

16th oct to 25th oct

GENERAL STUDIES-1

INDIAN CULTURE

THUMRI

Thumri is a common genre of semi-classical Indian music.

Origin: The term 'thumri' is derived from the Hindi verb thumakna which means "to walk with dancing steps so as to make the ankle-bells tinkle."

Details

The form is connected with dance, dramatic gestures, mild eroticism, evocative love poetry and folk songs of Uttar Pradesh, though there are regional variations.

- ✓ The text is romantic or devotional in nature, and usually revolves around a girl's love for Krishna.

Thumri is characterized by its sensuality, and by a greater flexibility with the raag.

GENERAL STUDIES-2

16th oct to 25th oct

POLITY

INTERNET INACCESSIBLE, OFTEN

Backgrounder

The authorities suspend mobile internet and broadband services whenever there has been violence, widespread protests because of social media posts or otherwise. Authorities justify the course of action as a move to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order.

Latest instances

- The J&K valley in 2017 so far has seen 10 cases of internet suspensions due to various incidents. Recently, due to the killing of Amarnath Yatris in Kashmir, internet services were terminated as a precaution.
- In Nagaland, mobile internet services were taken down multiple times as clashes took place between urban local bodies and the state government over reservation in civic body elections.
- Governments in Punjab and Haryana shut down internet access and text messaging services just before a verdict was to be released on a high-profile rape case.
- Similarly, due to unrest in Darjeeling over Gorkhaland agitation, web services were taken down.

Drastic action a major cause of concern

In the 21st century, the Internet has assumed an increasingly important place in our lives.

- From banking to political speech, and from complex medical procedures to the purchase of basic necessities, important aspects of our economic, social, and cultural life now depend upon the Internet.
- Many of the fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution — the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of association, the freedom of trade — are exercised in significant part on the Internet.

But the growing importance of the Internet in personal life, as well as its growing use to challenge governmental authority, has led to a backlash,

16th oct to 25th oct

where governments attempted to control the Internet in case of any law and order issue.

The increasing number of government mandated shutdown of Internet access have with serious consequences both for civil rights, and for business.

Legal basis for Internet shutdowns

Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) was invoked by Gujarat Highcourt to uphold an Internet shutdown. Section 144 has its roots in the colonial-era British police-state and it is primarily used to secure an area from damage or harm in the case of a potential or actual law and order disturbance, to ban protests or other forms of political action.

A key point to note in the Gujarat High Court's decision was that the provisions of the CrPC cannot directly be transposed into the online world. In case of section 144, it only ends up placing certain specific areas beyond the bounds of large assemblies and associations for a temporary period of time.

India responds to internet shutdown criticism by codifying rules to make it legal. The communication ministry has issued new rules that allow the government to temporarily shut down phone and internet services during a "public emergency" or for "public safety".

Suggestions and conclusion

The concentration of more power in the hands of the government will only further disempower the individual against the state, and achieve a temporary illusion of security at the cost of a permanent loss of freedom.

This is a power that may be liable to all kinds of misuse, and hence it must be tempered with stringent safeguards.

If the government wishes to keep law and order, then it may find other, less drastic ways such as increasing security or even winning the trust of the people and addressing their grievances.

16th oct to 25th oct

The Supreme Court has often insisted that the state's action must be proportionate: that is, there ought to be no greater invasion of the individual's right than what is strictly necessary to achieve the state's goal.

The Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules

The rules are framed by the govt. in exercise of the powers conferred by section 7 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885

- Directions for suspension shall not be issued except by an order made by the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs in the case of Government of India or by the Secretary to the State Government in-charge of the Home Department in the case of a State Government
- In unavoidable circumstances, where obtaining of prior direction is not feasible, such order may be issued by an officer, not below the rank of a Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Provided that the order shall be subject to the confirmation from the competent authority within 24 hours of issuing such order. Or else the order shall cease to exist.
- The Order shall contain reasons for such direction and a copy of such order shall be forwarded to the concerned Review Committee latest by next working day.
- The directions for suspension shall be conveyed to designated officers of the telegraph authority or to the designated officers of the service providers in writing or by secure electronic communication by an officer not below the rank of Superintendent of Police.
- The Central Government or the State Government, as the case may be, shall constitute a Review Committee and it shall meet within five working days of issue of directions for suspension of services.

Criticism of Rules

- There was no transparency or democratic debate when these rules were framed;
- Their scope is vast, and includes phone calls as well as Internet calls; and there is no provision that envisages a lifting of the shutdown after any specific time.
- There is a virtual non-existence of mechanisms of accountability.

Once the order is issued, the scope of "review committee" is limited to decide whether the declaration was valid or not.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SABARIMALA

16th oct to 25th oct

What's the issue?

The Supreme court is hearing a PIL filed in 2006 by non-profit body Indian Young Lawyers' Association, seeking entry for all women and girls to the Sabarimala shrine. Girls and women of menstruating age are not allowed in the premises of the temple, which houses Lord Ayyappan.

Present status of the case

The Supreme Court referred the matter relating to the entry of women in Kerala's Sabarimala shrine to a five-judge Constitution bench. The issue of entry of women would be tested against the fundamental rights of Article 14 (equality under law) and Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste etc) of the Constitution of India.

Discriminatory act

Preventing women's entry to the Sabarimala temple with an irrational and obsolete notion of "purity" clearly offends the equality clauses in the Constitution. In any civilised society, gender equality is to be treated as one of the core values.

- It denotes a patriarchal and partisan mindset.
- It curtails her religious freedom assured by Article 25(1).
- Prohibition of women's entry to the shrine solely on the basis of womanhood and the biological features associated with womanhood is derogatory to women, which Article 51A (e) aims to renounce.

Questioning a board

The court questioned how a temple managed by a statutory board — the Travancore Devaswom Board — and financed out of the Consolidated Fund of Kerala and Tamil Nadu "can indulge in practices violating constitutional principles/ morality."

The temple authorities have justified the restriction, saying it is a practice founded in tradition.

- The larger Bench will decide whether the ban qualifies as an "essential religious practice" of the Hindu faith, over which the court has no jurisdiction

16th oct to 25th oct

GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES

INTEGRITY INDEX

As a part of broader strategy and emphasis on preventive vigilance, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) believes that the next level of systemic change can be through the tool of Integrity Index.

