

CURRENT AFFAIRS

14.11.17

1. FOR INDIA, PEACE IS NOT A WORD; IT IS IN OUR VEINS- PRIME MINISTER

- ✚ Highlighting India's role in the Indo-Pacific region, Prime Minister spoke of Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi's tradition of peace.
- ✚ In a meeting with the non-resident Indian community, he said that India has sacrificed lives for the peace of the world even as he informed U.S. President Donald Trump that India will play a role for the welfare of humanity.

"History does not show us a single incident in which India has done bad things to anyone. During the World War I and the World War II, we did not have any territorial ambition, yet more than 1.5 lakh soldiers of my country sacrificed lives in quest for peace. Because of this sacrifice, any Indian can say with pride that we contribute to the world and do not take anything from the world. For India, the land of Buddha and Gandhi, peace is not just a word, peace is in our veins. And, we certainly have never snatched anything from anybody in the past," said Prime Minister to a gathering of non-resident Indians living in Philippines

"I have come to a nation and a region that is very important to India," he said to a cheering crowd. His comment sets the backdrop of the quadrilateral dialogue that is being interpreted as a move to counter China's growing might, PM indicated India's growing ambition to emerge as a global peacekeeping and peace-enforcing power reminding that India recognizes the need for peace in the global order. "If any country in the world is the largest contributor to global peacekeeping, then it is India. In many restive areas of the world, Indian peacekeepers are present," he said.

2. STUDY INDICATES HIGH LEVEL OF MERCURY IN FISH AT KODAI LAKE



- ✦ Relying on findings from an expert team from IIT-Hyderabad, environmental activists have alleged that Hindustan Unilever's (HUL) presence from the mid-80s to the beginning of the millennium had polluted the Kodaikanal lake and the surrounding Periyakulam pond.
- ✦ Claiming that the mercury levels in fish in the region were high, activists under the banner 'Campaign to Cleanup Kodaikanal Mercury Pollution,' including members of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and CPI (ML), urged the government on Monday to share vital information with the people and prevent spread of diseases. The fish were tested in December 2016.
- ✦ The activists displayed a few photographs to show how people in the hilly region had been at the receiving end due to pollution and contamination of the environment beyond permissible levels.
- ✦ Accusing the government and the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) of being dormant in the past, activist Nityanand Jayaraman said that the study had found high levels of mercury in fish from Kodai lake and ponds fed by the Pambar stream in Periyakulam plains.
- ✦ He said that, in a letter written to Theni and Dindigul District Collectors and Kodaikanal Municipal Commissioner on August 2, 2017, IIT-Hyderabad scientist Asif Qureshihe had urged the administration to advise people, particularly, pregnant women, to limit their consumption of fish from these water bodies.

POTENCY OF MERCURY

- ✚ Mercury is a potent neurotoxin. It can damage the brain and also lead to kidney failure. Methyl mercury, the form that is found in fish, is even more poisonous.
- ✚ The U.S. environmental Protection Agency has prescribed a safe level of 30 microgram/kg of mercury in fish. However, four out of eight fish caught from Kodai lake contained between 31.1 and 41.9 microgram/kg.
- ✚ Fish caught from a pond fed by the Pambar stream, less than 5 km from Kumbakarai falls, contained far higher levels – between 94 and 165 micrograms/kg.
- ✚ Unilver’s proposed clean-up standard for soil in Kodaikanal was 20 times weaker than the soil guideline value for mercury in the UK, Unilever’s headquarters, Mr. Nityanand said. He urged the State government and the TNPCB to tighten the clean-up standards for Unilever’s contaminated site remediation.
- ✚ Meanwhile, responding to the allegations, a spokesperson for HUL said that over the last 15 years, independent studies carried out by IIT-Delhi, the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow, and the Indian Institute of Soil and Water Conservation Research Centre, Ooty, have confirmed that there has been no adverse impact on the environment outside the factory premises.
- ✚ The only exception is a small area on the perimeter of the factory, which HUL has already committed to remediate through soil remediation trials which commenced in August 2017 as per approval given by the TNPCB.
- ✚ With regard to the proposed clean-up standard for soil in Kodaikanal, he said that the TNPCB, in consultation with the Scientific Experts Committee (constituted by the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee), set the remediation standard of 20 mg/kg based on a site-specific risk assessment study in line with international best practices.

