

G.K snippets...



Law, Policy and Governance



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Govt. asks farmers' unions to reconsider its proposal](#)

- Responding to an appeal from the Centre that the farmers' unions reconsider its proposal for amendments to the three agriculture sector laws and resume dialogue, the **Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM)**, a joint front of the farmers' unions, maintained that they too had not "shut the doors" for negotiations. However, they said the government must come up with a "concrete solution" to end the impasse.
- When asked about the possibility of the withdrawal of the laws, Mr. Tomar maintained that no law was "completely bad". Mr. Goyal said the government was "very, very open and flexible" to find an amicable solution to the concerns raised by the farmers.

2. [Trupti Desai detained en-route to Shirdi](#)

- The Maharashtra police detained **gender rights activist and Bhumata Brigade leader Trupti Desai** along with other members of her outfit at Ahmednagar while they were en-route to Sai Baba temple at Shirdi.
- Ms. Desai had criticized boards allegedly put up by the temple trust outside the premises, urging devotees to be dressed in a "civilised" manner as per "Indian culture". She had announced her intention to go to Shirdi and pull down the boards with the "contentious" messages on December 10. The entourage was detained near Supa village on the Pun Ahmednagar highway under Section 68 of the Bombay Police Act.

3. [NHRC got over 46,000 complaints since April](#)

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the **National Human Rights Commission** has received over 46,000 complaints of violation of rights and disposed of over 49,000 complaints, both old and new. Justice Pant said this year had been very difficult for humanity and there was a need for a cohesive response from public healthcare systems and the public.

4. Act against unscientific disposal of waste: NGT

- Following a plea seeking action against unscientific disposal of waste in storm water drains by dairy owners in Ghaziabad, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the State authorities to take action and ensure compliance of rules.
- A report furnished by the **Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board** said that some dairies were found non compliant to rules and hence environmental compensation had been assessed.

5. BKU faction moves SC against new laws

- The Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) moved the Supreme Court highlighting the “inconclusive” talks with the Centre over the repeal of the three controversial farm laws. The farmers’ body said the court should direct the government to strengthen the existing **Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC)** system to enable sale of farm produce at a good bargain.
- The petition, filed through advocate A.P. Singh, suggested the constitution of a ‘Farmers Commission’ to fix the prices of crops and advocated that the Acts will spell disaster for the farmers. They will become vulnerable to corporate greed.

6. HC stays CIC order on PM’s foreign visits

- The Delhi High Court stayed a **Central Information Commission (CIC)** direction to the Indian Air Force (IAF) to provide an RTI activist information regarding each foreign visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh undertaken on IAF aircraft. The IAF had moved the High Court challenging the July 8, 2020, order of the CIC, saying that the information sought was “*extremely sensitive in nature*”.

7. New cross-sector initiative for universal health coverage

- The **Lancet Citizens’ Commission** on Reimagining India’s Health System, a **cross-sector initiative** to develop a citizens’ roadmap to achieving **universal health coverage (UHC) in India** over a period of ten years, was launched online. The mission of the Commission is to lay out the path to achieving UHC in India in the coming decade, working with all stakeholders.
- The Commission will be guided by four principles: UHC covers all health concerns, prevention and long term care are key, the concern is financial protection for all health costs and aspiring for a health system that can be accessed by all who enjoy the same quality.

8. Delimitation should be based on 2031 Census

- A paper released by the **Pranab Mukherjee Foundation (PMF)** suggested that the next delimitation exercise should be a two step process: first a Delimitation Commission should be set up to redraw boundaries of constituencies on the **basis of the 2031 Census** and then a **State Reorganisation Act** be passed to split States into smaller ones. The 84th Amendment to the Constitution in 2002 had put a freeze on the delimitation of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies **till the first Census after 2026**. The current boundaries were drawn on the basis of the **2001 Census**, the number of Lok Sabha seats and State Assembly seats remained frozen on the basis of the **1971 Census**.

9. N.K Singh calls for a fresh look at the 7th Schedule

- **Fifteenth Finance Commission chairman N.K. Singh** has called for a fresh look at the **Constitution’s Seventh Schedule**, which forms the basis for allocating subjects to the Centre and States, and hinted at the need to fill an ‘institutional vacuum’ created by the abolition of the Planning Commission. He added that States were keen to have a different kind of ‘**a policy based consultative forum**’ with the Centre beyond the **Niti Aayog and the**

National Development Council. There is also a need to give more flexibility to the states in implementing centrally sponsored schemes.

- Mr. Singh also stressed that a coordination mechanism between the Finance Commission and the GST Council had now become an 'inescapable necessity' as both were constitutional bodies dealing with revenue and grappling with 'unsettled questions'. He further stated that it has now become more important to ponder whether the **existing arrangements governing Centre-State relations** - legislative, executive and financial - envisaged in the Constitution adequate to meet the aspirations of Indian society.

10. **NFHS-5 data on the 'dry state' of Bihar**

- The **latest National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5)** report for 2019-20 which was released on December 12 has revealed that still 15.5% men above 15 years of age consume alcohol in dry Bihar, nearly 77% women in Bihar have their own bank account and over 51% of them use mobile phones.
- In Bihar, the stringent Prohibition and Excise Act was enforced in April 2016 by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar led NDA government with a provision of a minimum 10 years of jail term for violators of the law. So far, over 2 lakh people, mostly from the poor marginalized class of society have been arrested under the new law. In November 2019, **the Patna High Court** pulled up the State government for clogging the courts with over two lakh cases related to the liquor ban.

11. **The Facebook lawsuit stories**

- The lawsuits against Facebook by the **Federal Trade Commission** and the **attorneys general of 46 U.S. States**, the District of Columbia and the territory of Guam are a significant challenge to the dominant Internet empire that Mark Zuckerberg has built in such a short time. The basic charge is that Facebook, in fear of competition, plays by **an anticompetitive strategy playbook**. It either buys potential competition or, if it cannot, cuts them off from accessing its large platform.
- The lawsuits highlight Facebook's **acquisition of Instagram and WhatsApp**, which happened when Mr. Zuckerberg saw them as real threats to Facebook's continuing success. The action against Facebook, however, is not to be seen in isolation, and is linked to the growing backlash against what is called '**Big Tech**' globally.
- Europe and the U.S., especially, have moved against these technology companies not just on antitrust charges but also on cases involving violation of privacy. Calls for the breakup of technology firms have been put forward by politicians in the U.S. With its immense scale, Facebook has on more than one occasion managed to startle regulators and administrators, not to mention civil society and activists, by its **grandiose plans which seemed to threaten the existing world order**.

12. **UP woman denies forced marriage**

- A 22-year-old pregnant Hindu woman from Moradabad, whose Muslim husband was arrested on December 5 under the new Uttar Pradesh ordinance against unlawful conversions, recorded her statement before a magistrate. Superintendent of Police, Moradabad Rural, said the woman had married Rashid in Dehradun in July of her free will. District officials **denied miscarriage**.

13. **HC criticises CBSE for 'anti-student attitude'**

- The Delhi High Court rapped the **Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)** for its "*anti student attitude*", saying it was "*treating students as enemies*" by dragging them all the way to the Supreme Court in certain matters.
- A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan made the observation while hearing a plea moved by the Board challenging a single judge order, which said the CBSE's reassessment scheme for students whose

board exams got cancelled due to COVID-19 would apply to improvement candidates also. The Bench further said that if the scheme applies to all improvement students, “*what is the harm in it?*”

14. Law Ministry nod sought on postal ballots for NRIs

- The proposal of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to extend the postal ballot option to overseas electors is pending with the Law Ministry. The ECI letter stated the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**, would need to be amended to send postal ballots to NRIs electronically and then have them sent back via post. The **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)**, used to send ballots to Service electors, would be extended to overseas Indians if the proposal is adopted.

15. Tablighi case: court acquits 36 foreigners

- A Delhi court acquitted 36 foreigners who were charge sheeted for attending a religious congregation at the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Nizamuddin here in alleged violation of visa norms and government guidelines issued in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The 36 foreigners were facing charges under - Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), Section 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Section 3 (disobeying regulation) of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and Section 51 (obstruction) of Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- Earlier, the local courts here had allowed over 120 Malaysians and 11 Saudi Arabians who had participated in the event to walk free after payment of ₹7,000 fine under the **plea bargaining process** .
- Plea bargaining is a provision under the CrPC in which an accused can negotiate with the prosecution at the pre trial stage and plead guilty in exchange for certain concessions.

16. OCI students eligible for govt. quota, says Karnataka HC

- Declaring that students under the **Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) category** are to be considered as “citizens of India” for admission to professional courses, the High Court of Karnataka has directed the State government to admit them to undergraduate professional courses, and not to restrict their admission only under the NRI quota.

17. SC moots panel for farmer-government talks

- Talks between the Union government and farmer leaders on the three controversial agriculture laws had broken no ground and were bound to fail, the Supreme Court said. The Bench, led by **Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde**, proposed the setting up of a committee of farmer leaders from across the country, including the **Bharatiya Kisan Union** that has been at the forefront of the protests, and government representatives to resolve the issue.

18. Plea in SC for uniform divorce, alimony rules

- The Supreme Court, while expressing “great caution”, agreed to examine a plea to frame uniform guidelines on divorce, maintenance, and alimony for all religions. The petitioner, advocate A.K. Upadhyay, argued that divorce, maintenance, and alimony laws in certain religions discriminated and marginalised women. These anomalies, varying from one religion to another, were violative of the right to equality (**Article 14 of the Constitution**) and **right against discrimination (Article 15)** on the basis of religion and gender and right to dignity.
- Chief Justice Bobde said, “*That [UCC] is for the government to do... The government can do anything. How can we as a court destroy personal law?*”

1. The role of Twitter deciding to interpret certain tweets as misinformation or manipulated has been called into question by some who see it as Twitter moderating its content and hence overarching its **role of being just an intermediary**. Questions have been raised on the procedure followed by the firm on picking and choosing certain tweets as ‘manipulated media’ when there are millions of objectionable content and bogus users on its platform. Demands have also been raised for a revamp of the privacy policies of these companies.
2. On March 5, 2020 Twitter started labelling tweets after its global survey found that people “wanted it to do something about” **misleading altered contents**. In the U.S, Twitter has been following the practice of **tagging and adding fact checking notices** to tweets by U.S. President Donald Trump.
3. In India, **Section 79 of the IT Act** shields social media platforms or intermediaries such as Twitter from liability for any third party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by it in certain cases. Section 79 was also read down by the Supreme Court, in its landmark decision in **Shreya Singhal vs Union of India case**, so that an intermediary will face legal action only if it fails to act on order of a court or from the appropriate government or its agency to remove or disable access to the objectionable content. Twitter might be risking its status as an intermediary by deciding to moderate the contents that are shared on its platform.
4. *“It is a complex area of policy debate with arguments for greater oversight by platforms to police content given they are reasoned to be a public venue. It also requires principles of **intermediary liability to be integrated with user rights**, which come with greater accountability and transparency towards users. Here, there is a realisation to move away from a liability-based conversation towards content and **providing greater rights to users**. Also, to focus on specific regulatory interventions that may impose legal duties and liabilities in cases of harm such as disinformation, which causes social harm. For instance through election interference,”* observed an expert.

National News/ Interventions



Daily snippets

1. **HelpAge India presented UN Population Award for 2020**
 - **HelpAge India** has been presented the **UN Population Award for 2020** (institutional category), according to a release issued by UNFPA. Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981, the **United Nations Population Award recognises contributions in the fields of population and reproductive health**.
 - The Committee for the United Nations Population Award, which made the selections, is **chaired by Ion Jinga**, the permanent representative of Romania to the United Nations, and is composed of representatives of nine other UN Member States.
 - *“For the first time in the history of the UN Population Award, the honour is being conferred on an Indian institution. The last time the Award came to an Indian was 28 years ago, back in 1992, when it was awarded to Mr. J.R.D. Tata as an individual laureate. HelpAge India, which has been working for ‘the cause and care of disadvantaged older persons to improve their quality of life’ for over four decades, is the **first Indian institution to receive this award,**”* added the release.
2. **True to its name**
 - **The Drugs Controller General of India** has put to rest any doubts and concerns that it would rush to grant emergency use approval to COVID-19 vaccines tested and manufactured in India or elsewhere in the absence of

sufficient data. The greatly reassuring decision to seek additional safety and immunogenicity data from the Pune-based **Serum Institute of India** and Hyderabad's **Bharat Biotech** underlines the regulator's priorities even for emergency use approval rather than an early roll-out of vaccines that have not been sufficiently studied.

