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General Studies-01

Yamuna in distress after immersions

News: Government agencies in the national capital have failed the dying Yamuna yet again this year, as the nine-day-long Durga Puja festivities, which came to a halt on Saturday, left the river in dire straits.



Beyond News:

- On the banks of south Delhi's Kalindi Kunj Ghat and north Delhi's Nigam Bodh Ghat, half submerged idols of Durga, most of them made of **Plaster of Paris (PoP)**, were seen on Sunday.
- A sea of plastic bags floating in river with glass bangles, flower petals and other decorations made of metal and plastic.

Legal interference:

- The **green court** had in 2015 placed a **complete ban on the use of PoP** and paints with high levels of lead for making idols, which are known to cause serious damage to the soil and water of the ecologically-sensitive area when immersed.
- Guidelines were also issued by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** in 2010 and by the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), which have largely been unheeded.
- Sanjay Upadhyay, a senior environment lawyer who raised the issue of the pollution caused by idol immersions in the Yamuna before the NGT in September, had made a **special appeal before the court** that a detailed action plan be filed by agencies — the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), three municipal corporations of the city (east, south and north), and the Delhi government — on how they would tackle the high influx of devotees to the ghats and check pollution.

General Studies-02

Police issue summons to 14 BHU students

News:

- The Uttar Pradesh police have issued summons to more than a dozen students of the Banaras Hindu University involved in last week's protests, citing various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including attempt to murder.

Beyond News:

- An FIR had been lodged at the Lanka police station in Varanasi under several sections of the Indian Penal Code, including:
 1. 148(rioting with armed weapon),
 2. 307 (attempt to murder),
 3. 353 (criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of duties),
 4. 332 (voluntarily causing hurt) and
 5. 436 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house).

{Op-Ed}Back to paper: on using VVPAT in Gujarat polls

Issue:

- The Election Commission's decision to deploy the **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail** system for all the constituencies in the Gujarat Assembly elections is questionable.

Background:

- This will be the first time VVPAT will be used on a State-wide basis.
- A costly but useful complement to the Electronic Voting Machine.
- It had also challenged political parties to a hackathon to see if, with these safeguards in place, EVMs could be manipulated.



Concerns:

- The implementation of VVPAT was to have been undertaken by the EC in a phased manner, but this blanket use appears to have been expedited after a series of unwarranted attacks on EVMs by some political parties and scaremongers.
- The introduction of VVPAT and the audit process should allay some of the doubts raised by EVM naysayers — but this is a costly process and should not become the norm going forward.
- The EC had sought to allay concerns and confront allegations of voter fraud by running through the administrative and technological safeguards instituted to keep EVMs and the voting process tamper-proof.

Advantages:

- it allows the voter to verify her vote after registering it on the EVM,
- the paper trail allows for an audit of the election results by the EC in a select and randomised number of constituencies.

General Studies-03

{Op-Ed} Maximum neglect: on Elphinstone stampede

Issue: Mumbai's ghastly suburban railway stampede, in which 23 people died after being crushed on a narrow staircase, was the inevitable consequence of prolonged neglect of urban public transport in India.

Background:

- The **financial capital** depends mainly on the 300 km suburban system, which has some of the highest passenger densities for any city railway in the world. Yet, it has no single accountable manager.
- It is unthinkable for a modern railway system to continue with business as usual when about 3,500 people die on its tracks in a year.

Solutions:

1. Creating canopies to shield passengers, such as those crowding the staircase to escape the rain in Mumbai,
2. putting in escalators and lifts,
3. providing exits on both sides of train coaches towards the street level wherever feasible...etc

Challenges:

- Reforming archaic transport planning and management for urban India remains the still bigger challenge.
- A sound transport demand management strategy would consider mapping travel patterns, and shifting some institutions to areas in the wider Mumbai Metropolitan Region where infrastructure, including housing, and amenities can be planned in advance.
- The latest carnage is evidence of the failure of civic policy to factor in the need for pedestrian access, and it applies not just to stations but to the wider city.
- The number of private vehicles and taxis has grown in Mumbai by four and six times, respectively, over the past two decades, leading to lobbying for wider roads and more flyovers, while mass mobility systems and facilities for walkers and cycle-users have not received similar attention.

Way ahead:

The families of the dead and the injured should be given exemplary compensation, to reinforce the accountability of the railway administration.

Coal is still the secret of our energy

With India embarking on an ambitious journey to achieve renewable energy capacity of 175 gigawatt (GW) by 2022, questions have been raised on the relevance of coal in the present context.

Does coal, the principal source of energy for now, face a dark future?

- According to analysts, renewable energy sources and coal will coexist, as the availability of coal is abundant in India and it can provide affordable power to propel India's growth and light every household.
- Despite the rapid growth in renewable energy, legacy coal plants will continue to generate thermal energy.
- This is evident from the fact that captive power plants purchased 80% of the coal offered on a five-year contract at an auction at an average premium of 25% over the notified price.
- At a similar auction held last year, Coal India had managed to receive a premium of 19% over the notified price.

In Indian context:

- In India, coal has always been thought of as the raw material for power. Because the demand from the power sector was much more than the availability of coal in the last 10 years, no serious thought has gone into any other use for coal.
- Once the power sector begins to use increasing amounts of power from solar and other renewable sources, then coal can be put to use elsewhere: eg, coal can be deployed in the manufacture of ammonia and for conversion of ammonia to fertilizer.
- With the government's plans to usher in a second green revolution, the demand for domestically-made fertilizer will be high.
- Thoughts are being channelised now to come up with methods to produce chemicals such as methanol and others of its ilk from coal.
- India's total coal reserve is estimated at a little more than 300 billion tonnes. If 50% of that is extractable, a 1-billion-tonne annual consumption will translate into availability for 150 years.

Green energy may power Kochi water metro ferries

News: The 78 ferries proposed for the **Kochi water metro** will make it the world's second largest in terms of the number of vessels.

Beyond News:

- The biggest fleet, comprising 156 ferries, operates in Venice.
- A general consultant, which is reviewing the ₹747-crore project mooted as a water-based extension of the Kochi metro, will shortly suggest specifications for boats, jetties, and other components.

- The first lot of modern ferries, including air-conditioned ones, is expected to take to Kochi's waterbodies by the end of 2018, said sources in Kochi Metro Rail Limited (KMRL).

Advantages:

- The advantage is power can be drawn simultaneously from diesel and electric energy.
- The diesel generator will step in if the vessel exhausts its electric power, they added.
- The ferries will rely on an intelligent navigation system.
- They will also have passenger information system, GPS tracking, on-board WiFi and surveillance systems, all monitored from an operational control centre.
- There might even be provision to carry bicycles on board, to promote eco-friendly transport.

111 leopards spotted at tiger reserve

News: In what is seen as a healthy sign of leopard population in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR), the Forest Department has identified and tagged 111 leopards through camera traps over a period of three years.

Beyond News:

- These included a leopardess with her three cubs.
- To promote conservation of the tiger, the Ministry of Environment and Forests is implementing 'Project Tiger' at the 50 tiger reserves in the country through the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- Tiger estimation is done through camera traps in association with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The STR — spread across 1,411.60sq.km. — has tigers, elephants, leopards, gaurs, blackbucks, four-horned antelopes, hyenas, wild dogs, white-backed vultures, deer and other animals.
- As many as 320 camera traps were placed in the forest during the last three years to capture the images of tigers and other animals.
- After profiling the images based on the unique skin rosette pattern, the department identified 111 leopards, including 35 male, 56 female and 20 unclassified leopards.

General Studies-04

Army veteran asked to prove Indian identity

News:

- Mohammad Haque retired as a Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) last year after serving the Army for 30 years, but that wasn't a proof enough that he was Indian.

Beyond News:

- Last month, he was issued summons by a foreigners tribunal in Assam to prove his identity.
- It resulted in widespread outrage.
- Mr. Haque who served in the Army's Corps of Engineers was summoned by the foreigners tribunal to appear before it on October 13 as he figured in the list of "doubtful voters" and prove he is not an illegal migrant from Bangladesh.

Background:

- This is not the first time he had to face such an ordeal.
- In 2012, Mr. Haque's wife Mumtaz Begum had a similar experience but was declared an Indian by the tribunal.
- He has been summoned on the premise that he moved to India after 1971.
- Mr. Haque said that he is a **citizen of India** and his mother Rahimon Nesa was in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951.
- While he retired from the Army, one of his sons is studying at the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC), Dehradun and wants to join the Army.

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General Studies-01

{Op-Ed}The numbers game: IMD forecast for farmers

Issue: With the India Meteorological Department getting its monsoon forecast wrong this year, its modeling has necessarily come under the spotlight.

Background:

- In April, the IMD had predicted "near normal", or 96%, rains and then upgraded the figure to 98% a couple of months later.
- These percentages refer to the proportion of rains to 89 cm, a 50-year average of monsoon rains.
- However, the country finally ended up with "below normal" rains .

Current scenario:

- Crop sowing is expected to be only a little less than last year, which saw a record harvest, with more districts posting deficient rain.
- Better drought management has over the years weakened the link between rain shortfall and food production, but the IMD continues to persevere with the meaningless practice of assigning a catch-all number to the quantum of rain expected during the monsoon.

Problems associated with IMD:

- While a single number, 96 or 95, has the power to brand rainfall as “near” or “below” normal, the IMD **never admits to being in error**.
- It relies on the security of generous error margins. Thus, a 98% forecast, say, implies a range from 94% to 102% and so could span “below normal” to “above normal”.
- The IMD is increasingly relying on **supercomputers and sophisticated models** to warn of weather changes at the district level.
- The fallout of focussing on numbers to gauge a phenomenon as geographically and quantitatively varied as the Indian monsoon is that it has ripple effects of tricking everyone from policymakers to the stock markets that a ‘normal’ monsoon implies all will be well with rainfall distribution.
- These localised estimates aim to warn of threatening weather — and are operationally useful — rather than reduce rain to numerical jugglery. The IMD must give momentum to this shift.



Indian Monsoon pattern:

- The Indian monsoon has over the centuries stayed remarkably **consistent at around 89 cm** during the monsoon months, give or take 10%.
- The challenge lies in capturing **intra-seasonal variation** or forecasting a sudden change in global weather (such as typhoons) that can affect rainfall over specific districts.
- While more and more farmers are opting for crop insurance and have far greater access — via mobile phones — to news on weather patterns, what they seek are localised, actionable inputs to guide them on sowing or harvesting decisions.

General Studies-02

SC questions Kerala HC annulment of Hindu-Muslim marriage

News: After ordering a National Investigation Agency probe into the alleged conversion and **marriage of a Hindu girl to a Muslim in Kerala**, the Supreme Court on Monday turned around to question the very annulment of the inter-religious marriage by the Kerala High Court and the legality of the girl's father keeping her in his custody for the past several months.

Beyond news:

- A Bench of Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra and Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and D.Y. Chandrachud asked how the High Court, on May 24, annulled the marriage of a woman, who has reached the age of majority, while **exercising writ jurisdiction under Article 226**, which is used to challenge violations of fundamental rights, legal rights and other basic rights.

- His recall petition requests the apex court to stop the NIA probe in light of subsequent events showing the girl **converted of her own free will** and she is being confined and “tortured” by her parents.
- The chairperson of Kerala Women’s Commission, M.C. Josephine, indicating that there is “**grave human rights violation in the case of the detenu (the girl) and that the commission is willing to act on a complaint**”.
- The application points out that the retired Supreme Court judge, Justice R.V. Raveendran, whom the Supreme Court had appointed to oversee the NIA investigation, has **refused the assignment**.
- It said that in the light of Justice Raveendran’s refusal, the NIA probe should be stopped as it would not be a fair one.
- It said that keeping the girl in custody against her will wherein **she is not free to practice the religion** she has chosen of her own free will is a clear violation of her fundamental rights.”

Police discount IS involvement despite claims

#NMI -Not much important

News: The barrage in Las Vegas from a 32nd-floor window in the Mandalay Bay hotel into a crowd of more than 40,000 people lasted several minutes, causing panic.

Beyond News:

- The **Islamic State militant group** claimed responsibility for the massacre, but U.S. officials expressed scepticism of that claim.
- The death toll, which police emphasised was preliminary, eclipsed last year’s massacre of 49 people at an Orlando night club by a gunman who pledged allegiance to IS militants.
- In the past, the group has also claimed responsibility for attacks without providing evidence

General Studies-03

Three gravitational wave detecting scientists win 2017 Physics Nobel.

News: The 2017 Nobel Physics Prize was divided, one half awarded to Rainer Weiss, the other half jointly to Barry C. Barish and Kip S. Thorne “for decisive contributions to the LIGO detector and the observation of gravitational waves”.

Beyond News:

- Ripples in the fabric of space-time, first predicted a century ago by Albert Einstein, sparked a revolution in astrophysics when their first detection was announced in early 2016.
- The teams involved in the discovery quickly emerged as favourites for the prize.

- Triggered when super-dense black holes merge, the waves were detected using laser beams at the **Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO)**.

Significance:

- “The signal was extremely weak when it reached the Earth, but is already promising a revolution in astrophysics.”
- The waves detected by the laureates came from the collision of two black holes some 1.3 billion light years away. **A light year is about 9.5 trillion km.**

8 core sectors witness growth by 4.9% in August, highest since April

News: Eight core sectors grew by 4.9% in August, the highest growth rate since April. This growth is on account of robust performance of coal, natural gas and electricity segments.

Beyond news:

The core sectors are:

1. coal	5. fertilisers
2. crude oil	6. steel
3. natural gas	7. cement
4. refinery products	8. electricity

- The infrastructure growth was 2.6% in July.
- The production of coal, natural gas and electricity rose by 15.3%, 4.2% and 10.3%.
- The production growth of refinery products and steel slowed down to 2.4% and 3% in August, against 2.5% and 16.7% respectively in the same month last year.
- Cumulatively, the eight core sectors in April-August recorded a growth rate of 3%, against 5.4% in the same period a year ago.
- The healthy growth of key sectors would have positive implications on the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), as these segments account for about 41% to the total factory output.

{Op-Ed}The cost of electricity

Issue: The value addition in charges of electricity from generator to consumer via several generators in between.

Issue in detail:

- Electricity reaches a consumer through the grid. Laying a grid needs significant investment.
- A distributor buys electricity from a generator, adds transmission and distribution charges, a charge to recover technical losses, operating expenses, and his profit to determine the tariff to be charged from a consumer.

- Since several generators are connected to the grid, interaction with the grid and grid-management policies influence the working of a generator.

Current scenario:

- At present, electricity markets do not assign any price to system effects, that is, to the complex interactions among various generators connected to the grid.
- In recent years, a large capacity based on **variable renewable energy (VRE)** sources has been connected to the grid. These sources are intermittent, but get priority feed-in due to nil fuelling cost.
- A grid manager must ensure that enough **dispatchable generation capacity** is connected to the grid to meet the peak load in the evening when solar power is not available.
- Dispatchable generation is provided by **base load technologies** like coal and nuclear, and by large hydropower.

In December 2016, the Central Electricity Authority issued a draft national electricity plan (DNEP), which refers to system effect and resulting system cost at several places.

Other costs:

- Other costs include those arising from the influence of electricity generation on health, influence on existing generation capacity due to adding new capacity, cost of accidents, security of supplies and net energy gain for society.
- In the Economic Survey 2016-17 (Volume 2), adds health costs, costs of intermittency, opportunity cost of land, cost of government incentives and cost arising from stranded assets.
- It estimates that the **total social cost of renewable was ₹11 per kWh**, around three times that of coal..

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General Studies-02

Can India protect Rohingya, SC asks govt.

SC View point:

Can India protect a large section of humanity comprising Rohingya women, children, the sick and the old who are “really suffering”? This is the question the Supreme Court wants the government to answer.



Government view point:

- The government said the crisis over its move to deport 40,000 Rohingya was not “justiciable”, that is, the issue outside the Supreme Court’s domain.
- communication to all the States to identify Rohingya and aid in their deportation was based on certain “executive parameters” such as diplomatic concerns, on whether the country can sustain such an influx of refugees and geographically whether there would be tensions and threat to national security.
- It denied saying all Rohingya were terrorists, but only “some of them”.

Rohingyas view point:

- Senior advocate Fali Nariman, appearing for the Rohingya community, said the government “has gone out of sync” with its August 8 directive for deportation of Rohingya violating Article 14.
- The government’s affidavit claiming the question of deportation of Rohingya was exclusively “within its subjective domain and not justiciable” makes “big inroads into what we thought our Constitution was.”
- Mr. Nariman, who introduced himself as a refugee from British Burma, submitted that the fundamental right to life enshrined in Article 21 protects all “persons,” including refugees who fled persecution in their native countries.
- The obligation to grant asylum was universal.

Excise duty on petrol, diesel cut

News: The government on Tuesday slashed the excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs. 2 per litre, effective from October 4.

Beyond news:

- The move comes days after senior Ministers defended the high tax levies on petroleum products.
- According to official data, the retail selling prices (RSP) of petrol and diesel in Delhi rose to Rs. 70.88 per litre and Rs. 59.14 per litre respectively, on October 3, 2017.
- These prices were Rs. 63.13 and Rs. 53.47, respectively, three months ago.

SC issues notice on donations to parties

- The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre and the Election Commission to respond to a petition challenging the various **amendments made through Finance Act 2017 and Finance Act 2016 in various statutes**, saying these changes have opened the floodgates for unlimited corporate and foreign donations to political parties.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra issued notice on the petition filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms and Common Cause seeking to **strike down the amendments made to:**

1. the Companies Act,
2. the Income Tax Act,
3. the Representation of the People Act,
4. the Reserve Bank of India Act and
5. the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act.

- The petitioners, represented by Prashant Bhushan and Neha Rathi, said the amendments, introduced as money Bills, legitimise electoral corruption, while ensuring complete non-transparency in political funding.

Ministry of Health ranks first in Swachh Bharat initiative

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been adjudged as the best department for its contribution during ‘Swachhta Pakhwada’, an inter-ministry initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The Ministry observed the Swachhta Pakhwada from February 1-15.
- The award was presented on the third anniversary of the Mission on October 2.
- “Swachhta Pakhwada was observed within the Ministry offices, in Central Government Hospitals, and in public health facilities in all the States/UTs,” noted a release issued by the Ministry.

India set to ink \$4.5-bn credit deal with Bangladesh

News: Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley arrived here on Tuesday ahead of India and Bangladesh signing the third line of credit (LoC) agreement involving \$4.5 billion to be spent on infrastructure and social sector development.

