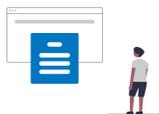


**G.K snippets...**



1. *The India way* is a book written by India's External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar**.

**Law, Policy and Governance**



[Daily snippets](#)

1. [Indian vaccines after phase 3 trials](#)

- The experts have said that India's own vaccines could be available "almost immediately" for public use after the phase 3 trials were completed and the drug regulator was convinced of a vaccine's potential efficacy. **Emergency use authorisation (EUA) procedure** in India is similar to that in the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- **Covishield** is based on the **AstraZeneca Oxford vaccine candidate**, ChAdOx1ncov19, and is being tested in 16,000 volunteers across the country. Covaxin has just begun Phase 3 trials and is being tested in 28,500 volunteers across the country.
- The EUA is not an approval. It is permission granted to a company for a limited time to offer a vaccine or a drug to people to tide over a crisis.

2. [Convicted legislators can't be barred for life from polls](#)

- The Central government has told the Supreme Court that it rejected the idea of barring convicted legislators for life from contesting elections, forming or becoming an office-bearer of a political party.
- The government said **disqualification under the Representation of the People Act** of 1951 for the period of the prison sentence and six years thereafter was enough for legislators. The Centre's stand differs from that taken by the Election Commission, which **endorsed a life ban** as necessary to "champion the cause of decriminalisation of politics".

3. [Not using masks flouts fundamental rights : SC](#)

- People who do not wear masks in public and follow physical distancing norms **violate the fundamental rights of others** amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Supreme Court said. Bench also flags neglect of physical distancing norms
- While expressing deep anxiety about the lack of implementation of COVID-19 norms across the country, a Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, however, stayed a Gujarat High Court order of December 2, which went to the “well intentioned but disproportionate and harsh” extent of directing people who do not wear masks to be **sent for community service at COVID-19 care centres** in the State.
- Justices Shah and R. Subhash Reddy, however, focussed on the intention behind the High Court order, saying the poor implementation and lack of will on the part of the authorities to enforce COVID-19 norms was stark.

#### 4. [Lottery, gambling and betting taxable under GST Act : SC](#)

- The Supreme Court held that lottery, gambling and betting are taxable under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act**. The court held that **lottery, betting and gambling were “actionable claims”** and came within the definition of ‘goods’ under Section 2(52) of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.
- A three judge Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan said the levy of GST on lotteries did not amount to “hostile discrimination”. Justice Bhushan was responding to arguments made by Skill Lotto Solutions and other lottery agents that the **lottery was not ‘goods’ and GST on it was illegal**.

#### 5. [SC rejects plea for govt. nominees in mosque trust](#)

- The Supreme Court rejected a plea to nominate Central and State government representatives to the **‘Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation Trust’** for building a mosque in Ayodhya.
- The **Ramjanmabhoomi title dispute verdict** of November last year had directed the Centre to allot five acres to the Sunni Waqf Board for a new mosque at a prominent place.
- It had said there was no provision for nominating any officer of the government. There should be the proper management of the funds and property vested in the trust.

#### 6. [Editors Guild issues advisory on stir coverage](#)

- **The Editors Guild of India (EGI)** urged media organisations to refrain from labelling farmers as “Khalistani”, “anti national” and other such terms so that the protests are not delegitimized. The EGI asked media organisations to display fairness, objectivity and balance in reporting.

#### 7. [Farmers firm on repeal of agri laws](#)

- Dimming hopes of a compromise, a joint front of protesting farmer groups rejected the Centre’s proposals to amend the three contentious agriculture laws and called for a **‘Bharat Bandh’ on December 8** to widen the agitation. The front reiterated the farmers’ demand for a total repeal of the three Central laws.
- The farmer leaders also stressed the demand for **legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price**. Farmer leaders from several States addressed the media briefing, stressing that it was an all India movement and their demand for repeal of the three farm laws was “non-negotiable”.

#### 8. [People have the right to demonstrate peacefully : UN](#)

- *“People have a right to demonstrate peacefully and authorities need to let them do so,”* Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the Secretary General of the United Nations said, on being asked about **the farmers’ movement in India**.

- The comment from the United Nations came even as 36 British Members of Parliament sent a joint letter to U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, calling upon him to bring up the concerns of British citizens over the protests in Punjab and in the outskirts of Delhi.

#### 9. MPs raise concerns over exemptions in privacy Bill

- Ten members of the 30 member joint parliamentary **committee on the Data Protection Bill, 2019**, have moved amendments against the provision in the legislation giving power to the Central government to **exempt any agency of the government from application of the Act**. The members have said this clause makes the entire Act infructuous.
- Invoking “sovereignty and integrity of India”, “public order”, “friendly relations with foreign states” and “security of the state”, the legislation gives powers to the Central government to **suspend all or any of the provisions of this Act** for government agencies.

#### 10. 140 pleas against CAA pending

- Over 140 petitions challenging the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have been pending for nearly a year in the Supreme Court, leaving petitioners from various walks of life and across the political spectrum “deeply disappointed” over the delay. In December 2019, the court declined a stay while asking the Centre to make an all-out effort to disseminate the actual **legislative intent of the citizenship law**.
- “Since the CAA has been unprecedented in many ways - be it the nature of amendment which strikes at the root of the Basic Structure of the Constitution or the protests it has evoked across the nation or the panic among the people that they will be driven out of the country - it would be in the best interest of all that the Supreme Court hears the case at the earliest and put at rest these issues,” observed the pleaders.

#### 11. J&K administration seeks review of order on Roshni Act

- The J&K administration has **sought modifications** to the High Court judgment passed on October 9, which **declared the 2001 Roshni Act null and void** in the Union Territory (UT) and directed authorities to end the ownership rights of occupants of government land. In a review petition filed on December 4, the J&K government has pleaded for “modifying the judgement”.
- The petition argued that a large number of common people would suffer unintentionally. *“This includes landless cultivators and individuals who are themselves residing in dwellings on small areas”*. The government underlined the need to *“distinguish between the two classes of people; the fact of being either a landless cultivator or the house holder with one dwelling in personal use.”*

#### 12. Plea to declare emergency unlawful

- The Supreme Court is scheduled on Monday to hear a 94-year-old widow who wants the **Emergency proclaimed in 1975** to be “wholly unconstitutional”. Veera Sarin said she and her family were victims of the excesses of that “grave and dark period of our nation’s history”.
- Their gold jewellery and diamond business based in Karol Bagh and Connaught Place in the National Capital were plundered by the government authorities during the Emergency, when civil rights and liberties were suspended.

#### 13. SC nod for Central Vista inauguration

- The Supreme Court allowed the foundation stone laying ceremony of a new parliament building to go ahead as scheduled on December 10 after the government gave an undertaking to **keep in abeyance the construction or demolition of buildings** and the shifting of trees in the Central Vista area for now.

- A Bench, led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, expressed displeasure with the government for “aggressively” continuing with the construction, demolition and shifting of trees even as questions concerning the legality of the Central Vista project were in court. Mr. Mehta, after receiving instructions from the government, apologized to the court and gave an undertaking that **no physical changes would be made to the area.**

#### 14. [Riots: HC seek response from police on JNU student’s plea](#)

- The Delhi High Court sought response from the police on a plea by JNU student and Pinjra Tod activist **Devangana Kalita** - arrested in a case related to the **north east Delhi riots** - seeking copies of videos of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).
- Ms. Kalita is in judicial custody in the case in which she is charged under the anti-terror law **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**. Earlier in September, the High Court had granted her bail in connection with an FIR registered on February 26, 2020 at Jafrabad police station.

#### 15. [Data of transgender prisoners to be included in reports : Centre](#)

- The **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** will include **transgenders as a separate third gender** in their annual publication of **Prison Statistics India** from 2020 onwards, the Delhi High Court was informed. In view of the submission, the High Court disposed of a petition by law graduate Karan Tripathi, seeking recognition of transgenders as a separate third gender in the PSI.
- Mr. Tripathi, represented by advocate Akhil Hasija, had argued that unless the NCRB assign a proper sex to the prison inmates, who may be transgenders, there cannot be a proper guarantee of their civil rights, constitutional rights and even basic human rights.

#### 16. [HC : cannot insist on physical presence of litigants, advocates](#)

- The Delhi High Court has said that litigants and advocates cannot be asked to appear physically before the trial court during the pandemic unless all the parties consent to it.
- Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva directed a trial court to take up the proceedings before it through video-conferencing and not to insist for a physical hearing unless all the parties consent to the same.
- The court’s direction came on a plea by a man challenging a trial court order listing, for a physical hearing on December 19, a 41-year old suit related to a property dispute. The man had contended that in view of the present pandemic, it would not be possible to physically appear in the proceedings.

#### 17. [High Court for knowing what actions other democracies took over offensive tweets](#)

- A Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.S. Karnik was hearing the final arguments on a plea filed by Mumbai resident Sunaina Holey, who has been booked by the Azad Maidan police for allegedly posting offensive tweets against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and his son Aaditya. Ms. Holey, through her counsel Abhinav Chandrachud, has sought that the FIR against her be quashed.
- The court asked what other democracies in the world did in similar cases.

#### 18. [Women entry curbs off the portal now](#)

- The restrictions mentioned on the portal for virtual queue booking for entry and darshan for **women below 50 years at the Ayyappa temple** at Sabarimala during the Mandalam Makaravilakku season have been taken off
- The ‘government’s change in stance’ on women’s entry amidst electioneering to the three phase polls to local bodies in the State has come in for flak even from the ruling party. The guideline now says devotees between the age of 60 and 65 should carry medical certificates while coming for darshan.

### 19. Conduct workshop for prison authorities

- Referring to civil rights campaigner Gautam Navlakha being denied his spectacles at Taloja Central Jail, the Bombay High Court said, "*Humanity is most important. This is high time to conduct a workshop for prison authorities.*"
- The court was hearing a criminal application filed by Mr. Navlakha's co-accused Ramesh Gaichor and Sagar Gorkhe in the **Bhima Koregaon case**, challenging their arrest by the NIA.

### 20. Supreme Court to maintain status-quo on economy

- The Supreme Court on Tuesday orally said it would not pass any order that would **risk the economy going "haywire"** after the Union government revealed that a blanket waiver of interest on debts incurred by all classes and categories of borrowers for the moratorium period would mean forgoing an estimated over ₹6 lakh crore.
- "If the banks were to bear this burden, it would necessarily wipe out a substantial and a major part of their net worth, rendering most of the banks unviable and raising a very serious question mark over their very survival," **Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta**, for the Centre, submitted before a Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan. It is estimated that for every loan account, there are approximately 8.5 depositors account in the Indian banking system.
- The Supreme Court is hearing the government's response to separate pleas made by industry, real estate and power sectors and others for debt relief, including waiver of interest, during the moratorium.
- "The Ministry of Finance, under the Disaster Management Act, and the RBI have acted proactively. The overriding objective was to prevent financial markets from freezing up; ensure normal functioning of financial intermediaries; ease the stress faced by households and businesses; and keep the life blood of finance flowing," the counsel added.
- The **resolution framework announced by the RBI** took care of the apprehensions raised about the possible downgrading of loan accounts from standard to **non performing asset (NPA)** and consequent impact on ratings. The **Securities and Exchange Board of India** had issued circulars to relax the "**recognition**" of defaults committed during moratorium. **The Kamath Committee** set up by the RBI has recommended financial parameters for debt restructuring of 26 sectors affected by COVID-19.

