
Law, Policy and Governance



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [WhatsApp messaging users on privacy](#)

- WhatsApp, which faced a severe backlash over the latest update to its privacy policy, will now leverage its own platform to reach out to users directly via the “status” feature, while also putting up banners on the application, to share detailed information on the proposed policy updates.
- However, amid criticism and confusion over the updates resulting in sharing of users’ data with Facebook, the company had pushed back the rollout to May 15. It has since clarified that this update does not expand its ability to share data with Facebook.

2. [‘Reply to appeals by Natasha, Devangana’](#)

- The Delhi High Court sought response of Delhi Police on appeals by **JNU students and Pinjra Tod members** Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita challenging the rejection of their bail pleas by a trial court.
- A Bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and A.J. Bhambhani also issued notice to the Delhi government and sought their stand by the next hearing. Both Ms. Narwal and Ms. Kalita are booked under the anti-terror law **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** in north east Delhi riots case.

3. [Contract workers must get maternity leave: HC](#)

- Coming down strongly on the Karnataka government for terminating the service of a woman employed on contract basis, merely because she had sought maternity leave, the Karnataka High Court observed that “*it would be power at wrong hands when men who man such offices become insensitive*”.
- “*The action of the DMA cannot be countenanced, as the Maternity Benefit Act, 1967, does not classify or qualify a mother to be a government servant, temporary employee, employee on contract or an employee on daily wages,*” the court held.

- The court also imposed a cost of ₹25,000 on the government while quashing the order of termination and directed the authorities to reinstate the petitioner with 50% back wages from the date of termination of her contract.

4. [Banks cannot disclaim responsibility on lockers: SC](#)

- Banks cannot wash their hands of any liability if any harm is caused to their customers' lockers or safe deposits in an era when miscreants can manipulate technology to gain access to electronically operated bank lockers, the Supreme Court observed in a judgment.
- The court gave the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) six months to lay down "*comprehensive directions mandating the steps to be taken by banks with respect to locker facility/safe deposit facility management*". The judgment came on an appeal filed against the Union Bank of India.

5. [SC refuses petition against M.P. ordinance](#)

- The Supreme Court declined to entertain a petition challenging the **validity of the controversial Madhya Pradesh ordinance** regulating religious conversions through inter faith marriages. The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde asked petitioner Vishal Thakre to approach the Madhya Pradesh High Court.
- The plea said the law, which followed a similar ordinance made by Uttar Pradesh, **infringed a person's right to privacy and freedom of choice**, leading to violations of fundamental rights under **Articles 14, 19(1)(a) and 21** of the Constitution.

National News/ Interventions



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Biometric authentication to benefit farmers : Centre](#)

- In a bid to cut out the middleman and ensure greater transparency in the procurement of farm produce, the Centre is encouraging the States to deploy biometric authentication of farmers. The practice, already adopted in Uttar Pradesh and set to be rolled out in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha this year, will **aid in tracking the end use beneficiary**, Food Minister Piyush Goyal said.
- "*This initiative reduced the need for extensive paperwork, prevented leakages and speeded up the process of procurement, with payment settlement being completed within 72 hours. The other advantage is that the farmer gets a receipt for his goods, showing the quantity and the MSP price, so nobody can cheat the farmer,*" said Mr. Goyal.

2. [Visible changes in J&K, says envoy](#)

- The 24 envoys, who toured Jammu on their second day visit to J&K, told Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha that the situation was "*witnessing a visible change*" in the Union Territory (UT). "*Change is visible in J&K. The envoys' visit to J&K is an eye opener and improved the understanding of important issues concerning J&K,*" Eritrea Ambassador Alem Tsehaye Woldermariam said.

- *“Efforts of the Prime Minister have ushered the UT into a new era, bringing socio-economic development in the region and empowerment of people. We have developed an ecosystem of democratic values, welfare principles and economic development in J&K,”* the LG said. He apprised the envoys of investments made in infrastructure, industries, education, healthcare, skill development and sustainable livelihood. Around 26 people representing civil society groups and elected members met the envoys too.
- J&K Congress president G.A Mir termed the envoys’ meetings as *“stage managed show”*. National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah said, *“Thank you for visiting Kashmir. Now please send some real tourists from your countries to visit J&K.”*

3. [25 cities in Nurturing Neighbourhoods contest](#)

- **The Urban Affairs Ministry** announced the names of the 25 cities selected for the **Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge** under the Smart Cities Mission. The shortlisted cities would carry out projects for making early childhood friendly neighbourhoods, the Ministry said.

