# EDITORIALS - 28TH OCT 2026

## 1. Fouled waters (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial '**Fouled waters**' was published in **The Hindu** on 28th Oct 2026, highlights systemic regulatory failure behind **Rajasthan's river pollution** and the limits of **judicial substitution** for regulators.

### *River Pollution and Regulatory Failure*

- Untreated textile-dyeing and steelworking **industrial effluents** pollute the seasonal Jojari, Luni and Bandi rivers and soil across Jodhpur, Balotra and Pali, threatening **20 lakh residents**; illegal sand mining compounds degradation.
- A **2011 PIL** alerted Rajasthan authorities, yet decades-long pollution persists, revealing **systemic oversight failure**.
- Rajasthan's **2025 submissions** showed sewage plants accommodated only half the three urban centres' sewage; **underutilised common effluent treatment plants** suggest treatment bypass, poor connections and/or location- or period-specific capacity shortages.

### *Judicial Intervention and State Accountability*

- A **2025 suo motu petition** led to the **High-level Ecosystem Oversight Committee**, chaired by Justice Sangeet Lodha, to audit treatment plants and prepare river-restoration plans.
- Based on committee reports, the **Supreme Court** prohibited construction within **100 metres** of river edges and hazardous industries within 500 metres of present river paths or available flood lines.
- Authorities cited the Court's stay of a **2022 NGT order**, imposing compensation on Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation and Jodhpur–Barmer administrations, to justify **non-enforcement of pollution norms**.
- Officials regularised leases despite knowing of **illegal mining**, warranting serious scrutiny of possible **official–industrial collusion**.
- Potential State liability under the **polluter pays principle** extends accountability to **government negligence**, indicting regulatory failure.

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***Environmental Justice***

- **Unequal exposure:** Flint's drinking-water crisis affected a predominantly Black, high-poverty city, illustrating disadvantaged communities' disproportionate pollution burdens.
- **Livelihood insecurity:** River diversion into irrigation devastated Aral Sea fisheries, while salinisation reduced agricultural productivity.

- **Health inequality:** The World Bank's Bangladesh assessment identifies poorer households, children, women and elderly people as disproportionately vulnerable to pollution.
- **Intergenerational injustice:** UNEP estimated Ogoniland's environmental recovery could take 25–30 years, illustrating contamination's enduring costs.
- **Meaningful participation:** The Aarhus Convention offers a model of environmental information access, public participation and access to justice.
- **Victim-centred compensation:** Japan's Minamata arrangements cover medical expenses, pensions and nursing care for recognised patients.
- **Equitable restoration:** Chilika Lake's restoration improved fisheries, local incomes and biodiversity, linking ecological recovery with community wellbeing.

## 2. A visit to Baku, a gateway to a changing Eurasia (GS Paper II International Relations)

This editorial '**A visit to Baku, a gateway to a changing Eurasia**' was published in **The Indian Express** on 28th Oct 2026, highlights the primacy of **national interests** over **identity-based solidarity** and opportunities for India's Eurasian engagement.

### *Diplomatic Reset and Limits of Identity Solidarity*

- Jaishankar's **Baku visit**, like the Canada rapprochement, demonstrates scope for **pragmatic diplomacy** despite strained relations and hostile public opinion.
- The **2021 Islamabad Declaration** backing Pakistan on Kashmir and "Three Brothers" military exercise reinforced perceptions of a Turkey–Azerbaijan–Pakistan bloc; **Operation Sindoor** in May 2025 triggered boycott calls, obscuring Baku's relatively thin Islamabad ties, largely mediated through Ankara.
- Like Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, **Pan-Turkism** faces limits: shared identities facilitate cooperation but cannot override **national interests** or automatically create strategic blocs.
- Turkic unity emerged during Ottoman decline; the **1991 Soviet collapse** enabled Turkish outreach, but newly independent republics prioritised **sovereignty**, rejecting replacement of one hegemon by another.
- The Turkic Council, established in 2009, became the **Organisation of Turkic States** in 2021: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are members; Turkmenistan is an observer; **functional cooperation** spans trade, transport, technology and culture, while security commitments remain difficult.
- Azerbaijan's school-headscarf restrictions drew conservative Turkish criticism; Baku defended **secularism**, rejected interference and issued arrest warrants against Turkish nationals accused of incitement, exposing divergent **state–religion relations**.
- Azerbaijan retains **strategic ties with Israel**, including defence cooperation, despite Turkey's antagonism towards it; strong Turkish–Azerbaijani ties do not ensure **foreign-policy convergence**.

### *Central Asian Autonomy and Eurasian Connectivity*

- Central Asian republics welcome Turkish investment, connectivity and military technology while pursuing **multi-vector partnerships**; unlike NATO-member Turkey, they must accommodate **Russia and China** while preserving independent choices.
- Kazakhstan's President Tokayev rejects converting OTS into a **military alliance** or geopolitical bloc; Kazakhstan–Kyrgyzstan membership of the Russia-led **CSTO** and growing Chinese economic ties further constrain alignment.
- Better ports, railways and customs can advance **Turkic cooperation** without security consensus; India must recognise regional states' **agency** alongside Russian power, China's presence and Turkish–Iranian ambitions.

