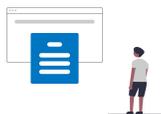


**G.K snippets...**



**1. Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas** : It is a celebratory day observed on **9 January** by the Republic of India to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community towards the development of India. The day commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to Mumbai on 9 January 1915. Suriname President **Chandrikapersad Santokhi** was chief guest for the 2021 event.

**Law, Policy and Governance**



[Daily snippets](#)

**1. 'Reply to plea on assistance for bonded labour victims'**

- The High Court sought response from the Centre as well as Delhi government to a plea seeking financial assistance for the rehabilitation of victims of child and bonded labour who have been rescued from the Capital.
- A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh asked the Union Ministry of Labour and the Delhi government to give their respective stands on the plea filed by the father of one of the children. Mohd. Kadir Ansari in his petition sought relief for 88 victims of child and bonded labour, which included his own minor son.

**2. Meghalaya lawmakers asked to unite for ILP**

- An umbrella organisation of NGOs in Meghalaya has asked the State's three MPs and all 60 MLAs to unite for the implementation of the **Inner-Line Permit (ILP)** and hit the streets of New Delhi together.
- The ILP is an official document issued to let an Indian citizen enter a protected area for a limited period. Pressure groups in the northeast view this permit as a shield against the entry of illegal immigrants.

**3. Rights activist Akhil Gogoi denied bail**

- The Gauhati High Court has rejected the bail plea of **peasants' rights activist Akhil Gogoi**, who has been in jail since December 2019 on multiple charges, including sedition and incitement of violence during the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) movement.

- The court heard Mr. Gogoi's bail plea in a case registered by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** in Guwahati.

#### 4. [SC expresses concern over farmers' stir](#)

- **Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde** voiced the Supreme Court's apprehension that mass gatherings of protesting farmers will lead to a *"problem similar to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation"*. The court was hearing a petition, seeking a CBI probe into circumstances leading to the swelling of migrant workers, anxious to leave the national capital for their villages and hometowns, at the Anand Vihar Bus Terminal for buses, and the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, which even saw foreign delegates, in violation of the social distancing norms.
- The court issued notice to the Union and Delhi governments, and asked Mr. Mehta to file a detailed report on the guidelines to prevent COVID-19, including restrictions on mass gatherings. The petition quoted the advisory, which mandates that *"any event [social, cultural, political, religious, academic, sports, seminars and conference] except marriages is restricted to a maximum of 50 persons in the NCT of Delhi till March 31"*.

#### 5. [SC notice to Centre on plea to debar legislators](#)

- The Supreme Court asked the Centre and the Election Commission of India (EC) to respond to a plea to debar legislators, **disqualified under the Tenth Schedule**, from contesting byelections during the rest of the tenure of the House. A Bench led by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde issued notice and asked the government and the EC to respond in four weeks.
- "Once a member of the House incurs disqualification under the Tenth Schedule, he cannot be permitted to contest again during the term for which he was elected. Article 172 makes a membership of a House coterminous with the term of five years of the House except in circumstances mentioned therein," the petition said.

#### 6. [Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia to head Gauhati HC](#)

- The Union Law Ministry notified the appointment of Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia as the new Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court. He is presently a judge in the Uttarakhand High Court.

#### 7. [Centre turns to SC as talks with farmers fail to break deadlock](#)

- The **eighth round of talks** between the Centre and the farmer unions, which saw raised voices and increased tensions, ended without any resolution to the ongoing stalemate. According to union leaders, the Centre told them that the issue is best **resolved by the Supreme Court**, asking the farmers to appear at the next hearing and suggesting that it would request daily hearings for speedy resolution of the case.
- Farmer outfits from Punjab, including the Bharatiya Kisan Union (EktaUgrahan), said the Centre's hint of getting the farm laws issue resolved by the Supreme Court was a ploy to prolong the issue in a bid to derail the ongoing agitation. *"There is no need of going to the Supreme court. The government should listen to farmers demand and immediately repeal the laws,"*.

#### 8. [Supreme Court tells govt. to arm forest officers to fight poachers](#)

- The Supreme Court urged the government to arm forest officers and provide them with bulletproof vests and vehicles when told that India recorded the *"greatest number of mortal fatalities"* among forest officials in the world.
- The court said the Centre should consider involving premier organisations such as the CBI to help the forest staff. It suggested that there should even be a separate wing or wildlife division in the Enforcement Directorate with clean officials to track and investigate crimes of the poachers and the proceeds of their crime.

#### 9. Decide on Rajoana mercy plea by Republic Day, SC tells govt.

- The Supreme Court pushed the government to take a decision on a mercy petition filed by **Balwant Singh Rajoana**, facing capital punishment for the assassination of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh, before Republic Day. Convict's petition has been pending for eight years.
- The President is empowered to take the final decision on whether Rajoana should live or not. Chief Justice Bobde said the government was merely asking for another week or two before taking a call.

#### 10. SC to hear plea against confession

- The Supreme Court agreed to consider after three weeks a petition filed by a group of women against the compulsory nature of sacred confessions to priests in Christianity. Appearing before a Bench led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, for the petitioners, said "*confessions are being abused*". He said forced confessions **violated the right to privacy**.
- He said the court could examine the issues in the petition as they came within the ambit of the **questions of faith, rights of women and equality** referred to a nine- judge Constitution Bench in the Sabarimala case. **Attorney General K.K. Venugopal**, when asked for an opinion by the court, said the whole issue stemmed from the **Jacobite Orthodox dispute**.

#### 11. Vaccination drive to start on January 16

- The COVID-19 vaccination drive in India will begin on January 16, with priority being given to an estimated three crore healthcare workers and frontline workers. The Ministry, in a release, said the Drugs Controller General of India had granted Emergency Use Authorisation to two vaccines - **Covishield and Covaxin**. "The vaccination exercise will use the principles of - people's participation (Jan Bhagidari), experience of elections (booth strategy) and Universal Immunisation Programme.

#### 12. Proceedings against Snapdeal quashed

- The High Court of Karnataka has quashed criminal proceedings initiated against ecommerce website snapdeal.com and its chief executive officer Kunal Bahl and chief operating officer Rohit Kumar Bansal during June 2020, for **enabling sale and supply of a drug** in contravention of the provisions of the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.
- "*An intermediary as defined under Section 2(w) of the Information Technology Act would not be liable for any action or inaction on part of a vendor/seller making use of the facilities provided by the intermediary in terms of a website or a marketplace,*" The court also found no justification for the delay of six years in lodging the complaint by the drugs authorities. The court also found that Snapdeal had done due diligence of the vendor as per the law and had initiated action on the vendor of the drug as per law, acting on initiation by the drugs authorities.

#### 13. M.P.'s anti-conversion ordinance gets Govt. Nod

- Madhya Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel gave assent to an ordinance which penalises religious conversions through fraudulent means, including those for the sake of marriage. The Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance, 2020, provides for 10 years in jail in some cases.

#### 14. Relax detention norms to prevent dropouts, says govt.

- Schools must relax detention norms in order to **prevent dropouts** in a year when COVID-19 has disrupted the teaching and learning process. The HRD Ministry also told the States to conduct comprehensive door to door

surveys to identify children out of school and migrant students, and prepare an action plan to prevent increased dropouts.

- Guidelines have been prepared *“in order to ensure that school going children have access to education with quality and equity and to minimize the impact of the pandemic on school education across the country,”* read a statement.

#### 15. [SC Bench to study Aadhaar verdict today](#)

- A five judge Bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar will examine seven petitions, including one by Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh, seeking a **review of the court’s verdict upholding the Aadhaar programme** as a reasonable restriction on individual privacy to fulfil the government’s “legitimate aim” to provide dignity to the poor.
- The petition points to **Section 2(k)**, which specifically prohibits any person from parting with any information which is pertaining to one’s “income”. It said the provision categorically states that demographic information shall not include information pertaining to one’s income statement.
- *“Despite a clear legislative mandate to the contrary, Section 139AA of the Income Tax Act, 1961, made it compulsory to ensure that PAN card is linked with one’s Aadhaar details”.*

#### 16. [HC upholds arrest provision in CGST Act for tax evasion](#)

- The Delhi High Court has upheld the controversial provisions in the **Central Goods and Service Tax (CGST) Act** that gives power to authorities to arrest any person if there is “reason to believe” that he has committed tax evasion.
- The petitioners here, a man and a firm facing action for allegedly availing fraudulent IGST refund and Input Tax Credits (ITC), had claimed that Section 69 being of criminal nature, it could not have been enacted under [Article 246A](#) of the Constitution. However, the High Court ruled *“...the pith and substance of the CGST Act is on a topic, upon which Parliament has power to legislate as the power to arrest and prosecute are ancillary and/or incidental to the power to levy and collect Goods and Services Tax”.*

#### 17. [SC intends to stay farm laws](#)

- The Supreme Court said it intended to stay the implementation of the controversial agricultural laws while proposing to form an independent committee chaired by a former Chief Justice of India to “amicably resolve” the standoff. A three judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, underlined its “disappointment” at the Centre’s handling of the protest.

#### 18. [On the consultation sought for farm laws by the government](#)

- The Union Agriculture Ministry could not provide any record of pre legislative consultations on the three farm reform laws, according to a response given by it to a query under the **Right to Information Act**. The Centre has now filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court saying that it is an “erroneous notion” that no consultations were held.
- In December 2020, RTI activist Anjali Bhardwaj asked the Agriculture Ministry for all details regarding stakeholder consultations held before the Centre promulgated three ordinances on agricultural reforms in June. The RTI request also asked for a copy of the comments and communications that had been sent by the States with which the consultations had been held. In a separate RTI filing, she also asked for details to show that the Central government had placed the draft legislation in the public domain for 30 days, in accordance with norms set by its own **Pre Legislative Consultation Policy** as well as by the **Central Information Commission**.

### 19. HC seeks govt. reply on plea to declare all child marriages in Capital invalid

- The Delhi High Court asked the AAP government to respond to a petition seeking to declare **all child marriages** performed in the Capital as invalid. Directions came after a petition by a woman, who has sought to nullify her marriage which was allegedly performed when she was a minor.
- The woman has challenged a **provision of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act**, which makes wedding of minors voidable only at the option of either of the parties who was a child at the time of the event.

