

G.K snippets...



1. **Gupkar Alliance** is a coalition of Jammu and Kashmir political parties

Law, Policy and Governance



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Employer free to reject overqualified aspirant: Supreme Court](#)

- The Supreme Court has held that a prospective employer has discretion not to appoint a candidate who may have a “higher qualification”, but not the one prescribed for the job vacancy. A Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan said courts have limited judicial review over such decisions by employers. Discretion lies with the employer.
- The judgment came on an appeal filed by the Punjab National Bank against an Orissa High Court decision allowing an overqualified candidate to be appointed as a peon. The Supreme Court set aside the High Court decision of November 22, 2019 upholding an overqualified candidate’s claim to a job as peon in the bank.

2. [Karnataka High Court issues direction to ensure sale of green crackers](#)

- The Karnataka High Court directed the State government to strictly ensure that only green fire-crackers, containing the distinct green logo of the (CSIR-NEERI) and the Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organisation (PESO), and a Quick Response (QR) code on their packaging, are sold across the State.
- The Court also directed authorised officers, police and the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board to regularly inspect stalls. The Court asked the government to give wide publicity through various media platforms.

3. [Forest rights claims of 1,200 tribals rejected](#)

- Over 1,200 tribals in Hunsur taluk of Mysuru district stare at an uncertain future as their review petition for recognition of their claims over forest land under the **Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**, has been rejected by the local authorities. NGOs in Karnataka alleged that review was done cursorily, and fear that more applications may be rejected

- The Supreme Court in 2019 ordered the eviction of nearly a million people across India, whose claims under the forest rights acts had been rejected. But the court stayed its earlier order and directed all State governments to file a review petition and submit a report.
- The FRA was enacted 13 years ago to recognise the rights of the tribals over the forests, apart from community rights over common property resources.
- [What is the Act](#)

4. [Former CEC calls for a ban on opinion polls](#)

- Former **Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi** called for a ban on opinion polls and also suggested counting of votes from the **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** slips instead of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
- Mr. Quraishi said the EC had been a “powerful neutral umpire” and never missed a deadline for elections. He also flagged the problem of “criminalisation”
- Among the reforms he suggested were:
 - Changing the process of removal of Election Commissioners, who can be removed on the recommendation of the CEC while the removal of the CEC is by impeachment.
 - The EC should have the power to de-register political parties.
 - Opinion polls should be banned.

5. [Ministry seeks feedback on draft social security rules](#)

- The Union Labour and Employment Ministry has notified the draft rules under the Code on Social Security, 2020, which propose to provide the unorganised sector, gig and platform workers access to social security benefits through a government portal.
- The Ministry said the rules had been framed for the implementation of the provisions of the Code on Social Security, 2020, passed by Parliament in September. The rules also provide for the Aadhaar based registration of BOCW on a portal of the Centre, State government or the BOCW welfare board of the State.

6. [‘Accused can get bail if probe is not over in time’](#)

- The Supreme Court has held in a judgment that an accused, irrespective of the merits of the case against him, should be granted “default” or “compulsive” bail if the investigating agency does not complete the probe within a prescribed time limit.
- Under Section 167, an accused can be detained in custody for a maximum of 90 days for a crime punishable with death, life imprisonment or a sentence of over 10 years. It is 60 days of detention if the probe relates to any other offence. These time limits were set to ensure that agencies do not use the ruse of an ongoing probe to keep people behind bars indefinitely.
- The Court also held that Magistrates have to mandatorily inform the accused, especially those from the poor sections, of their statutory right to apply for default bail.

7. [Judge recuses himself from Jagan Reddy case](#)

- **Justice U.U. Lalit** of the Supreme Court rescued himself from hearing separate **writ petitions** that sought action against the Andhra Pradesh government and **Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy** for levelling allegations against Supreme Court **judge N.V. Ramana** and other High Court judges.
- The judge withdrew from hearing the case, explaining that he had, as a lawyer, represented some of the parties involved in the case. The Bench then recorded a short order, requesting **Chief Justice of India (CJI) S.A. Bobde** to list the case before an appropriate Bench.

8. Winter session of Parliament unlikely amid rising COVID cases

- The winter session of Parliament that usually commences by last week of November is unlikely to be held due to the high number of COVID-19 cases in Delhi. **The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA)** meets to decide the dates for the session and the announcement has to be made giving Members of Parliament at least two weeks' notice. So far, the CCPA has not met and the government is mulling over combining the Budget session of Parliament, which usually begins on February 1, and the winter session.
- The Constitution of India mandates there should **not be a gap of six months** or more between two sessions. With the monsoon session of Parliament held in September, the government has no constitutional compulsion to hold a winter session.

9. Comply with FDI ceiling, govt. tells digital news firms

- The **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** issued a detailed notification asking digital news portals to comply with the 26% cap on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) sanctioned last year.
- The only major departure is that now even the companies with investment below the 26% cap have to intimate the Ministry about the share-holding pattern along with the **"names and addresses of its directors/shareholders"**. The firms which have more than 26% of FDI have been instructed to take steps to bring down the figure before October 15, 2021.

10. Mechanisms against fake NEWS

- The Supreme Court asked the Centre to explain its **"mechanism" against fake news and bigotry on air**, and to create one if it did not already exist. The Court said that the inability on the government's part may well see the job go to an "outside agency".
- Chief Justice Bobde, heading a three judge Bench, said the court was "disappointed" with the contents of the **latest government affidavit**, filed by Information and Broadcasting Secretary Amit Khare, **in the Tablighi Jamaat case**. The affidavit said media coverage "predominantly struck a balanced and neutral perspective" in the past few months.

11. Lack of consent by state won't vitiate CBI probe

- The Supreme Court has held that once a court takes cognisance of a corruption case investigated by the CBI, it **cannot be set aside for lack of the State government's prior consent** for the probe against some of the accused, unless it is shown that it has resulted in prejudice. The judgment came in appeals challenging a judgment passed by the Allahabad High Court in August 2019 against the Fertico Marketing and Investment Private Limited and others.

12. NHRC notes a drop in women workers

- Guidelines to the government to improve women's participation in the work-force would be issued by the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** soon. Expert groups have been advised to come up with Ministry-wise recommendations to increase their participation. The NHRC core group felt more women should take up jobs like drivers and electricians.

13. Questionnaire of NPR being finalized : RGI

- The **office of the Registrar-General of India (RGI)** has said the schedule, or the questionnaire, of the **National Population Register (NPR)** is "being finalised" and the information about the expected date of the first phase of Census 2021 is "not available". The response came in reply to a question filed under the Right to Information Act seeking information on the expected date of the first phase of the Census - House listing & Housing census.

14. 'Bindas Bol' is offensive, says I&B Ministry

- A **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** order placed on record in the Supreme Court said **Sudarshan TV's 'Bindas Bol UPSC Jihad'** programme is “not in good taste, offensive and has the likelihood of promoting communal attitudes”. But the Ministry order does not expressly stop the channel from telecasting further episodes. The Ministry order only says that the programme’s audio and visual content should be “suitably moderated, modified”.

Analysis : On Content tracking

1. The recent decision of the government to bring video streaming services and online news under the ambit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was much anticipated, though with some trepidation.
2. **More regulation is usually a problematic idea, bringing with it the real risk of censorship :**
 - But on one count at least this decision may have some merit, and that is if this is targeted at levelling the playing field by bringing new digital players within the purview of a regulation that non digital players have been subject to all these.
 - The fear is that this will just end up facilitating more governmental interference and censorship, especially problematic when it comes to regulating digital news. In a democracy, whose progress is dependent on free speech, it is important then that regulation is not an excuse to stifle voices, especially those not palatable to the ruling class.
 - It is also important that the government recognises that there is really no reason to have a different regulatory mechanism for digital news.

Opinion : Fallen through the cracks

1. **Events:**

- Fifty years of the **Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSW)** report - “**Towards Equality**” to the United Nations (UN).
 - 25th anniversary of the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), a benchmark for analysing the condition of women and Stated empowerment.
- ##### 2. The position of women’s work in India, the effects of the ongoing pandemic, and the new Indian labour codes in relation to women’s labour.
- India’s female employment trends do not resonate with its high economic growth, low fertility, and rise in female schooling.
 - The recently released **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**, 2018-19 indicates a dramatic fall in absolute employment for men, and more so women, who faced a decline in labour participation rates (from 2011 to 2019) in rural areas from 35.8% to 26.4%, and stagnation in urban areas at around 20.4%.
 - The **World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report** ranks India at 149 among 153 countries in terms of women’s economic participation and opportunity.
 - In the context of the ongoing pandemic, in India, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed that 39% of women lost their jobs in April and May compared to 29% of men, corroborating the UN’s fears of COVID19’s compounding impact on already low paid and insecurely employed poor women.
 - Unsurprisingly, India’s strikingly unequal gender division of household work has also worsened during the pandemic.