4. [Hyderabad wins global ‘Tree City’ status](#)

- Hyderabad has won a green contest among cities in India, and emerged one of the **‘Tree Cities of the World’**. That title has been bestowed by the **Arbor Day Foundation and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**. **Hyderabad has been selected for its commitment to growing and maintaining urban forestry**, a statement from the GHMC said on Thursday.
- With the recognition, the city joins 120 others from 23 countries, including the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Australia. The Municipal Administration and Urban Development Department applied for consideration, citing the State government’s **Haritha Haram programme** and its **Urban Forest Parks plan**, the statement said.
- The city was **evaluated on five metrics**: ‘Establish Responsibility’, ‘Set the Rules’, ‘Know What You Have’, ‘Allocate the Resources’, and ‘Celebrate the Achievements’.

5. [PM moots special visa scheme for medical staff in South Asia](#)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a workshop on *“COVID-19 management: exchange of good practices in tackling pandemic and the way forward”* with nine neighbouring countries, suggested that they consider **creating a special visa scheme for doctors and nurses** so that they can travel quickly within the region during health emergencies, on the request of the receiving country.
- India is hosting a Secretary Level virtual meeting on COVID-19 management with the countries including Pakistan. It is being chaired by Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan. The Prime Minister suggested that the Civil Aviation Ministries could coordinate a **regional air ambulance agreement** for contingencies, and countries could come together to create a regional platform for collating, compiling and studying data about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines among our populations. Highlighting the work done during the pandemic, he said that when it hit the world last year, many experts voiced special concern about our densely populated region.

6. [Make private traders pay MSP: Kisan Sabha](#)

- Minimum support prices for farm produce should be paid by private traders, not just the government, the **All India Kisan Sabha** said on Friday. The Left-affiliated farmers organisation, which is part of the ongoing farm protests, argued that its proposal for **legally guaranteed MSPs** would not place the entire additional burden on the government budget, or ultimately, the taxpayer. Instead, the large corporates who make large profits from agribusiness must be forced to share their surplus with the primary producers, AIKS general secretary Hannan Mollah told journalists.

7. [Dr. Reddy’s to seek nod for use of Sputnik V](#)

- **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.** announced that it had initiated the process with the **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** for **Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)** of human **adenoviral vector-based platform** vaccine candidate **Sputnik V**.
- G.V. Prasad, co-chairman and managing director of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, said, *"The efficacy of Sputnik V was reported to be 91.6 % by the Lancet. The initiation of the EUA process will be a critical step forward for us in ensuring speedy access to the Sputnik V vaccine in India."* Dr. Reddy's has partnered with the **Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF)** to conduct the clinical trials.

8. New tourist points to be identified at the Sambhar Lake

- New tourist points for witnessing **the flora and fauna** and having a **glimpse of salt harvesting** will be identified at the world famous **Sambhar Salt Lake**, situated 80 km away from Jaipur.
- The Sambhar Lake, which formed part of the **desert circuit in the Centre's Swadesh Darshan Scheme**, had an immense potential for tourism. In addition to the migratory birds, the natural process of salt getting deposited in the lake could be displayed to the tourists. A **constant monitoring for protection of migratory birds** would be ensured at the lake, where the mass death of birds had occurred in 2019 because of [avian botulism](#).

9. NEP is a milestone to self-reliant India : PM

- Describing the new education policy as a major milestone in the making of a self-reliant nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said **Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore** developed systems at Visva Bharati which were the medium of modernising Indian education and freeing it from the shackles of slavery. Mr. Modi, who was virtually addressing the convocation at Visva Bharati University, said the new education policy **promoted entrepreneurship and self employment, research and innovation**.



International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

Daily snippets

1. Quad meet: India, U.S. call for rule of law in Myanmar

- India joined Australia, Japan and the United States for a ministerial meeting under the quadrilateral grouping during which key issues, including Myanmar, came up for discussion. **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** and **U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken** said the **military takeover in Myanmar** featured in the talks and participants reiterated democratic values for the region.
- India also emphasised in its statement that the meeting expressed commitment to *"upholding rules based international order"* and *"peaceful resolution of disputes"*
- The leaders referred to the military crackdown in Myanmar, with the U.S. highlighting *"the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region"*.

