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**Law, Policy and Governance**

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[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Access to mental health helplines](#)

- Seventy per cent of callers to a **mental health rehabilitation helpline** launched, in September 2020 by the **Social Justice and Empowerment (SJE) Ministry**, were men according to an internal report of the Ministry accessed by The Hindu. About 32% of those who reached out were students.
  - The **'Kiran' service** was set up by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry. The 24/7 helpline offers early screening, psychological first aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well being, psychological crisis management services and referrals to mental health experts and is operated by 81 frontline professionals, apart from volunteer psychiatrists, clinical and rehabilitation psychologists.
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**National News/ Interventions**



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [7 killed after 'glacial burst' in Uttarakhand](#)

- Seven persons were killed and over 125 reported missing after a "glacial burst" on **Nanda Devi** triggered an avalanche and caused **flash floods in Rishi-Ganga and Dhauliganga rivers** in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand on

Sunday. The number of missing persons could rise as details were still being ascertained, **Uttarakhand Chief Minister T.S. Rawat** said at a press conference in Dehradun in the evening.

- While the **Rishiganga hydel project** had an installed capacity of 13.2 megawatts (MW), the 520 MW NTPC **Tapovan-Vishnugad project** on the Dhauliganga was much larger. Both sites have been virtually washed away. Environmental **experts attributed the Nanda Devi glacial melt to global warming**. Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of the mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes, according to the latest assessment reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- There is also high confidence that the number and area of glacier lakes will continue to increase in most regions in the coming decades, and new lakes will develop closer to steep and potentially unstable mountain walls, where lake outbursts can be more easily triggered.
- **Climate change has driven erratic weather patterns** like increased snowfall and rainfall, and warmer winters have led to the melting of a lot of snow. The thermal profile of ice, said experts, was increasing. Earlier the temperature of ice ranged from 6 to 20 degree Celsius; it is now 2 making it more susceptible to melting.

## 2. [‘Dhauliganga’s water level breaches records’](#)

- The water level of Dhauliganga river at Joshimath flew at a perilously high level, breaching all records, **Central Water Commission** officials said after a part of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off in Uttarakhand’s Chamoli district leading to massive floods. The glacial burst triggered an avalanche and a deluge in the Alaknanda river system that washed away hydroelectric stations and trapped more than 100 labourers who are feared dead. The intensity of the river’s flow in a short span of time was such that it engulfed whatever came in its way. This was a grim reminder of the **Kedarnath deluge of 2013**, which led to widespread devastation in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region.

## 3. [Afghanistan gets Covishield doses](#)

- Afghanistan received a large consignment of COVID-19 vaccines from India. A special Indian aircraft carrying **500,000 doses of the Covishield vaccine from Mumbai reached Kabul**, where officials of Afghanistan’s Health Ministry took charge of the consignment. The Indian-made vaccine is the first to reach Afghanistan as the country battles the pandemic. The vaccine, made by the Serum Institute of India, has already been supplied to **Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives in South Asia**.

## 4. [Ukraine looking at defence purchases from India](#)

- Ukraine is looking to procure some military hardware from India in addition to efforts to deepen its presence in the Indian defence market, said Yuriv Husyev, General Director of Ukroboronprom, the umbrella corporation of Ukrainian state defence companies.
- The two sides will discuss a range of proposals to take forward bilateral cooperation at the Bilateral Working Group meeting between the two Defence Ministries in April. Ukraine has signed four agreements worth \$70 million which includes sale of new weapons as well as maintenance and upgrades of existing ones in service with the Indian armed forces.

## 5. [On disinvestment](#)

- The government will adopt a **‘squeaky clean process’** for the privatisation of public sector enterprises as per the new policy unveiled in the Budget, said **Tuhin Kanta Pandey**, the top Finance Ministry official entrusted with steering the disinvestment process. The disinvestment policy envisages the **government exiting a large chunk of the 439 central public sector enterprises (PSEs)** in the country.
- The new disinvestment policy goes further than the past case-by-case approach, and straightaway allows the sale or closure of nearly 151 PSUs (83 holding companies and 68 subsidiaries) in non strategic sectors. It also

covers banks and insurers for the first time, with **two public sector banks and one general insurer** proposed to be sold in 2021-22.