Myths of Online Education : Field study by Azim Premji University

1. A field study by the **Azim Premji University** on the efficacy and accessibility of e-learning has found that more than 60% of the respondents who are enrolled in government schools could not access online education. The study was undertaken in five States across 26 districts and covered 1,522 schools. More than 80,000 students study in these government schools.
2. **Broad findings:**
 - The researchers noted that non availability or inadequate number of smart phones for dedicated use or sharing, as well as difficulty in using apps for online learning, were the most important reasons why students were not able to access classes.
 - Children with disabilities found it very difficult to participate in online sessions. The researchers pointed out that 90% of the teachers who work with children with disabilities found their students unable to participate online.
 - The study also found out that almost 90% of parents of government school students surveyed **were willing to send their children back to school** subject to condition if the health of the students were taken care of
 - Almost 70% of the parents surveyed were of the opinion that **online classes were not effective** and did not help in their child's learnings.
 - Teachers, too, expressed frustration with online classes. More than 80% surveyed said they were **unable to maintain emotional connect** with students during online classes, while 90% of teachers felt that **no meaningful assessment of children's learning was possible**.

Analysis : Rethinking our health, economic and climate policies

1. **Rethinking public health infrastructure**
 - Focus should be on building a robust public health infrastructure on the principle of public provisioning instead of walking down the insurance route to healthcare where the government only pays for certain ailments, this method has spectacularly failed in the U.S.
 2. **Rethinking climate-focused economic models**
 - The pandemic throws up an opportunity to think about climate change. There cannot be a better time than this for a green deal, which addresses both the demand and supply side of emissions as well as acts as the much needed fiscal stimulus which has long-term implications.
 - A **comprehensive green deal** can be planned, partly **financed by the government and partly by carbon tax**, which not only changes the energy mix of the economy but also makes the poor and the marginalised a part of a sustainable development process.
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Daily snippets

1. Government rolls out 1.19 lakh crore stimulus

Booster dose | A look at the fresh stimulus steps announced by the Finance Minister



Jobs
A new **Atmanirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana** mooted to spur job creation

- Govt. to foot **two years' EPF dues** (24% of wages) for new employees hired between Oct. 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021
- People earning less than **₹15,000 per month** who lost jobs between March 1 and Sept. 30 to be covered if re-employed
- Firms with more than 50 employees must hire **at least 5 more** to be covered



Salaried taxpayers
Some income tax relief for purchase of residential units of value up to **₹2 crore**

- Permissible differential under Income Tax Act between circle rate and agreement value to be raised from **10% to 20%** for primary sale of new units till June 30, 2021



Infrastructure
₹18,000 crore allocated to PM Awas Yojana to build urban housing, over the ₹8,000 crore allotted in the Budget

- Govt. expects this would create **78 lakh new jobs** and drive



Stressed sectors
Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme extended till March 31, 2021

- New scheme to provide credit to firms in the healthcare sector and 26 other sectors identified as 'stressed'



Farmers
Govt. to provide **₹65,000 crore** as fertilizer subsidy to ensure adequate availability in view of the expected rise in sown area

Additional **₹10,000 crore** announced for the PM Garib Kalyan Rozgar Yojana which could be used for MGNREGS or PM Gram Sadak Yojana

demand for 25 lakh MT of steel and 131 lakh MT of cement

- Free up infrastructure contractors' capital by reducing performance security charges, and scrapping earnest money deposits for bidding on government projects
- ₹6,000 crore** equity infusion in debt platform of National Infrastructure Investment Fund, which will be used to raise **₹1.1 lakh crore** for infra projects by 2025
- ₹10,200 crore** additional funding for capital and industrial expenditure

If you take all the packages and the RBI measures announced so far, a total of ₹29,87,641 crore has been given so far as stimulus. A total of 15% of GDP. The Central government on its own has provided 9% of GDP as stimulus



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN

Image Source : The Hindu

- A fresh set of relief and stimulus measures for the economy worth **₹1.19 lakh crore**, including a scheme to boost re-employment chances of formal sector employees who lost their jobs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Popularly referred to as **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan 3.0**.
- The measures included the **production linked incentive scheme for 10 sectors** with a proposed expenditure of ₹1.46 lakh crore over five years.
- ₹900 crore was marked for **research and development towards the COVID-19 vaccine**, and the government was ready to provide for the actual cost of the vaccine and the logistics for its distribution.
- To spur rural employment, an additional ₹10,000 crore has been provided for spending through the **MGNREGS and PM's rural roads scheme**. This takes the total allocations for MGNREGA in the year close to ₹1.1 lakh crore.
- To boost formal sector employment, a new **Atmanirbhar Rozgar Yojana** has been launched, under which the government will bear the entire Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) contributions for two years of all new employees hired between October 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, in firms with fewer than 1,000 employees. The definition of 'new employee' has been kept flexible to include anyone who was part of the EPF net earlier, but had lost their job between March 1 and September 30, 2020.
- For firms with more than 1,000 employees, the Centre will bear half of the EPF contributions (24% of wages), while for smaller firms, it will bear the entire EPF contribution.

- To boost urban housing and create jobs, an additional allocation of ₹18,000 crore has been made for the **PM Awas Yojana** over and above the ₹8,000 crore allotted in the Budget.
- Extending a ₹3 lakh crore emergency credit line guarantee scheme announced earlier for micro, small and medium enterprises till March 31, 2021, the Finance Minister also announced a credit guarantee plan for stressed sectors as well as healthcare. As per the **K.V Kamath committee**, the stressed sectors include auto components, construction, gems and jewellery, hotel and restaurants, iron and steel, real estate and textiles.
- To free up working capital for contractors bidding for public projects, the Centre has decided to reduce the performance security payable on individual contracts to 3% from the prevailing 5% to 10% of project value.

2. [China's line -up to the Arunachal Border](#)

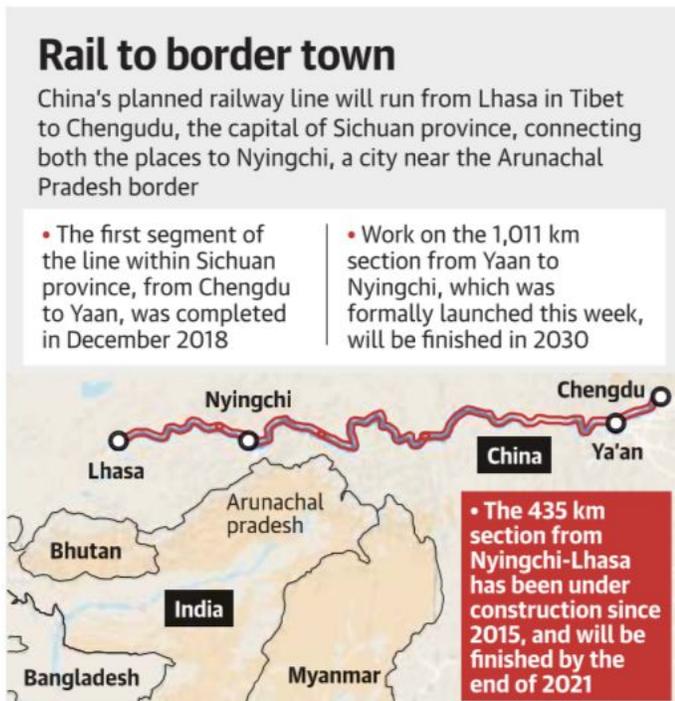


Image Source : The Hindu

3. [Air pollution, cold a lethal pair for COVID-19 patients](#)

- Doctors in the National Capital Region have warned that high levels of air pollution, exhausted medical staff and stressed health infrastructure is making COVID appropriate behaviour a “must” to contain the spread.
- Delhi, along with three other northern States Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, is among the 10 States/ Union Territories which have reported 76% of the new COVID-19 cases.
- Doctors said that due to low temperatures and increased air pollution, particulate matter remains suspended in the air for a longer period and this increases the transmissibility of the novel coronavirus, making people more vulnerable to the disease.
- The second mechanism linking increased COVID cases and mortality due to air pollution is that exposure to polluted air is known to cause inflammation and cellular damage, making it easy for the virus or any other pathogenic microbe to invade our lungs. Many people encounter acute exacerbations of their asthma and COPDs. This year the situation is compounded by the **ongoing COVID pandemic**.

