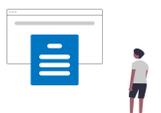


Law, Policy and Governance



Daily snippets

1. [Govt. Withdraws order on online science meets](#)

- The government has withdrawn a controversial order that required scientists and researchers, among others, participating in online international scientific seminars and conferences, to get prior clearance from the Ministry of External Affairs. The order, issued on January 31, had drawn severe backlash from scientists.
- The restrictions, according to scientists, were **too broad based and vague** and would have made it impossible for many scientists to participate in online conferences without contravening the law.

2. [Plea seeks simplification of child adoption process](#)

- Lengthy and cumbersome adoption procedures of the **Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)** and the increasing number of childless couples have given rise to a “grey market” for adoption, an NGO told the Delhi High Court.
- A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh issued notice to the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**, Delhi government, **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)** and **CARA** seeking their stand on the NGO’s plea seeking **simplification of the adoption procedure**.

3. [U.P. Assembly passes Bill on conversion amid protests](#)

- Amid protests by the Opposition, the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed by voice vote a Bill to **curb religious conversions** carried out by fraudulent or any other undue means, including through marriage.
- The **Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2021**, seeks to replace the ordinance promulgated in November last year that provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and a maximum fine of ₹50,000 for violators. Opposing the legislation, parties said that marriage is a personal matter of an individual.

4. [Govt. to monitor OTT content](#)

- For the first time, the government, under the ambit of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, has brought in **detailed guidelines for digital content on both digital media and Over The Top (OTT) platforms**, while giving itself overriding powers. The new rules lay down a three tier grievance redressal mechanism. However, over and above this framework, the government has equipped itself with “emergency” powers to block public access of any information.

5. [London court’s nod for Nirav Modi’s extradition](#)

- The Westminster Magistrates Court in London allowed India’s extradition request against businessman **Nirav Modi**, who is wanted in connection with the **₹13,758 crore Punjab National Bank** fraud, ruling that a prima facie case had been made out. Notice of application for approval to appeal has to be sought within 14 days of extradition, or discharge, ordered by the Secretary of State.

6. [Same-sex marriages will cause havoc, Central govt. tells HC](#)

- The Centre opposed any changes to the existing laws on marriage to recognise same-sex marriages, saying such interference would cause *“a complete havoc with the delicate balance of personal laws in the country”*. *Living together as partners and having sexual relationship by same-sex individuals is not comparable with the Indian family unit concept”*.
- The Centre submitted that *“registration of marriage of same-sex persons also results in violation of existing personal as well as codified law provisions”*.

7. [President’s Rule in Puducherry notified](#)

- President’s Rule was **imposed in the Union Territory of Puducherry** and the Legislative Assembly was placed under suspended animation, according to a notification issued by the Union Home Ministry. Union Territories are administered in accordance with the **provisions of Article 239 to 241** of the Constitution, and according to the **Allocation of Business Rules, 1961**, certain subjects pertaining to Union Territories, namely Legislative matters, Finance and Budget and Services, have been allocated to the Home Ministry. It comes after the fall of Congress govt.

8. [SC exploring avenues to offer quick relief to accident victims](#)

- The Supreme Court is exploring the **creation of a nationwide online mechanism** to help road accident victims and their families get compensation within a short time of the accident. A Bench led by Justice S.K. Kaul is considering various avenues to **speed up the compensation process**, including the setting up of a *national grid to seamlessly disburse compensation* across States to the online submission of police records and accident claim documents in Motor Accidents Claims Tribunals
- The court’s intervention came on a writ petition filed by one of India’s largest insurance firms, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company, on the plight of victims who have been waiting for years for compensation.



Daily snippets

1. [Disengagement a win-win situation, says Army chief](#)

- The **Chief of the Army Staff, General Manoj Naravane**, said the **disengagement in Pangong Tso (lake)** was a 'win-win' situation for both India and China and it was still a long way toward de-escalation.
- China has been in the habit of making small incremental moves like in the South China Sea that were not challenged but the Ladakh standoff has shown that this strategy will not work with India and *"every move will be met resolutely"*, he said at a webinar organised by Vivekananda International Foundation.

2. [India takes on Pak. at Human Rights Council](#)

- India hit out at Pakistan at the high-level segment of the **46th Session of the Human Rights Council** and said the recent **release of Al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh** is a *"clear example"* of the connection between the Pakistani state and terrorists.
- Responding to the **comments of Pakistan and Turkey on Kashmir and other issues**, the Indian diplomatic team said the government of India is *"fully cognizant"* of its human rights obligations. *"Pakistan has been the home and patron to the largest number of internationally proscribed terrorist entities and individuals in the world,"* said diplomat Seema Pujani after the **Pakistani delegation raised the Kashmir issue** and described the situation in the Valley as *"grave"*.
- **India also hit out at Turkey** and said the country had *"trampled upon"* its own civil society. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had raised the situation in Kashmir and called upon India to resolve the dispute as per the UNSC Resolutions.

