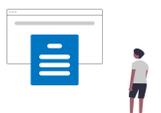

Law, Policy and Governance



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Punjabi actor-activist Deep Sidhu arrested over Red Fort vandalism](#)

- Punjabi actor activist **Deep Sidhu**, who was wanted in the Red Fort violence case, was arrested by the Delhi police. He was later produced in court and remanded in police custody for seven days. The police said Mr. Sidhu had instigated the mob to breach barricades with tractors and deviate from the approved tractor rally route.

2. [Army raises a specialist unit to 'sniff out' COVID-19](#)

- Casper and Jaya have been deployed in Chandigarh and Delhi to screen samples and detect COVID-19 among soldiers posted to forward areas of the Northern Command. They are the first two canines trained to detect COVID19 cases from sweat and urine samples.
- Samples identified as positive by the dogs are confirmed through the RTPCR test. A dog can screen approximately 100 samples in an hour with a rest period of five minutes after every 15 minutes.

3. [Rajya Sabha passes Bill extending protection to illegal constructions](#)

- The Rajya Sabha passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which extended the protections from punitive action for certain kinds of unauthorised constructions by three years. Legislation replaces ordinance promulgated by the Centre in December last year

4. [Centre objects to plea against Special Marriage Act](#)

- The Centre has objected to a petition seeking to discontinue with the provision of inviting objection from the public while applying for marriage registration under the Special Marriage Act (SMA). In an affidavit filed before the Delhi High Court, the Ministry of Law and Justice said that the intention behind the provision in SMA was to *"keep adequate safe-guards to the interest of various parties involved"*.

- The provision was challenged by an interfaith couple on the ground that the **30 days gestation period** was not warranted as the same objective can be mitigated on the basis of certificates issued by government hospitals and on the basis of undertaking by them.

5. [SC stays curbs on activist Rehana](#)

- The Supreme Court stayed a blanket ban imposed by the Kerala High Court on **activist Rehana Fathima** using any kind of media to express or share her views. However, a Bench led by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman retained a condition imposed by the High Court that Ms. Fathima **should not use the media to hurt religious feelings**.
- The December 2018 and November 2020 orders of the High Court concerned bail granted to Ms. Fathima in a case of committing "*deliberate and malicious acts*" to hurt religious feelings under **Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code**.

6. [POCSO doesn't brook dilution](#)

- The **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act** was enacted in 2012 especially to protect children (aged less than 18) from sexual assault.
- The difference between POCSO and IPC, as far as the offence of sexual assault is concerned, is twofold - **First**, the definition of '*assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty*' given in the IPC is generic whereas in POCSO, the **acts of sexual assault are explicitly mentioned** such as touching various private parts or doing any other act which involves physical contact without penetration. **Two**, whereas the IPC provides punishment for the offence irrespective of any age of the victim, *POCSO is specific for the protection of children*.
- The essence of a woman's modesty is her sex and the culpable intention of the accused is the crux of the matter in the cases of sexual assault. In the absence of any specific provision in the POCSO Act which requires skin to skin touch as a mandatory element of an offence, any interpretation which dilutes protection to children must be declared *ultra vires*.

7. [Twitter must follow Indian laws: Centre](#)

- With the government and Twitter at loggerheads over issues related to content removal and freedom of expression, the Centre expressed "*deep disappointment*" over the microblogging platform's partial compliance of its orders "grudgingly" and with substantial delay. In a meeting requested by Twitter, it was informed that the **government expected full compliance** of the blocking orders and that it was unlikely to revisit the list.

8. [2.2% UAPA cases ended in conviction in 3 years](#)

- Only 2.2 % of cases **registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** between 2016 and 2019 ended in convictions by court, according to data presented by the Union Home Ministry in the Rajya Sabha. **Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy** informed the Upper House that as per the **2019 Crime in India Report** compiled by the **National Crime Records Bureau**, the total number of persons arrested under the Act in 2019 is 1,948.
- In another reply, the Minister stated that in the year 2019, as many as 96 persons were arrested for sedition (Section 194A IPC) but only two were convicted and 29 persons were acquitted. Of the 93 cases of sedition, the charge sheet was filed in 40 cases the same year.

