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## UPSC Current Affairs 2017: News Analysis

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### Category: **POLITY**

1. [Selection of ECs must be transparent, SC tells Centre](#)

## Needed, a relook

### Past demands for giving Parliament more say in EC selection

- In the Constituent Assembly debates in 1949, Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena stressed that EC's appointment should be made by a two-third majority in both the Houses
- Due to this demand, the Constituent Assembly included Article 324(2), which says that the EC's appointment will be "subject to the provisions of law made by Parliament"

- In 1974, the V.M.Tarkunde panel recommended that the EC be appointed by the President on the advice of a panel consisting of the PM, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the CJI

### Context:

- Appointment of ECs.
- Fair, just and transparent process for selection of ECs.

### In news:

#### Supreme Court advice to Centre:

- Election Commissioners should be selected through the "most transparent and just process" formalised in a law enacted by Parliament.

#### Supreme Court observation:

- There is a ‘gap’ caused by the **lack of a parliamentary law** which transparently spells out the process of appointment of an election commissioner: ‘Who should be shortlisted? Who shortlists these names? What is the eligibility?’
- **Key Fact:** selection procedure of the CBI Director is formalised by a written law, but not that of Election Commissioners.

#### Practice at present:

- The filtering of names of suitable persons for appointment as Election Commissioners is done under the aegis of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, who in turn advise the President.

#### Constitutional obligation:

#### Article 324. Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission

**Clause(2):** The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, **subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament**, be made by the President

#### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. [India, Israel to set up \\$40 mn research fund](#)

##### Context: Prime Minister Modi visit to Israel.

On Day Two of Narendra Modi's Israel visit, the two countries announced a strategic partnership and signed seven agreements in the fields of water, agriculture and space. The agreements include a \$40-million joint fund for research and development in innovation.

##### PACTS SIGNED

- An agreement in the field of water deals with increasing awareness of the need for conservation; the Israeli Water Ministry and the U.P. Jal Nigam Board signed an MoU
- Three MoUs on space cooperation included one for electric propulsion for small satellites, and for the development of an optical link, as well as cooperation on atomic clocks
- The fund of Research and Development, called the “I4F”, or the India Israel Industrial Innovation Fund, will see both governments contribute \$20 million to help research scholars manufacture their inventions easily



#### In news:

- India and Israel announced a **strategic partnership between the two countries** after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu
- Signed seven agreements in the fields of water, agriculture, space, including a \$40 million joint fund for research and development in innovation.
- Agreed to cooperate to combat the growing radicalisation and terrorism, including in cyberspace.
- The two sides also agreed to increase air linkages between the two countries, with Air India expected to commence flights to Tel Aviv, as well as a ‘Cultural Centre’ at a location yet to be identified.
- Possibility in the near future of ‘joint development of defence products, including the transfer of technology from Israel.’

#### Water conservation:

- The two agreements in the field of water deal with the ‘increasing awareness’ of the need for water conservation

#### Memorandum of understanding signed:

- MoU between the Israeli Water Ministry and the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam Board.
- Three MoUs on space cooperation included one for Electric Propulsion for Small Satellites, and for the development of an optical link as well as cooperation on atomic clocks.

#### \$40 million joint fund for research and development:

- The fund of research and development, called the ‘**I4F**’ or **India Israel Industrial Innovation Fund**, will see both governments contribute \$20 million to help research scholars manufacture their inventions easily.

#### 2. [Pak successfully test fires short-range ballistic missile Nasr](#)

## In news:

- Pakistan successfully test fired short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile *â€™Nasrâ€™*.
- *â€™Nasrâ€™* is a high-precision weapon system with the ability to be deployed quickly and with enhanced range from 60-70 kilometres and flight maneuverability.
- Pakistan army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa response after the test fire: the successful test has put *â€œcold waterâ€œ* on Indian military's *â€œCold Startâ€œ* doctrine.

### 3. [Signs of a Persian gulf](#)

#### Context:

- Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's provocation on Kashmir by equating the Kashmir conflict with those in Yemen and Bahrain
- India has always been worried of Iran's support for Pakistan in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) regarding Kashmir.

#### Reason for Iran's interference in Kashmir issue

- India's growing closeness to Saudi Arabia and the UAE
- Reminder to India that Iran too has a role in the Islamic world which can't be ignored.
- Iran getting regionally isolated in the backdrop of Donald Trump administration's hard line against Tehran
- Saudi Arabia and its allies tries to squeeze Iran out of the regional matrix.

#### What is happening in Arab world?

- Blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and UAE after cutting off their diplomatic ties
- Arab states issued a 13-point demands to Qatar to curb diplomatic ties with Iran, severing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and shuttering the Al-Jazeera news network
- Saudi Arabia and Iran's proxy wars across the region *â€œ* in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, apart from their growing hostility in Iraq.
- Attack on Iran's Parliament, for which it blames Saudi Arabia, has further heightened the tensions.