3. [India, Pakistan agree to adhere to 2003 ceasefire](#)

- In a first joint statement issued by the two sides in years, India and Pakistan on Thursday said they have agreed to a *"strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors"* with effect from the midnight of February 24-25. The decision was announced after discussions between the **Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs)** of both sides over the established hotline on February 22.

4. [Labour rights activist released from jail](#)

- Labour rights activist **Naudeep Kaur** was on Friday released from a Haryana jail after the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted her bail in a case in which **faces charges of attempt to murder, rioting among others**, in an incident at Haryana's Kundli of Sonipat district. The 24-year old activist, who was in the Karnal jail, was released after the bail order.

5. [23.79 lakh register for free digital library service](#)

- The success of the government run digital library initiative, launched in Karnataka last year in February, weeks before the nationwide lockdown was imposed, has come as a surprise even to the authorities. In one year, over **23.79 lakh people signed up for services** during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a closer look at the data reveals that a **majority of subscribers to the free service did not download a single ebook or video**. According to data provided by the Department of Public Libraries, around **10.9 lakh ebooks and 5.49 lakh videos have been accessed so far**.

6. [U.S. welcomes IndiaPak. ceasefire agreement](#)

- The United States has welcomed the **announcement by India and Pakistan that they would observe the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC)**. The White House called for the two countries to build upon this progress and the State Department **encouraged a reduction in tensions and violence along the LoC**.
- Former U.S. President Donald Trump had ruffled feathers in New Delhi with repeated offers to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. Mr. Trump had announced in July 2019 that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked him to mediate on Kashmir with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar categorically assured Parliament that no such request was made.
- *"The Secretary-General is encouraged by the joint statement issued by the militaries of India and Pakistan on their agreement to observe the ceasefire at the Line of Control in Kashmir and engage through established mechanisms,"* spokesperson for the **UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres** said. The **European Union (EU)** also welcomed the ceasefire agreement.

7. [Panel seeks more data to clear Sputnik V](#)

- A **Subject Expert Committee (SEC)** of the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization** has sought more data on **Russia's Sputnik V vaccine** trials from Dr. Reddy's Laboratories to accord emergency use authorization for the COVID19 antidote. The SEC meeting asked **Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech**, which sought permission to conduct phase III clinical trials of the vaccine candidate in children aged 5-18 years, to submit **efficacy and safety data of ongoing Phase III clinical trials** in adults along with the age subgroup analysis.
- On Friday, **Bharat Biotech said it has signed an agreement with Brazil for supplying 20 million doses of Covaxin**. Under the deal worth 1.6 billion reais (\$290 million), the vaccine will be delivered in the second and third quarter of 2021

8. [Vaccines for seniors and 45-plus with comorbidities from March](#)

- People above 60 years of age and those above 45 with comorbidities would be given COVID-19 vaccines from March 1, the Union government announced. **Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar** said that under the second phase of vaccination, shots would be given for free at 10,000 government run facilities and for a charge at 20,000 private hospitals. Around 27 crore people are expected to be covered in the second phase. Of this group, around 10 crore people were over 60, he said.
- Detailed listing of the co morbidities and pre vaccination requirements would be issued, and strict surveillance and monitoring of those vaccinated would be done as part of the protocol.

9. [Punjab to amend Prisons Act to boost jail security](#)

- The Punjab government has decided to amend the **Prisons Act of 1894** to strengthen security at prisons and curb criminal acts by inmates through more stringent punishment for major offences such as rioting, escape from prison, and other violations of prison discipline and rules.
- The Council of Ministers approved a proposal mooted by the Jails department to add new penal provisions in the Act to strengthen security arrangements and prevent the use of mobile phones by the inmates, riots inside the jails, incidents of assault on the jail staff, damage to the jail property, incidents of absconding, possession of drugs inside the jails etc, said an official statement.

10. [Winter pollution on the rise](#)

- The **levels of PM 2.5**, the most threatening of particulate matter, **worsened in 43 of 99 cities** whose winter air in 2020 and 2019 was compared by the **Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)**, a nongovernmental research organisation. In the aftermath of the lockdown, several cities reported improved pollution levels but by winter, when the restrictions were significantly eased, pollution levels had clawed back to pre COVID-19 levels, the CSE notes, underlining the significant contribution of local and regional factors to a city's pollution levels.