### 21. Farmers reject amendment proposals, plan to intensify stir

- Farmer leaders rejected the Union government's proposal to amend the farm laws and vowed to intensify their agitation until they are repealed. They plan to block the capital's highways to Agra and Jaipur by December 12 and hold a nationwide dharna two days later.
- The Centre delivered its written proposal to the farmers' leadership at the Singhu border. The proposal offered a written assurance that government procurement at minimum support price would remain, along with proposals to amend the laws.
- On December 14, they plan a dharna, or sitting, with farmers from north Indian States urged to come to Delhi, while others begin indefinite protests in their home States.

### 22. Quarantine posters not required: SC

- The Supreme Court clarified that State governments and Union Territories are not required to paste posters outside the homes of quarantined COVID-19 patients. The order came on a petition filed by an advocate who has contended that such posters entail the violation of the fundamental right to privacy of patients.
- The Centre had said that its November 19 letter to States and Union Territories does not contain any instruction or guidance on affixing posters or signage outside the residences of those found COVID-19 patients. The court noted that the Delhi and Punjab governments have already withdrawn orders to paste posters.

### 23. Ensure 'country of origin' tag, HC tells Centre

- The Delhi High Court asked the Centre if e-commerce entities such as Flipkart, Amazon and Snapdeal, are complying with the requirement of displaying '**country of origin**' on products offered for sale on their websites. A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Prateek Jalan directed the Centre to verify it.

### 24. 'Rules governing CAA still under preparation

- A year after the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA)** was passed by the Lok Sabha, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has said that the rules governing the Act are still "under preparation". Without the rules being notified, the Act remains ineffective. This is the first official response from the MHA on the rules of the contentious Act after a question filed under the RTI.

### 25. Cabinet approves EPF subsidy for new workers

- The Union Cabinet approved a scheme that would entail the government paying Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions of both the employee and employer for two years for new workers hired from October 1 to June 30, 2021. The Cabinet approved spending ₹1,548 crore for the current financial year.
- It would benefit lakhs of workers. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation would credit the amount into the Aadhaar Seeded accounts of the members.

### 26. About 4,800 'noncitizens' in NRC: affidavit filed in High Court

- The **National Register of Citizens (NRC) authorities** have submitted to the Gauhati High Court an affidavit reportedly containing the details of "illegal foreigners" whose names had crept into the updated list of citizens released in 2019.
- Some 19.06 lakh out of 3.3 crore applicants were excluded from the complete draft NRC published on August 31, 2019. Some reports citing unspecified officials said there are about 4,800 ineligible people erroneously figuring in the NRC.

## Explainer : Caste in the census

### 1. Background

- The Tamil Nadu government has decided to appoint a commission to formulate a methodology to collect **caste wise particulars** of its population and use that to come up with a report. The Centre conducted a '**Socio-economic Caste Census**' (SECC) in 2011 throughout the country, but it did not make public the caste component of the findings.

### 2. Collection of caste details as a part of the census and the criticism

- Caste was among the details collected by enumerators during the **decennial Census of India until 1931**. It was given up in 1941, a year in which the census operation was partially affected by World War II.
- In his report on the 1941 exercise, then **Census Commissioner of India, M.W.M. Yeatts** indicated that tabulation of caste details separately involved additional costs, even in 1931, it was severely limited due to financial reasons.
- The principal argument **against taking caste particulars of individuals** is that it **tends to perpetuate the caste system**. **J.H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner in 1931**, noted that on the occasion of each successive census since 1901, some criticism had been raised about taking any note of the fact of caste.

### 3. [View after independence](#)

- **R.A. Gopaldaswami**, the first Indian **Registrar General of independent India**, said in the 1951 report: *“The 1951 census was not to concern itself with questions regarding castes, races and tribes, except in so far as the necessary statistical material related to ‘special groups’ and certain other material relating to backward classes collected and made over to the Backward Classes Commission”*. This implies that Backward Caste data were collected, but not compiled or published.

### 4. [How have caste details being collected so far?](#)

- While SC/ST details are collected as part of the census, details of other castes are not collected by the enumerators. So far, backward classes commissions in various States have been conducting their own counts to ascertain the population of backward castes. The methodology may vary from State to State.

### 5. [SECC 2011](#)

- The **Socio-economic Caste Census of 2011** was a major exercise to obtain data about the socioeconomic status of various communities. The general census is conducted in a small window of a month, while the caste census is conducted over a longer period of time.
- The SECC 2011 had two components: a survey of the rural and urban households and ranking of these households based on pre-set parameters, and a caste census. The caste data have not been released till now. While a precise reason is yet to be disclosed, it is surmised that the data were considered too politically sensitive.

### 6. [Legal imperative for a caste count](#)

- Over the last two decades, the Supreme Court has been raising questions about **the basis for reservation levels being high in various States**. It has laid down that there should be quantifiable data to justify the presence of a caste in the backward class list, as well as evidence of its underrepresentation in services. It has also called for periodical review of community wise lists so that the benefits do not perpetually go in favour of a few castes.

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## National News/ Interventions



### [Daily snippets](#)

#### 1. [AQI in Delhi continues to be 'very poor'](#)

- The air quality of Delhi, Gurugram and Noida continue to be in the “very poor” category as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. The Delhi government signed an MoU with Vidhi Centre of Legal Policy for suggesting legal reforms to fight air pollution in the city.
- The air quality is likely to marginally deteriorate for the next two days within the very poor owing to calm wind conditions. The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring States to PM2.5, a chief pollutant, in Delhi was estimated to be only 2% on Thursday.

#### 2. [‘Carefully monitoring’ Brahmaputra developments: India](#)

- India said it “carefully monitors all developments on the Brahmaputra” river, even as Beijing said it was its “legitimate right” to develop hydropower projects on the lower reaches of the river. A State-run Chinese hydropower firm, **POWERCHINA**, is planning to build the first downstream dam on the **Brahmaputra, known as the Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet**.
- Officials from the firm said last week that they were eyeing the enormous potential of the river’s “Great Bend” just across the border from Arunachal Pradesh in Tibet’s Medog county, where the river falls over a 2,000-metre drop before turning to flow into India. While China in 2015 operationalised its first hydropower project at Zangmu in Tibet and is constructing three other dams at Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha, these are run-of-the-river dams on the upper and middle reaches.

### 3. [MDH masala owner passes away](#)

- MDH Masala owner **Mahashay Dharampal Gulati**, 97, died here on Thursday. Gulati, who was awarded Padma Bhushan last year, was undergoing post-COVID-19 treatment. Born in Sialkot (now in Pakistan) in 1923, he came to India after Partition. **Mahashian Di Hatti (MDH)** was founded by his father Mahashay Chunni Lal Gulati.

### 4. [Safety of COVID vaccine paramount, says DCGI](#)

- Safety and efficacy of a COVID-19 vaccine is paramount with the regulatory pathway for the vaccine in India seeing an accelerated rolling review and interim analysis of clinical trials, **Drugs Controller-General of India V.G. Somani** said on Friday. At a discussion on “Regulatory pathways for COVID vaccines, clinical trials, rolling reviews and adverse event monitoring”, he said India had a system for compensating participants for adverse reactions to new drugs being tested.

### 5. [Cities with poor air quality told to sprinkle water on roads](#)

- **The National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has directed all municipal bodies in the NCR and other cities, where the ambient air quality is in the “poor” category, to ensure that water is sprinkled on roads before sweeping them. The green panel also directed authorities to ensure steps are taken to **plant grass or raise small herbs and shrubs** on the sides of pavements, roads and on open dusty areas.
- The directions came when the green panel was hearing a plea moved by petitioner R.S. Virk, seeking action to curb the impact of dust pollution arising out of dry sweeping of roads in metro cities. The petition contended that dust **contributed to around 43% of the air pollution**.

### 6. [Prime Minister Modi on the COVID vaccine](#)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday told floor leaders of 19 political parties represented in Parliament that a vaccine against COVID-19 could be **available for rollout in the next few weeks**.
- The government, he said, had set up **a national experts’ group of scientists**, Central and State government officials for mapping the vaccination programme, which would likely take advantage of India’s large and experienced vaccination network from its **universal immunisation programme**.
- Frontline health workers and those with comorbidities would be first in line for the vaccine. The pricing of the vaccine would be “according to the **imperatives of public health**” and in consultation with the State governments, he added. Eight vaccine candidates are being manufactured in India and three are being developed indigenously.
- Several parties flagged the need to pay the GST dues that the Central government owes to the States, and additional financial help to meet the revenue shortfall that many States are facing due to the pandemic.

### 7. [Nation is proud of the Navy : President Kovind](#)

- President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday greeted Navy personnel on Navy Day. “*Nation is proud of your commitment in protecting our maritime frontiers and providing assistance in times of civil emergencies. May you ever rule the waters. Jai Hind!*” he tweeted.

- December 4 is celebrated as Navy Day to commemorate the Indian Navy's **attack on Karachi harbour during the 1971 India-Pakistan war**.

#### 8. [Tribunal pulls up NHA over green cover](#)

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHA) was pulled up by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over **inadequate steps to maintain green cover** along highways to mitigate vehicular pollution.
- A Bench headed by **NGT chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel** noted the NHA's stand that the roads were constructed by concessionaires and it was their responsibility to comply with law.
- *"If the NHA in the course of its activities hires its agents, the liability of the principal does not end. The criminal as well as civil liability of NHA and its highest officers under the environmental law to be prosecuted and to be required to pay compensation continues."* The bench noted.

#### 9. [Alternative questions may be offered in CLAT](#)

- The Consortium of National Law Universities will consider the option of giving alternative questions in the **Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) 2021** to persons with disabilities, particularly visually challenged candidates, so that they are not at any disadvantage compared to other candidates.
- In a press release, Faizan Mustafa who is a member of the consortium said that the issue was raised by Supreme Court Judge, **Justice D.Y. Chandrachud**, who highlighted the hardships faced by persons with disabilities in answering some of the questions in CLAT.

#### 10. [Unsafe injections caused HIV surge in Unnao](#)

- *"Unsafe injection exposure during treatment and receipt of intramuscular injection in the last five years were independently associated with HIV sero-reactive (presence of antibodies) status,"* noted ICMR as the reason for the surge of **HIV in Unnao, U.P.**, in 2017-18.
- The study was done on individuals who were detected HIV sero-reactive during November 2017-April 2018 from three locations, namely Premganj, Karimuddinpur and Chakmeerapur in the Bangarmau block of Unnao district. The study has been critical to understanding the outbreak and the challenges associated with unsafe injection practices. A comprehensive approach should be adopted with interventions like increasing access to auto disabled syringes and needles, empowering local communities and implementing effective regulatory practices.

