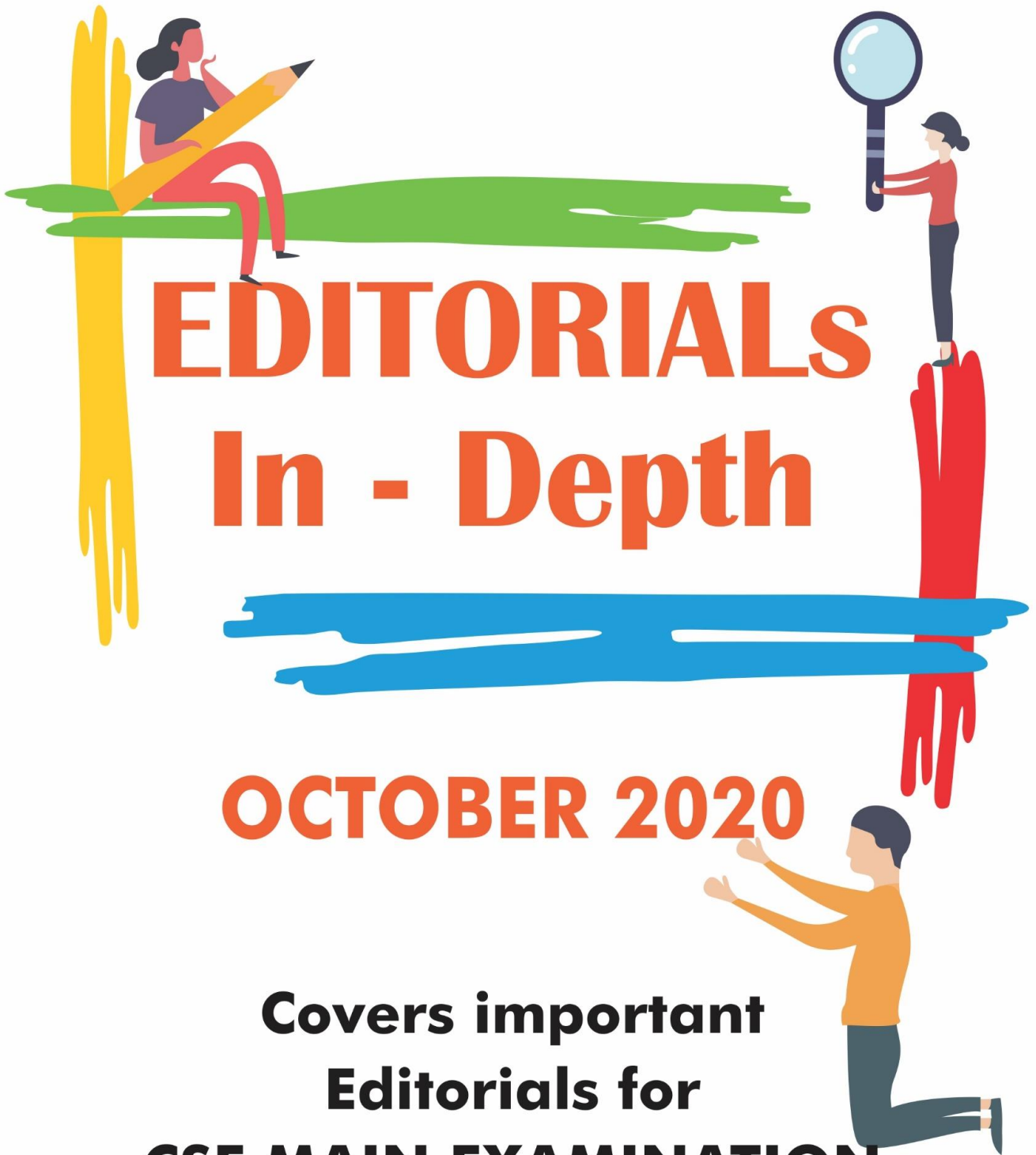




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A PROPOSED ROAD TUNNEL BENEATH WESTERN GHATS

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT)

Recently, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan 'launched' a **tunnel road project** that would connect Kozhikode with Wayanad. The tunnel road is **an outcome of a decades-long campaign for an alternative road** as the Thamarassery Ghat Road is congested and gets blocked by landslides during heavy monsoon.

Essentials for a tunnel road project

The launch of a **tunnel road project** actually meant the beginning of a survey and fixing the final alignment ahead of the detailed project report, which should be followed by steps such as:

- Technical sanction,
- Environmental impact assessment report, and
- Mandatory clearance from various agencies including the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

What is this tunnel road?

The **7-km tunnel**, is part of an 8-km road cutting through sensitive forests and hills of the Western Ghats. It is being described as the **third longest tunnel road** in the country.

- Its end points are at Maripuzha in Thiruvambady village panchayat (Kozhikode) and Kalladi in Meppadi panchayat (Wayanad).
- At present, **Wayanad plateau** is linked to the rest of Kerala via four roads, all with hilly sections, the longest being the 13-km Thamarassery Ghat Road along the Kozhikode-Mysuru NH 766.



Background

The tunnel road is an **outcome of a decades-long campaign** for an alternative road as the Thamarassery Ghat Road is congested and gets blocked by landslides during heavy monsoon.

- A proposal for widening the road has been pending clearance from the MoEFCC.
- Two alternative routes have been suggested connecting different parts of Kozhikode district to Wayanad, but those proposals did not make much headway either, **mainly because of forest patches that would need to be cleared.**

Emergence of plan for a tunnel road

At the very route of the proposed tunnel road, a surface road had been debated since the 1970s, but did not take off because forest land was involved.

- In 2015, the previous government finally ordered a survey by a private agency for a road through the forest between Maripuzha and Kalladi.
- The agency found the surface road an uphill task, but suggested cutting a tunnel with entry and exit points in private lands close to the forest. After the current government came to power in 2016, the project got a push.
- When **Metro pioneer E Sreedharan** was approached for support from Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, he suggested Konkan Railway Corporation (KRC) take it up.
- The government gave administrative sanction for the project earlier this year and promised Rs 658 crore from **Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB).**

Impact on ecology

- The Forest Department has identified the **proposed route as a highly sensitive patch comprising evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, marsh lands and shola tracts.**
- This **region is part of an elephant corridor** spread between Wayanad and Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu.

Key features of this region

Two major rivers, Chaliyar and Kabani that flows to Karnataka, originate from these hills in Wayanad.

- **Eruvazhanjipuzha**, a tributary of Chaliyar and the **lifeline of settlements in Malappuram and Kozhikode**, begins in the other side of the hills.
- The region, **known for torrential rain during monsoon, has witnessed several landslides**, including in 2019 at Kavalappura near Nilambur and at Puthumala, Meppadi in Wayanad.

Challenges in getting environmental clearance

Proponents of the project have been stressing that **the tunnel will not destroy forest (trees).**

- The MoEFCC guidelines state that the **Forest Act would apply not only to surface area, but the entire underground area beneath the trees.**
- For **tunnel projects, conditions relating to underground mining would be applicable.**
- As the proposed tunnel is 7 km long, **it will require emergency exit points and air ventilation wells** among other measures, which would impact the forest further.

PLAYING CATCH UP IN FLOOD FORECASTING TECHNOLOGY

GENERAL STUDIES - III (DISASTER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT)

India needs a technically capable workforce that can master ensemble weather and flood forecast models.

Preface

Often, in India a local agency makes a decision if a flood forecast merely uses the words “Rising” or “Falling” above a water level at a river point.

- There are many times this happens during flood events, when **the end users (district administration, municipalities and disaster management authorities) receive such forecasts and have to act quickly.**
- These compelling scenarios are often experienced across most flood forecast river points, examples readers will be familiar with — in Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala or Tamil Nadu.

What is the Ensemble forecast?

Ensemble forecast is another form of flood forecast that **provides a lead time of 7-10 days ahead**, with probabilities assigned to different scenarios of water levels and regions of inundation.

- The **United States, the European Union and Japan have already shifted towards “Ensemble flood forecasting” alongwith “Inundation modelling”.**
- India has only recently shifted towards **“Deterministic forecast”** (i.e. “Rising” or “Falling” type forecast per model run).

A case of multiple agencies

The **India Meteorological Department (IMD) issues meteorological or weather forecasts** while the **Central Water Commission (CWC) issues flood forecasts** at various river points.

- The **end-user agencies are disaster management authorities and local administrations.**
- Therefore, the advancement of **flood forecasting depends on how quickly rainfall is estimated and forecast by the IMD and how quickly the CWC integrates the rainfall forecast** (also known as Quantitative Precipitation Forecast or QPF) with flood forecast.
- It also is linked to how fast the CWC disseminates this data to end user agencies.

Technology used in forecasting

A study reports suggest that the **IMD has about 35 advanced Doppler weather radars** to help it with weather forecasting.

- Compared to point scale rainfall data from rain gauges, **Doppler weather radars can measure the likely rainfall** directly (known as **Quantitative Precipitation Estimation or QPE**) from the cloud reflectivity over a large area; thus the lead time can be extended by up to three days.
- But the **advantage of advanced technology becomes infructuous** because **most flood forecasts at several river points across India are based on outdated statistical methods** that enable a lead time of less than 24 hours.
- These **statistical methods fail to capture the hydrological response of river basins** between a base station and a forecast station. They cannot be coupled with QPF too.

Not uniform across India

A study by the National Institute of Technology, Warangal, Telangana shows that it is only recently that **India has moved to using hydrological (or simply rainfall-runoff models) capable of being coupled with QPF.**

- Just as **the CWC's technological gap limits the IMD's technological advancement**, the technological limitations of the IMD can also render any advanced infrastructure deployed by CWC infructuous.
- Therefore, **outdated technologies and a lack of technological parity between multiple agencies** and their poor water governance decrease crucial lead time.
- Forecasting errors increase and the burden of interpretation shifts to hapless end user agencies. The outcome is an increase in flood risk and disaster.

Ensemble technology

- The **developed world has shifted from deterministic forecasting towards ensemble weather models** that measure uncertainty by causing perturbations in initial conditions, reflecting the different states of the chaotic atmosphere.
- The IMD has begun testing and using ensemble models for weather forecast through its **8 peta flops supercomputers ("Pratyush" and "Mihir").**
- However, **the forecasting agency has still to catch up with advanced technology and achieve technological parity with the IMD** in order to couple ensemble forecasts to its hydrological models.

