Prelim Bits 11-11-2017

Expo Centre

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- Union Cabinet has recently approved the proposal of setting up of Exhibition-cum-convention Centre (ECC) at Dwarka, New Delhi.
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- Once it becomes fully operational, it is expected to bring New Delhi in the league of Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore in the area of exhibition market.
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- It will meet the requirement of global ECC operators with its integrated world class facility expo centre.
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- It is estimated to generate more than 5 lakh jobs.
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Groundnut crop free of toxin

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- Researchers at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in Hyderabad have recently used the gene silencing technique to keep groundnuts free of **aflatoxin** contamination.
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- Aflatoxin is a toxin produced by the fungi Aspergillus flavus and Aspergillus parasiticus.
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- Researchers deployed two strategies to prevent groundnuts being infected by the fungus.
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- One is inserting two alfalfa (flowering plant of pea family) genes to enhance immunity against fungal infection and growth.
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- Another is preventing aflatoxin production even in case of any infection through a plant-induced **gene silencing technique**.
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Gene Silencing Technique

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- Gene silencing is a technique that aims to reduce or eliminate the production of a protein from its corresponding gene.
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- It generally describe the “switching off” of a gene by a mechanism other than genetic modification
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- It occurs when RNA is unable to make a protein during translation (gene expression).
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- In the groundnut case, the researchers designed two small RNA molecules that silence the fungal genes which produce aflatoxin.
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- When the fungus and plant come in contact with each other the small RNA molecules from the plant enter the fungus and prevent it from producing aflatoxin (protein) by its corresponding gene.
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National Testing Agency

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- Union Cabinet has recently approved creation of National Testing Agency (NTA) to conduct entrance examinations for higher educational institutions.
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- It will be registered as a society under the Indian Societies Registration Act.
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- It will act an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization chaired by eminent educationist appointed by Ministry of HRD.
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- The setting up of NTA was announced in the union budget of 2017-18.
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- It would initially conduct those entrance examinations which are currently being conducted by the CBSE (NEET, JEE etc).
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- The entrance examinations will be conducted in online mode at least twice a year, giving adequate opportunity to candidates.
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- It will be given a one-time grant of Rs.25 crore from the Government to start its operation in the first year. Thereafter, it will be financially self-sustainable.
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- It will relieve CBSE, AICTE and other agencies from responsibility of conducting the entrance examinations.
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National Rural Drinking Water Programme

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- The NRDWP was started in 2009 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with 50-50 fund sharing between the Centre and the States.
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- Ministry of Drinking water and sanitation is the nodal ministry with an emphasis on ensuring sustainability (source) of water availability.
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- Recently, the cabinet has approved the continuation and restructuring of the programme to make it more flexible and result oriented.
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- The programme will cover all the rural population across the country to reach the goal of increasing coverage of sustainable piped water supply.
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- NRDWP will be continued co-terminus with the 14th Finance Commission cycle till March 2020.
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- There will be 2% earmarking of funds for Japanese Encephalitis (JE) /Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) affected areas.
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- A new sub-programme "**National Water Quality Sub-Mission (NWQSM)**" to cover all rural population in Arsenic/Fluoride affected habitations with clean drinking water on a sustainable basis by March 2021.
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National Judicial Pay Commission

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- National Judicial Pay Commission was formed to evolve the principles which would govern pay structure and other emoluments of Judicial Officers

belonging to the Subordinate Judiciary.
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- It will give its recommendation to State governments within the period of 18 months after its constitution.
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- It aims at making the pay scales and conditions of service of Judicial Officers uniform throughout the country.
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- Cabinet has recently approved the appointment of second national judicial pay commission headed by former Supreme Court judge.
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Source: The Hindu, PIB.

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