



## Current Affairs, 14<sup>th</sup> June to 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2020

### International

#### Trump's 'America-First' Policy Intensifies in An Election Year

- U.S. President Donald Trump's move to draw down troops from Germany, months before his November re-election bid, marks the return to a lynchpin of his 'America-first' foreign policy rooted in a repudiation of multilateralism. The development shows persistent strains in relations between the two countries. **Under the move, 9,500 American defence personnel, about a quarter of those stationed in Germany – home to the largest contingent of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe – would be removed by September.** The significance of the step may be gauged from the fact that the U.S. Army and Air Force headquarters for Europe and Africa are located in the country, which also hosts major American military training bases. These facilities serve as critical strategic and logistics centres to bolster Washington's security interests in West Asia and North Africa. A large U.S. presence has, moreover, served as a bulwark of peace in post-Second World War Europe, as well as to strengthen the Western alliance against threats from the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. Its relevance in current times remains undiminished, given Berlin's reticence to project strategic power, notwithstanding its economic pre-eminence.

#### Trump's Displeasure at Berlin

The relocation of troops signals Mr. Trump's strong disapproval of Berlin, which he has repeatedly singled out for non-compliance with NATO's stipulation to spend 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence. The pressure he has exerted on the bloc has already resulted in substantial increases in expenditure from many member states. However, the German government reported a marginal increase last year and aims to meet the bloc's target only in a decade. Turning up the heat on Berlin, whose huge trade surpluses with Washington have roiled domestic industrial lobbies, works to Mr. Trump's advantage in an election year. **Its backing for the Paris climate deal, the Iran nuclear agreement and even its domestic 2015 policy to let in immigrants have similarly drawn Mr. Trump's ire.** Washington's former Ambassador to Berlin Richard Grenell, a close Trump associate, **played down the significance of the troop withdrawal when he alluded to similar steps being planned in South Korea and Japan.** But there were overtones of Mr. Trump's stance of an isolationist America when Mr. Grenell remarked that there were costs to U.S. taxpayers from providing security for other countries.

#### Jitters Across the Atlantic

Washington's decision has, however, caused consternation across the Atlantic. Leaders from Germany's ruling conservative Christian Democratic Party have highlighted the absence of consultations over the unilateral move as illustrative of the lack of cohesiveness within NATO. Germany's left-wing Die Linke party has called on the government to push for a further rollback of U.S. troops. Conversely, over 20 Republicans from the House Arms and Defence Committee have written to the President opposing the troops pull-out, arguing that Russia under President Vladimir Putin continues to pose a real



and present danger to the security of Europe and beyond. A potential beneficiary from this stand-off could be Poland on NATO's eastern flanks, which spends 2% of its GDP on defence and has earmarked some \$48 billion to modernise its armed forces by 2026. The ultra-right government has already signed a contract worth billions of dollars for U.S. Patriot missiles and has expressed interest in the F-35 fighter jets. During the signing of a deal last year for the supply of additional 1000 troops to Warsaw, Mr. Trump indicated that they could be redeployed from Germany. Seizing the moment, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has sounded optimistic about Washington's latest decision. His ultimate aim is for a permanent U.S. military presence on Polish soil to counter Russian influence.

## The US Sanctions Against International Criminal Court: How Things Got Here

- The turbulent relationship between the US and the International Criminal Court (ICC) further exacerbated this week, after **President Donald Trump authorised sanctions against ICC officials involved in investigations into possible war crimes by US troops or those of its allies**. The Trump administration, which has long considered the international law forum a threat to US sovereignty, announced the strict punitive measures that Washington generally reserves for use against terror groups and those accused of abusing human rights. **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the country's top diplomat, called the 123 nations-strong tribunal a "kangaroo court"**. Without providing evidence, Attorney-General William Barr said that the US Justice Department had "received substantial credible information that raises serious concerns about a long history of financial corruption and malfeasance at the highest levels in the office of the prosecutor." **US officials have also blamed Russia for manipulating the ICC in its favour.**

### The International Criminal Court (ICC)

The ICC, a permanent judicial body based at The Hague in the Netherlands, was created by the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (its founding and governing document), and began functioning on 1 July 2002 when the Statute came into force. The forum was established as a court of last resort to prosecute offences that would otherwise go unpunished, and has jurisdiction over four main crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. 123 nations are States Parties to the Rome Statute and recognise the ICC's authority; the notable exceptions being the US, China, Russia, and India. **Unlike the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the ICC is not part of the United Nations system, with the UN-ICC relationship being governed by a separate agreement.** The ICJ, which is among the UN's 6 principal organs, mainly hears disputes between nations. The ICC, on the other hand, prosecutes individuals— its authority extending to offences committed in a member state or by a national of such a state. The ICC has been criticised for not pursuing investigations in Western countries (all 4 of its guilty verdicts pronounced so far are in trials from Africa), as well as for working inefficiently. Last year, the court ordered an independent expert review of its own functioning to address these concerns.

### Washington and the ICC

The Clinton administration (1993-2001) was involved in Rome Statute negotiations, and signed the document in 2000. However, the next president, George W. Bush in 2002 had the US "unsigned" the Statute and signed into law the American Service-Members' Protection Act to protect US nationals from the ICC's reach. Its differences with the ICC notwithstanding, Washington adopted a positive approach towards the forum during



several instances– in 2005 it did not veto a UN Security Council request to the ICC to investigate crimes during the Darfur crisis and in 2011 voted for Libya’s referral to the court. The US also provided critical support in transferring suspects from Africa to the ICC for trial. Since the election of President Donald Trump, relations have again soured, with Trump declaring at the UN General Assembly in 2018, “United States will provide no support or recognition to the International Criminal Court. As far as America is concerned the ICC has no jurisdiction, no legitimacy, and no authority.” In 2019, much to Washington’s chagrin, the ICC’s chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda asked for a formal probe into alleged atrocities committed during the Afghanistan War between 2003 and 2014 – leading to possible indictments of US military and CIA officials. The Trump administration reacted by revoking the Gambian lawyer’s US visa. In March this year, ICC judges approved Bensouda’s request.

### The Latest Upheaval

Washington broadened the visa restrictions on ICC officials directly involved in probes against its nationals or those of its allies, and anyone who has “materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support” to these officials. The restrictions also extend to the officials’ family members. Pompeo said that economic sanctions would be decided on a case-by-case basis. A day later, the ICC reacted by declaring support for its officials, and called Washington’s move an “unacceptable attempt to interfere with the rule of law”. “An attack on the ICC also represents an attack against the interests of victims of atrocity crimes, for many of whom the court represents the last hope for justice,” the court said in a statement. Israel welcomed the US decision, with prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu accusing the ICC of fabricating “outlandish charges” against his country.

### Backlash Against Washington

Except for Israel, many came out in support of the Hague-based tribunal. The United Nations said that it had “taken note with concern” about reports of the US order. The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, called the US decision “very bad news” and a “matter of serious concern”. Germany and France also expressed their displeasure. In a tweet on Friday, the Dutch foreign minister Stef Blok called the ICC “crucial in the fight against impunity and in upholding international rule of law,” and said that he was “very disturbed by the United States’ measures” against the ICC. The international NGO Human Rights Watch said, “Asset freezes and travel bans are for human rights violators, not prosecutors and judges seeking justice for victims... In penalising war crimes investigators, the Trump administration is openly siding with those who commit and cover up human rights abuses.”

## Juneteenth Day And Its Significance In The History Of US

- US President Donald Trump gave in to pressure and announced the postponement of his upcoming election rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma by a day so that it does not clash with Juneteenth, the day that celebrates the end of slavery in the US. Trump was criticised for his decision to hold his rally on June 19 in Tulsa, the city that saw some of the worst massacres of black people in US history witnessed in 1921. Amid the ongoing nation-wide anti-racism protests sparked after the custodial killing of African American George Floyd on May 25, Trump’s decision to hold the rally on the same day as Juneteenth was widely criticised as disrespecting the African American community. Further, on Tuesday, Twitter



and Square declared Juneteenth, as a company holiday. On June 9, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey tweeted, "Both Twitter and Square are making #Juneteenth (June 19th) a company holiday in the US, forevermore. A day for celebration, education, and connection." Now, Google, Nike, The New York Times and the National Football League (NFL) are the latest among the growing list of private sector organisations in the US that are choosing to commemorate Juneteenth by giving their workers off.

### What is Juneteenth?

Juneteenth is the portmanteau of June and nineteenth and while it is not a federal holiday, it is recognised as a state holiday in over 45 US states. The day is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the US and is observed on June 19. It is also known as Emancipation Day or Juneteenth Independence Day. On January 1, 1863, then-president Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that "all persons held as slaves" within the states in rebellion "are, and henceforward shall be free." Even so, over 2.5 years after Lincoln's proclamation, many slave owners continued to hold their slave's captive by hiding this information from them and holding them slaves for one more harvest season, as per the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

### So, What Then, Is the Significance of Juneteenth?

On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas and announced the end of both the Civil War and slavery. Since then, Juneteenth has become a largely symbolic date representing freedom for African Americans. As per CRS, Granger's announcement read the following, "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves and the connection heretofore existing between them, becomes that between employer and hired labour. The Freedmen are advised to remain at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere." For Texans, the first Juneteenth celebration started from 1866, with community-centric events such as parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings and musical performances. The day has evolved over the years with people and communities developing their own traditions and customs. For instance, some communities purchased land for celebrating the day, such as Emancipation Park in Houston, Texas. Juneteenth was recognised as an official holiday in Texas on January 1, 1980. As per the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation (NJO), the era of the "Modern Juneteenth Movement" began in 1994 when a group of Juneteenth leaders from across the country gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana to work towards the greater recognition of Juneteenth.

### What Is the Tulsa Race Massacre Of 1921?

According to the Tulsa Historical Society and Museum, after World War I, Tulsa was recognised for its affluent African American community, which was known as the Greenwood District or the "Black Wall Street". In June, 1921 a series of events that took place there, "nearly destroyed" the entire Greenwood area. On May 30, 1921, a black man named Dick Rowland was imprisoned for allegedly assaulting a white woman. After his arrest, an "inflammatory report" published in the May 31 edition of the Tulsa Tribune spurred a confrontation between black and white armed mobs, as per the museum's website. Some of the members of the mobs armed themselves to protect Rowland, while





others wanted to lynch him. By the morning of June 1, 1921, the Greenwood area was looted and burned down by white rioters. The incident referred to as the Tulsa race massacre or the Tulsa race riot, resulted in the deaths of over 300 people and is noted as one of the worst episodes of racial violence in US history.

## How Jean Smith Kennedy, JFK's Younger Sister, Helped End Sectarian Conflict in Northern Ireland

→ Jean Kennedy Smith, who as the United States Ambassador to Ireland in the 1990s played a key role in ending the decades-old sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, passed away on Wednesday at the age of 92. Smith's death marks the end of an era in US politics, as she was the last-surviving sibling of the Kennedy clan – one of the most prominent political families in American history. Her older brother, John F Kennedy, was the 35<sup>th</sup> president of the United States until his assassination in 1963. Further, two of her eight siblings Robert F Kennedy and Edward M Kennedy also had thriving political careers and served as US senators, while their elder brother Joseph Kennedy Jr died in action during World War II.

### Who Was Jean Kennedy Smith?

Despite the spotlight always shining bright on the Kennedy family, Smith was known to have kept a low profile for the majority of her life. Like most Kennedy women of her generation, she took a backseat when it came to active politics – engaging instead in philanthropy, and occasionally participating in her brothers' political campaigns. She married the Kennedy family's financial adviser Stephen Smith in 1956 and raised four children with him, before he died of lung cancer in 1990. In 1974, She founded Very Special Arts – an organisation that provides programs in creative writing, dance, music and drama for people with physical and mental disabilities in the United States and elsewhere. **It was only in 1993, at the age of 65, that Smith made her official debut in the world of diplomacy when she was named ambassador to Dublin by then US President Bill Clinton.** Despite her ancestry tracing back to Ireland, Smith had little knowledge of Irish politics and the sectarian violence that had plagued the country for over three decades. But over the years Smith forged her own brand of diplomacy and leadership in the state, until ultimately paving the way for the landmark **Belfast Agreement in 1988**, which ended the period of conflict in the region – popularly referred to as 'The Troubles'.

### What Was the Conflict About?

The conflict dates back to the early 1920s, when Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, while the rest of the country declared itself a republic, free from British rule. This caused a rift between Northern Ireland's Protestant Unionists – who believed that the region should remain a part of the UK, and the Catholic Nationalists – who wanted Northern Ireland to join the Republic and be independent from the UK. The chasm between the Protestants and the Catholics was made wider by the fact that a Unionist government was in power in Northern Ireland at the time. Catholics were far fewer in number, and began to protest against the government after struggling to find jobs and homes in the region. **The Protestant government responded with violence, leading to clashes between both groups. Rising tensions between the two sides turned violent in the 1960s, resulting in a period called 'The Troubles'.** British troops were sent into the area to restore peace, but were quickly confronted by several Republican armed groups, led by the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**. 'The Troubles' lasted over 33 years and led to more than 3,000 deaths. The



conflict ended only in May 1998 when the Protestants and Catholics agreed to share power in the region after signing the **Belfast Accord, also known as the "Good Friday Agreement"**.

### What Role Did Smith Play as US Ambassador to Ireland?

While Smith's appointment as US Ambassador to Ireland did not sit well with Protestant Unionists, she had the Catholic nationalists on her side. Her arrival in Dublin came at a pivotal time – when the IRA's resolve appeared to be waning and they were increasingly becoming open to end the conflict in Northern Ireland. During her five-year tenure, Smith was known for her unconventional approach to diplomacy and her tendency to flout protocol. "When I first came here," she said in an interview with the Boston Globe, "we saw in the news that a woman's husband had been shot. I said I wanted to stop by and see her. So, we did. We just took a long walk, the woman and I, and she told me the story of how it happened. She was extremely brave, and I was very moved. She opened up to me, because I think she saw me as someone who's been through it." In a move many considered risky, Smith often hosted warring unionists and loyalists at her ambassador's residence. Opinion leaders from both groups would sit together over dinner and speak their mind, Boston Globe's former Dublin Bureau Chief Kevin Cullen recounted. **Smith stirred up controversy in 1994 when she helped Gerry Adams, chief of IRA's political wing Sinn Fein, get a visa to visit the United States to argue for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of British troops from Ulster in Northern Ireland.** While her decision to help grant Adams a visa caused considerable outrage among British loyalists who had labelled him a terrorist, it ultimately led to a ceasefire being declared a mere six months later. **Eventually, the ceasefire ended in 1996 after the Sinn Fein was repeatedly kept out of peace talks. The IRA turned to the United States to help broker peace, which is when Smith stepped in to bring Adams and IRA leader Joe Cahill to New York to engage in negotiations, until the ceasefire was restored in 1997.** It is widely believed that Smith's relationship with the IRA and repeated efforts to win their trust is what paved the way for the Belfast Agreement in April, the next year. Upon ending her term as Ambassador, Smith was granted Irish citizenship for her distinguished service to the nation.

### The US Supreme Court Ruling Backing LGBTQ Workers

- The US Supreme Court ruled that the federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex should be interpreted to include sexual orientation and gender identity. In a 6-3 decision, the country's SC decided that gay and transgender people are protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The title prohibits employment discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex and national origin. The ruling comes just a few days after US President Donald Trump rolled back Obama-era regulations that prohibited discrimination in health care against transgender patients.

### What Does the Title Say?

As per Title VII, it is unlawful for an employer, "to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin; or". "to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin."



### What Has Changed with The Ruling?

Essentially, with this landmark ruling, the SC has said that Title VII's provision, which says that employers cannot discriminate on the basis of sex, includes LGBTQ employees. The ruling involved three cases filed by employees who claimed they were fired from their jobs because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In response to the ruling, Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) president Alphonso David said in a statement, "This is a landmark victory for LGBTQ equality. "No one should be denied a job or fired simply because of who they are or whom they love. For the past two decades, federal courts have determined that discrimination on the basis of LGBTQ status is unlawful discrimination under federal law. Today's historic ruling by the Supreme Court affirms that view, but there is still work left to be done. In many aspects of the public square, LGBTQ people still lack non-discrimination protections, which is why it is crucial that Congress pass the Equality Act to address the significant gaps in federal civil rights laws and improve protections for everyone," he added. In the statement, HRC has said that while this ruling is "much-needed", there are still "too many" places in law that lack protections. The group recommends that the Senate and House pass the Equality Act, which will codify protections for LGBTQ people in employment, housing, credit, education and jury service.

### What Were the Three Cases About?

The three employees were: Aimee Stephens, Donald Zarda and Gerald Bostock. Bostock, who is the only living plaintiff, said in his petition, "An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Sex plays a necessary and undisguisable role in the decision; exactly what Title VII forbids." Bostock claimed that he was fired by his employer after he joined a gay recreational softball league. Bostock's employer, Clayton County, Georgia, claimed that he was fired because his conduct was "unbecoming".

### Who was Sarah Hegazi, Egyptian LGBTQ activist who died by suicide?

- On June 14, Sarah Hegazi, a 30-year-old Egyptian gay rights activist died by suicide while in exile in Canada. In a handwritten note recovered and circulating on social media, Hegazi wrote: "To my siblings—I tried to find redemption and failed, forgive me."

### Who was Sarah Hegazi?

In 2017, Hegazi was one among 22 people arrested as part of a crackdown on gays after a rainbow flag — a symbol of the LGBTQ movement — was raised at a Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo, Egypt. Mashrou' Leila is a Lebanese alternative rock band whose lead singer is openly gay. According to a published by the Human Rights Watch (HRW), since September 22, 2017, Egyptian forces have been "relentless" in their bid to track down people that are suspected of being gay or supporting LGBTQ rights. On October 1, 2017, Egypt's Supreme State Security Prosecution ordered that two activists, Hegazi and Ahmed Alaa, be detained for a period of 15 days pending investigation into reports of them having joined a banned organisation and interfering with the constitution. As per the HRW report, Hegazi told her lawyers that police officers at the al-Sayeda Zeinab police station in Cairo allowed fellow detainees to beat and sexually harass her after informing them of the reason for her arrest. In an article published in Arabic on Mada Masr in September 2018, Hegazi wrote, "The men of the Sayeda Zeinab police station also incited the women being held there to sexually assault me, physically and verbally. "There is no difference between a bearded religious extremist who wants to kill you because he believes he ranks higher in



the eyes of his god, and is therefore tasked with killing anyone who is different to him, and a non-bearded, well-dressed man with a new phone and a fancy car who believes he ranks higher in the eyes of his god, and so is tasked with torturing and imprisoning and inciting against anyone who is different," she wrote. According to The New York Times, she was granted bail three months after her arrest, following "discreet pressure" from western and south American diplomats.

### **What Is the State of LGBT Rights in Egypt?**

While homosexuality is not technically banned in Egypt, law enforcement agencies use the debauchery law to criminalise it. As per Egypt's Law 10/1961 on the combating of prostitution, "Whoever incites a person, be they male or female, to engage in debauchery or in prostitution, or assists in this or facilitates it, and similarly whoever employs a person or tempts him or induces him with the intention of engaging in debauchery or prostitution, is to be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not less than one year and not more than three years", along with a fine. On October 25, 2017, members of the Egyptian parliament proposed a draft law to criminalise "acts of homosexuality". One of the members who proposed the draft law said it proposed to constrain the presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Egypt. The proposed Bill defined homosexuality as any person engaging in sexual intercourse with someone of the same sex. The Bill was later struck down. **A 1994 ruling by the UN Human Rights Committee found that laws that criminalised consensual sex between adults violated the right to privacy guaranteed by Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.**

### **Why Olof Palme Matters – To Sweden, The World and India**

- Sweden has officially closed among the world's longest police investigations, into the assassination of its former Prime Minister Olof Palme. The prosecutor in charge said there was "reasonable evidence" against a suspect, but there could be no prosecution, as the man was now dead.

### **February 28, 1986: A Murder in A Stockholm Street**

He disclosed that the suspected assassin was Stig Engstrom, a graphic artist with an insurance company. The was the same conclusion that an independent investigation by the Swedish journalist Thomas Peterson had reached; Peterson had presented his findings to the police in 2017, who had then reopened the investigation. The journalist had discovered that Engstrom worked in a building close to where Palme was shot dead at close quarters on February 1986, as he was walking back home with his wife late at night after watching a film at a Stockholm cinema. Peterson also found that Engstrom, who had presented himself as a witness to the killing, might have had a political motive. Engstrom worked at a shooting club, so he was no stranger to weapons. He was friendly with a former military man, a gun salesman who detested Palme for his socialist politics. Engstrom was right-wing too, Peterson had found. Engstrom, who was born in Mumbai in 1934 after his parents moved to British India – his father worked for an engineering firm and they returned to Sweden when he was 12 – committed suicide in 2000, when he was 66 years old. The prosecutor who reopened the case in 2017, said: "Engström is deceased. Therefore, I am not able to start proceedings or even interview him. That is why I decided to discontinue the investigation."





### Palme And His World – A Defining Moment for Sweden

The assassination of Palme shook Sweden, and has been described as a defining moment in how the country saw itself, and its place in the world. It was Sweden's first political killing in nearly 200 years. Palme himself was Sweden's first global politician who spoke for non-alignment during the Cold War, an anti-apartheid activist who funded the African National Congress, and a champion of anti-colonial liberation movements. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a friend of Palme's political mentor Tage Erlander. Palme belonged to an elite family, studied in America, and some years after his return, ascended to the leadership of an entirely blue-collar party. He led the Social Democrats for 16 years from 1969 until his death, with two terms as Prime Minister – he was killed in the fourth year of his second term. Palme and his party are associated with the modern Swedish welfare state, with its generous old age pensions and childcare benefits, free education and health. On the international stage, he was unafraid of taking positions on big issues of that time. He angered the US by taking a position against its war in Vietnam. Swedish commentators trace the country's independent foreign policy to the positions he took, especially on the Vietnam war. Sweden stayed away from joining NATO. In 1975-76, as an elected member of the UN security Council, Sweden went against the US by voting for a weapons embargo on South Africa, and for PLO's participation in the United Nations. He involved himself in efforts to resolve the middle east conflict. In India, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi declared a day of mourning for Palme, whose friendship he inherited from his mother Indira Gandhi. Indira, Palme, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and the leaders of Mexico, Greece, and Argentina joined hands to form a new grouping called the "Six-Nation Initiative", which Rajiv joined after becoming Prime Minister. A road in Delhi is named after Palme, as in cities across the world in developing countries. He was posthumously awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Peace Prize in 1987. At home, he was a controversial and polarising politician – Swedes loved him or hated him, depending on their politics. He was a people's leader and walked among them, literally, to emphasise that there was no difference between him and them. Swedish public life changed after his killing. In a report about the investigation into his assassination in The Guardian last year, Imogen West-Knight wrote that regardless of their political persuasion, all Swedes saw his killing as symbolic of something deeper: "It was as if the killer wanted to destroy the idea of modern Sweden itself". Palme's murder coincided with the end of the glory days of the Socialist Democrats in Sweden. Some would say it was his policies that led to a backlash against the party. The far-right Sweden Democrats was established two years after he died, and is part of the centre-right ruling alliance now. The Socialist Democrats polled their lowest ever votes in the 2018 election, even though they still remain the single largest party in the Swedish parliament.

### After the Murder: Writings, Including the Bofors Link

While the police botched up the investigation from Day 1, their inability to crack the case all this time shattered the confidence that many Swedes had in their police and judicial system, and spawned a number of private investigations – of which journalist Thomas Peterson's was one – and many conspiracy theories. Some even attribute the wave of crime fiction writing in Sweden to the country's obsession with the Palme assassination. The late Stieg Larsson, author of the Millennium Trilogy, is said to have been conducting his own investigation into the killing and its purported links to a conspiracy hatched against him in South Africa because of his sympathies for the ANC. One theory behind the assassination, which found a lot of purchase in India, was linked to the Bofors controversy. Jan Bondeson, author of Blood on the Snow: The Killing of Olof Palme, wrote in his book



that **Palme**, through his friendship with **Rajiv Gandhi**, had helped the Swedish arms company **Bofors** secure the howitzer deal with India. According to **Bondeson**, he was killed because he came to know that behind his back, **Bofors** had given bribes in India to sweeten the deal, through a UK-based front company called **AE Services**. But the police have been held responsible for letting the case slip. There was first a wild goose chase behind an alleged Kurdish connection to the killing; three years after the killing, police arrested a man called **Christer Petterson**, who was later released for want of any evidence. And even though **Engstrom** has now been named as the “probable” killer, it seems that the mystery of whether he was acting alone or as part of a larger conspiracy is likely to continue.

## A Fake Poisoning Plot, And A Diplomatic Flare-Up Between Russia, Czech Republic

- In a quid pro quo move, Russia ordered two diplomats from the Czech Republic to leave the country, days after Prague expelled two Russian diplomats over a fabricated story about a plan to ‘poison’ Czech politicians. Calling the move a “mirror measure in response to Prague’s provocative action”, the Russian foreign ministry declared the two Czech embassy employees’ personae non-gratae, ordering them to leave Russian territory with their family members.

### An Alleged “Poisoning Plot”

In late April, the Czech magazine ‘Respekt’ reported that the Czech intelligence agency had learnt of an alleged plot to assassinate the mayor of Prague, **Zdenek Hrib**, and the mayor of Prague 6 district, **Ondrej Kolar**, for ‘angering Russia’. The report said a ‘Russian intelligence officer’ had arrived in Prague on a diplomatic passport, carrying the potent toxin **ricin** in his luggage. At the time, Czech authorities refused to confirm or deny the report, and provided **Kolar**, **Hrib**, and the mayor of another Prague district with police protection. Then on June 5, the Czech government said the report in **Respekt** was fake, and the made-up murder plot was fed to Czech intelligence by a Russian diplomat who was at loggerheads with another embassy colleague. Czech Prime Minister **Andrej Babis** said that two Russian diplomats had been declared personae non-gratae, and were given 48 hours to leave the country. “We have an interest in having good relations with all countries, but we’re a sovereign state and such actions on our territory are unacceptable,” **Babis** said. Hitting back, Russia called the order a “fabricated provocation”, and warned of an “adequate response”.

### Moscow-Prague Tensions

For months, relations between Russia and the Czech Republic have been strained. In April, the Russian foreign ministry was furious after **Kolar** ordered the removal of a statue of **Ivan Konev** – a Soviet military hero credited for liberating Prague from Nazi Germany during World War II, but who is criticised for his role in crushing the 1956 Hungarian Uprising against Moscow. In February, Moscow was irked after the square outside its embassy in Prague was renamed after the Russian opposition leader **Boris Nemtsov**, who was shot dead in Moscow in 2015. Prague mayor **Hrib** had unveiled the new plaque.

### Why the Poisoning Threat Caused Worry

While under police protection at an undisclosed location, **Kolar** said in an interview with the BBC that he believed in the threat to his life, giving the example of the attempted poisoning of **Sergei Skripal**, a former Russian double agent who was administered a nerve agent in the UK in 2018. The Skripal incident had sparked a furore in the UK, causing



London and its allies to expel over 150 Russian diplomats – the worst fallout between the two countries since the Cold War. In Europe as well, Russian intelligence operatives have been accused of killing defecting agents.

## Why Did North Korea Blow Up A Joint Liaison Office with Seoul?

→ North Korea blew up the joint liaison office with South Korea in Kaesong, an industrial township on its side of the border, becoming one of the most serious incidents to have occurred between the two countries, without them actually going to war. The demolition of the joint liaison office follows a recent deterioration in relations between Pyongyang and Seoul and occurred just hours after Pyongyang threatened to engage in military action at the border with South Korea.

### Why Did Pyongyang Take This Step?

Tensions between the two countries had increased after Pyongyang objected to activists and defectors in South Korea sending anti-North Korean propaganda leaflets, rice and Bibles using balloons across the border into North Korean territory, and had cut off communication with Seoul. Experts believe that these moves come after North Korea's frustrations at South Korea's inability to revive inter-Korean economic projects that had been beneficial to Pyongyang, under pressure from the US, along with UN sanctions. The liaison office was set up in Kaesong in 2018 to facilitate communication between North Korea and South Korea. Following the demolition of the office, North Korean state media outlet KCNA released a statement saying the office had been "tragically ruined with a terrific explosion". South Korea's President Moon Jae-in called for an urgent national security meeting following the demolition. The country's Unification Ministry called the incident "a senseless act", one that had "destroyed the hopes of those who wished for peace on the Korean Peninsula". The South Korean government said they would "respond strongly" if the situation were to worsen but did not elaborate on how it would retaliate. The demolition occurred just days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong had threatened to destroy the liaison office.

### What Happened Next?

Following the demolition of the liaison office, North Korean state media KCNA announced that Pyongyang would be deploying troops in demilitarised areas, including in the Kaesong industrial zone. The KCNA added that North Korea would be adding artillery units along the border with South Korea for reinforcement and North Korean police posts that had been withdrawn when relations had improved between the two countries would now be instituted once again. Observers say that these actions by North Korea have been the most provocative in recent years. South Korea's President Moon Jae-in has made efforts over the past few years to improve relations with Pyongyang. Experts believe these provocations may have occurred because Pyongyang is hoping to pressure Seoul into giving it more concessions that would be economically beneficial for North Korea that has been hit hard by sanctions. Although it is not clear how COVID-19 has impacted North Korea, experts believe it is likely that the country has not escaped unscathed, especially in context of how China is North Korea's main trading partner. Experts believe these actions, however provocative, are not severe enough for Seoul to contemplate military aggression in retaliation. Following the demolition, Reuters reported that the US was coordinating with South Korea. Hours after the incident, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian announced in a daily briefing that China hoped for peace on the Korean Peninsula, and did



not mention the liaison office. Russian president Vladimir Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: "We call for restraint from all the sides."

