

1. Bt Cotton

Topic: Environment and Ecology

In News: The Haryana government has issued a no-objection certificate (NOC) to private firm to conduct field trials of new variety of Bt Cotton.

More on the Topic:

- New variety is **herbicide tolerant and insect resistant variety of BT cotton.**
- The HTBt cotton variant adds another layer of modification, making the plant resistant to the herbicide glyphosate, but has not been approved by regulators.
- With HTBt, simply one round of glyphosate spraying is needed with no weeding. It saves Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 8,000 per acre for farmers.
- Fears include **glyphosate having a carcinogenic effect**, as well as the unchecked spread of herbicide resistance to nearby plants through pollination, creating a variety of superweeds.
- Scientists are also in favour of this crop, and even the World Health Organization (WHO) has said it does not cause cancer.



Recent Changes in the Rules Related with Genome Edited Crops:

- The Ministry of Environment and Forests had, in the order, **exempted SDN1 and SDN2 genome edited plants from Rules 7-11 of the Environment Protection Act (EPA)** for manufacture, use or import or export and storage of hazardous microorganisms or genetically engineered organisms or cells rules-1989.
- Pertaining to this rule certain types of genome-edited crops from the stringent regulations applicable on genetically modified or GM crops, paving the way for further R&D on them.

About Bt Cotton:

- Bt cotton has been genetically modified by the insertion of one or more genes from a common soil bacterium, **Bacillus thuringiensis.**
- These genes encode for the production of insecticidal proteins, and thus, genetically transformed plants produce one or more toxins as they grow.
- The genes that have been inserted into cotton produce toxins that are limited in activity almost exclusively to caterpillar pests (Lepidoptera).

Source: Indian Express

2. Overground Workers

Topic: Internal Security

In News: Nearly 250 'overground workers' arrested in Jammu & Kashmir under the Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Most of them have been lodged in prisons outside the Union Territory.

More on the Topic:

- An OGW helps militants/terrorists in movement, ammunition supplies and accommodation.
- Over ground workers (OGWs) are people who help militants, or terrorists, with logistical support, cash, shelter, and other infrastructure with which armed groups and insurgency movements such as Hizbul Mujaheddin and Jaish-e-Muhammad in Jammu and Kashmir can operate.
- **OGWs play a vital role in militant attacks, providing real-time information and support to the tactical elements.**
- Over ground workers have diversified into other roles such as stone-pelting, mob-rioting, ideological support, radicalisation, and recruitment of militants.



Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act:

- Passed in 1967, **the law aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.**
- The Act assigns **absolute power to the central government**, by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.
- Under UAPA, **both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.**
- It will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if crime is committed on a foreign land, outside India.

Source: Indian Express

3.Small Finance Bank

Topic: Economy

In News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) asked small finance banks (SFBs) to focus on sustainable growth and accord importance to business model and governance.

More on the Topic:

- SFBs were advised to continue to evolve in tune with the differentiated banking licence given to them with proportionate growth in their capital base.
- The small finance bank shall **primarily undertake basic banking activities of acceptance of deposits and lending to unserved and underserved sections** including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries and unorganised sector entities.
- There will not be any restriction in the area of operations of small finance banks.
- The minimum paid-up equity capital for small finance banks shall be Rs. 100 crore.
- **Small Finance Banks are governed by the provisions of the:** Banking Regulation Act, 1949; Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934; Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999; etc.
- **Significance:** Small finance banks can **play an important role in the supply of credit to micro and small enterprises, agriculture and banking services in unbanked and under-banked regions** in the country.
- RBI has decided to licence new “small finance banks” in the private sector.

Background:

- In India an experiment with small banks was taken up by RBI issued guidelines for setting up of Local Area Banks (LABs) - 1996.
- The LABs were conceived as low cost structures which would provide efficient and competitive financial intermediation services in a limited area of operation, i.e., primarily in **rural and semi-urban areas**.

Source: Hindu



4. 'Black Death'

Topic: Health

In News: According to a German study published in 'Nature', the bacteria that caused world's deadliest pandemic, the medieval bubonic plague, originated in central Eurasia.



More on the Topic:

- Also known as the 'Black Death', the plague that spread through Eurasia and Northern Africa between 1346 and 1353 was **one of the largest infectious disease episodes in human history**, drastically reducing the world's population.
- While studies have put the toll at 25 million, estimates suggest the number of fatalities could have reached 200 million.
- The bubonic plague, a **rare zoonotic disease**, is one of the deadliest epidemics in the history of humankind.
- The Black Death was **caused by Yersinia pestis - a bacillus bacterium**.
- The Y. pestis was spread by infected fleas that were carried by rodent hosts.
- The onset of symptoms was followed by intense fever, joint pains and vomiting of blood.
- After the initial infection, most victims died within 2-7 days.

Source: Indian Express

5. Bharat Gaurav Trains

Topic: Economy

In News: The Indian Railways has flagged off India's first privately-run train under the scheme 'Bharat Gaurav'.

More on the Topic:

- The scheme was launched in November 2021, that allowed **private entities to operate theme-based train services across different circuits**.
- The services for this train are





provided by South Star Rail. This registered company is part of Future Gaming & Hotel Services Private Limited.

- The service provider has paid Rs 1 crore as security deposit to Southern Railway for the rake with a composition of 20 coaches.

What is the Bharat Gaurav policy?

- According to the Bharat Gaurav policy, any operator or service provider, or virtually anyone, **can lease trains from Indian Railways to run on a theme-based circuit** as a special tourism package.
- The tenure of the arrangement is **a minimum of two years and maximum of the codal life of the coach.**
- **The operator has the freedom to decide the route, the halts, the services provided,** and, most importantly, the tariff.
- The IRCTC runs such theme-based tourist trains, for instance, the Ramayana Express, which goes on a tour of several places connected to Lord Ram.
- In such packaged tours, typically the passengers stop over at a place, stay at hotels, undertake sightseeing, etc. — all organised by tour operators.

Two options:

- Registered Service Providers shall be offered rakes consisting of ICF coaches under **“Right to Use” model by Indian Railways (IR)** for operations of Bharat Gaurav Trains.
- Service Providers shall also have the option of **procurement of new coaches directly from production units through the Non Railway Customer (NRC) plan.**

Source: Business Standard

6. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

Topic: Government Schemes

In News: The National Health Authority (NHA) under its flagship scheme of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) has launched a public dashboard for real-time information.

More on the Topic:

- The public dashboard will be a one-stop solution for information on the mission's progress at state level.
- The dashboard will display detailed information on core registries under the mission – Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) numbers, Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR) and Health Facility Registry (HFR).
- ABDM is built on the principles of **accessibility, transparency, inclusivity and interoperability.**

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission:

- Ayushman Bharat is a flagship scheme of India which was launched as recommended by the National Health Policy 2017, **to achieve the vision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).**
- Under the mission, citizens will be able to create their Ayushman Bharat health account numbers, to which their digital health records can be linked.

Source: Hindu