### 20. Bhandara blaze : NHRC sends notice to the Maharashtra government

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sent a notice to the Maharashtra government and the State Director General of Police over the death of 10 babies in a fire at Bhandara district general hospital. The NHRC has sought a detailed report on the incident within four weeks. The Commission has also observed that the babies were in the custody of a State run hospital where they lost their lives, and "hence, the State cannot escape its responsibility".
- **What is NHRC?** It is a Statutory public body constituted on 12 October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Ordinance of 28 September 1993. The NHRC is responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as "*Rights Relating To Life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India.*".

### 21. Government defends rules for animal seizure

- The Central government defended the law to deprive owners of their animals, including cattle, on the suspicion that they are being subject to cruelty or illegally transported for slaughter.
- The government stated that the argument that owners are deprived of their right to livelihood is not sustainable. They have no right to do their business illegally. They have to transport the animals as per the requirements of the **Transport of Animals Rules of 1978**.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde was hearing a petition filed by the Buffalo Traders Welfare Association challenging the validity of the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and maintenance of case property animals) Rules 2017**.

### 22. Rubaiya Sayeed kidnapping : JKLF chief, 9 others to face charges

- Sunit Gupta, Special Judge, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act Court, Jammu, ordered the framing of charges against Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief **Yasin Malik and nine others in the Rubaiya Sayeed kidnapping**, which took place 30 years ago.
- The court is of the considered view that sufficient grounds exist for drawing prima facie presumption that the accused have committed offences under **Sections 120 B read with Section 368 RPC and Section 3/4 of TADA Act**. The CBI has said several accused had made confessional statements and disclosed their role "*which is found to be admissible in evidence under Section 15 of the TADA Act*".

### 23. SC stays implementation of three controversial farm laws

- The Supreme Court stayed the implementation of three controversial farm laws, calling its order "extraordinary" and a "victory for fair play". The court formed a four-member committee of experts "*to listen to the grievances of the farmers on the laws and the views of the government and make recommendations*".

### 24. CJ against resuming physical hearings

- **Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde** disagreed with the idea of resuming physical hearings in the Supreme Court, saying the court did not want to be the cause of fatalities due to the spread of COVID-19.

**Solicitor General Tushar Mehta** said it was salutary how the court had not denied justice to anyone by working throughout the pandemic as virtual court.

- The three judge Bench was hearing a *suo motu* case to provide financial aid to young lawyers struggling to make ends meet during the pandemic. One of the lawyers had sought a physical court hearing in the case.

#### 25. [HC notice to Centre on PIL challenging contempt Act](#)

- The Karnataka High Court ordered issue of notice to the Union government on a PIL petition filed by four eminent personalities challenging the constitutional validity of a **provision of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**, that makes “*scandalising or tends to scandalising courts*” as a ground for contempt.
- The petitioners have contended in their present petition that Section 2(c)(i) of the Act violates the right to free speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) and does not amount to a reasonable restriction under Article 19(2). The offence of “scandalising the court” cannot be considered to be covered under the category of “contempt of court” under Article 19(2), the petitioners contended, claiming that even if Section 2(c)(i) were permissible under the ground of contempt in Article 19(2), it would be disproportionate and therefore unreasonable.

#### 26. [Allay fears on anti-cow slaughter ordinance: HC](#)

- The Karnataka High Court ordered issue of notice to the State government on a public interest litigation (PIL) petition questioning the validity of the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Ordinance, 2020. The ordinance imposes penalties and varying jail terms for cattle slaughter.
- The Bench asked **Advocate General Prabhuling K. Navadgi** to clear apprehension about likely prosecution of farmers for transporting cattle within the State even for the exemption granted for bona fide agriculture and animal husbandry purpose as the government is yet to frame rules prescribing the manner of such transportation.

#### 27. [SC to hear plea against Republic Day tractor rally](#)

- The Supreme Court agreed to examine a plea made by the Centre, through the Delhi Police, seeking an **injunction order against any proposed** tractor, trolley or vehicle march or any other kind of protest by farmers to “disrupt” the Republic Day events. Such a protest by farmers would cause an embarrassment to the nation, says Centre.

#### 28. [‘Ban sex-selective surgeries on inter-sex infants and children’](#)

- The Delhi Commission for Protections of Child Rights (DCPCR), in an order, recommended that the Delhi government should declare a ban on medically unnecessary, sex selective surgeries on inter-sex infants and children except in the case of life threatening situations.
- The commission passed the order after deliberating on a plea that brought to its notice that there have been instances wherein inter-sex people are treated as disabled reducing them to an ‘impairment’ leading to medical interventions that can lead to long-term impairments and requiring lifetime medical care. Adviser to the commission, **a human rights activist Anjali Gopalan**, in her response said that such medical interventions are violative of the **fundamental right to bodily integrity and physical autonomy**.
- The DCPCR also said it had taken due notice of the judgment of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court wherein the court directed the Government of Tamil Nadu to **ban sex reassignment surgeries on intersex infants and children**.

#### 29. [SC takes cognisance of contamination of rivers](#)

- The Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of the contamination of rivers by sewage effluents through lapses committed by municipalities. *“Deterioration of quality of fresh water has a direct correlation with the quality of public health. The right to clean environment, and further, pollution free water, has been protected under the broad rubric of the right to life.”*
- The Bench was hearing an urgent petition filed by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), represented by advocate Shadan Farasat, to *“immediately stop”* Haryana from discharging pollutants into the Yamuna, which is causing an alarming increase in ammonia levels in the water.

### 30. [CBFC chief for regulating OTT platforms](#)

- OTT (Over-the-top) platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and others need to be regulated, Chairman of the **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Prasoon Joshi**, said at a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information and Technology.
- He also said while films which were made available for public viewing in cinema halls were regulated, similar checks and balances were missing for OTT platforms. The same content in cinema hall had to go through the CBFC, while it did not need any clearance if it was aired on the OTT platforms.

### 31. [Ministry denies RTI query on farm law consultations](#)

- The Agriculture Ministry has **denied a Right to Information (RTI) request** for details on pre legislative consultations on the farm reform laws, saying the matter is subjudice. In its response, the Ministry cited the clause from the RTI Act that exempts information that has been forbidden to be published by a court of law or whose disclosure would amount to contempt of court.

### 32. [Adultery law must stay for the military : Govt.](#)

- The Supreme Court admitted a petition filed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) seeking to **exempt armed forces personnel** from the ambit of a Constitution Bench judgment of 2018 that **decriminalised adultery**.
  - A three judge Bench led by Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman said the plea had to be considered by a Constitution Bench because the original verdict, striking down Section 497 (adultery) of the IPC, was pronounced by a five judge Bench in September 2018. The court referred the case to the Chief Justice to pass appropriate orders to form a five judge Bench to clarify the **impact of the 2018 judgment on the armed forces**.
  - The government said in the petition that personnel of the Army, Navy and the Air Force were a “distinct class”. They were governed by special legislation, the Army Act, the Navy Act and the Air Force Act.
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## National News/ Interventions



### Daily snippets

#### 1. Flu in full flight

- **Avian influenza outbreak** : Just three months after India declared itself to be free of the **avian influenza outbreak**, the highly pathogenic avian **influenza subtypes, H5N1 and H5N8**, have been reported from a dozen epicentres in four States - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala. While tests have confirmed H5N1 for causing the deaths of over 2,000 migratory birds in Himachal Pradesh, H5N8 has been identified for killing thousands of poultry in Kerala, and hundreds of crows in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Cause of Flu**: Migratory birds have been largely responsible for long distance transmission of the virus into India during winter. It then spreads through local movement of residential birds and poultry. Movement of men and material from poultry farms too has been a cause for further spread. This is why States have been asked to strengthen biosecurity of poultry farms, disinfection and proper disposal of dead birds.
- **Flu transmission to humans?** Avian influenza virus crossing the species barrier and directly infecting humans happens occasionally, **human to human spread has been rare**. But mutations or genetic reassortment of an avian influenza A virus and a human influenza A virus in a person can create a new influenza A virus that could likely result in sustained transmission between humans, thus increasing the risk of a pandemic influenza. It is important to **undertake genome sequencing of virus samples** to track the evolution of the virus.

#### 2. Satya Paul, who 'reinvented' the sari, passes away in Coimbatore

- **Satya Paul**, best known as the designer who reinvented the sari for contemporary women, died. He was 78. He was a pioneer in the field of retailing, starting in the late 1960s and expanding to exports of the finest Indian handloom products to high end retail stores in Europe and the U.S. In 1980, he launched the first sari boutique in India, **L’Affaire**, and in 1986, India’s first designer label. The **Satya Paul brand became one of the premier brands** in the country..

#### 3. China must respect rules, says France

- A day after the Chinese Ambassador in India objected to the outgoing U.S. Ambassador’s comments on the India-China standoff, a senior French diplomat, said that *“when China breaks rules, we have to be very robust and very clear”*. When it came to direct threats to India, he said, France had always been supportive on Kashmir at the UN Security Council and did *“not let the Chinese play any procedural games.”*

#### 4. WhatsApp updates privacy policy

- WhatsApp has updated its terms of service and privacy policy regarding how it processes user data and partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the platform’s products. Key updates include more information about WhatsApp’s service and how it processes user data; how businesses can use Facebook hosted services to store and manage their WhatsApp chats; and how WhatsApp partners with Facebook to offer integrations across the company products.
- *“As part of Facebook Companies, WhatsApp receives information from, and shares information with, other Facebook Companies.”*

#### 5. New freight corridor

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the New Rewari-New Madar section of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor and flagged off the **world's first 1.5 km long electrified double stack long haul container train**. Mr. Modi said the project was part of the mission to modernise the country's infrastructure and was being seen as a game changer for the India of the 21st century.
- Given the rapid infrastructure expansion, all the Northeast State capitals would soon be linked to the national rail network. The work of indigenously developing high speed tracks was also under way. In all, 133 railway stations in nine States would be impacted by the Dedicated Freight Corridor. New multi model logistic parks, freight terminals, container depots/ terminals and parcel hubs would be developed at these places.
- A portion of the **Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor**, the New Bhaupur-New Khurja section, was started last month and through it, farm produce were being transported from Punjab and coal from Jharkhand was being supplied to the National Capital Region, Haryana and Punjab.