Way forward

With integration between multiple flood forecasting agencies, end user agencies can receive probabilistic forecasts that will give them ample time to decide, react, prepare and undertake risk-based analysis and cost-effective rescue missions, reducing flood hazard across the length and breadth of India.

TRP AND ITS LOOPHOLES

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ROLE OF MEDIA)

Mumbai Police Commissioner, recently, said that police are looking into a scam about manipulation of **TRPs (Television Rating Points)** by rigging the devices used by the **Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India**, which has the mandate to measure television audience in India.

What is Television Rating Points (TRP)?

In simple terms, **anyone who watches television for more than a minute is considered a viewer**. A viewer can be as young as a two-year-old.

- The TRP or Television Rating Point is the **metric used by the marketing and advertising agencies to evaluate this viewership**.
- In India, the TRP is recorded by the **Broadcast Audience Research Council using Bar-O-Meters that are installed in televisions in selected households**.
- As on date, the BARC has installed these meters in 44,000 households across the country.
- **Audio watermarks are embedded in video content prior to broadcast**. These watermarks are not audible to the human ear, but can easily be detected and decoded using dedicated hardware and software.
- As viewing details are recorded by the Bar-O-Meters, so are the watermarks.

What is Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC)?

- It is an **industry body jointly owned by advertisers, ad agencies, and broadcasting companies**, represented by The Indian Society of Advertisers, the Indian Broadcasting Foundation and the Advertising Agencies Association of India.
- It was created in 2010, the **I&B Ministry notified the Policy Guidelines for Television Rating Agencies in India on January 10, 2014** and registered BARC in July 2015 under these guidelines, to carry out television ratings in India.

How is TRP calculated?

BARC has installed '**BAR-O-meters**' in over 45,000 empanelled households.

- These households are classified into 12 categories under the **New Consumer Classification System (NCCS)**.
- the so-called 'new SEC' adopted by BARC in 2015, based on the education level of the main wage earner and the ownership of consumer durables from a list of 11 items ranging from an electricity connection to a car.
- While watching a show, **members of the household register their presence by pressing their viewer ID button** — every person in household has a separate ID — thus capturing

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the duration for which the channel was watched and by whom, and providing data on viewership habits across age and socio-economic groups.

- The panel chosen to capture TRPs must be representative of the country's population, and the methodology must be economically viable for the industry.

How can TRP data be rigged?

- If broadcasters can find the households where devices are installed, **they can either bribe them to watch their channels, or ask cable operators or multi-system operators** to ensure their channel is available as the 'landing page' when the TV is switched on.
- For TRPs, **it does not matter what the entire country is watching**, but essentially what the 45,000-odd households supposed to represent TV viewership of the country have watched.
- Broadcasters can target these households to fudge actual viewership data.

How often have allegations been made?

For over a decade, questions have been raised by people from within the industry.

- In a letter to the BARC chairman in July, News Broadcasters Association president Rajat Sharma, who owns India TV News, complained against the ratings of TV9 Bharatvarsh, and said 'several news broadcasters have written to BARC drawing their attention that every week's ratings.
- Two years ago, the I&B Ministry had raised concerns that BARC was under-reporting viewership of Doordarshan, and floated the idea of chip-based activity logs through all set-top boxes. **The idea was finally rejected.**
- In 2017, the editor of one of the top five English news channels had written to BARC about how a few households from Gujarat were contributing heavily to a rival channel's overall viewership.

Way forward

As per several reports, about 70% of the revenue for television channels comes from advertising and only 30% from subscription.

Many channels have argued that the subscription rates, which are controlled by the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)**, should be raised so that TV channels are not forced to serve the lowest common denominator.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 12th OCTOBER 2020

WHAT IS GRADED RESPONSE ACTION PLAN (GRAP)?

GENERAL STUDIES - III (ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION)

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Starting October 15, some stricter measures to fight air pollution will come into force in Delhi and its neighbouring National Capital Region (NCR) towns, as part of the **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)**. The **action plan has been in effect for three years in Delhi and NCR**.

Highlights

Starting October 15, **diesel generator sets can no longer be used** in Delhi and the NCR towns of Noida, Ghaziabad, Greater Noida, Faridabad, and Gurgaon. The only exception is **DG sets used for emergency and essential services**.

- These measures are part of GRAP, which was formulated in 2016 and notified in 2017.
- Mechanised sweeping and frequent sprinkling of water on roads (to make the dust settle) have been directed.

What is GRAP?

Approved by the Supreme Court in 2016, the plan was formulated after several meetings that the **Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA)** held with state government representatives and experts.

- **GRAP was notified in 2017** by the Centre and draws its authority from this notification.
- The result was a plan that institutionalised measures to be taken when air quality deteriorates.
- **GRAP works only as an emergency measure**. As such, the plan does not include action by various state governments to be taken throughout the year to tackle industrial, vehicular and combustion emissions.
- The **plan is incremental in nature** — therefore, **when the air quality moves from 'Poor' to 'Very Poor'**, the measures listed under both sections have to be followed.
- If air quality reaches the **'Severe+' stage**, the response under GRAP includes extreme measures such as shutting down schools and implementing the odd-even road-space rationing scheme.

Imposition of measures

Before the imposition of any measures, **EPCA holds a meeting with representatives from all NCR states**, and a call is taken on which actions have to be made applicable in which town.

- A blanket ban on the DG sets for Delhi-NCR towns from October 15 onward was announced last year as well.
- Authorities from both Haryana and UP had informed EPCA at the time that they would put in required measures by winter 2020 for the supply of electricity from the grid. How the ban plays out this year remains to be seen.

Has GRAP helped?

- The biggest success of GRAP has been in fixing accountability and deadlines.
- For each action to be taken under a particular air quality category, executing agencies are clearly marked.

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- The coordination among as many as 13 agencies from four states is simplified to a degree because of the clear demarcation of responsibilities.

Constitution of EPCA

- The **EPCA includes members from the Centre for Science and Environment, was constituted in 1998 by the Supreme Court.**
- The initial mandate of the body was to ensure that Delhi's bus and auto fleet moves entirely to CNG — a mammoth task that played a crucial role in cleaning Delhi's air in the late 2000s.
- The body continues to monitor pollution, and assists the Supreme Court in several pollution-related matters.

What measures have been taken in other states?

- One **criticism of the EPCA as well as GRAP has been the focus on Delhi.**
- While other states have managed to delay several measures, citing lack of resources, Delhi has always been the first to have stringent measures enforced.
- For GRAP as well as EPCA, the next challenge is to extend the measures to other states effectively.

ACTIONS UNDER GRAP

Severe+ or Emergency

(PM 2.5 over 300 µg/cubic metre or PM10 over 500 µg/cu. m. for 48+ hours)

- Stop entry of trucks into Delhi (except essential commodities)
- Stop construction work
- Introduce odd/even scheme for private vehicles and minimise exemptions
- Task Force to decide any additional steps including shutting of schools

Severe

(PM 2.5 over 250 µg/cu. m. or PM10 over 430 µg/cu. m.)

- Close brick kilns, hot mix plants, stone crushers
- Maximise power generation from natural gas to reduce generation from coal
- Encourage public transport, with differential rates
- More frequent mechanised cleaning of road and sprinkling of water

Very Poor

(PM2.5 121-250 µg/cu. m. or PM10 351-430 µg/cu. m.)

- Stop use of diesel generator sets
- Enhance parking fee by 3-4 times
- Increase bus and Metro services
- Apartment owners to discourage burning fires in winter by providing electric heaters during winter

- Advisories to people with respiratory and cardiac conditions to restrict outdoor movement

Moderate to poor

(PM2.5 61-120 µg/cu. m. or PM10 101-350 µg/cu. m.)

- Heavy fines for garbage burning
- Close/enforce pollution control regulations in brick kilns and industries
- Mechanised sweeping on roads with heavy traffic and water sprinkling
- Strictly enforce ban on firecrackers

Steps taken to contain

Under the plan with a first round of measures including a ban on non-essential use of diesel generator sets. More measures will kick in as the anticipated increase in levels of pollution takes place with the arrival of winter.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 13th OCTOBER 2020

FEDERALISM, NOW A PARTISAN INTERNAL DIALOGUE

GENERAL STUDIES - II (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS AND AGREEMENTS)

At the first signs of stress, the grand vision of a nation unified in a singular system of taxation, was supplanted by a policy of every-state-for-itself.

Just over three years ago, the introduction of a unified “goods and services tax” (GST) was heralded by a midnight session of Parliament, a theatrical invocation of India’s 1947 “tryst with destiny”.

Miscued estimates

The triumphalism lived on, but only in the alternative world created by BJP acolytes in the media.

- In the real world, **evidence of seriously miscued revenue estimates, premised upon an ideological rather than pragmatic tax rate**, was accumulating at an alarming pace.
- The **Comptroller and Auditor-General of India (CAG)** recently revealed how a cess meant to remedy shortfalls in GST yields, was retained in central government revenues, in violation of all applicable norms.
- This revelation does little to build trust at a time when the States’ treasuries are running dry and the central government is gratuitously advising them to borrow on the strength of its guarantee.

- **States ruled by the BJP are willing to go along, but others believe that the onus of borrowing should rest with the central government,** given that it is the absolute sovereign and enjoys vastly greater taxation rights.

Fiscal deficit and investors

The **central government's refusal to contemplate the option that Opposition states are urging,** stems from legitimate concerns over its fiscal deficit, a parameter in turn seen as crucial to retaining the confidence of foreign institutional investors.

- Many of these investors who turn over vast sums of money in India's currency and share markets, have short-term perspectives.
- Yet, it does little for public confidence that the central government should base policy upon this thin artifice, when the States' fiscal health is in serious jeopardy.