#### 11. [States with stressed groundwater top cereal trade : A study](#)

- States with critically low groundwater reserves were responsible for **41%, or about 38.6 million tonnes, of domestic cereal trade**. Thus, nearly 39% of the groundwater is being used up in producing and trading cereals among States.
- Cereals are the source of about half the energy that an average Indian gets from her diet. Within them, rice and wheat dominate cereal production. Cereals are intensely water consumptive crops.
- Trade patterns varied between **PDS (Public Distribution System) and non-PDS cereals**. The majority (58%; 58.0 Mt) of interstate cereal trade occurred through the PDS. The study thus advocates the substantial potential for balancing water resources through the trade of crops in India, either in addition to or in place of large scale infrastructure projects.

#### 12. [Meghalaya gives 100 crore to pollution control panel](#)

- The Meghalaya government has transferred ₹100 crore to the **Central Pollution Control Board** for restoration of the environment damaged by **unregulated rat-hole coal mining** in the State. The **National Green Tribunal** had banned **rat-hole mining** in April 2014. The NGT has been advising the State government on the utilisation of the **Meghalaya Environment Restoration and Protection Fund (MERPF)**.

#### 13. [India set to be largest buyer of vaccines](#)

- India is set to be the largest buyer of COVID-19 vaccines in the world with **1.6 billion doses**, according to a global analysis, a number some scientists say could cover 800 million people or 60% of its population, and will be enough to develop 'herd immunity'.
- India has agreed to buy 500 million doses of the **Oxford University-AstraZeneca** vaccine candidate, one billion from the U.S. company **Novavax** and 100 million doses of the **Sputnik V** candidate from Russia's Gamaleya Research Institute, according to the U.S. based Duke University Global Health Innovation Center.
- **High-income countries** currently hold a *confirmed 3.8 billion doses*, **upper middle-income countries** hold *829 million doses*, and **lower middle-income countries** hold more than *1.7 billion doses*. According to the analysis, India is the top COVID-19 vaccine buyer followed by the European Union, which has confirmed 1.58 billion doses, and the U.S., the worst affected country so far, that has managed to purchase just over a billion doses.

#### 14. [Parliament project set for launch](#)

- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said Prime Minister Narendra Modi would on December 10 lay the foundation stone for the new Parliament building, which would be a symbol of "atmanirbhar Bharat" and a "temple of democracy" for Independent India. The new building would be built adjacent to the existing building in over 22 months. The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha chambers themselves would accommodate 888 and 384 MPs respectively.

#### 15. [NGT seeks action plan on elephant corridors](#)

- **The National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has directed the **Odisha government** to prepare an action plan within three months on 14 identified elephant corridors for providing stress-free migration to them from one habitation to another in the State. The State government had proposed 14 corridors stretching over a total area of 870.61 sq.km. having a length of 420.8 km. Despite the passing of several years, no tangible progress had been made on the government's proposal.

#### 16. [Government to promote AYUSH exports](#)

- Citing the rise in exports of Ayurveda-related products since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has decided to set up an export promotion council for **AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy)** products. The Ministries of Finance, Commerce and Industry, and AYUSH will work together to facilitate more exports of such products, by standardizing their HS (Harmonized System) codes for global trade.
- **The Bureau of Indian Standards** will be roped in to help develop international standards for AYUSH products and services.

#### 17. [Hampi chariot can't be touched](#)

- Tourists can no longer get too close to the iconic stone chariot in front of the **Vijaya Vittala Temple at Hampi**, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The architectural marvel, one of the most photographed monuments, has been cordoned off by a chain barricade by **the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**.
- The chariot inside the temple complex is a **shrine dedicated to Garuda**, but the sculpture of Garuda is now missing. The Hampi chariot is one among the **three famous stone chariots in India**, the other two being in **Konark, Odisha**, and **Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu**. The delicately carved chariot at Hampi, art historians say, reflects skill of temple architecture under the patronage of **Vijayanagar rulers** who reigned from **14th to 17th century CE**.

#### 18. [Memorial to Kadri Gopal Nath dedicated at his birthplace](#)

- The memorial, with a statue of the artiste holding a **saxophone**, was dedicated on Gopalnath's 71st birth anniversary about 35 km from Mangalore. The memorial is spread over 2,000 sq. ft, and has a garden.

- The artiste, born on December 6, 1949, had passed away in Mangalore on October 11, 2019. His son and music director Manikanth Kadri said the statue was made of 'Krishna Shile' (black granite)

#### **19. SII seeks emergency use nod for Covishield in India**

- **The Serum Institute of India (SII)** became the first indigenous company to apply to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) seeking emergency use authorisation for the **Oxford COVID-19 vaccine** in the country, citing unmet medical needs due to the pandemic and in the interest of the public at large.
- The phase3 clinical trial of the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine, Covishield, is being conducted by the Pune based SII, cosponsored by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in various parts of the country in addition to clinical studies being carried out by **Oxford AstraZeneca in the UK and Brazil**.
- According to the ICMR, the SII has already manufactured 40 million doses of the vaccine under the at-risk manufacturing and stockpiling license it obtained from the DCGI.

#### **20. Madhya Pradesh readies to treat 1 lakh malnourished children**

- The Madhya Pradesh government is preparing to deal with a likely surge in children suffering from **severe acute malnutrition (SAM)**. The strategy involved is by emphasising community led efforts to overcome shortcomings in health infrastructure.
- According to a Lancet article published on July 27, "there could be a **14.3% increase** in the prevalence of **moderate or severe wasting** among children younger than five years due to COVID-19 related losses. It also forecasts a rise in child mortality by up to 10,000 deaths per month globally.
- The community management treatment includes **identification of vulnerable children**, community supervised **feeding and monitoring of the health status**, and forming mothers' groups as well as those of adolescent girls to assist frontline workers in **spreading awareness** within the community.

#### **21. Tribals come together to protect soil biodiversity**

- Tribals in the **villages of southern Rajasthan** have come together to **protect soil biodiversity** during an agriculture and tribal sovereignty campaign. Special emphasis was laid on making efforts for harvesting of water coming to the agricultural fields and preventing the fertile **soil being drained away**.
- There's a constant struggle of tribal population to preserve their indigenous practices as well as the challenges of survival amid malnourishment, weather variability and resource losses. The campaign highlights soil as a legacy formed over thousands of years, which was to be left for posterity.

#### **22. After SII, Bharat Biotech seeks DCGI approval**

- After pharma majors **Pfizer and the Serum Institute of India (SII)**, Hyderabad based **Bharat Biotech International Ltd.** sought emergency use authorization from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) for its COVID-19 vaccine, **Covaxin**. The vaccine is being developed with the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**, and is undergoing Phase 3 trials in over 25 centres across India.

#### **23. Modi calls for legal reforms**

- Launching the construction of Agra Metro through video-conferencing, PM Modi said the laws that were beneficial in the last century, became a "burden" of the next century. For this reason, there must be a continuous process for reforms.
- **The Agra Metro project** comprises 2 corridors with a total length of 29.4 km and connects major tourist attractions such as the Taj Mahal, the Agra Fort and Sikandra with railway stations and bus stands, the government said. The project will benefit the 26 lakh population of Agra and also cater to more than 60 lakh tourists who visit the city every year. Its estimated cost will be ₹8,379.62 crore. It will be completed in 5 years.

#### **24. Over 70% turnout in Bodoland council polls**

- More than 70% of the 1,365,207 voters turned out for the first phase of the elections to the **Bodoland Territorial Council** in Assam. The elections to the 40-seat council have been billed as the “semi-final” before the 2021 Assembly polls, and its outcome could decide the fate of alliances. The voting too was incident free. In all, 241 candidates are in the fray.

## 25. Only organic farming allowed in Lakshadweep

- With the entire **Lakshadweep group of islands being declared an organic agricultural area**, the island administration is eyeing an expansion of the traditional business in coconuts and coconut products through value addition, better marketing, and round-the-year processing. Around 10 crore coconuts are produced on the island in 12,000 small holdings with an average size of 0.25 hectares, sources in the island administration say. The total acreage under coconuts is around 2,800 hectares.
- The island’s coconut farmers are also expected to benefit from the Union government’s ‘**One District One Product**’ programme of food processing, in which the entire island is being considered as a single district and coconut oil has been identified as the product.

## 26. Opinion/ Explainer : Investing in India's youth

- With the **largest youth population in the world**, India faces the difficult task of educating every citizen to become a productive member of society. This goal has become harder with the pandemic: over **320 million learners** have been affected and more than 5 million young people are likely to have lost their jobs. **Education can play a vital role** in bridging this gap.
- India’s **Right to Education Act** guarantees free and compulsory education for the ages of **6 to 14 years**, and is based on books and written examinations. However, evidence shows that many people develop 21st century skills on the job, or from courses that focus on practical application of skills. This indicates that vocational education can be a route for many to gain specific skill sets and knowledge which they can directly apply in their jobs. Such education formats are referred to as **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**.
- **The National Skill Development Policy** was launched in 2009 and revamped in 2015, recognizing the challenge of skilling with speed and high standards. **The Skill India Mission** was launched soon after, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his vision for making **India the “skill capital” of the world**.
- **UNESCO’s State of the Education Report for India 2020**, published this week, focuses on vocational education and training and showcases the growth of the skills development sector, along with emerging challenges. Considering that many employers are unable to find skilled candidates for jobs, **promoting skills development** and hiring skilled workers can make the economy stronger.
- **The new National Education Policy (NEP)** aims to provide vocational education to **50% of all learners by 2025**. Schools are encouraged to provide students access to vocational education from Grade 6 onwards and to offer courses that are aligned to the **local economies and can benefit local communities**.

## 27. AASU plans musical protest against CAA

- **The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU)** has planned a musical protest on December 12 to mark the “dark” anniversary of the contentious **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019**. The AASU has dubbed the State-wide protest as Gana Hunkaar (public cry) but voices against the “anti-indigenous” Act would be raised through traditional and folk musical instruments, leaders of the outfit said.
- **The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019** was passed by the Parliament of India on **11 December 2019**. It amended the **Citizenship Act, 1955** by providing a pathway to Indian citizenship for refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis or Christians, and arrived in India before the end of December 2014. The law does not grant such eligibility to Muslims from those three countries, all of which are Muslim-majority countries. The act was the first time that religion had been overtly used as a criterion for citizenship under Indian law.

### 28. [COVID-19 won't delay Rafale delivery](#)

- French Ambassador to India Emmanuel Lenain on Tuesday said France would deliver all 36 Rafale fighter aircraft to India by 2022 despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown on French defence industry.

### 29. [SII, Bharat Biotech emergency vaccine clearance on hold](#)

- India may have to wait longer for a locally produced vaccine as an expert committee of the **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)** has kept on hold, pending more evidence, proposals by the **Serum Institute of India (SII)** and **Bharat Biotech** requesting **emergency use authorization (EUA)** for their vaccine candidates **Covishield** and **Covaxin**.
- India's law allows a potential vaccine or drug to be commercially approved even without trials on Indians, provided the same has been approved in another country. However, such decisions usually rely on the **discretion of the committee members** who may ask for minimal, or several, lines of evidence before arriving at a decision.
- **Pfizer-BioNTech** - whose vaccine has been approved for use in the United Kingdom and Bahrain - had applied to Indian regulators before SII and Bharat Biotech, and was scheduled to present its data to the committee but did not turn up, the source added. The committee also gave permission to Pune-based **Gennova Biopharma**, which is developing an m-Rna vaccine, to begin human trials. The SII is testing a vaccine candidate developed by **Oxford University and AstraZeneca** on 1,600 volunteers in India, and Bharat Biotech has begun testing its vaccine in 28,500 volunteers across the country.

