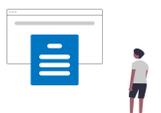


Law, Policy and Governance



Daily snippets

1. [‘Sedition law can’t be used to quell disquiet: court](#)

- Charges of sedition “cannot be invoked to quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling the miscreants”, a Delhi Court observed while granting bail to a 21-year old labourer. The youth was arrested for posting a fake video on Facebook about the Delhi police on the farmers’ agitation.

2. [Kiran Bedi removed as Puducherry L-G](#)

- Kiran Bedi was removed as the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry. Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundarajan has been given additional charge of the Union Territory until regular arrangements are made. The statement did not specify any reason behind Ms. Bedi’s removal. In fact, she had put up a two minute video reviewing the reasons for the low rate of COVID-19 vaccination in the UT.

3. [SC seeks Centre’s response on plea for safety system at airports](#)

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde visualized the horror and tragedy of an air crash while hearing a petition alleging “deliberate omission” on the part of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to **install a failsafe system** to stop an aircraft from overshooting runways at **vulnerable airports like Mangalore and Kozhikode**.
- The court asked **Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati**, appearing for the government and agreeing with the CJI’s oral observations, to file its response to the petition.
- The writ petition filed by Delhi resident Rajen Mehta sought the **installation of the Engineered Material Arresting System (EMAS)** in at risk airports across the country, more importantly at **table-top airports** in Kozhikode and Mangalore. Mr. Mehta also sought an inquiry into the delay in installing EMAS despite specific knowledge about the vulnerability.

4. [Toolkit content does not disclose sedition: ex-judge](#)

- **Publicly available content** of the toolkit, which led to the arrest of 22 year old climate activist Disha Ravi, does not disclose sedition, the former Supreme Court judge Justice Deepak Gupta said. Justice Gupta said charges in the toolkit case show a “*non-application of mind*”.

5. [Explain action taken on OTTs, SC tells govt.](#)

- The Supreme Court did not appear convinced with the government’s submission that it is “contemplating” regulations for OTT (over-the-top) platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. The court issued notice on a plea seeking a proper board/institution/association for monitoring and managing the content of different OTT/streaming and digital media platforms.

6. [2016 JNU sedition case: Delhi court summons Kanhaiya and nine others](#)

- A Delhi court has taken cognizance of a charge sheet filed by Delhi Police against former Jawaharlal Nehru University Students’ Union (JNUSU) president Kanhaiya Kumar and nine others in a 2016 sedition case. The court’s order came almost a year after the Delhi government gave its nod to police to prosecute Mr. Kumar and nine others for their involvement in a procession where they had allegedly supported seditious slogans raised on the varsity’s campus during an event on February 9, 2016.
- The accused have been charged with offences under - Sections 124A (*sedition*), 323 (*punishment for voluntarily causing hurt*), 471 (*using as genuine a forged document or electronic record*), 143 (*punishment for being a member of an unlawful assembly*), 149 (*being a member of an unlawful assembly*), 147 (*punishment for rioting*) and 120B (*criminal conspiracy*) of the Indian Penal Code.

7. [Priya Ramani - MJ Akbar case](#)

- A Delhi court threw out a criminal defamation case filed by former **Union Minister M.J. Akbar** against **journalist Priya Ramani** for her tweets accusing him of sexual harassment. “*The woman has a right to put her grievance at any platform of her choice and even after decades,*” said Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate. “*Despite how well respected some persons are in society, they - in their personal lives - could show extreme cruelty to the females,*” the court observed.
- Mr. Akbar had in his criminal defamation complaint claimed that Ms. Ramani’s tweet and her article accusing him of sexual harassment were defamatory and lowered his reputation. He also said that Ms. Ramani did not produce any evidence to prove her story. However, Ms. Ramani pleaded that **truth was her defence** in relation to the allegations of sexual harassment against Mr. Akbar.
- Following a Delhi court’s verdict acquitting her in a defamation case filed by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar, journalist Priya Ramani said she **felt vindicated on behalf of all women** who have ever spoken up against **sexual harassment at the workplace**.