2. [FB blocks access to news in Australia](#)

- Facebook blocked Australians from sharing news stories, escalating a **fight with the government over whether powerful tech companies should have to pay news organisations for content**. The digital platforms fear that what is happening in Australia will *become an expensive precedent for other countries*. Facebook acted after the House of Representatives passed legislation that would make it and Google pay for Australian journalism, said Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. He said he was given no warning before Facebook acted. The legislation must be passed by the Senate to become law.
- The **move was swiftly criticised by news producers, politicians and human rights advocates**, many of whom pointed out that official health and meteorology information had also been scrubbed during the coronavirus pandemic and at the height of Australia's summer bushfire season.
- Facebook's drastic move represents a split from search giant Google after they initially joined together to campaign against the laws. Both had threatened to cancel services in Australia, but **Google has instead sealed deals with several outlets in recent days**.
- Rupert Murdoch's News Corp was the latest to announce a deal, in which it will receive "*significant payments*" from Google in return for providing content for the search engine's News Showcase account. **The Australian law would require Facebook and Google to reach commercial deals with news outlets, whose links drive traffic to their platforms, or be subjected to forced arbitration to agree a price.**

3. [Texas shivers amid power outages, water shortages](#)

- Power was gradually being restored but hundreds of thousands of households remained without electricity on Thursday across **Texas, the oil and gas capital of the U.S.**, with some facing water shortages as a **deadly winter cold spell** that pummelled the southeastern part of the country headed east.
- The **National Weather Service (NWS) issued a winter storm warning**. It said the storm would bring ice, sleet and heavy snow to parts of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi as it tracks to the northeast, causing power outages, tree damage and making driving hazardous.
- Even though the Arctic air mass was beginning to lose its grip on an area of the country not used to such extreme cold, the frigid temperatures would continue, the NWS said. More than 30 storm related deaths have been reported.

4. [Belarus jails journalists over protest coverage](#)

- A Belarus court sentenced a pair of television journalists to two years in prison for covering a protest last year, the first lengthy jail term in a legal **crackdown on independent news media**. Standing defiant in a cage, Katerina Bakhvalova, 27, and Daria Chultsova, 23, flashed "V" for victory signs.
- The two women were detained in November while filming anti government rallies after strongman **Alexander Lukashenko** claimed victory in an August election.

5. [China steps up online control over bloggers](#)

- Beginning next week, the Cyberspace Administration of **China will require bloggers and influencers to have a government approved credential before they can publish** on a wide range of subjects. Some fear that only state media and official propaganda accounts will get permission. While permits have been needed since at least 2017 to write about topics such as political and military affairs, enforcement has not been widespread. The new rules expand that requirement to health, economics, education and judicial matters. The move is in line with **restrictive regulations under President Xi Jinping** that constrict an already narrow space for discourse.

6. [Bhutan General, 2 judges held for 'overthrow' bid](#)

- Police in Bhutan have detained a top General and two judges over an alleged plot to overthrow the country's top military officer and Chief Justice. **Former Royal Bodyguard Commandant Brigadier Thinley Tobgay**, Supreme Court judge **Kuenley Tshering** and top district court judge **Yeshey Dorji** appeared in court on Wednesday after being detained at their homes. The three have been accused of **plotting to overthrow the country's top military officer, Lieutenant General Batoo Tshering**, by implicating him in a corruption scandal.
- All were denied bail by the Thimphu district court and remanded in custody until a first formal hearing on February 27. According to reports, Brigadier Tobgay was alleged to have illegally obtained military documents on the procurement of vehicles from the United Nations. The Bhutanese newspaper said that while the tender was handled publicly and fairly, the documents were to be used to undermine the position of the military number one.

7. [U.S. ready for talks on Iran deal](#)

- The Biden administration has said that it will participate in talks with Iran with a view to reinstate the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** or the '*Iran nuclear deal*', which has been unravelling since the U.S.'s departure from the deal in 2018.
- In 2018, Mr. **Trump pulled the U.S. out of the JCPOA**, an agreement between **Iran, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany**, which lifted long standing international sanctions against Iran in exchange for Tehran scuttling its nuclear programme. The U.S. had reinstated ramped up sanctions against Iran as part of what it called a '*maximum pressure campaign*', after leaving the deal.
- Also on Thursday, **Secretary of State Antony Blinken** told his counterparts from the **U.K, France and Germany ('the E3')** that the U.S. is prepared to talk to Iran and was prepared to re-enter the JCPOA if Iran also returned to compliance with it. Iran has threatened to partially stop **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** inspections next week if other parties to the JCPOA do not meet their commitments under the deal - a move the West cautioned against.

8. [Transatlantic alliance is back, says Biden](#)

- **President Joe Biden** declared the "*transatlantic alliance is back*" on Friday in a powerful speech seeking to **reestablish the U.S. as leader of the West** against what he called a global assault on democracy.
- The address to the annual **Munich Security Conference** - held by video link - dovetailed with **German Chancellor Angela Merkel's** welcoming of a return to "*multilateralism*" after the confrontational years of Mr. Biden's predecessor Donald Trump. Mr. Biden said he was not seeking a return to "*the rigid blocs of the Cold War*", but **warned about the threats posed by Russia and China**.
- "*The Kremlin attacks our democracies and weaponises corruption to try and undermine our system of governance,*" he said. Similarly, U.S. partners should stand together against "*the Chinese government's economic abuses and coercion that undercut the foundations of the international economic system,*" he said.