- With the published data of the interim phase-3 trial of the Oxford vaccine raising some concerns, the committee has rightly sought immunogenicity data from the U.K. trial. While the U.K. has approved the mRNA vaccine from the U.S.-based **Pfizer**, no country including the U.K. has approved the Oxford vaccine manufactured by London-based AstraZeneca.
- Indian manufacturers should strive to carry out the **trials to the highest ethical standards** and submit comprehensive data such that emergency use approval is a sure shot. Any further haste shown in seeking approval for emergency use may turn detrimental and the companies may even run the risk of losing public trust.

3. [DRDO completes trials of indigenous carbine](#)

- A protective carbine designed by **the Defence Research and Development Organisation** has successfully undergone the final phase of user trials, it said in a statement. The 5.56x30 mm **Joint Venture Protective Carbine (JVPC)**, a gas operated semi bull-pup automatic weapon, has a firing rate of more than 700 rounds a minute.

4. [Deboo, the dancer who defied norms](#)

- Holistic in comprehending the Indian and Western dance aesthetics, **Astad Deboo** — who passed away in Mumbai on Thursday at the age of 73 - imbued modern dance with a narrative treatment and blended facial expressions with body movements to tell tales of contemporary India.
- Many of his works had political undertones. Inspired by Muktibodh's poem, *Lakdi Ka Ravan*, he explored how political leaders have feet of clay. In "Rhythm Divine: River Runs Deep", he collaborated with Manipuri drummers to bring out the political turmoil in the northeast.
- He was a recipient of the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Award** and the **Padma Shri**. Born in Gujarat in 1947, he was introduced to **Kathak** by **Guru Prahlad Das** when he was six. He later learnt **Kathakali** under **Guru E. Krishna Panicker** and mastered the modern dance techniques of **Martha Graham** and **Jose Limon** in London and New York. He collaborated with several international artists including Pina Bausch, Alison Becker Chase and Pink Floyd. A humanist, Deboo worked extensively with the **deaf and underprivileged street children**.

5. [New Parliament building will reflect India's aspirations : PM Modi](#)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the new Parliament building, for which the ground breaking ceremony was held, would channel and reflect the **aspirations of 21st century India**. The ceremony included an all faith prayer and rituals by priests from the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Karnataka.
- Mr. Modi spoke of some of the new features, including a space where people from constituencies could meet their MPs, something lacking in the current building. He called upon MPs to keep the spirit of optimism alive around democracy by always being accountable to people and the Constitution. He quoted the first Guru of the Sikhs, **Guru Nanak Devji**: "*as long as the world exists, conversations must continue*".
- Prime Minister stressed on India's long tradition of dialogue and democratic institutions, mentioning about the concept of the 12th century **Anubhava Mantapam** set up by **Basaveshwara**; a 10th century stone inscription in a village near Chennai, describing a panchayat mahasabha and its elaborate rules, including the need for members to disclose their income; and **the ancient republics of the Lichchavis and Shakyas**.

6. Rajnath Singh pitches for dialogue

- Terming terrorism a major scourge for the world, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said structures which support and sustain terrorism “continue to exist, including in India’s neighbourhood.” Virtually addressing the **14th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus** which includes China and its thematic discussions organised by Vietnam, Mr. Singh reiterated India’s call for an inclusive Indo-Pacific based on sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international laws.
- He also reiterated India’s support for freedom of navigation and overflight for all in international waters in accordance with the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**. He underlined the need to collectively address threats to rules based order, maritime security, cyber crimes and terror.

7. Panel probing ISRO case set to begin work

- A three member Committee chaired by former Supreme Court judge D.K. Jain is scheduled to begin work on unravelling the rogue officials responsible for the infamous **ISRO “frameup” case of 1994**, which destroyed the life and reputation of **Nambi Narayanan**, one of the country’s prominent space scientists. The Justice Jain committee is expected to sit at Thiruvananthapuram on December 14 and 15.
- At the time of his arrest on November 30, 1994, Mr. Narayanan was working on cryogenic engine technology at the premier **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**. The police investigators had accused him of passing on documents and drawings of ISRO relating to Viking/Vikas engine technology, cryogenic engine technology and PSLV flight data/ drawings to Pakistan.
- The court ordered the Kerala government to pay Mr. Narayanan ₹50 lakh in compensation, though it said mere money was not enough to make up for the torture the scientist had endured for 24 years.

8. NE students observe ‘black day’ against CAA

- Students’ organisations across the eight northeastern States relaunched their movement against the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)** by observing a black day on Friday, marking the passage of the law in the Rajya Sabha in 2019.
- **The North East Students’ Organisation (NESO)**, the apex body of the States and tribes based student bodies in the region, said they will continue to protest and observe December 11 as a black day until the citizenship law is scrapped. The NESO comprises the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union, Khasi Students’ Union, Mizo Zirlai Pawl, Garo Students’ Union, Naga Students’ Federation, Twipra Students’ Federation and All Manipur Students’ Union.

9. Apple trees cut in J&K anti encroachment drive

- With prediction of fresh snowfall in upper reaches of the Kashmir Valley, members of around 30 families are running from pillar to post to know the reason for the felling of tens of thousands of apple trees and a sudden eviction of nomadic population of Gujjars near the forest area in Budgam ’seh Pakherpora Block in central Kashmir.
- The Forest department has started a drive against “illegal encroachers” of forest land in the Valley. It also felled apple trees planted on what the department described as “forest land”.

10. ‘China rise has attracted a great deal of attention’

- In the midst of conflicts in the last three decades, global financial crisis and mushrooming of many multilateral organisations, China’s rise has been one of the most defining moments of the 21st century, **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Bipin Rawat** stated on Friday.

- *“At present, there are over 120 warships of extra regional forces deployed in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** in support of various missions. For now, by and large, the region has remained peaceful, albeit under contestation,”* he said, virtually addressing the **Global Dialogue Security Summit** on developments in the Indo-Pacific.
- Gen. Rawat also underscored that for a country like India, security of land borders remained the primary concern and, therefore, there was need to develop integrated structures to ensure that modernisation programmes undertaken by the armed forces were based on careful assessment of threats and challenges.
- Australian High Commissioner to India Barry O’Farrell, asserted that like India, Australia also took a keen interest in the Indo-Pacific region and it was increasingly concerned about security in the region.

11. PM, Uzbek President discuss Afghan projects

- India and Uzbekistan plan to cooperate on connectivity projects in Afghanistan and will participate in a trilateral dialogue with Iran, said the two sides after talks between **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and **Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev** during a virtual summit on Friday. Both addressed the need to fight terrorism and shared the “same vision” on the future of the Afghanistan peace process, officials said.
- India also confirmed the **approval of a \$448 million Line of Credit** for four developmental projects in Uzbekistan in the areas of “road construction, sewerage treatment and information technology” and specific projects under the Line of Credit were being identified at present, officials said.
- The two sides signed a **Dollar Credit Line Agreement** between the ExportImport Bank of India and the Uzbekistan Government and several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) including in the areas of renewable energy and information technology on the sidelines of the meeting.

12. Farmers to block Delhi Jaipur highway

- More farmers were streaming towards the national capital in response to the call from protesting unions to intensify the ongoing agitation against the three agricultural marketing reform laws by blocking the **Delhi Jaipur highway**, and picketing toll plazas.
- Police personnel have been deployed in strength to deal with the situation and provide alternate routes to commuters. Farmers from different parts of India are joining the protests. They are demanding a full repeal of the three contentious laws passed by Parliament.

13. Doctors stage protests against 'mixopathy' across country

- Members of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and several doctors across India staged protests against the government 's decision to allow **postgraduate Ayurveda doctors** to perform select medical procedures.
- A gazette notification, issued last month by the **Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)**, a statutory body under the AYUSH Ministry, listed 39 general surgery procedures and 19 other procedures by amending the **Indian Medicine Central Council (Post Graduate Ayurveda Education) Regulations, 2016**. The IMA termed it ‘mixopathy’.

14. Army veterans to lay down 25,000 medals for farmers’ cause

- Army veterans camping at the Singhu border, the heart of the farmers’ agitation, have collected 5,000 gallantry medals since November 26 to return to the Union government “in lieu” of a decision to repeal the three new farm laws.

15. Eminent Malayalam writer U.A. Khader dead

- Eminent writer **U.A. Khader**, who enriched Malayalam language and literature with his unique style, died. An active participant in literary and social gatherings for decades, the 85-year old was under treatment for cancer for sometime. A recipient of various honours, including the **Sahitya Akademi award**, he had authored hundreds of books, including novels and short stories.

16. Gujjars demand Parliament session

- Gujjars in Rajasthan, demanding reservation in jobs and education, have sought the Centre's intervention for Ninth Schedule protection to a 2019 State law which accords **Most Backward Class (MBC) category** for the community. The quota agitation has generated considerable political heat and disrupted public life several times in the State since 2007. The **Gujjar Aarakshan Sangharsh Samiti** has demanded that a special session of Parliament be convened for inclusion of the State Act in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, on the lines of the protection given to a reservation law of Tamil Nadu, and a constitutional amendment be brought to **enhance the 50% ceiling on reservation**

17. Manipur observes 81st year of 'women's war'

- Manipur observed the 81st anniversary of the "**women's war**" at an official function held at the "Women's War Memorial Complex" in Imphal. It was on **December 12, 1939**, that the women fought against the British after some of its officials colluded with traders to export the nutritious Manipuri rice, pushing people to the point of starvation. Following their protest, the export order was revoked.

18. Imposing family planning

- The Centre told the Supreme Court that it was against coercing couples into having a "certain number of children" in a bid to curb population explosion. The government said the **years from 2001 to 2011** witnessed the sharpest decline in decadal growth rate of Indian population in a 100 years. decadal growth rate fell from **21.54% in 1991-2001** to **17.64% in 2001-2011**. The wanted fertility in India as per **National Family Health Survey IV** is only 1.8 as against the actual fertility of 2.2 prevailing at that time, indicating that couples on an average do not want more than two children.
- "*The Family Welfare Programme in India is voluntary in nature, which enables couples to decide the size of their family and adopt the family planning methods best suited to them, according to their choice, without any compulsion,*" the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry said in an affidavit.
- India was a signatory to the **Programme of Action (POA) of the International Conference on Population and Development**, 1994, which was unequivocally against **coercion** in family planning.

19. Indigenous artillery gun trials to end in 2021

- User trials of the **indigenous Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)** developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) jointly with private industry are scheduled to be resumed later this month and proceed with winter and summer trials to be completed by mid-2021.
- The ATAGS is a 155mm, 52calibre artillery gun jointly developed by the **DRDO in partnership with Bharat Forge** of the Kalyani Group and the Tata Power SED. In August 2018, the **Defence Acquisition Council** approved the purchase of 150 of these guns at an approximate ₹3,365 crore which would be split between the two companies.

20. India set to exceed climate targets : Modi

- India was not only on track to fulfilling its climate commitments but would go further, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the Climate Action Summit. The online event was organized to mark five years since the **signing of the Paris Agreement**, in which 190 countries committed to taking action to limit global temperature from **rising beyond 2 degrees Celsius**.
- Mr. Modi added that India had reduced its **emissions intensity by 21% since 2005**. Installed solar capacity had grown to 36 gigawatt in 2020. The country's **renewable energy capacity** was the fourth largest in the world and would reach **175GW before 2022**. India has also pioneered the **International Solar Alliance** as well as the Coalition for Disaster Relief. He was among the several heads of state - including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan - to address the meeting.

- India has announced its **Nationally Determined Contribution** of reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 33-35% by 2030 along with its renewable energy and forest cover targets. India was planning to increase its renewable energy capacity to **450 GW by 2030**.

21. Meghalaya group seeks implementation of ILP, removal of CAA

- The memorandum by the Khasi Students Union (KSU) has petitioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding the implementation of **inner line permit (ILP)**, a British era entry restriction, in the State and the scrapping of the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)**. The KSU said the ILP would be an effective mechanism to regulate the entry of outsiders into the State that has a microscopic indigenous population.
- What is ILP? The ILP, based on the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, is applicable in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. It is a safeguard to regulate the entry of outsiders in certain states which might skew the demography of that state between indigenous tribal communities and the outsiders/migrant communities.
- Meghalaya's different pressure groups also cited their apprehensions with the CAA stating that Meghalaya had been bearing the brunt of **massive illegal immigration** since the **onset of the Bangladesh Liberation War** in 1971.