- There were no high hopes of a quick solution to the U.S.-North Korean rivalry – it goes back to the 1950-53 Korean war – when Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim met. Still, the summit was an opportunity to open a new direction in relations. Mr. Kim had in principle agreed to denuclearisation in return for the lifting of American sanctions. But talks stalled as the U.S. insisted on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization" by North Korea in return for any concession. The North Koreans were wary, particularly because of the U.S.'s history of going after dictators such as Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya or its breaching of the Iran nuclear deal. Mr. Kim's regime offered a staged approach. It put a freeze on nuclear tests and offered to shut its Yongbyon nuclear complex. The U.S. and South Korea could have responded to these measures and kept the talks on track. On less contentious issues, such as declaring a formal end to the Korean war – both Korea are still technically at war – an agreement could have been achieved as a confidence-building measure. But that road was not taken. Worse, the U.S. and South Korea went ahead with their joint military exercise. Mr. Trump is now grappling with many problems at home – from the coronavirus outbreak and a sagging economy, to anti-racism protests. Still, if he does not want his two summits with Mr. Kim to be mere footnotes of history, he should take measures to revive talks with North Korea and push the peninsula back to normalcy.

## Foreign Affairs

### Galwan: Postscript to A Tragedy (Nirupama Rao - Former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China)

- The night of June 15, 2020 will go down in the annals of Indian history as one steeped in tragedy. Twenty Indian Army personnel, including the Commanding Officer of 16<sup>th</sup> Bihar Regiment, lost their lives at the hands of Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley of Ladakh. The incident represents a watershed in India's relations with China and marks the end of a 45-year chapter which saw no armed confrontation involving loss of lives on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The period of bilateral relations that was inaugurated with former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988 also drew to a close in the darkness of that fateful Monday night. The incident has deeply shaken the nation. It had been assumed all along that there would be a de-escalation of the confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops in the area after the Corps Commander-level talks between the two sides on June 6. That things went terribly wrong is more than evident. What is the import and significance of what happened in Galwan Valley on June 15? Can it be business as usual with China after this? That would seem unlikely given the manner in which the whole calculus of relations has been disturbed by the incident.

#### From 1959 to 2020

Nothing on this scale was witnessed even in the run-up to the conflict between the two countries in 1962. In October 1959, there was a face-off between Indian and Chinese troops at Kongka La. Nine Indian soldiers were killed and three soldiers were detained then, including the legendary Karam Singh, the leader of the group who recorded after his release the ill-treatment he and his colleagues had been subjected to at the hands of their





captors. It was after Kongka La that the national mood turned against the Chinese in full measure in an atmosphere already complicated by the revolt in Tibet and the granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama in March 1959. There was very little room for a reasoned, negotiated settlement being reached on the boundary question between the two countries after that juncture. The rest is history. The conflict in 1962 inflicted gaping wounds on the national soul and prestige from which India took time to recover. Is the country at a similar juncture today? 2020 is not 1959. India and China are in a very different place in their history as nations today. They have grown immensely in strength and stature on the world stage and their relations have substance and a diversity of content in a manner absent in the 1950s. To assume that India is on a steep descent from here towards a full-blown conflict with China may therefore be an oversimplification. Both countries must stop that fall despite the terse messaging of statements issued in the two capitals after the incident. The statements are mutually accusatory, with each country disclaiming responsibility for the tragic turn of events. The mood is very sombre.

### If Soldiers on LAC Were Carrying Arms, Why Did They Not Open Fire?

- The political slugfest on Twitter between Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar about the death of 20 soldiers in a violent faceoff with the Chinese in Ladakh brought home the fact that the Indian troops were armed, but did not open fire. The minister said that “all troops on border duty always carry arms, especially when leaving post. Those at Galwan on 15 June did so. Long-standing practice (as per 1996 & 2005 agreements) not to use firearms during faceoffs”.

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The protocols Jaishankar referred to are from agreements signed between India and China in 1996 and 2005. The 1996 agreement is on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas. “With a view to preventing dangerous military activities along the line of actual control in the India-China border areas... Neither side shall open fire, cause bio-degradation, use hazardous chemicals, conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometres from the line of actual control. This prohibition shall not apply to routine firing activities in small arms firing ranges,” says Article VI (1) of the 1996 agreement. However, it is Article VI(4) that is more applicable in the current instance: “If the border personnel of the two sides come in a face-to-face situation due to differences on the alignment of the line of actual control of any other reason, they shall exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid an escalation of the situation. Both sides shall also enter into immediate consultations through diplomatic and/or other available channels to review the situation and prevent any escalation of tension.” But the 1996 agreement comes with a proviso in Article X(1) that “the full implementation of some of the provisions of the present Agreement will depend on the two sides arriving at a common understanding of the alignment of the line of actual control in the India-China border areas, the two sides agree to speed up the process clarification and confirmation of the line of actual control”. In Article 1 of the 2005 agreement, “the two sides will resolve the boundary question through peaceful and friendly consultations. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other by any means”. The 2013 agreement on Border Defence Cooperation also stated that neither side shall use its military capability against the other. None of these articles pertains directly to the situation that emerged on Monday where soldiers were brutally assaulted to death by the Chinese side in Galwan Valley area. As Jaishankar explained, it



was as per longstanding practice in the area flowing from these agreements that the soldiers did not open fire.

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The Indian Express spoke to Army officers, who confirmed that most of the soldiers in that group which clashed with the Chinese soldiers were carrying their personal weapons, and had ammunition on person. This is as per prevalent practice, borne out by videos and pictures of certain patrols coming face-to-face in the recent past that show soldiers carrying weapons, but with the barrels pointing downwards. That is part of a local drill followed to avoid any accidental firing or misunderstanding because of the rifle barrel pointing towards each other. Even though not strictly coded in any rules, officers said these practices have evolved over a period of time and have been firmed as part of a routine on the LAC. Since no round has been fired on the Sino-India border in Ladakh after 1962 and with a view to preventing any escalation, these routines of not firing have been drilled into the soldiers. In such an environment, every other weapon short of firing has become acceptable to use for the soldiers, who have used them during previous clashes. Even though people have been injured in such clashes, no one has died due to use of rocks and sticks. However, the ferocity of the use of these weapons has been increasing over time, as observed during the clash at Pangong Tso on May 5/6 which left more than 70 Indian soldiers injured. As per some reports, even the Army recently ordered full body protectors and anti-riot gear for its soldiers deployed there, further lending credence to the notion that opening of fire was strict taboo on the LAC. The incident on Monday happened under these circumstances, even though the Army's rules of engagement allow soldiers from opening fire if lives of their uniformed brethren is threatened. Questions have been raised in many quarters, including by Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, about the fact that no officer in the chain of command thought it fit to open fire in a clash that lasted a few hours. Some military veterans have even argued that even calling for artillery fire would have been fully justified as per rules in such a scenario. Army officers, however, argue that there is another side to the story. In the melee during the clash, where Indian and Chinese soldiers were grappling with each other in a hand-to-hand combat, it was very difficult to open fire without hitting one of your men. That, they say, was the reason soldiers did not open fire even when their Commanding Officer and 19 other men were killed, and 10 others taken captive.

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Arriving at judgments about complex military situations is fraught, especially for those not present on the ground. Decisions are taken on the spur of the moment, which change the course of events, and their consequences have to be borne by posterity. Whatever be the reason for Indian soldiers not opening fire, their decision prevented the situation from escalating. That said, the killings have put a question mark on the terms of engagement between the two armies going forward.

### How Serious Is the Situation, What Happens Next?

- Nearly 24 hours after news of the violent clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers in Ladakh broke, here's what we know about the incident.



### Is the Situation Serious?

Yes, undoubtedly so. This is the first time after the 1962 War that soldiers have died in clashes on the India-China border in Ladakh. Even otherwise, the last deaths on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) were an ambush of an Assam Rifles patrol in Arunachal Pradesh by the Chinese in 1975. But the last real military engagement between the two armies was at Nathu La in Sikkim in 1967, in which 88 Indian soldiers lost their lives, and more than 300 Chinese soldiers were killed. But all these incidents were prior to the two countries signing, starting from 1993, various agreements for maintaining peace and tranquillity on the border. Moreover, at least 20 soldiers including a Commanding Officer lost their lives on a single day in Galwan on Monday. To put that number in context, when 19 soldiers lost their lives in Uri in 2016, the Narendra Modi government launched surgical strikes across the Line of Control.

### But No Rounds Were Fired by Either Side. Isn't That A Good Thing?

Not really. If such a large number of soldiers could be killed without firing a round, it means that these deaths were far more brutal than they would have been had guns and rifles been used. However, that it remained restricted to a physical brawl points to the fact that there was no escalation to a kinetic level – rifles, howitzers, rockets, missiles, and fighter jets. China and India are both nuclear powers, and any climbing up the escalation ladder is fraught. But it could be a hope hanging by a slender thread if the history between the two sides is any precedent to go by. Even at Nathu La, before the military engagement escalated to artillery guns and threats of fighter jets, there was a scuffle between the soldiers of the two armies on the border.

### So, What Exactly Happened in The Galwan Valley?

Tensions had been running high in the area for the past few weeks, with a large number of soldiers and military equipment deployed along the LAC by both sides. Even though the LAC in Galwan Valley was never disputed by the two sides, the Chinese had moved into the Indian side of the LAC. After the meeting at the level of Corps Commanders on June 6, negotiations had been conducted between local military commanders of both the armies for a mutually agreed disengagement process. As part of that process, a buffer zone had been agreed to be created between the LAC and the junction of the Shyok and Galwan rivers to avoid any faceoff between the two armies. The two armies were to move back by a kilometre each in that area as a first step. When Colonel B Santosh Babu, who was monitoring this process, noticed that a Chinese camp was still existing in the area, he went to get it removed. This soon led to fisticuffs and blows being exchanged, resulting in deaths and injuries.

### But If There Were No Shots Fired, How Did the Soldiers Die?

Since the time tensions have erupted on the Ladakh border, there have been reports of some scuffles between the soldiers of both the armies. At Pangong Tso on the intervening night of May 5/6, there was a major scuffle between the soldiers in which more than 70 Indian soldiers were injured. In most of these scuffles, the Chinese have used bats, clubs, sticks and stones to cause major injuries. In Monday's clash, besides the use of these blunt objects to cause injuries, some soldiers, it has been learnt, could have been pushed into the fast-flowing Galwan river. Most of the deaths were due to injuries aggravated by the intense cold in the high-altitude area.



### **And How Many Chinese Soldiers Were Killed or Injured in The Clash?**

The official statements put out by the Army and the Ministry of External Affairs have no details of any deaths or injuries to Chinese soldiers, although the first statement by the Army on Tuesday was amended to say that there were casualties “on both sides”. The Chinese government or the PLA too, have not provided any details of soldiers killed or injured in the clash. The only numbers that have come from are from the news agency ANI, which has quoted unnamed sources claiming that as per radio transmission intercepts, 43 Chinese soldiers were either killed or injured in the clash. Another report in usnews.com has cited “American intelligence” to say that 35 Chinese troops, including an officer, are believed to have died.

### **Has the Situation Now Been Defused at The Site of The Clash?**

A meeting at the level of Major Generals of both armies took place at PP14 in the area on Tuesday, which continued until late in the evening. It brought the situation under control, and the Indian side was able to collect all the bodies. The Chinese were given permission to bring in helicopters to ferry their injured back.

### **Tensions Must Then Be High at The Ladakh Border?**

Yes, tensions have already been running high at various places on the Ladakh border where Indian and Chinese soldiers have been facing each other on the LAC since May. The latest incident has added to the tensions, but there have been no reports of any other clashes at the border.

### **So, What Does All This Mean? What Is the Key Takeaway?**

There were hopes of an early disengagement and de-escalation after conciliatory statements from both countries in the past few days, after the meeting at the level of Corps Commander on June 6. There were meetings being held at the level of various other military commanders from June 10, which were to continue for 10 days, by when the disengagement process would have been decided and finalised. But after this incident, that process is likely to take a back seat, and an early resolution now looks unlikely. China has reasserted its claim over Galwan Valley, and its army has made sharp statements alleging that Indian soldiers twice crossed the LAC. The MEA too, has categorically stated that the Chinese had violated the LAC in the Galwan Valley region, which had led to the current situation. These allegations and counter-allegations, along with the heightened public sentiment on the deaths of so many soldiers, will test any process towards resolution.

### **Can the Situation Escalate Hereon?**

As the two countries are still talking at military and diplomatic levels, any escalation into a major conflict looks some distance away at this moment. But conflict situations have a dynamic of their own, and events can overtake the best laid plans. A military conflict, if it occurs, can be localised to one area, can be along the whole border, or can be in any one sector. But unless there is another provocation and crisis, the two sides should be able to resolve the situation peacefully. That said, the government will place the armed forces on full alert, moving some of them forward for an early response in case of any eventuality. Simultaneously, it will continue to use diplomatic channels to resolve the crisis, while controlling the domestic messaging to avoid inflaming public emotions that can create





pressure on it to act strongly against China. The execution of that strategy will determine the course of the future action on China.

## Satellite Images Suggest Increased Chinese Activity at Border Before Clash

→ In the days leading up to the most violent border clash between India and China in decades, China brought in pieces of machinery, cut a trail into a Himalayan mountainside and may have even dammed a river, satellite pictures suggest. The images, shot a day after soldiers engaged in a hand-to-hand combat in the freezing Galwan Valley, show an increase in activity from a week earlier. India said 20 soldiers were killed in a premeditated attack by Chinese troops on Monday night at a time when top commanders had agreed to defuse tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). China rejected the allegations and blamed front-line Indian soldiers for provoking the conflict which took place at the freezing height of 14,000 feet (4,300 metres) in the western Himalayas. The 4,056-km border between India and China runs through glaciers, snow deserts and rivers in the west to thickly forested mountains in the east. The Galwan Valley is an arid, inhospitable area, where some soldiers are deployed on steep ridges. It is considered important because it leads to the Aksai Chin, a disputed plateau claimed by India but controlled by China. The satellite pictures, taken by earth-imaging company Planet Labs and obtained by Reuters, show signs of altering the landscape of the valley through widening tracks, moving earth and making river crossings, one expert said. The images show machinery along the bald mountains and in the Galwan River. "Looking at it in Planet, it looks like China is constructing roads in the valley and possibly damming the river," Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Non-proliferation Program at California's Middlebury Institute of International Studies. "There are a ton of vehicles on both sides [of the LAC], although there appear to be vastly more on the Chinese side. I count 30-40 Indian vehicles and well over 100 vehicles on the Chinese side." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said he was unaware of the specifics on the ground but reiterated that the Indian Army had crossed into Chinese territory in several places in recent days and that they should withdraw.

### Backlash

The clash was the most serious since 1967. Since early May, soldiers have faced off on the border where India says Chinese troops had intruded and set up temporary structures. The confrontation turned into a deadly brawl on Monday. **The fighting was triggered by a row over two Chinese tents and observation towers that India said had been built on its side of the LAC**, said Indian government sources in New Delhi and on the Indian side of the border in the Ladakh region. China had sought to erect a "structure" in the Galwan Valley on India's side of the LAC even after military officials had reached an agreement on June 6 to de-escalate, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar told China's senior diplomat Wang Yi in a phone call on Wednesday, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said. It was not immediately clear to what structure he was referring. **The problem arose when an Indian patrol visited the area near a ridge to verify a Chinese assertion that its troops had moved back from the LAC, the two government sources aware of the military situation said.** The Chinese troops had thinned out and left behind the two tents and small observation posts. The Indian party demolished the towers and burnt the tents, the sources said. The satellite images show possible debris from the observation posts on Tuesday morning on a ridge on India's side of the LAC. There was no such structure in the image taken a week earlier.



## What Happened to The Mountain Strike Corps?

→ As tensions between India and China remain high on the disputed border following death of at least 20 Indian soldiers, a search for military options is leading to questions about the current status of the mountain strike corps, sanctioned seven years ago but stalled two years ago for lack of funds. With only one of its two divisions raised, it now exists in a truncated shape while being tested for Army's new integrated battle group (IBG) concept. "Preliminary role for the truncated mountain strike corps is for an offensive – not limited to the east, but in Ladakh as well – in that sense, it is a dual role. It will definitely come into play if a war breaks out," a military official told The Indian Express. But others contend that had the full raising gone as per schedule, **the mountain strike corps could have been an effective deterrent, raising costs for trans-LAC incursions by China**. Used as testbed for the IBG model devised under the previous Army chief General Bipin Rawat, the Panagarh-headquartered 17 Corps now exists in a different form than was sanctioned in 2013. The new IBG model was tested in a major exercise, Him Vijay, in the eastern theatre last October, to validate the concept of a swift offensive in the high mountains along the China border. **The first division of the mountain strike corps was raised in the eastern sector but the raising of the second division at Pathankot in 2017-18 was never completed**. The raising was stopped due to a paucity of funds with the government, along with a rethink within the Army over the limitations in launching a full-fledged strike corps at the current levels of border infrastructure. Funds had always been a major issue for the raising of the strike corps, even when the initial raising expenditure of about ₹65,000 crore was not additionally allocated but considered to be a part of the normal budget. This led to the Army dipping into its resources for equipping the newly raised units, which caused an alarming fall in its War Wastage Reserves (WWR). **WWR are collections of military material and ammunition with the Army that can sustain a 40-day intense war**. As the then defence minister, the late Manohar Parrikar, explained to journalists, the mountain strike corps was not a financially viable project and those funds could be better utilised to modernise the Army. When the concept of IBG was finalised in 2018, this mountain strike corps became one of the testbeds along with the Pathankot-based 9 Corps. Under the new concept, 17 Corps is supposed to have three IBGs, each comprising around 4,000 soldiers under a Major General, directly under the operation control of the Corps headquarters. The IBG concept is envisaged to create in the mountain strike corps, an ability to move, deploy and launch limited offensives in the mountains very quickly. The aim of raising the mountain strike corps in a non-defensive role was to create capabilities to deter China's aggressive behaviour along the 3,488 km long Sino-India border. This had followed the raising of two new divisions in 2010 to strengthen the deployment in Arunachal Pradesh, along with an armoured, artillery and infantry brigade for other sectors of the LAC.

## History, The Stand-Off, And Policy Worth Rereading

→ The deadly clashes at Galwan and the ongoing stand-off between India and China on the ridges or "fingers" around the Pangong Tso are a metaphor for the wider conflict between the two countries over all the areas that Chinese strategy refers to as the "five fingers of the Tibetan palm". **According to the construct, attributed to Mao and cited in the 1950s by Chinese officials, Xizang (Tibet) was China's right palm, and it was its responsibility to "liberate" the fingers, defined as Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA, or Arunachal Pradesh)**. Sixty years ago, India began to set about ensuring that quite the reverse ensued, and all five fingers were more closely attached to India, not China. As the government of India grapples with its next steps at the Line of Actual Control

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)



(LAC), it must cast a similarly grand strategy, to renew its compact with each of those areas today.

### India's Countermove

In the 1950s, even after India and China signed the **Panchsheel agreement in 1954** and before the **1962 China-India war**, the Nehru government had begun to worry about some of China's proclamations. Especially after the **flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959**, **China began to demand "self-determination in Kashmir"**, wrote former Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul in his memoirs, detailing how the Chinese press and radio launched a propaganda war against India, while the Chinese government allowed Naga and Mizo dissidents into China for refuge and training. More importantly, **school textbooks there began to depict the "five fingers" as a part of China**, wrote Mr. Kaul, who was posted in Peking (Beijing) and then as Joint Secretary (East) overseeing the China relationship, in the 1950s. While Prime Minister Nehru's military miscalculations and India's defeat in the 1962 war have been studied in great detail, what is perhaps not so well understood is the three-pronged foreign policy New Delhi set into motion at the time, that provided an effective counter to Mao's five finger policy over the course of the century.

### Managing the Borders

The first was a push for building border infrastructure and governance. **In the mid-1950s the government piloted a project to build the Indian Frontier Administrative Services (IFAS) for overseeing NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) and other areas along the India-China frontier.** The Foreign secretary was the Chair of the IFAS selection board, and many who enlisted in the cadre overlapped between the Indian Foreign Service, the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, and rotated between postings in the most remote tribal areas and embassies in the region. A special desk was created in the Ministry of External Affairs for officers who would tour all the regions from NEFA to Ladakh in order to make suggestions for the rapid development of these areas. **While India's border infrastructure is only now catching up with the infrastructure China built in the course of the next few decades, its base was made during the brief period the IFAS existed, before it was wound up in 1968.** An idea before its time, **the IFAS's role has since been transferred to the Indian Army and the Border Roads Organisation**, but it is an idea worth revisiting, especially as areas along the frontier continue to complain of neglect and a lack of focus from the Centre (in 2019, the Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram called for the resurrection of the IFAS).

### Outreach and Treaties

The second prong were a series of treaties that were signed around that time with neighbours such as Nepal and Bhutan, and the consolidation of control, militarily and administratively, of other territories that acceded to India, including Ladakh as a part of Jammu and Kashmir (1947), and NEFA (1951). In 1950, India signed a treaty with Sikkim that made it a "protectorate", and by 1975 the Indira Gandhi Government had **annexed Sikkim and made it the 22<sup>nd</sup> State of India**. Each of these treaties built unique relationships with New Delhi, tying countries such as Nepal and Bhutan in ways that were seen as a "win-win" for both sides at the time. However, over time, the treaties have outlived their utility, and the benefits of unique ties with Nepal and Bhutan, including open borders and ease of movement, jobs and education for their youth as well as India's influential support on the world stage, have waned in public memory. **One of the reasons that China has been able to make inroads into Nepal and not with Bhutan, is that the government renegotiated its**



1949 Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan of 1949 with the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty in 2007, dropping an article that had committed Bhutan “to be guided” by India on its external affairs policy. This has held India and Bhutan ties in good stead thus far, even during the Doklam stand-off between India and China in 2017 in the face of severe pressure from China. However, despite years of requests from Kathmandu, New Delhi has dragged its feet on reviewing its 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal, and on accepting a report the Eminent Persons’ Group (EPG) on Nepal-India relations has produced that recommends a new treaty. New treaties may not, in themselves reduce India’s security threat from China in its neighbourhood, but they create space for a more mutually responsive diplomacy that is necessary to nurture special relationships.

### The Tibet Issue

For the third prong, India’s policy towards the “palm” or Tibet, itself should be looked at more closely as well. While New Delhi’s decision to shelter the Dalai Lama and lakhs of his followers since 1959 is a policy that is lauded, it does not change the need for New Delhi to look into the future of its relationship, both with the Tibetan refugee community in India, which has lived here in limbo for decades, as well as with its future leadership. **At present, the Dalai Lama has the loyalty of Tibetans worldwide, but in the future, the question over who will take up the political leadership of the community looms large.** The Karmapa Lama, who lived in India after his flight from China in 2000, and was groomed as a possible political successor, has now taken the citizenship of another country and lives mostly in the United States. Meanwhile, China will without doubt try to force its own choice on the community as well. Given that it is home to so many Tibetans, India must chart a more prominent role in this discourse.

### On J&K

Finally, it is necessary to introspect on how India’s own reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 has changed the security matrix and threat parameters for India, and its neighbours. While Pakistan’s extreme reaction to the move was expected, China’s reaction was perhaps not studied enough. Beijing issued a statement decrying the impact on Jammu and Kashmir, and another one specifically on Ladakh, calling it an attempt to “undermine China’s territorial sovereignty by unilaterally changing its domestic law” and warning that the move was “unacceptable and will not come into force”. Home Minister Amit Shah’s vow in Parliament, in August last year, to take back Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin was not taken lightly either, as China’s stakes in PoK now go beyond its historical closeness with Pakistan, to its investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that runs through it. The impact of the new map of Jammu and Kashmir on ties with Nepal as well, is no coincidence. There is proof enough that now more than ever, as the government readies its hand on dealing with China, it must not lose sight of every finger in play.

### When A Parliamentary Panel Red-Flagged China

- Amid the on-going India-China border tension, a Parliamentary Standing Committee report on Sino-India relations post the Doklam standoff – prepared after border visits, intense discussions and testimonies from top officials of the external affairs and defence ministries – assumes significance as it is the only detailed report on the border issue that





has been made available to the public. Submitted by the **Shashi Tharoor-led Standing Committee on External Affairs**, the report on Sino-India relations including Doklam, the border situation and cooperation in international organisations, **had cautioned the government that it needed to have “healthy scepticism” while dealing with China**. The report was prepared after following “tough questions and frank assessment”, Tharoor said in a tweet on Friday. Although the Opposition raised the Doklam stand-off in both Houses of Parliament, there was no detailed discussion in the House. However, the then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj made a statement on the issue saying the stand-off was a matter of concern, but that it would be solved in consultation with the concerned countries. In June 2017, the face-off at the India-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction – which began when PLA personnel entered Doklam in a bid to alter the status-quo thereby violating the understanding with both India and Bhutan – was resolved with the disengagement of border personnel. **This Standing Committee report – a bipartisan one as the committee has members from ruling and opposition parties – is one of the very few documents available in which the defence and foreign secretaries clarified the government’s official position on India-China border issues including the reported transgressions by the Chinese in the region.**

### What Did the Report State?

During discussions over the Doklam stand-off, S Jaishankar, the then Foreign Secretary who is now the External Affairs minister, his successor Vijay Gokhale along with then Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra testified before the panel. The Defence Secretary had clarified to the committee, which was concerned about multiple reports that alluded to Chinese presence around the Doklam plateau and the possibility of similar incidents happening in the future, that PLA troops were within their own territory and there was nothing unusual about their deployment. However, in the report, the MPs put on record their dissatisfaction. “Though the Government has categorically denied any Chinese activities near the actual face-off site, an ambivalent view has been expressed while confirming such activities for other areas in the Doklam plateau,” it said. The committee further noted: “Even if they have withdrawn their troops from Doklam for the time being, China’s strategic intentions should not be taken casually. The Committee would, therefore, urge the Government not to let its vigil down in order to prevent any untoward incident in future.” Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, BJP leaders Feroze Varun Gandhi, Swapan Dasgupta and current Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan, NCP leader Supriya Sule, DMK’s M Kanimozhi and CPI-M’s Mohd Salim were part of the 31-member panel.

### Parliamentary Committees

Apart from debates on bills and issues discussed and debated on the floor of the House, more detailed and in-depth discussions take place on issues as well as legislation in the parliamentary standing committees, in which MPs belonging to all major parties put forward their views without much consideration to the political differences they have. Considerable amount of legislative work gets done in these smaller units of MPs from both Houses, across political parties and they function throughout the year on a range of subject matters, Bills, and budgets of all the ministries. These reports are tabled in both Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha. **The Houses do not hold specific debate on the report, but it is often referred to during the discussions on the bills and the key issues.** Committee meetings also provide a forum where Members can engage with domain experts as well as senior-most officials of the concerned ministries.



## India-China: The Line of Actual Contest

→ The ongoing military standoffs with China at multiple points along the India-China border has turned the spotlight to the single most important element that has helped keep the peace across the Himalayas: The Line of Actual Control (LAC). Yet, what exactly the LAC is remains a source of much confusion. One possible reason for the confusion is that in the public imagination, it is sometimes spoken of in the same breath with that other contested three-letter abbreviation that is often in the news: The Line of Control (LoC) that separates India and Pakistan. They are different in one crucial way. **With Pakistan, India has an international boundary, which has been agreed upon, and the LoC, which has been delineated on a map by both sides. In contrast, the alignment of the LAC has never been agreed upon, and it is having neither been delineated nor demarcated. There is no official map in the public domain that depicts the LAC. It can best be thought of as an idea, reflecting the territories that are, at present, under the control of each side, pending a resolution of the boundary dispute. In a strange irony, if the LAC is far less clear than the LoC, it has remained much more peaceful, with not a shot fired since 1975 at Tulong La. Where does the LAC run? For the most part, in the western sector, it broadly corresponds with the border as China sees it. There are differences in several points here, including at the very start of the LAC, which India reportedly pegs northwest of the Karakoram Pass, but China further south. In the eastern sector, it broadly corresponds with the border as India sees it, along the McMahon Line that separates Arunachal Pradesh from Tibet. In the middle sector and Sikkim, the LAC is broadly aligned with the borders as India and China see it, with minor differences here.** Following the Tulong La incident, Delhi's China Study Group set patrolling limits that India would stick to, in order to assert its LAC alignment – limits that are still being followed today. The problem is India and China do not agree on the alignment of the LAC everywhere. **Differences in perception, particularly in 13 spots in the western, middle and eastern sectors of the border, often lead to what are called "face offs", when patrols encounter each other in these grey zones that lie in between the different alignments. Some of these areas are Chumar, Demchok and the north bank of the Pangong lake in the western sector, Barahoti in the middle sector, and Sumdorong Chu in the east. Both sides agreed to protocols in 2005 and 2013 that describe the rules of engagement to handle such situations, but as the current stand-off at Pangong Tso reminds us, they haven't always been followed. At Pangong Tso, India's LAC runs at Finger 8, and China's at Finger 4. The "fingers" from 1 to 8 refer to mountain spurs that run from west to east on the lake's northern bank. Currently, Chinese troops have erected tents in the Finger 4 area and are preventing India from reaching its LAC at Finger 8, leading to a stand-off.**

### Genesis

In a November 7, 1959 letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai suggested the armed forces of both sides withdraw 20 km, as he put it, "from the so-called McMahon Line in the east, and from the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west". Yet where exactly each side believed it exercised control was a matter of debate, complicated by the fact that **China's alignments kept changing. The "LAC" it referred to in 1960 and 1962 wasn't the same as 1959. When India and China signed the landmark Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (BPTA) in 1993, the first legal agreement that recognised the LAC, they avoided this problem by referring to the LAC at the time, and not the LAC of 1959, 1960 or 1962, all of which had different meanings. It isn't widely known that many of the ideas in the BPTA had, in part, a Russian genesis.**



Following Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to China, both sides were optimistic of pushing ahead on talks on the boundary. In this time, they were exploring regimes to maintain peace and tranquillity, and looked at, among others, the ongoing China-Russia boundary negotiations. "It was not that we came to some Nirvana moment," recalls Nirupama Rao, a former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China who had, in 1991, engaged with the Russians on this question as the then Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs. "For instance, the concept of mutual and equal security, which we included in the agreement, was a Russian term. This was a borrowed idea, like Eve being born from the rib of Adam." No other basis besides the LAC suggested itself, writes former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon in his book Choices. "The status quo was the LAC, irrespective of what had been said about it in the past. **The reference to the LAC would be unqualified, making it clear that it was the LAC at the time the agreement was signed that would be respected, and not some notional idea of where it was in 1959 or 1962.**" As Mr. Menon writes, this unqualified reference to the LAC created "the unintended side effect of further incentivising the forward creep to the line by both militaries", a consequence that both sides are currently dealing with at multiple points on the LAC.