### 30. [Poet Manglesh Dabral passes away aged 72](#)

- Senior Hindi poet and writer **Manglesh Dabral** passed away due to COVID-19 related complications in Delhi on Wednesday.
- Committed to secular and socialist values both in his writing and life, the **Sahitya Akademi Award winner** returned the coveted award in 2015 as a protest against the killing of scholar M.M. Kalburgi and the increasing instances of violence against public intellectuals. Born on May 14, 1948, in Kafalpani village of Tehri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, Dabral's poetry captured the pain of the soul that is uprooted from the hills. He **penned five anthologies of poetry**. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for ***Hum Jo Dekhte Hain***. Dabral edited several literary and cultural pages of newspapers but he is best remembered for nurturing **Jansatta's Sunday magazine**.

### 31. [Lakshadweep to get optical fibre cable](#)

- The Union Cabinet approved laying of **undersea optical fibre cable** to connect 11 islands of Lakshadweep with Kochi by May 2023, to help improve broadband connectivity in the Union Territory. The project is estimated to **cost about ₹1,072 crore**, including operational expenses for five years, and will be funded by the **Universal Service Obligation Fund**.
- The government said this would improve telecommunication facilities in Lakshadweep by providing large bandwidth, and will play a vital role for delivery of e-governance services, potential development of fisheries, coconut-based industries, high value tourism, educational development and healthcare.

### 32. [Setting up of public Wi-Fi networks](#)

- The Union Cabinet approved a proposal for **setting up public Wi-Fi hotspots across the country** via public data offices or PDOs, which could even be a *kirana* shop or a *paan* shop.
- The public Wi-Fi Access Network Interface, which will be called '**PM-WANI**', was **first recommended by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) in 2017**. This will involve multiple players, including PDOs, Public Data Office Aggregators (PDOA), app providers, and a central registry. PDOs - comparable to a PCO or a cybercafe - will establish, maintain, and operate Wi-Fi access points and deliver broadband services to

subscribers, while the PDOAs will be aggregators of PDOs and perform functions such as authorisation and accounting.

- According to TRAI, in most major economies, for 50% 70% of their total usage time, mobile users use Wi-Fi technology to communicate. However, in India, this figure is less than 10%. The move will help unleash a Wi-Fi revolution in the country.

### 33. Cattle grazing and Rhino nutrition in Mini Kaziranga National Park

- Too many cattle are robbing the **one horned rhinos of Assam's Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary**, referred to as 'Mini Kaziranga' for similar features, of their nutritious food. One of the factors behind the crisis of nutritional grass in Pobitora is the competition from some 10,000 cattle that graze on the fringes of the sanctuary measuring 38.81 sq km on paper but with only 16 sq km for an estimated 102 rhinos to inhabit.
- Non-rejuvenation of nutritious grass due to change in flood pattern has also combined with the expansion of woodland in the sanctuary, leaving the rhinos with less than 8 sq km of grassland to feed on.

### Opinion/ Explainer : Issue of procurement at the heart of Farmers' protest

1. The farmers' unions want nothing short of a complete withdrawal of the recently enacted Farm Acts, which they claim will ruin small and marginal farmers.
  2. Their main worry is about a **possible withdrawal of the Minimum Support Price (MSP)** and a **dismantling of the public procurement of grains**. They also contend that by leaving farmers to the mercy of the open market, the stage has been set for large private players to take over agriculture.
  3. The government claims that the Acts will only increase options for farmers in the output markets, that the MSP procurement system will continue, and that there is absolutely no plan to dismantle the system. There is absolutely no mention of either MSP or procurement in the Acts.
  4. **Importance of the Public Distribution System** : The PDS is the lifeline in these States. Farmers in **Punjab and Haryana are heavily dependent on public procurement** and assured price through MSP. Nearly 88% of the paddy production and 70% of the wheat production in Punjab and Haryana (in 2017-18 and 2018-19) has been absorbed through public procurement. It is conceivable then that any disruption to the system, real or perceived, will cause a major upheaval.
  5. The **government also needs the procurement systems** : This is because of its obligations under the **PDS and the National Food Security Act (NFSA)**. There are **nearly 80 crore NFSA beneficiaries and an additional eight crore migrants** who need to be supported under the PDS. The government needs an uninterrupted supply of grain, particularly from these two States, to maintain the PDS. This year, due to the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic and the migrant crisis, the government has earmarked much larger quantities for public distribution - about 58 million tons of rice and 37 million tons of wheat.
  6. It is clear that dismantling the procurement system is neither in the interests of farmers nor the government. Therefore, it is imperative that the government reaches out to the farmer groups and assures them of the **indispensability of MSP-procurement system**. The absence of a **regulatory mechanism** (to ensure fair play by private players *vis-a-vis* farmers) and the **lack of transparency in trade area transactions** are two of the major limitations that need to be addressed immediately also.
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## International NEWS/Events/ Personalities

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### Daily snippets

#### 1. Iran moves to step up nuclear enrichment

- Iran's watchdog body approved a law on Wednesday that obliges the government to halt U.N. inspections of its nuclear sites and step up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, if sanctions are not eased in a month.
- In retaliation for the killing last week of Iran's top nuclear scientist, which Tehran has blamed on Israel, Iran's hardline-dominated Parliament on Tuesday approved the Bill with a strong majority, hardening Iran's nuclear stance
- Under the new law, Tehran gives one month to the deal's European parties to ease sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors, imposed after Washington quit the pact between Tehran and six powers in 2018. It also says the government should resume uranium enrichment to 20% and install advanced centrifuges at its **Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities**.
- The U.S., along with other international powers, had signed a nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 and both countries were cooperating in the war against the Islamic State in Iraq. Then came Donald Trump, who pulled the U.S. out of **the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ( JCPOA)**, as the nuclear deal is called, and reimposed sanctions on Iran. Now, when Mr. Biden would assume the presidency on January 20, one of his most pressing early diplomatic challenges would be Iran.
- U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has said he would return to the pact and would lift sanctions if Tehran returned to "strict compliance with the nuclear deal". Iran's pragmatist **President Hassan Rouhani**, the architect of the 2015 deal, criticized Parliament's move as "harmful to diplomatic efforts" aimed at easing U.S. sanctions.

#### 2. Cyclone Burevi hits northern Sri Lanka, 12000 people affected

- At least 12,000 residents of Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces were severely affected as heavy rain lashed the region while **cyclone Burevi** made a landfall on Wednesday night. The maximum rainfall - 279.8 mm in the last 24 hours - was recorded in Kilinochchi district.

#### 3. Bangladesh begins shifting Rohingya

- Bangladesh began transferring hundreds of Rohingya refugees on Thursday to a low-lying island in an area prone to cyclones and floods, with rights groups alleging that people were being coerced into leaving.
- Officials said earlier that they planned to transfer around 2,500 people in the first phase. Rights groups alleged that some refugees had been coerced into going. However, **Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen** refuted the rights groups' claims and said the refugees were going voluntarily.

#### 4. US tightens visa rules for CCP members

- The Trump administration on Wednesday issued new rules to curtail travel to the U.S. by members of the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** and their immediate families, a move certain to further exacerbate tensions between the two countries. The new policy, which took immediate effect, limits the maximum duration of travel visas for party members and their families to one month.
- Previously, party members, like other Chinese citizens, could obtain visitor visas for the U.S. that were valid for 10 years. Travel visas for party members will also be limited to a single entry rather than multiple entries as was possible before, according to two people familiar with the changes.
- Coming in the twilight of the Trump administration and aimed squarely at China's ruling elite, the visa restrictions and the likely Chinese response will be **yet another challenge to President-elect Joe Biden**, who is inheriting a **U.S.-China relationship** that is in its worst state since the normalization of diplomatic ties in 1979.

#### 5. [US to block import of 'slave labour' cotton from China](#)

- The United States will block imports of cotton that, it says, is harvested with "slave labour" in China's **Xinjiang region**, authorities have announced. Beijing has come under intense international criticism over its policies in the **resource-rich territory**, where rights groups say as many as one million **Uighurs** and other mostly Muslim minorities are being held in internment camps. The new rule allows Customs and Border Protection officials to detain shipments containing cotton originating from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a major paramilitary group already sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury.

#### 6. [Speak for all religions, India tells UN](#)

- India has asked the United Nations to expand its criticism of hatred and violence against religions beyond **the three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam**.
- *"At the outset, let me state that we fully agree that anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian acts need to be condemned and India firmly condemns such acts. However, UN resolutions on such important issues speak only of these three Abrahamic religions together."* **First Secretary at India's Permanent Mission to the UN Ashish Sharma** said.
- *"This august body fails to acknowledge the rise of hatred and violence against Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism also."* Mr. Sharma's remarks were made during a "**Culture of Peace**" session organized by the **UN General Assembly**. The UN has organized such sessions **each year since 1997**.

#### 7. [US Senate clears Bill on immigration visas](#)

- The U.S. Senate has unanimously passed a Bill that eliminates the per country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrant visas and raises it for **family-based visas**, a legislation that will hugely benefit hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals in America who have been waiting for years to get their green cards.
- The Fairness for **High Skilled Immigrants Act** comes as a big relief to Indian IT professionals who come to the U.S. on H-1B work visas. Their current waiting period for the Green Card or permanent residency is running into decades.
- The legislation increases the per country cap on family based immigrant visas from 7% of the total number of such visas available that year to 15%.
- The provision will facilitate removal of the massive backlog of Indian IT professionals in the US. Currently, there is a backlog of almost one million foreign nationals and accompanying family members residing in the U.S. who have been approved for, and are waiting to receive, employment based Green Cards. The largest number of them are from India.

## 8. Remarks by Canadian PM unacceptable : India

- Comments from the leadership and other members of the Canadian government regarding the ongoing farmers agitation is “**unacceptable interference**” in India’s affairs, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday.
- Reacting to the development, **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** said: “*Canada will always stand up for the right to peaceful protest anywhere around the world and we are pleased to see moves towards de-escalation and dialogue (with the farmers).*” The farmers’ agitation has found strong resonance among the Indo-Canadian community as many members have their roots in the north Indian plains.

## 9. West Asian nations, US signal progress to resolve Qatar crisis

- **Rivals Qatar and Saudi Arabia**, along with **neutral Oman and Kuwait**, said on Friday progress had been made towards resolving the Gulf crisis that has pitted a regional group of nations against Doha. **U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** said he hoped Washington could broker a resolution but cautioned he was “out of the prediction business in terms of timing”, signaling a breakthrough may not be imminent.
- Saudi Arabia led its allies the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt to cut ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of backing radical Islamist movements and Iran, charges Doha denies. They subsequently forced out Qataris residing in their countries, closed their airspace to Qatari aircraft and sealed their borders and ports, separating some mixed-nationality families.

