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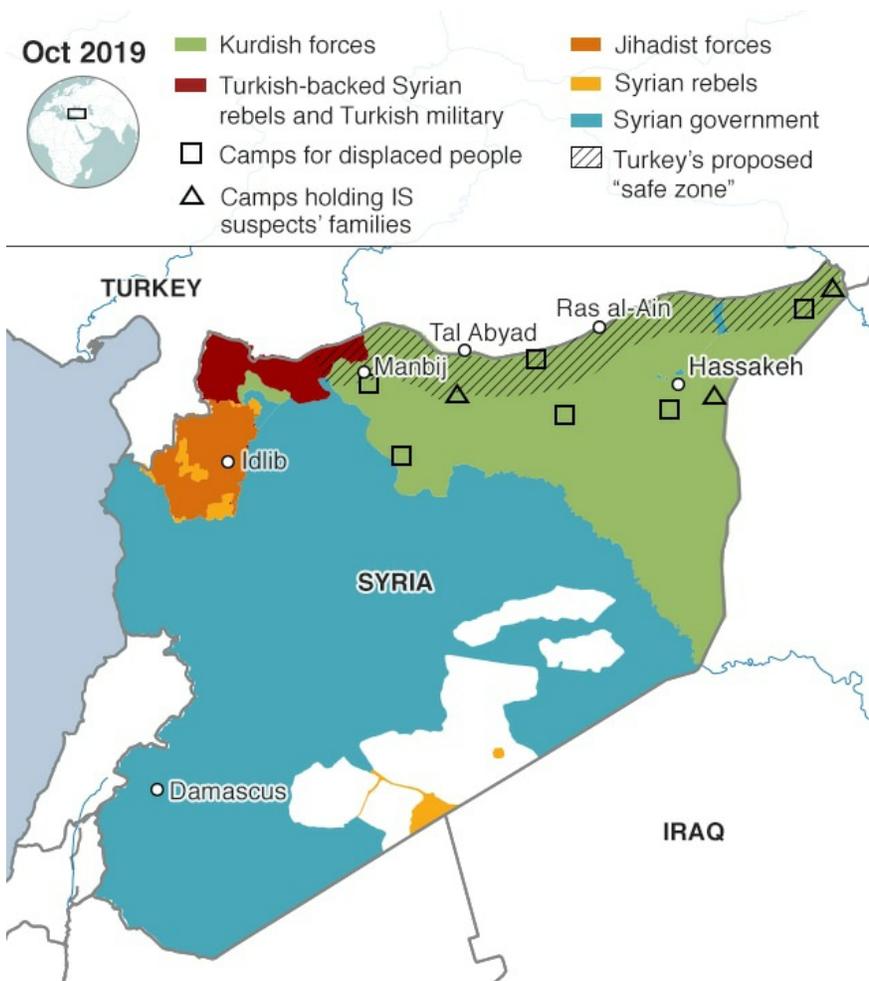
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## Turkey's Offensive in Syria

Turkey has launched a military operation called **Operation Peace Spring** against the **Syrian Kurdish militia (YPG) in Northeast Syria** just days after U.S. troops pulled back from the area.

- The YPG was the **USA's ally** in the **war against the Islamic state**. However, withdrawal of US troops allowed Turkey to launch the attack.
- Turkey stated that operation was aimed **to eliminate "terror corridor"** on **Turkey's southern border** as well as **to create a "safe zone"**. Turkey intends to settle millions of refugees in this safe zone who are now in Turkey.
- World powers fear the action could open a new chapter in **Syria's war and worsen the regional turmoil**.

The present chaos could present the Islamic State with an opportunity to stage a revival and worsen the situation in the middle east.



## Syria's Stand

- Syria has considered the attack as **"Turkish Aggression"** over Syria.
- The Syrian government wants to keep the **territorial integrity of Syria intact**.
  - The Kurdish people have been demanding a separate country for themselves. While, Syria has been **rejecting Kurdish demands for autonomy** in the region. Syria does not support the rise of federal governments in the country.
  - Whereas, Turkey wants to create a buffer between the Syrian Kurdistan and the Turkish border to resettle millions of refugees from Syria. Also, Kurdish people are involved in militant activities in Turkey thus Turkey is reluctant to support Kurdish people present in the region.