The standard has been confirmed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), to which the TNPCB had referred the matter. The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change has also endorsed the 20 mg/kg soil remediation standard.

3. MEERUT FARMERS DON'T BURN CROP STUBBLE: THEY MAKE MANURE OUT OF IT



- ✚ With stubble burning being held responsible for raising pollution to dangerous levels in the National Capital Region, over 50 villages in Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh have started an environment-friendly initiative.
- ✚ They have stopped burning crop residue, paddy waste and sugarcane leaves; instead, their farmers have started making organic manure from the remains. In the process, in the past one year alone, they prevented 2,250,000 kg of carbon dioxide from being released in the environment.
- ✚ The practice of stubble burning is confined mainly to Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. During the summer last year, over 250 farmers from 50 villages in Meerut division came up with a model that uses large quantities of paddy waste and sugarcane leaves to make rich quality of organic manure in a compost pit.

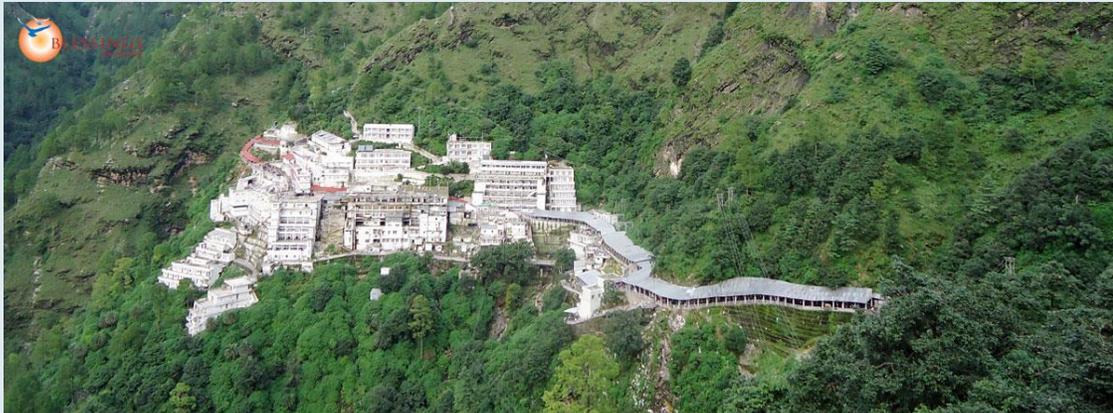
4. LIQUOR SALE BAN EXEMPTION APPLIES NATIONWIDE, SAYS SC

- ✚ The Supreme Court found itself surprised by a doubt raised by the Madras High Court about the December 2016 ban on sale of liquor within 500 metres along national and State highways.
- ✚ The bone of contention is a July 11 order of the apex court which clarified that stretches of highways running through municipal areas were exempted from the ban.
- ✚ But what has puzzled the Madras High Court is whether the exemption granted to municipal areas in the July 11 order pertained to only municipal areas in Chandigarh and none other.

- ✚ The question had popped up in the HC because the petitioner in the case was an NGO based in Chandigarh called Arrive Safe Society.
- ✚ The Madras HC asked the Tamil Nadu government to approach the Supreme Court and get a clarification.
- ✚ “The High Court says municipal areas in the SC order means only areas in Punjab and not in Chennai. The Chief Justice Bench of the HC wants a clarification whether the exemption applies only to Chandigarh,” senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for Tamil Nadu, addressed a Bench led by Chief Justice
- ✚ Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who had authored the highway ban verdict and is now part of the CJI’s Bench, observed that the exemption from ban applies to municipal areas across the country.
- ✚ The Madras High Court’s Division Bench of Chief Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice M. Sundar had recently felt that the State government should approach the apex court through an appropriate application and obtain further clarification on the specific issue as to whether it was entitled to open State-run liquor shops on highways passing through city and town limits without declassifying them. They had been hearing a public interest litigation.
- ✚ The Supreme Court had clarified in the July 11 order that its nationwide ban on sale of liquor within a distance of 500 metres along national and State highways does not extend to municipal areas. The court had clarified that the 500-metre ban does not prohibit licensed establishments within municipal areas.
- ✚ The apex court explained that the December 15, 2016 ban on liquor sale only extends along and in proximity of highways which provide connectivity between cities, towns and villages.
- ✚ This clarification from the apex court had effectively made infructuous any pending litigation in High Courts on declassification of State or national highways to district roads by State governments or local authorities. In short, stretches of highways running within city limits are now, by default, exempt from the liquor ban.
- ✚ The court’s clarification had come as a huge relief for bar and hotel owners who were forced to shut down operations post the December 15 ban. Thousands were left jobless after these establishments were closed down.
- ✚ On March 31, the court had dismissed their plea for modification of the ban and confirmed that the ban was not restricted to just liquor vends alongside the highways but also to other larger establishments, including pubs and hotels.

