has talked about wind, rain, thunder, clouds and climate, by quoting from the works such as Natrinai, Kurunthogai, and Agananuru.
- The findings of his study form part of a publication, Sanga Kala Vaanilai, (Sangam Era Weather)
- A recipient of the Central government's award four years ago for his article on tornado in Hindi, Dr. Balasubramanian has come out with another Tamil work which deals with six big-sized animals, which are herbivores.

River canalisation

What does it mean to canalise rivers?

It means to regulate the water of a river by directing it into specific channel or channels which could be regulated through mini dams or by constructing Dhussi Bandhs.

How many rivers flow in Punjab and how many of them are canalised?

- There are three perennial rivers — Sutlej, Beas and Ravi, one non-perennial river, Ghaggar, in the state.
- Besides these rivers there are over 100 local rivulets, choes and khads, which run during monsoon, and fall into these main rivers.
- Only three perennial rivers are canalised by making dams.
- There is Bhakra dam on Sutlej, Pong dam on Beas and Ranjit Sagar dam on Ravi- and Dhussi Bandhs, which are though quite weak at several places and often get breached with a little heavy flow in rivers. Ghaggar river is partially canalised.



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- As for as local nadis, major nallahs are concerned, there is hardly any canalisation system for them and they flow to the brim during the monsoon creating havoc at several places of Punjab individually or after adding water to the major rivers.

Why Punjab now feels the need to canalise its rivers?

- On August 18-19, Punjab faced floods across around half dozen of its districts due to overflowing of the Sutlej river.
- And the major contribution in these floods was of local and seasonal non-canalised rivers, nadis, rivulets, nallahs, choes and khads which fall into Sutlej due to which its flow increased to 2.75 lakh cusecs on Sunday after heavy rain on Saturday.
- Though Bhakra dam, which is made on Sutlej river, is being blamed for releasing huge water on August 18 in river, but the matter of fact is that Bhakra had released only 55,000 cusecs in the river that day and remaining over two-lakh cusecs came from these local streams due to heavy rain in the catchment areas of these small streams.
- Canalisation is needed to control such unregulated water which devastated state due to its uncontrolled flow.
- One local river Budhki is responsible for floods in Ropar, where its water spilled in several villages.

GS-3

Rupees vs Chinese renminbi

Why in news?

Even as the Sensex at the Bombay Stock Exchange rose by over 800 points, or 2.2 per cent, on Monday following the Finance Minister's announcement on Friday to roll back the surcharge on FPIs along with other measures aimed at improving liquidity in the market and lift sentiment, the Indian rupee fell sharply by up to 40 paise against the dollar to hit 72.05.



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Why did the rupee fall?

- Normally, the rupee moves in line with the movement of the stock market, as a positive development impacts both the currency and the bourses in a similar manner.
- On Monday, however, even as the Sensex jumped in reaction to the announcements on the domestic stimulus, the rupee reeled under global pressure as markets remained concerned over an escalation of the trade tariff war between the United States and China.
- As the Renminbi fell to a new 11-year low of 7.15 against the dollar on Monday on rising concerns over the tariff war, most emerging market currencies, including the Malaysian Ringgit, the Indonesian Rupiah, and the South African Rand, came under pressure. So did the rupee, which fell sharply intra day.

What is the like between RMB and INR?

- A weakness in the renminbi (yuan) increases the competitiveness of Chinese exports, as every dollar can import larger quantities of Chinese goods.
- At the same time, it puts competing countries under pressure, as their goods become relatively more expensive.
- However, as the Chinese currency has fallen sharply in August by over 3.7 per cent, the rupee has also lost over 4.5 per cent this month.
- Interestingly, the Indian central bank has not intervened in the current rupee slide, unlike in the past when such a sharp fall in the rupee led to intervention by the RBI.
- Over the last three weeks, India's foreign exchange reserves have risen from \$429.6 billion (July 26, 2019) to \$430.5 billion (August 16, 2019).

Gravitational lensing

Why in news?

Using NASA's James Webb Space Telescope as a sort of time machine, researchers plan to investigate how new stars are born. For this, they will take the help of a natural phenomenon called "gravitational lensing".



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What is it?

- The phenomenon occurs when a huge amount of matter, such as a massive galaxy or cluster of galaxies, creates a gravitational field that distorts and magnifies the light from objects behind it, but in the same line of sight, NASA explained on its website.
- In effect, these are natural, cosmic telescopes; they are called gravitational lenses.
- These large celestial objects will magnify the light from distant galaxies that are at or near the peak of star formation.
- The effect allows researchers to study the details of early galaxies too far away to be seen otherwise with even the most powerful space telescopes.

Background

- The Milky Way today forms the equivalent of one Sun every year, but in the past, that rate was up to 100 times greater.
- NASA now plans to look billions of years into the past in order to understand how our Sun formed.
- The programme is called Targeting Extremely Magnified Panchromatic Lensed Arcs and Their Extended Star Formation, or TEMPLATES.
- While it is an acronym, the meaning of TEMPLATES goes deeper, NASA said — the programme will set a template for future studies.

SAMEER

Context

The Centre for Electromagnetic Environmental Effects (Centre for E3), an advanced R&D facility for compliance evaluation of electronic devices and super-structures from a mobile phone to a complex ship or aircraft environment by the Central government, has become fully operational.

Background

- This is one among many projects promised for the State post-bifurcation, which is fully operational at Gambheeram on the city outskirts.
- The R&D lab, touted as first of its kind in the country, is set up under the aegis of Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering (SAMEER).