The Impositions

The **central government, in May, sanctioned a higher borrowing limit for States through the current year.**

- In the bargain, **it imposed conditionalities which reflected two deep dogmas:** enforcing a singular standard for the implementation of policies across a vast and diverse country, and **improving India's ranking as a place for "doing business".**
- States will have unconditional access to borrowings equivalent to half a percentage point of their gross output.
- But, subsequently, every tranche of a quarter point will be premised on progress in implementing the **"one nation, one ration card"** scheme, and improvements in the **"ease of doing business".**

The agrarian crisis

"Doing business" is a parameter the World Bank has devised as an indicator of a country's economic prospects.

- The **"doing business"** objective seemingly guided the central government when it introduced and pushed through — despite loudly vented reservations — laws that transform the infrastructure and regulatory processes of agricultural markets.
- There is a deep crisis in the agrarian sector that most evaluations have concluded, arises from ingrained asymmetries of market power.
- Absent a remedy for these, **the malaise is only likely to be aggravated by the entry of private corporate buyers,** who could overwhelm the fragile yet workable systems built up by State governments.

Evolution of power sharing

The **"Congress system",** was seen at one time to have **sufficient internal flexibility and resilience to absorb all factional pressures** and create a Grand National synthesis.

- The **challenge to that hegemonic vision** came first from the cultural terrain, compelling a reluctant national leadership to concede the principle of the linguistic reorganisation of States.

- And then, as ambitions of nation-building through rapid industrialisation began to flounder, agrarian interest groups in particular began peeling off, joining other factions to create the possibility of a non-Congress politics.

Agriculture subsumed

First, the BJP has grown in most parts of the country by wedging itself firmly into the deepest cultural fault lines in Indian society.

- This is **integral to its ideology and not merely the kind of pragmatic tactical recourse** that the Congress on occasion adopted.
- Second, the Congress's inattention to the rural agrarian sector was relatively benign, born in its belief that agriculture was a vast reservoir that would gladly yield its surpluses of manpower and product to fuel the growth of the urban industrial frontier.
- In the BJP's vision, agriculture is the tail-end of the economy which should be forcibly absorbed into the logic of private enterprise and the aggrandisement of India's wealthiest business groups.

Way forward

If there is a parallel to be drawn with the splintering of the Congress system and its replacement by a complex mosaic of politics led by the regions, it is simply this: that the agrarian sector could soon emerge as the force driving change.

Typically, these interest groups begin coalescing at the level of State politics and then forge larger unities, which begin to contest the overweening power of the Centre.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 14th OCTOBER 2020

SPACEX LAUNCHES ITS 13TH STARLINK MISSION

GENERAL STUDIES- III (SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY)

Recently, **Elon Musk-founded aerospace company, SpaceX**, successfully launched its 13th Starlink mission after aborting the mission four times due to bad weather.

Aboard the **Falcon 9 rocket**, the latest Starlink mission carried **60 satellites** that will join over **700** already in the orbit.

What is Starlink?

Starlink is a **network of satellites that provide internet**.

- Each **satellite is compactly designed**, weighs about 260kg, and is equipped with four-phased array antennas, single solar array, ion propulsion system, navigation sensors, and debris tracking system.

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- The **satellite network operates at 550km above the Earth's surface in low Earth orbit (LEO)**, unlike conventional internet satellites that **are positioned much higher, at over 35,000km**.
- SpaceX's **first Starlink mission was launched on May 24, 2019**, which carried 60 satellites.
- The company **has approval to launch 12,000 Starlink satellites**, and it has requested the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to approve launch of another 30,000 satellites.

How does it work?

When an internet signal is sent from the Earth, one of the Starlink satellites receives it and then communicates with other satellites in the network.

- Once **signal reaches the most ideally located satellite, it is relayed to a ground receiver**.
- Starlink satellites communicate with each other using laser light, and at any given time, **a Starlink satellite is connected to four other satellites in the mega-constellation**.
- The phased array antennas allow satellites to transfer huge amount of data in a short period of time.
- **The in-built navigation sensors provide altitude information to the satellites for precision internet data transfer.**

Space debris and Starlink satellites

As the **Starlink satellites orbit in LEO**, they are much closer to the ground receivers, which significantly reduces latency during data transfer process.

- On the down-side, more number of satellites are required to have an extensive coverage, as they are positioned much closer to Earth, and can only cover a limited area.
- The **ion thrusters**, help the satellites move to orbit, manoeuvre in space, and de-orbit at the end of their life.
- And the inputs from the debris tracking system helps them perform manoeuvres to avoid collisions with space debris and other spacecraft.

How will it be useful?

The **network of LEO satellites will deliver high speed, low latency internet in remote areas** where connectivity is limited or completely unavailable, including on aeroplanes and ships.

- So, people living in areas where traditional internet is inaccessible, **will be able to benefit the most from Starlink internet service, depending on its availability**.
- Once these satellites reach their target position, will be able to roll out **a fairly wide public beta in northern US & hopefully southern Canada**. Other countries to follow as soon as we receive regulatory approval.
- **Companies like Amazon, Telesat, and OneWeb are also considering to operate LEO-based internet service**. Amazon's Project Kuiper has been approved by the FCC, with a constellation of 3,236 satellites in the LEO.

A WEAK LINK IN THE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION CHAIN

GENERAL STUDIES- II (ISSUES RELATING TO EDUCATION)

For about three decades now, a large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are intensively engaged in the task of improving elementary education in the country. The lower end of the estimated number of NGO staff working for the improvement of quality and reach in elementary education must be over three lakh.

Scope of work

It is most probable that these workers are engaged in direct teaching in classrooms, demonstrating various activities and methods to teachers, conducting teacher workshops and so on.

- Most NGOs and large foundations believe that these people work as catalysts and influence the functioning of the system. For various reasons, they are supposed to be more effective than regular employees in the government system.
- There is a lot of discussion around education and the **Continuous Professional Development of Teachers (CPDT)**. A very common notion of what good quality school is in our society is based on a high score in the board examinations.

Key documents, framework

The four documents currently providing a framework of principles, guidelines and legal stipulations to deal with such questions are the **National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF)**, **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE)**, the **National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009 (NCFTE)** and the **National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)**.

- Even if the NCF and NCFTE change in the near future, the new documents are likely to have much in common with the present ones.
- Therefore, it is worthwhile to assume that any worker engaged in education improvement should reasonably understand these and similar documents.
- Regarding pedagogy, the RTE, in Section 29(e), recommends “**learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child-centered manner**”.

On curriculum, NEP 2020

- Paragraph 4.23 says, certain subjects, skills, and capacities should be learned by all students to become good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings in today’s rapidly changing world.

- To use this policy, we need to understand what paragraphs such as the above say. One has to note the complexity and profusion of terms used.

Aims of education

- **The paragraph from NEP 2020 also highlights certain aims of education:** namely, to make all children “good, successful, innovative, adaptable, and productive human beings in today’s rapidly changing world”.
- The NCFTE (page 23), says that we need teachers who “**Promote values of peace, democratic way of life, equality, justice, liberty, fraternity, secularism and zeal for social reconstruction**”.

Need for deep insights

It seems bringing about **improvement in the quality of education is not a simple task** that one can accomplish just by desire, hard work and interaction with teachers. It seems to require answers to a plethora of questions.

- **For someone engaged in CPDT**, a study of these documents alone will neither answer the questions raised above nor give him/her any better insight into these documents.
- A major part of this **theoretical knowledge is drawn from the philosophy of education, political theories, sociology of education, psychology of learning and development, and a contextual understanding of the current needs of our society.**
- Understanding an adequate part of all this and their implications for curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher development, therefore, becomes imperative to be effective in quality improvement or to contribute to good education.

An immediate task

- If the argument outlined so far is even tentatively acceptable, then a strong programme for capacity building of NGO workers engaged in educational improvement becomes an urgent need.
- However, NGOs do not seem to be paying adequate attention to this very important area. Nor do universities and teacher education colleges seem to be offering any short term and/or distance learning courses for this sector.

Way forward

If we want to implement NEP 2020 — presently leaving its merits and demerits aside — and really want to see improvement in the quality of education available to our children, we need to pay very close attention to capacity building of this vast workforce engaged in the field.

Without adequate preparation, the assumption that the mere appointment of a person in an NGO and being placed in the field will automatically develop the capabilities of these workers is incorrect, and a case of sheer injustice to them, to the education system, and to children in schools.

WHAT'S BEHIND THAILAND'S PROTESTS?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD- RELATIONS)

Recently, Thailand's government **banned gatherings of more than five people** in the face of three months of escalating demonstrations that have targeted **King Maha Vajiralongkorn** as well as **Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha**.

Background

Anti-government protests emerged last year **after courts banned the most vocal party opposing the government of former junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha**.

- After a pause during measures to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, protests resumed in mid-July – **pushing for Prayuth's removal, a new constitution and an end to the harassment of activists**.
- Some protesters went further with a list of **10 demands to reform the monarchy** – demands that were cheered by tens of thousands of people at a demonstration in September.
- Protesters say they do not seek to end the monarchy, only reform it, but conservatives are horrified by such attacks on an institution the constitution says is "enthroned in a position of revered worship".

What is the government doing?

Until few days back, **the government had said protests would be tolerated** but that they must keep within the law. That changed suddenly after it accused jeering protesters of obstructing **Queen Suthida's** motorcade and as thousands gathered at Government House to demand the removal of Prayuth.

- It imposed emergency measures banning gatherings of more than five people in Bangkok, forbid publication of news or online information that could harm national security and freed up police to arrest anyone linked to the protests.
- Soon after the measures were imposed, riot police cleared protesters from Government House and at least three protest leaders were arrested.

Who are the protesters?

Most are **students and young people** and there is **no overall leader**.

- Key groups include the **Free Youth Movement**, which was behind the **first major protest** in July and the **United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration**, a student group from Bangkok's Thammasat University, which has championed calls for monarchy reform.
- Then there is the **Bad Student movement of high schoolers**, which also seeks education reform.
- Most protest leaders are in their 20s although one of the most prominent figures, human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa, is 36.

What royal reforms do the protesters want?

Protesters want to reverse a 2017 increase in the king's constitutional powers, made the year after he succeeded his widely revered **late father King Bhumibol Adulyadej**.