9. [Editors Guild expresses concern over raids on News Click office](#)

- **The Editors Guild of India (EGI)** expressed concern over raids by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) at the office of the **news website NewsClick.in**, and the residences of its editor-in-chief and promoter, the editor and senior

management. **The Press Club of India** also expressed concern and called the raid an “*unsavoury attack on the media in a bid to intimidate and silence critical journalism*”.

10. Reinstate LGBT member of U.P. Home Guards: HC

- Treating a person’s sexual orientation as an offence would be **interference in the individual’s right of privacy**, **the Allahabad High Court noted** as it directed the Uttar Pradesh Home Guards to reinstate a staff member belonging to the LGBT community whose appointment was cancelled after a video revealing the person’s sexual orientation was widely shared.
- The sexual orientation of the petitioner had been stated to be “*indulgence in untoward activity*”, which was completely in violation of the observations of the Supreme Court in **Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India**, the court said.
- Any display of affection among the members of the LGBT community towards their partners in public, so long as **it did not amount to indecency or had the potentiality to disturb public order**, could not be bogged down by majority perception, the court further said referring to the Supreme Court case.

11. ‘School closure led to loss in foundational abilities’

- A field study by Azim Premji University paints a grim picture. Children not only missed out on the **regular curricular learning** they would have acquired had schools remained open, but are also ‘forgetting’ what they had learnt in previous years. Study says 92% of students from Classes II to VI have lost at least one specific ability in languages.
- Foundational abilities are those that **form the basis for further learning**. Some of the suggestions included eliminating vacations, extending the academic year well into 2021 and perhaps beyond depending on when schools open and reconfiguring the syllabus.

12. Tigress Avni killing: SC notice to forest officials

- The Supreme Court prima facie said “celebrations” after the **killing of tigress Avni** in November 2018 “clearly violated” the law. A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde issued notice to Vikas Kharge, Principal Secretary, Department of Revenue and Forests, Mumbai, and other Maharashtra Forest Department officials on a contempt petition filed by activist and petitioner in person Sangeeta Dogra.

National News/ Interventions



Daily snippets

1. New variety of marigold

- The new variety of marigold developed by the **Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR)** will fetch money even if they get spoiled as it can be **used for extraction of crude carotene**, which is mainly used in the pharmaceutical sector. All marigolds have a carotene content of up to 1.4%. However, **the Arka Shubha variety of marigold** has a carotene content of 2.8%, which is the highest content from a plant source. Presently, India

imports **most of its carotene** from China and other countries. The Arka Shubha variety is of use in the poultry sector as well. Its petals could be used as feed to get quality yolk. It is used as feed for sheep too.

2. ED searches offices of digital news platform

- **The Enforcement Directorate** conducted searches on the premises of **digital news platform NewsClick** and several other places in connection with alleged receipt of about ₹30 crore from overseas in the past three years. The ED officials said: *“The searches have been carried out under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act**, based on an FIR registered by the Delhi police a few months ago. We have so far found evidence showing receipt of about ₹30 crore from abroad.”* According to the agency, the company running NewsClick allegedly showed exports from a premises, which was closed for the past about two years.
- DIGIPUB News India Foundation issued a statement, strongly condemning the searches *“at the office of NewsClick and the homes of its directors and editor Prabir Purkayastha”*. *“DIGIPUB News India Foundation believes that the ED raids on NewsClick, its editor and directors, is a clear attempt to suppress journalism critical of the government and its allies,”* it said.

3. Actor Rajiv Kapoor passes away

- Actor-director Rajiv Kapoor, son of celebrated filmmaker-actor Raj Kapoor, died on Tuesday after a heart attack. Rajiv Kapoor made his acting debut with 1983 film *Ek Jaan Hain Hum*, but made his first appearance as a leading man in blockbuster *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, which was Raj Kapoor's last directorial venture.

