Al-Shabab Attack in Somalia

Why in news?

A fierce gunbattle began after al-Shabaab terrorists bombed a hotel in the heart of Somalia's capital, with notable death tolls.

Who are the al-Shabaab?

- Al-Shabaab translates as 'The Youth' in Arabic.
- It started as the extremist youth wing of the now-defunct Islamic Courts Union (ICU).
- ICU was a grouping of sharia courts that seized control of a large portion of Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu, for some months in 2006.
- The ICU retreated after intense repression by Somali and Ethiopian troops.
- But the hardline Islamists joined together in groups such as al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam to keep fighting.
- Over the years, foreign jihadists, including those from Western countries, have travelled to East Africa to join the al-Shabaab.
- The group is estimated to have 7,000-9,000 fighters as of at the end of 2017.
- It has been banned by the United States and the United Kingdom.

What is al-Shabaab's objective?

- Al-Shabaab has imposed a strict Wahhabi version of Islam in the areas under its control.
- E.g. its fighters have stoned to death women accused of adultery, and punished alleged thieves by cutting off their limbs
- In 2012, al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane had "pledged obedience" to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the emir of al-Qaeda.
- The group is believed to have also established links with Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb which is active in the Sahara.
- Al-Shabaab had considered offering allegiance to the Islamic State at the height of the terrorist group's power in 2014-15.
- But only a small splinter group ultimately did it.
- Al-Shabaab is currently led by Ahmed Umar alias Abu Ubaidah, on whom the US has put a bounty of $6 million.

What is the recent attack for?

- Somalia descended into chaos in the early 1990s, and the cycle of violence and terrorism has been going on since then.
- Al-Shabaab is trying to take back control of the Somalia capital Mogadishu from a Western-backed government.
- In the current attack, Hotel Maka Al-Mukarama in central Mogadishu was bombed by the al-Shabaab terrorists.
- The attack was in line with the al-Shabaab tactic of assaulting high-profile targets in East African countries.
- Days earlier, the US forces in Somalia had intensified airstrikes against al-Shabaab.
- The efforts by the Americans have seen the killing of over 50 al-Shabaab fighters in at least 6 airstrikes over the past week of the attack.

Source: Indian Express

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