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International

Why the American Museum of Natural History Wants to Remove Theodore Roosevelt's

Statue

- The killing of George Floyd, an African – American man in the US in May, led to mass protests against racism and police violence and brutality. As these protests spread to other parts of the world, protesters began pulling down statues and defacing monuments across the US, the UK and Europe that were representative of slavery and colonialism. **This weekend, the New York City government announced that a large statue of former US President Theodore Roosevelt that stands outside the American Museum of Natural History will soon be taken down.** The statue is a property of the city government and is located on the museum's main entrance, on Central Park West.

Why Will Roosevelt's Statue Be Taken Down?

The American Museum of Natural History has asked the New York City government to remove the statue of **Theodore Roosevelt**, the **26th President of the United States who was in office from 1901 to 1909.** Last year, the museum held an exhibition titled 'Addressing the Statue' that focused on this particular statue, officially called "The Equestrian Statue of Theodore Roosevelt". Six years after Roosevelt's death, the statue was commissioned in 1925 to stand on the steps of the museum and was unveiled to the public in 1940. **According to the American Museum of Natural History, the statue was a part of a larger New York State memorial to Roosevelt who had also served as New York state governor from January 1, 1899 – December 31, 1900. Roosevelt was also deeply interested in natural history and conservation and his father Theodore Roosevelt Sr. had also been one of the museum's founders. Back then, the museum had said that it was "proud of its historic association with the Roosevelt family".** On Sunday, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced in a statement that the museum had decided to remove this statue of Roosevelt because "it explicitly depicts black and indigenous people as subjugated and racially inferior".

Why Is Roosevelt's Statue Problematic?

The statue depicts an imposing figure of Roosevelt atop a horse with the figures of an African – American man and a Native American man on his either side. For its exhibition last year on the statue, the museum issued a statement acknowledging that it was problematic.

The earliest conversations around it can perhaps be traced to James Loewen's book 'Lie Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong' published in 1999, where the author wrote that the arrangement of the figures, with Roosevelt sitting in an imposing manner on a horse, with two smaller figures of an African-American man and a Native American man on either side, advocated white supremacy. Over the years, historians and critics have said that the statue is problematic for many reasons, including its representation of imposed social hierarchies.



It is not immediately clear when the statue will be removed from outside the museum and if it will be shifted anywhere. The Roosevelt family's association with the museum continues to this day, with Roosevelt's great-grandson being one of the institution's trustees. News reports say that as compensation for the removal of his Roosevelt's statue, the museum's Hall of Biodiversity will be named after him.

Was Roosevelt Racist?

Last year, before the exhibition on Roosevelt's statue opened at the museum, The New York Times published an op-ed titled 'Who owns Theodore Roosevelt' by Clay Risen, who wrote that racism was "central to Roosevelt's vision for America, and not just an artifact of his time and place". **There have been other research papers and books published on the subject of racism in the US in which Roosevelt finds mention. Historians believe that Roosevelt was also a supporter of eugenics**, so much so that in 1905, he gave a speech where he attempted to push the narrative of the purported threats of "race suicide".

Why Donald Trump Wants to Block Former NSA John Bolton's Book

→ With the November 2020 election fast approaching, US President Donald Trump has found himself at odds with **his former National Security Advisor John Bolton – an ally-turned-foe whose latest book paints a less than charitable picture of the Trump presidency**. The Trump administration, which tried to stop the book from being published, received a setback on Saturday when a federal court turned down its request, saying it was too late to implement such an order. The preview of Bolton's book – which releases June 23 – has already been shared with several media organisations, who have widely reported its main parts that show Trump in a bad light. On June 18, Trump had called Bolton a "disgruntled boring fool who only wanted to go to war. Never had a clue, was ostracized & happily dumped. What a dope!"

Who is John Bolton?

A lifelong conservative, John Bolton has served in the administrations of three US Presidents from the Republican party – Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush. Known for **his hawkish approach to America's foreign policy**, Bolton has strongly defended the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and has been critical of the United Nations. In recent years, he has also spoken in favour of bombing Iran and of launching a pre-emptive strike against North Korea. Bolton has also called Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election a "true act of war".

What Does His Book Say About Trump?

Bolton's book – The Room Where It Happened – recounts a number of episodes that damagingly portray Trump. In a 2019 meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping during the G20 summit in Japan, Trump "stunningly, turned the conversation to the coming US presidential election [in 2020], alluding to China's economic capability and **pleading with Xi to ensure he'd win**," Bolton writes. During the 2016 election, Trump was able to win the presidency largely due to crucial support from Midwest states, where agriculture is a major industry. According to Bolton, **Trump also agreed with China's highly criticised policy of bundling Uighur Muslims in internment camps– where they are allegedly schooled into giving up their identity, and assimilate better in the Communist country dominated by the Han Chinese**. Apart from the Chinese leader, Bolton also accuses Trump of cosying up to other authoritarian leaders, and giving "personal favours to dictators he liked". In 2018, the US



President offered to help Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over an ongoing investigation into a Turkish company, Bolton has alleged. Bolton has also written disparagingly about Trump's knowledge of facts, and of his fitness for the top job. As per Bolton, Trump did not know that the UK was a nuclear power, and thought that Finland was "kind of a satellite of Russia". The book also says that Trump thought invading Venezuela would be "cool", and that the Latin American country was "really part of the United States".

What Did Trump Do to Block Its Release?

In the past week, the US Justice Department went to court to stop the book's release, and asked for its copies to be retrieved. Trump officials said that Bolton had divulged classified information, and had failed to obtain a pre-publication clearance. Bolton's lawyers countered by saying that he had addressed the Trump administration's concerns about classified information for several months, and was assured by a White House official in late April that the manuscript no longer included such text.

Why the US Is Designating Chinese Media Outlets As 'Foreign Missions'

→ In the most recent flare-up between Washington and Beijing, the **US State Department on Monday designated four Chinese news outlets as "foreign missions", months after it had given five other Chinese entities the same label.** China Central Television, China News Service, the People's Daily, and the Global Times are now part of a list that includes Xinhua News Agency, China Global Television Network, China Radio International, China Daily Distribution Corporation, and Hai Tian Development USA that were designated on February 18 under the Foreign Missions Act. In a press statement, the State Department said, "The decision to designate these entities is not based on any content produced by these entities, nor does it place any restrictions on what the designated entities may publish in the United States. It simply recognises them for what they are. **"These nine entities all meet the definition of a foreign mission under the Foreign Missions Act, which is to say that they are 'substantially owned or effectively controlled' by a foreign government.** In this case, they are effectively controlled by the government of the People's Republic of China," it added.

So, What Sparked the Move?

Ties between the US and China have been strained since much before the coronavirus pandemic; the two countries have been locked in a bitter trade war since 2018. Amid Covid-19, relations have further deteriorated, with the two countries often finding themselves engaged in a political blame game. The Trump administration has repeatedly claimed the coronavirus originated from a Wuhan lab, threatened to disrupt bilateral ties with Beijing, and accused Chinese President Xi Jinping of failing to contain the disease. The US is also furious over developments in Hong Kong, where China is seeking greater control. For several years, the US had deliberated the decision to declare Chinese media outlets as foreign embassies, but desisted partly due to concerns over restricting press freedoms, according to The New York Times. But in February this year, the Trump administration pushed ahead, acting against five such organisations. Less than a day later, China expelled three journalists from The Wall Street Journal, giving them five days to leave the country. Then in March, Washington said it was imposing visa quotas on the five designated Chinese entities, because of Beijing's "long-standing intimidation and harassment of journalists." China hit back by expelling more American journalists working in the country for The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. The latest escalation occurred days after a meeting between US



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi in Hawaii. The meeting failing to improve US-China relations, a Financial Times report said.

What Does the Designation Mean?

According to The New York Times, **the designated news organisations will be required to give the US State Department a complete roster of employees in the US as well as a list of their real estate holdings.** The Chinese foreign ministry has denounced the move, calling it a “political suppression of Chinese media”, and urged the US to “abandon the Cold War mentality, ideological prejudice, and immediately stop and correct this practice that does harm to both sides.” Notably, the designation was announced soon after Trump’s former National Security Advisor John Bolton made scathing remarks about the president in a tell-all book, accusing Trump of seeking Xi’s support for getting re-elected in the November 2020 elections. According to Bolton, Trump also agreed with China’s highly criticised policy of bundling Uighur Muslims in internment camps – where they are allegedly schooled into giving up their identity, and assimilate better in the Communist country dominated by the Han Chinese.

The U.S. Trial at The Hague

- U.S. President Donald Trump’s authorisation of new sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) is an act of retaliation against the UN body’s high-profile investigation to bring justice to victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In March, **the Hague Court’s Appeals Chamber unanimously authorised investigation into alleged atrocities by U.S. troops in Afghanistan since May 1, 2003 as well as other alleged crimes committed since July 1, 2002 in the Central Intelligence Agency’s so-called black sites in Poland, Romania and Lithuania.** The court overturned a 2019 pre-trial chamber decision and admitted the 2016 preliminary findings of the ICC’s chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda. Ms. Bensouda’s report claims systematic atrocities of torture, summary executions, forced disappearances and rape, in which the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Afghanistan’s defence forces were also implicated.

Decrying the Probe

Mr. Trump’s June 11 executive order, which decries the investigations of U.S. personnel as a threat to American national security and foreign policy, slapped asset freezes and family travel bans on investigators. The curbs build on the State Department’s revocation last year of Ms. Bensouda’s U.S. visa. At the time, the move was widely viewed as an attempt to pre-empt the decision over the Afghanistan probe, which the pre-trial chamber declined to authorise the following month. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also said that the new measures would be deployed to shield Israel, which faces a separate inquiry following Ms. Bensouda’s application last December. It relates to Israel’s settlements on the West Bank and the 2014 invasion of Gaza, resulting in hundreds of Palestinian casualties. **The latest sanctions could in theory apply to victims and witnesses, besides lawyers and researchers assisting investigators. But their effectiveness is doubtful, say commentators, since the presence of the Hague staff and others on U.S. soil may not be required for progress in the case.** The U.S. has always refused to recognise ICC jurisdiction over U.S. personnel on the grounds that **it is not party to the Rome Statute that underpins the court. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration suspended its signature to the Statute, when it failed to win backing to restrict the court’s remit solely to cases where the accused belonged to a ratifying state. To do otherwise was a negation of a basic principle of treaty law and would impair the U.S.**



from meeting its international humanitarian obligations, the officials had argued. Accordingly, the U.S. Congress passed the American Service-Members' Protection Act, requiring the President to protect American forces from prosecution in The Hague court, besides extending such commitment to the troops of its allies. On the other hand, the 1998 Rome Statute provides for the prosecution of crimes committed in the territory of any one of the 123 states-parties, even if the accused come from a non-member nation. This is the basis for the current investigation wherein Afghanistan and the three European nations, the location of the alleged crimes, are within the ICC's jurisdiction, even if the U.S. remains outside.

Situation in Kabul

Meanwhile, after nearly 20 years of Afghanistan's brutal civil war, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, the country's political future seems highly uncertain. Kabul's government was excluded from the February agreement between the U.S. and the insurgent Taliban; the latter did not even commit to a lasting ceasefire. On the contrary, its leaders laid down the release of some 5,000 Taliban fighters as a precondition to begin negotiations with the government. The situation has thus strengthened the perception that the real aim behind the agreement was to demonstrate America's troop reduction before Mr. Trump hit the campaign trail on his re-election bid. In the absence of a functioning government in Kabul, domestic remedies for victims of mass atrocities are a far cry. The grounds for Ms. Bensouda's case could not be stronger.

Why Kosovo President Hashim Thaci Has Been Indicted for War Crimes

- ➔ The Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO) at The Hague in the Netherlands announced Wednesday that it has filed a 10-count indictment charging **Kosovo's president Hashim Thaci and another Kosovo politician Kadri Vesli of war crimes, including murder, forced disappearance of persons, persecution and torture during the Kosovo independence war in the 1990s.** The announcement came as Thaci was on his way to Washington to meet Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and US Special Envoy Richard Grenell to discuss Kosovo's status.

A Brief History of Kosovo

For more than four centuries, **Kosovo – a landlocked country in the Western Balkans with a population of more than 1.8 million situated north of Greece and surrounded by Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro, whose current residents are ethnic Albanians and Serb, Roma and other minority groups – was ruled by the Ottomans.** Serbia acquired it during the First Balkan War in 1912-13. In 1913, Kosovo was partitioned between Serbia and Montenegro. After World War I, Kosovo was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was later named Yugoslavia. According to an account maintained by the US Department of State, after World War II, Kosovo became an autonomous province of Serbia, following which the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution gave





Kosovo the status of a Socialist Autonomous Province within Serbia. But in 1981, Kosovo Albanians demanded that Kosovo be given full republic status. In the ensuing riots that year, the Kosovo Albanians were “violently suppressed”. Following this, in the late 80s, Slobodan Milosevic, the former Serbian president, eliminated Kosovo’s autonomy and imposed direct rule from Belgrade (Serbia’s capital) and ordered the removal of ethnic Albanian state employees, whose jobs were then taken over by Serbs, a minority in Kosovo. This led to the start of a resistance movement led by Kosovo Albanian leaders in the 1990s, whose main aim was to secure independence for Kosovo. As per the US government account, the leaders set up a parallel government funded by the Albanian diaspora and when this movement failed to show results, it led to the emergence of armed resistance in 1997 in the form of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). In the following years, Milosevic launched a military campaign to crackdown against the KLA, which resulted in ethnic Albanians fleeing Kosovo. The NATO intervened in 1999. According to an AP report, more than 10,000 people (mostly ethnic Albanians) died and over a million were driven away from their homes until the NATO intervention forced Serbia to pull its troops out of Kosovo and cede control to the UN and NATO. After the ethnic Albanians returned to Kosovo, some elements of the KLA conducted revenge killings and abductions of ethnic Serbs and Roma as a result of which thousands of people belonging to these ethnicities fled their homes during the latter half of 1999.

So, Who Controls Kosovo Now?

In February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia after years of conflict. While Kosovo’s status is recognised by the US and some countries in the EU, Serbia backed by Russia refuses to do so. Even so, there is little reconciliation between Kosovo’s majority ethnic Albanians who support independence and the Serbs in Kosovo, who do not recognise it.

What Are the Charges Against Kosovo’s President?

The indictment alleges that Thaci – one of the founders of the KLA – and other charged suspects are responsible for nearly 100 murders of known victims and political opponents of Kosovo Albanian, Serb and Roma ethnicities. In 1997, Thaci became the chief of the political directorate of the KLA and after the war, he became the prime minister in the provisional government of Kosovo from 1999-2000. He was also the prime minister of Kosovo, elected in November 2007, soon after which, he declared it an independent state.

So, What Does the Indictment Mean?

As of now, the indictment is only an accusation and reflects the SPO’s determination that it can prove the charges against Thaci beyond reasonable doubt. It is now up to the judge at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) to review the indictment and decide if the case will go to trial. The Hague based KSC was set up to try former members of the KLA. The press statement released by SPO on June 24 mentioned that Thaci and Vesli had repeatedly tried to undermine the work of the KSC and are believed to have carried out a “secret campaign” to overturn the law. “By taking these actions, Mr THAÇI and Mr VESELI have put their personal interests ahead of the victims of their crimes, the rule of law, and all people of Kosovo,” the SPO statement said.



In Pandemic Months, Fewer UK Deaths Than 5-Year Average

- Scientists have analysed mortality statistics in the UK during the initial phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, by analysing the weekly national mortality statistics over the last five years. They found there were fewer deaths recorded during December 2019-March 2020 in comparison to the previous five years – including in the subgroup assessment of respiratory mortality rates. The analysis found that **during the first months of 2020, there were consistently fewer deaths each week compared with the previous five years.** The study is published in the Journal of International Medical Research. Researchers have called this the **SARS-CoV-2 paradox** – and suggested this **could be due to early social distancing measures.** The scientists propose **it could also be due to the emphasised importance of washing hands, staying home when one feels unwell and coughing or sneezing into a tissue.** Also, mortality may be reduced as **hospital admission numbers have reduced; and there may thus be a reduction in the spread of hospital-acquired infections.** They propose that this could be related to Covid-19, as symptoms such as headaches and loss of taste weren't identified; however, they proposed, it could also be attributed to healthcare systems being increasingly selective about which patients to take as lockdown was formally announced that week.

The Lone Wolf Threat

- The knife attack at a park in Reading, a town west of London, which killed three people and injured three others, is yet another reminder of the threat of lone wolf attacks the U.K. is facing. Last November, the British government reduced the official threat level from “severe” to “substantial”, which means attacks could happen but there was no intelligence of an immediate terror strike. Since then, the country has seen three major incidents. **Lone wolf attacks, in which extremist individuals translate their beliefs into violent actions, are hard to detect and prevent. In coordinated terror attacks, the chances of competent intelligence agencies detecting the perpetrators are much higher.** To their credit, the U.K.'s intelligence wings have foiled dozens of terror attacks since the devastating 2005 London bombings that killed 52 people and injured 700 others. But the U.K., especially London, continued to see low-tech lone attacks, where the attacker either used vehicles to run over people or launched knife attacks. Terrorist organisations had also embraced this tactic to spread violence in countries where coordinated big attacks are impossible. **When the territories it controlled in Iraq and Syria started shrinking in the wake of counter – attacks, in 2015 and 2016 the Islamic State urged its supporters first to launch attacks in western cities and then declare allegiance to the 'Caliph'.** In 2017, Khalid Masood, a British citizen, drove a car into pedestrians on the pavement of Westminster Bridge and stabbed a police officer. He killed six people and injured 40 others before being shot by police. Though British authorities had foiled some knife attacks since the 2013 killing of soldier Lee Rigby in southeast London, lone wolf attacks continue to pose a security challenge to the public and the government. In all the last three knife attacks, the attackers were known to the agencies. The government and the security agencies need to adopt a multi-pronged approach towards radicalisation, which is anchored in human intelligence, strong ties with communities and community leaders and deradicalization programmes.

Why Russia Has to Vote on A Constitutional Referendum in The Middle of a Pandemic

- On April 22, Russians were supposed to vote on a constitutional referendum proposed by President Vladimir Putin in his address to the Federal Assembly in January. But the Covid-19 pandemic meant the poll had to be postponed. Though the new date of voting was fixed for

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)



July 1, officials have announced that polling would begin a week early to prevent overcrowding at the polling stations. Meanwhile, critics, including Opposition activist Alexei Navalny, have accused Putin of political manipulation that would allow him to effectively rule for life.

What Is This Vote About?

In his address to the Federal Assembly, Putin proposed substantial amendments to Russia's constitution for which he suggested holding a nation-wide constitutional referendum. In January, Putin formally submitted the proposed bill to the **State Duma**, the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia, that approved this proposal in March. Days later, the Constitutional Court of Russia also gave its approval to the proposed bill. **The proposed amendments included clauses that the heads of law enforcement agencies in Russia must be appointed by the president in consultation with the Federation Council and that the upper house of Russia's Parliament would be able to propose the dismissal of federal judges and that in specific cases, the Federation Council would have the right to remove judges of the Constitutional and Supreme courts following proposals by the Russian president.** The proposed amendments **would ban gay marriage.** Most importantly, however, **it would allow Putin to occupy the highest office in the country post 2024, when his term is set to expire, till at least 2036. The president is now 67 years old.** Other proposed amendments include provisions for the Russian constitution to take over international law. Individuals occupying high government positions, including those in the judiciary would not be allowed to have foreign citizenship or residency. **A presidential candidate would have to have lived in Russia for at least 25 years and cannot ever have held foreign citizenship or residency.** Some economic changes that were proposed include, making the minimum wage not lower than the subsistence minimum and making adjustments to the state pension in accordance with inflation. **The government had announced that in this referendum, individuals holding Russian citizenship in eastern Ukraine will also be permitted to vote.**

What Do Putin's Critics Say?

Critics believe that although Putin may have thought that these amendments would clear any potential obstacles for his rule over Russia beyond 2024, the process may not be as straightforward. Putin himself has indicated that he does not have plans of staying in office beyond his term. **Although the proposals have already been accepted in both houses in Russia's parliament and legally no referendum is required to enforce these amendments to the Russia's Constitution, Putin had said that a referendum was being held to give it legitimacy.** According to news reports, criticism of these proposals had been quickly shot down by government authorities. Observers do not believe that Putin will face challenges in the passing of these amendments. These moves, they say, are perhaps an indication that Putin plans on continuing to exert influence over the government after his tenure, but from the side-lines.

How Has COVID-19 Impacted This Referendum?

After initially postponing this referendum due to surging cases of coronavirus infections, days before the start of the voting process, Putin hailed what he called Russia's achievements in tackling the outbreak of coronavirus. This past week, Russia also held a two-day-long commemoration of the 75th Victory Day Parade that critics say was organised despite a ban on large gatherings due to COVID-19. Russia has some of the highest cases of coronavirus infections in the world, after countries like the United States, the United Kingdom



and Brazil, but critics believe that official numbers of related infections and deaths are much higher than those being reported. Critics believe that holding a nation-wide referendum during a pandemic would unnecessarily put the lives of people at risk.

Victory Day: Why Russia Celebrates WWII Triumph on A Different Date

- ➔ Defence Minister Rajnath Singh went to Russia to attend the 75th Victory Day. India has sent a tri-services contingent to participate in the Victory Day Parade on Wednesday. China's Defence Minister and troops will also be present.

What is Victory Day?

Victory Day marks the end of World War II and the victory of the Allied Forces in 1945. Adolf Hitler had shot himself on April 30. On May 7, German troops surrendered, which was formally accepted the next day, and came into effect on May 9. **In most European countries, it is celebrated on May 8, and is called the Victory in Europe Day.**

Why Does Russia Not Celebrate Victory Day on The Same Date?

The erstwhile Soviet Union had not wanted the surrender to take place in the west, and wanted that such a significant event should reflect the contribution of the Red Army and the Soviet population. According to military historian Antony Beevor's definitive book on World War II, Joseph Stalin, premier of the Soviet Union, wanted Germany to also sign a surrender in Berlin. The Act of Military Surrender was signed by Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command Generallutnant Alfred Jodl and General Admiral Hans-George von Friedeburg in the early hours of May 7 in France at Rheims, which was the headquarters of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). The surrender was to come into effect a minute past midnight on May 9. But, Beevor writes, "Stalin could not let the final ceremony take place in the west, so he insisted that the Germans sign another surrender in Berlin, at one-minute past midnight on 9 May, the moment the capitulation agreed at Rheims came into effect". Though the document was signed, Beevor says that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill "cabled Stalin to explain that, since crowds were already gathering in London to celebrate, Victory in Europe Day celebration in Britain would take place on 8 May, as they did in the United States". This did not convince Stalin, who argued that "Soviet troops were still fighting" the German forces in many areas. German soldiers did not surrender in East Prussia, Courland Peninsula, Czechoslovakia till later. "Victory celebration, Stalin wrote, could therefore not begin in the Soviet Union till 9 May," Beevor says in his book. **Since then May 9 has been celebrated at Victory Day in Russia.**

If May 9 Is Victory Day, Why Is It Being Celebrated on June 24?

This year, the celebrations this year were pushed to June because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In November 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Victory Day celebration which were due to be held on May 9. Modi could not travel to Moscow, but he wished Putin on May 9 through a tweet: "India stands with Russia in solemn remembrance today, on the 75th Anniversary of Victory Day. Tens of thousands of Indian soldiers also made the supreme sacrifice in the Second World War. My warm greetings to President Putin and the Russian people on this occasion."



Is the June 24 Date Particularly Significant?

Yes, it is. After winning the war and having its own Victory Day on May 9, Stalin wanted to commemorate the victory with a military parade. On June 22, 1945, he ordered: "In commemoration of the victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War, I appoint to hold the parade of the regular Army, Navy and the Moscow garrison – Victory Parade June 24, 1945 in Moscow's Red Square." Hence the first Victory Day Parade took place on June 24 in Moscow. However, since then, the Victory Day Parades have taken place on May 9.

Have Indian Politicians Taken Part in Such Celebrations Earlier?

Yes. Indian leaders have attended several Victory Day Parades. At the 70th anniversary Victory Day celebrations in 2015, then President Pranab Mukherjee went to represent India. Manmohan Singh had attended the 60th anniversary in 2005 as the then Prime Minister of India. Mukherjee had attended the celebrations earlier as well. In 1995, as the External Affairs Minister, he was present at the 50th anniversary celebrations. However, he noted in his memoirs that he had objected to India's participation before P V Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister at that time, as "there were several reasons why the government should not participate in Victory Day celebrations for the Second World War". He had stated that the Indian National Army of Subhash Chandra Bose had fought the Allied Forces and that leaders of Congress were jailed during the war for their protests.

Japan To Rename Islands Disputed with China

- A local council in southern Japan voted to rename an area, including islands disputed with China and Taiwan, a move Beijing denounced as illegal and a "serious provocation". The local assembly of Ishigaki city approved a plan to change the name of the area covering the Tokyo-controlled Senkaku Islands – known by Taiwan and China as the Diaoyus – from "Tonoshiro" to "Tonoshiro Senkaku". Local media said another part of Ishigaki is also known as Tonoshiro, and the name change was cast as a bid to avoid confusion. But the uninhabited islands are at the centre of a festering row between Tokyo and Beijing and the move sparked anger in both Taiwan and mainland China. Taiwan says the islands are part of its territory, and also protested the move.

Singapore To Hold General Elections Amid Covid-19: What Is at Stake?

- Singapore will hold general elections next month after its prime minister opted to go ahead with a vote that opposition parties and rights groups have criticised as opportunistic and unsafe because of the coronavirus pandemic. The election is to be held on July 10, and candidates have to submit nomination papers on June 30. The next general election could have been held as late as April 2021. But Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Tuesday it was not clear when the pandemic would end and his government needed a fresh mandate to steer Singapore through the social and economic challenges it posed.

What Precautions Will Be Taken?

Lee said the virus situation in the city-state, which has recorded some of Asia's highest infection rates, fuelled by outbreaks in migrant workers' dormitories, had stabilised and he was satisfied an election could be held safely. Authorities have outlined safety measures such as temperature screening and social distancing at polling stations, rubber gloves for handling ballot papers, and specific voting times for seniors. Rules for sick or quarantined



voters have yet to be finalised, but Singapore has said it will not allow mail-in ballots. Singapore will not allow physical rallies as it now limits public gatherings to five people.

Which Countries Have Voted During the Coronavirus Pandemic?

South Korea held parliamentary elections in April with stringent safety measures, and saw its highest turnout since 1992. Nearly 3,000 virus patients were allowed to vote by mail or in person, using special booths, while more than 13,000 in self-quarantine cast ballots after polls closed. Primary elections have been held in several US states ahead of a planned Nov. 3 election, while Serbia recently headed to the polls in Europe's first post-lockdown election.

Who Is Contesting the Singapore Election?

Lee's People's Action Party, which has won every election since Singapore's independence in 1965 and has never seen its vote share drop below 60%, is expected to win comfortably. The main opposition Workers' Party is likely to pose the stiffest challenge, but holds only six of parliament's 89 elected seats. The new Progress Singapore Party, led by former PAP lawmaker and presidential candidate Tan Cheng Bock, could cause an upset in a few seats, and has won backing from the prime minister's estranged brother.

Singapore Elections: What's at Stake?

The election is seen as a litmus test for Singapore's new generation of leaders, with Lee, a scion of the city-state's founding family, planning to step down in the coming years. While surveys show government satisfaction is high, people are most concerned about living costs and the gap between rich and poor in the wealthy city-state, a recent poll by BlackBox Research showed. Even small shifts in support for the ruling party can spur policy changes that affect many international firms based in the Asian business hub. After its worst result in 2011, although it still secured 60% of the vote, the PAP accelerated foreign labour curbs to allay citizens' unease about immigration levels and the impact on job prospects and property prices.

Criticism?

Some opposition parties have opposed holding an election during the pandemic as detrimental to public health and distracting from government efforts to combat the virus. Rights groups have long criticised Singapore's electoral process for favouring the ruling party. **Special virus-related measures to limit physical campaigning and rallies threaten to further disadvantage smaller parties**, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights said last week. The Elections Department said it was committed to ensuring "free and fair" elections and was providing alternatives for political parties and candidates to reach voters via additional television broadcasts and livestreaming.

U.S. Martyred Bin Laden, Says Imran Khan

- Pakistan's Prime Minister said that the U.S. "martyred" the al-Qaeda leader and mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Osama bin Laden, a term that reflected **a subtle jab at Washington as it's mainly used for honourable figures slain in battle**. Imran Khan delivered the jab in a rambling budget speech in Parliament, attacking his predecessors' foreign policies and saying Pakistan's partnership with the U.S. in the war on terror was a mistake. Mr. Khan also said Washington used abusive language against Pakistan, blaming Islamabad for its failures in neighbouring Afghanistan. Most of all, the U.S. refused to tell Islamabad of its operation



against bin Laden in 2011 before carrying out the Navy SEALs night-time raid. The special operations force swooped into Pakistan's military garrison town of Abbottabad in the middle of the night on May 2, 2011, killing Laden and several of his operatives. Washington has repeatedly accused Pakistan of harbouring the Afghan Taliban and giving safe haven to Haqqani network, a Taliban affiliate that has been blamed for some major attacks in Afghanistan.