## 10. China turns on 'artificial sun'

- China successfully powered up its “artificial sun” **nuclear fusion reactor** for the first time, marking a great advance in the country’s nuclear power research capabilities. **The HL-2M Tokamak reactor** is China’s largest and most advanced nuclear fusion experimental research device, and scientists hope that the device can potentially unlock a powerful clean energy source.
- It uses a powerful magnetic field to fuse hot plasma and can reach temperatures of over 150 million degrees Celsius, according to the People’s Daily, approximately ten times hotter than the core of the sun. Located in Sichuan province and completed late last year, the reactor is often called an “**artificial sun**” on account of the enormous heat and power it produces.
- Chinese scientists have been working on developing smaller versions of the nuclear fusion reactor since 2006. They plan to use the device in collaboration with scientists working on **the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor** - the world's largest nuclear fusion research project based in France, which is expected to be completed in 2025.

## 11. US, Huawei in talks over official's return

- The U.S. government is discussing a deal with **Chinese tech giant Huawei** that could see its detained **finance chief Meng Wanzhou** allowed to return to China, the Wall Street Journal said. Ms. Meng was **arrested in Vancouver in 2018** on a U.S. warrant and is fighting extradition to the US over charges that **Huawei violated American sanctions on Iran**, in a case that has plunged **Canada-China** relations into crisis.
- Both sides are hoping to reach agreement before the end of the administration of President Donald Trump, although Meng is reluctant to agree on a deal that would see her admit wrongdoing, the Journal said.

## 12. U.K drugs regulator defends fast pace of vaccine approval

- Britain’s medicines regulator insisted on Friday its world’s first approval of the **Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine** met all safety standards, after officials in Europe and the U.S. queried the rapid process. **The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)** on Wednesday announced emergency approval for the vaccine’s general use against COVID-19, and the government plans to start rolling it out next week.

- With Britain transitioning out of the European Union, the U.K. regulator obtained an exemption from the EU's medicines agency, which has stressed it prefers to wait for further review and consultations across the 27-nation bloc. Britain plans to distribute an initial batch of 8,00,000 doses starting next week, prioritising care homes.

### 13. [India, Russia navies hold exercise in Indian Ocean](#)

- The **navies of India and Russia** began a two-day **Passage Exercise (PASSEX)** in the East Indian Ocean Region on Friday, the Navy said. *"It is aimed at enhancing interoperability, imbibing best practices and would involve advanced surface and anti submarine warfare exercises, weapon firings and helicopter operations,"* the Navy said. Two warships from India and three ships from Russia are taking part in the PASSEX.

### 14. [Angola invites India to mine diamonds](#)

- Angola has invited Indian companies to invest in diamond mining. Angola is the third largest producer of diamonds in Africa and has only explored 40% of the diamond rich territory, but has had difficulty in attracting foreign investment.

### 15. [Australia-China ties hit a new low](#)

- Cracks began to show from 2018, when Australia **blacklisted Huawei and ZTE** from being involved in the rollout of its 5G networks. That same year, Australia passed a new **foreign interference law** that was widely being seen as aimed at China, with officials in Canberra pointing the finger at increasingly widespread Chinese influence operations primarily **targeting the Chinese-Australian community**, a claim dismissed by Beijing and its State media as hype tinged with racism.
- The cracks widened into a gaping rift this year when Australia in April called for an independent **inquiry into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic** and criticized both China and the World Health Organization (WHO) for the initial handling of the coronavirus outbreak, a move that enraged China and brought an increasingly troubled relationship into open discord.
- Beijing retaliated with a slew of punitive economic measures, banning meat imports from four Australian plants and imposing an 80.5% tariff on barley, a major Australian export. This broadened into a wider trading dispute, with Australia initiating its own anti-dumping investigations into Chinese companies. China then effectively banned Australian coal imports, leaving ships carrying millions of tonnes of coal stranded at Chinese ports for months awaiting clearance, and in November imposed tariffs of 107.1% to 212.1% on Australian wine labels, which have looked at China as an increasingly important market.
- China and Australia being among the 15 countries that signed the landmark **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** agreement in November mattered little to declining ties, which took another turn for the worse that same month after a statement from **Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.K. and the U.S** - dubbed the **"Five Eyes"** intelligence alliance - expressing concern over developments in Hong Kong.

### 16. [US ends exchange programme with China](#)

- The U.S. State Department said it has **ended five cultural exchange programs with China**, calling them "soft power propaganda tools." The Department said on its website it had "terminated" the Policymakers Educational China Trip Program, the U.S.-China Friendship Programme, the U.S.-China Leadership Exchange Program, the U.S.-China Transpacific Exchange Program and the Hong Kong Educational and Cultural Programme.
- The programmes had been set up under the auspices of the **Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act** - a 1961 law signed by **President John F. Kennedy** and aimed at boosting academic and cultural exchanges with foreign countries.

### 17. [US to pull out most troops from Somalia](#)

- The Pentagon said on Friday it is pulling most U.S. troops out of Somalia on President Donald Trump's orders, continuing a post-election push by Mr. Trump to shrink U.S. involvement in counterterrorism missions abroad. The Pentagon said in a statement that "a majority" of U.S. troops in Somalia will be withdrawn in early 2021.
- There are currently about 700 troops in that Horn of Africa nation, training and advising local forces in an extended fight against the extremist group **al-Shabab**, an affiliate of al-Qaeda. Mr. Trump recently ordered troop drawdowns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### 18. [Kuwait holds elections amid COVID surge](#)

- Kuwait voted on Saturday for its National Assembly, the first election since the death of its long-time ruling Emir. The country's hundreds of thousands of voters selected lawmakers for 50 seats in the parliament, the freest and most-rambunctious assembly in the Gulf Arab countries. However, Kuwait's parliament has tamped down opposition to its ruling Al Sabah family since the **2011 Arab Spring protests** that saw demonstrators storm the chamber.
- The vote came after the death in September of Kuwait's ruler, the 91-year-old **Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah**. **Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Sabah**, 83, quickly took power without any opposition. The outgoing Parliament then approved Sheikh Nawaf's choice for crown prince, **Sheikh Meshal Al Ahmad Al Jaber**, the 80-year-old deputy head of Kuwait's National Guard.

### 19. [Moscow starts inoculating vulnerable workers](#)

- Moscow began vaccinating workers at high risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus at newly opened clinics across the city. Russia was one of the first countries to announce the development of a vaccine, **Sputnik V** - dubbed after the Soviet era satellite - in August but before beginning final clinical trials.
- It is currently in its third and final stage of clinical trials involving some 40,000 volunteers. Sputnik V's developers last month said interim results had shown the vaccine was 95% effective and would be cheaper and easier to store than some alternatives. The jab uses two different human adenovirus vectors and is administered in two doses with a 21-day gap. The vaccine will be free to all Russian citizens and inoculation will be voluntary.

### 20. [China makes preparations for rollout of vaccines](#)

- Provincial governments across China are placing orders for experimental, domestically made coronavirus vaccines, though health officials have yet to say how well they work or how they may reach the country's 1.4 billion people. Developers are speeding up final testing, the Chinese Foreign Minister said during a UN meeting last week, as **Britain approved emergency use of Pfizer Inc.'s** vaccine candidate and providers scrambled to set up distribution.
- Even without final approval, more than 1 million health care workers and others in China who are deemed at high risk of infection have received experimental vaccines under emergency use permission. There has been no word on possible side effects.

### 21. [Protests against Indian farm laws in London](#)

- **Scotland Yard** has reportedly made a number of arrests after it warned of enforcement action ahead of thousands of protesters from different parts of the U.K. gathering outside the Indian High Commission in central London on Sunday, as a show of **support for farmers demonstrating against agricultural reforms in India**.
- The High Commission reiterated the government's stance that the protest against agriculture reform bills in India is part of an internal democratic process. The protest comes after a group of 36 British MPs led by **British Sikh Labor MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** had written to **U.K. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab**, asking him to

make representations to his Indian counterpart **S. Jaishankar** on the impact on British Punjabis of the demonstrations by farmers in India.

## 22. Saudi Arabia hits out at Israel at security summit

- A prominent Saudi prince harshly criticised Israel at a **Bahrain security summit** that was remotely attended by **Israel's Foreign Minister**, showing the challenges any further deals between **Arab States and Israel** face in the absence of an independent **Palestinian** state.
- The fiery remarks by **Prince Turki al-Faisal** at the **Manama Dialogue** appeared to catch Israel's Foreign Minister off guard, particularly as Israelis receive warm welcomes in Bahrain and the UAE following agreements to normalize ties. Left unresolved by those deals, however, is the decades-long **conflict between Israel and the Palestinians**. The Palestinians view those pacts as a stab in the back from their fellow Arabs and a betrayal of their cause.

## 23. Efforts to save BREXIT trade talks from failure

- British and EU negotiators embarked on probably their final two-day scramble to secure a **post-Brexit trade deal**, after failing for eight months to reach agreement. Meanwhile, **U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson** will reportedly lobby European leaders, after a call with **EU chief Ursula von der Leyen** on Saturday ended with the sides still facing "significant differences" on the key issues.
- Britain formally left the EU in January, nearly four years after a referendum. The U.K. is bound to the **EU's tariff-free single market** until a post-Brexit transition period expires at the end of the year - an immovable deadline by which time the two sides must try to agree on new terms of their future relationship.
- Without a deal, the bulk of cross-Channel trade will revert to **World Trade Organization** terms, a return to tariffs and quotas after almost five decades of close economic and political integration. Mr. Johnson has insisted Britain will "prosper mightily" whatever the outcome of the talks, but he will face severe political and economic fallout if he cannot seal a deal.

## 24. Culture and peace

- In a strong statement at the **UN General Assembly** discussing resolutions of the **UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)** on the 'Culture of Peace', India criticized the world body for what it called "selectivity" in seeking to protect **Abrahamic religions - Islam, Christianity and Judaism** - over others.
- The Indian delegate pointed out that previous resolutions of the UNAOC dating back to 2006 had repeatedly decried the hatred against those religions - "Islamophobia, Christian phobia and anti-Semitism" - but didn't condemn attacks on other religious groups including Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists, who have suffered terror strikes and seen their **shrines destroyed in Afghanistan and Pakistan**.
- In particular, India said, the UNGA statement welcomed **the Kartarpur Gurudwara corridor** agreement between India and Pakistan, but failed to note that Pakistan's government has taken over the management of the Sikh shrine, which it called a contravention of the agreement and a violation of Sikh beliefs. India's delegate also accused Pakistan of a "culture of hatred" against "religions in India" and fostering cross-border terrorism and said a culture of peace cannot exist until that is changed.
- The Indian statement said, the UN's **selectivity under the aegis of the UNAOC**, an organisation that was set up in 2005 to **prevent polarisation between societies and cultures** and to bridge differences between them, only serves to further the theory of an inevitable "clash of civilisations" instead.
- The government must be careful about ensuring that in exposing the UN's "selectivity" it doesn't open a flank for a counter-charge against India. **The Citizenship (Amendment) Act**, for example, has been criticized for offering fast-track citizenship to only a select group of religions, leaving out Muslims.

