Islamic State (IS) in India

Why in news?

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- Indian intelligence agents have confirmed the arrest of an Islamic State (IS) operative.
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- This was ahead of a planned plot to bomb New Delhi.
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How is IS presence in India?

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- The arrest throws the spotlight on the IS’s presence in India.
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- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) and state police have so far arrested 75 individuals with alleged IS links.
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- The highest number is from Kerala (21), followed by Telangana (16), Karnataka (9), Maharashtra (8).
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- Other states include MP (6), Uttarakhand (4), TN (4), UP (3), Rajasthan (2), J&K (1) and WB (1).
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How does IS recruit?

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- IS propaganda and recruitment depends largely on social media apps such as WhatsApp and Nimbus.
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- Recruiters and trainers use the Internet, the phone and one-on-one meetings for indoctrinating Indian youth.

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- They then get them travel to Syria, Libya or Iraq.
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- Of late, recruiters have been using the “dark web”.
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- This is a class of Internet content that is not visible to general browsing and is not indexed by search engines.
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How have IS's activities in India been?

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- So far, IS has not directly claimed responsibility for any attack in India.
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- The 2014 blast on **Church Street, Bengaluru** was however allegedly triggered by an IS-linked individual.
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- As per NIA reports, he had acted on directions from handlers in Syria associated with the IS.
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- The target was Israeli tourists in Bengaluru.
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- He was earlier with SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India) and then Indian Mujahideen.
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- IS is also suspected to be behind the low-intensity blasts on **Bhopal-Ujjain passenger train** in 2017.
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How is IS role in J&K?

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- The security establishment believes that the IS does not have any defined organisational structure in J&K.
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- 4 militants recently killed in South Kashmir belonged to Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK).
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- However, this outfit is believed to have no organisational links with ISIS.
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- ISJK recruits are mostly former operatives of other groups such as Hizb-ul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba.
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How does IS operate in India?

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- Bhatkal (Karnataka)-resident Shafi Armar is said to be highest-ranking IS operative in India.
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- He is designated a global militant by the United States.
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- Shafi Armar was earlier with the Indian Mujahideen.
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- He claims to have been tasked by IS chief al-Baghdadi to set up a Caliphate in India.
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- However, intelligence agencies doubt if he has a direct association with al-Baghdadi.
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- Officials suspect that Armar uses the name of ISIS on directions of Pakistan.
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- As, it is learnt that IS prefers Arab fighters for jihad and engages Indians mostly in administrative work.
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What is the government's response?

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- In 2015, the Home Ministry notified Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a banned terrorist organisation.
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- This was under the provisions of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.
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- It stated that ISIS was involved in radicalisation and recruitment of vulnerable youths.
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- Recently, the government included ISIS-K, also known as Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) or ISIS Wilayat Khorasan.
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- This is a branch that is active in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
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How is Afghanistan becoming significant?

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- The recently arrested Islamic State operative is an Afghan national.
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- The IS is looking for new bases as its territory is shrinking in Iraq and Syria.
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- Significantly, Afghanistan is one of the targeted countries.
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- Afghanistan’s Khorasan province, where many have migrated from Kerala, is being eyed.
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- Notably, in 2016, 22 residents of Kerala, including 6 women and 3 children, reached an IS establishment in Afghanistan.
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- Also, Pakistan-backed militant groups are suspected to use Afghanistan nationals to attack India in the name of the IS.
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- In 2015, such groups had allegedly tried to make use of medical visas granted to Afghan nationals.
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Source: Indian Express

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