4. Both sides disengaging from Pangong lake area, says China

- China's military announced that **frontline troops of India and China had begun disengaging** in a *“synchronised and organised”* manner from the **north and south banks of Pangong lake**, where both sides have been locked in a standoff for months which, an official source in Delhi said, was the first step in the long process of disengagement and deescalation.
- This restarts the stalled process of disengagement in the **most protracted military standoff between India and China** in decades that resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese casualties at Galwan last year. This is the **first phase of disengagement** with some tanks and armoured elements on the south bank being withdrawn as well as thinning down of troops on the north bank, a Government of India source said. However, **troops continue to remain in key positions**. It would be a **multistep process for disengagement** and de escalation along the **Line of Actual Control** and would take time.
- The focus of the **Corps Commander talks** has been on the north and south banks, which has seen tensions with warning shots also fired in the south last year, the first firing incidents along the border since 1975. As part of the first phase of disengagement last June, **both sides had pulled back troops by equal distance from Patrolling Points (PP) 14 in the Galwan valley and PP15 in GograHot Springs**. It was during the disengagement at Galwan that violent clashes occurred. **China and India have agreed to return to the pre-April 2020 positions in eastern Ladakh** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), according to the latest disengagement plan being implemented on the ground.
- India and China have been engaged in a faceoff in **various pockets in eastern Ladakh** since April last year after China stopped Indian patrols in the **Finger area of Pangong Tso**. The troops have not been able to patrol beyond Finger 4 since the last week of April 2020 after China had ingressed about 8 km. **Earlier, the troops could patrol up to Finger 8**. The other areas where the buildup continues are the **Depsang plains, Galwan, GograHot Springs and the south bank of Pangong**.

5. Naga students' body slams Governor for 'gag order'

- The **Naga Students' Federation (NSF)** has slammed **Nagaland Governor R.N. Ravi** for a *“gag order”* that prescribes stern penal and disciplinary action against government servants who post *“seditious and subversive”* content on social media. The Governor's office in the State capital Kohima had on January 16 informed Chief

Secretary Jane Alam about some government servants taking to social media to indulge in “*sedition and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country*”.

6. [SC orders status quo on INS Viraat dismantling](#)

- The Supreme Court ordered a status quo on the dismantling of the Navy’s decommissioned aircraft carrier, *INS Viraat*. The warship is currently awaiting dismantling at the shipbreaking yard at Alang in Gujarat. The petitioners have argued that *Viraat*, which was the oldest serving warship at the time of its decommissioning, **should not be sold as scrap**.
- In the High Court, the Centre had reportedly said that the 67-year old ship, which had served the Navy for about three decades, was sold to the Gujarat-based Shree Ram Group, a ship breaking firm, which won the bid. It had said that communications to various States for proposals on the ship were unanswered.

7. [Lahaul-Spiti residents want hydro projects in the region scrapped](#)

- There is increased anxiety among the people in the **Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh** who have been up in arms against the hydropower projects proposed in this tribal region. Among the projects proposed in Lahaul-Spiti are Tandi (104 Mega Watt), Rashil (102 MW), Bardang (126 MW), Miyar (90 MW) and Jispa (300 MW). Locals have been voicing their concerns for a long time now.

8. [India to better its disaster management](#)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **World Sustainable Development Summit, 2021**, organised by The Energy Resources Institute, in Delhi. “*We must enhance our disaster management capabilities. The way to do this is to improve our human resources as well as technology. India is part of the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**. We are working in this direction. We are working towards whatever needs to be done to achieve this. Our human centric approach could act as a force multiplier to achieve this,*” the PM said.



International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

[Daily snippets](#)

1. [WHO on Wuhan link to COVID-19](#)

- The virus responsible for COVID-19 was unlikely to **have leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan**, and the evidence pointed to natural origins, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) and China joint expert team that concluded a visit to Wuhan, where the pandemic began. The team also concluded that there was **no indication of SARS-CoV-2 having spread among the population there prior to December 2019**, when Wuhan’s hospitals first began reporting a pneumonia outbreak.
- “*Our initial findings suggest that the introduction through an intermediary host species is the most likely pathway and one that will require more studies and more specific, targeted research,*” WHO scientist Peter Ben

Embarek, who led the international team said. The location of the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in the city had led to theories suggesting the virus may have leaked from a laboratory.

- The team examined four pathways: direct transmission from wildlife, transmission through intermediate hosts, transmission via cold chain products, and a laboratory leak. While so far the intermediate host has not been identified, samples of some animals known to be susceptible to coronaviruses were identified at the market and some of those traced back to farms or parts of China that harboured bat environments.

