1. Not all quiet on the Kashmir front

Gs 3: internal challenges

Context:
The year 2016 has been one of the worst in recent times for the Army in terms of casualties in Jammu and Kashmir with major attacks on military installations and heightened tensions along the border with Pakistan.

Background:

1. It began on a bitter note with an attack on the Pathankot Air Force station in the early hours of January 2.
2. There were major attacks on Army bases in Uri and Nagrota in the latter part of the year, resulting in significant casualties on security forces. There was also a dramatic spike in cross-border firing after the Uri attack.
3. This year all parameters — infiltration, ceasefire violations, terrorists killed and soldiers lost — have seen an increase over last year.
4. The Army lost 63 personnel in Jammu & Kashmir, almost double that of last year. In 2015, it lost 33 personnel and in 2014, 32.

Assessment:

1. With increase in infiltration attempts, the number of terrorists killed has also gone up. Over 140 terrorists were neutralized. There was also an upward trend in the number of suicide attacks compared with the last two years.
2. The general assessment is that 2016 was less productive for Pakistan and so there was a concerted effort to push in infiltrators and also keep the hinterland active, a senior officer observed.
3. Things took a dramatic turn particularly after the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist Burhan Wani in July which plunged the Kashmir Valley into a spiral of protests and violence.
4. The protests had severely affected the Army’s target-specific operations in the hinterland as intelligence gathering and movement were disrupted.

Active border:

India on its part has toughened its response to provocations from across the border. The multiple attacks on military installations very close to the border have laid bare the gaps in perimeter security in high-
threat areas. However security forces have reasons to be concerned about the situation in the hinterland.

**Increase in militant ranks**

The number of terrorists in the Valley is estimated to be between 200-300. Army sources said that after Burhan Wani’s killing there is a rise in radicalization among the youth and more locals have joined militant ranks. Tackling them will be a challenge for the security forces in the New Year. The repercussions of this could be felt once snow melts next year.

**2. Passport reforms**

What is the news?

Ministry of external affairs had notified some policy changes regarding passport issuance. The main objective behind these reforms is to simplify the exiting cumbersome process and make more open and accessible to various sections of the society.

**What are changes that had been made??**

1. The most specious form of harassment of women passport applicants related to those who were either separated or divorced. In case of passport for their children the passport officials insisted on either the father’s consent or demanded a divorce decree. Following the recommendations of an inter-ministerial committee crucial changes have been introduced.

2. The application form now requires only the name of one parent, not both. This will enable single parents to apply for passports for their children without the name of either the father or the mother being printed in the document.

3. The stipulation that marriage certifications and divorce decrees should be provided has been removed;
4. The obsolete concept of getting documents attested by notaries or magistrates has also been jettisoned, and self-declarations on plain paper would now be accepted.

5. A key reform is that a birth certificate is no more the main proof of date of birth, and other official documents, including Aadhaar number and PAN card, which contain the date, can be utilised.

6. In the case of orphaned children, actual proof for date of birth has been dispensed with and a declaration from the head of a child care home or orphanage confirming the date is enough.

7. In keeping with the times, adopted and surrogate children can be issued passports even in the absence of the relevant documents, based on a declaration on plain paper.

8. Sadhus and sanyasins have been allowed to mention their gurus in lieu of the names of their parents.

Conclusion

The new rules address many irritants in the process of getting a passport, but also make one wonder why these were not introduced long ago. Ultimately, a passport ought to be every citizen’s right. Simplifying the procedures in obtaining one should be an ongoing exercise.

3. Behind Pakistan’s CPEC offer

What is the news??

Days after a senior Pakistani General suggested that India should shun its “enmity” with Pakistan and join the $46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, the Chinese foreign ministry has called the offer a “goodwill gesture”, exhorting India to take it up.

About CPEC

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (also known as CPEC and North-South economic corridor) is an economic corridor comprising a collection of projects currently under construction at a cost of $51 billion. CPEC aims to facilitate trade along an overland route that
connects Kashgar (CHINA) and Gwadar (Pakistan), through the construction of a network of highways, railways, and pipelines

Recent developments

Initially, New Delhi sought to play down its significance, as it was made just weeks before Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to China, and the government would have hoped to dissuade Beijing from pushing the more objectionable projects that run through disputed territory.

However, not only has the corridor taken shape rapidly, China and Pakistan have been drawn into a closer embrace, with Pakistan investing considerable resources in securing Chinese officials working on CPEC, and China redrawing its plans for the One Belt One Road to Central Asia to incorporate Pakistan’s interests.

