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International

Running Mate Matters

- Presumptive U.S. Democratic nominee and former Vice-President Joe Biden has picked Kamala Harris, Senator from California of Indian descent, as his vice-presidential running mate, a fillip to his party's connect with African-Americans, the Indian-American community, women and its core base of mainstream liberals. Ms. Harris – her late mother and cancer researcher Shyamala Gopalan hailed from a Chennai-based family, and Jamaican father Donald Harris, a retired Stanford professor – made a name for herself as a tough lawyer, politically ambitious enough to throw her hat in the ring as a Biden challenger in the Democratic primaries. In a close parallel to former President Barack Obama picking his Democratic primaries rival Hillary Clinton for Secretary of State, Mr. Biden chose Ms. Harris from amidst a cohort of strong candidates, including former NSA Susan Rice and Senator from Massachusetts Elizabeth Warren. In picking Ms. Harris, Mr. Biden has consolidated his position at the helm of the Democratic Party mainstream, ensuring a convergence of views with his vice-presidential nominee on race relations, policing and criminal justice reform, immigration, the health-care insurance industry and education policy. The timing of her selection could not be better – as an outspoken leader on racism and a woman of colour, the symbolism of Mr. Biden picking her will offer hope to many, including 'Black Lives Matter' activists.

What Is A Running Mate?

The Constitution of the United States provides for both a president and a vice-president, explains Edelson. Under the current system, the presidential candidate for each of the two major parties, the Democratic and the Republican party, chooses a vice presidential running mate. This process is also applicable to smaller political parties, says Edelson. "The running mate is simply the vice-presidential candidate. Voters vote on the two—presidential and vice-presidential candidates—as a team." The system isn't unique to the US. There are other countries where a similar process exists, for instance, Brazil, Indonesia and Palau, where the running mate of the presidential candidate is automatically made Vice-President.

What Is the Historical Background to the 'Running Mate' System in the US?

The running mate system in US politics was never formally adopted in law, but has existed since at least 1864. "Under the original system, the vice-president was simply the presidential candidate who received the second most electoral college votes in the presidential election. This led to an odd result after the 1796 election, when the vice president, Thomas Jefferson, was a political opponent of the president, John Adams," explains Edelson. However, Edelson says the US Constitution was subsequently changed in 1804 by the 12th Amendment "to provide that the electoral college would separately select a president and a vice-president, rather than simply choosing the runner up in the presidential election as the vice-president."



Here Is How Postal Voting in The US Works

- As the US presidential election is set to take place in November, many states are making postal voting options more easily accessible due to the coronavirus pandemic – which has impacted the US harder than all other countries. President Donald Trump, however, has stridently opposed mail-in options, tweeting on Thursday, “With Universal Mail-In Voting (not Absentee Voting, which is good), 2020 will be the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT Election in history. It will be a great embarrassment to the USA. Delay the Election until people can properly, securely and safely vote???” Previously, Trump has even said that should plans to expand postal voting succeed, “you’d never have a Republican elected in this country again.”

Voting Amid Coronavirus

Ever since the novel coronavirus pandemic has reached the US, many have pushed for the expanded use of postal ballots as opposed to in-person voting to ensure social distancing, a critical measure adopted around the world to halt the outbreak. President Trump’s Republican party has been resisting these efforts – with its legislators and court appointees at both state and federal levels working against the expansion of postal balloting. Republicans have argued that postal voting could increase risks of voter fraud, and have accused Democrats of using the pandemic as a pretext to further election reforms. Earlier this week, Trump made claims of a “rigged election” and that votes, specifically in New York state, were “missing”. Experts, however, have called these fears exaggerated, and insisted that such malpractices are exceedingly rare in the US.