22. Mother's in M.P to help check malnutrition

- The Madhya Pradesh government has issued an order for the appointment of committees led by mothers to ensure better monitoring of services delivered at anganwadi or day care centres across the State. These mothers will keep a watch on **weekly ration distribution** to beneficiaries as well as **suggest nutritious and tasteful recipes** for meals served to children at the centres, in a move that is **aimed at strengthening community response** to the problem of hunger and malnutrition in the State.
- Called '**Matru Sahyogini Samiti**' or **Mothers' Cooperation Committees**, these will comprise 10 mothers at each anganwadi representing the concerns of different sets of beneficiaries under the **Integrated Child Development Services**, or National Nutrition Mission.

23. U.S. court rejects bail plea filed by Tahawwur Rana

- A U.S. court has rejected the bail plea of **Tahawwur Rana, key accused in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack** lodged in a Los Angeles prison, who awaits extradition to India. Rana had sought release from prison till the extradition hearing was finalised, citing COVID-19 reinfection.
- Rana is **wanted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the 2008 terror attack case** that claimed the lives of 166 people. He was released from prison in June after an Illinois court commuted his jail sentence (scheduled to get over in September 2021) as he tested positive for COVID-19. He was provisionally arrested by the federal police **following the extradition request from India**.
- He was convicted for providing material support to the LeT in 2013. Unlike another prime accused **David Coleman Headley**, Rana did not enter into a plea bargain with the U.S. and he was placed under "provisional arrest" after he walked out of prison in June as the jail term that was to end in September 2021 was commuted.

24. Connectivity, infrastructure key points in Modi-Hasina summit

- Connectivity projects, including the resurrection of the 12km **Chilahati-Haldibari rail link** after 55 years, will be highlighted when **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and **Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina** hold a virtual bilateral summit on December 17, officials in Dhaka and Delhi said.
- Bangladesh's Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Memon said the "major issues", including the **water sharing agreement for the Teesta** and at least six other rivers, as well as continued reports of killings of its nationals at the border, would also be raised by Ms. Hasina.
- The list of agreements and discussions will include more connectivity and "high impact" infrastructure projects and a possible mechanism to oversee projects under concessional Lines of Credit of nearly \$10 billion from India

in 2017. Progress on a **petroleum ‘friendship’ pipeline from Siliguri to Bangladesh’s Dinajpur** that was agreed upon in 2018 and began construction last week, will also be discussed. The meeting would also seek to set aside concerns in Bangladesh over the Modi government’s plans for a **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** and the **CAA**, which led to massive protests in Dhaka last year ahead of PM Modi’s visit there, which was subsequently cancelled.

25. Invest in vaccine literacy, say experts

- With a COVID-19 vaccine seemingly just round the corner in India, **vaccine literacy**, and not publicity blitz about the emergence of one or more vaccines, is essential to building public trust, say health experts. This should be supplemented with **aggressive testing** and **tracing strategies** to keep a check on the infection numbers and test the efficacy of vaccines. Seconding this, N.K. Ganguly, former Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, said this could be done in three ways:
 - a. by **maintaining absolute transparency** in vaccine trial data results and adverse events,
 - b. **rigorous surveillance** through smart testing and tracing strategies as they form the bedrock for a vaccination campaign
 - c. finally by ensuring that the **Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB)** and the **regulator are composed of independent persons with significant technical experience** who do not have relation with the vaccine company or anyone who can influence.

26. Pandemic, poverty spur child marriages in Madhya Pradesh

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have proved to be new drivers of child marriages in rural Madhya Pradesh. Increased economic pressures due to the pandemic has pushed parents to marry off girls early.
- Madhya Pradesh recorded 46 child marriages between November 2019 and March 2020, a figure that jumped to 117 in just three months of the lockdown from April to June.

27. Exploring Kaziranga on boats and bicycles

- The park can now be explored by boats while bicycle tracks are also being finalised. However, the new activities are beyond the 1,302 sq km Kaziranga’s core area of 482 sq km. The Kaziranga National Park is famous for the one-horned Rhinoceros.
- “Our priority is conservation with some amount of commercialisation. At the same time, we want domination of the areas added to the tiger reserve and better monitoring by way of utilizing the fringe areas for tourists,” Kaziranga Field Director P. Sivakumar said.

28. Delhi begins doctors’ training for vaccine drive

- The Delhi government has started training more than 400 doctors from different hospitals in the city for the COVID-19 vaccination drive. The government will in the next stage train auxiliary nurse midwives and nurses, who would be the actual vaccinators. **Training will also be imparted to ASHA and Anganwadi workers** to spread awareness about the vaccine in their areas.
- **FELUDA test:** Also, staff are being trained to use FELUDA (**FNCAS9 Editor Limited Uniform Detection Assay**) paper strip test for COVID-19 from Monday. The FELUDA test is done in a lab using a nasopharyngeal swab, just like the RTPCR test. According to officials, the FELUDA paper strip test gives results within one hour, which is much faster than the RTPCR test.

29. Aerospace scientist Narasimha passes away

- Well Known aerospace scientist and Padma Vibhushan awardee **Roddam Narasimha** passed away He was 87. A distinguished scientist, Mr. Narasimha held various positions at the **Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru**. He was also the **Director of the National Aerospace Laboratories**. Mr. Narasimha was a member of the Space

Commission, Consultative Group of Eminent Senior Scientists, Government of India, and of the Bureau of the International Union of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics.

30. [India, Britain to discuss upgrade of ties](#)

- **British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab** will meet **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** and other Ministers during his three day visit to India, expected to prepare for a possible visit by **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson** in January.
- India has invited **Mr. Johnson as a guest for the Republic Day celebration**. While the visit has not been confirmed yet, Mr. Raab, the U.K. Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, will discuss a range of agreements, including one for an upgrade of the relationship to a “**Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**”, to be signed during Mr. Johnson’s visit.
- According to the officials, India and the U.K. will discuss the framework of the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**, which will include **defence and strategic relationship**, Indo-Pacific policy, trade, and cooperation on renewable energy ahead of the PM’s visit. Mr. Johnson’s visit to India will be one of his first forays abroad in 2021, after the U.K. formally leaves the European Union (EU), and officials are hopeful of an announcement that India and the U.K. would begin talks for an “**early harvest**” **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** during the visit.
- A **mutual defence logistics support agreement** is in an advanced stage of negotiation, while a government-to-government (G2G) mechanism for defence deals and a defence training Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) are also in the works. In addition, the two sides may conclude a **defence technology and industrial capability cooperation (DTICC) agreement**, the MoU for which was signed in April 2019. Government sources said the two countries were close to signing a G2G agreement on **jet engine technology development**.
- The U.K. has also made a pitch to India for joint technology development of **sixth generation fighter technologies** which can go into India’s fifth generation advanced medium combat aircraft. It has offered the **design of its Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier for the Indian Navy’s** proposed second indigenous carrier. The aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth would be in the Indian Ocean next year on its maiden deployment. Meanwhile, the U.K. has already announced its plans to deploy a **Liaison Officer at the Indian Navy’s Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFCIOR)** meant to improve **Maritime Domain Awareness**.
- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** is expected to travel to **Glasgow for the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021**, and both sides are keen on expanding their partnership on fighting global warming and building renewable energy technologies, officials said.

31. [Bodoland People's Front stakes claim to form Council](#)

- The **Bodoland People’s Front**, which emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats in the just concluded **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) polls**, staked claim to form the new Council. BPF president Hagrama Mohilyar in a letter to Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi requested to be given the opportunity to form the new council. He also requested the Governor to give them a period of seven days for following the necessary procedures to prove majority. The BJP-UPP-LGSP combine had staked its claim on Sunday with the Governor accepting their claim and directed that they be sworn in on December 15
- Established in 2003, BTC is an autonomous self-governing body under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**, a special provision that allows for **greater political autonomy** and decentralised governance in certain tribal areas of the Northeast.

32. [Operational guidelines released for COVID-19 vaccination by the Health Ministry](#)

- Setting the stage for a national rollout of vaccination against COVID-19, the Union Health Ministry operational guidelines said a vaccination team will include a **vaccinator officer** (anyone legally authorised to give injections may be considered as potential vaccinator), **doctors** (MBBS/BDS), staff nurse, pharmacist, and support staff.
- There will also be a designated person to check the registration status of the beneficiary at the entry point and ensure guarded entry to the vaccination session. Designated staff will also be present for verifying identification

documents, crowd management and communication. The operational guideline document also mentions about the planning and scheduling of vaccination sessions, which can either be a fixed site or mobile units being designated for high risk populations.

33. [Stealth frigate Himgiri ready for commissioning](#)

- *Himgiri*, the first of the three stealth frigates being built under **Project 17A** for the Navy, was launched into water on Monday. The fifth and last of the **offshore patrol vessels (OPV)** in the **series Saksham** being built at **Goa Shipyard** was launched into water and is expected to be delivered to the **Indian Coast Guard (ICG)** by October 2021. P17A ships with a displacement of around 6,670 tonnes will be the most advanced **state-of-the-art guided missile frigates** once inducted. **Fincantieri of Italy** is the know how provider for technology upgrade and capability enhancement in this project.

34. [Netaji museum planned in Kolkata for 125th anniversary](#)

- As a part of the commemoration of **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 125th birth anniversary in 2022**, the Union Culture Ministry is planning a museum in Kolkata, an exhibition at the Victoria Memorial and cultural performances in West Bengal.
- **Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel** held a meeting that was attended by family members of the freedom fighter to discuss the preparations. Mr. Patel said the programme would start from January 23, 2021, a year ahead of the **125th birth anniversary**. Historical documents, photos and other materials would be brought together at one place for display.

35. [Scrap quotas for IIT faculty : Ministry panel](#)

- A committee constituted by the Union Ministry of Education (MoE) to suggest measures for effective implementation of reservation policies in IITs has recommended that these institutions be **exempted from following the policies** in faculty recruitment.
- The committee based its recommendations primarily on arguments claiming the need for IITs to maintain their academic excellence and the lack of candidates from the reserved categories who fulfil the qualification criteria. The committee suggested that IITs be included in the **list of Institutes of Excellence (IoE)** that are exempted from reservation policies under the **Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act (CEI Act) of 2019**.
- To address diversity issues, the report argued that a **"system emphasising targeted goals over a period of time"** and not "specific quotas" be followed so that IITs can "compete with other top institutions in the world in terms of excellence, output, research and teaching." Highlighting the issue of low enrolment of reserved category students in Ph. D programmes in IITs, the committee said this was severely limiting the number of reserved category candidates available to be hired as faculty in the IIT system.

36. [Block-level monitoring hubs planned](#)

- State governments have been directed to identify at least one **Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI) management centre** in each block to ensure that any adverse reaction or side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine could be rapidly contained.
- NITI Aayog member (health) Dr. V.K. Paul said this was an adult vaccine, which would be administered at such a large scale for the first time and didn't begin from the hospital setting. "This will need extra caution," he noted.
- The Supreme Court on Tuesday clarified that homeopaths could prescribe government approved add-ons and mixtures to supplement conventional treatment for COVID-19 but could not advertise any cures.

37. [Postal Department launches digital payment service](#)

- The Department of **Posts and the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)** unveiled a new digital payment application “**DakPay**”. Union Minister for Communications Ravi Shankar Prasad said it added to the legacy of India Post, which was reaching out to every household.

38. Covaxin Phase1 trials show promising results

- Phase1 results show that **Covaxin**, a COVID-19 vaccine candidate, is safe. It was well tolerated in all dose groups and generated a “*robust immune response*”, according to the results released in a preprint paper, titled ‘*A Phase 1: Safety and Immunogenicity Trial of an Inactivated SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine - BBV152*’.
- The interim findings from the Phase1 placebo controlled randomised doubleblind trial on the safety and immunogenicity of three different formulations of BBV152 reported the results of the trial on 375 participants, with one adverse event which was found to be unrelated to the vaccine. The vaccine is being developed by the Hyderabad based **Bharat Biotech** in collaboration with the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**.

