

**G.K snippets...**



**Law, Policy and Governance**



**[Daily snippets](#)**

**1. [Non Essential expenses of civic bodies may stop](#)**

- The Delhi High Court hinted that it may stop all non essential, discretionary expenses of the three municipal corporations, including perks of councillors and senior officers, so that salaries and pensions of COVID-19 frontline workers can be paid. The court said *“paucity of funds cannot be an excuse for non-payment of salaries and pensions”* as these are fundamental rights.
- The Court was hearing several petitions claiming non-payment of salaries and pensions of serving and retired employees, including teachers, doctors and sanitation workers, of the three corporations.

**2. [Allahabad High Court on Private space](#)**

- Allahabad High Court ruling that people marrying under **the Special Marriage Act, 1954**, can choose not to publicise their union with a notice 30 days in advance may not exactly be a judicial pushback against problematic anti conversion laws enacted by several states. According to the new order, if a couple gives it in writing that they do not want the notice publicised, the Marriage Officer can solemnise the marriage.
- Justice Vivek Chaudhary said the Act’s interpretation has to be such that it upholds fundamental rights, not violate them. Laws should **not invade liberty and privacy**.
- The HC ruling came on the plea of a Muslim woman who converted to Hinduism for marriage as the couple saw the **notice period under the Special Marriage Act** as an invasion of their privacy. The HC ruling can now be cited across India to prevent public notices under the Special Marriage Act. Interfaith couples will hope that when the Supreme Court hears pleas on the U.P. conversion law, it will be guided by progressive verdicts.

**3. [NIA summons farm leader, TV journalist](#)**

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has summoned around 40 persons to be examined as ‘witness’ in a fresh case registered against the **Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)**. The summons were served to “ascertain details relating to the investigation”.
- The notices have been issued under **Section 160 Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**, Police officer’s power to require attendance of witnesses in FIR no 40/2020 under various Sections of the Indian Penal Code and the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.

#### 4. [WhatsApp pushes policy rollout to May 15th](#)

- Following a severe backlash over the latest update to its privacy policy, Facebook-owned WhatsApp said it has pushed back the policy rollout by three months to May 15. The company said it will also do a lot more to **clear up the misinformation** around how privacy and security works on WhatsApp.
- WhatsApp, it said, was built on a simple idea: what you share with your friends and family stays between you, while stressing that users’ **personal conversations are end to end encrypted** so that neither WhatsApp nor Facebook can see these private messages.

#### 5. [Farmers firm on conducting Republic Day tractor parade](#)

- Farmer unions protesting against the three contentious farm laws said they would go ahead with their tractor parade in Delhi on Republic Day. They said the parade would be “peaceful”, and no disruptions would be caused to the official ceremony. The Supreme Court is slated to hear a petition by the Centre on Monday to **injunction protesters from holding the parade** to “disrupt” the Republic Day celebrations.

#### 6. [‘Parents of road accident victims should be compensated’](#)

- The Delhi High Court said parents are dependent on their children at some stage of their lives and it would be inequitable to deny compensation to those who lost their ward in a road accident. Justice J.R. Midha made the observations while awarding compensation for loss of dependency to a woman, who lost her 23year old son in a road accident in 2008.

#### 7. [‘Explore crowdfunding to help two children with rare disease’](#)

- In an uncommon order, the Delhi High Court has ordered the Health Ministry to explore “**crowdfunding**” to help two children, who are suffering from a rare disease known as **Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy**, in importing exorbitantly priced medicines. Justice Prathiba M. Singh opined that just because of the exorbitant price of the drug or treatment, patients, especially children, suffering from a rare disease ought not to be deprived of treatment for their condition.
- ‘*Right to Health and Healthcare*’ is a **fundamental right** which has been recognised by the Supreme Court to be a part of the ‘Right to life’ of the Constitution, Ms.Singh remarked. The HC also directed the Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to give a specific timeline in respect to the finalisation and notification of the **Draft Health Policy for Rare Diseases, 2020**.

#### 8. [Only police should decide on tractor rally, says SC](#)

- The Supreme Court said the Union government and the Delhi Police should take a call on whether or not protesting farmers could hold tractor or vehicle marches on Republic Day in the national capital. The government could not ask the court to decide on issues concerning law and order. The government said the right to express dissent against the farm laws did not include a right to “*malign the nation globally*”.
- The Supreme Court appointed committee will meet the farmer groups from Thursday. The unions protesting on the borders of Delhi for almost two months have refused to meet the committee.

#### 9. CVC presses for expeditious disposal of vigilance cases

- The **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** has directed all Ministries/Departments of the Union government to strictly adhere to the time limits for various stages of disciplinary proceedings in vigilance cases since unexplained delay was causing undue advantage or harassment to the charged officials. *"Any delay in finalisation of such matters is neither in the interest of the organisation nor that of the employee concerned"*.

#### 10. Char Dham project : Centre's affidavit pushes for wide roads

- The Central government supported the majority view taken by the Supreme Court's **Char Dham High-powered Committee (HPC)** for the necessity of broadening the Himalayan feeder roads to India-China border in order to facilitate troop movement.
- The Ministry of Defence, in an affidavit, said it was unfortunate that three of the HPC members had given a minority view to reconsider a December 15, 2020 circular of the Ministry of Road and Transport and Highways (MoRTH). The Centre, in its affidavit, said it was *"unfortunate"* that the HPC members, who are in the minority, have given such an opinion *"notwithstanding the security of the country"*.

#### 11. Experts to be assigned to review State labour laws

- The **Union Labour and Employment Ministry** is likely to appoint legal consultants this month to look at whether the States' labour laws are in consonance with the Centre's four new labour codes. Along with the implementation of the codes, an official said the Ministry would appoint legal consultants soon to review the various State laws.
- The four codes have **amalgamated 29 Central labour laws**, including those covering matters of minimum wages, benefits for workers and strikes. For the first time, **gig and platform workers** have been covered under the social security schemes.

#### 12. Supreme Court's directive on quota in promotions

- The Supreme Court asked **Attorney General K.K. Venugopal** to compile the various issues being raised by States with regard to the application of a Constitution Bench judgment of 2006 in M. Nagaraj case, which had upheld the **application of creamy layer principle** to members of the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities in promotions. A three judge Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde said the issues raised by States are not common.

#### 13. Bar Council response on exam sought

- The Supreme Court asked the **Bar Council of India (BCI)** to respond to a plea challenging the **All India Bar Examination (AIBE)** as a restriction to practising law as an advocate. A Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar issued notice on a petition filed by Parthsarathi Mahesh Saraf, represented by advocate V.K. Biju, who argued that AIBE was being conducted without following the law.

#### 14. SC panel lays out road map on farmers' issue

- The Supreme Court appointed committee on farmers' issues has decided to meet the State governments and the State Agricultural Marketing Boards along with the farm unions and cooperatives to seek their views on the farm reform laws, starting January 21. The panel has **laid out a two month road map** for consultations after their first meeting. The SC appointed panel began work on Tuesday, chalking out a plan to **hold wide-ranging consultations** on the contentious farm laws.

#### 15. Physical hearings: SC tells lawyers to approach HC

- The Supreme Court said it understood the gravity of the problem lawyers and others, including litigants and employees, may have to face following the Delhi High Court's recent decision to resume physical hearings. The Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde said the apex court usually did not intervene in administrative decisions taken by High Courts.
- It asked the petitioners to approach the High Court itself. The petition said the notification was issued in "*utter and complete disregard of life, health*".

#### 16. Notice to Haryana govt. over Panchayati Raj Act

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court issued a notice to the Haryana government over certain **amendments on reservation system** to the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020.
- The petition filed by two women, who had held posts of members in Panchayati Raj institutions have challenged the recently passed **Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020**, particularly relating to the scheme of reservation provided therein. "*The amendment discriminates between eligible women and their male counterparts, which is in violation of Articles 14 and 15 of Constitution*".

#### 17. Centre targets Delhi over Yamuna pollution

- The Centre accused Delhi of being a "habitual offender" in polluting the waters of the Yamuna. 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.

#### 18. SC seeks status report on river water quality

- The Supreme Court sought a status report from the National Green Tribunal appointed **River Yamuna Monitoring Committee** led by former Delhi Chief Secretary Shailaja Chandra about its recommendations to improve the quality of water and the extent to which the States have implemented their suggestions.
- The Supreme Court had, on January 13, taken *suo motu cognisance* of the contamination of rivers by sewage effluents through lapses committed by municipalities, saying "*open surface water resources including rivers are the lifeline of human civilisation*". The right to clean environment, and further, pollution free water, has been protected under the broad rubric of the "**right to life**".

#### 19. Expression of views not bias: CJI

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde orally observed during a hearing that there was a "**peculiar lack of comprehension**" on the constitution of committees. "*There is some confusion in understanding the law. One person may have an opinion before being a part of the committee, but his opinion can change... There is no way that such a member cannot be part of a committee,*" he observed.

#### 20. Budget session to have Question Hour

- The Question Hour, which had been suspended by the government during the monsoon session, will resume when **Parliament meets for the Budget session** from January 29. The government had claimed that the suspension of the Question Hour, which gives the Opposition an opportunity to hold the government accountable, was an additional precautionary measure to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **What is Question Hour?** Question Hour is **the first hour of a sitting session of India's Lok Sabha** devoted to questions that Members of Parliament raise about any aspect of administrative activity. The concerned Minister is obliged to answer to the Parliament, either orally or in writing, depending on the type of question raised.