Difference Between Mail-In and Absentee Voting

Even before his tweet, Trump has repeatedly hit out at “mail-in voting” while defending “absentee voting” – a distinction rejected by several experts who say that the process is nearly the same for both; their difference mainly arising due to the terminology used by individual states. **Unlike in India, where the Constitution provides for a separate rule-making Election Commission that is independent of the executive in government, all US elections – federal, state, and local – are directly organised by the governments of individual states. According to the White House website, the US Constitution and laws grant the states wide latitude in how they administer elections, resulting in varying rules across the country.**

What Different States Stipulate

While every single state allows postal voting, some do so only in certain circumstances. In 17 states, mainly in the South and the Northeast, voters are provided absentee ballots if they provide an “excuse” as to why they cannot be present in person on election day. Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia have “no-excuse absentee voting”, where voters can get an absentee ballot without providing justification, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center. The states of Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington have “vote-by-mail”, where every registered voter is sent a ballot without a request.

The 2020 Election

Although individual states continue to have different postal voting rules, most of them are making these options more easily accessible due to the pandemic, and are inching closer to vote-by-mail. According to federal election data, around 24 per cent of voting during the



2016 election, which Trump won, happened through postal ballots. This year, that proportion is expected to surge significantly.

Why Has Trump Cited the Action by India To Order Bans on TikTok, WeChat?

- US President Donald Trump signed an executive order banning any transactions by the US or by US citizens on the Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat. The order will be effective 45 days from August 6. Trump said that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in India had, while announcing the ban on 59 Chinese apps “asserted that they were stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users’ data in an unauthorized manner to servers which have locations outside India”, and that the US too, therefore, needed to ban any transactions on such apps as a protective measure.

What Does the Order Mean in Practical Terms?

The order states that 45 days from now, no US citizen or any citizen on whom US laws apply, will be allowed to carry out any transactions with either ByteDance or any of its subsidiaries, which include TikTok, or with Tencent Holdings, which owns WeChat. The executive order also bans any transactions with the owners of these apps. This means that users of TikTok and WeChat will not be able to spend any money on or through the app to purchase anything. Although users will be able to use the app and still upload their videos on it, companies will not be able to use it for brand promotions or use influencers to advertise their products. The executive order could be a blow for TikTok. The US has been a big market for the app, from where it has been generating a lot of revenue. According to reports, ByteDance had expected a revenue of \$500 million in 2020 from the US alone. WeChat, which is a ‘super app’ that allows users to do just about everything from chatting to hailing rides to buying things online, is not very popular in the US. However, Tencent Holdings had recently planned to expand its presence in the US and had set up a new office in the country. The executive order can put paid to those plans of the company.

Why Were Transactions on The Two Apps Banned?

In his executive order, Trump also took on China for its aggression against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, and the apps from that country censoring any news on these.

What Happens to The Microsoft-TikTok Deal Now?

Global software giant Microsoft was reportedly in talks to buy TikTok’s operations in the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The company’s Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella had even met Trump to discuss the plan. Later, executives from the US administration hinted that Microsoft had time until September 15, after which the app in its current form would be banned from the United States. With the executive order giving a window of 45 days, Microsoft, if still interested in buying TikTok either wholly or partially, will have to complete the deal by September 22. WeChat could also look to hive off its US operations to another company, and exit the country.

U.S. Examines If Riyadh Has Nuclear Goals

- U.S. intelligence agencies are scrutinising efforts by Saudi Arabia to build up its ability to produce nuclear fuel that could put the kingdom on a path to developing nuclear weapons. Spy agencies in recent weeks circulated a classified analysis about the efforts underway



inside Saudi Arabia, working with China, to build industrial capacity to produce nuclear fuel. The analysis has raised alarms that there might be secret Saudi-Chinese efforts to process raw uranium into a form that could later be enriched into weapons fuel. As part of the study, they have identified a newly completed structure near a solar-panel production area near Riyadh that some experts suspect could be an undeclared nuclear site. U.S. officials said that the Saudi efforts were still in an early stage, and that intelligence analysts had yet to draw firm conclusions about some of the sites under scrutiny. Even if the kingdom has decided to pursue a military nuclear programme, they said, it would be years before it could have the ability to produce a single nuclear warhead. Saudi officials have made no secret of their determination to keep pace with Iran, which has accelerated since President Donald Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged in 2018 that his kingdom would try to develop or acquire nuclear weapons if Iran continued its work toward a bomb. Last week, the House Intelligence Committee included a provision in the Intelligence Budget Authorisation Bill, requiring the administration to submit a report about Saudi efforts since 2015 to develop a nuclear programme, a clear indication that the committee suspects that some undeclared nuclear activity is going on. The report, the provision stated, should include an assessment of “the state of nuclear cooperation between Saudi Arabia and any other country other than the U.S., such as the People’s Republic of China or the Russian Federation.” An article in The Wall Street Journal on Tuesday said that Western officials were concerned about a different facility in Saudi Arabia, in the country’s northwest desert. The Journal said it was part of a programme with the Chinese to extract uranium yellowcake from uranium ore. That is a necessary first step in the process of obtaining uranium for later enrichment, either for use in a civilian nuclear reactor or, enriched to much higher levels, a nuclear weapon.