8. [No role in Tamil Nadu govt.’s quota decisions, Centre tells SC](#)

- The Centre has told the Supreme Court that it has no role in the choices made by the Tamil Nadu government with **regard to the provision of reservation** for specific castes or communities in State government jobs and admissions. The Centre was responding to a petition challenging the **constitutionality of the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act of 1993**, which provides 69% reservation in the State.
- The case came up for hearing before a Bench, led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar. Tamil Nadu sought time to file a response. The case has been adjourned to February 25.

9. [Govt. denies link between Char Dham project, floods](#)

- The government denied in the Supreme Court any link between the **Char Dham road widening project in Uttarakhand** and the recent flash floods in the Rishiganga valley. The denial, before a Bench led by Justice Rohinton Nariman, came from Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, in response to a communication from a high-powered committee (HPC) chairperson Ravi Chopra, connected the tragedy with the Char Dham project. The court asked the government to file a response in two weeks.
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National News/ Interventions



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Team to study J&K situation](#)

- **European Union Ambassador Ugo Astuto** is expected to lead a delegation of Ambassadors, including some from European countries, to Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, beginning with Srinagar, in a visit expected to study the “**situation on the ground**” there ahead of **Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Porto** in May for the **E.U.-India summit**. In addition to Mr. Astuto, European Ambassadors from France, Portugal, Ireland, Sweden, Belgium, Estonia and Italy are expected to be part of the delegation, as well as envoys from other regions like Bangladesh, Chile, Brazil and Ghana.
- The J&K administration has extended invitations to Valley-based civil society groups, media persons and grassroots representatives and DDC members, to meet the delegation.

2. [India, China pull back troops from Pangong](#)

- With the withdrawal of tanks from the forward areas on the **south bank of Pangong Tso (lake) completed**, India and China have started pulling back troops in large numbers from the north and south banks and also restoring land that was dug up during the heavy buildup of defences last year.
- Videos released by the Army show the People’s Liberation Army troops dismantling tents and bunkers and moving equipment in vehicles. Infantry troops can be seen moving out on foot as well as long convoys of vehicles with stores and troops as part of the disengagement agreement.
- The Chinese troops have started clearing out from the **ridgelines of Finger 4**, a major area of contention. On the north bank, the Chinese troops will withdraw to the **east of Finger 8**, while the Indian troops will move to the **Dhan Singh Thapa post near Finger 3**.

3. [Oxford jab gets WHO green light](#)

- The World Health Organization (WHO) listed two versions of the **AstraZeneca-Oxford** COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, giving the green light for them to be rolled out globally through COVAX. The **vaccines are produced by AstraZeneca-SKBio (Republic of Korea) and the Serum Institute of India (SII)**. The world body had also listed the **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine for emergency use on December 31.

4. [India to gift 2 lakh vaccine doses to UN peacekeepers](#)

- India announced a gift of 2,00,000 doses of vaccine to the UN Peacekeeping Forces. The announcement was made by **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** during his remarks at a UN Security Council open debate on the **implementation of resolution 2532 (2020)**, passed last year, noting the impact of COVID-19 globally and calling for the cessation of hostilities around the world to help combat the pandemic. The debate was attended by the Foreign Ministers of the UNSC member countries. The Minister said **India had already sent vaccines to 25 countries under its Vaccine Maitri programme** and that 49 more countries would be supplied in the coming days.
- Mr. Jaishankar told his counterparts that **COVAX** (*a global initiative to develop, purchase and deliver vaccines worldwide*) would need to be strengthened, to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines. However, the government has been criticised for getting ahead of the science. Its approval of **Bharat Biotech's Covaxin** vaccine for emergency use authorisation in India before its efficacy was established via Phase-III trials had created a stir last month.
- **Disparity in vaccine accessibility:** Several rich countries have ordered more vaccine doses than required for their population, depriving developing economies of access to these doses. Just its orders of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines alone are enough to cover all adults in the U.S. This still leaves its orders of AstraZeneca, Novavax and Johnson and Johnson vaccines, which add up to over 500 million more doses. *"There currently exists a glaring disparity in accessibility of vaccines globally. Equity in access to vaccines is important for mitigating the impact of pandemic,"* Mr. Jaishankar said.