4. [Controlling stubble burning in Delhi](#)

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal shared the results of **bio decomposer technique** used at farmlands in Delhi and urged the Centre and governments of Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh to implement the technique to

prevent stubble burning. The impact assessment report across 24 villages in Delhi had shown that around 70-95% of stubble had turned into manure for as low as ₹30 per acre. The Central government has constituted an **Air Quality Commission (AQC)** to monitor pollution levels in Delhi NCR.

5. **Assam border dispute and Nagaland**

- Assam's border row with its neighbours in the North east has shifted from areas adjoining Mizoram to Nagaland.
- Assam has accused **Lotha and Tangkhul tribal people** of Nagaland, backed by the State administration, of encroaching upon areas inside the **Daldali Reserve Forest in Karbi Anglong**.
- Forest officials in Karbi Anglong have also raised concerns over encroachment by people from Nagaland by removing pillars demarcating the 512.1km border between the two States. The Nagaland government has allegedly issued land allotment certificates to the encroachers in Assam.
- Nagaland government has denied all charges of 'illegal occupation of land in Assam, claiming that its police personnel were keeping vigil within the State's periphery.
- At least 350 people have lost their lives on Assam's periphery, mostly along the boundary with Nagaland since 1965. A majority of the victims have been from Assam.

6. **WHO centre soon for traditional medicine**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) will set up a **Global Centre for Traditional Medicine** in India. Prime Minister Modi expressed confidence that WHO would become the centre for global wellness, just as India had emerged as the "**pharmacy of the world**". WHO **Director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** made the announcement in a video message.
- This will support WHO's efforts to implement the WHO **traditional medicine strategy 2014-2023**, which aims to support countries in developing policies and action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine.
- In the same event PM dedicated **two future ready Ayurveda institutions** in Jaipur and Jamnagar to the nation on the **5th Ayurveda Day**.

7. **President Kovind's message on expansion policy**

- **President Ram Nath Kovind**, virtually addressing the valedictory session of the 60th course of National Defence College (NDC) on Friday, said that the policy of expansionism followed by some nations demands a strategic and mature response and decision makers will have to be guided by national as well as international objectives.
- President Kovind, in his address, also highlighted the need to fight against terrorism and described it as the "most virulent curse on humanity".

8. **Soumitra Chatterjee, one of India's tallest actors, dies**

- **Soumitra Chatterjee**, Bengali superstar and one of India's tallest actors, widely admired for his roles as Apu and Feluda, died on Sunday after fighting for his life since October 6, when the 85-year old was admitted to Belle Vue Clinic here with symptoms of COVID-19. He is best known for his collaborations with director **Satyajit Ray**, with whom he worked in fourteen films.
- Chatterjee was the recipient of multiple honours and awards including the **Padma Bhushan** (2004) and **Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur** (2018). He received two **National Film Awards** as an actor and the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Award** for his work in theatre. In 2012, he received the **Dadasaheb Phalke Award**, *India's highest award in cinema given by the government of India for lifetime achievement*. In 2013, IBN Live named him as one of "The men who changed the face of the Indian Cinema".

9. **Arunachal Pradesh records best sex ratio**

- **Arunachal Pradesh** recorded the best sex ratio in the country, while **Manipur** recorded the worst, according to the 2018 report on "**Vital statistics of India based on the Civil Registration System**" published by the **Registrar General of India**. Sex ratio at birth is the number of females born per 1,000 males.

- Arunachal Pradesh recorded 1,084 females born per thousand males, followed by Nagaland (965) Mizoram (964), Kerala (963) and Karnataka (957). The worst was reported in Manipur (757), Lakshadweep (839) and Daman & Diu (877), Punjab (896) and Gujarat (897).
- The number of registered births increased to 2.33 crore in 2018 from 2.21 crore registered births the previous year. The prescribed time limit for registration of birth or death is 21 days. Some States, however, register the births and deaths even after a year. The birth or death certificate is issued free of charge by the Registrar concerned if reported within 21 days.

10. Worst air quality on Deepavali in four years

- The air pollution in Delhi on Deepavali and day after was the worst in the last four years, according to the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data**. Bursting of firecrackers was witnessed across Delhi on Deepavali night even though a ban was imposed on its sale. Local emissions worsened the quality of air in the city.
- **SAFAR**, the air quality monitoring agency of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**, said conditions are favourable for a quick recovery from the situation caused due to local emissions (firecrackers) as well as stubble fire related. It added that better ventilation condition is likely to prevail now for faster dispersion and scattered rainfall is also likely to help improve the air quality.

11. Former US President Barack Obama on Manmohan Singh in his book 'A Promised Land'

- *"A gentle, soft-spoken economist in his seventies, with a white beard and a turban that were the marks of his Sikh faith but to the Western eye lent him the air of a holy man, he had been India's finance minister in the 1990s, managing to lift millions of people from poverty. For the duration of his tenure as Prime Minister, I would find Singh to be wise, thoughtful, and scrupulously honest," "While he [Mr. Singh] could be cautious in foreign policy, unwilling to get out too far ahead of an Indian bureaucracy that was historically suspicious of U.S. intentions, our time together confirmed my initial impression of him as a man of uncommon wisdom and decency; and during my visit to the capital city of New Delhi, we reached agreements to strengthen U.S. cooperation on counterterrorism, global health, nuclear security, and trade."*
- Barack Obama was not all praise for India and talks about the striking inequality between the rich and poor and says *"violence, both public and private"* continued to be *"an all too pervasive part of Indian life."* *"What I couldn't tell was whether [Manmohan] Singh's rise to power represented the future of India's democracy or merely an aberration,"*
- He talks about Manmohan Singh's "restraint" against Pakistan after the November 2011 attacks in Mumbai had cost him politically, Mr. Obama writes. *"He [Mr. Singh] feared that rising anti Muslim sentiment had strengthened the influence of India's main opposition party, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),"* Mr. Obama writes, going on to quote Mr. Singh: *"'In uncertain times, Mr. President,' the Prime Minister said, 'the call of religious and ethnic solidarity can be intoxicating. And it's not so hard for politicians to exploit that, in India or anywhere else.'"*
- The book talks about 2011, towards the end of Mr. Obama's first term as US President. Presumably, it is for this reason, the author does not discuss Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who became Prime Minister in 2014 and hosted Mr. Obama in New Delhi at the Republic Day celebrations.

12. GAIL completes Kochi-Mangalore pipeline

- The 444 km long natural gas pipeline was launched in 2009 at an estimated cost of ₹2,915 crore and was to be commissioned in 2014. But opposition with regard to safety and on commercial grounds, wherein the land price was the main hurdle, had resulted in the project cost nearly doubling to over ₹5,750 crore.

13. Nagaland groups spar over 'Indian' security

- Rival Naga fractions - **Naga National Political Groups (NMPGs)**, a conglomerate of seven extremist groups and **Isak Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland**, or NSCN (IM) spared over the latter's demand for protection from the Indian security forces.
- Reacting to the barb, the NSCN (IM) said its leaders neither asked for security nor MP status from the Indian government during negotiations in New Delhi. [Further reading](#)

14. [Prime Minister Modi's address on the 12th BRICS summit](#)

- Addressing the **12th BRICS summit**, PM Modi said there was a need to confront the countries that supported and sponsored terror. Mr. Modi acknowledged the Russian support to the BRICS counterterrorism strategy. Mr. Modi also raised the issue of “credibility and effectiveness” of the institutions that were necessary for global governance.
- With reference to the **United Nations security council**, he stressed the need for urgent reforms. India, which will begin a two year stint as a **non-permanent member of the Security Council** next year, has been at the forefront of seeking expansion of the permanent membership of the council.
- He also stressed on the role of BRICS in the post COVID world, "BRICS countries will play a significant role in the recovery of the postCOVID-19 world. **42% of the world's population** resides in the BRICS countries and our economies are the major engines of the world. There is a lot of scope of increasing trade among the BRICS countries". He also added on the '**AtmaNirbhar Bharat**' scheme, stating that a self-reliant and resilient India can become a force multiplier for the post COVID-19 world order.
- On vaccine co-operation, India has led regional collaboration in South Asia for ensuring vaccine access to countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Chinese President Xi Jinping, in his speech, also called for collaboration between Beijing and New Delhi. Mr. Modi said the **New Development Bank (BRICS Bank)** would help in financing support for research in COVID-19.

