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General Studies-I (Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society)

Wetlands disappearing at an alarming pace, says report-They remain dangerously undervalued, warns the Ramsar Convention

- Wetlands, among the world's most valuable and biodiverse ecosystems, are disappearing at an alarming speed amid urbanisation and agriculture shifts, conservationists said, calling for urgent action to halt the erosion.
- Martha Rojas Urrego, head of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, told, warning of the potential devastating impact of wetland loss, including on climate change.
- The convention, adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar nearly a half-century ago, issued its first-ever global report on the state of the world's wetlands.
- The report found that around 35% of wetlands — which include lakes, rivers, marshes and peatlands, as well as coastal and marine areas like lagoons, mangroves and coral reefs — were lost between 1970 and 2015.
- Today, wetlands cover more than 12 million square km, the report said, warning that the annual rates of loss had accelerated since 2000.
- While the world has been increasingly focussed on global warming and its impact on oceans and forests, the Ramsar Convention said wetlands remain "dangerously undervalued".

Dubai meet

- The report, released ahead of a meeting of the parties to the convention in Dubai next month, stressed the importance of wetlands to all life on Earth.
- Directly or indirectly, they provide almost all of the world's consumption of freshwater and more than 40% of all species live and breed in wetlands.
- Animals and plants who call wetlands home are particularly vulnerable, with a quarter at risk of extinction, the report said.
- Wetlands also provide a livelihood for more than one billion people, while mitigating floods and protecting coastlines.

- They are also a vital source of food, raw materials and genetic resources for medicines.
 - The Ramsar Convention has been ratified by most of the world's nations, including the U.S., China and India, and since coming into force in 1975 has designated more than 2,300 sites of international importance.
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Supreme Court opens Sabarimala temple to women of all ages

- The Supreme Court, in a majority opinion of 4:1, lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women from the age of menarche to menopause to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala.
- "Right to pray" in the temple for women between 10 and 50 years of age won over the 'right to wait' campaign as the Supreme Court condemned the prohibition as "hegemonic patriarchy" saying Patriarchy cannot trump freedom to practice religion.
- The main opinion shared by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra and Justice A.M. Khanwilkar tells that ban on women ,the dualistic approach is nothing but patriarchy practised in religion.
- The ban 'exacts' more purity from women than men.
- It said that exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was unconstitutional.
- It amounted to discrimination based on a biological factor exclusive to gender.
- It was violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.

Judges Opinions

- In a separate, but concurring opinion, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud held that to treat women as the children of a lesser God was to blink at the Constitution and the prohibition was a form of untouchability.
- He said the logic behind the ban was that presence of women deviated men from celibacy.
- This was placing the burden of a men's celibacy on women thus, stigmatising women and stereotyping them. Individual dignity of women could not be at the mercy of a mob.
- Morality was not ephemeral. It transcended biological and physiological barriers.
- Chief Justice Misra wrote that relation with the Creator was a transcending one. Physiological and biological barriers created by rigid social dogma had no place.
- The CJI and Justice Khanwilkar held that the Sabarimala prohibition was a prejudice against women, which was zealously propagated and was not an essential part of religion.
- The majority view declared **Rule 3(b)** of the **Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965**, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, as ultra vires the Constitution.
- The CJI and Justice Khanwilkar held that the Rule violated the fundamental right

of a Hindu woman to offer worship at a place of her choice.

- Right to worship is equally available to men and women.
- The majority on the Bench agreed and Justice Rohinton Nariman held that Ayyappa devotees do not form a separate religious denomination, but it was only a part of Hindu worship.
- Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion.
- She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints.
- She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion.
- Constitutional morality in a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.
- Justice Malhotra observed that the freedom to practice their beliefs was enshrined in Article 25 of the Constitution.
- Harmonisation of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs.
- The Judge held that there were strong, plausible reasons to show that Ayyappa devotees had attributes of a religious denomination as they have a distinct names, properties.
- Besides, the Sabarimala temple was not funded out of the Consolidated Fund.
- The Temple Protection Movement (TPM) has supported the view of Justice Indu Malhotra.