Who Is David Duke, Former KKK Leader Banned by Twitter?

- David Duke, a former leader of the **Ku Klux Klan (KKK)**, was permanently banned by Twitter for violating the social media platform’s rules that forbid hate speech. The platform changed its content policy in March, as per which users are not allowed to share content that is hateful. According to the BBC, Duke’s last tweet linked to an interview with Holocaust denier Germar Rudolf. Duke was previously banned by YouTube in June. Twitter is not alone in reacting to hate speech. Last month, another social networking website, Reddit, updated its hate speech policy in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests after which many Redditors called into question the website’s commitment to standing up against hate and supporting black lives. As a result of this, Reddit banned one of its largest pro-Trump subreddits (a community forum) called “r/The Donald”, which had over 750,000 members.

Who is David Duke?

Duke, leader of the white supremacist KKK from 1974-1978, is one of the most recognisable white supremacists and Anti-Semites, who built an international reputation for himself as the “American face of white nationalism and pseudo-academic anti-Semitism”, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). “In his various incarnations, Duke has been a neo-Nazi, a major Klan leader, a slick far-right politician and – most recently – a professional lecturer and author traveling the world to warn of a global Jewish conspiracy and seek the separation of the races,” SPLC states. In 1991, Duke stood



a chance of being elected as the Governor of Louisiana against Democratic candidate Edwin Edwards, but lost even though he received more than half of the white vote.

[How Do Social Media Platforms Define Hate?](#)

There is no precise and exact definition of hate speech, but it is broadly understood as speech or content that calls for violence against people, or is threatening to them, and is based on their race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The Cambridge Dictionary defines hate speech as “public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence toward a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation (=the fact of being gay, etc.).”

Twitter: In its March 5 update, Twitter said, “...we expanded our rules against hateful conduct to include language that dehumanizes others on the basis of religion.” As per their new policy against “hateful conduct”, users are discouraged from promoting “violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease.”

Reddit: Rule 1 of Reddit’s content rules states, “Everyone has a right to use Reddit free of harassment, bullying, and threats of violence. Communities and users that incite violence or that promote hate based on identity or vulnerability will be banned.”

Facebook: Hate speech is one element of Facebook’s “Community Standards”. The platform states, “We do not allow hate speech on Facebook because it creates an environment of intimidation and exclusion and in some cases may promote real-world violence.

“We define hate speech as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics – race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, and serious disease or disability,” it adds. Apart from social media platforms, agencies such as the UN have also taken note of hate speech. UN launched the Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in 2019 that aims to provide the resources to tackle hate speech, in line with international human rights and the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

[Why Donald Trump Is Pulling Out Troops from Germany](#)

- ➔ Setting off another diplomatic row and inviting fresh charges of helping Russia, United States President Donald Trump has decided to withdraw nearly 12,000 American soldiers stationed in Germany.

[Why Is Trump Pulling Out Troops from Germany?](#)

President Trump, on many occasions, has criticised the European partners of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation of not spending enough to support the alliance. Since last year, Trump has been threatening to pull out troops from Germany, accusing the latter of not committing two per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for defence. However, according to Defence Secretary Mark Esper, “The current EUCOM (United States European Command) plan will reposition military personnel from Germany, from roughly 36,000 down to 24,000, in a manner that will strengthen NATO, enhance the deterrence of Russia, and meet the other principles....”



But Why Does the US Have Troops in Germany?