## Turkey's Stand

- Turkey considers the Syrian Kurdish militia as an offshoot of the Turkey Workers Party (PKK), the Kurdish militant group in Turkey. Therefore as a threat to the Turkish side.
- Turkey wants to create a buffer between the Syrian Kurdistan and the Turkish border.
- Turkey also plans to resettle some of the 3 million Syrian refugees it hosts in the buffer zone.

## India's Stand

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- India issued a strong statement expressing “**deep regret**” over Turkey’s military action in Syria and called it **unilateral and offensive**.
- India has called upon Turkey **to exercise restraint** and to respect the **territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria**.
- The diplomatic exchanges between Turkey and India have intensified in recent weeks following India’s decision to end the special status of Kashmir.  
Turkey supported Pakistan’s stance for reversal of the scrapping of Article 370.

## Kurds

- The Kurds are one of the **indigenous peoples of the Mesopotamian plains** and the highlands i.e. current south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and south-western Armenia.
- They form a distinctive community, united through race, culture and language, even though they have no standard dialect.  
They also adhere to a number of different religions and creeds, although the majority are Sunni Muslims.
- In the early 20th Century, many Kurds began to consider the creation of a homeland - generally referred to as "Kurdistan".  
But the boundaries of modern map of middle east made no provision for a Kurdish state and left Kurds with minority status in their respective countries.
- Thus Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran **demands recognition of their tradition, language and homeland state** (to be constituted with parts of south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran).

## Source:TH

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## Gangetic Dolphin Annual Census

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Recently, the **annual Ganges river Dolphin census** was undertaken by the **World Wide Fund for Nature- India** in collaboration with the **Uttar Pradesh Forest Department** along about 250 km. long riverine stretch of Upper Ganga river basin between **Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary** and **Narora Ramsar site**.

- This year the **tandem boat survey method** replaced the previous years’ **direct counting method** in order to provide a more accurate count of the endangered species.

In the ‘tandem boat survey’ method, the officials use two inflated boats which move in tandem to count the dolphins. After collating the data, statistical tools are employed to arrive at the final count.

- In 2015 census their count was 22, and since then the number has been stable in the last few years. This year, there is an expected rise in their number.

## Ganga River Dolphin (Platanista Gangetica)

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- The **Ganges river dolphin** is found in parts of the Ganges-Meghna-Brahmaputra and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- The Gangetic river dolphin is India's **national aquatic animal** and is popularly known as '**Susu**'.
- It is among the **four freshwater dolphins** in the world- the other three are:
  - The '**Baiji**' now likely extinct from the **Yangtze** River in China,
  - The '**Bhulan**' of the **Indus** in Pakistan, and
  - The '**Boto**' of the **Amazon** River in Latin America.
  - These four species live only in rivers and lakes.
- Its presence indicates the health of the riverine ecosystem.

## Threats:

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- **Pollution:** It faces a number of threats such as dumping of single-use plastics in water bodies, industrial pollution, fishing.
- **Restrictive Flow of Water:** The increase in the number of barrages and dams is also affecting their growth as such structures impede the flow of water.
- **Poaching:** Dolphins are also poached for their flesh, fat, and oil, which is used as a prey to catch fish, as an ointment and as a supposed aphrodisiac.
- **Shipping & Dredging:** It is also called a **blind dolphin** because it doesn't have an eye lens and uses **echolocation** to navigate and hunt.
  - Like bats, they produce high-frequency sounds which helps them to detect objects when the sound waves bounce off them.
  - Due to their dependence on echolocation, the Gangetic dolphins also suffer from the noise pollution created by large ship propellers, and by dredging.

## Protection Status

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- **IUCN** Status: Endangered
- It is listed on **CITES** Appendix-I.
- It is classified under Schedule 1, **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** providing absolute protection as offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.
- **Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur** district is India's only sanctuary for its national aquatic animal.

## **Source: TH**

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# Labour Rights & Tea Estates of Assam

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A report titled '**Addressing the Human Cost of Assam Tea**' by Oxfam has flagged violation of labour rights in the tea estates of Assam.