#### 6. [LeT commander gets 5-year jail term for terror financing](#)

- Mumbai attack mastermind and **Lashkar-e-Taiba operations commander Zakiur Rahman Lakhvi** was sentenced to 5 years in jail by a Pakistani antiterrorism court here in a terror financing case, amidst mounting international pressure on Islamabad to bring to justice terrorists roaming free in the country.
- The Anti-Terrorism Court also directed law enforcement agencies to arrest the co-accused in the case, **Abu Anas Mohsin**, due to the availability of sufficient evidence against him. The U.S. had welcomed Lakhvi's arrest last week but said **Pakistan should try him for the Mumbai attacks also**.
- India called the process "*farical*", and accused Pakistan of carrying out quick prosecutions of various UN sanctioned terrorist leaders to avoid punitive action at the upcoming **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** meetings, where it has been grey-listed.
- **Why is the upcoming FATF meeting crucial for Pakistan?** Thus far, Pakistan has cleared 21 of the 27 markers according to the FATF, and the APJG will submit its report on whether it has made progress on the remaining six. The FATF plenary session in February will then decide whether Pakistan should remain on the greylist, be downgraded to the "*blacklist*" of sanctioned "*high risk*" countries like Iran and North Korea, or let off the list.

#### 7. [British MPs flag farmers' protest](#)

- More than a hundred members of the British Parliament have signed a letter to **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson** asking him to raise the concerns of protesting farmers outside Delhi, and the "*brute force*" employed against them, in his discussion with **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**. The Indian diaspora and others have also joined in global protests in support of the farmers. Mr. Johnson has cancelled his plans to visit India as the chief guest for Republic Day because of the COVID-19 crisis in his country.
- Last month, a similar letter was written to **British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab**, who was in Delhi in December. He said he raised the issue with **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar**, but not with Mr. Modi. At that time, India termed the remarks on farmer protests by foreign leaders and politicians as "*ill informed*" and "*unwarranted*" as the matter pertained to the internal affairs of a democratic country.

#### 8. [Handover of power should be peaceful : MEA on the U.S. election crisis](#)

- Handover of power to the Biden-Harris administration in the United States should be conducted in an "*organised and peaceful*" manner, India said on Friday. The violent incidents in the American capital will not succeed in subverting the democratic process. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said on Thursday that the mob attack on the U.S. Congress had left him "*distressed*".
- For the **Indo-U.S bilateral relations**, an immediate issue of bilateral concern is likely to be India's purchase of a \$400 million missile defence system from Russia despite the US objection. MEA spokesperson added that India conducts its foreign policy on the basis of choices made to safeguard its "**national security interest**". "*We pursue*

*an independent foreign policy. This also applies to our defence acquisitions and supplies, which are guided by our national security interest".*

#### 9. Over half of Army personnel under severe stress, quotes a study

- More than half of Indian Army personnel seem to be under severe stress and the Army has been losing more personnel every year due to **suicides, fratricides and untoward incidents** than in response to any enemy or terrorist activities, according to the findings of a study by **United Service Institution of India (USI)**, a Service think tank. *"Prolonged exposure of Indian Army personnel to Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism (CI/CT) environment has been one of the contributory factors for increased stress levels,"* the study notes. The research was undertaken during 2019-20 by Col. AK Mor, Senior Research Fellow at the USI.
- While operational stressors are well understood and accepted by Army personnel, the study says that **non operational stressors** that add on *"have compounding adverse effects on health and combat efficiency of soldiers and thus affecting their respective units too."* The study observes that the overall job satisfaction and pride in uniform remains high amongst JCOs (Junior Commissioned officers) and Ors (Other Ranks).
- *"Despite harsh and challenging service conditions, Indian Army personnel remain highly motivated to serve in CI/CT areas voluntarily. However, the Officers lack a similar level of trust, faith and confidence in their leadership that JCOs and ORs demonstrate,"* it states.
- *"Units and subunits under stress are likely to witness an increased number of incidents of indiscipline, unsatisfactory state of training, in adequate maintenance of equipment and low morale, motivation and esprit-de-corps, thereby, adversely affecting their combat preparedness and operational performance,"* it says.

#### 10. Assam to gift Khadi clothes to employees

- The Assam government has decided to gift khadi shirt, *endi* shawl and *endi* stole to Grade IV male and female employees. The decision to provide free khadi clothes would be implemented as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and his movement for khadi besides paving the way for Assam to be self-reliant, **CM Sarbananda Sonowal** said.

#### 11. Ken-Betwa link soon

- Governments of **Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh** were close to an agreement on the Ken-Betwa river linking projects. The **Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP)** is the River interlinking project that aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken river in MP to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across the districts of two states mainly Jhansi, Banda, Lalitpur and Mahoba districts of UP and Tikamgarh, Panna and Chhatarpur districts of MP. Rivers Ken and Betwa are tributaries of **river Yamuna**.

#### 12. Arunachal Pradesh to recruit porters for moving food grains

- Arunachal Pradesh has sought a return to the **British era system of using porters** to transport food grains in remote administrative circles to save on air freight charges paid or payable to the Indian Air Force. *"This will not only minimize the expenditure on air freight charges but also create job opportunities for the rural youth in areas along the State's international borders,"* said State Food and Civil Supplies Minister **Kamlung Mosang**.

#### 13. Kerala to set up Kalaripayattu academy

- Kalaripayattu, considered the **oldest surviving martial art of the country**, with a legacy of more than 3,000 years, is set to see a surge in popularity with the establishment of an academy in the Kerala capital. Lessons in one of the most famous combat styles in the world will now be taught to the new generation at the facility, which will come up at Kerala Tourism's Vellar Crafts Village en route to Kovalam.

#### 14. Co-WIN

- Co-WIN aspires to be a **comprehensive digital database of every COVID-19 vaccine** that will be administered in India - tracking beneficiaries, intimating them about vaccine sites and dates, pre and post vaccination procedures, issuance of vaccination certificates, and follow up through the booster dose. Currently, self registration is not allowed on the application.
- It has been promised that 'at a later stage of implementation', Co-WIN will also be available as an application or as a **website in multiple Indian languages** so that beneficiaries can access it to keep track of their own progress and be connected organically to the system, if questions were to arise. It will also be a tool for others to "register" for a vaccine once the first line of targeted beneficiaries is cleared.
- After the second dose, Co-WIN will generate a digital certificate of completion for individuals who have been vaccinated. Messaging, chatbots and helpline assistance are available on the app, and any adverse event after the vaccination may be communicated back to the authorities through one of these access points.

### 15. **Shorter parade route, more tableaux this Republic Day**

- The Republic Day parade this year will see marching contingents terminate at the India Gate C Hexagon instead of the Red Fort. Earlier, the parade used to **cover around 8 km** but this year the distance has been reduced to roughly 3 km. The parade will now end at the National Stadium.
- The number of members in a marching contingent has been reduced from 144 to 96. The number of tableaux has, however, been **increased to 32 this year**. In previous years, there were an average of 28 tableaux on display.
- Following social distancing guidelines, the **six day Bharat Parv event** that is usually organised on Rajpath lawns from January 26-31 has been cancelled. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only 25,000 visitors will be permitted to witness the Republic Day parade compared with the usual over one lakh. Children under the age of 15 will not be allowed at the event.

### 16. **We were in the dark, say volunteers**

- Several persons in Bhopal who had volunteered for **Bharat Biotech's** ongoing trial of **Covaxin**, one of the two COVID-19 vaccine candidates approved in India, have alleged that the medical managers of the trial did not inform them that they were test subjects.
- At an online press conference, the volunteers said they were led to believe that they were getting vaccines as part of a government vaccination drive and were also promised ₹750 each for participating.
- The trial is being conducted at the People's Medical College (PMC), where there were reports that a 42-year old volunteer, who had been part of the trial, had died. His postmortem report, however, said the cause of death was "*cardiorespiratory failure due to suspected poisoning*". Bharat Biotech denied that his death was due to the vaccine. It is not known whether he got the vaccine or a placebo.

### 17. **Hospital fire in Maharashtra**

- The horrific tragedy in which 10 new born babies died in a hospital fire at Bhandara district in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said orders had been given for conducting a **safety and fire audit** of all government hospitals across the State.
- A committee has been formed to investigate the reason for the accident. The committee would be headed by the Divisional Commissioner and would also include a senior member of the Fire Department of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Mr. Thackeray said.

### 18. **Arunachal Pradesh : A key source of Vanadium**

- Arunachal Pradesh, considered a **sleeping hydropower giant**, is likely to become **India's prime producer of vanadium**, a high value metal used in **strengthening steel and titanium**. Exploration being carried out by the

Geological Survey of India (GSI) has placed the eastern Himalayan State on the vanadium map of the country, and geologists are confident of identifying a deposit soon.

- India consumed **4% of about 84,000 tonnes of vanadium produced** across the globe in 2017. China, which produces 57% of the world's vanadium, consumed 44% of the metal. *"The expected grade of vanadium mineralisation in Arunachal Pradesh is comparable to the important vanadium deposits of the world. The largest deposits are in China, followed by Russia and South Africa,"* the specialist from the GSI said.

#### **19. India-Australia test match racial abuse**

- The International Cricket Council (ICC) has launched an investigation into the Indian team's allegations of **racist abuse from sections of the crowd** in the third Test. The probe comes in the wake of **Mohammed Siraj** and **Jasprit Bumrah** "being targeted" while fielding near the boundary in the test match.
- Cricket Australia issued an apology to India and said anyone found guilty of abuse would face consequences. BCCI secretary Jay Shah, reacted **strongly to the racist slurs hurled at Indian cricketers** during the third Test in Australia.

#### **20. After 2 weeks, Dzukou Valley wildfire doused**

- The wildfire at **Dzukou Valley**, straddling the **Manipur-Nagaland border**, has been doused after it raged for two weeks, officials said on Monday. No fresh fire or smoke was visible. The Dzukou Valley, situated at an average altitude of 2,452 metres, is a **popular trekking destination known for its exotic flowers**.

#### **21. Centre orders 11 mn doses of Covishield**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the State governments would not have to pay for vaccinating the priority group of three crore healthcare and frontline workers, stating that the **Centre would bear the cost**. The announcement came as the Central government placed a purchase order with the Pune-Based **Serum Institute of India (SII)** for 11 million doses of Oxford COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, at a cost of ₹210 per dose (including GST).