### Clarification

**Both the 1993 BPTA agreement and the subsequent agreement on confidence-building measures in 1996 acknowledged that both sides would ultimately clarify the LAC. That process has, however, stalled since 2002, when China walked away from exchanging maps in the western sector.** During a 2015 visit to China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a pitch to revive the process, saying in a speech in Tsinghua University that "a shadow of uncertainty always hangs over the sensitive because neither side knows where the LAC is in these areas," he said. China rebuffed his request. Ms. Rao, the former Foreign Secretary, said that it wasn't a surprise, and China had, in several territorial disputes, intentionally left its claims ambiguous. **"The Chinese are masters at it. They don't stick to positions, and their actions on the ground constantly defy things they have done in the past. The Chinese line has kept shifting. There is always scope for redrawing, and we have never had the chance to look at their maps."** The current stand-offs, Ms. Rao said, have underlined the challenge India faces on its borders. "If a problem has lasted so long, and there is no settlement in sight, we may need another generation or two to settle it. The only answer for us is to be prepared, continue to build our roads and improve our infrastructure, keep ourselves ready to deal with these contingencies, and play the game in a way that safeguards our interests." The contest across the line isn't going anywhere.

### China Lays Claim to Entire Galwan Valley

- China's government on Friday said it claimed the entire Galwan Valley, the site of the June 15 clash on the border, including areas that are currently on India's side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). In a statement, the Foreign Ministry accused India of "unilaterally building roads, bridges and other facilities in the Galwan Valley region" and said "the Galwan Valley is located on the Chinese side of the LAC in the western section of the Sino-Indian border". The statement suggests Beijing is making a new claim to the LAC in this area, in the view of Indian officials. In the valley, **the LAC runs east of the confluence of the Galwan and Shyok rivers.**



## Why Ladakh Matters to India, China: History, Geography, And Strategy

→ In July 1958, an official monthly magazine in China named China pictorial published a map of the country that would in the next few months become a bone of contention between India and its East Asian neighbour. The map in question showed large parts of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and the Himalayan territory of Ladakh as part of China. The publication had been preceded with the Chinese building a road linking parts of Ladakh with Xinjiang, an autonomous region in China, and Tibet, which was by then under Chinese control. Soon after 'China pictorial' came out with the new Chinese map, the leaders of both countries began writing to each other frequently regarding Ladakh. The exchange of letters between Jawaharlal Nehru and his Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was followed by the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The war also led to the formation of the loosely demarcated Line of Actual Control (LAC) running through Ladakh. On Monday as fighting broke out along the disputed border between the Indian and Chinese militaries, at least 20 Indian soldiers including a commanding officer lost their lives. What is it about this cold, dry, high altitude territory with its extremely scarce vegetation that makes it a point of disagreement between India and China? In his statement in the Lok Sabha in August 1959, Nehru had said: "There is a large area in eastern and north-eastern Ladakh which is practically uninhabited." "Where not even a blade of grass grows," he had said famously. Political scientists Margaret W. Fisher and Leo E. Rose writing in their 1962 paper, 'Ladakh and the Sino-Indian border crisis' noted that "indeed it is open to question how many persons in the western world could then have located Ladakh with any precision, or even perhaps have stated with any confidence the nationality of the Ladakhi's." "Certainly, very few would have credited a prediction that armed clashes and the threat of full-scale war between India and China would arise over possession of the high alkaline plain known as Aksai Chin," they said. The importance of Ladakh to both India and China is rooted in complicated historical processes that led to the territory becoming part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and China's interest in it post the occupation of Tibet in 1950.

### The Integration of Ladakh Into Jammu And Kashmir

Up until the Dogra invasion of 1834, Ladakh was an independent Himalayan state, much the same way as Bhutan and Sikkim. Historically and culturally, however, the state was intrinsically linked to neighbouring Tibet. Language and religion linked Ladakh and Tibet; politically too, they shared a common history. "Ladakh was part of the Tibetan empire which broke up after the assassination of King Langdarma in 742 CE," historian John Bray wrote in his research paper, 'Ladakhi history and Indian nationhood.' "Thereafter it became an independent kingdom, though its borders fluctuated at different periods of its history and, at times included much of what is now western Tibet." Economically, the importance of the region stemmed from the fact that it was an entrepôt between central Asia and Kashmir. "Tibetan pashmina shawl wool was carried through Ladakh to Kashmir. At the same time, there was a flourishing trade route across the Karakorum pass to Yarkand and Kashgar to Chinese Turkestan," Bray wrote. As the Sikhs acquired Kashmir in 1819, Emperor Ranjit Singh turned his ambition towards Ladakh. But it was Gulab Singh, the Dogra feudatory of the Sikhs in Jammu, who went ahead with the task of integrating Ladakh into Jammu and Kashmir. The British East India Company, which was by now steadily establishing itself in India, had lacked interest in Ladakh initially. However, it did show enthusiasm for the Dogra invasion of the area, with the hope that as a consequence, a large portion of Tibetan trade would be diverted to its holdings. In 1834, Gulab Singh sent his ablest general, Zarowar Singh Kahluria, with 4,000 infantrymen to conquer the territory.





“There was no opposition at first, as the Ladakhis were taken by surprise, but on August 16, 1834, the Dogras defeated an army of some 5,000 men under the Bhotia leader, Mangal, at Sanku,” historian Robert A. Huttenback wrote in his article, ‘Gulab Singh and the creation of the Dogra state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.’ Thereafter, Ladakh came under Dogra rule. **In May 1841, Tibet under the Qing dynasty of China invaded Ladakh with the hope of adding it to the imperial Chinese dominions, leading to the Sino-Sikh war. However, the Sino-Tibetan army was defeated, and the Treaty of Chushul was signed that agreed on no further transgressions or interference in the other country’s frontiers. After the first Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, including Ladakh, was taken out of the Sikh empire and brought under British suzerainty.** “The state of Jammu and Kashmir was essentially a British creation, formed as a buffer zone where they could meet the Russians. Consequently, there was an attempt to delimiting what exactly was Ladakh and the extent of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but it became convoluted since that area came under Tibetan and Central Asian influence,”. “It is important to remember though, at that time people did not have a very good sense of which country they belonged to. So, one can argue that when the mapping happened defining the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the British may have overstepped,” Rej added. **The British legacy of the map of the territory though continued to remain the ground upon which India laid its claim on the area.** In his book India after Gandhi, historian Ramachandra Guha wrote that “the Indians insisted that the border was, for most part, recognised and assured by treaty and tradition; the Chinese argued it had never really been delimited. The claims of both governments rested in part on the legacy of imperialism; British imperialism (for India), and Chinese imperialism (over Tibet) for China.”

### **Chinese Interest in Ladakh After the Occupation of Tibet in 1950**

**The annexation of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China in 1950 sparked newfound interest in Ladakh, and particularly so after the 1959 Tibetan uprising that erupted in Lhasa when the Dalai Lama fled into exile and was granted political asylum in India.** “In attempting to crush the Tibetan revolt while at the same time denying its existence, the Chinese have used methods which have brought China and India into sharp conflict,” Fisher and Rose wrote. **To begin with, the road that the Chinese built across Ladakh in 1956-57 was important for the maintenance of their control over Tibet.** “Without such a supply route, the at the time unacknowledged Khampa revolt in eastern Tibet might have reached dangerous proportions,” they noted. “Indeed, in the event of any serious weakening of the Peking government, this area might well prove to be the key to Chinese hold over Tibet.” **The building of the road through Ladakh upset Nehru’s government.** “Nehru had hoped that Tibet would have a degree of autonomy even though it came under Chinese occupation. A relatively independent Tibet would serve as a buffer between the Chinese and India,” Rej said. “Once the road construction started, he knew that the original Chinese territory which is Xinjiang will have a direct connection with Tibet. This meant that the Chinese could keep on exercising their control,” he added. The diplomatic negotiations failed, and the war of 1962 followed. On why conflict has flared up again in Ladakh, Rej said: “There are two layers to this. First, **up to 2013 India’s infrastructural development in that area was minimal. From 2013, India started pushing for infrastructure projects there and by 2015, it became a major defence priority.** “The second layer is the August 5, 2019 decision (to remove the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and downgrade the state into two Union Territories). From the Chinese point of view, they would have assumed that if India makes Ladakh a Union Territory, they would be reasserting its control over the



entire state. Moreover, it is also important to note that over time, Xinjiang which is part of Aksai Chin, has become very important to China for their internal reasons," he added.

### Why China Is Flexing Its Muscle

→ The tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between Indian security forces and China's PLA have renewed the question of how New Delhi should deal with a rising, assertive Beijing. According to C Raja Mohan, director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express, the Chinese establishment, and others, are using the changed constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir to justify the PLA's aggression and make Beijing a party to the Kashmir dispute. But this argument holds little water because the changes in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir have no impact on the current territorial disposition with China and Pakistan. In fact, Raja Mohan argues in The Indian Express, "It's a pity that India's debate on the Ladakh crisis is fixated in finding China's motive." The reasons behind China's muscle-flexing in fact, are "the PLA's growing military capabilities and the political will to use them," Raja Mohan says. **New Delhi must reduce its military and economic imbalance with Beijing for long-term regional stability and its own security.** While New Delhi has not changed the situation on the ground in the disputed parts of Jammu and Kashmir, China has done so in the South China Sea, and "matched those moves with physical steps to gain effective control over the disputed waters." Former Foreign Secretary and India's Ambassador to China, Vijay Gokhale, looks at Beijing's attempts to reorder the Indo-Pacific as its zone of influence. Taking off from an article by Singapore's Prime Minister, Gokhale examines in The Indian Express how it is important for ASEAN to maintain a balance between the United States and China in the SCS. Thus far, **the littoral states and those with a stake in the Indo-Pacific had benefited from the security provided by the US – the primary maritime power in the region – as well as the economic rise of China. But Beijing's recent territorial claims in the region – "neither treaty-based nor legally sound" – "are neither benign nor helpful for long-term peace and stability."** Yet, ASEAN will continue to try and balance China and the US, and a radical change in regional alignments is unlikely. India has been a stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific and SCS for millennia. It must do more to make its presence felt. **"The real choice is not between China and America – it is between keeping the global commons open for all or surrendering the right to choose one's partners for the foreseeable future,"** Gokhale writes. It is in India's benefit to ensure that the SCS remains part of the global commons and China is encouraged to pursue its interests in a "legitimate manner". For this, India must be responsive to ASEAN's expectations. Regional arrangements like RCEP hold great importance in this respect.

### Remaining Non-Aligned Is Good Advice (M.K. Narayanan - Former National Security

#### Adviser)

→ Confirmed facts about incursions during May are that Chinese forces came in sizeable numbers and crossed the undemarcated LAC at quite a few points in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. These were in the vicinity of **Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector.** Talks at the level of military commanders, from lieutenant generals to brigadiers and lower formations, have produced, to repeat the official jargon, a "partial disengagement". Both sides have also agreed, according to the same set of officials, to handle the situation "in line with the



agreement” that had been reached. The blandness of the statements conceals many a truth. **This time, it would appear, the Chinese are here to stay in places such as the Galwan Valley. It is also unclear, as of now, whether the Chinese would withdraw from Pangong Tso, any time soon. Restoration of the status quo ante which existed in mid-April is thus nowhere on the horizon.** Another bone of contention also seems unlikely to be resolved for quite some time, viz., China’s insistence that India stop road construction in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory. Public attention has been deflected from China’s sizeable military presence along the LAC, (comprising armoured vehicles, artillery units and infantry combat vehicles in far larger numbers than at any time in recent years), and the partial disengagement may provide many in India an opportunity to claim that China “blinked” while India showed “steely resolve”. This is not, however, the time for political grandstanding. There is a great deal at stake.

### More Weightier Reasons

**India needs to undertake a detailed analysis of recent events to find proper answers to many vexed questions. To merely affirm that India’s decision to strengthen its border infrastructure was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic. Both India and China have been strengthening their border infrastructure in recent years, and while the strengthening of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road may have angered the Chinese, to ascribe China’s recent show of strength to this would be misplaced.** Admittedly, Chinese President Xi Jinping disdains Deng Xiaoping’s aphorism, “to keep your head low and bide your time”, but Mr. Xi is not known to act irresponsibly. A demonstration of military strength, merely because India was improving its border infrastructure, would fall into this category. Nor does this action fit in with western assertions that such steps demonstrate China’s newly assertive post-pandemic foreign policy. There have to be far weightier reasons for China’s actions, and India needs to do a deep dive to discern whether there is a method behind China’s actions, viz., as for instance, the existence of certain geopolitical factors, an increase in bilateral tensions between India and China, economic pressures, apart from China’s internal dynamics. China’s action clearly belies the code of conduct drawn up at the **Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu)** summits by the leaders of India and China, and the recent incursions do convey the imprimatur of the top Chinese leadership.

### The American Orbit

If we were to examine geopolitical factors, it is no secret that while India professes to be non-aligned, it is increasingly perceived as having shifted towards the American orbit of influence. **India’s United States tilt is perhaps most pronounced in the domain of U.S.-China relations. Quite a few instances could be highlighted to confirm the perception that India tends to side with the U.S. and against China whenever there is a conflict of interest between the two. An evident degree of geopolitical convergence also exists between the U.S. and India in the Indo-Pacific, again directed against China. India is today a member of the Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) which has a definite anti-China connotation. U.S. President Donald Trump’s latest ploy of redesigning the G-7, including in its countries such as India (India has conveyed its acceptance), but excluding China, provides China yet another instance of India and China being in opposite camps.** A recent editorial in China’s Global Times confirms how seriously China views the growing proximity between Delhi and Washington. Coming next to bilateral relations, and notwithstanding the public bonhomie at the level of Mr. Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, relations between the



two countries have been steadily deteriorating. India is almost the last holdout in Asia against China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI). India also loses no opportunity to declaim against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China further views India's assertions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, as an implicit attack on the CPEC, China's flagship programme. More recently, India was one of the earliest countries to put curbs and restrictions on Chinese foreign direct investment. Adding to this, is the rising crescendo of anti-China propaganda within India. The Global Times has implied in one of its editorial pieces recently, that China's friendly policy towards India should be reciprocated, and that India "should not be fooled by Washington". On the eve of the recent high-level border talks between top military leaders, China again made an elliptical reference to the need for India to maintain equidistance between the U.S. and China. Such sentiments do impact border matters. Almost all India-China border agreements are premised on the presumed neutrality of both countries. As the Special Representative for Border Talks with China (2005 to 2010), this sentiment was an ever-present reality during all border discussions. The document, "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question" (2005), one of the very few documents relating to the China-India border, reflects this reality.

### China's Internal Dynamics

One should also not ignore the impact of internal pressures that have been generated within China – in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in part due to other factors. Mr. Xi has, no doubt, accumulated more power than any other Chinese Communist leader since Mao, but there are reports of growing opposition within party ranks to some of his policies, including the BRI. As the full impact of the most serious health crisis that China has faced since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 becomes evident, and alongside this the Chinese economic miracle is also beginning to lose steam, the current Chinese leadership is faced with a unique crisis. The coupling of political and economic tensions has greatly aggravated pressures on Mr. Xi, and the situation could become still more fragile, given the rising tide of anti-China sentiment the world over. How the present crop of Chinese leaders led by Mr. Xi would react to this situation, remains to be seen.

### History and The Present

These are dangerous times, more so for countries in China's vicinity, and specially India. India is being increasingly projected as an alternative model to China, and being co-opted into a wider anti-China alliance which China clearly perceives as provocation. We cannot ignore or forget the circumstances that led to the unfortunate India-China war of 1962. Faced with the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and increasing isolation globally (with even Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev trading barbs), Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West. A single misstep could lead to a wider conflagration, which both sides must avoid. This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place – even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, now seems to be joining the anti-China bandwagon under prodding from the U.S. India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains truly non-aligned and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India's long-term interest.





## The Offer That Zhou Made, And Nehru Rejected... The Lessons from It

→ In his article 'Biting the bullet', Sudheendra Kulkarni, a former aide to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, draws lessons from the build-up to the 1962 war and cautions Prime Minister Narendra Modi against repeating the "blunder" of Jawaharlal Nehru. Kulkarni recalls Chinese premier Zhou Enlai's visit to India in April 1960, in the course of which he offered a "workable solution" on the border dispute that was threatening to derail India-China relations. Kulkarni writes: "Zhou offered, obviously with the approval of Chairman Mao, a 'package deal' for a final settlement – China would accept India's control over today's Arunachal Pradesh, which meant its de facto recognition of India's jurisdiction up to the McMahon Line, if India accepted China's control over Aksai Chin." Kulkarni quotes from a research paper by historian Srinath Raghavan to explain why Nehru rejected Zhou's offer. Raghavan wrote, Kulkarni quotes: "Nehru was pushed to a position where his diplomatic manoeuvrability was severely curtailed. Henceforth he had to assess constantly what the political marketplace would bear and adopt only those policies that could be conceivably sold to the public." According to Kulkarni, Nehru himself voiced his fear: "If I give them (Chinese) that (Aksai Chin), I shall no longer be Prime Minister of India – I will not do it." Kulkarni believes that Nehru "had the power and stature to convince the people to accept such a bargain in India's vital long-term interest", though "the media and Opposition leaders (including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who, subsequently as PM, changed his views on this matter) were stridently opposed to conceding any land to China". **Had Nehru accepted Zhou's compromise-based solution, Kulkarni argues, "India and China, after some negotiations, could have fixed the boundary permanently" and "prevented" the 1962 war.** "There would have been no recurring face-offs along a disputed LAC of the kind we are witnessing even in 2020" since "China in 1960 had even hinted that, 'as part of an overall settlement', it would accept India's sovereign claim on Jammu & Kashmir (minus Aksai Chin) vis-à-vis Pakistan," he adds. Kulkarni wonders if Prime Minister Modi, "without worrying about the 'political marketplace', and without relying on Trump or his successor to come to India's aid, show the courage to swing the public opinion in favour of a compromise-dependent transformation of the LAC into a BAC (Boundary of Assured Control)".

## 'There Will Be No Conflict If Indian Army Doesn't Enter Our Actual Line of Control'

→ The Chinese have literally stuck to their guns since the 1962 border conflict when it comes to approaching a border settlement with India and reaching a common position on who sits where along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). A slice of history from the archives reveals that Beijing would be unyielding if India tried to disturb the post-1962 status quo, something that could shine a light on current border incidents with China. In December 1963, a year after the November 1962 border conflict with India, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai told Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser "What is the outlook for the Sino-Indian border conflict? Frankly speaking, all is well for now. Since our side has taken the initiative of a ceasefire and such mitigation measures as initiating a withdrawal of 20 kilometres along the entire front line, there will be no conflict between the two sides if the Indian army does not again enter our actual line of control."

### Chinese Assessment

Given the recent impasse along the LAC and fisticuffs between Indian and Chinese soldiers, Mr. Zhou's dictum holds good – all would be well as long as the Indian side did



not assert itself. A record of the Zhou-Nasser conversation, available on the Wilson Centre Digital Archive, showed the Chinese assessment of New Delhi's position: "India's attitude is: for the eastern border, we must accept the McMahon line; for the western border, India wants it where it has never been, an area where Chinese have been living for several hundred years and made their own." Mr. Zhou claimed that he visited India three times – in 1954, 1956 and 1957 – but the Indian side never put forth any proposals. In July 1962, Foreign Minister Marshal Chen Yi and Defence Minister Krishna Menon met in Geneva in a "situation where both sides were prepared to settle through discussion in maintaining the border status quo [both the eastern and western border were more to India's advantage at that time than at present] and hold talks without conditions to resolve the issue".

### No Agreement

"At the time we assumed that the Indian side could accept a negotiated agreement reached with us on the basis of maintaining the border status quo. But unexpectedly, Menon wanted our side first to demarcate several areas to give to him, commit them in advance, and then hold talks again. Because of this, the two sides did not come to an agreement," Mr. Zhou told Mr. Nasser. **The Chinese side seems stuck on this even today – they have not agreed to share maps on their perception on the eastern and western sectors of LAC first at the Joint Working Group (JWG) mechanism at foreign secretary-level agreed upon during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's path-breaking visit to Beijing in December 1988. Maps in the less contentious middle sector were shared at a JWG meeting in 2001. In a major step-up, the two countries agreed to set up a dedicated mechanism at the level of Special Representatives (SRs) to resolve the border dispute during Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's China trip in June 2003. This superseded the JWG.** Though the SR mechanism led to a "guiding principles" agreement in 2005, the two countries are still to exchange maps on where each side is in the eastern and western sectors. **"Advance demarcation" still appears to be a problem for the Chinese side, although the contours of a possible settlement referred to by Mr. Zhou is no longer Beijing's official position.**

### A Pressing Issue

Over the years, India and China have agreed on a number of mechanisms to enhance confidence at the military level, but their inability to agree to a border settlement have led to consistent problems – troops coming into conflict with each other – and continues to be a pressing issue. Mercifully, there have been no fatalities on either side for the past 45 years – since the two countries restored full diplomatic relations in 1976.

### What happened in Nathu La in 1967?

- The last military skirmish between India and China took place at **Nathu La in September 1967**. Before the skirmish escalated to artillery guns and threats of fighter jets, there was a scuffle between the soldiers of the two armies. The clash eventually left 88 Indian soldiers dead. More than 300 Chinese soldiers were killed. In the weeks and months ahead of the clash, the Indian side had decided to fence the border with three layers of barbed wire. Work started on August 20, 1967. On August 23, about 75 Chinese in battle dress, carrying rifles fitted with bayonets, advanced slowly towards Nathu La in an extended line, and stopped at the border. The Political Commissar – identifiable by a red patch on his cap, and the only one who could speak some English – read out slogans from a red book, which the rest of the party shouted after him. The Indian troops were "standing to",

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)



watching and waiting. After about an hour, the Chinese withdrew. But they returned later, and continued their protests. On September 5, as the barbed wire fence was being upgraded to a concertina coil, the Political Commissar had an argument with the Commanding Officer of the local infantry battalion, Lt Colonel Rai Singh. Thereafter, work stopped. Work was, however, resumed on September 7. This provoked about 100 Chinese soldiers to rush up, and a scuffle ensued. Beaten down by the Jats, the Chinese resorted to stone-pelting, and the Indians responded in kind. On September 10, the Chinese sent across a warning through the Indian embassy: "The Chinese Government sternly warns the Indian Government: the Chinese Border Defence Troops are closely watching the development of the situation along the China-Sikkim boundary. Should the Indian troops continue to make provocative intrusions, the Indian Government must be held responsible for all the grave consequences." The corps commander had ordered the fence to be completed on September 11. That day, as work started, the Chinese came to protest, led by the Political Commissar. Lt Col Rai Singh went out to talk to them. Suddenly, the Chinese opened fire, and Singh fell to the ground, injured. Seeing their CO hit, the infantry battalion attacked the Chinese post. But they suffered heavy casualties, including two officers, who were both given gallantry awards. Soldiers in the open were mowed down by Chinese machine gun fire. The Indians responded with artillery fire, and pummelled every Chinese post in the vicinity. Many more Chinese perished in these heavy fire assaults than the number of Indians who were killed in the initial engagement. Taken aback by the strong Indian response, the Chinese threatened to bring in warplanes. When the Indians refused to back off, the Chinese news agency Xinhua denied these plans. Having sent its message militarily, India, on September 12, delivered a note to the Chinese, offering an unconditional ceasefire across the Sikkim-Tibet border beginning 5.30 am on September 13. This was rejected, but the situation remained largely peaceful until the 14<sup>th</sup>. On September 15, the Chinese handed over the bodies of Indian soldiers with arms and ammunition, saying they were acting in the interest of "preserving Sino-Indian friendship". On October 1, another skirmish erupted at Cho La, but the Indians again repulsed the Chinese.

### Forgotten in The Fog of War, The Last Firing on The India-China Border

- The 1967 clash between India and China is often remembered as the last shot fired on the India-China border. That clash in Sikkim, where India got the better of China just five years after defeat in the 1962 war, saw more than 80 Indian soldiers killed while estimates say 400 Chinese soldiers may have been killed.

#### 1967 Clashes

If it is true that 1967 marked the last major fighting that saw casualties on both sides, it was not, however, the last incident of a shot being fired on the contested boundary. That would happen eight years later, when a patrol of Assam Rifles jawans was ambushed by the Chinese at **Tulung La in Arunachal Pradesh**. Four were killed. "We often remember 1967, but to say that was the last firing, and that what happened eight years later was some sort of accident does not square with the facts," said Nirupama Rao, a former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China. "It was an ambush, plain and simple, and four of ours lost their lives." The Indian government maintained that the Chinese had crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and ambushed the patrol on October 20, 1975. The Chinese denied this and blamed India for the incident. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing accused the patrol of crossing the LAC and firing at a Chinese post. The Ministry handed a protest note on October 22 to the Charge d'Affaires of the Indian Embassy in



Beijing describing China's actions as "a self-defence response", according to a November 3 report in the French newspaper Le Monde, that was shared with The Hindu by Saurabh Vashist, a researcher on India-China relations. The report said India recovered their bodies a week later on October 28.

### U.S. Cable

A U.S. State Department cable from 1975 noted India's view that the "Chinese ambush was sprung 500 metres south of Tulung La" and took place on Indian territory. It quoted a senior Indian military intelligence officer as saying on November 5 the border there was very clear, marked by a distinctive shale cliff. He said China had moved up a company to the pass and detached a platoon which erected stone walls on India's side of the pass, and from there fired several hundred rounds at the patrol. Four of the patrol had gone into a leading position, while two others, who escaped, had stayed behind. The officer said the patrol was routine and had been in the area several times before. The cable noted that Tulung La was among the more remote passes in the region, a few dozen kilometres from Bum La and Tawang. It noted China had used the pass during the 1962 war as a channel to send its troops down to Bomdi La, to defeat the Indian resistance there to their offensive. "Although the Chinese appear to be following their policy of enforcing the status quo with respect to the LAC pending negotiations," the cable concluded, "they apparently still lay claim to Arunachal Pradesh down to the foothills".

### Is China's 'Peaceful Development' Over?

- On Tuesday, the same day news broke about the violent clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley of eastern Ladakh, in which at least 20 Indian soldiers died, a Chinese J-10 fighter briefly entered Taiwan's air defence zone, prompting the self-ruled island to scramble its aircraft in response. This was the third Chinese incursion into Taiwan's airspace within a week. Two months ago, Chinese vessels had entered the waters of Malaysia and Vietnam. Last month, Chinese Coast Guard ships pursued Japanese fishing boats in waters claimed by both countries. All these incidents point to a newfound aggressiveness in China's approach towards its already troubled neighbourhood, from the Himalayas to the South and East China Seas. Tensions in the neighbourhood are not new for China. The roughly 4,000 km-long India-China border, which is not clearly demarcated, has seen occasional flare-ups. In 2017, troops from both countries were locked in a face-off in the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction of Doklam for over two months. China has claims over the South China Sea, and "reunification" with Taiwan is one of its self-declared goals. But what makes the current stand-offs different is China's readiness to use force in addressing these challenges. This was the first time in 45 years that blood was spilt on the India-China border. Last month, in an annual policy blueprint, China dropped the word "peaceful" in referring to its desire to "reunify" with Taiwan, ending a nearly 30-year-long precedent.

### Sharp Turn

This sharp turn marks China's most major policy decisions post-COVID-19. Relations with the U.S. are particularly bad, with the Trump administration now openly targeting China for its handling of the pandemic. When Australia pushed for an investigation into the pandemic outbreak, Beijing punished the country by imposing trade curbs. In Hong Kong, which has been seeing anti-China protests for a year, Beijing has introduced a new national security law, granting itself broader powers in the Special Administrative Region. If Xi





Jinping was facing one of the biggest crises of his Presidency early this year, in the middle of the COVID-19 outbreak, he now appears to be firmly in control, overseeing an expansive foreign policy that pushes the boundaries. “The ‘peaceful rise’ is now out of the question. They think they have arrived,” said Alka Acharya, professor of international studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. **President Hu Jintao, Mr. Xi’s predecessor, had adopted the “peaceful rise” (or “peaceful development”, as the Chinese later called it) policy to assure other countries, especially the U.S. and China’s Asian neighbours, that its rise did not pose any threat to others.** China came out of it long ago; Prof. Acharya told The Hindu.

### The Virus Factor

In Prof. Acharya’s view, COVID-19 has brought on a “sharper turn” to China’s foreign policy because: “suddenly, it was quite obvious that China was on the back foot. It was getting very bad press all around. Other countries were speaking out against its handling of the outbreak. The Americans are now open about building a coalition against China. So, a lot of China’s response is part of their way of tackling this crisis. We are going to fight back is the message from Beijing.” But China has always contested such analysis. In its version, China is a rising, responsible power and some tensions are part of its rise. The “China Dream”, laid out by President Xi after he took power in 2012, seeks to turn the country into wealthy, strong and modern global power by 2049, the centenary of the Communist revolution.