What is the basis?

The development of the Integrity Index is based on bench-marking of internal processes and controls within an organisation as well as management of relationships and expectations of outside stakeholders.

Main objectives

- Define what constitutes Integrity of Public Organizations.
- Identify the different factors of Integrity and their inter-linkages.
- Create an objective and reliable tool that can measure the performance of organizations along these above factors.
- Validate the findings over a period of time to improve upon the robustness of the tool that measures Integrity.
- Create an internal and external ecosystem that promotes working with Integrity where public organizations lead the way.

CVC has adopted a research-based approach for creating an integrity index that various organizations can use to measure themselves

EXEMPTING CBI FROM RTI

Why in news?

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court for an early hearing of a petition challenging a 2011 government notification, which includes the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the list of “intelligence and security organisations” exempted from disclosing information to the public under section 24 of the Right to Information Act.

Opposing exemption

16th oct to 25th oct

CBI is only an investigating agency and not a security or intelligence organisation. Such an administrative decision has a profound impact on the citizens of India as it restricts their fundamental right to information.

By this method the government could keep adding organisations to the Second Schedule, which do not meet the express criteria laid down in Section 24(2) of the RTI Act and ultimately render the RTI Act ineffective.

Section 24 of the RTI act

It is titled 'act not to apply to certain organizations'. It provides exception to obtaining information from intelligence and security organisations specified in the second schedule to the RTI act or any information furnished by them to the government.

NO PROBE AGAINST JUDGES, OFFICERS WITHOUT SANCTION IN RAJASTHAN

Rajasthan government has passed an ordinance, the Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, which seeks to protect both serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in Rajasthan from being investigated for on-duty action without its prior sanction.

Details

The ordinance amends the Criminal Code of Procedure, 1973 and also seeks curb on publishing and printing or publicising in any case the name, address, photograph, family details of the public servants.

- It seeks to bar the media from reporting on accusations till the sanction to proceed with the probe is obtained.
- No magistrate shall order an investigation nor will any investigation be conducted against a person, who is or was a judge or a magistrate or a public servant.
- If there is no decision on the sanction request post the stipulated time period, it will automatically mean that sanction has been granted.
- Violation would call for two years imprisonment.

16th oct to 25th oct

WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS

UNIVERSAL SOCIAL SECURITY PLAN

In an attempt to improve the life of the extremely poor people of India, the government has drafted a Rs 1.2 lakh crore plan to provide universal social security coverage for the poorest people of the country.

Details

Three categories of subscribers

1. The poorest 20%, who will get a government payout
2. Those who subscribe on their own
3. Formal sector workers who will need to set aside a fixed proportion of income toward the scheme.

Two tiers

- The first of these comprises mandatory pension, insurance (both death and disability) and maternity coverage
- The second, optional medical, sickness and unemployment coverage.

Funds collected under the universal social security scheme will be divided into sub-schemes and be ringfenced, meaning the benefits and the contribution will be commensurate.

Significance

Out of the 450 million strong work force, only a little over 10% are in the organised sector and get to enjoy the basic social security.

Amongst the 10 million people who add on to the workforce every year, most of them don't receive the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security coverage, the reason being that most of them belong to the unorganised sector.

While funding the scheme will be a challenge for the government, which has pledged to stick to the deficit target, it is seen as one that will gain broad popular support. The new policy will be part of the social security code, one of four codes that the labour ministry is finalising and will

16th oct to 25th oct

subsume the existing legislations governing social security coverage in the country.

RESERVATION IN PRIVATE SECTOR

Why in news?

Niti Aayog vice chairman Rajiv Kumar has said that he is against extending the policy to the private sector, while admitting that more efforts are needed to generate more employment.

Why is the debate on now?

Scores of young people join the labour force every year, many of whom do not find any job. Earlier, many people used to find some kinds of jobs in informal sector but that has reached a point of saturation. Therefore, several political leaders are advocating job reservation for SC/ST in private sector.

On the flip side, several industry associations have maintained over the years that introducing reservations could create hurdles in growth due to dearth of skilled labor and hurt chances of attracting investments.

Arguments against

1. Impacts innovation and performance
2. In conflict with international standards
3. While there is reservation in government jobs, employment by government has fallen, meanwhile private sector jobs have increased. While there has been 27% reservation for OBCs in government jobs since 1992, only around 12% got jobs. Hence, it is first necessary to fill this gap.

In conclusion

Quotas are no silver bullet that deliver social justice. The only way to ensure that is to level the playing field, through better education and training, and a constant vigil that would ensure action against those who undermine the equality for all promised by the Constitution.

16th oct to 25th oct

INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

'FREE MOVEMENT' ALONG MYANMAR BORDER

The Centre is putting in measures to facilitate free movement of Indian and Myanmar citizens within 16 km along the Myanmar border. Consultations were held in this regard with four States — Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

The move comes in the wake of large-scale displacement of Rohingya people from Rakhine State in Myanmar.

Backgrounder:

Only recently, the Ministry had constituted a committee to examine various methods to curb the misuse of free movement along the Myanmar border.

Free movement regime:

India-Myanmar border is unique in many ways as it has a visa-free movement regime for people living within 16 km on either side of the border.

- They can stay up to 72 hours with effective and valid permits issued by the designated authorities on either side.
- This regime has been in place keeping in view the traditional social relations among the border people. It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border.
- It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border. However, it is misused by militants and criminals who smuggle weapons, narcotics, contraband goods and Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN)

IMPLEMENTATION OF MOTOR PACT

India has embarked on the implementation of the BBIN motor pact with Bangladesh and Nepal.

16th oct to 25th oct

Details

Signed in 2015, it is a major sub-regional transport project amongst Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN). The Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) is for the seamless transit of passenger and cargo vehicles among them.

The pact aims to realise the ultimate objective of free movement of people and goods in the region and this would be supplemented through the building and upgrading roads, railways and waterways infrastructure.

Bhutan not a part yet

However, Bhutan could not get public and parliamentary support for it. However, Bhutan has suggested that Bangladesh, India and Nepal may consider the implementation of the MVA.

NEW INTEGRATED CHECK POSTS WITH SAARC

The Union Home Ministry has made a cabinet proposal to set up 13 new Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) to encourage India's engagement with its neighbours belonging to SAARC region.