### 21. Let police decide on parade: CJ

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde told the government that it was both “*improper and irregular*” for the Supreme Court to disallow any rally by farmers on Republic Day. The CJI’s remarks were in response to a submission by Mr. Mehta to adjourn the hearing on a government plea to **bar farmers from holding rallies** to “disrupt” the Republic Day celebration. The court said farmers should ensure that the citizens of Delhi were assured of “*complete peace*” on January 26.

### 22. Supreme Court dismisses Aadhaar review petitions

- The Supreme Court, in a majority view, dismissed a series of petitions seeking a review of its 2018 judgment upholding the *Lok Sabha Speaker’s certification of Aadhaar law as a Money Bill* and its subsequent passage in Parliament.
- Two questions had come up for review regarding the five judge Aadhaar Bench’s judgment in 2018. One, whether the Speaker’s decision to declare a proposed law as Money Bill was “final” and cannot be challenged in court. The second, whether the **Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016** was correctly certified as a ‘Money Bill’ under **Article 110 (1) of the Constitution**.
- On the first question, the majority judgment in 2018 said the Speaker’s decision could be challenged in court only under “*certain circumstances*”. On the second, it concluded that the Aadhaar Act was rightly called a Money Bill. Justice Chandrachud, who was on the Bench, had dissented on the second conclusion in 2018.

### 23. ‘Biomedical waste sites must get authorisation’

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed biomedical waste management facilities in the country to obtain authorisation from State pollution control boards while asking the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to ensure strict compliance of **biomedical waste management rules**.
- “*The CPCB may ensure that for strict compliance of rules, the compensation regime is duly applied against the defaulters, following due process. Standards of handling of BMW need to be duly complied. The authorities must ensure that waste is disposed of only through authorised agencies, common facilities are located as per sitting guidelines and there is environmental clearance...*”

### 24. Varavara Rao’s detention cruel, inhuman: Indira Jaising to Bombay HC

- **Senior advocate Indira Jaising**, arguing for 82-year old poet **Varavara Rao’s** medical bail, told the Bombay High Court that the activist’s detention was *cruel and inhuman*, and amounted to *violation of his right to life and dignity*. Mr. Grover said Mr. Rao, who is being treated at Nanavati Hospital since November 18, should be discharged and sent home. He said Mr. Rao should not be sent back to Taloja Central Jail as the prison administration is not capable of looking after him with the existing infrastructure.

### 25. Cattle transport: govt. gives undertaking to HC

- The Karnataka government gave an undertaking to the High Court that *no coercive action* will be initiated for transporting cattle in breach of Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Ordinance, 2020 till the relevant rules are brought into force. **Advocate General Prabhuling K. Navadgi** made submissions in this regard before a Division bench during the hearing of PIL petitions challenging the *constitutional validity of the Ordinance* promulgated recently.
- The Bench said that there was no need to pass any interim order at this stage while adjourning hearing till February 26. The Bench also said that it may have to examine a few provisions of the Ordinance.

### 26. Why cast aspersions on court, asks CJI Bobde

- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde said it had become “*almost a cultural thing*” to brand people while lashing out at articles hinting the possibility of “bias” on the part of members of an expert committee constituted by the Supreme Court to intercede between the protesting farmers and the government. There was criticism in social media and articles in newspapers over the court’s choice of members of the committee constituted on January 12.



## National News/ Interventions



### Daily snippets

#### 1. World's largest vaccination programme begins

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the first phase of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive. The world's largest vaccination programme began at a total of 3,006 session sites across all the States and the Union Territories, which were connected virtually throughout the exercise. Healthcare workers, both in the **government and private sectors**, including Integrated Child Development Services workers, will receive the vaccine in the first phase.

#### 2. Policy cloud delays Brazil vaccine flight

- A special plane from Brazil to carry the first exports of **Covishield**, the Indian-made coronavirus vaccine, was delayed on Friday, amid confusion over clearance for the shipment. The flight, due to leave Brazil on Thursday and return on Saturday with two million doses of the vaccine, was put off, the Brazilian Ministry of Health announced, citing logistical and licensing issues.

#### 3. Biden's NEC pick sparks celebrations in Srinagar

- The appointment on Thursday of Kashmiri-origin **Sameera Fazili** as **Deputy Director of the U.S. National Economic Council (NEC)** by President-elect Joe Biden sparked off celebrations among her extended family in Srinagar.

#### 4. Nepal raises Kalapani boundary issue with India

- Nepal has raised the **Kalapani boundary dispute** with India during the Joint Commission meeting, visiting **Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali** said. The Minister said that the Indo-Nepal boundary dispute existed in "*two segments*" and Kathmandu wished to find a solution to the matter urgently. Mr. Gyawali also took up Nepal's requirement for vaccines to fight the COVID-19 pandemic as **Kathmandu has approved Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield vaccine**.
- This is the first time that the Foreign Minister of Nepal has presented the dispute on the boundary front from the Indian capital since the issue erupted in November 2019 prompting Nepal to unveil a new political map that showed the **Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiadora** region of Pithoragarh district as part of the country's sovereign territory.
- The statement from Nepal said that both the teams "*discussed the review of the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950*". It is understood that the review has been recommended by the **Eminent Persons Group (EPG)** constituted by Mr. Modi and Mr. Oli in 2016.

#### 5. 2.24 lakh vaccinated in 2 days, 447 report adverse reactions

- A total of 2,24,301 individuals were administered the COVID-19 vaccine in two days, with more than 17,000 receiving the shot on Sunday, the Health Ministry said in a briefing. With 3,000 vaccination sites and a capacity of 100 persons per site, the Centre had planned to vaccinate 3,00,000 persons nationally on Saturday.
- Of all those vaccinated so far, **447 reported reactions such as pain, mild swelling, mild fever or nausea**, with only three persons requiring hospitalisation.

- The Health Ministry has advised the States and the Union Territories to conduct vaccination on only four days a week to minimise disruption to routine health services. **India plans to inoculate 3 crore health workers, municipal workers, sanitation workers**, and later on, 27 crore of those most vulnerable to the disease by July.

#### 6. [U.K. invites PM Modi to G7 summit in June](#)

- The United Kingdom has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the G7 summit that is scheduled to be held in June. Apart from India, Australia and South Korea are also invited to participate in the proceedings of the summit as “*guest countries*”.
- The invitation came days after Mr. Johnson cancelled his visit to India in the last week of January because of a new wave of COVID-19 in Britain. He said he will visit India “*ahead*” of the G7 summit. Cooperation between the U.K. and India is significant this year as India is a non-permanent member at the UN Security Council, where the United Kingdom will take over the presidency in February.

#### 7. [NIA examines Khalsa Aid functionary in SFJ case](#)

- **The National Investigation Agency (NIA)** examined a functionary of Khalsa Aid, an international NGO, in connection with a recent case registered against **Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)**, a foreign based group that advocates secessionist and pro-Khalistani activities in India. Khalsa Aid provided aid during the ongoing farmers’ agitation. This was the first time since 1999, the year they started work in India, that the group members had been called for questioning by any Indian agency. Khalsa Aid has a presence in the U.K, the U.S., and Canada.
- Khalsa Aid’s founder Ravinder Singh said that Khalsa Aid was registered as a charitable trust in Delhi with offices in Patiala and Jalandhar and had not received any foreign donations. “*Every item we distribute at Delhi’s border has been donated by Indians. The only items we purchased were massage machines and geysers. Every day, people are donating truckloads of essentials, we have an account of every transaction,*” he said.
- The NIA filed a fresh case against SFJ on December 15 last year where it alleged that large amounts of funds being collected by Khalistani terrorist outfits are being sent through NGOs to **pro-Khalistani elements based in India**.

#### 8. [Aero India to showcase indigenous helicopters](#)

- The India Pavilion at the **Aero India 2021** next month will showcase a range of indigenously developed helicopters, while **Defence Minister Rajnath Singh** is scheduled to hold a conclave of Defence Ministers from the **Indian Ocean Littoral (IOR) state**.
- A *Light Utility Helicopter (LUH)*, a *weaponised Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH)* and a *Light Combat Helicopter (LCH)* would be on display inside the pavilion. All these helicopters have been designed and manufactured by **Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL)**. The LUH for the Army, which had completed all the tests and also demonstrated its high-altitude capability in hot and high weather conditions last September, is likely to get the **Initial Operational Clearance (IOC)** at Aero India.
- In view of the pandemic, the **13th edition of the biennial Aero India** will be held only on three business days from February 3. All precautions with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic had been taken.

#### 9. [Covaxin not to be used in cases of allergy, fever, poor immunity](#)

- Those with a history of allergies, fever and bleeding disorder, people on blood thinners and those with compromised immunity or on medication that **affects the immune system** have been told by **Bharat Biotech, manufacturer of Covaxin**, not to take the COVID-19 vaccine.
- A statement uploaded on the company website said the vaccine was also **contraindicated for pregnant and lactating women**, those using other COVID-19 vaccines and people with any other serious health related issues as determined by the vaccinator or the officer supervising the vaccination.