Nair Service Society: prohibition not based on misogyny but celibate nature of deity

- Senior advocate K. Parasaran, for the Nair Service Society, countered the apex court's observations about patriarchy.
- The prohibition was not based on misogyny but the celibate nature of the deity, he said.
- Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, for the Travancore Devaswom Board, argued that Sabarimala did not practice exclusion.
- People from all walks of life and from every creed, caste and religion entered and offered their prayers in the temple.
- He submitted that it was also physiologically impossible for women to observe the 41-day penance before the pilgrimage.
- He reiterated that the restriction found its source in the celibate status of the Sabarimala deity and not in patriarchy.
- However, the Kerala government reaffirmed its complete support for lifting the prohibition.
- With the verdict, the Supreme Court has set aside a 27-year-old Kerala High Court judgment that upheld the prohibition.
- The High Court had pointed out that the 'Naisthik Brahmachari' nature of the deity was "a vital reason for imposing this restriction on young women".

Green learning: language grows on trees in this plot-Global Language Park in Pune to promote linguistic diversity

- In what is certainly the first such experiment in the country, and perhaps the world, the eminent linguist Ganesh Devy who was awarded the Linguapax Prize by the United Nations in 2011 plans to set up a Global Language Park (bhasha van in Hindi) in Pune.
- It will be located on a one-acre plot on the premises of the Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU).
- Conceptualised as part of the 84th PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) International Congress that is under way in the city, the park will have about 80 'language trees.'
- Akin to the concept of a language tree in English grammar, each of the 80 trees will symbolise a major or minor language tree sprouting from the important language families.
- Each tree represents the languages and dialects derived from the family or parent tree, explaining the connection between natural trees and languages in the park.
- Linguists estimate that the world has more than 140 language families, each with its member-languages and dialects.

Audio tour

- Set to open in January 2019, the park will have a tree-lined walkway.
- Each plant will be equipped with a 'bespoke audio tour' to aid visitors.
- Audio samples of songs, poems, folk tales, sayings, and jokes will be drawn from different world languages.

Saplings planted

- Writers from across the world, including poet-essayist Ashok Vajpeyi, Spanish poet Carles Torner and political psychologist Ashis Nandy, planted a sapling each.
- The Savitribai Phule Pune University will nurture the trees.

River pollution: NGT directs States to act-Orders preparation of action plans within two months

- Taking suo motu cognisance on the increase in polluted river stretches in the country, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed all States and Union Territories to prepare action plans within two months.
- Stating that the action plans should aim at improving the polluted stretches for "at least bathing purposes", a bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh

Kumar Goel said.

- The tribunal specified that Chief Secretaries of each State and administrators of UTs will be “personally accountable for failure to formulate action plan.”
- The bench directed that four-member committees, comprising representatives of State pollution control boards and the State governments, be constituted for preparing and executing the action plans.

Components of Action Plan

- The action plan will include components like
 - Identification of polluting sources
 - Including functioning or status of sewage treatment plants,
 - Common effluent treatment plants, solid waste management and processing facilities, quantification and
 - Characterisation of sewage generated in the catchment area of the polluted river stretch
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12 satellite-tagged vultures take wing from Nepal-Eight of them are captive-bred; the birds are also fitted with wing tags

- In a first for Asia, Nepal released 12 satellite-tagged white-rumped vultures, eight of which are captive-bred – chicks born to vultures in captivity.
- This signifies a huge step for the vulture breeding and recovery programme in not just Nepal but the entire subcontinent, as India’s captive-bred vultures too await their turn, said Chris Bowden, programme manager of SAVE-Vultures, a consortium that co-ordinates recovery efforts and conservation breeding programmes across Asia.

Second release

- This is Nepal’s second vulture release; last year, it released six captive-reared (wild chicks reared in captivity) satellite-tagged white-rumped vultures.

The Indian connection

- Eliminating the illegal use of **diclofenac (its consumption through cattle carcasses is lethal to vultures)** is crucial to complement conservation measures, including the breeding programme (where vultures are reared and bred in captivity, and released in the wild to prevent species extinction).
- Before release, the birds are fitted with satellite and wing tags; these are now providing interesting information about the movement of Nepal’s vultures.
- The Indian government has granted permission to satellite-tag captive-bred white-rumped vultures in Haryana’s Pinjore, one of the conservation breeding centres in India.
- Here, as the vultures await their satellite tags from the government, survey teams

monitor availability of diclofenac in local pharmacies and test for its residue in cattle carcasses.