15. [Missing circus animals](#)

- The Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the **Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI)** and the **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)** to find out what happened to the circus animals which were missing when inspection was carried out at circuses across the country.
- The court direction came after the **Federation of Indian Animals Protection Organisation (FIAPO)** said, according to the survey report filed by AWBI, that around 740 circus animals were registered with it, but in the survey only 28 were found.
- PETA India has claimed that due to the pandemic outbreak and the lockdown, circuses are finding it difficult to feed the animals who are at various stages of starvation. PETA has also sought a direction to the Centre to immediately notify the **Performing Animals (Registration) Amendment Rules of 2018**, which expressly prohibit training and exhibition of performing animals in circuses and “mobile entertainment facilities”.
- FIAPO has challenged the **Performing Animal Rules, 1973 and Performing Animal (Registration) Rules, 2001** to the extent that they allow registration of animals as ‘performing animals’ for circuses as against the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Constitution of India. Their plea stated that on account of the pandemic, there have been numerous reports of animals being stranded or abandoned.

16. [Bru refugees demand immediate implementation of settlement pact](#)

- Leaders of the **Mizoram Bru refugees** have demanded commencement of their permanent rehabilitation in Tripura in the light of the **quadripartite agreement signed in New Delhi** in January. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had presided over the signing of the accord by the MHA with the State governments of Mizoram, Tripura and the leaders of the refugees to permanently settle some 35,000 evacuees in Tripura.

- Officials said the State government had selected 12 places including the Kanchanpur subdivision in north Tripura where the Brus have been housed in six makeshift camps since 1997. However, the decision to settle some of the refugees is facing protests from a local forum called Joint Movement. **The Joint Movement** has enforced an indefinite strike in Kanchanpur from Monday to press the State government to give up plans to rehabilitate the Brus in the area.

17. [Indigenous QRSAM successfully tested again](#)

- **The Defence Research and Development Organisation** on Tuesday successfully tested the indigenous under development **Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM)** system for the second time in five days, off Odisha coast. The test was carried out against unmanned aerial target '**Banshee**', which simulates an aircraft.

18. [Tribals in Maharashtra yet to receive aid for the lockdown](#)

- Four months after the Maharashtra Cabinet decided to extend assistance - cash and good- to a few of the most backward tribes, landless labourers, and needy families from the tribal community facing financial brunt due to the lockdown, not a single rupee has been disbursed to any beneficiary.
- On August 12, the **Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government** cleared the Khawati Grants scheme targeting 11.55 lakh tribal families across the State. Under this, each family was to be benefited by ₹2,000 being deposited in their bank or postal account and by receiving essential food items worth ₹2,000.

19. [Head Constable gets out-of-turn promotion](#)

- **Seema Dhaka**, Head Constable at the Samaypur Badli Police Station, became the first police personnel in Delhi to be granted '**out-of-turn promotion**' under the incentive scheme. She had traced 76 missing children, out of which 56 were under the age of 14, officers said on Wednesday. On August 7, Delhi Police Commissioner S.N. Shrivastava had announced the grant of additional incentives, including out-of-town promotion, for any Constable or Head Constable who rescues 50 or more missing children below 14 years within 12 months.

20. [Varavara Rao to be shifted from jail](#)

- After a nudge from the Bombay High Court, **the Maharashtra government** agreed on Wednesday to shift **81-year-old activist-poet Varavara Rao** from the Taloja central jail hospital to Nanavati Hospital for 15 days for medical examination and treatment.
 - In August 2018, Rao was arrested from his residence in Hyderabad for his alleged involvement in the **Bhima-Koregaon violence**. Police had claimed that speeches made at the event on 31 December 2017, were partially responsible for instigating violence. Several bail requests made by Rao due to his poor health condition have been rejected.
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International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

Daily snippets

1. India-ASEAN to expand trade despite RCEP walkout

- India and ASEAN countries said they would explore ways to increase trade between them despite India's exit from the 15 nation **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement**.
- RCEP agreement is expected to be signed on November 15, between China, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and 10 Association of SouthEast Asian (ASEAN) nations. However, they are expected to leave in a clause allowing India to rejoin at a later date.
- India announced on the sidelines of the 17th ASEAN-India summit, a \$1 million contribution to the ASEAN COVID19 recovery fund.
- The leaders affirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, safety and security in the South China Sea, in particular freedom of navigation and overflight.

2. China chairs meet with S. Asian partners amid COVID-19

- Chairing its second multilateral discussion with South Asian partners in the last four months, China brought together key Foreign Ministry officials from **Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan** in a virtual conference.
- According to a press release issued by the Chinese Embassy in Colombo, the initiative was aimed at discussing a collective response to the second wave of COVID-19. The two virtual meets appear part of China's growing engagement in the region, in the wake of the global pandemic. Reeling under the effect of COVID-19 and its economic fallout, Sri Lanka is counting on China to cope with the economic crisis.

3. Suu Kyi's party wins absolute majority

- The ruling party of Myanmar leader **Aung San Suu Kyi** has won enough parliamentary seats to form the next government. Her **National League for Democracy (NLD)** had secured the 322 seats in the bicameral legislature needed to form a government.
- She is tasked with developing a country that has suffered nearly 50 years of isolation and decay under strict military rule, years of which she was held under house arrest.
- The ballot was seen as a referendum on Ms. Suu Kyi's government, which is hugely popular at home. However, its reputation abroad has col lapsed due to accusations of genocide against the country's **Rohingya Muslim minority**, which it denies.

4. 25,000 Ethiopians flee Sudan

- Around 25,000 **Ethiopians** fleeing conflict in the **Tigray** region have crossed into neighbouring **Sudan**, state news agency SUNA reported, as the UN said it was working to find them shelter. Sudan's commissioner for refugees Abdullah Suleiman toured the border region on Saturday with UN refugee agency assistant representative in Sudan Jan Hansmann to discuss the influx.

- Sudan has already said it would shelter thousands of Ethiopians fleeing the conflict at the Um Raquba camp, which in the 1980s hosted thousands of Ethiopian fleeing famine. Meanwhile, the leader of the Tigray region on Sunday claimed responsibility for rocket strikes on the airport in neighbouring **Eritrea's** capital, a move that ratcheted up fears of a wider conflict in the **Horn of Africa region**.
- **Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed** announced November 4 he had ordered military operations in Tigray in a dramatic escalation of a long-running feud with the region's ruling party, **the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**.

5. [UAE to widen 'golden' visa's eligibility criteria](#)

- The **United Arab Emirates** will extend its "golden" visa system — which grants 10-year residency in the West Asian nation — to certain professionals, specialized degree-holders and others, the UAE's Vice-President said. Foreigners in the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment.
- Also eligible are those with specialised degrees in artificial intelligence, big data and epidemiology, as well as high school students living in the UAE who rank top in the country and students from certain universities with a GPA of 3.8 or higher. After first announcing a long-term visa plan in 2018, the UAE in 2019 started granting 5 and 10-year renewable visas to certain foreign investors, entrepreneurs, chief executives, scientists and outstanding students.

6. [Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly poll concludes; counting begins](#)

- **India** has slammed **Pakistan** for its decision to hold elections in **Gilgit-Baltistan** and said any action to alter the status of the militarily occupied region has no legal basis. There are 24 seats for the contest but polling on one seat was postponed, leaving 23 seats up for grabs. As many as 330 candidates, including four women, are in the contest.

7. [Suu Kyi again](#)

- The **National League for Democracy's** landslide victory in the November 8 general election in **Myanmar** indicates that a vast majority of its nearly 38 million voters continue to think that **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi** is a bulwark against the military, which ruled the nation with an iron fist for about half a century.
- The Election Commission has stated that her party has won at least 346 of the 476 elected seats in Parliament, well past the 322-mark needed to stay in power. The military-linked **main opposition Union Solidarity and Development Party** has won 25 seats so far.
- Ms. Suu Kyi, who is barred from becoming the President by the military-era Constitution, took the levers of power as **the State Counsellor in 2015**. But during this time, instead of confronting the Generals or pushing to end the military's outsized influence, she appeared to have bought peace with them. Her public defence of the Generals' handling of the operations in Rakhine State that led to the exodus of at least 740,000 Rohingya Muslims dented her image as a pro-democracy fighter and raised questions about her commitment to the country's transition.