#### 10. [Aware of construction on LAC: MEA](#)

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it was aware of **infrastructure construction by China** in the past several years *“along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)”* and that India had also stepped up its construction, after a report by NDTV showed satellite images of a **new Chinese settlement in Arunachal Pradesh**.
- This is the first time the government has acknowledged Chinese construction, although official sources say the land has been under the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) control since 1959. Satellite images show the construction of a big village on the **banks of Tsari Chu river in Upper Subansiri district** between November 2019 and November 2020

#### **11. ‘Legal issue’ delaying Mallya’s extradition**

- The U.K. government has told the Indian side that businessman **Vijay Mallya cannot be extradited** until a confidential *“legal issue”* concerning him is resolved, the Centre informed the Supreme Court. An official letter from the Ministry of External Affairs, quoting excerpts from the U.K. government’s communication, was read out by **Solicitor General Tushar Mehta** before a Special Bench led by Justice U.U. Lalit. Mr. Mehta said the government had been making frequent and repeated efforts to extradite Mr. Mallya.

#### **12. Tandav crew and cast issue apology**

- The cast and crew of *Tandav*, a web series on Amazon Prime Video platform, have issued an apology. In a statement, shared on Twitter by **Ali Abbas Zafar**, director of the series, they *“unconditionally apologised”* taking cognisance of the concerns expressed by people *“if it has unintentionally hurt anyone’s sentiments”*. The statement added that *“the cast and crew did not have any intention to offend the sentiments of any individual, caste, community, race, religion or religious belief or insult or outrage any institution, political party or person, living or dead.”*
- An FIR has been lodged against the makers of the web series on charges of hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus and promoting enmity on grounds of religion. The political drama series has Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia, Tigmanshu Dhulia and Mohammad Zeeshan Ayyub in the cast. The FIR was filed under **various Sections of the IPC and the IT Act**.

#### **13. Women volunteers to ensure peaceful farmers' parade**

- Women are likely to play a major role in ensuring that the **proposed tractor rally on Republic Day** remains peaceful, according to **Kavitha Kuruganti**, the only woman delegate on the farm unions’ team participating in negotiations with the Centre. She is a representative of the **Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch**, an alliance of women farmers’ organisations and supporters.
- Women farmers, as well as women students from Punjab’s universities, were often seen in the forefront in the faceoffs with the police at the borders between Punjab and Haryana, as the unions marched towards Delhi. Women are also training to drive some tractors for the rally on January 26.
- She pointed out that as per census data, **30% of all cultivators** and **43% of all agricultural labourers are women**, but few of them have land rights in their own names. The struggle for **land and inheritance rights** is unfortunately something that most mainstream farm unions have failed to take up, said Ms. Kuruganti. Also, 15-20% of protesters at the **Singhu border** are women.

#### **14. Rafale to make debut in Republic Day Parade**

- The Rafale fighter jet inducted into the Indian Air Force last year would **fly over Rajpath** during the Republic Day parade. The fly past will culminate with a single Rafale aircraft carrying out a ‘vertical charlie’ formation, the IAF said.

#### **15. Task force on marriage age submits report to PMO**

- The task force set up to take a **relook at the age of marriage for women** has submitted its report to the Prime Minister's Office and the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**. Chairperson of the committee **Jaya Jaitley** refused to comment on the contents of the report submitted after a delay of five months.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech last year spoke about a panel formed to decide on the "**right age of marriage**" for women. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech last year proposed a panel on the "**age of a girl entering motherhood**" to lower maternal mortality rates and improve nutrition levels.
- The terms of reference for the task force included, "the correlation of age of marriage and motherhood" with health and nutritional status of mothers and infants.
- **Women's rights activists** have opposed the suggestion of **raising the age of marriage from 18 to 21 for women** and have cited evidence to show that such a move may be used to incarcerate young adults marrying without parents' consent.

#### 16. **India-Nepal relations in a new transition**

- The year 2020 marked China's unprecedented aggression, with an aim to counter India's conventional edge in Nepal and South Asia at large. Accordingly, China's *geostrategic, economic and infrastructural drives* were made tempting to a precarious Nepal with its fragile democracy and the adulterated ideological standing of the ruling **Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)**.
- The CPN is a divided house, and publicly, this was known when **Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli dissolved the House of Representatives** in late December 2020. The move was termed '*unconstitutional*' by the experts and the country's Supreme Court is hearing writ petitions against Mr. Oli.
- Amidst the domestic political chaos, the **Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, visited New Delhi** for the sixth meeting of the **India-Nepal Joint Commission** on January 15, 2021, that was co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.
- The keenly awaited meeting proved to be more **focused on confidence building measures** such as exchanges of courteous remarks on significant and concrete progress made since the last meeting of the Joint Commission in taking forward several bilateral initiatives, and the close cooperation between the two sides in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Moving away from the recent hiatus, **Nepal expressed support for India's permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council (UNSC)** to reflect the changed balance of power. The next meeting of the Joint Commission in Nepal should be crucial in giving a new direction to the bilateral ties, keeping a **balance between change and continuity**.
- Nepal's democracy has been affected with an **extreme rise in majoritarian sentiments**. Nepal cannot afford to enter in another round of political instability, and those who have commanding authority to spearhead India-Nepal bilateral relations must give a humane consideration to it.

#### 17. **Poet-historian Narendra Luther passes away**

- Well-known poet, historian, author and retired bureaucrat **Narendra Luther** passed away on Tuesday at a private hospital. He was 88 and ailing for some time. He played a key role in **Save the Rock** society and built his house around a rock in 1977 in the Banjara Hills area.

#### 18. **Netaji's birth anniversary to be celebrated as 'Parakram Divas'**

- The Union Culture Ministry on Tuesday announced that **January 23, birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose**, would be celebrated as "**Parakram Divas**", day of courage, every year.
- Later, at a press conference, **Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel** said Prime Minister Narendra Modi would preside over the inauguration of the celebrations in Kolkata, where a permanent exhibition on Netaji would be opened at the Victoria Memorial.

### 19. Cancer care pioneer no more

- A pioneer in cancer care in the country, and the **chairperson of the Adyar Cancer Institute, V. Shanta** breathed her last in Chennai early on Tuesday. A crusader for cancer research and making cancer care affordable for all, **Dr. Shanta and her mentor S. Krishnamurthi** built the **Cancer Institute** from a cottage hospital into a 500 plus bedded institution, offering state-of-the-art care to people **across the income spectrum**. Only 40% are paying beds and the remaining are general beds where patients are boarded and lodged free of cost.
- Dr. Shanta was the recipient of several honours and awards through her life, recognising her devotion to oncology care and research. The **Padma Vibhushan** and **Ramon Magasaysay** awards were among them.

### 20. India asks WhatsApp to revoke changes in its privacy policy

- The Union government has asked WhatsApp to withdraw the **proposed changes to its privacy policy**, stating that it raised "grave concerns" over the implications of the choice and autonomy of Indian citizens. In a letter to **WhatsApp chief executive officer Will Cathcart**, the government pointed out that by not giving the **option to opt out of data sharing with Facebook companies**, Indian users were being treated differently from those in Europe.
- The letter further stated that sovereign independence of **India's distinct identity and its people** must be properly respected and any unilateral changes to WhatsApp terms of service and privacy would not be fair and acceptable. The government also asked the Facebook owned platform to reconsider its approach to respect the informational privacy, freedom of choice and data security of Indian citizens.

### 21. India to fly out vaccines to neighbours

- India will begin to ship out lakhs of doses of the **novel coronavirus vaccine** to neighbouring countries beginning Wednesday, with the first batches expected to reach Bhutan and the Maldives among several countries by special planes as a grant or gift. The External Affairs Ministry said shipments to **Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and the Seychelles** would commence this week, while those to **Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius** were awaiting "necessary regulatory clearances".
- The region's preference for Indian vaccines, including the Covishield from the Serum Institute of India (SII) developed with Oxford University and AstraZeneca, and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, are due to **cost, easier storage requirements and the geographical proximity**. The only exception to **India's regional vaccine diplomacy would be Pakistan**, which has cleared the AstraZeneca vaccine for use, but has neither requested nor discussed any doses from India yet.

### 22. Karnataka tops in innovation, shows index

- Karnataka retained its leadership position in the major States category in the second edition of **India Innovation Index released by NITI Aayog**. It was followed by **Maharashtra**, which moved past Tamil Nadu to occupy the second place.
- Other States in the top 10 are **Telangana, Kerala, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab**. Barring Maharashtra, all other States in the top five are in the south. **Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Bihar scored the lowest** on the index, which put them at the bottom in the "major States" category.
- **The India Innovation Index** : Niti Aayog said, it aims to create an extensive framework for a continual evaluation of **India's innovation environment**. The index aims to rank States and UTs based on their scores, recognise opportunities and challenges, and assist in tailoring government policies to foster innovation.

### 23. India sends vaccines to 2 countries

- India began the **delivery of COVID-19 vaccines to six "neighbouring and key partner countries"**. The delivery began with two special flights carrying the first consignments of Covishield to the **Maldives and Bhutan**. Sources said **Bangladesh and Nepal** will receive two large consignments of the same vaccine on Thursday followed by

supplies to **Myanmar** and the **Seychelles**. Bhutan is the first country to receive the vaccine manufactured by the Punebased Serum Institute of India (SII).