### *Implications for India*

- Azerbaijan borders Russia and Iran, connects west through Georgia–Turkey and across the Caspian towards Central Asia; its **energy resources** and **transport links** offer India wider access to the Caucasus, inner Asia and Greater Middle East.
- India's energy interests and stake in the **International North-South Transport Corridor**, alongside Baku's Israel–UAE ties, provide convergence; engagement can preserve India's **Armenia partnership** as Baku and Yerevan pursue normalisation.

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### *Constraints on India's Eurasian Outreach*

- **Physical access:** The 2016 India–Iran–Afghanistan Chabahar agreement illustrates efforts to secure alternative maritime access for landlocked Afghanistan.
- **Corridor viability:** Tripling Middle Corridor trade by 2030, projected by the World Bank, requires investment and efficiency improvements.
- **Financing constraints:** In February 2026, the World Bank approved an $846 million guarantee to mobilise $1.41 billion for Kazakhstan's rail connectivity.
- **Sanctions exposure:** The EU's exclusion of seven Russian banks from SWIFT in March 2022 illustrates regional payment risks.
- **Regulatory friction:** CAREC's 2023 monitoring recorded average border-crossing delays of 11 hours for road freight and 29 hours for rail.
- **Implementation gaps:** The 2023 Russia–Iran agreement for the 162-km Rasht–Astara railway illustrates the need to complete missing corridor links.
- **Commercial preparedness:** The India–Central Asia Business Council, launched in 2020, provides a platform to translate diplomatic goodwill into business partnerships.

## 3. On theatre commands, let's finish arguing, reach a settlement, before next crisis comes (GS Paper III Security)

This editorial '**On theatre commands, let's finish arguing, reach a settlement, before next crisis comes ',** was published in **The Indian Express** on 28th Oct 2026 and highlights the urgency of resolving **inter-service disputes** through political leadership to establish theatre commands.

### *Need for Theatre Commands and Service Concerns*

- Seven years after the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** received the restructuring mandate, **inter-service disputes** persist: Army fears inadequate air support, Air Force fears fragmentation of scarce squadrons, and Navy fears resource deprivation under continental priorities.
- India's **17 single-service commands** have mismatched operational boundaries and separate headquarters; cross-command coordination risks delays in fast-moving, AI-guided warfare, whereas **theatre commands** would unite operational authority and necessary forces.
- The IAF's **centralised control and decentralised execution** doctrine need not change: squadrons retain locations, tasking remains centralised, and authority shifts to the **theatre commander**, advised by a three-star IAF Component Commander; doctrine concerns conflate organisational authority with its holder.
- Service concerns are legitimate, but airpower disputes date to World War I; resolution requires **inter-service negotiation** supervised by informed, committed **political leadership**.

### *Lessons from Foreign Military Reforms*

- America's **National Security Act, 1947** created an independent Air Force and unified defence establishment without settling service roles; the **Key West Agreement** subsequently allocated strategic air warfare to the Air Force, carrier aviation and Marines to the Navy, and land combat to the Army through minister-led negotiations.
- The **1966 Army–USAF agreement** exchanged Army fixed-wing aircraft for combat-helicopter responsibility, with USAF relinquishing most rotary-wing claims; service roles can be reallocated through **mutual agreement** under civilian authority.
- Achieving American jointness required nearly four decades and operational disasters before the **Goldwater–Nichols Act, 1986**; India's security environment makes comparable **procrastination** unaffordable.
- **Changing warfare** demands learning before major acquisitions: Ukraine crippled Russia's Black Sea Fleet without a traditional navy; Iran used **missiles and drones**, despite a decimated air force, against 14 US bases in West Asia and to contest Persian Gulf control.
- Britain's appointment of non-pilot Richard Knighton as RAF chief in 2023 and CDS in 2025, alongside Royal Marine Gwyn Jenkins as Navy head, illustrates **institutional openness** and **decisive leadership**, contrasting with India's prolonged impasse.

### *Priorities for Implementation*

- **India-specific solutions** should incorporate foreign lessons; implementation requires bold service chiefs, a **CDS as honest broker**, and government leadership backed by clear vision and a formal national security strategy.

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### *Operational Prerequisites for Theatreisation*

- **Communication interoperability:** India's Defence Communication Network, dedicated in 2016, integrates secure voice, data and video services across the three services.
- **Joint logistics:** Nodes operationalised at Mumbai, Guwahati and Port Blair in 2021 provide foundations for integrated military support.
- **Intelligence integration:** Exercise Kavach, 2021 tested intelligence collection, analysis and near-real-time sharing across space, air, land and sea assets.
- **Common training:** Military Institute of Technology, Pune introduced tri-service Joint Training Teams for its technical staff course in 2024.
- **Personnel incentives:** Career systems should reward joint exposure; India's 2023 defence review proposed cross-attachments at other services' headquarters.
- **Resource pooling:** NATO's collectively owned AWACS fleet illustrates shared employment of expensive surveillance and command-support capabilities.
- **Operational validation:** Exercise Prachand Prahar, March 2025 tested tri-service planning, command arrangements, surveillance and coordinated firepower.