A separate body, Land Port Authority of India (LPAI), was set up in 2011 for their management.

Integrated check post

An ICP not only provides various services under one roof but is also equipped with cargo process building, cargo inspection sheds, warehouse, cold storage, currency exchange counters, Internet hubs, clearing agents, banks, vehicle scanners, isolation bay and parking.

Need

The borders need to be secured against interests hostile to the country. Putting in place systems that are able to intercept such elements while facilitating legitimate trade and commerce are among the principal objectives behind setting up the new ICPs.

16th oct to 25th oct

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

SPAIN MOVES TO SUSPEND AUTONOMY

Spain is planning to suspend Catalonia's autonomy, as the region's leader threatens to declare independence. Article 155 of the constitution, which cemented democratic rule in 1975, allows Madrid to impose direct rule in a crisis but it has never been invoked.

Catalonia Location

Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy. It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The capital and largest city is Barcelona, which is the second most populated city in Spain.

Effects on Spanish economy

The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress.

- Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP. Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output

MAN BOOKER PRIZE FOR LINCOLN IN THE BARDO

Who? George Saunders

Work: Novel named "Lincoln in the Bardo"

What's the novel about?

The book tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's grief after the death of his young son, and his visits to his tomb.

Man Booker Prize:

16th oct to 25th oct

The leading literary award in English, The Man Booker Prize was launched in 1969. It aims to promote the 'finest in fiction' and is awarded each year to the book adjudged as the best novel of the year written in English and published in the United Kingdom.

- Sponsored by Man Group
- The winner and shortlisted authors are also guaranteed a worldwide readership as well as a dramatic spike in book sales.

BETWEEN DISARMAMENT AND DETERRENCE

For the second time in the last decade, the Nobel Committee awarded its annual peace prize to the laudable goal of nuclear disarmament. This year's recipient, *the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)*, has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of nuclear dangers.

ICAN and its work

The ICAN, a coalition of NGOs from almost 100 countries, has been tirelessly working on a global campaign to mobilise people to inspire, persuade and pressure their governments to initiate and support negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapons (the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations). This treaty is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, reflects the ambition of many states to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Significant treaty but can't ban

The prohibition treaty creates a legal basis for banning nuclear weapons among adhering states; however it hasn't actually banned such weapons. Nuclear arsenals exist and will continue to exist for years to come.

- The treaty establishes no new mechanisms to encourage states with nuclear weapons to dismantle them.
- Instead, it seeks to de-legitimise nuclear weapons as tools of statecraft on the grounds of indiscriminate humanitarian effects.

16th oct to 25th oct

- A state that joins the treaty while still possessing nuclear weapons is not required to accept any safeguards until after it has eliminated its weapons. This is a major weakness – elimination could take years, during which time the state could be producing new weapons to replace those it is eliminating.

The nuclear prohibition movement has no doubt gained momentum but neither the advent of a nuclear prohibition treaty, nor the increase in nuclear dangers seems to have weakened the belief in nuclear deterrence by the states possessing such weapons.

Meaning of Nuclear Deterrence

The strategic concept of deterrence aims to prevent war. It is the justification virtually every nuclear state uses for maintaining nuclear arsenals.

- The concept of deterrence can be defined as the use of threats by one party to convince another party to refrain from initiating some course of action.
- The concept of nuclear deterrence follows the rationale of the 'first user' principle. States reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in self-defence against an armed attack threatening their vital security interests.
- Possession of nuclear weapons could be seen as the ultimate bargaining tool in international diplomacy under such concept.

The supporters of this concept argue that without nuclear weapons there would be more violence. Many of the states opposed to the prohibition treaty are located in Europe and East Asia, regions whose politics continue to be shaped by the trauma and outcome of the Second World War.

The reason for the quest for nuclear weapons

The current ban movement and the nuclear prohibition treaty have trouble addressing potentially existential threats faced by states, as few alternatives are available to nuclear deterrence.

Many states will join the treaty in the hope that it will stigmatise nuclear weapons but many states will reject the treaty and continue to hope that nuclear weapons and alliances backed by them will guarantee their

16th oct to 25th oct

security. Indeed, states with nuclear weapons are now engaged in efforts to modernise their arsenals to be useful for decades to come.

None of the weapons possessors seems particularly concerned with the stigma created by the prohibition treaty.

Role of civil societies

For international civil society actors who support the objective of disarmament, this international situation presents an uncomfortable choice.

- Sharp analysis can highlight the negative outcomes of nuclear deterrence policy.
- It is useful to foster debate that forces policymakers to justify their investment in nuclear weapons.
- *In states desiring to prohibit nuclear weapons*, civil society actors can encourage actions and policies that aim to mitigate security threats that drive demand for nuclear weapons.
- Strengthening international institutions and mechanisms that prevent proliferation and enhance the credible peaceful uses of nuclear technology is a critical enabler of disarmament.

ENTERING UNSC

Why in news?

US ambassador to the United Nations (Nikki Haley) said that America was open to UN reforms to expand the permanent membership of the security council but the key for India to get there would be to “not touch” the issue of veto power that current members are neither willing to share nor give up.

India, however, maintains that there is no change in India’s stand that it should have “the same obligations, responsibilities and prerogatives as the existing permanent members of the Security Council.”

Backgrounder:

16th oct to 25th oct

India believes that the United Nations (UN), especially the UN Security Council (UNSC), must reflect contemporary global realities. For this purpose the reform of the UN including the expansion of the UNSC in both permanent and non-permanent categories is essential.

To this end, the Government of India has been actively working along with other like-minded countries for building support among the UN membership.

Arguments for UNSC reform

The current permanent members of the Security Council are the five nations that were made permanent members in the charter when the United Nations was founded. These countries were the victors in the World War II and China was their ally. UNSC reform is the need of the hour because,

- UNSC still reflects the geopolitical architecture of the Second World War.
- It was expanded only once in 1963 to add 4 non-permanent members.
- The membership of the United Nations has increased from 113 to 193 without any change in the composition of the UNSC.
- No permanent member from Africa, despite 75% of work of the UNSC is focused on Africa.
- Unable to respond effectively to situations of international conflict.

India and a large number of countries believe that the current UN and its powerful Security Council does not reflect the ground realities of the 21st century.

India's credentials

India has been an extensive contributor to the activities of the UN particularly the maintenance of international peace and security.