#### 24. Sweets, souvenirs in Thulasendrapuram

- Celebrations broke out in **Thulasendrapuram**, the ancestral village of new U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris in Tiruvarur district of Tamil Nadu. The villagers said her assumption of office will strengthen the relationship between the two largest democracies.
- *"I never dreamt that a person with roots in our village would go on to hold the high office of the Vice President of the U.S. We are all very excited. It is a proud moment for each and every one of us,"* said J. Sudhakar, a villager.

#### 25. Centre offers to put off farm reforms for 18 months

- Farm union leaders will consider a proposal from the Union government to suspend the implementation of the three contentious farm reform laws for the next year and a half while a committee is formed to look into their demands. They will discuss the proposal internally and return with their response at the next round of discussions on Friday.
- The farmers have been protesting for more than 50 days now and their major demands have been a **repeal of the three laws on agricultural marketing**, and a **new legal guarantee for minimum support prices**.
- In order to increase the farmer unions' belief and trust in the fact that they are very serious and sincere about the suspension idea, the government said it is willing to do this **through an undertaking in the Supreme Court**. When the negotiations began on Wednesday, the unions raised the **issue of the National Intelligence Agency issuing notices** to supporters of the agitation, as well as FIRs filed against protesting farmers in Haryana.

#### 26. Dragon fruit story

- The Gujarat government has decided to rename the dragon fruit as '**kamalam**'. According to **Chief Minister Vijay Rupani**, the fruit's outer shape resembles a lotus. Another reason Mr. Rupani cited for renaming the fruit was that the word dragon reminded one of China.





## International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

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### Daily snippets

#### 1. Biden unveils \$1.9 trillion relief package

- President-elect Joe Biden has unveiled a **\$1.9 trillion coronavirus plan** to end “*a crisis of deep human suffering*” by speeding up vaccines and pumping out financial help to those struggling with the pandemic’s prolonged economic fallout.
- Called the “**American Rescue Plan**,” the proposal would meet Mr. Biden’s goal of **administering 100 million vaccines by the 100th day of his administration**, and advance his objective of re-opening most schools by the spring. On a parallel track, it delivers **another round of aid to stabilise the economy** while the public health effort seeks the upper hand on the pandemic.
- Mr. Biden proposed **\$1,400 cheques for most Americans**, which on top of \$600 provided in the most recent COVID-19 Bill would bring the total to the \$2,000 that Mr. Biden has called for. It would also extend a temporary **boost in unemployment benefits** and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through September. And it shoe horns in long term Democratic policy aims such as **increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour**, expanding paid leave for workers, and increasing **tax credits for families with children**.

#### 2. Mounting pressure on China, U.S. blacklists Xiaomi, CNOOC

- The U.S. government has blacklisted Chinese smartphone maker **Xiaomi Corp.** and China’s third largest national oil company for alleged military links, heaping pressure on Beijing in President Donald Trump’s last week in office.
- The Department of Defense added nine companies to its list of Chinese firms with military links, including Xiaomi and state owned plane manufacturer **Commercial Aircraft Corp. of China (Comac)**. Xiaomi Corp. overtook Apple Inc. as the world’s No. 3 smartphone maker by sales in the third quarter of 2020, according to data by Gartner.
- The move comes after about 60 Chinese companies were added to the list in December, including **drone maker DJI** and **semiconductor firm SMIC**. **CNOOC** has been involved in offshore drilling in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, where **Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with other countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Taiwan, and Malaysia**.

#### 3. Unveiled document highlights Trump’s mixed China legacy

- The newly declassified **2018 Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific**, made public by the Trump administration in its last week in office, underlines how prominently “**strategic competition between the U.S. and China**” set Washington’s regional policy over the past four years, and President Donald Trump’s mixed record in effectively addressing that challenge.
- Among the objectives outlined in the document are **promoting American values** throughout the region to “*counterbalance*” values being promoted by China, *detering China from using force or threats against U.S. allies*

and partners, and building a *credible economic response* and advancing “**U.S. global economic leadership**” to counter **China’s influence** and its projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

- The Trump administration certainly did achieve some of the outlined objectives, particularly in expanding security cooperation with India, Japan and Australia - or the “**Quad**”. However, its economic aspirations, as well as building a broader coalition to respond to China’s actions, remain, at best, work-in-progress.
- The end of his term, meanwhile, saw the China-backed **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** agreement come into force in November last year. This includes Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand - four countries that the U.S. had hoped to align with to offer a robust economic regional response to China.
- **Relations with India** emerge as one major positive. The framework describes as one of its “desired end states” the U.S. becoming **India’s “preferred partner on security issues”** - a trend that the past four years has certainly seen as well as the two countries cooperating to counter Chinese influence in South and Southeast Asia - which, however, remains a work in progress.

#### 4. [Dutch govt. resigns over child welfare scandal](#)

- **Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte** and his entire Cabinet resigned to take political responsibility for a scandal involving **investigations into child welfare payments** that wrongly labelled thousands of parents as fraudsters. The move was seen as largely symbolic as the government will remain in office until a new coalition is formed after a March 17 election in the Netherlands.

#### 5. [Fiji wins presidency of UN rights body](#)

- **The UN Human Rights Council** elected Fiji’s Ambassador as its **2021 President** in an unprecedented secret ballot after a diplomatic stand-off blocked the usual consensus decision. **Fiji’s Ambassador in Geneva, Nazhat Shameem Khan**, who served as the council’s Vice-President in 2020 and is considered a rights champion, won with 29 out of 47 votes.

#### 6. [After U.S., Russia pulls out of Open Skies treaty](#)

- Russia announced that it was pulling out of the **Open Skies treaty**, saying that the pact, which **allows unarmed surveillance flights over member countries**, had been seriously compromised by the withdrawal of the United States. The move, announced by Russia’s Foreign Ministry, comes days before U.S. President-elect Joe Biden’s January 20 inauguration amid fears of a burgeoning arms race.
- Moscow’s last major nuclear arms pact with Washington is set to expire next month. The **United States left the Open Skies arms control and verification treaty in November**, accusing Russia of violating it, something Moscow denied.
- **Open Skies” treaty** : The treaty **allows 34 countries to conduct unarmed surveillance flights** over one another’s territories. It was signed in 1992 and went into effect in 2002. The treaty was designed to enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants, regardless of size, a direct role in gathering information through aerial imaging on military forces and activities of concern to them.

#### 7. [Uganda’s Bobi Wine rejects election results, claims victory](#)

- **Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine** claimed victory in the presidential election, rejecting as a “*complete sham*” early results that gave **President Yoweri Museveni** a wide lead. Mr. Wine said he felt under threat as soldiers surrounded his home on Friday evening after he alleged that Thursday’s election was rigged and said “every legal option is on the table” to challenge the official results, including protests. He referred to himself as the “*President-elect.*”

## 8. [Sri Lanka's Tamil parties seek mechanism to probe 'war crimes'](#)

- Sri Lanka's main Tamil political parties have sought an international probe, including at the International Criminal Court (ICC), into allegations of **human rights abuses during the civil war**, deeming there is “no scope” for a domestic process that can “genuinely” deal with accountability.
- **UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva** usually evoke sharp and opposing views within Sri Lanka, with much of the Tamil polity pinning hopes on the Council for **wartime accountability**, while the southern Sinhala polity and its core electorate vehemently oppose any international interference in its affairs.
- In February last year, months after **President Gotabaya Rajapaksa** was elected to office, Sri Lanka formally notified the Human Right Council that it was withdrawing from the 2019 UN resolution on post war accountability and reconciliation, scheduled to be taken up in the upcoming session.
- Citing Sri Lanka's unfulfilled commitments to promote accountability and reconciliation, the Tamil leaders urged that UN organs, including the **UN Security Council and General Assembly**, to take “suitable action by reference to the International Criminal Court and any other appropriate and effective international accountability mechanisms to inquire into the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.” They also sought an international evidence gathering mechanism such as the one set up for Syria.

## 9. [Five Hong Kong activists who fled the city seek asylum in the U.S.](#)

- Five Hong Kong democracy protesters who reportedly fled to Taiwan have arrived in the United States intending to seek asylum. Their escape follows the **mass arrest of democracy figures in Hong Kong under a new national security law** that is part of a mounting crackdown by China on the financial hub.
- The **Hong Kong Democracy Council (HKDC)**, a U.S. based group, said it had welcomed a group of young activists to America this week and their journey had been “arduous and perilous”.
- After massive **democracy protests across Hong Kong in 2019** in which more than 11,000 people were arrested, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law late last June to silence dissent. In August, another group of 12 Hong Kong activists made an attempt to flee by speedboat to Taiwan but were arrested by Chinese coastguards. Last month, a Chinese court **jailed 10 of these 12 fugitives** for up to three years for “organising and participating in an illegal border crossing”.

## 10. [Merkel ally wins race to lead her party](#)

- **Armin Laschet**, the **new head of Germany's conservative CDU party**, is a sworn European and defender of multiculturalism who has promised to continue the centrist course of **Chancellor Angela Merkel**. The affable 59-year old was elected as head of the CDU on Saturday, beating corporate lawyer Friedrich Merz and foreign affairs expert Norbert Roettgen.
- The CDU chairman traditionally leads the party and its CSU Bavarian sister party to the polls, meaning Mr. Laschet is in with a fighting chance of becoming Germany's next Chancellor. He is a sworn Merkel loyalist who famously stuck by the Chancellor in 2015, when Germany left its borders open to hundreds of thousands of migrants from Syria and other hotspots.