- During winter, cool and calm weather traps and spikes daily pollution, particularly in north Indian cities located in the Indo Gangetic Plain. This bouncing back of pollution post lockdown unmasks the **high impacts of local and regional pollution**. This demands quicker regional reforms to curb pollution from vehicles, industry, power plants and waste burning to curb the winter pollution and also sustain annual improvement at a regional scale with speed. The study emphasises it was the smaller and upcoming cities that were emerging as pollution hotspots.

11. INCOIS to go for aerial mapping of ocean floor

- The **Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)** is planning to take the help of the **National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC)** for aerial mapping of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep to get a better picture of the ocean floor, also called 'bathymetric' study.
- "NRSC has already done a similar **high resolution topographic Airborne Laser Terrain Mapping (ALTM)** for the entire coastal areas of the country and we are in the process of integrating the data for a 3D multi hazard mapping of both the east and west coastline for a more precise picture of the ocean floor," said director T Srinivasa Kumar. Such a study has become imperative in view of the recent tsunamis of the Indonesian coasts where more than the quake related high waves, damage was due to landslides under the seabeds causing sudden wave surges leading to much damage without giving sufficient time to alert people, he pointed out.

12. Pandemic generation and the impacts

- The country is all set to usher in a "pandemic generation", with 375 million children (from new-borns to 14 year olds) likely to suffer long-lasting impacts. The challenges could range from being underweight, stunting and increased child mortality, to losses in education and work productivity, according to the **State of Environment Report, 2021**, released by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on Thursday. Over **500 million children** have been forced out of school globally and **India accounts for more than half of them. 115 million additional people** might get **pushed into extreme poverty** by the pandemic — and most of them live in South Asia.
- **India ranked 117 among 192 nations** in terms of **sustainable development** and was now behind all South Asian nations, except Pakistan, according to the report. Of 88 major industrial clusters in the country, according to the Central Pollution Control Board, 35 showed overall environmental degradation, 33 pointed to worsening air quality, 45 had more polluted water and in 17, land pollution became worse. **Tarapur in Maharashtra** emerged as the most polluted cluster. When ranked on the basis of **achieving Sustainable Development Goals**, the best performing States were Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. The worst performers were Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh, the report stated.

13. Second wave of infections

- A recent surge in infections notwithstanding, India is unlikely to see a "second wave" in infections, says Manindra Agrawal, Deputy Director, IIT, Kanpur, and one of India's leading mathematicians who is involved with the **National 'Super Model' initiative** led by the Department of Science and Technology.
- The current wave of infections - averaging 13,000 16,000 new confirmed infections a day since February 23 - was primarily being led by Maharashtra and would not last beyond "two three weeks" in March, he said. The reason, he said, is because **around 60% of India's population had already been exposed** to the virus and the country had reached herd immunity, or where the number of susceptible individuals were too few to allow the virus to exponentially grow.
- Whether herd immunity levels have been reached is moot, because the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) reported that only 21% of Indians** were estimated to have been infected, as per its third national serological survey conducted from December 17 to January 8, 2021. The Super Model's estimate is about thrice that number.
- Epidemiologists refer to the second wave as a resurgence of infection in an area where the transmission had decreased to below the outbreak potential but is now continually increasing over a certain period. The pre

requisites for defining the second wave are that the **first wave should have been contained** - the **reproduction number or R0 is below 1.5** and **low rate of infection has been sustained for at least one month**. The **cumulative test positivity rate below 5%** is generally used as a criterion to decide the end of a wave. But all these assumptions would prove wrong if a **new variant that shows greater transmissibility** either arises in India or those circulating in other countries spreads here. Newer variants, especially those capable of immune escape, can change everything we know, and this is the only way to have a second wave more devastating than the first wave.

14. [Karnataka to move SC against Tamil Nadu's project](#)

- Terming Tamil Nadu's decision to **utilise surplus water in the Cauvery basin** 'illegal', Karnataka Home, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the State would approach the Supreme Court for a legal recourse. The decision follows Tamil Nadu's move to lay foundation to the **Cauvery-Vellaru-Vaigai-Gundar link scheme** last Sunday. The link scheme proposes to utilise the surplus water in the Cauvery basin and transfer it to its Southern region.
- Mr. Bommai said: *"It is not right on the part of Tamil Nadu to utilise surplus water before it is allocated. Under the provisions of The Inter State Water Disputes Act, it is illegal and cannot happen without proper allocation."*

15. [Odisha's Puri Heritage corridor](#)

- The Naveen Patnaik government aggressively pushed the **₹3,200 crore heritage corridor project for Puri Jagannath Temple**. According to the State government, the heritage corridor would be divided into nine zones. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said the mega project was conceptualised keeping three objectives such as the security of the temple, safety of devotees and religious atmosphere for devotees in mind.