2. [UAE's Hope Probe enters Mars orbit](#)

- The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) first mission to Mars reached the red planet and entered orbit on Tuesday after a seven-month, 494 million km journey, allowing it to start sending data about the Martian atmosphere. *"Contact with #HopeProbe has been established again. The Mars Orbit Insertion is now complete,"* the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) said.

3. [Saudi authorities release women's rights activist](#)

- Saudi authorities released prominent women's rights activist **Loujain alHathloul** after nearly three years in detention, her family said, as the kingdom faces renewed U.S. pressure over its human rights record. Ms. Hathloul, 31, was arrested in May 2018 with about a dozen other women activists weeks before the historic lifting of a decades long **ban on female drivers, a reform they had long campaigned for**, sparking a torrent of international criticism.
- In late December, a Saudi court handed Ms. Hathloul a prison term of five years and eight months for terrorism related crimes, but her family said a partially suspended sentence paved the way for her early release. Her release comes after the U.S. **President Joe Biden pledged to intensify scrutiny of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's human rights record.**



Opinions and Analysis

[Analysis : Taking the long view with China](#)

1. **Background**

- In late January, **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** said that while both India and China remained committed to a multipolar world, they should recognise that a *"multipolar Asia"* was one of its essential constituents. As it moves to **becoming the third largest economy in the world**, India needs to have a clear-eyed world view and strategy as it makes hard choices. It needs to reject the developing country regional mindset that has hobbled national aims and foreign policy.
- The External Affairs Ministry is also now more forthright. We have a *"special and privileged strategic partnership"* with Russia, which provides more than three quarter of India's military equipment, and a

“comprehensive global strategic partnership” with the U.S. despite the United States Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific, 2018, wishing that India sees the **U.S. as its preferred partner on security issues**.

2. **Diplomatic challenge**

- The foreign policy challenge for India is really **two sides of the China conundrum**: defining engagement with its neighbour which is consolidating an expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) while remaining involved with the strategic, security and technological concerns of the U.S. located across the vast Pacific Ocean.
- In the financial sphere, there is the real possibility of the Chinese renminbi becoming a global reserve currency or yuan becoming the digital payments currency. China is the world’s largest trading economy. It could soon become the world’s largest economy - the Fortune Global 500 list of the world’s largest companies by revenue for the first time contains more companies based in China, including Hong Kong, than in the U.S.

3. **Policy elements**

- Some form of the **EU’s China policy** of seeing the emerging superpower as a partner, competitor, and economic rival depending on the policy area in question is going to be the global norm. The **EU’s reaching out to China** despite misgivings of the U.S. means the West has given up on containing the rise of China.
- The **China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank** has increased its membership to 100 countries. China is now the **second biggest financial contributor to the UN** and has published more high impact research papers than the U.S. did in 23 out of 30 “hot” research fields and enhancing its ‘soft power’ nearly to levels achieved by the U.S. earlier. Instead of an alternate development model, **India should move the Quad towards supplementing the infrastructure push of the BRI** in line with other strategic concerns in the region.

4. **Policy evolution**

- Another area where India can play a ‘bridging role’ is **global governance** whose *principles, institutions and structures* now have to accommodate other views for issue based understandings. President Xi Jinping’s “community with shared future for mankind”, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “climate justice” and asking how long India will be excluded from the UN Security Council, challenge the frame of the liberal order without providing specific alternatives. With **respect to digital data**, the *defining issue of the 21st century*, India has recently expressed that there must be **reciprocity in data sharing**, and this is the kind of ‘big idea’ for sharing prosperity that will gain traction with other countries.

Commentary : Denying women the right over their bodies

1. **Background**

- The Indian Parliament will consider an amendment to our abortion laws this Budget Session but unlike the Argentina law which is touted as being historic, the **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (MTP Bill)**, will not translate into greater autonomy for women over their own bodies.

