

# UPSC 2017: Comprehensive News Analysis – October 13

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## Category: WOMEN ISSUES

1. [Verdict today in Sabarimala case](#)

#### Context:

- Sabarimala temple and restricted entry of women of a certain age.
- The temple prohibits women aged between 10 and 50 from undertaking pilgrimage to Sabarimala – which means women are banned from even making the arduous trek to the shrine.

#### In news:

- **From three judge bench to constitution bench:** The Supreme Court will pronounce verdict on whether to refer to a Constitution Bench a bunch of petitions challenging the age-old practice in Kerala’s famed Sabarimala temple to restrict entry of women of a certain age.
- **Prime issues to be dealt by the constitution bench:**
  - Whether the multitude of worshippers of Swami Ayyappa visiting the famous shrine located in Kerala form a separate religious “denomination.”
  - If so, should their privilege to manage their religious affairs yield to the fundamental right of women to practice religion freely.
  - Included whether the restriction is a “permissible practice”
  - Who is the competent authority to decide on whether the restriction comes within the ambit of “custom”; and, finally, whether such a “custom” comes under the constitutional principles.
  - **Reasons for the restriction:** The restriction finds its source in the legend that the Sabarimala temple deity, Swami Ayyappa, is a “Naishtika Brahmachari” and should not be disturbed.

#### 1991 Kerala High Court judgement:

- Supports the restriction imposed on women devotees.
- It had found that the restriction was in place since time immemorial and not discriminatory under the Constitution.

## Category: POLITY

1. [Reconsider new Haj policy, urges Rajasthan body](#)

#### Context:

- **The new Haj policy for 2018-22.**

#### **In news:**

#### **Reforms recommended:**

- The reduction of embarkation points for Haj pilgrimage from the existing 21 to only nine across the country.
- Abolishing subsidy for Haj pilgrims and allowing women above 45 years of age to travel in a group of at least four without a male.

#### **Rajasthan pilgrims against the recommendations made :**

- Reason: termination of flights from Jaipur. The Haj flights from the State capital had started in 2005 after a seven-year-long agitation.
- The termination of flights from Jaipur would put the pilgrims to a great inconvenience, as they would be required to travel to either Delhi or Ahmedabad to board the special flights. It will impose an additional expenditure and cause a great difficulty to old and infirm pilgrims.
- Allowing women to travel without a male companion was against the principles of Shariah

## **2. Lawyers as Seniors: Supreme Court frames rules for itself, 24 High Courts**

#### **Context**

- Days after it announced that it would put online reasons behind appointments and transfer of judges, the Supreme Court took another step towards transparency, this time in its process of designating senior lawyers.
- It laid down guidelines for itself and 24 High Courts to govern the exercise of designating lawyers as seniors and ordered setting up of a permanent committee headed by the Chief Justice of India assisted by a secretariat.

#### **The Permanent Committee**

- The permanent committee will comprise the **Chief Justice of India and two senior most companion judges , Attorney General of India and a representative from the bar nominated by the first four members.**
- For the HCs, it will have the Chief Justice of the respective HC and the Advocate General of the state in place of CJI and Attorney General.
- The Committee will interview the candidate and make an overall evaluation on the basis of his/her number of years of practice, judgments (reported and unreported) which indicate the legal formulations advanced by the Advocate concerned in the course of the proceedings of the case, pro bono work done by him/her, domain expertise of the applicant in various branches of law and publications by the advocate.
- After a name is considered and approved by the permanent committee, it will be put before the Full Court which will include SC/HC judges as the case may be and will further decide to accord senior designation to an advocate either unanimously or by majority, through secret ballot.
- The Full Court may also recall the senior designation of a lawyer if it feels he is guilty of conduct that disentitles him to the same.

#### **The Permanent Secretariat**

- The applications including proposals from the judges will be submitted to the permanent secretariat
- It will compile the relevant data and information with regard to the reputation, conduct, integrity of the Advocate(s) concerned including his/her participation in pro bono work; reported judgments in which the concerned Advocate(s) had appeared; the number of such judgments for the last five years.
- It will also publish the proposal of designation of a particular Advocate in the official website of the Court concerned inviting the suggestions and views of other stakeholders in the proposed designation.
- The cases will then be put up before the Permanent Committee for scrutiny.