9. [Northern Tamils sceptical ahead of 'another Geneva session](#)

- The **46th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council** will take place from 22 February to 23 March 2021 in *Geneva*. Ahead of the session, the Sri Lankan government, Tamil polity, civil society, and diaspora groups are frantically lobbying member countries, hoping for different outcomes. So far, **none of the past UN resolutions or governmental mechanisms has delivered a convincing outcome**.
- **Sri Lanka's long civil war** played out across the Tamil majority north and east, but Mullaitivu bore the brunt of its gruesome end. According to UN estimates, some 40,000 civilians were trapped and killed in the final **battle between the armed forces and the separatist LTTE**, at the Nandikadal lagoon in May 2009.

- The Rajapaksa administration in power then and now, except from 2015 to 2019, has repeatedly denied the number of civilian casualties, deeming it an “*exaggeration*”. The numbers may be contested, but survivors’ suffering is hard to miss, following death and destruction all around.
- Districts in the former war zone are among the poorest in the country. Neither appropriate development, nor adequate jobs have come their way. **Mullaitivu district remains militarised**, with even traffic checkpoints run by armed military men.
- Months after **Gotabaya Rajapaksa** was elected President in late 2019, **Sri Lanka said it would withdraw from the existing UN resolution on postwar accountability and reconciliation**. It has instead proposed a domestic mechanism that Tamils have even less faith in, compared to international ones.
- It is in this climate that thousands of Tamilspeaking people recently took out a mass rally from Pothuvil in the eastern Ampara district to **Polihandy in Jaffna (titled ‘P2P’), demanding the rights of Tamil and Muslim minorities**. “*Whether Geneva delivers or not, people are certain that this government will not. That is why we pursue international mechanisms despite all the limitations,*” says Shanthi Sriskantharajah, a former MP from the district

10. **Uber drivers entitled to workers’ rights: U.K. SC**

- Britain’s top court ruled that ride hailing giant Uber’s drivers are entitled to workers’ rights, in a judgment with huge implications for the “*gig economy*”. The Supreme Court ruling that the drivers were employees followed a years long legal battle with the Silicon Valley taxi and delivery company. “*This has been a gruelling four year legal battle for our members - but it ended in a historic win,*” said Mick Rix, from the GMB trade union. “*The Supreme Court has upheld the decision of three previous courts, backing up what GMB has said all along; Uber drivers are workers and entitled to breaks, holiday pay and minimum wage,*” he added.

11. **U.S. reaffirms Saudi ‘defence partnership’**

- **Washington has reaffirmed its “strategic defence partnership” with Riyadh** in the face of increased attacks by Yemeni rebels. **Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin** condemned the Houthi attacks in a telephone call with his Saudi counterpart, **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman**. “*The secretary has condemned the recent Houthi cross border attacks,*” the official Saudi Press Agency said

12. **Indian-American behind NASA rover’s Mars landing**

- **Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan**, who leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of **NASA’s Mars 2020 mission**, played a pivotal role in landing the U.S. space agency’s historic **Perseverance** rover on the Martian surface on Friday. Ms. Mohan was also the first to confirm that the rover had successfully touched down on the Martian surface after surviving a particularly tricky plunge through the atmosphere of the Red Planet.
- Raised in the Northern Virginia Washington DC metro area, she completed her bachelor’s degree from Cornell University in Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering, and her M.S. and Ph.D from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Aeronautics/Astronautics.
- **Mars 2020** is a Mars rover mission by NASA’s Mars Exploration Program that includes the rover Perseverance and the small robotic helicopter Ingenuity. **NASA’s Mars 2020 Perseverance rover** will look for signs of past microbial life, cache rock and soil samples, and prepare for future human exploration.