16. [Tracking the elusive snow leopard in Himachal](#)

- Himachal Pradesh's **high altitude hilly terrain** could be harbouring as many as **73 snow leopards** (*Panthera uncia*), says a recent study based on a scientific enumeration of the elusive animal. Snow leopards are **one of the most endangered wildlife species**. The first ever such study on snow leopards, a **top predator of the Indian Himalaya**, was completed in January by the Himachal Pradesh Wildlife Department and the Mysore based Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF).
 - In Himachal Pradesh, the snow leopard's habitat covers a greater part of the districts of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur. Its potential habitat also extends into the upper regions of the districts of Shimla, Kullu, Chamba and Kangra. This project is the first systematic effort at a **large regional scale** that utilised a **stratified sampling design** to estimate the snow leopard population over an area of 26,112 sq. km. The region was first stratified into three categories - high, low or unknown snow leopard occurrence, based on **questionnaire surveys of local communities** residing in these areas. **Camera trap surveys** were then carried out in areas under each of the categories. The studies found that the **snow leopard density** was positively correlated with the wild prey density, indicating that higher wild prey densities corresponded to higher snow leopard densities. The results reiterate, the study said, that **local communities are the strongest allies in conservation**, if their concerns can be factored into conservation planning.
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International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

Daily snippets

1. U.S. will seek to rejoin UNHRC: Blinken

- The **U.S. will seek re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced, as he “humbly” asked for the support of UN member states.
- This is the latest in a series of moves by the Biden administration to reverse a pattern of retreat from multilateralism that was characteristic of the Trump regime **Former President Donald Trump had taken the U.S. out of the Council in 2018**, saying it was *biased against Israel* and had members who were human rights abusers.

2. Imran announces \$50 mn defence credit line for Lanka

- **Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan** announced a **\$50 million defence credit line facility for Sri Lanka**, even as the two countries stressed the need for “*stronger partnership*” in security, combating terrorism, organised crime and drug and narcotic trafficking, and intelligence sharing.
- Mr. Khan’s visit to Sri Lanka is the first to be undertaken by a head of government, after the pandemic hit the world. It was the first visit by the Pakistani Prime Minister since the formation of the new governments in both the countries and marked Mr. Khan’s return since his cricketing tours to Sri Lanka in 1975 and 1986. Mr. Khan met with representatives of Sri Lanka’s sports fraternity, at an event where Sri Lanka’s Minister of Sports and Youth Namal Rajapaksa announced the commissioning of the ‘*Imran Khan High Performance Sports Centre*’ in Colombo.

3. ‘Japan-U.S. treaty a product of Cold War’

- China called the **Japan-U.S. mutual security pact a product of the Cold War** following U.S. criticism of the presence of Chinese coast guard vessels in Japanese-claimed territorial waters over the weekend. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin also reasserted China’s claim to a string of tiny, uninhabited islands in the East China Sea controlled by Japan.
- The verbal exchange followed reports that two Chinese coast guard ships on Sunday twice entered Japanese territorial waters surrounding the islands, **known by Japan as Senkaku and by China as Diaoyu**. Chief Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said China had “*continued to flout international rules*” and the U.S. would work with its allies to address such challenges.
- Wang did not directly address the criticism but said the islands were “*China’s inherent territory*”. “*The U.S. Japan security treaty is a product of the Cold War, which should not harm a third party’s interest or endanger regional peace and stability,*” Wang said at a daily briefing.

4. Ghana first country to receive COVAX vaccines

- **Ghana** received the world's first delivery of coronavirus vaccines from the **United Nations-backed COVAX initiative** - the long awaited start for a program that has thus far fallen short of hopes that it would ensure shots were given quickly to the world's most vulnerable people.
- The arrival of 600,000 doses of the **AstraZeneca vaccine** in the West African country marks the beginning of the **largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history**, according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF. However, the initiative has been **hampered by the severely limited global supply of doses and logistical problems**. Although it **aims to deliver 2 billion shots this year**, it currently has agreements only for several hundred million shots.

5. [France slams 'repression' of Uighurs](#)

- French Foreign Minister Jean Yves Le Drian denounced what he called the "*institutionalised repression*" of **China's Uighur minority**. Speaking by video link at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Mr. Le Drian said witness accounts from the Chinese region of Xinjiang pointed to "*unjustifiable practices towards Uighurs, and a system of large scale surveillance and institutionalised repression.*"
- Rights groups believe that **at least 1 million Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslim minorities** are incarcerated in camps in the western region of Xinjiang. Mr. Le Drian cited Xinjiang among several examples of "*considerable regressions for human rights*" in 2020.