#### **The Senior Advocate**

- Supreme Court rules say that the Chief Justice and the judges may with the consent of the advocate, designate an advocate as senior advocate if “ In their opinion by virtue of his ability; standing at the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law distinction.

## **3. Saving child brides “ on SC ruling on sex with minor wife**

#### **Context:**

- The recent Supreme Court Ruling that criminalises sex with wife below 18 years of age

#### **Key Points:**

- By ruling that marriage cannot be a licence to have sex with a minor girl, the Supreme Court has corrected an anomaly in the country’s criminal law.
- Earlier, the age of consent under the IPC was raised in 2013 from 16 to 18 to bring it in line with the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012. However, the age above which marriage is an exception to rape was retained at 15, as fixed in 1940.
- Under the Indian Penal Code, it is an offence to have sex with a girl below 18 years of age, regardless of consent.
- In other words, what was statutory rape is treated as permissible within a marriage.
- By reading down the exception to limit it to girls aged 18 and older, the court has sought to harmonise the various laws in which any person under 18 is a minor.
- Child marriage is a social evil and a serious infringement of child rights.
- It adversely affects the physical and mental health of children, denies them opportunities for education, infringes on

their bodily autonomy and deprives them of any role in deciding on many aspects of their lives.

### Practical application:

- It is not clear yet whether all men married to girls between the ages of 15 and 18 to be condemned to face criminal cases as rapists.
- Given the prevalence of child marriage in this country, it is doubtful whether it is possible or even desirable to implement the statutory rape law uniformly in the context of marriages.
- It is not clear what it means for those married under Muslim personal law, which permits girls below 18 to be married.
- POCSO criminalises even consensual teenage sexual activity and the latest ruling has brought this into the domain of marriage.
- A teenager could be prosecuted for a sexual offence under POCSO even if he was just a little above 18.
- Significantly, if boys under 18 but over 16 are charged with penetrative sexual assault under POCSO or rape under the IPC, which can be termed "heinous offences", they could face the prospect of being tried as adults, according to the juvenile law as it stands now.
- Treating all below 18 as children may be good for their care and protection, but whether 18 is the right age for consent in this day and age remains a moot question.

The state's argument that given the widespread prevalence of child marriage it is not possible to remove the exception may be flawed from a formal standpoint, but its concerns about the implications of the verdict must not be underestimated.

### Category: INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/BILATERAL RELATIONS

#### 1. [U.S. pulls out of UNESCO accusing it of "anti-Israel bias"](#)

##### In news:

- The United States announced its withdrawal from the **N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)**, accusing it of "continuing anti-Israel bias". The U.S. withdrawal will take effect on December 31, 2018 and until then it will remain a full member of the body.
- **Key Fact:** UNESCO is the first U.N. agency that has admitted **Palestine** as a full member, in 2011.
- **Desire to remain as a non-member observer state:** The United States indicated to the Director-General of UNESCO its desire to remain engaged with UNESCO as a non-member observer state in order to contribute U.S. views, perspectives and expertise on some of the important issues undertaken by the organisation, including the protection of world heritage, advocating for press freedoms, and promoting scientific collaboration and education.
- **Back in History:** The U.S. had earlier once withdrawn from the UNESCO, in 1984, under President Ronald Regan who accused it of favoring the Soviet Union. Under President George W. Bush, Washington rejoined the organisation in 2002.
- **Israel and UNESCO:**
  - Israel and UNESCO have a contentious relationship, and Israel recalled its ambassador to UNESCO in 2016, accusing it of ignoring Jewish views of the heritage of the region.
  - UNESCO declared the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron a Palestinian World Heritage Site

##### Basic Information:

#### The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

- UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) based in Paris.
- Its declared purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.
- It is the successor of the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.
- UNESCO has 195 member states and ten associate members.
- UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture and communication/information.
- Projects sponsored by UNESCO include literacy, technical, and teacher-training programmes, international science programmes, the promotion of independent media and freedom of the press, regional and cultural history projects, the promotion of cultural diversity, translations of world literature, international cooperation agreements on secure the world cultural and natural heritage (World Heritage Sites) and to preserve human rights, and attempts to bridge the worldwide digital divide.
- It is also a member of the United Nations Development Group.

