Read the articles and answer the following questions.

**In Syria’s Lost Cause, Jared Malsin draws attention to the six-year rebellion in Syria.**

1. Explain why ‘the rebellion against the Assad regime is in crisis’ but may not end any time soon. *Ans: pp21-23 – Not too long ago, the Syrian rebels thought they were poised to win the war. However, Assad refused to go and his forces resorted to widespread killing, placed cities under siege, and dropped barrel bombs on civilian areas to bring about a bloody stalemate. The stalemate was broken by Russia’s entry into the war and its air strikes targeted rebel forces rather than ISIS. Shi’ite-dominated Iraq, troops from Iran, and fighters from Hizballah bolstered the offensive. Assad’s troops and allied militias have nearly circled the rebels’ most important redoubt in Aleppo. A vital supply line from Turkey to Aleppo has been cut. The rebels are locked in a three-pronged fight with the regime, ISIS, and Kurdish milita in the surrounding area. However, even though the Assad regime has strengthened its grip on part of Syria, it still lacks a formula for a clear military victory and the conflict may just enter a new phase in which extremist groups continue to gather strength, taking in fighters from battered rebel battalions. Even if a ceasefire or peace deal could be reached, some rebels will keep fighting because they will never be safe as long as the Assad circle controls the security establishment.*

2. Explain how ‘civilians have paid the heaviest price.’ *Ans: p22 – Russia and the Syrian regime have launched widespread attacks on hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure and relentless attacks on civilian targets have depopulated entire towns. Evacuation is chaotic and many have died defending their homes. Tens of thousands of Syrians who have fled their homes are essentially trapped in a war zone in the north after Turkey sealed its border to stem the influx of refugees.*

3. The beleaguered rebels believe the only way for them to offset Russia’s aid to the regime is for allies to send them game-changing weapons. Why is that unlikely to happen and no guarantee against defeat? *Ans: pp22-23 – Washington is focused on combating ISIS and this limits its support to rebel groups. Moreover, the rebel groups are fractured and constantly reorganising rather than fighting their foes in a united fashion. The chaos makes Washington worry that heavy weapons could potentially fall into jihadist hands. Russia’s move into Syria has also tied the U.S.’s hands: it cannot risk a conflict with Russia because it could escalate into a large-scale war (WWIII).*

**In The Increasingly Compelling Case for Why You Shouldn’t be Allowed to Drive, Mat Vella imagines the changes that might be set in motion by self-driving cars.**

4. How might self-driving cars remake not just the driving experience but urban planning and lifestyles too? *Ans: pp27-28 – Given the ability of autonomous vehicles to communicate with one another and regulate their speeds to stagger their arrivals at intersections, traffic management will become a precision ballet. Parking will also be transformed as software can enable the cars to valet park themselves and be summoned when they are needed. This and other features means the landscape and roads can be redesigned more efficiently (translating into cost savings). Car density can be improved too, allowing existing roads to be better utilised and relieving the pressure to widen highways. Self-driving cars can improve mobility for the young, elderly, and disabled too.*

5. Explain the writer’s observation that ‘every Eden has its serpent.’ *Ans: p28 – It remains to be seen how an algorithmic car would react to an ethical conundrum (e.g. traffic accident scenarios). Faulty and dangerous technology will cause fatalities too. A decision would also need to be made about the age at which passengers can ride unaccompanied in the vehicles. There will be multi-billion deep disruptions too, such as to the auto-insurance, parking and auto-aftermarket industries.*

6. It is predicted that self-driving cars will become prevalent in the next one or two decades. What is your opinion of this impending driverless revolution? What changes do you anticipate for yourself and how
would life in your country be transformed? What repercussions might be set in motion and would they be as destructive as the proverbial serpent in Eden?

In *Encounters with the Archgenius*, David Von Drehle discusses artificial intelligence and the human mind with David Gelernter.

7. ‘Among the thundering vanguard, though, is a growing group of worried individuals, some of them doomstruck Cassandras, some machine-hating Luddites and a few who fit in neither group.’ *(a)* What is the writer suggesting about the advocates of artificial intelligence and some of its naysayers? *(b)* Where does Gelernter belong and why? *Ans:* *(a)* p35 – The writer’s description of a ‘thundering vanguard’ draws attention to the impressive background of the foremost advocates of AI that boosts the credibility of their positive evaluation of AI. By describing some of the naysayers as ‘doomstruck Cassandras’, he is alluding to the disasters they prophesise and how their predictions are being disregarded as unfounded. By describing other naysayers as ‘machine-hating Luddites’, he is suggesting that these people are seen as habitually assuming technology to be threatening. As they would oppose any new developments, their opinion is readily adopted by the masses. *(b)* p36&39 – Gelernter belongs in the third group of ‘worried individuals’. As he is a computer virtuoso and an extremely learned man with a wealth of knowledge who has delved into human consciousness at length, his opinion about AI carries more weight than those of the Cassandras and Luddites. However, even he acknowledges that he is in the minority/vastly outnumbered and his ideas might simply be ignored too.