### Why China Trade Ban Is A Bad Idea

- The Indian government has tried to respond to the border dispute with China by training its guns on trade. The idea resonating in Indian streets is that Indians should boycott Chinese goods and thus “teach China a lesson”. Visuals of **Indians breaking and burning their fully functional Chinese appliances such as TVs** have been doing the rounds in social media. **Union minister Ramdas Athawale has even demanded a ban on restaurants selling Chinese food even though these would be Indian restaurants, employing Indian chefs and using largely Indian agricultural produce to serve such Chinese dishes.** While one can understand the outrage that Indians feel when they hear about the brutal deaths of their soldiers, turning a border or defence dispute into a trade one is an ill-advised move.

There are several reasons.

#### 1) Trade Deficits Are Not Necessarily Bad

One of the main reasons why banning trade has been the first reaction is the notion that having a trade deficit is somehow a “bad” thing. The fact is altogether different. Trade deficits/surpluses are just accounting exercises and having a trade deficit against a country doesn’t make the domestic economy weaker or worse off. For instance, if one looks at the top 25 countries with whom India trades, it has a trade surplus with the US, the UK and the Netherlands. But that doesn’t mean the Indian economy is stronger or better off than any of these three. Similarly, it has a trade deficit with the other 22 of them (including China) – regardless of their size and geographic location. This list includes France, Germany, Nigeria, South Africa, UAE, Qatar, Russia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia among others. Yet, a trade deficit doesn’t necessarily mean that the Indian economy is worse off than South Africa’s. A trade deficit with China only means that Indians buy more Chinese products than what Chinese from India. But per se that is not a bad thing. Why?



Because it shows that Indian consumers – who made these purchase decisions individually and voluntarily – are now better off than what they would have been had they bought either, say, a Japanese or French or even an Indian alternative. Essentially, it shows that Indian consumers, as well as the Chinese producers, gained through trading. It is this very process that generates the gains from trade. **Both sides are better off than what they would have been without trade.** Of course, running persistent trade deficits across all countries raises **two main issues**. One, **does a country have the foreign exchange reserves to “buy” the imports.** Today, **India has more than \$500 billion of forex – good enough to cover imports for 12 months.** Two, it also shows that **India is not capable of producing for the needs of its own people in the most efficient manner.** At one level, no country is self-sufficient and that is why trade is such a fantastic idea. It allows countries to specialise in what they can do most efficiently and export that good while importing whatever some other country does more efficiently. **So while a persistent trade deficit merits the domestic government – the Indian government in this case – to put in place policies and create the infrastructure that raises competitiveness, it should not “force” or even “nudge” people to move away from trade because doing so will undermine efficiency and come at the cost of the consumer’s benefits.**

## **2) Will Hurt the Indian Poor the Most**

**More often than not, the poorest consumers are the worst-hit in a trade ban of this kind because they are the most price-sensitive.** For instance, if Chinese ACs were replaced by either costlier Japanese ACs or less efficient Indian ones, richer Indians may still survive this ban – by buying the costlier option – but a number of poor, who could have otherwise afforded an AC, would either have to forgo buying one because it is now too costly (say a Japanese or European firm) or suffer (as a consumer) by buying a less efficient Indian one. Similarly, the **Chinese products that are in India are already paid for.** By banning their sale or avoiding them, Indians will be hurting fellow Indian retailers. Again, this hit would be proportionately more on the poorest retailers because of their relative inability to cope with the unexpected losses.

## **3) Will Punish Indian Producers and Exporters**

Some may argue that trading with China hurts many Indian producers. This is true, but it is also true that trading hurts only the less efficient Indian producers while helping the more efficient Indian producers and businesses. It is important to note that the list of Indian consumers of Chinese imports does not comprise just those who consume the final finished good from China; **several businesses in India import intermediate goods and raw materials**, which, in turn, are used to create final goods – both for the domestic Indian market as well as the global market (as Indian exports). **Contrary to popular belief an overwhelming proportion of Chinese imports are in the form of intermediate goods such as electrical machinery, nuclear reactors, fertilisers, optical and photographic measuring equipment organic chemicals etc.** Such imports are used to produce final goods which are then either **sold in India or exported.** A blanket ban on Chinese imports will hurt all these businesses at a time when they are already struggling to survive, apart from hitting India’s ability to produce finished goods. To recap: Trade deficits are not necessarily bad; they improve the wellbeing of Indian consumers including



producers and exporters. In any case, India has trade deficits with most countries so why single out China.

#### 4) Will Barely Hurt China

Still, some may argue that we want to single out China because it has killed our soldiers at the border and we will now punish it through trade. Then the question is: Will banning trade hurt China? The truth is the exact opposite. **It will hurt India and Indian far more than it will hurt China.** Let's look at the facts again. While China accounts for 5% of India's exports and 14% of India's imports – in US\$ value terms – India's imports from China (that is, China's exports) are just 3% of China's total exports. More importantly, China's imports from India are less than 1% of its total imports. The point is that if India and China stop trading then – on the face of it – China would lose only 3% of its exports and less than 1% of its imports, while India will lose 5% of its exports and 14% of its imports. Moreover, if one takes the notion of not letting China profit from the Indian purchasing power strictly, then Indians should also avoid buying all products that use Chinese goods and labour. So, forget the several obvious Chinese brands and products, Indian consumers would have to go about figuring out if China gains any money from, say, the iPhones that are sold in India. Or if the steel used in a European gadget is Chinese or not. The trouble is this is a near-impossible task not just because of China's centrality in global trade and global value chains but also because even teams of bureaucrats will find it tough to map Chinese involvement in all our trade on a real-time basis. On the whole, it is much easier for China to replace India than for India to replace China. Here's some food for thought: /What if Xi Jinping and the political establishment in China do the same thing to India? What if they decided to abruptly ban all trade and forbid all private investment via any route into India? Of course, India would survive, but at a huge cost to common Indians while depriving many Indian businesses (the start-ups with billion-dollar valuations) of Chinese funding. Why? Because in the short to medium term, it would be both difficult and costly to replace Chinese products. **Imagine diverting all our imports from China to Japan and Germany. We will only increase our total trade deficit. If on the other hand, we decide to use Indian products, that too would cost us more – albeit just internally.**

#### 5) India Will Lose Policy Credibility

It has also been suggested that India should renege on existing contracts with China. Again, while in the short-term this may assuage hurt sentiments, it would be hugely detrimental for a country such as India which has been trying to attract foreign investment. **One of the first things an investor – especially foreign – tracks is the policy credibility and certainty. If policies can be changed overnight, if taxes can be slapped with retrospective effect, or if the government itself reneges on contracts, no investor will invest.** Or, if they do, they will demand higher returns for the increased risk.

#### 6) Raising Tariffs Is Mutually Assured Destruction

It has also been argued that India should just slap higher import duties on Chinese goods. Others have suggested that India can allow primary and intermediate goods from China at zero duty, but apply prohibitive tariffs on final goods. Even leaving aside the rules of the World Trade Organization that India would be violating, this is a poor strategy since others – not just China – can and most likely will reciprocate



in the same way. What will also go against India here is its relatively insignificant presence in global trade and value chains. In other words, it is relatively easy for the world to bypass India and carry on trading if India doesn't play by the rules.

### The Upshot:

The first thing to understand is that turning a border dispute into a trade war is unlikely to solve the border dispute. Worse, given India and China's position in both global trade as well as relative to each other, this trade war will hurt India far more than China. Thirdly, such a shock – banning all trade with China – will be most poorly timed since the Indian economy is already at its weakest point ever – facing a sharp GDP contraction. The surge of protectionism and anti-globalisation sentiment since the start of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 is well known but it is also well established that trade leaves people better off. Of course, not everyone. For instance, all inefficient domestic industries would want to be protected by higher tariffs in the name of economic nationalism. But, as explained above, this protection will come at the cost of domestic consumers. Indeed, in the first four decades of India's existence, it has tried – and miserably failed – making mantras like “self-reliance”, “import-substitution” and “protecting infant domestic industries” work. India must try to aggressively acquire a higher share of global trade by raising its competitiveness. India now has an insignificant share in world trade. If it is not careful, much smaller countries will further chip away. For instance, while in November 2019, India refused to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in a region that is least affected by Covid and most likely to see trade volumes in the future – Vietnam signed an FTA with the European Union earlier this month. Indian exporters were already losing ground in the EU to Vietnam will now be adversely affected since most Vietnamese goods will enjoy zero import duties in the EU, thus making them more affordable for European consumers.

### Now, China Embraces Bangladesh In Trade

- In a significant show of economic diplomacy in South Asia, China has announced tariff exemption for 97 per cent of exports from Bangladesh. And diplomatic sources of Bangladesh have described the Chinese move as a “major success” in Dhaka-Beijing relationship. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh announced on Friday that 97 percent of items covering fisheries and leather products would be exempted of Chinese tariffs. Beijing's decision came a month after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President Xi Jinping discussed enhancing bilateral relation in the background of the economic hardship triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. “Bangladesh is among the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and that is why this decision was taken by China”, announced Mohammed Touhidul Islam, Senior Information Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Friday's announcement is expected to help Bangladesh cushion the economic impact of the pandemic and also emerge as a possible beneficiary alongside Vietnam and Chile of the U.S.-China trade war. Bangladesh imports around \$ 15 billion in Chinese goods but its China-bound exports had been very low in comparison. “Bangladesh already receives tariff-exemption for 3,095 items under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA). As a result of the latest announcement, a total of 8,256 goods from Bangladesh will be exempted of Chinese tariffs,” Mr. Islam said.





## Nepal's New Map Now Part of Constitution

- The Upper House of Nepal's Parliament on Thursday passed the Second Constitution Amendment Bill 2077 (Vikram era), with all 57 members voting in favour of the new map that claims parts of Indian territory in Pithoragarh district. One post has fallen vacant and the Chairperson doesn't vote. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari signed the Bill hours later in her official residence, Shital Niwas. **The voting and the presidential assent completed the legislative procedure of the Bill that was taken up by the government of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, after India inaugurated the Darchula-Lipulekh link road on May 8.** Nepal immediately protested, saying the road violated the status quo of the region, which it described as "unresolved". The process of passing of the Bill – cleared unanimously by the **Lower House, Pratinidhi Sabha** – was fast-tracked. **The new map will now be part of the national emblem of Nepal. The Parliament Secretariat had started using it in its official letterheads and posters. It is likely to be featured prominently on the promotional tourism documents. The formal inclusion of the map gives a rare guarantee to the physical territory of the Nepalese state that makes negotiations with India on the Kalapani issue difficult.** However, Nepal has maintained that it is open for dialogue. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava had said the amendment amounts to "artificial enlargement of claims that are not based on historical fact or evidence and is not tenable".
- After months of brinkmanship, India and Nepal have brought their relations to the edge of a precipice. The Oli government's decision to pass the constitutional amendment ratifying a change in its maps that include Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, territories that India controls, marks a decidedly new phase in ties. While the issue is an old one, it resurfaced in 2019 when New Delhi published new political maps to reflect the changes following the decision on August 5 to reorganise the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and Nepal objected to the depiction of disputed territory. **In 2000 and 2014, India and Nepal agreed to hold talks about Kalapani and Susta, without much success.** Matters snowballed when India's Defence Minister inaugurated a surfaced road over the territory; when Nepal protested, Indian Army Chief, General Naravane, suggested it was at the "behest" of China. At the base of the rift is the lack of diplomatic manoeuvring to allow a step back from the brink. While New Delhi contends that it was willing to discuss matters "at a mutually convenient date", **Kathmandu says the MEA has rejected two dates suggested by the Nepal MoFA, and has routinely dismissed requests from the Nepal Ambassador for a meet with the Foreign Secretary. That the MEA said Kalapani talks could wait until both countries had dealt with the coronavirus pandemic first, further enraged the Oli government, which has pointed out India's participation by videoconference in bilateral and multilateral meetings.** Meanwhile, Mr. Oli's purposeful manner in pursuing the amendment at exactly the same time as the India-China border stand-off bolsters the belief among some in New Delhi that he is speaking with confidence borne from Beijing's backing. Regardless of the truth of those accusations, or who is more responsible for the downslide in ties, the speed with which the constitutional amendment was passed has left little space for diplomacy now. **That the vote was unanimous should also inform New Delhi of the futility of casting Mr. Oli alone as the 'villain' of the piece.** It is necessary the two nations resolve their issues through dialogue lest they face more serious consequences. The Modi government has in the past not flinched from taking tough measures, including the 2015 blockade that severely affected India's land-locked neighbour. **The Oli government, which seeks to build its legacy by overturning what it calls "unequal" agreements made by the monarchy, could also cause a security nightmare for India if it opens up other parts of their long boundary, and reverses old commitments on open and unsecured border posts. Both**



sides moved quickly this week to manage the fallout of border firing by Nepali police on a group of Indians that left one dead. The same alacrity is needed to manage the fallout of Saturday's amendment vote, on the once celebrated "special" relationship between the two countries.

## Nepal Ties and The Banaras To Bengaluru Spectrum (Manjeev S. Puri - Former Ambassador of India To Nepal)

→ Banaras was a keystone of India-Nepal ties for centuries. B.P. Koirala, the doyen of democratic politics in Nepal, was a resident of the city; so too was Pushpalal Shrestha, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Nepal. **Many in bureaucracy and politics had studied at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and Nepal's intellectual software was largely coded there. Till the 1980s, an easy and affordable way to reach Kathmandu was to fly from Banaras. Then the flights stopped as takers became insufficient. Today, one of the most profitable sectors for Nepal Airlines is Kathmandu-Bengaluru.** Here, a burgeoning colony of Nepali programmer's work for storied Indian tech companies, creating software for the world. The changed equation symbolises both a changing India and a changing Nepal.

### A Changing Nepal

The obvious change in Nepal is that it is now a democratic republic after nearly 250 years of being a monarchy. The Nepali Congress and Maoist leader, Prachanda, claim democracy (1990) and the abolition of monarchy (2008) as their legacies. More pervasive is the societal change from Nepal's exposure to globalisation. Geography, too, stands to change, with the Chinese now having the potential to bore through the Himalayas and exhibiting their presence in Kathmandu in economics and politics. **The constant in Nepal is a nationalism which is really a mask for anti-India sentiment. Politicians use it for personal gain, and it is deeply ingrained in the bureaucracy, academia and the media.** Today, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli is cementing his legacy as a nationalist by extending Nepal's map into Indian territory. The cartographic aggression and the embedding of the new map in the country's national emblem and Constitution are untenable and should have been avoided under all circumstances. But this is not the first time Nepal has thumbed its nose at India, even at the cost of its people's well-being. In 2015, the Nepali Congress government adopted the new Constitution, ignoring India's concerns. This instinct to cut off the nose to spite the face is visible in the lack of progress on the game-changing **5,000 MW Pancheshwar hydroelectric project. Nepal's viable hydro-electricity potential is 40,000 MW; the country generates only 1,000 MW and must import 600 MW from India.** Identity politics with India is also visible within the country where **Nepali citizens from the Terai (Madhesis) feel discriminated as being "Indian".** To Nepal, their attitudes reflect the angst of a small state. To India, Nepal appears incorrigible.

### Shift with Globalisation

After democracy was restored in 1990, passports were more liberally issued, and Nepalis began looking for work opportunities globally, beyond just India. West Asia and South-East Asia specifically became major destinations for labour migration. Security uncertainties with the Maoist insurgency at home also propelled the trend of migration. Students and skilled personnel began moving to Europe, the United States, Australia, Thailand and even to Japan and South Korea. **As of 2019, nearly a fifth of Nepal's population, from all parts**



of the country, were reportedly overseas. At an estimated \$8 billion, global remittances account for nearly 30% of Nepal's nominal GDP, making it one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world. Leftist ideology and the prominent presence of international non-governmental organisations – ostensibly there to resolve conflict and alleviate poverty – have added to Nepal's exposure to the world. Underreported is the presence of Christian missionaries who entered Nepal during and in the aftermath of the Maoist insurgency. "Faith Houses", as churches are euphemistically called in Nepal, can be found in villages and towns across the country, including the Terai, and represent not only European and American organisations but Korean too. Moreover, posters advertising education opportunities in Australia, the United States, Canada and South-East Asia adorn Nepal. Nepal's 2011 Census shows that over 80% of its 28 million-strong population were Hindus, and since 1962, it had formally been a Hindu kingdom. The new Constitution in 2015 makes Nepal a secular country. The proliferation of communication technology has also spread a certain cosmopolitanism but without the accompanying metropolitanism.

### A Link Despite Diversification

Kathmandu has continued its long-standing efforts to spread Nepal's options beyond India. Multilateral development banks are by far the biggest lenders and players in the country's development efforts. And in fact, one of Nepal's largest aid donors is the European Union. India and China are not the only players for big projects either. A long-delayed project to pipe water into Kathmandu was with an Italian company, major investments in the telecom sector are coming from Malaysia, and the largest international carrier in Nepal is Qatar Airways. The outward movement of students, along with the growth of institutions of higher learning at home, has meant that most young people in Nepal, including emerging contemporary leaders in politics, business or academics, have not studied in India. This lack of common collegiate roots removes a natural bond of previous generations that had provided for better understanding and even empathy. Today, while most Nepalis understand Hindi, because of the popularity of Bollywood, articulation is quite another matter. But despite Nepal's efforts to diversify its options globally, its linkages with India remain robust. Nepal's trade with India has grown in absolute terms and continues to account for more than two-thirds of Nepal's external trade of around \$12 billion annually. This clearly reflects the advantages of geography, both physical and societal. India continues to be the largest aggregate investor in Nepal. The massive under-construction Arun-III 900 MW hydro-electric project is slated to singly produce as much power, when completed in five years, as Nepal produces today. Moreover, the peg with the Indian Rupee provides unique stability to the Nepali Rupee. Nepal's per-capita income is just above \$1,000. While the huge remittance economy has brought a semblance of well-being, the country has a long way to go in reaching prosperity. The relationship with India, with open borders and Nepalis being allowed to live and work freely, provides Nepal a unique advantage and an economic cushion. The latter is particularly important today with COVID-19-caused global contraction positioned to pop the remittance bubble. Neither the Chinese nor any others are likely to write blank cheques.

### Focus Areas

India for its part should also focus on developing its border areas with Nepal, with better roads and amenities of interest (such as shopping malls) to the burgeoning Nepali middle class. This would have economic plusses for both sides and keep ties strong at the people's level. It would also be an image makeover. Given the cultural and ethnic commonalities, it befuddles and draws anger in India when things go wrong in ties with



Nepal. Those responsible for bringing things to such an impasse must be held to account, but it is important that we update the prism through which we view our relationship with our Himalayan neighbour. We must not forget the past nor turn away from it but, instead, must be mindful of the realities of a changing India and a changing Nepal. Banaras will always be a keystone, but contemporary reality makes it imperative to look at Bengaluru.

## Non-Permanent Seats in the UNSC, And How They Are Filled

- Early on Thursday (June 18), the official handle of the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York tweeted: “Member States elect India to the non-permanent seat of the Security Council for the term 2021-22 with overwhelming support. **India gets 184 out of the 192 valid votes polled.**” In a video message, T S Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, said he was “deeply humbled by the tremendous confidence which the member states of the United Nations have reposed in India”.

### What Are ‘Non-Permanent Seats’ at the UNSC?

The UNSC is composed of **15 members**: **five permanent members** – China, France, Russian Federation, the United States, and the United Kingdom – and **10 non-permanent members who are elected by the General Assembly**. The non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms – so every year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members out of the total 10. These 10 seats are distributed among the regions of the world: five seats for African and Asian countries; one for Eastern European countries; two for Latin American and Caribbean countries; and two for Western European and Other Countries. Of the five seats for Africa and Asia, three are for Africa and two for Asia. Also, there is an informal understanding between the two groups to reserve one seat for an Arab country. The Africa and Asia Pacific group takes turns every two years to put up an Arab candidate. Elections for terms beginning in even-numbered years select two African members, and one each within Eastern Europe, the Asia Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Terms beginning in odd-numbered years consist of two Western European and Other members, and one each from Asia Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The current non-permanent members of the Security Council are Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia, and South Africa, all of whose terms end this year; and Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, and Vietnam, whose terms end in 2021. India begins its term in the beginning of 2021, and will hold the position until the end of 2022.

### What Happened at The Election That India Won?

India was the only candidate for the vacancy from the Asia Pacific. Its candidature for the seat was endorsed unanimously by the Asia Pacific group, which comprises 55 countries, including Pakistan and China, last year. “A unanimous step. Asia-Pacific Group @UN unanimously endorses India’s candidature for a non-permanent seat of the Security Council for a 2-year term in 2021/22. Thanks to all 55 members for their support,” Syed Akbaruddin, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations at the time, had tweeted on June 26, 2019. That endorsement meant that India would be a “clean slate” candidate for the elections, with an assured victory. Besides India, China, and Pakistan the **55-country Asia Pacific group includes** Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Cyprus, North Korea, South Korea, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall





Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Oman, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, UAE, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vietnam, and Yemen.

### Has India Been in The UNSC Earlier?

India has earlier been a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and 2011-12. For the 2011-12 term, India won 187 of 190 votes after Kazakhstan stood down from its candidacy. Unlike Africa, which has formalised a system of rotation of its three seats, the Asia Pacific grouping has often seen contests for seats. In 2018, there was a contest between the Maldives and Indonesia. On the occasions when there is a contest, the elections for non-permanent seats can go on for several rounds. Back in 1975, there was a contest between India and Pakistan, which went into eight rounds, with Pakistan finally winning the seat. And in 1996, India lost a contest to Japan. **Even if a country is a “clean slate” candidate and has been endorsed by its group, it still needs to secure the votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting at the General Assembly session – which is a minimum of 129 votes, if all 193 member states participate.** After India won 184 of the 192 votes cast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the nations of the world. “Deeply grateful for the overwhelming support shown by the global community for India’s membership of the @UN Security Council. India will work with all member countries to promote global peace, security, resilience and equity,” the Prime Minister said on Twitter.

- **Mexico, Norway and Ireland were also elected as non-permanent members.** While Mexico won the Latin American seat uncontested, Norway and Ireland emerged victorious from a three-way contest for the Western Europe and Others Group seat. Canada failed to win enough votes in this group. Neither Kenya nor Djibouti, which were contesting the seat from Africa, won a two-thirds majority. They will face another vote. India sought the support of member countries by highlighting its commitment to multilateralism and reforms. **Ahead of the vote, India had launched a campaign brochure which highlighted its demand for transparency in mandates for UN peacekeeping missions and push for the India-led Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, and called for joint efforts for UN reform and expansion of the Security Council.** A “new orientation for a reformed multilateral system” (NORMS), as laid out by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, would be India’s overall objective during the two-year tenure that will begin next year. Achieving this would depend on how India will conduct diplomacy in the global body, build alliances and raise issues that go beyond the interests of the big five. **India has long been of the view that the structure of the UN Security Council doesn’t reflect the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has also got increasing support from member countries for its push for reforms.** But the five permanent members of the Security Council have resisted these attempts. The COVID-19 pandemic has already shaken up the global order and sharpened the rivalry between the U.S. and China. It has also opened up fresh debates on strengthening multilateralism and multilateral institutions. In this context, the challenges before India are many. The Security Council is one of the most important multilateral decision-making bodies where the contours of global geopolitics are often drawn. India should avoid the temptation of taking sides at a time when the Security Council is getting more and more polarised. To serve its interests and push for its agenda of multilateralism and reforms, India should adopt value-based positions that are not transactional, aspire for the leadership of the non-permanent members of the Council and be the voice of the weaker nations.



In Pandemic Crisis, Bridging the Gulf with West Asia (Navdeep Suri - Distinguished Fellow and Director of The Centre For New Economic Diplomacy, Observer Research Foundation (ORF) And Former Indian Ambassador to The UAE And Egypt And High Commissioner to Australia. Kabir Taneja - Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, ORF)

- As the world continues to collaborate in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic which has shattered lives, economies and, arguably, even political and global institutions, the post-pandemic architecture may look drastically different from what we have been used to. For India and its foreign policy, the West Asia/Gulf region holds a significant court for strategic, economic and even domestic political agendas, ranging from migration to energy security. The pandemic has initiated a reverse migration of Indian blue-collar workers as projects in oil-rich States stall, and infrastructure development halts amidst a contracting global economy that some say may be worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s.

### The Stakes in Numbers

India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar has said that India would repatriate more than 100,000 of its citizens between May 17 and June 13 from 60 countries, a majority of whom are expected to be from the West Asia region. Between June 10 and June 16, there were around 20 flights scheduled to bring Indian citizens back between India and Saudi Arabia alone. In neighbouring United Arab Emirates (UAE), more than 3.4 million Indians work. Overall, an estimated figure of close to nine million Indians work in West Asia, responsible for sending back more than 56% of India's annual infusion of \$80 billion in remittances. The UAE alone is responsible for \$19 billion in remittances, being the third largest trade partner of India after the United States and China. Much of the impressive numbers above are now under stress, perhaps for the first time since the first Gulf War in 1991. The oil price crash, triggered by expectations of oversupply following a dispute on output caps between Saudi Arabia and Russia, exacerbated by the crash in demand due to COVID-19, will carry massive costs to the West Asian economies, and, by association, to foreign workers employed there. According to a Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry survey, more than 70% of businesses classified as small and medium-sized enterprises in Dubai, many owned by Indian nationals, may not survive over the months to come as labour critical industries such as tourism, conventions, hospitality and airlines bear the immediate brunt. To put it in perspective, according to a 2019 U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council report, the UAE's hospitality sector itself contributes 4.6% of the country's GDP, making nearly 600,000 jobs that are mostly fulfilled by foreign workers. Some reports suggest that up to 30% of these jobs could be lost. In Saudi Arabia, consumer spending for April 2020, compared to the same time last year, was reportedly down by 34.6%. However, beyond the immediate effects, the oil price crash is expected to have a significant blow on the reform plans initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, specifically mega-projects such as the envisioned \$500 billion futuristic mega-city of Neom planned on the coast of the Red Sea, and other more structural efforts to open up the Saudi economy and move the country's financial ecosystem away from its overt dependence on petro dollars.

### Oil and Investment

India gets around 60% of its hydrocarbon requirements from West Asia. On an annualised basis, India saves up to \$1.35 billion for each \$1 drop in oil prices. With Brent still hovering



under \$40, the softening oil prices have helped cushion the impact of the national lockdown on the balance of payments. India has also taken advantage of the low prices to build up its strategic reserves and is looking at offshore storage options. The major sovereign wealth funds and other financial institutions in West Asia have been hit hard by COVID-19 as well. Some have seen their real estate and retail portfolios shrink dramatically over the last three months. India is well-placed to attract a significant amount of capital from West Asia and reports of investment by UAE's Mubadala and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) are a case in point. The economic reforms announced by the Finance Minister in the week of May 13 bring much needed clarity to industrial and agricultural policy. A strong, positive message to West Asian investors from New Delhi is now the need of the hour.

### Steps to Take

As a starting point, working with the government of Maharashtra to expedite land acquisition for the \$50 billion mega-refinery project could be an important first step. Saudi Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company have committed to investing \$25 billion in the project. Fast-track resolution of endless litigation that has bedevilled the sale of a major stake of Mumbai airport by GVK to a consortium that includes the UAE sovereign fund, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) will also send out a positive signal to the markets. Some of the UAE's largest companies such as Etisalat, Emaar and Etihad have previously had a tough time with their investments in India. By creating a few immediate success stories, India has the opportunity to transform the landscape and attract the kind of long-term capital that the economy needs. The government has announced that it has set up an empowered group headed by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba to take necessary steps to attract FDI into India. Hopefully, this mechanism can take up West Asia on priority.

### Reverse Migration and Jobs

If the economic prophecies come true till a certain degree, India will also share the brunt with West Asia, and both are well placed to help each other in this regard. Arguably, more than the loss of trade revenue and remittances, the return of semi-skilled and skilled workers alike into an economy already struggling with jobs may become a point of worry. To mitigate the same, the government has tried to soften the blow by launching the Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support (SWADES) which attempts to capture the skills profile of returning workers and house them in a central portal that can be accessed by Indian and foreign companies. However, much more needs to be done with regard to reverse-migration and the economics attached to it, as globally, bilateral and multilateral trade-diplomacy is set to witness a tectonic shift towards the unknown.

## Nation

### Lessons for Yogi from Gandhi And Lee (Arun Maira - Former Member, Planning Commission)

- Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is determined to bring all migrant workers back to his State. He says he does not want U.P.'s citizens to migrate in future. He has a vision of providing homes and jobs to all of them — in a State which has not yet been able to provide for the larger multitudes who stayed behind. Moreover, he will be competing

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



with neighbouring States (Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, etc.) and also States further away, which will also be working harder to grow jobs. He needs a good plan. He would do well to take some lessons from Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of modern Singapore, and from Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation.

### Developing Singapore

Lee declared that Singapore would become the first 'developed' country in Asia, when it was founded in 1965. His measure of development was the per capita incomes of Singaporeans which would rise to the same levels as citizens in more advanced economies. Singapore did not have any natural resources, like oil or minerals, which it could sell to the West to bring in money for its citizens. All that it could offer large Western companies to use was its strategic location on shipping routes between the East and West, and its people. Lee invited companies from the U.S., Europe, and Japan to set up manufacturing facilities in Singapore and use Singapore labour. The companies were attracted by the large pools of low-cost labour in ASEAN countries. Amongst these countries, Singapore was the most attractive for its location. They welcomed his invitation. But Lee had a condition they were not prepared for. He did not want them to merely set up labour-intensive assembly factories. Lee wanted wages to rise in Singapore, so that per capita incomes would rise. Therefore, he wanted the companies to train Singaporeans to do higher-value work. Global supply chains were forming then: MNCs were on the lookout for lower-cost sources. MNCs could 'plug and play' in larger labour markets. If wages rose in Singapore, which Lee wanted, he feared they would move their assembly operations to the neighbouring countries. Lee promised the companies world-class infrastructure, an efficient administration, and low taxes. In return, he wanted the companies to help the government by investing in continuous upgradation of their employees' skills, so that Singaporeans would earn more and Singapore would become fully 'developed'. The companies were not willing to make such long-term investments in Singapore's people. Lee turned to J.R.D. Tata to set up a training centre and a precision tool room in partnership with the Singapore government, and help build foundations for Singapore's industrial growth. Thus, the Tatas were pioneers in Singapore in the 1970s; other, much larger companies then came along. The rules of globalisation have made life easy for migrant capital, not for migrant labour. They make it easy for migrant capital to come into a country, make profits, and leave when it wishes to. It has been hard for migrant labour to join the global party. They have died in hundreds while crossing the seas to Europe, and walls are shutting them out from the U.S. Tragically, even when they leave India's globalising cities to go back to their villages, after being used and discarded, they are dying on the way out too. Governments must listen to and care for their citizens and workers more than to investors. They must encourage only those investors who care as much for citizens and workers where they invest as for their own investors back home. Economists who advise governments must be clear that humans are not tools to produce returns for investors; rather, money is a tool to produce benefits for humans.