- **Pro-democracy activists** say Thailand is **backtracking on the constitutional monarchy established when absolute royal rule ended in 1932**.
- They say the **monarchy is too close to the army** and argue that this has **undermined democracy**.
- Protesters also seek the scrapping of **lese majeste laws** against insulting the king.
- They want the **king to relinquish the personal control he took over a palace fortune** estimated in the tens of billions of dollars, and some units of the army.

Why else are they unhappy?

Protesters complain that the **king endorsed Prayuth's premiership after elections last year that opposition figures say were engineered to keep his hands on power**.

- Prayuth, **who as army chief led a 2014 coup**, says the election was fair.
- Protesters have voiced anger that **the king spends much of his time in Europe**.
- They have also **challenged the spending of the Palace and lifestyle of the king**, who has been married four times and last year took a royal consort.

What do the Lese majeste laws mean?

The monarchy is **protected by Section 112 of the Penal Code**, which says whoever defames, **insults or threatens the king, queen, heir-apparent or regent shall be jailed for three to 15 years**.

- In June, Prayuth said the law was no longer being applied because of **"His Majesty's mercy"**.
- **Rights groups say opponents of the government** – including more than a dozen of the protest leaders – **have recently been charged under other laws** such as those against sedition and computer crimes.
- The government has said it does not target opponents but it is the responsibility of police to uphold the law.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 17th OCTOBER 2020

IMF DATA ON PER CAPITA GDP OF INDIA, BANGLADESH

GENERAL STUDIES- III (INDIAN ECONOMY)

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) latest projection of Bangladesh's real per capita GDP surpassing India's real per capita GDP, after India had a lead of 25 per cent five years ago, is shocking, and **calls for "bold fiscal/monetary policy"**.

- IMF's estimate shows **Bangladesh will cross India in real GDP per capita in 2021**.

- Any emerging economy doing well is good news. But it's shocking that India, which had a lead of 25% 5 years ago, is now trailing.

What do the IMF data show?

In its latest **World Economic Outlook**, the IMF has projected the **Indian economy to contract 10.3 per cent in 2020-21**.

- It is a deeper hit than the June estimate of 4.5 per cent contraction in the wake of the economic slump due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- Revisions to the forecast are particularly large for India, where GDP contracted much more severely than expected in the second (April-June) quarter.
- As a result, the economy is projected to contract by 10.3% in 2020, before rebounding by 8.8% in 2021.

Global growth is projected to contract 4.4 per cent, an upward revision of 0.8 per cent from its June update, the IMF said.

The **Reserve Bank of India has projected a 9.5 per cent contraction** for the Indian economy in 2020-21.

What does the per capita GDP comparison show?

India's per capita GDP, in nominal US dollar terms, is projected to be \$1,876.53 in 2020, **lower than \$1,887.97** projected for Bangladesh.

- On average, **India's per capita GDP has been 24 per cent higher than Bangladesh's during the last five years**.
- India's per capita GDP is **expected to overtake Bangladesh's per capita GDP in 2021**.
- However, the trend is not expected to sustain for long as India's per capita GDP is **then again expected to slip below Bangladesh's per capita GDP in 2024**.
- In 2025, India's per capita GDP is projected again lower than Bangladesh's projected per capita GDP.

The reason behind India's per capita income fallen below Bangladesh

- Growth rate:** Both countries have been growing faster in 2004. But, since 2017 onwards, India's growth rate has decelerated sharply while Bangladesh's has become even faster.
- Population growth:** In the last 15 years, India's population grew faster (around 21%) than Bangladesh's population (just under 18%).
- The most immediate factor was the relative impact of Covid-19** on the two economies in 2020. While India's GDP is set to reduce by 10%, Bangladesh's is expected to grow by almost 4%.

The reason behind Bangladesh' Higher GDP

- A key driver of growth has been **the garment industry where women workers gave Bangladesh the edge to corner the global export markets from which China retreated.**
- The structure of Bangladesh's economy is such that **its GDP is led by the industrial sector, followed by the services sector.** Both these sectors create a lot of jobs and are more remunerative than agriculture.
- Over the past two decades, Bangladesh **improved on several social and political metrics** such as health, sanitation, financial inclusion, and women's political representation.
- On financial inclusion, according to **the World Bank's Global Findex database**, while a smaller proportion of its population has bank accounts, **the proportion of dormant bank accounts is quite small when compared to India.**
- Bangladesh is also far ahead of India in **the latest gender parity rankings.**
- It has performed well in **the Global Hunger Index too.**

What does the government say on the rankings?

- Government sources have said that in terms of purchasing power parity, India's per capita GDP was 11 times higher than that of Bangladesh in 2019.
- India's per capita GDP in PPP terms in 2020 was estimated by the IMF at \$6,284, compared with \$5,139 per capita GDP (PPP) of Bangladesh for 2020.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 19th OCTOBER 2020

ISSUE OF 'ORIGINALISM' AND US SUPREME COURT NOMINEE AMY BARRETT

GENERAL STUDIES- II (IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS)

US Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett, who is widely expected to be confirmed by Republican lawmakers before the November 3 election, has described **"originalism"** — or interpreting the country's Constitution as per the intentions of its 18th-century founding leaders — as **her legal philosophy.**

Background

When, **Amy Coney Barrett, the Conservative judge** was asked during her confirmation hearing what it meant to be an "originalist", to which Barrett answered, **"In English, that means I interpret the Constitution as a law.**

According to her, the text is text, and she understand it to have the meaning that it had at the time people ratified it. **It does not change over time**, and it is not up to me to update it or infuse her own views into it."

Significance of legal philosophy of a US Supreme Court judge

The US Supreme Court is a 9-member top court— where justices can potentially serve for life.

- Thus, **A US Supreme Court judge's legal philosophy**, has a major impact on divisive and consequential issues facing the country — such as abortion, gun control, healthcare and voting rights.
- Barrett, 48, is slated to be the third judge to be appointed by President Donald Trump **to the country's apex court**.
- The late **Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg**, whom Barrett is to replace, died last month at 87, having served on the bench for 27 years.

What does 'originalism' mean?

In legal philosophy, this theory prescribes that while resolving disputes, **judges should interpret the constitution as it was understood at the time it was ratified**, irrespective of whether they personally agree or disagree with the outcome of a case decided this way.

- **According to originalists, the meaning of the constitution is fixed at the time of its framing**, either in the form of the meaning of the words used, or the intentions of the drafters.
- The job of the court is to stick to this original meaning.

Origin of the term 'originalism'

The word '**originalism**' was coined in the 1980s, and has since been **popular among US conservatives**, who have sought to promote judicial restraint on the country's federal courts.

- Adherents of originalism believe that **social change should be brought about by new laws made by elected representatives, and not through judicial activism**, in which judges make new interpretations of the constitution.
- A **self-described originalist, Judge Barrett** has been mentored by the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia — considered a strong champion of constitutional originalism and judicial conservatism in recent decades.

Criticism of originalism

According to the critics, the originalists' core belief — that the constitution should be interpreted the way it was written — is unviable.

- Given that the **document's meaning has remained uncertain despite the efforts of countless jurists since its ratification in 1787** at the close of the American Revolution.
- Some have denounced it as another name **for right-wing political agenda**.
- They have accused originalists **of trying to chip away at hard-earned social reforms** by applying outdated beliefs of the 18th and 19th centuries to modern-day legal disputes.

Originalists's counter-view

Originalists contest these accusations, and claim that **it is their method which in fact delivers less biased decisions.**

- The US Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, **another self-proclaimed originalist** and Trump appointee, argues, **“Originalism is a theory focused on process, not on substance.**
- The fact is, a good originalist judge will not hesitate to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution’s original meaning, regardless of contemporary political consequences.”
- Defending the legal theory, the late Justice Scalia had famously said, “We are governed by laws, not by the intentions of legislators.”

‘Living constitution’ theory

- The legal philosophy which is said to be the **opposite of originalism is ‘living constitution’ or ‘modernism’.**
- **This theory, espoused by likes of the late Justice Ginsburg,** believes that the constitution should be updated with times to encompass changing societal needs.
- Originalists consider this theory as judicial overreach, and **criticise living constitution jurists as “activist judges”.**

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 20th OCTOBER 2020

AGRICULTURAL RELATED ISSUES

GENERAL STUDIES- III (FERTILISER SUBSIDY)

The Centre is working on a plan **to restrict the number of fertilizer bags that individual farmers can buy during any cropping season.**

What is fertiliser subsidy?

Farmers buy fertilisers **at MRPs (maximum retail price) below their normal supply-and-demand-based market rates** or what it costs to produce/import them.

- For instance, **The MRP of neem-coated urea, is fixed by the government at Rs 5,922.22 per tonne,** whereas **its average cost-plus price payable to domestic manufacturers and importers comes to around Rs 17,000 and Rs 23,000 per tonne,** respectively.
- The **difference varies according to plant-wise production cost and import price** and is footed by the Centre as subsidy.

Decontrolled fertilisers

- The MRPs **of non-urea fertilisers are decontrolled or fixed by the companies.**
- The Centre, however, **pays a flat per-tonne subsidy on these nutrients** to ensure they are priced at “reasonable levels”.

- Thus, decontrolled fertilisers, retail way above urea, while they also attract lower subsidy.

How is the subsidy paid and who gets it?

The **subsidy goes to fertiliser companies**, although its **ultimate beneficiary is the farmer** who pays MRPs less than the market-determined rates.

- Companies, until recently, **were paid after their bagged material had been dispatched and received at a district's railhead point or approved godown.**
- From March 2018, **a new so-called direct benefit transfer (DBT) system** was introduced, wherein **subsidy payment to the companies would happen only after actual sales to farmers by retailers.**

How it is implemented?

Each retailer, now has a **point-of-sale (PoS) machine** linked to the **Department of Fertilisers' e-Urvarak DBT portal.**

- Anybody buying subsidised fertilisers is **required to furnish his/her Aadhaar unique identity or Kisan Credit Card number.**
- The quantities of the individual fertilisers purchased, along with the buyer's name and biometric authentication, have to be captured on the PoS device.
- Only upon the sale getting registered on the **e-Urvarak platform** can a company claim subsidy, with these being **processed on a weekly basis** and payments remitted electronically to its bank account.

The purpose of new payment system

The min motive is to curb diversion.