5. **Sikh pilgrims denied permission to visit Pak.**

- The Union Home Ministry has denied permission to a Sikh *jattha* (group) of nearly 600 pilgrims to visit Pakistan for the **100th anniversary of the Saka Nankana Sahib**. The group was expected to visit five gurdwaras in Pakistan from February 18 to 21. The **Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)**, an apex Sikh religious body, had sought permission from the Ministry.
- It added that the Ministry had not accorded permission to the group for crossing over to Pakistan, which was mandatory in the wake of the suspension of traffic between the two countries due to the pandemic. According to a **1974 bilateral protocol with Pakistan**, four Sikh *jatthas* visit important gurdwaras in Pakistan every year.

6. **Leopard population tracking**

- Experts from three organisations, one of them Assam based Aaranyak, have come up with a system, SMR (Spatial Mark-Resight models), that helps in properly estimating the leopard population in areas **sustaining a mix of rosette and melanistic individuals**.
 - **Rosettes** are jagged black circular marks on the tawny coat of a leopard. Like the tiger's stripes, the *rosettes of each leopard are unique* in shape and size, making the species identifiable individually. But **melanistic leopards** - commonly called black leopards or black panthers or ghongs (Assamese) - have been difficult to estimate as their rosettes are invisible.
 - *"When a population has only rosette leopard, estimating their population size becomes easy because all the individuals can be identified. Unlike rosette leopards, a black leopard can often not be reliably identified individually, although special cases exist. We are, therefore, unable to completely estimate population sizes of leopards, a metric that is very critical for their conservation,"* Dipankar Lahkar, a tiger biologist with Aaranyak, said.
 - This problem is acute in the tropical and subtropical moist forests of South and Southeast Asia where the **frequency of melanistic leopards** is high and leopards also face the greatest threat. No precise estimates of leopard population could thus be done in protected areas and non protected areas in India except on some occasions.
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International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

Daily snippets

1. [France passes Bill to battle extremism](#)

- Lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a Bill that would strengthen oversight of mosques, schools and sports clubs to safeguard France from radical Islamists and ensure respect for French values - one of **President Emmanuel Macron's** landmark projects.
- The vote in the lower house was the first critical hurdle for the legislation that has been long in the making after two weeks of intense debate. The Bill passed 347 to 151 with 65 abstentions. The Bill that **covers most aspects of French life** has been hotly contested by Muslims, lawmakers and others, who fear the state is intruding on essential freedoms and **pointing a finger at Islam**, the **nation's second major religion**.

2. [Dhaka court sentences 5 to death for killing writer](#)

- Five Islamist extremists were sentenced to death over the brutal murder of a **Bangladeshi-American writer and rights activist Avijit Roy** six years ago. **Avijit Roy**, a prolific blogger and the author of 10 books including the bestselling *Biswasher Virus* ("*Virus of Faith*"), was hacked to death outside Bangladesh's largest book fair by machete wielding extremists in February 2015.
- The murder, part of a reign of terror by extremists at the time, enraged the Muslim-majority nation's secular activists who staged days of protests. Roy was born in Bangladesh in 1972 and moved to the U.S. in 2006 from where he continued to criticise the government for the jailing of atheist bloggers.

3. ['North Korean hackers target vaccine tech'](#)

- North Korean hackers attempted to steal information **about coronavirus vaccines and treatments**, South Korea's intelligence service said, but it denied a lawmaker's claim that vaccine maker Pfizer Inc. was targeted. Earlier on Tuesday, Ha Taekeung, a Member of Parliament's intelligence committee, told reporters that the National Intelligence Service told him and other lawmakers during a closed door briefing that **North Korea hacked Pfizer to obtain COVID-19 vaccine technology**.
- After Mr. Ha's comments made headlines, the NIS said it didn't mention any pharmaceutical company by name. Mr. Ha, however, stood by his claim when contacted by the Associated Press.