Pakistan To Remain on FATF 'Greylist'

→ Pakistan received another extension on the "Greylist", as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary session on decided to continue to keep all countries that were on the list under scrutiny for Terror Financing and Money Laundering until October 2020. However, Islamabad faced setbacks on other fronts, with the United States slamming its record on terrorism, including its failure to act against groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and received a U.S. veto against its joint effort with China to list an Indian engineer on the UN Security Council (UNSC)'s 1267 list. At the FATF plenary, held through videoconferencing, Pakistan was due for a decision on whether it would be kept on the "Greylist" or downgraded to the blacklist for failing to meet the finance watchdog's 27-point action plan on countering terror financing and anti-money laundering (CFT/AML) measures. Sources said the FATF, which had given Pakistan two extensions to comply with its action plan since October 2019, decided unanimously to postpone decisions on all countries under "increased monitoring" or the "Greylist", as well on "high risk jurisdictions", as the "blacklist" is formally known, owing to the coronavirus pandemic. The FATF decision came even as the U.S. released its 2019 country report for terrorism, where the State Department said Pakistan had continued to "serve as a safe haven" for regional terrorist groups. "It allowed groups targeting Afghanistan, including the Afghan Taliban and affiliated HQN, as well as groups targeting India, including LeT and its affiliated front organizations, and JeM, to operate from its territory," said the report, adding that while it (Pakistan) had taken "modest" steps in 2019 to tackle terror financing and restrain some India-focused terrorist organizations after the February 14 terror attack in Pulwama last year, it still had not taken "decisive action" that would undermine the operational capability of India and Afghanistan focused terrorists. The report also took note of LeT chief Hafiz Saeed's arrest last year but pointed out that JeM founder Masood Azhar and Sajid Mir were at large. Azhar was designated a global terrorist by the U.N. last year. However, the report said Pakistan had played a "constructive role" in facilitating U.S. talks with the Taliban. Pakistan said it was "disappointed" at the U.S. for vetoing its joint request with China to have one of four Indians listed with the UNSC sanctions Committee on designating terror entities. In September 2019, Pakistan and China moved the joint proposal to declare Mr. Dongara, an Indian engineer working in Afghanistan, as a terrorist. "We are disappointed that Pakistan's proposal to designate Venumadhav Dongara as a terrorist has been objected to. Pakistan hopes that the listing requests of other three Indian nationals will be given due consideration," said a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.

FATF Report Flags Wildlife Trade

→ In its first global report on the illegal wildlife trade, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has described it as a "global threat", which also has links with other organised crimes such as modern slavery, drug trafficking and arms trade. The illegal trade is estimated to generate revenues of up to \$23 billion a year. The report says a financial investigation is key to



dismantling the syndicates involved, which can in turn significantly impact the associated criminal activities. The findings of the study, which expressed concern over the lack of focus on the financial aspects of the crime, are based on inputs from some 50 jurisdictions across the FATF global network, as well as expertise from the private sector and civil society.

Fraud and Tax Evasion

The “Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade” report said “criminals are frequently misusing the legitimate wildlife trade, as well as other import-export type businesses, as a front to move and hide illegal proceeds from wildlife crimes. They also rely regularly on corruption, complex fraud and tax evasion”. The study has highlighted the growing role of online marketplaces and mobile and social media-based payments to facilitate movement of proceeds warranting a coordinated response from government bodies, the private sector and the civil society. The FATF found that jurisdictions often did not have the required knowledge, legislative basis and resources to assess and combat the threat posed by the funds generated through the trade.

Good Practices

The report recommended that jurisdictions should consider implementing the good practices, as observed during the study. The report noted that in 2012, India amended the Prevention of Money Laundering Act removing a value threshold – of ₹30 lakh and above – that was earlier applicable to the wildlife trade predicates.

Google To Pay for News Content

- Google will pay partnered media publishers in three countries and offer some users free access to paywalled news sites, the tech giant said on Thursday. The announcement comes after legal battles in France and Australia over Google’s refusal to pay news organizations for content. In a blog post, the company said it would launch “a licensing programme to pay publishers for high-quality content for a new news experience” due to launch later this year. Brad Bender, Google’s vice-president of product management, said they had been in discussions with partnered publishers – including the Spiegel Group in Germany, Schwartz media in Australia and Brazil’s Diarios Associados – for several months, “with more to come.” “Google will also offer to pay for free access for users to read paywalled articles on a publisher’s site,” the statement said, without offering any further details. Bender said the program will help publishers “monetize their content through an enhanced storytelling experience.” He added it would build on the 2018 Google News Initiative, a \$300 million project that aimed to tackle disinformation online and help news sites grow financially. It comes after growing calls for internet tech titans, notably Google, to pay for content. A number of European and global publications – including AFP – have called on the European Union to adopt laws requiring internet companies to pay for the material they produce. In April, France’s competition regulator said the firm must start paying media groups for displaying their content, ordering it to begin negotiations after refusing for months to comply with Europe’s new digital copyright law. And earlier this month, Google rejected an Australian ruling that it pay hundreds of millions of dollars per year in compensation to local news media under a government-imposed revenue sharing deal.



Foreign Affairs

India Mulls Bilateral Air Bubbles — What Are They, And What Are the Risks?

- India has proposed establishing air travel “bubbles” with several countries including the United States, Germany, and France on the lines of “air bridges” or “Covid-safe travel zones” that have been conceptualised by countries that have managed to fully or partially contain the outbreak. **The Ministry of Civil Aviation is negotiating the setting up of travel bubbles to restart scheduled international passenger flights — however, a number of factors could end up pricking the bubble even before it is formed.**

So, What Are Travel Bubbles?

While quarantining and testing of passengers have universal appeal, some jurisdictions are talking of “bubbles” or “air bridges” joining states that have largely eliminated the virus, and who trust in each other’s testing and case numbers. According to The Economist, **Australia and New Zealand could lead the way with a proposed “Covid-safe travel zone”, or the trans-Tasman bubble. Small countries in the Pacific including Fiji and the Cook Islands, which have kept the virus at bay, could join in, with the zone being expanded to other jurisdictions such as Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. The Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia too have created a bubble allowing free travel among themselves, while restricting outsiders.** The concept of a travel bubble, or an air bridge, is reciprocal in nature, which means that both sides — the departure point and the arrival point — have to be on board. It also means that travel restrictions such as quarantining or testing of passengers have to be discarded among the countries in the bubble.

And What Is India’s Proposal?

Responding to allegations by the US government of distorting the level playing field by allowing Air India to fly commercial passengers on outbound legs of repatriation flights, the Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation said that it was looking at the possibility of establishing bilateral arrangements. This was on account of moving away from controlled and managed aviation evacuation of Indian citizens in different parts of the world and foreign nationals from India. “As we contemplate further opening up in response to demands, we are looking at the prospect of establishing individual bilateral bubbles, India-US, India-France, India-Germany, India-UK. These are all destinations where demand for travel has not diminished. Final decisions pursuant to negotiations are expected to be taken soon,” the Ministry said in an official statement.

What Could Be the Hurdles for This Proposal?

The finalising of travel bubbles could be a huge step in the direction of resuming scheduled international air travel, which has been suspended for three months now. But **a lot depends on the destination country’s perception of India in terms of being a Covid threat.** India is now fourth on Johns Hopkins University global coronavirus tracker dashboard, with only the United States, Brazil, and Russia having reported a larger number of cases. Also, the Indian government’s move to allow outbound commercial travel on flights meant to repatriate Indian citizens without allowing reciprocal benefits to some countries like the US and France could have resulted in sentiments turning sour in these countries. With the order restricting Air India’s repatriation flights on Monday, threatening to suspend the third and fourth



freedoms of flying, the US has already tightened the policy on flying from India. France and the UAE too, have forced Air India to fly to Paris without any passengers. And then, there are the risks of rushing in too fast. **New Zealand, which had successfully controlled the spread of coronavirus with zero fresh cases for weeks, relaxed the restrictions on travel into the country, only to almost immediately start recording new cases.** Following this, the country tightened border restrictions again. Similarly, several European Union countries that wanted to reopen travel to revive their economies are considering blocking American citizens from entering their borders because they deem the US to be risky, The New York Times reported.

How US Pause on H1-B Visas Will Impact Indian Companies

- The US administration said that it was extending the 60-day ban on immigration and non-immigrant worker visas till the end of 2020. Popular work **visas including the much-coveted H-1B and H-2B, and certain categories of H-4, J, and L visas shall also remain suspended until December 31, the White House said in a press note.** The move, US President Donald Trump said, was to protect domestic workers who had been impacted due to a contraction in the economy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

What is H-1B, H-2B, L and Other Work Visas?

In order to fill a vacuum of highly-skilled low-cost employees in IT and other related domains, the US administration issues a certain number of visas each year which allows companies from outside the US to send employees to work on client sites. Of these work visas, the **H-1B remains the most popular among Indian IT companies. The US government has a cap of 85,000 total H-1B visas for each year. Of this, 65,000 H-1B visas are issued to highly skilled foreign workers, while the rest 20,000 can be additionally allotted to highly skilled foreign workers who have a higher education or master's degree from an American university.** Apart from the H-1B visas, the US government also issues **L1 visas which allows companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years. H-2B visas allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.**

Why Did the US Suspend Non-Immigrant Worker Visas?

Since it was started in 1952, the H-1 visa scheme has undergone many changes and revisions to allow or disallow certain categories of skilled workers in the US, depending on the economic situation of the country. The technology boom coupled with the arrival of the internet and low-cost computers in developing nations such as India and China saw a large number of graduates willing to work at relatively low costs in the US, a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee. However, it has since often been criticised for sending low cost workers to the US at the expense of domestic workers. In January 2017, after taking over as the president of the US, Trump had hinted that the low-cost workers were hampering the economy and undercutting jobs of citizens. The US had then hinted at reforming the "broken" H-1B visa system. Trump seized the opportunity provided by the economic contraction due to Covid-19 by first banning the entry of non-immigrant workers till June 23, and then extending it till December 31. In his executive order extending the ban, Trump said that while under normal circumstances, "properly administered temporary worker programs can provide benefits to the economy," the extraordinary economic contraction created due to Covid-19 posed a threat to the US workers.



Who All Does It Impact?

Since the ban is effective immediately, the processing of all new H-1B, H-2B, J, and L visa categories stand suspended. **This means those who do not have a valid non-immigrant visa as of June 23, and are outside of the US, will not be allowed to enter the country until December 31.** Workers in essential services in the food sector have been given some reprieve, and their entry shall be decided by the consular officer of immigration services. **H-1B, H-2B, J and L visa holders, and their spouse or children already present in the US shall not be impacted by the new worker visa ban.**

How Does It Impact Indian IT Companies?

Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime, and have since 1990s cornered a lion's share of the total number of visas issued each year. As of April 1, 2020, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had received about 2.5 lakh H-1B work visa applications, according to official data. Indians had applied for as many as 1.84 lakh or 67 per cent of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year ending March 2021. Apart from the suspension of these work visas, the executive order signed by **Trump has also made sweeping changes to the H-1B work visa norms, which will no longer be decided by the currently prevalent lottery system. The new norms will now favour highly-skilled workers who are paid the highest wages by their respective companies. This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies which send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.** Though the large Indian IT companies have cut down their dependency on H-1B and other worker visas by hiring as much as 50 per cent of staff locally, they still rely on these visas to keep costs in check. Indian IT companies also offer subcontracts to Indian nationals already present in the US with valid H-1B visas. Bangalore-based Wipro spends as much as 20 per cent of its revenue to subcontract Indian workers with valid H-1B visas.

- There is little doubt that the policies of the Trump White House are likely to genuflect to the broader requirements of the 2020 presidential campaign, one of which is a sharp focus on "America First," or in this case the need to project aggressive action against American jobs allegedly being lost to foreign workers. This week's proclamation offered data to bolster that claim, noting that between February and April, "more than 20 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in key industries where employers are currently requesting H-1B and L workers to fill positions". It also observed that similar or higher numbers could be found in the other listed visa categories. However, Mr. Trump may find that the blowback from America Inc., the employers of millions of non-immigrant foreign workers, is speedy and savage. Already Google CEO Sundar Pichai has responded by tweeting, "Immigration has contributed immensely to America's economic success, making it a global leader in tech, and also Google the company it is today. Disappointed by today's proclamation – we'll continue to stand with immigrants and work to expand opportunity for all." If more captains of the Fortune 500 companies strike this note of disappointment – and lobby quietly behind closed doors to boost the prospects of Mr. Trump's rival in the November election, former Democratic Vice-President Joe Biden – this might be the straw that breaks the back of the Trump campaign juggernaut.



Who Does Galwan Valley Belong To?

- On June 15, the worst violence on the India-China border since 1967 claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers. The clash occurred in the Galwan Valley, which hasn't been a site of conflict since 1962. On June 19, the Chinese Foreign Ministry in a statement claimed that the entire valley is located "on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)", which followed a statement from the People's Liberation Army stating that "China always owns sovereignty over the Galwan Valley region". India has described the claims as "exaggerated and untenable".

Where is Galwan Valley?

The valley refers to the land that sits between steep mountains that buffet the Galwan River. The river has its source in Aksai Chin, on China's side of the LAC, and it flows east to Ladakh, where it meets the Shyok river on India's side of the LAC. The valley is strategically located between Ladakh in the west and Aksai Chin in the east, which is currently controlled by China as part of its Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. At its western end are the Shyok river and the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulet Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road. Its eastern mouth lies not far from China's vital Xinjiang Tibet road, now called the G219 highway.

Where Does the Line of Actual Control Lie?

The LAC lies east of the confluence of the Galwan and Shyok rivers in the valley, up to which both India and China have been patrolling in recent years. After the June 15 clash, however, China has claimed the entire valley lies on its side of the LAC. Since early May, China has been objecting to India's road construction activities at the western end of the valley, in the area between the Galwan-Shyok confluence and the LAC. Beijing is now saying the entire valley is on its side of the LAC, which pegs the line further west near the Shyok river. India has rejected the claim as "exaggerated and untenable".

Are China's Claims New?

Most Chinese maps show most of Galwan river on China's side of the line, but short of the confluence. This broadly corresponds with the LAC as India sees it – and in India's view, as China saw it, until recently. "Chinese maps that I have seen show almost all of the Galwan River as lying within the territory China claims in the area," said M. Taylor Fravel, a professor at that Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes. "The one discrepancy would be the western tip of the Galwan River as it meets the Shyok River. Here, the last few kilometres of the Galwan River are often depicted as lying beyond China's border."

What Do Maps Tell Us?

Maps paint a complicated picture. As Manoj Joshi of the Observer Research Foundation notes, in 1959, then Premier Zhou Enlai said a 1956 map portrayed the correct alignment. This showed the entire Galwan Valley as a part of India. However, in June 1960 China put out a map claiming sovereignty over the valley. A Chinese map from November 1962 also claims the entire valley, but subsequent maps have not shown the western tip of the river as a part of China.



By Citing Its Territorial Claims, Can China Alter the Line of Actual Control?

Territorial claims and LAC claims are not the same. Regardless of whether or not China claims territorial rights to the valley, as one scholar suggested this week, the LAC that both countries abided by until recently ran through the valley. The distinction between territorial claims and LAC claims is sometimes blurred. The LAC refers to territory under the effective control of each side, not to their entire territorial claim. For instance, India's territorial claims extend 38,000 sq. km on the other side of the LAC across all of Aksai Chin, but the LAC India observes runs through the valley. It is true that the LAC has never been demarcated and there are differences in perception of where it lies in more than a dozen spots, but there have not been previous incidents in the valley. By now staking a claim to the entire Galwan Valley and up to the confluence of the rivers, China is, in India's view, unilaterally altering the LAC here. According to the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA), India and China agreed to "strictly respect and observe the LAC between the two sides". This referred to the LAC at the time, rendering irrelevant the line of actual control in 1959 or 1962. It also says that "when necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of the line of actual control where they have different views as to its alignment." Clarifying the LAC has also been explicitly codified in the 1996 agreement on confidence-building measures and subsequent agreements. China, however, has refused to exchange maps in the western sector to take this process forward. The BPTA also said "the two sides agree that references to the line of actual control in this agreement do not prejudice their respective positions on the boundary question."

A Spur in The Grand Rivalry

→ The deadly clash at patrolling Point 14 on a ridge line overlooking the fast flowing Galwan river in eastern Ladakh, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, echoes episodes of the Great Game – the late 19th century tussle where colonial Britain worked feverishly to block Russian influence from permeating through the mountainous "gates" of India. There were multiple fronts of the Great Game, including Central Asia and Afghanistan, but Ladakh, starting from Leh, known for its lucrative trade through the lofty Karakoram Pass, into the heart of Xinjiang, had become an important spur in this grand imperial rivalry. But two decades into the 21st century, India and China – two aspirational Asian nations – are following this trail of rivalry at strategic pivots along their contested mountainous borders.

New Road

Point 14, overlooking the Galwan river valley, is one of these key fulcrums, over which the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army of China brutally clashed with barbed wired rods, stones and rocks on the night of June 15. The area, from where the Chinese were supposed to withdraw, following a June 6 understanding, is of considerable strategic value. India's newly built **Darbuk Shyok Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road**, which leads to the base of the legendary 18,176-foot high Karakoram Pass, is within striking distance from this vantage point in the high mountains. **In case the Chinese manage to build an observation tower in this area, they can disrupt traffic over an under-construction bridge along the DSDBO road, using heavy weapons.** Understanding the strategic value of this location, it is hardly surprising that the soldiers following Col. Santosh Babu laid down their lives in a bid to prevent a permanent Chinese encampment near Point 14. Traditionally, the Galwan Valley area has been part of the winter trade route that linked Leh with Yarkand and Kashgar across the Karakoram Pass, when frozen rivers allowed caravans to progress towards their destinations. From Leh, the caravans breached the Ladakh range at Chang La pass, reaching Darbuk, Shyok village on

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



their way to the Karakoram Pass via Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO). Once the pass was crossed, traders, often in company of monks and scholars, headed for Yarkand and Kashgar, where British India had opened a consulate in a building complex called Chini Bagh. Much later, a motorable road was built from Leh. It entered the Nubra Valley, cutting through the Ladakh range via the 18,600-foot Khardungla Pass and heading to the base of Saser Kangri. Thereafter, a track headed to Murgo – linking up with the DSDBO route. But the Galwan Valley is also not far from Aksai Chin, which is occupied by China. China's highway number G219 passes through Aksai Chin, which is a vital artery linking the sporadically restive Tibet and Xinjiang, the gateway to Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, heading in the direction of Central Asia en route Europe. The Chinese have long established Hweitan – 48 km northeast of the LAC as the crow flies – as their main base servicing the Galwan Valley posts. Incidentally, Hweitan was also a launch pad for mounting an offensive during the 1962 India-China war.

Chinese Claim Line

In order to protect their strategic road in Aksai Chin built in the 1950s, the Chinese have unilaterally expanded their territorial claim line along commanding heights, including the Galwan Valley. In response, India, in mid-1962, established a post opposite Samzungling, an area from where the 80-km-long Galwan river originates before joining the Shyok river, which in turn merges with the Indus. During the 1962 war, a Chinese battalion destroyed this hopelessly outnumbered Galwan Valley post, after fierce combat, which lasted 24 hours. Despite bouts of violence in its recent history, Galwan Valley was so named during the less brutal encounters of the Great Game. **The Galwan river was named after Ghulam Rasool Galwan, a Ladakhi adventurer and explorer, who had been part of many European explorations, including two in 1890 and 1896 led by Francis Younghusband – a British explorer and Army officer, who became famous for his role in blocking Russian advances in Tibet.**

Lost in Clarifications

→ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments to an all-party meet on Friday, claiming there had neither been any intrusion by China nor was any intruder present, expectedly caused a political storm. Not only was the violence on the night of June 15 that claimed 20 Indian soldiers triggered by China erecting structures on India's side of the LAC in the Galwan Valley, Chinese troops still remain present on Indian territory elsewhere in Ladakh, including on the northern bank of Pangong Lake. After the problems with his remarks were highlighted by the Opposition, the Prime Minister's Office was moved to issue a much needed clarification on Saturday, stating the PM was only referring to the situation in the Galwan Valley "as a consequence of the bravery of our armed forces" that foiled a Chinese transgression. **Even if the PMO attributed the political storm to "a mischievous interpretation", it is more than clear that the PM did not choose his words carefully. In fact, his remarks have already been seized upon by the Chinese state media, and were seen as endorsing Beijing's claims that its troops did not cross the LAC and justifying the People's Liberation Army's recent actions. The MEA issued its own statement, reiterating that the Chinese had crossed the LAC and erected structures across the line.**

While it should be obvious that any speech that requires no less than two clarifications has serious problems with its messaging, the controversy has only underlined the government's poor communication on the border issue. The tragic loss of lives followed more than six weeks of tensions in the Galwan Valley. During this time, the public was kept in the dark about



what was transpiring along the LAC. True, **sharing every detail in the public domain is not possible when it comes to negotiating sensitive issues of national security. Indeed, the solution to the current crisis, and the disengagement that is needed urgently at various points along the LAC, can make progress only through diplomacy.** At the same time, a blanket of silence hardly serves the government's interests. The absence of timely and credible information will only fuel speculation and alarm. The silence has also triggered unseemly domestic politics and a blame-game, at a time when India is confronting possibly its **biggest national security challenge since Kargil.** Friday's all-party meet was certainly a step in the right direction, even if it perhaps came a few weeks too late. India's China policy may be approaching as significant an inflection point as 1988, which marked the normalisation of ties after 1962. Crafting the way ahead for the relationship after the worst violence since 1967 will require a measured appraisal of how to purposively engage India's biggest and most powerful neighbour. This cannot happen by being in denial or by attempting to obscure facts. The first step to a solution is a realisation of the nature and the magnitude of the problem.

Why China Is Being Aggressive Along The LAC

→ One popular argument is that China's move, driven by local factors such as India's infrastructure upgrade and its decision to change the status of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, was reckless. For some square kilometres of land, this argument goes, China has lost India strategically, to the West. Several experts have claimed that the tensions on the border are driving India deeper into a strategic embrace with the U.S. But it's not as simple as it seems. **There is a clear shift in Chinese foreign policy post the COVID-19 outbreak. This is seen in China's rising tensions with the U.S., its threats against Taiwan, repeated naval incidents in the South China Sea, and a new security law for Hong Kong. The tensions along the LAC are part of this shift.** To understand this shift, one has to get a sense of the sources of China's conduct.

Today's China is an ambitious rising power which wants to reorient the global order. Unlike the Soviet Union of the 1940s (in the early stages of the Cold War), China is not an ideological state that intends to export communism to other countries. But like the Soviet Union of the post-war world, China is the new superpower on the rise. When it was rising, China had adopted different tactical positions – "hide your capacity and bide your time", "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development". That era is over. Under President Xi Jinping, the Chinese think they have arrived. With the global economy in the doldrums, globalisation in an irrecoverable crisis accentuated by the COVID-19 outbreak, and the U.S. under an isolationist President taking the most aggressive position towards China since Richard Nixon, Beijing believes the global order is at a breaking point. It is fighting back through what game theorists call "**salami tactics**" – **where a dominant power attempts to establish its hegemony piece by piece.** India is one slice in this salami slice strategy.

Perception of Decline

China doesn't see India as a 'swing state' any more. It sees India as an ally-in-progress of the U.S. **Its actions were not reckless, taken at the risk of losing India strategically. Its actions are a result of what it perceives as a strategic loss that has already happened. If India is what many in the West call the "counterweight" to China's rise, Beijing's definite message is that it is not deterred by the counterweight. This is a message not just to India, but to a host of China's rivals that are teaming up and eager to recruit India to the club.** Within this broader framework there could be a host of factors – local, regional and global – that influenced



China's moves. When most of the world's big powers are grappling with the pandemic, revisionist powers such as China have more room for geopolitical manoeuvring. Europe has been devastated by the virus. The U.S. is battling in an election year the COVID-19 outbreak as well as the deepest economic meltdown since the Great Depression. Its global leadership is unravelling fast. The Indian economy was in trouble even before COVID-19 struck the country, slowing down its rise. Social upheaval over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, and the National Register of Citizens had weakened the Indian polity. India's traditional clout in its neighbourhood was slipping: tensions with Pakistan have been high keeping the troops occupied in the border areas; Nepal raised boundary issues with India; Sri Lanka is diversifying its foreign policy and China is making deep inroads into that region; and Bangladesh was deeply miffed with the CAA. Even in Afghanistan, where Pakistan, China, Russia and the U.S. are involved in the transition process, India is out. More important, last year's Balakot airstrike was strategically disastrous. It may have helped Prime Minister Modi win a re-election, but there was no evidence that proved that Indian strikes hit the militants. India lost a jet to the neighbour and its pilot was captured and later released by Pakistan. The whole operation exposed the chinks in our armour, eroding India's deterrence. A confluence of all these factors, which point to a decline in the country's smart power, allowed China to make aggressive moves on the LAC. This is a strategic trap. India has reached here partly because of the lack of depth in its strategic thinking. A deep embrace of a declining U.S. is not a solution as many argue; rather, it's part of the problem. Pakistan embraced a far steadier U.S. during the Cold War to check India. What happened to Pakistan thereafter should be a lesson for India. What India needs is a national security strategy that's decoupled from the compulsions of domestic politics and anchored in neighbourhood realism. It should stand up to China's bullying on the border now, with a long-term focus on enhancing capacities and winning back its friendly neighbours. There are no quick fixes this time.

China Policy Lacks Perspicacity (Mohammed Ayoob - University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University)

- While the military is more cognisant of China's tactical goals in terms of creating facts on the ground and making them the base line for future negotiations, the political leadership, it appears, has failed to fully comprehend China's strategic objectives. These strategic goals include
- ensuring that India understands that it is not in the same league as China and driving home the lesson by periodic localised assaults across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) if it tries to assume a position of equality;
 - warning India not to actively oppose Chinese designs to dominate the Indo-Pacific region by aligning with the U.S. and its allies – Japan and Australia, in particular – in an attempt to contain China;
 - keeping India preoccupied with problems in its immediate neighbourhood so that it cannot act as an alternative pole of power to China in the broader Asian region; and
 - as part of the last objective, supporting Pakistan economically and militarily, including the sharing of nuclear weapons designs, to neutralise India's conventional power superiority vis-à-vis that country.

An understanding of these objectives is essential to fashioning a realistic Indian response to China's aggressive policies in Ladakh and elsewhere along the LAC. Pakistan is at best an irritant for India that can be managed with the use of diplomatic tools, international



opprobrium, and superior military force. In fact, the Pakistani challenge to India has become magnified because of its nexus with China.

What India Should Do

China is undoubtedly India's principal long-term adversary. Wining and dining with its leaders create confusion and hinders a clear perception of this reality. India's main strategic goal should be the adoption of carefully calculated policies that neutralise China's diplomatic and military clout in the Asia-Pacific region without making India appear as a surrogate for other powers and without sacrificing India's autonomy of decision-making in foreign policy.

In India-China, the Russia Role

- While India and China have been talking at each other – and not to each other – the outreach to Moscow is noteworthy. It is widely known that Russia and China have grown their relationship in the past few years. The Moscow-Beijing axis is crucial, especially since Washington has been at loggerheads with China in recent months and Russia much more calibrated, even in its response on the Covid-19 outbreak. New Delhi believes that the approach of Western countries, especially that of the US towards both Moscow and Beijing, has brought them even closer.

Initial Friction

Russia and China have had a rocky start to their relationship, after Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China. When Mao made his first visit to Moscow after winning control of China, in 1949, he was made to wait for weeks for a meeting with the Soviet leader. "He spent several weeks cooling his heels in a remote dacha outside Moscow where the sole recreational facility was a broken table tennis table," an article in the Smithsonian Magazine said. During the Cold War, China and the USSR were rivals after the Sino-Soviet split in 1961, competing for control of the worldwide Communist movement. There was a serious possibility of a major war in the early 1960s and a brief border war took place in 1969. This enmity began to reduce following Mao's death in 1976, but relations were not very good until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Mending Fences

In the post-Cold War era, economic relations have formed the "new strategic basis" for Sino-Russian relations. China is Russia's biggest trading partner and the largest Asian investor in Russia. China sees Russia as a powerhouse of raw material and a growing market for its consumer goods. The West's approach towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea through harsh sanctions in 2014 brought Moscow much closer to China. And India, for its part, has always felt that it was the West which has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of Beijing. A Sino-Russian quasi-alliance has formed in recent years, and this has been possible due to the anti-Chinese rhetoric from Washington, collapse of oil prices and growing dependence of Russia on Chinese consumption. Western analysts see this as a "friendship of convenience" between two countries led by strongmen – Russia by President Vladimir Putin and China by President Xi Jinping. Russia has been extremely calibrated in its statements on issues on which Beijing is most sensitive to: Huawei's 5G rollout, Hong Kong and the Covid-19 pandemic. Beijing and Moscow, however, do not always see eye to eye with each other. **China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia, and Moscow, formally speaking, takes a neutral stance on Beijing's claims in the South China Sea.**



India and Russia

India has a historical relationship with Russia, spanning over seven decades. While the relationship has grown in some areas and atrophied in some others, the strongest pillar of the strategic partnership is of the defence basket. Although New Delhi has consciously diversified its new purchases from other countries, the bulk of its defence equipment is from Russia. Estimates say 60 to 70 per cent of India's supplies are from Russia, and New Delhi needs a regular and reliable supply of spare parts from the Russian defence industry. In fact, Prime Minister Modi has held informal summits with only two leaders – Xi and Putin. India has made this decision to reach out to Russia not just out of choice, but also out of necessity, since it believes Moscow has leverage and influence to shape and change Beijing's hard stance on border issue. At this time when there is tension at the border, Defence Minister Singh will discuss supply and purchase of new defence systems – like the S-400 missile defence system – with the Russian top brass in the military and government.