- Being super-subsidised, **urea is always prone to diversion for non-agricultural use** — as a binder by plywood/particle board makers, cheap protein source by animal feed manufacturers or adulterant by milk vendors — apart from **being smuggled to Nepal and Bangladesh.**
- The scope for leakage was more in the earlier system, right from the point of dispatch till the retailer end.
- With DBT, pilferage happens only at the retailer level, **as there is no subsidy payment till sales are made through POS machines and subject to the buyers' biometric authentication.**

What is the next step being proposed?

At present, the Centre is following a **"no denial" policy.**

- Anybody, **non-farmers included, can purchase any quantity of fertilisers through the PoS machines.**
- That obviously **allows for bulk buying by unintended beneficiaries**, who are not genuine or deserving farmers.
- While there is a **limit of 100 bags that an individual can purchase at one time**, it does not stop anyone from buying any number of times.

- One plan under discussion is to **cap the total number of subsidised fertiliser bags that any person can buy during an entire kharif or rabi cropping season.**

The fertiliser requirement of a typical farmer

It depends on the crop.

- A farmer growing irrigated wheat or paddy may **use about three 45-kg bags of urea, one 50-kg bag of DAP and half-a-bag (25 kg) of MOP per acre.**
- A total of **100 bags would easily cover the seasonal requirement of a 20-acre farmer.**
- And that could possibly be a **reasonable cap to impose**; those wanting more can well afford to pay the unsubsidised rates for the extra bags.

How much subsidy does a farmer really get per acre?

- **For three bags urea, one bag DAP and half-a-bag MOP per acre**, the farmer would spend a total of Rs 2,437 at existing MRPs.
- The corresponding subsidy value – at an average of Rs 13,000 per tonne (Rs 585/bag) for urea, Rs 511.55/bag for DAP and Rs 303.5/bag for MOP – will add up to Rs 2,418.3 per acre.

Taxes paid by the Farmers

The farmers are also taxed on other inputs.

- Diesel, where the incidence of **excise and value added tax is Rs 42.19 on a litre** retailing at Rs 70.46 in Delhi.
- On 30 litres of average per-acre consumption for paddy or wheat, that will be nearly Rs 1,266. So, for every Re 1 spent on fertiliser subsidy, more than half is recovered as diesel tax.
- In addition, **farmers pay goods and service tax (GST) on inputs**, ranging from 12% on tractors, agricultural implements, pumps and drip/sprinkler irrigation systems to 18% on crop protection chemicals.
- **Fertiliser itself is taxed at 5%.**
- And since **there's no GST on farm produce**, they **cannot claim any input tax credit on their sales, unlike other businessmen.**

Way Forward

The time has come to seriously consider paying farmers a flat per-acre cash subsidy that they can use to purchase any fertiliser. The amount could vary, depending on the number of crops grown and whether the land is irrigated or not.

This is, perhaps, the only sustainable solution to prevent diversion and also encourage judicious application of fertilisers, with the right nutrient (macro and micro) combination based on proper soil testing and crop-specific requirements.

CHARGES LEVELLED AGAINST JUDGES BY THE ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

GENERAL STUDIES- II (SEPARATION OF POWERS)

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has stirred a hornet's nest by writing to the Chief Justice of India **complaining about Supreme Court judge Justice N.V. Ramana.**

Background

In his letter Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan complained for **allegedly influencing posting of cases in the State High Court** and alleging that some **High Court judges are hostile to his government** and are deliberately striking down his regime's decisions and orders.

- In effect, **he has accused many judges of misconduct, corruption and political bias.**
- Such an **open conflict between the judiciary and a Chief Minister** is without precedent. Questions arise about what can be done about this serious complaint.

How are allegations of misconduct against judges dealt with?

The Constitution protects the independence of judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court by making them removable only through a long process of impeachment.

- However, **not all forms of misconduct will warrant impeachment.** There could be other kinds of impropriety too.
- There are times when serious complaints of this sort are received, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is called upon to examine them.
- Since **1997, judges have adopted an 'in-house procedure'** for inquiring into such charges.

How does the in-house procedure work?

When a complaint is received against a High Court judge: The CJI should decide if it is considered frivolous or if it is "directly related to the merits of a substantive decision in a judicial matter", or it does not involve any serious misconduct or impropriety.

- **If it is serious,** the CJI should get the judge's response. He may close the matter if he is satisfied with the response.
- **If a deeper probe is considered necessary,** both the complaint and the judge's response, along with the Chief Justice's comments, are recorded for further action.
- The same procedure holds well if the CJI receives a complaint directly.

In-House Probe Committee

After considering the High Court's Chief Justice, **the judge involved and the complaint,** the CJI, if deemed necessary, **forms a three-member committee.**

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- The committee should have **two Chief Justices from other High Courts and one High Court judge.**
- The inquiry it holds is of **the nature of a fact-finding mission** and is **not a formal judicial inquiry** involving examination of witnesses. The judge concerned is entitled to appear before it.
- If the **case is against a High Court's Chief Justice, the same procedure is followed**, but the probe committee comprises a **Supreme Court judge and two Chief Justices.**
- **If a Supreme Court judge faces such a charge**, the in-house panel will comprise **three Supreme Court judges.**
- The in-house procedure **does not give any separate provision to deal with complaints against the Chief Justice of India.**
- But in practice, a panel of three other Supreme Court justices is formed.

What happens after the probe is done?

If the committee finds substance in the charges, it can give two kinds of recommendations.

1. One, that the misconduct is serious enough to require removal from office,
2. Or, that it is not serious enough to warrant removal.

In the former case, the judge concerned will be urged to resign or seek voluntary retirement.

- If the judge is unwilling to quit, the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned would be asked to withdraw judicial work from him.
- The President and the Prime Minister will be informed of the situation.
- This is expected to clear the way for Parliament to begin the process of impeachment. If the misconduct does not warrant removal, the judge would be advised accordingly.

How will the CM's complaint be handled?

The complaint by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister **will have to be examined by the CJI** from the perspective of whether it can be rejected as baseless, or it requires a deeper investigation.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 22nd OCTOBER 2020

RECALLING A PAKISTAN MISADVENTURE ON OCTOBER 22, 1947

GENERAL STUDIES- I (POST-INDEPENDENCE CONSOLIDATION)

Kashmiris have traditionally observed **October 27 as a Black Day** to mark the first landing of **Indian troops in the Valley in 1947** to push back Pakistan-backed tribal invaders.

But this year, in what appears to be **an effort by the government to change that narrative**, the Ministry of Culture is marking October 22 — the day the Pakistani invasion began and set the stage for the first India-Pakistan war — with a string of events, including a symposium in Srinagar on the events of that day.

The lead-up to Oct 22

By October 1947, Kashmir was in high ferment.

- For months before the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan, **Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of Muslim-majority Kashmir**, was facing a **rebellion in Poonch by Muslim subjects** who refused to pay taxes and **launched an armed insurgency**.
- Hari Singh deployed the Kashmir state forces to crack down.
- At the same time, **with Partition nearing, Hindus and Sikhs had been crossing into Jammu**, bringing with them stories of harrowing violence in Rawalpindi and other areas.
- Jammu had turned into a communal cauldron by the time anti-Muslim clashes broke out.
- There are varying versions of how many Muslims were killed, but most accounts speak of the riots as a massacre.

The Independence and situations in Kashmir

At Independence, **Hari Singh decided that Kashmir would not accede to either India or Pakistan**.

- Instead, he made an **offer of a standstill agreement** with both, but only Pakistan signed.
- **Pakistan took charge of Kashmir's post and telegraphs** and agreed to continue supplying essentials such as fuel and grains through West Punjab, now part of the new country.
- But as the clashes continued, **the supplies from Pakistan dried up**. Lack of petrol immobilised transport; Pakistan stopped the train service from Sialkot to Jammu; banking got disrupted.
- On the borders, **bands of armed raiders were already launching hit-and-run attacks**.
- The situation grew alarming for Hari Singh and his small army from about mid-October, and his cables to the Pakistan PM to put an end to the raids were rebuffed.

Oct 22 invasion & resistance

On October 22, **thousands of tribal invaders crossed into Kashmir** overrunning outposts of Hari Singh's state forces in Muzaffarabad, Domel and other places on the road to Srinagar.

- The Kashmir forces were too small in number. Plus, the **Muslim soldiers, who were in equal numbers with the Dogras in the force, joined hands with the raiders**.
- According to the **Ministry of Defence's official history of the war**:
"The plan of the invaders was tactfully sound and, in the beginning, brilliantly executed. The main attack had to be frontally launched along the motor road. Apart from the rifles, the standard weapon of the raiders, the main force had also a few light machine guns and travelled in about 300 civilian lorries."

Indian forces airlifted to Srinagar on Oct 27, 1947

Pakistan maintained it had nothing to do with this invasion, but evidence to the contrary has come up in several accounts.

- Indian military histories say the invasion was planned two months ahead by the Pakistan Army, and codenamed **Operation Gulmarg**.
- One of the **most significant episodes was the attack** on Baramulla on the night of October 26-27.
- Various accounts of the invasion have explained **why the Pashtun tribesmen came to form the advance party of the Pakistan military**.
- Whitehead writes that **Pakistan did not want to trigger an open conflict with India**, and found its best option in “turning the martial mood of the the Pathan hill tribes to [its] best interests”.
- **India’s official account says** the use of Pashtun tribesmen by Pakistan sought to divert the **demands for Pashtunistan in the North-West Frontier Province**.

After the raid

After Hari Singh signed off on the accession, four Dakotas flew to Srinagar from Delhi through October 27 transporting troops.

- More troops followed over the next few days. **The invaders were held off close to Srinagar**, at a place called Shalteng, and there was a battle in Budgam, close to the airport.
- By **November 8, the Indian Army had taken control of Srinagar**; on November 9, of Baramulla; and by November 13, of Uri.

The end of first war with Pakistan

However, with **Pakistani forces formally entering the battlefield in support of the tribesmen**, the war would continue for over a year.