8. ‘Gelernter argues that the entire field of AI is off track and dangerously so.’ Explain why he thinks so. *Ans:* pp36-39 – Unlike the gurus of AI who argue that the differences between humans and machines will vanish in the not-too-distant future when human minds, memories and personalities are downloadable to computers and human brains become infinitely upgradable (Kurzeil’s Singularity), Gelernter remains unconvinced. He points out that the human mind is not just a creation of thoughts and data but a product of feelings too. The mind emerges from a particular person’s experience of sensations, images and ideas. The memories of these sensations are worked and reworked over a lifetime through conscious thinking and in dreams. The mind is in a particular body and consciousness is the work of the whole body. When the body changes, the mind alters along with it: physical conditions go into the formation and operation of a human mind and the latter operates in different ways through the course of the day. At the moment, the field of AI does not have anything that speaks to emotions or the physical body. To Gelernter, even if his mind can be downloaded onto a computer, it will no longer be him. Furthermore, while computers may function like a mind in high focus (up-spectrum), it is still unable to mimic a mind in low focus (down-spectrum). To Gelernter, the full expression of a human mind requires the entire spectrum and until a computer can hallucinate, there is no AI. He also points out that not all logical breakthroughs come from minds operating a high focus (refer to his personal example on p38) but there is a fundamental cultural prejudice that high-focus thought is better. Although computers have enough capacity to mimic low-focus thought and can be “trained” to become adept at faking the feelings that give structure to down-spectrum consciousness, Gelernter likens such machines to zombies because they would not have genuine human feelings and cannot experience existential dread.

9. Are you with the ‘thundering vanguard’ or ‘worried individuals’? Can AI replicate the human mind? In time to come, AI will become even more integrated into our lives. Do you see such a development as benevolent or catastrophic?

Hannah Beech highlights *China’s war on the media* while Julian Sanchez considers the real meaning of *Apple’s battle with the FBI over encryption*. Nikhil Kumar suggests that the arrest of a student leader *spotlights India’s battle for free speech*.

10. In the articles, the actions of governments threaten the freedom accorded to citizens, companies, and organisations. Explain what is at stake in each case. *Ans:* p8 – *China*: limiting press freedom: journalists are told to speak up for the CCP’s will, foreign companies forbidden from publishing informational or thoughtful online content within China without preapproval from the government, legislation criminalise digital content deemed to be national security threats, and bloggers and writers can be jailed for causing serious social disorder. pp18-19 – *U.S.*: hacking into encrypted devices for law enforcement: the future of high-tech surveillance, the trust infrastructure undergirding the global software ecosystem, how far technology companies can be conscripted (in secret) as unwilling suppliers of hacking tools by
governments. **India**: (over)reactions to anti-national elements: the BJP practises politics of divisiveness even though it does not necessarily translate into votes. The sedition charges against student leaders is seen as an overreaction by the government and creates a new divide between nationalist forces allied with the BJP that are propagating an ideology that views India above all else as a Hindu nation and liberals who fear that the space for dissent and free expression is shrinking under Modi’s rule. Activists believe the authorities are deliberately fanning nationalist emotions and unwilling to investigate supporters who commit violence in the name of nationalism. The incident highlights the two faces of the Modi government: it positions itself as an economic reformer in the international arena but pursues a narrow political and social agenda at home. Opposing parties could use the controversy to stall Modi’s plans for the economy.

11. Based on your evaluation of developments and challenges affecting your country, under what circumstances, if at all, would you support decisions that are meant to safeguard national interests and security but will limit the freedom or privacy of citizens, companies, or organisations?

**Complete the contextual meanings of the following words.**

After completing this exercise, use the words in sentences of your own making.

**The Court’s Next Trial**

1. It was a quip typically hurled at judges who diverged from Scalia’s own philosophy, but it also encapsulated his dismay at much of the culture surrounding him. **Ans**: QUIP: a [A14] witty remark. **ENCAPSULATED**: expressed the essential features of (something) [A39] succinctly

2. And so it would hardly have surprised the brilliant and irascible jurist that mere hours after he was found dead on a Saturday morning in a quiet quarter of the West Texas mountains, a circus was already unfolding. **Ans**: IRASCIBLE: Having or showing a tendency to be easily angered; [D34] tetchy. **CIRCUS**: A public scene of [D30] frenetic, noisy, or confused activity

3. But many close to the court viewed it with foreboding. **Ans**: fearful [D7] apprehension

4. It isn’t inevitable that the fight over replacing Scalia will end in gridlock, but it’s close. **Ans**: a situation, typically one involving opposing parties, in which no progress can be made; [A20] deadlock