Beyond News:

- Two agreements for the implementation of the third LoC and the ‘Joint Interpretative Notes on the Agreement between India and Bangladesh for the Promotion and Protection of Investments’ would also be signed .
- The two countries signed the first LoC in August 2010. The second one was inked in March, 2016.
- Mr. Jaitley would call on the Bangladesh premier and inaugurate, along with his counterpart, a new scheme for cashless transactions in visa services run by the State Bank of India on behalf of the Indian High Commission here.

{Op-Ed} The cold facts.

Issue: Ever since the influenza virus known as H1N1 landed on Indian shores during the 2009 pandemic, outbreaks have been an annual occurrence.

Background:

- The worst case was in 2015, when 2,990 people succumbed to it.
- This year the virus has been particularly active; mortality, at 1,873 by the last week of September, is quickly catching up with the 2015 toll.
- In comparison, official figures show 2016 to be a relatively benign year, with an H1N1 death toll of 265. The problem with these official figures, however, is that they only capture H1N1 numbers, a practice that has been adopted in response to the severity of the 2009 pandemic.
- But influenza was present in India even before 2009 in the form of H3N2 and Influenza B virus types.
- Out of these, H3N2 is capable of causing outbreaks as big as H1N1, and yet India does not track H3N2 cases as extensively as it does H1N1.
- This means that seemingly benign years such as 2016 may probably not be benign at all.

Inferences:

- All this indicates that India's surveillance systems are still poor and underestimate the influenza burden substantially.
- If numbers are unsatisfactorily tracked, so are changes in the viral genome.
- Sequencing is important because it can detect mutations in genetic material that help the virus evade human immune systems, making it more deadly.

Way ahead:

- Vaccination is the best weapon that India has against this menace, because Oseltamivir, the antiviral commonly deployed against flu, is of doubtful efficacy unless administered early enough.
- Yet, India has thus far stayed away from vaccinating even high-risk groups such as pregnant women and diabetics, because influenza is thought to be a more manageable public health challenge compared to mammoths such as tuberculosis.
- Better surveillance of influenza will possibly change this perception by revealing the true scale of this public health issue.

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General Studies-02

Gujarat HC rejects Zakia Jafri's plea challenging lower court order upholding clean chit to Modi

News: The Gujarat High Court on Thursday, October 5 dismissed the plea of Zakia Jafri, wife of slain ex-MP Ehsan Jafri, challenging the Social Investigation Team's clean chit to Narendra Modi and others pertaining to "larger conspiracy" behind the 2002 riots in which more than 1000 people were massacred in Gujarat.

Beyond News:

- The court upheld the magisterial court's verdict, accepting the Supreme Court-appointed SIT's closure report giving clean chit to the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi and others, citing lack of "prosecutable evidence" against them.
- However, the court has held that the petitioner Zakia, whose ex parliamentarian husband late Ehsan Jafri was among the 69 people massacred in Gulbarg society during the 2002 riots, can either approach the trial court or the Apex Court seeking reinvestigation into her allegations against the accused.

No Indian troops in Afghanistan because of Pak. considerations, says US

- US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has said that India's decision not to send its troops to Afghanistan was in view of Pakistan's considerations as this would bring in new complexities in the region.

Open border trade between India, Pakistan

- The defense secretary insisted that an open border trade between India and Pakistan would help in bringing regional stability.
- Stability can follow economics as much as stability enables economics & they will eventually see that happen.
- New Delhi has been generous over many years with Afghanistan.
- Because of its very generous funding over the years, India has achieved a degree of affection from the Afghan people as a result.
- Furthermore, they are providing training for Afghan military officers and NCOs at their schools."

Rehabilitation of Soviet-era equipment

- India, is willing to do rehabilitation of Soviet-era equipment until they are replaced with American. That will take years.
- Furthermore, India has been providing and will continue to provide training for Afghan Army doctors and medics in the field so that the Afghan Army is able to take casualties and better sustain themselves thing, he said.
- Mattis said there are many areas where India and the US are natural partners for each other.
- The two countries, are deepening and broadening the military-to-military relationship.

Chinese troops still present in Doklam: Air Chief

- China, held military exercises every year in summer and so their forces were closeby when the Doklam standoff happened.
- The Air Chief said the possibility of a two-front war remains low but the Indian Air Force has adequate capability to tackle threats despite a shortage of fighter jets.
- With Pakistan the IAF was more than matched while with China it was adequate.

- Despite a shortage of fighter jets, the service had plan B to optimise the existing resources and was adequate to tackle any threats.
- “By 2032, we will reach 42 squadrons. With whatever numbers we have, we are capable of executing operations as we speak,” he said.

VVPAT to be tested in State during Nanded civic poll

News: The State Election Commission on Wednesday said Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines would be used in ward no. 2 during the elections on October 11 to the Nanded-Waghala Municipal Corporation (NWMC).

Beyond News:

- VVPAT machines were used in all 40 Assembly constituencies in Goa during the elections held recently, in 33 Assembly segments in Punjab and for the Bawana bypoll in New Delhi.
- Political parties, especially the Aam Adami Party (AAP), has been demanding VVPAT machines, which they say will bring in transparency.
- In October 2013, the Supreme Court had directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to begin using VVPAT machines in a phased manner in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.
- To adhere to the SC order, the State Election Commission has introduced the machines for the Nanded civic polls.

General Studies-03

{Op-Ed} Steadying hand: On RBI's monetary statement

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee has since inception retained its unwavering focus on its primary remit: **the preservation of price stability**.

- It follows then that the central bank's rate-setting panel opted to leave **benchmark interest rates unchanged** and retain a neutral stance to achieve the medium-term target of keeping Consumer Price Index inflation close to 4% on a durable basis, while supporting growth.
- The uncertainty posed by the prospects of weaker-than-anticipated kharif crop output and the impact this may have on food prices, and the concerns agitating policymakers will be evident.

CPI inflation has risen by around two percentage points since the MPC's last meeting in August: from 1.46% in June 2017, to a provisional 3.36% in August.

- The overwhelming majority of the **MPC's six members** saw little choice but to hold rates;



there was a solitary dissent vote for a 25 basis points cut.

- The RBI's policymakers simultaneously raised their inflation projection for the second half of the current fiscal to a 4.2-4.6% range and cut the estimate for real Gross Value Added growth this year to 6.7%, from the August forecast of 7.3%.
- Reiterating the urgent imperative to “reinvigorate investment activity” to spur growth, the MPC has laid the onus squarely on the government's shoulders: from suggesting the recapitalisation of stressed state-owned lenders, to calling for further simplification of the GST regime and urging that stalled public sector investment projects be restarted.

Coal-fired projections: on the draft energy policy

- The NITI Aayog's Draft National Energy Policy (DNEP) predicts that between now and 2040, there will be a quantum leap in the uptake of renewable energy together with a drastic reduction in fossil fuel energy intensity.
- Because of **economic and population growth**, India's annual per-capita electricity consumption is expected to triple, from 1075 kWh in 2015-16 to over 2900 kWh in 2040.
- The DNEP assumes 100% electrification throughout India in the near term — Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced that the government will invest \$2.5 billion to provide electricity connections to every home in India by the end of 2018 — and steadily improving energy efficiency.
- But the DNEP fails to consider several critical issues involved in the ongoing energy transition.

Based on coal

- The DNEP does not say what would be the fate of new allottees of coal mines which have bid aggressively and won rights to mine coal for captive power generation.
- **Generation of power is licence free** under the Electricity Act of 2003, so private miners do not need any licence to set up generating plants. All they need is a **connection to the grid**.
- Since the grid is State-owned, the Central government has adequate leverage to defer or delay connections.
In the past three years, with slow industrial growth, independent coal producers have been faced with reduced demand for their power.
- The conventional power industry already suffers a high level of bank loan defaults, insolvency and other legal proceedings.

An electric future

- The DNEP fails to highlight the gradual substitution of internal combustion engines with electric vehicles.
- Several European nations have announced their plans to go for 100% electric vehicles in the next two decades.
- This transformation in the automobile sector could be accompanied by grid- and consumer-level electricity storage at homes, offices and factories.

- While storage and electric vehicles are cursorily mentioned, the DNEP does not focus on these crucial subjects.

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General Studies-01

Kathak, qawwali and opera on the same stage

News: Kathak and tap dancers, the sarod and the organ came together in a gala in central London on Wednesday night, as the Southbank centre hosted over 150 artists from across Britain and India for an event pegged as the highlight of the 2017 India-U.K. Year of Culture.

Beyond news:

- The push for a year-long **celebration of Indian and British culture** was agreed upon during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Britain in 2015.
- Since its launch earlier this year, events have been taking place across the country, with many museums and institutions using the opportunity to create India-related events — from Kew Gardens' annual orchid festival focused around the Indian orchid to the Science Museum's exhibition examining the place of India in the development of science and technology over the past 5,000 years.

General Studies-02

{Op-Ed}States in Indian diplomacy: when Sharjah ruler visited Kerala

What this op-Ed is all about:

States role in competitive federalism in the light of recent Sharjah rulers visit to kerala & its associated benefits to india & especially kerala.

Key aspects of Kerala visit:

- Kerala government honored sultan with a **D.Litt from the Calicut University**.
- The ruler had agreed to **release 149 Indian prisoners** from Sharjah jails.
- Instead of returning them back, sharjah offers **job to continue work** there itself.
- Kerala government **handed over some ancient documents about kerala** & sultan proclaimed that its his duty to preserve these precious documents.



- This 5 day visit makes Kerala as an example for Narendra Modi's **concept of competitive federalism**.

According to our PM- "Team India shall not be limited to the Prime Minister-led team in Delhi, but will also include Chief Ministers and other functionaries as equal partners."

Author says that Centre always respects states' initiatives. The example quoted is about Andhra Pradesh.

- In his earlier stint as Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu negotiated with foreign governments to make **Hyderabad an IT capital**, prompting even presidents and prime ministers to visit the city on state visits. Given his **personal reputation**, the Government of India invited Mr. Naidu to lead an Indian delegation on IT.

Author says that the Centre had established the basic mechanism for the States to play an important role in not only implementing foreign policy, but also in formulating it.

Back to history:

- Earlier there was a period when Pandit Nehru wrote letters to the Chief Ministers, explaining certain aspects of foreign policy, but did not solicit their views, though they could ask questions or make suggestions.
- But those were the days when he could do no wrong as he was considered infallible and unflappable. But as regional parties began to exert influence at the national level, States began to dictate terms even in foreign policy.
- The States exercised veto on crucial issues, making it difficult for the Prime Minister to have his way in formulating policy.

Remodelling the MEA

Some examples of states' interference:

West Bengal: The Chief Minister of West Bengal stopped then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from signing an agreement on sharing of Teesta waters with Bangladesh after the agreement was negotiated.

Tamil Nadu: Political parties in Tamil Nadu not only insisted that India should support the U.S. resolution against Sri Lanka in the Human Rights Council, but also stopped the Prime Minister from attending a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) on the ground that Sri Lanka was not safeguarding the interests of the Tamil minority.

Kerala: Insisted that the Italian marines who killed two fishermen should be tried in India and punished here, causing a rift in India's relations with the European Union.

Author's conclusion:

- The promise made in the BJP manifesto that States would be involved more in foreign affairs has not been kept as yet as the moves made so far are tentative and half-hearted.
- A major change in mindset is necessary to accomplish it.
- The States must also develop expertise on foreign affairs to be able to take responsible decisions in their interaction with foreign lands.

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons awarded 2017 Nobel Prize in Peace

News: The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), a coalition of non-governmental organisations from over 100 countries around the globe.

Beyond News:

- The committee emphasised that “the next steps towards attaining a world free of nuclear weapons must involve the nuclear-armed states”.
- The 2017 Peace Prize called upon nuclear-armed states to initiate negotiations to gradual elimination of the world's 15,000 nuclear weapons .

What is ICAN?

- ICAN stands for **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons**.
- ICAN has been the leading civil society actor in the effort to achieve a prohibition of nuclear weapons under international law.
- ICAN had in the past year given the efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons a new direction and new vigour, it added.
- ICAN describes itself as a coalition of grass roots non-government groups in more than 100 nations. It began in Australia and was officially launched in Vienna in 2007.



7 killed as IAF chopper crashes in Arunachal

News: Seven military personnel were killed when a Mi-17 helicopter of the Air Force crashed in Arunachal Pradesh on Friday.

Beyond News:

- The Russian manufactured Mi-17 V5 chopper was on an air maintenance mission and was also scheduled to drop off kerosene jerry cans at an Army camp in Yangste.
- The Mi-17 V5 (domestic designation Mi-8 MTV5) is a military transport variant in the Mi-8/17 family of helicopters.

- It is produced by Kazan Helicopters, a subsidiary of Russian Helicopters. The aircraft has a maximum takeoff weight of 13,000 kg.
- It can transport either 36 armed soldiers internally or 4,500 kg of load on a sling.

Now, SC Collegium to make judges' appointments transparent

News: In a historic move to ensure transparency in judicial appointments, the Supreme Court Collegium, led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, has resolved to post on the court's website its recommendations on judicial appointments, transfers and elevations for public consumption.

Beyond News:

- The information posted online will also “**indicate**” reasons for the recommendation or **rejection** of a name for judicial appointment, transfer and elevation to High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- As a start, the **Supreme Court has posted online** detailed reasons for its October 3, 2017 recommendations for judicial appointments to the Madras High Court and the Kerala High Court.
- **Details are now available online** under the tag “Collegium Resolutions”
- The Supreme Court has also posted on its website the minutes of the Collegium meeting, which led to its decision to go ahead with transparency.

General Studies-03

Snow leopard photographed in Arunachal

News: Scientists have obtained the first evidence of the elusive snow leopard in Arunachal Pradesh.

Why it's important? Arunachal Pradesh is one of the 22 priority landscapes of the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program and while locals and researchers knew that there were snow leopards in the area, scientists had not been able to get photographs thus far.

Beyond News:

- The presence of the species outside a protected areas **highlights the importance of community support** for conservation as well as landscape-scale planning.
- The camera-trapping, part of a State-wide survey initiated in March 2017 by WWF-India in collaboration with the Arunachal Pradesh Environment and Forest Department, focused on unexplored snow leopard habitats.
- A small fraction of snow leopard habitats falling in the two protected areas (**the Dibang Biosphere Reserve and Namdapha National Park**) in the State, scientists tapped into the knowledge of locals — including herders and former hunters — to understand the current distribution of snow leopards and other mammals.
- Over 80% of the respondents confirmed the presence of snow leopards in their area.

Aadhaar mandatory for PPF, NSC, Kisan Vikas Patra

News:

- The Union government has made linking Aadhaar mandatory for the Public Provident Fund (PPF), the National Savings Certificates (NSC) and the Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP).

Beyond News:

- The government had made it mandatory to link Aadhaar to PAN by December 31 and to SIM connections by February 2018.
- Existing subscribers have time till December 31, 2017 to link their Aadhaar.
- Every depositor under this scheme who has not given his Aadhaar number at the time of application for such deposit shall submit his Aadhaar number to the Post Office Savings Bank or Accounts Office concerned, on or before the 31st day of December, 2017.
- About 135 schemes, including the free cooking gas (LPG) to poor women, kerosene and fertilizer subsidy, targeted public distribution system (PDS) and MGNREGA are also reportedly to be linked to the biometric identification.

Pesticides cause farmer deaths, illnesses in Yavatmal

News: A farmer from the Bellora village in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, is tied with ropes to a bed in Ward Number 12 of the Vasantrao Naik Government Medical College (VNGMC).

Beyond News:

- This was one of the 27 farmers currently undergoing treatment at Yavatmal's VNGMC for infections caused by **spraying pesticides on their cotton produce**.
- Over 472 farmers have been admitted to the hospital for the same infection in the last three months.
- **"improper pesticide use"** is considered as reason for this infections.

The rhythm of life: on the Nobel Prize in Medicine

Key aspect:

- the Nobel Prize for Physics was awarded to a trio of physicists for their work in the detection of gravitational waves emanating from the recesses of the space-time continuum, the 2017 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was won by a triumvirate of chronobiologists for their work in discovering the mechanisms controlling the internal clocks that keep time in all living organisms, including humans.

Men behind the findings: Jeffrey C. Hall, Michael Rosbash and Michael W. Young, three Americans born in the 1940s.

Key finding:

- Working with the humble fruit fly, the three scientists isolated a gene named period that studies had shown disrupted the fly's circadian clock.
- It Made pioneering contributions in helping unravel the genetic coding and protein pathways that regulate the **circadian rhythm**.
- Dr. Hall and Dr. Rosbash then went on to discover that the **protein PER**, which acts as a functional communicator for this gene, accumulated at night and then diminished during the day.
- Then spotted the third gene, **doubletime**, which through an encoded protein served as the regulator of the frequency of the oscillations.
- Nobel-winning researchers' contributions have also led to an improved understanding of the link between peak physical performance in sport and the time of the day.

What is circadian rhythm is all about?

- Its a rhythm which tells us when it is time to eat and sleep, or wake up even when we have no bedside alarm.
- It is crucial in human health angle that has spawned a mushrooming body of science centred on understanding the linkages between sleep and normal metabolic activity, and the potentially deleterious effect of sleep deprivation.
- From "jet lag", when people travel across different time zones challenging the internal biological clock, to the difficulties people engaged in shift-based jobs have in resetting their sleep-wake cycles, contemporary medical science acknowledges the hazards that lack of adequate sleep can pose.
- The prospect that the circadian rhythm may well hold the key to future breakthroughs in the modulation and treatment of various diseases is truly tantalizing.

OCTOBER 7 2017

General Studies-01

{Op-Ed}Law, faith, unreason: on eradicating superstition from society

Issue: Editorial deals with the need for broad minded social reform additional to laws to eradicate superstition from indian society.

- The Karnataka **Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017** has been approved by the State Cabinet and is likely to be introduced soon in the Assembly.

- It is not accurate to characterise this as just an ‘**anti-superstition bill**’, as what it seeks to prohibit are actions that offend human dignity, result in the exploitation of gullible and vulnerable people or cause harm to them.

Bill outlaws:

- ❖ the urulu seve, also known as made snana, in which devotees roll over food leftovers,
- ❖ the practice of walking on fire,
- ❖ branding children,
- ❖ piercing one’s tongue or cheeks.

Bill exempts:

- Established religious practices and the propagation of spiritual learning and arts, besides astrology and vastu.
- Organising **macabre rituals**, offering magical cures and threatening people, under peril of incurring divine or supernatural displeasure, are covered by this law, even though these can be treated as offences under the Indian Penal Code too.

Eradicating Superstition

The proposed law ought to be seen as a reasonable restriction on the right to practise and propagate one’s religion under Article 25 of the Constitution. As long as these restrictions are in the interest of public order, morality and health, the law may withstand the test of constitutionality.



