



News Analysis (11 Oct, 2019)

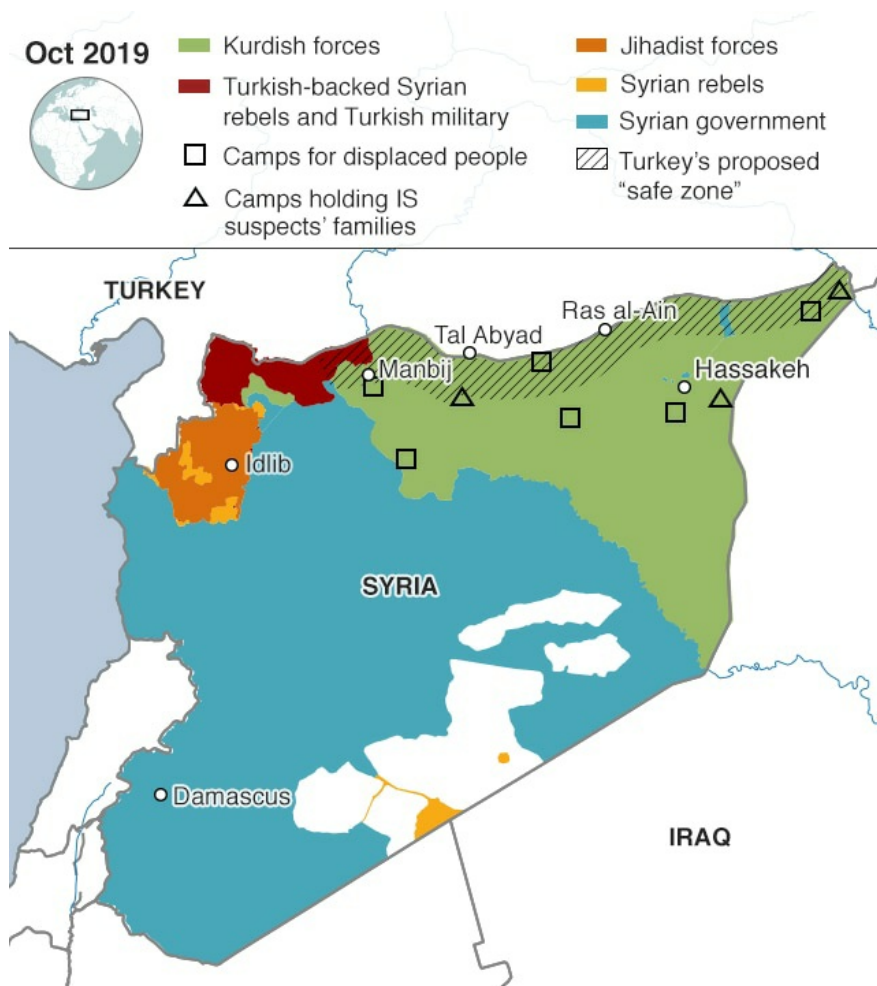
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Turkey's Offensive in Syria

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

- 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

Gangetic Dolphin Annual Census

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)

- 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

- **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

- **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

Invasive Weeds Threatening Tiger Habitats

The spread of **invasive weed species like Hyptis, Cassia Tora and Parthenium** has been detected in environmentally-sensitive areas like Adilabad district of Telangana.

- These invasive weeds do not allow the grasslands to grow, which in turn leads to a decrease in the population of herbivores, which are prey to the Tigers.
- The decrease in the numbers of herbivores may threaten the existence of the tiger population in the area.
- **The Rio de Janeiro Convention on Biodiversity (1992)** had recognised **the biological invasion of alien species of plants as the second-worst threat to the environment** after habitat destruction.

International Instruments and Programmes on Invasive Species

- **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000)**
 - The Protocol seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by **Living Modified Organisms** resulting from modern biotechnology.
- **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**
 - It was one of the key agreements adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
 - **Article 8 (h)** of the Convention calls on Parties to **prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species** which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.
- **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) or Bonn Convention (1979)**
 - It is an **intergovernmental treaty** that aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species throughout their range.
 - It also aims to control or to eliminate already present invasive alien species.
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**
 - It is an **international agreement** adopted in **1975** that aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
 - It also consider the problems of invasive species when it is involved in trade and threatens the survival of live animals or plants.
- **Ramsar Convention (1971)**
 - The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance is an **international treaty** for the **conservation and sustainable use of wetlands**.
 - It also addresses the environmental, economic and social impact of invasive species on wetlands within their jurisdictions and to take account of the methods of control and solutions for combating invasive species.