- By any objective criteria such as population, territorial size, GDP, economic potential, civilizational legacy, cultural diversity, political system and past and on-going contributions to the activities of the UN, India is suited for permanent membership of an expanded UNSC.

16th oct to 25th oct

- India's performance as a non-permanent member of the Security Council during 2011- 2012 has also significantly strengthened India's claim to permanent membership.

Efforts made by India

India along with Brazil, Japan and Germany (together known as the G-4) has proposed expansion of the membership of the UNSC in both the permanent and non-permanent categories.

Separately, India is spearheading a group of around 42 developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America – ***called the L.69 Group*** – which has demanded urgent action on the UNSC reform front.

India is also pursuing the matter through bilateral channels with our interlocutors. A large number of countries have supported India's initiatives for reform of the UNSC as well as endorsed its candidature for permanent membership. India has also received support from several other multilateral groupings including BRICS and IBSA.

U.S. stand

US told all members of the UN that it is in support of Security Council reform, as long as its veto power is not taken away.

However, the new candidates were only demanding the same veto power for themselves, and the U.S. and other permanent members were firm in rejecting such demands.

Where do the other four permanent members stand?

Among the permanent members, the opinion of France was closest to India's in the sense that it supported the addition of five new permanent members, including India, without any objection to veto being extended to them.

- The U.K. supported the G-4 without the power of veto.
- Russia, an old supporter of India, was non-committal
- China indicated that the time had not come for any serious negotiations on the subject.

Impact of India's permanent membership

16th oct to 25th oct

Newly included members will get to say in the matters of war and peace. India can represent or lead other countries to stop western forces from promoting their vested interests. India will have leverage in geopolitics, military, economic and political groupings and negotiations as permanent member of UNSC.

In conclusion

India's claim for permanent membership is a genuine demand in the changed geo politics of 21st century.

US ambassador's statement opens up the possibility of permanent membership for India without veto. A draft resolution circulated by the candidates (G-4) had already conceded that they would not expect to have the veto at least for 15 years. India should pursue the lead offered by the U.S. to end the deadlock over the Security Council's expansion.

MOGADISHU TERROR ATTACK



Why in news?

16th oct to 25th oct

A deadly terrorist attack killed more than 300 people. Mogadishu has seen a number of attacks and suicide bombings on “soft targets”, mostly hotels and restaurants, and military targets

Who lodged the attacks?

The attacks have been orchestrated by the terrorist group al-Shabaab, an Islamist organisation which vow allegiance to al-Qaeda-allied.

History

The country has been slowly moving back from a state of anarchy that began in the 1990s, with warlords controlling various parts of the country. It has a functional presidential government. It was the long spell of anarchy that enabled al-Shabaab to attain a position of prominence as an offshoot of the conservative Islamic Courts Union, which promised a semblance of order through the implementation of Sharia law and the capacity to fill a vacuum in governance.

Military intervention

Al-Shabaab had retreated from Mogadishu in 2011 following intense joint offensives led by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali federal government. The increased involvement of Kenyan and Ethiopian military forces, as part of AMISOM, in the conflict had pushed al-Shabaab fighters even further into interior Somalia. Logistical support from the U.S. government, which was stepped up after Donald Trump became President, has helped the Somali government fight al-Shabaab.

Yet the group’s defeat is based not just on military strategy but also on isolating it from the levers of power in Somalia’s clan-driven society. Al-Shabaab still has the capacity and wherewithal to carry out terror attacks as it is emboldened and aided by divisions within Somali society.

A weakened Al-Shabaab has managed to revive itself as a guerrilla force lately.

Way forward

The attack signals a dangerous reversal. Somalia must immediately work towards building a sense of civic solidarity among the various clans in the

16th oct to 25th oct

country and use the popular revulsion following the bombing to isolate al-Shabaab and its backers.

IBSA TRUST FUND AGREEMENT

India, Brazil and South Africa signed the IBSA Trust Fund Agreement that seeks to fight poverty in developing countries.

Where? At the 8th IBSA trilateral Ministerial Commission Meeting in Durban.

Details

The Fund brings together the three emerging economies to combat poverty in other developing countries.

- ✓ Each country contributes USD 1 million annually to this fund which is managed by the UN Development Programmes (UNDP) Special Unit for South-South Cooperation.

IBSA

Established: 2003

IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to:

- Contribute to the construction of a new international architecture.
- Bring their voice together on global issues.
- Deepen their ties in various areas.
- IBSA also opens itself to concrete projects of cooperation and partnership with less developed countries.

The establishment of IBSA was formalised by the Brasilia Declaration of 2003, which mentions India, Brazil and South Africa's democratic credentials, their condition as developing nations and their capacity of acting on a global scale as the main reasons for the three countries to come together.

THE IRANIAN OR "DEAL"

16th oct to 25th oct

What's the issue?

US President announced that he was “decertifying” Iran’s compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (“JCPOA”). By itself, this action does not mean that the United States has withdrawn from the JCPOA, nor does it reinstate sanctions that were lifted under the JCPOA.

What it does do, however, is to hand the matter over to the US Congress for a 60-day review period in which Congress must decide whether the sanctions relief under the JCPOA will remain in effect.

Where do the rest stand?

Against this uncertain US political backdrop, both Iran and US allies have reaffirmed their clear commitment to Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General publicly stated that Iran is in full compliance with the deal and subject to the world’s most robust nuclear verification regime.

Why and what of sanctions on Iran?

In 2004, Iran had around 1000 centrifuges, and by 2015 the number had grown to 20,000. The U.S. concluded that Iran had recovered from the Stuxnet debacle and was barely months away from producing enough highly enriched uranium (20-25 kg) to produce a nuclear device.

As a result, the UN, EU and several individual countries had imposed sanctions in an attempt to prevent it from developing military nuclear capability. Therefore, the JCPOA focussed exclusively on rolling back Iran’s nuclear activities.

JCPOA

The P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the European Union (EU), and Iran reached a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to ensure that Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful.

Under the JCPOA,

16th oct to 25th oct

- Iran ended converting the underground **Fordow** enrichment facility into a research centre and dismantling of the **Arak** heavy water research reactor)
- Accepted restraints on reducing the number of operational centrifuges.
- Accepted a highly rigorous inspection regime.
- In return, Iranian assets were unfrozen and Iran was allowed to resume sales of oil.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has verified that Iran has implemented its key nuclear-related measures described in the JCPOA.