Russia Position, Then & Now

During the Doklam crisis in 2017, Russian diplomats in Beijing were among the few briefed by the Chinese government. At that time, it was kept under the wraps. While Russia's position during the 1962 war was not particularly supportive of India, New Delhi takes comfort in Moscow's support during the 1971 war. Tuesday's RIC Foreign Ministers' meeting, which was put off in March, will be the first opportunity for Jaishankar and Wang Yi to engage in that trilateral format. Asked on the possibility of discussing the India-China tension, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov had said last week: "The agenda does not involve discussing issues that relate to bilateral relations of a country with another member of this format." On the events in Galwan, Moscow responded in a very calibrated manner last week. On June 17, Russian Ambassador Kudashev tweeted, "We welcome all steps aimed at de-escalation at the LAC, including the conversation between the two FMs, and remain optimistic." He had said: "The existence of the RIC is an undisputable reality, firmly fixed on the world map. As for the current stage of the trilateral cooperation, there are no indications that it might be frozen." According to Russian news agency TASS, Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the Kremlin is concerned over a clash between the military on the border between China and India but believes that the two countries could resolve this conflict themselves. The Kremlin spokesman emphasised that China and India are Russia's close partners and allies, and "have very close and mutually beneficial relations built on mutual respect".

The Sharp End of Military Power (Arjun Subramaniam - Retired Air Vice Marshal From

The IAF And A Military Historian)

- In 1962, an uninformed political leadership, dominant Army brass, and diffident Air Force leadership ensured that a reasonably potent offensive element of the Indian Air Force (IAF) watched from the sidelines as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) rolled into Ladakh and down the Sela Pass into Bomdila. Swayed by the assessments of a British Operations Research expert, Patrick Blackett, and the U.S. Ambassador to New Delhi, John Kenneth Galbraith, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru balked at the idea of using the IAF to stem the Chinese tide. IAF fighter pilots posted at air bases that could impact operations in Ladakh and the Tawang Sector (Pathankot and Tezpur) recall that they were battle ready and waited for the call to action that never came.



Defensive and Offensive Strategy

Fast forward to the winter of 1986 and the summer of 1987. Following the establishment of a camp at Wangdung grazing grounds in the Sumdorong Chu Valley (northwest of Tawang and in the same area where Indian forces were overwhelmed in 1962), the trio of General Krishnaswamy Sundarji, Lieutenant General Narahari and Major General J.M. Singh put together a logistically viable envelopment strategy that spooked the Chinese with numbers, firepower, and aggression without needless confrontation. An important element of this strategy was the use of helicopters and transport aircraft to facilitate and sustain this deployment. That was not all. They even developed an offensive strategy to take the battle to Le, the forward most PLA base in the sector. There was close coordination between 4 Corps in Tezpur and the fighter base close by and training was stepped up in the valleys to support offensive operations if required. In an interview with the author, Major General J.M. Singh was emphatic that air power held the key in operations on the Tibetan Plateau. He argued, "We must have the capability to gain and maintain a favourable air situation for limited periods of time, and carry out interdiction to back shallow multi-pronged thrusts across road-less terrain to outflank the Chinese build-up that will take place on the existing road and rail networks."

The IAF's Advantage

On June 15, 2020, there was a violent clash at Patrolling Point 14 in Galwan. The ground situation across the entire Line of Actual Control (LAC) is largely one of parity and for any tangible gains or tactical advantage to be gained on the ground the Indian Army needs a numerical superiority of at least 5:1. Therefore, if there is any asymmetric advantage to be gained, it is air power that will prove to be decisive in depleting the PLA's combat potential before it is applied along the LAC. **By all recent operational assessments including one by the Harvard Kennedy School, the IAF currently enjoys both a qualitative and quantitative advantage over the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) across the LAC. It's fighter fleet of 4th Generation Aircraft (Su-30 MKIs, Mirage-2000s and MiG-29s) are superior in almost every respect to the PLAAF's J-10s, J-11s and SU-30 MKKs. The IAF has more operational bases than the PLAAF close to the LAC.** There is reasonable redundancy and survivability to withstand an initial attack on IAF bases by the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). There are, however, two areas of concern. The first is a strong ground-based air defence network strung up by the PLAAF in Tibet comprising the S-300, S-400 and HQ-9 systems that the IAF will have to contest during its offensive operations. The second is the advantage that the PLAAF has in long-range air delivered cruise missiles (500-3,000 km) from the H-6 bomber. As compared to this, the IAF's Su-30 MKI has just been cleared to carry the BrahMos land attack cruise missile with a range of 300 km which could be a significant force multiplier against targets in Aksai Chin and Tibet. The other area of significant advantage enjoyed by the IAF is in the aerial mobility department where the IAF transport fleet of C-17s, Il-76s, An-32s and C-130s are as proficient in diverse roles as the best air forces in the world. Whether it is rapid troop induction into major bases or at Advance Landing Grounds like DBO, Nyoma or Mechuka, or inter-valley transfer and insertion of special forces with helicopters like the recently inducted Chinooks and the versatile Mi-17 series, these are areas that will provide great confidence to the Indian Army. After initial setbacks in Afghanistan, the U.S. Army has figured out a way to exploit the lethal firepower of the Apache Attack Helicopter at altitudes of 12,000-14,000 feet. It would be reasonable to expect that the IAF's Apaches would add significant firepower in Ladakh. Finally, in the area of surveillance, China possesses a large complement of the Yaogan series of low earth orbit surveillance satellites that offer it an



almost persistent stare capability over areas of interest. To counter this India must leverage its existing space-based surveillance assets and airborne surveillance platforms to support wide-spectrum operations and provide better situational awareness.

The Importance of Air Power

Unless there is vision and an acceptance of the importance of air power in what has been till now a significantly land-centric operational philosophy across the LAC, there is a clear and present danger. In the next decade or so, the IAF will lose its competitive advantage with the PLAAF as the latter has invested heavily in modernisation and is continuing to do so. On the other hand, with deep budgetary cuts and the likelihood of the slowing down of the induction of cutting-edge platforms and weapon systems, the choice is not about what the IAF wants but what the country needs in the prevailing complex security environment. Air power represents the sharp end of contemporary military power. We need to ensure that it does not get blunt.

Why High-Altitude Warfare Is Challenging, How Soldiers Are Trained

- The violent standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in Galwan Valley of Ladakh region has thrown the spotlight on high-altitude warfare and the challenges that troops face, particularly when advantageous positions on the heights are occupied by the other side.

How Is High-Altitude Warfare Fought?

High-altitude warfare is fought keeping the terrain and weather in mind. The kind of infrastructure and training that the troops require for high-altitude warfare are key factors. The evolution of such warfare goes back a long way: European countries had mountain brigades in view of the kind of terrain prevalent in those countries. The harshness of the terrain calls for a specialised kind of training to prepare soldiers in terms of mindset and acclimatisation. "To begin with, the troops are imparted training in basic and advance training in mountaineering to make them equipped for mountain warfare,".

How Is India Equipped in Such Warfare?

Generally, India is considered a hub of mountain warfare skills since most of the country's north and northeast requires such skills. Ladakh Scouts are considered the best in this kind of warfare. **Mountain chop**, a tactic involved in such warfare, evolved in India where the mountainous terrain is very difficult to scale. Colonel Sonam said: "The mindset of the enemy sitting above needs to be assessed. Taking stock of the entire situation, one needs to find out the easiest approaches.

What Are the Challenges Involved in Warfare in A High-Altitude Place Like Galwan Valley?

A big factor is who has taken defensive positions and who is sitting on higher ground. Once troops are sitting on high ground, it becomes very difficult to dislodge them from there. In a place like Galwan Valley, which is absolutely barren, there is not much concealment. The soldier on high ground is absolutely stationary, which makes those on lower terrain easy targets; the enemy can pick them up one by one. **Normally in mountain warfare, troops on lower ground use a combat ratio of 1:6, but in circumstances as in Galwan, it may go up to 1:10.** Generally, mountain warfare is fought using the period of darkness to reach the



opposing army, engage and overpower them before the first light of day. In case troops do not have the capabilities, fitness or strategies to do so before dawn, then it is a lost cause. Col Sonam said, "Local troops in Kargil proved fantastic since they were fantastic mountain climbers. But without adequately trained troops who are well-versed with the terrain and are properly acclimatised, it is not an easy game".

What Are the Other Challenges Faced by Soldiers in High Altitudes?

The first major factor is acclimatisation since the oxygen supply reduces drastically. Next, the load carrying capacity of individuals reduces drastically. Things move very slow in the mountains and mobilisation of troops consumes time. Thus, time and place need to be kept on top priority when deciding where the troops have to be stationed and how they have to be mobilised. At every stage when an assault progresses, the troops require access to maintenance. One needs to identify tactical points (which are passes in the current scenario) where troops can build roads and take defensive positions, and where those troops need to be maintained. Normally, advance troops may be able to carry packed rations or other required equipment that can last for 48-72 hours, but then constant supplies are required to reach them. Generally, troops carry a 30-35 kg load including weapons, ammunition, communication equipment, rations etc. It is difficult to negotiate such terrains carrying such loads; it is difficult even to raise one's hand.

What Are the Logistical Challenges in This Kind of Warfare?

One major challenge is that weapons jam, particularly in high-altitude areas. When a soldier is at a height of 17,000 ft or above, it is very cold, and he needs to grease the weapons and clean the barrels at least once a week to ensure they function efficiently. But at the time of combat, this becomes difficult. Vehicles do not start when fuel jams. If the fuel is diesel, it won't ignite unless it is mixed with thinners or other chemicals to make them thin enough to fire the engine. Planning has to be done in advance, with recces carried out, which again is difficult in the mountains. There has to be a contingency plan to first identify the tactical points that need to be used in case of an assault. In Galwan, which is an extremely tactical area and strategically important, reinforcement plays a vital role, particularly when the Indian troops are not in a position of advantage. For communication equipment, troops need to carry more batteries because they drain very quickly at high altitude. While a battery tends to last for 24 hours in the plains, it will drain in 1-2 hours in these severely cold areas. Transport animals such as mules need to be used to maintain adequate supplies, which is not an easy task. Weather constraints play a major factor.

Will Banning Chinese Imports Hurt India's Exports?

- Following the recent clashes with Chinese troops in Ladakh in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, there has been a growing clamour in the country to boycott goods from the neighbouring country. However, the development has caused an alarm among various industry bodies that are concerned about the adverse impact in the event of a blanket ban on exports in several sectors. Industry associations, from pharmaceuticals to telecommunications and automobiles, are of the view that a "knee-jerk" offensive against China till alternative vendors are finalised or domestic capacities are built will hurt the economy, including the country's exports.



How Dependent Is India On Chinese Imports?

China accounts for a sizable portion of India's top imports, especially where **intermediate products or components and raw materials** are concerned. It has also been the top exporter of products like electrical machinery, equipment and their parts, nuclear reactors, organic and inorganic chemicals, fertilisers as well as vehicles, their parts and accessories. In several cases, China's contribution is much higher than the second-largest exporter countries of these products to India. **The neighbouring country also accounts for 45 per cent of India's total electronics imports. A third of machinery and almost two-fifths of organic chemicals that India purchases from the world comes from China**, according to the Confederation of Indian Industry. **Automotive parts and fertilisers are other items where China's share in India's import is more than 25 per cent.** Several of these products are used by Indian manufacturers in the production of finished goods, thus thoroughly integrating China in India's manufacturing supply chain. For instance, India sources close to 90 per cent of certain mobile phone parts from China. **Even as an export market, China is a major partner for India. At \$15.5 billion, it is the third largest destination for Indian shipments.** At the same time, India only accounts for a little over two per cent of China's total exports, according to the Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO).

How Could A Blanket Ban on Chinese Imports Hit India's Exports?

Across sectors from pharmaceuticals to telecommunications and automobiles, industry associations have been speaking up against a complete boycott of Chinese imports. FIEO president Sharad Kumar Saraf, and Director General Ajay Sahai said that a "blanket ban" may not be feasible because of India's dependence on the country for crucial raw materials. "If they take retaliatory measures, it would impact us more negatively." The India Cellular and Electronics Association and the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association are among other trade and industry associations that are on the edge. "There are strategic... and key inputs that we use from China (raw materials) due to which our exports are more competitive," said Sahai. For instance, **of the nearly \$3.6 billion worth of ingredients that Indian drug-makers import to manufacture several essential medicines, China catered to around 68 per cent.** India is considered one of the largest pharma industries in the world, and accounts for a considerable portion of imports of finished formulations by other large economies like the US. While pharma consignments from China have unofficially been stopped at ports in India, and are expected to be cleared after thorough checks, **a ban could create shortages of medicines both for India's domestic and export markets.** Most large pharmaceutical firms in India currently have sufficient stock of ingredients to last them until September, according to R C Juneja, Chairman of Delhi-headquartered Mankind Pharma. "We will start seeing a major impact by December if the issue is not resolved by then. Several countries and regions depend on India for formulations like paracetamol," he said.

What Are the Alternatives in This Situation?

According to FIEO's Saraf, the decision to boycott non-essential products made in China can be left to the individual, while trade-related measures like raising duties on cheaper raw materials imported from China would be better than an outright embargo. This would still allow access to crucial ingredients in the short-term while India looks to build self-reliance or maybe switch to alternate trade partners. An analysis by CII shows that countries like the US, Vietnam, Japan, Mexico and certain European countries could be tapped as alternate import sources for some critical electronic, vehicular and pharmaceutical components as well. It is likely that the costs of the raw materials from these alternate sources will be higher and may



get passed on to consumers if the manufacturers cannot absorb them. India will need to look into the totality of its trade with China and Hong Kong and implement certain short- to long-term plans to reduce its dependence on them, according to FIEO. The government's "Atmanirbhar" focus is expected to help ministries handhold industries where self-reliance needs to be built. Some measures, like the decision to push bulk drug parks in India, have to be executed. India has been able to reduce its import dependence in the mobile sector through a long-term focus on building self-reliance in manufacturing some of the crucial components required to make them. According to FIEO, this approach can be replicated in other sectors like electronic and telecommunication where there is a need to encourage Indian investments as well as Foreign Direct Investments through fiscal incentives. "While an increase in tariff can be one way to achieve it (import substitution), the more effective strategy would be to provide an ecosystem that addresses the cost disability of Indian manufacturing leading to such imports. Import substitution manufacturing should attract interest subvention on credit, offsetting inland freight disadvantage besides equalization of import tariff from free trade areas," said FIEO. Exporters will also have to minimise their impact through strategies that involve a focus on other advanced and emerging markets and by also exploring countries that are currently experiencing a high anti-China sentiment, according to FIEO.

What India Can Learn from China About Becoming Trading Powerhouse

- ➔ China and India not only account for 2.7 billion people – roughly 40% of the 7.5 billion people on the planet – but are also two of the biggest economies in the world. It is another matter that **at a per capita GDP level, both countries are relatively "poor" when compared to some of the most developed economies.** For instance, as of 2018, the per capita GDP of the **United States was \$54,659** while that of Sweden was even higher at \$57,966. In comparison, **China (at \$7,752) and India (at \$2,100)** lag far behind. India, in particular, is the worst of the lot. **China's per capita GDP is roughly 4 times India's; the US and Sweden's are a whopping 26- and 27-times India's.** This shows how far an average Indian is from an average Chinese or American. That is why economists repeat it ad nauseam that India has to grow rapidly for several decades at a stretch if it wants the average level of lifestyle to reach anywhere close to the developed world. In this context, the spilling over of the latest border dispute between these two Asian giants into the economic sphere is particularly ill-timed. Hurt by China's aggression, several Indians, including many in the government, have argued in favour of boycotting the use of Chinese products. However, for a variety of reasons, this strategy, while targeting China, is likely to hurt India far more.
- ➔ The first thing to understand is that India's poor share in global trade, especially on goods, is a reflection of our **acute lack of competitiveness.** This is the harsh truth but far too often, instead of accepting this reality, **policymakers have blamed India's stagnant exports performance on weak global demand.** An analysis by HSBC in late 2016 showed that **weak global demand explained only 33% of the slowdown in Indian exports. The biggest culprit was "domestic bottlenecks" – explaining 50% of the slowdown.** The remaining 17% was blamed on an overvalued rupee. The impact of **domestic bottlenecks (such as poor infrastructure, lack of reliable electricity, logistical delays, regulatory hurdles, problems in enforcing contracts etc.)** was higher still – 60% – when one looked at only the trade in goods (that is, by leaving aside the trade in services). There's little any individual country can do about global growth or demand – that's a factor which is the same for all nations. What matters then are domestic bottlenecks and rupee exchange rate. On the exchange rate, the jury is still out. Some argue that a cheaper rupee would make our exports more competitive



– and that seems fairly straightforward. Others argue that a stronger rupee will help us import intermediary goods at a cheaper price thus helping our export competitiveness. The only place there is consensus is on the biggest factor – domestic bottlenecks. The analysis, led by Pranjul Bhandari, further showed that there were a lot of sector-specific factors that can make a meaningful difference. “For instance, India’s desire to revive textile exports can be helped by **increasing productivity in cotton plantations (by better implementing available technology, for example BT Cotton). Trade negotiations (bilateral, multilateral and plurilateral) to lower tariffs that India’s exports face abroad can boost India’s exports in textiles and engineering goods**”. Towards fine-tuning a sector-specific strategy to boost exports, the government can just revisit the advice rendered by its Chief Economic Adviser Krishnamurthy V. Subramanian in the latest Economic Survey released in January-end this year. Chapter 5 of Volume I is dedicated to this issue. In it, the Survey makes two key points. One, India must not harbour “misplaced insecurity on the trade front” lest it misses the opportunity that trade provides. It states, “contrary to recent fears, careful analysis...shows that India has gained from trade agreements: a 0.7 per cent increase per year in trade surplus with partner countries for manufactured products and 2.3 per cent per year for total merchandise”. Two, its states, “the current environment for international trade presents India an unprecedented opportunity to chart a China-like, labour-intensive, export trajectory and thereby create unparalleled job opportunities for our burgeoning youth”. According to the Survey, by integrating “Assemble in India for the world” into Make in India, “India can create 4 crore well-paid jobs by 2025 and 8 crores by 2030”. The Survey singled out China as a model for India to emulate. “China’s remarkable export performance vis-à-vis India is driven primarily by deliberate specialization at large scale in labour-intensive activities, especially ‘network products’, where production occurs across Global Value Chains (GVCs) operated by multi-national corporations”. India must defend its territorial integrity and yes, it must do whatever it can to hit back at China, but, and this cannot be overemphasised, it is critical not to resort to knee-jerk reactions. Sun Tzu wrote: “Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing”. In the same way, India’s trade policy must be an informed choice.

Why Shipments from China Are Stuck at Indian Ports

- The conflict on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has started to cause concern for American firms with manufacturing operations in India, as they are experiencing difficulties in accessing crucial components from their facilities in China. A group representing some of these firms has written to the Secretary in charge of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Dr Guruprasad Mohapatra, expressing these concerns.

What Is the Issue Here?

Import consignments from China are learnt to be facing hurdles at some ports, including Chennai and Mumbai. It is learnt that over the last fortnight, **Customs authorities have indicated to importers that there will be delays in clearing Chinese shipments, but have not cited any reasons. There have not been any written or verbal instructions from the Customs or Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) authorities either, importers say. While some Chennai Customs zone officials said that checks were being carried out on the basis of specific intelligence-based inputs, importers and industry are seeing it as a nudge to change their import pattern, especially of non-essential goods, amid calls for reducing the consumption of Chinese goods in the wake of the border tensions.**



Why Are American Firms Worried?

The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), a group representing some American firms involved in manufacturing activities in India, said they were “increasingly concerned” that component parts and other inputs “necessary” to their manufacturing operations here, were being detained at the ports. The forum has sought the restoration of port operations or, “at a minimum”, that the government publish any change in port policy “to provide the business community with the visibility they need to function.” **Consignments of around 50 US firms with manufacturing operations in India across sectors such as telecommunications, automobiles, medical equipment, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMGC) are learnt to be among those affected.** For instance, some major American telecom and auto makers have direct or contract manufacturing operations in Chennai, and some of them import components from facilities in China. And **with “no formal orders” issued by the government nor any “specific” reason provided to the firms as to why their consignments are not being cleared, the group has flagged the lack of transparency that they feel “threatens” the business continuity.** *An “unanticipated” embargo on imports of goods from neighbouring countries will have repercussions on supply chains and manufacturing in India, and will send a “chilling” signal to foreign investors, who look for predictability and transparency, the USISPF has argued.*

What Is the Volume of Trade with China?

Possible curbs on imports from China in the form of tariff or non-tariff barriers are being discussed within the government, which is said to be considering a list of imported items for the various restrictive measures. **Between April 2019 and February 2020, China accounted for around 14 per cent of India’s total imports; the main items being components for smartphones and automobiles, telecom equipment, plastic and metallic goods, active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), and other chemicals.** In pharmaceuticals particularly, India depends heavily on China for crucial ingredients. In 2018-19, around 68 per cent of India’s \$3.56 billion worth of bulk drugs or API imports were from China.

India’s Continuing Two-Front Conundrum (Jayant Prasad, A Former Diplomat, Served As Director General Of The Institute For Defence Studies And Analyses)

- ➔ Since 1959, when India-China relations sharply deteriorated, India has known that it has two geopolitical adversaries. Concerning China and Pakistan, the American academician, Professor Wayne Wilcox of Columbia University, famously stated in an article in Survival that India has to “hedge all bets and cover all contingencies”. Recently, India’s Chief of the Army Staff, General Manoj Mukund Naravane, reassuringly said in May at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses that the Indian Army remains “alive” to a “two-front” war.

Strategy and Two Wars

Whenever India has forgotten that it has two antagonists and let its guard down, it has paid dearly for it. Conversely, whenever India has accounted for the prospect of a possible threat from both quarters, it has done well. The two obvious examples are the 1962 and 1971 wars. In 1962, India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Defence Minister V.K. Krishna Menon had both believed that the threat to India’s security came principally from Pakistan. **In 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took account of a possible Chinese move in support of Pakistan.** India, therefore, took out an insurance policy in the form of the Treaty of Peace, Friendship



and Cooperation between the Government of India and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The mistake made earlier is instructive today. There has been an obsession concerning the threat from Pakistan, together with a degree of complacency vis-à-vis China, in part because the recent stand-offs in Depsang, Chumar, and Doklam were defused. The interactions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at Wuhan (April 2018) and Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu (October 2019) further blind-sided those involved in foreign and security policy planning in New Delhi.

The Lessons of 1962

In the India-China interactions leading up to the 1962 China-India war, India had demonstrated friendliness without reciprocity and firmness without force. Despite deteriorating India-China relations in the late-1950s, neither Nehru nor Krishna Menon had contemplated a war between the two countries. A contemporary observer, Raj Thapar, founder-editor of the journal, Seminar, described in her autobiography how Mr. Menon, “firmly opposed moving a single man from the Kashmir front, so convinced was he that Pakistan would attack at any opportune moment”. She wrote that it was his immutable belief that Pakistan was the threat, not China. Krishna Menon could go to any lengths to convince others of this point of view. He asked India’s High Commissioner to Pakistan, Rajeshwar Dayal, to brief a group of senior Indian Army officers about Pakistan’s war preparations against India. Warned that projecting a danger from Pakistan was part of the Defence Minister’s larger plan, in the meeting Ambassador Dayal said that he had detected nothing about the Pakistani preparations. According to witnesses, Krishna Menon was visibly annoyed. Nehru too shared the view that Pakistan posed the greater threat to India. He and Krishna Menon reinforced each other’s slant in this respect. “To be frank about it,” Nehru had acknowledged in parliament soon after the 1962 war, India’s defence dispositions “were based on our unfortunate position vis-à-vis Pakistan.” He was misled also by the good equation he had developed with Premier Zhou En-lai, forgetting that countries seldom predicate their security interests on the personal predilections of their leaders. India’s complacency and misjudgement in 1962 were not for want of warning signs from China. Indian leaders had apparently convinced themselves that the Chinese would not attack. Indeed, it was Nehru who told Krishna Menon and India’s Chief of the Army Staff that he had reliable information that the Chinese forces would not offer resistance if there was a show of force from India. Well over a year before the outbreak of hostilities, Krishna Menon took to denying that there was any problem with China, or that China was in occupation of what the government of India considered Indian territory. Addressing officers of the Indian Air Force Station, Agra, he had declared: “I am not aware of any aggression, incursion, encroachment or intrusion by the Chinese of any part of Indian territory.” The then Chief of the Army Staff, General P.N. Thapar, had told Krishna Menon that the Indian Army did not have the necessary strength to evict the Chinese from their posts. With the troop deployment of six Chinese soldiers to one Indian, the Indian Army could have been facing an adventure. Krishna Menon reassured him that the Chinese Deputy Premier, Chen Yi, had told him that China would never fight India over the border issue. General Thapar had wanted to share his misgivings with Prime Minister Nehru, but was dissuaded by the Cabinet Secretary on the ground that Nehru might consider that General Thapar was “afraid to fight”. Later, when a prominent Indian journalist checked from Krishna Menon whether General Thapar had brought up his concerns, Krishna Menon had replied with an acid tongue: “That toothless old woman; he did not know how to fight a war.”



Full Aggression

On October 20, 1962, the People's Liberation Army struck simultaneously, all along the India-China frontier — a move smacking of long preparation. The 13 forward Indian posts, from Galwan Valley up to north of Daulat Beg Oldi were attacked by the Chinese forces. Concurrently, in the eastern sector, they launched an attack on Indian forces deployed along the Namka Chu river and at Khinzemane, eventually enveloping in their attack on four out of the five frontier Divisions of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), namely Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, and Lohit Divisions. In his biography of Prime Minister Nehru, Professor Sarvepalli Gopal suggested that when Nehru issued instructions in November 1961 for the management of the India-China border, it was based on advice from the Intelligence Bureau that while the Chinese would move into areas where there was no Indian presence, they would keep away where Indian personnel had established themselves. It was assumed that the Chinese would not do anything against Indian forces when "even in a position to do so." Professor Gopal also suggested that **Nehru was perhaps unaware of the warning by the Indian Army's General that the Indian Army was in no position to sustain an operation across the entirety of the India-China border.**

China's March to Dominance

It would not be out of place to remind ourselves why India became the object of Chinese aggression. Nehru had explained in an interview aired just nine days before his death in 1964 that the Chinese acted the way they did principally as "they wanted the Asian world to realise that they are the top dog in Asia and that any person or any country in Asia should remember that". Months earlier, Nehru had written to U.S. President John F. Kennedy that China was making a bid for leadership, not just of Asia, but "as a first step in their bid for world leadership". So far as India was concerned, continued Nehru, China's aim was not to acquire territory: the real aim was "to force on India a political settlement which will involve India re-orienting its policies to suit the pattern of Chinese global policies". Although circumstances are different today, India continues to face the two-front conundrum. The last word on the present crisis is yet to be said. India must meanwhile assess its options in a balanced way. While remaining clear-eyed about Chinese intentions, India must resist the temptation to remedy past errors by precipitate action. These need a long-term vision, executed with patience and perseverance.

ASEAN States Warn of S. China Sea Tensions

- Vietnam and the Philippines warned of growing insecurity in Southeast Asia at a regional summit on Friday amid concerns that China was stepping up its activity in the disputed South China Sea during the coronavirus pandemic. **Both Hanoi and Manila lodged protests with China in April after Beijing unilaterally declared the creation of new administrative districts on islands in the troubled waterways to which Vietnam and the Philippines also have competing claims.**

'Abide by Global Law'

"Even as our region struggles to contain COVID-19, alarming incidents in the South China Sea occurred," Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte told an online meeting of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders on Friday. "We call on parties to refrain from escalating tensions and abide by responsibilities under international law," he said. China has been pushing its presence in the Exclusive Economic Zones of other countries while



claimants are preoccupied tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the United States to call on China to stop its “bullying behaviour” there. In early April, Vietnam said one of its fishing boats was sunk by a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel. China said that Vietnam's claims in South China sea are illegal and “doomed to fail”. In his opening remarks at the ASEAN Summit, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said international institutions and international law had been seriously challenged during the global crisis.

‘Irresponsible Acts’

“The pandemic is fanning the flames of dormant challenges within the political, economic and social environment of the world and in each region,” the Prime Minister said. “While the entire world is stretched thin in the fight against the pandemic, irresponsible acts and acts in violation of international law are still taking place, affecting the environment of security and stability in certain regions, including in our region,” said Mr. Nguyen , who made no mention of China in relation to the comments.

What Changed in India-Nepal Ties?

- A 12-point understanding among Nepal's eight political parties including Maoists, signed in November 2005 in Delhi, scripted the ouster of the monarchy. India was for long a factor – and to a large extent the sole external actor – in Nepal's internal politics. But when India openly took the lead role in transforming Nepal into a secular republic from a Hindu kingdom, it set off events leading to India losing its clout and allies in Nepal. The suspension of the monarchy and its subsequent abolition in 2008, and declaration of Nepal as a secular country, was followed by Nepal's journey towards federalism. None of these crucial issues was discussed at length in Parliament. The European Union took a very open stance that secularism will have no meaning without the right to conversion being incorporated as a fundamental right in the new Constitution. This led to resentment among the majority population about this “imposed secularism”. Other radical agenda got overshadowed as the civil-society-new-power axis and international stakeholders simply dismissed these as regressive forces. The EU and the US, which had begun to emerge as India's allies in Nepal's transition after 2005-06, began supporting radical federalism based on ethnicity, higher autonomy and with the right to self-determination that initially Maoists had backed. China, worried about the combined presence of India, US and EU in Nepal and their influence on internal politics, began increasing its presence and investment in Nepal, targeting tourism, post-earthquake reconstruction, trade and energy, with a message that its interest in Nepal is no less than India's or its allies put together. Although political parties backed by India in the 2005-06 movement continue to be in power in Nepal, they have visibly become more and more distant from New Delhi. The Maoists, who are now part of the ruling NCP headed jointly by Oli and Prachanda, are no longer under Indian influence.