39. ‘Farmer protests part of U.K. politics because of diaspora’

- Agricultural reforms are India’s internal matter but the protests here are part of British politics too, said the visiting **British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab**, who “discussed” the ongoing farmers protests at Delhi’s borders during talks with **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar**. Mr. Raab, who met **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** on Wednesday, said the U.K. respected India’s “heritage” of protests and debates, and was watching the situation closely.
- **Protests over farm laws in UK:** Over the past two weeks, 36 British Members of Parliament, mostly from the Opposition Labour Party had written to Mr. Raab, asking him to raise the agricultural laws, which they called a “death warrant” for farmers, while the leader of the **Liberal Democratic party Ed Davey** reportedly criticised the handling of the protests by Indian “militarised police” and the need to respect “human rights”.
- The latest position in cases against Indian fugitives currently in the U.K., including former **Kingfisher group owner Vijay Mallya, whose extradition to India** has been held up by the British government for more than six months now, had also been discussed, he said. Mr. Raab is in Delhi to prepare for the visit of **Prime Minister Boris Johnson to India as the chief guest of the Republic Day** parade next month.

40. Study warns of vaccine hesitancy

- As the country readies to implement its **COVID-19 vaccination programme, vaccine hesitancy** could be an issue that the government needs to address forthwith. The results of an online survey showed that there was considerable hesitation even among the medical community to take the vaccine as soon as it is available.

41. History of farming movements in Punjab

- Punjab has historically been a witness to several long farmer agitations, including a century-old “Pagri Sambhal Jatta” movement by Bhagat Singh’s uncle during the British rule and later an anti-Betterment Levy agitation in 1959 against the proposed tax for providing canal waters. Punjab has had a strong APMC market system since 1939 and reaped maximum benefits of the Green Revolution owing to better irrigation facilities.

42. Communications satellite to be launched today

- The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** will launch a **communications satellite, CMS-01**, on board the PSLV-C50 from the second launch pad of the **Satish Dhawan Space Centre, SHAR** on Thursday.
- CMS-01 is a communications satellite envisaged for providing services in extended C Band of the frequency spectrum and its coverage will include the Indian mainland, and the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands, ISRO said. CMS-01 is the **42nd communication satellite of India**.

43. India ranked 131 on the Human Development Index

- India dropped two ranks in the **United Nations' Human Development Index** this year, standing at 131 out of 189 countries. For the first time, the **United Nations Development Programme** introduced a new metric to reflect the impact caused by each **country's per capita carbon emissions** and its material footprint, which measures the amount of fossil fuels, metals and other resources used to make the goods and services it consumes.
- Norway, which tops the HDI, falls 15 places if this metric is used, leaving Ireland at the top of the table. "No country has yet been able to achieve a very high level of development without putting a huge strain on natural resources. We have to be the first generation to do things right," said Ms. Shoko Nada, UNDP India's representative. The HDI itself is an assessment of a nation's health, education and standards of living.

44. Cabinet clears spectrum auction

- The Union Cabinet approved the auction of **2,251.25 megahertz of spectrum** with a reserve price of ₹3.92 lakh crore, a move that should help boost the quality of 4G telecom services in the country. Spectrum in the frequency bands of 700MHz, 800MHz, 900MHz, 1,800MHz, 2,100MHz, 2,300MHz and 2,500MHz would be offered for 20 years.
- Bidders will have to comply with conditions, including block size, in which bidders will be able to submit their bids, spectrum cap or the maximum amount of spectrum that can be held by a bidder after completion of auction, rollout obligations and payment terms.
- *"Spectrum holding per operator in a service area in our country is well below the international average, so any further auctioning of spectrum is welcome. There are about 700 million mobile broadband subscribers in the country, some of whom are on 3G. Subscriber count needs to go up for 4G given that our total mobile subscriber base is 1,149 million. We need 4G in every nook and corner, However, the bands, especially the 700 Mhz band, must be priced appropriately and it must be picked up,"* observed Prof. V. Sridhar.



International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

Daily snippets

1. Iran's calculated risk

- The **Barack Obama's administration** saw Iran's nuclear programme, which was at an advanced stage in 2015, as a national security problem and tackled it via diplomacy.
- But Iran's regional rivals, mainly **Israel and Saudi Arabia**, who are also America's allies, saw the Iran problem differently. The problem was Iran itself: Tehran's influence across West Asia, its backing for non-state militias, and its ambition to emerge as a dominant pillar in the region based on the **political heft of the Shia community**.
- The **Donald Trump administration** pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal, despite United Nations certification that Iran was compliant with its terms, and reimposed sanctions on Tehran. In practical terms, Mr. Trump's approach towards Iran had aligned with that of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

- It was against this background **Mohsen Fakhrizadeh**, a top Iranian nuclear physicist, was assassinated on November 27 on the outskirts of Tehran. The attack has put Iran in a spot. If it does not retaliate, it shows that Iran's deterrence is getting weaker, which could trigger more such attacks from its rivals. If it retaliates, it could escalate the conflict, giving the outgoing Trump administration and a crisis-hit Benjamin Netanyahu government reasons to launch heavier strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, closing off the diplomatic path.
- **Iran's response:** Iran seems to have opted for the less risky option. Instead of walking into the trap of provocation, its Parliament passed a Bill that obliges the government to enrich uranium to a higher level - from less than 5% now to 20%, which is a technical step away from the weapons-grade level of 90% - and stop access for UN inspectors to the country's top nuclear facilities in two months if sanctions relief is not given.

2. [Morocco to normalise ties with Israel](#)

- **Morocco** has become the fourth Arab nation this year to recognise Israel, U.S. President Donald Trump announced, as he, in turn, fulfilled a decades old goal of Morocco by backing its sovereignty in disputed Western Sahara.
- After the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan, Morocco is the fourth Arab State since August to commit to establishing **diplomatic relations with the Jewish State**.
- **Morocco and Israel** had respectively maintained liaison offices in Tel Aviv and Rabat in the 1990s, before closing them in 2000.

3. [Israel set to open up parts of Herod's palace](#)

- Israeli authorities are set to unveil previously off-limits structures within **King Herod's palace**-fortress, Herodium, which the tyrannical Roman-era leader interred as his enormous burial plot.
- **Herodium**, a popular tourism destination, is near Bethlehem **in the occupied West Bank** but falls in an area where Israel exercises military and civilian control. Archaeologists say Herod decided towards the end of his life to bury his palace, using ground from below the hill it was perched upon, until the outline of the structure was no longer visible.
- Israel's Nature and Parks Authority **plans to open the revamped site**, allowing visitors to see for the first time Herodium's arched stairway, foyer and private theatre. The Judean desert complex was built by the Roman-appointed king known both for his brutality and the magnificent structures built during his reign over Judea from 37 to 4 BC.

4. [Riot turns spotlight on Sri Lanka's jails](#)

- The **riot in Sri Lanka's Mahara prison** on November 29, in which 11 inmates were killed, has turned the spotlight on the alarming conditions in the country's prisons, only magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic that has not spared even highly guarded prison cells.
- The recent prison riot was a reality check. Amid Sri Lanka's persisting second wave - cases number over 30,000 - the violent incident showed how the **triple challenges of the pandemic, a flourishing narcotics trade and poor prison conditions in Sri Lanka** converged, eventually resulting in the death of 11 unarmed inmates.

5. [Italian legend Rossi passes away](#)

- Paolo Rossi, a hero of Italian football who fired the *Az-zurri* to victory in the 1982 World Cup, has died aged 64. Tributes were paid to **Pablito**, the star who was banned for three years for his part in a betting scandal, but returned to win the World Cup in Spain and the Ballon D'Or the same year.

- Rossi won the hearts of Italian fans during the summer of 1982, when his goals dragged **Enzo Bearzot's Az-zurri to a third World title**. Along with Christian Vieri and Roberto Baggio, he holds the Italian record for **nine goals scored in the World Cup**. Indian football legend I.M Vijayan said that Rosi was his first hero. Vijayan said he admired Rossi's ability to convert chances that came his way. *"He had that knack to be at the right place to score goals, like Gary Lineker,"* he said. *"Rossi was indeed an inspiration for me during my school days."*

6. [U.S. experts back Pfizer vaccine approval](#)

- The U.S. could soon be the next country to launch an immunisation campaign against COVID19 after experts voted to recommend **emergency approval for PfizerBioNTech's vaccine**. The key milestone comes as the world's hardest hit country logged nearly 6,000 virus deaths in 48 hours, with its overall toll approaching 300,000. **President-elect Joe Biden** called the FDA experts' decision a "bright light in a needlessly dark time", with official approval expected within days.
- Britain this week became the first Western country to roll out the PfizerBioNTech jab, which Canada, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have also approved. And while Russia and China have already begun inoculation efforts with domestically produced vaccines, European Union (EU) countries are eagerly awaiting clearance.

7. [No deal very likely, says Johnson](#)

- Britain is likely to leave the European Union (EU) without a trade deal in just under three weeks' time, **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson** and **European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen** said on Friday.
- Britain quit the EU in January but remains an informal member until December 31, the end of a transition period during which it has remained in the EU single market and customs union. Both sides say they want to agree arrangements to cover nearly \$1 trillion in annual trade, but talks are at an impasse. Ms. von der Leyen told EU leaders that a no-deal was more likely than a deal, an official said

8. [Jimmy Lai charged under security law](#)

- Hong Kong media tycoon and Beijing critic **Jimmy Lai** was charged under a new **national security law** on Friday for allegedly colluding with foreign forces. He is the latest pro-democracy figure targeted under the legislation.

9. [Bhutan MPs vote to lift ban on same-sex relations](#)

- Bhutan's Parliament has voted to decriminalise samesex relations, amending an existing law that penalised what it deemed "unnatural sex". The amendment was approved on Thursday by 63 out of 69 lawmakers, with six abstaining from voting. The amendment now needs to be approved by Bhutan's king to become law.

10. [U.S. approves Pfizer vaccine as millions of doses begin shipping](#)

- The U.S. green lighted the **PfizerBioNTech** COVID-19 vaccine late on Friday, paving the way for millions of vulnerable people to receive their shots in the world's hardest hit country. The U.S. is now the sixth country to approve the two dose regimen, after Britain, Bahrain, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Mexico.

11. [Iran executes dissident journalist](#)

- Iran on Saturday executed a once exiled journalist over his online work that helped inspire **nationwide economic protests in 2017**, authorities said, just months after he returned to Tehran under mysterious circumstances. **Ruhollah Zam's** website AmadNews and a channel he created on the popular messaging app Telegram had spread the timings of the protests and embarrassing information about officials that directly **challenged Iran's Shia theocracy**. Those demonstrations, which began at the end of 2017, represented the biggest challenge to Iran's rulers since the **2009 Green Movement protests** and set the stage for similar mass unrest in November of

last year. The initial spark for the 2017 protests was a sudden jump in food prices. Many believe that hardline opponents of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani instigated the first demonstrations in the conservative city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran, trying to direct public anger at the President.

12. [Israel and Bhutan establish diplomatic ties](#)

- Bhutan and Israel established formal ties on Saturday, with a formal ceremony in New Delhi where the Ambassadors of both countries to India exchanged agreements. The move follows a flurry of diplomatic activity in both countries in the past few weeks. In deals brokered by the United States, **Israel has established full relations with the United Arab Emirates(UAE), Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco in the last two months**, while **Bhutan established ties with Germany**, its first new formal relationship since 2013. With the announcement, Bhutan, which does not have ties with any permanent UNSC member, has taken the restricted number of diplomatic relations to 54 countries and the European Union.
- While Israel and Bhutan have not had formal ties, the two sides cooperate on development activities and agricultural training. **Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV)** has trained hundreds of Bhutanese youth since 2013.

13. [Shifting the Rohingya to Bhashan Char](#)

- The main argument for the charland being unsafe is that these lands are known to be unstable and flood prone. The other fear factor includes the tropical cyclones that visit the area every year. The Bangladesh government has earmarked around **1,350 acres for the Rohingya refugees**, of which 432 acres is dedicated to their rehabilitation and the rest remains for future projects. The government has constructed a large number of housing units in the section designated for the Rohingya. The country sent 1,642 Rohingya refugees to the islet from their temporary camps in Kutupalong, near Cox's Bazar, on December 4.
- **Why is Bangladesh moving the refugees?** Ever since their arrival, the refugees, numbering 1.1 million, have been living in Kutupalong under bamboo and tarpaulin structures. The camp is located on a hillock, which was a sanctuary for elephants and other wild animals. Kutupalong has also been in the news for its rising crime rate. Bangladesh argues that the islet will provide a safer place.
- **Why are human rights agencies upset?** Amnesty International said Bangladesh must "drop" its plans to shift Rohingya refugees to Bhashan Char as the charland had not yet been declared safe for habitation by the United Nations.
- **What happens next?** Diplomatic sources have confirmed that Dhaka does not plan to relocate the entire refugee settlement and only aims at reducing the congestion in Kutupalong. The country's longterm plan for Rohingya refugees is to seek their **repatriation to the Rakhine province of Myanmar**.