China has defended Pakistan against India’s efforts to pin it down with regard to support to terror groups, and to draw an obstructionist equivalence with India’s Nuclear Suppliers Group membership application. Given all this, the General’s suggestion can only be understood to have been made rhetorically, especially as it was accompanied by allegations of India’s “anti-Pakistan activities and subversion” in Balochistan.

How should India view this offer??

India has no dialogue with Pakistan at present, and has opposed the project, bilaterally with China “at the highest level” as well as at the UN. Relations with China have deteriorated considerably since President Xi Jinping’s visit to Pakistan to announce the project in April 2015.

While there can be little expectation of any room for India in CPEC at present, there is space for India to step back and see where China and Pakistan want to go with it. The offer to India was made along with offers to other “neighbouring countries”.

Already, Iran, Turkmenistan and other Central Asian republics have shown interest in the warm-water port that will be a nodal point for goods through Pakistan to the China. Despite its problems on terror from
Pakistan, Afghanistan is becoming a nodal point for China’s connectivity projects to Iran.

**Geo-strategic dimension**

The meeting among Russian, Chinese and Pakistani officials on Afghanistan this week, and Russian engagement with the Taliban, indicate much more is changing in the region than just the alignment of highways and tunnels.

While India has done well to shore up relations with others in the region, it cannot afford to be blindsided by their involvement with the OBOR project and Chinese plans. CPEC is no longer a project in Pakistan, but one that runs through it, a project that will link 64 countries.

**4. Antlers could end up in medicines**

**Context:**

Union government’s approval to be sought for using deer antlers in Ayurveda drugs. Antlers of spotted deer and sambar may find their way to Ayurveda medicines if a recommendation of the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) finds favour with the National Board for Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

**About Deer’s in India:**

**Antlers** are extensions of the skull grown by members of the **deer** family. India has a distinction of having the largest number of deer species in the world. The species found in India varies in size as per the areas they live. Antlers are the extensions of the skull of the deer. All the three deer varieties found in Kerala, including spotted deer, sambar, and barking deer, shed their antlers annually.

**Deers and their location**

**The Swamp Deer or the Barasingha** - found mainly in the Terai region of U.P., small numbers in the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary and more recently discovered herd in JhilmilJheel in Uttaranchal. and as well as in
Assam. The other race is the Hard Ground one found only in Madhya Pradesh. The Barasingha of the swamps of terrain are mainly found in the small islands of reed and grass in the swamps

**The Sambhar (Cervus unicolor)** - Sambhar is the largest of all deer species found in the Indian Sub-continent. The antler size varies in between the Sambhar found in Madhya Pradesh and the ones found in the forests of North east India.

**The Chital or the Spotted Deer (Axis axis)** - Chital has bright spots on its body. Out of the deer species Chital is the most beautiful of them. found in the terai region in the foothills of Himalayas and in Madhya Pradesh.

**The Hog Deer (Axis porcinus) -** A deer quite related to the Chital it is smaller and more stoutly built then the Chital. In India, Hog Deer inhabits the alluvial grasslands of the terai forest right from Corbett to the forests of Assam.

**The Muntjac or the Barking Deer (Muntiacus muntjak)** - A smaller deer as compared to Chital. The coat is reddish brown in color. found all over India

**Hangul or the Kashmir Stag** - A deer species more related to the Red Deer found commonly in Europe, Hangul is found in the valley of Kashmir especially in areas above Srinagar called Dachigam.

**The Thamin or Brow-Antlered Deer (Cervus eldi)** - This deer is also called the Dancing Deer due to its delicate style of walking. found only in Manipur in Eastern India and that also on the Shore of Loktak Lake.

SBWL of Kerala decided to approach the Centre for suitable amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act for using the antlers for medicinal purposes.

Though some board members objected to the recommendation apprehending that such a move would lead to hunting of the animals, the Chief Minister was of the view that it shall be permitted as the clearance was sought for Oushadhi, an Ayurvedic medicine manufacturing company owned by the Kerala government, said poet Sugathakumari, who attended the meeting.
**Impact:**

1. A member on the SBWL, said the suggestion to make amendments to the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 came at a time when the world was united against wildlife hunting.

2. It may be recalled that many countries had recently destroyed huge quantities of ivory seized by them. Those countries could have earned money by allowing the use of ivory for various purposes.

3. In the long run the recommendation on antlers would lead to hunting of animals.

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**5. Status of tribal development remains poor: Ministry report**

**Context:**

Ministry of tribal Affairs has released the annual report on the status of the tribal development.

**Status of Tribal’s:**

1. The tribal population In India lags behind other social groups on various social parameters, such as child mortality, infant mortality, number of anaemic women

2. Tribal population, with a vast majority engaged in agricultural labour, has the largest number of anaemic women, the report states.