Relations, Then and Now

Two major questions that crop up in the context of bilateral context. Why did China's clout increase to this level when India apparently calculated that the monarchy's exit will increase its own influence on Nepal? And does India have any institutional allies left in Nepal, like the monarchy and Nepali Congress like in the pre-2005 phase? **The Nepali Congress was formed in India in the early 20th century and many of its leaders participated in India's freedom struggle, thinking an independent and democratic India would help establish democracy back home. The party, despite consistently taking the lead role in the movement for a multi-party**



democracy with constitutional monarchy, was often branded “pro-India” by Communists given their close ties with Indian National Congress and socialists. However, following the 12-point agreement, the Nepali Congress was forced to accept the lead role of Maoists (Communists) in the impending political change, and agree to dispense with constitutional monarchy that it had all along said represented “forces of nationalism” and “symbol of unity in diversity”. During major face-offs, three trade embargos since the 1970s and sensitive security issues, the Kings of Nepal and the Indian Prime Ministers, directly or by using back channels – including Indian royalty and even Shankaracharya’s when Nepal was a Hindu nation – have succeeded in bringing the crises to an end. But over the years, India’s focus on Nepal appears driven more by security concerns and threat perception than by promoting a soft power-based approach like in the past. During the current spell of dispute, India has once again begun ‘valuing’ common civilizational, cultural, historic and people to people ties.

India’s Old Allies, Today

India’s old allies are regretting having aligned with the Maoists. “Nothing could have been a more erroneous judgment of India in 2006 than that Maoists were the emerging forces of the people and bringing them to the centre stage of Nepali politics and power would consolidate democracy,” a senior Nepali Congress leader said. “I think it is about time that we reviewed the 12-point agreement and restore our lead role in Nepali politics rather than being seen as follower of the Maoists,” said Gopal Man Shrestha, one of the eight leaders who signed the 12-point agreement. **Besides the monarchy, Nepali Congress and in the recent past Madhes parties to some extent, the only other institutional ally that India has had is the Nepal army.** The chief of each national army has enjoyed the status of Honorary General of the other side, on a reciprocal basis since 1950. When Oli refused to accept India’s invitation for a state visit in April 2006, during a blockade, it was the armies of both sides—especially at the then chiefs’ level –that did the homework for lifting it. Oli became a nationalist and gained much popularity thanks to the blockade. But in the current sentiment triggered by the border dispute, the idea of nationalism has once again been appropriated by a Communist leader who has all through concentrated state powers upon himself. It’s Oli who is dictating Nepal-India relations.

A Way Out of Undelineated Borders (Mukul Sanwal - Former UN Diplomat and Has Served as Deputy Commissioner Almora)

- The Galwan face-off should focus minds on resolving, not managing, different perceptions of the northern border, relying first on ‘Samadhaan’, as Kautilya suggested. The root of the misunderstanding between India and Nepal lies in a treaty to end a territorial war to which no map was attached and the negotiators had no idea of the geography of the area, except that devout Hindus on the way to Mansarovar considered the springs at Kalapani, at the base of the Lipulekh pass, as the source of the Kali river.

Historical Facts

The Treaty of Sugauli in 1815-16, which ended the Anglo-Nepalese War, stipulated that “the Kali River” would mark Nepal’s western border with the British East India Company. The demarcation undertaken by W.J. Webb later in 1816, covered ‘the entire Byans region both to the east and west of the river, on the ground that it had traditionally been part of Kumaon prior to the 25-year-old occupation by Nepal’. In 1817, Nepal made a ‘representation to the British, claiming that it was entitled to the areas east of the river. The British Governor-General



in Council accepted the demand', and the villages of Tinkar and Chaggru were transferred to Nepal, dividing the Byans area. The drainage of the Kalapani and Lipulekh was considered wholly within British territory, and it was stated that a short way below the springs, the Kali formed the boundary with Nepal. Nepal later 'extended a claim to the Kuthi valley further to the west, stating that the Kuthi – Yankti stream, the western branch of the head waters, should be considered the main Kali river'. The Himalayan Gazetteer records that the surveyor, W.J. Webb, made known to Bam Shah, the Governor of Doti, who had negotiated the Treaty, 'that the lesser stream flowing from the Kalapani springs had always been recognised as the main branch of the Kali and had in fact given its name to the river. **The British retained the Kuthi Valley' and the Limpiyadhura Pass.** The first British Resident in Nepal, Edward Gardner, laid this out to the Nepal Durbar, in correspondence (February 4, 1817 to October 10, 1817). The matter was considered settled as only **the lowland lying between the Kali and Gorakhpur that were ceded in 1815 were restored to Nepal by the Treaty of 1860.** To establish the boundary, initially, the Deputy Commissioner of Almora would each year travel to the Lipulekh Pass to open trade. The northern boundary of Byans was stated as the line of water parting between India and 'Hundes' in the Settlements of Trail in 1828 and Batten in 1840-41. The first Settlement, under the British government of Beckett between 1863 -1873, measured each cultivated field, reiterated this, and, as The Himalayan Gazetteer points out, was used to input local names into the new map prepared by the Survey of India, correcting earlier sketchy maps. The British Government did not shift the British East India Company boundary, as Nepal alleges.

Agreed Tri-Junction

In 1905, Charles A. Sherring, Deputy Commissioner of Almora, recorded his travels across Lipulekh into Tibet. He camped at Kalapani and noted its half dozen springs and the Nepal boundary at the Tinkar Pass. Trade through Lipulekh, amounting to £26,000 annually, had grown ten-fold since 1816, and was regulated by the British. The 1954 Trade Agreement between India and China mentions Lipulekh as one of the passes that could be used for trade and pilgrimage traffic; **a police post was established by India at Kalapani in 1956.** The China-Nepal Boundary Treaty, October 5, 1961, in its Article 1 states: "**The Chinese-Nepalese boundary line starts from the point where the watershed between the Kali River and the Tinkar River meet the watershed between the tributaries of the Mapchu (Karnali) River on the one hand and the Tinkar River on the other hand.**" The China-Nepal Boundary Protocol of January 20, 1963 established permanent boundary markers "as numbered 1 to 79 in serial order from west to east." The first marker of the Sino-Nepal border is at Tinkar. The tri-junction, though not delineated, corresponds to the border claimed by India and shown on the British map of 1879, and in subsequent ones, is about 5 km east-southeast of Lipulekh and 20 km from the Limpiyadhura pass.

International Law

Principles of international law support the British and India's claim. Borders are established through political agreements; delimitation gives specific meaning to the verbal description and is considered part of the negotiations and demarcation is the setting up of boundary markers. **In the case of Lipulekh and Kalapani, and now Limpiyadhura, the political agreement in 1817 has been acted upon and not open to challenge now.** A treaty has to be interpreted with reference to the circumstances prevailing at the time the treaty was concluded. In considering the general significance of map evidence, the basis of Nepal's claim, if that evidence is inconsistent, its value is reduced by any delimitation done at that time and textual



interpretation as well as legislative, administrative or judicial assertions of authority over the area. There are also clear legal grounds and reasons for corrections in names in the maps. The militarisation of this un-delineated part of the border has made it imperative for India to respond early to Nepal's selective reference to certain maps of the British East India Company – first raised in 1997 – with a white paper and discuss giving Byansis in Nepal all facilities, as those villages are cut-off from the rest of Nepal. Equally important is the need for another white paper on Aksai Chin where the border is also not delineated. Resolution is a part of political negotiation and overlapping “patrolling points” are grossly inadequate substitutes for boundary pillars. Civilizational states should rely on the power of persuasion to settle misapprehensions left over by colonialism based on historical facts and summit diplomacy.

The Case Against Tahawwur Rana, the 26/11 Plotter Arrested in The US Last Week

- On June 19, police in Los Angeles arrested the former Pakistani Army doctor Tahawwur Hussain Rana on a request made by the Indian government, soon after Rana had been released from prison on health grounds. India has sought Rana's extradition to face trial for conspiring to commit the 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

India's Fresh Extradition Request

In 2011, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had filed a charge sheet against nine people including Rana, his former school-mate and friend David Coleman Headley, Hafiz Saeed and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, al-Qaeda operative Ilyas Kashmiri, and several Pakistan Army officials for planning and executing the attack in which 166 people, including several American citizens, were killed. In 2014, a Sessions Court in Delhi issued fresh non-bailable warrants against the nine men whom the NIA had listed as being absconding. However, Chicago resident Rana had been convicted by a court in that city in 2011 for providing material support to the LeT and Headley for conspiring to attack the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten as retribution for publishing a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad. However, the attack was never carried out. While Headley, who too was convicted in 2013, entered into a plea bargain with prosecutors in exchange for a reduced 35-year sentence, Rana did not. Last week, Rana was granted early release on health grounds from the Terminal Island prison in Southern California after he tested positive for Covid-19. Fearing that Rana, who is now in the final years of his sentence, would be freed, India pushed its pending provisional arrest request warrant and extradition request for Rana. After American authorities executed that request on June 10, he was arrested in Los Angeles.

Rana, The Man and The Conspiracy

Rana, who is now 59 years old, studied at the Hasan Abdal Cadet School in Pakistan, which Headley too attended for five years. After a stint as a doctor in the Pakistan Army, Rana moved to Canada, and was eventually granted Canadian citizenship. Subsequently, Rana went on to establish a consultancy firm called First World Immigration Services in Chicago. It was a branch of this business in Mumbai that provided Headley with the perfect cover to identify and surveil potential targets for the LeT. Rana was arrested by American police soon after Headley's arrest at Chicago's O'Hare airport in October 2009. It was Headley's testimony as a government witness at Rana's trial in Chicago that led him to being sentenced to 14 years in prison, followed by five years of supervised release. Headley told prosecutors that in July 2006, he had travelled to Chicago to meet Rana, and had told Rana of the mission that the LeT had assigned to him. Rana had approved of Headley's plan to establish a First World



Immigration Services centre in Mumbai, and had helped him obtain a five-year business visa. However, while deposing via video link at the Bombay City Civil and Sessions Court in February 2016, Headley claimed that he had informed Rana of his activities only a few months before the attacks in November 2008. Rana's chief concern, Headley claimed, had been that no terror activities should be conducted from the company's office in Tardeo in central Mumbai. Headley also told prosecutors in Mumbai that not a single visa application had been processed at the centre. Rana also provided financial support to Headley, paying him ₹67,605 in October 2006, \$500 in November 2006, ₹17,636 a few days later, and \$1,000 in December 2006. Just before their arrest in 2009, both men had also agreed that the nine Pakistani terrorists killed in the 26/11 attacks should receive the Nishan-e-Haider, the highest military award for gallantry in Pakistan. At the trial, Headley also testified that Rana had approved his travel to Copenhagen, Denmark, posing as a representative of the Immigration Law Centre, the business name of First World Immigration Services. Business cards had been printed to help complete Headley's cover. The plan to attack the Jyllands-Posten newspaper, dubbed the "Mickey Mouse Project" by al-Qaeda, was, however, never executed. During Rana's trial, his attorneys accused Headley of being a liar and a manipulator. The men had been old friends, but the Pakistani-American Headley had a history of selling out friends and associates in order to escape with light prison sentences. During his 2016 deposition, Headley testified that he had sent his final will and testament to Rana before leaving for Mumbai in 2006. Asked why, Headley had said, "I thought it was a responsible thing to do in case I was killed or arrested. I wanted him to take care of some personal family matters for me."

Hearing on June 30

Under the India-U.S. Extradition Treaty of 1997, he can only be extradited to be tried in a case registered by the NIA in 2009 to unearth the conspiracy of several such crimes, including the 26/11 terror attack. A U.S. district court has scheduled the hearing for June 30. The "double jeopardy" clause in the U.S. law prohibits punishment for the same crime twice. Therefore, India tweaked its bid to seek Rana's custody on the ground that he was actively involved in planning an attack on the National Defence College, Delhi, and Chabad houses (Jewish religious centres) in several Indian cities in 2009.

Nation

Sec 309 IPC: Questions and Issues Around an Archaic Section of The Law

- Soon after the suicide of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, the conversation moved around the sensitivity with which issues surrounding mental health should be handled. However, one of the most archaic laws that punishes attempts to commit suicide – Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) – contrary to popular perception that it has been repealed, continues to exist in the statute book and, as reports suggest, is often misused.

Who Can Be Booked Under Section 309 IPC? What Punishment Does It Carry?

Why Is It There to Begin With?

Anyone who survives an attempted suicide can be booked under Section 309 IPC, which deals with "Attempt to commit suicide". The section reads: "Whoever attempts to commit



suicide and does any act towards the commission of such offence, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year (or with fine, or with both)". The law, brought in by the British in the 19th century, reflected the thinking of the time, when killing or attempting to kill oneself was considered a crime against the state, as well as against religion.

But Wasn't Section 309 Repealed A Few Years Back?

No. The section continues to remain in the IPC. What has happened though, is that **The Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA), 2017, which came into force in July 2018, has significantly reduced the scope for the use of Section 309 IPC – and made the attempt to commit suicide punishable only as an exception.** Section 115(1) of The MHCA says: "Notwithstanding anything contained in section 309 of the Indian Penal Code any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code." Section 115(2) says that "The appropriate Government shall have a duty to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation to a person, having severe stress and who attempted to commit suicide, to reduce the risk of recurrence of attempt to commit suicide."

But This Seems as Good as Repealed, Even If the Section Does Continue to Be in the IPC?

Not quite. The restrictions put on the use of this section under the provisions of the MHCA – as opposed to it being removed from the statute all together – do not seem to be enough simply because of continued reports of its use by police forces across the country. In one recent example, on June 8, a runaway couple allegedly attempted suicide at Ashok Nagar police station in Bengaluru by consuming hair dye. Local media reported that they were booked under Section 309. Again, on May 20, an inmate at Gurgaon's Bhondsi jail who had allegedly tried to kill himself with a pair of scissors, was reported to have been booked under Section 309 IPC. Several senior police officers said that **on many occasions, there is lack of awareness among officers at the level of the police station about the relatively new MHCA,** and they simply go by the IPC. However, the charge under Section 309 is often dropped subsequently, following consultations with senior officers, said Harsh Poddar, Superintendent of Police, Beed.

What Problems Can Arise Out of The Use of This Section?

Chennai based psychiatrist Dr Laxmi Vijaykumar, who is also a member of the WHO's Network on Suicide Research and Prevention, said that **use of this Section can potentially deprive a victim of treatment in the golden hour,** as hospitals wait for a go-ahead from police in what would be seen as a "medico-legal case". It is possible that unscrupulous hospital authorities may misuse this situation and charge extra to "hush up" the case by not informing the police; similar extortion is possible on the part of corrupt police personnel as well. **All of this is in addition to the trauma and harassment that an already severely distressed individual and people around him/her would likely be going through. Only 24 countries around the world have a section such as this in their laws,** experts said.

But Is There Another Side to This Story?

It is possible that there might be one – and this is where the argument in favour of Section 309 IPC co-existing with the provisions of the MHCA, 2017, comes in. A veteran police officer



who declined to be identified said **there were occasions when people showed up at government offices and threatened to kill themselves if their demands were not met.** “It is in these cases, where we suspect that the person does not intend to commit suicide but is using the threat as a way to unfairly pressure or blackmail the system, that this section is used.” A senior IPS officer said, “If 309 is repealed, there will be no provision to take action against those who intend to create trouble of this sort.” SP Poddar said: “Section 309 IPC can be redefined in such a manner where it can still be leveraged in law and order situations, and not be used against those who are suffering from genuine mental health issues.”

What Attempts Have Been Made to Repeal Section 309 In the Past?

Dr Vijaykumar, who has been advocating that the section be repealed, said that the process has been ongoing for years. In 1971, the Law Commission in its 42nd Report recommended the repeal of Section 309 IPC. The IPC (Amendment) Bill, 1978, was even passed by Rajya Sabha, but before it could be passed by Lok Sabha, Parliament was dissolved, and the Bill lapsed. In ‘Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab’, 1996, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 309. However, in 2008, the Law Commission in its 210th Report, said that an attempt to suicide needed medical and psychiatric care, and not punishment. In March 2011, the Supreme Court too recommended to Parliament that it should consider the feasibility of deleting the section. In 2014, repealing to a question in Rajya Sabha, then Minister of State for Home Haribhai Parthibhai Chaudhary said the government had decided to drop Section 309 from the IPC after 18 states and 4 Union Territories had backed the recommendation of the Law Commission. The matter did not, however, reach its logical conclusion.

Transparency During A Crisis (Anjali Bhardwaj - Associated with The National Campaign for Peoples’ Right to Information)

- ➔ Right to Information (RTI) applications seeking information pertaining to the PM CARES Fund have been stonewalled. **No information exists on the official website of the Fund regarding the amount collected, names of donors, expenditure incurred, or details of beneficiaries. The trust deed of the fund chaired by the Prime Minister is not available for public scrutiny.** Reports suggest that **donations of over \$1 billion have been made, including contributions from foreign sources.**

Access to Information Is Crucial

This violation of peoples’ RTI is particularly concerning given the unprecedented crisis gripping the nation. Relief and welfare programmes funded through public money are the sole lifeline of millions who suddenly lost income-earning opportunities during the lockdown. If the poor and marginalised affected by the public health emergency are to have any hope of obtaining the benefits of government schemes, they must have access to relevant information. Ironically, however, a corrosive narrative seems to have emerged that public scrutiny of government actions is undesirable during the crisis and citizens must unquestioningly trust the state. This undermines the basic democratic tenet that citizens’ participation and oversight is necessary to ensure they are able to access their rights. Without information, peoples’ ability to perform that role is eviscerated, and corruption thrives. The RTI Act, 2005, has empowered citizens to access information from public authorities and hold them accountable. During the COVID-19 crisis, proper implementation of the law has assumed greater significance than ever before. It is crucial that information



related to implementation of relief measures announced by governments be widely disseminated. For instance, to ensure food security for the needy, Central and State governments have put in place schemes to provide subsidised rations. For effective delivery of food grains and other essential commodities, information must be made available in the public domain about the quantity and price of commodities, details of beneficiaries and the list of ration shops along with their stock position. Ground reports have revealed that in the absence of information, it is impossible for intended beneficiaries to get their due – ration shopkeepers siphon food grains and keep their shops closed on the pretext that they have no stocks. Greater openness would prevent controversies of the kind exemplified by faulty testing kits and fake ventilators. Following complaints from various States about rapid COVID-19 testing kits imported from China, the Indian Council for Medical Research halted their use. Serious questions arose about the government's decision to order the kits from China, especially in the backdrop of countries like Spain and the Netherlands returning faulty Chinese kits. Numerous instances have been reported of COVID-19-positive patients requiring treatment in intensive care units being shunted from one hospital to another. This could be prevented if hospitals and health centres publicly provide real-time information about availability of beds and other facilities. To ensure easy accessibility to those who need it the most, relevant information must be made available in local languages and widely disseminated. In fact, this is a statutory obligation of public authorities under Section 4 of the RTI Act.

Role of Transparency Watchdogs

In the current scenario the role of information commissions is crucial. While in the midst of a pandemic it is reasonable to expect delays in processing information requests, public authorities must not be allowed to interpret the crisis as a justification for not complying with the RTI Act. **Unfortunately, an assessment of the functioning of the transparency watchdogs revealed that 21 out of 29 commissions in the country did not hold a single hearing during the first three stages of the lockdown.** While the Central Information Commission and some State commissions used audio and video conferencing to hear and dispose cases, most commissions did not make provision for hearing even urgent matters. **At a time when incentives for secrecy are great, and the scope for discretionary actions wide, it is critical to create a culture of openness to empower people to participate meaningfully in the decisions that have profound effects on their lives and livelihoods.** People must be able to obtain information about how and where their money is being spent in the efforts to combat the pandemic and whether funds are reaching the intended beneficiaries. **It is behind the cloak of secrecy that the rights of individuals are most frequently abrogated, corruption thrives and public trust in institutions is eroded.**

Merger of RS And LS Channels in Final Stages

- The process of the merger of Rajya Sabha TV and Lok Sabha TV into Sansad TV is in the final stages. Live proceedings of Parliament sessions will continue to be telecast but the manpower and technical resources will be integrated. Sources said the launch could be by the end of the year, though the deadline has not been finalised. LS Television was launched in 2006 and RS TV in 2011. They have been functioning independently since then. In November last, after discussions between Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu, a committee headed by former Prasar Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash was set up, and it submitted its report in February. Three different sub-committees are examining the report to finalise the integration of technical and manpower resources.



The Surya Prakash committee also met with MPs from various political parties, who strongly recommended that the live telecast should be continued. Under the banner of the Sansad TV, sources said, the two will continue to telecast live proceedings. The attempt is to go beyond House proceedings and show the functioning of Parliament and parliamentarians when the Houses are not in session. Sources said the new channel would work under an integrated management.

How Are the Rajya Sabha Polls Different?

- Another round of Rajya Sabha elections has been completed. Polls to some seats were postponed in view of the situation caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak. All the 19 seats for which balloting was held had clear winners, but there was a hint of controversy about who ought to have been allowed to vote or barred from voting in Manipur. Such issues arise mainly due to the interpretation of rules and features peculiar to the Rajya Sabha elections. Cross-voting, breach of confidentiality by showing the ballot/vote to a person other than the member's own party's agent, and eligibility to vote under certain conditions are common grounds for objections to be raised. There are several features that distinguish elections to the Council of States, or the Upper House of Parliament, from the general elections.

What Is Peculiar to The Rajya Sabha Polls as Far As The Electorate Is Concerned?

Only elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies can vote in a Rajya Sabha election. The legislators send a batch of new members to the Upper House every two years for a six-year term. A third of Members of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha (which is a permanent House and is not subject to dissolution), from each State retire once in two years and polls are held to fill up the vacancies. In addition, vacancies that arise due to resignation, death or disqualification are filled up through by polls after which those elected serve out the remainder of their predecessors' term. Voting is by **single transferable vote**, as the election is held on the **principle of proportional representation**. In other words, a bloc of MPs belonging to one or more parties can elect a member of their choice if they have the requisite numbers. This is to avoid the principle of majority, which would mean that only candidates put up by ruling parties in the respective States will be elected. The Delhi and Puducherry Assemblies elect members to the Rajya Sabha to represent the two Union Territories.

When Are the Elections Held?

Polling for a Rajya Sabha election will be held only if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies. Since the strength of each party in the Assembly is known, it is not difficult to estimate the number of seats a party would win in the Rajya Sabha poll. For instance, if there are four seats to be filled up, and the ruling party and its allies command a two-thirds majority, and the Opposition a third, it will mean that the election will go three seats to one in favour of the ruling party. In many States, parties avoid a contest by fielding candidates only in respect to their strength. Where an extra candidate enters the fray, voting becomes necessary. Candidates fielded by political parties have to be proposed by at least 10 members of the Assembly or 10% of the party's strength in the House, whichever is less. For independents, there should be 10 proposers, all of whom should be members of the Assembly. A single transferable vote means electors can vote for any number of candidates in order of their preference. A candidate requires a specified number of first preference votes to win. Each first-choice vote has a value of 100 in the first round. To qualify, a candidate needs one point more than the quotient obtained by dividing the total value of the number of seats for which elections are taking place plus one. For instance, if there are four seats and



180 MLAs voting, the qualifying number will be $180/5 = 36$ votes or a value of 3,600. Normally, the results are clear after one round itself. The extra candidate is eliminated for want of enough first preference votes. However, counting may go to the second round, if more than one candidate fails to get the specified number. In such a situation, the second preference polled by the candidates (in ballots where the first preference has gone to those already qualified) will be transferred to their kitty, but with a diminished value. The total value of the votes polled by the remaining candidates both as first and subsequent preferences would be used to decide the winner.

Why Is There No Secret Ballot in The Rajya Sabha Elections?

The Rajya Sabha polls have a system of open ballot, but it is a limited form of openness. As a measure to check rampant cross-voting, which was taken to mean that the vote had been purchased by corrupt means, the system of each party MLA showing his or her marked ballots to the party's authorised agent, before they are put into the ballot box, has been introduced. Showing a marked ballot to anyone other than one's own party's authorised agent will render the vote invalid. Not showing the ballot to the authorised agent will also mean that the vote cannot be counted. And independent candidates are barred from showing their ballots to anyone.

Why Does Not 'None of The Above', Or NOTA, Apply to The Rajya Sabha Polls?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) issued two circulars, on January 24, 2014 and November 12, 2015, giving Rajya Sabha members the option to press the NOTA button in the Upper House polls. However, in 2018, the Supreme Court of India struck down the provision, holding that the 'none of the above' option is only for general elections held on the basis of universal adult suffrage, and cannot be applied to indirect elections based on proportional representation.

Does Cross – Voting Attract Disqualification?

No. The Supreme Court, while declining to interfere with the open ballot system, ruled that not voting for the party candidate will not attract disqualification under the anti-defection law. As voters, MLAs retain their freedom to vote for a candidate of their choice. However, the Court observed that since the party would know who voted against its own candidate, it is free to take disciplinary action against the legislator concerned.

Can A Legislator Vote Without Taking Oath as A Member of The Assembly?

While taking oath as a member is for anyone to function as a legislator, the Supreme Court has ruled that a member can vote in a Rajya Sabha election even before taking oath as legislator. It ruled that voting at the Rajya Sabha polls, being a non-legislative activity, can be performed without taking oath. A person becomes a member as soon as the list of elected members is notified by the ECI, it said. Further, a member can also propose a candidate before taking oath.

Members as Numbers

- ➔ The ruling BJP now has 86 members in the Rajya Sabha after elections to 19 seats across several States. This is the highest number for the party in the Upper House, though it is still short of the halfway mark. Of a total of 61 vacancies, 42 were filled unopposed earlier and of the 19 contests, the BJP won eight while the Congress won four. Of the 61 outgoing



members, 17 were from the Congress and 15 from the BJP. With this round of elections, the BJP's tally increased by 11, from 75. The Congress now has 41. The Opposition benches will now have veterans such as H.D. Deve Gowda, Mallikarjun Kharge (both from Karnataka) Digvijaya Singh (from Madhya Pradesh) and Shibu Soren (from Jharkhand) and K.C. Venugopal (from Rajasthan). A noticeable addition to the treasury benches is Jyotiraditya Scindia, whose defection from the Congress in March brought down the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh, and brought the BJP back to power there. Bhubaneswar Kalita, the Congress's chief whip in the Rajya Sabha until August last year, is now returning as a BJP member from Assam. All this point to a pattern of the BJP's frenzied approach to increasing its Rajya Sabha strength.

After the elections were announced, eight Congress MLAs left the party in Gujarat, and enabled the victory of an extra BJP candidate to the Rajya Sabha. In Rajasthan, the party fielded two candidates though it had the strength to elect only one, leading to speculation that plans were underway to poach Congress MLAs. The sight of political parties hauling in MLAs to luxury confinements ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls has become common. The Council of States institutionalises the sharing of power between the Centre and the State under India's federal structure. The House of the elders is also considered an exalted forum of scholarship and statesmanship. But this majesty has taken a beating due to factors, including but not limited to machinations that go into its making. The steady ingress of celebrities and business tycoons has not made a serious contribution to the Rajya Sabha's working. The BJP, under its current leadership, has demonstrated an aversion to deliberations of all types, and the Rajya Sabha has been a particular target. In a country as vast and diverse as India, deliberations are critical. The government has arbitrarily labelled bills as money bills to bypass scrutiny and passing by the Rajya Sabha. And some pieces of legislation with far-reaching effect on the country – to change the status of Jammu and Kashmir, for instance – have been pushed through both Houses. In such a scenario, it is imperative that members work across party lines to uphold Parliament's constitutional role.

Senseless Deaths

- Even for a country as inured to custodial violence as India, the death of a father-son duo arrested for a lockdown violation in Tamil Nadu is distressingly senseless. P. Jayaraj, 58, a timber trader, and his son, J. Benicks, 31, who ran a mobile phone service and sales centre, were arrested for allegedly keeping their outlets open after permitted hours at Sattankulam town in Thoothukudi district and remanded to judicial custody. The police claim they took ill on successive days while being lodged in a sub-jail and breathed their last in hospital. In a swift response, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, which took Suo motu cognisance of their death, has decided to monitor the progress of the statutory magisterial probe. It has asked for a status report from the police and also directed that the autopsy be video-graphed. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has announced a compensation of ₹10 lakh each, while two sub-inspectors have been suspended and an inspector placed on compulsory wait. The mere suspension of police personnel involved is an inadequate response to an incredibly wrongful abuse of authority by the law enforcement machinery. The police should register a case of murder and the matter taken over by an independent agency for a fair investigation. Custodial deaths are often the result of the pervasive use of torture in India's police stations for extracting admissions of crime, but it is not uncommon, regrettably, for the police to use their power and authority to settle personal scores. If the death of Jayaraj and Benicks are ultimately established as custodial murder as a result of torture or assault by the police, it would only mean that the problem is much deeper than



the mere lack of professionalism in investigative methods. It might indicate a different pathology among police officials that makes them inflict violence and harm against the weak. Since the early days of the current lockdown, there have been innumerable reports, often backed by video footage, of the police and officials attacking citizens in the name of enforcing restrictions, and awarding personalised punishment on violators, and sometimes kicking and overturning carts containing items for sale. In this case, the father was thrashed even before being taken to the police station. Their offence would have only attracted Section 188 of IPC (for disobeying the time restrictions ordered by a public servant), but they were also booked under Section 383 (extortion by threat) and Section 506 (ii) (criminal intimidation). It is well known that the police include 'intimidation' in the FIR solely to obtain an order of remand, as it is non-bailable, if they are bent upon sending someone to jail. The inclusion of non-bailable sections for a lockdown violation indicates a perverse and prior inclination to harass the two and cause suffering. The top brass of the police too will have to bear responsibility for this atrocity as it indicates a signal failure to lay down norms for policemen on the field to handle lockdown violations with humaneness.