## 11. [Museveni wins 6th term, amid allegations of rigged election](#)

- Uganda's Electoral Commission said that **President Yoweri Museveni** won a sixth five year term, extending his rule to four decades, while top **opposition challenger Bobi Wine** dismissed “cooked up, fraudulent results” and officials struggled to explain how polling results were compiled amid an Internet blackout.
- In a generational clash watched across the African continent with a booming young population and a host of ageing leaders, the 38 year old singer turned lawmaker Mr. Wine posed arguably Mr. Museveni's greatest

challenge yet. The self described “ghetto president” had strong support in urban centers where frustration with unemployment and corruption is high. He has claimed victory.

- The Electoral Commission said **Mr. Museveni received 58%** of ballots and **Mr. Wine 34%**, and voter turnout was 52%, in a process that the top U.S. diplomat to Africa called “*fundamentally flawed.*” The vote followed the East African country’s worst pre-election violence since the 76year old Mr. Museveni took office in 1986.

#### 12. Navalny detained in Moscow on arrival

- Russia’s prison service said **opposition leader Alexei Navalny** was detained at a Moscow airport after returning from Germany on Sunday. The prison service said he was detained for **multiple violations of parole and terms of a suspended prison sentence** and would be held in custody until a court makes a decision in his case.
- Mr. Navalny, who is President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent and determined foe, was returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from **poisoning by Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok**, which he blames on the Kremlin. Russia’s prison service last week issued a warrant for his arrest, saying he had violated the terms of suspended sentence he received on a 2014 conviction for embezzlement. The prison service has asked a Moscow court to turn Mr. Navalny’s 3-1/2year suspended sentence into a real one.

#### 13. Iran denies claim it was making nuclear weapons

- **Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif** on Sunday dismissed a claim by France that Tehran was in the process of building up its nuclear weapons, calling it “*absurd nonsense*”.
- **French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian**, in an interview said Iran was building up its nuclear weapons’ capacity and it was urgent that Tehran and Washington return to a 2015 nuclear deal. “*Dear colleague: You kick-started your cabinet career with arms sales to Saudi war criminals. Avoid absurd nonsense about Iran,*” Mr. Zarif said in a Twitter post, in which he tagged Mr. LeDrian.

#### 14. India ‘intervened’ on Jaffna varsity memorial issue

- A message from India to the Sri Lankan leadership on the controversial **demolition of a memorial for war victims at the Jaffna University** appears to have contributed to authorities’ decision to “*rebuild*” the structure on campus. A day after news of the latenight destruction of the monument broke, **Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay met Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.**
- It all began late evening on January 8, when Jaffna University authorities bulldozed a memorial erected two years ago, to commemorate the scores of civilians killed in the **final phase of Sri Lanka’s civil war in Mullivaikkal**, in 2009. The sudden, overnight removal of sculpture - of several hands held out of water - set off spontaneous student protests, and drew sharp criticism of the attempt to stifle Tamils’ right to remember their loved ones lost in war.

#### 15. U.K. urges China to grant UN access to Xinjiang

- Britain’s government on Sunday pressed China to allow UN rights inspectors to visit Xinjiang after raising new allegations of “*appalling*” **human rights abuses against the Uighur minority people.**
- **Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab** last week introduced import controls on firms that may have sourced goods from the region in northwest China using forced labour from the mainly **Muslim Uighur community.**
- Mr. Raab’s government opposes efforts underway in Parliament to give U.K. courts the power to declare a genocide in Xinjiang, which would bar the government from proceeding with any freetrade agreement with China.

#### 16. U.S., China spar over the origins of novel coronavirus

- The U.S. and China sparred over the **origins of the coronavirus pandemic**, the latest in a growing list of tensions that have left relations strained as President Donald Trump leaves office. In recent weeks, Washington and Beijing have clashed over **trade issues**, the **sanctioning of Chinese companies, Taiwan and Hong Kong**.
- In a reflection of the state of relations, China's official Xinhua news agency issued a commentary, headlined "*Good riddance, Trump administration and its final madness*", hitting out over the sanctioning of six Chinese officials related to Hong Kong. The latest spat followed the U.S. State Department on Friday releasing a "*fact-sheet*" **linking the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) to the start of the COVID-19 outbreak**, which brought another sharp response from Beijing.
- A team of scientists from the WHO arrived in Wuhan last week to research the origins of the outbreak. The agency said on Friday the world may never find "*patient zero*" as it continues its study into tracing the origins in China.

#### **17. Tunisia arrests 600 over riots, deploys troops**

- Tunisian authorities said on Monday they had arrested more than 600 people and deployed troops after a third consecutive night of riots, mostly by young people in working class districts of several cities.
- The unrest came despite a **nationwide pandemic lockdown** declared last Thursday - the day that also marked **10 years since demonstrators forced dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fall from power**. Many Tunisians are increasingly angered by poor public services and a political class that has repeatedly proved unable to govern coherently a decade on from the 2011 revolution. GDP shrank by 9% last year, consumer prices have spiraled and one-third of young people are unemployed.

#### **18. India, China to lead Asia's COVID vaccination plans**

- India and China are expected to take the lead in **driving Asia's vaccination plans** efforts, even as third waves of infections and stringent measures to curb fresh COVID-19 cases in **Japan, South Korea and some South-East Asian Nations** remain a dampener for Asia's uneven economic recovery, Moody's Analytics said in a note.
- "*As the largest producer of vaccines in the world, with 60% of the global share, India is well positioned to use its existing manufacturing capabilities to contribute to mass vaccine production and distribution needs for other countries in addition to meeting its domestic requirements,*" the note said. **Indonesia's approval of China's COVID-19 vaccine Sinovac** for emergency use, the first country outside China to do so, could open the door for other Asian economies to follow suit.

#### **19. U.S. won't lift travel ban: Biden team**

- Shortly after the U.S. President Donald **Trump announced the lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions** on parts of Europe and Brazil, the incoming **Biden administration said it would reverse the move**.
- Mr. Trump signed an executive order removing restrictions on air travel for most non U.S. citizens and permanent residents travelling from the Schengen Area, Ireland, the U.K. and Brazil starting January 26.

#### **20. An inauguration modified by security and health threats**

- The inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as President and Vice President of the U.S. will be a highly unusual affair this year - curtailed and modified by various forces gone out of control.
- The COVID-19 **pandemic and security threats from Trump supporters** in the aftermath of President Donald Trump's challenges to the results have compelled the Biden-Harris team to have an **inauguration that will not be accessible to the masses**, as is usually the case.
- The setting, Washington DC, will be transformed with some 25,000 National Guardsmen to secure the proceedings. Additionally, the **Trumps will be conspicuous by their absence**, and the ceremony will

consequently need further modification. Vice-President Mike Pence and Second Lady Karen Pence are expected to attend the inauguration, as are former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

#### 21. [Biden to introduce Bill for eight-year citizenship path](#)

- United States President elect Joe Biden plans to unveil a sweeping **immigration Bill** on the first day of his administration, hoping to provide **an eight year path** to citizenship for an estimated 11 million people living in the U.S. without legal status - a **massive reversal from the Trump administration's harsh immigration policies**.
- The Bill puts Mr. Biden on track to deliver on a major campaign promise important to Latino voters and other immigrant communities after four years of President Donald Trump's restrictive policies and mass deportations.

#### 22. [Sudan troops deployed in Darfur after clashes](#)

- A heavy Sudanese troop presence helped restore calm on Tuesday in Darfur after three days of inter-ethnic violence that claimed at least 155 lives and displaced tens of thousands. West Darfur authorities have imposed a statewide curfew.

#### 23. [UN calls on Israel to halt work at West Bank](#)

- **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres** urged Israel to "*halt and reverse*" its decision to build 800 homes for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank. He said the decision was "*a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution*"
- The two-state solution to the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** envisions an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, west of the Jordan River.

#### 24. [Chinese COVID-19 vaccines find takers in Southeast Asia](#)

- China has signed **deals with as many as 20 countries**, many of which are in Southeast Asia, to offer its home developed COVID-19 vaccines, Chinese media has reported.
- With **five vaccines being developed in China**, Beijing is offering them both as donations and on a commercial basis. Among the countries that are ordering Chinese vaccines are Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Algeria, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan, Brazil, Ukraine, and Serbia. **Pakistan on Monday became the first country in South Asia to approve a Chinese vaccine**, giving the nod for emergency use for Sinopharm's vaccine.

#### 25. [Biden sworn in, delivers message of unity, hope](#)

- **Joseph R. Biden Jr.** was sworn in as the **46th President of the U.S.** Addressing the country for the first time as President, **Mr. Biden delivered a message of unity and hope** while laying out the enormous challenges faced by the country, from a raging pandemic to deep political divisions and frayed race relations.
- Mr. Biden was administered the oath by **Chief Justice John Roberts**. Just prior to that, **Kamala Devi Harris, the first woman, African American and Indian American to hold the post**, was sworn in by **Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor - the first Latina in the U.S.'s top court**.

#### 26. [Uganda: Polls apart](#)

- **Yoweri Museveni**, Uganda's 76-year old leader who has been in power since 1986, won another five year term in the January 14 presidential election, but the contested result has pushed the country into its **worst political crisis in decades**.
- According to Uganda's Electoral Commission, he won nearly 59% of the vote, while his main rival, **Robert Kyagulanyi, a pop musician better known by his stage name Bobi Wine**, secured 34%. **Mr. Wine has alleged**

**voter fraud**, which the government was quick to dismiss, while putting him and several other leaders of his National Unity Platform under house arrest.