A ceasefire was declared on the night of December 31, 1948, and the **terms of the ceasefire were accepted on January 5, 1949**.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 23rd OCTOBER 2020

HOW WILL PURCHASES FROM RUSSIA AFFECT INDIA-U.S. TIES?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS)

Exactly a year ago, on October 5, 2018, **India and Russia signed a contract to buy the Russian Triumf missile system**, concluding negotiations that began in 2015.

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During that time, however, a new U.S. law, called “**Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act**” or **CAATSA** was passed by the U.S. Congress.

CAATSA transformed what should have been a straightforward bilateral deal into a complex trilateral balancing game for India.

How significant is the Russian deal for New Delhi?

A year after **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an agreement for the \$5.4 billion S-400 Triumf missile system**, the deal continues to cast a cloud over India-U.S. ties.

- Earlier in a meeting of External Affairs Minister of India and his American counterpart, a **U.S. official reminded India of the “risks” attached to the deal.**
- The State Department spokesperson said, “**We urge all of our allies and partners to forgo transactions with Russia that risk triggering sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).**”
- The External Affairs Minister had said in Washington, “**We would not like any state to tell us what to buy or not to buy from Russia** any more than we would like any state to tell us to buy or not buy from America.”
- He also asserted both India’s traditional ties to Russia, as well as the significance of the S-400 deal in particular.



Why is the S-400 deal important?

The agreement to purchase the Triumf missile system **boosted India-Russia defence ties** at a point of inflection last year.

- **Russia has traditionally been India’s biggest defence supplier, but was surpassed by the U.S. in the last few years**, a fact that had added to a perceptible drift in bilateral ties.

- Mr. Putin and Mr. Modi addressed **this drift with a special “reset” summit in Sochi** last May, which was followed by Mr. Putin’s visit to Delhi on October 5, 2018.
- **The Indian Air Force has also backed the superior air defence system** in that it will fill the gap in India’s particular needs: countering its main adversaries and neighbours, China and Pakistan’s growing air power, while dealing with a depleting stock of fighter aircraft.

Is India the only country facing CAATSA sanctions?

By coincidence, **CAATSA has now been invoked by the United States twice already**, and both times for countries buying the Triumf system from Russia.

- In September 2018, the U.S. State Department and Treasury Department announced **sanctions on China’s Equipment Development Department (EDD)** for the procurement of the S-400 Triumf air defence system and Sukhoi S-35 fighter aircraft.
- **Washington expelled Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet programme** in July this year after the first delivery of S-400s was received, and says sanctions are still under consideration unless Turkey reverses its deal with Russia.

India is neither like China, which has an inimical relationship with the U.S., and hence not bound by its diktats, nor like Turkey which is a NATO ally of the U.S. and expected to comply with Washington’s demands, and hence hopes to escape CAATSA sanctions.

Is a sanctions waiver possible for India?

CAATSA includes an exit clause, which states that “*The [US] President may waive the application of [CAATSA] sanctions if the President determines that such a waiver is in the national security interest of the United States.*”

- In August 2018, the **U.S. Congress also modified the waiver clause** to allow the President to certify that a country is “cooperating with the United States Government on other matters that are critical to United States’ strategic national security interests”.
- Indian Government officials have expressed the hope that the U.S. will exercise this waiver for the S-400 deal to India for a **number of reasons**;
- *A militarily stronger India is in the U.S.’s interests,*
- *India cannot completely drop its traditional dependence on Russian defence equipment without being weakened.*

It is hoped that USA will grant India a waiver on the deal, due to good bilateral relations with India and the fact that it is a “major defence partner” of the U.S.

What happens if a waiver is not granted?

Section 235 of the CAATSA legislation stipulates 12 kinds of punitive sanctions that the U.S. could place on a country conducting significant transactions in defence, energy, oil pipelines and cybersecurity technology with any of the U.S.’s “adversaries”.

According to the Act, the U.S. President may impose “**five or more of the sanctions described**”.

These measures include

- export sanctions,
- cancellation of loans from U.S. and international financial institutions,
- ban on investments and procurement,
- restrictions on foreign exchange and banking transactions, and
- A visa and travel ban on officials associated with any entity carrying out the sanctioned transactions.

None of these is expected to go into process until India takes delivery of the five S-400 systems it has paid an advance on, which are expected to begin in about 20 months and conclude by 2023.

Has India given the U.S. a fait accompli on the S-400?

- India's firm-footed response to the U.S. threat of sanctions on the Russian S-400 is in sharp contrast to its decision to "zero out" oil purchases from Iran, which were sanctioned by the U.S. last year.
- It denotes that while the government is prepared to diversify its energy sources, it will not be bullied on its defence security options.

Conclusion

Given the stakes involved, the government hopes that the U.S. will put its burgeoning strategic, defence and business bilateral relationship with India above its rancour with Russia. If not, however, officials say they are prepared to ride out the storm.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 24th OCTOBER 2020

WHAT DETERMINES ONION PRICES?

GENERAL STUDIES- III (STORAGE, TRANSPORT AND MARKETING OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE)

With less than a week to go for the Bihar elections, the **Centre recently reintroduced the stock limit on onions**. The aim of this move was to control rising prices, which crossed Rs 80 per kg in many cities.

- Barely a month ago, **had Parliament amended the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to exclude onions— besides potatoes, edible oils, oilseed and pulses— from the list of essential commodities**, thus freeing them from stock limits.
- Since then, **possibly with the Bihar elections in mind**, the **government has acted twice towards controlling onion prices**; it relaxed import norms, followed reintroduction of the stock limit.

Why have onion prices been rising?

The onion prices have been rising since the last week of August, as reports started coming in of massive losses to kharif onions caused by heavy rainfall in north Karnataka.

There are three main onion crops —

1. *kharif (June-July sowing, post-October harvest),*
2. *late kharif (September sowing, post-December harvest), and*
3. *Rabi (December-January sowing, post-March harvest).*

The rabi crop has the least moisture content, making it amenable to storage.

Farmers, especially in Maharashtra, store it in on-field structures called **kanda chawls** to protect it from moisture and light.

Rain effect on the crop

The heavy rain in September not only destroyed the new crop in Karnataka but also took a toll on stored onions in states like Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

- Farmers in **Maharashtra alone had marketable onions**, having stored around 28 lakh tonnes at the start of summer.
- But even Maharashtra farmers, in fact, have suffered more than their usual storage losses — 50-60% as against 30-40% normally.
- Rain in the **onion belt of Ahmednagar, Nashik and Pune** had caused water seepage into the structures.

Urea effect on the crop

- The shelf life of the **onion is lower this year due to overuse of urea by farmers.**
- Last year, onion prices were good and farmers were extra-indulgent with urea to increase yield. Unfortunately, this reduces the shelf life of onions.

Onion consumption and sowing area

- The **national acreage for rabi onions last season was increased** to 10 lakh hectares as against 7 lakh hectares of 2018-19.
- The **yearly consumption of onions in India is slated to be 160 lakh tonnes** with **Maharashtra alone consuming around 4,000-6,000 tonnes per day.**

How has the government reacted to this?

The Centre applied the first brakes on rising prices on September 14, when it banned the export of onions.

- This was done when the **amendment to Essential Commodities Act 1955 took away the power of the government to put stock limits on onions and a few other commodities.**
- Stock limits have been a potent weapon for controlling prices.

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- But even **after the export ban**, prices continued to rise due to a **supply-demand mismatch**.
- This was followed by the **relaxation of import norms**, to allow easy shipping in from Iran, Turkey and other onion-producing nations.

The government reintroduced the stock limit

- **Wholesale traders are now allowed to stock up to 25 tonnes of onion**, and **retail traders up to 2 tonnes**.
- These limits were set after taking into consideration the rise in prices year-on-year.

Will imports help bring prices down?

- The **landed cost of onions from Iran** at Mumbai port works out to around **Rs 35 per kg**.
- Taking into consideration transport, handling and other charges, the final retail cost for such onions come to around Rs 40-45 per kg.

Way forward

In its statement, the Centre has expressed hope that **the kharif crop will soon hit the markets which will help in cooling down the prices**.

- However, reports of **heavy crop losses have started coming in from Nashik due to exceptionally heavy rainfall in the last few days**.
- While the **imports can see prices move downward in the short term**, most say the real price correction can happen only when the new crop hits the market. That will be only post-November.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 26th OCTOBER 2020

LIBYA CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

GENERAL STUDIES- II (EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES)

Recently, the **rival parties in Libya announced a historic ceasefire followed by five days of the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission (JMC) talks in Geneva**, giving way to the possibility that the long-drawn conflict might be coming to an end.

What is happening in Libya?

Libya has been embroiled in a **tussle for power between rival militias ever since Muammar Gaddafi was ousted from power by NATO-backed forces and was killed by rebel militia in October 2011**.

- **Gaddafi's death** marked the end of an eventful 42-year rule by the former Army officer **who took over the reins of power from King Idris in a military coup in 1969**.

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

- In the wake of Gaddafi's ouster, **dozens of militias led by multiple warlords scrambled to occupy the power vacuum.**
- As a result, **Libya turned into a war zone with different militant leaders** claiming control of the North African nation.
- Some of the issues of dispute among the warring factions include **control of the oil infrastructure, governance, national finances and the military.**



Other countries involvements

The UN-backed internationally recognised government called the **Government of National Accord (GNA)** is led by Fayeze al-Sarraj, **whose Tripoli-based government is supported by allies Qatar and Turkey.**

- According to the BBC, **Turkey has sent troops to Libya, which includes Syrian rebel fighters** who are aligned with Turkey.
- **The GNA**, whose authority is challenged by the factions controlling the east, **took power in 2015 under the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement.**
- The **eastern part of Libya is controlled by rebel forces under the Libyan National Army (LNA)** that is led by General Khalifa Haftar who are **supported by Russian military contractors.**
- Between 2014-2019, the **LNA has conducted military operations against the Islamic State** in the east.
- The **spread of the Islamic State has further complicated the situation** and is also one reason the US is one of the foreign states that has intervened.

Impact of the civil war in Libya

- As per the Council on Foreign Relations' Global Conflict Tracker, the **civil war in Libya has created over 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers**, while more than 268,000 people have been displaced.
- According to a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, **since April 2019, over 2,600 Libyans including hundreds of civilians have been killed.**

What is the new ceasefire agreement about?