- Of India's nine vulture species, four (including the white-rumped) are categorised as "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Additional Info:

- Populations of three formerly abundant species of vulture endemic to Asia collapsed in the 1990s over a huge area covering India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- Scientific research identified the veterinary drug diclofenac as the main cause of these declines.
- SAVE was established in 2011 as a consortium to co-ordinate and drive forward the ambitious long-term international conservation effort without which the Critically Endangered oriental white-backed (Gyps bengalensis), long-billed (G. indicus) and slender-billed vulture (G. tenuirostris) would go extinct.
- These species are breeding residents in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Cambodia, and also have non-breeding or marginal status in Afghanistan, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- A further two species, the Critically Endangered red-headed vulture (Sarcogyps calvus) and the Endangered Egyptian vulture (Neophron percnopterus) have also undergone declines.
- The subcontinent-wide decline in Asian vultures has attracted the attention of the world's conservation community.
- SAVE is a collaboration between a large and growing number of conservation and research groups.
- The mission statement is "To respond to the vulture crisis in Asia by striving to halt vulture population declines and working to minimise their negative impacts on ecological and human health".

Key Actions

- Rapid removal of diclofenac and other drugs toxic to vultures from their food supply in key areas defined as Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) where vulture populations remain.
- Removal of diclofenac and other toxic drugs from the whole of the species' range to enable spread of birds from VSZs, with appropriate regulation, monitoring and enforcement, and testing of new drugs.
- Conservation breeding of vultures to ensure that the species do not go extinct and to provide a pool from which to re-establish wild populations.
- SAVE co-ordinate recovery efforts across vulture range countries, provide scientific and other advice, and help with publicity and fund-raising.
- SAVE is not a legally constituted body and does not have an office or independent staff, and open to new partners.

Kanniyakumari's lighthouse set to beam anew-In a first, the 19th century Muttom facility will become a tourist attraction offering 60 cottages

Directorate of Lighthouses and Lightships

- Tenders soon to be called for the construction of 60 cottages by the Noida-based Directorate of Lighthouses and Lightships for beach resort planned at the Muttom Lighthouse in Kanniyakumari district, Tamil Nadu.
- The Directorate has administrative control of the entire national coastline, which is divided into nine districts ranging from Gandhidam to Port Blair.
- This will be the first such lighthouse in the country to get such facilities which will be constructed under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

Gandhi: a fox or a hedgehog?-He was a man who looked for a harmonious universe, but he was also a pragmatist

- As the world prepares to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary in 2019, opinions and views about his person and his non-violent technique of struggle remain deeply divided.
- For some, he was a puritanical, conservative critique of modernity for whom he created and perpetuated unrealistic and confused ideas about economic development and technological progress.
- For his admirers, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a man of spiritual truthfulness and democratic action, both at the public and personal levels, with a unique method of struggle that combined political pragmatism with ethical integrity.
- Some among these admirers evaluate Gandhi's impact on human history as being as significant as that of Jesus, Buddha and Karl Marx.

Two Gandhis

- Thus, in the minds of people around the world, Gandhi represents two different and contradictory characters.
- The first Gandhi is the political Gandhi who fought against British colonialism and is the father of the modern Indian nation.
- The second Gandhi is the Ashramic Gandhi who is more of a mystic than a politician, who used fasting as a method of struggle, and who Rabindranath Tagore considered as the "Mahatma", the "Great Soul".
- To be sure, Gandhi certainly deserves the accolade as a courageous fighter, a deep thinker, and a great leader of men and ideas.
- But if anything, Gandhi was a man of experimentation, a man who insisted on the quest for truth.
- As such, Gandhi claimed that his life was his message, simply because he

extended his practice of satyagraha (asserting for truth) to all walks of life.

- Gandhi, in short, was a leader looking for a spiritual cause who found it, of course, in his non-violence and, ultimately, in independence for India.
- But there is more to Gandhi which makes him a political thinker and a relevant social reformer.
- Gandhi was a dialogical thinker who was open to other horizons of thinking.
- He firmly believed that the spirit of genuine reciprocity and solidarity is not just a moral requirement, but also a geopolitical necessity.
- He encouraged inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, so that individuals could see their faith and culture in a comparative and critical reflection of the other.
- The point here is that in Gandhi's political thinking, the experience of freedom derives not only from constitutional rights but mainly from the diverse modes of participation of the individual in a common humanity.
- Today, many around the world consider Gandhian ideas as impractical, not to say utopian.
- However, Gandhian ethics of social and political reconstruction are more relevant than ever, since they represent an act of self-transformation of humanity rather than an illusory dream of a political leader.
- Gandhi wanted to change the values that govern the social, political and economic activities in human society.
- Significantly, like Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi believed that decentralised politics and an egalitarian economy function better at the level of micro-communities, where citizens can operate in relations of reciprocity and mutuality.

Who Wins?