- It appears that Mr. Museveni, whose **National Resistance Movement** came to power by waging a guerrilla war in the 1980s, seems determined to prevent Mr. Wine even coming close to power. Uganda has long been torn by coups and violence before Mr. Museveni's rise. Even after **Idi Amin, the infamous dictator, was overthrown in 1979**, politics remained volatile and violent.
- In 2005, Mr. **Museveni amended the Constitution to remove the presidential term limits** and in 2017, signed a law scrapping the age limit of 75 for presidential candidates. He might continue in office, but his greed for power and disregard for a fair electoral process and rights, coupled with economic woes, have already left cracks in his support base. Mr. Wine, in a short span, has emerged as the President's most potent political rival.

## **27. The many infirmities of China's Western Theatre Command**

- In the first week of the new year, **Chinese President Xi Jinping** instructed his armed forces to be "*combat ready to act at any second*" as they began their new training exercises. Mr. Xi also issued new rules for the selection, training and promotion of military personnel. There were several reasons for this aggressive rhetoric.
- *Firstly*, with Joe Biden assuming the U.S. Presidency on January 20, **Mr. Xi wants to signal confidence and military preparedness** in responding to new U.S. policies on the **freedom of navigation** operations in the South China Sea and Taiwan straits. *Secondly*, **Mr. Xi's aggressive pursuit of disputed territories** in the South China Sea, Taiwan and across borders with India has increased the chances of military conflicts. *Thirdly*, the **performance of China's Western Theatre Command (WTC) in Ladakh last year was below par**. It suffered a high number of casualties in the June 15 Galwan valley clash. The Indian Army also captured the strategic mountainous heights at Rezang La and other passes.
- The country's armed forces also suffer from a **number of other structural issues** : they are a political and not a professional force, and the personnel are mostly conscripts with low levels of education and low motivation (mostly from one-child families). They lack a tough mindset and battlefield experience, and face a serious problem of 'brain drain'. These limitations will certainly affect the performance of the Chinese armed forces in a war with any professional army, as was seen in Ladakh.

## **28. U.S. to review Houthi terrorist label, says Blinken**

- U.S. President Joe Biden's administration will quickly **revisit the designation of Yemen's Houthi rebels as terrorists** and end support to the devastating Saudi offensive on the country, **Secretary of State, Antony Blinken**, said.
- At his confirmation hearing, Mr. Blinken said he would "*immediately*" review the outgoing Trump administration's labelling of the Iran-linked insurgents, fearing the move was worsening a humanitarian crisis. Mr. Trump has been a staunch ally of Saudi Arabia, offering U.S. logistical help and military sales for its six year campaign to dislodge the rebels who have taken over much of the neighbouring country.
- The United Nations and aid groups have warned the terrorist designation risks worsening the plight of a country where millions depend on aid to survive. The designation took effect on Tuesday, with the Houthis warning that they would respond to any action against them.

## **29. Pakistan test-fires nuclear-capable missile**

- Pakistan on Wednesday said it has successfully test-fired a *nuclear-capable surface-to surface ballistic missile* which can strike targets up to 2,750 km. The launch of **Shaheen-III missile** was "*aimed at revalidating various design and technical parameters of the weapon system*", said a statement issued by the media wing of the Pakistani Army.

### 30. [China sanctions 28 Trump administration officials](#)

- China announced sanctions on 28 officials connected to the outgoing Donald Trump administration, **including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo**, just as the new United States President, Joe Biden, was taking his oath of office.
- The Ministry said *“these individuals and their immediate family members are prohibited from entering the mainland, Hong Kong and Macao of China”* and *“they and the companies and institutions associated with them are also restricted from doing business with China”*. The announcement came as China and the U.S. clashed over the Trump administration, on its last day, accusing China of committing *“genocide”* and *“crimes against humanity”* against its minority **Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang**.
- This followed a number of recent measures that have brought relations with China to a low, with **both sides clashing over Taiwan, Hong Kong as well as sanctions on Chinese firms**. Mr. Biden, during the election campaign, had also described what China was doing in Xinjiang, where around a million people have been forced to *“reeducation”* centres, as *“genocide”*. The declaration by the U.S. will likely mean a continuation of sanctions, including a **ban on imports of cotton and tomatoes from Xinjiang** as well as designations of Chinese officials seen to be involved in the Xinjiang policy.

### 31. [Israel rights group breaks taboo with ‘apartheid’ tag](#)

- An Israeli nongovernmental organisation has accused the Jewish state of *“apartheid”* **in its treatment of Palestinians** - a taboo-breaking move that has seen its representatives banned from speaking in schools. **B’Tselem** said it carefully weighed its decision to use the hugely emotive phrase but concluded that it was an accurate description of **Israel’s attitude both to residents of the occupied Palestinian territories** and to its own Arab citizens.
  - **Israel-Palestine Conflict** : Israel occupied the West Bank, including Arab east Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in the **Six-Day War of 1967**. Today it is home to at least five million Palestinians defined by the United Nations as living under Israeli occupation. Arab Israelis - Palestinians who stayed on their land following the Jewish state's creation in 1948 and their descendants - make up about **20% of Israel’s roughly nine million people**. By law they have rights equal to those of Jewish citizens, but they say that in practice they suffer discrimination in employment, housing, policing and other essentials.
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## Opinions and Analysis

### Opinion : Can courts stay laws made by the legislature?

#### 1. Background

- The Supreme Court's recent order staying the implementation of three farm laws, while appointing a four member committee to thrash out issues between agitating farmers and the Union government, has been criticised in some quarters. Many have questioned the suspension of action under the laws as **such interim orders are extremely rare**. The court did not accept the Attorney General's argument that **laws made by the legislature should not be ordinarily stayed**, as there is a presumption of constitutionality in favour of the laws.

#### 2. What the court opined

- *"This court cannot be said to be completely powerless to grant stay of any executive action under a statutory enactment,"* the Bench observed in its order. The Supreme Court observed that a stay on the farm laws' implementation may assuage the hurt feelings of farmers and encourage them to come to the negotiating table.

#### 3. On Judicial Review

- Under the broad framework of judicial review under the Constitution, the Supreme Court and High Courts have the **power to declare any law unconstitutional**, either because it is ultra vires or it violates any of the fundamental rights, or invalid because it is repugnant to a central law on the same subject or has been enacted without legislative jurisdiction.
- However, interim orders staying or suspending laws enacted by the legislature are frowned upon by constitutional courts and legal scholars. The main principle is that suspending a law made by the legislature **goes against the concept of separation of powers**. Courts are expected to defer to the legislature's wisdom at the threshold of a legal challenge to the validity of a law. The validity of a law ought to be considered normally only at the time of final adjudication, and not at the initial stage. Case law suggests that in some cases, High Courts indeed stayed the operation of some laws. However, the Supreme Court took a dim view.

### Analysis : U.S. & Section 230

#### 1. The story so far:

- In the U.S., **Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA)** regulates online publication and liability. Specifically, the 1996 law states: *"No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."* Author and cybersecurity lawyer Jeff Kosseff describes the law as *'the 26 words that created the internet'*.
- But the legislation has come in the crosshairs of both Republicans and Democrats. U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly called for it to be repealed, including days ago, when he was suspended, first temporarily and

then indefinitely, by social media sites, including **Twitter and Facebook**. President-elect Joe Biden has also called for the law's repeal.

## 2. Why was the law passed?

- The law grants **Internet platforms immunity for almost all content posted by users** - it is because of Section 230 of the CDA that Twitter is not normally liable for the content of tweets posted by its users, and Google is protected when a restaurant tries to sue it for a bad user review, for instance. The law was passed in the aftermath of two court cases against Internet service providers, and different courts had ruled differently on the extent of liability for content hosting, and the extent of this liability itself.

## 3. Where do Republicans and Democrats stand on the law?

- Republicans oppose Section 230 because for long, they have accused **social media giants of silencing or stifling conservative voices**. Democrats oppose it because they want greater policing of the Internet to tackle extremism, abuse and misinformation.

## 4. How has the industry reacted to the opposition?

- In general, the tech industry has said any changes to the law must consider the impact on First Amendment rights (free speech), business and innovation. In June 2019, **the Internet Association**, whose members include Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc., came out in **support of Section 230**.

## On the vaccination drive

### 1. Scientists divided over Covaxin nod

- Scientists and doctors are divided on the issue of **restricted use approval granted to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin**, a COVID-19 vaccine, even as India prepares to vaccinate three crore people. On Thursday, the health Ministry released a statement by four dozen scientists and doctors to "*collectively assure*" the safety of the vaccines. Scientists on the other side say, "*It is imperative that relevant data from the **larger Phase-III trial** become available before administering the vaccine to large numbers of people.*" They also add: "*A greater degree of transparency prior to the start of the vaccination programme is essential. This is especially true for Covaxin, for which Phase-III safety and efficacy data are not yet available.*"
- Dr. Sunil Kumar Arora from the Department of Immunopathology at PGIMER Chandigarh, said that even **robust immunogenicity data from Phase-II** cannot be used as a substitute for efficacy data from Phase-III trials.
- "*To talk of the need for safety in a vaccination program where many hundreds of millions of healthy people will be vaccinated is not about "vested interests", "defamation" and "irresponsible statements",* says Dr. Gautam Menon, Professor of Physics and biology at the Ashoka University. *By not waiting for efficacy data from Phase-III trials, the Indian regulator has bypassed the approval process even for restricted use,* says Dr. Aniket Sule from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR).