- Ultimately, it is education and awareness that can truly liberate a society from superstition, blind faith and abominable practices in the name of faith. Until then, the law will have to continue to identify and punish acts that violate the people’s right to life, health and dignity.

General Studies-02

Australia, India to enhance ties

News: India and Australia discussed ways to enhance cooperation in tackling terrorism, radicalization and cyber-crimes, the Home Ministry said in a statement.

Beyond News:

- During the meeting, the two sides discussed the **scope for cooperation in counter-terrorism and checking extremism and radicalisation**, besides steps to check illegal financial transactions, counterfeiting and cyber-crimes.

- Issues related to **human trafficking and people smuggling**, combating illegal drug trafficking, and sharing information between law enforcement agencies, were also discussed.

Aadhaar now must for PPF, KVP

News: The government has made linking Aadhaar mandatory for the Public Provident Fund, the National Savings Certificate and the Kisan Vikas Patra schemes.

Beyond News:

- Subscribers have time till December 31 to link their Aadhaar to the schemes.
- Every depositor who has not given his Aadhaar number at the time of application shall submit it to the Post Office Savings Bank or accounts office concerned on or before December 31.
- The government has already made it mandatory to link Aadhaar to PAN by December 31 and to SIM connections by February 2018.
- Some 135 schemes, including free cooking gas, kerosene and fertilizer subsidy, targeted public distribution system and MGNREGA, are reportedly to be linked to the biometric identification.

India's greenhouse gas emissions up by 4.7% in 2016

According to the latest report by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency- Trends in global CO₂ and total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions show that **India's emissions have gone up by 4.7% in 2016.**

- For most major GHG emitters in the world, the emission figures have gone down, barring India and Indonesia.

According to the Dutch strategic agency's report- Emissions in following countries shows fall in emission:

1. U.S. saw a fall of 2%,
 2. Russian Federation 2.1%,
 3. Brazil 6.1%,
 4. China 0.3%,
 5. within the European Union, the United Kingdom 6.4%.
- The report's data is based on the Emission Database for Global Atmospheric Research (EDGAR) produced by the European Union.

Non-CO₂ emissions

- In 2016, the five largest emitting countries and the European Union accounted for 68% of total global CO₂ emissions and about 63% of total global GHG emissions.

- Most of the emissions consist of CO₂, about 72%.
- Over the past three years, non-CO₂ GHG emissions have continued to grow somewhat faster than CO₂ emissions: by 1.5% (2014), 1.2% (2015) and 1.0% (2016).
- CO₂ over the same period increased by a respective 0.8%, -0.2% and 0.3%.
- Globally, the combined share of non-CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions is about 28% in total GHG emissions, but it varies for the largest countries: 11% for Japan and 31% for India.

General Studies-03

GST Council gives relief to exporters, small businesses

News: GST Council on Friday announced a slew of decisions to reduce their compliance burden.

Beyond News:

- It includes the eventual setting up of an **e-wallet for input tax credits for exporters**, and the option for small businesses to file returns and **pay taxes only once a quarter**.
- The decision regarding exporters taken by the Council is to impose a nominal 0.1% GST rate for them till March 31, 2018.
- The e-wallet system is expected to rollout from April 1, 2018.
- The GST Council also **reduced the tax rates on 27 items**.

Important items among those 27:

- Sliced dried mangos,
- khakhra and plain chappatis,
- unbranded ayurvedic medicines,
- plastic, rubber and paper waste,
- yarn,
- diesel engine parts, pump parts,
- e-waste and several services.

'Mission rice' to conserve indigenous seeds

News:

- After empowering rural women folk in the State, the Kudumbasree Mission is gearing up to script another success story by conserving traditional rice seeds of Wayanad.

Beyond News:

- The project has been executed through **joint liability groups (JLGs)** of the mission.
- The pilot project has been executed by the mission through the Kairaly JLG and five acres of fallow land at Kenichira under the Poothadi grama panchayat has been utilised for the purpose this season.
- The mission is planning to **expand the project on 300 acres** next year.

- The Kudumbasree State Mission has allotted Rs. 1 lakh for the project and the Agriculture Department would provide an **incentive of Rs. 50,000 for the JLG under the Haritha Keralam Mission.**

Aayog forms panel for 'intelligent' transport

News: The NITI Aayog has set up a national-level committee constituting officials from various ministries and States to develop a roadmap for the implementation of the **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)** policy.

Key aspects:

- The National ITS policy will aim to reduce urban traffic congestion, improve parking for vehicles in cities, road safety and the security of passenger and goods traffic.
- The committee will work towards setting uniform standards to implement the ITS in various parts of the country, Anil Srivastava, IAS, Advisor, (Infrastructure) NITI Aayog, said during an event organised by the International Road Federation.
- Subjects covered under the panel's purview would include traffic management, parking management, electronic enforcement of traffic rules and fleet management.
- The committee's mandate would also include monitoring and encouraging pilot projects.

OCTOBER 9 AND 10 2017

General Studies-02

SC brings back ban on firecrackers in Delhi-NCR region

News: The Supreme Court on Monday suspended the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and NCR till November 1, 2017 in a bid to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a "positive effect" on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.

Beyond News:

- A Bench of Justices reverted to its November 2016 decision to suspend sales of firecrackers "to test itself to find out whether there would be a positive effect of this suspension, particularly during Deepavali period."
- The judgment came on petitions challenging the September 12 modification of the November 2016 ban on sale of firecrackers.
- Perusing records, the Bench pointed to the various efforts made by the government, media and civil society to create awareness of the harms of bursting firecrackers, especially on children.

Rationale behind:

- It said the adverse effects of burning of crackers during Deepavali have been witnessed year after year.
- The air quality deteriorates abysmally and the city chokes. It leads to closing the schools and the authorities are compelled to take various measures on emergent basis, when faced with a “health emergency”.
- The judgment said the September 12 verdict modifying the ban on sale of firecrackers was taken without the knowledge of the Central Pollution Control Board’s (CPCB) consistent stand for the past 20 years that sulphur in fireworks should not be permitted.

SC lays stress on safety norms for schools

News: The Supreme Court on Monday stressed the need for safety guidelines for children in schools across India which makes authorities accountable and result in adverse consequences upon them in cases of violation.

Beyond News:

- It had made three additions to the school safety guidelines on three separate occasions and handed it over to the States for implementation.
- The court was hearing a petition filed by the father of Pradyuman, who was found brutally murdered on the premises of Gurugram's Ryan International School.

Petitioners Stand: Mr. Kumar said the Centre has also modified the National Disaster Management guidelines, specifically focusing on the safety of school children, and to prevent the occurrence of such tragic incidents.

Centers stand:

- The Centre said it has already prepared an affidavit on the steps taken and would file it in the Supreme Court in the course of the day.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had recently filed an affidavit stating that the Gurugram incident took place due to the “negligence” of the administration as drivers and conductors were allowed to use washrooms meant for students.

U.S. bid to inject India in Afghanistan won't work: Pakistan

News:

- Rejecting any role for India in Afghanistan, Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Monday warned that the Trump administration’s desire to inject New Delhi in the war-torn country would be “detrimental”.

Beyond News:

- U.S. President Donald Trump in August unveiled his South Asia policy and vowed to boost strategic partnership with India in Afghanistan.
- Mr. Trump also sought an enhanced role for India to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.
- India has been supporting an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, broad-based and inclusive process of peace and reconciliation, and advocating the need for a sustained and long-term commitment to Afghanistan by the international community.
- Mr. Abbasi said Pakistan had major U.S. weapons systems in its military, but it also possessed Chinese and European systems, and more recently it inducted Russian attack helicopters.

{Op-Ed} Transparency on judicial appointments.

Issue: Op-Ed is all about the SC decision to publish reasons for selection & rejection of judges in public platform.

- The Supreme Court collegium's decision to disclose the reasons for its recommendations marks a historic and welcome departure from the entrenched culture of secrecy surrounding judicial appointments.
- The collegium, comprises the Chief Justice of India and four senior judges.

What all will be revealed?

1. The reasons behind decisions on the initial appointment of candidates to High Court benches
 2. their confirmation as permanent judges
 3. elevation as High Court Chief Justices and to the Supreme Court
 4. transfer of judges and Chief Justices from one High Court to another.
- It is important to strike the right balance between full disclosure and opaqueness. It is to be hoped that this balancing of transparency and confidentiality will augur well for the judiciary.
 - The introduction of transparency acquires salience in the light of the resignation of Justice Jayant M. Patel of the Karnataka High Court after he was transferred to the Allahabad High Court as a puisne judge, despite his being senior enough to be a High Court Chief Justice.

Current scenario:

- There are 387 vacancies in the various High Courts as on October 1.
- The mammoth task of filling these vacancies would be better served if a revised Memorandum of Procedure for appointments is agreed upon soon.
- A screening system, along with a permanent secretariat for the collegium, would be ideal for the task.

- The introduction of transparency should be backed by a continuous process of addressing perceived shortcomings.
- The present disclosure norm is a commendable beginning.

Bay of Bengal diplomacy

News: India will seek to reaffirm its regional leadership in environmental and climate diplomacy as it hosts the first Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation Disaster Management Exercise (BIMSTEC DMEEx 2017) starting October 10.

Beyond News:

- The BIMSTEC region, comprising **22% of the global population**, is exposed to an ever-increasing threat from natural disasters.
- Whether it is the recurrent floods affecting Assam, West Bengal and downstream in Bangladesh or Himalayan landslides in India and Nepal, regular disasters in the sub-region continue to cause transboundary impacts, damaging lives, livelihoods and assets, often leading to mass displacement and migration across borders.
- BIMSTEC, has the opportunity to enable a paradigm policy **shift from a traditional** relief centric, reactive approach towards a joint, **proactive**, holistic one that encompasses disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation and risk reduction among member states.
- In order to strengthen inter-governmental coordination, among BIMSTEC members, the first step would be to devise a **comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** regional action plan.
- The road map should reflect a clear strategy to integrate DRR in all development programmes of member nations, adopt a multi-hazard and multi-sectoral approach to DRR and work towards common outcomes through institutionalising partnerships across all levels of governance.

Building capacity

- India has volunteered to lead the Environment and Natural Disaster Agenda under BIMSTEC, and must make the best of this opportunity by translating the learnings from the disaster management experiences of SAARC and ASEAN.
- This is also an opportunity for India to take a measured approach and add value to its own regional agenda.

General Studies-03

{Op-Ed} Problem animals — on wildlife protection strategies

Key issue: In June this year, the Bombay High Court quashed an order by the Maharashtra Forest Department to shoot a tigress in the Bramhapuri region after she killed two persons.

Rationale behind:

- The death warrant was overturned as a result of a Public Interest Litigation petition by an animal rights activist, which argued that the tigress's behaviour had been forged by illegal human intrusion into her territory.
- Forest officials were then forced to capture the problem animal and re-release her in the Bor forest reserve, less than 200 km away, **putting another set of villagers in harm's way**.
- The released tigress went on to kill two others in Bor, and the authorities scrambled to capture her again. Such actions go against conservation science.

Core issues behind:

- **Translocating a large carnivore as a response to conflict does not work.**
- Large predators need a certain prey density and are territorial, and they would tend to find their way back, even over hundreds of kilometres, to their original habitat.

A 2011 study in Maharashtra showed that moving leopards from one region to another to reduce attacks on livestock only increased attacks on humans. To translocate a tiger in response to man-eating behaviour is absurd.

- A major challenge for India in the coming years will be to engage rural communities in conservation, because our burgeoning population and a revival in tiger numbers will only increase the intensity of conflict.
- Coercing terrified villagers to co-exist with man-eaters is the best way to ensure we lose our chance of doing that.

Will consult States on bringing petroleum products within scope of GST, says Modi

News: The Union government would consult the States on bringing petroleum products into the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.

Beyond News:

- The Centre now levies an excise duty of ₹19.48 a litre on petrol and the States levy VAT ranging between 6% and 48%.
- Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has repeatedly urged the GST Council to bring petrol and diesel under the GST.
- Besides petrol and diesel, natural gas, and alcohol are also outside the GST.

OCTOBER 11 2017

General Studies-02

Hate messages could have communal angle: Kerala police.

News: A fake audio clip about a hotel owner in Kozhikode bludgeoning to death a migrant worker had recently spawned a visceral sense of insecurity among other-State labourers in North Kerala.

Beyond News:

- The police pointed out that the bulk of the migrant labour community in Kerala relied exclusively on **WhatsApp groups to communicate** with each other and their families in Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand. Such groups were their sole source of news.
- They conceded that running to ground the perpetrators of the disinformation campaign might be difficult given the fact that such platforms used encrypted communication. Senior police officers pointed out that a similar set of **regional language chauvinists** had unleashed a comparable fake news campaign in Mumbai last year to drive out migrant workers.
- They have also not ruled out the possibility that business rivalry between labour suppliers could have motivated the fake news.
- The **police have launched a social media campaign** to counter the attempt to sow division between migrant workers and the indigenous population and to reassure other-State workers.

India, U.K. to firm up defense links

- Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to London in 2015, the two countries agreed to hold regular dialogues, as part of the India-U.K. Defence Consultative Group.
- Since then, a step change in terms of depth had taken place in cooperation and dialogue in the area, Mr. Mitra said.

Wide-ranging dialogue

During his trip which focused on meetings of the Defence Consultative Group.

'Make in India' push

India has pegged the defence sector as one of the major areas where the bilateral partnership could be expanded around the "Make in India" campaign.

- During Mr. Modi's visit in 2015, the two sides agreed to move towards a new Defence and International Security Partnership that would "intensify cooperation on defence and security, including cybersecurity, and maritime security" pushing for joint working in key strategic areas.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan to visit India and Pakistan

News: London's Mayor Sadiq Khan and Deputy Mayor Rajesh Agarwal are to visit India and Pakistan later this year.

Beyond News:

- In the first official trip by a senior British politician to both countries, as city authorities seek to reassure businesses and others across the world of the resilience and strengths of the city post-Brexit.
- The six-day visit due to take place at a yet-to-be-confirmed date later this year is part of the Labour Mayor's 'London is Open' campaign.

Significance:

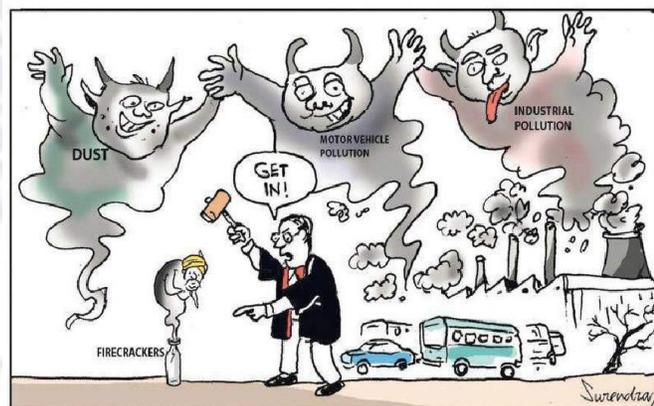
- European cities and financial centres have launched aggressive bids for international business amid the insecurity thrown up by Brexit.
- London, while not complacent, remained confident that it would retain its current status.
- He also highlighted concerns about the impact of U.K. government immigration policy on international students.
- While the U.K. government couldn't do trade deals with non-EU countries while still in the EU, it could take steps to ease relations with them.
- The Mayor will also be accompanied by a delegation of businesses that are part of his International Business Programme, focussed on helping city businesses attract international business and investment.
- The visit was intended to demonstrate how Britain was equal partners with both countries, with Britain able to offer India and Pakistan as much as the other way around.

{Op-Ed} Foggy thinking — on SC restoring ban on cracker sales in Delhi

Issue: Editorial is all about supreme court ban on Firecrackers during deepavali.

For the second time since November 2016, the Supreme Court has temporarily banned the sale of firecrackers in the National Capital Region.

- The idea is to test whether it cuts the deadly pollution levels seen in Delhi during and after Deepavali.
- More importantly, despite delivering a big blow to the industry and incurring the displeasure of many, it offers too piecemeal a solution, akin to the



even-odd licence number scheme of the Delhi government in 2015.

Core issues:

- The major sources of pollution in the NCR have been clear enough to drive policy changes.
- While their relative contributions are still indeterminate, these include construction dust, vehicular pollution, waste burning, generators and crop residue burning in the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- To tackle each of these will take decisive and persistent policy actions, not panic-driven and ill-considered bans.

Back to History:

- Take the 2015 ban on crop-residue burning in Punjab and Haryana for example.
- Two years later, farmers continue to violate it, because the State governments have still not taken the steps required to solve the underlying problem — the high cost of cleaning the paddy stubble instead of burning it to prepare the field to sow wheat.
- Another option is biomass-energy plants that buy paddy straw from farmers for use in generating power.

Solutions:

- The only answer is for the Punjab and Haryana governments to move purposefully on the solutions they know will work — just as the only option for the Delhi government is to raise awareness on the impact of firecrackers, while also tackling vehicular pollution, construction dust and other pollution sources.
- In the absence of these less dramatic, but more feasible solutions, it is unlikely a firecracker sale ban will avert the kind of health emergency that struck Delhi last year.

General Studies-03

IMF lowers forecasts for India

News: India's economic growth for 2017 and 2018 will be slower than earlier projected, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its latest World Economic Outlook released on Tuesday.

Beyond News:

- The report cited “lingering impact” of demonetization and the Goods and Services Tax for the expected slowdown during the current and the next year.
- The IMF projected India to grow at 6.7% in 2017 and 7.4% in 2018, which are 0.5 and 0.3 percentage points lower than the projections earlier this year, respectively.
- India's slowdown is happening even as the world economy is picking up steam.

- The IMF has revised upwards “global growth projections to 3.6% for this year and 3.7% for the next.”

The wrong options

- It has been well over three years since the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power at the Centre.
- Mr. Modi’s election promise of creating a “**minimum government**” that would liberalise the economy by cutting down the size of the government’s influence over the economy remains a pipe-dream.
- Instead, each passing day, the goods and services tax (GST) and demonetization are being touted as big-bang reforms that, despite the short-term costs, will bring long-term economic benefits to the nation.

Unnecessary pain, no gain

- What India needs, in other words, is not increased tax compliance among citizens, but pro-market reforms that will make the country a free and competitive marketplace.
- A government that allows free competition, without favouring special interest groups, either through pro-business or pro-poor policies, will also be sowing the seeds for improved living standards.
- As several scholars have pointed out, historically this is pretty much the only way countries have managed to free themselves from the shackles of poverty.