## 25. [China pushes false theories about virus](#)

- **Alexander Kekulé**, director of the Institute for Biosecurity Research in Halle, Germany, has been all over the state-run media in China in recent days. News outlets have taken Mr. Kekulé's research out of context to suggest that Italy, not China, is where the coronavirus pandemic began.
- Facing global anger over their **initial mishandling of the outbreak**, Chinese authorities are now trying to rewrite the narrative of the pandemic by **pushing theories that the virus originated outside China**. In recent days, Chinese officials have said packaged food from overseas might have initially brought the virus to China. Scientists have released a paper positing that the pandemic could have started in India. The campaign seems to reflect anxiety within the ruling party about the continuing damage to China's reputation brought by the virus.

## 26. [Bob Dylan sells his entire catalogue to universal Music](#)

- **Universal Music** has bought the entire back catalogue of **Bob Dylan's** songs, in a purported nine-figure deal for one of the most prized rights' collections in music history. The deal covers more than 600 song copyrights spanning 60 years, including Blowin' In The Wind, The Times They Are a-Changin, Like A Rolling Stone, Lay Lady Lay and Forever Young, Universal Music said in a statement.
- *"The deal is the most significant music publishing agreement this century and one of the most important of all time,"* Universal Music said in its statement. The **value of owning music rights has soared in recent years with the surge in popularity of streaming sites** such as Spotify.

## 27. [Ethiopia working to restore order in Tigray](#)

- **Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed** on Monday said efforts were on to restore order in **Tigray**, where fighting and lawlessness were hindering aid delivery to desperate civilians. Mr. Abiy, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace Prize, on November 28 declared victory in Tigray after the army captured **Mekele**, the regional capital, following nearly a month of bloody conflict against the **Tigray People's Liberation Front**.

## 28. [Maduro wins legislature polls boycotted by opposition](#)

- **President Nicolas Maduro** seized total control of Venezuela's political institutions with a sweeping victory in legislative elections that were boycotted by the main Opposition parties. Mr. Maduro and his leftwing allies had 67.7% of the vote with over 80% of ballots counted, while the Opposition bloc which broke the boycott had 18%, National Electoral Council president Indira Alfonzo said.
- It further weakened U.S.- backed **Opposition leader Juan Guaido**, who led the boycott after calling the vote "a fraud". **U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** denounced the polls as "a fraud and a sham" engineered by Mr. Maduro. **Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo** tweeted that the vote was an "electoral farce" and an attempt by the Maduro "dictatorship" to legitimize its rule. Canada and the Organisation of American States said they would not recognise the result.
- Washington, Mr. Guaido's main ally, is leading pressure to **oust Mr. Maduro** with **economic sanctions, including an oil embargo** in force since April 2019.

## 29. [US-China dominate arms market : Report](#)

- The U.S. arms industry accounted for 61% of sales by the world's "Top 25" manufacturers last year, ahead of China's 15.7%, according to the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute**. Six U.S companies and three Chinese firms were in the top 10, rounded out by Britain's BAE Systems in seventh spot.
- **U.S. companies** Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics clinched the top five spots, while **China's** AVIC, CETC and Norinco held spots six, eight and nine. U.S. group L3Harris Technologies was in 10th place.

- For the first time, a company from West Asia made it into the “Top 25”: **EDGE**, of the United Arab Emirates, was formed by the consolidation of some 25 defense entities in 2019. SIPRI also noted that **French** group Dassault had shot up from 38th to 17th place, boosted by exports of its Rafale fighter jets in 2019. Meanwhile, two **Russian** companies were also in the “Top 25”, Almaz-Antey in 15th spot and United Shipbuilding in 25th.

### **30. PM Modi backs Macron in fight against terror**

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** spoke to **French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron**, offering India’s support to France on fighting terrorism, and also invited Mr. Macron to visit Delhi. Mr. Modi’s call came days after Mr. Macron said in an interview that he felt France was “lonely” in fighting for freedom of speech, referring to an ongoing spat with **Turkish President Recep Erdogan** who has been sharply critical of Mr. Macron for his response to the attacks.

### **31. No joint commemorative stamps with India, says China**

- China’s State Post Bureau said it had decided to cancel its plan to jointly launch commemorative stamps with India.
- India and China had planned a series of events to mark the **70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year**, plans which have been disrupted both by the COVID-19 pandemic and the worst crisis on the border in decades, sparked by China’s multiple transgressions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) starting in May.

### **32. Britain begins vaccinating population with Pfizer/BioNTech shot**

- Nurses cheered as a 90-year-old grandmother in Britain became the first person in the Western world to receive an approved vaccine against COVID-19, at the start of a marathon campaign health officials hope heralds a fightback against the pandemic.
- The over-80s, care home workers and at-risk health and social care staff are first in line to get the jab, on what has been dubbed “V-Day”. A second jab is required after 21 days.

### **33. Afghan civilian deaths surged during Taliban talks : Report**

- Deaths of Afghan civilians in airstrikes jumped from 2017 after the United States loosened its criteria and escalated attacks on the Taliban, according to a report.
- The number of civilians killed annually in U.S. and coalition air strikes soared by 330% to some 700 civilians in 2019, said Neta C. Crawford, co-director of the **Costs of War Project at Brown University**. The U.S. pulled back on air strikes after striking a **peace deal with the Taliban in February 2020**. But the Afghan forces stepped up their own as they entered talks with the rebels. While total deaths from airstrikes has fallen, attacks are now coming from Kabul’s forces, and have accelerated in recent months. The Afghan Air Force, she wrote, is now “harming more Afghan civilians than at any time in its history.”

### **34. Britain, EU strike deal on Ireland border**

- Britain said it would drop clauses in draft domestic legislation that breached the **Brexit Withdrawal Agreement** after it clinched a deal with the European Union over how to manage the **Ireland-Northern Ireland border**.
- The deal is separate to wider trade talks, which have yet to find a solution on **how to manage nearly \$1 trillion of annual trade between Britain and the EU**, despite having just weeks until temporary arrangements expire. But the agreement removes what was a major point of contention between Britain and the EU, with Brussels warning that no wider trade deal would be possible if London went through with its threat to unpick the exit treaty.

- The deal fills in some of the blanks left by the January treaty, covering issues such as what export declarations are needed, supply rules for medicines and food to supermarkets, and the process for border checks on animals and plants. Meanwhile, **Mr. Johnson and the EU's Ursula von der Leyen** will meet on Wednesday in Brussels to try to unlock Brexit trade deal talks.

### 35. Pakistan, China violate religious freedom : US

- Pakistan and China along with Myanmar, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were placed in the list for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, egregious **violations of religious freedom**, Mr. Pompeo said in a statement.
- The State Department placed the Comoros, Cuba, Nicaragua and Russia on a **Special Watch List (SWL)** for governments that have engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.
- The U.S. also designated al-Shabaab, al-Qaida, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, ISIS, ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS-West Africa, Jamaat Nasral-Islam wal Muslimin and the Taliban as '**Entities of Particular Concern**'.

### 36. Amid pandemic, Nobel prize winners receive prizes at home

- Adjusting to a world where travel is hampered by the pandemic, this year's Nobel laureates will receive their prizes at home this week following the **cancellation of the traditional Stockholm and Oslo ceremonies**. The **awards in the six categories** were announced in nearly typical fashion in October, albeit with fewer reporters in physical attendance.
- The ceremonies are traditionally held on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of the prize's founder, Swedish entrepreneur and inventor of dynamite **Alfred Nobel**.

### 37. China's first big ticket investment in Sri Lankan manufacturing

- Sri Lanka announced the **first large-scale Chinese investment in manufacturing** in the country, a \$300-million tyre factory near a strategic deep-sea port. Western nations, as well as regional power India, have long been concerned about Chinese influence in Sri Lanka through projects under its gargantuan **Belt and Road infrastructure** initiative. The factory will be adjacent to the **Hambantota port**, which was leased to a Chinese company in 2017 after Sri Lanka failed to service the \$1.4-billion debt from Beijing used to build it.
- **The Colombo Port City - a \$1.4 billion land reclamation project** which started in 2014 - has doubled the size of Sri Lanka's current financial district. When Mr. Rajapaksa was President between 2005-15, Colombo borrowed billions from China, accumulating a mountain of debt for a string of infrastructure projects - including an international airport dubbed "**the world's emptiest**" by the media for its lack of flights.

### 38. SAARC needs a terror-free milieu : PM Modi

- SAARC can only be fully effective in the **absence of "terror and violence"**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a message to the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation** on its **36th Charter Day anniversary**. He also called for SAARC countries to "recommit to defeating the forces that support and nurture terrorism".
- Nepal is the current chairperson of SAARC, a position which moves by rotation through the eight countries of South Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In 2016, Pakistan was due to hold the next summit, but it had to be put off after India refused to attend the event in Islamabad, and Nepal continues to hold the chair.
- *"SAARC is not a choice, but a necessity for meaningful regional cooperation in South Asia... The longer we delay, the more will be the opportunity cost,"* wrote Nepal's PM Mr. Oli in his message on SAARC Charter Day.

- India had proposed a **SAARC COVID emergency fund**. India had pledged US \$10 million to start the fund, the others, including Pakistan, committed about \$9.8 million together, and the SAARC Secretariat committed \$5 million. India has sent medical equipment worth \$1 million to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

### 39. Opinion : Stirring the pot in Venezuela

- A third of the registered voters went to vote despite the pandemic, intimidation from the extremist opposition (which had boycotted the election), and the difficulties produced by the illegal U.S. sanctions (including shortages of fuel, which has hurt transportation networks). Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said the day after the election that his country had completed a "peaceful journey" on the road to full democracy.
- For the past decade, the U.S. has sought to undermine the normal operations of **Venezuela's democratic institutions**, including its elections. It is the U.S. that pushed the extremist elements in the opposition to boycott all the institutions and urged the opposition to set itself up as a separate political pole, led by **Juan Guaido**. The National Assembly refused to recognize Nicolas Maduro's victory in the 2018 presidential election. Calling the election rigged, Mr. Guaido, as chief of the National Assembly, challenged Mr. Maduro, supported by the U.S.
- Now, with the low oil prices, the U.S. sanctions, and the pandemic, the Venezuelan government has had to be creative in salvaging productive economic activity and in fighting the pandemic. Residues of **Chavismo** - the great respect for Hugo Chavez personally and the commitment to the **Bolivarian Revolution** - fuel the movement of people to the polls and to reject the attempt to overthrow this government with a coup.