8. [Thai protesters rally again, call for reforms](#)

- Pro-democracy protesters in **Thailand** rallied again on Saturday, promoting a diversity of causes and taking an opportunity to display their rejection of the country's power structure directly to the monarch. Some 20 groups called the rally at **Bangkok's Democracy Monument** under the name "**Mob Fest**" as the latest in a series of protests calling for significant reforms in government.
- **The core demands of the student led protest movement are:**
 - **Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha** step down

- The constitution be amended to make it more democratic
- The monarchy be reformed and be made more accountable.
- The demand over the monarchy is controversial because the royal institution is traditionally regarded as the heart and soul of the nation, and is to be treated with respect. It is protected by a law that makes defaming the monarch punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

9. [Azerbaijan extends Armenian pull-out date](#)

- **Azerbaijan** said on Sunday it had agreed to extend a deadline for **Armenia** to withdraw from a disputed district as part of a peace accord that ended six weeks of fierce fighting over the **Nagorno-Karabakh** region. The withdrawal deadline for “Armenian armed forces and of illegal Armenian settlers” has been extended until November 25.

10. [India, U.S. keen on training peace missions](#)

- With China significantly scaling up its troop contribution for **United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPK)** missions, India and the U.S. are looking to undertake training of military personnel for the missions from Southeast Asian countries on the lines of the ongoing initiative for African countries.
- **India** has consistently been among the top troop contributing nations to the UN and is the fifth largest with 5,424 personnel in eight countries. The **U.S.** on the other hand has never contributed ground troops but contributes 27% of the U.N. peacekeeping budget.
- In 2016, India and the U.S. began a joint annual initiative “UN Peacekeeping Course for African Partners” to build and enhance the capacity of African troop and police-contributing countries to participate in the U.N. and regional peacekeeping operations. While this is going on, the U.S. is keen on a similar initiative for Southeast Asian nations like Vietnam and others, the source said. **China** contributes 12% of the UN regular general budget and 15% of the peacekeeping budget. India’s contribution to the regular budget is 0.83% and 0.16% of the peacekeeping budget.
- India has so far participated in 51 of the 71 missions and contributed over 2 lakh personnel. It has troop deployment in Lebanon, Golan Heights, Congo and South Sudan in addition to staff officers in other missions. India has also set up two field hospitals in South Sudan and one in Congo. Since 2018, India has co-opted a contingent from Kazakhstan at the mission in Lebanon. Bhutan too has expressed interest in joining a UN mission within the Indian contingent.

11. [Pakistan continues to raise terror charges](#)

- A day after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) described **Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi’s** allegations against India as ‘diversion’, Islamabad cited a recent U.N. report and claimed presence of the **Islamic State** and **Al-Qaeda** in India.
- The claim indicates a change in Pakistani campaign for global platforms where it is often accused of harbouring top international terrorists from a wide variety of groups like al-Qaeda.

12. [Imran's party in the lead in Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly polls](#)

- **Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI)** won eight of 23 constituencies and was leading in one seat in the legislative assembly polls in Gilgit-Baltistan, prompting Opposition parties to dub the election as “stolen.” India has slammed Pakistan for its decision to hold elections in Gilgit-Baltistan and said any action to alter the status of the militarily occupied region has no legal basis.

13. [Islamabad blocked off over anti-France protests](#)

- Pakistan authorities sealed off a major road into Islamabad for a second day on Monday as a far-right religious party held fresh anti-France protests. Pakistan has seen small and scattered protests in recent weeks after **French President Emmanuel Macron** condemned the beheading of a teacher by an extremist at a school near Paris. The teacher had shown cartoons of Muhammed — forbidden under Islam’s ban on depictions of the prophet — during a class on free speech. Mr. Macron’s response triggered anger across the Islamic world, with tens of thousands in Pakistan, neighboring Iran and other Muslim countries in South Asia flooding the streets and organizing anti-French boycotts.

14. [Johnson raises ire over remarks on Scotland](#)

- **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson** has inflamed Scottish discontent with his Conservative government by reportedly saying that giving governing powers to Scotland had been a “disaster.”
- **Scotland** has an Edinburgh - based government and Parliament, set up in 1999, with broad powers in areas including health and education. **Wales** and **Northern Ireland** also have their own legislatures and regional administrations. **The Scottish National Party**, which wants Scotland to become an independent country, leads the government in Edinburgh. It is strongly critical of the decision to leave **the European Union**.

15. [Obama's 'A Promised Land' : Elements in Pak. military had Qaeda links](#)

- **Barack Obama** has said he had ruled out involving Pakistan in the raid on **Osama bin Laden**’s hideout because it was an “open secret” that certain elements inside Pakistan’s military, and especially its intelligence services, maintained links to the **Taliban** and perhaps even the **Al Qaeda**, sometimes using them as strategic assets against Afghanistan and India. His book **A Promised Land** gave a blow-by-blow account of **the Abbottabad raid** by American commandos that killed the world’s most wanted terrorist on May 2, 2011.

16. [Sri Lanka to open up Chinese-backed 'port city'](#)

- A mega Chinese real-estate development in Sri Lanka will open early next year offering tax concessions to attract investors and revive the struggling economy. **Colombo Port City** — a \$1.4 billion land reclamation project beside the capital’s port which started in 2014 — has doubled the size of Sri Lanka’s current financial district. The development — the largest single foreign investment in Sri Lanka so far — is **one of several massive Asian infrastructure projects** funded by China as Beijing increases its footprint in the region.

17. [Peru gets its third President in a week](#)

- **Peruvian lawmaker Francisco Sagasti** is set to be sworn in as interim President after being voted for by Congress in a bid to help calm anger on the streets amid deadly protests and the departure of two Presidents over the past week. Mr. Sagasti, a legislator from the centrist **Purple Party**, will be sworn in to fulfil a government mandate until July next year, which would include holding a new presidential election scheduled for April 11.
- The Andean nation has been shaken since the abrupt ouster in an impeachment trial of popular leader **Martin Vizcarra** last Monday. His successor, Manuel Merino, resigned on Sunday after two young people died in protests against his government. Mr. Sagasti will be Peru’s fourth President in less than three years, after the departures of Mr. Vizcarra and Mr. Merino, and the resignation of Mr. Kuczynski in 2018 on allegations of corruption.

18. [US to reduce troops in Iraq, Afghanistan](#)

- The U.S. will slash troop levels in **Afghanistan** and **Iraq** to their lowest in nearly 20 years, the Pentagon said on Tuesday, prompting security worries among allies and fear on Kabul’s streets after President Donald Trump pledged to end conflicts abroad.

- Rejecting concerns that precipitous drawdowns could give up security gains after years of fighting, **Acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller** said **around 2,000 troops would be pulled from Afghanistan** by January 15. Five hundred more would return from Iraq by the same date, leaving 2,500 in each country.
- Mr. Trump had made ending overseas wars one of his key promises and U.S. forces in Afghanistan had already been reduced from about 13,000 following a deal with the Taliban.

19. Iran vows to return to nuclear deal if US sanctions are lifted

- Iran will “automatically” return to its nuclear commitments if **U.S. President-elect Joe Biden** lifts sanctions imposed over the past two years, its **Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif** said Wednesday. Decades old U.S.- Iranian tensions escalated after **U.S. President Donald Trump** unilaterally withdrew from a **landmark nuclear agreement in 2018** and re-imposed, then reinforced, crippling sanctions. Iran has since May 2019 gradually suspended most of its key obligations under the agreement.

Explainer : Conflict between the Ethiopian govt. and Tigray rebels

1. Background

- Ethiopia’s **Nobel Prize** winning **Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed** started a military operation in the rebellious Tigray region earlier this month. Mr. Abiy has said it would be a limited campaign focusing on the **Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)**, the militia-cum-political party that runs the northern region. However, almost two weeks into the conflict, Ethiopia risks falling into an ethnic civil war with regional implications.