Lewy Body Disease, is a Form of Dementia.

Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji, the Khilafat Leader who Declared an Independent State

→ The legend of Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji, the brave freedom fighter who stood up to the British in Kerala's Malabar region, in early 20th century and even established a short-lived regime of his own, is all set to be portrayed on the silver screen. The film, purportedly titled '**Variyamkunnan**', directed by Aashiq Abu and starring Prithviraj Sukumaran in the titular role, is expected to hit theatres in 2021, the **100th – year anniversary of the Malabar uprising**. Kunjahammed Haji is an important figure in the echelons of Kerala's colonial history as a rebel leader who took on the mighty British Raj. He was born into an affluent Muslim family sometime in the 1870s, and grew up hearing stories of the torture and injustice meted out by the British to the locals and to his own family. His father, Moideenkutty Haji, was deported and jailed in the Andaman Islands for his participation in a rebellion against the British. Such personal incidents, very early on in his life, played an important role in lighting the fire of vengeance inside Kunjahammed. **An interesting facet in Haji's early life was his fascination with traditional music-based art forms like Daffumutt and poems like 'Malappuram Padappattu' and 'Badr Padappattu' and how he used art as an instrument to rally the locals against the British. By invoking such poems, that spoke of the exploitation of the peasants by feudal lords under the British and which were later banned by them, Kunjahammed Haji was simultaneously challenging the British and igniting sentiments against them among the local population.** These acts were a continuation of a stream of anger that had begun to strengthen against the colonialists and which is believed to have resulted in the Malabar uprising in 1921. Dr Hussain Randathani wrote that Kunjahammed Haji was respected for his scholarship and knowledge in Urdu, Arabic and English. According to the historian, during a meeting in Manjeri, Kattilassery Muhammad Musaliyar and MP Narayana Menon, leaders of Khilafat movement and the Indian National Congress, introduced him to the Khilafat cause, "though he thought that it was a Turkish question (sic). "However, he promised to join with them against the atrocities of the British and the landlords." **"When Haji got the news that his countryman and Khilafat leader Ali Musaliyar was arrested at Tirurangadi and the mosque**

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



has been looted and some police officers killed in the ensuing fight, Haji decided to take arms against the British and arranged a band of army with the help of some sepoys who enthusiastically rallied behind him. As the leader of the Khilafat, he was mostly heard all over Calicut and south Malabar." Though prominent British accounts cast him as a religious fanatic to create divisions within the movement, Haji was aware of the strength of Hindu-Muslim unity and ensured people of other faiths were given adequate security. Mujeeb Rahman, a professor at Calicut University, told IndianExpress.com that the **Haji ensured that the movement had a secular character.** "There was a possibility of the movement losing direction and perhaps even resulting in a communal riot. But **Haji gave orders to his followers that people of other faiths were to be given adequate security and not be subjected to torture. But at the same time, he targeted all those who helped the British, be they Hindu or Muslim.**" As the rebellion helmed by the Haji and others began to spread across the Ernad and Valluvanad taluks of erstwhile Malabar district, British officers and the local police loyal to them escaped, leaving vast tracts of territory firmly under the control of the local rebels. The territory was declared an 'independent state' in August 1921 with Haji its undisputed ruler. For nearly six months, Haji ran a parallel Khilafat regime headquartered in Nilambur, with even its own separate passport, currency and system of taxation. During the time, an extensive army with the participation of Hindu men was built with the express aim of thwarting any attempt by the British to overthrow the Khilafat rule. Tenants were granted the power over the lands they cultivated along with tax incentives. But the rule did not last long. In January 1922, under the guise of a treaty, the British betrayed Haji through his close friend Unyan Musaliyar, arresting him from his hideout and producing him before a British judge. He was sentenced to death along with his compatriots. "When the police officer began to cover his eyes with a towel, he objected saying that he wanted to see the shooting. **While Haji was chanting the holy words of Kalimah, he was shot dead... his comrades were also shot at the same place. The bodies were cremated fearing that the grave may become further inspiration for the rebels... all the records connected with the Khilafat raj was burnt in order to make the people forget the Mappila khilafat rule of six months,**" wrote Dr Randathani.

To Mark Tilak's Death Centenary, Pune NGO Aims to Revive Spirit of 'Lal-Bal-Pal'

- In a bid to revive the Independence-era spirit of the 'Lal-Bal-Pal', named after nationalists Lala Lajpat Rai, 'Lokmanya' Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, and to mark the death centenary of Tilak, Pune-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) **'Sarhad' will launch a series of literary and cultural programmes to strengthen connections between Maharashtra and West Bengal.** The programmes are to be inaugurated on August 1 through videoconferencing in the presence of Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. Sarhad's two-year-long event, 'Maharashtra-Bengal friendship chapter', and envisioned as a people's cultural revivalist movement in these two States, **will commence on Tilak's death centenary (August 1, 1920-August 1, 2020) and will go on till August 15, 2022 to mark the 150th birth anniversary of the great philosopher, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.** "We are in touch with the offices of Mamata Banerjee, Capt. Amarinder Singh and Uddhav Thackeray, as well as with Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar. Their response has been most positive. We have also spoken with the descendants of Lala Lajpat Rai, Lokmanya Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal who have expressed their readiness to participate in the various programmes from August 1," said Sanjay Nahar, founder, Sarhad. "Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra have played significant roles during the struggle for Indian Independence. The historical association and cultural bonds among the three States was solidified in the modern



era by the trinity of 'Lal-Bal-Pal'. In a way, these leaders also represent the bonds that writers, poets and artists from these States have shared over so many years," Mr. Nahar said.

Socio-Cultural Bonds

"After Independence, while the socio-cultural bonds between Maharashtra and Punjab have grown stronger, our ties with Bengal have somewhat weakened, despite a rich pedigree of literary and cultural affinity in the past," Mr. Nahar said. "Satyendra Nath Tagore had translated Tilak's Geetarahasya and Sant Tukaram's abhangs [devotional poetry] into Bengali, while Rabindranath Tagore had penned a poem on Chhatrapati Shivaji. In the mid-1970s, eminent Marathi litterateur P.L. Deshpande, known as 'Pu La', had visited Tagore's Shanti Niketan and had penned his masterful Vang-Chitre soon after. It is precisely such ties that we seek to revive through this mega cultural event," Mr. Nahar said. He said around 50 literary works in Bengali, Marathi and Punjabi would be translated into respective vernaculars. A number of Marathi plays would be performed in Bengali and Punjabi and vice-versa, while Bengali films would be screened in Pune and other places. He said Sarhad would be facilitating the publishing of these translated works.

The Legacy of Sukapha, Founder of Ahom Kingdom

- ➔ Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal ordered the arrest of a Kolkata-based political commentator, Garga Chatterjee, who had described Chaolung Sukapha as a "Chinese invader".

Who Was Chaolung Sukapha?

Sukapha was a 13th – century ruler who founded the Ahom kingdom that ruled Assam for six centuries. Contemporary scholars trace his roots to Burma. "Sukapha was a leader of the Ahoms. He reached Brahmaputra valley in Assam from upper Burma in the 13th century with around 9,000 followers," said Arup Kumar Dutta, author of the book The Ahoms. In his authoritative book on Assam history – A History of Assam, Sir Edward Gait wrote that Sukapha is said to have left a place called Maulung in AD 1215 with eight nobles and 9,000 men, women and children – mostly men. He had with him two elephants, and 300 horses. Gait wrote that in 1235, Sukapha and his people settled in Charaideo in upper Assam after wandering about for years, defeating those who protested his advance, and temporarily staying at different locations. It was in Charaideo that Sukapha established his first small principality, sowing the seeds of further expansion of the Ahom kingdom.

Who Are the Ahoms Today?

The founders of the Ahom kingdom had their own language and followed their own religion. Over the centuries, the Ahoms accepted the Hindu religion and the Assamese language, scholars say. "The Ahoms embraced the language, religion and rituals of the communities living here – they did not impose theirs on those living here," said Dutta. As written by Gait, most of those who came with Sukapha were men. Dutta said the men later married women from communities living in Assam. Today, the Ahom community is estimated to number between 4 million and 5 million. He said Sukapha developed very amiable relationships with the tribal communities living here – especially the Sutias, the Morans and the Kacharis. Inter-marriage also increased assimilation processes.



Why Is Sukapha Important?

Sukapha's significance – especially in today's Assam – lies in his successful efforts towards assimilation of different communities and tribes. He is widely referred to as the architect of "Bor Asom" or "greater Assam". "Sukapha and his people could consolidate power, culture and religion in the region in a manner which brought a diverse mix of jati and janajatis (multiple tribes and communities) together who at different points of history offered their allegiance to the Ahom kings... For this very reason that the Ahoms managed to group a diverse mix of people in such a politically sensitive region criss-crossing South Asia and South-East Asia, the first Ahom King Sukapha is hailed as an architect of Bor (larger) Assam in popular culture," Suraj Gogoi, a doctoral candidate at the National University of Singapore, told The Indian Express. To commemorate Sukapha and his rule, Assam celebrates "Asom Divas" on December 2 every year. Speaking on the occasion last December, Chief Minister Sonowal had said Sukapha "was the architect of greater Assamese society". "He laid the foundation for a robust and vibrant Assam through his policy of amity, unity and harmony," Sonowal said.

What Has the Political Commentator Said About Sukapha?

In a series of tweets, Garga Chatterjee, who describes himself as a "Bengali nationalist" on Twitter, repeatedly referred to Sukapha as a "Chinese invader" and questioned why the BJP-led state government commemorates his rule as "State Day". In a tweet on June 17, Chatterjee wrote: "Why does @sarbanandsonwal regularly celebrate a Chinese invader and his invading army? Why does banned separatist group ULFA also celebrate the Chinese invader? Do real Indians know that Indian tax money is being used by BJP in Assam to put up statues of a Chinese invader?" In another tweet – whose screenshot is available but could not be accessed online – Chatterjee wrote, "There is a state in India where the 'State Day' is celebrated by Assam BJP to commemorate a Chinese invader who brutally attacked India with Chinese troops. This invader is considered a Hero by China-funded anti-Indian separatist group ULFA."

What Action Is Being Taken?

Chatterjee's tweets caused outrage in Assam. Multiple police cases were filed. On Friday, Sonowal directed the state police to arrest Chatterjee and bring him to Assam. An Assam police team has left for Kolkata. In a press statement on Friday on him ordering Chatterjee's arrest, Sonowal said Sukapha was the architect of the greater Assamese identity and making derogatory statements about such a great personality could not be tolerated. "Posting of offensive remarks on social media misinterpreting historical facts could lead to rift between different communities in an ethnically diverse state like Assam," said Sonowal, adding that the derogatory statements had "hurt the sentiments of Assamese people".

How One Anamika Shukla's Name Was Used for Six Different Teaching Jobs In UP

- The Uttar Pradesh police have arrested eight persons for using the documents of one woman, Anamika Shukla of Gonda district, to secure jobs in nine different government schools. The arrested include the mastermind, education department officials and some women.

How Was the Scam Exposed?

The scam came to light after **the Prerna Application, a software maintaining the database of all teachers employed with the state Basic Education Department and monitored at the state**

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



and district levels, showed some discrepancies. In March, state-level officers found something amiss in the attendance being marked by Anamika Shukla with the same credentials at six KGBVs in districts. However, investigations were delayed due to the lockdown. Interestingly, use of the app for attendance using selfies was vehemently opposed by government teachers across the state.

How Was the Scam Operated?

In 2017, Anamika Shukla applied at KGBVs in Sultanpur, Jaunpur, Basti, Mirzapur and Lucknow. But poor health prevented her from appearing for counselling. However, a copy of her documents was accessed by a clerk, Anand Singh, at the Basic Education Department in Jaunpur. Now in jail, Singh made copies of the documents and passed them on to the alleged mastermind Pushpendra, who gave copies of the same documents to different women and charged between ₹2-3 lakh for getting them women the job. Because for recruitment at KGBVs original documents are not needed and only attested copies of originals are required, Pushpendra handed over these copied documents to women who wanted jobs. With the use of these copied documents, different women were shortlisted at Baghpat, Varanasi, Aligarh, Kasganj, Amethi, Raebareli, Prayagraj, Saharanpur AND Ambedkar Nagar. Out of these nine districts, women got jobs in six and drew ₹12.24 lakh as salaries. An aspirant is not required to sit for a written examination and first round of selection is done on the basis of scores of Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.), Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) and other examinations like Class X and XII. The real Anamika Shukla, whose educational certificates were used, had high scores in her B.Ed. and TET and hence, the aspirants were shortlisted in the first round itself. No doubts were raised because the aspirants for the ad hoc jobs would reach the counselling centre in the last 10-15 minutes so that the committee screening the documents would not get too much time to question the aspirants about their subjects. At Kasganj, Supriya Jatav (now arrested), reached the counselling centre quite late and hence, could not be interviewed in detail. Officials said a similar method was used in the other districts too. For the counselling process, a team of district officials, including Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) and a psychology expert, are part of the committee. Because the documents used by the aspirants were genuine, and it was a case of impersonation, and not of forgery, the documents would go through the verification process (with boards and universities) on multiple occasions without anyone getting to know about the fraud.

Why Did the Scam Not Get Exposed Earlier?

The reason the fraudsters could manage to get away for two years was that the KGBVs were run on the district level without any centralisation. Only after the introduction of the Prerna Application in 2019, could the fraud be caught.

The Accused

Apart from providing documents to nine women, Pushpendra was himself working as an assistant teacher at a government school in Farrukhabad district in the name of Sushil Chandra. His brother Jaswant was working as Vibhav Kumar, headmaster of a school in Kannauj district. The method for getting jobs for himself and his brother was different than the method used for getting the women jobs as Anamika Shukla. After getting to know of people and their educational qualification, Pushpendra would lodge a police complaint through post reporting that the original documents have been lost. Then, he would get an advertisement published in a newspaper with the help of the police complaint. With these documents, he would apply for new documents to examination boards, colleges and



universities for fresh original documents which were used by him and Jaswant to get jobs at government schools. Pushpendra had also helped two women get jobs in Jaunpur and Azamgarh at KGBVs by using the fake documents of one Preeti Yadav, who had applied for employment at Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya in Jaunpur in 2017.

Monsoon Has Covered Country at Fastest Pace Since 2013

- The southwest monsoon has galloped to cover the entire country at a pace not seen since 2013, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The normal date for the monsoon to span the whole country is July 8. This year, the monsoon set in early on its expected date of June 1 and was only briefly stalled due to the impact of cyclone Nisarga that struck Maharashtra on June 2.

Low Pressure

“The early advance over Central & Northwest India was facilitated by formation of a low-pressure area over Bay of Bengal which moved west-north-westwards, and another cyclonic circulation over central India,” the IMD said in a statement. However, the monsoon’s advent into northwest India has not translated into significant rainfall in the region. The IMD says that most of the rainfall will be towards India’s northeast, at least until June 29. Usually the monsoon trough see-saws, in that heavy rain in the north-east translates to little rain over the rest of the country and when rains wane over the Himalayan foothills and the east, it starts to pick up in the rest of the country. “Rains may revive over north India by June 28th, but they are unlikely to be very heavy,”. So far, the monsoon rainfall in June has been 21% more than what is normal for this time of the month.

Case Filed Against Marathi Preacher Over ‘Odd-Even’ Remark for Girl-Boy Child

- A case has been lodged under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act against popular Marathi kirtankar (preacher) Nivrutti Maharaj Indurikar at a local court in Sangamner in Ahmednagar district over controversial remarks made by him at a sermon this year.

Centre Of Controversy

In February, Mr. Indurikar became the centre of a controversy following his alleged remarks during a sermon in Ahmednagar that intercourse by a couple on an even date would beget a male child, while on an odd date would result in the birth of a girl. “If the intercourse is done at an inauspicious time, the child that is born would bring a bad name to the family,”. Since then, several activists and rationalist outfits like the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) had been clamouring for a police case to be lodged against Mr. Indurikar on grounds that his comments violated provisions of the PCPNDT Act. However, while criticising his remarks, the political establishment, whether leaders in the ruling Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) or the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had been ambivalent over prosecuting the kirtankar.

‘Taken Out of Context’

Indurikar, who is known for addressing social issues through his sermons by deploying witty, hard-edged satire, apologised in a hand-written note following the furore. The preacher, who has a large following in the State, claimed his remarks were taken out of context. Minister of



State for Women and Child Welfare Bacchu Kadu said the State government would not be filing a case against Mr. Indurikar as he was working to enlighten people. BJP State president Chandrakant Patil, while admonishing the preacher, said his party stood by him and his work. However, gender rights activist and Bhumata Brigade leader Trupti Desai had been insistent on a case being lodged against the preacher. She said, "The case finally lodged against him is an instance of 'better late than never'. He had received great sympathy from the warkaris, while the BJP, too, had supported him. His derogatory remarks against women must not be allowed to go unpunished."

[Ayush Lens on Ramdev's COVID-19 Cure](#)

- Hours after yoga guru Baba Ramdev unveiled Ayurvedic medicines – 'Coronil' and 'Swasari' – on Tuesday, claiming that clinical trials on COVID-19 affected patients had shown favourable results, the Central government asked Patanjali Ayurveda Limited to stop advertising the drug and sought details on its claimed "successful trial and cure". Facts of the claim related to the drug and details of the stated scientific study are not known to the Ministry, the statement said.

[List of Details](#)

Patanjali Ayurved has been asked to provide, at the earliest, details of the name and composition of the medicines being claimed as successful in COVID-19 treatment; site(s)/ hospital(s) where the research study was conducted; the protocol, sample size, Institutional Ethics Committee clearance, Clinical Trials Registry-India (CTRI) registration, and results data of the study, and to stop advertising/publicising such claims till the issue has been duly examined. The Ministry has also requested the concerned State Licensing Authority of the Uttarakhand government to provide copies of the license and product approval details of Ayurvedic medicines being claimed as useful in the treatment of COVID -19. "Also, the concerned Ayurvedic drug manufacturing company has been informed that such advertisements of drugs, including Ayurvedic medicines, are regulated under the provisions of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954, and Rules thereunder and the directives issued by the Central government in the wake of COVID outbreak," the Ministry said. Meanwhile, a scientist associated with the trial, said trial investigators had not yet published the results. Dr. Abhishekh Sharma, assistant professor of medicine, National Institute of Medical Sciences and among those who supervised the trial, said that 100 patients, who had tested positive for the virus, were recruited for the trial. Of them, 50 were given the medicine and five dropped out midway. The remaining 50 were administered a placebo. "69% of the 45, when tested on the third day, were found clear of the virus and half of those on the placebo recovered," said Dr. Sharma. That works out to 31 of those on the treatment tested negative, and 25 of those on placebo tested negative. No other details on the profiles of the COVID-19 positive persons – the degree of sickness in those who enrolled for the trial, their age, whether they were on other medication prior to enrolment – were immediately available. A check on the clinical trial registry, where all trials must be registered, showed that a wide spectrum of patients were solicited. The medicine regime involved are the Tablet Swasari Ras (500 mg), Tablet Pure Ashwagandha Extract (500 mg), Tablet Pure Giloy Extract (500 mg), Tablet Pure Tulsi Extract (500 mg) and Anu Taila (nasal drop), according to information on the clinical trial website.

- The unrelenting spread of COVID-19 has set off both mass anxiety and a clamour for a panacea. Fear paves the way for profiteers. Patanjali Ayurved's recent claim of having discovered a "cure" and the publicity that this garnered, bypassing every regulatory



requirement without any serious consequence so far, shows that India's regulatory checks and balances are wanting. The company said in Haridwar that its product, 'Coronil', had cured everyone in a clinical trial. While quackery and the potency of 'magic drugs' are a part of life in India, its declarations could not be ignored because of the tremendous influence its products wield and its claim to have proved the product through a clinical trial, which makes it open to evaluation by the standards of modern medicine.

As it now emerges, the company has probably misrepresented the drug's efficacy. **The clinical trial tested the drug on 45 and another 50 were administered a placebo. All of the participants had tested positive for the virus. On the third day, 31 who were given the drug recovered and 25 of those on the placebo recovered. That is not a measurable improvement considering the small number enrolled in the trial.** Moreover, they were mildly symptomatic. Ramdev claimed that by the seventh day, all had recovered. If this also included all those on the placebo, then it further weakens the claim that it was the drug alone that worked. The doctors in the trial have spelt out on the clinical trials registry the process they would employ to test the drug but said **they had neither published their results nor submitted it for peer-review.** Therefore, the company's claim of a cure by all accounts was a clear subversion of the scientific process. When hydroxychloroquine was being touted as a potential wonder drug for COVID-19, some of India's scientists were quick to join a global opprobrium that raised methodological issues with a study in The Lancet, that claimed no effect – and even harm – from HCQ. The study was retracted as it relied on a spurious database. But its overall finding that HCQ does not work has been borne out by other validated studies. Thus, **more than the outcome, it is the method deployed that ought to be scrutinised by scientists to reinforce public trust in scientific assessment.** There has always been a tension between traditional Indian systems of medicine and pharmaceutical drugs but there is now consensus in India's regulatory system that claims by both systems of developing safe efficacious drugs must pass clinical trials. It is well within the domain of institutions of the ICMR or the CSIR or national science academies to call out a breach of due process in the appraisal of any drug, whether allopathic, ayurvedic or homeopathic. To not do so would amount to criminal negligence.

Why International Yoga Day Is Observed on June 21

- Coinciding with the summer solstice, June 21 is observed as International Yoga Day, recognising the many benefits of the ancient Indian practice of yoga. **The year 2020 marks the 6th International Yoga Day.** The United Nations theme for this year is "Yoga for Health – Yoga at Home", which takes into account the social distancing measures announced by most countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi today (Sunday) shared his remarks on the occasion. **The UN proclaimed June 21 as International Day of Yoga by passing a resolution on December 11, 2014, during the 69th session of the General Assembly.** At the session, Modi had said, "Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach [that] is valuable to our health and our well-being. Yoga is not just about exercise; it is a way to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature." **The Yoga Day celebrations in 2015 at Rajpath in New Delhi, with Modi and other dignitaries in attendance, had created two Guinness World Records, performing around 21 yoga asanas.** The first record was set for housing 35,985 people and being the world's largest yoga session. The second was for having the most number (84) of nationalities participating in it. **The word 'yoga' is derived from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolising the union of a person's body and consciousness.** "Yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India. The word 'yoga'



derives from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolizing the union of body and consciousness,” the United Nations website says. According to its famous practitioner BKS Iyengar, “Yoga cultivates the ways of maintaining a balanced attitude in day-to-day life and endows skill in the performance of one’s actions.” In its ‘Common Yoga Protocol’ from 2019, the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) lists Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, Bandhas and Mudras, Satkarmas, Yuktahara, Mantra-japa, Yukta-karma among popular yoga ‘sadhanas’. The AYUSH protocol describes the **folding-hands logo** of Yoga Day as reflecting “the union of individual consciousness with that of universal consciousness, a perfect harmony between mind and body, man and nature, the holistic approach to health and well-being. **The brown leaves in the logo symbolize the earth element, the green leaves of nature, blue the fire element while the sun symbolises the source of energy and inspiration.**”

How Covid-19 is Helping Punjab’s War on Drugs

- ➔ The drug problem of Punjab is back in the spotlight. This time due to a massive number of addicts making beelines to **Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) centres** in the state due to drug supply lines getting choked when Punjab imposed a strict curfew and lockdown to fight Covid-19 pandemic.

What Are OOAT Centres And How Many New Addicts Have Registered for Treatment with Them During the Pandemic?

The concept to set up OOAT centres in Punjab began in October 2017. The centres were set up to administer de-addiction medicine, a combination of **buprenorphine and naloxone**, to the addicts registering with them. Administered in the form of a pill, the opioid assisted treatment as the name suggests is primarily for addicts who are hooked to and dependent on various **opioid drugs, including heroin, poppy husk and opium**. The centres were set up seven months after Punjab CM Amarinder Singh formed a Special Task Force (STF) to tackle the drug problem and take on drug mafia in the state. There are currently 199 government-run OOAT centres where medicine is given free of cost. There are 130 private de-addiction centres which can also administer buprenorphine-naloxone tablets, charging not more than ₹7.5 per tablet, said a senior Punjab Health official associated with de-addiction programme. From March 23, when Punjab government imposed a strict curfew and lockdown, to June 17, when the unlock relaxations are in place, 1,29,504 new addicts enrolled in the OOAT centres. Around 1.2 lakh of them registered during the period when curfew and lockdown was strictly in place. As of June 17, the total number of addicts registered with OOAT centres is 5,44,125, meaning thereby that 23 per cent of the total enrolled in less than three months alone during the pandemic.

What Is the Age Profile of The Addicts Who Enrolled During Covid Pandemic?

Official data compiled by the Punjab government reveals that new registrations for treatment include addicts from almost all the age groups, from aged less than 20 years to more than 80. As per the data, there are 38,152 new addicts in the age group of 30 to 39 who registered in less than three months, maximum for an age bracket. Also, 956 were below the age of 20 and 366 above 80. Among the new registrations, 4,585 were between 70 to 79 years of age, 11,267 between 60 to 69 years of age and 20,296 in the age bracket of 50 and 59. There are 22,909 new registrations in the age bracket of 20 to 29.



What Is the Carry Home Dosage from OOAT Centres And the Controversy About It?

During curfew/lockdown, as the movement of people was restricted, the government increased the carry home dosage of buprenorphine-naloxone tablets from a week to fourteen days and subsequently to 21 days. Later, however, amid fears of “misuse and diversion” the state government reduced the carry home dosage to a week after lockdown restrictions were eased. On ground, the medicine is being administered for five to seven days to each registered for treatment. Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu says that the carry home dose has been reduced so that addicts could make more visits to the OOAT centres so that they could be counselled more frequently. STF chief Additional Director General of Police Harpreet Singh Sidhu is, however, for longer duration of carry home dosage saying that “those who come to take the free medicine from OOAT clinics usually cannot afford to pay for these medicines at private centres. More frequent visits for medicine would mean that they would end up wasting a day or half which could be used for gainful employment. Calling them repeatedly for the medicine also puts a burden on doctors and other staff who are working very hard and also are already overstretched”.

What About the Efficacy of Buprenorphine-Naloxone Tablets?

Viewpoints are divergent to an extent. Some say that since it is opioid assisted therapy, it is another form of addiction and there should be adequate checks and balances. STF chief Sidhu, however, asserts there are minimal chances of any “misuse” of buprenorphine. “Its misuse is very minimal. For instance, only the first pill will work and even if someone consumes more pills, these would have no impact due to the ‘ceiling effect’ of the medication and will not cause any harm,” said Sidhu. Dr Abhishek Ghosh, assistant professor in PGI psychiatry department and de-addiction and treatment centre, also vouches for the efficacy. “Buprenorphine does not produce a high or euphoria equivalent to other abusive drugs like heroin or other opioid drugs. **It is basically a medicine which can take care of craving, withdrawal symptoms and which can also block the effects of abusive drugs.** For example, **if a person is on adequate dose of buprenorphine and that person relapses for heroin and even if he/she takes heroin he/she will not get high because of the heroin,**” said Dr Ghosh. Dr Ghosh said that since buprenorphine was being administered in combination with naloxone, risk of abuse was very low. “There is a ceiling effect after a certain dosage,” added Dr Ghosh.

How Has the Drugs Issue Played Out Politically in Punjab?

Facing drug taint in the run up to 2017 Assembly elections, Shiromani Akali Dal was hit hard. SAD has since targeted Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh for failing to fulfil the promise to eliminate drugs in four weeks as he had declared during his campaign. Amarinder Singh says he had vowed to break the backbone of drug supply chain and those involved in drug trade and he has done that. But, minus the Covid pandemic data where around 1.3 lakh registered for treatment in OOAT centres in less than three months, it appears the drug backbone remained far from broken in the state prior to that.

Puri Jagannath Rath Yatra Gets Conditional Nod

- ➔ The Supreme Court on Monday lifted its June 18 ban on the conduct of Puri Jagannath Rath Yatra after ensuring a complete lack of public attendance for the festival to avoid spread of infection amid the pandemic. A virtual court Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde ordered “strict curfew” in the city of Puri from Monday night (June 22) onwards till the

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)



entire duration of the festival. All entry points to the city would also remain closed during this period. The festival is scheduled to begin from June 23. "During the period of curfew, no one would be allowed to come out of their houses or their places of residence, such as, hotels, lodging houses, etc. To start with, the curfew shall begin tonight at 8 p.m.," the Supreme Court ordered.