#### India's irking economic ties with Iran

- Iran hasn't taken a decision on contract for gas exploration in its Farzad B offshore field.
- So India has decided to decrease the volume of Iranian crude oil it will be buying this year.
- There are reports that Tehran has signed an agreement for the gas field with Russian giant Gazprom.
- Now Iran stated that Chabahar port project, won't be exclusive to India.
- Pakistan and China might also be invited to get involved.

#### How it affects India?

- For India, this undercuts the very strategic utility of the port
- Chabahar port is viewed as India's answer to the Gwadar port and to circumvent Pakistan and open up a route to landlocked Afghanistan

## C. GS3 Related

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### Category: ECONOMICS

#### 1. [UDAY covers 97% of discom debt: Centre](#)

##### In News:

- About 97% of the total outstanding debt of all state power distribution companies (discoms) has been covered under the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), the government announced
- 86% of the restructurable debt has been revamped under the scheme

##### What was the debt amount?

- As on September 30, 2015, the total debt of all state-owned discoms was Rs. 3.95 lakh crore
- The total liability opted for restructuring by the states through the issuance of bonds was Rs. 2.69 lakh crore

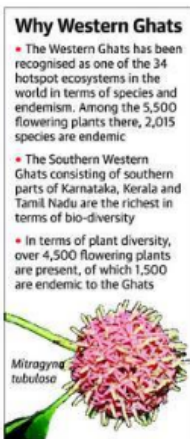
##### National average:

- The national average of aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses (from all UDAY states) stood at 20.2% in FY17

The difference between the average cost of supply (ACS) and the average revenue realised (ARR) had come down in the last year

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. [Of plant species few and far between](#)



**In news:**

- Scientists have recorded a major section of **Rare Endemic and Threatened plants** and trees in the Western Ghats, some of which have not been assessed by international conservation bodies for nearly two decades.
- The Botanical Survey of India (BSI) project on endemic tree resources in the southern Western Ghats, including Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has now documented about 250 ~RET~ species.
- The assessment of some of these conducted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature for the IUCN Red List puts them under vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered categories based on literature from 1998.
- **Heavily exploited**
  - Poorly documented, heavily exploited or habitat-deprived species such as Kingiodendron pinnatum, known in Malayalam as Chukannapayini, Cynometra travancorica, Vateria indica and Hopea parviflora now have better records.
  - Evidence on medicinally important plants including Aglaia malabarica (critically endangered in the Red List), Myristica malabarica (vulnerable), Syzigium stocksii and Syzigium dhaneshiana as well as economically important ones like Humboldtia vahliana (unsustainably collection) and Hopea ponga has been gathered.

**D. GS4 Related**

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[PIB Articles Editorials Roundup](#)

**E. Concepts-in-News: Related Concepts to Revise/Learn**

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**F. Bills/Acts/Schemes/Orgs in News**

**Articles in News**

About the Articles

324.  
*Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission*

1. The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice President held under this Constitution shall be vested in a Commission (referred to in this Constitution as the Election Commission)
2. The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the President may from time to time fix and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President
3. When any other Election Commissioner is so appointed the Chief Election Commissioner shall act as the Chairman of the Election Commission
4. Before each general election to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of each State, and before the first general election and thereafter before each biennial election to the Legislative Council of each State having such Council, the President may also appoint after consultation with the Election Commission such Regional Commissioners as he may consider necessary to assist the Election Commission in the performance of the functions conferred on the Commission by clause ( 1 )
5. Subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, the conditions of service and tenure of office of the Election Commissioners and the Regional Commissioners shall be such as the President may by rule determine; Provided that the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court and the conditions of service of the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment: Provided further that any other Election Commissioner or a Regional Commissioner shall not be removed from office except on the recommendation of the Chief Election Commissioner
6. The President, or the Governor of a State, shall, when so requested by th Election Commission, make available to the Election Commission or to a Regional Commissioner such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the Election Commission by clause (1)

**Schemes in news**

About the schemes

*Ujwal DISCOM  
Assurance Yojana  
(UDAY)*

- Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) is the financial turnaround and revival package for electricity distribution companies of India (DISCOMs) initiated by the Government of India with the intent to find a permanent solution to the financial mess that the power distribution is in.
  - It allows state governments, which own the discoms, to take over 75 percent of their debt as of September 30, 2015, and pay back lenders by selling bonds. Discoms are expected to issue bonds for the remaining 25 percent of their debt.
  - **The scheme envisages:**
    - Financial Turnaround
    - Operational improvement
    - Reduction of cost of generation of power
    - Development of Renewable Energy
    - Energy efficiency & conservation
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