- As a dreamer who looked for a harmonious universe, Gandhi was a hedgehog, but as a pragmatist who had a devastating sense of reality, he was a fox who knew many things about the insane world of human beings filled with hatred, revenge, greed for power and violence.
- The question is, in history who wins? The fox or the hedgehog?

In a first, South African lion cubs conceived artificially-The breakthrough came after 18 months of trials at the University of Pretoria

- The first ever lion cubs to be born by means of artificial insemination — the first such pair anywhere in the world at conservation centre, announced the University of Pretoria, whose scientists are researching the reproductive system of female African lions.
- The two cubs, a male and female, born on August 25 are healthy and normal, said the director of the University of Pretoria's mammal research institute.
- His team's breakthrough came after 18 months of intensive trials where they collected sperm from a healthy lion.

- Then when the lioness' hormone levels were found to be viable, she was inseminated artificially.
 - The breakthrough could be repeated, with scientists hoping the technique can be used to save other endangered big cats.
 - Lions are extinct in 26 African countries and numbers in the wild have plummeted 43% over the last two decades, with roughly only 20,000 left, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which lists the African lion as vulnerable.
 - Andre Mentz, a prominent lion breeder in South Africa's Free State province, described the birth of the cubs as "very revolutionary".
 - But animal welfare organisations are less enthused as they opine that the captive lion breeding industry is exploitative and profit-driven.
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False association-Pakistan's neo-Deobandis are defaming the school's foundational philosophy

- The neo-Deobandis of Pakistan are a blot on the reputation of the Darul Uloom Deoband (in picture), India's premier Islamic seminary.
 - Supported by Saudi money, they have adopted a form of Wahhabism that stands in direct contradiction to the original philosophy of Deoband.
 - Wahhabism, which represents a rigid, exclusivist, virulently anti-Sufi form of Islam that allows its adherents to proclaim other Muslims as 'unbelievers', is in stark contrast to the original Deobandi perspective.
 - Hence, for the neo-Deobandis of Pakistan to attack Sufi shrines is a travesty of the original teachings.
 - At its inception, the Deoband movement was a progressive bastion of anti-colonialism.
 - Most important, Deoband was and is a proponent of muttahida qawmiyat (composite nationalism).
 - Therefore, for the so-called Deobandis of Pakistan to claim ideological descent from the Darul Uloom is pure fabrication that defames Deoband and distorts its foundational philosophy.
 - Given Deoband's uncompromising opposition to the idea of Pakistan, the very term 'Pakistani Deobandi' is a contradiction in terms.
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Lagoon villas to come to Lakshadweep's emeralds-NITI Aayog plans 'eco-cottages' and a film city to boost tourism in the island territories

- There is now a plan to come up with a popular alternative to leading destinations such as Mauritius and Maldives, if the government's plan for the "holistic development of the islands" is any indication.
- Jitendra Kumar, Adviser, NITI Aayog, stated that government wants to set up island water villas because of abundant lagoon area, ecological concerns and

tribal-related issues will be fully addressed.

- Other countries have built villas and attract tourists from across the globe and now it's India's turn.
 - NITI Aayog, along with other stakeholders, including the Island Development Agency (IDA), which is chaired by Home Minister Rajnath Singh, is conducting a technical feasibility study for the project.
 - Additionally, efforts are on to identify an island where a film city can be built easing pressure on Mumbai as a filming hub.
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Gujarat acts to save its pride-While efforts continue to protect Gir lions which are perishing at an alarming rate

- Stunned by the deaths of 23 lions since September, the Gujarat government, which initially insisted that the lions had died due to infighting for territorial domination, has now sprung into action and launched not only rescue efforts but also called experts from outside, including London, and imported a vaccine from the United States.
 - In possibly the worst-ever tragedy in the Gir forest, the only abode of Asiatic lions in the world, apart from the 23 lions that have died since September, as many as 36 are battling for their lives as a deadly outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and tick-borne Babesiosis is killing the great cats famously known as Gujarat's pride.
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Next steps at Gir-A geographically separate population of Asiatic lions needs to be created

- While mass mortalities in wildlife are always a cause for concern, this case is even more worrisome as the big cat population in Gujarat is the last of the Asiatic lions in the wild.
- In 2013, the Supreme Court had issued an order that lions from Gujarat be relocated to the Kuno sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh as a check against the threat of epidemic.
- But even wild animals are subject to State politics.
- Gujarat has been unwilling to part with its lions, calling them "its pride" in an affidavit.