2. **What’s in the proposed bill**

- The proposed amendment still **requires one doctor to sign off on termination of pregnancies** up to 20 weeks old, and **two doctors for pregnancies between 20 and 24 weeks old**. Thus, it is not based on any request or isn’t at the pregnant person’s will but on a doctor’s opinion.
- The Bill also mandates the **government to set up a medical board in every State and UT**. Medical boards can rely on the facts of the case but personal beliefs could impact the medical board’s opinion, which is one of the biggest challenges in having a third party opinion on a decision which is very personal.

- While the current Bill provides that safe abortions can be performed at any stage of the pregnancy in case of foetal “abnormalities,” it **fails to consider any other reason** such as personal choice, a sudden change in circumstances due to separation from or death of a partner, and domestic violence.
- The proposed amendment uses the word “women” throughout, **denying access to safe abortion to transgender, intersex and gender diverse persons.**

Analysis : Cutting trans fat

1. Background

- India will join a select group of countries **limiting trans fat to 2% by mass** of the total oils/fats present in the product. In mid-2016, the trans fat content limit was halved from 10% to 5%, and in December 2020, the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** capped it to 3% by 2021.
- While trans fat is naturally present in red meat and dairy products, the focus is on restricting the industrially produced trans fat used solely to **prolong the shelf life of products** at less cost. The government’s notification specifically mentions edible oils and fats that are used as ingredients, it also **applies to emulsions such as margarines.**

2. Nuances on trans fat

- Even when the fat/oil contains less than 2% trans fat, **repeated use at high temperature** can increase the trans fat content.
- The focus on cutting down trans fat content in food arises from its **proclivity to negatively alter the lipoprotein cholesterol profile** by increasing the **level of bad cholesterol (LDL)** while **decreasing the level of HDL or good cholesterol.** These changes in the lipoprotein cholesterol profile **increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases.**
- In 2004, Denmark became the first country to limit trans fat content in all foods to 2% of fats and oils. In April 2019, the European Union (EU) adopted a new regulation - from April 2021 - to **limit the amount of industrially produced trans fat** to 2% in all foods sold within the EU. According to a 2020 report of WHO, **32 countries** already have some form of mandatory limits on trans fat. It is now well known that trans fat can be completely eliminated and replaced with healthier substitutes without any change in the food taste or cost.



Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. Government to clarify e-commerce FDI rules

- The Centre plans to issue a clarification on the **foreign direct investment (FDI) policy for the ecommerce sector** in the wake of investigations into some foreign players’ operations following complaints about malpractices, according to **Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.**

- “To reiterate, e-commerce is supposed to provide an agnostic platform so that buyers and sellers can trade with each other, the platform should not become a part of the trading transaction, neither should it be funding it or having algorithms that give preference to one or the other. They should neither be promoting their own products, but provide all data required to make a rational choice and the choice should be the free choice of the consumers,” Mr. Goyal explained.

2. [Government asks auto firms to not sell vehicles low on safety](#)

- The government expressed concern over reports that manufacturers are selling vehicles with purposefully downgraded safety standards in India and asked them to stop the ‘unpardonable’ practice.
- Over the past few years, **vehicle safety group Global NCAP**, under its *safer cars for India campaign*, had found in various tests that some models sold in India were found to have *inferior safety ratings* as compared to the export version of the same model sold in developed markets.

3. [SEBI fines NSE](#)

- In the high profile, co-location case, markets regulator SEBI imposed a penalty of ₹1 crore on the NSE for failing to provide a level playing field for trading members subscribing to its tick-by-tick (TBT) data feed system. In addition, the regulator levied a fine of ₹25 lakh each on NSE’s former managing directors and chief executive officers.
- The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) colocation facility allows stock brokers to colocate their servers and systems within the exchange premises, which helps **reduce latency for connectivity** to the exchange’s trading systems. In its order, SEBI said unequal access was apparent at different stages of the technology process and that NSE failed to ensure a level playing field for trading members subscribing to its TBT data feed system.

Suggested Readings

1. Priya Ramani vs M.J Akbar case, [Link to article](#)
2. Remembering K.T Shah, [Link to article](#)
3. Election Commission and its power to de-register parties, [Link to article](#)
4. International best practices for whistle-blowers, [Link to article](#)
5. Disinformation and cyber-security, [Link to article](#)

Sources referred to : [The Hindu](#), [The Indian Express](#), [Live Law](#), [Bar & Bench](#)

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