Opinions and Analysis

Commentary : The pressing need to adjudicate, not mediate

1. Background

- The recent judgment of the Supreme Court that refused to review its earlier **verdict on the Shaheen Bagh protest** is inseparable from its political context.
- The verdict of October 7, 2020 declared that there is **no absolute right to protest**, and it could be subjected to the orders of the authority regarding the place and time

2. Analysis

- The top court could not exercise its constitutional role and **ensure judicial scrutiny on an aggrandising executive** and an equally imposing Parliament by exercising its **counter majoritarian function**. Having failed to do so, the kind of 'balancing' which the Court now tries to attain by way of the Shaheen Bagh orders will pose more questions than it answers.
- In the original judgment on Shaheen Bagh, the Court attempted to "*mediate*" the issue and admitted in the judgment that it "*did not produce any solution*". The Court's duty during the testing times is to adjudicate, and not to mediate. A **reconciliatory approach is not a substitute for juridical assertion**.
- When fear is the new normal for the average Indian, the court's only role is to act as the **guardian of the right to dissent**.
- In the review petition, the petitioners rightly apprehended that the observations in the earlier judgment against the indefinite occupation of public space "*may prove to be a license in the hands of the police to commit atrocities on legitimate voice of protest*".

Study : Stress levels lower among yoga practitioners

- A study by IIT Delhi scientists has revealed that those who practised yoga during the pandemic induced lockdown had lower stress, anxiety and depression, higher wellbeing and more peace of mind as compared to nonpractitioners. The study was undertaken by **National Resource Centre for Value Education in Engineering (NRCVEE)**, an academic centre at IIT Delhi.
- The study was carried on a total of 668 adults during lockdown between April 26 and June 8, 2020. The participants were grouped as yoga practitioners, other spiritual practitioners, and non practitioners. Yoga practitioners were further examined based on the duration of practice as **long term, midterm, and beginners**.
- "*The long-term practitioners reported higher personal control and lower illness concern in contracting COVID-19 than the midterm or beginner group. The long term and midterm practitioners also reported perceiving lower emotional impact of COVID-19 and lower risk in contracting the virus than the beginners,*" the institute said. Further, the long-term practitioners were found to have the highest peace of mind, lowest depression and anxiety with no significant difference in the midterm and the beginner group. The research pitches for the inclusion of yoga as an alternate therapy for self management of stress-related problems during conditions like COVID-19 pandemic.



Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. New PSE policy envisages at most 4 strategic-sector firms

- The **new public sector enterprises policy** envisages that the **strategic sectors have limited number of players** restricting it to maximum four public sector enterprises of a holding nature. The remaining enterprises would be rationalised in terms of mergers, amalgamations and privatisation if feasible.
- As part of the '**Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**', Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced that there would be a **maximum of four public sector companies** in strategic sectors, and state-owned firms in other segments would **eventually be privatised**.

2. Government likely to file appeal against Cairn arbitration award

- The Centre is likely to file an appeal against the \$1.4 billion international arbitration award won by Cairn Energy in a tax dispute. The government intends to **defend its sovereign right in taxation** and will file an appeal.
- Cairn has indicated it could **seize overseas assets such as aircraft and ships** if New Delhi fails to comply with the arbitration award and return the value of the shares sold, dividend seized and tax refund withheld by the income tax department to recover part of the tax demand it had raised using retrospective legislation. Indian government has kept open the **possibility of a resolution within Indian laws**. The options include Cairn opting for the **Vivad se Vishwas scheme**, which gives relief on interest and penalty if the principal tax demand is paid.

3. Indian IT workers to benefit from US immigration bill

- In a major move that will **benefit thousands of Indian IT professionals in America**, the Biden administration has introduced an immigration bill in Congress, which, among other things, proposes to eliminate the **per country cap for employment based green cards**.
- **The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021** proposes a pathway to citizenship to **11 million undocumented workers**, elimination of per country quota for employment based green cards and work authorisation for dependents of H1B foreign work. Authors of the bill, **Senator Bob Menendez** and **Congresswoman Linda Sanchez**, said the bill establishes a vision of immigration reform that is **expansive and inclusive**.



Sports

Daily snippets

1. Player Profiles:

- **Achanta Sharath Kamal** : He is a professional table tennis player from Tamil Nadu. He is the first Indian table tennis player ever to become **nine times Senior National Champion**. Recently he received the fourth highest civilian award, Padma Shri. Sharath won the men's singles gold in the 16th Commonwealth table tennis championship in 2004. He won the US Open Table Tennis Men's championships in July 2010. He also won the gold medal at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. He represented India in the 2004 Olympics in Athens and is still the top Indian TT player. He also represented the country in the 2006 Asian Games at Qatar.

2. Ankita Raina claims maiden WTA 250 doubles title

- Ankita Raina, partnering Russia's Kamilla Rakhimova, captured her maiden WTA 250 doubles title. The win is the biggest of Ankita's career, making her India's first WTA champion since Sania Mirza.

Suggested Readings

1. Transit anticipatory bail, [Link to article](#)
2. Nagaland's first solar electrified village, [Link to article](#)

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

END

SUBSCRIBE to [YourNEWSpage](#)