### 2. DCGI nod for Phase 3 trial of Sputnik V

- **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories** has received the approval of the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to conduct Phase-III clinical trial for **Russia's COVID-19 vaccine candidate, Sputnik V**, in the country. The Phase-III trial will be conducted on 1,500 subjects as part of the **randomised, double blind, parallel group, placebo** controlled study in India, said the firm.
- Dr. Reddy's and **Russian Direct Investment Fund** had announced a partnership in September on clinical trials for Sputnik V and its distribution rights in India.

### 3. Pregnancy and vaccine

- Pregnant and lactating women have **not been a part of any COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial** so far and should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine at this time, **cautioned the Health Ministry** in its note on precautions and contraindications for the vaccines.
- In the recent COVID scenario in India, India is reporting **one new death per million population in the last seven days**, with a case fatality rate of 1.44%. **Deaths per million population in India are among the lowest** in the world, said the Ministry.

### 4. Consent form mandatory for Covaxin shot

- Those receiving Covaxin have been asked to **sign a consent form** before being vaccinated as the vaccine *“has been allowed by the government in clinical trial mode”*. The form adds that compensation for serious adverse events will be paid by the company if it is proven to be causally related to the vaccine.
- *“The clinical efficacy of Covaxin is yet to be established and it is still being studied in phase 3 clinical trials. Hence, it is important to appreciate that receiving the vaccine does not mean that other precautions related to COVID-19 need not be followed. The Central Licensing Authority has granted permission for Covaxin for restricted use in emergency situations in public interest... in clinical trial mode,”* the form says.
- The recipients will be handed over a fact sheet and a form to report adverse effects, in which they have to note down symptoms like fever, pain within seven days. Currently beneficiaries don't have a choice of vaccine and several Central government hospitals in Delhi - AIIMS, Safdarjung, Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, Kalawati Saran Children Hospital - administered Covaxin to its staff under the first round of vaccination.

## Analysis : Update debate

### 1. Background

- WhatsApp's decision to delay the **update of its privacy policy**, following a backlash from its users, is an implicit acknowledgement of the increasing role played by perceptions about privacy in the continued well being of a popular service.
- According to the new policy users would no longer be able to opt out of sharing data with Facebook. February 8 was kept as the deadline for the new terms to be accepted. The WhatsApp policy update has clearly spooked many users, who, concerned about their privacy getting compromised, have shifted to alternative platforms such as **Signal and Telegram**.

### 2. How WhatsApp reacted

- An under fire WhatsApp, on its part, has tried to allay fears about privacy being compromised because of the updates. It has put out numerous messages and taken out advertisements to convey that the changes are *“related to optional business features on WhatsApp, and provides further transparency about how we collect and use data”*.
- The change will **ultimately be inevitable**, given that WhatsApp, bought by Facebook for a whopping \$19 billion and having subsequently given up plans to charge its users, would be betting on its handling of business interactions to make its big monies.

### 3. WhatsApp and GDPR lessons

- It cannot force these changes on its users in Europe, for, Europe's stringent **General Data Protection Regulation**, more popularly called GDPR, prevents such sharing between apps. India could do with such a law. All it has is a

draft version of a law, and it has been so for a few years now. **Privacy of a billion citizens** is too important a thing to be left just to the practices of a commercial enterprise.





## Science & Technology and Environment

### Daily snippets

#### 1. Gujarat rivers remain highly polluted

- The unchecked flow of **untreated industrial effluent** into rivers in Gujarat has led to increasing pollution in the **Sabarmati, Mahisagar, Narmada, Vishwamitri and Bhadar**. According to data from the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), the **Sabarmati is among the most polluted rivers** in the country. Gujarat ranks fourth among the top five States with highly polluted rivers, with as many as **20 rivers in the critically polluted category**.
- Both treated and untreated effluent is released into the estuary of the Mahisagar and Gulf of Cambay, flouting the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). As per the official parameters, if the **chemical oxygen demand (COD)**, which indicates organic pollutant load, is **higher than 250 mg per litre**, then it should not be released into the rivers. Most of the Gujarat rivers where the effluents are dumped into, the COD level is in the **range of 700 to 1000 mg per litre**. While **Dissolved Oxygen (DO) level** [indicating the health of a river] in perennial rivers like Mahisgar should be in the range of 6 to 8mg per litre, it is actually below 2.9 mg per litre. The State government has now proposed a ₹2,300 crore project for a deep sea effluent disposal pipeline to cater to nearly 4,500 industrial units.

#### 2. Migratory birds flock to Punjab wetland

- Winter migratory water birds using the **central Asian flyway** have started making a beeline to **Punjab's Harike wetland**. Birds such as *the Eurasian coot, greylag goose, barheaded goose, gadwall* and *the northern shoveler* are the prominent ones that could be sighted at Harike. Among other species, *common pochard, spotbilled duck, little cormorant, pied avocet, great cormorant, ferruginous pochard* and *common teal* have been spotted. On an average, the number has been **anywhere between 92,000 and 94,000 over the years**. The average number has been stable.

#### 3. The threat of deepfakes

- Deep fakes- synthetic media, meaning media (including images, audio and video) that are either manipulated or wholly generated by Artificial Intelligence - have the power to threaten the electoral outcome of democracies like the US.
- The cyberworld has been facing the challenge of deepfakes for a while now. AI is used for fabricating audios, videos and texts to show real people saying and doing things they never did, or creating new images and videos. Detection can often be done only by AI generated tools. Threats of AI-generated content comprising non-existent personalities, synthetic datasets, unreal activities of real people, and content manipulation. Deepfakes can target anyone, anywhere.
- According to **Section 230** of the **Communications Decency Act of 1996 in the US**, a law which protects freedom of expression and innovation on the Internet, "*No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.*" This means that the companies are not responsible for the posts on their platforms.

- India too has not enacted **any specific legislation** to deal with deepfakes, though there are some provisions in the Indian Penal Code that criminalise certain forms of **online/social media content manipulation**. The **Information Technology Act, 2000** covers certain cyber crimes. But this law and the **Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018** are inadequate to deal with content manipulation on digital platforms.
- As innovation in deepfakes gets better, AI-based automated tools must be invented accordingly for detection. Blockchains are robust against many security threats and can be used to digitally sign and affirm the validity of a video or document. Educating media users about the capabilities of AI algorithms could help.





## Economics and Finance

### Daily snippets

#### 1. India's trade with China : Statistics

- India's trade with China declined last year to the lowest level since 2017, with the trade deficit narrowing to a five-year low as the country imported far fewer goods from its northern neighbour. Bilateral trade **slid 5.6% to \$87.6 billion**, according to new figures from **China's General Administration of Customs (GAC)**.
- India's imports from China **shrank by 10.8% to \$66.7 billion**, marking the **lowest level of inbound shipments** since 2016. India's exports to China, however, jumped 16%, crossing the \$20 billion mark for the first time to a **record high of \$20.86 billion**. The **trade deficit**, a source of friction in bilateral ties, shrank to \$45.8 billion, the lowest level since 2015.
- It is however, difficult to determine whether 2020 is an exception or marks a turn away from the recent pattern of India's trade with China, especially since there is, as yet, no evidence to suggest India has replaced its import dependence on China by either sourcing those goods elsewhere or manufacturing them at home.
- China was *"the world's only major economy to have registered positive growth in foreign trade in goods,"* said Li Kuiwen, spokesperson of the GAC, with China's foreign trade and exports in the first 10 months of the year accounting for a record 12.8% and 14.2% share of the global totals, respectively. China posted sharp increases with most of its major trading partners.
- Despite the trade war with the U.S. and the pandemic, two-way trade was **up 8.3% to \$586 billion**, with China's exports rising 7.9% to reach a record \$451 billion. The **trade surplus with the U.S. expanded to \$317 billion in 2020**, compared with the \$288 billion figure at the end of President Donald Trump's first year in office in 2017, underlining the limited impact of his tariff measures as he ends his presidency.

#### 2. Forex reserves increase to \$586 billion

- Foreign exchange reserves **rose by \$758 million to reach a record high of \$586.08 billion** in the week ended January 8, RBI data showed. In the week ended January 1, the reserves had increased by \$4.48 billion to \$585.32 billion. Gold reserves rose \$568 million to \$37.59 billion in the reporting week.

#### 3. US departments to pare purchases from China

- U.S. President Donald Trump directed government departments to look at ways to **minimise procurement of Chinese goods and services** to reduce the risks from espionage. In a statement, **National Security Advisor, Robert O'Brien** accused China of targeting the information systems of the U.S. government for personnel records, military plans, and other data through cyber and other means. A key aim was to push back against Chinese attempts to **infiltrate the U.S. IT networks**.