4. [Sri Lanka considering India's grant instead of China project](#)

- In an apparent bid to displace a Chinese company that had won the contract to install renewable energy systems in three small islands off Jaffna Peninsula in northern Sri Lanka, India has offered a grant of \$12 million to execute it.
- **Sri Lanka's Minister of Power Dullas Alahapperuma** has recently said that the government would consider India's proposal, and that he would present a Cabinet paper on the matter soon. Newspaper reports quoted him

as saying that receiving a grant “*is an advantage*” that would ease the burden on the Treasury, as opposed to an **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** loan, as per the original project proposal, that would have to be repaid.

- The development comes less than a month after the Cabinet cleared a **project to install hybrid renewable energy systems** in Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Analaitivu, located in the **Palk Bay**, some 50 km off Tamil Nadu.
- The Cabinet decisions taken on January 18, published officially, included a proposal to award the contract to Sinosoar Etechwin Joint Venture in China, with funding from the ADB. **India’s swift offer comes in the wake of being ejected, along with Japan, out of the East Container Terminal (ECT) development project at the Colombo Port**, following another Cabinet decision taken on February 1 this year.

5. **‘No immediate plan to end presence in Sahel’**

- France has no immediate plans to adjust its military presence in **Africa’s Sahel region**, and any changes will depend on other countries contributing troops, **President Emmanuel Macron** told a news conference. Mr. Macron added there was an increased willingness from other European countries to take part in the **Takuba military force** in Sahel. France is searching for an exit strategy after years of military intervention against Islamist militants.
- **The Sahel** is the ecoclimatic and biogeographic realm of transition in Africa between the Sahara to the north and the Sudanian savanna to the south.
- **The Takuba Task Force** is a European military task force led by France which will advise, assist and accompany Malian Armed Forces, in coordination with **G5-Sahel** partners and other international actors on the ground.
- **G5-Sahel or G5S** is an institutional framework for coordination of regional cooperation in development policies and security matters in west Africa. It was formed on 16 February 2014 in Nouakchott, Mauritania, at a summit of **five Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger**.

6. **‘U.S. will pay over \$200 million to WHO’**

- **U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken** announced that his country would pay the World Health Organization (WHO) \$200 million by the end of this month. The announcement is significant as the former U.S. President Donald Trump had begun the **process of withdrawing the U.S. from the WHO**, a process stopped by his successor, President Joe Biden.
- Mr. Blinken called for transparency on outbreak data, saying countries should participate in “*transparent and robust processes*” in their prevention and response to health emergencies. The **U.S. is the largest funder of the WHO**, contributing more than 15% of its total funds. “*We plan to provide significant financial support to COVAX through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. And we’ll work to strengthen other multilateral initiatives involved in the global COVID-19 response — for example, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria,*” Mr. Blinken said.

7. **China blocked Ma’s IPO over ‘political links’**

- **China’s President Xi Jinping** pushed for blocking what would have been a record breaking **initial public offering (IPO)** for billionaire **Jack Ma’s Ant Group** last year because of Communist Party linked “*political families*” who stood to gain billions of dollars through opaque investment vehicles, according to a new report.
- Investment companies linked to the grandson of former President Jiang Zemin and the son in law of former Politburo Standing Committee member Jia Qinglin stood to profit from the IPO, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, with their ownership in the **Ant Group, the financial payments arm of Mr. Ma’s Alibaba empire**, held through “*layers of opaque investment vehicles that own stakes in the firm*”.