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## International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

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### Daily snippets

#### 1. [A jumbo struggle for farmers in Sri Lanka](#)

- Farmer groups in the district have been agitating for weeks, demanding that the government soon gazette a **Wildlife Management Reserve** in the area. This, they hope, will put an end to wild elephants ravaging their fields and homes. The farmers accuse the government of pursuing “*thoughtless, large scale development*” that destroys the elephants’ natural habitat.
- Sri Lanka has an **estimated 6,000 elephants, and hundreds die every year**, frequently in ‘hakka patas’ or traps made of explosives, and gunshot injuries. In 2019, Sri Lanka reported 407 elephant deaths, the highest number recorded in the world. In 2020, 318 elephants and 112 people were killed in conflicts, according to the Wildlife Department.
- The continuing **farmers’ struggle in Hambantota** is the first instance of protracted resistance from within the ruling regime’s **southern Sinhala Buddhist core constituency**, and it has drawn support from farmer organisations and trade unions elsewhere.

#### 2. [Thousands rally in Jaffna to assert minority rights](#)

- Thousands of people from **Sri Lanka’s Tamil-majority areas** culminated in Jaffna on Sunday, ending a five day rally to assert the **rights of Tamil and Muslim** minorities. Many civil society organisations came together, while prominent legislators and members of various Tamil and Muslim political parties joined the procession, chanting slogans against the government’s “*repression*” against Sri Lanka’s minorities.
- The issues highlighted at the rally included the persisting calls from families of forcible disappeared persons, concerns around “*land grab*” and reported attacks on Hindu temples in the area, persisting militarisation, surveillance of journalists and human rights defenders, attempts to prevent memorialisation by Tamils, mandatory cremations denying Muslims burial rights during the pandemic, and long pending call for a LKR1,000 rupee basic wage for Malaiyaha or Hill Country Tamils employed in tea estates.

#### 3. [‘Oxford vaccine less effective against South African variant’](#)

- The **Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine** fails to prevent mild and moderate cases of the South African coronavirus strain, according to research reported in the Financial Times. But in its study, due to be published on Monday, the pharma group said it could still have an effect on severe disease - although there is not yet enough data to make a definitive judgment.

- None of the 2,000 participants in the trial developed serious symptoms, the FT said, but AstraZeneca said the sample size was too small to make a full determination.

#### 4. [Pope appoints more women to Vatican posts](#)

- **Pope Francis** has appointed two women to Vatican posts previously held only by men, in back to back moves giving women more empowerment in the maledominated Holy See. He appointed **Nathalie Becquart**, a French member of the Xaviere Missionary Sisters, on Saturday as co-undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, a department that prepares major meetings of world bishops held every few years on a different topic.
- Voting rights earlier, the Pope named Italian magistrate **Catia Summaria** as the first woman Promoter of Justice in the Vatican's Court of Appeals. Sister Becquart's position, effectively a joint number two spot, will give her the right to vote in the allmale assemblies, something many women and some bishops have called for. She is 52, relatively young by Vatican standards.
- **Women have participated as observers and consultants** in past synods but only "*synod fathers*", including bishops and specially appointed or elected male representatives, could vote on final documents sent to the pope. During a synod in 2018, more than 10,000 people signed a petition demanding that women get the vote. "*A door has been opened. We will see what other steps could be taken in the future,*" Cardinal Mario Grech, the synod's secretary general, said.



## Opinions and Analysis

### [Analysis : The cost of Internet shutdown](#)

#### 1. **Background**

- The movement led by farmers against the Central government's agricultural laws has become a part of our national and international discourse. The manner in which the Centre introduced the Bills and its actions towards countering the movement have raised plenty of concerns.

#### 2. **Concerns**

- A principal concern among these has been the **recurrent shutdowns**, ordered by the Ministry of Home Affairs, of Internet services around many border areas of NCR since the unruly incidents on January 26.
- Currently, Indian laws have **vague provisions for suspending telecommunication services**, including the Internet, during times of public emergencies, or, if required, for protecting 'public interest'. The impact of shutdowns becomes even more pronounced during a pandemic.

#### 3. **The way forward**

- Internet bans should be a last resort and must be enforced following well formulated protocols. Upgrading cyber divisions of law enforcement agencies with new age innovations may offer several alternatives.

- To conclude, Governments, especially in democracies, will have to create **modern, independent institutions** that have the authority and expertise to create frameworks that meet these challenges, without falling back on measures that **result in state overreach**.

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### Suggested Readings

1. Implications of Section 69 of IT Act 2000, [Link to article](#)
2. Neckbands and Broadbands, [Link to article](#)
3. Infrastructure push and Fiscal consolidation, [Link to article](#)
4. Glacier collapse and 2013 flash floods, [Link to article](#)

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

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