### Gandhian Economics

U.P. is more complex than Singapore. Singapore is a city state with about 6 million citizens, while U.P., with a population of more than 200 million, has dozens of towns and thousands of villages. Migrants are returning from India's cities to villages in U.P. and other States. They are returning to a world Gandhi knew well. **Gandhi said that unless people in India's villages have economic and social freedom, India cannot be a free country. This was his vision of 'Poorna Swaraj'. For him, political freedom from the British was a step on the way.**





Gandhi is often dismissed as an impractical romantic. However, Gandhi and his economic advisers understood the economic and social problems in India's villages better than the economists in India's Planning Commission did. Gandhi also knew the potential of India's poorest people, who were merely statistics for the economists. Above all, **he believed that the economy must serve human needs, rather than human beings becoming fodder for the GDP.** This was a vision that Lee Kuan Yew had too: for him, the ultimate measure of Singapore becoming fully developed was not the size of its GDP, but the incomes of its citizens. U.P. does not have a 'migrant' problem. It has a 'citizen' problem. **All citizens of the State (and India too) deserve jobs, livelihoods and a good life with dignity, whether they are migrants or not. The test of public policies must be not what is good for investors and for the GDP, but what is good for the people, especially those who are the most powerless. In Lee's, Tata's, and Gandhi's books, diluting the rights of workers to make life easier for investors was not done.** The world has been 'deglobalising' since the financial crisis of 2008. Many countries have raised barriers against migrants from other countries. The World Trade Organization is very sick. COVID-19 has sharply accelerated a trend towards localisation that was already under way. Supply chains have broken up. Barriers against movement of people have gone up everywhere. 'Gandhian' economics, which E.F. Schumacher (author of *Small is Beautiful*) and J.C. Kumarappa (sometimes referred to as Gandhi's Planning Commission) articulated very well, is based on simple principles. One, human beings and local communities must be the means for human progress – and their well-being must be the purpose of progress too. Two, governance must be strengthened at the local level, in villages and cities. Three, wealth is good, but wealthy people must be only trustees of a community's wealth, and not its owners. Four, the alienation of owners from workers must be reduced with the creation of **new models of cooperative capitalist enterprises, where the workers, not remote capitalists, or the state, are owners of the enterprises.** India had come to a fork in the road in 1947: it could run behind the West to catch up; or it could take a path less taken, using a 'Gandhian' approach for human development. It chose to run behind the others. Now, we are back at the crossroads. The health crisis and the economic crisis have made people everywhere consider what path we should take after this crisis. Back to the 'normal' economics of GDP or towards a more human and more local economics?

## The Gross Abuse of The Manipur Mandate (Pradip Phanjoubam - Editor, FPSJ Review of Arts and Politics)

- Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, a parallel crisis of democracy is unfolding in Manipur – one which also reflects on the state of Indian democracy in general, where the mandate of the people decided at periodic elections is increasingly being allowed to be twisted by turncoat-elected representatives to serve the end of their unique and grotesque power game. **So endemic had defection become, that a law – the 10<sup>th</sup> Schedule – was introduced in 1985 by the 52<sup>nd</sup> amendment of the Constitution, but when the loopholes in the law were being exploited to make it irrelevant, it was toughened in 2003 by the 91<sup>st</sup> amendment of the Constitution.** That a country's leaders have to be restrained thus is itself a disgrace, but in recent times, it is no longer a question of dodging the law, but of overturning the very idea of the rule of law by those in power. The Manipur cases illustrate this very well.



### Government Formation

In the March 2017 Assembly election, Manipur saw a hung verdict, with the Indian National Congress emerging as the single largest party with 28 seats in the 60-member House (now 59, after one disqualification). The Bharatiya Janata Party was second, with 21. For inadequately unexplained reasons, the State Governor, Najma Heptulla, decided the more stable post-poll alliance would be the one the BJP led, though the party needed the support of at least 10 non-BJP MLAs to be in a majority position, rather than the Congress which needed just three. The BJP did manage to forge an alliance that exceeded the majority mark, but at a cost which it is discovering is too dear only now. The ceiling on the Manipur cabinet set by the 10<sup>th</sup> Schedule is 12 including the Chief Minister. Of the remaining 11, seven had to be given away to the allies to secure their loyalty, (four to National People's Party (NPP) and one each to the Naga People's Front, the Lok Janshakti Party and the first Congress MLA to defect to the BJP), leaving only three cabinet berths for the BJP's own legislators besides the Chief Minister. Luckily for the BJP, most of its veterans did not win the last election, and a great number of those who did were first timers, whose demands were not always seriously for ministerial berths.

### Partisan Politics

Nearly three-and-a-half years down the line, after the initial euphoria of being part of a ruling formation has long died down, many BJP MLAs are now obviously concerned with the reduced prospect of re-election from their constituencies if they went to the polls as mere camp followers. Hence, the internal friction within the ruling party has been visible for the past few months. The tipping point was reached on June 17, when three of their MLAs decided to quit the party and Assembly membership to align with the Congress. The crisis now has the potential of spiralling out of control and more could join the deserters in the days ahead; but given the fact that the adjudication function of the law has been totally smothered, and instead its provisions are now being used with impunity to promote partisan politics, nothing can be said for certain. The resultant loss of esteem for the law in the eyes of the public is predicted to have very long term and grave social consequences in this sensitive, insurgency-torn border State. Another development after the BJP assumed power was that seven more Congress MLAs defected to the ruling side, bringing up the total number of Congress defectors to eight. They were also obviously hoping for some official position to share the spoils of power, but nothing has been forthcoming for them. Hence, other than the first defector who was absorbed as a cabinet minister, the latter seven continued to sit in the Opposition benches but voted all along with the ruling. Since no action was taken by the Speaker on the disqualification petitions, a writ petition was filed before the High Court of Manipur in Imphal seeking directions to decide on the petition within a reasonable time. However, the court did not pass an order saying that the larger issue of whether a High Court can direct a Speaker to decide a disqualification petition within a certain timeframe is pending before a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. The parties were left with the option to move the apex court or wait for the outcome of the cases pending before it. In 2018, however, the High Court, refusing the preliminary objections of the Speaker, decided to hear the case on merits. It reasoned that since the remedy under Tenth Schedule is an alternative to moving courts. It said that if the remedy is found to be ineffective due to deliberate inaction or indecision on the part of the Speaker, the court will have jurisdiction. However, the High Court again did not pass orders since the larger issue is pending before the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the Manipur case reached the Supreme Court. In the 2016 SA Sampath Kumar vs Kale Yadaiah and Others case relating to the disqualification of a Telangana MLA, a two-judge bench of the



Supreme Court had asked a larger bench to clarify the legal position on the Speaker's powers to disqualify and the extent to which such decisions of the Speaker can be reviewed by the courts. This larger bench, however, is yet to be formed. **This January, expressing its displeasure with the Speaker's lack of urgency in deciding the disqualification petitions, a three-judge bench comprising Justices Rohinton F Nariman, Aniruddha Bose and V Ramasubramanian ruled that Speakers of assemblies and the Parliament must decide disqualification pleas within a period of three months except in extraordinary circumstances.** This settled the law for situations where the timing of the disqualification is meddled to manipulate floor tests. The court also recommended that the Parliament consider taking a relook at the powers of the Speakers citing instances of partisanship. **The court suggested independent tribunals to decide on disqualification.** In the context of Manipur, this ruling meant that Speaker Khemchand had to rule on the disqualification within three months since. **While making a ruling in the Manipur case, the three-judge bench led by justice Nariman also ruled that the 2016 reference to a larger bench by a two-judge bench was not needed.** It said, that the two-judge bench had not been apprised of a five-judge bench ruling in 2007 that answers the questions raised by the 2016 reference. Decisions of a larger bench are precedents and are binding on smaller benches. Incidentally, the 2016 reference was made by a bench of Justices R K Agarwal and Nariman. But even after three months after the Supreme Court order, the Speaker did not take a call on the disqualifications. **On March 18, in an extraordinary move, the Supreme Court removed Manipur Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh, against whom disqualification petition was also pending before the Speaker since 2017, from the state cabinet and restrained him "from entering the Legislative Assembly till further orders".** When the seven other defectors remained unpenalised, the Congress moved the Manipur High Court. The High Court took the cue from the earlier Supreme Court ruling to direct the Speaker to dispose of the case at the soonest but after the election to the State's lone Rajya Sabha. Till this was done, the High Court placed a ban on the seven MLAs from entering the Assembly.

### Jumping Ship

The BJP, however, has more to worry now. It is also beginning to lose its partners. The biggest of these is the NPP, which has four MLAs in the Assembly. The party walked out of the BJP-led alliance and pledged support to the Opposition Congress on June 17. Along with them, one MLA of the Trinamool Congress and an independent MLA also jumped ship and joined the Congress camp. Almost at the same time, in a curious turn of events, four of the seven Congress defectors also decided to return to the Congress camp. If they remained not disqualified and if they were allowed to vote, it had become a foregone conclusion that the BJP would lose the Rajya Sabha seat. But yesterday, in the morning, the Speaker has heard and disposed of the case of the three defectors still in the BJP camp although there is a High Court directive that the hearing should not be before the Rajya Sabha election, and exonerated them so they could vote. However, the names of the other four were missing from the list of voters. One of those four MLAs, Brojen Singh, moved the High Court a day before the election and secured permission to vote. **With the speaker disqualifying the other three and a TMC MLA, the Congress secured 24 votes, four shorts of the BJP.** With the disqualifications, BJP candidate Leisemba Sanajaoba was elected to the Rajya Sabha with 28 votes.

Even if the BJP, with the help of the Speaker's controversial rulings, wins the Rajya Sabha seat, the trouble for the coalition can hardly be said to be over. One, **it is extremely likely that intervention would come from the High Court on the election and selective disposal**



of the disqualification cases as well as the Speaker's tribunal overruling the High Court directive. Two, the Opposition is now demanding a no-confidence motion against the government. It remains to be seen where this will lead to, or if those with the reins of power will allow a non-partisan decision of the Assembly. At this moment though, **it does seem the law has become what those in power want it to be**. There can be no dispute there is danger in the law being made a subordinate function of power. The Manipur BJP seems to be wrestling to fight its own original demon now.

- The shenanigans in Manipur are not unique to the State. The examples of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh most recently, and Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand earlier show the utter failure of the anti-defection law in curbing the brazen subversion of electoral mandates by legislators who get elected on the ticket of one party but do not find it inconvenient to shift to another, due to the lure of ministerial berths or financial gains. If the role of the Speaker who has the authority to decide upon defections has been utilised by ruling parties to engineer defections without inviting immediate disqualification in some cases, legislators have also adhered to the law in letter if not spirit by utilising the option of outright resignation. **This begs the question whether the anti-defection law actually serves any purpose today**. In the absence of any amendments to the law suitably, the only disincentive for defectors is the possibility that voters might punish them in a by-election. But as Karnataka recently showed, **voters in some States have yet to discern candidacies beyond considerations of patronage and identity, emboldening parties to retain or seize power through immoral machinations**.

### A Quota Case

- Quota politics is back in play to favour, this time, students from government higher secondary schools in Tamil Nadu. The Cabinet's nod on Monday, for an ordinance to create a horizontal 7.5% reservation of the State's quota of seats in medical colleges, is a well-intentioned move to address the problem of poor representation from government schools in MBBS/BDS courses which has been in existence even prior to the introduction of NEET for admission. The issue of inequity has come in for criticism against NEET which came into operation in Tamil Nadu in 2017. Since then, there has been a high-decibel campaign, against NEET and the AIADMK government, led by Edappadi K. Palaniswami, on the ground that the design and form of the test are loaded against students of rural areas, government schools, Backward and Most Backward Classes, and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. Like in the case of other professional course entrance tests, most candidates clearing NEET in Tamil Nadu are invariably those who undergo private coaching. It was also in the last three years that the AIADMK regime veered closer towards the BJP-led government at the Centre. Despite the authorities asserting that NEET is neither against communal reservation nor weaker sections, the campaign appears to have had an impact during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls as the DMK-led front won 38 out of 39 seats. The State's latest decision comes in the backdrop of this factor and also of next year's Assembly election. It is unclear whether the horizontal reservation will pass legal scrutiny. **In February 2002, the Madras High Court quashed the horizontal quota of 25% in professional courses for higher secondary students from schools in village panchayats**. This time, the State has acted on a panel recommendation, which concluded that there was a **"cognitive gap" among students of government schools**, given the perception that those from the CBSE stream enjoy greater advantage in NEET than students of the State board. **Those backing the latest quota cite special reservation for the differently-abled and an arrangement in Karnataka, of 15% of seats being set apart for rural students seeking professional courses**.





Apparently, there is nothing in NEET's rules against States providing "special reservation" out of their quota of seats, a position articulated, in 2017, by former Union Health Minister and BJP president, J.P. Nadda, in favour of rural students. The trend of horizontal reservation is happening with respect to national law universities for students from the host States. It is debatable whether the test of backwardness can be stretched to any extent although the equity principle is important. **While poor representation in professional courses from the vulnerable sections is a symptom, the causes are deep-rooted. A holistic and sustained approach to improve school education will alone pave the way for a lasting solution.**

### In Defence of MPLADS (Rajmohan Unnithan - MP in the Lok Sabha from Kasaragod)

→ The Indian Parliament is the nucleus of the republic. It has a legion of functions to perform. Subhash Kashyap, in Our Parliament, has enumerated the multiple functions of Parliament. It includes political and financial control, supervision of administration, elicitation and dissemination of information on the government of the day, grievance ventilation, national integration, legislative and constituent functions and furnishing leadership to the nation. The functions are non-exhaustive and incremental.

#### Doing Away with A Vital Role

The responsibility of an MP does not end with the supervision of administration and legislation. He has to find solutions to the grievances of the electorate of his constituency and promote their developmental aspirations. As Parliament is a multifunctional institution, an MP is a multifunctional representative. His representative and grievance ventilation functions should not end with petitioning ministers and officials. **An MP knows the developmental and welfare issues of his constituency better than anyone else.** The Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) has enabled MPs to play a leadership role in the developmental process of his constituency and sort out its day-to-day problems. The suspension of the MPLADS for 2020-21 and 2021-22 in the wake of the pandemic has done away with this vital role of MPs. The government's decision to suspend MPLADS funds for two years evoked mixed reactions. Many Opposition parties opposed the move. On social media, many people supported the move and even demanded the scrapping of the scheme altogether citing reasons that are unfounded. A close examination of the arguments against the MPLADS will expose their hollowness. The first is that the very nature of the scheme gives space for corruption. This is not supported by empirical data. **The vital role of an MP in the MPLADS ends with selecting micro development projects for his constituency. Implementation of these projects is done by district-level officers under the vigilant eye of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The projects are implemented according to the Ministry's guidelines. Furthermore, the Scheme undergoes an impartial and meticulous auditing. The second instalment of funds is released only when the first instalment is fully utilised with no audit objections.** This procedure leaves no place for corruption. The pork barrel policy of State and Union Governments often leads to skewed development and regional imbalance. The ruling party channels public money to particular constituencies based on political considerations, at the expense of broader public interests. The elected opposition legislators of those constituencies fall victim to this pork barrel politics. MPLADS has been an antidote to this favouritism. **The Scheme provided opposition MPs some chance to cater to the developmental needs of their constituency.** The suspension of the Scheme has snatched away this limited opportunity.



### **Aspirations of The Marginalised**

Of the MPLADS corpus, 15% has been earmarked for the development of Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for the Scheduled Tribes. Around ₹20 lakh of the MPLADS fund per annum has been allotted for the welfare of differently abled people. Suspension of the MPLADS undermines the developmental aspirations of these marginalised segments. In Kerala there are handsome funds at the disposal of MLAs. In 2012, Kerala announced the launching of the Legislative Assembly Constituency Asset Development Fund. This aims at creating durable assets for which each MLA will be allocated ₹5 crore during a particular financial year for undertaking capital works in his/her constituency so as to improve infrastructural facilities. The corpus has subsequently been enhanced to ₹6 crore per annum. The suspension of the MPLADS undermines the prestige of MPs vis-à-vis MLAs. A scheme that catered to the developmental aspirations of local people, ironed out the regional imbalances and made MPs engaged should be restored as early as possible.

### **Meet the Parotta – The Kerala Flatbread That Attracts More GST Than North Indian**

#### **Roti**

- The Karnataka bench of the Authority for Advance Rulings (AAR) has said that packaged “parotas” would attract a GST of 18 per cent because, unlike plain rotis and khakhras (5 per cent GST), they need to be heated before consumption. Social media has been in uproar over the ruling, with the hashtag #HandsOffPorotta trending on Friday evening, and many alleging that the ruling was yet another instance of the government imposing itself on the beloved foods of the South. But why did this alleged discrimination against the parotta – more commonly spelled ‘parotta’ – trigger such outrage? What exactly is a parotta anyway?

#### **For Starters, It’s A Parotta, Not A Paratha**

Archaeologist and culinary anthropologist Kurush Dalal underlines that the parotta of South India is not the same as the paratha of the North. “Generically, they are the same thing in that the dough is allowed to briefly self-leaven by resting and fat is added to the dough before it’s rolled out in order to create the layers. **But the North Indian paratha is made of whole wheat, while the Kerala parotta is made of maida.**” Another difference is that with most parathas, you roll and fold the dough to get the layers, whereas the parotta belongs to a sub-type in which the dough is rolled into a ball and then into a long rope, which is coiled and then rolled out again. “Its physical properties then become very different from the regular North Indian paratha. It’s more like the lachchha paratha,” he says.

#### **Where Did the Parotta Come From?**

The word parotta is generally used for the **Malabar or Kerala parotta**, the flaky, layered bread made of refined wheat flour or maida. It is a popular street and restaurant food across the state, and is usually served with beef fry (egg curry and chicken curry are other popular accompaniments). In fact, the parotta-beef fry combination carries political meaning in Kerala, and is frequently used as the symbol of a state that prizes the cosmopolitan origins of its modern culinary culture. How parotta came to exist and become so popular in a state where rice is the ubiquitous staple is unclear. Did it travel to the South from the North, or did it arrive on the Malabar coast independently? Dalal speculates that the latter is more likely. “That style of layering is not indigenous to India. I



believe that it came from West Asia, and you see West Asian contact with Kerala from a very early period, even before the arrival of Islam,” he says. However, he adds, it remains difficult to assert definitively how the parotta came to exist on the Malabar coast, given the paucity of sources on the subject.

### Variations of The Parotta In India And Abroad

While the Malabar parotta is the best-known of its kind, other varieties are popular street snacks as well, especially in Tamil Nadu. One such is the parotta salna, which is basically parotta that is served with a plain, tomato-based gravy on the side. There is also the **kothu parotta**, which is shredded parotta mixed and served with a masala (gravy) that includes egg or meat. It is believed to have originated in Madurai, although it is now found all over Tamil Nadu. (There is also a Sri Lankan version known there as the **kottu parotta**.) Another famous parotta also comes from Madurai and is only found there – the bun parotta, as the name indicates, looks like a bun but is layered and flaky like a parotta should be. International variations of the parotta include, besides the Sri Lankan kottu parotta, **Malaysia’s roti canai** and **Trinidad’s ‘buss up shut’** – named for the ‘busted-up shirt’ that this soft, crumpled and torn parotta with layers is supposed to resemble. **There is a striking similarity of technique between making the parotta and the Chinese scallion pancake, although in texture the latter is far crisper.** According to Anissa Helou in her book ‘Feast: Food of the Islamic World’ (2018), scallion pancakes were originally made by the indigenous Uighur people of China’s Xinjiang province, through which the ancient Silk Route passed. It is highly likely that the scallion pancake is based on layered flatbreads that travelled centuries ago from West Asia to Xinjiang along the Silk Route; just as, Dalal says, they likely travelled from West Asia along ancient sea routes to the Malabar coast and led to the creation of the parotta.

### What Is the Scrapped Buses Scam in Andhra Pradesh?

- The Andhra Pradesh Transport Department has initiated an inquiry after being tipped-off that buses sold as scrap by Ashok Leyland were purchased by two companies in Anantapur who were illegally using them in private travels business. Transport officials contacted Ashok Leyland on January 10, 2020 which on January 23 confirmed that in 2018, it sold 40 scrap buses to C Gopal Reddy and 26 scrap buses to Jatadhara Industries Private Ltd based at Tadipatri in Anantapur district.

### Who Are Involved in The Scam?

Jatadhara Industries is owned by J C Uma Reddy wife of former TDP MLA J C Prabhakar Reddy, and their son J S Asmith Reddy. C Gopal Reddy is a close associate of Prabhakar Reddy. Prabhakar Reddy and Gopal Reddy were arrested Saturday morning.

### What Did the Investigation Find?

The investigation found that all the condemned vehicles were first registered with transport registration authority at Kohima, Nagaland and then brought to Anantapur district with a NOC from Nagaland. A team comprising officials of transport department and Anantapur Police went to Kohima and found that forged documents including Ashok Leyland invoices were used to get the vehicles registered there. The buses were shown as latest models and BS IV compliant. The applications for registration were made by J C Uma Reddy on behalf of C Gopal Reddy. The invoices were shown to have been issued by Ashok Leyland Ltd, Kalyanpur, Uttarakhand and Ashok Leyland Ltd, Hosur, Tamilnadu.



Though they purchased the vehicles as scrap, they tried to make them fit and road worthy on record for their unlawful gain and for plying vehicles illegally.

### Why Is It Illegal to Use Scrapped Vehicles?

The Supreme Court had on March 29, 2017, ordered that all vehicles that are not compliant to BS IV emission norms shall not be sold in India by any manufacturer or dealer from April 1, 2017, and that the registering authorities also are prohibited from registering such vehicles from April 1, 2017. "It became clear that Jatadhara Industries and C Gopal Reddy purchased as scrap the vehicles which are not road worthy, fabricated documents to show that these vehicles were road worthy vehicles properly sold by the manufacturer/dealer and registerable under the Motor Vehicle Act, with intention to get them registered at a faraway place in Nagaland," Joint Transport Commissioner (Road Safety) S A V Prasada Rao said. Officials said that plying the scrap and unfit vehicles was in violation of the orders Supreme Court orders and also put the lives of people at risk. The buses were plying mostly in Anantapur district.

### Where Are These Buses Now?

Officials said some of these vehicles have since been sold on to various others in AP. "As of now we know that they purchased 154 vehicles — Jatadhara Industries got 50 and C Gopal Reddy 104 — of BS III emission standards sold as scrap. All these were registered as BS IV vehicles in various parts of the country, including at RTA Anantapur in the names of the Jatadhara Industries and C Gopal Reddy. The transport department has blocked and cancelled registration of 101 of these buses which are in AP rolls, and seized 60 buses while 41 are yet to be traced. About 28 vehicles are in other states and transport authorities there have been informed to block and seize the vehicles.

### Why Are Punjab Congress Leaders Up Against CBS Notification?

- Punjab government **notifying Civil Services Board providing for fixed tenure of IAS officers** has left Congress leaders in the state upset. The Indian Express explains the board and the resistance to its notification:

### What Is the Civil Services Board (CSB)?

As per a state government notification dated June 2, **CSB will be headed by Chief Secretary, with Personnel Secretary, and either Financial Commissioner (Revenue) or Home Secretary (who so ever is senior in the pecking order) as its members. The board provides for the state to follow Centre's guidelines on giving a fixed tenure of at least two years for cadre officers.** They cannot be transferred before that and if anyone recommends their transfer then the board will examine and effect it. The final authority is the Chief Minister.

### Why Had Previous Government in The State Declined to Follow Centre's Guidelines?

**Previous government led by former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal had refused to follow the guidelines on the argument that appointment and transfer of IAS officers are a prerogative of the state. If their term is fixed, it had argued, it will not only create functional and administrative problems, but also overstep the authority and jurisdiction of the state government.**





### Why Are Congress Leaders Upset?

The political leadership of ruling party in the state has usually always had a say in postings and transfers of district officials in the state. Akalis have been known to lend supremacy to its leadership over bureaucrats in the state. But ever since Congress government has taken over, the grouse of its leaders has been that they do not get a due respect in their own regime. The district officials allegedly make them wait and do not listen to them while Akalis were still getting the respect and honour from these officials. **This has led to several confrontations in the past. With the fixed tenure rule and Chief Secretary's board having all power to examine a recommendation for a transfer, the leaders feel their influence has been reduced to a naught and all power handed to the CS.**

### How Do They See the Board to Be Lending Officers Supremacy Over Them?

If any officer is to be transferred before completing his minimum tenure, the board will record the reasons for the transfer, will seek views from the concerned officer and then give a judgement on whether the tenure of the officer is to be ended mid-way. The final authority will be the CM.

### What Is the Government's Argument in Its Favour?

It says if the officials have a fixed tenure, they will be able to provide better administration. They will also feel safe and try to stick to the rules instead of pleasing political bosses. It says every official requires 3-6 months to get into the groove at his new place of posting. If he stays there for two years, it would mean better delivery and stable tenure to people.

### What Do the Officials Say?

They feel the rules will not be followed in letter and spirit unless a few officers go to the courts and ensure that the guidelines are followed. They say that neighbouring Haryana had the board in place but the guidelines were not followed.

Rural India, The New Viral Flash Point (M.S. Seshadri - Retired Professor of Medical Endocrinology, Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore. T. Jacob John - Retired Professor of Clinical Virology, CMC, Vellore)

- The initial misplaced optimism that India is somehow protected from the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be illusory, with rapidly escalating numbers of cases and deaths in urban India. The urban blight is so intense as to occupy the entire attention of the health-care workforce, planners and policy makers. The medical services in these urban areas – Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai to cite the three major epicentres of the epidemic – have been overwhelmed, judging from the reports available every day in the public domain.

### Clearly Unprepared

We are now facing only the fury of the urban wave of this epidemic in India. Remember, 65% of the country's population is rural. They have been relatively underexposed, with very few cases and deaths. Thus, the large, vulnerable majority in rural India is yet to feel the heat of this epidemic. There is a pervasive and false confidence among the general public that, somehow, rural India will escape with minimal casualty. The recent (limited) restoration of public transport and a relaxation of restrictions on the movement of people are developments that have set the stage for the inevitable and even more dangerous wave



of this epidemic. **Just as importations from other countries through air traffic set the stage for the urban blight, importations from urban to rural India will set the stage for the rural wave.** We need to remind ourselves that rural India is clearly unprepared to face this epidemic.

### Contrasts in Health Care

There has always been an urban-rural divide in India in health care and education, two vital indices of human development. This deficiency has been very costly not only in terms of rural lives and livelihoods but also overall national wealth creation. If the first urban wave of the COVID-19 tsunami is overwhelming our relatively better urban health-care resources, one can imagine the predicament of rural India with its already deficient health-care resources when it faces the rural epidemic tidal wave. **The lockdown of the entire country led to a paralysis of urban and rural life synchronously while the urban and rural waves of this epidemic are clearly asynchronous.** The rural wave is just beginning while the urban wave is about to peak. When rural areas were hardly affected, we had the lockdown but now that the rural wave is just beginning, paradoxically, we find that rural people are going about without masks or physical distancing, congregating in marketplaces and places of worship. This portends an imminent catastrophe, yet unrecognised and therefore inadequately anticipated for risk-mitigation.

### Administer the Social Vaccine

Now is the right time to implement the social vaccine, a prophylaxis before the rural spread of the epidemic. A decentralised approach with participation of all stakeholders in each village, taluk and district is the need and potential of the day. The most important step would be to educate rural people with all the tools at our disposal – print, radio, the electronic media, and messages through mobile phones. We need to give them accurate information in simple language to make them clearly understand that their self-protection and the protection of their families are entirely in their hands. Two behavioural changes are critical – every man, woman and child must wear a cotton cloth mask when out of the home, and observe strict hand hygiene. All elders and any person with a co-morbidity should be cocooned (by reverse quarantine) – all wearing masks when interacting with others even inside homes. It is mortality that we must prevent in this unfair disease for the vulnerable.

### Proceeding Step by Step

At the State and district levels, we need a systematic approach; it must entail blocking urban-rural importations, quarantining those who move from red zone to green, diagnosing and managing clinical COVID-19 syndrome with or without positive PCR test results, and providing field hospitals exclusively for isolating and managing COVID-19 cases (manned by younger, and therefore less vulnerable, medical and nursing teams). At the same time, we need to protect and sustain existing hospitals and primary health centres not to be frequented by COVID-19 patients, but for providing care for all other medical, surgical and obstetric emergencies. **Mildly and moderately symptomatic COVID-19 patients should be managed by home isolation, delivering essential and medical supplies at home, and home monitoring of oxygen saturation by readily available portable finger pulse oximeters.** Each such patient should be followed up daily by a designated medical professional, who should call over the phone and identify those who need hospitalisation for life-threatening pneumonia. **Non-communicable diseases and other common diseases should be handled on a tele-medicine platform manned by experienced and older (age more than 55 years)**



medical personnel; there should be a follow-up over the mobile phone. This approach will minimise the loss of medical manpower due to COVID-19 at the time when we need them the most. If we are caught napping at this crucial hour, it will be a monumental error for which we can never forgive ourselves. State health administrators and the medical fraternity have the knowledge and skills to tackle the rural wave with courage and wisdom.