#### 2. [Fatah, Hamas sign reconciliation accord](#)

##### In news:

##### Deal signed:

- Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal
- This deal came after Hamas agreed to hand over administrative control of **Gaza**, including the key **Rafah** border crossing

##### Modalities:

- The deal was brokered by Egypt
- It will bridge a bitter gulf between the Western-backed mainstream Fatah party and Hamas, an Islamist movement designated as a terrorist group by Western countries and Israel

- The agreement calls for Mr. Abbas's presidential guard to assume responsibility of the Rafah crossing on November 1
- And for the full handover of administrative control of Gaza to the unity government to be completed by December 1

## Background

- Hamas and Fatah agreed in 2014 to form a national reconciliation government but the deal soon dissipated and Hamas continuing to dominate Gaza

## Analysts opinion:

- According to the analysts, the deal is more likely to stick than earlier ones given Hamas's growing isolation and realisation of how hard Gaza was to govern, after its economy damaged by border blockades and infrastructure shattered by wars with Israel

## Basic Information:

**Hamas:** Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization

- It has a social service wing, Dawah, and a military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades
- It has been the de facto governing authority of the Gaza Strip since its takeover of that area in 2007
- During this period it fought several wars with Israel
- It is regarded, either in whole or in part, as a terrorist organization by several countries and international organizations, most notably by Israel, the United States and the European Union

## Fatah:



- Fatah, formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, is a Palestinian nationalist political party and the largest faction of the confederated multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
- Fatah is generally considered to have had a strong involvement in revolutionary struggle in the past and has maintained a number of militant groups
- Fatah had been closely identified with the leadership of its founder Yasser Arafat, until his death in 2004. Since Arafat's departure, factionalism within the ideologically diverse movement has become more apparent
- In the 2006 parliamentary election, the party lost its majority in the Palestinian parliament to Hamas.
- However, the Hamas legislative victory led to a conflict between Fatah and Hamas, with Fatah retaining control of the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank

## Rafah Border Crossing

- The Rafah Border Crossing or Rafah Crossing Point is the sole crossing point between Egypt and Gaza Strip
- It is located on the Gaza-Egypt border, which was recognized by the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty
- The original crossing point was named Rafah land port
- Only passage of persons takes place through the Rafah Border Crossing
- All traffic of goods is diverted to the Kerem Shalom border crossing

## Category: HEALTH ISSUES

### 1. [Idli, dosa help fight mineral deficiency](#)

## In news:

## Highlights of a study published last month in Current Science by scientists of the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research.

- South Indian food items like idlis and dosas help in the body's absorption of minerals such as iron and zinc.
- Why?: This is because these dishes have undergone fermentation, soaking, and germination, which reduces phytates, leading to enhanced bioavailability
- A large number of Indians have trouble absorbing iron and zinc from food, this is mainly due to vegetarian food habits.
- The high content of phytates (anti-oxidants in cereals, legumes and oilseeds) in Indian foods slows down the absorption of iron and zinc. This causes deficiencies even in people whose diet may contain abundant quantities of these minerals.
- **Suggestions:**

- Research efforts should focus on **bioavailability (absorption by the body) rather than biofortification**, as food sources already supply enough iron and zinc.
- The absorption efficiency of these minerals among most Indians eating phytate-rich foods was below 10%. It should rise to 25% and above. This does not mean that people should quit vegetarian food, but they should adjust diets to reduce phytates.
- The problem of phytates could also be overcome by eating fruits like guava and amla, and meat, poultry or fish.

## 2. India's hunger problem is worse than North Korea's: global hunger index report

### Context:

- Recently released report of the International Food Policy Research Institute.
- The report talks about the global hunger problem.

### Basics:

**Global Hunger Index:** The GHI score is a multidimensional index composed of four indicators

- Proportion of undernourished in the population,
- Prevalence of child mortality,
- Child stunting, and
- Child wasting.

**Scores and indication:** On the severity scale, a GHI score of less than 10 means 'low' prevalence of hunger while a score of more than 50 implies an 'extremely alarming' situation.

### Key Highlights of Global Hunger Index report:

- India ranks 100 among 119 countries. It has a score of 31.4 on the Global Hunger Index (GHI). India is at the high end of the 'serious' category.
- More than one-fifth of Indian children under five weigh too little for their height and over a third are too short for their age
- Comparison with other nations: Although India ranks above Pakistan, it performs dismally with others such as Nepal (72), Myanmar (77), Bangladesh (88), Sri Lanka (84) and China (29).
- India is the world's second largest food producer, yet it is also home to the second highest population of undernourished in the world.
- According to the GHI report, more than a fifth (21%) of children in India suffer from wasting (low weight for height) – up from 20% in 2005-2006.
- India's poor score is one of the main factors pushing South Asia to the category of the worst performing region on the GHI scale this year.
- **Best performers amongst Developing nations:** Chile, Cuba and Turkey have a GHI score of less than 5 and ranked the best among developing nations.
- **Worst performers:** Nations like Chad and Central African Republic fare the worst with a score of 43.5 and 50.9, respectively.