Why “decertify” the JCPOA now?

U.S. sanctions relief was more complicated because of a multiplicity of sanctions relating to nuclear and missile activities, human rights violations and terrorism.

Sanctions also had extra-territorial application, implying that third country companies would be penalised if they engaged in activities from which U.S. companies were barred.

The President’s announcement was made in anticipation of an October 15 deadline under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 (“INARA”). The objective of the Act was to constrain presidential authority to waive sanctions on Iran.

Under the INARA, every 90 days, the President is obliged to certify to the US Congress that Iran is in compliance with the terms of the JCPOA and INARA also obliged the President to provide a report on Iran’s support to terrorism, human rights violations and ballistic missile activities.

The President has made this certification twice since he was sworn in. However, President’s latest announcement was made due to the deteriorated relations between President and Senator recently.

Only two countries have applauded US decision — Saudi Arabia praised the U.S.’s firm strategy and Israeli Prime Minister conveyed his congratulations.

EU response

16th oct to 25th oct

A joint statement was issued by Germany, France and UK expressing concern for the potential implications of President's decision and encouraging the US Congress to consider the effects on the security of both the US and its allies.

In line with the joint statement, the EC reiterated that while it remains concerned with Iran's development of its ballistic missile program, it contends that such concerns ought to be addressed outside of the JCPOA.

Implications of US sanctions on Iran

Other countries have promised to uphold it but their ability to do so will depend on how their companies can be firewalled from U.S. sanctions if they continue their engagement with Iran.

The sanctions often referred to as "secondary sanctions", which primarily target *non-US companies* engaging in business in or with Iran entirely outside US jurisdiction.

However, implications are not limited to U.S.-Iran relations.

- Iran can make things difficult for the U.S. in Afghanistan as also in Iraq and Syria.
- The U.S.'s ability to work with Russia in Syria or with China regarding North Korea will also be impacted.
- Questions may be asked in Iran about why it should continue with the restrictions and inspections that it accepted under the JCPOA, which would have far-reaching implications for the global nuclear architecture.
- Coming after the rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris climate change accord and the North American Free Trade Agreement, President's decision further diminishes U.S. credibility.

16th oct to 25th oct

GENERAL STUDIES-3

INDIAN ECONOMY

₹ 2.11 LAKH CRORE RECAPITALISATION

The Centre unveiled an ambitious plan to infuse ₹ 2.11 lakh crore capital over the next two years into public sector banks (PSBs)

Why now?

PSBs are burdened with high, non-performing assets which was brought to light by Asset Quality Review conducted by the RBI

Twin-Balance Sheet Problem has led to low credit growth and Private

Twin-Balance Sheet Problem:

The balance sheets of both public sector banks (PSBs) and some corporate houses are in terrible shape and it has been seen as a major obstacle to investment and reviving growth. Companies borrowed a lot of money from banks to invest in infrastructure and commodity- related businesses, such as steel, power, infrastructure etc. But now, due to slump in both these sectors, the corporate profits have hit new lows. With low profits, the corporates are not able to repay their loans and their debts are rising and in turn cut down on investments

investment is cut down

Steps Taken:

16th oct to 25th oct

Govt has taken massive step to capitalise PSBs in a frontloaded manner, to support credit growth and job creation.

- Govt plans to fund through budgetary provisions of 18k crore and the sale of recapitalisation bonds worth 1.35 L crore. The balance would be raised by the banks themselves by diluting the government's equity share.

These steps will boost flagging economic growth and create jobs. The effect of recapitalisation on the fiscal deficit would be determined by the type of bonds and as to who the issuing authority would be.

ON MULTI COMMODITY EXCHANGE

The government announced last year that it would take steps towards introducing new varieties of commodity derivatives in the market.

Recently, Finance minister launched the first options security with gold as the underlying asset for trading on Multi Commodity Exchange Ltd. Launching gold options is a step towards "formalising trade" in the yellow metal. The gold options contract launched allows trading in 1kg gold. The move will make gold trading more transparent.

First option

Gold Options is the first product for options trading that the regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has allowed after 14 years of commencement of commodity exchanges in the country.

What is MCX?

Multi Commodity Exchange [MCX] as the name suggests is an exchange like BSE and NSE where commodities are traded.

- It is a platform to facilitate online trading, settlement and clearing of commodity futures transactions, thereby providing a platform for risk management (hedging).
- It was established in November 2003 under the regulatory framework of FMC (Forward Markets Commission).

16th oct to 25th oct

- In 2016, the FMC was merged with SEBI and MCX as an exchange falls under the regulatory purview of SEBI.

What are Options?

Options are a type of derivative security. They are a derivative because the price of an option is intrinsically linked to the price of something else. Options, like other financial derivatives, allow price risks to be transferred between market players in an efficient manner.

Benefits of Gold Options

The derivative instrument allows investors to enter into contracts to either buy or sell gold sometime in the future at a pre-determined price, thus allowing investors to hedge any volatility in the price of the metal, for a price.

- Options usually are cheaper than binding future agreements
- They will help in the wider participation of investors in the realm of commodity speculation.
- Helps in formalising Gold trade.
- The introduction of a new financial instrument in India clears a path to building a vibrant market for commodities.

In Conclusion

The move to allow 'options trading' comes on the back of several other steps the government has taken, like Sovereign Gold bond scheme and Gold monetization scheme, to make gold trading more transparent.

INDIA'S FIRST INFORMATION UTILITY

Who? National e-Governance Services Ltd (NeSL)

What for? For bankruptcy cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016.

Who owns it? NeSL is owned by State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation Ltd., among others.

16th oct to 25th oct

Information utility

It is an information network which would store financial data like borrowings, default and security interests among others of firms. The utility would specialise in procuring, maintaining and providing/supplying financial information to businesses, financial institutions, adjudicating authority, insolvency professionals and other relevant stake holders.

Significance

The objective behind information utilities is to provide high-quality, authenticated information about debts and defaults.

The database and records maintained by them would help lenders in taking informed decisions about credit transactions. It would also make debtors cautious as credit information is available with the utility. More importantly, information available with the utility can be used as evidence in bankruptcy cases before the National Company Law Tribunal.