### Amid Pandemic, Traditional Art Of 'Talamaddale' Goes Digital

→ The traditional art of 'Talamaddale', a variant of Yakshagana theatre, too has gone virtual in times of COVID-19. A performance was streamed live on social media on June 13 and more such are in store.

Unlike the Yakshagana performance, in the conventional 'Talamaddale,' the artists sit across in a place without any costumes and engage in testing their oratory skills based on the episode chosen. If music is common for both Yakshagana performance and 'Talamaddale', the latter has only spoken word without any dance or costumes. Hence it is an art form minus dance, costumes and stage conventions. Under the changed circumstances due to the lockdown, many Yakshagana artists and Yakshagana-related organisations are hosting the virtual 'Talamaddale' live programmes on the Facebook, YouTube since past over a fortnight. Their links are shared on social media platforms, including on WhatsApp, leading the art lovers to enjoy them on their mobile phones. Virtual live streaming is not a new trend in case of Yakshagana performance. But for 'Talamaddale' it is and catching up. If some used virtual meeting apps and then streamed it live on social media, many others streamed the conventional 'Talamaddale' (where all artists had a 'Baithak' in a place) live on social media.

### Helping the Helpers (Meva Bharti - Convener of The Jaipur-Based Rajasthan Mahila Kamgaar Union)

→ The fact that India's cities run on the backs of workers is known, but what is often unacknowledged is that so do many private homes. Domestic work is one of the biggest employers in India's large informal economy, especially in urban areas. It is also one of the largest employers for women. Yet, not enough focus has been placed on working women in our discussions on COVID-19 and the lockdown – there are no special economic packages for domestic workers unlike, say, for construction workers. Soon, the rhythms of domestic life will be faster and more consistent, just like before. And like always, an entire set of activities and hours of labour will escape the purview of lawyers, economists and politicians alike. When the lockdown began, there were appeals to employers to not withhold salaries for domestic workers. Yet, in an informal workplace with no formal job contract, these appeals are unenforceable. In March, 51% of the respondents said they were not paid fully indicating some compliance by employers. However, 89% said they were not paid at all in April. Ground reports suggest that May was no different. This has had an immediate effect on worker households. The income of domestic workers is 50% of the total household income. It is the more regular form of income supplemented by other members who are generally daily wagers. So, what happened to these households?

### No Savings Left

First, it is important to recognise that these households were vulnerable even before the COVID-19 outbreak. On the eve of March 25, the average holding of rice and wheat in each household was less than 8 kg. On an average, households had operational savings worth



barely 15 days with most households reporting only 10 days' worth of operational savings. In the best cases women reported operational savings worth 23 days, far less than the time they had to ride out without income due to the lockdown. These workers, despite the hardships, haven't left the cities and don't intend to do so. The city and the state will soon rely on them to restore normalcy. But can that be achieved if they continue to battle precarity of income, job, nutrition and housing on an everyday basis?

### ICMR Study Plots Mid-November Peak

- The peak stage of COVID-19 in India has been delayed by the eight-week lockdown along with strengthened public health measures, and **it may now arrive around mid-November when a paucity of isolation and ICU beds and ventilators can arise, a study says.**

#### Delayed by Lockdown

The study, conducted by researchers from an Operations Research Group constituted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said the lockdown shifted the peak by an estimated 34 days to 76 days and helped bring down the number of infections by between 69% and 97%, allowing time to shore up resources and health infrastructure. In a scenario of intensified public health measures with 60% effectiveness after the lockdown, the demand for treatment facilities can be met until the first week of November. Thereafter, isolation beds could be inadequate for 5.4 months, ICU beds for 4.6 months and ventilators for 3.9 months, projections by the researchers showed. However, this shortfall is estimated to be 83% less than what it could have been without the lockdown and public health measures. With sustained measures to increase the infrastructure and the varying pace of the epidemic in different regions, the impact of the unmet need can be reduced. If the coverage of healthcare measures can be increased to 80%, the epidemic can be mitigated. According to the model-based analysis for the pandemic in India, with the additional capacity built for testing, treating and isolating patients during the lockdown, the number of cases at the peak could come down by 70% and the cumulative cases may drop by nearly 27%. As for mortality, approximately 60% deaths were prevented and one-third of this mortality prevention is attributed to the reduction in the unmet need for critical care as a result of the intervention, the analysis showed.

### Will Monsoon Impact Coronavirus Spread?

- Some months ago, when the novel coronavirus epidemic was still emerging in India, it was hoped that rising temperature in the summer months would weaken the potency of the virus and slow down its spread. That did not happen. Now that the monsoon season is here, the likely impact of rain on the virus, and its transmission, is the subject of discussion. Since it is a new virus, scientists are not yet sure how the rain might affect its behaviour. So, the effort is to look for clues in the way other similar viruses behave during the rainy season.

#### Much Still Unknown

Rain brings with it several vectors borne diseases like malaria, dengue and chikungunya. In the case of dengue, some studies have shown that excessive rains could disrupt the mosquito's reproductive cycle and flush out its breeding sites. But the comparison that is being made is that with influenza, which, like Covid-19, is a respiratory disease, though there are important differences in the way the two viruses replicate and affect human





beings. The problem, as Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson, an infectious disease epidemiologist who worked with US Centres for Disease Prevention and Control and is now Director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium, points out, is that even in the case of influenza, and several other viral respiratory diseases, the drivers for their seasonal behaviour are not fully understood. “In the United States, for example, it is very difficult to predict the flu season. There is no single factor like temperature or rainfall, or staying indoors that can be said to have decisive impact. Many other factors like sunlight, and Vitamin D levels in people are also responsible in how these diseases spread. In addition, it is not very clear how much transmission happens through surfaces (as against human contact, or through air). Most people are of the opinion that only little contamination happens through surfaces. And, that during the rainy season, it would not affect indoor surfaces at all,” he said in an email. Dr M S Chadha, former Deputy Director of National Institute of Virology who has worked on the seasonality of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), said it could take several years to determine how novel coronavirus is affected by different seasons. “Since RSV infection and other respiratory diseases usually do follow seasonal patterns, carrying out year-round Covid-19 surveillance for several years would be the key to determining its seasonality,” he said.

### Seasons & Human Behaviour

Dr Subhojit Sen, a scientist with Centre for Excellence in Basic Sciences in Mumbai, said the viral disease spread depends on three major factors — seasonal changes in environment (temperature, humidity, sunlight), human behavioural patterns, and intrinsic characteristics of the virus, like its infectiousness, pathogenicity and survival. He pointed out some of the things that can be expected during the rainy season that can have an impact on how such diseases spread. “For example, spitting on the streets is a common problem that increases the risk of virus transmission. The hope is that rains will wash or dilute this off the streets,” he said. Also, during rains, people spend an extended period of time within closed spaces, like homes or offices, and there is likely to be a lower number of people in crowded public spaces.

### Why Is Meghalaya Treating Every Resident as An Asymptomatic Carrier of Covid-19?

- On June 2, the Meghalaya Health department issued a new health protocol saying that the state would consider everybody as an asymptomatic carrier of the novel coronavirus “by default”. The order reasoned that this was the best way to prevent the threat of community transmission with thousands of migrants returning to the state from different zones. Behind this announcement is a four-pronged plan that suggests not just testing everyone who enters the state and thereafter isolating them, but a psychological model which stresses on behavioural change and training.

### What Is the Concept Behind This Approach?

“The pandemic has resulted in two kinds of fear: fear for the loss of life and fear for the loss of livelihood,” said Meghalaya Health Commissioner and Secretary Sampath Kumar, “That is why we wanted to build a system through which you can protect yourself and carry out your livelihood at the same time — because let’s face it, you simply have to live with Covid.” The bureaucrat — who holds the rural development and health portfolios — said this could be achieved through what psychologists call the “**locus of control**”, or the extent to which one feels control over events in their lives. “The point is to consider that the problem is from within,” he said, “The moment you think you could be Covid positive, then your



entire behaviour will change – you will be more cautious and feel responsible for your actions, and thus help reducing the risk of community transmission.” The idea is called the ‘Behaviour Change Model for living with COVID-19’.

### How Will It Be Implemented?

As per the order, everyone in the state shall be treated as “Category ‘A’ patients unless they are tested on a continuous basis.” “This implies living with the assumption that every person could be an asymptomatic, mobile carrier of the Covid-19 virus, with a probability of transmitting the virus to others unknowingly,” said Kumar. The ‘Category A’ patient will have to follow three non-negotiable practices: compulsory mask-wearing, hand hygiene and social distancing. For that the department has built a series of training modules by dividing the entire population into three categories: one, the elderly who are above 65, two, those who have comorbidities and three, the mobile group, or the mobile workforce, including students who are constantly on the move. The training will be carried out by the Health Department with the help of identified master trainers. At the end of it, a certificate will be provided to all those who have successfully completed training. “Currently we are training the trainers,” said Kumar, “This includes government department officials (including headmen of villages) as well as private agencies (taxi associations, market unions, school teachers).” Rules will differ from sector to sector depending on the kind of activities their profession involves.

### What Are the Key Components of Training?

The two main components include **checklists and self-help diaries**. “For the senior population, or those who are living with comorbidities, the self-help diaries can be used as a tool to monitor themselves,” said Kumar. ASHA (accredited social health activist) and Anganwadi teams are going house to house to train this section. For the mobile workforce group, Kumar said the training is rooted on the psychological concept of **mindfulness** – basically paying attention to what you are currently doing, and observing every step you take, since you are technically an asymptomatic carrier. For all three groups, a checklist – with a set of model questions which address topics such as hand hygiene, social distancing, respiratory etiquette – will be provided.

### How Will It Ensure Results?

“First thing we must remember is that behavioural change does not happen through scaring people,” said Kumar, “We hope that constant repetition of these habits, using the self-help diary or checklist through appreciation and progress monitoring, will lead to change.” The checklist is designed in such a way that one can rate themselves out of ten based on their performance on that day. “For example, the question might ask ‘Did I take a bath or wash my hands and feet thoroughly after returning home?’. If the answer is yes, then you get one point,” explained Kumar, adding that they are especially depending on village headmen at the local level to influence such changes. The government is also considering a social reward system – where points can be redeemed for items at shops etc. “We are only considering this idea at this point,” he said, adding that he hopes that the shift in responsibility will “create a supportive environment that will remove fear and encourage compassionate care towards fellow beings.”



## What Must Schools Do Before Reopening?

- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has largely left the decision on how to proceed to its affiliate schools, but has promised a syllabus reduction. For the 33% of students in private schools, classes have gone online with teachers attempting to maintain a regular schedule. For others, the Centre has brought out an educational calendar with lesson plans and learning activities, and is also beaming classes through dedicated television channels in multiple languages, especially for older children. Teachers in government schools in Delhi are giving out assignments via WhatsApp, while Class 10 students in corporation schools in Chennai were to have got an Android phone so that classes can continue. However, given that this kind of distance education requires digital access and/or self-motivation and parental involvement, the vast majority of children in government schools have spent the last three months on an extended summer holiday.

## When Will Schools Reopen?

No one knows when schools can reopen. Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' has said that physical reopening of schools will not take place till August 15, although some States such as Haryana have suggested a July reopening date. The Centre will announce the earliest possible date for reopening after consultation between the HRD, Health and Home Ministries, but the final call will be left to State governments. For those in containment zones, the wait may be longer, leading to worries about unequal educational opportunities among the same age cohort. A growing number of parents, Right to Education activists and the Delhi government teachers' association are calling for 2020-21 to be treated as a "zero academic year", with no pressure to set a reopening date at all. "Zero year" means teaching and learning will happen to the extent possible, but there will not be grading or exams or promotion to the next class. **An online poll by Local Circles found that 37% of parents want to send their child to school only 21 days after there are no new cases in their districts, while another 36% say it should be three weeks after no new cases in the State or country. In fact, 13% do not want schools to restart until a vaccine is developed.** Apart from governments and parents, teachers and schools are also important stakeholders in this decision. It was the Tamil Nadu High and Higher Secondary School Graduate Teachers Association that successfully filed a court case against holding Class 10 board examinations in the State. Its president S. Bakthavatchalam pointed out that apart from the impossibility of teaching classes online in government schools, older teachers, especially those with comorbidities are also at risk from young students who cannot be expected to follow social distancing norms. With some State governments announcing that fees cannot be collected for online classes, some private schools are divided between the need for income to pay teachers' salaries and the difficulty of ensuring they do not become infection hotspots. Experts point out that countries such as France and Israel saw cases shooting up when they tried to reopen schools.

## What Is the Health Protocol That Needs to Be in Place Before Schools Reopen?

The Centre is expected to release guidelines on this issue next week. HRD officials say some likely steps include temperature screening at the entrance to schools and classrooms, monitoring to ensure mask or shield-wearing and social distancing, sanitisation routines to clean all furniture and facilities, isolation and hospitalisation protocols for infected students and staff, as well as plans for staggered attendance and blended learning to limit the number of students on the premises on any given day. **Public**



Health Foundation of India president K. Srinath Reddy says that children are at more risk for clinical symptoms than earlier understood, and have been seen to develop a paediatric multi-system inflammatory condition associated with COVID-19, although they usually recover. The bigger danger is that because social distancing may be difficult for children, they will act as transmission agents to staff and older adults back home. Dr. Reddy has also raised the issue of mental health risks from COVID-19 stress, due to economic or medical crises at home, or the psychological impact of increased isolation and treating everyone as a potential threat.

### Is Online Education A Viable Alternative?

The Centre is preparing guidelines on digital education, including cyber-safety. It is likely to include limiting the number of hours a child is online, with a one to three-hour cap on synchronous interaction. Currently, some schools are trying to maintain a seven-hour teaching schedule, which creates stress and distraction. Educational apps are largely in English, although multi-lingual apps are being developed. Equity and access are the bigger problems with online education in India, says Minati Panda, a professor at JNU's Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies. **Only 11% of Indian households have a computer. Although smartphone penetration is higher, only 24% have Internet facilities, which drops to 15% in rural areas, according to the latest National Sample Survey.** A single device in a household cannot help multiple children, while poor students in an economically weaker section (EWS) quota in a privileged school may be the worst hit. If a government or school wants to run an online education programme, it must ensure equal access to all participants, says Dr. Panda.

### How Can Evaluation Be Done?

This is the immediate battle, given that several boards, including the CBSE, are yet to conclude examinations from the previous 2019-20 academic year. The Board has exponentially increased the number of examination centres to 13,000 and is developing screening protocols, but the question of whether Class 12 examinations can be safely conducted in the first two weeks of July is currently in the Supreme Court. Children's health is more important than any academic advancement, says Ishwar Achanta who went to court to prevent his son from having to write an examination. Schools are experimenting with multiple choice tests and uploaded answers for at-home evaluation options. If a zero academic year is considered, conceptual teaching and learning may continue through varied modes through the year, but without the pressure of evaluation and grading.

### For Better Conditions of Work (Devaki Jain - Delhi-Based Economist)

- After a stressful lockdown period, thousands of migrant workers have returned to their villages. Many have said they wish to stay there. They no longer yearn to go back to their work in the cities. This is understandable given their terrible living conditions in the cities and the shocking treatment meted out to them during the lockdown period. This is an opportunity for those working to provide workers security, those involved in the cooperative movement, those trying to improve the living conditions in rural India, and those working in the area of skill development to reach out to, and enable, the migrant workers to fulfil their desire of staying at home.





### Forming Cooperative Societies

Back home, the migrants can form cooperative societies. So can MGNREGA workers. Many migrant workers said they worked as tailors in the cities, many as plumbers, some as cooks, and some as construction workers. All of them can form cooperatives. What will be the purpose of these cooperatives? These cooperative societies, if they expand and form hubs, could start developing their services or products that can be sold with better terms and conditions. For example, **if in a village in Bihar several tailors come together to form a cooperative society of tailoring, they could attract contracts from garment manufacturers in Bihar and also elsewhere. There are many government agencies that have been mandated to help build cooperative societies.** There are also cooperative banks to help such societies. With large national institutions enabling such cooperative societies, groups of migrant workers can find institutional strength. Another possibility for those whose skills or products does not have enough marketing in a local area is to re-enter the city as labour cooperatives, or even unions, with demands that they get housing and other support systems that help them have a decent living, not only a wage. Many workers are engaged in seasonal work in cities. With the marriage season requiring many special services, for example, it is customary for such workers to provide their services and return to their villages. They too could get together to form service cooperatives. NGOs and cooperative federations, agencies such as the National Cooperative Union of India, and labour unions can intervene, especially since many workers have said they do not have work in the village but they also do not want to move elsewhere. The AMUL project is a model of one kind, but there are other, lesser-known models which are not as sophisticated and fair in terms of wages and other terms as AMUL but still offer ideas for today. India has examples of putting-out work in several industries. I once found that the parts of dry iron boxes were being produced by a group of women from their homes. It was a deeply exploitative system where the women on contractual work had poor salaries and no benefits. Cooperatives, on the other hand, can get the same process done without the middleman. MGNREGA has been offered as a way of alleviating migrant workers' distress but this is not only a short term but also vulnerable wage-earning occupation. Sites cannot be opened during the monsoon season. Also, at any given area, there may not be enough sites to engage many people. So, another possibility is to give MGNREGA better shape so that MGNREGA funds can be used to enable women or artisans to market their products.

### A Pyramid of Group Economic Activity

This is a valuable opportunity for the state to build new kinds of economic structures in India, a pyramid of group economic activity going from the rural areas through collective marketing to fill the demand from the cities. What has been lacking so far in this dispersed production model is lack of concern for the fair treatment of the workers. In Mangaluru, a beedi worker said beedis are rolled by women in their own homes. The leaf, the thread and the tobacco are given to them by middlemen. The woman said she takes back packets of 1,000 rolled bidis and is paid for them. But she would be denied wages if she didn't submit to the sexual demands of the contractor. This said, beedi workers have been unionised in many areas now, so dispersed production can be a way forward. Successful unionisation of workers can protect them from exploitation. It is possible to have dispersed production, home-based or small-unit based, to start a supply chain to markets, whether local markets or capital city markets or export markets. This is an opportunity to rebuild economic production through different institutional arrangements. Arrangements that can provide an optimal solution to the workers as well as contribute to the GDP must be made. It will



also rebuild an India where cities are not congested and where the standard of living in rural areas will improve.

## Business & Economics

### Why Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Should Not Make India Turn Away from International Trade

- In his book, Economics: A user's guide, Ha-Joon Chang starts the chapter on international trade by narrating the story of Qianlong, the Chinese emperor, who, in 1792, rejected the request of George III, the British king, to allow more open trade between the two countries. Britain had run up a huge trade deficit, thanks largely to its new-found taste of tea. The British monarch had hoped that if China allowed trade at more ports – instead of just one (Canton or Guangzhou) – British goods could be sold all across China and thus plug some of the trade deficit. The point of the story wasn't that Qianlong rejected but the reason he gave for his summary dismissal of the British proposal. "He reminded the British king that China had allowed the European nations to trade in Canton only as a 'signal mark of favour', as tea, silk and porcelain, which the Celestial Empire produces, are absolute necessities to European nations. Qianlong declared that 'our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its own borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce'." Call it self-sufficiency or self-reliance, few statements capture the notion better. Chang points out that given the development of international trade as an academic discipline at that time, it made sense for Qianlong to turn away from trade because China seemed to enjoy "absolute advantage" over other countries. But later refinements in the discipline – Theory of Comparative Advantage – showed even such a country, which enjoys self-sufficiency, should trade as it would be beneficial. Why? Because there are certain things a country can do much better than others. **If it focusses on doing more of what it does better – by taking away resources from doing what it does less efficiently – it improves its wellbeing.** This episode underscores the importance of trade even for those countries that think they have achieved self-sufficiency. For those who are not self-sufficient, trade is an absolute must. Again, look at China. Till about 1990, India and China had roughly the same annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, India's per capita GDP was higher because its population was much smaller than China's. **But in the last three decades, China's economy has grown rapidly and leapfrogged over most other countries like the United Kingdom. In the process, today, it is roughly 4 to 5 times India's size. In another few years, it is set to topple the US to become the world's largest economy. What has all this got to do with India, you may ask. There were several reasons for China's rise but the central factor was its intent and ability to use international trade to boost domestic growth, raise incomes and reduce poverty. Its share in global exports and imports rose from barely over 1% in the early 1980s to over 13% and 11%, respectively, in 2018 – far in excess of any European country, and equalling the US. By contrast, India's trade performance has been a non-starter. For instance, India's share of global merchandise exports was higher a year after Independence (2.2% in 1948) than 70 years later (1.7% in 2018). Why did India turn away from trade after Independence when many other Asian cousins were doing the exact opposite? The answer was economic nationalism, which, in turn, was a reaction to**



the colonial regime's free trade policy. "Self-reliance under economic nationalism was narrowly interpreted as self-sufficiency and founded in a deep-rooted suspicion of international trade...", state Suresh Tendulkar and T A Bhavani in their book Understanding Reforms. Coupled with socialism – also rooted in the **colonial era leadership's misgivings about private enterprise** – economic nationalism held back India's growth potential for several decades. Since his address to the nation on May 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly talked about his "new" vision for India: Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan or Self-reliant India Mission. However, the absence of any concrete policy steps on how the government intends to achieve this goal has given rise to several apprehensions. Is this a definite move towards Swadeshi – the long-standing demand of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ruling party's ideological parent? Over the past few years, India has been taking an increasingly protectionist stance as evidenced by higher tariffs. The most alarming episode was when it decided to opt-out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November last year fearing Indian markets will be flooded with all manners of imported goods – from Chinese steel to New Zealand's milk. There are other worries. Last week many Indians "celebrated" our forex reserves crossing the \$500 million mark, thanks in part to higher foreign inflows – both, portfolio and direct. **Over the past six years, PM Modi has assiduously worked towards convincing international brands to come to India and invest. But openly suggesting that Indians choose the Indian alternative does not sit well with that invitation. Moreover, at least in the short term, any move towards self-reliance will come at the cost of consumers, who will have to either pay more for an Indian alternative or make do with a less efficient Indian alternative instead of enjoying the best product at the cheapest prices possible.** In that sense, as things stand, this policy, like many in India's long past, **simply robs the consumers to pay the producers, who tend to be better at lobbying for their interests.** Further, in trying to assuage apprehensions, the government has stated that this move is not intended to take India back to "command and control" economy but to go towards "plug and play". Regardless of what exactly a "plug and play" economy is, the "command and control" bit should not be conflated with the desire to participate in international trade. China is a great example of a command and control economy that uses trade as a springboard for growth. **Coming back to the notion of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. As much as these are desirable goals, in the modern economy, they are often either not achievable or achievable in a counter-productive manner.** Let me leave you with one provocative example. India is very proud of its self-sufficiency in food grains. But do you know that when it comes to fertilisers, which is arguably the most important input towards achieving self-sufficiency in food grains, India is not self-sufficient? This is true for all the main fertilisers – N (Nitrogen or Urea), P (Phosphorus) and K (Potassium). Worse, in all likelihood, India would never be. Why? Feedstock, typically natural gas, accounts for around 75%-80% of fertiliser production cost. Like with all our energy needs, Indian firms import large quantities of natural gas – often at double or triple the domestic price. At present, India imports two-thirds of its requirement for fertilisers. But diverting all domestic natural gas to fertilisers would come at the cost of power generation, CNG etc. In the weeks and months ahead, we hope to see concrete policy steps towards achieving the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat because without them, it will repeat the tepid track record of the Make in India initiative. **And let's hope future policy steps under this rubric do not set back India's economic growth the way the first wave of economic nationalism did immediately after Independence.**



## Behind the Curve

→ Meeting for the second time since the pandemic took hold in the country, the GST Council, last Friday, decided to relax late fees and interest payable for those taxpayers failing to file returns on time. For businesses with no tax liabilities under the indirect tax regime, the late fees were completely waived. This is in line with similar relaxations announced by the Centre in March, before the lockdown was declared, to ease compliance deadline worries of small businesses in particular. Since the full lockdown lasted longer than initially envisaged, and only began to unwind this month, the forbearance on offer was a necessary step. But given the extent of economic damage as well as the States' fiscal positions in the period between these two meetings of the Council, its decisions are far from sufficient. In March, GST collections had slipped to ₹97,597 crore after surpassing the ₹1-lakh crore mark over the previous four months, and the numbers for April and May will not be known before July. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has told State representatives in the Council that just 45% of the indirect tax target had been met in the past two months. Although aware of the dwindling tax kitty during the lockdown, States have had their hands full managing the pandemic.

It is for this reason that several States have been urging the Centre to extend emergency fiscal support and release past GST compensation dues enshrined in the pact that allowed the new tax regime to take off three years ago. In its stimulus package, in May, the Centre enhanced States' power to borrow, but only part of that was completely unconditional, and a large chunk was contingent on States undertaking specified reforms. These reforms may be long-pursued ideals, but whether this is the right time for prioritising them has been questioned. **GST compensation (for revenue shortfalls in the first five years of GST) due to States for December 2019 to February 2020 was only released on June 4. Perhaps, it was timed to pre-empt discontent in the Council's meeting.** Yet, Centre-State ties could turn more fractious, especially in the GST Council where things have usually evolved with consensus so far – thanks to the failure to finalise the way forward for paying States the compensation. **One of the ideas on the table, officially discussed for around two months, is to raise loans against future GST cess accruals in order to recompense States.** Any decision on this front, along with proposed GST rate rationalisations in the textiles, footwear and fertilizers sectors that were on the Council's agenda, can now only be expected at a special meet in July. Procrastination is not an appropriate response at this arc of the curve – be it the pandemic or the economy.

## Household Savings Going Up Might Not Be Good News

→ Net financial assets of Indian households rose to 7.7 per cent of the GDP in FY'20. Though it may appear to be a positive development, a closer look at the numbers suggest that it is on account of decline in bank borrowings by households which in turn is a reflection of slowdown in the economy and weaker sentiments.

### What Are Net Financial Assets?

Net financial asset is the difference between gross financial assets (deposits and investments) fewer financial liabilities (borrowings). RBI data shows that in the year ended March 2020, the net financial assets jumped from ₹13.73 lakh crore in FY'19 (7.2 % of GDP) to ₹15.62 lakh crore (7.7% of the GDP) last year. While the gross financial assets (GFA) rose marginally ₹21.23 lakh crore in FY'19 to ₹21.63 lakh crore last year, the financial liabilities (FL) witnessed a sharp decline from ₹7.5 lakh crore to 6.01 lakh crore, thereby





contributing to the rise in net financial assets. In terms of percentage of GDP, the GFA declined from 11.1 per cent to 10.6 per cent and the financial liabilities fell deeper from 3.9 per cent of GDP to 2.9 per cent in FY'20.

### What Does Decline in Financial Liabilities Mean?

According to RBI, a significant decline in the share of borrowings from the banking sector in total liabilities during 2019-20 reflected the **economic slowdown** and **risk aversion of banks**. Economists say that since there is an economic slowdown and income levels of individuals are either going down or not increasing, the financial sector will practice higher caution in extending loan and that is what is leading to a decline in financial liabilities of households. It is reflective of a slowdown in the economy.

### Are Households Saving More?

In terms of percentage of GDP, the GFA declined from 11.1 per cent to 10.6 per cent. In value terms it has increased marginally from ₹21.23 lakh crore in FY'19 to ₹21.63 lakh crore last year. While overall savings have not grown in proportion, a closer look at the data shows that there has been shift in preference of deposit instruments by individuals over the last few years. While household savings in bank deposits as a per cent of GDP stood at 3.8 per cent in year ended March 2019, it decline to 3.4 per cent in March 2020 as banks reduced their interest rates following sharp cut in repo rate by the Reserve bank of India over the last 18-months. A repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends to commercial banks. Between January 2019 and March 2020, RBI cut the repo rate by 210 basis points from 6.5 per cent to 4.4 per cent. In May, the reduced it further to 4 per cent. Small saving instruments that continued to offer higher rates than bank deposits witnessed a higher deployment of household savings as their share as per cent of GDP increased from 1.1 per cent to 1.3 per cent in the same period. Savings into life insurance funds and mutual funds as a per cent of GDP also declined from 2.2 per cent in FY'19 to 1.9 per cent in FY'20. The percentage of household assets in the form of currency also declined from 1.5 per cent to 1.4 per cent in the same period. **However, since lockdown announcement in march 2020, there has been a sharp rise in currency with the public.** RBI data shows that the current with public increased from ₹23.41 lakh crore on March 27, 2020 to Rs 25.12 lakh crore in the week ended May 22, 2020.

### Is Household Savings Expected to Rise?

RBI article "Quarterly Estimates of Households' Financial Assets and Liabilities" says several studies show households tend to save more during a slowdown and income uncertainty. **RBI expects a spike in savings in current times of slowdown and income uncertainty.** The report said, "Going forward, a spike in net financial assets of households is likely in the first quarter of 2020-21 on account of a sharp drop in lockdown induced consumption. Lags in the pickup of economic activity may cause the financial surplus of households to taper off in subsequent quarters. With construction activity at a standstill, there is a possibility of a shift by households from physical to financial assets." The report further noted that while household sector is the most sustainable and self-reliant source of financing for the Indian economy, "Its role is likely to become critical in the context of the policy effort gathering critical mass to lift the Indian economy from the vice-like grip of a slowdown and, more recently the life-threatening COVID-19 pandemic."



## India's First Gas Exchange: What It Is, And How It Will Work

- India's first gas exchange – the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) – was launched recently. The exchange is expected to facilitate transparent price discovery in natural gas, and facilitate the growth of the share of natural gas in India's energy basket.