- Among them is **Boyu Capital**, a private equity firm founded by Mr. Jiang's grandson, Jiang Zhicheng. Another is **Li Botan**, who controls the **Beijing Zhaode Group**, that has invested in Ant through three layers of investment vehicles, the report said. Mr. Li is the son-in-law of Jia Qinglin, a senior leader who served on the top Politburo Standing Committee for ten years until 2012 and is close to Mr. Jiang.
- The **suspension of the \$35 billion IPO of the Ant Group**, which is Alibaba's financial arm and behind Alipay, a digital payments company, triggered intense speculation about the fate of Mr. Ma, but subsequent reports have said he is working with regulators to address their concerns.
- In December, the **State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR)** said it had launched a probe into Alibaba's "*suspected monopolistic acts*" including "*forcing merchants to choose one platform between two competitors*". Financial risks were cited as one concern, with the group emerging as a lender to millions of small businesses, and operating, like other fintech companies, without some of the capital requirements that apply to banks. Ant's access to **troves of consumer credit data** was also under the lens.

8. 'Pak. to remain in FATF grey list until June'

- Pakistan is unlikely to exit the **Financial Action Task Force's (FATF)** 'grey' list until June, despite its efforts to garner support from the member nations ahead of the plenary meeting of the global terror financing and money laundering watchdog next week, according to a media report.
- The **FATF's Plenary and Working Group meetings**, scheduled to be held from February 21 to 26 in Paris, is all set to decide on Pakistan's grey list status. **Pakistan was placed on the 'grey' list in June 2018** and given a timeline to **implement 27 action points**.

9. Sri Lanka cancels Pakistan PM's address to Parliament

- **Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's coming visit to Sri Lanka**, Colombo has cancelled his Parliament address scheduled next week, sparking speculation in political and diplomatic circles in the capital. Government officials have cited "*COVID-19 constraints*" as reason for the decision, while a Parliament spokesman attributed it to "*scheduling issues*".
- Colombo's revision of the visiting leader's itinerary has raised questions for obvious reasons. It comes barely a week before **Sri Lanka faces a likely contested resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council** in Geneva, in which Pakistan is currently a member.
- The cancellation is also being viewed in the context of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's assurance to Parliament on February 10 that burial of COVID-19 victims would be allowed, amid a persisting campaign from **Sri Lanka's Muslim community, seeking burial rights**. But a week since, the government is yet to reverse its contested policy of enforcing cremations for COVID-19 victims, being followed despite the **WHO clearing both burial and cremation**.



Commentary : A growing rights crisis in Lanka

1. Background

- The human rights situation in Sri Lanka has worsened since **Gotabaya Rajapaksa** became President in 2019. At its next session starting February 22, the **UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** will face a crucial test in taking action for *protecting vulnerable Sri Lankans and upholding international law*. India, as a council member, will have a key role.

2. Rajapaksa's abuse of human rights:

- Rajapaksa was the defence secretary in the government led by his brother Mahinda from 2005 to 2015, a period marked by **particularly egregious human rights abuses**. Critics of the government were murdered, tortured, and forcibly made to disappear. Tens of **thousands of civilians were killed in the civil war** which ended in 2009 between government forces and the separatist **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)**, with both sides **responsible for numerous war crimes**. In the final months of the war, the armed forces indiscriminately shelled civilians and summarily executed suspected LTTE fighters.
- In January, the authorities **bulldozed a memorial at Jaffna university that commemorated Tamil civilian victims** of the civil war.

3. The current situation

- The Rajapaksa government, in 2020, **renounced its commitments under the 2015 Human Rights Council resolution** and is threatening victims' families and activists who supported it.
- The **Rajapaksa government has shown outright disdain for accountability**. Since 2012, the Human Rights Council has sought to work with Sri Lanka to promote reconciliation and accountability, efforts that India has backed. Sri Lanka is now rejecting that endeavour, instead proposing a new domestic commission that UN experts have dismissed as lacking credibility or independence. The UNHRC should recognise the government's actions for what they are - an effort to impede justice.