New-age conservation

- In its 2013 order, the Supreme Court had said: "Asiatic lion, it has been noticed, has been restricted to only one single habitat, i.e. the Gir National Forest and its surrounding areas and an outbreak of possible epidemic or natural calamity might wipe off the entire species."
- The court also noted how 30% of the lion population in Tanzania's Serengeti was

- killed due to an outbreak of canine distemper, a viral disease that affects animals.
- Gujarat's response to this was that lions are now spread over the Greater Gir region and this reduces the threat.
 - It has also had an intense, managerial response to the disease — when ill, lions are routinely picked up, medically treated, and then released.
 - Wildlife conservation concerns itself with maintaining ecological processes and reducing threats to endangered species.
 - Yet even the most flexible of conservationists would agree that intensive artificial medical treatment of wild animals does not augur well for long-term sustainability.
 - The role of wildlife managers should be to reduce unnatural threats, not unnaturally prolong life.
 - While Gujarat has done a good job of conserving its lions, it should turn its attention to reducing the drivers of disease, which includes controlling feral dog populations.

On metapopulations

- Gujarat submitted before the Supreme Court that one of the reasons it did not want to part with the lions was because there are metapopulations in the State.
- Metapopulations may be geographically separate but have interactions and an exchange of individuals.
- Crucially though, these areas are connected to each other and this does not address the main concern of creating geographically distant populations.
- Undoubtedly, after the lion deaths, Gujarat should work towards colonising new habitats outside the Gir landscape within the State.
- Finally, there is no getting around the fact that a geographically separate population of Asiatic lions needs to be created.

Honouring the British Indian Army

- The Khanjar (knife) of Tipu Sultan of 1799, an 1840 painting of Skinner's horse regiment, objects of silver and an extensive collection of uniforms are among a range of items of the British Indian Army in the collection of the National Army Museum in London.
- Over the next couple of years, a range of this collection will be exhibited in a new gallery.
- With the centenary of the end of World War-I coming up in November, the museum is keen to seize the opportunity and tell this amazing story.
- On November 11, 1918 an armistice was signed between the Germans and the Allies, ending World War-I, also called the Great War, Indian soldiers under the British Indian Army played a decisive role in several battles in many theatres across the globe.
- While the idea is to position the gallery as a must see for visitors to London

interested in military history of the Indian sub-continent, there are plans to host the collection online to enable access from across the globe.

- November 11 or Armistice Day is observed as Remembrance Day to mark the sacrifices of the Great War.
- India Gate in the national capital has a memorial dedicated for the fallen Indian soldiers of WW-I, inscribed with over 72,000 names.
- The National Army Museum is working with the United Service Institution (USI) of India in this endeavour and is also exploring opportunities with other stakeholders.

Indian democracy's Westphalian moment-The Congress and non-NDA regional parties must forge 'a practical accommodation to reality'

- With the Election Commission having announced the schedule for elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Telangana in November-December, the stage has been set for a 'dress rehearsal' of the elections to the Lok Sabha in 2019.
- This dress rehearsal will, in ideological terms, be a straight fight between majoritarian supremacism and democracy, between ideological hegemonism and constitutional federalism.
- The 'Karnataka moment' was what can be called a Westphalian moment.

Message from 1648

- The Treaties of Westphalia ushered in a balance between states in central Europe which had, until that watershed accord, been dominated by the Holy Roman Empire with the Habsburgs and their Catholic allies on one side and Europe's Protestant nations and France (Catholic but anti-Habsburg) on the other.
- Westphalia has its critics who point to the risks of territoriality stemming from geopolitical autonomy, but it has, nonetheless, become a metaphor, a by-word for smaller entities coming together to resist the might of the physically and militarily large, the technologically and financially preponderant and the politically dominant.
- No analogies are perfect, no metaphors fit like a glove but post-Karnataka India, in 2018, shows unmistakable signs of a Westphalian moment — its fragilities and possibilities, both.
- If in the State Assembly elections that have just been calendared, the Congress shows a "practical accommodation to reality", then the possibility of the gesture being reciprocated by the regional parties and by India's Left, never to be discounted either for its ideological voltage or its numerical increment, in 2019 gets enhanced.

A choice and a chance

- That highly intelligent voter must be given the choice and the chance to vote

simultaneously for federalism within the State and democracy at the Centre.

- And that choice and chance can be given to the voter only if the Congress and the other Opposition parties come together in a pre-poll alliance.
- If they do not have such an alliance and the democratic vote gets splintered, plain arithmetic tells us that the chance of majoritarianism getting the better of democracy will heighten.
- Its Westphalian moment must be seen and grasped by India's democratic Opposition.