6. [Biden revokes Trump's immigrant visa ban](#)

- The Biden administration took another step to undo the previous government's immigration policy legacy by **revoking Donald Trump's suspension of new immigrant visas**, which had been in effect since late April last year. The order had been extended through to March 31 by Mr. Trump. The revoked order (Proclamation 10014) had **suspended the entry of certain immigrants and non-immigrants into the U.S.** ostensibly on grounds of **protecting the U.S. labour market** in the wake of COVID-19.
- The **U.S. issues up to 55,000 immigrant visas** (these become "*Green Cards*" after the recipient enters the U.S.) via its *diversity lottery* each year to encourage immigration from nationalities that are demographically underrepresented in the U.S
- Mr. Biden, however, **did not revoke a Trump administration pause on H1B** (skilled worker), L (intra-company transfer) and several other work and exchange visitor visa categories (and dependents of these visa holders) that went into effect on June 24 last year. **H1B visas are predominantly granted to workers in the IT sector**, and most of these visas — over 70% — have gone to Indian citizens in recent years.

7. [FB bans Myanmar military accounts](#)

- Facebook said it has banned all remaining accounts linked to the Myanmar military, citing the junta's use of deadly force against anti-coup demonstrators. The move, which takes effect immediately, applies to the **military and entities controlled by the armed forces** on both Facebook and Instagram. It also bans "*military-linked commercial entities*" from advertising on the platforms.
- The junta has steadily increased its use of force against a massive and largely peaceful civil disobedience campaign demanding Myanmar's Army leaders relinquish power. Pages for government offices now run by the junta remain unaffected.

8. [Pakistan will remain on FATF 'greylist'](#)

- The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** decided to **retain Pakistan on the "greylist"** till the next review of its performance during the June plenary session. At a press briefing, **FATF president Marcus Pleyer** said although Pakistan had made significant progress, it was **still to fully comply with three of the 27 point action plans** it had

been presented with in June 2018 when it was first put on the “greylist”. He urged Pakistan to make fast progress on them.

- The three points on which the FATF has sought urgent action by Pakistan pertain to effective steps, in terms of financial sanctions and penalties, against terror funding infrastructure and the entities involved. After assessing the measures taken during the June session, the FATF would verify the implementation and test the sustainability of reforms undertaken by Pakistan to this end. To a query on **when Pakistan would be put on the “blacklist”**, the FATF chief said it would happen when the country shows progress; it was not the time for such an action.

9. [As reserves shrink, Sri Lanka seeks \\$2.2 billion from China](#)

- **Sri Lanka is seeking \$2.2 billion from Chinese banks**, the government said on Thursday, in echoes of a borrowing binge more than a decade ago that resulted in the country having to give up a strategic port to China. Money and Capital Markets Minister Nivard Cabraal said the government was hopeful of finalising a **\$1.5 billion swap facility with China’s central bank**.
- Official figures show **Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves plummeted to \$4.8 billion** at the end of January, the lowest since September 2009 when they fell to \$4.2 billion. Officials said the **country was also in talks with China Development Bank for a \$700 million loan** that would include the equivalent of \$200 million being drawn in Chinese currency.

10. [Armenian PM accuses military of coup attempt](#)

- **Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan** warned of an **attempted military coup** against him on Thursday, and thousands took to the streets of the capital to support him after the Army demanded he and his government resign. Mr. Pashinyan, 45, has faced calls to quit since November after what critics said was his disastrous handling of a conflict between **Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenian forces** over the **Nagorno-Karabakh** enclave and surrounding areas. **Armenia ceded swathes of the territory to Azerbaijan after Mr. Pashinyan signed a peace deal last November**.

11. [India cannot abandon us, says Sri Lanka](#)

- Seeking India’s “*proactive*” support at the **UN Human Rights Council**, where a resolution on Sri Lanka will be soon put to vote, the Secretary to Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, “*India cannot abandon us*”. “*Sri Lanka is in dire need of support from our friendly neighbours. And we are not asking anything extraordinary, we are asking something based on your **neighbourhood first policy**, based on **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**.*”
- His appeal comes at a time when Indo-Lanka bilateral ties have come under strain, following a series of decisions taken by Colombo on development projects involving India and China. It remains to be seen how India might vote on the Sri Lanka resolution that draws from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet’s damning report on Sri Lanka’s “*alarming path towards recurrence of grave human rights violations*”, which Colombo has categorically rejected. On **Pakistan PM Imran Khan’s recent visit to Colombo**, he said it should not be seen as Sri Lanka attempting “*to join a bloc*” or country, against others. “*It is a bilateral visit.*”

12. [Sri Lanka to allow burial of virus victims](#)

- Sri Lanka on Friday cleared the burial of COVID-19 victims, reversing its nearly year long policy of mandatory cremations that the country’s Muslim community denounced. The change in the government’s position follows **Pakistani PM Imran Khan’s recent visit**, when he reportedly urged the **Rajapaksa administration to respect Muslims’ burial rights**.