5. NGT ORDER

- ✦ Only 50,000 pilgrims will be allowed to visit the Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu to avoid any untoward incident
- ✦ The green panel also said that a new path to the shrine exclusively for pedestrians and battery-operated cars will be opened from November 24.
- ✦ The NGT directed that no horses or mules shall be allowed on the new route to the shrine and these animals shall be removed slowly from the old path as well.
- ✦ It also directed the authorities to impose a fine (environment compensation) of Rs 2,000 on anyone found littering the roads as well as the bus stop at the nearby Katra town.
- ✦ Vaishno Devi Mandir is a Hindu temple dedicated to the Hindu Goddess, located in Katra at the Trikuta Mountains within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.



6. SC TERMS DELHI SMOG LIFE-THREATENING

SEEKS RESPONSE OF CENTRE, PUNJAB AND HARYANA GOVTS.

- ✦ The Supreme Court on Monday sought the response of the Centre and the governments of Punjab, Delhi and Haryana on measures taken to counter the smog and pollution choking the national capital and surrounding areas.
- ✦ Acknowledging the dire consequences that continued exposure to peaking levels of air pollution would visit on the public, including schoolchildren, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra said long-term preventive measures should be taken to end this life-threatening situation caused by stubble burning and dust from construction activities.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION



Noting that the petition filed by advocate R.K. Kapoor, highlighting the need for action, should be restored to an appropriate Bench, the Supreme Court said it would focus on chalking out a long-term solution to the problem. Other forums like the National Green Tribunal (NGT) should go ahead with hearing the pollution cases, it said.

The apex court's green signal to the NGT came on a day the tribunal pulled up the Uttar Pradesh government for not complying with its order to ban construction in the National Capital Region despite PM10 level being over 900. The tribunal described the State's attitude as making a "mockery of the system."

7. TEJAS AIRCRAFT CAPABILITY TO BE ENHANCED



IAF had recently told the government that the LCA did not meet its requirements.

- ✦ In the face of the Air Force raising questions about the capability of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, the government is now aiming to install capability enhancements and speed up the rate of production.
- ✦ The production of Tejas Mk-1A will begin in 2019. Most of the 43 improvements have already been made and the tender process to install an Advanced Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar and Self-Protection Jammer is under way. A refuelling probe would also be added to increase range
- ✦ While the design cannot be changed and endurance improved as it is powered by the GE-404 engine, the enhancements will increase the capability of the aircraft. The IAF had told the government that Tejas did not meet its requirements.
- ✦ IAF was in the process of issuing a tender for the procurement of 100 jets through the Strategic partnership mode, for which the contenders were Lockheed F-16 and SAAB Gripen. Lockheed had tied up with Tata group and SAAB with the Adani group to build them locally if selected.
- ✦ Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) was undertaking the enhancements and was in the process of setting up another assembly line at a cost of Rs.130 crore to increase production rate from the present eight to 16. The second line would be ready by 2019 when Mk-1A began production.
- ✦ The HAL Tejas is an Indian single-seat, single-jet engine, multirole light fighter designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Air Force and Navy.
- ✦ The aircraft has a tail-less compound delta-wing configuration, which provides for high maneuverability. The Tejas is the second supersonic fighter developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) after the HAL HF-24 Marut.

8. 25 LAKH SCHOOL STUDENTS TESTED IN SURVEY

- ✦ This is the largest-ever survey of learning outcomes among school students in India
- ✦ The largest-ever survey of learning outcomes among school students covering 25 lakh students was held across India covering all the States of the country.