Overcoming memory

- The Congress's memory of its past supremacy energises it but restricts its scope for a practical accommodation of current realities.
 - They are not about a choice between democrats within democracy, but a choice in a fragile democracy between those who want to protect it and those who want to usurp it.
 - The party is bigger than its leaders, the nation bigger than a party.
 - Never before has this been truer than today when a systematic attempt is being made to use the methods of democracy to morph it into its very antithesis.
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Cyclone Titli to hit East Coast-Bulletin advises total suspension of fishing till October 11

- The Indian National Centre for Oceanic Information Services (INCOIS) and the Indian Met Department (IMD) in a joint bulletin evening called for total suspension of fishing operations, and urged fishermen not to venture into deep sea till October 11 while advising coastal hutment dwellers to move to safer places with the deep depression over Bay of Bengal intensifying into a cyclonic storm, christened Titli.
- It is highly likely to intensify further into a severe cyclonic storm during the next 24 hours and move west-northwestwards for some more time, then northwestwards and cross Odisha and adjoining north Andhra Pradesh coasts between Gopalpur and Kalingapatnam around October 11 morning, causing heavy rain.

Cyclone Luban

- Meanwhile, another cyclonic storm, Luban, over Arabian Sea is also highly likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm.
- Hence, fishermen have been warned not to venture into the deep sea areas of west-central Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden at least till October 13.
- Gale wind speed reaching 85-95 kmph gusting to 105 kmph is prevailing and could increase gradually to 135 kmph during October 10-12 and then decrease gradually over southwest Arabian Sea by October 13.

The power of non-alignment-There is space to resurrect the old movement as a soft balancing mechanism against powerful states

- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and its precursor, the Bandung Afro-Asian conference in 1955, were examples of soft balancing by weaker states towards great powers engaged in intense rivalry and conflict.
- As they had little material ability to constrain superpower conflict and arms build-ups, the newly emerging states under the leadership of India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and Indonesia's Sukarno, and later joined by Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, adopted a soft balancing strategy aimed at challenging the superpower excesses in a normative manner, hoping for preventing the global order from sliding into war.
- The founders of the NAM, if alive today, could have taken solace in the fact that in the long run some of their goals were achieved due to a radical change in the policies of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Understanding a movement

- The NAM is often not given credit for what it deserves, because by the 1970s, some of the key players, including India, began to lose interest in the movement as they formed coalitions with one or the other superpower to wage their conflicts with their neighbours.
- The Western countries often portrayed non-alignment as pro-Soviet or ineffective and the general intellectual opposition was the result of the Western scholarly bias against a coalitional move by the weaker states of the international system.
- Despite all its blemishes, the NAM and the Afro-Asian grouping acted as a limited soft balancing mechanism by attempting to delegitimise the threatening behaviour of the superpowers, particularly through their activism at the UN and other forums such as the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament, as well as through resolutions.
- They definitely deserve partial credit for ending colonialism as it was practised, especially in the 1950s and 1960s in Africa, parts of Asia and the Caribbean through their activism at the UN General Assembly which declared decolonisation as a key objective in 1960.

Impact on N-tests

- The non-aligned declarations on nuclear testing and nuclear non-proliferation especially helped to concretise the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.
- They also helped create several nuclear weapon free zones as well as formulate the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.
- The tradition of 'non-use of nuclear weapons', or the 'nuclear taboo', was strengthened partially due to activism by the non-aligned countries' at the UN.
- As the great powers are once again launching a new round of nuclear arms race

and territorial expansion and militarisation of the oceans, a renewed activism by leading global south countries may be necessary to delegitimise their imperial ventures, even if they do not succeed immediately.

- If these states do not act as cushioning forces, international order could deteriorate and new forms of cold and hot wars could develop.
- China, the U.S. and Russia need to be balanced and restrained and soft balancing by non-superpower states has a key role to play in this.
- Smaller states would be the first to suffer if there is a war in the Asia-Pacific or an intense Cold War-style rivalry develops between the U.S. and China.

The way forward

- They could engage in soft balancing of this nature hoping to delegitimise the aggressive behaviour of the great powers.
- The rise of China and India, with their own ambitious agendas, makes it difficult that either will take the lead in organising such a movement.
- More concrete initiatives may have to rest with emerging states in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping.
- Engaging China and India more intensely while restraining the U.S. and Russia from aggravating military conflict in Asia-Pacific can be the effort of the developing countries.
- The alternative is to leave it to the great powers to engage in mindless arms race and debilitating interventions, which rarely create order in the regions.
- Restraining the established and rising powers through institutional and normative soft balancing may emerge as an option for developing countries in the years to come.