OCTOBER 12 2017

General Studies-01

{Op-Ed}It's not enough to know who killed Mahatma Gandhi-we must understand why he was killed

Key fact: Sixty-nine years down the line, Pankaj Phadnis has appealed that the Supreme Court reinvestigate the death of Gandhi, and holds that Gandhi was killed by a fourth bullet fired by someone else.

Authors view points:

- Indians continue to be murdered for the same reason — therefore, the murder of a Gauri Lankesh here, of a Narendra Dabholkar there, of a Govind Pansare here, and of an M.M. Kalburgi there.
 - Gandhi was a powerful moral exemplar — therefore, he posed a distinct threat to the dark forces of doom and destruction. He had to be removed physically.
- Nathuram Godse of the Hindu Mahasabha assassinated Gandhi because the Mahatma stood for a world view implacably opposed to the hate-filled rhetoric of the religious right.

- It was not just Gandhi who got assassinated but entire perspective committed to ahimsa, toleration, and respect for other religious traditions was sought to be obliterated.
- But killers target failed because Gandhi continues to live in our hearts, he inhabits our imaginations.

Albert Einstein remarked that: “generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth”.

What made Gandhi great?

- Gandhi himself was what he was, a great moral leader and a giver of remedies for the maladies of the human condition, because he drew inspiration from a variety of sources.
- Gandhi’s truth led inexorably in the direction of toleration
- We do not tolerate others because we alone know the truth, we tolerate because we do not know enough.
- Confidence that we know the truth leads to violence, doubt that we know enough leads to non-violence.

General Studies-02

Sexual intercourse with minor wife is rape, says SC

News: The Supreme Court on Wednesday held that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is below 18 years of age, is rape.

Details of verdict:

- A girl child **below the age of 18** cannot be treated as a commodity having no say over her body or someone who has no right to deny sexual intercourse to her husband. The court read down **Exception 2 to Section 375** (rape) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which allowed the husband of a girl child — between 15 and 18 years of age — blanket liberty and freedom to have non-consensual sexual intercourse with her.
- The exception had remained an anomaly because Section 375 itself mandated that sex with a girl below 18 years of age, with or without her consent, was statutory rape.
- With this judgment, considered by experts as trigger to declaring child marriage void ab initio, the court ended the decades-old disparity between Exception 2 to Section 375 IPC and other child protection laws.

SC to frame norms for drafting ‘living wills’

News: A person’s advance directive to withdraw medical care to allow him to die with dignity should take effect only when a medical board affirms that his medical condition is beyond cure and irreversible, Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra said on Wednesday.

Informed consent:

- It would lay down guidelines for **drafting living wills** and how it could be authenticated. It had reserved the case for judgment.
- The court is hearing a petition by an NGO, Common Cause, **to legalise euthanasia** and the concept of living will.
- A certificate from a statutory medical board that **a patient's condition was beyond cure and irreversible** would take care of apprehensions of relatives and doctors about withdrawing life support.
The legalisation of “advance directives” would amount to the waiving of the paramount fundamental right to life enshrined under **Article 21 of the Constitution**.

U.K. race audit shows British Indians are better off

News: The British government published a report earlier this week highlighting the huge differences in the experiences of ethnic minority groups across Britain in terms of access to public services ranging from education to health as well as in the outcomes and treatment they experienced.

Beyond News:

- It Builds up a snapshot of the British Indian community, which appeared to show them often to be better off than their counterparts from other ethnic minority groups.
- On employment, British Indians had among the highest rates of hourly pay, above the national average and the white British community, while levels of employment was only marginally lower than that of white British (73% against 75%).
- British Indians also did well in areas of education, with one of the higher rates of students achieving at least 3 A grades at A level in the final school exams.

General Studies-04

{Op-Ed}The will to die

The debate on allowing euthanasia as a means to protect the dignity of patients in a vegetative state has crystallised into a key question before a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court.

Should the law allow ‘living wills’?

- These are advance directives that people can lay down while being sound of mind, on whether they should continue **to get life-sustaining treatment** after they reach a stage of total incapacitation, that is, a vegetative state.
- The question is fraught with legal, moral and philosophical implications.
- The **court will have to resolve** the question whether the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, which according to an earlier verdict does not include the right to die, is being voluntarily waived by a person giving such an advance directive.

- A living will, may relieve the close family members and caregivers of a terminally ill patient of the moral burden of making a life-ending decision.

In case of US jurisdiction:

- Under U.S. jurisdiction patient autonomy is paramount, and many States have laws allowing advance directives, even the nomination of a 'health care proxy' who can decide on behalf of the patient.

Should India follow suit?

- The court has indicated that it may lay down comprehensive guidelines on operationalising the idea of living wills.
- The **government has opposed** the concept of an advance directive, arguing that it would be against public policy and the right to life.

Back to history:

- The Supreme Court, in a landmark **verdict in 2011**, ruled out any support for active euthanasia, but laid down a broad legal framework for passive euthanasia, or the withdrawal of life support subject to safeguards and a fair procedure.

Current scenario:

- In the present case, the court may have to draw up stringent safeguards for certifying living wills, preferably by a judicial officer, and lay down the exact stage at which the advance directive becomes applicable.
- The court's observation that it would kick in only after a medical board rules that a person's condition is incurable ought to be sufficient reassurance for those concerned about its possible misuse.
- The present law provides for advance directives regarding treatment of mental illness, so the concept is not new to Indian law.

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General Studies-01

Assam govt decides to rejuvenate Barak river

News: The Assam government plans to rejuvenate the Barak river .

Why its important? It has potential to revitalize trade and commerce with **Bangladesh and Myanmar**. Developing the river as a major channel for water transport will help improve trade with the neighbouring countries.

Barak River:

It is one of the major rivers of South Assam and is a part of the Surma-Meghna River System. It rises in the hill country of **Manipur State**, where it is the biggest and the most important of the hill country rivers. **After Manipur it flows through Mizoram State** and into Assam, ending just after it enters Bangladesh where it forks into the Surma and Kushiyara rivers



ADD-ON Info: Namami Barak festival

Barak, the gift of God has been a source of great blessing to the people of Tahamzam(Senapati) district since time immemorial. Besides irrigating crops and increasing productivity and prosperity, it has provided cleansing drainage over the ages and touched the lands along its majestic flow with charm and scenic beauty and transformed it into an eco-tourism paradise.

Averting disaster

Issue: In recent times, Category 5 hurricanes in the Caribbean and in the American mainland; record floods across Bangladesh, India and Nepal; and drought emergencies in 20 countries in Africa have damaged these regions, killed hundreds, and ruined the lives of millions.

Impact on least developed countries:

- The impact of disasters can strip away livelihoods; for developed and middle-income countries, the economic losses from infrastructure alone can be massive; for both, these events reiterate the need to act on a changing climate, the effects of which have been revelatory.
- While 4.2 million people dying prematurely each year from ambient pollution gets relatively little media attention, the effect of heat-trapping greenhouse gases on extreme weather events is coming into sharper focus.
- It could not be otherwise when the impacts of these weather events are so profound.

Seriousness of issue: During the last two years, over 40 million people, mainly in countries which contribute least to global warming, have been forced from their homes by disasters.

Tackle climate change

- While the Paris Agreement has set the world on a long-term path towards a low-carbon future, it is a windy path that reflects pragmatism and realities in each individual country.
- Thus, while carbon emissions are expected to drop as countries meet their targets, the impacts of climate change may be felt for some time, leaving the world with little choice but to invest, simultaneously, in efforts to adapt to climate change and reduce disaster risk.

- This will require international cooperation. Restoring the ecological balance between emissions and the natural absorptive capacity of the planet is the long-term goal.

General Studies-02

Israel joins U.S to quit UNESCO

News: The United States and Israel announced on Thursday they were quitting the U.N.'s cultural agency UNESCO, after Washington accused it of anti-Israeli bias.

When did this all started?

Washington has already withheld its funding for UNESCO since 2011, when the body admitted Palestine as a full member.

The **United States and Israel were among** just 14 of 194 members **that voted against admitting the Palestinians.**

In recent years, Israel has repeatedly complained about what it says is the body taking sides in disputes over cultural heritage sites in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories.

Impact of this decision:

The withdrawal of the United States, which is meant to provide a fifth of UNESCO's funding, is a major blow for the Paris-based organization, founded after World War Two to help protect cultural and natural heritage around the world.

The US withdrawal will become **effective at the end of December 2018** – until then, the US will remain a full member.

UNESCO: The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**; is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) based in Paris.

Its declared purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.

{Op-Ed} Saving child brides

- By ruling that marriage cannot be a licence to have sex with a minor girl, the Supreme Court has corrected an anomaly in the country's criminal law.

Under Indian Penal code:

- It is an offence to have sex with a girl below 18 years of age, regardless of consent. However, it made an exception if the girl was the man's wife, provided she was not below 15.
- In other words, what was statutory rape is treated as permissible within a marriage.
- By reading down the exception to limit it to girls aged 18 and older, the court has sought to harmonise the various laws in which any person under 18 is a minor.
- The age of consent under the IPC was raised in 2013 from 16 to 18 to bring it in line with the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
- However, the age above which marriage is an exception to rape was retained at 15, as fixed in 1940

Perspective:

- As a move to strengthen the **fight against child marriage and help stricter enforcement** of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the judgment cannot be faulted.
- But the practical implications of the judgment are worrying.
- Given the **prevalence of child marriage** in this country, it is doubtful whether it is possible — or even desirable — to implement the statutory rape law uniformly in the context of marriages.
- Significantly, if **boys under 18** but over 16 are charged with penetrative sexual assault under POCSO or rape under the IPC, which can be termed 'heinous offences', they could face the prospect of being tried as adults, according to the juvenile law as it stands now.
- Treating **all below 18 as children may be good** for their care and protection, but whether 18 is the right age for consent in this day and age remains a moot question.

Regulatory upgrade

- Pesticides play an important role in sustaining agricultural production, and in controlling vectors responsible for diseases.
- On the flip side, **they can be toxic.**
- Therefore, what is needed is a top-notch mechanism to regulate the import, manufacture, sale, transport, distribution and use of insecticides with a view to preventing risk to human beings and animals.

Significant bills & acts :

- The **Insecticides Act, 1968** was enacted to ensure this, until deficiencies in the statute caught the eye of several Parliamentary Committees and stakeholders.
- The **Pesticides Management Bill of 2008**, which is pending in Parliament, aims to cover this ground.

The statement of objects and reasons of the draft says that the proposed legislation, among others, intends to provide for an elaborate definition of pesticides to cover any substance of chemical or biological origin intended for preventing, destroying, repelling, mitigating or controlling any pest, including unwanted species of plants or animals, which will enable regulation of existing pesticides as well as new discoveries.

General Studies-03

'GST to hit aviation sector by Rs. 5,700 cr. a year'

- The aviation industry will take a annual hit of Rs. 5,700 crore following the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), domestic airlines told the Finance Ministry recently.
 - The Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), which represents IndiGo, SpiceJet, Jet Airways and GoAir, made a presentation before top Finance Ministry officials on September 27 on behalf of the entire airline industry, saying guideline principles of the new indirect system — revenue neutrality and equity — have been violated by the GST.
- GST, in the current form, was against the objective of “affordability and sustainability” stated in the National Civil Aviation Policy 2016 and regional connectivity scheme UDAN released last year.

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General Studies-02

Public health key concern in banning crackers: SC

News: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to modify its October 9 order suspending the sale of firecrackers in Delhi NCR till November 1, 2017.

Beyond News:

- The court said that its concern primarily was the health of the masses.
- Interestingly, the October 9 order **only suspended the sale and did not impose any restriction on the bursting of crackers.**
- The court said it would anyway monitor the post-Deepavali situation after November 1.
- The suspension was ordered in a bid **to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a “positive effect”** on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.

SC asks Centre to strike a balance on Rohingya issue

- The Supreme Court on Friday came close to ordering the government not to deport the Rohingya.
- It finally settled on merely observing that a balance should be struck between humanitarian concern for the community and the country's national security and economic interests.
- The court was hearing a bunch of petitions, one filed by persons belonging to the community, against a proposed move to deport over 40,000 Rohingya refugees.

Law Ministry hails SC verdict on Section 375

News: The Law Ministry will not challenge the Supreme Court verdict that having sex with a minor wife is rape, said a top Law Ministry official.

Beyond News:

- The court order will act as a deterrent against child marriage, as the punishment will now be much stricter than the violation of the child marriage law, the official said.
- Sexual intercourse by a man with his minor wife now attracts a jail term of 10 years under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or a life term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

India to speak up at Bahamas meeting

News: India will strongly articulate the need to strengthen counter terrorism measures and prevent radicalisation of youth through information and communication technology (ICT) at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting that begins on Monday in the islands of the Bahamas.

Beyond News:

- Addressing the issue of using ICT and social media platforms to recruit terrorists and radicalize youth is also part of the agenda.
- Like the September face-off at the United Nations General Assembly, India and Pakistan could once again spar here as well — **Pakistan is also a member of the Commonwealth.**
- Cyber-crimes, climate change, the practice of child marriage, and the need for effective laws, to deal with these issues are also important items on the agenda.

General Studies-03

{Op-Ed}Six steps to job creation

Key aspects: Unemployment, irregular jobs and low salaries continue to hurt India while it continues to embrace labor reforms.

- **Three demographic groups that are in urgent need of jobs**
 - Growing number of better educated youth.
 - Uneducated agricultural workers who wish to leave agricultural distress behind.
 - Young women.

Opinion proposes solution for the 6 issues

1. **Excessive imports have been decimating Indian manufacturing.** As a result, domestic manufacturers face high tariffs since the last 12-15 years, leading to higher raw material

cost at home, emanating from the unfavorable inverted duty structure.

Solutions: Making Trade policy consistent with such an industrial policy.

2. The packaging labour intensive sectors have been ignored.

Solution: special packages are needed for labour-intensive industries to create jobs. There are a number of labor intensive manufacturing sectors in India such as food processing, leather and footwear, wood manufacturers and furniture, textiles and apparel and garments.

3. **Unorganized sector employment is in MSMEs**, which tend to be concentrated in specific geographic locations.

Solution: there should be cluster development to support job creation in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

4. **The Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD)** has a programme called AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) aimed at improving infrastructure for small towns. Infrastructure investment by the government always creates many jobs. But the programme does not take into account whether the infrastructure investment under it is taking place in towns which have clusters of unorganised sector economic activities.

Solution: An engagement between the Urban Development and MSME Ministries is necessary to ensure that this is happening. It will attract more investment to industrial clusters, which is where most non-agricultural jobs are.

5. The problem with skill development women programs has been low placement after training is complete.

Solution: The availability of jobs close to where the training is conducted will also enhance the demand for training.

6. Public investment in the health sector has remained even in the last three years at 1.15% of GDP, despite the creation of the national health policy at the beginning of 2017.

Solution: Public investments in health, education, police and judiciary can create many government jobs.

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General Studies-02

Pakistan withdraws terror charges against Hafiz Saeed

News: Pakistani authorities have withdrawn terrorism charges against Hafiz Saeed and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), paving the way for the possible release of the man designated a terrorist by the UN, the U.S. and India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Beyond News:

- Saeed and the JuD are already banned by the UN, while the U.S. has announced a \$10 million bounty for his arrest.
- Saeed had challenged his detention in the Lahore High Court, alleging that it was due to U.S. pressure and he had never been charged for any crime.

Doklam derails train plan?

News: Officials cite 'lack of response' from China company to high-speed train project

Beyond News:

- An ambitious high-speed train project to connect Chennai and Mysore, via Bengaluru, has been delayed as a Chinese company has maintained silence after completing a feasibility study a year ago.
- They suggest that the "lack of response" may be due to the Doklam standoff.
- An internal brief of the Mobility Directorate on the status of nine high-speed projects of the Railways shows that the **492-km Chennai-Bengaluru-Mysuru corridor** lies in limbo because the Chinese company has failed to respond to the Ministry's communiques.

{Op-Ed} The case for a public health cadre.

Key aspect: Opinion deals with keeping a designated officer for health cadre who is specially trained in that area.

Current scenario:

- **The 12th Five Year Plan** and **the National Health Policy, 2017** have also strongly advocated establishing a public health management cadre to improve the quality of health services by having dedicated, trained and exclusive personnel to run public health facilities.
- Recently, **Odisha, with the support of the Public Health Foundation of India, has notified the establishment of a public health cadre** in the hope of ensuring vast improvement in the delivery of health care.

Need for such a cadre?

- The idea is on the lines of the civil service — of having dedicated, professionally trained personnel to address the specific and complex needs of the Indian health-care
- Doctors with clinical qualifications and even with vast experience are unable to address all these challenges, thereby hampering the quality of our public health-care system.
- In the absence of a public health cadre in most States, even an anaesthetist or an ophthalmologist with hardly any public health knowledge and its principles is required to implement reproductive and child health or a malaria control programme.

Benefits

- This will definitely improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Indian health system.
- The poor will also stand to benefit as this will reduce their out-of-pocket expenditure and dependence on prohibitively expensive private health care.

General Studies-03

Make pollution-free crackers

News: Scientists have been asked to develop zero-pollution firecrackers that do not cause health hazards to children

Beyond News:

- This was urged by Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan Flagging off the 'Run for Clean Air' campaign here as a part of the 'Clean Air Campaign'.
- The 'Clean Air Campaign' was launched to create awareness on air pollution.

Indian economy on very solid track in the medium term

News: IMF chief Christine Lagarde said the Indian economy was on a “very solid track” in the medium term, days after the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the current and the next year.

Beyond News:

- The IMF last week lowered India's growth projection to 6.7% in 2017, 0.5 percentage points less than its previous two forecasts in April and July, attributing it to demonetisation and introduction of the GST.
- It also lowered the country's growth for 2018 to 7.4%, 0.3 percentage points less than its previous two projections in July and April.
- India's growth rate in 2016 was 7.1%, which saw an upward revision of 0.3 percentage points from its April report.

GDP may grow at 7% in FY18: NITI Aayog

- NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar has said the economic slowdown that began in 2013-14 has bottomed out and the GDP is likely to grow at 6.9-7 % this fiscal and 7.5% in 2018-19.
- On a quarterly basis also, the growth in the first quarter of the current fiscal had slipped to 5.7%.

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General Studies-02

Need to implement progressive laws: CIC

News: Chief Information Commissioner of India Rajiv Mathur on Monday called for immediate **implementation of the Whistleblowers' Protection Act, the Lokpal Act and the Lokayukta Act**, which would strengthen governance systems further.