Temple, Govt. Responsible

The court said the Jagannath Puri temple administration and the State government, in consultation with the Centre, were entirely responsible for the safe conduct of the festival in line with COVID-19 guidelines. "We take note of the fact that the State of Odisha has a good record of having controlled the pandemic with a very little loss of life. We see no reason why the same attitude of care and caution should not be applied to the Rath Yatra," the court said. **The court had stopped the Yatra for this year to avoid public gathering and risk of infection. The Bench was assembled in short notice during court vacation on Monday after the Centre made an urgent mentioning along with over a dozen other applicants seeking a recall of the injunction order.** "We are informed that in the 18th-19th century, a Yatra of this kind was responsible for the spread of cholera and plague 'like wild fire'. **We say this in order to remind the authorities concerned that the situation can become dangerous if the rules of caution are ignored,**" the court cautioned the applicants. The Bench explained it opted for an injunction on June 18 when informed that a festival without public attendance was "well-nigh impossible". The court indicated that an application by Gajapati Maharaj of Puri, the chairman of the Puri Jagannath temple administration, proposing to hold the festival "in a limited way without public attendance" has now changed its mind. "If it is possible to ensure that there is no public attendance, we see no reason why the Rath Yatra cannot be conducted safely," the court said. The 11 conditions include that only those who have tested COVID-19 negative would be allowed to pull the chariots and participate in the rituals. It said only "bare minimum number of people" would be allowed to participate in the Yatra. **The court directed that 500 people who have cleared the COVID-19 test would be allowed to pull each chariot. There should be a one-hour gap between two chariots. Visual media would be allowed to install cameras at vantage points.**

L-G Rolls Back Institutional Quarantine Order

- A day after announcing five-day mandatory institutional quarantine in the national capital, Lieutenant-Governor Anil Bajjal rolled back his order. The order was vehemently opposed by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia at the first session of a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Saturday morning. This was followed by another meeting at 5 p.m. where the DDMA approved recommendations of a high-level expert committee for fixing rates charged by private hospitals in Delhi for isolation beds and ICUs with and without ventilator support. The Delhi government later issued an order capping maximum per day package rates for COVID-19-related treatment in private hospitals in the range of ₹8,000 to ₹18,000. "Regarding institutional isolation, only those positive cases which do not require hospitalisation on clinical assessment and do not have adequate facilities for home isolation would be required to undergo institutional isolation," Mr. Bajjal tweeted after the meeting.

'Arbitrary Decision'

Earlier, in his capacity as the chairperson of the DDMA, Mr. Bajjal had ordered that the five-day institutional quarantine would mandatorily apply to each case currently under home

[Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur](#)



quarantine. An estimated 80% of the infected patients in the city are under home isolation. The Delhi government had called the decision “arbitrary” and asked for it to be reconsidered. After the evening meeting, the Raj Niwas issued a statement saying all individuals who are positive would be referred to the COVID care centres for assessment of clinical conditions, the severity and the presence of co-morbidities. Simultaneously, it also said, physical assessment will be done whether adequate facilities for home isolation like minimum two rooms and separate toilet exists so that the family members and neighbours are protected. “If adequate facility for home isolation exists and the person on clinical assessment does not require hospitalisation, he would be offered to either continue to stay in COVID centre/paid isolation facility [hotels etc.] or can opt for home isolation,” the Raj Niwas said. “Those who are in home isolation should follow the guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and should stay in touch with healthcare providers so that if their condition deteriorates, they can be moved to the COVID hospitals,” it said. Mr. Sisodia tweeted, “All apprehensions of L-G sir regarding home isolation were resolved in the SDMA meeting and now the system of home isolation will continue. We thank L-G sir for this.”

MPs’ Panel Looking into Aarogya Setu

- After several failed attempts to organise a meeting, both online and offline, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information and Technology has started working on the various questions of privacy and data security of the government-run Aarogya Setu app, which was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic. Speaking to The Hindu, Chairperson of the committee Shashi Tharoor said the committee’s work “must and will” continue, even though the panel members can’t meet in person or via videoconference. “Due to restrictions on movement and various other functional challenges, the physical occurrence of committee meetings is proving to be a challenge. Despite that, its work must and will continue, as there are a host of critical matters that need to be addressed,” he said.

Forwarding Questions

For now, the committee is forwarding all the questions raised by the members on the Aarogya Setu app to the government and other stakeholders concerned. These replies are then circulated amongst the members for further deliberations. Mr. Tharoor refused to delve into details about the deliberations but sources indicated that **the committee will also look into the legality of the government’s mandatory imposition of the app on various categories of persons.**

Budget Session

The Budget Session ended abruptly hurrying through the debates on the Finance Bill on March 23. Since then no department related standing committee has met. Mr. Tharoor, on April 20, announced on Twitter that the panel would meet via videoconference. He was later informed by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla’s office that videoconferences cannot be used as a medium to hold parliamentary panel meetings till the rules are approved by both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha since it violates the confidentiality clause. After much to and fro, a meeting was called for June 10 at the Parliament complex but it had to be deferred to June 17. On both days, the committee could not meet because of varied quarantine rules and travel restrictions for out of State travellers since most of the members are in their respective constituencies.



Logging on To the Class

→ A UNESCO report estimates that nearly 300 million students worldwide are out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, fears that “the global scale and speed of the current educational disruption is unparalleled and if prolonged, could threaten the ‘right to education’.” The hardest hit by the lockdown are the disadvantaged children and youth. The report says over 320 million students in Indian schools and colleges have been hit hard, as these institutions remain closed. Students from Classes 9 to 12 will be the worst hit. More than 130 million students who will be appearing for the Board exams face an uncertain future. The Finance Minister on May 17 announced that efforts are being made by the Human Resource Development Ministry to leverage digital technology for teaching by dedicating 12 channels, one for each class. This will help all those children who do not have computers and Internet connectivity at home. However, no timeline has been set to implement this initiative. Many private schools have started e-classes. But unfortunately, not many students have benefited as those from poor households which do not have a TV or computer are unable to log in. The governments need to expand the reach of e-learning and consider providing computers to poor students. Even teachers are finding it difficult to adapt to online teaching. Many complain that children are not fully focused or are distracted by TV or what is going on in their houses. The behaviour of such children and their parents affects the entire class. There is another problem that parents in many poor households are not familiar with digital technology, which may act as an impediment to helping their children in the age group of five to eight in attending online classes. As most students remain glued to the screen for long hours, physical and psychological problems may crop up. Many disadvantaged children will become undernourished without the midday meals served at school. Efforts should be made to identify such children and deliver food packets to them at home. **There is another fear that when the schools reopen, disadvantaged children will find it difficult to catch up with studies, widening the gap in education with those from middle class and rich backgrounds. In sum, e-learning is a poor substitute for classroom learning as it leads to social isolation and limits personality development.** The development of physical and mental faculties of children depends on **participation in sports and extracurricular activities and bonding with other children.** Proper teaching occurs only in a typical classroom setting where the teachers continually monitor the progress of the children and take steps to plug the learning gaps.

Hybrid Learning

Extending the lockdown may cause great harm to children. It is for this reason the government should take immediate steps to reopen schools by issuing guidelines for physical distancing in the classroom. In sum, only through a hybrid learning approach, by balancing online classes with classroom teaching, schools can ensure proper teaching. One way of doing it is limiting the average class strength from 30 to 15. Half the class can attend on the first two days of the week, and the rest can do so the next two days. At any given point of time, only half the students should be in school. The schools should utilise the balance two days by conducting online classes, giving the students an opportunity to clear their doubts. This is not a sure-fire formula, but a start worth making.



Transforming Education (Sujatha Byravan - Scientist Who Studies Technology, Science and Development Policy)

- If we want long-lasting and transformational changes to connect sustainably with the web of life, we have to think about how we educate ourselves.

A Different Education

We must recognise, at an early age, the interconnectedness of the natural world with our everyday lives, and with the well-being of the planet. To accomplish that, education in history, geography, economics, biology and chemistry, for example, would have to be very different. Instead of presenting each discipline as distinct and separate, we ought to integrate their domains with the natural world. History is set in periods divided by wars and victors, but should include ecological changes to the landscape in a region as part of the lesson. Just as there was a movement in history to include narratives of the subaltern, we need integration with ecological connections and changes. What were the consequences, for instance, of the British building railways across the country for better extraction of resources? Trains were earlier powered by wood from deforestation. Where did the wood come from and what was the local effect on people and forest cover? Similarly, geography must describe the land and the forests, how cities develop and what these changes do to the coast and the hinterland, water bodies and the commons. There is a renewed interest in using more illustrations and models to enliven learning in the sciences. Biology and chemistry need not begin with the periodic table, reactions and cells, but start by framing the organism and cells as located within a milieu where materials, energy and information are exchanged. Chemistry could begin with cycles such as the nitrogen, carbon, phosphorus, and water cycles, which link together the biosphere, rocks and minerals. This type of teaching and learning will not do away with previously taught knowledge. It introduces a holism where there is reductionism, and the foundation would be the linkages across human and non-human entities.

Small Beginnings

Such new learning would set the grounds for understanding climate change from rising anthropogenic greenhouse gases. There has been a small movement to include the anthropogenic changes we have wrought on the earth into fields of inquiry such as literature, culture studies and history. Still, this inclusive thinking is not mainstream. A significant level of unlearning will have to be done along with new learning. Curriculum developers will have to restructure and rebuild materials used to impart knowledge. **In *Unruly Waters*, historian Sunil Amrith describes the subcontinent's history by looking at the rain, rivers and coasts. He writes how water was studied, managed and divided as a result of human activity through political and economic development. In *Indica*, Pranay Lal teaches geology and natural history simultaneously. Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* is about imperialism and its role in climate change. The economic historian, Prasannan Parthasarathi, is preparing new materials to teach modern history incorporating ecological changes, and novelists and poets are beginning to integrate the Anthropocene in their writing.** The initial waft of change we see in some areas of knowledge will have to deepen and spread. The Gaia hypothesis put forth by James Lovelock is an ecological theory proposing that living creatures and the physical world are in a complex interacting system that maintains equilibrium. One might imagine the COVID-19 crisis as Gaia giving us a warning, showing how flimsy human life and the structures we rely upon are. Unchecked rapaciousness has been unleashed by policies that support "growth at any cost". It will ultimately fail since all goods used in any economy arise



from the natural world. Our educational system needs to lay down the bricks for this understanding.

Fewer Hospital-Born Babies as Women Fear Virus

- Madhya Pradesh recorded a fall of 18.6% in institutional deliveries in April, the first month of the COVID-19 lockdown, casting a shadow on an improving trend, National Health Mission (NHM) data show. Private and government-run health centres recorded 97,881 births in April 2019, around 18.1% more than the previous year. However, the count dipped to 79,619 in the corresponding month this year, the Health Management Information System, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare data showed. Institutional deliveries shot up to 90% in 2019, and were growing by 2-3% each year.

A Case to Exempt GST In Central Police Canteens (M.P. Nathanael - Inspector General of Police (Retd), Central Reserve Police Force)

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced in early May that only indigenous products will be sold in all Central Police Canteens run by the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF). This is a welcome step in keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directive to promote indigenously manufactured products, or swadeshi products, in India. As almost all products sold in CAPF canteens are indigenous, detailed instructions on this are awaited from the Home Ministry. The CAPF comprises the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force, the Central Industrial Security Force, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, the Sashastra Seema Bal, the Assam Rifles and the National Security Guard.

Clearing Proposals

Repeated efforts over the years to get the facilities of the Canteen Stores Department for CAPF personnel proved futile though the items were sold to civilians as part of the Army's civic action programme in the Northeast. When Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as Prime Minister, concurred with the Home Ministry's proposal to include the CAPF in the list of beneficiaries of the Canteen Stores Department, the Defence Ministry opposed it and later shelved it. A proposal was subsequently cleared in 2006 by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to open Central Police Canteens for the police forces of the country on the lines of the Canteen Stores Department. The first CEO of the Central Police Canteen, R.K. Singh, visited the Canteen Stores Department headquarters in Mumbai to obtain first-hand knowledge for the gargantuan task of opening Central Police Canteens. Headed by an Additional Director General, the Central Police Canteen Purchase Committee registered nearly 200 firms and the project took off in 2007. Run by the CAPFs, the Central Police Canteens are open to serving and retired CAPF and State police personnel and their families all over the country. With over 119 master canteens functioning as depots and 1,700 canteens running across the country catering to over 50 lakh family members of 10 lakh serving personnel, the Central Police Canteen boasts of sales of over ₹2,800 crore worth of products annually. Baba Ramdev's Patanjali has already made inroads into these canteens with various products and is expected to expand. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission is also channelising the sale of its products like textiles and uniform accoutrements through these canteens. Non-exemption of GST on all products sold through canteens has been a sore point among the CAPF personnel. The rates at which the products are sold at present in the canteens are marginally less than the market rates. Exemption of GST will reduce the costs further making



the products more easily affordable and lucrative. The government has to pay serious attention to this aspect.

Paying VAT

Before the GST came into effect, certain States had exempted the levy of VAT while many others, including Delhi, were reluctant to extend this benefit. While VAT was exempted for all Canteen Stores Department items, the Central Police Canteens in most States had to continue paying VAT. The authorities cannot ignore the fact that the CAPF is working in difficult conditions across the country at grave risk to their lives. Not only are these personnel combating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, tackling insurgency in the Northeast and fighting the Maoists in left wing extremism-affected areas but are also in the forefront quelling riots, as they did in Delhi and Aligarh recently. While sale of indigenous products in CAPF canteens is a step in the right direction, the issue of exemption of GST needs to be addressed on priority lest the CAPF personnel feel that they are being given step-motherly treatment despite the arduous duties they carry out in inhospitable terrains and the innumerable sacrifices they make for the nation.

Business & Economics

Getting Out of the 'Guns, Germs and Steel' Crisis (Praveen Chakravarty - Political Economist and A Senior Office-Bearer of The Congress Party)

- Standing up to a military threat by a superpower neighbour will pose an inevitable drain on the finances of the government. India's war against Pakistan in Kargil in May 1999 provides hints of the financial burden of a military threat. India's defence expenditure in the war year shot up by nearly 20% from the previous year. It also forced the then government to increase India's defence budget for the next financial year to 2.7% of nominal GDP, the highest in decades. China is a far mightier power than Pakistan. In this face-off, 20 Indian soldiers have been brutally killed and many more injured by the Chinese Army. A portion of India's land in Ladakh has been grabbed by China. Surely, India is bound to assert its rights, which will necessitate higher expenditure. **India's defence budget has been whittled down to just 2% of GDP for the financial year 2021.** China's defence budget is nearly four times larger. In all likelihood, the Chinese conflict will stretch central government finances by an additional one to two percentage points of GDP, as India staves off the current threat and shores up its defence preparedness.

Health Care and Economy

The health pandemic has exposed India's woefully inadequate health infrastructure. **The combined public health expenditure of States and the central government in India is a mere 1.5% of GDP, compared to China's at 3% and America's at 9%.** The COVID-19 epidemic is expected to linger on for another two years until a suitable vaccine is available at large. There is no option other than to significantly ramp up India's health expenditure. **Many public health experts are of the opinion that the central government will need additional funds of the equivalent of at least one percentage point of GDP to continue the fight against COVID-19.** It is no secret that the extreme national lockdown has thrown India's economy into utter disarray. India's economy has four major drivers – people's spending on consumption,



government spending, investment and external trade. Spending by people is the largest contributor to India's economic growth every year. For every ₹100 in incremental GDP, ₹60 to ₹70 comes from people's consumption spending. The lockdown shut off people from spending for two full months, which will contract India's economy for the first time in nearly five decades, regardless of a strong agriculture performance. Even prior to COVID-19 when the global economy was robust, India's trade levels had fallen from 55% of nominal GDP in 2014 to 40% in 2020. Now, with the global economy in tatters, trade is not a viable alternative to offset the loss from consumption. Investment is also not a viable option at this stage since the demand for goods and services has fallen dramatically.

Incremental Funds Needed

The only options then are to either put money in the hands of the needy to stimulate immediate consumption or for the government to embark on a massive spending spree, akin to the "New Deal" which was a series of programmes and projects instituted by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Based on estimates of loss of consumption, incomes and its multiplier impact, my estimate is that the government will need to inject incremental funds of five percentage points of GDP to absorb the economic shock and kick start the spending cycle again. Thus, India's "guns, germs and steel" crisis will impose a total financial burden of an additional eight percentage points of GDP on the central government exchequer. Where will the government get such a large sum of money from? The government had expected a nominal GDP growth of 10% this year. It is clear now that GDP will not grow but shrink. There is much hullabaloo about a 'V' shaped economic recovery, which is a mere illusion. A 5% fall now and a 10% growth next year will be hailed as a sharp 'V' shaped recovery by economists and the International Monetary Fund. But as your local grocery store – keeper will elucidate, it only means that his total sales is a tad higher than two years ago. Central government revenues for this year were budgeted at 10% of GDP which will not be achieved. Revenues will likely fall short by two percentage points of GDP. In sum, the government needs to spend an additional eight percentage points of GDP while revenues will be lower by two percentage points of GDP, a combined gap of 10% of GDP. Potential new sources of revenue such as a wealth tax or a large capital gains tax are ideas worth exploring for the medium term but will not be of much immediate help.

The 'Junk Rating' Risk

The only option for the government to finance its needs is to borrow copiously, which will obviously push up debt to ominous levels. When government debt rises dramatically, there will be a fourth dimension to the "guns, germs and steel crisis"; a "junk" crisis. With rising debt levels, international ratings agencies will likely downgrade India's investment rating to "junk", which will then trigger panic among foreign investors. India thus faces a tough "Dasharatha" dilemma – save the country's borders, citizens and economy or prevent a "junk" rating. Some economists argue that there is a magical third choice – to simply print how much ever money the government needs to overcome these crises. Economic theory states that if money is printed at will, it can lead to a massive spike in prices and inflation. This theory has fallen flat in the past decade in developed nations such as America where the creation of phantom money has not led to inflation. Hence, the Reserve Bank of India can just create money at will and transfer them to government coffers electronically, is the argument. There are multiple problems with this argument but the most important one is that regardless of whether money is printed or borrowed from others, it will still be counted as government debt and not escape a potential downgrade to a "junk" rating. The U.S dollar, by virtue of being



the world's reserve currency, has an in-built protection against a currency crisis that can be triggered by at-will printing of money, that other developing nations such as India do not possess. If there were indeed no costs to printing money whenever governments need, then why tax citizens at all? Countries could just print money for all their expenses every year. The magical third choice is not a magic wand that can give the Indian government the money it needs and, also prevent a ratings downgrade. The nation is at the precipice of an extremely challenging moment in her history. How India emerges from this crisis will shape not just India's destiny but the worlds. The government's choices are either to be bold and embark on a rescue mission, or do nothing and hope the situation resolves itself. On balance, it seems that the best course of action is to borrow unabashedly to pull India out of the "guns, germs and steel" crisis and deal with the consequences of a potential "junk" nation label.

₹150,000 Crore Plus: The Govt Stimulus for Rural Areas Post Lockdown

→ There are many parallels one can draw between the novel coronavirus-induced lockdown (Gharbandi) and demonetisation (Notebandi), in terms of their impact on India's farm economy. Both resulted in the same thing – demand destruction – albeit through different routes. Notebandi caused a haemorrhaging of liquidity from the predominantly cash-based farm produce markets. In the pre-demonetisation era, it wasn't uncommon for individual traders to purchase produce worth ₹50 lakh or even ₹1 crore daily during the peak arrival season and make payments to farmers entirely in cash. With demonetisation, and also restrictions on cash transactions introduced in the 2017-18 Union Budget, wholesale mandis were suddenly denuded of liquidity and, thereby, demand. In Gharbandi, demand destruction was wrought not by a lack of cash, but of buyers themselves. And these were institutional buyers, as opposed to households. The closure of hotels, restaurants, tea stalls, street food joints, sweetmeat shops, hostels and canteens – in addition to no wedding receptions and other public functions – led to a collapse of out-of-home food consumption. Even household-level food consumption was affected by falling incomes (in respect of poor and lower middle-class families suddenly finding themselves without work) and reduced requirement due to forced inactivity (as with the rich and better off). Either way, the outcome was the same. Notebandi and Gharbandi both basically "flattened" farm produce prices, by shifting the demand curves to the left. The demand drop wasn't due to prices going up. Rather, with consumption being limited to homes – manpower shortages forced many food companies to also curtail production in factories and, hence, cut raw material purchases – there was less demand now for milk, potatoes or tomatoes even at the same price. This wasn't, in other words, simply a "movement along the demand curve", but a "leftward shift in the demand curve". The other similarity between demonetisation and lockdown is that both struck just after farmers had produced a bumper rabi crop – the former in April-June 2017 and the latter barely three years later.

Notwithstanding these and other similarities – both followed overnight 8 pm announcements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi – there are differences between the situations brought about by Gharbandi and Notebandi. To start with, when demonetisation happened, the farm sector had already gone through tough times, with back-to-back droughts in 2014 and 2015 on top of a global Agri-commodity price crash in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Also, Notebandi primarily hit agriculture and informal enterprises, while organised manufacturing and services sector firms had actually benefited from demonetisation and the GST regime. The lockdown, by contrast, has affected these industries far more than

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agriculture. Agricultural growth had surpassed overall economic growth during the last two quarters of 2019-20, in real as well as nominal terms after factoring in inflation. Even after lockdown came into effect from March 25, farm-related operations – from harvesting and sale of produce in mandis, to their intra- and inter-state movement – were exempted from Gharbandi restrictions. The second major difference has been government response. India's imports of pulses and edible oils peaked during 2015-16 to 2017-18. This period, before and after demonetisation, saw the government formally embracing "inflation targeting" and also giving the Essential Commodities Act a new lease of life. Stockholding limits were clamped from time to time on onion, potatoes, pulses and sugar, alongside allowing duty-free imports and placing of export curbs. These measures were persisted with despite consumer food price inflation ruling below general retail inflation since September 2016. Import controls came in only towards late 2017, partly in reaction to growing agrarian unrest. The government's approach during lockdown has, in comparison, been more proactive. One reason for it might be the realisation that agriculture – apart from being "essential" for supplying food in a public health emergency – offered itself as the only feasible economic activity under the existing circumstances. All administrative steps were, therefore, taken to permit movement of labourers and machines for farmers to harvest their rabi crop. It is true that farmers this time round, too, have incurred losses on sales of milk and perishable produce, from tomatoes, carrots, capsicum and gourds to grapes, bananas, watermelons and totapuri mangoes. The collapse of institutional demand and out-of-home consumption has further hurt poultry, maize and sugarcane growers, whether through slide in prices or non-payment by mills. But it's also a fact that government agencies have undertaken record procurement of wheat (38.6 million tonnes of the 2019-20 crop, with minimum support price value of over ₹74,200 crore) and paddy (74.3 mt, including 15.7 mt after March 31 and worth ₹28,500 crore). Besides, they have bought about 1.8 mt of chana (valued at Rs 8,750 crore), 0.8 mt of rapeseed-mustard (₹3,300 crore) and 0.3 mt of tur/arhar (₹1,750 crore). Add the ₹16,750 crore direct transfers to 8.37 crore farmer accounts as first instalment payment of ₹2,000 each under the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, the total liquidity pumped into the farm economy, post-lockdown, by the government works out to more than ₹133,000 crore. That isn't small money, given the short time span (less than three months) within which this liquidity infusion has taken place and the sheer logistics involved in physical purchasing grain from farmers without violation of social distancing norms.

Agriculture's newfound importance is also reflected in the two major reforms that might not have come about in normal times. The first one permits sale and purchase of farm produce outside the physical boundaries of state-regulated mandis. That, in theory, gives farmers freedom to sell directly to processors, exporters, wholesalers and retailers both within and outside their states, including through electronic trading platforms. The second reform does away with the imposition of ECA stockholding limits on foodstuffs, save under extraordinary conditions. These were powers that this very government had, ironically, been invoking until recently. It took an all-round economic crisis, which Covid-19 brutally lay bare, to recognise the value and potential of Indian agriculture. If the ₹17,622 crore of wage payments made under MGNREG from April 1 is also accounted for, the government's total spend on farmers and rural workers in the past three months will be well in excess of ₹150,000 crore. With the Covid situation in cities showing little improvement, it is clearly laying all hopes of an economic recovery on Bharat.



'Country of Origin' Must on GeM Platform

- In a push to promote local products, the Union government has made it mandatory for all sellers on the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), a platform for public procurement, to list the country of origin while registering new products. Those who had uploaded products are getting regular warnings that they will be removed if the origin details are not updated.

Local Content

The changes to the GeM, a Special Purpose Vehicle under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, are in line with the Centre's Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India policies, an official statement said. Buyers on the platform can now see the percentage of local content in various products. They can also switch on a new Make in India filter to see products that match their preferences on local content. For example, buyers can choose to buy only those products that meet a minimum 50% local content criteria. "In case of bids, buyers can now reserve any bid for Class I local suppliers (local content > 50%). For those bids below ₹200 crore, only Class I and Class II local suppliers (local content > 50% and > 20% respectively) are eligible to bid, with Class I supplier getting purchase preference," said the statement.

RBI Will Supervise Coop. Banks

- To protect depositors, the Centre has decided to bring all urban and multi-State cooperative banks under the supervision of the RBI. The Union Cabinet approved an ordinance to this effect. "In a landmark decision, the urban cooperatives and multi-State cooperative banks, which are 1,540 in number and have a depositor base of 8.6 crore, who have saved ₹4.84 lakh crore, a huge amount... They have been brought under RBI supervision process, which is applicable to scheduled banks. Depositors will get more security..." Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said. **Currently, these banks come under dual regulation of the RBI and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies.** The move to bring these urban and multi-State coop. banks under the supervision of the RBI comes after several instances of fraud and serious financial irregularities, including the major scam at the Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative (PMC) Bank last year. In September, the RBI was forced to supersede the PMC Bank's board and impose strict restrictions. The Cabinet also approved a scheme to provide interest subvention of 2% for a 12-month period to small borrowers with loans up to ₹50,000 under the Shishu category of the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. This relief had been announced as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat package last month.

Insurers Can Offer Short-Term COVID-19 Health Cover

- Short-term health insurance cover specifically for COVID-19 may soon be available, with the insurance regulator on Tuesday issuing guidelines permitting insurers to offer such policies. All life, general and health insurers are allowed to offer COVID-19 specific short-term health insurance policies. **Such policies will be for a minimum term of three months and a maximum term of 11 months, according to the IRDAI guidelines.** IRDAI general manager (Health) D.V.S. Ramesh said short-term health insurance policies providing coverage specific to COVID-19 disease is the need of the hour. The objective is to make available insurance to various sections of people during the pandemic. **The guidelines, which will remain valid for issue of the policies till March 31, 2021, unless extended further, permit issue of short-term policies both as individual or group products.** No separate add-ons will be permitted. Optional covers that enhance the health insurance coverage are allowed to be offered for the same policy



duration. Advising insurers to devise inclusive short-term health insurance products, IRDAI said where waiting period is a part of the product, it should not be more than 15 days. In other words, a claim can be made after 15 days of the policy issue date. The guidelines follow IRDAI's communication in March asking insurers to design products covering costs of treatment for COVID-19.

The Biggest LIC IPO That Govt Is Set to Launch

- The government has started the process to launch the initial public offer (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) within this year. The IPO is expected to be the biggest in the Indian capital markets given the size and scale of LIC, the country's oldest and largest life insurer. The finance ministry last week invited bids from transaction advisors, including consulting firms, investment bankers, and financial institutions, for assisting the government in the preparatory processes leading to the IPO.

What Is the Size and Position of LIC In Insurance Market?

Even if the government decides to sell 5-10 per cent of its equity in LIC through an IPO, the share sale of LIC, which was set up in 1956, is expected to be the largest. The insurer's total assets had touched an all-time high of ₹31.11 lakh crore in 2018-19, an increase of 9.4 per cent. The Corporation realised a profit of ₹23,621 crore from its equity investment during 2018-19, down 7.89 per cent from ₹25,646 crore in the previous year. **The LIC had 66.24 per cent market share in total first-year premium and 74.71 per cent share in new policies in 2018-19, as per its latest available Annual Report.** The government has sought to appoint to two pre-IPO transaction advisors, who should have successfully managed at least one transaction of IPO of a size of at least ₹5,000 crore, or a capital market transaction of at least ₹15,000 crore.

How Does LIC Fit into The Overall Disinvestment Roadmap?

In the Budget 2020-21, the finance ministry had announced plans for IPO of LIC and a proposal to sell the government's equity in the stressed IDBI Bank to private, retail and institutional investors through the stock exchange. The government expects to raise ₹90,000 crore through stake sale in LIC and IDBI Bank, and another ₹1.2 lakh crore through other disinvestments. LIC is also a majority shareholder in IDBI Bank. The government had earlier listed the shares of General Insurance Corporation and New India Assurance through IPOs three years ago.

What Benefits Can Be Expected Through The IPO?

An IPO will certainly bring in transparency into affairs of LIC since it will be required to inform financial numbers and other market-related developments on time to the stock exchanges. Investors can benefit from picking up equity in the insurer, which has been making underwriting profit as well as profits on its investments. LIC's investment in various equity and bond instruments will come under greater scrutiny after its lists on the exchanges.

What Does Recent NCLAT Ruling — Liquidation of A Firm Under IBC Holds Precedence

— Mean?

- The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has ruled that liquidation process of a company under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) holds precedence over outcome

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of an arbitration proceeding. A three-member Bench, headed by Justice Venugopal M, ruled that just because **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited** had won an arbitration award against **Surana Power**, which was undergoing liquidation, the process would not be stopped to favour it. The Chennai Bench of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had earlier ruled in favour of BHEL.