As part of NATO, also known as the North Atlantic Alliance, US troops are stationed in member states all across Europe. This is to counter any military threat to any of the alliance member. The Treaty commits each member to share the risk, responsibilities and benefits of collective defence.

What is NATO?

NATO is a multilateral Organisation founded by 12 member states following the signing of the Washington Treaty on April 4, 1949. The objective of the Treaty was to create an alliance to counter the Soviet Union and its influence in western Europe. The Treaty derives its authority from Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which confers the inherent right to a nation to "individual or collective self-defense". Currently, the alliance has 30 members, spanning over North America and Europe.

How Much Funding on Defence Is Expected from Each Member?

In 2006, defence ministers of NATO nations agreed to spend a minimum of two per cent of their GDP on defence. However, most member states fail to abide by this commitment. NATO's 2019 estimates show that only nine nations, including the United Kingdom and the US, spend two per cent or more of their GDP on defence. European powerhouses such as Germany and France spend only 1.38 per cent and 1.84 per cent respectively.

Where Will These Troops Move To?

According to the plan, while about 6,400 soldiers will be brought back to the US, the remaining 5,400 will be redeployed in Europe including in Italy and Poland. According to Defence Secretary Esper, the plan is likely to cost Pentagon billions of dollars.

What Has Been the US Reaction to The Withdrawal of Troops?

The decision is being opposed by members of both the Republicans and Democrats. It has been reported that at least 22 Republicans on the House Armed Service Committee have written a letter urging the President to rethink the plan. The lawmakers wrote, "In Europe, the threats posed by Russia have not lessened, and we believe that signs of a weakened US commitment to NATO will encourage further Russian aggression and opportunism." Following Esper's announcement, Republican Senator Mitt Romney, a former presidential candidate, tweeted, "The Administration's plan to remove thousands of U.S. troops from Germany is a grave error. It is a slap in the face at a friend and ally when we should instead be drawing closer in our mutual commitment to deter Russian and Chinese aggression." Senator Jack Reed, a Democrat in the Senate Armed Services Committee, called Trump's move as "another Favour" to Russian President Vladimir Putin. However, defending his decision to cut troops in Germany, Trump tweeted, "Germany pays Russia billions of dollars a year for Energy, and we are supposed to protect Germany from Russia. What's that all about?"

How Has Germany Reacted to The Pullout?

Germany's Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer has expressed regret over Trump's decision to pull out troops from her country. "Regarding the regrettable plans to withdraw U.S. troops, I will, at the beginning of the parliamentary session after the summer, invite the premiers of the states affected to discuss how the Bundeswehr can support the



affected regions,” she said in a statement, adding, “We’re bearing German and European interests in mind. The truth is that a good life in Germany and Europe increasingly depends on how we ensure our own security.”

Mayhem in Minsk

→ Belarus has seen dramatic political developments over the past few days. First, the Election Commission announced that long-term President **Alexander Lukashenko** was the winner of Sunday’s election. His main rival, **Svetlana Tikhanovskaya**, rejected the results and called for a recount. Protests broke out in the capital, Minsk, which was met with a **violent security crackdown**. At least 2,000 people were detained and dozens injured. Then, as the country was slipping into chaos and anarchy, she fled to neighbouring Lithuania, saying she made “a very difficult decision”. But her campaign committee has said that it would continue to support the protests against the “election fraud”. This was the hardest fought election in Belarus, a former Soviet republic, since the USSR’s disintegration. There has been widespread anger against the government over a stagnant economy. **Mr. Lukashenko, often touted as Europe’s last dictator, had cracked down on the Opposition even before the election. Ms. Tikhanovskaya entered the race after her husband and a popular YouTuber, Sergei Tikhanovsky, who was to contest against Mr. Lukashenko, was detained and barred from contesting for allegedly inciting unrest.** Throughout the campaigning and the election, the Opposition accused the government of intimidation, cracking down on journalists and activists, and prohibiting independent observers. All these raised doubts about the fairness of the election.