2. Who is TPLF?

- The TPLF was founded in 1975 as a resistance army of the Tigrayan people against the military dictatorship, which was called **the Derg**. The TPLF played a crucial role in ousting the junta and they were welcomed as national heroes in 1991.
- **TPLF leader Meles Zenawi** took over as the interim President in 1991 and became the first elected Prime Minister in 1995. He is largely seen as the architect of the country’s ethno-federal system and remained in power till 2012. But over the years, the government led by the **Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)**, a coalition put together by Mr. Zenawi, was accused of being increasingly authoritarian and there were frequent mass protests in the regions.
- Though the EPRDF contains regional political parties such as the Amhara Democratic Party, the Oromo Democratic Party and the Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement, the TPLF remained the dominant political force.
- The **Tigray** people make up roughly 6% of the population, while **the Oromos** have a 34% share and **the Amharas** 27%. While the TPLF controlled the levers of power through the EPRDF, the Oromos alleged marginalisation.

3. Rise of PM Abiy

- In 2018, the EPRDF chose Mr. Abiy, a former military intelligence officer, to lead the government amid growing protests and a political deadlock. As Prime Minister, Mr. Abiy took a host of steps to cut the outsized influence of the TPLF in the government. He purged TPLF functionaries from key government posts, released political prisoners (jailed by the TPLF-led government) and promised freer media. He reached out to **Eritrea**, a sworn enemy of the TPLF, which shares a long border with the Tigray region.

4. The war

- When Mr. Abiy formed a new political coalition, **the Prosperity Party**, all constituents of the EPRDF, except the TPLF, joined the new platform. The TPLF’s leadership shifted from Addis Ababa to Mekele, the Tigray regional capital.

- In August, when Mr. Abiy's government decided to postpone parliamentary elections, citing COVID-19, the TPLF openly challenged the decision. They accused the Prime Minister of power grab and went ahead holding elections in the region in defiance of the federal government.
- On November 3, TPLF militants attacked a federal military command in the Tigray region and captured military hardware and equipment, prompting Mr. Abiy to declare the military operation.

5. [Geopolitical angle \(Eritrea/Sudan\)](#)

- Mr. Abiy's outreach to Eritrea had outraged the TPLF, which had fought a prolonged war with the Eritrean government along the Tigray border. The TPLF now accuses Eritrea of backing Mr. Abiy's offensive.
- Even if Mr. Abiy is serious about keeping the operation short, it could spill out of control, given the underlying complexities of the conflict. Also, the Tigray region shares a border with **Sudan**. The TPLF enjoyed good relations with Sudan's ousted dictator **Omar Bashir**. Sudan has a border dispute with Ethiopia. If Sudan's new rulers (the transition government includes civilian and military leaders) keep the old links with the TPLF active and the border open for the rebels, the conflict could go on.

[Explainer : Armenia. Azerbaijan ceasefire](#)

1. The six-week-long war over **Nagorno-Karabakh** has come to a halt following a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement between **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan**, but only after altering the balance of power in the region.

2. [Start of War:](#)

- Before **Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev** went to war in late September, Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding villages connecting the enclave with mainland Armenia were controlled by either Armenian troops or their proxies. Armenia had captured the mountainous region within Azerbaijan- populated by ethnic Armenians- in the earlier war in the 1990s. But tensions continued even after the 1994 ceasefire. When he launched the offensive, Mr. Aliyev, backed by Turkey, vowed to capture Nagorno-Karabakh.

3. [Current status of conflict:](#)

- Last week, when the ceasefire was announced, Azeri troops had captured several areas around Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia, including the strategic Shusha, a city just 16 km from **Nagorno-Karabakh's capital, Stepanakert**.
- On the other side, **Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan** is facing a political backlash. Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan has quit over the ceasefire and the country's President has asked Mr. Pashinyan to resign and hold a snap election.

4. [Role of Russia and Turkey:](#)

- Even if the direct conflict was between Armenia and Azerbaijan, two bigger powers had high stakes — Russia and Turkey. While Turkey strongly supported Azerbaijan, reportedly with armed drones and military advisers, Russia, which has a security agreement with Armenia, tried to remain neutral. While Azerbaijan made military progress, Russia resisted calls to back Armenia and continued with its push to bring the conflict in its backyard to an end, which it managed to do, finally. Vladimir Putin is the only signatory to the agreement besides the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

5. [The dangers ahead:](#)

- So now, there is **a triumphant Azerbaijan, a wounded Armenia, a cautious Russia and an ambitious Turkey**, with a fragile truce over an unresolved dispute. For peace to prevail, Armenia and Azerbaijan must find a lasting settlement to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The ceasefire in 1994 did not resolve the conflict. And unlike 1994, when Russia was the only big power, now, **the South Caucasus** is open for contest between Russia and Turkey, which makes the crisis even more dangerous.



Science & Technology and Environment

Daily snippets

1. [Zydus completes phase 2 trial of COVID-19 therapy](#)

- Zydus Cadila on Thursday said it has successfully completed a phase 2 clinical trial in COVID-19 patients with its biological therapy, '**PegiHep**', and will now begin phase 3 clinical trial.
- The drug firm said **Pegylated Interferon alpha — 2b** significantly increased viral reduction and reduced the need for supplemental oxygen in moderate COVID-19 patients.

2. [COVISHIELD trials](#)

- The **Serum Institute of India (SII)** and the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** announced the completion of enrolment for Phase-3 clinical trials of Covishield in India.
- The ICMR and the SII have further collaborated for clinical development of **Covovax (Novavax)** developed by **Novavax**, the U.S., and **upscaled by the SII**.
- At present, the SII and the ICMR are conducting Phase 2 and 3 clinical trials of Covishield at 15 different centres across the country.
- Covishield has been developed at the SII Pune laboratory with a master seed from Oxford University/AstraZeneca. The SII has already manufactured 40 million doses of the vaccine, under the at-risk manufacturing and stockpiling licence from the DCGI (Drugs Controller General of India)
- ICMR Director-general Dr. Balram Bhargava said, "At present, India plays a prominent role in vaccine development and manufacturing globally."

3. [New species of vine snakes discovered](#)

- A team of researchers from the **Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES)**, **Indian Institute of Science (IISc)** have discovered new species of vine snakes.
- The team carried out field visits across India to collect morphological data, tissue samples and specimens to understand the patterns of distribution and diversification of vine snakes. Vine snakes are known to be among the most common snakes in peninsular India, found even in many peri urban areas and in the Western Ghats. There are now six species of vine snakes endemic to the Western Ghats.

4. [Lancet panel seeks new task force on diabetes](#)

- A **Lancet Commission on Diabetes**, four years in the making, warns of possible damaging effects of coronavirus 2 on the pancreatic islets, responsible for regulating blood sugar, and thereby, on diabetes. It has also recommended the setting up of a **global task force for diabetes and non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**, consisting of stakeholders from different sectors. In 2016, 26 experts in public health, clinical care, epidemiology, and health economics were brought together by The Lancet to review the evidence and knowledge gaps in diabetes and to develop actionable plans.

5. [India sees 375 cyberattacks everyday](#)

- Referring to China as a major 'challenge' from a cyber security perspective for India, **National Cyber Security Coordinator** Lt. Gen. (retd.) Rajesh Pant said cyberattacks have gone up multi fold in the current environment. Data shows that 4 lakh malwares are dealt with on a daily basis with more than 375 attacks taking place.

6. [ICMR against indiscriminate use of plasma therapy](#)

- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has warned against indiscriminate use of **convalescent plasma therapy (CPT)** for treating COVID-19. A research report by the ICMR mentions that the therapy "did not lead to a reduction in progression to severe COVID or all-cause mortality in the group that received CPT as compared to the group that did not receive CPT".
- Benefits of CPT in improving the clinical outcomes, reducing severity of disease, duration of hospitalisation and mortality in patients were dependent on the concentration of specific antibodies in convalescent plasma that could neutralise the effects of SARS-CoV-2.
- **PLACID is the world's largest pragmatic trial on CPT** conducted in 464 moderately ill, confirmed affected adults in a real-world setting, wherein no benefit of use of CPT could be established, the ICMR said.
- Similar studies conducted in China and the Netherlands have also documented no significant benefit of CPT in improving the clinical outcomes of hospitalised patients.