Rules governing these utilities

Information utilities are governed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code 2016 and IBBI (Information Utilities) Regulations 2017. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) oversees aspects such as registration and cancellation of these entities, their shareholding and governance among others. Recently, IBBI eased norms for information utilities, allowing Indian firms listed on stock exchanges to hold 100% in such firms.

AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS

CHAMAN FOR HORTICULTURE

To develop India's horticulture sector and help states identify suitable areas and crop types, the agriculture ministry is working on a project which uses satellites and remote sensing technology. The project is known as CHAMAN.

Implemented by: Delhi-based Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre

16th oct to 25th oct

Details

CHAMAN, or Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management will use remote sensing and geoinformatics data to integrate information on weather, soil, land-use, and crop mapping to prepare horticulture development plans. The idea is to use space technology to identify crops suitable to different areas and raise production of horticulture crops.

- The project will help states develop horticulture clusters and related infrastructure like cold chains.
- The project will also help in accurate forecasting of area and production of seven major crops in about 185 districts across India. These crops are banana, mango, citrus, potato, onion, tomato and chilli.

Significance

Driven by consumer demand, farmers across India have rapidly adopted horticulture crops which ensure a quicker cash flow and can be grown in very small plots. Currently, India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world, and a top producer of crops like banana, mango and lemons.

TOXIC FARMING

What's the issue?

Reports of farmers dying from pesticide exposure in Maharashtra's cotton belt make it evident that the government's efforts to regulate toxic chemicals used in agriculture have failed.

Multiple causes

It is natural for farmers under pressure to protect their investments to rely on greater volumes of insecticides in the face of severe pest attacks. It appears many of them have suffered high levels of exposure to the poisons, leading to their death.

- The fact that they had to rely mainly on the advice of unscrupulous agents and commercial outlets for pesticides, rather than on

16th oct to 25th oct

agricultural extension officers, shows gross irresponsibility on the part of the government.

- It is also an irony that the Centre has failed to use its vast communication infrastructure, including DD Kisan, the satellite television channel from Doordarshan dedicated to agriculture, to address distressed farmers.
- The system of regulation of insecticides in India is obsolete, and even the feeble efforts at reform initiated have fallen by the wayside. A new Pesticides Management Bill introduced in 2008 was studied by the Parliamentary Standing Committee, but it is still pending.
- There is worrying evidence that a large quantum of pesticides sold to farmers today is spurious, and such fakes are enjoying a higher growth rate than the genuine products.

Significance

It is incongruous that the Centre has failed to grasp the need for reform in the regulation of pesticides when it is focused on growth in both agricultural production and exports. Agricultural products from India, including fruits and vegetables, have been subjected to import restrictions internationally for failing to comply with safety norms.

What's needed?

Clearly, there is a need for a high-level inquiry into the nature of pesticides used across the country, and the failure of the regulatory system.

- It is imperative that a Central Pesticides Board be formed to advise on use and disposal of pesticides on sound lines, as envisaged under the law proposed in 2008. This will strengthen oversight of registration, distribution and sale of toxic chemicals.
- A stronger law will eliminate the weaknesses in the current rules that govern enforcement and introduce penalties where there are none.
- Aligning the new pesticides regulatory framework with food safety laws and products used in health care will make it broad-based.

A forward-looking farm policy would minimise the use of toxic chemicals, and encourage organic methods where they are efficacious. This will benefit both farmer and consumer.

16th oct to 25th oct

CONTROVERSIAL GM MUSTARD

Earlier this year, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) cleared the transgenic mustard, DMH-11, for commercial cultivation. However, the records of that meeting, now made public, do not record any such approval.

Final call

Though cleared by the GEAC, a full release is contingent on approval by the Environment Minister.

- The GM mustard in question (DMH-11) has been developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of Delhi University.
- If it gets the green light from the environment ministry's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), it will be the first GM food crop to be commercially cultivated in India.
- Right now, only GM cotton is allowed.

About GAEC

GEAC is the environment ministry's regulator for GMOs and transgenic products.

- It is established under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- It is the apex body for approval of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants

It is also responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products including experimental field trials

INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

NIIF GETS FIRST INVESTOR

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) of India has signed an investment agreement with the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA).

16th oct to 25th oct

- ADIA will become the first institutional investor in NIIF's Master Fund and a shareholder in National Investment and Infrastructure Ltd, NIIF's investment management company.

NIIF:

NIIF was set up in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects in the infrastructure sector.

- NIIF will invest in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.
- The corpus of the fund is proposed to be around Rs40,000 crore, with the government investing 49% and the rest to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments etc.

BHARATMALA PROJECT

The BharatMala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and Greenfield expressways (800 km).

Further, the remaining road projects of 10,000 km under the National Highways Development Project will be a part of the programme.

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

QUESTIONS AROUND INTERLINKING

Work will begin in around a month on an \$87 billion scheme to connect some of the country's biggest rivers. The plan entails linking nearly 60 rivers, including Ganges, which the government hopes will cut farmers'

16th oct to 25th oct

dependence on fickle monsoon rains and help generate thousands of megawatts of electricity.

Introduction

Water being the most important natural resource, sustains all aspects of life. United Nations agencies and the World Bank have claimed that these scarcities will escalate in the future, creating serious problems for humankind and the environment.

Keeping in mind the increasing demand for water, the government of India has developed a new National Water Policy which claims that water is a prime natural resource, a basic need and a precious national asset. India's National Water Development Agency (NWDA) has suggested the interlinking of rivers of the country.

Inter-basin Inequality

Inequality in distribution is the reason why policymakers have urged for the diverting water from the Ganga basin, which floods even in drought years.

Being able to successfully transfer water through the interlinking of rivers will mean millions of hectares of irrigation, raising the ultimate irrigation potential and generation of power, apart from the incidental benefits of flood control, navigation, and water supply, fisheries, salinity and pollution control, according to the Central government.

Interlinking River Project (ILR)

The interlinking of rivers has two components: the Himalayan component and a Peninsular one. All interlinking schemes are aimed at transferring of water from one river system to another or by lifting across natural basins.

Advantages

- Creates the potential to increase agricultural production. Avoids the loss of crops because of extreme draught or flood condition.
- Unify the country by involving every Panchayat as a shareholder
- Eradicate the flooding problems which recur in the northeast and the north every year
- Provide employment opportunities.