14. [U.K. and EU ditch deadline to pursue Brexit negotiations](#)

- **Prime Minister Boris Johnson** and **EU chief Ursula von der Leyen** agreed to abandon their supposed make-or-break deadline. The pair had said last week they would decide whether an agreement was possible by the end of Sunday, but after a cross-Channel crisis call they agreed to "**go the extra mile**".
- Without a trade deal, cross-Channel trade will revert to WTO rules, with tariffs driving up prices and generating paperwork for importers, and the failed negotiation could poison **relations between London and Brussels** for years to come.

15. [German envoy summoned after EU raps Iran over Zam](#)

- Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Germany and France's envoys to protest EU condemnation of the execution of an opposition figure, describing it as an "unacceptable interference" in Tehran's affairs, state media reported.

- **Ruhollah Zam** was hanged on Saturday after Iran's Supreme Court upheld his death sentence passed in June over his role in protests during the winter of 2017/18, among other charges. The EU in a statement condemned the execution in the "*strongest terms*" and emphasised its "*irrevocable opposition to the use of capital punishment*". **Germany currently holds the European Union's rotating presidency.**

16. [Germany orders partial lockdown](#)

- Germany will go into a partial lockdown from Wednesday with nonessential shops and schools to close, as Europe's biggest economy battles to halt an "exponential growth" in coronavirus infections. The new curbs will apply until January 10, with companies also urged to allow employees to work from home or offer extended company holidays, under the new measures agreed by **Chancellor Angela Merkel** with regional leaders of Germany's 16 States on Sunday.

17. [China moon probe heads back to Earth](#)

- A Chinese spacecraft carrying rocks and soil from the moon has begun its journey back to Earth, putting China on course to become **the first country to successfully retrieve lunar samples since the 1970s**. Engines on the **Chang'e5** probe were ignited 230 km from the lunar surface early on Sunday, Beijing time, before being shut down after 22 minutes with the craft on a trajectory towards Earth.
- A successful landing in Inner Mongolia would make China only **the third country to have retrieved lunar samples after the United States and the Soviet Union**. The plan was to collect 2 kg (4.4 lbs) of samples, although it has not been disclosed how much was actually gathered. The **Chang'e5 was launched on Nov. 24** and a lander vehicle touched down on the moon on Dec. 1. The mission was expected to take around 23 days in total.

18. [U.S. agencies hit by massive cyberattack](#)

- The U.S. government issued an emergency directive to federal agencies in the wake of a major cyberattack, as multiple media outlets reported at least two departments - including the Treasury - had been targeted by hackers with ties to Russia.
- In a statement on Sunday, the **Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)** said it had ordered federal agencies to immediately stop using **SolarWinds Orion IT** products following reports that hackers had used a recent update to gain access to internal communications.
- The hacks are part of a wider campaign that also hit major cybersecurity firm **FireEye**, which said its own defences had been breached by sophisticated attackers who stole tools used to test customers' computer systems. FireEye said it suspected the attack could have affected numerous high profile targets across the globe.
- **Microsoft also alerted its users** to what it described as a sophisticated campaign aimed at "**high value targets**" in government and cybersecurity and which it said represented "**nation-state activity at significant scale.**" U.S. media reports said the **FBI was investigating a group working for the Russian foreign intelligence service, SVR.**

19. [British spy thriller author John le Carre dies aged 89](#)

- **John le Carre**, the British writer best known for his Cold War espionage novels *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, has died aged 89. The author, a former British intelligence officer whose real name was **David Cornwell**, wrote 25 novels and one memoir in a career spanning six decades, selling 60 million books worldwide.

20. [Google hit by brief outage](#)

- Google users in the U.S., Europe, India and other parts of the world were briefly unable to access their Gmail accounts, watch YouTube videos or get to their online documents during an outage on Monday. Tens of

thousands of complaints popped up around 7 a.m. Eastern time along the East Coast of the U.S. The vast majority of those people, about 90%, could not log in, according to the site Downtdetector.

21. [U.S. lifts Sudan off terror list](#)

- The U.S. on Monday removed Sudan from its state sponsors of terrorism blacklist, less than two months **after the Arab nation pledged to normalise ties with Israel**. The move opens the way for aid, debt relief and investment to a country going through a rocky political transition. President Donald Trump had announced in October that he was delisting Sudan, 27 years after the U.S. first put the country on its blacklist for harbouring Islamist militants.

22. [New York nurse receives first COVID19 vaccine in U.S.](#)

- A nurse in New York became the first person in the United States to receive the coronavirus vaccine on Monday. **Sandra Lindsay**, a critical care nurse at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center, received the **PfizerBioNTech** shot live on television.

23. [Sri Lanka's youngest virus victim triggers campaign against forced cremations](#)

- Ever since COVID-19 struck Sri Lanka in March, the **government has been enforcing cremations for all victims**, despite the World Health Organization saying bodies "can be buried or cremated". The island is witnessing a surge in cases - totalling over 32,000 now - since the second major outbreak in October.
- Making up about **10% of the country's 21 millionstrong population**, Sri Lanka's **Muslim community has been urging the government to revise its pandemic guidelines** that go against Islamic religious beliefs, but to no avail. The UN and international human rights organisations urged Sri Lankan authorities to reverse the policy, but the government's rules remain unchanged.
- As calls to stop mandatory cremations grew louder over the past week, **Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa** directed officials to find land suitable for burials, local media reported. Meanwhile, neighbouring **Maldives**, an Islamic country of nearly 400,000 people, has stepped in to **assist Sri Lanka in facilitating Islamic funeral rites in the Maldives** for Sri Lankan Muslims succumbing to COVID-19 pandemic.

24. [A test for Ghana](#)

- Ghana, which has just concluded its **eighth successive general election since the end of military rule in 1992**, is regarded as a kind of gold standard for political stability in the region.
- The country was the earliest in SubSaharan Africa to win **freedom from colonial rule in 1957**, when the **nation's first Prime Minister and President Kwame Nkrumah** championed the cause of panAfrican unity. That vision has since enlarged into the current **African Union of 55 member states**, which recently launched a fledgling free trade area across the continent. The heralding of multi-party democracy in the country, alongside other nations in the continent in more recent years, has been described as Africa's second liberation.
- The largely peaceful general election, held on December 7, could, however, begin to test Accra's growing reputation for a free and fair poll and a smooth handover of power. **President Nana Addo Dankwa AkufoAddo**, who was lucky in the 2016 race after contesting unsuccessfully twice earlier, won a re-election in a high turnout contest, heading the centre right **New Patriotic Party (NPP)**.
- In a similarly narrow race, the **parliamentary polls have produced a hung legislature**, with the **National Democratic Congress (NDC)**, which has its roots in the military backed Provisional National Defence Council in the 1980s, within touching distance of the NPP. The **NDC leader, John Dramani Mahama**, who, before the results were declared, had alleged that the vote was rigged, has vowed to mount a legal challenge over the outcome.

- Observers point to **strains in Ghana's two party system** — in part from the competition for control of oil revenues from 2010, in addition to the country's traditional dominance in cocoa and gold. For a leader whose main plank in the 2016 election was to combat the rampant corruption of the previous government, Mr. AkufoAddo's jumbo sized **cabinet was criticised as one intended to reward loyalists**.
- The exforeign minister will begin his second term by attempting to redeem his pledge to build a factory for each of Ghana's 216 districts, a dam in every village in the country's north, and provide a million dollars for every electoral constituency. That is a tall order at the best of times. During the current pandemic, it seems rather unrealistic.

25. U.S. imposes CAATSA sanctions on Turkey over S-400 purchase

- The U.S. has imposed **sanctions on NATO ally Turkey for its purchase of Russia's S400 missile defence system**, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on Monday.
- **How does it affect India?** : The issue of sanctions under Section 231 of the **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)** for purchase of Russian arms is of particular interest to New Delhi, which is also in the process of buying the S400 from Moscow.
- **What sanctions will apply?** : These SSB sanctions comprise a **ban on granting specific U.S. export licences** and authorisations for any goods or technology, a **ban on loans or credits by U.S. financial institutions** totalling more than \$10 million in any 12month period, a **ban on U.S. ExportImport Bank assistance** for exports and mandated U.S. opposition to loans by international financial organisations to SSB. Additionally, sanctions will include **full blocking sanctions and visa restrictions on SSB president Ismail Demir** and other officials
- Last year, the **U.S. had removed Turkey from its F35 jet programme** over concerns that sensitive information could be accessed by Russia if Turkey used Russian systems along with U.S. jets.
- The administration has now had to face a **\$740 million National Defense Authorization Bill (NDAA) 2021** from the U.S. Congress, which mandates sanctions against Turkey within 30 days of the Bill's passage (December 11). **Mr. Trump has threatened to veto the Bill** as U.S. President Donald Trump and **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** have an apparently close relationship.

26. Bomb kills Deputy Governor in Kabul

- A Deputy Governor of Kabul province and his aide were killed on Tuesday by a bomb in the Afghan capital, officials said, the latest in a wave of targeted killings in the country.
- **Violence has raged across the country since the Taliban and the Afghan government launched peace talks** in Qatar in September. Afghanistan — and especially Kabul — has seen a spate of **murders of prominent figures**, including journalists, clerics, politicians and rights activists.

27. Riyadh announces three-phase roll-out of COVID-19 vaccine

- Saudi Arabia on Tuesday announced a **three phase COVID19 vaccination programme** as it began registering citizens and foreign residents after approving the **PfizerBioNTech vaccine**. People aged over 65 as well as those with chronic ailments or those at a high risk of infection will receive the vaccine in the **first stage**, and those aged over 50 in the **second**, the official Saudi Press Agency said. Everyone else will be vaccinated in the **third stage**, SPA said citing the Health Ministry, without specifying the dates for each phase or how long the mass campaign would take.
- The Gulf kingdom has a **population of more than 34 million**, according to official figures. The Ministry opened registration for the vaccination campaign through an online application called '**Sehaty**', and said the vaccine would be "**free for all citizens and residents**".

- Last week, **Saudi Arabia became the second Gulf country after Bahrain to greenlight the vaccine.** It has recorded more than 3,60,000 COVID19 cases and more than 6,000 deaths — the highest in the Gulf.

28. 'Over 5 lakh Uighurs involved in Xinjiang cotton coerced labour'

- Hundreds of thousands of ethnic minority labourers in **China's northwestern Xinjiang region** are being forced to pick cotton through a coercive state-run scheme, a report has said. The research published on Monday by Washington Based think tank the **Center for Global Policy** is likely to heap more pressure on global brands such as Nike, Gap and Adidas, which have been accused of **using Uighur forced labour in their textile supply chains.**
- Rights activists have said **Xinjiang is home to a vast network of extrajudicial internment camps** that have imprisoned at least one million people, which China has defended as vocational training centres to counter extremism.
- Researchers warned of the “potentially drastic consequences” for global cotton supply chains, with **Xinjiang producing more than 20% of the world's cotton** and around a fifth of the yarn used in the United States coming from the region.

29. Russia denies role of FSB in opposition leader's poisoning

- **Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov** denied recent media investigations that alleged the country's **Federal Security Service (FSB)** had followed and poisoned **opposition leader Alexei Navalny.**
- **Poisoning of Navalny:** Several European labs in September concluded that Navalny, 44, was poisoned after he fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow in August before being transported by medical aircraft to Berlin. A joint investigation published earlier this week by several media outlets claimed FSB chemical weapons experts had followed Mr. Navalny for years, including on the day he was poisoned.
- The European Union has imposed entry bans and bank account freezes on six people suspected of being responsible, including **FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov.**

30. Erdogan says U.S. sanctions an attack on Turkey's sovereignty

- **President Tayyip Erdogan** said that **U.S. sanctions imposed on Turkey over its purchase of Russian defence systems** were an attack on Ankara's sovereign rights aimed at deterring its defence industry, a move which he said was bound to fail. On Monday, Washington imposed the sanctions targeting NATO member **Turkey's Defence Industry Directorate (SSB)**, its chief **Ismail Demir** and three other employees over its acquisition of **Russian S400 missile defence systems.**
- Washington says the **S400s pose a threat to its F35 fighter jets** and to NATO's broader defence systems. Turkey rejects this and says S400s will not be integrated into NATO. On Wednesday, Erdogan repeated that the U.S. concerns had no technical basis. He added that Ankara still produced close to 1,000 parts for the F35 jets, despite being removed from the programme over the S400 purchase. Turkey had also been due to buy more than 100 F35 jets.