Beyond News:

Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2011 is an Act in the Parliament of India which provides a mechanism to investigate alleged corruption and misuse of power by public servants and also protect anyone who exposes alleged wrongdoing in government bodies, projects and offices. The wrongdoing might take the form of fraud, corruption or mismanagement. The Act will also ensure punishment for false or frivolous complaints

The Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013 seeks to provide for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States to inquire into allegations. According to the act, the Lokpal would constitute an Inquiry Wing, which is to be headed by Director of Inquiry. Its function is to conduct the prelim

LIMITATIONS OF LOKPAL & LOKAYUKTA ACT

- ➔ No protection to whistle blowers: This was one of the main demands in the Janlokal Bill. The recently passed act has not at all provisions for whistle blower protection. We have to have a separate law for that.
- ➔ There is only one section on Lokayukta in the act which says that within one year, the states shall enact the Lokayukta act. However, there is nothing regarding their composition, powers etc. In fact, states are free to define how their own Lokayuktas would be appointed, how they would work and under what circumstances they would serve.
- ➔ The Lokpal act brings the PM under its jurisdiction, yet the Judiciary has been left. Judiciary is NOT subject to Lokpal jurisdiction.
- ➔ The provisions of the act have become anomalous because of Lokpal's relations with the CBI. Under the provisions of the act, Lokpal has been vested with all powers related to only those cases which it refers to CBI. Instead, there was a long demand that CBI should be merged with Lokpal. The current provisions are open to misuse.
- ➔ There are no provisions related to Citizen's charter.
- ➔ There are no adequate provisions to appeal against the Lokpal. Lokpal cannot conduct inquiry against itself.

Italian PM's visit to mark a new start

News: Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni will travel to India to meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 30

Beyond news:

- Expected to put to rest more than 5 years of tensions over the marines case
- The visit, the first by any Prime Minister on either side since 2007

BACKGROUND:

- Diplomatic ties between India and Italy virtually came to a standstill over the **m.v. Enrica Lexie case**, the ship on which two Italian marines were on **guard duty in February 2012**, when two Indian fishermen were shot and killed off the coast of Kerala.

- The marines, Latorre Massimiliano and Salvatore Girone, were suspected of shooting the fishermen, and taken into custody, although Italy claimed the ship was in international waters and hence only subject to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).
- As the case moved to the Supreme Court, India refused to hand over the Italian marines, except giving them furlough to travel to Italy on a few occasions, which became a **major campaign issue in Italy**.

Current scenario:

The decision to release the marines in 2016 bore fruit as India and Italy re-engaged. The current visit will enhance relation to new levels.

{Op-Ed}Out of UNESCO

Key aspect: Opinion deals with the USA's decision to quit UNESCO.

The U.S.'s decision to quit UNESCO is an attempt to reassert geopolitical influence in West Asia.

BACK GROUND:

- **Washington, was opposing** the admission of Palestine to world bodies for a long time.
- The UNESCO, which designates world heritage spots, **accorded recognition in 2011** to Palestine as its 195th member.
- Ever since, **controversies** over the historical status of the region's religious symbols, that have divided the Palestinian Authority and Israel, have come into sharp focus.
- Then onwards, **US promptly slashed funding**, amounting to about a quarter of UNESCO's annual budge.
- The 2012 elevation to a non-member observer status at the UN came as a shot in the arm for Palestinians demanding separate statehood.

While **Israel has also followed the U.S. lead**, it would nevertheless be hasty to view Washington's exit from the UNESCO as a point of no return.

General Studies-03

Boosting horticulture through remote sensing

News: Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh on Monday announced March 2018 as the deadline to complete the ambitious project of developing the horticulture sector using remote sensing technology and geo-informatics.

Beyond News:

- India is the second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world and the biggest producer of fruits such as banana, mango, papaya and lemon among others.

- In 2015, the Modi government started project CHAMAN — acronym for Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management using geo-informatics — to prepare a comprehensive horticultural plan.
- Using remote sensing technology to study soil conditions, land use, weather and cropping patters, the Centre has chosen 185 districts across the **country where seven selected crops** are being promoted.

Different states have been divided into different groups to grow: banana, mango, citrus fruits, potato, tomato, onion and chilli.

{Op-Ed} Avoid the adventurous path

Key aspect: Opinion revolves round the fiscal deficit issue & solutions.

Proposed solutions:

- Policy initiatives must be directed towards raising private investment.
- A strong fiscal stimulus through an increase in public investment by relaxing the fiscal deficit.
- It is also suggested that what is relevant is revenue deficit and that there is no rationale for having a fiscal deficit target.

problems with this arguments:

First, the focus on fiscal deficit is mainly to ensure that the private sector has sufficient borrowing space.. The argument in the TFC was that when the transferable saving of the household sector relative to GDP is 10% and an acceptable level of current account deficit 1.5%, containing the aggregate deficit of the Centre and States at 6% and providing 1.5% to the public sector enterprises would leave 4% borrowing space to the private sector.

Second, over 60% of the estimated fiscal deficit at the Centre in 2017-18 (1.9% out of 3.2%) is revenue deficit. At the State level, when the impact of loan waivers, additional interest payments on account of Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) and possible impact of pay revision is considered, the revenue deficit may increase by 1% of GDP. Thus, the problem of proliferation in revenue deficit continues.

Shortfalls in Centre and States

TO CENTRE

- Adhering to the fiscal deficit targets set out in the Budgets is going to be challenging.
- There will be a sharp reduction in the dividends from banking and financial institutions.
- The RBI has announced that against the expected Rs. 58,000 crore, the actual dividend will be Rs. 36,905 crore, and given the difficulties in the public sector banks, there will be shortfalls in the dividends from them as well.
- There will be a shortfall in disinvestment and tax revenue collection, if current trends persist.

TO STATES

At the State level, the combined fiscal deficit for 26 States is budgeted at 2.2% of GDP excluding the deficit arising from taking over the power distribution companies (discoms) loans.

- The expenditure on account of loan waivers is estimated at about 0.5% of GDP.
- Following pay revision at the Centre, some of the States may revise their pay scales which could add to the fiscal pressure.
- There could be a slippage of about 1% GDP in fiscal deficits.

WAY AHEAD:

- Reviving private investment, recapitalizing banks to enable them to lend more, and speedy completion of stalled projects.
- Fiscal policy can at best play a role in creating the appropriate climate.
- Fiscal prudence is one of the elements in sustaining growth over an extended period

OCTOBER 18 2017

General Studies-02

U.S.-backed forces wrest Raqqa from IS

News: U.S.-backed forces took full control of Raqqa from the Islamic State group on Tuesday, defeating the last jihadist holdouts in the de facto Syrian capital of their now-shattered 'caliphate.'

Background:

- The victory caps a battle of more than four months for Raqqa, and hammers another nail in the coffin of the jihadist group's experiment in statehood, which has collapsed in the face of offensives in Syria and Iraq.
- Inside Raqqa, joyous fighters from the Kurdish-Arab Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) celebrated and raised their yellow flag in the city's Al-Naim traffic circle, which became known as 'Hell Roundabout' after it was used for gruesome public executions.
- The SDF broke into Raqqa in June, after months of fighting



to surround the city, and on Tuesday flushed the last few hundred IS fighters from their remaining positions in the main hospital and the municipal stadium.

Notes for enrichment:

- The **2017 Battle of Raqqa** was the fifth and final phase of the Raqqa campaign (2016–2017) launched by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) de facto capital in the city of Raqqa.
- The battle began on 6 June 2017, and was supported by airstrikes and ground troops from the US-led coalition. The operation was named the "**Great Battle**" by the SDF.
- The battle ran concurrently with the Battle of Mosul, which started six months earlier, as part of an effort by the CJTF–OIR and its allies to strip ISIL of its regional centers of power and to dismantle it as an organization controlling territory.

65 AYUSH hospitals in three years

News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that time had come for a “health revolution” under the aegis of the traditional medicine system.

Background:

- The government is working towards setting up an Ayurveda hospital in each district.
- The day was also celebrated as Dhanwantari Jayanti (Dhanteras) across India.

Beyond news:

- The AYUSH Ministry is working swiftly in this direction, and in more than three years, more than 65 AYUSH hospitals have been developed.
- The Prime Minister urged private players to use part of their corporate social responsibility funds to help strengthen Ayurveda.

More check-posts to come up on Bangladesh border

News: The Home Ministry will move a Cabinet note to construct seven integrated check-posts (ICPs) along the Bangladesh border to give a fillip to trade and business with the neighboring country.

Beyond News:

- The project was envisaged in 2007.
- A separate body — **the Land Port Authority of India (LPAI)** — was constituted in 2011 to boost trade via the land border points.
- Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) was studying the proposal estimated to cost Rs. 5,000 crore.
- 19 ICPs are expected to come up along the Bangladesh border. Besides the seven in West Bengal, three will be in Assam, two in Meghalaya and seven in Tripura.

- An ICP has several facilities such as passenger terminal building, currency exchange counter, Internet hubs, cargo process building, cargo inspection sheds, warehouse, cold storage, quarantine laboratory, clearing agents, banks, vehicle scanners, isolation bay, parking and cafeteria.

U.S. ploy against Iran: envoy

News: Accusing the U.S. of trying to ensure that India reduced oil imports from his country, Iranian Ambassador Gholamreza Ansari said that even so, U.S. President Donald Trump's policy shift would not affect the India-Iran relationship, and the development of the Chabahar port project remained on track.

Beyond News:

- India has cut its oil imports from Iran by approximately 20% in 2017, though its global imports have risen by 5.4%.
- Some companies such as Essar oil have dropped imports from Iran in August by as much as 75%, according to oil industry estimates.
- According to Petroleum Ministry: India has been trying to "diversify" its imports so as to get more competitive rates.
- Major development is India's decision to import its first shipment of crude oil from the U.S., with an order of 8.45 million barrels, giving rise to speculation that New Delhi's new policy will come at the cost of imports from Iran.

General Studies-03

Investments in overseas units fall 39%

News: India Inc.'s investment in overseas ventures fell by almost 39.3% to \$2.65 billion in September this year, according to the RBI data released on Tuesday.

Beyond news:

- Domestic companies had committed \$4.37 billion as outward **foreign direct investment** in the year-earlier period.
- In August 2017, India Inc. had invested \$1.34 billion in their overseas ventures that were either fully owned subsidiaries or joint ventures of the Indian parent companies.
- The \$2.65 billion worth of investment in September was in the form of equity stake, loan and issuance of guarantee by Indian entities, the RBI said.

{Op-Ed}Of faith and fever

Key aspect: Need for the validation of traditional medicine

Example from Tamil Nadu:

- This year the Tamil Nadu government responded to one of the worst dengue epidemic by **freely distributing a herbal concoction, nilavembu kudineer**, recommended for fevers under the ancient Siddha system of medicine.
- Even though there is no evidence of their efficacy, alternative remedies such as **papaya-leaf juice** for dengue find many takers during epidemics.
- While it is hard for government bodies to curb such practices, what they must never do is to endorse them.

Core issues:

- Eventhough there are some evidence exists for herbs potency against a range of illnesses, only a tiny handful of these remedies go on **to prove their efficacy in large-scale**, placebo-controlled human trials, the gold standard of modern medicine.
- This is because the science of **developing drugs from medicinal plants is complicated**.
- Poly-herbal remedies like nilavembu are **a mix of several compounds**, while most of modern medicine relies on single-compounds.
- The **amount of the active ingredient** — the compound in a herb that acts against an illness — varies across plants.

Way ahead:

- Drugmakers have to find a way to identify this ingredient and **test it in large-scale trials**. This exercise requires not only massive financial investment but also intellectual honesty.
- Too many **attempts in India by the government** to validate traditional medicine are driven less by honesty and more by blind faith. This has led to the promotion of herbal remedies with scant evidentiary basis.
- At a time when modern medicine is advancing towards greater transparency and replicability in clinical evidence, the government's claims on nilavembu aren't fooling anyone in the scientific community.

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General Studies-01

Delhi pollution bursts at the seams

Smoked out

Data collected from four measuring stations across Delhi on Deepavali day, showed a relative dip in pollution levels when compared to the last two years, but air quality continued to be in the 'very poor' bracket



Reality check: A scene day after Deepavali, in west Delhi on Friday. - SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Stations	11.11.2015	30.10.2016	19.10.2017
Mandir Marg	362	397	318
Anand Vihar	460	455	397
R.K. Puram	406	401	366
Punjabi Bagh	403	441	356

GOOD (0-50) SATISFACTORY (51-100) MODERATE (101-200) POOR (201-300) VERY POOR (301-400) SEVERE (>401)

SOURCE: CENTRAL POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

News: Air quality plummeted to 'severe', the worst rating on the air quality index (AQI), according to the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) updated report of Friday.

Beyond News:

- Despite a ban on the sale of crackers, the evening after Deepavali saw the Delhi record its sharpest dip in air quality this year.
- The AQI registered 402 on the scale — the uppermost being 500 — according to data from 14 monitoring stations in Delhi.

Severe smog:

- The severe smog, which built up in the days leading to Deepavali last year, triggered a directive by the Supreme Court to implement a comprehensive pollution management plan.
- A consequence of this plan was that, over the last week, the Badarpur Thermal Power Station was shut down, diesel generators in Delhi banned.
- The AQI on **Deepavali day in 2015 was 327, 426 in 2016 and 327 this year**, according to the agency's Deepavali report.

- Concentrations of most categories of pollutants — sulphur dioxide, particulate matter 10 and 2.5 — saw a fall this year across most stations, except for nitrous oxide.
- Air quality this year was slightly better than last time, even though meteorological conditions, such as average wind speeds and mixing heights were almost as unfavourable last year.

General Studies-02

France wants India to buy more Rafales

News: French Defense Minister Florance Parley will be in New Delhi on an official visit during which she is likely to make a strong pitch to sell additional Rafale fighter jets.

Beyond News:

- In September last year, India and France concluded a €7.87-billion government-to-government **deal for 36 Rafale** jets in flyaway condition scheduled to be delivered between 2019 and 2022.
- The deal has a 50% offset clause to be executed by Dassault and its partners in India amounting up to Rs. 30,000 crore.
- Following this, Dassault Aviation and Reliance Defence announced a joint venture called “Dassault Reliance Aerospace”, which is likely to execute a major part of the offsets.

Single-engine jet:

- The Indian Air Force has stated its requirement for additional twin-engine fighter jets and has expressed its desire for more Rafale jets.
- The focus is now on procuring a single-engine fighter jet under the newly promulgated Strategic Partnership model, With a depleting fighter strength and several squadrons of MiG-21s and MiG-27s to be phased out,.
- The IAF is operating 32 fighter squadrons against the sanctioned strength of 42, which is set to drop further in the coming years.

U.S. starts anti-dumping probe into PTFE resin from India

News: The U.S. has initiated **anti-dumping duty** investigations against import of **polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE)** resin from India and China, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Beyond News:

- The PTFE is mostly **used as a non-stick coating for utensils**.
- The department has stated that the estimated dumping margins alleged by the petitioner range from 23.4%-408.9% for China and 15.8% to 128.1% for India.

- In the anti-dumping investigations, it said the department would determine whether imports of the resin from China and India were being dumped in the American market at less than fair value.
- Countries initiate anti-dumping probes to determine if the domestic industry has been hurt by a surge in below-cost imports.
- **As a counter-measure**, they impose duties under the multilateral WTO regime. Anti-dumping measures are taken to ensure fair trade and provide a level-playing field to the domestic industry. They are not a measure to restrict imports or cause an unjustified increase in cost of products.

{Op-Ed}A flood of questions

Key aspect: The National Democratic Alliance government is all set to begin work on an estimated \$87 billion plan to connect around 60 of India's largest rivers; this includes the Ganga. Once complete, it is expected to help end farmers' dependence on fickle monsoon rains, bring millions of hectares of cultivable land under irrigation and help generate thousands of megawatts of electricity.

- The river-linking plan was first proposed in 2002 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government. However, it was stalled as States failed to end differences over water sharing contracts and clearances. This government has been able to push through clearances for the first phase of the project. Work is now set to link the Betwa and Ken rivers which pass through Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Issues should be sorted out first before billions of rupees are spent on a project:

First, Water is listed as entry 17 in List II of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. While the government has initiated discussions to bring the subject under the concurrent list, it may not be an easy task to achieve. Without having a full-fledged architecture to solve disputes, it would not be prudent to embark on a mammoth project like this.

Second, India is technically poor with respect to data related to the water sector. Unlike other countries, the Central Statistics Office has neither attempted nor funded studies to gather data on water tables at an all-India or State level. Many water stressed countries produce these on a regular basis at a regional level and link them to national accounts statistics.

Third, In addition to facilitating the integration and sharing of a more comprehensive knowledge base, the natural resource accounting framework provides the basis for evaluating the consistency between the objectives and priorities of water resource management and broader goals of economic development planning and policy at a national and local scale. This in turn improves communication between various agencies generating and using information about water for various purposes and contributes to better coordination, packaging and analyses of such information that are more relevant to the needs of water managers and policy-makers'.

Fourth, the government should pay more attention to its 'more crop per drop' mission, to what extent Indian agriculture follows this practice and whether water-stressed regions are water exporters due to the crops they cultivate.

current scenario:

Among the north zone States, Punjab has the highest water losses, while Maharashtra (west) and Tamil Nadu (south) the highest water savings in 1996–2005 and 2005–2014, respectively. Therefore, at a subnational scale, VW(virtual wate) flows are not consistent with relative water scarcity. This finding is also crucial as it emphasises the need to carry out a subnational VW flow assessment. Such analysis for all the major crops at subnational levels is a must for efficient planning of a scarce resource such as water.

General Studies-03

Most pollution-linked deaths occur in India

News: India is ranked number one globally on the toll taken by pollution, with a staggering 2.51 million deaths in 2015, an international commission has reported.

Beyond News:

- Out of an estimated 9 million premature deaths linked to pollution worldwide, the country accounted for about 28%.
- Air pollution, the leading cause, **killed 6.5 million people** around the world.
- **India and Bangladesh** recorded the largest increases in pollution-related deaths among the 10 most populous countries for the year.

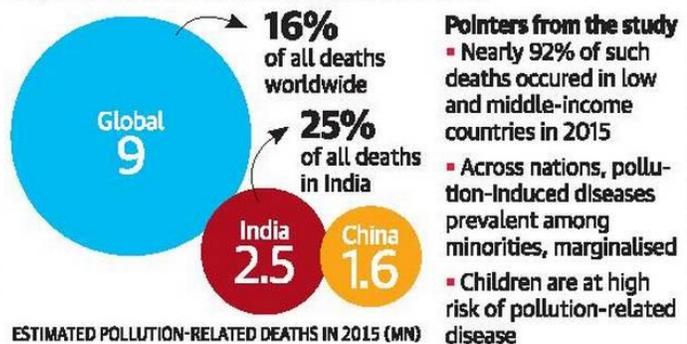
Nearly a **quarter of all deaths**

in India in 2015 were attributed to pollution; Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Kenya too reported one in four deaths due to the same cause.