#### **22. Farmers reject court's proposal**

- Farmers groups have rejected the Supreme Court's suggestion to appoint a committee to resolve the ongoing crisis over three farm reform laws. They say the Centre's attitude in court makes it clear that the government will not agree to discuss farmers' demand for repeal of the three laws in such a committee.
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#### **23. Author Ved Mehta passes away in the U.S.**

- Celebrated Indian-American author **Ved Mehta**, who overcame blindness and became widely known as the 20th century writer most responsible for introducing American readers to India, died in the U.S. *The New Yorker* magazine, where he had been a staff writer for 33 years, announced his death on Sunday.
- He is best known for his 12-volume memoir, which focused on the troubled modern history of India and his early struggles with blindness. Mehta brought out **24 books that included volumes of reportage on India**, among them *Walking the Indian Streets* (1960), *Portrait of India* (1970) and *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (1977), as well as explorations of philosophy, theology and linguistics.

#### **24. In his first speech at UNSC, Jaishankar slams China and Pak**

- Urging UN Security Council members not to make false distinctions of "good" terrorists and "bad" terrorists, **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** made indirect references to both **China and Pakistan** for delaying the process of designating terrorist individuals and entities, as well as failing to stop the funding of terror.
- In a speech to the UNSC that convened a session to mark two decades since the **1373 antiterror resolution** was passed after the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., Mr. Jaishankar called for "zero tolerance to terrorism". Mr. Jaishankar

also made a call for “*enhanced UN coordination with the FATF*”, just ahead of a meeting of the Task Force’s Asia Pacific Joint Group (APJG), which will review Pakistan’s performance in countering terror financing and money laundering.

#### 25. Labour codes may be implemented before April 1st

- The four labour law codes enacted by Parliament in 2020 and 2019 could be implemented before the earlier target of April 1, according to Union Labour and Employment Ministry officials. The codes have amalgamated 29 laws governing minimum wages, occupational safety, social security into four codes.
- On Tuesday, **Labour Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar** held discussions with trade unions and employers’ organisations regarding the occupational safety and social security rules. The rules under the *Code on Wages, 2019* have been finalised, those under the *Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020*, the *Industrial Relations Code, 2020* and the *Social Security Code, 2020* were yet to be notified.
- Ten central trade unions boycotted the virtual meeting, terming it a “farce” via a joint statement on Monday. *“We have been critical of adoption of labour codes by flouting all Parliamentary norms without discussion in absence of the entire opposition from the Parliament and without tripartite consultations. Instead of taking our objections seriously, the government is trying to create a farce of tripartite consultations by setting up this kind of video conference when we know that the physical meetings of the government at various levels are taking place, including the negotiations with the farmers as well as the election preparation rallies in various states, etc,”* the statement said.

#### 26. Ajit Doval spurs youth to take nation-building path

- **National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval** said that the youth of India is bursting with energy to march ahead with patriotism and that if they put their collective energy towards nation building, they could transform India and the world at large. Mr. Doval was delivering the **first Swami Vivekananda Memorial Lecture** at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Mr. Doval said that Swami Vivekananda was a revolutionary young monk and a visionary who was the first to make the world look towards India and **realise the glory of Hinduism**.
- He added that at the time when Swami Vivekananda was propagating his message, the country was politically saturated, economically impoverished, socially fragmented and psychologically stunned to silence and his message helped people look towards a better future with hope and a belief that it can be changed.

#### 27. No option to select between 2 vaccines : Health Ministry

- People will not have the option of making a choice between the two available COVID vaccines - **Covishield and Covaxin** - when the roll out starts on January 16. Four other COVID-19 vaccines are also under trial currently in the country.
- ICMR head Dr. Balram Bhargava said, *“There will be a gap of 28 days between two doses and the effectiveness begins 14 days after the second dose. During the vaccination process and after that also, COVID-19 appropriate behaviour is a must.”*

#### 28. CCS approves 83 Tejas fighters for Air Force

- In the biggest indigenous defence deal, the **Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)** approved the manufacture of **83 Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)** for the Indian Air Force (IAF) at a cost of around ₹47,000 crore.
- The Cabinet also approved infrastructure development by the IAF under the project to enable them to handle repairs or servicing at their base depot so that the **turnaround time is reduced for mission critical systems**, which would lead to increased availability of aircraft for operational exploitation, the statement said.
- The first LCA MK1A is expected to roll out 2023-24 onwards, after which HAL plans to ramp up the production rate to 16 aircraft a year.

### 29. Polio immunisation drive postponed

- The Union Health Ministry has postponed the polio immunisation drive scheduled from January 17 till further notice, citing unforeseen activities. While the COVID19 vaccination starts on **January 16, the National Immunisation Day (NID)**, commonly known as Pulse Polio Immunisation programme, was scheduled for January 17 across India.

### 30. NSA Doval holds talks in Afghanistan

- **National Security Adviser Ajit Doval** held talks on Wednesday with the Afghan leadership in Kabul on the security scenario in Afghanistan, ahead of the arrival of the Biden-Harris administration in Washington DC.
  - The Office of the National Security Council of Afghanistan said in a public announcement that the two sides held *“extensive conversations on issues of strategic mutual interest, including on synchronising efforts to combat terrorism and build peace”*.
  - He also met with **President Ashraf Ghani** and **Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah**.
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## International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

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### Daily snippets

#### 1. **Biden win confirmed amid pro-Trump mob attack**

- The **U.S. Congress confirmed Democrat Joe Biden as the presidential election winner** after a violent **mob loyal to President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol** in a stunning attempt to overturn the presidential election, undercut the nation's democracy and keep Mr. Trump in the White House.
- **Vice-President Mike Pence**, presiding over the joint session, announced the tally - 306-232. Mr. Trump, who repeatedly refused to concede the election, said in a statement immediately after the vote that there would be a smooth transition of power on Inauguration Day.
- **The United States Capitol** : Often called the Capitol Building, is the meeting place of the United States Congress and the seat of the legislative branch of the U.S. federal government. It is located on Capitol Hill at the eastern end of the National Mall in Washington, D.C.
- The domed Capitol building has for centuries been the scene of protests and occasional violence. But Wednesday's events were particularly astounding both because they unfolded at least initially with the implicit blessing of the President and because of the underlying goal of overturning the results of a free and fair poll. The last time the Capitol Building was attacked was when British forces burned it in August 1814
- **China's reaction:** China on Thursday said it *"hopes the people in the U.S. can enjoy peace"* as it **compared the events with the protests in Hong Kong**. Similarity with the protests in Hong Kong was a common theme in China's state media's coverage.
- **India's Reaction:** *"Distressed to see news about rioting and violence in Washington DC. Orderly and peaceful transfer of power must continue. The democratic process cannot be allowed to be subverted through unlawful protests,"* the **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** said on his personal Twitter handle.
- **Trump's trigger for the Violence:** Over the last two months, **Mr. Trump had encouraged his supporters to challenge the Presidential election results**, which he said were fraudulent. The immediate trigger for the mob was the surprise victory of two Democratic candidates, Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, in the **January 5 runoff election in Georgia**. That election was necessitated by the fact that no candidate won 50% of the popular vote in the November 3 general election. Their win gives Democrats 50 seats in the Senate, which is tantamount to control of the upper chamber of Congress, because the **incoming Vice-President, Kamala Harris**, will cast a deciding vote in a tie.
- **Tough Road ahead for Joe Biden:** To say that the incoming and **46th U.S. President, Joe Biden**, has a tough job on his hands after his **inauguration on January 20**, would be an understatement. The sheer viciousness of the January 6 mob attack, and more than two months of hateful vitriol online and offline following the 2020 election, is proof that political America is deeply polarised, brimming with anger and disenchantment at the ground realities.
- **Trump banned on Social Media:** Twitter for the first time locked Mr. Trump's account, demanded that he remove the tweets excusing violence and threatened *"permanent suspension"*. Facebook banned him from the

platform “*indefinitely*” due to his efforts to incite the violence, chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said. As a result of Wednesday’s events, talk of the **25th Amendment**, a statute that governs the **removal of a sitting President from office due to reasons of incapacitation**, increased.

## 2. ‘Alarming’ U.K. virus variant needs bolder response: WHO

- The World Health Organization’s European branch said more needed to be done to deal with the alarming situation brought on by a recently discovered variant of the novel coronavirus. While it is natural for viruses to change over time and the variant is not believed to cause more severe symptoms, its “*increased transmissibility*” still raises concerns, according to WHO Europe.

## 3. Indian-American named U.S. Army’s first CIO

- Indian-American **Raj Iyer** has taken over as the **first Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the U.S. Army** after the Pentagon created the position in July 2020.
- One of the highest ranking Indian-American civilians in the U.S. Department of Defense, Dr. Iyer, who holds a PhD. in Electrical Engineering, serves as the Principal Adviser to the Secretary of the Army and directs representation of the Secretary in matters relating to information management/ information technology (IT).
- Equivalent in rank to a three star General, Dr. Iyer will **supervise an annual budget of \$16 billion** for the U.S. Army’s IT operations. Over 15,000 civilians and military personnel posted across 100 countries work under him.

## 4. Pak. ATC court issues arrest warrant for Masood Azhar

- An antiterrorism court in Pakistan issued an **arrest warrant for Masood Azhar**, chief of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), on **charges of terror financing**. The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Gujranwala issued the warrant during a hearing in a terror financing case instituted by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of the Punjab police against some members of the JeM.
- Azhar is believed to be hiding in a “*safe place*” in his native town Bahawalpur. Following the **Pulwama terror attack in February 2019 in India**, Pakistan’s Punjab province police had launched a crackdown on terrorism financing, and in this connection arrested six activists of the JeM. The CTD said its teams raided the whereabouts of the JeM’s “*safe house*” and arrested its members and recovered lakhs of rupees from their possession.

## 5. China holds third edition of South Asia multilateral meet

- China has held its **third multilateral dialogue with countries from South Asia** to take forward closer cooperation on fighting COVID19 and coordinating their economic agendas, reflecting a new approach in Beijing’s outreach to the region.
- The third dialogue, held virtually on January 6, brought together every country in the region barring India, Bhutan and the Maldives. It was attended by all five countries that have taken part in these dialogues — **Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh** - and was a followup to the two earlier meetings.
- In the previous two rounds, the countries also discussed how to work more closely together under **China’s Belt and Road Initiative** to boost their post-COVID-19 economic recovery and agreed that countries linked by land ports should establish joint response mechanisms in border areas, apart from committing to greater information sharing and international cooperation.
- At the July quadrilateral dialogue with Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed **extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan**, as well as taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, called the **Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Connectivity Network**.