- In April, a month after the pandemic struck Sri Lanka, the **government banned burials of victims**, based on unsubstantiated claims that the practice might contaminate groundwater, further spreading the virus. Despite senior virologists terming the claim baseless, and the **World Health Organization permitting both burials and cremation**, the government stuck to its position.
- Several members of the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** had raised the issue, both in Sri Lanka and at global fora, including the 46th session of the UNHRC. As many as 15 OIC countries are among the 47 current members of the Council, and will soon get to vote on a contested resolution on Sri Lanka.

13. Gunmen abduct 317 Nigerian schoolgirls

- Gunmen abducted 317 girls from a boarding school in northern Nigeria on Friday, police said, the latest in a series of **mass kidnappings of students in the West African nation**. Nigeria has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by **jihadi group Boko Haram** of 276 girls from the **secondary school in Chibok in Borno State**. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing.

14. U.S. strikes on Iran-backed militias in Syria kill at least 22

- The U.S. military has struck **Iran Backed militias in eastern Syria**, killing at least 22 fighters, according to a war monitor. In its first military action against Iran Linked groups since Joe Biden became President five weeks ago, the Pentagon said it had carried out air strikes on Thursday **at a Syria-Iraq border control point** used by Iran-backed groups, destroying “*multiple facilities*”, in retaliation for a spate of rocket attacks targeting its troops in Iraq.

15. Bangladeshis protest death of writer in jail

- Protesters blocked a busy intersection in Bangladesh’s capital to protest the death in prison of a writer and commentator, who was arrested on charges of violating a sweeping **digital security law that critics say stifles freedom of expression**.
- **Mushtaq Ahmed**, 53, was arrested in Dhaka in May last year for *making comments on social media that criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina government’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic*. He had been denied bail at least six times. It was not immediately clear how Mr. Ahmed died on Thursday. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said an investigation would follow.

16. MBS behind ‘capture or kill Khashoggi’ operation

- **Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman**, commonly known as **MBS**, approved of an operation to capture or kill dissident journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** who was murdered in 2018, according to a **declassified U.S. intelligence assessment** released in a manner choreographed to limit damage to the U.S.-Saudi ties.
 - **Khashoggi**, a U.S. resident who wrote columns for *The Washington Post* critical of the Crown Prince’s policies, was killed and dismembered by a team of operatives linked to the Crown Prince in the kingdom’s Consulate in Istanbul. Riyadh has denied any involvement by the Crown Prince, Saudi Arabia’s de-facto ruler.
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Opinions and Analysis

Commentary : Bail as right

1. In granting bail for six months to poet Varvara Rao in the Bhima Koregoan case on medical grounds, the Bombay High Court has affirmed the principle that **even the stringent provisions of an antiterrorism law are not invincible before a prisoner's constitutional rights.**
2. The court overruled the **National Investigation Agency's** objection that bail should not be granted on medical grounds once an undertrial prisoner's bail application was rejected on merits under UAPA, as long as access to treatment in a government hospital was available. The court looked at Mr. Rao's plight from the perspective of **his right to life under Article 21.**
3. Bail is routinely denied in most cases under UAPA. It became a watertight embargo since the Supreme Court in 2019 gave a ruling that **made it nearly impossible for anyone arrested under UAPA to be released on bail,** unless the accused could demonstrate that the charges against them were prima facie untrue. However, a few recent judicial decisions have sought to carve out exceptions. The Supreme Court laid down recently that **prolonged incarceration without any possibility of an early completion of trial** could be a ground for granting bail.

Analysis : Inhibiting free speech

1. Background

- The Delhi Assembly summoned **Facebook honcho Ajit Mohan** to depose before its **Peace and Harmony Committee**, it unwittingly provoked a litigation that may have far-reaching implications on federalism, the separation of powers and fundamental rights in India.