- ✚ Students of Classes III, V and VIII from government and government-aided schools were tested for their performance in terms of learning outcomes developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in Maths, languages, Sciences and Social Sciences.
- ✚ The National Achievement Survey NAS is a transparent and credible exercise done under third party verification.
- ✚ The survey tools used multiple test booklets with 45 questions in Classes III and V related to language and Mathematics, and 60 questions in Class VIII in Mathematics, Language, Sciences and Social Sciences.
- ✚ Students from 1.1-lakh schools across 700 districts in all 36 States/ Union Territories took the test.
- ✚ More than 1.75 lakh trained field investigators from outside the government education system were engaged to conduct the learning assessment in the country.
- ✚ To ensure fairness of the survey, a monitoring team was constituted which consisted of observers from inter-Ministerial departments drawn from the State governments, national and state observers from education departments and multi-lateral organisations.
- ✚ This monitoring team observed the implementation of the survey in all the districts on the day of assessment.
- ✚ District-wise learning report cards will now be prepared on a specially designed software. Analytical reports will also be prepared, with the analysis reflecting disaggregated learning levels. The process is expected to be complete in three-five months, said the release.
- ✚ The exercise is expected to help identify problem areas and facilitate better planning for the future.
- ✚ NGO Pratham's last Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for rural India documented the deficit in learning levels among school children. The proportion of Class VIII students who could solve a three-digit by one-digit division problem was 43.3% in 2016 and that of Class III students who could perform a two-digit subtraction was 27.7%.

9. 415 KILLED IN QUAKE ALONG IRAN-IRAQ BORDER

The 7.3-magnitude tremble had its epicentre in Penjwin, Sulaimaniyan Province, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq

- ✦ a major earthquake struck the Iran-Iraq border, killing at least 415 people and injuring thousands.
- ✦ The 7.3-magnitude quake rocked a border area 30 km southwest of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan
- ✦ Many people would have been at home when the quake hit in Iran's western Province of Kermanshah, about 15 km from the Iraq border, where authorities said it killed at least 407 people and injured 6,700.
- ✦ Sarpol-e Zahab, the worst hit area with a population of 85,000.

10. CHINA PROPOSES INCLUSIVE INDO-PACIFIC DIALOGUE AS RECIPE FOR REGIONAL PEACE



“The relevant proposal [of forming the Indo-Pacific quad] should be open and inclusive and should be conducive to the win-win cooperation and avoid politicising or excluding some relevant parties,” Mr. Geng observed.

- ✚ China on Monday proposed an inclusive dialogue among all countries in the Indo-Pacific area, following fledgling attempts to form the quad group comprising India, the United States, Australia and Japan.
- ✚ Officials from the quad--India, Japan, the United States and Australia-- have met in Manila on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit
- ✚ There is a wide-spread perception in China that the quad effort is primarily aimed at its “containment,” in response to Beijing’s rapid rise.

11. COUNTRIES SKIRT HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

Not much discussion on either Myanmar’s Rohingya issue or Philippines’ war on drugs

- ✚ Leaders of Asian nations meeting in Manila on Monday skirted around the mass exodus of Rohingya Muslims triggered by Myanmar’s military crackdown, disappointing human rights groups who were hoping for a tough stand on the humanitarian crisis. There was no pressure either from U.S. President Donald Trump over the Philippines’ bloody war on drugs during a meeting on the sidelines of the summit with President Rodrigo Duterte.
- ✚ A draft of the statement to be issued after a meeting of Southeast Asian leaders made no mention of the flight of Rohingya from military operations in Myanmar’s Rakhine State that the United Nations has described as ethnic cleansing.
- ✚ One paragraph mentioned fleetingly the importance of humanitarian relief for “affected communities” in Rakhine State.
- ✚ The statement was drawn up by the Philippines, current chair of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes Myanmar.
- ✚ The ASEAN leaders did agree that they should not take a lull in the dispute over the South China Sea for granted.

12. IAEA: IRAN COMPLYING WITH NUCLEAR DEAL

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog, said that **Iran remains in compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal** it signed with Western powers.

- ✚ The quarterly IAEA update confirmed that key parameters of Iran's nuclear program remained within the limits of the accord with major powers.
- ✚ The restricted report, said Iran "has not enriched" uranium above low levels and that its stockpile of enriched uranium was under the agreed limit of 300 kilograms (660 pounds).
- ✚ The new IAEA report said that the number of enrichment centrifuges installed at Iran's **Natanz site** remained below the upper limit of 5,060 during the reporting period.
- ✚ The volume of heavy water -- a reactor coolant -- remained below the agreed maximum of 130 tonnes throughout the past three months and on November 6 was 114.4 tons.
- ✚ Iran has gone above that ceiling twice since the deal came into force in January 2016.
- ✚ The IAEA assessment showed that, aside from on heavy water, a relatively minor breach, Tehran has complied with the deal since its entry into force in January 2016.