It is too early to say if Ms. Tikhanovskaya’s departure would remove the hurdles Mr. Lukashenko faces in extending his term further. If the protests questioning the legitimacy of his presidency continue, at a time of growing economic troubles, it could substantially weaken him. **The crisis has already derailed his plans for a strategic realignment in Eastern Europe. In recent years, Belarus, a geopolitical ally of Russia with cultural links, has shown a willingness to work closer with the West.** His bet was to raise the strategic profile of his landlocked country at a time when the contest for influence in Eastern Europe between Moscow and Washington was hotting up. But many western countries have condemned the handling of the election and the protests, and called for a peaceful settlement. **Moscow immediately sensed an opportunity to cement ties with Belarus, which is an important transit route of Russian gas to Europe as well as a buffer between Russia and European powers. Mr. Lukashenko has nowhere to turn to other than Moscow.** He has to decide whether he wants to extend his 26-year reign at any cost or ensure the formation of a legitimate government that could address the country’s vital problems. If he chooses the last, he has to rein in the police, reach out to the Opposition and offer talks to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis.





Why the Beirut Explosion Has Caused Widespread Anger in Lebanon

- The catastrophic Beirut blasts on August 4, which left more than 200 dead and 6,000 injured, have reignited anti-government protests in Lebanon. Last Sunday, thousands of protesters pelted stones in central Beirut where Lebanon's parliament is located. The demonstrations, which began peacefully, have since taken a violent turn, with police launching teargas canisters at protesters, who lobbed back firecrackers and rubble in return. A day before, protesters stormed Lebanon's foreign, economy and environment ministries to vent their anger, Deutsche Welle reported.

Why the Beirut Explosion Has Reignited Protests

The recent explosion was caused by 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate stored for six years in a warehouse in the city's port. Its negligence by officials has sparked widespread public anger, which had already been stoked over the past year due to serious economic woes. According to a BBC report, the Beirut explosion has caused damage worth \$3 billion, with the country's collective loss estimated at \$15 billion. Large parts of the capital city have been devastated. The country's economic downturn, at the center of which has been a currency crisis, has caused large-scale closure of businesses and soaring prices of basic commodities resulting in social unrest.



Lebanon's Long-Running Protests

The protests in Lebanon started in October 2019 after the government announced plans for new taxes during the 2020 budget season, on everything from tobacco to social media platforms like WhatsApp. Public anger escalated and expanded to wide-scale protests against an unstable economy, sectarian rule, unemployment and corruption, and also compelled a shake-up of the country's leadership. The mass protests that went on for weeks, petered down closer to Christmas and New Year, only to restart by the middle of January. In March this year, Lebanon's government put the country in a state of emergency to combat the spread of coronavirus, closing land and seaports, and causing concerns that this would cause a further setback to an already beleaguered country. Lebanon's financial crisis resulted in a sovereign debt default and also affected its currency's value. During the emergency, protest camps were ordered to be removed by the country's security forces and restrictions were imposed on public gatherings. The government's decision to remove these camps were interpreted by many, including sections of the country's press, as a move to suppress protests.



Another Government Changes

Lebanon has been ruled by a political settlement that ended its 1975-1990 civil war, which distributes power and top offices among the country's Shiites, Sunnis and Christians. While this complex sectarian system has largely been able to keep the country peaceful, it has made decision-making extremely difficult, with long periods of political gridlock. The protests last **October saw the ouster of the West-backed Prime Minister Saad Hariri**, who headed a national unity government that was dominated by factions linked to the Hezbollah militant group. **Now, the months-old government of PM Hassan Diab has also resigned.** On Friday, Diab promised early parliamentary elections as a solution for the country's structural crisis.

The Beirut-Like Explosion That Rocked Bombay 76 Years Ago

- The catastrophic explosions at Beirut port earlier this week, which have so far killed at least 150 people and injured around 5,000, bear a resemblance with an even more calamitous incident that occurred in Mumbai 76 years ago. **On April 14, 1944, a ship lying outside Mumbai's Victoria Dock caught fire, resulting in two explosions that left around a 1,000 dead, thousands injured, and several buildings in the city destroyed.** The raging inferno was visible for miles across the city, and took three days of efforts by dozens of firefighters to be doused.