2. What the principles says : Federalism vs Parliamentary privilege

- Federalism imposes an **insuperable challenge to the traditional broad reading of parliamentary privilege.** The argument goes: Unlike the House of Commons, the powers of State Assemblies are more limited. If the State Assembly cannot pass a law on a subject, how can it claim a right to discuss it or call witnesses for it?
 - Legislatures also have a **separate non judicial power of inquiry** which has been judicially regarded as being inherent to the legislature, flowing perhaps from what Walter Bagehot would call the expressive and informative function of the House.
 - Second, the legislative lists frequently overlap and courts resolve any conflict by **adopting a test of pith and substance of the law** in question. Third, we live in the era of cooperative federalism. Fourth, there is the delicate issue of whether the courts can or ought to sit in judgment on the proceedings of State Assemblies determining what can or cannot be discussed based on the courts' view of the topic. The experiences of Canada and Australia, both common law federal jurisdictions, are also instructive.
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Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. **Modi on government assets**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi **urged foreign investors to tap investment opportunities** thrown up by the government's decision to **privatise most public sector entities** and monetise '*unutilised and underutilised assets*' such as airports that have an estimated investment potential of ₹2.5 lakh crore. The government's mantra is '*Monetise or Modernise*', the PM said, stressing that the funds raised from the exercise will help empower citizens by building homes for the poor and ensuring clean water reaches all.
- Mr. Modi said government officials in charge of PSUs are often scared of taking decisions and there is a tendency to maintain status quo. The private sector can not only bring capital but also introduce global best practices and quality manpower and modernise enterprises, the PM pointed out.

2. **Private banks can handle government business**

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the embargo on **private banks handling government business had been lifted**, paving the way for such lenders to handle tax payments, pension payments and even small savings schemes. The government's decision has been conveyed to the Reserve Bank of India, the Finance Ministry said in a statement, as the central bank is entrusted with authorising private banks to undertake handling of government and its agencies' business.

3. **Cabinet approves PLI plan for pharma, IT hardware**

- The Union Cabinet approved the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme** for the **pharmaceuticals and IT hardware sectors**, entailing an outlay of ₹15,000 crore and ₹7,350 crore, respectively. The PLI scheme for pharmaceuticals, for nine years till 2028-29, will benefit domestic manufacturers, help create employment and is expected to contribute to the availability of a wider range of affordable medicines for consumers, the government said. The scheme is expected to bring in investment of **₹15,000 crore in the pharmaceutical sector**.
- The scheme also aims to create global champions from India that have the potential to grow in size and scale using cutting edge technology and thereby **penetrate global value chains**. The Cabinet also **approved the PLI Scheme for IT hardware** such as laptops, tablets, all in one PCs and servers. The scheme, under which an incentive will be given on net incremental sales of goods manufactured in India for four years, will benefit five 'major global players' and ten domestic 'champions' in IT hardware, the government said.

4. **Proposed 'Bad Banks' move will not hit existing Asset reconstruction companies (ARC)**

- The 'bad bank' proposed in the Union Budget will not jeopardise the activity of existing **asset reconstruction companies (ARCs)**, said Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das. Advocating a **durable push for Indian exports through free trade pacts** with 'strategically important economies,' Mr. Das warned that the **recovery in global trade was uneven** and sought urgent attention from global policymakers to rein in disruptions in global supply chains caused by a **steep surge in shipping costs and delivery times**.
- "It's not really a bad bank (but) an ARC type entity that will be set up to take over the **stressed assets from the books of public sector banks (PSBs)** and try to resolve them like any other ARC. So that is targeting a specific set

of bad assets which certain groups of PSBs hold. In no way will it jeopardise the activity of existing ARCs.” **On free trade pacts**, he said, “*Key considerations should be to identify countries and regions that not only have the potential as a market for domestic goods and services but also have the scope to enhance domestic competitiveness.*”

5. [Current inflation target band apt for next five years, says RBI report](#)

- With the next review of the **flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework** coming up soon, the Reserve Bank of India, in the Report on Currency and Finance for FY21, said the current inflation target of 4% with a +/-2% tolerance band is appropriate for the next five years.
- The report said the trend **inflation** had fallen from above 9% before FIT to a **range of 3.84.3 % during FIT**, indicating that 4% is the appropriate level of the inflation target. The report said an inflation rate of 6% is the appropriate upper tolerance limit for the target. A lower bound above 2% can lead to actual inflation frequently dipping below the tolerance band while a lower bound below 2% will hamper growth, indicating that an **inflation rate of 2 % is the appropriate lower tolerance bound**.

