

UPSC 2017: Comprehensive News Analysis “Sept 18

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A. GS1 Related

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Category: POLITY

1. [Narmada dam built despite attempts to stop it, says PM](#)

In news:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Narmada Dam project.
- The foundation for the project was laid by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.
- **Key Fact:**
- **Second biggest:** The dam is the second biggest concrete gravity dam by volume in the world after the **Grand Coulee Dam** in the United States.
- **Hurdles faced:** World Bank refused to fund it on grounds of environmental damage and displacement of tribal people in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.
- **Benefits:** farmers in the parched north Gujarat and Saurashtra regions would get irrigation benefits.

Basic Information:

- Grand Coulee Dam is a concrete gravity dam on the Columbia River in the U.S. state of Washington, built to produce hydroelectric power and provide irrigation water.

2. [PDS digitisation moving at snail’s pace](#)

Context:

- End-to-end digitisation of the Public Distribution System (PDS): To track the movement of foodgrains so that they reached the right beneficiaries.

In news:

- The project was launched in 2012 at a cost of ₹1,884 crore to ensure that, at every step from field to fork, the government would be able to track the movement of foodgrains so that they reached the right beneficiaries. As part of the effort, all fair price or ration shops were to be digitised.
- The project also calls for automation of the supply chain – online monitoring of stock positions in godowns, tracking the movement of the food grains from the godowns to the fair price shops, SMS alerts to beneficiaries, etc.
- **No progress made in ensuring end to end digitization:**
- 11 States have not taken the elementary step of digitising fair price shops and nine other States, including Uttar Pradesh, have hardly made any progress.
- But out of 5.26 lakh ration shops, only 51% have been digitised in three years.

- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have cited connectivity issues for their inability to commence the process of digitisation.
- **Non “starters:** Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal

3. [Ministry gets notice over National Library extension](#)

In news:

- The **Central Information Commission (CIC)** has served a show-cause notice to the Ministry of Culture for not replying to a RTI
- The Commission has directed the respondent authority to provide point-wise information to the applicant
- The Commission also directed the Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) to show-cause why maximum penalty should not be imposed for not replying properly

RTI:

- Sought complete information and each copy of relevant documents relating to present and final/ultimate/long term plan of action and policy and programme in future regarding the establishment of Regional Centre/Extension Centre of National Library at New Delhi
- The document, titled Proposal for Establishment of National Library Extension Centre/Regional Centre at New Delhi, says that the regional centre should be established at New Delhi (instead of Kolkata) for “better coordination and liaison with publishers
- Currently, the sole campus of the National Library is located in South Kolkata

4. [A fairer test: Alternative to NEET must be sensitive to concerns of inequality and exclusion](#)

Context:

- The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) failed to harmonise the qualifying exam, making it fair while rewarding the brightest.
- NEET is seen as elitist, favouring the rich, urban families.

Reasons for getting NEET pattern of examination:

- Extortionist policies of private medical colleges
- Students are admitted on their ability to pay rather than commitment to the profession
- Weakening standards of high school education
- Over 30 entrance tests for students to gain admission, making it highly iniquitous and stressful.

Reasons for huge protest against NEET:

- Wide variance in standards between the CBSE and the SSC
- CBSE syllabus focuses on science and math and encourages thinking
- State boards focus on the rote method of learning and liberal arts, worsened by the non-availability of science, english and math teachers in rural areas.
- The gap has widened further with most competitive exams based on CBSE
- It implicitly denying students from rural areas and poor families access to professional education.
- NEET was based on a CBSE plus standard, compelling even the bright CBSE students to take recourse to expensive tutorials for cracking the exam
- Tamil Nadu has more government colleges and in recruiting students from rural and ensure availability of doctors at peripheral facilities.
- In pursuing “high standards”, it is apprehended that the IIT phenomenon may be getting repeated.
- Under the highly competitive IIT system, the majority are in the US or multinational companies and a handful in rural areas or government.

Way forward:

- Enforce an acceptable standard of school education, making entrance examinations unnecessary.
- Till that happens, the NEET must harmonise the test keeping in mind the syllabus of what is taught in state high schools and the CBSE in order to provide a level playing field to all aspirants.
- Revive the old system of pre medical course
- Medical students can be taught for one or two years basic sciences and brought on par with the knowledge levels required for medical education.
- Given our commitment to cooperative federalism, allow states to have their own admission policies
- But make an All India Licence Examination for registration with the MCI mandatory for those wanting to study or practise in other states or go abroad , alongside instituting the National Exit Examination.

Category: INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. [India under U.S. pressure to scale down ties with North Korea](#)

In news:

- S. officials have asked India to cut down ties with Pyongyang (North Korea).
- The American insistence that India reduce ties with North Korea is an important move as it aims to draw New Delhi more strongly into the East Asian crisis
- **India- Japan joint statement:**
- Described North Korea as a common threat.
- Called upon North Korea to roll back its nuclear and missile programmes.