## 6. ‘Pfizer vaccine works against virus variants’

- New research suggests that **Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine** can protect against a mutation found in two easier to spread variants of the coronavirus that erupted in Britain and South Africa.
- Pfizer, along with researchers from the University of Texas Medical Branch, found that antibodies from vaccine recipients fended off the virus in lab dishes. The preliminary study is yet to be reviewed by experts.

#### 7. [Indonesian cleric linked to Bali bombings freed](#)

- A radical cleric linked to the **Bali nightclub bombings** was freed from prison on Friday, stirring grief and anger among victims nearly two decades after more than 200 people, mostly foreign tourists, were killed in the terror attack.
- **Abu Bakar Bashir**, 82, is seen as the spiritual leader of Islamist terror network **Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)**, which was responsible for the massive blasts that ripped through a pair of packed bars in **October 2002**.
- He was released after completing an unrelated jail term for helping fund militant training. But he has long been suspected of involvement in the horrific holiday island bombings. Sentenced to 15 years in 2011, his term was later cut due to sentencing reductions handed to most prisoners in Indonesia.

#### 8. [Biden picks Sumona Guha for key role on South Asia at NSC](#)

- The Biden-Harris transition team announced the appointment of Indian-American **Sumona Guha** to the role of **Senior Director for South Asia at the National Security Council**. Ms. Guha co-chaired the South Asia foreign policy working group on the BidenHarris campaign, and was a member of the transition team.
- She will succeed the Trump administration's Lisa Curtis in the role. Ms. Guha, a former Foreign Service officer, has been a senior vice-president since mid-2018 at the Albright Stonebridge Group, whose chair is former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. She has also worked at the U.S.-India Business Council and, prior to that, in the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff with responsibility for South Asia.

#### 9. [U.S. modifies H1B visa selection process](#)

- The outgoing Trump administration on Friday **modified the selection process for H1B visa**, giving **priority to salary and skills** instead of the current lottery procedures. The notification was published in the Federal Register. It would come into force in 60 days.
- **What is H1B Visa?:** The H1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. firms to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The next H1B visa filing season is slated to start on April 1. The notification is the **latest effort to bar the entry of immigrants to the U.S.**

#### 10. [Twitter bans Donald Trump, citing risk of violent incitement](#)

- Twitter has long given Mr. Trump and other world leaders broad exemptions from its rules against personal attacks, hate speech and other behaviours. But in a detailed explanation posted on its blog on Friday, the company said recent Trump tweets amounted to **glorification of violence when read in the context of the Capitol riot** and plans circulating online for future armed protests around the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden.
- The **official account for the President of the United States, @POTUS**, remains live. In fact, Mr. Trump, who issued a statement on Friday evening that denounced Twitter as an enemy of free speech, floated the idea that he might build his own "*platform*". The Democrats are considering lightning quick action. The **Articles of Impeachment** are expected to be introduced on Monday, with a House vote as soon as Wednesday.

#### 11. [U.S. removes restrictions on diplomatic contact with Taiwan](#)

- **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** announced that the State Department is voiding long standing restrictions on how U.S. diplomats and others have contact with their counterparts in Taiwan, another move that is expected to upset China as the Trump administration winds to an end.
- The Trump administration has sought to **strengthen bilateral relations with Taiwan**. It announced that UN Ambassador Kelly Craft would go to Taiwan, a move that sparked sharp criticism from Beijing and a warning that the U.S. would pay a heavy price. In August, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar became the first Cabinet member to visit Taiwan since 2014.
- **Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu** has welcomed the move.
- **China's grip over Taiwan:** The Chinese government maintains that mainland China and Taiwan are parts of "**one China**." China has been stepping up its threats to bring the self governing island under its control by military force with frequent war games and aerial patrols. It has been using its diplomatic clout to stop Taiwan from joining any organisations that require statehood for membership.

## 12. Qataris head to Saudi Arabia after reopening of border

- Qataris celebrated crossing their border with Saudi Arabia, calling the Kingdom "*our second country*", as Doha readied its strict coronavirus measures for Saudis to enter following a Gulf diplomatic thaw.
- **Why was Qatar blocked ?** Saudi Arabia shut its side of Qatar's only land border in June 2017 as part of a package of sanctions it said was a response to Doha's backing of radical Islamist groups and closeness to Iran. Qatar always denied the charges. **Saudi Arabia, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt**, all of which had also imposed embargoes on travel and trade, agreed to lift the restrictions at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit in the kingdom on Tuesday.
- Qatar Airways and Saudi Airlines said on Twitter that they would begin resuming flights between their countries from Monday.

## 13. Democrats introduce article of impeachment against Trump

- Democrats in the House of Representatives introduced an article of **impeachment against the U.S. President Donald Trump** - the "*incitement of insurrection*" for his role in the attack on the Capitol last Wednesday. The House could vote on this charge on Wednesday.
- House Republicans blocked a measure on asking **Vice-President Mike Pence** to **invoke the 25th amendment**, a statute by which the President can be removed on grounds of incapacitation.
- The measure will go to the full House floor for a vote. There are ten days left in Mr. Trump's term and if impeached, he **will be the first President to be impeached twice**. If convicted in the Senate, Mr. Trump could be barred from running for office again in the future.

## 14. WHO experts to visit China to trace origins of COVID-19

- Chinese authorities said that a team of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) will arrive in China on Thursday to study the origins of COVID-19. The trip had been scheduled for last week, but some members of the team were at the last minute told the trip would be delayed. **WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** said last week he was "*very disappointed*" China had not permitted the trip, in rare criticism of Beijing from the agency.
- **China's National Health Commission** said the team will arrive on Thursday "*to conduct joint research with Chinese scientists on the origin tracing of the novel coronavirus*". Investigations into the origins of the coronavirus have already become politicised. The WHO has been criticised, particularly by the United States, for its response to the pandemic and was described by President Donald Trump as being "*China-centric*" and "*a*

*puppet of China*". China's authorities, for their part, have suggested they will control how much access international scientists will have and that its scientists will have a say in how the investigations go forward.

#### 15. [Iran warns against action over seized South Korean vessel](#)

- Iran warned on its seizure of a **South Korean tanker in the Gulf** must not be politicised, after the U.S. and France urged the Islamic Republic to release the ship. The **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps** seized the **Hankuk Chemi** and arrested its multinational crew of 20 near the strategic **Strait of Hormuz** one week ago. The move came as Tehran urged Seoul to release billions of dollars of Iranian assets frozen in South Korea as part of U.S. sanctions.

#### 16. [Pope says women can read at Mass, but still can't be priests](#)

- **Pope Francis** changed church law on Monday to explicitly **allow women to do more things during Mass**, while continuing to affirm that **they cannot be priests**. The Pope amended the law to formalise and institutionalise what is common practice in many parts of the world: that women can read the Gospel and serve on the altar as eucharistic ministers. Previously, such roles were officially reserved to men even though exceptions were made.
- The change comes as **Pope Francis remains under pressure to allow women to be deacons** - ministers who perform many of the same functions as priests, such as presiding at weddings, baptisms and funerals. Currently, the ministry is reserved for men.

#### 17. [Worries rise over more violence in the U.S.](#)

- **U.S. Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf** announced his resignation as worries rose over more violence during **President-elect Joe Biden's** inauguration next week. Mr. Wolf's departure as head of the body in charge of security for the January 20 event came five days after **President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol**, hoping to prevent Mr. Biden from replacing him.
- The Homeland Security Department oversees several law enforcement bodies, including the Secret Service, the point agency for security for the White House and the U.S. President. An internal FBI document warned of the possibility that armed Trump supporters could hold protests in all 50 States between the coming weekend and January 20, according to U.S. media. President Donald Trump denied responsibility for his supporters storming Congress, and warned that his imminent impeachment is causing "*tremendous anger*".

#### 18. [Malaysia declares state of emergency over virus surge](#)

- Malaysia's king declared a **nationwide state of emergency** to fight a coronavirus surge and Parliament was suspended, with critics charging that it was a bid by the unstable government to cling to power. The surprise move came a day after the Prime Minister announced sweeping new curbs across much of the Southeast Asian nation, including the closure of most businesses, and warned the health system was "*at breaking point*".
- **Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah** agreed to declare an emergency until August 1 following a request from **Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin**, the national palace said in a statement. It is the first time Malaysia has declared a national state of emergency in over half a century and Mr. Muhyiddin, in a televised address, confirmed Parliament would be suspended and elections would not take place for the time being.
- Malaysia kept the virus in check for much of last year with a tough lockdown but, once curbs were eased, cases accelerated and have repeatedly hit fresh records in the recent days. The country has reported more than 1,38,000 virus cases and 555 deaths.

#### 19. [U.S. rebrands Cuba as state sponsor of terrorism](#)

- U.S. blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism, erecting a roadblock to expected efforts by President-elect Joe Biden to ease tensions. The terror designation hampers foreign investment and can only be removed after a formal review by the Biden administration.
- **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** cited Cuba's ties with Colombian rebels, alliance with leftist Venezuela and sanctuary to several U.S. fugitives in justifying the blacklisting. Former **President Barack Obama in 2015 delisted Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism** as he moved to normalise relations.

## 20. [Ahead of Gyawali's visit, Nepal, India differ on conducting 'border talks'](#)

- The **Kalapani territorial dispute** is expected to be "*raised*" by Nepal during the Joint Commission meeting to be held here during the visit of **Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali** this week, but there will be no "*border talks*", officials here confirmed.
- The visit, which was announced by **Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli** in his speech to the Upper House of Parliament, will instead focus on the Joint Commission agenda, which includes **a broad spectrum of development projects**. The boundary issue that erupted last year over Nepal's decision to include Indian territories in its map, would be handled separately only when the designated Foreign Secretary Level mechanism, which is agreed upon bilaterally, meets.
- It is understood that Nepal may raise its requirement of COVID-19 vaccines and both sides may discuss an agreement for their supply, once the government clarifies its **plans to allow the export of Covishield and Covaxin**.
- **Eminent Persons Group (EPG)**: Nepal is also expected to raise the need to discuss and adopt the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report which has been completed but has not found official recognition from the Indian side. The EPG, constituted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Oli in February 2016, has recommended several measures such as firming up Nepal's land boundary with India and the revision of historic treaties.
- Mr. Gyawali's visit comes weeks after Mr. Oli recommended the dissolution of the Lower House of Parliament — Pratinidhi Sabha. The "*broader message*" of the visit is likely to be India's silent acknowledgement of the action of Mr. Oli. India had to engage Mr. Oli now as the other option would be to wait for the election which may not be held in the foreseeable future. Prime Minister Oli has called for election in April-May, however the legal process over the dissolution of the Lower House is under way and sources indicated that they are expecting that the polling could be postponed.