INCOIS gets it right on Cyclone Titli-Sends warning signals to seafarers with the help of a test device called Navic app

- The **Indian National Centre for Oceanic Information Services (INCOIS)** was able to send warning signals to seafarers out in the deep sea during Cyclone Titli with the help of a prototype test device called **Navic app**, developed by **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System**.

WAMAN network

- INCOIS also has 16 '**WAMAN**' (**Wave Monitoring Along Nearshore**) buoy network with real-time connectivity for closely monitoring such situations along the Indian coastline.

Unclogging our oceans-India can emulate innovative solutions from across the

world to tackle the problem of ghost gear

- In March 2018, fishermen hauled 400 kg of fishing nets out of the sea in a few locations off Kerala's south coast.
- The problem of ghost gear (any fishing equipment that has been lost, discarded or abandoned in water bodies) has grown from a fishing fallout that people had not heard of to one that is now difficult to ignore.

Consequences of marine debris

- Between 2011 and 2018 alone, the Olive Ridley Project, a U.K. registered charity that removes ghost nets and protects sea turtles, recorded 601 sea turtles being entangled in ghost gear near the Maldives, of which 528 were Olive Ridleys — the same species that come in thousands to Odisha's coasts to nest.
- Other casualties worldwide include whales, dolphins, sharks and even pelagic birds.
- In 2016, when a team of marine biologists reviewed 76 publications and other sources of literature on ghost gear from across the world, they found that over 5,400 marine animals belonging to 40 different species were recorded as entangled in ghost gear, or associated with it.
- This analysis also showed a huge gap in data from the Indian, Southern and Arctic Oceans, prompting the team to recommend that future studies focus on these areas.
- And data is crucial here, for the detrimental effects of these nets also spillover into other countries and oceans.
- Ocean currents carry them for thousands of km across the ocean floor, ensnaring, injuring and drowning marine life and damaging live corals along the way.
- Discarded Indian and Thai fishing nets, for instance, have been fished out of Maldivian coasts, reports a study that examined 74 separate ghost net collections between 2013 and 2014.

National Ghost Net Management Policy

- According to the scientists, the Indian government is also currently preparing a national ghost net management policy.
- Images of turtles tangled in nylon and of beautiful blue oceans blemished by a mist-like white net floating about highlight the plight of marine life and prompt immediate action.
- But the consequences of overfishing, using nets of the smallest mesh size, and illegal fishing are far less visible, though more worrying.
- Entire fishing communities are affected by these actions, especially in developing countries like India where the demand for fish keeps rising.

Transforming used nets

- In one instance in India, ghost nets hauled from Kerala's Kollam have been used to pave roads.

- This shows that transformation is possible, though more efforts to make the process more organised across the over 7,500 km of India's coasts, as well as inland water bodies, are the need of the hour.
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Saffron marigold is the colour of sacrifice-It will be the symbol of remembrance for Indian soldiers martyred in First World War

- The ubiquitous marigold will be the symbol of India's sacrifices when the world marks the centenary of the end of the First World War on November 11.
- In line with this, the '**India Remembers**' project, initiated by the United Service Institution of India (USI), proposed that the marigold flower join the poppy as a uniquely Indian symbol of remembrance.

Why was it chosen?

- The marigold was chosen because it is easily and widely available and also because saffron is often seen as a colour of sacrifice.
- The India Remembers project is a joint endeavour of the USI and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and a part of the 'India and the Great War' Centenary Commemoration project initiated by the USI in 2014 with the support of the Ministry of External Affairs and in close association with the British High Commission.

Widely promoted

- The proposal was put up in 2016 and since then, the marigold has been widely promoted in all India-related commemorative events around the world.
 - The First World War ended with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918.
 - Since then, poppy was adopted as the symbol of remembrance as it grew widely in the Flanders fields in Europe where some of the major battles were fought.
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Our time begins now-India stands to suffer most from climate change. A road map to transit quickly to a near-zero carbon economy

- Even at the time of its signing in 2015, it was clear that the Paris Agreement on climate change would not be enough to avoid global warming of 1.5° C over pre-industrial temperatures.
- In fact, early analyses revealed that the collective effect of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) would result in 3-5° C of warming.
- More recently, there has been mounting pressure on India to raise its pledges further.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on 1.5° C has

come at a time when there are multiple alarms for India.