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About SAMEER

- SAMEER, which is an autonomous body under the Department of Electronics and IT in the Ministry of Communications and IT, has its first R&D lab in Mumbai and later it established world-class labs in Navi Mumbai and Chennai.
- SAMEER has the expertise for application-oriented research in microwave and electromagnetics.
- The facility was of significance for defence sector in ensuring satisfactory performance of strategic hardware.
- The Centre for E3 will undertake evaluation, design and consultancy services.
- The SAMEER project, located adjoining IIM-Vizag, is completed in all respects with highly specialised facilities like electromagnetic pulse (EMP), pulsed current injection (PCI), ultra-wide band (UWB), electromagnetic modelling and simulation lab and large RF shielded anechoic chamber (EMC chamber) for evaluating compliance of electronics as per military and several civilian standards.
- The project is empanelled as EMP consultant for country's prestigious project for establishment of EMP compliant centres across the country for strategic applications.
- It is competent to develop indigenous point-of-entry (POE) protection systems against EMP for strategic applications.
- It has encouraged internship and industrial training programmes and has provided the opportunity so far to over 100 undergraduates and 20 post-graduates every year.
- It also offers paid apprenticeship to diploma holders and graduates.

World trade organization

The story so far: U.S.

- President Donald Trump earlier this month attacked the World Trade Organization (WTO) for allowing countries such as India and China to engage in unfair trade practices that affect American economic interests.
- While addressing a gathering in Pennsylvania, Mr. Trump took issue with the "developing country" status enjoyed by India and China at the WTO.
- He argued that these countries are not developing economies, as they claim to be, but instead grown economies that do not deserve any preferential trade treatment from the WTO over developed countries such as the U.S.



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What is the “developing country” status?

- The “developing country” status allows a member of the WTO to seek temporary exception from the commitments under various multilateral trade agreements ratified by the organisation.
- It was introduced during the initial days of the WTO as a mechanism to offer some respite to poor countries while they try to adjust to a new global trade order marked by lower barriers to trade.
- Countries such as India and China, while seeking exception from various WTO agreements, have argued that their economic backwardness should be considered when it comes to the timeline of implementation of these agreements.
- The issue of farm subsidies, for instance, is one over which rich and poor countries have had major disagreements.
- The WTO, however, does not formally classify any of its members as a developing country. Individual countries are allowed to unilaterally classify themselves as developing economies.
- So, as many as two-thirds of the 164 members of the WTO have classified themselves as developing countries.

How do countries such as India and China benefit from the special status?

- The WTO was envisaged as an international trade body to help foster more trading in goods and services between nations by lowering various barriers to trade such as tariffs, subsidies and quotas.
- Towards this end, several trade agreements have been ratified over the years under the WTO.
- Developing countries such as India and China, however, as earlier mentioned, can seek to delay the implementation of these WTO agreements owing to their disadvantaged economic status.
- They can continue to impose tariffs and quotas on goods and services in order to limit imports and promote domestic producers who may otherwise be affected adversely by imports that are lower in price or better in quality.
- India, for instance, subsidises agriculture heavily in the name of food security in order to protect its farmers.
- While local producers may be protected by protectionist barriers such as tariffs, consumers in India and China will have limited access to foreign goods.

Is the U.S. justified in criticising the WTO?

- While the “developing country” status was supposed to help poor countries ease gradually into a more globalised world economy, it has had other unintended effects.



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- Since the WTO allows countries to unilaterally classify themselves as “developing”, many countries have been happy to make use of this freedom.
- Even many developed economies such as Singapore and Hong Kong which have per capita income levels higher than the U.S., have made use of the provision to classify themselves as growing economies.
- Further, countries such as China justify that while their per capita income level has increased many-fold over the last few decades, these are still far below that of high income levels in countries such as the U.S. Thus, Mr. Trump may have a prima facie case in urging the WTO to address the issue of how countries arbitrarily classify themselves as “developing” to justify raising trade barriers.
- This is, however, not to say that WTO rules always work to the advantage of developing countries alone.
- Developed countries such as the U.S. have tried to force poorer countries to impose stringent labour safety and other regulations that are already widely prevalent in the West.
- These regulations can increase the cost of production in developing countries and make them globally uncompetitive.
- Developing countries further view the introduction of labour issues into trade agreements as beyond the scope of the WTO, which is primarily supposed to be an organisation dealing with trade.
- Many economists also oppose the fundamental argument of poorer countries that low per capita income levels justify their decision to raise trade barriers.
- They argue that free trade benefits all countries irrespective of their income levels.
- In fact, they argue that protectionist trade barriers impede the transition of developing economies to higher income levels.
- The developing country status may thus simply be a false pretext to justify protectionism.

What lies ahead?

- Mr. Trump’s criticism of the WTO is seen by many as the opening of a new front in his trade war against China. Earlier, the U.S. President had termed China as a “currency manipulator” for allowing the yuan to depreciate against the dollar.
- China and the U.S. have also been slapping steep tariffs on imports from each other since early last year.
- China’s developing country status at the WTO gives Mr. Trump yet another opportunity to attack China.



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- Since developing countries are likely to oppose any efforts to stop them from protecting their domestic economic interests, global trade rules are unlikely to experience any drastic reform any time soon.
- Further, ahead of the next ministerial-level talks of the WTO scheduled to be held in Kazakhstan next year, the inability of the WTO to rein in global trade tensions has raised questions about its relevance in today's world.
- This is particularly so given that global tariff rates over the years have dropped more due to bilateral trade agreements rather than due to multilateral trade agreements brokered at the WTO.
- Further, the dispute resolution mechanism of the WTO, which can pass judgments on disputes, lacks the powers to enforce them as the enforcement of decisions is left to individual member states.
- While initially envisaged as a global body to promote free trade, the WTO has now deteriorated into a forum where competing governments fiercely try to protect their narrow interests.