- Again, air pollution took the heaviest toll in India (1.81 million), followed by water (0.64 million).
- Deaths linked to air pollution were a result of **heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**.
- The **Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health** is a two-year project that involved over 40 international health and environmental authors.

Every breath we take

Pollution is the biggest environmental cause of premature death according to a Lancet study. In absolute numbers, India surpassed all countries in such deaths in 2015



SOURCE: THE LANCET COMMISSION ON POLLUTION AND HEALTH

- Pointers from the study**
- Nearly 92% of such deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries in 2015
 - Across nations, pollution-induced diseases prevalent among minorities, marginalised
 - Children are at high risk of pollution-related disease

{Op-Ed}Darjeeling deadlock

Key aspect: The 104-day shutdown in the Darjeeling hills called by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) may have been lifted in late September, but peace remains elusive.

Background:

- On October 15, the Union Home Ministry wrote to the State government that it was calling back 10 of the 15 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces posted in the hills.
- In response, two days later Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee moved the Calcutta High Court and got a stay. GJM chief Bimal Gurung is on the run.
- While the announcement to end the shutdown had come from him after the Centre appealed to protesters and offered to talk, the State government has raided his properties, lodged several cases against him, including for misappropriation of funds and triggering violence.
- In an attempt to exploit differences within the GJM, the State government propped up rebel Gorkha leader Binoy Tamang, naming him chief of a new board of administrators to head the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, which had been set up in 2012 as a semi-autonomous body.

Current scenario:

- With peace yet to be restored fully, the Central and State governments need to urgently sink their differences, hold tripartite talks and meaningfully empower the GTA.
- The economy of the Darjeeling hills has taken a severe hit with both the tea and tourism industries having suffered huge losses and struggling to chart a way out.
- The tea industry, for example, lost almost all its second flush crop, with losses estimated at Rs. 400 crore and counting.
- Tourists have begun to trickle back, but the peak season is over. With the West Bengal government looking to be in no mood to talk to Mr. Gurung, the political crisis is far from over.
- It was Ms. Banerjee's initial statement that Bengali would be made compulsory in the State, including in the hills, that revived the Gorkhaland stir.

OCTOBER 22 & 23 2017

General Studies-01

{Op-Ed}It's time to make deep emission cuts

Key aspect: Global warming, Issues & solutions.

- In 2016, the earth's temperature was 1.3°C warmer than in pre-industrial times — as warm as in the Eemian interglacial period some 125,000 years ago, when sea levels were 6-9 metres higher than they are today.
- More dishearteningly, even if countries take the action they promised at the Paris climate change conference in 2015, the world would be about 3°C warmer by 2100, well above the 2°C temperature guardrail to avoid dangerous climate change.

Negative emissions

- Closer examination reveals that many of the integrated assessment models used to study future scenarios and emissions assume that the world would somehow make use of **significant amounts of ‘negative emissions’**.
- These are ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, or even change the earth’s radiation balance through geo engineering.
- These negative emissions in the models are used in addition to increasing use of renewables and improving the efficiency of energy services.

BECCS

- One method that is widely discussed is **bioenergy for fuel in combination with carbon capture and storage (BECCS)**.
- This involves the use of plants as fuel. The released carbon dioxide is then captured and safely stored indefinitely.
- However, due to competition for land for food and other purposes, and due to technological limitations, this approach is believed to be inappropriate for extensive use.

Peak emissions

- Another critical scientific finding is **that even if global emissions were to go down to zero** by 2050 through some Herculean feat, there would be considerable amount of warming that the world is already locked into.
- The adverse effects of these would be severe and difficult to adapt to. This is already in evidence all over the world with several seasons of intense storms, droughts, floods, fires and their aftermath, meaning that any further delay in reducing emissions would put at risk many more lives, livelihoods and investments for decades to come.

Solutions

- **Policies need to support practices** that successfully keep carbon in the ground, prevent deforestation, support agricultural practice that sequesters carbon and promote sustainable land use practices that reduce emissions.
- We also **need a carbon tax** — various models for these have been discussed.
- Policies should nudge especially the more prosperous communities towards less carbon intensive lifestyles, either through taxes or incentives or both.

General Studies-02

{Op-Ed}Unacceptable fetters

Key aspect: Corruption

- The Rajasthan ordinance making it a **punishable offence to disclose the names of public servants facing allegations of corruption** before the government grants formal sanction to prosecute them is a grave threat to media freedom and the public's right to know.

This is the **first time a section prescribing punishment for disclosure** is being introduced in India, though provisions barring investigation or prosecution without prior sanction are also in force in Maharashtra.

Section 228-B:

- It's a newly introduced Indian Penal Code offence that relates to acts done in the course of discharging official functions, is a direct threat to the functioning of the media and whistle-blowers.

Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017

- In addition, the Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 fetters judicial magistrates from ordering an investigation without prior sanction, as an additional shield for public servants who already enjoy the protection of Section 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and Section 19 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, which make prior sanction mandatory before a court can take cognizance of a case.

Response time delay:

- The time limit for the sanctioning authority to act is 180 days in Rajasthan, and 90 days in Maharashtra. The Union government, too, has a set of amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act pending since 2013, including a proviso for prior sanction.

The court had observed that such a provision destroys the objective of anti-corruption legislation, blocks the truth from surfacing, thwarts independent investigation and forewarns corrupt officers.

It is time the Centre enforced a strong body of legislation that punishes the corrupt, protects the honest, and ensures time-bound public services and whistle-blower safety.

{Op-Ed}In a foreign policy haze

Key aspect: Issues & benefits associated with strengthening Indo-US relation.

Background:

- In an ambitious statement ahead of his visit to India this week, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson set the course for India-U.S. relations going ahead, mapping convergences in connectivity, trade and economics and counter-terrorism cooperation.
- He displayed a keen understanding of India's strengths as a "diverse, dynamic, and pluralistic" democracy.

FOR INDIA:

- It is disappointing that Washington has not been similarly pro-active in **condemning the Pakistan government's decision** to drop terrorism charges and paving the way for 26/11 mastermind and Lashkar-e-Taiba leader Hafiz Saeed's release from detention, while it is hoped that Mr. Tillerson will make those statements in Islamabad. Instead, Mr. Tillerson appears to be keen on brokering dialogue between India and Pakistan, saying that he hopes to "ease tensions along their border."
- **If Iran is unable to conduct more trade**, it will have less incentive to focus on the new Chabahar port over the pre-existing trade through Bandar Abbas. This would certainly impact India's plans for connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- It also remains to be seen whether the Trump administration would countenance Indian **investment in Chabahar**, the development of the railways through to Zahedan, and regular trade through Iran in order to increase assistance to Afghanistan, as the U.S.'s South Asia policy encourages, given the tough language it has employed in its Iran strategy.

As Mr. Tillerson touches down in Delhi for his first visit to the region as Secretary of State, **New Delhi must prepare for the challenges ahead** with this wobbly compass in hand.

- The government has a **multi-fold challenge before it**, to address its concerns on all these issues, while keeping the focus on the India-U.S. bilateral relationship, which is largely more beneficial for India.
- This will be yet more complicated as Delhi hosts Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on the same day that Mr. Tillerson arrives, and the talks could give the appearance of a trilateral.

Cattle smuggling goes on along Indo-Bangla border

News: Two Border Security Force (BSF) personnel have been killed, allegedly by cattle smugglers along the India-Bangladesh border, over the past two months.

Beyond News:

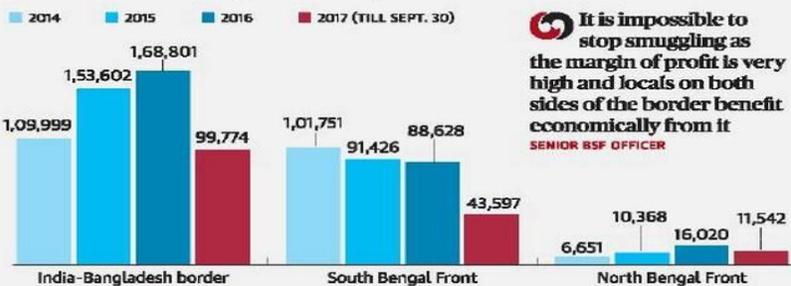
- The two deaths are an indication that cattle smuggling along the international border is a major challenge for security personnel guarding the border.
- **BSF's SBF(South Bengal Frontier)**, which extends from West Bengal's Sunderbans to Malda is considered most porous and vulnerable to cross border smuggling.

Bovines sans borders

Smuggling of cattle continues unabated as smugglers find newer routes along the porous India-Bangladesh border, which spans 4,096 km along West Bengal and the northeastern States of Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Assam



Tight vigil: File photo of a BSF jawan guarding cattle captured along the India-Bangladesh border. ■ REUTERS



It is impossible to stop smuggling as the margin of profit is very high and locals on both sides of the border benefit economically from it
SENIOR BSF OFFICER

India-Bangla Border:

- Of the **918-km border**, only a **third is fenced and large parts of about 360 km** is riverine, where rivers flowing between the two countries serve as the international border.
- India shares a **4,096-km border with Bangladesh along the States of West Bengal** (the longest at 2,216 km), Tripura (856 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Mizoram (318 km) and Assam (263 km).
- Each State in the northeast has a dedicated BSF Frontier for managing security along the border. Illegal trade of cattle remains huge in terms of the numbers of cattle heads seized.

High margins:

- The margin for one smuggled cattle head may be as high as Rs. 10,000-Rs. 15,000, depending on the size of cattle.
- Figures indicate that over 5.32 lakh heads of cattle valued at valuing about Rs. 350 crore have been seized along the eastern theater since 2014.

'Why exempt CBI from RTI Act?'

News: A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court for an early hearing of a petition challenging a 2011 government notification, which **includes the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the list of “intelligence and security organisations” exempted from disclosing information** to the public under the Right to Information Act.

Beyond News:

- Counsel Ajay Agrawal, in his petition, said the June 9, 2011 notification including the CBI in the Second Schedule of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005** was arbitrary, especially when the organization was only an investigating agency and not a security or intelligence organization.
- This case had been **transferred from the Delhi High Court to the apex court** following the government's claim of multiplicity of such petitions in several High Courts.

India gifts war memorabilia to Bangladesh

News:

India on Sunday gifted to Bangladesh Prime Minister the memorabilia of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 when an estimated 10 million Bangladesh people took refuge in India and the two neighbours fought together to drive out the Pakistani occupation army.

Beyond News:

- It includes **military equipment utilised by the joint forces** of India and Bangladesh during the Liberation War as well as **large number of artefacts and documents** including historical photographs, archival audio and video clippings, maps, battle records, newspaper clippings, documentary films.

- The collection is proposed to **be displayed at the Bangladesh National Museum** in Shahbagh and the Museum of Independence in Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka.
- The memorabilia, handed over to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj

General Studies-03

{Op-Ed}Cycle of terror

Key aspect: Terrorism & security situation in Afghanistan

- The multiple terror attacks that killed at least 200 people in Afghanistan last week has set alarm bells ringing in Kabul.
- Attacks occurred at a time when the United States was putting to work its new strategy to stabilise Afghanistan underscores the resolve of the militants to stay the course of insurgency. Most of these attacks were carried out by the Taliban.

The security situation in Afghanistan is increasingly worsening. If the government faced only one major armed insurgency till a couple of years ago, now it has to fight on many fronts.

The U.S. has made several promises *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan. But after 16 years of war, the world's largest military force appears to be as clueless as the Afghan army on how to put an end to the conflict. One option, as many diplomats have pointed out, is to engage the Taliban directly, while continuing the fight against other terror groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS.

The latest wave of Taliban attacks occurred days after officials from four countries — the U.S., China, Pakistan and Afghanistan — met in Oman, seeking ways to revive peace talks. The attacks are a message from the Taliban that they are least interested in talks.

An outright military victory in Afghanistan appears remote, given the Taliban's swelling networks and the support they enjoy in rural areas. But an outright victory looks impossible for the Taliban too as long as the U.S. remains committed to Afghanistan. This makes peace talks the only practical way forward. But Kabul and the coalition should first restore Afghan confidence in the government's ability to govern, before reaching out to the Taliban.

Bhitarakanika has reasons to cheer

News: Forest authorities are excited over a slight increase in the number of tourists coming to see **crocodiles basking on mudflats** of the **Bhitarakanika National Park in Odisha's Kendrapara district** during the month of September, considered an off-season.

Major attractions

- Apart from crocodiles, meandering water courses flanked by green mangrove forests and migratory birds flocking in search of prey in the swampy fields of Bhitarakanika are some of the major attractions.

- The forest department has come across 80 crocodile nests in their wild habitats in 2017 compared to 75 in 2016 and 70 in 2015.
- In September, 2,681 tourists, including nine foreigners, visited Bhitarkanika compared with 1,968 tourists in August during which 44 foreigners came for sightseeing.
- Recently, the Odisha government facilitated exposure visit of tour operators hoping that word-of-mouth marketing would pay good dividend.

Other animals

- According to the National Park authorities, mammals found in the place include **leopards, wild boars, fishing cats, hyenas, sambar deer and Gangetic dolphins**.
- Reptiles include olive ridley sea turtles, crocodiles, water monitors, pythons and king cobras.
- Around 166 species of birds have been spotted in the park.

Social media trends to help monitor security

News:

- Social media trends and data analytics will be used for the first time in **monitoring security at the country's airports, and nuclear and aerospace installations**.

Beyond News:

- The **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)**, tasked to secure these important assets, has created a maiden 'media lab' and social media monitoring control room — the **Pattern Research For Institutional Social Media (PRISM)** analytics
- Its base is in Arakkonam near Chennai.
- A special team of CISF agents has been trained in tracking social media trends, collate them and dish them out as vital pieces of "actionable intelligence" to various airports and other vital units.
- Platforms like **Twitter, FaceBook, YouTube and Flickr** will be used to check any suspicious and sabotage-like activity against the assets.

Govt. may have to foot bill for rail safety fund

News: The Indian Railways' income stood at Rs. 80,519 crore till September compared with Rs. 76,405 crore till September last year.

Beyond News:

- The actual income was 8.45% lower than the targeted earnings till September this year.
- The Railways had set a target of earning Rs. 1.88 lakh crore in 2017-18 against Rs. 1.65 lakh crore in 2016-17.
- The Finance Ministry is scheduled to meet the officials of the Ministry of Railway on November 10 for pre-budget discussions to finalise the revised estimates for 2017-18 and budget estimates for 2018-19.

Background:

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced the setting up a special safety fund with a corpus of more than Rs. 1 lakh crore over a period of five years in Budget 2017-18. According to the plan, while the Finance Ministry would contribute Rs. 15,000 crore annually towards the fund, the Ministry of Railways would fund the balance Rs. 5,000 crore every year.

In the first six months of the current financial year, the Indian Railways had utilised a quarter of the safety fund as it had spent Rs. 5,031 crore from the RRSK. Although the Railways' passenger and goods earnings had increased 4.5% and 8.4% respectively till September this year compared with the last year, its sundry earnings had declined sharply by 35.7% during this period

OCTOBER 24 2017

General Studies-02

{Op-Ed}The gown and the Bench

Key aspect: An overview of the transformation in collegium system.

Background: Political interference in the selection of judges in the third and fourth decades of independent India resulted in the collegium system where judges select judges.

In 2014: The opaque system and unsatisfactory selection, transfer, and elevation of judges to the Supreme Court caused disquiet and led to the passing of the Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, 2014 and the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, 2014, which sought to give politicians and civil society a final say in the appointment of judges to the highest courts.

In 2015: A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court declared these unconstitutional on the ground that the composition of the NJAC did not provide adequate representation to those from the judiciary in the selection and appointment of judges.

Permanent committee:

- All these developments resulted in demand for permanent committee.
- It will consist of the Chief Justice of India, two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court/ High Courts, the Attorney General of India/ the Advocate General of State, and a member of the Bar to be nominated by the above four members.
- The committee will have a permanent Secretariat.
- The committee will examine each candidate's case, interview the candidate, and make its assessment based on a point-based format.
- The transparency is ensured by publishing decisions in website officially.
- The secretariat should not be dragged into the quagmire of investigating frivolous complaints or objections.

{Op-Ed}Facts in fiction

Key aspect: Editorial is dealing with the controversies associated with Tamil movie mersal & central government.

Issue:

- BJP leaders want the deletion of particular scenes on **the goods and services tax regime** (because these are factually incorrect) as well as those on the health care situation in the country (because these are critical of the government).
- Opposition parties & Actors came up with arguments.

Background:

- Controversial sections of the **Indian Penal Code such as 153A**, which prohibits the promotion of enmity between different groups, and **295A**, which prohibits insult of religious beliefs, are routinely used to silence voices or harass those who hold dissenting views.

Findings by the editor:

- The cynical manipulation of such sections of the law is bad enough.
- Mersal is a pure work of fiction, and if the lead actor got his facts about GST in a twist, this is best left to film critics and the audience to react to.
- There is not even a bad provision in the law that bars criticism of the government, whether in newspapers or in films

Why make a show of patriotism: SC judge

News: Justice Chandrachud ,part of a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra criticized November order while hearing a petition filed by the Kodungallur Film Society in Kerala to recall the November order.

Beyond News:

- The Supreme Court's controversial order mandating moviegoers to stand up when the national anthem is featured in cinema halls before every show found criticism from within the highest judiciary itself.
- The court left it to the government to bring out any notification, if necessary, to make or not make the playing of the anthem mandatory in cinema halls.

Background:

- It was a Bench led by Justice Misra, before he became Chief Justice, which passed the order in November 2016, making it mandatory for movie halls to play the national anthem before every show.

- Justice Misra had reasoned that the practice would “instil a feeling of committed patriotism and nationalism.”

Centre eases norms for sewage plants

News The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has relaxed standards for upcoming sewage treatment plants (STP), including those to come up on extremely polluted stretches of the Ganga.

Beyond News:

- One of the prongs of the government’s Rs. 20,000 crore push to clean the river was a 2015-proposal to have higher standards for STPs.
- They would have to ensure that the biochemical oxygen demand (Bod) — a marker for organic pollutants — in the treated water had to be no more than 10 mg/litre. Existing laws permit BoD up to 30 mg/litre.

A notification by the Union Environment Ministry this month has junked the 10 mg/litre target.

- It says that STPs coming up after June 2019 — except in major State capitals and metropolitan cities — need only conform to 30 mg/litre of BoD.
- Critics argue that the 10 mg criteria was impractical and required advanced technology that was too costly for most States.