#### 4. Aiding fiscal sustainability : RBI Governor

- **Maintaining and improving the quality of expenditure** would help address the objectives of fiscal sustainability while supporting growth, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said. As per IMF's calculations, the **total fiscal support in response to COVID-19** amounted to about 12% of global GDP by mid September 2020.
- He said although the scale of fiscal spending was expected to breach the quantitative targets of fiscal prudence across most economies in the short run, it was crucial in the context of the pandemic from the perspective of the welfare aspect of public expenditure.
- *"Expenditure on physical and social infrastructure including **human capital, science and technology** is not only welfare enhancing, it also paves the way for higher growth through their higher multiplier effect and enhancement of **both capital and labour productivity**,"* Mr. Das said. It becomes imperative that fiscal road maps are defined not only in terms of quantitative parameters like fiscal balance to GDP ratio or debt to GDP ratio, but also in terms of measurable parameters relating to quality of expenditure, both for the Centre and States. He also said that the **principal objective** of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) during the pandemic was to **support economic activity**. *"Looking back, it is evident that our policies have helped in easing the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic,"* he said.

#### 5. [China's economy grows 2.3%, slowest pace in 44 years](#)

- China said on Monday the nation's economy expanded in 2020 by 2.3% , the slowest pace of growth since the end of **Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in 1976**. China will, however, likely be the only major economy to have avoided a contraction in a pandemic hit year.
- China's economy contracted 6.8% in the first quarter. The stringent lockdown did, however, allow the country to broadly curb the spread of COVID-19 at home by the summer. The economy recovered to grow 3.2% in the second quarter, 4.9% in the third and 6.5% in the last quarter of 2020.
- However, the **Chinese government's long-term plan to rebalance growth** and rely more on domestic consumption rather than state-led investment, ended up taking a step backward, as did its efforts to trim the ballooning national debt. A **range of stimulus measures**, largely led by spending on infrastructure projects, was the main driver of growth in 2020 along with a rebound in exports, which grew 10.9% in December and 4% last year.

#### 6. [India may raise import duties by 5-10%](#)

- India is considering **raising import duties by 5%-10%** on more than 50 items including smartphones, electronic components and appliances in the upcoming budget. The move to increase import duties is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **self reliant India campaign** that aims to promote and support domestic manufacturing.
- India's finance minister will on Feb. 1 unveil the central government's annual budget for the 202122 financial year, which begins on April 1. India has in recent years taken a series of measures that industry executives say discriminate against foreign companies. Last year, **India raised duties** on a range of products such as footwear, furniture, toys, electrical and electronics items by up to 20%.

#### 7. [Native 5g model must to aid education, agri, healthcare](#)

- *"Indian players must be proactive in creating **an inclusive Indian 5G model** as the country's appetite for mobile technology is going to be so huge,"* said Ravi Shankar Prasad, **Union Minister for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology and Law & Justice**.
- *"We have become the second biggest mobile manufacturer in the world, and it is my wish to make India number one... We must also become a lead player in laptops, machine-to-machine equipment, tablets and IoT devices. We can easily create that ecosystem,"* he said.

## 8. Online gaming bats for one regulator

- The online gaming industry has asked the government think tank NITI Aayog to set up a single, self regulatory body to standardise regulations governing the **entire online skill gaming industry**, instead of just fantasy sports. The recommendation follows a draft report wherein the NITI Aayog has suggested the setting up a single, self regulatory body for fantasy sports. The size of India's online skill gaming industry is estimated at about **₹5,250 crore, according to KPMG**.

## 9. Possible Investment rule changes in the e-commerce sector

- India is considering revising its **foreign investment rules** for e-commerce. The government discussions coincide with a growing number of complaints from India's bricks and mortar retailers, which have for years accused Amazon and Walmart Inc. controlled Flipkart of creating complex structures to bypass federal rules, allegations the U.S. companies deny.
- India only allows foreign ecommerce players to **operate as a marketplace** to connect buyers and sellers. It prohibits them from holding inventories of goods and directly selling them on their platforms. Among other changes, the government is considering changes that would prohibit online sales by a seller who purchases goods from the e-commerce entity or its group firm, and then sells them on the entity's websites.
- India's e-commerce retail market is seen growing to \$200 billion a year by 2026, from \$30 billion in 2019, **investment promotion agency Invest India estimates**.

## 10. India must remain a part of global economy

- India must remain an **integral part of the global economy** if it has to grow at 9-10% over the next three decades, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said. Speaking at the **15th India Digital Summit**, he said India needs to **become a major global exporting nation**. Without it, it will not be possible to become richer and create wealth for its people over the next three decades.
- *"If India has to grow at 9-10% over a three decade period, it must be open, it must be an integral part of the global economy. It must be an integral part of the global supply chain,"* he said. According to the NITI Aayog CEO, post COVID-19 pandemic, only those countries will grow who will **use the digital ecosystem**. On the **production linked incentive (PLI) plan**, Mr. Kant said the scheme in electronics and mobile manufacturing has received a very good response.

## 11. Founder Jack Ma appears in public

- Alibaba founder Jack Ma made his first public appearance since early November. Alibaba's shares surged 8% in Hong Kong after Mr. Ma's first appearance in close to three months, as he appeared *"during a rural teacher-themed social welfare event via video link"*, Chinese media reported. There has been speculation about Mr. Ma after he kept a low profile in the wake of recent troubles surrounding his group.
- The State Administration for Market Regulation had said it had initiated a probe into Alibaba's *"suspected monopolistic acts"* including *"forcing merchants to choose one platform between two competitors"*.

## 12. Emerging market NPAs to continue rising : S&P

- The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath will continue to dominate the **credit story for emerging markets (EMs)**, including India in 2021, S&P Global Ratings said in a report.
- We expect non performing loans to continue increasing and cost of risk to stabilise at high levels as central banks start to remove regulatory forbearance measures in some of the markets where such measures were implemented and banks start recognising the full extent of asset quality deterioration."

- *“In India, SMEs [accounted] for around 20% of total exposures at mid-2020. Stress in SMEs is somewhat **tempered by the government’s guarantee of new loans taken by SMEs,**” up to 20% of their total loans, it said.*

### 13. **Weak reform push, financial sector woes may damp growth**

- **Fitch Ratings** said India’s medium term growth potential is at about 6.5% but **weak implementation of reforms,** combined with continued financial sector problems, could lower its potential. It said the **revival of the reform agenda** is among the Indian government’s policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shock. However, the process of reform in India remains complex, and implementation at times has proven difficult Fitch said.
- The ratings agency last week said India’s gross domestic product (GDP) would **expand by 11% in the financial year 2021-22,** after witnessing a 9.4% contraction in the current fiscal period ending in March 2021.

### 14. **CCI plans to export 10 lakh bales of cotton**

- The **Cotton Corporation of India (CCI)** plans to export at least 10 lakh bales of cotton during the current season. The CCI is active mainly in Telangana and Maharashtra. Of the cotton procured so far, it had sold 12 lakh bales to the domestic textile sector. The CCI has till now exported about 25,000 bales. It is looking at a minimum of 10 lakh bales for export this season, a **majority of which would be to Bangladesh.**





## Sports

### Daily snippets

#### 1. McNeal suspended for doping violation

- Olympic **100m hurdles champion Brianna McNeal** has been provisionally suspended for doping violations, the **Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU)** announced. The 29-year-old American, who claimed **Olympic gold in Rio de Janeiro in 2016** and also **won World gold in Moscow in 2013**, was charged with "tampering" with part of a doping control, AIU said. She faces the prospect of missing the rescheduled Tokyo Games later this year.

#### 2. Thailand Open : India's campaign comes to an end

- Former World No. 1 Saina Nehwal was knocked out of the **Yonex Thailand Open Super 1000** event. In men's singles, another former World No. 1 **K. Srikanth** conceded a walkover to his eighth seeded Malaysian opponent Lee Zii Jia after pulling his right calf muscle.
  - The **Indian men's doubles** pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also bowed out of the competition after a 21-19, 21-17 defeat to the second seeded Indonesian combination of Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan. Later in the day, Satwik and his **mixed doubles** partner **Ashwini Ponnappa** went down 21-12, 21-17 to the Hong Kong pairing of Chang Tak Ching and Ng Wing Yung.
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## Suggested Readings

1. Homemaker's contribution, [Link to article](#)
2. Profile : Nani Palkhivala, [Link to article](#)
3. Delhi High Court on RTI, [Link to article](#)
4. The ongoing struggle for Women's Freedoms, [Link to article](#)
5. A Non Criminalizing Crime : Marital Rape, [Link to article](#)
6. Right to internet : Fundamental Right, [Link to article](#)
7. Bridging the gap between dreams and reality, [Link to article](#)
8. Women's autonomy and Protection, [Link to article](#)
9. Responsibility of the Custodes and Farm Laws Committee, [Link to article](#)
10. Balance Sheet of a Bad Bank, [Link to article](#)
11. Sikhs for Justice and NIA, [Link to article](#)
12. Reservation to Transgender Community, [Link to article](#)
13. Courts, CAG and the Process of Conducting an Audit, [Link to article](#)
14. Profile : Dr. V Shanta, [Link to article](#)
15. India-Australia and the Gabba, [Link to article](#)
16. Arrest warrant against journalist Paranjay Guha Thakurta in Adani Defamation case, [Link to article](#)
17. On Farm Protection Laws, [Link to article](#)
18. On Housework Valuation, [Link to article](#)
19. Privacy and the Signal App, [Link to article](#)

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**\*There was no dailyNEWSpage for January 15th, 2021.**

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

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