6. [India 'out of recession', GDP grows 0.4%](#)

- India's economy resurfaced to growth territory in the third quarter of fiscal year (FY) 202021, clocking a 0.4% rise in the gross domestic product (GDP), as per data from the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**. GDP had **shrunk in the first two quarters by 24.4% and 7.3% as per revised data**, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, marking a technical recession.
- The Finance Ministry termed the 0.4% real GDP growth in Q3 as a return to 'the pre pandemic times of positive growth rates' and a reflection of a 'further strengthening of V shaped recovery that began in Q2'. **India's farm sector remained resilient**, clocking a 3.9% growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the economy in the October-to-December quarter, after recording a 3.3% and 3% rise in the first two quarters, respectively. In Q3, manufacturing, construction and financial, real estate and professional services staged a return to growth for the first time in the year after two bad quarters.
- The Finance Ministry said the **resurgence in manufacturing and construction** augured well for them to drive growth in FY22 and added that **services, which account for more than 50% of India's GVA** and the biggest source for pushing consumption, had done remarkably better in Q3.
- What is Gross Value Added? In economics, gross value added is the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

7. [Coffee output may drop](#)

- Untimely rains and hail stones that lashed plantations in the last six days causing **large scale berry dropping** is expected to **impact arabica and robusta coffee production** by 30% for the 202021 crop year, as per estimates by planters. According to **Coffee Board's post monsoon estimates**, during the crop year 2020-21, India was expecting an **arabica production of 1.02 lakh metric tonnes (MT)** and **robusta production of 2.4 lakh MT**.

8. [India's import guidelines review with China](#)

- The government has **placed curbs on the procurement of finished goods from China** by firms supplying goods and services under the public procurement system, while **allowing the use of Chinese raw material or components** without prior permission. “*A bidder is permitted to procure raw material, components, subassemblies, etc. from the vendors from such countries which shares a land border,*” the Department of Expenditure in the Finance Ministry has said in a memo, arguing that such **procurement cannot be equated with subcontracting**.

- Vendors proposing to source finished goods from Chinese suppliers will need to seek registration with the committee. The development assumes significance at a time the government is considering rebooting **approvals for China-related investment proposals** following the disengagement at the Indo-Chinese border after an extended period of tension.



Sports

Daily snippets

1. **Motera stadium named after PM Modi**

- The **world's largest cricket arena at Motera** in Ahmedabad, the Sardar Patel Cricket Stadium, was renamed Narendra Modi Stadium and was inaugurated on Wednesday by President Ram Nath Kovind. The rebuilt stadium is part of the proposed **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave** to be spread over 220 acres on the Sabarmati river bank in the North East of Ahmedabad. It will comprise a natatorium, athletics track, football, hockey and tennis stadia, velodrome/skating area among other facilities.
- The refurbished venue is spread over 63 acres and has a seating capacity of 1.1 lakh, more than double the previous number of 49,000. The ground has been equipped with LED floodlights, a first for any Indian sports site.

2. **Ankita Raina : The new Indian on the bloc**

- Last week, Ankita Raina became **India's first WTA champion since Sania Mirza**, when she won the doubles title at Phillip Island Trophy in Melbourne. She became the third Indian woman after **Sania Mirza and Shikha Uberoi** to enter the top100 in doubles while representing India.

3. **PM Modi inaugurates Khelo India Winter Games**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated **the second edition of the Khelo India Winter Games** and said hosting such events will make J&K a sports hub. He said the second edition of the Winter Games at Gulmarg will prepare sportsmen for bigger international platforms like the Olympics. Modi said the players participating in the event epitomises the 'one India, one nation' spirit. Around **1200 athletes and guests from across the country** will participate in multiple events, including snowshoe race, ice skating, ice hockey, skiing, Nordic ski, snowboarding, ski mountaineering, ice stock, etc.

4. **Bronze for Indian men's skeet team**

- **Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Gurjoat Khangura** narrowly missed a chance to fight for the gold, but **clinched the skeet team bronze** in the **Shotgun World Cup** being held in Cairo. The Indian team **shot 146 out of 150 to reach a total of 491** and tied with Russia, while Czech Republic topped with 498. India beat Kazakhstan 62 to win the bronze.

- The Indian women's team of Parinaaz Dhaliwal, Ganemat Sekhon and Karttiki Singh Shaktawat lost the battle for bronze 46 to Kazakhstan, while Russia beat Czech Republic 62 for the gold.
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Suggested Readings

1. New social media rules, [Link to article](#)
 2. The absurdity of the anti-defection law, [Link to article](#)
 3. GOI limitations on International Webinars, [Link to article](#)
 4. Making Indian Judiciary more economically responsible, [Link to article](#)
 5. Federalism and India's human capital, [Link to article](#)
 6. Explainer : Australian government vs Facebook, [Link to article](#)
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