31. We won't allow communal anarchy in Bangladesh: PM

- Bangladesh marked the **49th anniversary of the victory in the Liberation War** on Tuesday with official events in its diplomatic missions in various countries. **Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina** greeted veteran freedom fighters in Dhaka, and said Bangladesh would not allow communalisation of politics.
- **Victory Day in Bangladesh:** The Victory Day was marked across the country as well as in the diplomatic missions of Bangladesh in multiple countries. In the Bangladesh High Commission here, High Commissioner Muhammad Imran led the celebration and paid **tributes to the sacrifices made by millions of people during the nine month long Liberation War in 1971, which culminated in the birth of Bangladesh on December 16.** The day was also

celebrated in India as Vijay Divas as India paid tributes to the military martyrs in the **India-Pakistan war of December 1971**.

- **Communalisation of politics:** The Islamist organisation has been building pressure on the government of Ms. Hasina over the past few months and has been insisting on following a more Islamic style of government. However, Ms. Hasina said in her speech that the freedom of 1971 was gained “inexchange” of the blood of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians and everyone in Bangladesh irrespective of religious identity has a right to practise religion in peace.

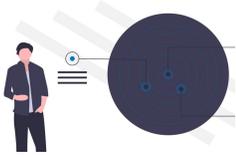
32. Pak. approves chemical castration of sex offenders

- Pakistan has approved the **chemical castration of rapists** as part of sweeping new legislation sparked by outcry over the gangrape of a mother on a motorway. New laws approved by **President Arif Alvi** on Tuesday will see rape cases expedited through the courts and create the country’s first national sex offenders register.
- **Pakistan is a deeply conservative and patriarchal nation** where victims of sexual abuse often are too afraid to speak out, or where criminal complaints are frequently not investigated seriously. Mr. Khan had said the worst sex crimes should be punishable by public hangings but added this could impact trade with partners that oppose the death penalty, such as the European Union. Rights activists have warned the provision of **chemical castration could affect Pakistan’s international human rights obligations**.

Opinion : Agrarian discontent convergence in South Asia

1. The systematic attack on agriculture in South Asia over the last decades. Recent events point to a similar picture. **In Pakistan**, farmers **protesting for support price** were beaten up and were rested in Lahore only a month ago; **in Sri Lanka**, where **shortages of imported fertilizers** and declining subsidies has led to farmers’ out cry. Thus, efforts by South Asian governments to project corporatisation and de-regulation as the way forward for agriculture have angered long-suffering farmers.
2. **Contempt for smallholding producers** has been a part and parcel of policy making across the region for decades. South Asia’s rural landscape has been profoundly reshaped by ‘reforms’ like - relaxing norms for cheap food imports, encouraging export oriented production, price speculation, agribusiness and retail supermarkets, which has resulted in dispossessing farmers of their land, and pushing them in to wage labour and migration as coping mechanisms.
3. Amidst the pandemic, India is not the only South Asian nation deregulating its agricultural markets, Pakistan, at the height of the first lockdown in May this year, the government inked an agreement with the World Bank to **further deregulate the country’s wheat market**. In Sri Lanka, with the national budget just passed for 2021, there are only **meagre allocations towards revitalising agricultural livelihoods** and policies focused on supporting technologies suitable for agribusinesses. Deregulation makes farmers’ livelihoods even more precarious and **threatens food sovereignty** through **increased dependence on global agricultural trade**. It was the collapse of global agricultural commodity prices in the 1970s that had a large role to play in the debt crisis that haunts countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
4. Rural movements in South Asian nations : Rural movements played a crucial role in the **anticolonial struggle** and fought for **progressive land and agrarian reform** after Independence. They are now fighting these policies, while advancing new progressive visions such as **peasant agroecology and food sovereignty**, which put small food producers and the environment at the centre. The COVID-19 pandemic has **pushed food sovereignty back** into the public imagination. The solution, of course, only begins with making farming a viable livelihood.

5. Questions of land redistribution and other rural inequalities must remain a crucial part of the political agenda. The situation of mostly female agricultural workers, the rural landless and Dalits in South Asia remains precarious. There needs to come new visions of rural emancipation in South Asia.



Explainers/ Opinion

[Maduro's win](#)

1. The sweeping victory **Nicolás Maduro** and his allies secured in Sunday's legislative elections in Venezuela has allowed the oil-rich country's President to tighten his grip on power. The outgoing National Assembly, in which the opposition has a majority, has remained outside his influence.
2. Last year, the Assembly Speaker, **Juan Guaidó**, declared himself acting President after the opposition refused to recognise Mr. Maduro's 2018 re-election. But despite Mr. Guaidó's call for revolt and the support he got internationally, including from the U.S., all other major institutions, including the judiciary and the military, remained loyal to Mr. Maduro — he has emerged stronger with his United Socialist Party and allies winning 67% of the vote.
3. But the results are unlikely to resolve the political crisis. The Guaidóled main right wing opposition bloc had boycotted the election. It claimed that the Supreme Court's decision earlier this year to appoint a new election commission without participation from the National Assembly was illegal. The opposition has also rejected the results. It points out that only 31% of registered voters cast their ballots — less than half of the turnout in the 2015 legislative election which the opposition won — questioning the legitimacy of the whole process. The U.S. and several EU countries too have refused to recognise the vote.
4. By boycotting the election, the opposition has, in practice, made it easier for Mr. Maduro to win it. If the opposition wants to challenge the government effectively, it should build a political movement at home, tapping the grievances of the public, not on the support that may or may not come from abroad.

[Israel-Morocco pact follows a history of secret dealings](#)

1. Behind the announcement on Thursday that **Israel and Morocco will establish their first formal diplomatic ties**, there lies almost **six decades of close, secret cooperation** on intelligence and military matters between the two nations that officially did not acknowledge each other. Israel has helped Morocco obtain weapons and intelligence gathering gear and learn how to use them, and helped it assassinate an opposition leader. Morocco has helped Israel take in Moroccan Jews, mount an operation against Osama bin Laden, and even spy on other Arab countries.
2. The **Moroccan-Israeli ties** stemmed in part from the large number of Jews in Morocco before the birth of Israel in 1948, many of whom would migrate there, making up one of the largest parts of Israel's population. Some 1 million Israelis are from Morocco, or descended from those who were.

3. When Morocco gained independence from France in 1956, it banned Jewish emigration. **Israel's spy agency, Mossad**, smuggled out many Jews, but the operation was exposed in 1961, when a Mossad ship carrying such migrants sank, killing most of those on board.
4. The next month, a new **Moroccan king, Hassan II**, took power, and Israel made a highly successful effort to cultivate him. Israeli agents met with the Moroccan opposition leader, **Mehdi Ben Barka**, who asked for help overthrowing the king; instead, the Israelis told Hassan of the plot. The king permitted mass emigration of Jews and allowed Mossad to establish a station in Morocco.
5. A crucial moment came in 1965, when Arab leaders and military commanders met in Casablanca, and Morocco allowed Mossad to bug their meeting rooms and private suites. This gave Israel unprecedented insight into Arab plans, which helped it in preparing for the 1967 war.
6. A decade later, Hassan and his government became the back channel between Israel and Egypt, and Morocco became the site of secret meetings between their officials, ahead of the **1978 Camp David accords** and normalisation of relations between the former enemies.
7. In 1995, Moroccan intelligence joined in an ultimately unsuccessful Mossad plan to recruit Osama bin Laden's secretary, to find and kill the leader of alQaeda.
8. For years, Hassan II's successor, **King Muhammad VI**, has sought Israel's help in winning American acquiescence to Morocco's annexation of Western Sahara, which finally came to fruition in Thursday's announcement.

Hunger and Lockdown

1. Six or seven months after the lockdown, people continued to go to bed hungry, skip meals frequently, and are unable to afford nutritious diets because of loss of income, shows a survey by the **Right to Food Campaign** of 4,000 people living on the margins across 11 States. This calls into question the government's decision to withdraw free food grains under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)** after November.
2. The survey, called Hunger Watch, recorded responses from **marginalised and excluded communities**, such as the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and minority religious communities including Muslims, 80% of whom earned **less than ₹7,000 a month** before the lockdown in March. Most of the people surveyed reported a drastic drop in food intake. On consumption of vegetables, 73% reported a drop in consumption of vegetables. 64% reported a decrease in consumption of pulses. Nearly 66% of people said they were having less than the quantity they used to eat.
3. The survey reported discrimination on the lines of caste and religion while accessing food during the lockdown. One in four Dalits and one in four Muslims reported they faced discrimination and about 12% of Scheduled Tribes felt discriminated against. The income levels of the people surveyed, only 3% of them have returned to the pre-lockdown income levels.

Central Vista Project : Remaking the face of the capital

1. The ambitious plan to redevelop the 3 km long historical stretch from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate known as the Central Vista. Recently the Prime Minister marked the beginning of the project with the '*bhoomi puja*'. Construction will only start after the Supreme Court disposes of all challenges to the project that are pending before it.
2. The plan, as drafted by Ahmedabad based **HCP Design, Planning and Management**, involves constructing a triangular shaped Parliament building adjacent to the existing one that was built in the 1920s by the British; demolishing the post Independence office buildings along the Central Vista and replacing them with 10 modern

multi-storey office complexes to house all Ministries; and revamping the civic infrastructure and facilities for the Republic Day parade on Rajpath.

3. **Why the need for the project?** Government's arguments in court is that the existing Parliament House is almost 100 years old, structurally unsafe, and lacks adequate workspace for a modern legislature. The 10 new office buildings proposed are required to bring all Central Ministries in one place. Another reason is the **expected increase in the number of constituencies** after delimitation, which is frozen till the **first Census after 2026**. The current Parliament House would not be able to accommodate additional MPs, the government has maintained. The Prime Minister stated that the new temple of democracy will be a symbol of the new **Atmanirbhar India**.
4. **The structure** : Spread over 64,500 sq. ft of built-up area, the new building will have a **Lok Sabha chamber** with the capacity to seat 1,272 and a **Rajya Sabha chamber** with 384 seats and a Central Constitutional Gallery that will be open to the public. The extended plan also includes building new Secretariat buildings, a Prime Minister's Office, PM's Residence and Vice President's Enclave. The project was awarded to Tata Projects for ₹971 crore after a two-step bid process earlier this year. The construction is expected to take 22 months and is scheduled to finish in time for the Winter Session of Parliament in 2022, when **India marks 75 years of Independence**.
5. The government is yet to publicly state the cost of the entire project. However, sources say, it could cost at least ₹11,000 crore and take up to six years to complete.

Emergency use of COVID-19 vaccines

1. **Background** : The Pune based **Serum Institute of India** and **Bharat Biotech** of Hyderabad, frontrunners among Indian vaccine makers, have been advised by India's drugs regulator - the **Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI)** - to furnish more evidence that their vaccine candidates were safe and capable of preventing COVID-19.
2. **What is Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA)**
 - The conventional process to approve new drugs or vaccines is to subject them to a clinical trial process. The trials in **phase 1, 2 and 3** are designed to establish the **drug's safety and efficacy**, and promoters of the new drug or vaccine must furnish data from each phase to a country's drugs regulators to satisfy them that the results are promising enough to move to the next stage.
 - However, there may be several situations when the approval process must be hastened, It is under such circumstances that health regulators allow accelerated approvals under EUA. The terminology is specific to the United States Food and Drug Administration but several countries have similar provisions under similar names.
3. **What is the process in India**
 - India does not have an explicit EUA provision. A section in the rules governing the use and regulation of drugs that came into effect in 2019 - called the **New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019** - mentions an '**accelerated approval process**'. According to this provision, depending on the severity of the disease, urgency, rarity or the lack of alternative treatments, the regulator has the right to waive local clinical trials if a **drug has been approved elsewhere**. The drug is evaluated based on the **first two phases of the testing** and the larger - usually more time-consuming and expensive - phase 3 trial can be deferred.
 - Thus, vaccine makers such as Serum Institute of India (SII), Bharat Biotech (BB), and Zydus Cadila, have been allowed to rely on the efficacy of data from other countries, or limited human trials to accelerate their testing process.
4. **Why did DGCA seek more data**
 - Drugs regulators are not enjoined to approve a drug just because there is a pandemic. The DCGI has a **Subject Expert Committee (SEC)** which evaluates technical data from trials. The committee mentioned that, though countries have approved for emergency usage, early results from its phase 3 trials are being scrutinised by their

respective drugs regulators, the Indian committee also wanted to evaluate this data as well as also wait for their decisions on the vaccine.