Setting the bar low

The standards proposed in 2015 for upcoming sewage treatment plants have been relaxed in the final plan citing technological limitations

Parameter	Proposed plan (Nov. 2015)	Final plan (Oct. 2017)
pH	6.5-9.0	6.5-9.0
Biochemical oxygen demand	10 mg/l	<20 or <30*
Total dissolved solids	20 mg/l	<50
Faecal coliform	<100	<1,000

*20 In major State capitals, five major cities, 30 In the rest of country



SOURCE: CPCB/MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS

Ministry seeks lower GST for 5-star hotels

News:

- The tourism ministry has proposed a reduction in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates for five-star hotels and the grant of ‘infrastructure status’ as part of measures to boost the vital jobs- and foreign exchange generating sector.

Beyond News:

- Providing land on lower lease rentals for hotel construction, cutting the number of permits needed to open hotels, as well as establishing a National Tourism Regulator and the related regulatory framework are some of the other proposals made by the ministry.

The aim is to ensure that within five years the sector generates 100 million jobs (from the current 43 million), attracts 40 million tourists (from 14.4 million now), and generates \$100 billion worth of foreign exchange earnings (from about \$24 billion at present).

Rajasthan tables Criminal Laws Amendment Bill amid uproar

News: Rajasthan Home Minister Gulabchand Kataria on Monday tabled in the Assembly a Bill to replace the ordinance to protect serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants from being investigated for on-duty action without government sanction.

Beyond News:

- The **Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill, 2017**, seeks to replace the September 7 ordinance, which drew widespread criticism.
- The ordinance also **barred the media from reporting** on accusations of such wrongdoings till the government sanctions a probe.

Nb: Details were covered in previous days.

U.P. plans to digitise medical college records

News: The BJP government is planning to start an 'E-hospital' facility at medical colleges.

Beyond News:

- The government's decision to digitalise information on stock supply in government hospitals comes a few months after about 30 children died within 48 hours at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College in Gorakhpur, allegedly due to shortage of oxygen supply.
- Case histories of patients, and information related to hospital staff and stocks of medicines, could soon be available online in State-run medical colleges in **Uttar Pradesh**.

To set up the hospital management system, the government has already allotted a budget of ₹10 crore, he added.

- Apart from E-hospitals, the government has also formed a Medical Education Strategy Cell (MESC), the first of its kind in the State, to create a roadmap for phase-wise improvements in the medical education sector.

General Studies-03

{oP-eD}Economic growth: an alternative view

key Aspect: GDP growth and environmental damage

- There is a drop in GDP growth rate from 7.4% in January-March 2016 to 5.7% in April-June 2017 is equivalent to Rs. 2.59 trillion.
- It is argued that smaller rate of GDP growth will have a negative impact on the growth of employment, income and livelihood opportunities.

Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis:

- It underlines almost all our development policies, which are directed towards pushing double-digit income growth with little concern for environmental capital.
- The EKC hypothesis is shown in an inverted U-shaped curve depicting the relationship between per capita income and environmental deterioration.
- It suggests that during the initial period of economic development, where per capita income is low, deterioration of environmental quality caused by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation is inevitable.
 - In reality, the EKC is a near myth since an increase in per capita income does not bring desirable levels of improvement to the environment.

The Indian context: There were several studies to estimate economic cost of environmental damages in India.

- A 2013 World Bank study highlighted that in India, a higher level of economic growth maintained in the past imposed Rs. 3.75 trillion worth of environmental damage cost, which is equivalent to **5.7% of the country's GDP** at 2009 prices.
- Another study by World Bank and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington found that India's air pollution alone caused welfare loss equivalent to 7.69% (approximately Rs. 31,316.2 billion) of its GDP in 2013.
- Since **GDP growth and environmental damage have a strong positive relationship**, lower growth in GDP could afford benefits.
- Income growth on a higher path brings a win-win outcome in the long run where poverty is reduced and environmental quality is improved.
- Efforts to develop environmental accounting and green GDP for India can help us achieve sustainable development in future.

{Op-Ed} On a different trajectory

key Aspect: Analysis of Maoism from its beginning in India till now.

- Independent India had previously experienced **armed peasant movements**, including the Telangana armed struggle and the Tebhaga movement (in Bengal), but the Naxalbari movement seemed to follow a different trajectory.
- It was ignited by a small group of Bengal revolutionaries (all members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) formed in 1964) who felt disillusioned with the so-called embourgeoisement of the party which had only recently split from the CPI on the ground it had turned revisionist.
 - Breaking away from the CPI(M), this faction received almost instant endorsement from the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao**.

This was followed by a few cadres visiting China to receive the benediction of the CCP. In course of time some of the cadres went to China for training.

Rural, semi-urban base

- In April 1969: The movement took formal shape, with the coming into existence of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar.
- The CPI(ML), hence, consisted of both rural and semi-urban elements. In the early years, and till the 1990s, a number of recruits to the movement came from the urban intelligentsia.

From the beginning, the movement, which included many well-known ideologues, **suffered from a series of splits**. Several leaders from Bengal and Andhra Pradesh thereafter set up their separate parties.

The main strength of the CPI (Maoist) are:

1. **its organisational structure**
2. **a Central Committee**
3. **a powerful military wing**
4. **Geographical distribution of key committee members.**

The presence of over 100 battalions of Central paramilitary forces aided by State police forces has had a sobering effect on the movement in reducing maoist presence.

Major attacks this year:

1. March: leading to the killing of 12 CRPF personnel, members of a road opening party.
2. April: More daring attack on a CRPF patrol in Sukma district killing 25 personnel.

In official circles, Maoist success is often attributed to the failure of police personnel to observe 'Standard Operating Procedures' and also to the failure of intelligence.

Authors findings:

- A strong possibility exists that Ganapathy may be replaced by the present chief of the CMC. The CMC is in direct charge of guerrilla type violent activities of the party.
- The CPI (Maoist), bereft of ideology, could then drift towards becoming like any other militant or terror group active in different parts of the country.
- This could have graver consequences for the country since the CPI (Maoist) has a much wider base than any other militant outfit

AI to monitor fraud

News: Danske Bank, Teradata deploy Artificial intelligence to monitor fraud

Beyond News:

- From fighting financial fraud, reducing the time to find lost packages to optimizing how ships approach the harbour, were some of the artificial intelligence and data analytics-based innovations showcased by Teradata, a leading data and analytics company.
- It uses **machine learning** to analyse tens of thousands of potential features, scoring millions of online **banking** transactions in real-time to provide actionable insights about any fraudulent activity.
- By significantly reducing the cost of investigating false-positives, the company said Danske Bank increased its overall efficiency and is now poised for substantial savings.
- Its technology outperformed its competitors in helping clients accelerate their AI initiatives and drive operational efficiencies.

It allows users to run their analytics against larger data sets with greater speed and frequency

Narrow rings of comets spotted forming planets

News Scientists using NASA telescopes have spotted narrow dense rings of comets coming together to form massive planets on the outskirts of at least three distant solar systems.

Beyond News:

- Estimating the mass of these rings from the amount of light they reflect shows that each of these developing planets is at least the size of a few Earths, according to Carey Lisse, a planetary scientist at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (APL) in the US.



Over the past few decades, using powerful NASA observatories such as the Infrared Telescope Facility in Hawaii and the Spitzer Space Telescope, scientists have found a number of young debris disk systems with thin but bright outer rings composed of comet—like bodies at 75 to 200 astronomical units from their parent stars — about two to seven times the distance of Pluto from our own Sun.

- The composition of the material in these rings varies from ice—rich (seen in the Fomalhaut and HD 32297 systems) to ice—depleted but carbon rich (the HR 4796A system).
- The scientists are especially intrigued by the red dust ring surrounding HR 4796A, which shows unusually tight form for an infant solar system.

Lisse traced the extreme red color to the burnt—out rocky organic remains of comets, a result of the system’s ring being close enough to the star that they have all boiled off.

OCTOBER 25 2017

General Studies-02

Rs. 5.35 lakh crore for new road project

News: The Centre on Tuesday announced a Rs. 5.35 lakh crore road construction package, called BharatMala Pariyojana, in a bid to spur the economy as private investment remains moribund.

Beyond News:

- This follows the Cabinet nod to build 34,800 km of roads nationwide, including in border and coastal areas.
- The BharatMala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and green-field expressways (800 km).
- Further, the remaining road projects of 10,000 km under the National Highways Development Project will form a part of the programme.

The government has identified new routes between economically important cities that would be 20% longer in terms of distance but take relatively less travel time.

{Op}Complicated terms of engagement

Key aspect: Analysis of SC verdict on OCT 17

- On October 17, the Supreme Court read down the marital rape exception for married girls between the ages of 15 and 18.

The judgment is prospective in nature. Essentially, the court held that since sexual assault in marriage is already a crime under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO)**, it is discriminatory and arbitrary to suspend the protection of the rape law for these underage married girls.

Understanding the law

- The Supreme Court decision makes it clear that sexual consent can only be given by an adult woman of 18 years.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 prohibits the solemnisation of child marriages wherein a child means a person who if male has not yet completed 21 years, and if female not yet 18 years.

Individual choice

- The Supreme Court rightly holds that the **'the girl child must not be deprived of her right of choice'**.

The right to choose, which is free and unfettered, includes freedom from parental pressure to marry early, freedom from forced marriages, freedom of choice of sexual orientation, and freedom to find self-fulfilment through study, work, profession, vocation or talent.

India, U.S. to take up 'high tariff', visa curbs in Washington meet

News: India and the U.S. are slated to hold high-level talks this week to boost bilateral trade and investment.

Beyond News:

On the agenda of the India-U.S. Trade Policy Forum (TPF), scheduled to be held in Washington DC on October 26, are ways to iron out irritants including 'visa curbs' of the U.S. and India's 'high tariffs' on manufactured products and 'restrictions' on e-commerce, as well as steps to expedite the conclusion of negotiations on a bilateral social security pact .

IPR issues

- The TPF, which is the main forum to resolve bilateral trade and investment issues, is also likely to take up the 'challenges' that American innovative industries face due to India's 'weak' Intellectual Property Rights regime.
- It would also discuss the 'non-tariff barriers' of the U.S. that are adversely impacting India's agriculture, pharmaceuticals and other industrial exports.
- Both countries aim to increase bilateral goods and services trade to \$500 billion soon, from about \$115 billion in 2016.
- Industry bodies including USIBC and US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) are working with the governments of both the countries on mechanisms to ensure greater engagement at the State-level, instead of focusing entirely on the Central/Federal-level discussions.

{Op} Shedding light on Saubhagya

Key Aspect: Analysis of Saubhagya scheme ,Its objectives & gaps in reality.

Overview:

The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana ('Saubhagya') launched in September, which claims to ensure electrification of all willing households in the country, is too ambitious a project.

This new scheme is just a way of refurbishing the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY), the earlier scheme of rural electrification launched in July 2015, which aimed to electrify all un-electrified villages by May 2018.

Objective:

The objective of the Saubhagya scheme is to “provide energy access to all by last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining un-electrified households in rural as well as urban areas to achieve universal household electrification in the country.”

Definition and the gap

- Under DDUGJY, the government managed to electrify 14,701 villages while 2,760 villages remain un-electrified;

However, out of the 14,701 villages, only in 8%, i.e. 1,198 villages, do all households have connectivity.

- Even if the programme is successful, hypothetically, and all households are provided a connection, there would still be the problem of regular supply.

Industry estimates suggest that this scheme would potentially require an **additional 28,000 MW and additional energy of about 80,000 million units per annum**, which is roughly 7% of India’s current installed power capacity.

- **There is a power shortage even at this moment** leading to scheduled and unscheduled load shedding, often up to 10 hours or more.

The problem is graver still in interior rural India. Considering the huge lapses as far as electricity availability is concerned, managing this additional demand would prove to be challenging.

General Studies-03

{Op}Bitcoin will crash

Key aspect: Bitcoins, Significance & challenges to national fiat currencies.

- The price of bit coin hit yet another lifetime high last week breaking the \$6,000 mark for the first time across major exchanges. The rise of bit coin has also been seen as a serious challenge to national fiat currencies issued by central banks as well as physical gold.

While bit coin has indeed proved many of its critics wrong over the years, its immediate and long-term prospects may not be too bright.



This is for at least two reasons.

One, the volatility witnessed in the price of bitcoin against major national currencies like the dollar does not suggest that the private currency's trading price is reflective of its fundamental value.

- The fundamental value of any money, as a medium of exchange that helps in the exchange for goods and services, usually exhibits a fair amount of stability as people are willing to accept it in repeated transactions; if so, trading prices that track them are likely to reflect the same kind of stability.

Two, even if bitcoin were to hold some fundamental value as money, as it very well might if bitcoin speculators are right in paying its current price, the political risks facing the currency are simply too huge to allow its long-term survival.

- National fiat currencies like the dollar allow governments, through their central banks, to easily tax their citizens by printing a fresh supply of money whenever they need it.

Bitcoin strikes at the root of this centuries-long monopoly power over money held by governments, and the consequences are unlikely to work out in bitcoin's favour.

GST afterthoughts

Updates:

- GST has brought 27 lakh new registered entities into formal tax coverage in its first three months, over half of those in the GST net are paying taxes and filing tax returns.
- September GST collections stood at Rs. 92,150 crore by Monday — compared to over Rs. 95,000 crore in July, its first month.
- At the last GST Council meeting, rates of over two dozen items were reset, taking such rate changes since July 1 to over 100 — while some procedural and compliance-related norms were eased

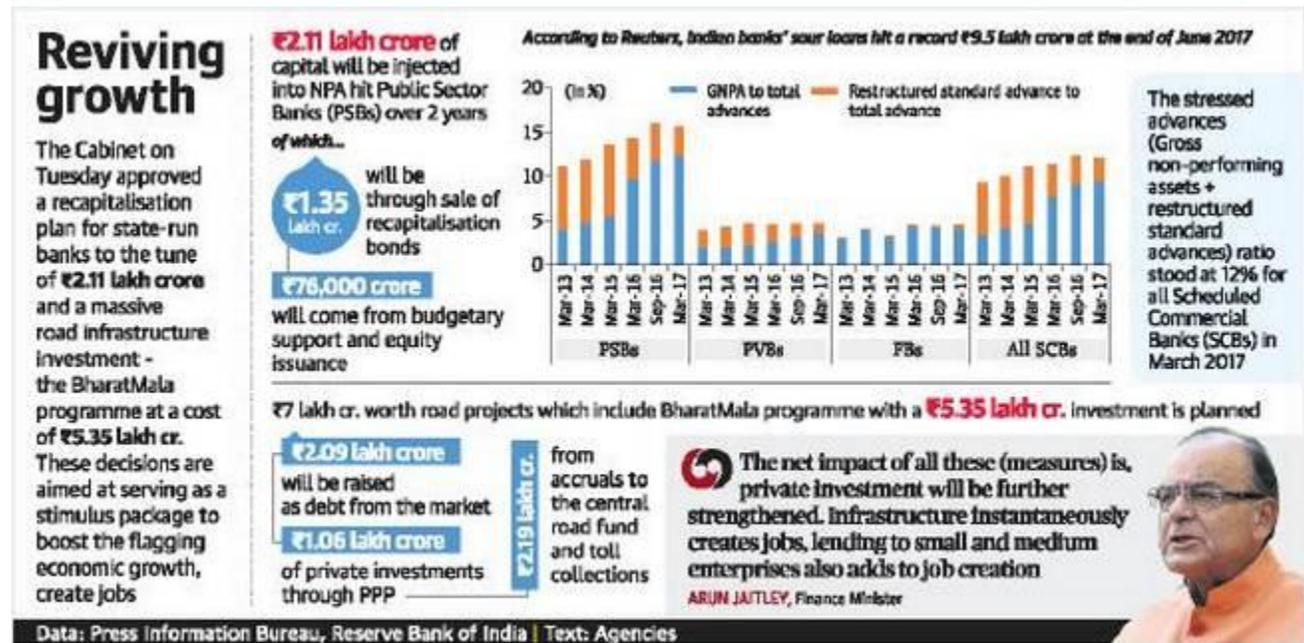
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Rs. 2.11 lakh crore for PSU banks to boost lending



News: The Centre on Tuesday unveiled an ambitious plan to infuse Rs. 2.11 lakh crore capital over the next two years into public sector banks (PSBs) saddled with high, non-performing assets and facing the prospect of having to take haircuts on loans stuck in insolvency proceedings.

Beyond News:

- The move is vital for the slowing economy, as private investments remain elusive in the face of the **“twin-balance sheet problem”** afflicting corporate India and public sector banks reflected in slow bank credit growth.
- Financial Services Secretary Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday that the Union Cabinet had approved the capital infusion plan for PSBs, adding that the funding **pattern would be front-loaded**.
- The Financial Services Secretary added that this would be funded through budgetary provisions of Rs. 18,139 crore and the sale of recapitalisation bonds worth Rs. 1.35 lakh crore.

The balance would be raised by the banks themselves by diluting the government’s equity share.

OCTOBER 26 2017

General Studies-02

{Op-Ed} Trump and the new world disorder

Current scenario:

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's speech on relations with India on October 18 was ambitious in scope and sought to define it for the "next hundred years," when both countries will be "standing firm in defence of a rules-based order."

Background:

- American leadership and ability to arm twist other countries, including China and Pakistan, have **benefited India on occasions**, the space for New Delhi's global ambitions come only from America's retreat.
- It was the U.S. that **forced China to accede to Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver** for nuclear commerce for India and forced Pakistan into resolving the Kargil conflict.
- But a relatively weakened U.S. is what took a more friendly view of India to begin with.

The change in Washington

- The Trump administration's disregard for the 'world order' would open **opportunities for India's ambitions to be a 'leading power,'** but a gradual retreat of the existing order is what could benefit India.
- The transition from a U.S President (Barack Obama) who reminded India about its own Constitution to a leader (Mr. Trump) who does not bother much about even the U.S's Constitution *could be welcome from the perspective of the Narendra Modi government's nationalist agenda.*



However, any abrupt creation of a power vacuum in the event of American abdication of its global role would invite conflict and chaos. More than the reassurance of order, what India should be watchful of should be the threats of conflict.

Navy to increase watch over Indian Ocean

News: The Navy is institutionalizing an experimental concept of round-the-clock surveillance of critical choke points in the Indian Ocean.

Beyond News:

- The new mission-based deployment concept was unveiled in the last Naval Commander's Conference and was ratified for incremental implementation, in the backdrop of **increased Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).**
- As part of this, at least **12-15 major warships** are on round-the-clock surveillance of critical choke points in the IOR, the official added.
- Earlier, China has increased its presence in Indian Ocean **in the name of anti-piracy operations.**

'Linking of Aadhaar, bank account must'

News: The government has proposed extending the deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts and mobile phones from December 31, 2017 to March 31, 2018.