What Does the NCLAT Order Mean?

In its judgment, the NCLAT set aside an order of Chennai NCLT on the grounds that BHEL's charge over Surana Power assets were equal to the other 10 financial creditors, and therefore it could not be given precedence. BHEL's claim that it the first right over the assets and properties of Surana Power, was wrong as all other creditors had given the assent to liquidate the corporate debtor, the NCLAT held. **The NCLAT's judgment essentially holds that if a corporate debtor is being liquidated, a creditor cannot claim superiority over other secured creditors in the same band, and that everyone must receive their fair share by following the waterfall mechanism of liquidation.**

What Is the Waterfall Mechanism for Liquidation?

As the name suggests, the **waterfall mechanism** under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code gives priority to secured financial creditors over unsecured financial creditors. The mechanism says that if a company is being liquidated, these secured financial creditors must be first paid the full extent of their admitted claim, before any sale proceedings are distributed to any other unsecured creditor. Under Section 53 of the IBC, which deals with waterfall mechanism, the **topmost priority, however, is given to costs related to the liquidation process and dues of workmen of the corporate debtor.** The dues of the workmen include all their salaries, provident, pension, retirement and gratuity fund, as well as any other funds maintained for the welfare of the workmen.

Why Did BHEL Object to Liquidation of Surana Power?

State-run BHEL, which was also a secured creditor for Surana Power, had won an arbitration award against the company. It gave BHEL complete and undisputed rights over all the assets, equipment, goods lying at the site of the power plant. It also gave BHEL title rights over the finished and unfinished buildings. BHEL objected to the liquidation process as it held only 26.24 per cent share by value in the Surana Power, which is being liquidated. Going by the waterfall mechanism, though it would have got the money over other unsecured creditors, its share would come down by a lot. **The arbitration award route would have, on the other hand, given it complete rights over all properties, assets and equipment, while leaving little to nothing for other creditors.** Though the NCLT Chennai bench had held that BHEL was right in claiming priority over other creditors, **the NCLAT held that in order to claim priority, BHEL should have had at least 60 per cent share value.** Since it did not have the same, it would be unfair to stop the liquidation proceedings because of one dissenting creditor.

Nation's Top Wheat Contributor Tag: How M.P. Stole Punjab's Crown

- ➔ Although Punjab stayed the undisputed leader in wheat procurement for the national pool till 2019, Madhya Pradesh (MP) this year surpassed Punjab to become the number one contributor of wheat. Punjab, however, is still a way ahead from MP as far as per hectare productivity of wheat is concerned, which is around 52 per cent more (per hectare) than MP.



The Indian Express explains how MP managed to beat Punjab in procurement despite this huge gap in per hectare productivity.

What Is the Area Under Wheat Cultivation in Punjab and MP?

Punjab's area under wheat cultivation has remained close to 35 lakh hectares (LH) every year since over the last decade. While the area under wheat was 34.90 LH last year in Punjab, it was 35.05 LH this year. Meanwhile, MP's area under wheat has successively grown each year – doubling from 41 LH in 2007-08 to around 77.22 LH in 2018-19. According to the office of the Director of Department of Agriculture Madhya Pradesh, there was a huge jump in wheat area in MP in 2019-20 Rabi season when it increased by 25 LH and reached to over 102 LH (10.02 million hectares). According to the state's Agriculture Department, an increase of 32.4 per cent in the wheat area was witnessed in MP in just one year. This Rabi season, MP's area was around 67.23 LH (191.7 per cent) more than Punjab.

How Do Both States Fare In Terms Of Area Under Wheat Cultivation?

This year wheat was sown on 330.2 LH across the country against 296.98 LH last year. This Rabi season also saw the highest ever area was sown under wheat since Independence. Of the total wheat area in the country, **MP's share was 31 per cent, while Punjab cultivated wheat on 10.6 per cent of the total national area.** Thereafter, **MP contributed 129.28 lakh tonnes (LT), which is 33.83 per cent of the total wheat procurement by the Centre till June 16, while Punjab has contributed 127.12 LT, which is 33.27 per cent to the national pool.** The Centre has procured 382.05 lakh tonnes till June 16. **However, despite around three times (192 per cent) more area under wheat compared to Punjab this year, MP's contribution is only 1.67 per cent more than Punjab.**

What Is Per Hectare Yield in Both States?

According to the Agriculture Department Punjab, the average yield per hectares was recorded at 50.08 quintals (20.275 quintals per acre). Due to untimely rains in Punjab, productivity was low this year compared to previous years when Punjab had recorded 51 quintals and 51.88 quintals per hectares in 2019 and 2018, respectively. "The productivity in MP has increased and it was recorded 32.98 quintals per hectares (13.35 quintals per acre) against 32.73 quintals hectare last year". **Punjab records 52 per cent more yield per hectare than MP.**

What Is the Total Wheat Production in Both the States?

Apart from contributing to the national pool, every state keeps the crop for self-consumption or selling to the local wheat flour mills or processing industry. **This year Punjab's total wheat production was recorded 175.67 LT (17.5 million tonnes) till May 31 against 178 LT (17.8 MT) last year and 182.62 LT (18.2 MT) in 2018. Out of 175.67 LT, Punjab's farmers brought only 127.62 LT (72.6%) to the mandis of which 127.12 LT has been procured by the government agencies for the central pool and remaining was purchased by the private players. Nearly, 48 LT has been kept by the farmers of the state with them. "In MP the total wheat production this year would be around 336 LT as per the average yield per hectares recorded in the state out of which states' farmers have sold only 39 per cent of the total production to the Centre till June 16 and out of remaining they may sell some more to government as procurement in MP will end on June 31,"** said a senior Agriculture officer in MP, adding that the remaining 200 LT would be kept for state's consumption, and selling to the private players. Last year state had contributed to the central pool only 73.69 LT, while remaining around 179 LT was used for self-consumption and sold to private players. Wheat



procurement ended in Punjab on May 31. "If we compare the total production of both the states, MP's production is 92 per cent more than Punjab but their area under wheat too is 192 per cent more than Punjab. MP's productivity, however, is quite low," said a senior officer in Punjab Agriculture Department.

How Many Farmers Registered on The Government's Procurement Portal in Both States This Year?

In Punjab, almost every wheat producer – there are 12-13 lakh – sells his produce to the government agencies after keeping some produce for self-consumption or selling to some private players. But in MP, large number of private players enter the market because MP's wheat is considered to be very good in quality. These private players either pick the wheat from farmers' fields or from mandis, but this time due to Covid-19 fear around 81 per cent of farmers (there is total over 10 million farmers in MP as per the record provided by the Department of Agriculture, MP) came to sell a major portion of their crop to the government agencies this year against 48 per cent of farmers last year, said a senior Food and Civil Supply Department officer in MP. **Due to Covid-19 outbreak, few private players entered mandis to purchase wheat.**

HUL to Drop 'Fair & Lovely' Skin Lightening Product Name

- ➔ Unilever will drop the word 'fair' from its "Fair & Lovely" brand of skin lightening products which are popular in South Asia but have long been criticised for promoting negative stereotypes against people with darker skin. Companies face a mounting backlash on social media in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. **Products marketed for skin lightening have a huge market in South Asia due to a societal obsession with fairer skin tones, but those notions are being questioned more frequently as perceptions change.** Johnson & Johnson this month said it would stop selling skin-whitening creams which are popular in Asia and the Middle East.

'Singular Ideal'

"We recognise that the use of the words 'fair', 'white' and 'light' suggest a singular ideal of beauty that we don't think is right, and we want to address this," Sunny Jain, president of Unilever's beauty and personal care division, said in a statement. Unilever's 'Fair & Lovely' brand dominates the market in South Asia. Similar products are also sold by L'Oreal and Procter & Gamble. "We are making our skin care portfolio more inclusive... a more diverse portrayal of beauty," Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) Chairman Sanjiv Mehta said in a separate statement. In India, fairness products have long been endorsed by leading Bollywood celebrities, as well as other popular youth icons. This month activists started petitions on Change.Org, drawing thousands of signatures, including one by Nina Davuluri, who in 2014 became the first Indian American to be crowned Miss America.

Why Apple has Ditched Intel for ARM on Macs

- ➔ At its just-concluded Worldwide Developer Conference (WWDC), the first to be organised fully online, Apple announced it will soon have its own chipsets powering its Mac range of computers. Now, these run on Intel's X86 architecture processors. Over the next couple of years, Apple will switch its Macs also to ARM architecture-based A-series processors, which now power iPhones and iPads. Apple's move to its own ARM-based, custom-designed chips



for its Mac computers was long anticipated. The simple reason behind the shift is Cupertino's obsession with end-to-end control over its hardware and software – it has achieved the same with almost all its other products, including iPhones and iPads. **Apple says its custom-designed chips for Macs will deliver better performance, but consume less power. The tech giant further said that its "Apple Silicon" will also make it easier for developers to write apps for the entire ecosystem. By using its own chipsets, Apple can also improve the security of its Mac computers, making them more difficult for hackers to break in.** Also, full control will mean Apple can push the envelope on what a Mac can achieve – maybe 24-hour battery life and built-in 5G connectivity. **Once Apple has Macs running on its silicon, it will be able to run iOS apps natively on Mac OS without any alteration.** To make sure apps work on any device running an Apple chip, Apple has built a new Universal engine for developers. For those apps that don't yet work on the new silicon, Apple has announced Rosetta 2 in macOS Big Sur – a sort of converter that makes non-compatible apps run on the new chips. **Apple has been making mobile processors since the days of iPhone 4 and the first iPad, both of which featured the Apple A4 SoC.**

Apple's ambitions to be less reliant on companies like Intel and Qualcomm shows how it has progressed in the areas of chipset designing and development. It is now confident enough to pitch its latest A-series mobile processors against Intel computer chips. Revealing the iPad Pro in 2018, Apple claimed its A12X processor was faster than 92 per cent of portable PCs sold in the market. Intel still continues to dominate the PC market with its chipsets, but has over the past few years been struggling to show big improvements in performance. It also struggled to deliver on time, which for a control-obsessed company like Apple is more than a worry. There are also questions being raised about whether Apple's ARM chips can actually replace processors from Intel and AMD. Apple just says its custom-designed chips are powerful, without going into the details.

Life & Science

How Close Are We to A Covid-19 Vaccine? What's the Testing Process?

- Even as the Covid-19 pandemic has set off an unprecedented response among the global scientific community to find a vaccine, the race is set to kick up a notch from next month as three candidates – the ones developed by **Moderna Inc**, **China's Sinovac Biotech** and **UK's Oxford-AstraZeneca** – are set to enter late-stage trials. According to the World Health Organization's latest count, **13 experimental vaccines are being tested in humans and more than 120 others are in earlier stages of development** even as the infections near nine million, including 468,484 deaths. China has six candidates undergoing human trials, the maximum. If all goes well, we may have a vaccine for emergency use by November even though experts have said getting regulatory approval followed by mass production and supply chain issues may push the development into next year. **The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Solidarity Trial, the UK's RECOVERY Trial and the US's 'Operation Warp Speed'** are three of the leading scientific efforts pivoting research in the battle against Covid-19.

What Are the Stages in Development of a Vaccine?

Firstly, a new vaccine candidate has to pass testing in animals, following which clinical trials kick in. Then, over three phases, the vaccine candidate's safety and efficacy are tested as per



protocols. A fourth stage involves collection and analysis of post-marketing data. Pre-clinical tests: In this primary stage, scientists test the vaccine on animals such as mice or monkeys to see if it produces an immune response.

Phase I Trials: This is the first step where the experimental vaccine is given to humans, usually between 20-80 subjects, to test safety and dosage and check whether it stimulates the immune system.

Phase II Trials: In this stage, a larger group of several hundred individuals are enrolled for testing and they are split into groups age-wise such as children and elderly. The Phase II testing studies the candidate vaccine's safety, immunogenicity, proposed doses, schedule of immunisations and method of delivery.

Phase III Trials: Since certain side effects may not surface in the smaller groups of humans tested in earlier phases, the vaccine candidate is given to thousands of people in this stage. Here, the scientists check how many become infected compared with volunteers who receive a placebo. These trials can determine if the vaccine protects against the coronavirus. Approval: After Phase III trials, the vaccine developer submits a license application to the regulatory authority in their respective country. The regulator then inspects the factory where the vaccine will be made and approves its labelling. During a pandemic, a vaccine may receive emergency use authorisation before a formal green signal.

What Types of Covid-19 Vaccines Are Being Developed?

With limited time in their hands, scientists are developing some vaccines from scratch and some from existing molecules developed for other diseases. What has aided the research is the fact that the novel coronavirus is from a family on which work is already being done worldwide after SARS and MERS.

Genetic Vaccines: These are the vaccines that use the genes of the coronavirus (in the form of DNA or RNA) to provoke an immune response.

Viral Vector Vaccines: These vaccines use a virus to deliver coronavirus genes into cells and provoke an immune response. These viruses are weakened so they cannot cause disease.

Protein-Based Vaccines: These vaccines use a coronavirus protein or a protein fragment to provoke an immune response by mimicking the coronavirus' outer coat.

Whole-Virus Vaccines: Such vaccines use a weakened or inactivated version of the virus. These vaccines are created by inactivating a pathogen, typically using heat or chemicals. This destroys the pathogen's infectivity while retaining immunogenicity.

Which Covid-19 Vaccines Are the Top Contenders and Have Shown Promise?

Even though most of the over 120 vaccines under development are undergoing Phase II clinical trials, only two of them are in combined Phase II/III trials.

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1. [Oxford-AstraZeneca Vaccine \(Phase II/III\)](#)

Being jointly developed by British-Swedish company AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, the **AZD1222 vaccine**, based on a **chimpanzee adenovirus called ChAdOx1**, is beginning Phase II/III testing in the UK and Brazil. AstraZeneca has already started to mass-produce the vaccine candidate and plans to roll out up to two billion doses of a coronavirus vaccine in September. The firm has signed deals to produce 400 million doses for the US and 100 million for the UK if it is successful in human trials.

2. [Moderna Vaccine \(Phase II\)](#)

US firm Moderna Inc is developing a vaccine, **part of US' Operation Warp Speed**, using messenger RNA to produce viral proteins. Final-stage trials of the **mRNA-1273 vaccine** is set to begin next month on 30,000 people and the firm hopes to have vaccine doses ready by early 2021. Earlier this month, preliminary information revealed that a series of studies in mice has lent some assurance that it may not increase the risk of more severe disease and that one dose may provide protection against the novel coronavirus.

3. [Pfizer-BNTECH Vaccine \(Phase II\)](#)

Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, which is co-producing a Covid-19 vaccine with the help of German company BNTECH, has started the process of dosing patients. Four vaccine candidates **based on messenger RNA (mRNA) format** are being tested on volunteers. The tests are currently going on in Germany and parts of the US. Pfizer believes that a Covid-19 vaccine could be ready by the end of October 2020.

4. [Imperial College London Vaccine \(Phase II\)](#)

The vaccine candidate developed by Imperial College London researchers is **based on self-amplifying RNA technology** and over 300 healthy people have been immunised with two doses. The vaccine has been backed by 41 million pounds in government funding. A further trial involving 6,000 people is planned for October and if these prove successful, Imperial hopes the vaccine could be distributed in the UK and abroad early next year.

5. [Sinovac Biotech Vaccine \(Phase II\)](#)

The Beijing-based company is testing an **inactivated vaccine called CoronaVac** and is preparing Phase III trials in China and Brazil. Preliminary findings from phase I and II trials in China have shown that its shot is safe and capable of eliciting an immune response from human trials. Sinovac's research and development subsidiary has received \$15 million from private equity firms Advantech Capital and Vivo Capital to fund the development of the vaccine.

6. [CanSino Biologics \(Phase II\)](#)

Chinese Vaccine Company Cansino Biologics Inc Has Claimed in A Paper in The Lancet That Its Vaccine Candidate, **Based on An Adenovirus Called Ad5**, Was Able to Generate an Immune Response Against the Virus. However, As Per the Study, about 81 Per Cent of All the Participants Showed At Least One Adverse Reaction to The Vaccine Within the First Seven Days.



7. **Novavax Vaccine (Phase II)**

US biotechnology company Novavax has kicked off human trials of its **protein-based NVX-CoV2373 vaccine** for Covid-19 in Australia. The results of the first phase of clinical trials in Melbourne and Brisbane are expected to be known in July following which thousands of candidates in several countries would then become involved in a second phase. Animal testing suggested the recombinant vaccine is effective in low doses. Novavax is planning to manufacture at least 100 million doses this year and 1.5 billion in 2021.

8. **Sinopharm Vaccine (Phase II)**

China National Biotech Group (CNBG), known as Sinopharm, is planning late-stage human trials in foreign countries by next month. It recently said its experimental coronavirus vaccine has triggered antibodies in April clinical trials involving 1,120 healthy participants.

9. **CureVac Vaccine (Phase I)**

German biotech firm CureVac has started human trials of its coronavirus vaccines, involving 168 healthy volunteers. The firm is using **a new technology based on mRNA, a type of genetic material never before used to make a vaccine**. Earlier this month, the German government said it was spending 300 million euros to take a 23-percent stake in the firm.

10. **Johnson & Johnson Vaccine (Phase I)**

American firm Johnson & Johnson has fast-tracked the start of human clinical trials for its recombinant Ad26. COV2-S vaccine by two months to the second half of July. The company is also in talks with the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to start larger, late-stage trials ahead of schedule. In March, J&J signed deals with the US government to create enough manufacturing capacity to produce more than 1 billion doses of its vaccine through 2021, Reuters reported.

Antibodies from Convalescent Plasma Protect Against COVID-19

- A team of scientists led by Dennis R. Burton from the Scripps Research Institute has discovered that neutralising antibodies present in the blood of COVID-19 infected who have recovered offers powerful protection against novel coronavirus in animals. The researchers found that passive transfer of neutralising antibodies into Syrian hamsters protects them against the disease when exposed to the virus. The protection was found when antibodies at high dose were transferred to the animals.

Role for Antibodies

The small animals that received high dose of antibodies did not lose weight and the amount of virus in the lungs was low compared with those that received low dose of the antibodies and the control group. "The study suggests a role for neutralising antibodies in prophylaxis, and potentially therapy, of COVID-19. The neutralising antibodies define protective epitopes to guide vaccine design," they write in a paper published in Science. Prior to transferring and testing the ability of the antibodies to protect the animals from the virus, the researchers tested it on human cell cultures and found the antibodies to have superior ability to protect against the virus. Two different antibodies in five different concentrations were tested on the small animals to evaluate dose-dependent protection. The highest dose tested was 2



mg/animal and the lowest dose was 8 microgram/animal. The animals were challenged with the virus 12 hours after the antibodies were transferred. Lung tissues were collected to measure viral load on day 5 post virus challenge. In contrast to the antibody to receptor-binding domain of the virus, the less potent and incompletely neutralising antibody showed no evidence of protection at any concentration compared to the control animals.

Promising Study

The authors state that the efficacy of the antibodies in Syrian hamsters is “promising” and suggest that human studies be undertaken based on animal trial results. Incidentally, the researchers also identified one antibody that can neutralise the 2002 SARS virus. According to the release, the antibodies can be injected into patients in the early stage of the disease to reduce the viral load and thus protect the patient from progressing to the severe form of the disease. “The antibodies also may be used to provide temporary, vaccine-like protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection for healthcare workers, elderly people and others who respond poorly to traditional vaccines or are suspected of a recent exposure to the coronavirus,” the release says. The antibodies can then be mass-produced either as a treatment to prevent deterioration of the disease and as a preventive vaccine, as in the case of Ebola virus, the release notes. “If further safety tests in animals and clinical trials in people go well, then conceivably the antibodies could be used in clinical settings as early as next January,” the researchers say in the release. **More than 1,000 antibody-producing immune cells called the B cells were first isolated. These antibodies were isolated based on their ability to bind to the virus and prevent it from infecting the test cells.**

Gene Sequence

Each of the 1,000 immune B cells produced a distinct antibody against the virus. In order to mass-produce the antibody, the scientists obtained the gene sequence of each antibody. They then screened each antibody and 33 antibodies that could block the virus from binding to the test cells were identified. They identified one antibody that could also protect hamsters against heavy viral exposure.

Antibodies Against Coronavirus Start to Decrease In 2-3 Months

- Now, a study published in Nature Medicine suggests that antibodies formed against SARS-CoV-2 begin to decrease in number, just two-three months after infection. “We observed that IgG levels and neutralizing antibodies in a high proportion of individuals who recovered from SARS-CoV-2 infection start to decrease within two-three months after infection,” Quan-Xin Long from Chongqing Medical University, Chongqing, China and others write. In contrast, circulating antibodies against 2002-2003 SARS and MERS coronavirus were found to last more than one year. In the case of the 2002 SARS, sustained IgG levels were seen for more than two years after infection, while antibody response lasted for nearly three years in the case of MERS. This does not necessarily mean that people previously infected with SARS-CoV-2 can be reinfected soon after. **Even if the antibody level decreases, it might be protective. “A person with low antibody level can get reinfected but the viral load will be low, infectivity will be less and he/she may not progress to a diseased state,”** says virologist Jacob John formerly with CMC Vellore. “Antibodies specific to a virus even when present in low levels will be protective against disease.”



Cellular Immunity

Besides inducing neutralising antibodies, novel coronavirus has also been found to induce cellular immunity. As a result, **the immune system's T cells and B cells are elevated in an infected person.** "Generally, when antibody levels are high, the T cells are low and vice versa," says Dr. John. **When infected by a virus, non-specific immune response in the form of macrophages, neutrophils and other cells tend to prevent the virus from causing symptoms.** Soon after, the body makes antibodies specific to the virus called the immunoglobulins – IgG and IgM, called the adaptive response. In addition, the cellular immunity kicks in when **the body makes T cells that destroy cells that have been infected by the virus.** The combination of adaptive response and cellular immunity "may prevent progression to severe illness or re-infection by the same virus. This process is often measured by the presence of antibodies in blood," WHO says. For the study, the researchers compared 37 asymptomatic people with an equal number of people who exhibited overt symptoms in the Wanzhou District of China. **They found that asymptomatic people elicited a weaker immune response to the virus compared with those who developed symptoms.** As a result, 40% of asymptomatic individuals had antibody levels at undetectable levels compared with nearly 13% in the case of symptomatic individuals. Nearly 80% of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 show no or very mild symptoms.

Implications

"The reduction in IgG and neutralizing antibody levels in the early convalescent phase might have implications for immunity strategy and serological surveys," they write. "These data might indicate the risks of using COVID-19 'immunity passports' and support the prolongation of public health interventions, including social distancing, hygiene, isolation of high-risk groups and widespread testing." Another paper published in Nature found that even when the antibodies were present at low levels, it was sufficient to neutralise the virus. The authors say that "most convalescent plasmas obtained from individuals who recover from COVID-19 do not contain high levels of neutralizing activity" yet antibodies with "potent antiviral activity" were found in all these individuals.

The Drugs Being Used for Treating Covid-19 Symptoms in India Now

→ Drugs, Treatment Presently Available for Coronavirus (Covid-19)

1. Remdesivir

Originally developed by US-based biopharma company Gilead Sciences, Remdesivir is an antiviral that was used for the treatment of Ebola and has been repurposed for treatment of Covid-19. Part of the World Health Organisation's ongoing Solidarity Trials, Remdesivir received emergency use authorisation by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) on May 1.

How Remdesivir Works?

Remdesivir is designed to obstruct the viral replication of SARS-CoV-2. This is the stage when the virus creates copies of itself, followed endlessly by the copies creating copies of themselves. Coronaviruses are RNA viruses and at the replication stage the key viral protein at play is an enzyme called **RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RdRp).** **Remdesivir mimics a part of the viral RNA and it inserts itself into the RNA strand during the replication stage.**



When attached, the drug prevents any further copying, leaving the RNA strand incomplete and unable to produce critical viral parts.

[Which Firms Are Manufacturing Remdesivir And What Are the Costs?](#)

On June 21, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation gave approval to Hetero Drugs and Cipla to manufacture and market remdesivir. Both the firms have already entered into non-exclusive licensing agreements with **Gilead Sciences, which is the patent holder of the drug remdesivir**. Hetero has said the drug, named Covifor, will be available in 100 mg vials (injectable), which has to be administered intravenously in a hospital setting. Hetero Group of Companies MD Vamsi Krishna Bandi told PTI the price of its remdesivir will be in the range of ₹5,000-6,000 per dose. Cipla Ltd has announced that the generic version of remdesivir will be sold under the brand name Cipremi. The medicine is in the form of lyophilised powder for injection (100 mg). Prices of the drug in the Indian market are yet to be announced by Cipla.

[2. Favipiravir](#)

Favipiravir is an antiviral given to inhibit viral replication. It is used as an anti-influenza drug. Originally it was manufactured by Japan's Fujifilm Toyama Chemical Ltd.

[How Favipiravir Works?](#)

Since the novel coronavirus is an RNA virus, studies have shown that **favipiravir gets activated inside the cells and then gets incorporated into the viral RNA. It restricts the multiplication of the virus in the body of the host once it gets inside a host cell, reducing viral load**. Favipiravir has shown clinical improvement of up to 88 per cent in mild to moderate Covid-19 cases, an official statement said.

[Which Firms Are Manufacturing Favipiravir And What Are The Costs?](#)

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals has launched the drug under the brand name FabiFlu, making it the first oral Favipiravir-approved medication in India for the treatment of Covid-19. The firm has fixed its price at ₹103 per tablet.

[3. Dexamethasone](#)

Dexamethasone is a generic steroid widely used in other diseases to reduce inflammation. The steroid medicine has been available as a generic for decades. It is used to treat a range of diseases, including rheumatism, asthma, allergies and even to help cancer patients better handle the nausea triggered by chemotherapy.

[How Dexamethasone Works?](#)

Steroid drugs **reduce inflammation**, which sometimes develops in Covid-19 patients as the immune system overreacts to fight the infection. The UK-based RECOVERY trial results have shown dexamethasone reduces death by up to a third in Covid-19 patients on ventilator support, and by a fifth in patients receiving only oxygen. Dexamethasone is categorised under corticosteroids, which closely mimic cortisol, the hormone naturally produced by the adrenal glands in humans.



Which Firms Are Manufacturing Dexamethasone and What Are the Costs?

The United Kingdom has authorised the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) to use steroid dexamethasone. The drug costs just £5 for a course. It is still not part of India's treatment protocol. Currently, the cost of the injection is below ₹10 in India.

4. Hydroxychloroquine

Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) was first developed in India for the treatment of malaria. The drug is also a disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug (DMARD), which helps in reducing swelling and pain in arthritis patients.

How Does Hydroxychloroquine Work?

An article in The Lancet Global Health said Hydroxychloroquine **shows antiviral activity in-vitro against coronaviruses, and specifically, SARS-CoV-2**. At approved doses, the drug can prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection and ameliorate viral shedding.

Which Companies Are Manufacturing HCQ And What Are the Costs?

At present, 12 manufacturing units in the country are producing hydroxychloroquine, with Zydus Cadila and Ipca Laboratories being the largest manufacturers. Other leading manufacturers of HCQ include Intas Pharmaceuticals, McW Healthcare of Indore, Macleods Pharmaceuticals, Cipla and Lupin. In India, HCQ costs less than ₹3 per tablet.

The Many Questions About Favipiravir (S.P. Kalantri - Professor of Medicine at The Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences and Medical Superintendent of Kasturba Hospital, Sevagram, Maharashtra; Dinesh Thakur - Public Health Activist)

- The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, an Indian pharmaceutical company, to sell generic versions of Favipiravir for the treatment of COVID-19. This drug, originally invented by a Japanese company, was meant to treat influenza. After the outbreak of COVID-19, doctors in China and Russia started using it to treat COVID-19 patients although there is no scientific consensus on the efficacy of the drug. As per Glenmark's filing with the Bombay Stock Exchange, the company has received "accelerated approval" from the DCGI for "restricted emergency use in India". On what basis did the DCGI grant approval? Will the underlying data be made publicly available to the medical community? While the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019 allow the DCGI to grant approvals for the use of certain drugs based on approvals granted overseas, they do not absolve it from making their rationale for such decision's public. There is no information on the DCGI's website explaining the scientific basis of its approval of Favipiravir for COVID-19. **Evidence-based medicine requires the testing of pharmaceutical drugs through randomised clinical trials (RCT) wherein one set of patients get a placebo (or an alternate therapy) and the other set of patients gets the investigational drug. Neither the doctors nor the patients know who gets what drug. If the set of patients that gets the investigational drug shows a better outcome, it can be presumed that the drug has a demonstrable therapeutic effect on the disease in comparison to the comparator. This is the gold standard for demonstrating the efficacy of a drug in treating a particular disease. The data collected from such clinical trials are usually published in a peer-reviewed journal where they are subject to scientific scrutiny.** This system has worked during this pandemic to disprove claims that hydroxychloroquine was useful in treating COVID-19. With regard to Favipiravir, we know that



Glenmark was conducting a clinical trial for this drug in India. According to the Clinical Trials Registry of India (CTRI), Glenmark's study was meant to be carried out on 150 patients at 12 different hospitals in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi with the aim of comparing Favipiravir with "standard care" provided to patients with mild or moderate COVID-19. The decision to enrol patients with "mild" COVID-19 is baffling given that virtually all these "mild" cases often resolve themselves without any intervention. Further, the CTRI does not explain the nature of the "standard care" being provided to the patients. It is important to disclose this information from a scientific and ethical viewpoint. If we do not know the treatment with which Favipiravir is being compared, how do we know if it is any better than perhaps a placebo? The Japanese regulator, which approved this drug for influenza, mandated a warning to be printed on the packaging of this drug for early embryo toxicity and teratogenicity, specifically cautioning its use in women in the early stages of pregnancy. The exclusion criteria listed on the CTRI list pregnant and lactating women, which is not necessarily the same thing. The protocol on CTRI also specifies that the 150 patients enrolled in the study will be randomised 1:1. This patient cohort is not adequate to substantiate statistically either the primary or the secondary endpoint of the study.