3. The community also registered the highest child mortality and infant mortality rates, when compared to other social groups, the data indicates.

4. While educational achievements on the whole has improved, statistics cited elsewhere in the Report shows that the gross enrolment ratio among tribal students in the primary school level has declined from 113.2 in 2013-14 to 109.4 in 2015-16. Besides,
the dropout rate among tribal students has been at an alarming level.

5. While the overall poverty rates among the tribal population have fallen compared to previous years, they remain relatively poorer when weighed against other social groups.

6. Health infrastructure has also been found wanting in tribal areas. At an all-India level, there is a shortfall of 6,796 Sub Centres, 1267 Primary Health Centres and 309 Community Health Centres in tribal areas as on March 31, 2015, the Report points out.

Gaps in rehabilitation

1. Further, it exposes the gap in rehabilitation of tribal community members displaced by various development projects. Out of an estimated 85 lakh persons displaced due to development projects and natural calamities, only 21 lakh were shown to have been rehabilitated so far, the Report states.

2. Responding to this figure, Sudhir Pattanaik, Odisha-based social activist and Editor Samadrusti said that even the 21 lakh
resettlement figure in the Report is questionable as there is no way to verify this data.

3. In the case of displacement caused by mining plants and captive power projects set up in the past several years in Angul, Koraput, Raigadh and Kalahandi districts in the odisha, Mr. Pattanaik said that it was tribal land acquisition and not tribal development that was the focus of the government.

In 2014, the Central government initiated the VanbandhuKalyanYojana for the holistic development and welfare of tribal population on a pilot basis. However, the Annual Report points out that the token budgetary provisions being made under the scheme to the tune of Rs.100.00 crore and Rs.200.00 crore for 2014-15 and 2015-16, respectively, is minuscule and barely sufficient to meet the purpose of the Scheme given that it intends to cover 27 States across the country. The Ministry has emphasised that more funds be provided for the Scheme from the year 2016-17 onwards.

6. Navy begins work to set INS Betwa upright

The Navy has begun the process of restoring guided missile frigate INS Betwa that tipped over while it was being undocked at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai early this month. Two people were killed and 14 injured in the incident.

About INS Betwa:

INS Betwa (F39) is a Brahmaputra-class guided missile frigate currently in service with the Indian Navy. The ship is named for the Betwa River.

Betwariver - The Betwa or Betravati is a river in Northern India, and a tributary of the Yamuna. Also known as the Vetravati, the Betwa rises in the Vindhya Range just north of Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh and flows north-east through Madhya Pradesh and Orchha to Uttar Pradesh.
7. Nepal rejects India’s ‘open sky’ offer

Context:
Nepal has rejected India’s ‘open sky’ offer to allow unlimited flights between the two countries.

What is Open Sky Policy?
Open sky refers to an agreement between two countries to allow any number of airlines to fly from either of them without any restriction on number of flights, number of destinations, number of seats, price and so on. However, this is a general definition. In actual practice, there are always some restrictions.

India’s current Open Sky agreements
Currently, India has open sky agreements with US without restriction. Further, it has such agreement with some restrictions wit UK’ a limited open-sky with ASEAN and bilateral agreements with more than 100 countries. For some tourist destinations of ASEAN, India has limited open sky policy. India has also entered into bilateral agreements with more than 100 countries over landing points, traffic rights, seasons, capacity etc.

Open sky policy in National Civil Aviation Policy 2016:
The National Civil Aviation Policy 2016 has proposed to remove all restrictions on number of flights to and from destinations in SAARC and a radius beyond 5000KmsFor countries within 5000 kilometres, the rights will be auctioned so that the revenue accrues to the government. The government has also restricted this to few airports to protect the domestic airlines.
Nepal said it was not yet ready for the agreement. India has been keen on countering Nepal’s recent engagement with China on the road, railways and port connectivity.

The latest development comes days after India signed an agreement with Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Guyana, Czech Republic, Finland and Spain to allow airlines to operate unlimited flights to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

**Advantage of Open Sky Policy**

1. Nepal has long been pushing for new airspaces to ease congestion on the existing routes and to save time and cost for air passengers.

2. “Nepal is building a major international airport at Bhairwaha, near the Uttar Pradesh border, and the airport at Pokhara will soon be brought to international standards. Therefore, we believe India and Nepal should give each more access to the other’s skies and move with the times.

3. It would directly benefit Nepal and help strengthen our economic partnership.

Among SAARC countries, India doesn’t have any ‘open sky’ agreement with Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan. It allows unlimited flights from Bangladesh and Maldives at 18 domestic airports, from Sri Lanka at 23 airports, and from Bhutan at all its airports.