The 1944 Bombay Docks Explosions

In the early months of 1944, when World War II had gripped Asia, the British cargo ship 'Fort Stikine' was carrying tons of explosives, fighter aircraft and gold bullion from Birkenhead in the UK to Mumbai. En route, the Fort Stikine picked up hundreds of cotton bales from Karachi, which were stored one level below 300 tons of dynamite, despite the threat of combustion. In the afternoon of April 14, when the ship was moored at Mumbai's Victoria Dock, a fire was detected aboard, which continued to rage despite firefighting efforts. Within a few hours, the dynamite was ignited, and two massive explosions one after the other rocked Mumbai's immediate neighborhoods, causing one of the city's deadliest fires.

Damage Caused

The explosions caused 12 ships docked in the vicinity to be destroyed– the force from the blast caused one 4000-tonne ship to be flung onto land. Everyone in close proximity was killed; the casualties have been estimated between 800 and 1,300, which included Bombay Port Trust workers, army and navy personnel, sailors and policemen. Like in Beirut, the second explosion caused greater damage in Mumbai as well. A report by The Indian Express on April 17, 1944 reads "The second explosion probably caused more casualties. After the first explosion scores of people made their way towards the direction from which rose thick black smoke in huge columns and were caught unawares by the second explosion. Pedestrians and sightseers were blown off their feet and motorcars overturned. An immense volume of thick black smoke that rose covered the sky. "The unexpected nature of the occurrence and the panic it created can well be imagined by the fact that goods left on the open roads remained untouched by thieves and robbers long afterwards," the report stated. **In 1968, April 14 was declared as Fire Services Day**, when a memorial was built with the names of the fallen firefighters at the fire brigade headquarters in Byculla.



What Is Ammonium Nitrate, Which Caused the Massive Explosion in Beirut?

- According to the government of Lebanon explosion was caused by over 2,700 tons of ammonium nitrate kept in storage for over six years. A common chemical ingredient of agricultural fertilizers, the nitrogen rich compound is also the main component of the explosive composition known as ANFO – ammonium nitrate fuel oil. What is this chemical, how and where is it used or misused, what hazards does it present, and what are the rules and regulations about its use in India?

Ammonium Nitrate. The Substance

In its pure form, ammonium nitrate (NH_4NO_3) is a white, crystalline chemical which is soluble in water. It is the main ingredient in the manufacture of commercial explosives used in mining and construction. In India, The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012, under The Explosives Act, 1884, define ammonium nitrate as the “compound with formula NH_4NO_3 including any mixture or compound having more than 45 per cent ammonium nitrate by weight including emulsions, suspensions, melts or gels but excluding emulsion or slurry explosives and non-explosives emulsion matrix and fertilizers from which the ammonium nitrate cannot be separated”.

Ammonium Nitrate as An Explosive

Pure ammonium nitrate is not an explosive on its own. It is classified as an oxidiser (Grade 5.1) under the United Nations classification of dangerous goods. If mixed with ingredients like fuel or some other contaminants, or because of some other external factors, it can be very explosive. However, for combinations to explode, triggers like detonators are required. Many Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) used by terrorists around the world have ANFO as the main explosive, triggered by primary explosives like RDX or TNT. In the majority of terror attacks in India, including those in Pulwama, Varanasi, Malegaon, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, ammonium nitrate has been used along with initiator explosives like RDX.

Stored Ammonium Nitrate Is A Major Fire Hazard

Large quantities of stored ammonium nitrate are regarded as a major fire hazard, with multiple reported cases across the world. The explosion of large storage can happen primarily in two ways. One is by some type detonation or initiation because the storage comes in contact with explosive mixture. Second, the blast can result due to a fire which starts in the ammonium nitrate store because of the heat generated due to the oxidation process at large scale. The second one seems to be the primary likely cause of the incident at Beirut port. There are several documented examples of deadly ammonium nitrate fire and explosion incidents in the past, some with large numbers of fatalities like in China in 2015 and in Texas in 1947.

Regulations in India About Ammonium Nitrate

Because it is used as an ingredient for the production of industrial explosives, anesthetic gases, fertilizers, cold packs and has a strong possibility of misuse, ammonium nitrate is highly regulated in India, at least in letter. The manufacture, conversion, bagging, import, export, transport, possession for sale or use of ammonium nitrate is covered under The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012. The rules also make storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas illegal in India. For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an



Industrial license is required under the **Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951**. A license under the **Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012** is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.