Along with Oxfam, Tata Institute of Social Sciences was also involved in this research.

## Key Findings

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- **Extremely Low Wages:**

- Workers are **paid in a 'blend' of cash and in-kind benefits** and services. Cash payments are supplemented by the provision of food rations and free housing, healthcare and primary education, as required by the Plantations Labour Act (PLA), 1951.
- Plantation owners describe wages in terms of the total value of both cash and in-kind benefits, claiming that this meets minimum wage levels.
  - India's **Minimum Wage Act of 1948** stipulates that in-kind benefits may not form part of the minimum wage calculation.
  - However, the Act is **not compulsory** and **Assam (like West Bengal) has agreed an exception for tea companies.**
- The cash component of Assam tea workers' wages is **well below the minimum wage level of unskilled agricultural workers in the state i.e. Rs. 254.91.**

- **Injustice for Women:**

- Women do the labour-intensive, low-paid task of plucking tea, while men get the better paid, more respected factory jobs.
- They are **excluded from decision making and from pay and working conditions negotiations**, partly due to being under-represented in trade unions.
- These add up to a working life deprived of dignity.

- **Lack of Basic Facilities:**

- **Indian tea estates** are legally obliged **under the PLA, 1951 to provide decent housing, healthcare**, education and working conditions – but are clearly **failing to do so.**
- Housing and toilets are dilapidated or non-existent.
- Most workers **do not have access to safe drinking water**, so they have to drink the contaminated water, meaning diseases such as cholera, typhoid etc.

- **Main Reason: Inequality of Power**
  - **Supermarkets and tea brands** in India **retain more than half (58.2%) of the final consumer price** of black processed tea sold in the country, with just **7.2% remaining for workers.**
  - The relentless squeeze by supermarkets and brands on the share of the end consumer price for tea makes poverty and hardship for workers in Assam more likely.
- **Suggestions:**
  - **Enabling Living Wages:** Closing the gap between current wages and living wages for tea workers could be supported in one of **two ways:**
    - Either by supermarkets **increasing the end consumer price of tea,** alongside making a commitment to pass this increase to workers rather than increasing their own margins.
    - Or alternatively, by maintaining current prices but **redistributing some of the retailer and tea brand share** of the end consumer price **to workers.**
    - It is to be noted that **the amount of additional money required to enable a living wage for workers is relatively small.**
    - Workers on tea estates in Assam currently receive just around Rs 3 per 100g of bagged black tea sold to consumers and would require only around Rs 7 to enable living wages to be paid.
- **For ending hardships:**
  - Tea brands and supermarkets should work with trade unions, civil society, producers and the relevant government bodies to address the systemic challenges facing the industry and end the human suffering of the millions of workers who depend on tea for their livelihood.
  - There is a need to ensure that **women workers have a voice** in decision making and can work in decent conditions without discrimination.
  - It should be ensured that **tea estates comply with their legal obligation under the Plantations Labour Act (PLA), 1951.**
    - In the proposed labour law changes, it needs to be ensured that the PLA provisions in the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code** further the realization of workers' rights and human rights
  - The government of Assam **should implement a minimum wage level of INR 351 per day, as committed by it.** Also, there is a need to **exclude in-kind benefits from minimum wage calculations** on tea plantations.

### **Plantations Labour Act (PLA), 1951.**

- The PLA of 1951 provides for the welfare of plantation labour and regulates the working conditions on plantations.

- The Government of India is **planning to subsume the PLA in the Labour Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Bill, 2019.**

This new Bill inter alia aims to provide fair wages to plantation workers by limiting the in-kind component of their pay and instead providing welfare facilities through the welfare schemes of the government.

### **Related Constitutional Provisions**

- Under the Constitution of India, Labour is a subject in the **Concurrent List** where both the Central & State Governments are competent to enact legislation subject to certain matters being reserved for the Centre.
- **Article 39** of the Constitution states that the State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing **equal pay for equal work for both men and women.**
- **Article 43** of the Constitution states that the State shall endeavour to secure, by suitable legislation or in any other way, to all workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise, **work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life.**

**Source: TH**

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