### 40. Quad is U.S. anti-China game: Russia

- Russia hit out at the four-nation quadrilateral strategic dialogue or Quad, calling it a "devious policy" by western powers to engage India in "anti-China games". While Moscow has expressed concerns about the U.S. Indo-Pacific policy and criticised the **Quad, comprising the U.S., Australia, Japan and India**, as a "divisive" and "exclusivist" concept, this is the first time it has suggested **that India-Russia ties could be affected** by it.
- In the past month, India hosted military exercises with all the members of the Quad, and signed the final pending 'foundational agreement' **BECA**, which facilitates **Indian and U.S. militaries in sharing intelligence**. The incoming Biden administration is also expected to press harder on India against its purchase of the **S-400 anti-missile system from Russia**, which could attract U.S. sanctions. In his comments, Mr. Lavrov said the U.S. and European countries were trying to "restore" the unipolar model with U.S. leadership, but that other powers or poles such as Russia and China would not be "subordinate to it". The "U.S.-led West" had launched what he called a "game" that seeks to "isolate" Russia, as well as China, he said.

### 41. Good deal is still possible with EU, says British PM Johnson

- **Prime Minister Boris Johnson** on Wednesday said a post-Brexit trade deal was still possible, as he prepared to head to Brussels to meet **European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen**.
- Britain formally left the EU on January 31, nearly four years after a referendum on membership that divided the country and paralysed politics. The end of a transition period, designed to allow both sides to thrash out the terms of their new relationship, is approaching on December 31, making agreement on a deal more urgent. Whatever happens, Britain will leave the **European customs union and single market**. Mr. Johnson said deal or no deal, the country will "prosper mightily". By retaking control of U.K. money, borders and laws, "we will seize all of the opportunities that Brexit brings", he said.

### 42. Iran says it is ready to return to nuclear deal

- Iran is ready to return to full compliance with a 2015 nuclear deal with major powers as soon as the other parties honour their commitments, **President Hassan Rouhani** said on Wednesday. The agreement between Iran

and major powers has teetered on the brink of collapse since outgoing U.S. **President Donald Trump** pulled out of it in 2018 and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions. US **President-elect Joe Biden** has expressed readiness to return to the agreement.

#### 43. [UAE approves Chinese COVID-19 vaccine](#)

- The United Arab Emirates officially registered the coronavirus vaccine produced by Chinese drug giant **Sinopharm**, saying it was **86% effective** according to analysis of third-phase trials.
- China has four vaccine products in the final stages of development, three of which - including Sinopharm - use an **inactivated form of the novel coronavirus** to boost immunity. This means they only need to be refrigerated and can be easily distributed compared to jabs developed by rivals Pfizer and BioNTech or Moderna, which have reported efficacy of 95% and 94% respectively but need to be transported at minus 70 to 20 degrees Celsius. However, Chinese drug makers have not released any data on their vaccines' safety or efficacy.

#### 44. [Macron unveils draft law to tackle 'radical Islamism'](#)

- **President Emmanuel Macron** sought his Cabinet's blessing for a draft law aimed at combating "radical Islamism" after a spate of attacks, which critics fear risks targeting all Muslims. Mr. Macron argues the legislation is needed to shore up France's staunchly secular system but the plan has further stirred up social tensions over the consequences for Europe's largest Muslim community.
- The text was originally titled the "anti-separatism" bill, using a term Mr. Macron uses to describe ultra-conservative Muslims withdrawing from mainstream society. Following criticism of that term, it is now called a "**draft law to strengthen republican values**", mostly secularism and freedom of expression.

#### 45. ['China ties hit like never before'](#)

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said China had given India "**five differing explanations**" for deploying large forces at the LAC, adding this violation of bilateral pacts had "*very significantly damaged their relationship that is now at its most difficult phase*" in the last 30-40 years.
- "*The relationship this year has been very significantly damaged. We are very clear that maintaining peace and tranquillity along the LAC is the basis for the rest of the relationship to progress. You can't have the kind of situation you have on the border and say let's carry on with life in all other sectors of activity. It's just unrealistic,*" he said.
- He said multiple agreements between the two sides were inked from 1993 with a commitment that both parties would not bring large forces to the border areas. The Minister also said the "very big issue" was how to get the relationship back on track. He also mentioned various diplomatic and military engagements between the two sides in the last few months.

### [India's engagement with her neighbors](#)

(Shyam Sharan, Constantino Xavier)

#### 1. [Background](#)

- The **engagement with neighboring countries should not be episodic**. India should have a plan for continuous engagement at various levels. There will be an awareness that there is a price to be paid if India tries to always prioritise domestic factors over foreign policy issues. India should fashion its diplomacy in a manner which **does not give rise to feelings** [amongst smaller neighbours] **of being slighted or marginalised**.

#### 2. [The China factor](#)

- With China making a grand entry in the neighbourhood and the U.S. developing relations on its own with some of India's neighbours the **geopolitical dynamics of the region is constantly changing**. The capacity of China to deliver on its commitments exposed **India's deficit** specially in regions like Sri Lanka, Tibet etc.
- Sometimes India uses the security threat from China as an excuse to limit the capacity of neighbours to deepen relations with China or to accept Chinese investment for their own infrastructure modernisation. This might play out against India in the future. These nations will always be anxious about India and play out a balancing game. The focus should be on **creating interdependence in this region** that will give India strategic leverage.
- The **various connectivity initiatives** that India has taken over the last few years in the neighbourhood, in terms of energy, interdependence, infrastructural connectivity, grants and loans, have all gone up. This is not just because India's feeling more generous towards its neighbours; it's because India is facing competition from China.

### 3. [The way forward](#)

- India should **try and give 'national treatment' to her neighbours** with respect to the use of transportation network or ports, and exports and imports. The aim should be to be the best possible alternative in terms of the economic development of our neighbours.
- In the past few years, India has **been much more open to coordinating and aligning policies in South Asia**. That has an advantage because it **increases synergies among countries** in the region with global powers like Japan and USA. Also, there is a possibility that global powers like the USA, Japan etc. are pursuing projects or activities that are not necessarily aligned to India. This could be a problem in the future.

### 4. [Relevance of SAARC](#)

- Some experts believe that the format of SAARC is outdated and does not serve the complex, fluid regional cooperation agenda any longer. Pakistan has taken a very different approach to regional connectivity, where it sees itself mostly as a **hub between China and the Gulf or Central Asian regions**, so towards the west and the north, and India therefore had to respond and seek to gravitate more towards the south, to the Indian Ocean region, and the east, across the Bay of Bengal with Southeast Asia.
- India has **revived BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** and worked in the **BBIN (Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal)** quadrilateral for a framework on motor vehicle and water governance, which don't hold India's cooperation agenda hostage to a consensus at SAARC, which will always depend on a Pakistani veto.
- Some experts are also of the view that the idea of a fully integrated South Asia is something India should always keep in front of her. Other neighbours see **SAARC as a worthwhile platform for regional cooperation**. If India is going to turn its back on SAARC, there could even be a possibility of China being welcomed into SAARC.

### [Explainer/Opinion : Islamic multilateralism with internal fissures](#)

1. **The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** was born in the backdrop of a series of historic developments in the Arab world, beginning with the **Six-Day War of 1967** that led to the shocking defeat of the frontline Arab countries such as **Egypt, Jordan and Syria**.
2. The war also led to the loss of East Jerusalem, which hosts the **Al-Aqsa mosque**, one of the three holiest shrines in Islam after Mecca and Medina. The **sensational victory of the Israel Defence Forces** was topped by the arrival of the Jewish troops at the Western Wall, the Jewish holy site adjoining Al-Aqsa.
3. After an **arson attack on Al-Aqsa mosque** by **Dennis Michael Rohanin**, the Israel-held East Jerusalem, leaders from Muslim countries met in **Rabat in 1969**, and called for closer ties among Muslim governments. The Rabat

conference had two **criteria of membership**: the countries with **Muslim majority** and those with a **Muslim head of state** could be considered for membership of the collective that would eventually become the OIC.

4. The summit boosted the **Palestine cause** considerably and the next four years, the world witnessed a series of developments, including dramatic hijacking of aircraft by various organizations demanding the **liberation of Palestine**.
5. Meanwhile, Yahya Khan had a personal setback with the **defeat of Pakistan in the 1971 war against India**. This defeat, which was noted within the OIC, was followed by the **Yom Kippur War of 1973** during which the Arab air forces were able to stun Israel. Soon, the OIC was divided across the middle as the eight-year-long **Iran-Iraq war** broke out in 1980.
6. **About the OIC**
  - Headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the group now has **57-member States**. Former Saudi Social Affairs Minister **Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen** is its current Secretary-General. In recent years, apart from terrorism, the OIC has routinely taken up vexing problems like the Rohingya refugee crisis, the Syrian civil war, Kashmir, the conflict in Yemen and, of course, the Palestine issue. But besides passing resolutions, the group could do little to resolve any of these problems. Also, even when it projects itself as a body for transnational Islamic cooperation, the divisions within the group run deep.



## Science & Technology and Environment

### Daily snippets

1. **Case for more testing in COVID**
  - A paper in the **peer reviewed U.S. journal Health Factors** has shown a strong correlation between testing intensity and reduced transmission of COVID-19. The paper quotes 'the robustness of the **relationship between testing and transmissibility is consistent** with a known mechanism'.
  - According to the authors, **around half or more of COVID-19 transmissions** are caused by people who are asymptomatic or who have only minor symptoms. Increasing PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing makes it possible to increase detection and isolation of infectious cases, and then to increase the numbers of their potentially infectious contacts who are isolated.
  - The paper also advances the theory that freezing mobility, as in lockdowns, had very little impact on the transmission of the virus itself. India, which had a national lockdown, and in countries such as Bolivia, Peru and Chile, there was hardly any benefit from the measure.
  - The paper advances a strong case for continuing with a high level of PCR tests, even as vaccines are rolled out. Quoting "None of the vaccines candidate we have so far are good enough to eliminate the virus. The vaccine will be much more effective if you have other control measures".
2. **Dark Puzzle**
  - In 2018, astronomers found a galaxy **NGC 1052-DF2**, and a year later another, **NGC 1052-DF4**, which did not contain as much dark matter as expected. Dark matter is key in current models of galaxy formation, so this was

extremely puzzling. Now Hubble data analysis shows that the massive galactic neighbor of NGC 1052-DF4 has **such enormous gravity** that it has torn it, stripping it of dark matter.

### 3. [What is rat-hole mining?](#)

- Rat-hole mining is a term used for a hazardous and arduous mining technique where miners crawl into winding underground tunnels that are just 45 feet in diameter to extract coal from the **deep seams with a pickaxe**. The National Green Tribunal banned it in 2014.

### 4. [A policy for robotic surgery](#)

- Robotic surgery holds significant promise in the field of healthcare. The introduction of such surgeries has made the performance of complicated procedures much easier. They allow doctors to perform different types of complex procedures with more precision, flexibility, and control than possible with conventional techniques.
- The benefits of such procedures in India come at a lower cost than in developed nations, making it easily accessible to a larger section of the population. Robotic surgeries also reduce the trauma caused to the patient. The instruments can access hard to reach areas of a patient's body more easily through smaller incisions compared with traditional open and laparoscopic surgeries. They are **minimally invasive, painless and have a bigger cosmetic advantage**.
- All the **advanced robotic surgeries along with bariatric surgeries** can now be availed of by anyone having a **comprehensive health insurance cover**. A complex robotic surgery is likely to be almost ₹2 lakh more than a laparoscopic procedure.