Central Council Of Health And Family Welfare Conference

Recently, the 13th Conference of the Central Council of Health and Family Welfare (CCHFW) was held in New Delhi.

Key Highlights

- The purpose of the meeting was to **build a consensus** on the **national health priorities**.
- It focused on **two priority areas** for the public health sector:
 - **Increasing health budgets** by the Centre and the States/UTs.
According to the **National Health Policy (NHP), 2017**, there has to be a collective increase in healthcare spending by the Centre & States/UTs to meet the goals of healthcare spending of **2.5% of GDP by 2025**.
 - **Strengthening of medical infrastructure**.
This would target the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through **Ayushman Bharat, eliminating TB** and other communicable diseases, **National Health Mission**, and other priority agendas.
- In the conference, the emphasis was laid upon **four pillars of healthcare**, which include,
 - Mission mode interventions,
 - Quality, accessible, and affordable healthcare services,
 - Universal health coverage, and
 - Adequate health infrastructure.

Central Council of Health and Family Welfare (CCHFW)

- It is an apex **advisory body** set up under **Article 263 of the Constitution** to provide support and advice to the **Department of Health, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** on policy formulation and to consider and recommend broad lines of policy in regard to matters concerning health.
- The first meeting of the CCHFW was held in **1988**.
- **Organizational Structure of Council:**
 - **Chairperson:** Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare,
 - **Vice-Chairperson:** Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare.

Article 263 of the Constitution

- Article 263 contemplates the establishment of an Inter-State Council to effect coordination between Centre and states. Thus, the President can establish such a council if at any time it appears to him that the public interest would be served by its establishment.
- Therefore, the president has established the following councils to make recommendations for the better coordination of policy and action in the related subjects:
 - Central Council of Health.
 - Central Council of Local Government and Urban Development.
 - Four Regional Councils for Sales Tax for the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Zones.
- To mark the occasion of **World Sight Day** (a global **annual** event observed on the **second Thursday of October**) report on '**National Diabetes & Diabetic Retinopathy Survey India 2015-19**' and on '**National Blindness & Visual Impairment Survey India 2015-19**' were released.

Major findings of the survey in India are:

 - One in eight persons above 50 years is **Diabetic**,
 - One in every 46 diabetics is **Blind**; and
 - One in seven suffers from some form of **visual impairment** due to high blood sugar levels.
- **Initiatives Launched:**
 - **Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN):** This initiative aims to achieve **zero** preventable **Maternal and Newborn Deaths**. On the occasion, its website and the grievance redressal portal was also launched.

According to the **NITI Aayog** data, **Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR)** has dropped by 8% in India to **130 per 100,000 live births**. The aim is to get it in line with the Sustainable Development Goal of 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.
 - **Other initiatives:** The minister unveiled two info-leaflets on Suicide Prevention to mark the **World Mental Health Day**.
 - Guidelines on Drugs and Diagnostic Service Initiative,
 - Guidelines for Biomedical Equipment Management & Maintenance Programme, and
 - Guidelines for Peritoneal Dialysis under **Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme**.

Way Forward

- There is a **need for enhanced engagement with the private sector** for augmenting the efforts of the public sector, to bring in equity by increasing the number of beds and hospitals, so as to meet the global standards of health infrastructure.

- Without the political leadership and commitment of the States & UTs, healthcare cannot be effective. As highlighted in Economic Survey 2017-18 the cooperative federalism “technology” of the GST Council that brings together the Center and States could be promisingly deployed to meet the desired targets.

Source: PIB

Child’s Right to Affection of Both Parents

The Supreme Court recently in a case has ruled that **‘a child has the right to affection of both his parents’**.