Beyond News:

- The note, however, insisted that those who already have Aadhaar will be “required” to sync their numbers with SIM cards, bank accounts, PAN and “other schemes where **Section 7 (Aadhaar Act)** notifications have been issued.”
- The court asked Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, for the Centre, whether it can give an assurance that no “**coercive action**” would be taken against those who do not want to link their bank accounts and mobile phones with Aadhaar.
- Mr. Venugopal gave a verbal assurance, but this did not satisfy the petitioners who have been **challenging the constitutionality of the Aadhaar scheme.**

U.S. opposes Iran's 'DESTABILIZING' activities

News: U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that Washington does not intend to oppose Iran’s business with India.

Beyond News:

- Tillerson said U.S. opposition to Iran was limited to Tehran’s “**destabilising activities**” in the wider West Asian region and sought help from countries with ties with Iran to push it to stop its regional activities.
- India and North Korea have maintained diplomatic offices in each other’s capitals, though New Delhi recently banned trade of most goods with the country, except in food or medicine.

General Studies-03

Railways floats global tender for procuring rail worth about Rs. 3,500 cr.

News: In a first, the Ministry of Railways has floated a global tender to procure seven lakh tonne of rail, worth about Rs. 3,500 crore, instead of purchasing from the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), in a bid to clear pending track renewal work.

Beyond News:

- At present, the Railways procures rail solely **from public sector SAIL** which is the largest steel producer in the country.
- The move comes five months after the Union Cabinet approved a policy to provide preference to domestically manufactured iron and steel products in government procurement.
- The Ministry had decided that the rails earmarked for constructing new lines would be diverted for **renewing tracks in accident-prone areas in the wake of rising derailment cases.**

NITI report:

SAIL had committed to supply 11.45 lakh tonne rail to the Railways in 2017-18, leaving a deficit of 3.14 lakh tonnes.

A NITI Aayog report earlier this year raised concerns over delay in overdue track replacement that could likely lead to train accidents. In 2016-17, the Railways renewed 2,487 km tracks compared with 2,794 km in 2015-16 and 2,424 km in 2014-15.

'Fish-lizard' fossil from Kutch is a Jurassic first

News: A near-complete Jurassic-era fossil of an intriguing animal that looks like a mashup of a dolphin and lizard, and lived during the twilight of the dinosaurs, has been unearthed in Kutch, Gujarat.

Beyond News:

- **Ichthyosaurs**, or 'fish- lizards' in Greek, were large reptiles that lived at the same time as dinosaurs.
- Many ichthyosaur fossils have been **found in North America and Europe**, the fossil record in the Southern Hemisphere has mostly been limited to South America and Australia.
- The 5.5 metre-long skeleton is thought to belong to the Ophthalmosauridae family, which likely lived between 165 and 90 million years ago, when the arid Kutch was a sea.



Background:

- Earlier too, researchers have discovered evidence of ichthyosaurs in prehistoric India.
- Remnants were reported from Ariyalur, Tamil Nadu in 2016 but these were only fossils of teeth and part of the vertebra.
- In Kutch, the team reported the finding of vertebral column, ribs, neural spines and a part of the snout. Some isolated teeth, vertebrae, jaw fragments, and other bone fragments were found scattered around the excavation site.

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General Studies-02

Rajasthan passes Bill to hike OBC quota

News: The Rajasthan Assembly passed a Bill which has increased reservation for Other Backward Classes in government jobs and educational institutions **from 21% to 26%**.

Why it's important?

With the Bill's passage, reservation in Rajasthan now stands at **54%, exceeding the 50% ceiling** mandated by the Supreme Court.

Beyond News:

- The Bill created a new “**most backward**” category within the OBCs for providing the quota benefit to Gujjars and four other nomadic communities.

India, Sri Lanka ink housing project deal in Hambantota

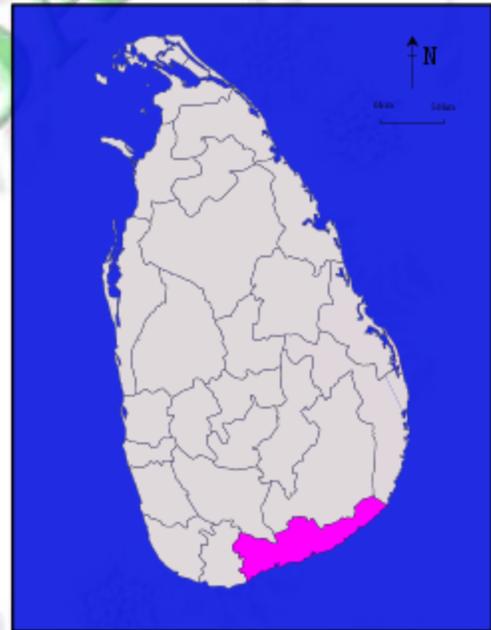
News: Sri Lanka signed an agreement with India to build 1,200 houses in a public ceremony held in the southern port city

Why its important?

The coastal city of Hambantota gained strategic significance after President Rajapaksa built a massive port and an airport with huge Chinese loans.

Beyond News:

The signing of the MoU in Hambantota assumes significance not only in its timing, but also in taking India's housing project to the Sinhala-majority Southern Province.



'Don't deny food items for lack of Aadhaar'

News: The Centre has instructed the States **not to deny PDS benefits to any person** who does not have Aadhaar or has not linked the ration card.

Beyond News:

- This comes a week of after an **11-year-old Jharkhand girl allegedly died** of starvation recently after she was denied PDS ration.
- It also asked the States not to delete eligible households from the list of beneficiaries for non-possession of Aadhaar.

Ex-Kerala Minister moves SC against Aadhaar linking

News: Former Kerala Minister Binoy Viswam on Thursday moved the Supreme Court challenging a provision in the Income Tax law that mandates the linking of Aadhaar with PAN as a violation of the fundamental right to privacy.

Beyond News:

June 9, 2017: A Division Bench of the Supreme Court upheld Section 139AA of the Income Tax Act of 1961, which mandates the linking of PAN with Aadhaar number, to the extent that it was not discriminatory under Article 14 and not a violation of the fundamental right to trade and profession under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution.

- Later Justice A.K. Sikri had left the question whether Section 139AA was violation of the right to privacy open.

Aug 24: The issue was finally decided by a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court; unanimously held that privacy was indeed a part of the fundamental right to life under Article 21

- Petitioner claims that Section 139AA, was introduced into the Income Tax statute by the government this year via the Finance Act & asks to suspend the same.

General Studies-03

Russian team in Vizag to inspect damaged submarine

News:

A Russian technical team is in Vizag for a joint investigation into the mysterious damage suffered by **INS Chakra**.

Beyond News:



- INS Chakra, is a nuclear submarine leased to India by Russia in 2011.
- The damage to the submarine was not very serious, and did not impact the nuclear reactor, because it was all contained to the outer hull.
- The Russian team arrived in India after it refused to be satisfied with the findings of a three-member Indian team's official inquiry.

OCTOBER 28 2017

General Studies-02

India, France to boost defense ties

News: India and France decided to expand military cooperation in the strategically key Indo-Pacific region, besides resolving to ramp up the overall defence and security ties.

Beyond News:

- At their delegation-level talks, the two sides also agreed to expand counter-terror cooperation.
- India had signed a Rs. 58,000-crore deal with France for the supply of 36 Rafale jets last year and the IAF was pitching for procuring another fleet of 36.
- India and France will further expand information sharing arrangements.

Indo -France Relations



SC questions Centre on judicial posts

News:

- SC inquired the reasons for delay by government to iron out the dos and don'ts of judicial appointments to the Supreme Court and the high courts.

Why the delay, asks court

Presently, seven of 24 HCs are without regular Chief Justices

• On December 16, 2015, the apex court directed the Centre to draft and finalise the procedure for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts

• SC wants to know from the Attorney-General why it has still not been done. It wants a mechanism to prevent delay in appointment of 'regular' Chief Justices of HCs



• SC refers to the judgment against Justice C.S. Karnan. Says the verdict talked of a need to re-visit the judicial appointments process and find an alternative to impeachment of erring Judges

Beyond News:

- The Supreme Court also wants Attorney General to address it on the delay in appointment of "regular" Chief Justices to various high courts.
 - Six of the 24 high courts have been without regular Chief Justices for months.
 -

Act or we will, U.S. tells Pakistan

News: The Trump administration has firmly told Pakistan that if it fails to take “decisive” action against terror groups, it will “adjust” its tactics and strategies to achieve the objective in a “different way.



Beyond News:

- Noted that the future course of action would be based on conditions on the ground, entire South Asia strategy is a conditions-based strategy.
- Pakistan Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif in a meeting on Thursday with the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs said that Pakistan will neither surrender to the U.S. nor compromise on its sovereignty.

Tokyo for quadrilateral talks

News: India open to Japan’s move to include Delhi in dialogue with U.S., Australia

Beyond News:

- The Ministry’s reaction to the quadrilateral came days after the re-election of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, indicating that the new government is expected to push for overhauling of the post-World War strategic doctrine of Japan.
- Indications of regional partnership between India and Japan came also during Mr Abe’s visit, with both sides indicating willingness to manage the maritime domain from Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific zone.

General Studies-03

Scientists link new virus to kala-azar

News:

Researchers have stumbled upon tantalizing evidence of an unknown virus that may be responsible for the persistence of kala-azar or visceral leishmaniasis.

Beyond News:

- This month, a group of scientists claims that Another parasite called *Leptomonas seymouri* may also be present.
- Inferred that they found the *L seymouri* and a virus called *Lepsey NLV1* within it in 20 of 22 biological samples of patients who had a residual *L donovani* infection.

Background:

- Kala-azar or visceral leishmaniasis, a parasite infection that has spawned epidemics and sickened thousands of Indians for over a century.
- People get infected when bitten by an insect called the sandfly, which harbours the disease-causing parasite.
- Kala-azar is endemic to the Indian subcontinent in 119 districts in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal).
- India itself accounts for half the global burden of the disease. If untreated, kala-azar can kill within two years of the onset of the ailment, though the availability of a range of drugs has meant that less than one in 1,000 now succumbs to the disease.

Centre can now shift troops from Bengal

News: Law and order in Darjeeling is State's problem- SC tells govt.

Beyond News:

- SC allowed the Centre to withdraw seven companies of the Central police forces stationed in the restive Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal for deployment in poll-bound States.
- The districts had witnessed a spate of violence following the resurgence of the Gorkhaland movement.
- The Chief Justice observed that the SC would decide on two issues: whether courts can intervene in the placement of troops; and whether courts can intervene with the government in the placement of forces in order to protect the lives of citizens.



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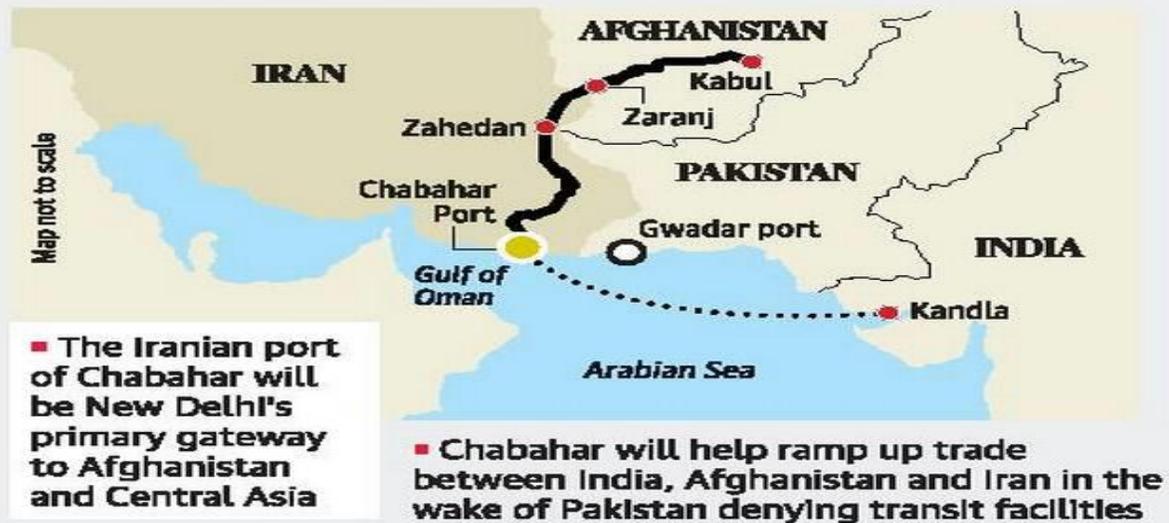
OCTOBER 29 AND 30 2017

General Studies-02

India ships wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar

Geo-strategic push

The consignment of wheat is the first of six shipments to be sent to Afghanistan over the next few months via Iran



News: India on Sunday began shipment of wheat to Afghanistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar.

Why its important? The move is significant as it indicates India remains firm in delivering on its regional commitment through partnership with Iran, despite Tehran's ongoing tension with the United States.

Beyond News:

- The statement noted that Sunday's transfer was part of India's commitment to send 1.1 million tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan on grant basis.
- It pledged that Kabul will receive the entire amount in six different installments over the coming months.

Multilateral subjects set to top talks with Italy

News: A range of multilateral and bilateral subjects are likely to be in focus during the visit of Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni that begins on Monday.

Beyond News:

- Diplomats indicated that India's global push for the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership and bilateral trade are likely to be on top of the agenda.
- Italy's support for India's candidature at the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016 was an important marker in multilateral collaboration and indicated Rome's long-term commitment to supporting India's role in the export control regimes.

Apart from the NSG, India is also seeking Italian support at the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) meeting that begins on Monday in Buenos Aires, where India has been pushing for stringent measures against Pakistan on terror funding issues.

India, Russia conclude war games

News: India and Russia concluded their joint tri-service exercise, Indra, in Vladivostok on Sunday.

Beyond News:

- Indra was an 11-day joint training in counter-terrorism operations.
- This is India's first tri-service exercise with any country.
- The exercise also provided an opportunity to both the armies for greater cultural understanding, sharing experiences and strengthening mutual trust and cooperation.
- The exercise began on October 19 and saw the participation of over 800 Indian personnel.

Indian forces largely used Russian equipment with which they are very familiar.

General Studies-03

Army finalises plan to modernise weapons

News: A fresh RFI (request for information) to procure the LMGs will be issued in the next few days, months after the Defence Ministry scrapped the tender for the 7.62 calibre guns as there was only one vendor left after a series of field trials.

Beyond News:

- The plan is to initially procure around 10,000 LMGs.
- The Army has also finalised the specifications for a new 7.62 mm assault rifle.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the Ministry's highest decision-making body on procurement, is expected to give the go-ahead for it.

Background:

- In June, the Army had rejected an assault rifle built by the state-run Rifle Factory, Ishapore, after the guns miserably failed the firing tests.
- The procurement of assault rifles has witnessed significant delays due to a variety of reasons, including the Army's failure to finalise the specifications for it.
- The Army needs around 7 lakh 7.62 x 51 mm assault guns to replace its INSAS rifles.

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General Studies-02

Five-judge statute Bench to decide on Aadhaar validity

News: The Supreme Court on Monday decided to constitute a five-judge Constitution Bench to hear petitions from November against the validity of the Aadhaar scheme.

Beyond News:

- The decision to set up a five-judge Bench comes despite Justice Rohinton Nariman's separate judgment in the nine-judge Bench declaring privacy as a fundamental right.
- Justice Nariman's judgment had directed the Aadhaar petitions to be posted for hearing before the 'original' three-judge Bench.
- This 'original' Bench led by Justice J. Chelameswar had referred the petitions for hearing before a five-judge Bench, which found it necessary to first decide whether privacy was a fundamental right or not before hearing the Aadhaar petitions.



Source: UIDAI

Historic judgment

- It had referred the legal question to a nine-judge Bench, which came out with the historic judgment in favour of the common man's fundamental right to privacy against state intrusions.

[Centre gets SC to freeze hearing on Article 35A](#)

News: The Centre convinced the Supreme Court on Monday to defer hearing on petitions challenging the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir, saying it has appointed an interlocutor to commence talks with stakeholders in the State.

Beyond News:

- Attorney General said the court should adjourn the hearing on the petitions against Article 35A of the Constitution for six months. The court, however, settled for 12 weeks in its order.
- The provision mandates that no act of the State legislature coming under the ambit of Article 35A can be challenged for violating the Indian Constitution or any other law of the land.

[Fewer TB deaths in India: WHO](#)

News:

Death from tuberculosis in India saw a 12% decline from last year even as the number of new cases saw a 5% increase, according to a report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on Monday.

Beyond News:

- With 1.7 million new cases in 2016, **India continued to be the largest contributor** to the global burden with up to a quarter of the 6.3 million new cases of TB (up from 6.1 million in 2015).
- The rise in cases was due to greater surveillance and the dip in mortality from 480,000 to 423,000 in 2016, due to improved drug management.
- The government has committed to achieve a '**90-90-90 target**' by 2035 (90% reductions in incidence, mortality and catastrophic health expenditures due to TB).

This is premised on **improved diagnostics, shorter treatment courses, a better vaccine and comprehensive preventive strategies.**

[India, Italy vow to fight terror](#)

News:

Reviving bilateral ties, India and Italy on Monday agreed to coordinate efforts at the multilateral level to counter global terrorism.

Beyond News:

- Italy supported India's quest to bring Pakistan-based terror masterminds Masood Azhar, Dawood Ibrahim and others to justice.
- Both sides expressed a desire to leave difficult issues such as the **Italian marines** case behind and initiate steps in the interest of the larger relationship.

- Describing India as an “Asian superpower”, visiting Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni said Italy was in favour of a EU-India free trade agreement.
- Both are keen on deepening cooperation in the strategic sectors and focussed on cybersecurity and anti-terrorism as common areas of cooperation.

General Studies-03

Farmers rally to seek fair support price

News:

Thousands of farmers from western Odisha, under the banner of the ‘State Level Coordination Committee of Farmer Organisations’ assembled to demand a fair support price for agricultural produce and respite from loan.

Beyond News:

- The farmer organisations are demanding implementation of the recommendation of the **M.S. Swaminathan committee report**, which suggested that fair price of agricultural commodities be fixed at 1.5 times the production cost.
- The farmer organisations have demanded that the Centre immediately accept Rs. 2,930 as the **minimum support price** for one quintal of paddy and till that happens, the Odisha government should pay a bonus of Rs. 500 per quintal.
- They also urged the government to **completely waive farm loans** as farmers are in distress. In the case of Odisha, the farmers have demanded that efforts should be made to ensure assured irrigation so that recurring droughts have little impact on fields.

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