Subsequent to a scandal in 2012, the DCGI instituted a system of review by a Subject Expert Committee (SEC) to decide whether a new drug should be approved for the Indian market. The SEC was meant to have external experts who were specialists in the field of therapy being considered. After a SEC approval, the DCGI is required to take the final call on whether to approve a drug. Thereafter the information on which such decisions were made was required to be disclosed because the Right to Information Act requires such a disclosure. However, in this case, the minutes of the meetings, the composition of the SEC and the clinical trial results submitted to the SEC/DCGI are not available on the DCGI's website. A representative of Glenmark disclosed on a channel that the approval for restricted use was based on an "early readout" from the study; the study is expected to be completed in the coming weeks and months. So, on what basis did the DCGI approve restricted use of this drug? A culture of secrecy around drug approvals serves no purpose except to benefit pharmaceutical companies. At ₹103 a tablet, the manufacturer stands to make a fortune once there are bulk orders for this drug. However, if the drug does not work as advertised, the DCGI could end up promoting widespread misuse of this drug and a false sense of security amongst the population. The regulator would be responsible for promoting irrational medicine as it has been on previous occasions. We would caution our countrymen against any such purchases until the DCGI makes public the clinical information on the basis of which the accelerated approval has been granted along with the minutes of the SEC meeting where this drug was approved.

IN-SPACe Explained: What It Means to The Future Of Space Exploration

- The government on Wednesday approved the creation of a new organisation to ensure greater private participation in India's space activities, a decision which it described as "historic", and which Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman K Sivan said was part of an important set of reforms to open up the space sector and make space-based applications and services more widely accessible to everyone. The new Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), which is expected to be functional within six months, will assess the needs and demands of private players, including educational and research institutions, and, explore ways to accommodate these requirements in consultation with ISRO. Existing ISRO infrastructure, both ground- and space-



based, scientific and technical resources, and even data are planned to be made accessible to interested parties to enable them to carry out their space-related activities.

Why Private Participants

It is not that there is no private industry involvement in India's space sector. In fact, a large part of manufacturing and fabrication of rockets and satellites now happens in the private sector. There is an increasing participation of research institutions as well. But as Sivan told this newspaper, Indian industry had a barely three per cent share in a rapidly growing global space economy which was already worth at least \$360 billion. Only two per cent of this market was for rocket and satellite launch services, which require fairly large infrastructure and heavy investment. The remaining 95 per cent related to satellite-based services, and ground-based systems. Indian industry, however, is unable to compete, because till now its role has been mainly that of suppliers of components and sub-systems. Indian industries do not have the resources or the technology to undertake independent space projects of the kind that US companies such as SpaceX have been doing, or provide space-based services. Additionally, the demand for space-based applications and services is growing even within India, and ISRO is unable to cater to this. The need for satellite data, imageries and space technology now cuts across sectors, from weather to agriculture to transport to urban development, and more. ISRO would have to be expanded 10 times the current level to meet all the demand that is arising. At the same time, there were several Indian companies waiting for make use of these opportunities. Sivan said there were a few companies that were in the process of developing their own launch vehicles, the rockets like ISRO's PSLV that carry the satellites and other payloads into space, and ISRO would like to help them do that. Right now, all launches from India happen on ISRO rockets, the different versions of PSLV and GSLV. Sivan said ISRO was ready to provide all its facilities to private players whose projects had been approved by IN-SPACe. Private companies, if they wanted, could even build their own launchpad within the Sriharikota launch station, and ISRO would provide the necessary land for that, he said. IN-SPACe is supposed to be a facilitator, and also a regulator. It will act as an interface between ISRO and private parties, and assess how best to utilise India's space resources and increase space-based activities.

How ISRO Gains

There are two main reasons why enhanced private involvement in the space sector seems important. One is commercial, and the other strategic. Of course, there is need for greater dissemination of space technologies, better utilisation of space resources, and increased requirement of space-based services. And ISRO seems unable to satisfy this need on its own. The private industry will also free up ISRO to concentrate on science, research and development, interplanetary exploration and strategic launches. Right now, too much of ISRO's resources is consumed by routine activities that delay its more strategic objectives. There is no reason why ISRO alone should be launching weather or communication satellites. The world over, an increasing number of private players are taking over this activity for commercial benefits. ISRO, like NASA, is essentially a scientific organisation whose main objective is exploration of space and carrying out scientific missions. There are a number of ambitious space missions lined up in the coming years, including a mission to observe the Sun, a mission to the Moon, a human spaceflight, and then, possibly, a human landing on the Moon. And it is not that private players will wean away the revenues that ISRO gets through commercial launches. As Sivan said, the space-based economy is expected to "explode" in



the next few years, even in India, and there would be more than enough for all. In addition, ISRO can earn some money by making its facilities and data available to private players.

Beyond IN-SPACe

IN-SPACe is the second space organisation created by the government in the last two years. In the 2019 Budget, the government had announced the setting up of a **New Space India Limited (NSIL)**, a public sector company that would serve as a marketing arm of ISRO. Its main purpose is to market the technologies developed by ISRO and bring it more clients that need space-based services. That role, incidentally, was already being performed by Antrix Corporation, another PSU working under the Department of Space, and which still exists. It is still not very clear why there was a need for another organisation with overlapping function. However, the government said it was redefining the role of NSIL so that it would have a demand-driven approach rather than the current supply-driven strategy. Essentially, what that means is that instead of just marketing what ISRO has to offer, NSIL would listen to the needs of the clients and ask ISRO to fulfil those. This change in NSIL's role, Sivan said, was also part of the reforms that have been initiated in the space sector.

→ IN-SPACe, a new entity of the Department of Space, will have its own chairperson and Board, and regulate and promote building of routine satellites, rockets and commercial launch services through Indian industry and start-ups. These activities had been largely the domain of the 50-year-old Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) until now, but the change will not upset the core research activity of ISRO, K. Sivan, Secretary, Department of Space, and ISRO Chairman, said in a televised briefing on Thursday. IN-SPACe, or Indian Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre, is touted as the body that will ensure a level playing field for Indian industry in a fast-growing global space sector. It will function autonomously and parallel to ISRO "without taking away anything from it", Dr. Sivan said. The entity was approved by the Union Cabinet and was unveiled by Minister of State for Space Jitendra Singh in Delhi.

IN-SPACe will have its own directorates for technical, legal, safety and security, monitoring and activities promotion. The year-old NSIL [NewSpace India Ltd] will be strengthened and empowered with a larger role in what the government has called the new "open and inclusive" space sector. It will work with IN-SPACe and enable industry consortia to take on some of the activities of ISRO.

Navigation Policy

A new satellite navigation policy, which has a strategic military element to it, is being proposed. The older ones, namely Remote Sensing Data Policy and the SatCom Policy of 2000, are being revised. These are apart from a proposed policy for space activities that has seen a draft.

Mary Jackson: NASA's First African American Female Aeronautical Engineer

→ Joining the tidal wave of organisations in the United States that have promised efforts towards thwarting systemic racism in the country, space agency **NASA Wednesday announced its headquarters in the nation's capital would be named after Mary W. Jackson (1921-2005), the agency's first African American female engineer.** "Mary W. Jackson was part of a group of very important women who helped NASA succeed in getting American astronauts into space. Mary never accepted the status quo, she helped break barriers and open opportunities for African Americans and women in the field of engineering and



technology,” NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said. “Today, we proudly announce the Mary W. Jackson NASA Headquarters building.”

Who was Mary Jackson?

Born in an era when racial segregation was legal in the United States, Jackson first worked as a math teacher at a black school in Maryland state after she graduated with a dual degree in Math and Physical Sciences from the historically black Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). Jackson went through a number of career changes before making history at NASA. According to the space agency’s website, it is possible that Jackson might have been the only black female aeronautical engineer in the male-dominated field at the time. Over the next two decades, she worked at several NASA departments, and authored or co-authored 12 technical papers before retiring in 1985. Jackson also worked at the Federal Women’s Program, the NASA Office of Equal Opportunity Programs, and the Affirmative Action Program, where she furthered the role of women in NASA’s science, engineering, and mathematics careers. Jackson was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the United States in 2019.

NASA’s ‘Hidden Figures’

In 2016, the work of the West Area Computing Unit – where Jackson first worked – achieved international fame after the release of the book “Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race” and the Oscar-nominated film “Hidden Figures” that the book inspired. The Washington, DC headquarters which has now been named after Jackson is also located on a street called ‘Hidden Figures Way,’ named so in 2019. Bridenstine said “... Mary is one of many incredible and talented professionals in NASA’s history who contributed to this agency’s success. Hidden no more, we will continue to recognize the contributions of women, African Americans, and people of all backgrounds who have made NASA’s successful history of exploration possible.”

Why Scientists Want to Map the Ocean Floor

- ➔ Announcing a new milestone in the history of marine exploration, **an international collaboration of researchers** said on June 21 that it had finished mapping nearly one-fifth of the world’s ocean floor. The **Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project**, which is coordinating efforts to complete the mapping of the entire ocean floor by 2030, said on World Hydrography Day (June 21) that it had added 1.45 crore square kilometres of new bathymetric data to its latest grid. **Since the launch of the project in 2017, the surveying of the ocean bed as per modern standards has gone up from around 6 per cent to 19 per cent.** In a press release, Jamie McMichael-Phillips, Seabed 2030 Project Director, said: “This is a leap forward towards achieving our mission, by the year 2030, to empower the world to make policy decisions, use the ocean sustainability and undertake scientific research based on detailed bathymetric information of the Earth’s seabed.”

Why Is the Study of The Ocean Floor Important?

The knowledge of bathymetry – the measurement of the shape and depth of the ocean floor – **is instrumental in understanding several natural phenomena, including ocean circulation, tides, and biological hotspots.** It also provides key inputs for navigation, forecasting tsunamis, exploration for oil and gas projects, building offshore wind turbines, fishing



resources, and for laying cables and pipelines. This data becomes highly valuable during disaster situations. According to an expert who spoke to Science Magazine, thanks to the previously mapped seafloor, scientists in Japan were able to reconstruct the forces behind the destructive 2011 Tohoku earthquake. As per a Seabed 2030 document, “The need for a bathymetric base map of the south-eastern Indian Ocean also became particularly evident in the search for the Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, which disappeared 8 March 2014.” Importantly, the maps would also ensure a better understanding of climate change, since floor features including canyons and underwater volcanoes influence phenomena such as the vertical mixing of ocean water, and ocean currents – which act as conveyor belts of warm and cold water, thus influencing the weather and climate. Climate change has impacted the flow of these currents, and more knowledge about them would help scientists create models forecasting the future behaviour of the climate, including sea-level rise. A map of the entire global ocean floor would also help further achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources.

The Seabed 2030 Project

The global initiative is a collaboration between Japan’s non-profit Nippon Foundation and the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO). As per its website, GEBCO is the only intergovernmental organisation with a mandate to map the entire ocean floor, and traces its origins to the GEBCO chart series initiated in 1903 by Prince Albert I of Monaco. The Project was launched at the United Nations Ocean Conference in 2017, and coordinates and oversees the sourcing and compilation of bathymetric data from different parts of the world’s ocean through its five centres into the freely – available GEBCO Grid. In the past, satellites and planes carrying altimeter instruments have been able to provide large swathes of data about the ocean floor. The Seabed 2030 Project, however, aims to obtain higher quality information that has a minimum resolution of 100 m at all spots, using equipment such as deep-water hull-mounted sonar systems, and more advanced options such as Underwater Vehicles (AUVs). For this, the project aims to rope in governments, private companies, and international organisations to acquire data.

Annular Solar Eclipse and Summer Solstice, Witnessed on June 20-21

- Out of the two solar eclipses that will be observed this year, one took place today (June 21) and was visible in India until 3:04 pm. It was also visible in parts of Asia, Africa, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, parts of Europe and Australia. The point of “maximum eclipse”, characterised by a perfect solar halo around the moon, was witnessed over Uttarakhand and the exact formation lasted for about 38 seconds. Today’s solar eclipse is a rare annular eclipse that occurs once in every one or two years, and coincides with the northern hemisphere’s longest day of the year, called the summer solstice. Like the solar eclipse, a second solstice happens each year in December.

What is the Summer Solstice?

June 20 or the day of the summer solstice is characterised by a greater amount of energy received from the Sun. According to NASA, the amount of incoming energy the Earth received from the Sun on this day is 30 per cent higher at the North Pole than at the Equator. What this means is that on the day of the solstice, the northern hemisphere received the longest stretch of daylight in a given year. During the solstice, the Earth’s axis – around which the planet spins, completing one turn each day – is tilted in a way that the North Pole is tipped towards the Sun and the South Pole is away from it. Typically, this imaginary axis passes right through



the middle of the Earth from top to bottom and is always tilted at 23.5 degrees with respect to the Sun. Therefore, the solstice, as NASA puts it, is that instant in time when the North Pole points more directly toward the Sun than at any other time during the year. **Solstice means "sun stands still" in Latin.**

What is an Annular Solar Eclipse?

A solar eclipse is witnessed when the moon is aligned between the Sun and Earth, blocking the light received by the Earth from the Sun. An annular solar eclipse, on the other hand, happens when the Moon is the farthest from the Earth, because of which, it looks smaller and does not block the entire view of the Sun creating a "ring of fire" effect.

Anthropause, The Period UK Researchers Are Set to Study

→ Researchers in the UK are set to study the "anthropause", a term they have coined to refer to the coronavirus-induced lockdown period and its impact on other species. The unprecedented curbs imposed on millions of people around the world, mainly due to restrictions in travel, led to reports of unusual animal behaviour. For instance, **there were pumas sighted in Chile's Santiago, jackals in the parks of Tel Aviv in Israel, dolphins in the waters of Italy and even a monkey fight on the streets of Thailand.** The researchers believe studying this period will provide valuable insights into the relationship between human-wildlife interactions in the 21st century. They have outlined their study in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution.

What Is The 'Anthropause' Period?

Researchers have suggested the lockdown period, which is also being referred to as the "Great Pause", be referred to with a more precise term. "We propose 'anthropause' to refer specifically to a considerable global slowing of modern human activities, notably travel," they said. **"We are aware that the correct prefix is 'anthropo-' (for 'human') but opted for the shortened form, which is easier to remember and use, and where the missing 'po' is still echoed in the pronunciation of 'pause',"** they added.

Anthropause: Who Do the Researchers Hope to Find?

In their outline, researchers mention how the scientific community can use these "extraordinary circumstance" provided by global lockdowns to understand how human activity affects wildlife. They maintain that as a result of the lockdown, nature appears to have changed, especially in urban environments, since not only are there now more animals, but also some "unexpected visitors." **"People have reported sightings of pumas in downtown Santiago, Chile, of dolphins in untypically calm waters in the harbour of Trieste, Italy, and of jackals in broad daylight in urban parks in Tel Aviv, Israel. Hidden from view, animals may also start roaming more freely across the world's oceans, following reductions in vessel traffic and noise-pollution levels,"** they said. On the other hand, there are some animals for whom the lockdown may have made things more challenging. For instance, **for various urban-dwelling animals, such as rats, gulls and monkeys who depend on food provided or discarded by humans, the lockdown would have made life more difficult.**

Why Is Studying the Lockdown Important?

According to the researchers, as expanding human populations continue to transform their environments at "unprecedented rates", **studying how human and animal behaviour may be**



linked can help provide insights that may be useful in preserving global biodiversity, maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and predicting global zoonoses and environmental changes. Further, because the reduction in human activity during the lockdown on both land and sea has been “unparalleled” in recent history, the effects have been “drastic, sudden and widespread”. Essentially, this gives them a chance to study the extent to which modern human mobility affects wildlife. “...the pandemic affords an opportunity to build a global picture of animal responses by pooling large numbers of datasets. Such collaborative projects can integrate the spatial and temporal approaches outlined above, in an attempt to uncover causal relationships,” researchers said.

Ozone Pollution Sees A Spike

- While particulate matter and nitrous oxide levels fell during the lockdown, ozone – also a harmful pollutant – increased in several cities, according to an analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). Ozone is primarily a “sunny weather problem” in India, said CSE researchers, that otherwise remains highly variable during the year. It is a highly reactive gas; even short-term exposure of an hour is dangerous for those with respiratory conditions and asthma and that’s why an eight-hour average is considered for ozone instead of the 24-hour average for other pollutants. The analysis was based on Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data from 22 cities in 15 States in lockdown days considered from March 25 to May 31. It emerged that more than two-thirds of the lockdown days in Delhi-NCR cities and Ahmedabad had at least one observation station that exceeded the standard.
- Ozone is not directly emitted by any source but is formed by photochemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen (NO_x) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and gases in the air under the influence of sunlight and heat. It can be curtailed only if gases from all sources are controlled. “This pandemic-led change in air quality has helped us understand summer pollution. Normally, every year, winter pollution is what draws our attention. The characteristics of summer pollution are different: there are high winds, intermittent rains and thunderstorms, and high temperature and heat waves,” Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director-research and advocacy, CSE, said.

What Is the Arctic Heatwave Warming Up Siberia?

- The Arctic Circle has recorded temperatures reaching over 38 degrees Celsius in the Siberian town of Verkhoyansk, likely an all-time high. According to the BBC, while the record still needs to be verified, the temperatures seem to have been 18 degree Celsius higher than normal in June. These higher temperatures are pushing the world towards what might be the hottest year on record, despite a fall in emissions due to the coronavirus lockdown.

What Is Happening in The Arctic?

According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (CCCS), in the past month, the most above-average temperatures were recorded in Siberia, where they were about 10 degrees Celsius above normal. However, the phenomenon wasn’t just for May. Siberia has been recording higher-than-average surface air temperatures since January. Significantly, as per the CCCS, while the planet as a whole is warming, regions like Western Siberia stand out, since they are warming faster than average. In December 2019, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin expressed concern over the rising temperatures, which could lead to the melting of the permafrost on which some northern Russian cities are built. Another reason for concern in the region is wildfires.



Are Arctic Heat Waves Common?

This is not the first time that rising temperatures in the Arctic have created alarm. A 2017 article in Nature Climate Change mentions that Arctic temperatures in 2016 were “truly exceptional”. The daily anomalies during that year, for instance, recorded above normal temperatures exceeding 16 degree Celsius in some locations. The article attributed the rising temperatures to large-scale wind patterns that blasted the Arctic with heat, the absence of sea ice, and human-induced climate change, among other reasons. Another article published in February this year in IOP Science says that in the last decades, there has been an increase of heat wave occurrences over the terrestrial Arctic. It also mentions that **heat wave occurrences in this region have already started to threaten local vegetation, ecology, human health and economy.**

Why ‘Extreme Heat Wave Like Conditions’ Are Created Inside Parked Cars

- A recent study by doctors from the Department of Community Medicine at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) observed how extreme “heat wave like conditions” are created inside parked vehicles. The study observed that the mean radiant temperature in parked cars in the summer exceeded 62 degree Celsius, when the acceptable radiant temperature should be less than 35 degrees Celsius, according to the standards prescribed by the Indian Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers. The Indian Express explains the reasons behind the study and its results.

What Is the Purpose of The Study?

Thermal discomfort in buildings and other indoor spaces have been extensively studied in the past, but very few studies assessed it in standing vehicles. As mercury rises, heat gets trapped inside parked vehicles through the **greenhouse effect** creating “heat wave like conditions”, which are much worse than the atmospheric temperature outside. This study used different models of cars to capture the extent of heat wave like conditions and thermal discomfort experienced by passengers in the micro-environment of the vehicle. “Such conditions are known to have adverse effect on health. Apart from heat exhaustion, irritability and difficulty in concentration, **it can lead to major issues such as a heart attack or even a stroke,**” says Ravindra Khaiwal, one of the authors of the study. “With temperatures rising and people spending more and more time commuting in their vehicles, it is essential that the cars are designed to reduce such thermal conditions in the future,” adds Khaiwal.

How Was the Study Conducted?

The study was conducted in a parking lot inside PGIMER, Chandigarh, where the ambient conditions inside and outside three models – a sedan, an SUV and a hatchback – were recorded on different days in the summer of 2018. Devices to record relative humidity, air temperature and pollution levels were placed in the front of the car, the back and outside on the top of the car. These parameters were further used to calculate Predicted Mean Vote (PMV) and Predicted Percentage Dissatisfied (PPD). Both PMV and PPD are measurement scales devised to calculate the thermal comfort experienced by individuals. PMV records the level of discomfort faced by an individual and PPD predicts the percentage of individuals who will be dissatisfied by the thermal conditions. Parameters including clothing insulation and metabolism rate of individuals are also incorporated into the PMV-PPD calculation.



What Were the Results of The Study?

It was observed that the mean radiant temperature remained more than 62° C in all cases inside all three cars monitored in the study, while the ambient temperature outside remained between 30 to 40°C. This is much above the standards of minimal thermal discomfort in asymmetrical structures as prescribed by the Indian Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers. Further, temperatures recorded in the front area of cars was always higher than the back, and **the temperature inside the cars was at its peak in the evening.**

How Can Vehicles Be Modelled Differently to Curb Thermal Discomfort?

As global temperatures rise, it will be crucial to model cars specifically to decrease levels of thermal discomfort within. “We can’t just rely on air conditioning, because the sudden blast of AC can make us even more sick. The point is that the designs of cars should be made keeping in mind strategies to curb heat wave like conditions within,” explains Khaiwal. To mitigate conditions, Khaiwal and his team suggests developing sensors for monitoring thermal discomfort parameters within the car and installing an alarm system based on artificial intelligence which “advises passengers to exit the car or wait for a specific time interval before entering the car cabin in case of poor thermal comfort”. “Less complicated factors such as the material of the car and even just the colour scheme of cars can make a lot of difference in controlling thermal conditions. One can even just begin by using thermal shades when their cars are parked in the heat for longer periods of time,” says Khaiwal.

IITM, German Institute Collaborating to Develop Green Energy Solutions

- ➔ Researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras are collaborating with their counterparts in Germany to develop new materials for green energy solutions. The project, taken up under the Scheme for Promotion of academic and Research Collaboration or SPARC, aims at developing alternative technologies to produce green hydrogen in anticipation of transition to hydrogen-based economy. SPARC is an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- ➔ Conventional methods of generating hydrogen result in a large quantity of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that imposed serious environmental concerns. Whereas **electrochemical splitting of water, called 'Water Electrolysis' (WE), is clean, facile, and highly efficient technology for large-scale production of high-purity H₂.** “Through this international collaboration we aim to develop novel low cost electrocatalysts for hydrogen evolution reactions,” he said. The first phase of this project began with a visit to University of Cologne by IIT Madras researchers and Mr. Mathur’s visit to the Institute in February-March this year.

Even Golden Langurs Suffer Forced Abortion, Infanticide

- ➔ An endangered species of monkey, found only in Assam and parts of Bhutan, has a far-from-golden trait – forced abortion. Primatologists have observed that the Gee’s golden langur (*Trachypithecus geei*), endemic to the semi-evergreen and mixed-deciduous forests straddling India and Bhutan, induce stillbirth of babies killed inside the womb of females, besides practising infanticide.

Killer Wires

The golden langurs in Assam are hemmed in by three rivers – Brahmaputra in the south, Manas in east and Sonkosh in west. Their northern limit is the range of hills in Bhutan up to



2,400 metres above sea level. Primatologists say their habitat in Assam has fragmented drastically in the last 30 years but electric wires began to be strung through them mostly after a thrust on rural electrification six years ago. "Unlike the Hanuman langurs elsewhere, golden langurs are yet to adapt to the wires, and they use the upper canopy of trees to travel because of fear of dogs on the ground. Electrocutation has also killed the monkeys in groups," said Jihusuo Biswas of Guwahati's Primate Research Centre. Obstructions such as wires, and gaps in the forest due to felling, have increased the threat of inbreeding among golden langurs. "This is happening in the highly fragmented Kakoijana forest. This is not a serious issue now, but could explode into a major problem later," he said. "Avoiding inbreeding is the reason why golden langurs live in specific groups, Mr. Biswas said. **Forced abortion and infanticide happen when a new male takes over. He often kills the baby of a lactating female or hits the abdomen of a female impregnated by the deposed male till the point of abortion. Golden langur females maintain a gap of at least two years between babies. This gap can increase to three years depending on habitat conditions, which is a cause of concern for primatologists.**" They survive mostly on a variety of juicy leaves. But fragmentation of forests and selective logging is making their food scarcer," Mr. Biswas said. In 2019, Bhutan recorded a drop of 62% in the population of golden langurs over the 2009 census. The recorded estimation in Assam in 2009 was 5,140. This year's census could not be completed due to the lockdown.

Google Chrome In Spying Spot

→ A few days ago, Reuters reported a "newly discovered spyware effort" targeting users of Google's browser Chrome. The spyware, it said, has been pushed through at least 111 malicious or fake Chrome browser extensions, which have been downloaded some 32 million times. (Browser extensions are add-ons that provide additional capabilities to the user.) The report also said Google had taken off more than 70 extensions from its official Web Store last month after being alerted to their malicious nature by researchers at Awake Security. The rest were never in its web store.

How Do These Malicious Extensions Get In To The Chrome Store in The First Place?

Short answer: they seem harmless, to being with. According to the report by Awake Security, which brought this issue to light, these "sleeper agent extensions" appear to do nothing in the beginning. The "malicious payloads" are only pushed on to the extensions much after the "clean" versions have been approved.

What Do the Malicious Extensions Do?

They can take "screenshots, read the clipboard, harvest credential tokens stored in cookies or parameters, grab user keystrokes (like passwords)," says the report.

How Has Google Reacted to This?

As mentioned above, Google has recently removed the malicious extensions. Reuters reported Google's spokesman Scott Westover as saying, "When we are alerted of extensions in the Web Store that violate our policies, we take action and use those incidents as training material to improve our automated and manual analyses." It also said in its report: "Google declined to discuss how the latest spyware compared with prior campaigns, the breadth of the damage, or why it did not detect and remove the bad extensions on its own despite past promises to supervise offerings more closely."



When Olympic Games Brought Cheer After A Crisis In 1948

→ From initially insisting that the Olympics would be held on the originally stipulated dates with the usual pomp and pageantry, Japan had to agree to an unprecedented one-year postponement. And now with the Covid-19 pandemic refusing to go away anytime soon, the organisers have realised that the only way the Games may be held in 2021 could be if they are scaled down to keep costs and health hazards in check. This vision of a “simplified” Olympics – to use the description by Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike – includes doing away with the one-year countdown to the revised Games, scheduled for July 23 to August 8 next year, scaling down of the opening and closing ceremonies, and reducing the number of spectators. The organisers intend to test every athlete, coach, official and spectator. Also, the movement of everyone involved in the Games, in whatever capacity, is likely to be considerably restricted. All these measures become all the more crucial as the International Olympic Committee has said the Games will not be postponed again, but will be cancelled if they are not held in July-August next year.

The 1948 Precedent

The current pandemic is considered the world’s biggest common challenge since World War II. In the aftermath of that, too, the 1948 London Olympics – and sports – helped the world bounce back, and played a morale-boosting role. One key difference is that Tokyo had already made arrangements for a grand edition of the Games and will now have to scale them down, but London 1948 couldn’t afford the expenditure when the world was recovering from the war. **Several parts of London were still wearing a dilapidated look from the bombings they had suffered. There was a shortage of most provisions and strict rationing of daily necessities for citizens. In contrast to the Games Village set up at Tokyo Bay, the male athletes in 1948 were housed at Royal Air Force camps while the women stayed at colleges.** As the Guardian writes: “Not only was there no new Olympic stadium, there was no new velodrome, aquatics centre or handball arena either. Nor was there a purpose-built Olympic village... The organisers laid on bedding but asked contestants to bring their own towels.” They even converted Wembley into an athletics stadium by putting 800 tonnes of cinders over the greyhound track. No wonder the **1948 Olympics were called the ‘Austerity Games’.** **It was hard for even the British athletes to get the food they needed for optimal performance in their disciplines, which may partly explain the host country’s meagre haul of three gold, 14 silver and six bronze medals. Many teams brought their own food to the Games.** But the Games are today remembered for the feats of Fanny Blankers-Koen, the 30-year-old Dutch mother of two, who won four gold medals, and Czechoslovakia’s Emil Zatopek who took home the 10,000m gold. **For India, competing at the Olympics as an independent country for the first time, the highlight was their fourth successive hockey gold medal – that too defeating Britain, their erstwhile rulers, in their own backyard. But the Games – featuring 59 countries, with defeated powers Japan and Germany kept out and the Soviet Union declining to participate – also brought people some relief amid their post-war struggles.** The Guardian writes that the 1948 Olympics even managed a profit of almost £30,000, something unthinkable in the present age of ballooning budgets.

Takeaways for 2021

Today, the world is much more interconnected than it was in 1948. If the 2021 Olympics do take place, it will not be just about the sporting achievements. As Emil Zatopek had said at the end of the 1948 Games: “After all those dark days – the bombing, the killing, the starvation



– the revival of the Olympic Games was as if the sun had come out... Suddenly there were no frontiers, no more barriers, just the people meeting together.”



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