- India and Japan called on the international community to rigorously and fully implement relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions to maximise pressure on North Korea.
- Also discussed the role of Pakistan's A.Q. Khan network in supporting the clandestine nuclear programme of North Korea.
- **India and North Korea:**
- India has repeatedly deplored the recent missile and nuclear tests by Pyongyang though bilateral ties with the government of Kim Jong-un have remained more or less undisturbed.
- India played a key role in the resolution of the Korean War during the early 1950s and has maintained diplomatic ties with Pyongyang.
- India supported the U.N. in banning trade with North Korea though the Ministry of External Affairs has maintained that Indian trade has consisted of humanitarian ingredients like food items and medicines.

2. [Tweaks to pact with South Korea mooted](#)

In news:

- India is looking to plug loopholes in its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Korea following concerns over a recent sudden surge in imports of gold and related articles from that country.
- Authorities are also learnt to be probing a possible "criminal angle" behind the recent rapid rise in imports of the yellow metal from South Korea.
- Certain firms, "owned and operated by some Indians", allegedly misusing the India-South Korea FTA "officially called the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**" that allows duty-free imports of the precious metal and its articles.
- The authorities are examining a possible criminal angle in such transactions as those entities were allegedly sending gold medallion directly from Dubai to South Korea and then exporting to India, in violation of the FTA norms.
- Currently, under the FTA, duty-free import of gold medallion is allowed only if it has met the norm of "Change in Tariff Heading" under the Harmonised System (HS) Code which means one could send gold bars and rods from a third country to South Korea, convert them into medallion (thereby changing the tariff line due to some transformation) there, then export to India and avail the zero-duty benefit.
- **Key Fact:**
- Gold imports from South Korea had shot up to around \$340 million during July 1-August 3, 2017, while the same for the entire 2016-17 was just about \$71 million
- India in the bilateral meeting to be held soon with South Korea on trade issues, will come up with a long-lasting measure, push for inclusion of tighter norms in the FTA on imports of gold and its items, to prevent misuse.
- India will insist on incorporating a clause in the FTA specifying the criteria of (at least 35%) "value addition" as well as "Change in Tariff Sub-Heading" (under the Harmonised System Code) to ensure that the item has undergone substantial transformation in South Korea, and not just routed through that country to take advantage of the duty-free norms under the FTA.
- Simultaneously, there are also plans to impose safeguard duty (of around 12.5%) on gold imports from South Korea.

Category: ECONOMY

1. [Gold imports rise three-fold to \\$15 bn](#)

In news:

- **Commerce Ministry data:** The country's gold imports recorded a three-fold jump to \$15.24 billion during the April-August period of the current fiscal.
- Gold imports, which has a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), stood at \$108 billion in April-August 2016-17.
- Surge in gold imports last month contributed to the widening of trade deficit to \$11.64 billion as against \$7.7 billion in August 2016.
- CAD rose sharply to \$14.3 billion "or 2.4% of GDP" at the end of first quarter of 2017-18. In general terms, CAD refers to the difference between inflow and outflow of foreign exchange that has an impact on exchange rate.
- Worried over surge in gold imports from South Korea, with which India has a free trade agreement, the government has restricted inbound shipments of the precious metal.

2. [A powerful move](#)

Context:

- **Catch-22:** India is the third largest coal producer in the world. But it is also its third largest importer.
- The government has decided to offer 10 coal mines for auction

Impact:

- It will break the 41-year old domination of the state-owned Coal India Limited (CIL) over commercial mining
- It will improve supply of the fuel, and its quality

Present scenario:

- Current regulation restricts commercial operations to CIL "and Singareni Collieries Limited
- It is the major reasons for the energy-strapped country not being able to tap the full potential of its coal reserves

Monopoly of CIL

- Competition Commission of India (CCI) said that monopoly exercised by CIL is "patently unfair".
- It is found that CIL and its subsidiaries is "in contravention of the provisions of Section 4(2)(a)(i) of the Competition Act, 2002, for imposing unfair/discriminatory conditions in fuel supply agreements with power

producersâ€

Issues:

- Indian coal has about 45 per cent ash, much higher than the 25-30 per cent ideally required for the efficient burning of the fuel in thermal power stations
- Geological factors are the primary reason for this lacuna
- CILâ€™s overwhelming dominance of commercial mining has made the outfit stingy in investing in technology
- Coal washing, for example â€” that increases the efficiency of coal. Less than 20 per cent of the coal produced by CIL undergoes coal washing.
- Thermal power plants also have to reckon with stones in the coal they procure, which adds to their production costs and contributes to the wear and tear of their equipment

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F. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

G. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS Paper I

1. Growing feeling of regionalism is an important factor in the generation of demand for a separate state. Discuss.

GS Paper II

1. â€”The Supreme Court of India keeps a check on arbitrary power of the Parliament in amending the Constitution.â€™ Discuss critically.

GS Paper III

1. Many food items contain â€œtrans fatsâ€. What do you understand by this term? Which Indian food items contain â€œtrans fatâ€? What are the implications of trans fats on human health?