7. [Vaccine trial showed 95% success : Pfizer](#)

- **Pfizer Inc** will seek emergency U.S. approval for its COVID-19 vaccine within days after final trial results showed its shot had a **95% success rate** and no serious side effects, the drug maker said on Wednesday. Recently, the interim results of **Moderna's** mRNA vaccine showed that it has **94.5% efficacy** in preventing COVID-19.
- **Vaccination for children** : Authorisation of vaccines for children will take longer. Only **Pfizer** has started vaccinating volunteers under the age of 18 in trials, giving shots to children as young as 12. **Moderna** and **Johnson & Johnson** have said they hope to start testing the vaccine in younger patients soon.
- **The storage worries**: The stability of the **Moderna** vaccine at -20°C for up to six months, 2°C-8°C for 30 days, and at room temperature for up to 12 hours will be critical for the broad rollout of the vaccine in most countries, particularly in developing countries. In contrast, **Pfizer's** mRNA vaccine requires storage at -70°C to -80°C, which makes vaccine **shipping and storage logistics** a nightmare even in developed countries.
- **Vaccine for India**: Most districts in India that are under the **universal immunisation programme** already have facilities to store huge volumes of the oral polio vaccine at -20°C. Hence, Moderna's mRNA vaccine can be made available in most parts of the country as it remains stable for 30 days at 2°C-8°C. However, no vaccine manufacturer in India has tied up with Moderna to make the vaccine in India, and as on October 31, "discussions about the terms of India's potential participation" in GAVI's **COVAX** Advance Market Commitment for COVID-19 vaccines were only getting "underway". The Pune-based **Genova Biopharmaceuticals Limited**, a subsidiary of Emcure Pharmaceuticals Limited, is also developing a mRNA vaccine.

[Moderna says its vaccine is 94.5% effective](#)

1. Drugmaker **Moderna** announced that its coronavirus vaccine was 94.5% effective, based on an early look at the results from its large, continuing study. Moderna is the second company to report preliminary data on an apparently successful vaccine, offering hope in a surging pandemic that has infected more than 53 million people worldwide and killed more than 1.2 million. **Pfizer, in collaboration with BioNTech**, was the first, reporting a week ago that its vaccine was more than 90% effective.

2. **Inconclusive result:** Pfizer and Moderna each announced the findings in news releases, not in peer reviewed scientific journals, and the companies have not yet disclosed the detailed data that would allow outside experts to evaluate their claims.
3. **How do the vaccines work?** Both use a synthetic version of coronavirus genetic material, called **messenger RNA or mRNA**, to programme a person's cells to churn out many copies of a fragment of the virus. That fragment sets off alarms in the immune system and stimulates it to attack, should the real virus try to invade.
4. **Vaccine concerns:**
 - Whether the vaccines will work equally well in older and younger people
 - Will the vaccines prevent people from spreading the virus
 - How long will the immunity provided by the vaccines last.
 - An additional concern is that the vaccines must be stored and transported at low temperatures — minus 20 degree Celsius for Moderna, and minus 70 degree Celsius for Pfizer — which could complicate their distribution.
 - So far, studies of the two vaccines have not found serious side effects, but participants have reported sore arms, fatigue, fever and joint and muscle aches that last for a day or two.

T-cell immunity and COVID-19

1. Our immune system responds to virus infections with a firstline defence called '**innate**' immunity, followed by the second line called '**adaptive**' immunity. If the virus is highly virulent or the 'inoculum'(infecting virus load) is heavy, Innate immunity passes the baton to adaptive immunity.
2. **Adaptive immunity**
 - Adaptive immunity has two arms — antibodies and T-cell immunity.
 - **What are antibodies?** Antibodies are protein molecules that recognise and bind to viral antigens. Some among them tend to neutralise viruses from infecting fresh host cells. In most viral infections, the presence of antibodies in the blood is sufficient to classify individuals as immune.
 - **How is COVID-19 different?** Antibodies for COVID-19 wane fairly soon. In persons with asymptomatic infections or mild COVID-19, nearly half will have no detectable antibodies after two months. This phenomenon of short-lived antibodies and consequent reinfection is also seen in some other respiratory tract viruses.
 - Does protection after one COVID-19 infection not last? Reinfection with symptoms has so far been proven in only about ten cases among millions infected, protective immunity after the first infection is thus durable. In COVID-19 infection, T-cell immunity is more long-lasting than antibodies.
3. **What are T-Cells**
 - T-Cell immunity resides in a subset of white blood cells called T-lymphocytes, or T-cells. However, the test for assessing T-cell immunity is complicated and expensive.
 - Karolinska Institute Case study : About 25% of blood donors in 2019, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 infection in Sweden, had T-cell immunity against it. These observations imply that prior exposure to some other coronavirus (es) had evoked "**cross reacting**" **T-cell immunity** towards the COVID-19 coronavirus. The Karolinska investigators found that the immune T cells had 'stem cell' like characteristics — indicating their long-term survival and potential of quick multiplication.
4. **Prevalence of cross reacting T-cells and their implication**
 - Four coronaviruses causing common cold are widely prevalent in human communities. The prevalence of cross reacting T-cell immunity from the common cold coronaviruses is likely to vary from country to country, depending partly on population density and the frequency of recurrent viral infections of the respiratory tract. Countries with high population density, where such infections spread quickly, may be expected to have a higher proportion of the population exposed to them.

5. Developing simple and rapid assays for T-cell immunity should be a priority for Indian scientists to work on, quickly. Those with T-cell immunity may need no vaccine, or only a single dose of a two dose vaccine regimen.



Economics and Finance

Daily snippets

1. Moody's narrows 2020 GDP contraction to 8.9%

- **Rating agency Moody's Investors Service** has revised upward its forecast for India's GDP for calendar year 2020 to an **8.9% contraction** from its earlier projection for a contraction of 9.6%.
- India's GDP forecast for calendar year 2021 has been revised upwards to 8.6% growth from the 8.1% projected earlier.
- India's economy had the biggest contraction, 24% year over year in the second quarter, as a result of a long and strict nationwide lockdown. Restrictions have eased only slowly and in phases, and localised restrictions in containment zones remain.
- Moody's statement added that the scope for additional rate cuts was limited in most emerging market economies and quantitative easing in the short-run is not expected.
- **What is quantitative easing?** It is a form of unconventional monetary policy in which a central bank purchases longer-term securities from the open market in order to increase the money supply and encourage lending and investment.
- The agency stressed that geopolitical and trade risks would remain a key focus in the year ahead as the relationship between the U.S. and China, had deteriorated. The pandemic has also led to security concerns in several countries about supply chain vulnerabilities and economic dependencies.
- Overall, G20 economies were expected to collectively contract 3.8% in 2020, followed by 4.9% growth in 2021 and 3.8% growth in 2022. The agency expects pandemic management to improve over time, allowing for steady normalisation of social and economic activity.

2. Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- The **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** is an **index** which shows the growth rates in different **industry** groups of the economy in a stipulated period of time. The **IIP index** is computed and published by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) on a monthly basis. [Further Reading](#)

3. Made in China items find favor with 29% buyers

- Chinese products continued to find favour among more than a fourth of Indian households as they offered higher 'value for money' even as a majority of respondents chose to skip products made in China, according to a survey.

- In a **survey by Local Circles**, which registered 14,000 responses, 71% respondents said that they “consciously did not buy made in China items' ', while 29% said they had bought made in China products this festival season. With earnings impacted, for many households this year, buying the lowest cost product was not a choice but the only option.

4. [External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on trade blocs](#)

- India has allowed other countries 'unfair trade and manufacturing advantages “in the name of openness”, **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** asserted in a speech criticising globalisation.
- Without directly referring to the RCEP, the trading bloc that India decided to walk out of a year ago, Mr. Jaishankar said that the government had decided to move away from trading arrangements, towards an **“Aatmanirbhar Bharat”** policy where India could decide the rules and consolidate “comprehensive national power”.
- The Minister added that the consequences of future trade agreements would lock India in to global commitments, many of them not to our advantage. The minister’s comments indicate that India is not considering an offer from RCEP nations to rejoin the group.

5. [Goldman Sachs sees narrower GDP contraction of 10.3%](#)

- Goldman Sachs has revised **upwards its estimate for India’s GDP** this year to a **10.3% contraction** from a 14.8% contraction projected earlier. and expects the economy to grow by as much as 13% in 2021-22, higher than other forecasts made so far.
- Projections are driven by expectations of broad based availability of an effective vaccine in India that could allow containment policies and mobility to normalise by mid-2022.
- The pace of the rebound will be restrained by some economic scarring and factors including a weak labour market, the hit to private sector incomes and balance sheets, tighter credit supply conditions and a limited impetus from fiscal policy.