## 21. [Sri Lanka jails exMinister for saying judges are corrupt](#)

- An outspoken Sri Lankan Opposition politician was jailed on Tuesday for four years over his remarks alleging that the majority of judges in the South Asian nation were corrupt. **Ranjan Ramanayake**, a Deputy Minister of the United National Party before it was voted out in 2019, claimed that he was being targeted for speaking out against corruption.
- Mr. **Ramanayake was a Deputy Minister in the government of then President Maithripala Sirisena** when he made the remarks after a meeting with top anti-corruption officials. Following the change in government, Mr. Ramanayake was arrested and charged for allegedly recording more than 1, 00,000 personal phone calls. The sometimes lewd and compromising contents were leaked on social media early last year, causing a major scandal.

## 22. [Two protests and false parallels](#)

- As a pro-Trump mob swarmed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, the comparisons drawn to the storming of Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) complex on July 1, 2019 were immediate.

- **Stark differences:** While those besieging the Capitol sought to overturn the results of an election to cement their strongman leader's rule, those in Hong Kong sought to secure their right to elect their leader and govern themselves, as promised in their own constitutional document. While hordes supporting U.S. President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol as Congress was in session, intending to hold their elected representatives hostage, LegCo was occupied late at night when it was empty. The target of the Hong Kong protesters was not any individual but a symbol: a building that, far from a centuries old temple of democracy, was a barely eight year old steel glass dolmen for a government they had never voted for, and which continued to ignore them even when two million Hong Kongers marched peacefully through the streets to demand the withdrawal of a bill allowing criminal suspects to be sent to Communist Party-controlled courts in mainland China.
- One should also ask whether it is responsible to make an equivalence between an incident in which democracy was under siege and one in which autocracy was under siege.

### 23. [Sri Lankan court acquits rebel turned lawmaker](#)

- The court in the eastern town of Batticaloa released **Sivanesathurai Chandarakanthan**, who won a seat while in detention in last August's parliamentary election, representing a party that backs **President Gotabaya Rajapaksa**.
- Chandrakanthan was a former child soldier in the Tamil Tiger rebel group that fought a quarter century civil war. He later joined a renegade faction that emerged from the biggest split in the rebel group in 2004 and functioned as a paramilitary group supporting government forces. His faction played a key role in the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in the eastern province, a precursor to their total rout in 2009. He then entered politics and became the **government backed Chief Minister of Eastern Province**.

### 24. [57 killed in deadliest Israeli strikes on Syria in years](#)

- **Israeli air strikes on east Syria** killed 57 regime forces and allied Iran-backed fighters, in the deadliest such strikes since the start of the conflict, a war monitoring group said on Wednesday.
- Days before the strikes, **the Fatimid Brigade** transported a consignment of Iranian-manufactured weapons to eastern Syria from neighbouring Iraq, said the Observatory. They were stored in the region targeted overnight, it added.
- **Syria Civil War:** The Syrian civil war is an ongoing multi-sided civil war in Syria fought between the **Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic** led by **Syrian President Bashar al-Assad**, along with domestic and foreign allies, and various domestic and foreign forces opposing both the Syrian government and each other in varying combinations.

### 25. [Biden names Samantha Power as USAID chief](#)

- **President-elect Joe Biden** nominated former Ambassador to the UN **Samantha Power**, a forceful advocate of humanitarian diplomacy, to lead the **U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)**, and elevated the position's role. Ms. Power, if confirmed, would sit on the National Security Council along with John Kerry, the former Secretary of State tapped as climate envoy - for the first time giving such prominence to the two issues.
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## Opinions and Analysis

### [Analysis : ZAKIUR-REHMAN LAKHVI The terror mastermind](#)

#### 1. **Background**

- Just six days after his arrest on January 2, **ZakiurRehman Lakhvi**, the known Lashkar-e-Taiba mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai terror strikes, was **sentenced to a five year jail term on terror financing charges** on January 8.
- The speed with which the wheels of justice turned in Pakistan in the case of Lakhvi's terror financing case are in sharp contrast to the years he remained charged in the Mumbai attack case, in which he was eventually bailed out.

#### 2. **Islamabad and FATF**

- It's evident that where Indian pressure and American prodding didn't work in ensuring Lakhvi's conviction in the Mumbai terror strikes, in which 166 persons were killed, Islamabad's fears about punitive action from the **Financial Action Task Force, or FATF**, seem to have done the trick. Lakhvi's sentence is also in line with that of **Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed's** conviction in four terror financing cases in November and February 2020.
- In October 2020, **FATF decided that Pakistan would remain on its grey list**, pending full compliance with its action plan.

#### 3. **Terrorism, Pakistan and deep-state**

- A recent arrest warrant for **Masood Azhar**, leader of the Jaish-e-Muhammad, confirms after years the presence of the wanted terrorist in Pakistan. Azhar was one of the terrorists exchanged by India in return for the passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines flight to Kandahar in December 1999.
- Given their being creatures of the Pakistani establishment, and the enduring interest in using non-State actors to foment trouble in Jammu and Kashmir, it's quite likely that new outfits may have already received the blessings of the deep State. For now, Lakhvi and Saeed are in jail. Azhar's fate will be keenly watched in India.

### [Analysis : U.S. CAPITOL: The siege of a historical power centre](#)

#### 1. **Background**

- The grand **U.S. Capitol building in Washington, home to the Senate and House of Representatives**, has hardly been immune to attacks historically, but on January 6, many across the country and the world watched with disbelief as the beating heart of the world's oldest democracy was subjected to a siege by a violent mob.

#### 2. **Cause of Mob violence**

- It appeared to be a dire warning and uncontrolled venting of rage that came with the election results - the loss of Mr. Trump by margin of nearly 7 million despite his garnering around 74 million votes - following which the Republicans also lost control of the Senate after a runoff election in Georgia on January 5 led to two seats of the upper chamber flipping to Democrats.

- The violence triggered by these events, and also the evident desire of the mob to **disrupt Congressional proceedings to formally certify the win of President-elect Joe Biden** - an act for which lawmakers boldly reconvened and voted on the same day - only demonstrates the importance of the Senate and House as parallel repositories of legislative power to counterbalance the executive power of the White House. It is undoubtedly for this reason that the Capitol building, as the locus of legislative power, has faced multiple security threats and assaults over many years since it was built.

### 3. History of the US Capitol

- President George Washington laid the cornerstone for the capitol in 1793. The construction continued through the early 1800s, while the project cost soared to over \$2.4 million by 1827. The building faced its first major attack, a fire set off by **British troops in August 1814, during the 1812 war**. The first major incident of violence came on January 30, 1835, when a British immigrant attempted to **assassinate President Andrew Jackson**.
- The attacks took an international flavour in 1983 when a leftist group set off a bomb outside the Senate chamber, apparently to protest the **U.S. military's actions in Grenada and Lebanon**.

### Opinion : Beyond the Central Vista verdict, key questions

1. The Supreme Court of India has cleared the decks for the intensely contested new Parliament and Central Vista projects in New Delhi. The JUDGEMENT may have put an end to the litigation but it does not necessarily mean that such disputes and bitter situations would not recur. The critical questions on **ensuring public commitment in civic projects**, improving participatory processes in city building, and effective procurement of professional services remain unanswered. Inadequate regulations that do not incorporate best practices will remain as they are.
2. The Delhi project is only the most visible of instances, but the problem is widespread. The **imprudent planning and reckless abandonment of Amaravati**, the proposed capital for Andhra Pradesh, is but an example. As political scientists have explained, most governments ensure that **whimsical agendas** do not drive public projects by institutionalising 'horizontal' and 'vertical' accountabilities.
3. A second regulatory change is required for choosing designers for public projects. Many public projects insist on steep turnover conditions for architecture firms to qualify.
4. To conclude, practices will improve as economic growth happens and as the country builds capabilities. On the face of it, such an incremental approach appears to make sense. However, it needs to be moderated in light of two facts. First, a comparison of responses to the novel coronavirus pandemic by India and the United States has shown that **state capacity is not always directly proportional to wealth** but more connected to will and second, state capacity does not grow on its own as wealth increases. It **improves only when the state is committed to doing better**.

### Policy : Electrical mobility

#### 1. Background

- Reducing dependence on crude oil will save the government money, reduce carbon emissions, and build domestic energy independence. India's transition to electric vehicles will allow us to fine tune our infrastructure.
- Impact on foreign policy : our energy security dependence will shift from West Asia to Latin America. India imported 228.6 MT of crude oil worth \$120 billion in 2018–19, which made it the third largest oil importer in the world in terms of value.

## 2. Shift to electric vehicles

- Under the 'Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles' and its updated (**Fame 2**) **version**, the government has allocated \$1.3 billion in incentives for electric buses, three-wheelers and four-wheelers to be used for commercial purposes till 2022, and earmarked another \$135 million for charging stations. A proposal for a **\$4.6 billion subsidy for battery makers** has also been proposed by the NITI Aayog.
- These policies are embedded with the vision to have **30% electric vehicles plying the roads by 2030**. Developing **domestic battery manufacturing capacity** may fundamentally change India's relationship with resource rich Latin America as the government plans to buy **overseas lithium reserves**. Latin America's famous **lithium triangle** that encompasses lithium deposits under the salt flats of northwest Argentina, northern Chile, and southwest Bolivia holds about **80% of the explored lithium of the world**.

## 3. Mineral assets

- **National Aluminium Company (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) and Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd (MECL)** formally signed a joint venture agreement to form **Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)** to scout for strategic mineral assets like **lithium and cobalt abroad** for commercial use and for supplying to meet the domestic requirement for battery manufacturers. At present, India's lithium ion battery demand is fulfilled by imports from China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong.
- Lithium is also used as a **drug to treat bipolar disorder** and is soon becoming the metal to treat a world polluted by excessive carbon emissions. Currently, India's biggest trading partners in Latin America are **Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela**, and the majority of trade is concentrated on crude oil which includes **14%-20% of India's total crude oil imports**.