### How Will This Exchange Work?

The IGX is a digital trading platform that will allow buyers and sellers of natural gas to trade both in the spot market and in the forward market for imported natural gas across three hubs – Dahej and Hazira in Gujarat, and Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh. Imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) will be regasified and sold to buyers through the exchange, removing the requirement for buyers and sellers to find each other. "This will mean that buyers do not have to contact multiple dealers to ensure they find a fair price," Rajesh Kumar Mediratta, director of IGX, said. The exchange also allows much shorter contracts – for delivery on the next day, and up to a month – while ordinarily contracts for natural gas supply are as long as six months to a year. This, experts say, will allow buyers and sellers greater flexibility.

### Will Domestically Produced Natural Gas Also Be Bought and Sold on The Exchange?

No. The price of domestically produced natural gas is decided by the government. It will not be sold on the gas exchange. However, following appeals by domestic producers that the prices set by the government are not viable given the cost of exploration and production in India, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has indicated that a new gas policy will include reforms in domestic gas pricing, and will move towards more market-oriented pricing. IGX officials said that a highly liquid gas exchange, which prices gas fairly may lead to the government stepping away from pricing domestically produced gas.

### Will This Make India More Import Dependent?

Domestic production of gas has been falling over the past two fiscals as current sources of natural gas have become less productive. Domestically produced natural gas currently accounts for less than half the country's natural gas consumption; imported LNG accounts for the other half. LNG imports are set to become a larger proportion of domestic gas consumption as India moves to increase the proportion of natural gas in the energy basket from 6.2% in 2018 to 15% by 2030.

### What Regulatory Change Is Required?

Currently, the pipeline infrastructure necessary for the transportation of natural gas is controlled by the companies that own the network. State-owned GAIL owns and operates India's largest gas pipeline network, spanning over 12,000 km. Mediratta of IGX said an independent system operator for natural gas pipelines would help ensure transparent allocation of pipeline usage, and build confidence in the minds of buyers and sellers about neutrality in the allocation of pipeline capacity. Experts have also called for natural gas to be included in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime to avoid buyers having to deal with different levies such as VAT across states, when purchasing natural gas from the exchange.



## Why India Is Trying to Boost Its Oil Refining Capacity

- India is set to double its refining capacity for crude oil to 450-500 million tonnes per annum by 2030 said Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday. The minister said the construction of a new refinery in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra with a refining capacity of 60 million tonnes per annum is set to start soon.

### Why Is This Boost in Capacity Needed?

India's current refining capacity of 249.9 million tonnes per annum exceeds domestic consumption of petroleum products which was 213.7 million tonnes in the previous fiscal. However, India's consumption of petroleum products is likely to rise to 335 million tonnes per annum by 2030 and to 472 million tonnes by 2040 according to government estimates. India needs to boost refining capacity to meet growing demand.

### How Will This Be Achieved?

Pradhan said the expansion in refining capacity will come from both **brownfield and greenfield projects**. The new refinery project in Ratnagiri is one of the key projects in the planned expansion and has received investment from Saudi Arabia and the UAE's national oil companies – Saudi Aramco and ADNOC respectively – which together own 50 per cent of the project while the remaining 50 per cent is owned by Indian PSUs, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd., Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. Other key projects include a joint venture between HPCL and the Rajasthan government for a new refinery in Barmer Rajasthan with a refining capacity of 9 million tonnes per annum as well as the major expansion projects in existing refineries in Panipat, Paradip and Koyali.

### What Are Some of The Roadblocks in Achieving This?

Experts said many of the projects by the state-run oil refiners have been severely delayed in the past because of issues in acquiring the required land as well as in obtaining environmental clearances. IOCL's Paradip refinery was initially expected to begin operations in 2012 but was only able to start operations in 2015 because it faced land acquisition and environmental clearance issues.

## Fleecing Fuel Users

- In just 12 straight days, India's state-owned oil marketing companies have raised the retail prices of petrol and diesel by ₹6.55 and ₹7.04 a litre, respectively. A consumer in Delhi would have ended up spending about 9% more on petrol at an Indian Oil Corporation fuel pump on Thursday while those driving diesel vehicles would have found their fuel costs had risen by a little more than 10%. Over the same period, the price of Brent crude oil futures, which contributes a fourth to the value of the Indian crude basket, declined by about 3%. If one drills down to the price build-up data shared by IOC, petrol's freight inclusive base price as on June 16 in Delhi was ₹22.44, a significant 23% higher than the ₹18.28 before the refiners embarked on their latest round of price increases. It is disconcerting that between the OMCs, which had frozen their daily resetting of prices for almost 12 weeks following a reduction on March 16, and the Central and State governments, automobile fuels have been targeted for milking revenue. **The build-up data shows that Excise Duty, levied by the Centre, and VAT collected by the Delhi government together constituted two-thirds the ₹76.73 pump price of petrol as on June 16.**



On the face of it, the OMCs' decision to resume daily price resetting would appear to be in broad conformity with the pricing deregulation that the Centre has intermittently committed to ever since the government of the day freed up petrol prices in 2010. However, the timing of the recent moves to raise levies and retail prices by the governments and fuel marketers, respectively, is at odds with logic at a point when the country is grappling with the impact of a pandemic. The aim of maximising takings from fuel products to offset shortfalls in other revenue streams can only bear fruit if petrol and diesel offtake remains unaffected and the rising fuel bill doesn't end up depleting household consumption budgets. With public transportation yet to restart fully in most urban areas and operating with tight restrictions and at lower frequencies even where some services have resumed, most commuters continue to have little choice but to use personal vehicles. Also, with the lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 having severely hit business activity at all levels, the onus is on the governments – both at the Centre and in the States – to facilitate the resumption of economic activity in every manner possible. Given that diesel is the primary fuel for the vast and essential road freight sector, every incremental addition to haulage costs ends up dampening both the transport industry and wider economic revival. It is imperative that authorities remove the speed breakers on the path back to normalcy.

### Of Gods and Governments (Ram Singh - Professor, Delhi School Of Economics, And Utkarsh Leo - Assistant Professor, NALSAR University Of Law)

- The COVID-19 pandemic is unleashing a flurry of contractual disputes. Due to the lockdowns, a large number of companies and individually owned enterprises find their contractual obligations impossible to meet or economically ruinous, especially in the aviation, automobile, construction, hospitality and entertainment, retail, and insurance sectors. Consequently, they have refused the promised employment and suspended supplies of goods or services, triggering legal claims of compensation from the counterparties.

#### Reducing Scope of Dispute

Many parties have invoked COVID-19 as **force majeure (FM)** – **an event that is beyond the control of the parties and renders contractual performance impossible**. Most contracts contain a FM clause to catalogue events like wars, riots or strikes in which the parties would prefer to terminate the contract or put it on hold. **Acts of the government (such as lockdowns) and acts of god (such as floods, cyclones) are typically listed under a FM clause**. This provision reduces the scope of dispute between parties in case a FM event occurs. Plus, it helps them allocate contract risks efficiently. The problem is, many a times the clause contains ambiguous and catch-all phrases like, **'events including but not limited to the ones listed herein'**. **Such ambiguities are being exploited by many contracting parties**. They are seeking termination or suspension of business deals by claiming that COVID-19 is a FM event. Moreover, ambivalent statements by government agencies regarding the pandemic have added to the confusion. How the courts and the regulators adjudicate contractual disputes will determine the distribution of losses among the disputants and, more importantly, the quantum of economic cost of the pandemic. Delayed or ambiguous rulings will aggravate the economic costs of the disease by disrupting supply chains beyond the lockdown period. By contrast, clear and consistent judgments will discourage opportunistic behaviour and encourage pre-trial negotiations thereby





avoiding unnecessary litigation and attendant social costs. Issues of individual welfare are better addressed through public policy and not court rulings. As to the status of COVID-19 or the lockdowns as FM, courts should interpret ambiguous or catch-all terms on the principle of **ejusdem generis** – ‘when general words follow an enumeration of things, they apply to things of the same general kind specifically mentioned.’ COVID-19 is not FM per se. **It is the lockdowns, not the virus, that has made it impossible for the airlines, hotels and caterers to deliver as promised and contractors to complete projects on schedule.** Under such contexts, it is justified to use the lockdowns as FM for non-performance or delayed performance, as the case may be. In other contexts, however, the clause has been used for dubious reasons. **Discoms have invoked it under power purchase agreements. They have withheld monthly payments and have asked some power producers to stop the project.** True, due to lockdown of industries and commercial establishments the demand for electricity has fallen. However, the virus and the lockdowns have not affected the generation-capacity of power producers, nor have they rendered it impossible for Discoms to off-take electricity, an essential service. In any case, a reduced demand or the agreement becoming commercially onerous does not qualify as a FM event. **If the contract does not have a FM clause, parties can seek termination of the contract on grounds of frustration.** Section 56 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, along with its interpretations by the Supreme Court (Satyabrata Ghose v. Mugneeram Bangur) renders a contract void **if a subsequent event makes performance impossible or useless for one or the other party.** Accordingly, claims by wedding caterers regarding frustration of contract can hold ground for events that were pre-scheduled but could not take place during the lockdown.

### Lockdown As Force Majeure

A justifiable use of COVID-19-induced lockdown as FM or an event causing frustration of contract is subject to context and facts. In Standard Retail Pvt. Ltd. v G.S Global Corp. & Ors. (2020), the Bombay High Court rejected the claims of the petitioner, who argued that the lockdowns had led to frustration of his contract for supply of steel by the respondent G.S Global Corp. The Court aptly observed that the lockdowns did not apply to the steel sector, an essential item as per the government notification. Moreover, the relief under FM was applicable only to the seller (if supply became impossible). But the seller had already dispatched the supplies. Moreover, restitution goes hand-in-hand with the use of FM and frustration of purpose to terminate the contract. A seller seeking to terminate the contract should return the payment received for the yet-to-be-fulfilled part of the promise. This principle has been grossly violated by the airlines. Thousands of prior bookings had to be cancelled due to ban of flights during the lockdown (a FM event in this case). What is troublesome is that rather than refunding the cancelled tickets, airlines have sought to convert them into credit shells usable only for buying future tickets from the same carrier. This is an opportunistic move. Riskiness of returns is an integral part of most business and commercial activities. The Supreme Court in *Naihati Jute Mills Ltd v. Hyaliram Jagannath* (1967) held that a contractual obligation becoming economically arduous is not a ground for absolving a party of its commitment. Therefore, OYO's decision to suspend payments to client hotels citing commercial unprofitability is not a ground for frustration of contract. Similarly, the demands of multiplexes, retailers and restaurants are untenable. They are seeking rental waivers from premise owners citing the lockdowns as FM. Government notifications declaring COVID-19 as FM has encouraged such demands. Lease agreements typically allow rental waivers only if a FM event causes physical damage to the property rendering it unfit for commercial use. This is not the case with COVID-19. Besides, lessee cannot claim frustration of contracts as the lockdowns and



concomitant losses are temporary. Insurance contracts are intricate. Property insurance claims require physical damage to the property. As the lockdown has caused no physical harm, claims for loss of business income are not tenable. Moreover, courts should realise that the losses on account of the lockdown are quite different from those meant to be covered by individual policies. **Business losses caused by epidemics and lockdowns tend to be numerous and highly correlated. That is why standard insurance policies do not allow compensation for such losses. Allowing a single claim will set a precedent for all, potentially bankrupting the insurance industry. Courts and regulators should encourage litigants to go for negotiations or mediation to settle disputes. In most cases, a middle ground exists within the contract letter.**

### For Better Conditions of Work (Devaki Jain - Delhi-Based Economist)

- After a stressful lockdown period, thousands of migrant workers have returned to their villages. Many have said they wish to stay there. They no longer yearn to go back to their work in the cities. This is understandable given their terrible living conditions in the cities and the shocking treatment meted out to them during the lockdown period. This is an opportunity for those working to provide workers security, those involved in the cooperative movement, those trying to improve the living conditions in rural India, and those working in the area of skill development to reach out to, and enable, the migrant workers to fulfil their desire of staying at home.

#### Forming Cooperative Societies

Back home, the migrants can form cooperative societies. So can MGNREGA workers. Many migrant workers said they worked as tailors in the cities, many as plumbers, some as cooks, and some as construction workers. All of them can form cooperatives. What will be the purpose of these cooperatives? These cooperative societies, if they expand and form hubs, could start developing their services or products that can be sold with better terms and conditions. For example, **if in a village in Bihar several tailors come together to form a cooperative society of tailoring, they could attract contracts from garment manufacturers in Bihar and also elsewhere. There are many government agencies that have been mandated to help build cooperative societies.** There are also cooperative banks to help such societies. With large national institutions enabling such cooperative societies, groups of migrant workers can find institutional strength. Another possibility for those whose skills or products does not have enough marketing in a local area is to re-enter the city as labour cooperatives, or even unions, with demands that they get housing and other support systems that help them have a decent living, not only a wage. Many workers are engaged in seasonal work in cities. With the marriage season requiring many special services, for example, it is customary for such workers to provide their services and return to their villages. They too could get together to form service cooperatives. NGOs and cooperative federations, agencies such as the National Cooperative Union of India, and labour unions can intervene, especially since many workers have said they do not have work in the village but they also do not want to move elsewhere. The AMUL project is a model of one kind, but there are other, lesser-known models which are not as sophisticated and fair in terms of wages and other terms as AMUL but still offer ideas for today. India has examples of putting-out work in several industries. I once found that the parts of dry iron boxes were being produced by a group of women from their homes. It was a deeply exploitative system where the women on contractual work had poor salaries and no benefits. Cooperatives, on the other hand, can get the same process done without the



middleman. MGNREGA has been offered as a way of alleviating migrant workers' distress but this is not only a short term but also vulnerable wage-earning occupation. Sites cannot be opened during the monsoon season. Also, at any given area, there may not be enough sites to engage many people. So, another possibility is to give MGNREGA better shape so that MGNREGA funds can be used to enable women or artisans to market their products.

### A Pyramid of Group Economic Activity

This is a valuable opportunity for the state to build new kinds of economic structures in India, a pyramid of group economic activity going from the rural areas through collective marketing to fill the demand from the cities. What has been lacking so far in this dispersed production model is lack of concern for the fair treatment of the workers. In Mangaluru, a beedi worker said beedis are rolled by women in their own homes. The leaf, the thread and the tobacco are given to them by middlemen. The woman said she takes back packets of 1,000 rolled bidis and is paid for them. But she would be denied wages if she didn't submit to the sexual demands of the contractor. This said, beedi workers have been unionised in many areas now, so dispersed production can be a way forward. Successful unionisation of workers can protect them from exploitation. It is possible to have dispersed production, home-based or small-unit based, to start a supply chain to markets, whether local markets or capital city markets or export markets. This is an opportunity to rebuild economic production through different institutional arrangements. Arrangements that can provide an optimal solution to the workers as well as contribute to the GDP must be made. It will also rebuild an India where cities are not congested and where the standard of living in rural areas will improve.

Life & Science

### China Publishes Virus Genome Data

- China has released genome sequencing data for the coronavirus responsible for a recent outbreak in Beijing, with officials saying, **it identified a European strain**. China, which had been under pressure to make the data public sooner rather than later as COVID-19 cases mount in the country's capital, said it had also submitted the data to the World Health Organization (WHO). In the latest Beijing outbreak, the WHO said it had been informed by the Chinese of ongoing investigations into the source of the cluster and the extent of the infections.

### 'Origins in Europe'

The genome sequencing was published, and had also been shared with the WHO and the Global Influenza Data Initiative (GISAID). Details published on China's National Microbiology Data Center website revealed the Beijing genome data was based on three samples – two human and one environmental – collected on June 11. "According to preliminary genomic and epidemiological study results, the virus is from Europe, but it is different from the virus currently spreading in Europe," CDC official Zhang Yong was cited as saying in an article published by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. "It's older than the virus currently spreading in Europe."



## WHO, on the Virus

### → Do Genes Have A Role in Determining the Degree of Sickness?

This is still an open question and researchers across the world are comparing the genes of those with the disease and trying to find correlations with the severity of illness. Being a novel coronavirus, by definition, a large population is susceptible and no natural immunity prevails anywhere. Genetic factors are known to play a role in severe malaria. Chronic health conditions such as diabetes and hypertension increase susceptibility to severe COVID-19 disease. **A recent study, that is still being peer reviewed, associated severe respiratory failure to genes that determine blood type. Blood type A was found to be more susceptible to respiratory disease than O.** There were also other genes found that influenced how the immune system responded to the virus. **A lot of focus in collaborative human genome studies is on understanding the role of certain genes in the Human Leukocyte Antigen complex, which is an important part of the immune system.** The virus, as it is now understood, is able to spread easily because of a mutation in its spike protein; this helps it to lodge itself better in the lung cells. It is the variation in the HLA across populations that can reveal immune response. But there is no genetic link yet on why some people are asymptomatic.

## Why an Expert Suggests Wearing A Three-Ply Surgical Mask in The Monsoon

→ Ever since health experts and agencies around the world started to stress the wearing of masks – or “face coverings” – as one of the best ways to restrict the spread of the novel coronavirus infection, the question has been asked: what kind of mask is the best? While research remains ongoing, most experts agree that N95 respirators provide the best protection against Covid-19; however, these masks are meant mostly for specialised use, and are expensive and uncomfortable to wear for long. Health authorities in many countries including India have recommended simple home-made face coverings made of cloth, preferably cotton, which can be tied or fastened over the nose and mouth. However, with the monsoon having set in over some parts of India, and set to proceed northward and westward over the next few weeks, three-ply surgical masks present an advantage. Material scientist Dr Arnab Bhattacharya of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai, underlined that these masks have an exterior that does not get wet during the monsoon. “Most of these masks have a hydrophobic exterior. You can check whether your mask has this hydrophobic layer by placing a drop of water on it, and if the mask is water resistant, the droplet will roll off,” Prof Bhattacharya said. **It is important to wear the mask correctly – the side of the mask that is lighter in colour is meant to be inside, while the darker side, which is hydrophobic, should be worn outside.** Since the inside is not water resistant, if the mask does get wet inside, it is best to change it, and to leave it to dry before you use it again. However, if the mask gets completely drenched, you should discard it, as **the efficacy of all masks reduces considerably if they get wet.** As for essential service providers, wearing a face shield is an ideal and comfortable alternative. The essential service provider can wear a mask underneath the shield, which will remain dry due to the protection provided by the face shield.

## How India Tests for Covid-19

→ The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recently approved ELISA test kits for Covid-19 developed by two companies. These were the first ELISA test kits approved other than





those that use the ICMR's own technology, and add to the basket of choices for testing for Covid-19. A look at these choices:

### ELISA

Developed in 1974, ELISA stands for **enzyme-linked immuno-sorbent assay**. It detects whether a person's immune system has produced antibodies against a particular infection – such as HIV. The test is called “enzyme-linked” because **it uses enzymes to detect presence of antibodies in a blood sample**. An ELISA test is of two types depending on the antibodies tested for – **immunoglobulin G (IgG) and immunoglobulin M (IgM)**. “IgG detects antibodies developed in later stage of infection, and IgM detects antibodies produced in early stages of infection,” said Dr Sujata Baveja, microbiologist with Sion Hospital. Currently only IgG testing kits have been approved in India. **In India, the ELISA test for Covid-19 is only approved for serosurveys— which estimate the proportion of the population exposed to infection— and for surveys in high-risk areas and segments like containment zones, immunocompromised individuals, and frontline and health workers.** “Depending upon the level of seroprevalence of infection, matching public health interventions can be implemented for prevention and control of the disease,” the ICMR says. In May, **ICMR designed a Covid Kavach ELISA IgG test** through the National Institute of Virology in Pune. Seven companies are manufacturing kits using this technology in India – Zydus Cadila, Meril Diagnostics, Voxturn Bio, Trivitron Healthcare, J Mitra & Co, Karwa Enterprise, and Avecon Healthcare. Earlier this month, **ICMR approved ELISA kits for Covid-19 testing designed by Transasia Bio Medicals (based in Mumbai) and Euroimmun US Inc.**

### RT-PCR

**While ELISA is expected to be relatively inexpensive and is fast, its use is limited to making population-based estimates that can inform policy decisions.** For individual diagnosis and treatment of Covid-19, the test used worldwide is RT-PCR (reverse-polymerase chain reaction). Earlier it was also used for Ebola and Zika diagnosis. **In India, RT-PCR remains the final confirmatory test for Covid-19.** Until May end, the ICMR had capped the cost of a test at ₹4,500 for private laboratories, but has since removed the cap for private labs, allowing states to fix their own prices. ICMR has evaluated 97 kits of various manufacturers for RT-PCR testing, of which 40 have so far been approved. **Apart from nasal or oral swab, another option for RT-PCR is the bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) method, which a bronchoscope is passed to obtain fluid from lungs or sputum. Sputum or BAL has a higher viral load, so there is a higher chance of virus detection than nasal or oral swab.**

### Rapid Antibody Test

This, too, looks for antibodies in the blood, takes hardly 20-30 minutes, and is the cheapest. But a rapid test involves a high risk of false results – it may detect antibodies against of some other infection and show that the sample is positive for Covid-19. Hence this test is only used for population surveys. If a person tests positive through a rapid test, he has to undergo a confirmatory RT-PCR test before treatment. **ELISA is more accurate than a rapid test.** Rapid antibody test involves taking a blood sample from the finger and putting it in a testing template. It cost ₹600. Plasma or serum can also be used to test instead of blood. The ICMR has evaluated 46 rapid testing kits, and approved 14 so far. Eleven of the manufacturers are based in India. According to ICMR, a person may test positive for antibodies 7-10 days after contracting Covid-19 infection and may continue to show positive results for several weeks. While a positive result indicates the person has been exposed to the coronavirus, a negative result may not entirely rule out Covid-19. “Rapid



test kits are useful for giving results within 30 mins but the results are not 100% reliable as they can give false positive results. Though the antibody tests on ELISA... take a little more time than rapid tests to give results, they have better specificities as the reagent formulation is different... Hence these are more reliable in diagnosis than rapid tests. Probably this is the reason ICMR has not yet approved use of rapid tests in diagnosis yet," said Dr K Krishnan, Technical Expert, Ortho Clinical Diagnostics, which recently got ICMR approval.

### TrueNat

This is a privately designed test that works on the same principle as RT-PCR, but with a smaller kit and with faster results. TrueNat, designed by MolBio Diagnostics Pvt Ltd, Goa, is commonly used for tuberculosis and HIV testing. Recently, the ICMR approved TrueNat for screening and confirmation for Covid-19. If a sample test negative, it has to be treated as negative; if it tests positive, a second test called RdRp gene confirmatory assay has to be performed. The TrueNat machine is small and portable, mostly running on batteries, and provides result within 60 minutes. It involves taking nasal or oral swabs. Across India there are over 800 machines to test for TB; hence the government will not have to invest further in machines.

### When to Use Which

To understand which test to use, the purpose has to be defined. A person may test positive in these tests at different point of time during an infection. After the person is exposed, the viral load may be high in the respiratory tract within a few days, and an RT-PCR or TrueNat test may return positive. But if the person has not developed antibodies, both a rapid test and ELISA will return negative. In a few days, say over a week later, antibodies start getting produced, at which point RT-PCR may show negative but ELISA and Rapid will show positive. To diagnose and treat, doctors rely on RT-PCR, which implies active infection. Once confirmed the person has to be isolated, and treated if symptoms emerge. A positive result from ELISA or rapid antibody test may not mean the person needs isolation or is infectious; it may simply mean the person was exposed to the virus and has developed antibodies. These two tests, being cheaper than RT-PCR, are employed in large-scale population surveys. According to Dr Archana Patil, Additional Director in the Directorate of Health Services, Maharashtra, rapid or ELISA tests are tools that only show how widespread the infection is.

### Can A COVID-19 Vaccine Be Developed Soon?

- According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, the general stages of the development cycle of a vaccine are: exploratory stage, pre-clinical stage, clinical development, regulatory review and approval, manufacturing and quality control. If vaccine candidates do make it to the third stage, clinical development is a three-phase process. It says: "During Phase I, small groups of people receive the trial vaccine. In Phase II, the clinical study is expanded and vaccine is given to people who have characteristics (such as age and physical health) similar to those for whom the new vaccine is intended. In Phase III, the vaccine is given to thousands of people and tested for efficacy and safety." If a vaccine is approved by a licensing agency, then it can move into the manufacturing stage, but constant monitoring of the process and quality control measures must be put in place. Vaccine production should comply with the current Good Manufacturing Practice standards to ensure constant quality and safety of vaccine.



### What Is the Status of A SARS-COV-2 Vaccine?

To start with, the primary advantage with SARS-CoV-2 was that it was identified in record time, and its genomic sequence was made globally available by January. Amanat and Krammer say: "In addition, we know from studies on SARS-CoV-1 and the related MERS-CoV vaccines that the **S protein on the surface of the virus is an ideal target for a vaccine...** The structure of the S protein of SARS-CoV-2 was solved in record time at high resolution, contributing to our understanding of this vaccine target. Therefore, we have a target antigen that can be incorporated into advanced vaccine platforms." Thanks to this, vaccine candidates are being generated. They further explain, "This is usually followed by two important steps that are typically needed before bringing a vaccine into clinical trials. First, **the vaccine is tested in appropriate animal models to see whether it is protective.** However, animal models for SARS-CoV-2 might be difficult to develop... **Even in the absence of an animal model that replicates human disease, it is possible to evaluate the vaccine because serum from vaccinated animals can be tested in vitro neutralisation assays...** Second, **vaccines need to be tested for toxicity in animals, e.g., in rabbits.** Usually, viral challenge is not part of this process, because only the safety of the vaccine will be evaluated. This testing, which has to be performed in a manner compliant with GLP (Good Laboratory Practice), typically takes 3–6 months to complete."

In mid-May, K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Union government, said there were nearly 30 'attempts' from India to develop vaccines. The leading attempts among them are: the Pune-based Serum Institute of India tie-up with Oxford University operating with a weakened adenovirus; the Indian Council of Medical Research's collaboration with the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech to develop a vaccine based on a SARS-CoV-2 strain isolated at the National Institute of Virology, Pune. Bharat Biotech is also involved in two other vaccine development projects with different groups, according to officials. On WHO's list is also a pre-clinical evaluation effort by the Hyderabad-based Indian Immunologicals Ltd. Except for the Oxford University trial, all others are in the pre-clinical stage. The New York Times, meanwhile, has an updated status report on vaccines, as of June 12: 125-plus are in the pre-clinical stage (not yet in human trial phase), seven in the first phase (vaccines testing safety and dosage), another seven in the second phase (vaccines in expanded safety trials) and two in phase three trials (vaccines in large-scale efficacy tests). Some coronavirus vaccines are now in phase I/II trials, for example, in which they are tested for the first time on hundreds of people.

### What About Current Projections and What Happens Next?

The development of vaccines for human use takes years normally. Many additional steps are needed before these vaccine candidates that have shown promise can be used in the population, and this process might take months, if not years, indicate Amanat and Krammer. "Because no coronavirus vaccines are on the market and no large-scale manufacturing capacity for these vaccines exists as yet, we will need to build these processes and capacities. Doing this for the first time can be tedious and time-consuming." Experts say some of the other concerns for the development of an effective vaccine are the prospect of the virus mutating, and a waning of the antibody response. **It is known that infection with human coronaviruses does not always produce long-lived antibody responses, and re-infection, likely to be mild [symptoms] in a fraction of individuals, is possible after an extended period of time, the Science Direct article points out. It further adds that any effective vaccine must overcome all these issues in order to ensure protection against a virus that seems to have taken the world by surprise.** However, current projections indicate that the virus is likely to become endemic and cause recurrent



seasonal epidemics. In such a scenario, a vaccine will be the most effective tool to battle a virus the world is yet to fully understand.

## Dexamethasone – Use, Action, And What A Recovery Trial Found

- A low-cost, widely used steroid, **dexamethasone**, has become the subject of discussion after researchers from the Recovery Trial reported that it helps reduce death rates in certain Covid-19 patients.

### What Is Dexamethasone?

It is an **anti-inflammatory drug**, commonly used to treat conditions in which the body's immune system does not function properly, and causes inflammation and tissue damage. **Dexamethasone reduces the production of the chemicals that cause inflammation and also reduces the activity of the immune system by affecting the way white blood cells function.** Dexamethasone falls in a category called **corticosteroids, which closely mimic cortisol, the hormone naturally produced by the adrenal glands in humans.** It is commonly used in treatment for rheumatological inflammatory conditions: inflammations of muscles, inflammation of blood vessels, chronic arthritis, and lupus. It is used in lung diseases, kidney inflammation and eye inflammation, and to reduce swelling associated with tumours of the brain and spine. In cancer patients, it is used to treat nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy drugs.

### How Useful Is It in Covid-19 Treatment?

There is no specific proven treatment for Covid-19 yet. Patients are being administered different drugs that are approved for treating for other diseases. **During the SARS outbreak in 2003, corticosteroid therapy was used to reduce inflammatory-induced lung injury. In Covid-19, too, many countries are investigating the effectiveness of corticosteroid therapy on patients with an acute respiratory infection.** Also, the World Health Organization (WHO) has prioritised the evaluation of corticosteroids in clinical trials to assess safety and efficacy. In interim guidelines on Covid-19 treatment released on May 27, the WHO has recommended “against the routine of systematic corticosteroid” for treatment of viral pneumonia. It said a systematic review and meta-analysis of the impact of corticosteroid therapy on persons with SARS-CoV-2, SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV revealed corticosteroids did not significantly reduce the risk of death, did not reduce hospitalisation duration, ICU admission rate and/or use of mechanical ventilation, and had several adverse effects.

### So, What Has Newly Been Reported?

The Recovery Trial in the UK has an arm investigating dexamethasone. Oxford researchers this week announced the results of the dexamethasone trial, where 2,104 enrolled patients were administered 6 mg of the drug for 10 days. The drug was found to have reduced deaths by one-third in ventilated patients and by one-fifth in patients receiving only oxygen. “Based on these results, 1 (one) death would be prevented by treatment of around 8 ventilated patients, or around 25 patients requiring oxygen alone,” the university said. It said the drug was found to have reduced the 28-day mortality rate by 17 per cent, with a “highly significant” trend showing “greatest benefit” among patients requiring ventilation.