6. [Asian Development Bank allocates \\$20 million for COVID-19 vaccine access](#)

- The [Asian Development Bank \(ADB\)](#) said it had allocated \$20.3 million in aid to developing member countries to access COVID-19 vaccines and establish systems to enable equitable vaccine distribution.
- The technical assistance will also support identification and promotion of innovative cold chain and vaccine-tracking technologies.

7. [Manufacturing of Laptops and tablets, a \\$100 billion opportunity](#)

- The manufacturing of laptops and tablets presents a **\$100 billion opportunity for India by 2025** provided there is a ‘conducive policy environment’ and incentives, the **India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA)** said.
- The industry body pitched for a PLI scheme for manufacturing of laptops and tablets on the lines of the one introduced for mobile phones. The global market for these products is expected to be about \$ 220 billion per year over the next five years. This presents an opportunity for India to ramp up the export of ‘Made in India’ laptops and tablets.

8. [IMF foresees legacy scars from COVID-19 crisis](#)

- **Gita Gopinath**, chief economist at the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, said that the world economy hadn’t returned to pre pandemic levels yet despite a rebound in recent months. She added that the crisis triggered by the virus was likely to scar future economic activity as companies, governments, students and the worst hit sections of the workforce would have to cope with the pandemic’s ‘legacies’.

- There will be corporates with stressed balance sheets, there will be governments with large amounts of debt. We have a generation of students impacted by loss of schooling. The job market is recovering in some places strongly, but if you look at low-income workers, women and young workers, they are very hard hit. She also urged countries to push for green investments as part of the recovery process as they were more job intensive.

9. [Finance Commission recommends PPP on health infra](#)

- The **15th Finance Commission** has mooted a greater role for **public private partnerships** to ramp up health infrastructure and scale up public spending on health from 0.95% of the GDP to 2.5% by 2024. The Commission recommended public outlays to focus on primary health care at the panchayat and municipality levels and private players for providing specialty healthcare.
- **N.K Singh, chairman of the commission** recommended substantial improvements in the working conditions for doctors in government hospitals, many of whom are hired on a contract basis by the States, and the creation of an Indian Medical Service cadre as envisaged in the **Civil Services Act, 1951**.

10. [The MGNREGS wage struggle](#)

- A study by **LibTech India** based on the survey of almost **2,000 workers in Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan**, for most rural workers dependent on the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, their labour does not end at the work site. Many of them are **forced to make multiple trips to the bank**, adding travel costs and income losses, and face repeated rejections of payment, biometric errors and wrong information, just to get their hands on their wages.
- The study found that only one in 10 workers get an SMS message that their wages have been credited. A third of workers must visit the bank branch just to find out whether their wages have been credited. There has been **little change in the number of bank branches** per capita in rural areas.
- A brief summary of the expense of a worker in Jharkhand who puts in a week of hard labour to earn ₹1,026 which the government credits directly into her bank account, It costs an average of ₹53 a trip, and as the branch is usually at the block headquarters a significant distance from her home village, and the time spent at the bank is three to four hours, a worker will also lose the day's wages while she attempts to withdraw her money. Paying ₹100 for travel for two trips, plus ₹342 for lost wages, plus about ₹25 for food, the worker may spend ₹392, effectively shelling out a third of her weekly wage just to withdraw it.

[Mega trade bloc RCEP takes off](#)

1. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a mega trade bloc comprising 15 countries led by China, came into existence on Sunday. Members of the RCEP include all ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia) along with Japan, South Korea, China and Australia.
2. The members account for nearly 30% of the global GDP. The RCEP includes provisions on trade in goods and services, intellectual property, e-commerce, telecommunication, small and medium enterprises, and other issues. It will emerge as the largest free trade agreement in the world.
3. The three largest economies in the pact, China, Japan and South Korea, are a part of a free trade agreement for the first time. On November 4, 2019, India walked out of the agreement as negotiations failed to address the country's issues and concerns.
4. **Leverage for China via the RCEP**
 - It will give China access to Japanese and South Korean markets in a big way.

- Except with Australia and Japan, there is a sense that India increasingly turning inward doesn't connect with a region looking to come together, which again puts China in a position of influence.
- It will also help China move out supply chains in the coming 5-10 years.

5. India's concerns over the RCEP

- Concerns regarding China in the post coronavirus world scenario had prevented Delhi from restarting negotiations for membership of the RCEP. India did not return to the negotiations despite a request from the RCEP members, who have discussed the trade pact for nearly eight years.
 - Staying out of RCEP may interfere with India's bilateral trading with the RCEP member countries.
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Sports

Daily snippets

1. Sports Personalities

- **Apurvi Chandela** : She is an Indian Shooting player who competes in the **10 metre air rifle event**. She won the gold medal in the **2019 ISSF World Cup in New Delhi**. She is a **former world number 1**. In 2012, Chandela won the gold medal in the 10 metres air rifle event at the National shooting championships in New Delhi. In 2014, she won four medals at the Intershoot Championships at The Hague, that included two individual and two team medals. In the same year, she won the gold medal in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, setting up a new world record. Chandela qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics in the women's 10m air rifle event, where she finished at 34th position in the qualification round out of 51 contestants. At the 2018 Asian Games, she paired with Ravi Kumar for the 10 meter air rifle mixed team event, and won a bronze medal.
- **Prajesh Gunneswaran** : He is an Indian tennis player. He has won 2 ATP Challenger and 8 ITF titles in singles and 1 ITF title in doubles. He is currently the second highest ranked Indian singles player and represents India at the Davis Cup.

2. Delhi Half Marathon

- Ethiopians **Andamlak Belihu** and **Tsehay Gemecu** have confirmed their participation in the 16th edition of the Airtel Delhi half marathon to defend their titles among the men and women respectively.
- The course record is held by Ethiopian Guye Adola, who clocked 59:06 in 2014. Among the women, Tsehay Gemechu would be looking to improve her personal best of 66:00 she timed last year.
- **What is a Marathon?** The **marathon** is a long-distance race with an **official distance of 42.195 kilometers** (26 miles 385 yards), usually run as a road race. The event was instituted in commemoration of the fabled run of the **Greek soldier Pheidippides**, a messenger from the **Battle of Marathon to Athens**, who reported the victory. The marathon was one of the original modern Olympic events in 1896, though the distance did not become standardized until 1921. More than 800 marathons are held throughout the world each year, with the vast majority of competitors being recreational athletes, as larger marathons can have tens of thousands of participants.

3. Lewis Hamilton makes history!

- Britain's Lewis Hamilton choked back the tears as he won a record equalling seventh Formula One world championship to become the most successful driver in history. This was also his 94th career win.
- Only **Ferrari great Michael Schumacher** has seven titles to his name, a number once thought unlikely ever to be matched, but most of the German's records have been passed by Hamilton.
- Hamilton now has more race wins, pole positions and podium finishes than anyone in history.

4. Adam Peaty sets world record

- **Britain's Adam Peaty** set a world record for the short course 100m breaststroke at the professional International Swimming League finishing in 55.49 seconds to better the 55.61s set by **South Africa's Cameron van der Burgh** 11 years ago.

5. Joan Mir is the moto champion of the world!

- Suzuki rider Joan Mir clinched his maiden MotoGP crown and became the Japanese team's first World champion in two decades.

6. Golf : Dustin Johnson wins Masters

- Top ranked Dustin Johnson won the Masters, capturing his second Major title with the lowest total score in Augusta National history. "As a kid I always wanted to become a Masters champion. It's just incredible." Johnson's other major came in 2016.
- Johnson's score in relation to par matched the lowest in Major history and smashed the old 72-hole Masters mark of 18 under 270 set by Tiger Woods in 1997. Johnson is the first reigning World No. 1 to grab the green jacket since Tiger Woods in 2002.

7. Dominic Thiem beat Rafael Nadal at the ATP finals

- **Austria's Dominic Thiem** produced a stunning display of attacking tennis to beat **Rafael Nadal** 7-6(7), 7-6(4) in a high-quality duel at the ATP Finals and seize control of their group
- Spaniard Nadal, bidding to win the only big title to elude him, engineered the first break of the match at 3-3 in the second set only for Thiem to reply in stunning fashion.

8. IOC chief says 'Athletes won't be forced to get vaccinated'

- **International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach** said that athletes would not be forced to get COVID-19 vaccinations ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, but added they should as a "**demonstration of solidarity**" with the Japanese.
 - More than 11,000 athletes are expected to descend in the Japanese capital for the Olympics, which is due to begin on July 23, with thousands more coming for the subsequent Paralympics.
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