- Another study in Nature Climate Change identifies India as the country with the most expected damage from rising levels of carbon dioxide.

How should India respond?

- India's NDC is already ambitious and it has made decisive changes in its energy sector.
- Meanwhile, the U.S. has pulled out of the climate treaty, and the support of Australia and Brazil teeters on the outcome of their respective elections.
- Some countries are also doing less than they claim.

A socio-economic challenge

- India has two complex and inter-related problems.
- The first is to bring a vast population out of poverty and into decent lives.
- The second is to do this while dealing responsibly with the global carbon challenge and building resilience to climate change.
- While India is often mentioned along with China in climate-related discussions as a large emerging economy, the two are very different.
- Adding to this the current rural distress and the large youth bulge with few job prospects, and the country is in dire straits.
- It is clear that past development frameworks have not improved well-being across social strata.

SDGs are crucial

- It turns out that the most sensible way to deal with these complex challenges is to deepen and expand India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The synergies of meeting SDGs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to a changing climate can only be fully realised if transformative and cross-scale changes are conceived, deliberated upon and tested widely.
- India, nevertheless, has a large number of successful examples of transformative innovation around energy production and access, land, livelihoods and climate resilience.

Energy Efficiency

- The Bureau of Energy Efficiency showed how government 'nudges' are made effective through appliance labelling and large-scale procurement of efficient devices.

Infrastructure

- In the building and cement industry, innovation around housing and new materials, including natural fibre composites, could make far-reaching changes in

infrastructure through low-carbon modular technologies.

Power & Microgrids

- India expects to reach its ambitious solar target of 100 GW capacity by 2022 primarily through large centralised solar power plants, but these require significant amounts of land, water and evacuation infrastructure and support from mega-corporations.
- Instead, as some States have shown, renewable-based microgrids can become an important feature of electricity policy.
- In the near future, entrepreneurs could make use of rapidly lowering storage costs to build decentralised, neighbourhood-scale micro-utilities, managed by locally owned enterprises and cooperatives.
- With modern power electronics and innovations in hybrid waste to energy, water recycling and community gardens could be integrated as standalone modules that are connected to larger grids.

Sustainable Approaches, Agro-Ecology Methods

- Sustainable approaches to land are evident in cases such as forest conservation.
- Some research groups have recognised that agro-ecology methods are best suited for increasing crop yield, raising profits, trapping soil carbon, reducing dependence on fertilisers and pesticides where successful models are already effective on small scales in many States.

Transport & Urbanisation

- In transport and urbanisation, the challenge is to create isotropic communities in the areas of the peri-urban, the rapidly expanding hinterland, which would have to be designed around not cars but walking, cycling and sustainable neighbourhood vehicles.

Work & Industry

- Work and industry would also have to focus on the small and medium scale of about 300 employees and modest capital investments, which reduce the risk of speculation and jobless growth.

Energy & Livelihood

- Energy and livelihood gains from such alternative visions could be far more significant than conventional ways of replacing fossil-fuelled infrastructure with renewables.
- But they also involve a lot of learning-by-doing, living laboratories and innovation, practice, patience and support from government and academia.

Putting plans into action

- The next round of state action plans on climate change now being developed might begin with identifying successful development approaches overlaid with expected climate impacts in each ecological zone.
 - Policymakers, with inputs from academia, community workers and the public, could then work on how these would be repeated in other contexts keeping climate impacts in mind.
 - Large investments are needed to make the transitions in each sector that would take the country to a near zero-carbon economy.
 - But given the shortage of external support and the need for rapid deployment, India will not be able to rely entirely on external funds.
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Migratory birds start arriving at Chilika, numbers are down

- Migratory birds have started arriving at the wetlands of Odisha's Chilika Lake — one of the largest wintering grounds in Asia, but not in their usual numbers this year.
- The arrival of migratory birds is awaited with the onset of winter every year. This year, however, fewer winged visitors have descended on the mudflats of the lake.
- Close to one million birds congregate on the mudflats of the lake during winter.
- The lake, spread over 1,000 sq km, is home to 230 bird species, out of which 97 are intercontinental migrants from the Arctic and Eurasian regions.
- The lake has been a designated Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance) since 1981.

Rain-induced flooding

- The Nalabana Bird Sanctuary and Mangalajodi, the two major places where the birds congregate, also have not received the usual numbers.
 - One of the reasons behind the low turnout is the flooding after incessant rain triggered by cyclone Titli that hit the Odisha coast in the second week of October.
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Source: The Hindu