## Opinion : Reframing India's foreign policy priorities

### 1. Background

- The new year will be dominated by strong authoritarian leaders like Xi Jinping in China, Vladimir Putin in Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey.

### 2. The China factor

- The year 2021, hence, begins on a triumphal note for China and China's Supreme Leader, Xi Jinping. **China is about the only major country which had a positive rate of growth at the end of 2020**, and its economy is poised to grow even faster in 2021.
- Militarily, China has further strengthened itself, and now seeks to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its announcement of the launch of its third aircraft carrier in 2021. Simultaneously, it is seeking to strengthen its **military coordination with Russia**. Consequent on all this, and notwithstanding Chinese intransigence in several matters including its heavy handed actions in Hong Kong and Uighur, China's position across Asia is, if anything, stronger than in 2020.

### 3. Russia's change of priorities:

- Russia is beginning to display greater interest in the affairs of countries on its periphery and, together with strengthening ties with China and reaching an entente with Turkey, this seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.

### 4. West Asia's Abraham Accords:

- In West Asia, the Abraham Accords, leading to a realignment of forces in the Arab world, have sharpened the division between the Saudi Bloc and Iran-Turkey. Despite the hype surrounding the Abraham Accords, the situation, however, remains fluid and has not reduced the risk of a **confrontation between Iran and Israel**.
  - This does pose problems for India, since both have relations with it. Meanwhile, China demonstrates a willingness to play a much larger role in the region, including contemplating a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement with Iran.
5. **India isolated**
- No breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations has, or is likely to occur, and the confrontation between Indian and Chinese armed forces is expected to continue.
  - India currently plays no significant role in West Asia. **India-Iran relations** today lack warmth. In **Afghanistan**, India has been marginalised as far as the peace process is concerned. While India's charges against Pakistan of sponsoring terror have had some impact globally, it has further aggravated tensions between the two neighbours, and in the process, also **helped Pakistan to cement its relations with China**. While hostility between **India and Nepal** appears to have reduced lately, relations continue to be strained. Through a series of diplomatic visits, India has made valiant efforts to improve relations with some of its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, but as of now worthwhile results are not evident.
  - Currently, India remains isolated from two important supranational bodies of which it used to be a founding member, viz., the **NonAligned Movement (NAM)** and the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**. Efforts to whip up enthusiasm for newer institutions such as the **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)**, have hardly been successful. India has opted out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** (a majority of Asian countries are members), and failed to take advantage of the **RIC, or the Russia, India and China** grouping, even as relations with Russia and China have deteriorated.
  - India will serve as the **president of the powerful UN Security Council for the month of August, 2021**, but if it is to make a real impact, it must be seen to possess substantial weight to shape policies, more so in its traditional areas of influence

### Analysis : In ancient Al-Ula, forging a new future

#### 1. **Background**

- On January 5, the leaders of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** met at the ancient town of Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia to end the bitter discord that three of its members - **Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, along with Egypt** - have had with their partner, Qatar.
- On June 5, 2017, the **Arab Quartet**, as they styled themselves, subjected Qatar to an onerous diplomatic boycott and **a total land, sea and air embargo**. They accused Qatar of destabilising the region with its support for Islamist groups. They then presented Qatar with 13 demands including severing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, diluting relations with Turkey and Iran, and shutting down the Al Jazeera network, in order to normalise ties.

#### 2. **Background to the boycott**

- Ten years ago, the **Arab Spring** uprisings across West Asia had thrown up popular demands for reform - an end to authoritarian rule and the restoration of Arab "*dignity*" through freedom and democracy. Four leaders fell under these pressures, which also gave rise to two new developments: one, Muslim Brotherhood affiliated parties came to power in Egypt and Tunisia; and, two, Saudi Arabia decided to divert demands for domestic reform by highlighting a threat from Iran.

- **Qatar and the Brotherhood:** Qatar, a GCC member, has over several years been a maverick in GCC counsels. Besides supporting its independent television channel, **Al Jazeera**, that often criticises regional leaders, it is a major supporter of the Brotherhood.
  
  - 3. **How Qatar steered through the blockage ?** U.S. President Donald Trump’s visceral hostility towards Iran and total support for Saudi Arabia gave the quartet the opportunity to change Qatar’s ways: through the boycott of June 2017, they sought to pressurise their partner into submission. This approach failed: with its huge resources, **Qatar could weather the financial assault**, while the backing of Turkey, Iran and two GCC partners, Kuwait and Oman, ensured that the movement of goods and people was maintained.
  
  - 4. **Recent happenings and geopolitical impact**
    - Recently, when the UAE and Bahrain “*normalised*” ties with Israel, both Qatar and Turkey affirmed their support for **Hamas, the Islamist party in power in Gaza**. The two countries are also partners in Libya, raging against the group backed by Egypt and the UAE in the ongoing civil conflict.
    - The Al-Ula conclave could herald some major shifts in regional alignments. There could be a **nascent Saudi-UAE competition**, with the UAE ingratiating itself with the U.S. and supporting its interests in diverse theatres – Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the western Indian Ocean. Turkey and Qatar, possibly with Iran, could then seize the opportunity to re engage with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, thus **shaping an alternative regional coalition** that would perhaps be **closer to Russia and China than to the U.S.** As Mr. Biden takes charge in the U.S., the Al-Ula conclave could trigger the **emergence of a new regional order in West Asia**.
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## Science & Technology and Environment

### [Daily snippets](#)

#### [On the COVID-19 vaccination drive](#)

(N.K Ahuja, Head OR group, ICMR national task force for COVID-19 vaccine)

1. India has an existing vaccine safety surveillance mechanism called the **AEFI (Adverse Events Following Immunisation) surveillance**. It comprises a national secretariat under the **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)**, including doctors, data specialists and public health specialists. The vaccine safety surveillance network extends up to every district where a panel of doctors and health workers monitor events of concern after getting any vaccine, investigate and report to state and national level. The AEFI members will be trained to look for any adverse event before we start the immunization process. Adverse event surveillance is being established to actively seek these events across designated health facilities across the country.
  2. **Awareness programmes before vaccine roll-out?**
    - Some people might face mild symptoms such as pain or swelling, mild fever, among others. It is a normal immune response.
    - All the global agencies have set the benchmark that only those vaccine candidates which show an efficacy of at least 50-60% will be considered. Interestingly, most of the vaccines have shown an efficacy of 70–90% within the short period of two or three months of observation. When a vaccine is given an **emergency use authorisation**, as in the case of the COVID-19 vaccine, the trial follow-ups continue for one-two years to assess the total duration of protection the vaccine will provide.
  3. **On authorisation of Covaxin before its Phase 3 trials** - Both preclinical and clinical data (complete data for Phase I and II, and partial data for Phase III) of Covaxin have been thoroughly scrutinised by the regulators. This data shows that the vaccine is safe and induces a robust antibody response. However, to what extent the vaccine will protect the recipients from getting the disease is not known yet. Hence, it has been approved to be used in trial mode.
  4. **Life cycle of trial mode?** First, the recipient will be asked to give a written consent. Then he/ she will undergo some blood tests before and after taking the vaccine. Additionally, the recipient will be followed up actively to see if the vaccine has led to any side effects. In short, it will be an extension of the Phase 3 trial. In this case the person will know that he/she has received a vaccine and not placebo. It will be completely a person's choice if he or she would like to give the vaccine a try or not.
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## Economics and Finance

### Daily snippets

#### 1. GDP likely to contract by 7.7% this fiscal : Government

- India's **real GDP (Gross Domestic Product)** is estimated to contract by **7.7%** in 2020-21 with GVA (Gross Value added) shrinking by 7.2%, advance estimates released by the National Statistical Office show. India's economy had **expanded 4.2% in 2019-20**, but entered a recessionary phase with two successive quarters of sharp contraction triggered by the COVID-19 lockdowns.
- Following a 23.9% collapse in the economy in the April-June period, the GDP shrank by 7.5% in the second quarter - leading to a real GDP contraction of 15.7% in the first half of 2020-21.
- Based on an uptick in several indicators in the past few months, several agencies have upgraded their estimates, with the **RBI recently projecting a 7.5% contraction** in the year compared to its earlier estimate of a 9.5% decline.
- Just two sectors are estimated to record positive growth in GVA, with agriculture continuing its strong run through the first half of the year into the second half (3.4%) and electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services posting (2.7%).
- SBI group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh said, *"It's now official. Due to the pandemic, India will witness a negative GDP growth rate for the first time after 197980. This estimate, however, has a shelf life of only two months and is only used as an input for Budget arithmetic."*

#### 2. USTR slams India's digital tax, holds off on tariffs

- Digital services taxes adopted by **India, Italy and Turkey** discriminate against U.S. companies and are inconsistent with international tax principles, the U.S. Trade Representative's office said, paving the way for potential retaliatory tariffs. USTR, releasing the findings of its **"Section 301"** investigations into the digital taxes, said it was not taking specific actions at this time, but *"will continue to evaluate all available options"*.
- In the latest report, the USTR also said the Indian, Italian and Turkish taxes were *"unreasonable"* because they are *"inconsistent with principles of international taxation, including due to its application to revenue rather than income, extraterritorial application, and failure to provide tax certainty.* India on Thursday said the 2% equalisation levy does not discriminate against U.S. companies as it applies equally to all non-resident e-commerce operators irrespective of their country of residence, *Press Trust of India* reported.

#### 3. World Food Price Index

- **World food prices** rose for a seventh consecutive month in December, with all the major categories, barring sugar, posting gains last month, the United Nations food agency said. The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) food price index, which **measures monthly changes for a basket of** cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar, averaged 107.5 points last month versus 105.2 in November. For the whole of 2020, the benchmark index averaged 97.9 points, a three-year high and a 3.1% increase from 2019.

- Vegetable oil prices continued recent strong gains, jumping 4.7% month on month in December. The cereal price index posted a more modest 1.1% rise in December from the month before. Export prices for wheat, maize, sorghum and rice all rose in December.