As per this **new agreement facilitated by the UN**:

- All **foreign mercenaries and armed forces will have to withdraw** within the next 90 days.
- The parties also agreed that **any violations in the ceasefire will be dealt by a joint military force**, which will be under a unified command.
- The ceasefire, however, **does not apply to UN-designated terrorist groups**.
- The agreement has also **established a Joint Police Operations room** that will implement and propose special arrangements to secure the areas that are cleared of military units and armed groups.

After the ceasefire

Libya has **Africa's largest oil and gas reserves** and with regards to oil production, the different parties have agreed that the commanders of the petroleum facilities from the east and west will work directly with a representative who will be appointed by **the National Oil Corporation (NOC)**.

- This representative will be tasked with recommending a plan for restructuring the Petroleum Facilities Guards in order to ensure that the flow of oil continues.
- This is a significant development since control of the oil infrastructure is one the elements of competition between the GNA and LNA.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 27th OCTOBER 2020

INTERIM ARBITRATION AWARD TO AMAZON MEANS FOR THE FUTURE-RIL DEAL

GENERAL STUDIES- II (IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES)

Recently, a **tribunal in Singapore restrained Future Group and Reliance Industries Limited** from proceeding with a Rs 24,713-crore deal signed in August for **Future Retail to sell its retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing units to Reliance Retail and Fashion style**.

The emergency order by the **Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC)** came on a plea from global e-commerce giant Amazon.

Why did Amazon approach SIAC for arbitration?

The arbitral institution administering the arbitration, **the applicable rules and the seat of arbitration is decided as per the contractual agreement between the parties**.

In this case **Amazon and Future Group** have under their agreement agreed to refer their **disputes to SIAC**, with Singapore presumably being the contractual choice for the seat/place of arbitration.

Emergency award to stop the Future-RIL deal

Once a dispute is referred to arbitration pursuant to the agreement between the parties, the process of appointment of the arbitral tribunal takes place.

- Typically, **in case of a three member tribunal, both the parties appoint one member each to the tribunal**, while the third member is jointly appointed by the two nominees or, if they fail to agree, by SIAC.
- This process takes a certain time to complete.
- However, under the rules of SIAC, **parties can move SIAC to appoint an emergency arbitrator to get urgent interim relief**, even as the process of appointment of the main arbitral tribunal is underway.
- **Accordingly**, pursuant to Amazon's request, an Emergency Arbitrator was appointed by SIAC, who after hearing the parties passed the emergency award.

How can this interim award be enforced on the parties in India?

According to an expert on International Dispute Resolution matters, **currently under Indian law, there is no express mechanism for enforcement of the orders of the Emergency Arbitrator.**

- Typically, the parties voluntarily comply with the Emergency Award.
- However, **if the parties don't comply with the order voluntarily**, then the party which has won the emergency award, in this case Amazon, **can move the High Court in India under Section 9 of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act, 1996**, to get similar reliefs as granted by the Emergency Arbitrator.
- In the past, **High Courts in India have passed orders which indirectly enforced the reliefs granted by the Emergency Arbitrator.**

Can Future Group challenge the interim award of the emergency arbitrator in India?

The Future Group **cannot challenge the order passed by the Emergency Arbitrator in India.**

- It may either apply before the Emergency Arbitrator itself showing cause why the order should be vacated or modified, or await the constitution of the arbitral tribunal and then apply before the main tribunal.
- However, **if a petition is filed before the High Court in India under Section 9 of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act, 1996**, then the Future Group could put forth its objections on why the reliefs as granted by the Emergency Arbitrator should not be granted by the High Court.

Why has Singapore become the hub of international arbitration?

Singapore has **emerged as the preferred location for international arbitration** involving Indian companies **as foreign investors typically want to avoid the rigmarole of the Indian courts.**

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

Foreign investors who have invested in India feel that **Singapore is neutral ground for dispute resolution.**

Singapore itself over time has built a **stellar reputation as jurisdiction driven by rule of law with international standards and high integrity.**

International arbitration in India

- India now has its **own international arbitration centre in Mumbai.** But in context of arbitration, this is a recent development.
- According to the 2019 annual report of SIAC, **India was the top user of its arbitration seat with 485 cases being referred to SIAC,** followed by Philippines at 122, China at 76 and the United States at 65.

The interim award and the role of Competition Commission of India (CCI) in the Future-RIL deal

There is no specific requirement under the regulations that requires the CCI to defer its decision due this order of the Emergency Arbitrator.

- However, passive or perception-based impact of the order cannot be ruled out.
- It also depends on whether Reliance and Future voluntarily make any statements before the CCI.

Competition Commission of India (CCI)

Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a **quasi-judicial statutory body** of the Government of India responsible for enforcing The **Competition Act, 2002.**

- Competition Commission of India (CCI) and Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) were established **under the Competition Act, 2002.**
- It was established on 14 October 2003 and became fully functional in May 2009.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 28th OCTOBER 2020

K.R. NARAYANAN: THE PRESIDENT WHO CALLED A SPADE A SPADE

GENERAL STUDIES- I (MODERN INDIAN HISTORY)

About him

Kocheril Raman Narayanan was born on **27 October 1920** in a **Dalit family in Uzhavoor, now in the Kottayam district of Kerala.**

- Through his education, he emerged as a great scholar like Dr B R Ambedkar.
- He was an Indian diplomat, academic and politician who served as the **10th President of India (1997–2002)** and **9th Vice President of India (1992–1997).**

Administrative roles

He joined the **Indian Foreign Service** and served as an **Indian Ambassador** in several countries, including **China**.

- After retiring from the IFS in 1978, he was appointed as **Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)** in **January 1979**.
- Later on, he was elected to Parliament and became a minister in the Union government.
- He was elected as **the Vice President in 1992 and finally the President in 1997**.

Example of an inclusive India

In the process, K.R. Narayanan became a **prime example of an inclusive India**.

- He had the **distinction of being the first Dalit President of India**.
- He was the presidential choice of a political dispensation that sincerely believed that **if India had to progress and become a great nation, then it must be a country for all Indians**, from all strata, unimpeded with competitive parochialism.
- In his long innings of public service, **R. Narayanan conducted himself as a modern man, well-tutored in scientific temper**.
- He became the first Indian public figure when as Vice-President, **he shook hands with an HIV-infected person**, whereas the self-proclaimed charismatic saviours were shying up making the gesture.

Reining in Governors

In the process **he became the protector of constitutional morality**, the most cherished republican virtue. Most gratifyingly, **he twice used his position to rein in errant Governors**, even though they had the ruling establishment's patronage.

First, it was Romesh Bhandari at the Lucknow Raj Bhavan, who fell afoul of President Narayanan's sense of constitutional fairness.

- Within months of taking over as the President, Narayanan stood up to the United Front political bosses and would not go along with the I.K. Gujral cabinet's preference to invoke Article 356 to get rid of the Kalyan Singh Government in Uttar Pradesh.
- It was the **first time that a President had asked the Union Cabinet to reconsider a proposed constitutional act**.

The second time President Narayanan ticked off a Governor's conduct was in July 2001.

- **The Raj Bhavan in Chennai disappointingly remained a mute spectator** as a former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi were roughed up by the Tamil Nadu police, at the behest of an extremely vindictive Chief Minister Jayalalitha.
- It was **President Narayanan who suggested to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to demand a report from Tamil Nadu Governor M. Fathima Beevi**.
- A presidential rebuke was implicit in the Rashtrapati Bhavan suggestion; soon, the Governor was recalled.

In both these instances, the Governors had allowed the Raj Bhavan to be used to give respectability to shabby political calculations. Not on his presidential watch, insisted Narayanan.

Speaking his mind

The Indian Constitution does not envisage the President of India to be a power centre, leave alone set himself up as a rival power centre (to the Prime Minister). Yet, there is always considerable wiggle room for a President to have his presence felt.

Once A.B. Vajpayee became the Prime Minister, **the National Democratic Alliance bosses learnt to their discomfort that the man occupying the Rashtrapati Bhavan was no push-over.**

L.K. Advani, in his memoirs, disparagingly called him an **“activist president.”**

- After its 1999 Lok Sabha victory, the BJP crowd thought that it had earned a **licence to make amendments to the Constitution.**
- There was even a **commission to review the ‘working’ of the Constitution.**
- **R. Narayanan used the prestige and the pulpit of his office to warn the nation of inherent danger to the Constitution.**

During U.S. President Bill Clinton’s visit

K.R. Narayanan again made his presence felt during U.S. President Bill Clinton’s visit to India.

- At the Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet for the visiting American, **President Narayanan horrified the ministerial posse by reminding everyone of non-alignment as an instrument of Indian foreign policy in pursuit of autonomy and independence.**
- That was the time when the Vajpayee government was doing all it could to cosy up to the Americans.
- **The ruling coterie was not amused; it thought the President had gone off the reservation.**
- Yet, it was a battle that the ruling politicians lost in the face of a resolute presidential rectitude.

Significance of his acts

As the **President, Narayanan was nobody’s man.** A President need not be anybody’s man or woman.

- The Constitution thrives on a dynamic interlocking institutional balance; failure of one functionary to perform his or her dharma ends up injuring the health of the entire Republic.
- Narayanan demonstrated how it was possible to be brilliantly creative in upholding the institutional obligations of an office — and, preserve the republic’s equilibrium.

IMPORTANCE OF THREE FOUNDATIONAL PACTS OF INDIA-US MILITARY COOPERATION

GENERAL STUDIES- II (BILATERAL AGREEMENTS)

India and the United States on October 27 signed the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)**, which, along with the two agreements signed earlier — the **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** and the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** — completes a troika of “foundational pacts” for deep military cooperation between the two countries.

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)

This agreement would facilitate exchange of geospatial information between India and United States for both military and civilian use.

BECA will help India get real-time access to American geospatial intelligence that will enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.

- Through the **sharing of information on maps and satellite images**, it will help India access topographical and aeronautical data, and advanced products that will aid in navigation and targeting.

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)

LEMOA was the first of the three pacts to be signed in August 2016.

