Prelim Bits 08-09-2018

Leptospirosis

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- It is a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals.
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- It is caused by corkscrew-shaped bacteria called *Leptospira*.
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- In humans, it can lead to kidney damage, meningitis (inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord), liver failure, respiratory distress, and even death.
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- It’s spread through urine of infected dogs, rodents, and farm animals.
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Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

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- India recently decided to end its boycott of the PISA.
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- PISA was introduced in the year 2000 by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD).
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- It tests the learning levels of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science.
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- The test is carried out every three years.
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- India decided to stay away from PISA on account of its dismal performance in 2009.
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- The “out of context” questions were stated as a reason for the poor show.
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- in 2012 and 2015, when it was placed 72nd among the 74 participating countries.
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- India, subsequently, chose to not participate in the 2012 and 2015 cycle.
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- The HRD Ministry, now, had formally decided to end this boycott.
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- The ministry will negotiate India’s terms of participation in 2021 with OECD.
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- Unlike 2009, when schools in Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh had participated, the Union government will request OECD to administer the test across all schools in Chandigarh in 2021.
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- Chandigarh was selected for three reasons.
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1. Compact area.
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2. To keep number of languages in which the test has to be administered to a minimum and
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3. Chandigarh’s record of performing well in learning assessments.
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HY-1C satellite

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- It is a marine satellite launched by China recently.
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- It was launched by Long March-2C rocket from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in Shanxi province.
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- It is a part of series of satellites.
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- HY-1A was launched in 2002 and HY-1B satellite was launched in 2007.
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- It was launched to help improve understanding of maritime waters and climate change.
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- HY-1C can detect chlorophyll and suspended sediment concentrations and dissolved organic matter, which can affect ocean colour, as well as temperatures on the sea surface.
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- The data will help survey fishery and aquaculture resources and

environments, offering a scientific basis for reasonable exploitation and utilization of marine resources.
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- Scientists will also use the data to study global environmental changes, the role of the oceans in the global carbon cycle and the El Nino phenomenon.
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Hubballi–Ankola railway line

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- National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is soon expected to deliver the fate of the controversial Hubballi–Ankola railway line.
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- It is been opposed because will claim nearly 1,300 acres of pristine forest land apart from the cutting of 1.73 lakh trees, spanning three elephant corridors in Dharwad, Yellapur, and Karwar.
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- In June 2017 the Regional Empowered Committee of the MoEF&CC recommended the Stage-1 clearance for the project.
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- Also, earlier this year, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) rejected the proposal, saying it would have repercussions on tiger and other wildlife in the area.
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"Positive Update" on Australia's Great Barrier Reef

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- Dire warnings of reef die-off were given after massive coral bleaching in 2016 and 2017.
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- Recently, Tourism and Events Queensland has issued a "positive update, reporting that some affected areas are showing "substantial signs of recovery."
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- The Great Barrier Reef is the longest coral reef in the world and the first

coral reef ecosystem to be awarded Unesco World Heritage Status.
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- It stretches more than 1,430 miles along Queensland’s spectacular coastline.
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- Coral bleaching occurs when coral experiences stress from heightened water temperatures or poor water quality.
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- In response, the coral ejects a photosynthetic algae called zooxanthellae, which removes the coral’s distinctive color.
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- If the stress conditions persist, the coral will die.
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- But if conditions return to acceptable levels, some coral can reabsorb the substance and recover.
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- Coral bleaching occurs in multiple stages, ranging from the equivalent of a mild sunburn to coral mortality.
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Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

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