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INCREASE IN NUMBER OF SUPREME COURT JUDGES TO 38: PRESIDENT MURMU APPROVES

- At present, the strength of judges in the Supreme Court stands at the Chief Justice and 33 judges.
- The Union Cabinet on the 5th approved raising this strength to 38.
- He said that as the next step, an amendment bill to increase 4 judge posts will be passed in the upcoming session of Parliament.
- When the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act was enacted in 1956, the total strength of other judges in the Supreme Court, excluding the Chief Justice, was fixed at only 10.
- Through an amendment act in 1960, the strength was increased to 13, and through the next amendment, the strength of judges was raised to 17.
- Later, in 1986, through an amendment act again, the strength of Supreme Court judges was increased from 17 to 25.
- Subsequently, in 2009, this strength was increased to 30, and in 2019, the strength including the Chief Justice and other judges was raised to 34.

GLANDERS INFECTION

» What is Glanders:

- It is a type of infection that affects horses, donkeys, and mules.
- It is spread by a bacterial microorganism named *Burkholderia mallei*.
- It can spread very rapidly between horses and donkeys. Since nodules (glands) form all over the body of the affected animals, it is named Glanders disease.

» How does it spread?

- Blisters and nodules appear on the skin area of the infected horses and turn into sores.
- The infection is transmitted to other animals through the fluid discharged from them.
- Sores also form in the horse's respiratory tract, nose, trachea, and lungs, from which droplets are discharged.
- 95 percent of the animals affected by this disease die. This affliction is frequently recorded in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

» Will it spread to humans?

- There is a possibility of Glanders disease spreading to people who are in direct contact with the infected animals.
- Particularly, the chances are higher for veterinarians and animal caretakers.

» Mode of transmission:

- The infection spreads when the fluid discharging from the sores of the animal comes into direct contact with human skin.
- It also spreads from the tears, mucus, and saliva of infected horses and donkeys.
- When they cough and neigh, the infection is transmitted to humans by inhaling the droplets discharged from them.

OIL CRISIS AND THE CRAZE FOR GOLD..

- The war surrounding Iran and the resulting geopolitical tensions have created a difficult situation for countries that are heavily dependent on crude oil imports.
 - We import about 85-89 percent of our total crude oil requirement. Due to the war situation, the price of crude oil has risen erratically.
 - So far, a major portion of the increase in crude oil import costs has been absorbed by oil marketing companies (OMCs), without being fully passed on to consumers.
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- The Problem Caused by High Gold Consumption
- India has another structural challenge as well, which is gold consumption. To meet the country's domestic demand, gold has to be imported on a large scale.
 - This, on one hand, leads to dollar expenditure and, on the other hand, puts additional pressure on the rupee-dollar exchange rate.
 - Statistics show that Indian households lead globally in holding gold reserves. It is estimated that Indians hold about 25,000 to 34,000 tonnes of gold.

- The value of this gold, which is in the form of jewellery, coins, gold bars, and temple repositories, could be worth several trillion dollars.
- This is many times higher than the official gold reserves of the Reserve Bank of India (about 900 tonnes).
- In India, besides gaining cultural significance in weddings, festivals, and religious traditions, gold is also considered a safe long-term investment against inflation and economic uncertainty, and specifically as a reliable form of financial savings in rural areas.

» Gold Import in 2nd Place

- In the 2025-26 financial year, India's gold imports rose to about 72 billion dollars.
- The share of gold in the country's total import expenditure was about 9%. This is the 2nd largest import item next to crude oil.

» The objective of these measures:

- ↳ Protecting economic stability
- ↳ Safeguarding foreign exchange reserves
- ↳ Controlling non-essential imports

» A few more ideas:

- Controlling the expansion of Gold ETFs (Gold Exchange-Traded Funds): According to early 2026 data, during times of economic uncertainty and price fluctuations, Gold ETF schemes have become one of the major factors increasing the demand for gold.
- It is reported that Indian Gold ETFs purchased about 20 tonnes of gold in the first quarter of 2026 alone: In the month of January (2026) alone, ETF investment was a major share of monthly gold imports.

Today News...

- In a situation where pressure on foreign exchange reserves is increasing, the government may consider temporarily controlling the utilization of new gold for the expansion of ETFs.
- However, it is also true that Gold ETFs serve as a transparent and regulated investment opportunity for investors.
- This can sometimes help reduce the demand for gold for jewellery and gold coins. Therefore, any regulations must be carefully designed.
- » Under these circumstances, the Reserve Bank may tighten regulations in the following aspects:
 - ^ Review of Loan-to-Value ratios
 - ^ Monitoring the utilization of loans
 - ^ Increasing interest rates
 - ^ Increasing risk weight to increase the surplus funds maintained by banks
- Such measures may help prevent excessive debt dependency on gold. This will increase the gold available for trade in the market.

THE ANAIMANGALAM COPPER PLATES RETURNED HOME FROM THE NETHERLANDS AFTER 300 YEARS

- In the 21st regnal year of the great king Raja Raja Chola, in 1005 AD, Raja Raja Chola orally granted the Anaimangalam village, spanning an area of 97 Veli, as a Pallichchandam (land donation to non-Vedic religions) to the Buddhist monastery named 'Chulamani Varma Vihara', which was built in Nagapattinam by Maravijayottunggavarman, the king of Sri Vijaya Kedah.
- This charter was not created until Raja Raja passed away in 1014. His son, Rajendra Chola I, confirmed this in writing by engraving a charter.
- Weighing 30 kg, the 21 copper plates are bound together by a bronze ring. The ring bears the Chola royal seal. 5 plates are in Sanskrit, and 16 plates are in Tamil.
- 3 small plates confirmed by Kulothunga Chola are also attached. Raja Raja Chola, who belonged to the Saivite religion, donating an entire village to a Buddhist monastery shows the religious tolerance of Tamil kings.
- The Tamil plates record the administrative terminology, land measurement methods, and legal documentary traditions of those days.
- This stands as evidence of the 11th-century international trade, Buddhist-Saivite harmony, administrative efficiency of the Cholas, and overseas diplomatic relations.
- It also contains the list of Chola kings, the list of officials, and mentions of conquered countries.
- During the 18th-century Dutch dominance, these copper plates were taken from Nagai to the Netherlands by a person named Florensius Camper.
- Having been in the possession of the Hamaker family, they were donated to the Leiden University Museum in 1862.
- Numerous Tamil enthusiasts continuously raised their voices demanding that these should be retrieved and brought back to Tamil Nadu.
- The Anaimangalam copper plates serve as a mirror of time that speaks of the charitable nature, religious harmony, administrative integrity, and international perspective of Tamils from a thousand years ago.