- LEMOA allows the **militaries of the US and India to replenish from each other's bases**, and access supplies, spare parts and services from each other's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed.
- LEMOA is **extremely useful for India-US Navy-to-Navy cooperation**, since the two countries are cooperating closely in the Indo-Pacific.
- The **critical element that underpins LEMOA is mutual trust**. Without trust, no country will be willing to expose its military and strategic assets such as warships to the facilities of another country.

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)

COMCASA was signed in September 2018, after the first 2+2 dialogue between India and USA.

- The pact **allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems** so that Indian and US military commanders, and the aircraft and ships of the

two countries, can communicate through secure networks during times of both peace and war.

- The signing of **COMCASA** paved the way for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India.
- It aimed to facilitate “interoperability” between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secure data links.

Practical benefit of these pacts to India

The **strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries** must be seen in the **context of an increasingly aggressive China**.

- China has been **threatening a large number of countries in its neighbourhood and beyond**, and which has been challenging several established norms and aspects of international relations.
- **Amid the ongoing standoff on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh** — the longest and most serious in three decades — **India and the US intensified under-the-radar intelligence and military cooperation** at an unprecedented level, especially since June.

The way forward

It marks, above all, the enhancement of mutual trust and a commitment to the long-term strategic relationship.

With these key defence pacts in place, cooperation between the US and India can take place in a more structured and efficient way, rather than in episodic bursts.

*While **LEMOA** means one partner trusts the other enough to expose its valuable assets, **COMCASA** means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems to connect the two militaries. And the latest pact, **BECA**, means the countries can share highly classified information in real time without fear of being compromised.*

Concerns with these pacts

The **US wants India to move away from Russian equipment and platforms**, as it feels this may expose its technology and information to Moscow.

- So far, **India is going ahead with the purchase of the S-400 air defence missile system from Russia**, and this has been a sticking point for American interlocutors.
- For its part, **India is wary of Pakistan’s deep-rooted ties with the Pentagon**, and Washington’s dependence on Rawalpindi for access to Afghanistan as well as its exit strategy.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE ERDOGAN-MACRON SPAT?

GENERAL STUDIES- II (EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES)

Relations between **France and Turkey, two NATO members**, hit a new low this month after Recep Tayyip Erdogan launched a **personal attack on his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron following the latter's call for reforming Islam**.

- Last week, **France recalled its Ambassador from Turkey**, for the first time, and Ankara called for a boycott of French goods.
- Several other **Muslim countries, including Pakistan, voiced protests against Mr. Macron**.

What triggered the latest tensions?

Turkey and France have clashed over a number of geopolitical issues in recent years.

- The trigger for the latest clash was the **French government's support for Charlie Hebdo, the satirical magazine** whose office was attacked by al-Qaeda-linked jihadists in January 2015 over its publication of a set of caricatures of Prophet Mohammed, to republish the cartoons.
- Ankara, under **Erdogan's Islamist Justice and Development Party, has projected itself as a defender of (selective) Muslims causes worldwide**, and had slammed Mr. Macron earlier over his **push to "reform" Islam in France**.

What was happened?

On October 16, a **middle school history teacher in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, a suburb of Paris, was beheaded by an 18-year-old Chechen refugee** after he showed his students caricatures of the Prophet in a class on free speech.

- Following the teacher's murder, the French government started an operation to crack down on Islamist organisations.
- **President Macron, a strong defender of French secularism (laicite) and the freedom of speech, stated that Islam was in need of an "enlightenment"**.
- While paying homage to **the middle school history teacher**, government buildings in several cities displayed the caricatures of the Prophet.
- While the **French response triggered criticism in Muslim countries**, Mr. Erdogan launched the sharpest attack on Mr. Macron, saying he "needs mental treatment".
- In response, France recalled its Ambassador from Turkey.

What's Macron's reform plan?

CHROMEIAS ACADEMY

In early October, **Mr. Macron** outlined the substance of a long-awaited law which his government is planning to introduce to regulate the practice of Islam in France.

In September, Charlie Hebdo republished the cartoons when the trial of the **suspected 14 accomplices of the terrorists who attacked the magazine office in 2015 and killed 12 journalists** began.

Mr. Macron had defended blasphemy, saying “the right to caricature is an essential part of being French”.

- On October 3, while unveiling the essence of the Bill, the President said the **law was being brought in to fight “Islamist separatism”**, which is a “conscious, theorised, politico-religious project that materialises through repeated deviations from the values of the republic and which often result in the creation of a counter-society”.
- It will crack down on **foreign influence in French Muslim communities** (the country’s largest religious minority) and allow the government to track funding for mosques from overseas.
- The government will also create a **certificate programme for the imams and ban homeschooling**.

Who supports whom?

While Mr. Macron is trying to sell his push for reform as an antidote to the growing Islamist violence in France (the country saw some 36 terrorist attacks in the past eight years that killed hundreds).

Many of his critics see the French President taking the battle against terrorism to Islam—something which the French far-right already does openly.

- This offers an **opportunity for leaders like Mr. Erdogan, the votaries of political Islam**, to attack the “hypocrisy” of the West in dealing with Islam.
- **Erdogan’s call to boycott French goods** gained support in several Muslim-majority countries.
- Pakistan **Prime Minister Imran Khan** accused **Mr. Macron** of “attacking Islam”.
- Bangladesh saw a **demonstration of thousands against the French government** and Mr. Macron.
- **Saudi Arabia, a regional rival of Turkey**, joined hands with it in rejecting “any attempt to link Islam with terrorism”.
- **On the other side, the U.K. and EU leaders offered support to Mr. Macron.**
- **India**, which enjoys close defence and strategic partnership with France, issued a statement on Wednesday, **condemning the personal attacks against Mr. Macron.**

Is there a geopolitical angle?

While the immediate trigger was the Charlie Hebdo cartoons and Mr. Macron's push to "reform" Islam, **there is a larger geopolitical context to the rising tensions between Turkey and France.**

- As Turkey, under **Erdogan**, is trying to expand its influence to the erstwhile Ottoman territories, France has stood in its way.
- In **Libya**, where Turkey is backing the Tripoli-based internationally-recognised government, France has supported the Tobruk-based parallel government and the military campaign of the renegade General Khalifa Haftar against Tripoli.
- In the **Eastern Mediterranean region**, Turkey has launched a gas exploration mission, clashing with Greece and Cyprus, while France threw its weight behind the fellow EU members and even sent French warships to the region.
- In the **Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh**, Turkey offered unconditional support to the Azeri military offensive, while Mr. Macron slammed Ankara's "reckless and dangerous" intervention.
- In all these cases, **France and Turkey emerged as two opposing poles in the West and the East**, respectively.

Conclusion

While **France, the EU's most powerful military**, is trying to assert itself under Mr. Macron's leadership, Mr. Erdogan's neo-Ottoman foreign policy is ready to pick up fights wherever it sees an opening.

It was against this background, the cartoon controversy sent tensions soaring.

EDITORIALS IN-DEPTH – 31st OCTOBER 2020

US SECRETARY OF STATE'S INDO-PACIFIC TOUR- A MESSAGE TO CHINA

GENERAL STUDIES- II (EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES)

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo swung through **three Indian Ocean countries after the 2+2 US-India talks in New Delhi** earlier this week, bringing the China-US spat to India's doorstep.

Pompeo peeled off on an openly anti-China tour of the Indian Ocean, now geographically part of the larger Indo-Pacific region.

Why Indo-Pacific matters?

It is a vast area where the US and China have competed for influence for years, and where, more recently, Indian and Chinese interests have come up against each other, specifically in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

India's new policies on Indo-Pacific matters

India had been trying to regain a slipping foothold in these countries by itself without taking sides in the larger geopolitical rivalry, for many years.

- India, at times even pushed back on US attempts to expand its footprint in its immediate Indian Ocean neighbourhood.
- New Delhi now appears not to mind the playing out of the superpower rivalry close home, hoping it will help to reduce Chinese influence in the region.
- With its military eyeballing Chinese soldiers at the Line of Actual Control, India has embraced a closer relationship with the US, as well as stepped up US engagement in the region.

The three countries visit

All three countries Pompeo visited – Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia – are strategically vital to Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative.

In all three countries, Pompeo's message was:

China and the Chinese Communist Party are "lawless", do not respect international rules, ensnare small countries into debt traps, and make irredentist claims on territory that fall within the boundaries of other nations, and that the Trump administration was there to prevent that.

SRI LANKA:

- China's appears strongest in Sri Lanka, where it has control of the Hambantota port, is making a terminal at the Colombo port and a new city off the Colombo seafront, and is involved in a slew of other infrastructure projects.
- Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa also refuted Pompeo's assertion that Sri Lanka was caught in a debt trap with the Chinese.

MALDIVES:

In the Maldives, which signed a "framework defence and security agreement" with the US in September, Pompeo repeated that the "Chinese Communist Party continues its lawless and threatening behaviour" and announced the opening of an embassy in Male.

- Earlier, the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka had concurrent charge of Maldives.
- India, which had prevented a US-Maldives defence treaty back in 2013, welcomed the new agreement saying it was in line with India's interests and regional stability.

- Since 2018, when **Ibrahim Solih became President**, the **country has scrapped an earlier tilt toward Beijing**, and recast its foreign policy to reflect other long-standing ties, including with India.

INDONESIA:

In Jakarta, which is also the headquarters of ASEAN, some of whose members are faced with Chinese claims on their territory, **Pompeo lauded both Indonesia and ASEAN for standing up to China.**

He said, “Our law-abiding nations reject **the unlawful claims by Chinese Communist Party in the South China Sea** as is clear from Indonesia’s courageous leadership on this subject within ASEAN and at the United Nations”.

Implications

The recent **clashes initiated by the PLA are just the latest examples of the Chinese Communist Party’s unacceptable behaviour.** It is important that democracies should work together.

- In July, **Pompeo had criticised China for its aggressive moves against its neighbours**, including “instigating” a deadly confrontation with India in eastern Ladakh.
- **The US and India are taking steps to strengthen their cooperation against all manner of threats** and not just those posed by the Chinese Communist Party.
- China will be closely monitoring the **Malabar naval exercise among the navies of the US, Japan, India and Australia in November** – the thinking in Beijing is that an **anti-China Indo-Pacific maritime security structure** is gradually taking shape.



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