Western Sahara on edge after Israel-Morocco deal

1. **Background** : In return for **Morocco's decision to establish formal ties with Israel**, the **U.S. has recognised Rabat's sovereignty over Western Sahara**, a disputed territory in northwestern Africa, which has been under Moroccan control for decades. Morocco has long been campaigning internationally, using economic pressure and diplomacy, for recognition of its claims to Western Sahara.
2. **History of Western Sahara** : This large, arid and sparsely populated region that **shares borders with Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania** and has a long Atlantic coast, **was a Spanish colony**. The region is home to the Sahrawi tribe. In the 1970s, when international and local pressure mounted on Spain to vacate its colonies in Africa, Libya and Algeria helped found a Sahrawi insurgency group against the Spanish rule in Western Sahara. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, known as the **Polisario Front**, started guerilla warfare against Spanish colonists. In 1975, as part of the **Madrid Accords with Morocco and Mauritania**, Spain decided to leave the territory, which was then called Spanish Sahara.
3. **Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR):**
 - Both Morocco and Mauritania moved troops to Western Sahara to assert their claims. Polisario, backed by Algeria, continued the guerilla resistance, demanding their withdrawal. On February 27, 1976, a day before Spain ended its presence, the Polisario Front declared the **Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)** in Western Sahara. The SADR has been recognised by several African countries and is a member of the African Union.
4. **The story till now**
 - In August 1979, Mauritania signed a peace treaty with Polisario, bringing the country's military involvement in Western Sahara to an end. When Mauritanian forces withdrew from the southern part of the desert that they had occupied, Morocco swiftly advanced troops.
 - In 1991, when a ceasefire was finally achieved, upon the promise of holding an independence referendum in Western Sahara, Morocco had taken control of about 80% of the territory. The war had forced almost 200,000 Sahrawis to flee the territory to neighbouring Algeria, where Polisario is running squalid refugee camps. The SADR is operating largely from the eastern flank of Western Sahara. **Moroccan troops have built a huge sand wall called *Berm***, from the Atlantic coast to the mountains of Morocco, dividing the territories they control from that of Polisario.
 - After the **Trump administration's recognition** of Morocco's claim, Polisario said it would keep fighting until Moroccan troops are forced to withdraw. The U.S. move would upset Algeria, the biggest backer of Polisario. Among the nations that condemned the U.S. decision is Russia, which said the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara "is a violation of international law".

The many challenges of the WTO

1. Balancing the diverse and varied interests of the **164 member countries**, and especially, for reconciling competing multilateral and national visions, for the organisation to work efficiently. In a world grappled with the global economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and working towards carrying out reforms of the multilateral trading system for **reviving the world economy**.
2. At the core of the divide within the WTO is the **Doha Development Agenda**, which the developed countries sought to jettison in favour of a new agenda that includes, amongst others, ecommerce, investment facilitation,

MSMEs and gender. Restoring the **WTO dispute settlement mechanism**, especially the **revival of its Appellate body**, is also crucial for the organisation's efficient functioning.

3. The push for a change in the **definition of "developing country"** under the principle of special and differential treatment (S&DT), aimed at upgrading certain developing countries, will deeply impinge on the status of emerging economies such as India, China, South Africa, Turkey, Egypt, etc. The assumption that some developing countries have benefited immensely from the WTO rules since its formation in 1995 and hence the rules need to be changed is flawed, at least in the case of India.
4. Among the current negotiations at the WTO, the most important is the fisheries subsidies negotiations. The danger lies in seeking larger carveouts, which, if universally applicable to all, could result in developed countries ploughing precious fisheries resources in international waters. The **consensus based decision making in the WTO**, which makes dissension by even one member stop the process in its track, gives developing countries some heft and influence at par with developed countries.
5. Also, ensuring that supply chains remain free and open, recommending a standard harmonised system with classification for vaccines, and by the removal of import/export restrictions will go a long way in mitigating effects of COVID-19. Voluntary sharing and pooling of **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)** is required for any global effort to tackle the pandemic, but with the fear of vaccine nationalism looming large, several countries are seeking to secure future supply of leading COVID-19 vaccines. WTO can play a responsible role here by removing barriers to intellectual property and securing a legal framework within the **WTO TRIPS Agreement**, by lending salience to the **effective interpretation of Articles 8 and 31** of the Agreement, that allow **compulsory licensing and agreement of a patent** without the authorisation of its owner under certain conditions.



Science & Technology and Environment

Daily snippets

1. **Bringing life back to Western Ghat grasslands**

- **Tropical montane grasslands (TMG)** in the Shola Sky Islands of the Western Ghats have suffered big reductions due to invasions by exotic trees. Some populations are being driven to local extinction. In a study titled '*Opportunities and challenges in using remote sensing for invasive tree species management, and in the identification of restoration sites in tropical montane grasslands*', researchers have advocated focus on identifying grassland restoration sites using satellite images with a **high spatial resolution** (RapidEye), and have recommended careful **removal of young and isolated exotic trees** at the invasion front and restoring grasslands, instead of removing dense stands of mature exotic trees.
- About **TROPICAL MONTANE GRASSLANDS (TMG)** ? TMG are high elevation grasslands forming only 2% of all grasslands in the world. Among their functions is regulating the global carbon cycle and serving as a source of water to downstream communities. "In India, TMG have even been **classified as wastelands** in forest management plans since they are unlikely to generate revenue, contrary to the timber (even if exotic) found in

forests,” the study says. In the Western Ghats, 23% of montane grasslands were reportedly converted into **invasive exotic tree cover** over a period of 44 years.

2. [Kerala to augment wildlife rehab](#)

- Kerala is set to augment its wildlife rehabilitation capabilities by establishing a dedicated facility to treat and nurture injured and orphaned big cats and other large carnivores that are rescued from the wild. The move is spurred by frequent incursions by injured wild animals into human habitations. The proposed centre will treat animals until they can be released back into the wild, and rehabilitate those that are permanently disabled.
- Taking cue from other States, the facility can also be utilised to rear orphaned or abandoned cubs rescued from different places. The State currently has a rescue and rehabilitation centre for captive and wild elephants at Kottoor in Thiruvananthapuram.

3. [Rare Myristica swamp treefrog found in Thrissur](#)

- **Myristica swamp treefrog**, a rare arboreal species endemic to the **Western Ghats** that bears the scientific name *Mercurana myristicapalustris*, has been recorded for the first time in the **Vazhachal Reserve Forest** in Kerala’s Thrissur district.
- The discovery was a part of a 2-year exploration study. The recording has been published in the December issue of **Reptiles & Amphibians**, an international journal dedicated to the studies of amphibians and reptiles.
- These frogs are **rare and elusive** for the reason that they are **arboreal and active only for a few weeks during their breeding season**. The males vocalise in groups from the low perches in the swamps. They exhibit unique breeding behaviour. The breeding season, unlike for other frogs, starts in the pre-monsoon season (May) and ends before the monsoon becomes fully active in June. Extended distribution of such rare frogs in the Western Ghats have conservation implications and provide a suitable niche for further studies on the diverse amphibian fauna of the Ghat.

4. [Virus RNA found in sewage samples, says ICMR study](#)

- The detection of the presence of **SARS-CoV-2 RNA** in sewage samples has raised the possibility of using environmental water surveillance to monitor virus activity in infected areas, researchers have said. Similar environmental surveillance for the polio virus had played a critical role in the eradication of wild polio virus globally.
- In their paper, titled “*SARSCoV2 detection in sewage samples: standardisation of method and preliminary observations*”, published recently in the **Indian Journal of Medical Research**, researchers claimed to have undertaken the study to standardise the methodology for detection of SARSCoV2 from sewage and explore the feasibility of establishing supplementary surveillance for COVID-19. They suggested that SARSCoV2 detection in wastewater could be used to understand the epidemiology of COVID-19. The study also quoted detection of virus in **stool samples of patients**, indicating active **infection of gastrointestinal tract**.

[Notes on the Paris agreement CoP 21 and India's commitments](#)

1. **The Paris Agreement**

- The Paris Agreement, adopted at **COP 21 in Paris, on December 12, 2015**, constitutes a landmark agreement on climate change that seeks to **limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre industrial levels** and endeavour to limit the increase to 1.5°C. The agreement, which came into force on **November 4, 2016**, currently has 188 parties. All parties to it are expected to undertake ambitious efforts to support the

agreement's goals and communicate their related intentions every five years in the form of **NDCs (Nationally determined Contributions)**.

2. **India's Nationally Determined Contributions :**

- Improving the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33-35% by 2030 over 2005 levels.
- Increasing the share of non-fossil fuels based electricity to 40% by 2030.
- Enhancing its forest cover, thereby absorbing 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Hazardous ideas for the Himalayas

1. **Background** : China's 14th Five-Year Plan document states the building of a hydro-power project on the **Yarlung Zangbo river, in Medog country in Tibet**. The Chinese authorities say the project will help the country realise its goal of reaching a carbon emission peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060. Indian counterparts were quick to reiterate their plans to dam the Himalayas on this side of the border. India is reportedly considering a **10 GW hydropower project** in an eastern State.

2. **The idea of 'Super Dams'**

- Both countries ignore how unviable such 'super' dams projects are, given that they are being planned in an area that is **geologically unstable**. Over the past 20 years, both China and India have been competing with each other to build **hydroelectric dams** in this ecologically fragile and seismically vulnerable area.
- Two prominent projects from the Indian side are: the **600 MW Kameng project** on the Bichom and Tenga Rivers and the **2,000 MW Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric Project**. On the other side of the border, China has already completed 11 out of 55 projects that are planned for the Tibetan region. The sides have overestimated their economic potential and grossly underestimated the earthquake vulnerability of the region.

3. **Himalayan Region as a high seismic zone**

- High seismic zones coincide with areas of high population concentration in the Himalayan region where landslides and glacial lake outburst floods are common. About **15% of the great earthquakes of the 20th century** (with a magnitude of more than 8) occurred in the Himalayan region. The northeast Himalayan bend has experienced several large earthquakes of magnitude 7 and above in the last 100 years, more than the share from other parts of the Himalayas. The earthquakes have been felt over an extensive area comprising parts of India, Tibet, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- The main mechanisms that contributed to the **vulnerability of hydropower projects** were found to be landslides, which depend on the intensity of seismic ground shaking and slope gradients. **Heavy siltation** from giant land slides expected in the project sites and headwater region from future earthquakes will severely reduce the water holding capacity and life expectancy of such dams. **Desilting of dams** is not an economically viable proposition and is technologically challenging.

4. **The spillovers**

- We do not know how reservoirs with their water load would alter the existing stresses and strains on the earth's crust in the long term, impacting the frequency of earthquakes and their mechanisms.
 - The Himalayan range is a **transnational mountain chain** and is the chief driver of the Asian climate. It is a source for numerous Asian river systems and glaciers which are now under the threat of degradation and retreat due to global warming. In a recent article in *Nature*, **Maharaj K. Pandit**, a Himalayan ecologist, says in recent years, the Himalayas have seen the **highest rate of deforestation** and land use changes. He suggests that the upper Himalayas should be converted into a **nature reserve by an international agreement**.
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Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. Lawsuits could force Facebook to sell Instagram, WhatsApp

- Facebook Inc could be forced to sell WhatsApp and Instagram after the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and nearly every U.S. State filed lawsuits against the company, saying it **used a “buy or bury” strategy** to snap up rivals and keep smaller competitors at bay.
- With the filing of the law suits, Facebook becomes the second Big Tech company to face a major legal challenge this year after the U.S. Justice Department sued Alphabet Inc’s Google in October, accusing the \$1 trillion company of using its market power to fend off rivals. The lawsuits highlight the growing bipartisan consensus to **hold Big Tech accountable for business practices**. Facebook’s general counsel called the lawsuits “**revisionist history**” and said antitrust laws do not exist to punish “successful companies.”