16th oct to 25th oct

- The large canals linking the rivers are also expected to facilitate inland navigation

Ken-Betwa Link project

Despite opposition from environmentalists and tiger conservationists, the first phase of the project will involve construction of a dam on the *Ken River*, also known as the Karnavati and a canal connecting it to the shallow *Betwa*.

The link will facilitate export of water from drought-prone Bundelkhand to the upper Betwa basin.

Critics say that there has been no credible environmental impact assessment of the link and no public hearings in canal and downstream affected areas and the link's environmental management plan is still being prepared. They also say that the Ken-Betwa link threatens about 200 sq. km of the Panna tiger reserve and with it the Ken River and large parts of Bundelkhand.

The government justifies the Ken-Betwa link, and indeed the river interlinking project as a whole, by saying that it will provide irrigation, water supply, hydropower and flood control.

Perils of interlinking

Challenges related to economic, ecological, and social costs.

- Interlinking of rivers is a very expensive and hence fiscal problems
- It has huge adverse environmental impacts on land, forests, biodiversity, rivers and the livelihood of millions of people.
- Social unrest/Psychological damage due to forced resettlement of local people.
- It will not only add to climate change impact but will also reduce our capacity to adapt to climate change.
- Large dams and reservoirs of this scale can cause earthquakes. The controversies over koyna dam, Tehri dam.
- Transfer of water is bound to be unacceptable as no state is likely to transfer water to another foregoing possible future use of such water. Domestic and regional geo-politics play a pivotal role on the discussions on ILR

16th oct to 25th oct

- IRL project has caused much anger and protest in our neighbouring nation, Bangladesh.

Natural resource accounting framework

India has insufficient data related to the water sector. Many water stressed countries produce these on a regular basis at a regional level and link them to national accounts statistics.

In addition to facilitating the integration and sharing of a more comprehensive knowledge base, the natural resource accounting framework provides the basis for evaluating the consistency between the objectives and priorities of water resource management

It also provides basis for broader goals of economic development planning and policy at a national and local scale. This in turn improves communication between various agencies generating and using information about water for various purposes and contributes to better coordination.

In conclusion

As this project is of massive estimated cost, a long term planning and a sound financial simulation are required to meet the standard of due diligence for such proposals.

Comprehensive assessment of all possible impacts in a credible way has to be done. Study needs to be conducted on the economic viability of project, socio-economic impacts, environmental impacts

Preparation of resettlement plans; Develop a mechanism for speedy consensus amongst states and prioritize different projects; Need of organizational structures for implementing the project; Consider funding modalities for the project; Consider the international ramifications of the project.

The focus of our water resources development should also be on how the groundwater lifeline can be sustained.

The government should pay more attention to its 'more crop per drop' mission and whether water-stressed regions are water exporters due to the crops they cultivate.

16th oct to 25th oct

FIRST RO RO FERRY SERVICE

The Prime Minister, inaugurated Phase 1 of the RO RO (Roll on, Roll off) ferry service, recently.

Connectivity : Between Ghogha in Saurashtra, and Dahej in South Gujarat which shall reduce the travel time from eight hours to over an hour.

Details

- This ferry service is a first of sorts, will save a lot of time and fuel as many people commute between these two regions frequently.
- Government aims to develop coastal infrastructure, integrate transport sector and improve state-of-the-art to augment steps towards blue economy

Blue Economy:

It is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health. It encompasses many activities

- Renewable Energy
- Fisheries
- Maritime Transport
- Tourism
- Waste Management
- Climate Change

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

EXTENSION OF DAWN MISSION

NASA has authorized a second extension of the Dawn mission at Ceres, the largest object in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.

Objective

The spacecraft will descend to lower altitudes than ever before at the dwarf planet, which it has been orbiting since March 2015. A priority of the second Ceres mission extension is collecting data. This information is important for understanding the composition of Ceres' uppermost layer and how much ice it contains.

16th oct to 25th oct

- The spacecraft also will take visible-light images of Ceres' surface geology with its camera, as well as measurements of Ceres' mineralogy.

Dawn mission:

NASA's Dawn mission will study the asteroid Vesta and dwarf planet Ceres, celestial bodies believed to have accreted early in the history of the solar system.

Dawn is the only mission ever to orbit two extraterrestrial targets. It orbited giant asteroid Vesta for 14 months from 2011 to 2012, then continued on to Ceres, where it has been in orbit since March 2015.

INS KILTAN

It is an indigenously-built anti-submarine warfare stealth corvette that was commissioned into the Indian Navy, recently.

- This is the third of the four Kamorta-class corvettes being built under Project 28.
- The Kamorta-class corvettes are a class of anti-submarine warfare corvettes currently in service with the Indian Navy.
- It is designed by the Indian Navy's in-house organisation, Directorate of Naval Design.
- INS Kiltan is the latest indigenous warship after Shivalik Class, Kolkata Class and sister ships INS Kamorta and INS Kadmat.

It is the first major warship to have undertaken sea trials of all major weapons and sensors as a pilot project. The ship derives its name from one of the islands in Aminidivi group of the Lakshadweep and Minicoy group of islands.

TACKLING ZOONOTIC TB

Why in news?

16th oct to 25th oct

The first-ever road map to combat animal tuberculosis (bovine TB) and its transmission to humans, referred to as zoonotic TB, was recently launched at the Union World Conference on Lung Health in Mexico.

Significance

New data released by the WHO estimates that close to 1.5 lakh people fall ill each year to zoonotic TB – mostly in the African and the South-East Asian regions.

In India, consumption of raw milk and living in close proximity to cattle has been attributed to high incidence rates of bovine TB in the central Indian populations. There is no cure for bovine TB and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

Zoonotic TB:

It is a type of TB in people caused by mycobacterium bovis. The disease can affect many other species surrounding cattle and become established in wildlife reservoirs.

Bovine TB is most often communicated to humans through food consumption, usually non-heat-treated dairy products or raw, or improperly cooked meat from diseased animals. Direct transmission from infected animals or animal products to people can also occur.

In conclusion

The implementation of strategies based on international standards and a cross-sectoral approach will enable improved surveillance and diagnosis of the disease in animals and consequently reduce the risks for humans. For countries to achieve the global TB elimination targets, interventions addressing zoonotic TB must be introduced in the national programmes.