Analysis : Freedom and security

1. By calling on social media platforms operating in India to **follow the law of the land**, the government has not just stated the seemingly obvious but also delivered a warning to Twitter that it ought not to defy its orders again, the way it did in early February, when the government wanted certain handles blocked for spreading incendiary content.
 2. The government wanted problematic hashtags blocked is understandable, given the tense situation on the ground on the day of the farmer protests, but what is difficult to appreciate is that *it also wanted handles of some journalists, activists and politicians to be blocked*.
 3. If either one of the parties had decided to escalate the issue, the contentious law under which social media platforms are required to comply with blocking orders could come under legal scrutiny. The reference is to **Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000**, under which the government can order a digital intermediary to block any content on grounds including security of the state and public order.
 4. It is, therefore, important that freedom of speech is not seen as the antithesis of security of the state, but as one of its key facilitators.
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Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. Telcos ask government to defer net neutrality rules

- The COAI has urged the government to bring **over the top (OTT) service providers** such as WhatsApp under the licensing regime and defer net neutrality rules on telecom operators till the time *'same service, same rules'* are applied on the applications. *"Till the time any decision is taken regarding licensing of OTT communication providers, the unequitability between TSPs (telecom service providers) and OTTs should not be increased further. Till such time, no new licensing conditions, including that of traffic management practices for net neutrality etc., should be imposed on TSPs,"* Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said.
- **Net neutrality principle** - The net neutrality principles prohibit service providers from discriminating against Internet content and services by blocking, throttling or according preferential higher speeds.

2. Cairn files case in US against claims of \$1.2 billion award from India

- Cairn Energy has filed a case in a U.S. district court to enforce a **\$1.2 billion arbitration award** it won in a tax dispute against India. In December, an arbitration body awarded the British firm **damages of more than \$1.2 billion** plus interest and costs. The tribunal ruled India breached an investment treaty with Britain and said New Delhi was liable to pay.
- The case marked a first step in Cairn's efforts towards recovering its dues, potentially by seizing Indian assets, if the government did not pay. It was reported last month that Cairn was **identifying India's overseas assets**, including bank accounts and even Air India planes or Indian ships, that could be seized in the absence of a settlement.

3. Cabinet approves PLI plan for telecom

- The Union Cabinet approved the **production linked incentive scheme** for the telecom sector with an outlay of ₹12,195 crore over five years. The scheme, which aims to make India a **global hub for manufacturing telecom equipment**, is expected to lead to an incremental production of about ₹2.4 lakh crore, with exports of about ₹2 lakh crore over five years and bring in investments of more than ₹3,000 crore.
- The scheme was also likely to generate 40,000 **direct and indirect employment opportunities** and generate tax revenue of ₹17,000 crore from telecom equipment manufacturing, including core transmission equipment, 4G/5G Next Generation Radio Access Network and wireless equipment, access and Customer Premises Equipment (CPE), Internet of Things (IoT) access devices, other wireless equipment and enterprise equipment such as switches and routers.

4. Start-ups must create world class products : PM

- Start-ups in India should not focus only on valuations and exit strategies, but on **creating institutions that will outlast this century and products that set the global benchmark on excellence**, to help India become a global leader in technology, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said speaking at the NASSCOM Technology and Leadership Forum (NTLF).

5. [India's economic march in 2021](#)

- S&P Global Ratings said India will be **one of the fastest growing emerging market economies** with a 10% growth in the next fiscal, and future sovereign rating action would hinge on **lowering fiscal deficit and sustaining debt burden**.
 - The forecast for India in 2021 is on the stronger side and shows that a lot of economic activity, which was frozen last year, is coming back on line to normalisation, there by brightening the growth prospects. S&P said India's economy has stabilised over recent months, with progressively better manufacturing, services, labour market and revenue data.
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Suggested Readings

1. Priya Ramani - MJ Akbar case & the #Metoo movement, [Link to article](#)
 2. Judiciary and its independence, [Link to article](#)
 3. Supreme Court and farm laws, [Link to article](#)
 4. Scaling up the Indian advantage in telehealth, [Link to article](#)
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Sources referred to : [The Hindu](#), [The Indian Express](#), [Live Law](#), [Bar & Bench](#)

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