2. Asian Development Bank narrows India's FY21 GDP contraction projection to 8%

- The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** upgraded its forecast for the Indian economy, projecting 8% contraction in 2020-21 as compared to 9% estimated earlier, on the back of a faster-than-expected recovery. The **Asian Development Outlook (ADO)** Supplement said the second quarter contraction at 7.5% was better-than-expected. Growth will return in 2021-22, at 7.2% in South Asia, the Asian lender added.
- Earlier this month, **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das** had said the economy was recuperating faster than anticipated and that the growth rate was likely to turn positive in the second half of the current financial year. Inflation though is a concern, supply chain disruptions had taken **food inflation** to an average of 9.1% in the first 7 months of 2020-21, **pushing headline inflation** to 6.9% in the same period.

3. Forex reserves surged by \$4.525 billion : RBI data

- The country’s foreign exchange reserves surged by \$4.525 billion to touch a **record high of \$579.346 billion** in the week ended December 4, the RBI’s data showed. Foreign currency assets rose by \$3.932 billion to **\$537.386 billion**.

4. The beer cartel

- Top executives of Carlsberg, SABMiller and India’s United Breweries (UB) exchanged commercially sensitive information and colluded to fix beer prices in India over 11 years, according to a government antitrust investigation report seen by *Reuters*. The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** in 2018 raided the offices of the three brewers and started an inquiry.
- Executives’ conversations, WhatsApp messages and emails contained in the report show the companies regularly and collectively strategized in seeking price increases in “several States”.

5. Finance Ministry unveils 9879 crore capex plan

- The Finance Ministry said it had approved ₹9,879.61 crore worth of capital expenditure proposals of 27 States. Of this, ₹4,939.81 crore has been released as the first instalment. In a statement, the ministry said that all States, except Tamil Nadu, had availed benefits of the newly announced scheme for **'Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure'**.
- **What is Capital Expenditure?** Capital expenditures (CapEx) are funds used by an entity to acquire, upgrade, and maintain physical assets such as property, plants, buildings, technology, or equipment. CapEx is often used to undertake new projects or investments.

6. [India needs data, taxation norms to tap opportunities](#)

- Tata Sons Chairman **N. Chandrasekaran** said he saw "limitless opportunities" for India, but added that the government needed to establish regulatory standards on data and taxation. Mr. Chandrasekaran noted that India's GDP would likely grow at 11% in fiscal 2022, after a significant contraction this year.
- Highlighting trends such as digital and data, rush towards renewables and de coupling of the U.S. and China, Mr. Chandrasekaran said he saw limitless opportunities for India in these trends.

7. [Central government for a framework for widening credit push](#)

- NITI Aayog CEO **Amitabh Kant** said that India's **private credit-to-GDP ratio** was the lowest among its global peers and that the government was in the process of putting in place a framework for a **credit push towards untapped segments**. He mentioned that the credit scenario in India in recent years, for a greater part, had been seen as a drag on the economy, improving this would have a substantial impact on the living standard of people on the back of high leverage.
- Mr. Kant also said **micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)** play a crucial role in providing employment but their credit needs are largely unmet by the formal **financial sector**. The sector's credit gap was estimated to be ₹25 lakh crore. He also stressed that financial inclusion depended on the regulatory environment. The entire process would require bringing all stakeholders such as banking and industry professionals, together, he added.

8. [Slowdown in loans sanctioned to struggling firms](#)

- There has been some slow down in loans sanctioned to struggling businesses and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) over the months of October and November. In its first three months, the **Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) Fund** had led to sanction of soft term loans of ₹1.86 lakh crore.
- The ECLGS is a key element of the government's stimulus and support measures for firms battered by the lockdown restrictions put in place in March to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. The financing is in the form of a term loan at a **concessional rate of interest**.
- In November, the government had announced the expansion of the scheme to cover even larger firms operating in healthcare and the 26 most stressed sectors identified by the **K.V. Kamath Committee** appointed by the RBI.
- The ₹45,000crore **Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme 2.0** to enable non banking finance companies (NBFCs), housing finance companies and microfinance institutions to under take fresh lending to MSMEs and individuals recorded a tepid offtake between September 25 and December 4.

9. [Telcos spar amid farmer protests](#)

- **Reliance Jio** has sought action against rivals **Airtel and Vi**, alleging that the two telcos were encouraging the public to migrate from Jio to show support for farmers by spreading 'frivolous rumours'. Jio had alleged that the two companies were either directly or indirectly involved in "supporting and furthering the insinuation and false and frivolous rumours of Reliance being an undue beneficiary of the farm bills.

- Airtel, in its reply to TRAI, has refuted Jio's allegations. Vi, in a statement, termed Jio's charge as 'baseless' and said it was intended to "malign our reputation."

10. States get 6000 crores in GST compensation dues

- The Centre has so far **borrowed ₹42,000 crore since October** and released the funds to States to meet **GST compensation shortfall**, the Finance Ministry said. The latest instalment of ₹6,000 crore was released to the States on Monday, out of which **₹5,516.60 crore has been released to 23 States** and **₹483.40 crore has been released to 3 Union Territories (UT)**.

11. Discretionary spending set for uptick

- About 48% consumers plan to spend a minimum of ₹1,000, going up to ₹50,000, on purchasing discretionary products in the next four months, according to a survey by **LocalCircles**. The biannual '*Mood of the Consumer Survey*' received more than **44,000 responses** from consumers in **302 districts of India** with 55% respondents from tier 1 cities, 26% from tier 2 cities, and 19% from tier 3 and tier 4 cities and rural districts.
- *"This would mean good news for many sectors of the economy that saw slow down in consumer demand in the first six months of FY21,"* said the company.

12. CRISIL narrows FY21 GDP shrinkage estimate to 7.7%

- CRISIL has re-adjusted India's fiscal 2021 **real gross domestic product (GDP) forecast** to a contraction of 7.7% compared with a contraction of 9% forecast in September. This was on account of a **faster than expected revival** in activity in the second quarter, that continued into the festive season. A **consistent decline in overall COVID-19 case load** also aided the revision. It however stated that the rise in inflation is also a nagging source of concern, constraining recovery.
- *"Inadequate fiscal spending, however, remains a constraint, while the possibility of a second wave of afflictions, uncertainty regarding availability of vaccine, and hiccups in global economic revival due to resurgence of cases, call for caution,"* it said.

13. Air India bidding

- *"Multiple expressions of interest have been received for strategic disinvestment of Air India. The transaction will now move to the second stage,"* according to a tweet from the Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management. Tata Sons, India's auto-to-steel conglomerate, is expected to have submitted an initial bid for the loss making airline.
- Tata already operates two airlines in India — full service carrier Vistara, which is in partnership with Singapore Airlines, and budget airline AirAsia India along with Malaysia's AirAsia Group.
- A successful bidder would win control of **Air India's 4,400 domestic and 1,800 international landing and parking slots at domestic airports**, as well as 900 slots at airports overseas. It would also get 100% of the low cost arm **Air India Express** and 50% of AISATS, which provides cargo and ground handling services at major Indian airports, the bid document showed.

14. CII's suggestions for the Union Budget

- **The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)** has urged the government to look at fiscal management from a three year perspective. In its recommendations for the Union Budget, it has also suggested aggressive disinvestment, including bringing down stake in majority public sector banks (PSBs) to below 50%, as well as monetisation of assets.

- The Centre should prioritise expenditure in three areas - **infrastructure, healthcare and sustainability** - and that the Budget proposals should address critical areas of **boosting private investments** and providing **support for employment generation**.

15. FSDC mulls steps to hasten growth

- Fiscal Stability and Development council, headed by **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman** discussed additional measures that could be taken by the government in the next Budget to accelerate growth while maintaining financial stability. The meeting noted there was a need to keep continuous vigil by the government and all regulators on financial conditions that could expose financial vulnerabilities.
- The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) is the apex body of sectoral regulators, headed by the Finance Minister.

16. Insurers, Pension funds must be tapped for infrastructure development

- India needs to direct more insurance and pension savings into bond markets and encourage greater foreign participation in debt in order to finance its infrastructure building plans, said **State Bank of India chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara**. He added that the funding requirements of the economy, including ₹100 lakh crore of infrastructure investments, can only be met if capital markets are opened up further. Only domestic savings might not be sufficient.

17. Government must unveil stimulus to spur demand, and SoPs for the automobile sector: MPs' panel

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry** has asked the government to announce a stimulus package focused on generating demand, stressing that its responses so far have focused only on the supply side. The panel has also asked for GST rates levied on automobiles to be rationalised from the present 28% tax rate with an additional compensation cess ranging from 1-22%, to 18%, to spur demand for new vehicles and help the sector overcome the present slump.
- Further, the committee recommends that the government may consider rationalisation in GST rates on internal combustion engine vehicles based on their size, CC, price brackets, seating capacity, etc., rather than having a fixed slab on all categories without distinction of standard, popular, luxury etc., in order to raise the demand for newer vehicles.
- The panel also suggested that the government request the Supreme Court to allow sales of BS-IV vehicles that couldn't be sold due to the pandemic and lockdown. Also, the scrappage policy for the NCR, applicable on diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years, must be revisited.

18. US puts India on 'currency manipulators' monitoring list

- The U.S. Treasury labelled **Switzerland and Vietnam** as currency manipulators and added three new names, including India, to a watch list of countries it suspects of taking **measures to devalue their currencies against the dollar**.
- The U.S. Treasury said that in the year through June 2020 Switzerland and Vietnam had intervened heavily in currency markets to prevent effective balance of payments adjustments. In response, the **Swiss National Bank** said it does not manipulate its currency and its monetary policy approach would be unchanged, adding that it *"remains willing to intervene more strongly in the foreign exchange market"*.
- To be labelled a manipulator by the U.S. Treasury, countries must at least have a \$20 billion plus bilateral trade surplus with the U.S., foreign currency intervention exceeding 2% of gross domestic product and a global current account surplus exceeding 2% of GDP.

19. [Cabinet clears 3500-cr subsidy for sugar exports](#)

- The Centre approved a **₹3,500-crore subsidy to sugar mills** to incentivise them to export 60 lakh tonnes of surplus stock in the 2020-21 season, helping them to clear payment arrears due to cane farmers. The decision, taken by the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs**, would benefit **five crore cane farmers** and an equal number of mill workers, according to an official statement.
- The sugar industry as well as the farmers were in crisis with **production at 310 lakh tonnes** against the annual domestic consumption **demand of 260 lakh tonnes**, **Prakash Javadekar, Information and Broadcasting Minister**, told journalists after the Cabinet meeting.



Sports

[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Former Indian footballer Ethiraj passes away](#)

- Former India football player **D. Ethiraj**, a centre-forward in the **1962 Asian Games gold medal-winning team**, passed away. He was 87. Ethiraj also led Services to Santosh Trophy triumph in 1960-61.

2. [LeBron James is Time's Athlete-of-the-year](#)

- LeBron James, who won an NBA title with Los Angeles Lakers and formed a coalition to battle voter suppression, was on Thursday named **Time magazine's 2020 Athlete-of-the-Year**. *Time* lauded James' 'More than a Vote', a non-profit organization aimed at encouraging Black citizens and others to exercise their right to vote.

3. [Joshua retains world heavyweight titles](#)

- Anthony Joshua knocked out Kubrat Pulev in the ninth round at London's Wembley Arena to retain his **IBF, WBA and WBO world heavyweight titles**. Joshua's victory sets up a potential all British heavyweight unification bout against Tyson Fury in 2021.

4. [National stadium to have squash courts](#)

- The **Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium** at India Gate, that had hosted the inaugural **Asian Games in 1951**, and known for its hockey facility, is all set to add squash in its complex.
- "We have to democratise sport, it must not be a privilege. Most of the sports in which we have done well is because it has been democratised. I hope, in the case of squash, it is one step in that direction," External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar said.

5. [India to bid for 2027 AFC Asian Cup](#)

- India is set to bid for the **2027 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup**, confident of getting the nod ahead of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran. All India Football Federation president Praful Patel sounded extremely

optimistic of India's prospects of playing the host to the prestigious quadrennial competition. India hosted the **2017 FIFA under-17 World Cup**.

Suggested Readings

1. India's pedagogic space, [Link to article](#)
2. Remembering Nani Palkhivala, [Link to article](#)
3. One year of CAA, [Link to article](#)
4. A Marketplace for Wobbly Ideas, [Link to article](#)
5. Pointing fingers at Parliamentary scrutiny, [Link to article](#)
6. Pro-LGBT + Steps taken by other countries, [Link to article](#)
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