ENVIRONMENT

16th oct to 25th oct

SAWFISH MORE THREATENED THAN TIGERS

Sawfish appear to be more threatened than tigers and elephants, as per the scientists. Anecdotal evidence suggested they were once common along the Indian coast.



Status

The sawfish has been included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 enacted to save them from exploitation.

Details

There are only five species of the sawfish ever identified — dwarf sawfish, knifetooth sawfish, smalltooth sawfish, largetooth sawfish and green sawfish.

- Sawfish are elasmobranchs, meaning their skeleton is made of cartilage. They are closely related to sharks and have shark-shaped bodies and, hence, are also called flat sharks.
- The sawfish family has been assessed either 'Endangered' or 'Critically Endangered' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Global Red List, considering their threatened status, high extinction risk and observed population decline.

16th oct to 25th oct

NEW SPECIES OF LARGE GECKO

Name: Kanger valley rock gecko Hemidactylus kangerensis

Where?

Eastern Ghats: Chhattisgarh's Kanger Ghati National Park, Jagdalpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh and in Khamman in the adjoining State of Telangana



Details

The distinct black-bordered beige bands that the new species sports right from its neck to its tail tip and specific scales on its thighs sets the Kanger valley rock gecko apart from the commonly-found rock gecko.

GRADED PLAN FOR DELHI POLLUTION

16th oct to 25th oct

The Graded Response Action Plan, Delhi-NCR's answer to combat air pollution that assumes apocalyptic proportions during this time of the year, will come into force for the first time from October 17th.

How it will be implemented?

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will monitor air quality from various stations located across Delhi-NCR. Daily reports will be sent to the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), the implementing authority of the plan, which will take a decision on the future course of action.

- If data of any station shows a sudden spike in pollution level, a team will rush to the spot and try to analyse the reason. Accordingly, action would be taken and instructions issued.
- The CPCB has directed all state pollution control boards of NCR states to form teams that will fan out and flag violations. The CPCB has formed around 40 teams that are visiting various parts of Delhi alone.
- The chief secretaries of NCR states have been designated as nodal officers. We will direct them to take immediate action if any particular area shows a spike in air pollution.

Background:

As per a Supreme Court order, the Graded Response Action Plan for the NCR involves stringent measures against burning of waste, industrial pollution and transport sector emissions. Notified by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest in January.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

GETTING READY FOR NEW FRONTIERS

The advancement of technology has led to new domains of warfare being opened to the militaries world over. Space and cyber warfare are two such domains where most modern militaries have focused on. The US pushed the Iranian nuclear programme back by use of the Stuxnet virus, while Russian and Chinese governments have also been suspected of using tools of cyber warfare against other countries.

16th oct to 25th oct

China has also demonstrated its capabilities of space warfare by shooting down a satellite, challenging the American prowess in that field. Equally pathbreaking has been the use of Special Forces in an independent role in global missions. All this had happened years ago, but Indian military neither had any domain expertise nor any dedicated agencies to work in these areas.

Efforts in this regard

Five years ago, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, comprising of three military chiefs had asked the government for establishing three new military commands in these domains — cyber, space and special operations. These commands were proposed to be raised as tri-service commands, modelled on the Andaman and Nicobar Command, thereby also enhancing jointness among the three defence services. After going through multiple rounds of deliberations and discussions at the defence ministry the proposal was finally approved in July this year.

Diluted though

The proposal, however, had been diluted in a major way. Instead of commands, which are headed by Lt Generals, cyber and space would be agencies — and special operations a division — to be headed by Major Generals.

Although there is merit in the argument that this marks a beginning in these fields of warfare, there is a fear that creating of agencies — and not commands — may lead to these domains not getting adequate importance, thereby defeating their very purpose.

Way ahead

While there is a likelihood that these agencies would eventually be upgraded to commands, this points to a bigger problem in higher defence organisation: The lack of a single point military commander or advisor.

India still doesn't have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (PC-COSC), who would have then overseen these joint agencies and given them due importance. The creation of a CDS or PC-COSC has been delayed for too long; any further delay will only prevent India from leveraging its military power effectively.

16th oct to 25th oct

CORPAT WITH INDONESIA

The 30th edition of CORPAT (Coordinated Patrol) and 3rd bilateral exercise between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy, was conducted at Belawan, Indonesia.

Aim: To enhance mutual understanding and inter-operability between the navies, carries search and rescue operations, institutes measures for vessels indulged in unlawful activities as well as control pollution.

Details

The bilateral maritime exercise has been carried out twice a year since 2002. The CORPAT exercise between the two navies aims

Significance:

- It demonstrates India's commitment to its ties with Indonesia and to the maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.
- As part of the Indian Government's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), Indian Navy has also been involved in assisting countries in the Indian Ocean Region with EEZ surveillance, Search and Rescue and other capability enhancement activities

INTERLOCUTOR IN J&K

Who? Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Dineshwar Sharma

What's his work?

He is appointed as Representative of Government of India to initiate and carry forward a dialogue with the elected representatives, various organizations and concerned individuals in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

- He will have rank equivalent to a Cabinet Secretary and complete independence in deciding who to hold talks with.
- He would try to know how things are panning out on the ground for and against India and try to understand the legitimate aspirations of the people of the state.

16th oct to 25th oct

What necessitated this?

J & K Valley's prolonged anti-india protest, rising insurgency in Kashmir, intense counter- insurgency operation has caused acute distress in the region. Demand for the political outreach emerged to prevent radicalisation of local youth which is the topmost concern for the Indian security establishment

If a political dialogue, towards a lasting solution, were to begin between all the stakeholders, it would help in confidence-building measures between the government, civil society and dissidents.

INDRA EXERCISE

Participating countries: India and Russia

Significance:

This is the first mega tri-services war game involving their armies, navies and air forces with an aim to boost their operational coordination.

- The joint tri-service exercise will be a demonstration of the increasing commitment of both nations to address common challenges across the full spectrum of operations.
- The first ever tri-service exercise between the two countries reflects the vibrancy of the continued Indo-Russian strategic partnership.
- With the rich operational experience of Russian and Indian armies in counter insurgency operations, both sides will gain immensely from each other to further develop their capabilities.