## Category: ECONOMICS

### 1. Why the economic slowdown, and how to fix it?

#### Context:

- Increased spending by the government and lowering of interest rates by the RBI.
- Fiscal stimulus is the only logical way to pull the economy out of slowdown.

#### Current state of the economy:

- Data from 107 companies from the organised sector (excluding IT & financial services) indicate that number of persons employed by them has decreased by 2% between Mar-2016 and Mar-2017.
- The latest RBI Consumer Confidence Survey concludes that there is significant dip in the consumer confidence and business sentiment in manufacturing.

#### The slowdown periods:

- The period 2003/04-2007/08 witnessed the most rapid sustained GDP growth in India at 8% per annum, riding on the boom in the world economy.
- Then came the bust, as growth dropped to 3.9% in 2008-09.
- Surprisingly, GDP growth rose to 5% per annum during 2009/10-2010/11. This recovery was attributable to counter-cyclical macroeconomic policies among other things.
- But the resilience did not last long. Growth slowed to 4% per annum during 2011/12-2013/14, as fiscal imbalances mounted, inflation quickened, and the current account deficit in the balance of payments widened.
- In 2015-16 and 2016-17 the GDP growth rate averaged 7.5% owing to one thing only- sharp drop in world oil prices, from more than \$110 per barrel to less than \$50 per barrel. This led to decrease in current account deficit and fall in inflation.

#### Reasons:

- Demonetisation and introduction of GST have led to decrease in output in mainly unorganised sectors. But these are not the real reasons for the current slowdown in the economy.

### **Structural reasons:**

- **Rural distress:** GDP per capita in the agricultural sector has been less than one-tenth GDP per capita in the non-agricultural sector for 25 years. Employment creation is negligible. The outcome is rural distress.
- **Low share of manufacturing:** The share of manufacturing in GDP and employment is lower than it was 25 years ago. India's share in industrial production and manufactured exports in the world economy has declined steadily.
- Thus, GDP growth is supported largely by the services sector, while employment growth in the economy has been sustained essentially by construction activities and the informal services sector both of which have been hurt by demonetization.
- RBI's reluctance to cut interest rates: Between 2013-14 and 2015-16, the RBI repo rate, which sets interest rates in the economy, was reduced by a mere 1.25 percentage points although inflation came down by almost 5 percentage points in terms of the consumer price index. The opportunity to stimulate investment by dropping interest rates sharply was missed out altogether
- Appreciation of rupee leading to erosion of export competitiveness: Between January 2014 and June 2017, the rupee appreciated by 10% in nominal terms and 15% in real terms.

### **Remedial measures:**

- Government should undertake fiscal stimulus by increasing spending and reviving demand. The government need to break free from the 3.5% fiscal deficit target and increase it to 4.0%. It is to be noted that borrowing is bad for the economy only when it is used for paying debts. But if it is used for creation of infrastructure and investment then it is actually good for the economy.
- RBI should lower the interest rates by 2 percentage points: It has to be noted that the inflation in economy was controlled not due to lowering of interest rates but because of the fall in global crude oil prices.

### **Basic Information:**

- **Fiscal Deficit:** A Fiscal Deficit occurs when government's total expenditures exceed its total revenues (excluding borrowings).
- **Fiscal Stimulus:** Increasing government spending on infrastructure etc in order to lift investor sentiment, increase money supply in the market and increase demand in the economy.
- **Expansionary monetary policy:** This refers to a monetary policy by a central bank in which interest rates are cut in order to ease money supply in the economy.

***Nothing here for Today!!!***

***Nothing here for Today!!!***

### **F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam**

### **G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions**

#### **GS Paper II**

1. "The role of pressure groups in India is marked by a number of remarkable features distinct to the Indian Political System". Comment.

#### **GS Paper III**

1. Adaptation of PPP model for infrastructure development of the country has not been free from criticism. Critically discuss the pros and cons of the model.