## Economics and Finance

### [Daily snippets](#)

#### 1. [Economy on the path of V-shaped recovery says government](#)

- India's economy is firmly on the path of a V-shaped recovery after the collapse in the first quarter, and further improvement is expected in the third quarter attributing the recovery to the **unlocking process** along with **'astute' stimulus measures**. The prospects of a **second wave of COVID-19 infections**, however, remains the key downside risk to the economy
- Arguing that inflation, which had risen to 7.61% in October, may have peaked, **the Department of Economic Affairs in the ministry** said consumer price inflation was likely to 'decelerate gradually' as **base effects would kick in**, and food inflation was expected to cool thanks to a good kharif harvest.

#### 2. [COVID-19 has accelerated digitisation process](#)

- The report '**Future Technology Services - Navigating the New Normal**' quoted that COVID-19 had accelerated the digitisation process across industries, and technology service providers saw a jump of 30% digital

transformation deals since the pandemic's outbreak. It further added that, there had been an 80% jump in cloud spending and 15% in customer experience during the period.

- The report suggests that the world has leapfrogged on digital adoption by 3-5 years in the last nine months. NASSCOM and McKinsey stated in the report that 70% of enterprises were looking to either increase or reprioritise their outsourcing expenditure.

### **3. Aviation losses to widen to 21000 crores in FY21 : ICRA**

- The Indian aviation industry is estimated to report a significant net loss of ₹21,000 crore in FY21, against a net loss of ₹12,700 crore in FY20, with the industry debt level increasing to ₹50,000 crore (excluding lease liabilities) over FY 21-22, ICRA said in a report.
- The rating agency said the recovery in domestic passenger traffic depends on containment of the spread of COVID-19, willingness of consumers to under take leisure travel, recovery in macroeconomic growth, travel restrictions, quarantine norms, and recovery in business travel.

### **4. India can be a \$100-billion PCBA hub**

- India has the potential to become a **\$100 billion global manufacturing and export hub for printed circuit board assembly (PCBA) by 2026** - a key to reducing dependency on China, which is currently the world's largest exporter, the **India Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA)** and EY said in a report.
- All electronic devices from mobile phones to air conditioners derive their functionality and intelligence from the PCBA, which constitutes up to **50% of the cost of manufacturing**.

### **5. RBI tightens oversight of NBFCs, UCBs**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the introduction of **risk based internal audit norms** for large **urban cooperative banks (UCBs)** and **non banking financial companies (NBFCs)**, as part of measures aimed at improving governance and assurance functions at supervised entities.
- The RBI also moved to harmonise the guidelines on appointment of statutory auditors for commercial banks, UCBs and NBFCs in order to improve the **quality of financial reporting**.
- The RBI guidelines stated that banks and NBFCs should give highest priority to quality of governance, risk management and internal controls. It further added that there was a need for all banks and financial entities to invest more in their IT systems so that public confidence was maintained.
- With a view to **deepening financial markets**, regional rural banks would be allowed to access the **liquidity adjustment facility (LAF)** and **marginal standing facility (MSF)** of the RBI.
- **What is a Liquidity adjustment facility?** It is a tool used in monetary policy, primarily by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that allows banks to borrow money through repurchase agreements (repos) or to make loans to the RBI through reverse repo agreements.
- **What is a marginal standing facility?** It is a window for banks to borrow from the Reserve Bank of India in an emergency when interbank liquidity dries up completely. The **Marginal standing facility** is a scheme launched by RBI while reforming the monetary policy in 2011-12.

### **6. Supply side issues fueling inflation, says RBI's Patra**

- RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra said supply-side issues, including **profit maximisation at retailers' end**, are hurting the inflation situation, which has breached the central bank's comfort level in the past few months. Very high margins being charged by the retailers and some amount of indirect taxes are worsening the situation.

### **7. RBI holds rates, sees FY GDP contraction at 7.5%**

- The **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) left **benchmark interest rates unchanged** and retained an '**accommodative**' stance as it prioritised support for the economy over 'sticky' inflation amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The MPC kept the RBI's key lending rate, the repo rate, steady at 4%. Governor Shaktikanta Das, while announcing the policy, however, reiterated that inflation still remains a concern for policymakers.
- The RBI also brightened its outlook for the economy, projecting that the GDP contraction would narrow to 7.5% for the financial year ending in March 2021.
- *"There is considerable optimism on successes in vaccine trials,"* the MPC said. *"Consumers remain optimistic about the outlook, and business sentiment of manufacturing firms is gradually improving"* . Asserting that the RBI would monitor all threats to price stability closely so as to anchor broader macroeconomic and financial stability, the MPC decided to continue with the accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive growth on a durable basis and mitigate the impact of COVID19 on the economy, while ensuring that inflation remained within the mandated target (4 +/- 2%)

#### 8. **Natural gas producers don't need govt. nod for gas pricing**

- Producers of natural gas will no longer need the government's approval for gas price if it is arrived at **using the new guidelines for the discovery of market price**. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, last week, notified guidelines for discovery of market prices for domestically produced natural gas via e-bidding.
- ONGC and OIL are also to follow these guidelines for discovery of market price of natural gas from their fields wherever pricing and marketing freedom have been granted.

#### 9. **Telcos urge government to spell out 5G policy : Indian Mobile Congress**

- Telecom industry leaders urged the Centre to **spell out the policy framework and standards** that would enable an expeditious rollout of 5G technology in the country and help ensure the success of the 'Digital India' initiative.
- Cautioning against adopting **India specific standards on 5G**, Bharti Airtel's Gopal Vittal told participants at the **India Mobile Congress 2020** that the country risked isolating itself from the **larger world of communications**. He added that this could lock India out of a global ecosystem and slow down the pace of innovation. He cited the **example of CDMA vs GSM technology**, while CDMA was a better technology, GSM won as it had gained wider acceptance with more companies in the world embracing it.
- A consensus was reached stating that to deliver the vision of Digital India, there was a need for enabling policies that kept the access to technology affordable and for all stakeholders to work together to ensure timely rollout of 5G technology as well as make India a global **hub for telecom equipment, design, development and manufacturing**.
- Prime Minister Modi, addressing the Indian Mobile Congress also highlighted the aspect of **generation of electronic waste** with successive upgrades in technology. In his address, Minister for Communications and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad urged innovators and manufacturers to tap the enabling atmosphere in India, stating that **while foreign capital and innovation was welcome**, safety and security of the nation was also important. He added that digital technology had to be secure so that vested interests and extremists were not able to abuse it. On the development of AI, it was stressed that AI should lead to **empowerment of common people** and India should try to **become a hub for the same**.

#### 10. **'Murugappa group is mentoring only sons' : Valli Arunachalam**

- **Valli Arunachalam, the elder daughter of the late M.V. Murugappan**, has termed the restructuring exercise at the Murugappa Group 'unfortunate' as it failed to keep pace with time in an era when women are an integral

part of the workforce. She added that it is rather shocking that the Murugappa Group continues to marginalise daughters and mentors only sons for leadership roles.

- Ms. Arunachalam, along with her sister, holds about 8.21% stake inherited from their late father in the ₹38,105crore Chennai based group.

### 11. [India sees spike in AI adoption in 2020 : PwC](#)

- India witnessed the highest increase in the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven technologies in 2020 compared with the U.S., U.K. and Japan, said PwC India. **Over 90% of Indian enterprises** surveyed by PwC are implementing or planning to invest in AI solutions or technologies to address business challenges brought in by the pandemic, as per the consulting firm.

### 12. [Discretionary consumption will bounce back in 2021 : CEA](#)

- Chief Economic Adviser **Krishnamurthy Subramanian** expects discretionary consumption to bounce back in 2021, along with spending on sectors affected by social distancing norms, given the promise of COVID-19 vaccines bringing the pandemic under control. The CEA also said the advent of the Joe Biden administration and a change in the U.S.' stance on trade would benefit India.



## Sports

### [Daily snippets](#)

#### 1. [1960 Olympics decathlon winner Johnson passes away](#)

- **Rafer Johnson**, who won the decathlon at the **1960 Rome Olympics** and helped subdue Robert F. Kennedy's assassin in 1968, passed away on Wednesday. Johnson was among the **world's greatest athletes** from 1955 through his Olympic triumph in 1960, winning a National decathlon championship in 1956 and a silver medal at the **Melbourne Olympics** that year.

#### 2. [Frappart makes history](#)

- **Stephanie Frappart** became the **first woman to referee a men's Champions League game** on Wednesday. The 36-year old Frappart has already made history as the first woman to referee in Ligue 1, and took charge of the 2019 UEFA Super Cup final between Liverpool and Chelsea. She also made her Europa League debut in October.

#### 3. [Hall-of-famer Ralston passes away](#)

- **Dennis Ralston**, a five time Grand Slam doubles champion who was one of the initial players signed to the professional World Championship Tennis tour in the 1960s and a member of the sport's Hall of Fame, has died of cancer aged 78.

#### 4. [Parthiv Patel calls it time](#)

- Parthiv Patel, who earned a Test cap as a 17 year-old in 2002 even before making his Ranji Trophy debut, brought the curtain down on a career having played 18 years of First Class cricket and India career, which spanned generations.
- He converted Gujarat from an also ran to a domestic force to reckon with. The side achieved the rare accolade of winning all three inter-State tournaments under his captaincy - a testament to Parthiv's character. Parthiv remains **the youngest wicket keeper to play test cricket**, having made his debut at **17 years and 152 days**.

#### 5. Elavenil and Bajrang named the year's best

- Shooter **Elavenil Valarivan** and wrestler **Bajrang Punia** bagged the sportspersons of the year award at the **FICCI India awards ceremony**. Former India cricket captain and coach, **Anil Kumble** received the 'best company promoting sports' award on behalf of his enterprise, Tenvic Sports.

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### Suggested Readings

1. CLAT and disabled test takers, [Link to article](#)
2. Article 32 and basic structure of the Constitution , [Link to article](#)
3. Judicial Review in the UK : Lessons for India, [Link to article](#)
4. Profile : HM Seervai, [Link to article](#)
5. Lessons in tiger conservation from Malenad, [Link to article](#)
6. Inflation and monetary policy, [Link to article](#)
7. Babri Masjid demolition timeline, [Link to article](#)
8. Dr. Ambedkar on Nation, Democracy and Constitutionalism, [Link to article](#)
9. SCBA President says Farm Laws 'Unconstitutional', [Link to article](#)
10. Transgender prisoners and NCRB, [Link to article](#)
11. Labour laws and the unorganized sector, [Link to article](#)
12. A 'duet' of India's urban women, [Link to article](#)
13. Future of clean mobility for India, [Link to article](#)
14. Doctrine of Legitimate Expectation and Promissory Estoppel, [Link to article](#)
15. A commemorative Remembrance and Tribute, [Link to article](#)
16. Gender bias and Sexual harassment, [Link to article](#)
17. The rise of the AI economy, [Link to article](#)
18. Roshni Land Scam judgement, [Link to article](#)
19. FoE case : Sanitary Panel cartoonist, [Link to article](#)
20. Farm Laws and Justice delivery, [Link to article](#)
21. Thousand days of nutrition : POSHAN, [Link to article](#)

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

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