An IAEA report released in September had also affirmed Iran's compliance with the nuclear deal, which froze some of Tehran's nuclear activities. Last month, the watchdog's head, Yukiya Amano, **affirmed Iran's commitment** to the 2015 nuclear deal.

The IAEA report comes a month after U.S. President Donald Trump **refused to certify the deal**, saying it was not in America's national interest and leaving the accord's fate up to Congress.

13. RECORD DIPLOMATIC BODIES' UIN: CENTRE

'NO ADDITIONAL TAX ON SALES TO MISSIONS'

- ✚ The government has clarified that sales or supply to foreign diplomatic missions or UN organisations will not have any additional effect on the supplier's tax liability and so such supplies must be recorded along with the Unique Identification Number (UIN) of the recipient.
- ✚ This clarification follows several foreign diplomatic missions complaining that their suppliers are refusing to record their UIN during transactions.

UIN FOR REFUND CLAIMS

- ✚ Recording of UIN while making such sales will enable foreign diplomatic missions/UN organisations to claim refund of the taxes paid by them in India. Therefore, it is advised that under no circumstance any supplier should decline to record the UIN of the diplomat/official on the tax invoice.
- ✚ Foreign diplomats posted in New Delhi have complained to the Ministry of External Affairs that the Goods and Services Tax regime had modified the tax-exempt status of the foreign missions, and also that the UIN system meant that a country with an embassy as well as a consulate would have to acquire different UIN numbers for the embassy as well as the consulates.
- ✚ The diplomats also complained that the UIN system infringed on the confidentiality of diplomatic practices and privacy of foreign diplomats posted in India.

14. FOOD PRICES SPUR CPI INFLATION TO 3.58%

Acceleration in Oct. retail price gains also driven by fuel and light segment as crude oil climbs globally

- ✚ **Retail inflation accelerated to 3.58% in October on the back of rising food and fuel prices.**
Inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 3.28% in September and as low as 1.46% in June. The food and beverages component of CPI saw a growth of 2.26% in October, the fastest pace since March, and up from 1.76% in September. This was mainly driven by a sharp uptick in vegetable prices.
- ✚ Inflation in the fuel and light segment came in at 6.36%, up from 5.56% in September.
- ✚ The food influence is seasonal, but global crude prices are firming up and that will have a longer term adverse impact on Indian inflation
- ✚ Within the food segment, vegetable inflation quickened rapidly to 7.47% in October, from 3.92% in September. Price changes in almost all other key food segments — fruits, oils and fats, spices, pulses, and sugar and confectionery — hovered around the same levels as in September. Inflation in the milk and milk products category quickened to 4.30% in October from 3.87% in the previous month.
- ✚ Retail inflation has moved up in October on expected lines and is likely to breach the 4% mark in the coming months. Important to remember that the RBI now looks at an inflation target range of 4% plus/minus 2%. It seems that pay revision in the public sector and a change in the tax

regime has had some effect on prices while there has been some increase in vegetable prices due to erratic rains affecting supply.

- ✚ Increasing inflation prints, rising crude oil prices coupled with uncertainty on account of U.S. central bank's policy are likely to result in the RBI keeping rates unchanged in the upcoming policy meeting in December
- ✚ In October, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee had said that retail inflation was broadly moving along expected lines and projected that the rate would quicken to 4.2% to 4.6% over the following six months.
- ✚ Oil prices are currently at about \$64 a barrel, far higher than the average \$50-55 a barrel seen over the last 18 months or so.
- ✚ Core inflation, which excludes food and fuel inflation, eased marginally to 4.55% in October, from 4.60% in the previous month, breaking a three-month quickening streak.
- ✚ Inflation in the other major categories of the CPI remained stable. The rate of growth of prices in the clothing and footwear category speeded up a tad to 4.76% in October, from 4.63% in September. Inflation in the housing sector accelerated to 6.68%, from 6.10% in the preceding month.