### How Significant Are These Findings?

First, the study found no evidence of benefit for patients who did not require oxygen. Peter Horby, professor of Emerging Infectious Diseases in Nuffield Department of Medicine,

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)





Oxford University, acknowledged that **survival benefit is clear and large only in patients who are sick enough to require oxygen treatment**. Also, the trial did not study patients outside the hospital setting. Therefore, the drug is not recommended to the large population of mild patients.

### Does India Use Corticosteroid Therapy?

Yes. **The clinical management protocol for Covid-19 released by the Health Ministry allows the use of the corticosteroid methylprednisolone.**

### Dexamethasone: What Are the Side Effects?

The Health Ministry protocol says a larger dose of glucocorticoid will delay the removal of coronavirus due to immunosuppressive effects. On May 25, The Lancet published a correspondence that said **"improper use of systemic corticosteroids can increase the risk of osteonecrosis of the femoral head (ONFH)".** **Osteonecrosis** refers to the death of bone tissue due to lack of blood supply. Also, the WHO says that "given the lack of effectiveness and possible harm", routine corticosteroids should be avoided unless they are indicated for another reason. "Other reasons may include **exacerbation of asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**, septic shock or ARDS, and risk/benefit analysis needs to be conducted for individual patients."

- **The low-cost, anti-inflammatory steroid is well known in the world of sport. Dexamethasone has been used for years by sportspersons to hasten their rehabilitation from injuries and recover from infections. The drug is on the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA's) list of prohibited substances, and sportspersons from Spain and Real Madrid star Sergio Ramos to Malaysian badminton legend Lee Chong Wei and, most recently, Indian javelin thrower Davinder Singh Kang, have been caught using it. Athletes are, however, barred from using dexamethasone only during competition – meaning, if the substance is detected prior to a competition, it will not be considered a doping offence. Dr Ashok Ahuja, former head of sports medicine at the Sports Authority of India (SAI), said dexamethasone is a corticosteroid, an easily available medicine that prevents the release of substances in the body that cause inflammation. Its effects are frequently seen within a day, and last for about three days. "The drug is used when there is any inflammation in the body due to infection or injury. In sports, it is not permitted during competition because it helps all the infection and inflammation to subside and gives you a feeling of well-being. It may not directly enhance performance, but it helps in quick recovery," Dr Ahuja said. Navin Agarwal, director general of the National Anti-Doping Agency, said athletes can use this drug if they take a TUE (Therapeutic Use Exemption). "There is a provision in the WADA Code that for drugs like these, you can take an exemption and use it. If an athlete follows the rules while administering this drug, he or she will not face a problem," Agarwal said.**

### Hydroxychloroquine Does Not Reduce Mortality, RECOVERY Trial Finds

- **The RECOVERY trial, a large randomised controlled trial in the U.K. to test five drugs, including hydroxychloroquine, has found no clinical benefit from use of hydroxychloroquine in hospitalised patients with COVID-19. The trial investigators found that there was no significant benefit in mortality reduction in the intervention group, which was the primary objective. The RECOVERY trial began in March. It is a dynamic trial assessing five candidate drugs and convalescent plasma therapy for treating COVID-19 in patients in U.K. hospitals.**



## What Are the Prospects for A Second Wave Of COVID-19?

- As authorities the world over lift economy-crippling movement restrictions aimed at curbing coronavirus infections, the fear on everyone's minds can be expressed in two words: second wave. The concern is that, once quelled, the pandemic will resurface with renewed strength, causing a repeat of rising infections, swamped health systems and orders for lockdowns. Rashes of new cases in pockets of Asia and the U.S. have added to the fears.

### What's A Second Wave?

It's not a scientific term with well-defined parameters. Rather, it's used to refer to a **subsequent, serious increase in cases that occurs after the original surge has been quashed in a given area.** *Pandemics are caused by new pathogens that the vast majority of humans have no immune protection against.* That's what allows them to become global outbreaks. Pandemics are uncommon, but influenza is one of the more frequent causes. What often happens is that a novel variant of flu virus spreads around the world and then recedes, kind of like a tsunami. A few months later, it comes back and spreads around the world, or large parts of it, again.

### What Are the Prospects for Covid-19?

Most countries responded to the pandemic by restricting movement, which slows the virus's spread but leaves many people vulnerable to infection once they begin to venture out again. Parts of the U.S. including Texas, California and Florida have seen localized outbreaks weeks into their re-openings. Experts are at a loss to explain why; it's not clear they're linked to resumed economic activity. There also have been scares in Asia. Travel restrictions were imposed on more than 100 million people in China's Jilin province, on the border with Russia, after dozens of cases were detected there in May – a month after China's first lockdown ended in far-away Wuhan. By early June that outbreak was under control and normal life was resuming. South Korea, which began easing its social distancing measures in April, suspended plans for further relaxation in June as new infections emerged. Testing, isolating and contact-tracing remain the main tools to stop a cluster from growing into a wave.

### What Makes A First Wave Recede?

Influenza pandemics can be temporarily beaten back by the change of seasons, moving to the southern hemisphere when the northern half of the globe heats up during its summer, and vice versa. The virus may also have infected a huge portion of people in most areas, giving them immunity from re-infection and possibly creating so-called herd immunity, which protects those who haven't been infected by curtailing the virus's circulation. In the case of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19, countries around the world adopted movement restrictions on an unprecedented scale and social-distancing measures that combined kept people far enough apart that the virus couldn't easily spread.

### So How Does A Virus Come Back?

**Lifting containment measures too quickly** may allow cases to start rising anew. Other factors could lead to a more dramatic increase that might be clearly recognizable as a second wave. In the case of influenza, there's the **onset of cool weather**, a factor that may affect the coronavirus, too. Or the **pathogen can mutate**. This is another feature of flu, which evolves more or less constantly. **In the latter part of 1918, a second wave of the**



historic influenza outbreak occurred and caused most of the deaths in that pandemic. Some researchers believe it was brought about by a mutation that made the virus again unrecognizable to most people's immune systems. Another important variable is the movement of the virus to populations that haven't been exposed before and don't have immunity.

### What Could Prevent It?

The WHO has recommended **lifting movement restrictions in stages to test the effect of each** before moving to greater openness. In any case, experts say, the key to keeping infections low without locking down everyone is to **scale up testing and contact tracing**. Health authorities need to find infected people, isolate them and identify their recent contacts, so they can be tested as well and isolated if necessary. Eventually, it's possible that **enough people will become exposed to the coronavirus** that herd immunity will develop and it will stop spreading, or that **a vaccine against it will be licensed**.

### Why Wasn't There A Second Wave Of SARS?

The 2002-2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in Asia never reached the scope of a pandemic. Though caused by a coronavirus, it wasn't as contagious as the one responsible for Covid-19. Its spread was mainly restricted to hospitals and other settings where people came in close contact with the body fluids of infected patients. Ebola is another pathogen relatively new to humans. There have been periodic outbreaks in Africa, but while the virus is highly contagious in some settings, it hasn't been sufficiently infectious to spread around the world like the coronavirus.

### Cases of Pregnant Women Infecting Baby with Covid Found Uncommon

- The fact that pregnant women with Covid-19 can transmit the virus to the foetus is now well documented: a few such cases have been reported from around the world. Now, a study has found that such transmission is uncommon. Also, the rate of infection is no greater when the baby is born vaginally, breastfed or allowed contact with the mother. And **babies that did test positive for Covid-19, were mostly asymptomatic**.

### As Sports Events Resume, A Look at The New Protocols in Place

- A **bio-bubble** is essentially the securing of a sanitised area that can be accessed by only a certain set of people – all of whom need to be clear of coronavirus. The bubble has been tested briefly in the last few months, over exhibition tennis events involving players who live near the stadium, and even in the German Bundesliga, where players are to stay at a hotel seven days prior to a match. Now several major competitions are poised to resume, with protocols in place.

### Persistent Global Transmission of Chikungunya from India

- Studying the geographic distribution and evolution of the chikungunya virus over the period from 2005-2018, a team from **ICMR-National Institute of Virology, Pune, has noted India as an endemic reservoir for the virus with persistent global transmissions from the country**. The paper published recently in Infection, Genetics and Evolution adds that "dispersal of the strains from India was noted to neighbouring and distant countries" such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China. The team studied newly sequenced chikungunya viruses isolated



during outbreaks that happened between 2014 and 2018. During these years, the virus showed activity in India. Karnataka, Maharashtra and New Delhi accounted for a majority of the cases.

### Indian Ocean Lineage

The whole-genome sequencing study revealed that the isolates belonged to the Indian subcontinent sub-lineage of the Indian Ocean lineage. The Indian Ocean lineage is a subgroup within the East Central South African genotype. It was responsible for the resurgence in the epidemic on La Reunion island and other neighbouring islands in the Indian Ocean and in the Indian sub-continent during 2004-2005. This study helped understand the overall evolution and epidemiology of the Indian Ocean lineage. Analyses of about 207 whole genomes, including the eleven whole genomes of this study and 39 additional whole genomes from India, showed two separate clusters of Indian Ocean islands sub-lineage and Indian subcontinent sub-lineage. It is already known that Kenya was the most likely ancestral location for both the sub-lineages, and the study further confirmed this.

### IIT Madras Study Reveals Metabolism of Key Gut Microbiota

- A study by IIT Madras researchers of 36 strains of gut bacteria commonly found in the gut reveals their metabolism and could bring added rigour into the development of probiotics. **Probiotics are cocktails of helpful bacteria which, among other uses, are prescribed to alleviate digestive imbalances.**

### Main Commensals

The human gut microbiome has a huge number of beneficial bacteria, collectively called commensals, living in it. Key among these are the bacteria of the **Bifidobacterium** genus. **Bifidobacterium adolescentis** and **B. longum** are found in adult human gut whereas **B. bifidum** are found in infant gut. More than 80 species of Bifidobacterium are found in the human gut of which 36 strains comprising 20 species have been studied by the researchers through metabolic network modelling. Bifidobacterium is one of the largest genera among gut bacteria and its species are known to be early colonisers of the breastfed infant gut.

### Metabolic Differences

Little is known about the key metabolic differences between different strains of this genera and consequently their individual commercial uses. This work has classified the studied strains of these bacteria into three groups. Specifically, **the researchers estimate the ability of the bacteria to produce short-chain fatty acids, which maintain the acidity level (pH) of the gut milieu.** In the studied strains of bacteria, the researchers find that acetate production is strain-specific, unlike the production of lactate.

The study underlines the power of analysing metabolic capabilities to define the properties of the human gut microbiota and also can be leveraged for commercial purposes to produce probiotics. While in the last few years, there has been significant improvement in the composition of probiotics, their development is still predominantly by trial and error, and this study is a step towards a more methodical approach.





## What is NASA's Gateway Lunar Orbiting Outpost?

- NASA recently finalised the contract for the initial crew module of the agency's Gateway lunar orbiting outpost. The contract, which is worth \$187 million has been awarded to Orbital Science Corporation of Dulles, Virginia, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Northrop Grumman Space. NASA has described the Gateway as key to the new era of lunar explorations both in the orbit and on the surface of the Moon. One of the most unique features of the Gateway is that it can be moved to other orbits around the Moon to conduct more research. The Gateway is being built by both international and commercial partners and will support exploration on and near the Moon and later to Mars as well.

### What Is the Contract For?

NASA has issued this contract to design the habitation and logistics (HALO) support for the Gateway, which is a part of NASA's Artemis program that aims to send the first woman and the next man to the Moon by 2024. The HALO refers to the pressurised living quarters where astronauts will spend their time while visiting the Gateway. As per a NASA press release, these quarters will be about the size of a small apartment and will provide augmented life support in tandem with NASA's Orion spacecraft.

### What Is NASA's Gateway Lunar Orbit Outpost?

Essentially, the Gateway is a small spaceship that will orbit the Moon, meant for astronaut missions to the Moon and later, for expeditions to Mars. It will act as a temporary office and living quarters for astronauts, distanced at about 250,000 miles from Earth. The spaceship will have living quarters, laboratories for science and research and docking ports for visiting spacecraft. Further, astronauts will use the Gateway at least once per year and not stay around the year like they do on the International Space Station (ISS). Compared to the ISS, the Gateway is much smaller (the size of a studio apartment), while the ISS is about the size of a six-bedroom house. Once docked to the Gateway, astronauts will be able to stay there for three months at a time, conduct science experiments and take trips to the surface of the Moon. As per information on NASA's website, the Gateway will act as an airport, where spacecraft bound for the lunar surface of Mars can refuel or replace parts and resupply things like food and oxygen, allowing astronauts to take multiple trips to the Lunar surface and exploration of new locations across the Moon. Significantly, 'The agency wants to use the Gateway as a science platform to look back at the Earth, observe the Sun, and get unobstructed views of the vast universe. By studying the geology of the Earth, the Moon, and Mars – the three planetary bodies we know the most about – and the ways in which they are similar and different from each other, we can learn important things about how planets and planetary systems form,' NASA says on its website.

### How Long Will It Take to Build the Gateway?

As of now, NASA has targeted the completion of the Gateway for 2026, while work on the spaceship is already underway. By 2022, NASA plans to ready the power and propulsion for the spaceship, which will be launched on a partner-provided commercial rocket.



## What is Axone?

→ Axone – also spelled akhuni – is a fermented soya bean of Nagaland, known for its distinctive flavour and smell. As much an ingredient as it is a condiment, axone used to make pickles and chutneys, or curries of pork, fish, chicken, beef etc. “It imparts a lot of flavour to anything you cook – even vegetables,” said Aditya Kiran Kakati, a historian and anthropologist, who has done ethnographic research on the emergence and mainstreaming of ‘ethnic’ cuisines of Northeast India. While it is called ‘axone’ in parts of Nagaland, fermented soya bean is cooked with, eaten and known by different names in different parts of Northeast India, including Meghalaya and Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur as well in other South, Southeast and East Asian countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Japan, Korea, China, Myanmar, Vietnam and Indonesia. “It [fermented soya bean] is the one food that connects the Eastern Himalayas,” said Dolly Kikon, Melbourne-based anthropologist, who is currently researching fermentation. According to Kakati, it is possible to demystify axone because it is more “culturally cross-cutting” than one would expect it to be. “It belongs to the broader phenomena of fermentation necessary for food preservation in certain ecological contexts. In that way, flavours generated by axone are comparable to that of Japanese miso, which is quite mainstream in Japanese restaurants,” he said.

## How Popular is it in Nagaland?

Axone is prepared and eaten across Nagaland but is particularly popular among the Sumi (also Sema) tribe. “They use it in every meal,” said Aketoli Zhimomi, a chef who runs a restaurant called Ethnic Table in Dimapur. Kikon attributed the love for axone to the larger eating habits of a community. “In a rice-based culture, condiments become very important. Usually it has to be something that excites the senses – salty, spicy, fermented,” said Kikon, “In that manner, axone becomes central to the meal.” In the last two decades, the ingredient has travelled beyond the state. “Many students, professionals from Nagaland move to cities like Delhi and Mumbai and it is common for them to carry axone there,” said Zhimomi, “Moreover, there are now number of eateries serving ethnic North-eastern cuisine which have opened in these cities, and axone is a prominent part of the menu.” Despite that Kikon feels the Indian palette is more curious and accepting of international cuisines like Korean and Japanese. “In Mumbai and Delhi, you will go looking for ‘natto soybeans’, but axone – essentially the same thing – is still alien to the mainstream consumer. One has to be considered adventurous to negotiate with a dish made of axone,” she said.

## How Is Axone Prepared?

There are two ways of making axone: either dry or like a paste. The preparatory steps for both are the same. “We soak it overnight, boil it in water till it becomes soft – but not too soft,” said Zhimomi. Thereafter, the water is drained and the soya beans are put in bamboo baskets lined with banana leaves. This is then kept over a fireplace in the kitchen for the process of fermentation to start. While all households in the village would have a fireplace in the kitchen, in cities, fermentation can be done by keeping it in direct sunlight on a terrace. “But the results are not the same,” said Zhimomi, “For example, in a traditional fireplace, even the wood we use lends flavour to the axone. When we were young, we were not allowed to even burn a piece of paper in that fire lest it interfered with the flavour of the axone,” she said. After it is fermented, the beans are mashed, made into cakes and wrapped in banana leaves and kept near the fireplace to ferment further. This paste-like form of axone is used to make curries and stews of fish, pork, chicken etc. The drier form



of axone, on the other hand, is not mashed, but further dried in the sun till it becomes dehydrated. "You can then fry it with ginger, garlic and chilli powder, make powdered chutney or pickles," she said.

### What Lends Axone Its Characteristic Smell and Taste?

Axone is made by fermenting soya beans. "Fermentation is what lends it its distinct smell and taste," said Kakati, "It has the fifth element of our basic taste senses, and invokes the elusive umami flavour profile which is difficult to define and yet elevates any dish." In fact, it is this smell which gives it its name. "In Sumi dialect 'axo' means smell, and 'ne' means strong," said Zhimomi, "For us Nagas, this fragrance makes us feel hungry, while for others, it might be unbearable."

### Does the Ingredient Play A Role in Tribal Identity and Culture?

Tribal folklore has references to the ingredient. For example, as per a Sumi folktale, axone was an "accidental discovery." "Legend says that a young girl, who worked as a domestic help, would be sent to the fields to work only with boiled soya bean and rice to eat," said Zhimomi, "It was inedible, so the girl kept the soya bean aside, wrapped in a banana leaf. A few days later, she found the soya had fermented, with a unique smell. She decided to use it in a dish and that is how axone was discovered." Scholars feel that despite the increasing visibility of the ingredient on restaurant menus etc, a racial politics of sorts has emerged around axone. "Or even bamboo shoots, for that matter," said Kakati, adding that discrimination on the basis of smell of such fermented food could often "lead to experiences of exclusion". Anecdotal accounts from members of the North-eastern community living in big metros often allude to that. Kikon, in her 2015 paper 'Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the Nation's Table in India', writes about the smell: "Some become lifelong connoisseurs, while others detest it and develop a long-lasting repulsion to it." This often creates an avenue for conflict between those cooking and eating it and those unfamiliar to it – also the crux of the film **Axone (2019)** by Nicholas Kharkongor, where a group of North-easterners have a run-in with their landlord in a locality in Delhi while cooking axone. In fact, Kikon refers to how in 2007, due to increasing "akhuni conflict in New Delhi", the Delhi Police produced a handbook that "cautioned students and workers from Northeast India that they should refrain from cooking axone and other fermented foods". Such directives have often led to relegating the food of particular social groups to a remote, primitive position, she said. Kikon argues that the process of making and eating fermented food is much more than a "simple matter of eating and taste". "Instead, they are connected to a larger politics of articulating assertion and dignity," she said. Kakati agreed and said that directives such as the one by Delhi Police or other instances of profiling by landlords may contribute to the otherization of the community – but conversely, may sometimes lead to strengthening of internal community sentiments too. "The feeling of being 'different' may strengthen sentiments towards one's own community. In that, axone becomes a means to express your own sense of identity, comfort and familiarity – especially when you are away from home," he said.

### With 334 Species, Guwahati Redefining Concept of Urban Jungle

- What is common to the Chinese pangolin, Nepal cricket frog, Bengal monitor lizard, Assamese cat snake, Eurasian moorhen, Asian elephant, Terai cricket frog and Ganges river dolphin? They share space with an estimated one million humans in Guwahati, Assam's principal city and the largest in the northeast, along with 326 other species of



fauna recorded so far. Very few of them are caged in the Assam State zoo that occupies 30 hectares of the 620-hectare Hengerabari Reserve Forest referred to as the city's lungs. According to city-based wildlife biologist Jayaditya Purkayastha, Guwahati redefines the term "urban jungle" with 334 and counting free-ranging faunal species living in the green spaces within concrete structures. The 328-sq km city and its outskirts have 18 hills, eight reserve forests, two wildlife sanctuaries and a Ramsar site (Deepor Beel) besides the Brahmaputra flowing past its northern edge. This stretch of the river has a few Ganges river dolphin, which has the status of 'city animal'. Mr. Purkayastha and members of Help Earth, a green group, have over the years recorded 26 species of amphibians, 56 reptiles, 36 mammals and 216 birds. "We have more than 1,100 captive wild animals belonging to 107 species, of which 52 are highly protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. Our captive animals include exotic species such as giraffe, hippopotamus, macaw, Gaboon viper and some birds," said Tejas Mariswamy, the zoo's director.

"Six of Guwahati's resident snakes are venomous, three of them [krait] strictly nocturnal while the monocled cobra is around wetlands. Thus, the snakes we see in the city are most likely to be non-venomous, providing services such as rodent population control,". Wildlife specialists are worried that Guwahati has been following the global trend, which projects the urban area on earth to triple before 2030. "Our innate obsession with big and colourful creatures makes it hard to recognise the small and less charismatic species. The common Asian toad, red-eyed frog, tokay gecko, Salazar's pit viper, Indian roofed turtle, bar-headed goose and oriental turtle dove need to survive as much as their larger neighbours like the elephant, gaur, leopard, Bengal fox, dhole and Indian flying squirrel," Mr. Purkayastha said.

### The Pangolin: Can the Protection Upgrade by China Curb Its Trafficking?

→ China accorded the pangolin the highest level of protection and removed the scales of the endangered mammal from its list of approved traditional medicines. Experts said that while China banned pangolin meat in February amid links between wild meat and the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, they remain sceptical on how seriously the ban on its scales – which are believed to have various health benefits – will be imposed.

Pangolin meat is considered a delicacy in China and Vietnam, and their scales – which are made of keratin, the same protein present in human nails – are believed to improve lactation, promote blood circulation, and remove blood stasis. These so-called health benefits are so far unproven. Jose Louies, Deputy Director & Chief, Wildlife Crime Control Division at the Wildlife Trust of India, said that the suspected link between the virus and pangolins likely influenced China's decision. But while the link between pangolins and Covid-19 remains unproven, the mere suspicion has increased public discussion on health risks from human-wildlife interactions, and raised awareness of the exploitation of pangolins.

### What Makes Pangolins the Most Trafficked Animals in The World?

Eight species of the scaly insectivorous creatures are distributed across Asia and Africa. They have long been hunted for their meat and scales, which indigenous tribes in central and eastern India are also known to have worn as rings. Two of these species are found in 15 states in India, although their numbers are yet to be completely documented. The creatures are strictly nocturnal, repelling predators by curling up into scaly spheres upon being alarmed. The same defence mechanism however, makes them slow and easy to catch once spotted. While pangolin populations are well spread out across the country, they do not occur in large numbers and their shy nature makes encounters with humans





rare. Their alleged health benefits in TCM prompted a booming illicit export of scales from Africa over the past decade. International outcry over pangolins being hunted to near extinction has resulted in crackdowns on wildlife traffickers in Africa, and the interception of containers containing several tonnes of live pangolins and scales. **Conservation of pangolins received its first shot in the arm when the 2017 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) enforced an international trade ban.**

### **Are the Animals Trafficked from India As Well?**

Law enforcement authorities in India have made seizures of pangolin scales from 2012 onward. Agni Mitra, Regional Deputy Director (Eastern Region), Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), said “Once the demand for pangolins in China became known, indigenous tribes in Eastern and Central India began to supply customers through middlemen in Bhutan and Nepal.” Once Pangolins are caught, killed and skinned, the exchange of scales typically takes place at Siliguri in West Bengal or at Moreh in Manipur. Poachers use only trains and buses to avoid detection, and carry as much as 30 kg of scales at a time, said Mitra. The WCCB has found that the consignments are transported to Bhutan and Nepal via porous borders in Siliguri and into Myanmar from Moreh and onwards to paying customers. A study released in 2018 by the international conservation group TRAFFIC had found that 5,772 pangolins had been detected by law enforcement agencies in India between 2009 and 2017. The study acknowledged, however, that the figure was a conservative estimate of the number of pangolins actually being smuggled out of India. The Madhya Pradesh Police’s Special Task Force is the leader in tracking pangolin poachers and traffickers. Formed in 2014 specifically to crack down the illicit export of the endangered creatures, the STF has arrested 164 people in 13 cases across 12 states since then, and seized 80 kg of scales, STF chief Ritesh Sarothiya said. Given the fluctuating demand for scales, Mitra said, it is difficult to put a value to pangolin parts. WCCB detectives who have managed to successfully trap smugglers over the years by posing as buyers, have had to quote anywhere between ₹30,000 and ₹1 crore for a single animal. “The price went through the roof in September last year after the supply of pangolins from Africa dropped sharply,” he said.

### **How Will China’s Decision Impact Pangolin Trafficking?**

The immediate impact, said Dr Saket Badola of TRAFFIC India, would be pangolin scales losing their legitimacy in TCM. However, WTI’s Louies said that the history of the ban of wildlife trade in China is not encouraging, citing as an example the continued availability of tiger bone wine – believed to cure a host of conditions ranging from dysentery to rheumatism – despite its ban on tiger products in 1993. Peter Knights, CEO of WildAid, an American organisation working to conserve endangered species, pointed out that the price of elephant ivory plummeted by two-thirds after China banned it. “We remain hopeful the same trend will apply to pangolin scales,” he said. India, where the trade largely remains local, has been registering a decline from before China’s ban. The Wildlife Seizure Database maintained by C4ADS shows that between 2015 and 2019, India made 115 seizures of live or dead pangolins, second in Asia only to China. The database also registered a dip in pangolin product seizures in India between January and May this year as compared to the corresponding period last year – from 15 to 12. While Horner of C4ADS attributed this to the decrease to border closures, shifts in law enforcement priorities, or decreased media reporting on wildlife seizures, Mitra of the WCCB credited the decline to the disappearance of public transport due to the national lockdown. Louies said the trade in India was limited to “unorganised traders” and “con-artists”. “The trade in pangolin



scales is already showing a decreasing trend in India and the only trade is the trade in live animals by unorganised traders, who ask for a few crores for each live animal,” Louies said. While Knights hailed China’s decision as the “single greatest measure that could be taken to save the pangolin”, he warned that questions still remain about what it means for approved patent medicines. “Pangolin trade will not disappear overnight,” Knights said.

### Why Fastest Runner Got A Doorbell Camera After A Missed Dope Test

- The United States’ 100-metre world champion Christian Coleman faces a two-year ban after he was provisionally suspended for ‘whereabouts failure’ including missed tests – a violation of anti-doping rules. In his defence, Coleman has said there is no record of anyone (anti-doping authorities) going to his home and added his parents later gave him a doorbell camera to ensure that there is a record of future visits. The 400-metre world champion, another young star, Salwa Eid Nazer, faces a similar sanction. Closer home, five Indian cricketers have also been served notices for not updating their ‘whereabouts’. So why are **high-profile athletes falling foul of a seemingly simple rule of keeping anti-doping watchdogs in the loop about where they will be during a predetermined time slot every day and not being there when the inspectors come to collect samples?**

### Why Is Submitting Whereabouts Important?

Whereabouts filings is the process of feeding details into a database of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) about where one will be for a one-hour time slot everyday – say 7 am to 8 am or 3 pm to 4 pm. This information helps anti-doping officers travel to the given address, without prior notice, and collect samples (blood and/or urine). **Out-of-competition testing has been proven to be an effective way to check if athletes are doping during their off-period or when they are not competing and are at home or at a training base.** “No advance notice testing”, as the strategy is called, is also an effective deterrent.

### What Details Does an Athlete Have to Give?

Whereabouts filings have to include the address of where an athlete is living and also additional information as to where they will be while competing and training for the upcoming quarter. But the athlete is also encouraged to give details about her/his whereabouts outside the 60-minute slot.

### Who Is Required to File Whereabouts?

Athletes who are part of the Registered Testing Pool (RTP) created by the national anti-doping agency or an international federation will have to submit details. The details of these athletes will be made available to the World Anti-Doping Agency via the ADAMS (anti-doping administration and management system) database. Athletes included in the RTP are those ‘highest-priority athletes’, including medal winners at major games. If an athlete is to be tested more than three times a year (out of competition), has prior anti-doping rule violations and has shown sudden improvements in performances, the athlete can be added to the RTP. An athlete whose name is added or removed from the RTP has to be notified about the change in status.

### What Constitutes A Missed Test?

An athlete would be deemed to have “missed a test” if she/he is not available for testing at the given location during the 60-minute slot submitted and updated through ADAMS when dope control officers arrive for the purpose of collecting samples.



### How Does Whereabouts Failure Lead to Anti-Doping Rule Violation?

Three missed tests – an athlete being not available for testing when officers come for sample collection during the one-hour slot – during a 12-month period amount to an anti-doping rule violation and an athlete can be provisionally suspended. In addition, a combination of failure to file/accurately update whereabouts and missed tests, which add up to a total of three instances in 12 months, is also a rule violation.

### What Is Coleman's Take on His Suspension?

Coleman put out a statement on Wednesday claiming that he was shopping for Christmas on December 9, 2019 (January 16 and April 26, 2019, were two other instances) when anti-doping officers came to his house to collect samples. The 24-year-old, one of the biggest stars of track and field in the post-USain Bolt era, has accused officers of purposely trying to get him to “miss a test”. In addition to the 100 metres gold at the 2019 Doha world championship, he was part of the United States 4×100 metres relay team which won gold. Coleman said he was in the weight-training room on January 16 last year and took responsibility for a “filing failure” on April 26.

### Are Indian Cricketers at Fault?

The Board of Control for Cricket in India has told the National Anti-Doping Agency that a ‘password’ problem was behind five cricketers – Cheteshwar Pujara, Ravindra Jadeja, K L Rahul, Smriti Mandhana and Deepti Sharma – failing to update their whereabouts. However, this is the first violation by these cricketers. National Anti-Doping Agency director general Navin Agarwal said the cricket board’s explanation was being reviewed. “The BCCI has claimed they had a problem with the password. If we find their response is genuine, this won’t be considered as a filing failure,” Agarwal said. Cricketers in India don’t file whereabouts on their own but forward it to the BCCI’s anti-doping officer who feeds it into the database.

**DreamIAS**