- The order is based on a plea by a man for custody of his child, who is with the wife.
- The court declined to interfere with the family court’s order granting custody of the child to the mother.
- However, it gave the man liberty to approach the family court for enhancement of his visitation rights.

SC’s Observations

- The **interest of the child should be kept foremost** in custody battles between separated parents.
- Family courts should grant visitation rights in such a manner that **a child is not deprived of the love and care of either parent**.

Issues related to the Custody of a Child

- The legal provisions which currently exist as per various personal laws are in the **nature of entrusting the custody of children exclusively to one of the parents** in case of separation.
Also, there are a number of provisions in various family law statutes which **discriminate** on the custodial rights of separated parents solely **on the basis of their gender**.
- This presumption severely **affects the rights of the spouse who has been denied custody rights** and the **rights of the child** who will be deprived of care and love of both parents.
It is argued that the present family laws **lack** a child-centric approach, which is based on the idea of **shared parenting**.
- The Supreme Court has recently agreed to examine provisions in family laws which allow exclusive custody of children to just one parent after a marital separation.

Divorce and Article 142

- Recently, the Supreme Court exercised its inherent powers **under Article 142** of the Constitution **to annul a marriage** of an estranged couple, residing separately for over two decades, **saying it was a case of irretrievable breakdown of wedlock**.
- Article 142 empowers the apex court to "pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it".
- The apex court in a series of verdicts **has asked the Centre to amend the law to introduce irretrievable breakdown as a ground of divorce but the law remains unamended** and divorce is denied even if the couple are not living together for years and their relationship bruised beyond repair. This effectively denies them an opportunity to explore life afresh as their marriage survives in law even if not in substance.
 - Even the Law Commission, in its reports in 1978 and 2009, recommended the Centre to take "immediate action" to amend the laws with regard to "irretrievable breakdown" where a "wedlock becomes a deadlock".
 - As the **Centre failed to act on the suggestions**, the apex court has from time to time invoked Article 142 for dissolution of a marriage where the court finds that the marriage is totally unworkable, emotionally dead, beyond salvage and has broken down irretrievably, even if the facts of the case do not provide a ground in law on which the divorce could be granted.

Source: TH

Labour Rights & Tea Estates of Assam

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

- **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

Green Crackers

In a bid to resolve the crisis of air pollution, the Government has launched **green firecrackers**.

- These crackers are available as sparklers, flowerpots, maroons and atom bombs and have been **developed by the National Environmental and Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)**, a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (**CSIR**) lab.
- CSIR has signed agreements with 230 companies to manufacture green crackers and make them available for sale.
- As per the CSIR's assessment, green crackers would **reduce particulate matter pollution by 30%**.
- **Green logo as well as a Quick Response (QR) coding system** has been developed for differentiation of green crackers from conventional crackers.
 QR codes is a novel feature incorporated on the fire crackers to avoid manufacture and sale of counterfeit products.

Background

- Concerned about the pollution levels and the role firecrackers played in exacerbating it, the Supreme Court in October 2018 banned the sale, use and manufacture of crackers that weren't 'green'.
- This meant that the crackers couldn't be loud beyond a certain limit, had to be approved by the **Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)** and had to be free of mercury, arsenic and barium. However, compliant crackers weren't available in the market.

- The Supreme Court, in May 2019, allowed the bulk manufacture of green crackers after the CSIR said its labs had been able to make trial samples and had them approved by the PESO.
CSIR's project of development of green crackers adopted a two-pronged approach.
 - One stream of activity was focussed on improving the traditional crackers through **reduction in the level of Barium Nitrate**.
 - The second pathway aimed at **replacing Barium Nitrate** with a more benign Potassium Nitrate.
- The apex court is expected to take a decision on "improved crackers", which have reduced levels of barium nitrate on 22nd October 2019.

Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation

- PESO is an office under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, **Ministry of Commerce and Industries**.
- It was established in 1898 as a **nodal agency for regulating safety of substances such as explosives**, compressed gases and petroleum.
- Its head office is located in **Nagpur, Maharashtra**.

National Environmental and Engineering Research Institute

- Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) is an autonomous body under Ministry of Science & Technology, having **38 national laboratories** working in various areas of science and technology
- **CSIR-NEERI is one among those laboratories.**

Source: TH