#### 4. [RBI to phase in normal liquidity management](#)

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it had decided to **restore normal liquidity management operations** in a phased manner and would conduct variable rate reverse repo auction of ₹2 lakh crore on January 15. In February, RBI had announced a revised Liquidity Management Framework, but had temporarily suspended it in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

#### 5. [US loses 1.4 lakh jobs amidst surging COVID-19 cases](#)

- The U.S. economy shed jobs for the first time in eight months in December as the country buckled under an onslaught of COVID-19 infections, suggesting a significant loss of momentum that could temporarily stall recovery from the pandemic. The economy has recovered just over half of the 22.2 million jobs lost in March and April. The unemployment rate was at 6.7% in December.
- Despite the labour market weakness, the economy is unlikely to fall back into recession, with a backstop of nearly \$900 billion in additional pandemic relief approved by the government last week. More fiscal stimulus is expected now that the Democrats have gained control of the Senate, boosting the prospects for President elect Joe Biden's legislative agenda.

#### 6. [SEBI eases norms for follow-on public offers](#)

- Capital markets watchdog SEBI relaxed the framework for **follow-on public offers (FPOs)**, a move that will help promoters of companies to raise funds more easily through this route. The applicability of **minimum promoters' contribution norm** and the subsequent **lock-in requirements** for the issuers making the FPO have been done away with by the regulator.
- Earlier, promoters were mandated to contribute 20% towards a FPO. Also, the minimum promoters' contribution was required to be locked in for three years. SEBI said the relaxation would be available for those companies which are frequently traded on a stock exchange for at least three years. Also, such firms should have redressed **95% of investor complaints**.

#### 7. [Public procurement by Central government departments](#)

- The Finance Ministry has drafted a model tender document for public procurement by all central government departments, in a bid to **standardise the language and clauses included, and avoid contractual disputes**.
- **Public procurement** refers to the purchase of goods and services by the public sector or the government, accounting for an average 15% of GDP globally. In India, government procurement is estimated to **constitute about 30% of GDP** with the central government accounting for a major chunk.
- "There is no standardised nomenclature in public procurement in India and a mix of American, European and Indian nomenclature has become common," the department of expenditure pointed out in an introduction to the document for inviting bids for official supplies.

#### 8. [RBI governor warns on stretched valuations](#)

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das has flagged the growing disconnect between **exuberant equity markets and real economic activity** and warned that the 'stretched valuations of financial assets' threaten overall financial stability. He wrote in his foreword to the **RBI's biannual Financial Stability Report**

**(FSR)**. Pointing to the interconnected nature of the financial system, the RBI Governor urged banks and financial intermediaries to be cognisant of the risk.

- *“Congenial liquidity and financing conditions have shored up the financial parameters of banks, but it is recognised that the available accounting numbers obscure a true recognition of stress,”* Mr. Das wrote. As per the FSR, the **gross non performing assets (GNPA)** and net NPA (NNPA) ratios of banks fell to 7.5% and 2.1%, respectively, by September 2020. But the RBI warned that the withdrawal of pandemic triggered reliefs could see a jump in bad loans at lenders.
- *“Maintaining the health of the banking sector remains a policy priority and preservation of the stability of the financial system is an overarching goal,”* Mr. Das said.

#### **9. Amazon urges SEBI to suspend Future-RIL deal review**

- Amazon has written to SEBI again, apprising the regulator of the **formation of the arbitration tribunal at SIAC** while urging it to suspend the review of the ₹24,713 crore Future-RIL deal. The single member bench of the Delhi HC had rejected Future Group’s plea to restrain Amazon from writing to regulatory authorities about the SIAC’s (Singapore International Arbitration Centre) arbitral order but gave a go ahead to the regulators to decide on the deal.
- Amazon had dragged Future Group to arbitration after an indebted Kishore Biyani group firm signed a pact to **sell retail, wholesale, logistics and warehousing units** to Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance last year in a ₹24,713 crore deal. In 2019, Amazon had agreed to purchase 49% stake in Future’s unlisted firm - Future Coupons Ltd. - with the right to buy into FRL after a period of three to ten years.

#### **10. GDP to expand by 10.1% in FY22**

- India’s GDP is expected to witness a **record double digit expansion of 10.1% in FY22** but the value of the GDP will only mildly surpass the level that had been recorded in FY20, ICRA said in a report. *“The seemingly sharp expansion will be led by the continued normalisation in economic activities as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines gathers traction, as well as the low base.”*

#### **11. Inflation slows to 4.59%**

- India’s retail inflation decelerated appreciably to 4.59% in December, from 6.93% in November, dipping below 6% for the first time since March 2020 as food prices cooled. The lowest **consumer price inflation (CPI)** print in 14 months was driven by a sharp slowdown in food price inflation, which eased to 3.4% in December, from the preceding month’s 9.5%.
- India’s **index of industrial production (IIP)** for November was dragged lower by mining and manufacturing. Mining output contracted 7.3% in the month, while manufacturing declined 1.7%. Electricity production grew for the third month in a row, rising 3.5% year-on-year. Only 10 out of 23 industry groups showed positive growth in November.
- *“The November data once again shows that the uptick witnessed in the month of September and October was due to a combination of festive and pent-up demand and the recovery is still shallow and fragile,”* said an economist from India Ratings & Research.

#### **12. WhatsApp goes all out for its privacy pitch**

- In the wake of a backlash over its updated privacy policy, Facebook owned WhatsApp clarified that the update would not affect users’ messages to friends or family. The changes only relate to **messaging a business using the platform**. In an FAQ posted on its website, WhatsApp added that this update includes changes related to messaging a business on WhatsApp, which is optional, and provided further transparency about how the

company collects and uses data. The provider added that it neither keeps record of a user's contacts nor can it see a user's shared location.

### **13. Bharat Biotech to supply Covaxin to Brazil**

- Covaxin maker Bharat Biotech has signed an agreement with **Precisa Medicamentos**, a firm in Brazil, to supply the COVID-19 vaccine candidate to the Latin American country. Twelve million doses of the indigenous vaccine are likely to be supplied over a period of time. The company will probably be the first to export COVID-19 vaccines from India. Ambassador of Brazil **André Aranha Corrêa do Lago** had also expressed interest on behalf of the government of Brazil towards procurement of Covaxin.

### **14. EV major Tesla gets an India address**

- Electric vehicle company Tesla has officially entered India by registering with the Registrar of Companies as **Tesla India Motors and Energy Private Ltd.**, incorporated in Bengaluru. Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister C.N. Ashwath Narayan had earlier said that his government invited the EV firm to setup an R&D centre in the city. **Tesla CEO Elon Musk** had also said his company would enter India in 2021. Tesla has been exploring its India entry with a bunch of states in the last 3 years.

### **15. Dell technologies 'Data Protection Trends for 2021' report**

- Enterprises in 2021 will aggressively **embrace digital transformation** to protect and manage critical data. Data protection has transformed itself into a top priority and organisations are investing heavily to safeguard their IT architecture against any kind of cyber threat or malware attack. In 2021, some **42% of organizations in India and globally**, will continue to invest in cybersecurity and privacy solutions. The report added that organisations need to accelerate their data mining and extract maximum insights available from the collected data sets.

### **16. RBI forms working group on digital lending**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted a working group on digital lending - including online platforms and mobile apps - to study **all aspects of digital lending activities** in the regulated financial sector as well as by unregulated players. This is to put in place an appropriate regulatory approach.
- *"Digital lending has the potential to make access to financial products and services more fair, efficient and inclusive. From a peripheral supporting role a few years ago, FinTech-led innovation is now at the core of the design, pricing and delivery of financial products and services,"* the RBI said in a notification.
- *"A balanced approach needs to be followed so that the regulatory framework supports innovation while ensuring data security, privacy, confidentiality and consumer protection,"* banking regulator added.
- The working group will **evaluate digital lending activities** and assess the **penetration and standards of outsourced digital lending activities** in RBI regulated entities; **identify the risks posed by unregulated digital lending** to financial stability, regulated entities and consumers; and **suggest regulatory changes** to promote **orderly growth of digital lending**. It will also recommend measures for expansion of specific regulatory or statutory perimeter and suggest the **role of various regulatory and government agencies**. It will also recommend a **robust fair practices code for digital lending players**.

### **17. IRDAI forms advisory panel on health cover**

- Insurance regulator IRDAI has constituted a **health insurance advisory committee** to examine the availability of products, suggest an approach on the coverage of specific diseases, and develop a strategy on treatment protocol. The 10-member committee has been also tasked with **examining the extant health insurance product structure** in terms of policy conditions to protect the interest of the policyholders.



## Sports

### Daily snippets

#### 1. India files racial abuse complaint

- The Indian cricket team has lodged a official complaint with the match referee, claiming that **Jaspreet Bumrah** and **Mohammed Siraj** were targets of racial abuse from sections of the crowd at the **Sydney Cricket Ground**. The matter will now be dealt with by the International Cricket Council, the game's governing body, and Cricket Australia.

#### 2. Viswanathan Anand on the AICF's Advisory board

- Five time World champion Viswanathan Anand has consented to be on the **All India Chess Federation's Advisory Board**. The re-elected AICF secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan said that Anand's presence will go a long way in strengthening the initiative to bring on board some of the chess loving people from the corporate sector and his guidance and inputs will be paramount.
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## Suggested Readings

1. BREXIT's legal ramification, [Link to article](#)
2. Social media and identity of sexual offence victims, [Link to article](#)
3. Do we have a grip on disinformation, [Link to article](#)
4. Irrational and indiscriminate arrests and violation of Human Rights, [Link to article](#)
5. Right to Personal Liberty : Challenges before Constitutional courts, [Link to article](#)
6. Supreme Court and Farmer protests, [Link to article](#)
7. Criminal contempt and well founded criticism, [Link to article](#)
8. Monitoring the performance of judges and judiciary, [Link to article](#)
9. The threat posed by avian influenza, [Link to article](#)
10. Supreme Court on Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Rules 2017, [Link to article](#)
11. Supreme Court on centre's handling of the Farmers' protests, [Link to article](#)
12. Harassment in common workplace : Rajasthan HC, [Link to article](#)
13. Side-effects of a flawed vaccine trial, [Link to article](#)
14. What is Index of Industrial Production (IIP), [Link to article](#)
15. Plea to declare all child marriages in Delhi as void, [Link to article](#)
16. Tractor Rally on the Republic Day, [Link to article](#)
17. Minting money on people's faith, [Link to article](#)
18. Cuba's currency reforms, [Link to article](#)
19. Policy on paying women for domestic work, [Link to article](#)
20. The underworlds of WhatsApp, [Link to article](#)
21. Giving freedom some breathing space, [Link to article](#)

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

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