5. It was designed that way, to reflect the court’s exalted role as the branch of government most likely to bend towards justice. And while no court has ever been devoid of politics, the Supreme Court has historically resisted the partisan excesses seen in the neighbourhood’s other buildings. **Ans**: EXALTED: of a [D4] noble, elevated, or lofty nature. **DEVOID**: [D8] entirely lacking or free from

6. A bon vivant, sought-after public speaker and unparalleled writer who charmed many an opponent … Scalia became by far the most famous Justice on the bench. **Ans**: a person who devotes himself to a [D19] sociable and luxurious lifestyle

7. Scalia began shaking up the staid, hierarchical Supreme Court from the moment he sat down for his first oral argument in the far-right chair that is reserved for the most junior Justice. **Ans**: sedate, respectable, and [A11] unadventurous

8. Though the sessions are undeniably more engaging and penetrating than they once were, with eight Justices and at least two lawyers vying for time and talking over one another, they can take on the feel of a crowded presidential debate stage. **Ans**: PENETRATING: having or showing great [A10] insight. **VYING**: competing [D32] eagerly with someone in order to do or achieve something

9. Critics noted that his reference to Obama was gratuitous, since it wasn’t even part of the case. **Ans**: done without good reason; [A24] uncalled for

10. “I prefer not to take part in the assembling of an apparent but specious unanimity,” he wrote in a separate opinion in a 9–0 case striking down a Massachusetts restriction on abortion protesters. **Ans**: SPECIOUS: superficially [A5] plausible, but actually wrong. **UNANIMITY**: agreement by all people involved; [D31] consensus

11. But it is a tough recipe for a court that aims to be a redoubt from the fray in an increasingly fray democracy. **Ans**: REDOUBT: a protected place of [A16] refuge or defence. **FRAY**: a [D13] heated dispute or intensely competitive situation. **FRAYED**: under great [A40] strain
12. It is too early to tell, and may even require undue optimism in this season of vitriol, but perhaps Scalia’s departure will boost Roberts’ efforts. Ans: UNDUE: [A35] unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate. VITRIOL: bitter criticism or [A6] malice

The Increasingly Compelling Case for Why You Shouldn't Be Allowed to Drive

13. Other stoked non-drivers have posted videos of themselves reading books, brushing their teeth and otherwise ignoring the road as their cars zoomed along. Ans: excited or [D28] euphoric

14. Born-again evangelists of self-driving cars include some of the most venerable names in the business … (Toyoda, a racing buff, was adamantly opposed to self-drivers before reversing himself late last year.) Ans: VENERABLE: accorded a great deal of [A37] respect, especially because of age, wisdom, or character. ADAMANTLY: firmly and [D17] resolutely

15. These words may grate in the sunburnt ears of car-loving Americans. Ans: have an [D26] irritating effect

16. There is no “right to drive” enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, but forced to choose, a lot of people would rather take the wheel than the Fifth – no matter how many statistics are marshalled to prove that driving puts others’ lives at risk. Ans: ENSHRINED: [A27] preserved (a right, tradition, or idea) in a form that ensured it will be protected and respected. MARSHALLED: brought together and arranged in [A36] order (facts, ideas, objects, etc.)

17. Freedom vs. security that quintessential quandary of the 21st century, will frame the transition from human drivers to more skilful computers. Ans: QUINTESENTIAL: representing the most [A29] perfect or typical example of a quality or class. QUANDARY: a state of [D38] perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation

18. Today you pay higher insurance premiums to drive a zippy roadster than a dowdy minivan. Ans: unfashionable and [D2] unstylish in appearance

19. Such questions are likely to contort ethicists and lawyers for years to come. But all revolutions involve upheaval and this one is poised to create far more than it destroys. Ans: CONTORT: cause to [D12] deviate from what is normal, proper, or accurate. UPHEAVAL: a strong, sudden, or violent [A3] disturbance in politics, social conditions, etc. POISED: ready; on the [A25] brink of

20. A few hours later, I walked out of the hospital more or less unscathed. Ans: without suffering any [D18] injury, damage, or harm

21. Your car, for one, bears the stamp of human fallibility. Ans: the tendency to make [D9] mistakes or be wrong

22. If you have ever tried to bump Dad to the backseat at a rest stop in Montana … you have an inkling of the uphill fight that lies ahead for the driverless revolution. Ans: INKLING: slight knowledge or [A1] suspicion. UPHILL: requiring great effort; [A21] arduous

23. The coming years will no doubt be a seesaw of competing calculations, in which irrefutable data vies with ingrained passion. Ans: IRREFUTABLE: impossible to [A22] deny or disprove. INGRAINED: deeply [A15] embedded

24. Indeed, during the cross-country test of the self-driving Tesla, the car … had a disquieting tendency to race into curves at breakneck speed. Ans: inducing feelings of [A33] anxiety or worry

25. Manufacturers like Volvo and Mercedes-Benz have ratified that position by promising to assume the liability for any mistakes their smart vehicles make. Ans: approved and given formal [A23] sanction to