Spain's Former King Flees Country

→ Spain's former king Juan Carlos, at the center of an alleged \$100-million corruption scandal, has reportedly fled to the Dominican Republic after his shock announcement that he was going into exile. The 82-year-old revealed on Monday that he had taken the decision to leave Spain to help his son, the current King Felipe VI, "exercise his responsibilities". The letter, published on the royal palace's website, did not mention where the former king would go, nor when exactly he would leave the country. But on Tuesday, daily newspaper ABC reported that he left Spain on Sunday and flew to the Dominican Republic via Portugal. The ex-king's lawyer, Javier Sanchez-Junco, issued a statement on Monday saying his client was not trying to escape justice by going into exile and would remain available to prosecutors.

Popular for Decades

The former head of state has been under a cloud since various media reported that he allegedly received funds from Saudi Arabia and probes are now under way in both Switzerland and Spain. Spain's Supreme Court announced in June an investigation to determine the legal responsibility of the ex-monarch – but only for acts committed after his abdication in 2014, because of the immunity he holds. The suspicions center on \$100 million allegedly paid secretly into a Swiss bank account in 2008. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez spoke out in July, saying "the entire Spanish population are receiving disturbing information which is troubling for us all, including me". He ascended the throne in 1975 on the death of the fascist dictator **Francisco Franco** and ruled for 38 years before abdicating in Favour of his son Felipe VI in June 2014. He was a popular figure for decades, playing a key role in the democratic transition from the Franco dictatorship which ruled Spain from 1939-1975.

Limited Peace

→ The peace agreement reached between Israel and the United Arab Emirates has formalised the thaw in Arab-Israeli relations that has been under way for a few years. As part of the deal announced by U.S. President Trump, the UAE would recognise the state of Israel and establish formal diplomatic relations, while Israel would halt its controversial plan to annex swathes of the Palestinian West Bank. The **UAE becomes the third Arab nation to recognise Israel after Egypt (in 1979) and Jordan (1994) and the first in the Gulf recognising Israel.** It could pave the way for the region's Sunni Arab kingdoms and the Jewish-majority Israel enhancing regional cooperation against their common foe, Shia Iran. Israel has said it would focus on "expanding ties with other countries in the Arab and Muslim world", while the U.S. has expressed hope that more Arab countries would follow the UAE's lead – Arab-Israeli relations have largely been conflict-ridden ever since the state of Israel was declared in 1948. For Mr. Trump who played a critical role, it is a rare diplomatic victory just months before he seeks re-election. His other foreign policy bets – Iran, North Korea or Afghanistan – were either disastrous or inconclusive. But in the case of Israel and the UAE, both allies of the U.S., quiet diplomacy worked. The U.S. had



arranged several meetings between Israeli and Emirati officials last year, which probably laid the foundations for the agreement.

While the deal has the potential to change Arab-Israeli relations for good, it also shows how the Arab countries are gradually decoupling themselves from the Palestine question. The UAE offered full diplomatic recognition in return for Israel's suspension of a planned annexation, not for any relaxation of the actual occupation. As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, Israel made peace with an Arab country without "our returning to the 1967 borders". The Arab Peace Initiative, a Saudi Arabia initiative endorsed by the Arab League, offered recognition to Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the occupied territories. Ironically, the UAE's peace agreement comes close on the heels of the Trump administration's back-to-back decisions to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and its sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights. Clearly, the UAE has moved away from the Arab initiative. The question now is whether the Emiratis would be able to press the Jewish state to relax its inhuman and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and start talks between the occupier and the occupied. If it cannot, the UAE-Israel deal would be of little significance for the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership, on its part, should understand the emerging reality in West Asia – the Arab-Israel conflict is coming to a close, but the Palestine-Israel conflict is to continue without any respite.

What About the Palestinians?

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, which seeks a two-state solution, lashed out against the deal as a "betrayal" by the UAE. The Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist militant group that de facto runs the Gaza strip, and views the relationship with Israel as a fight to the finish, called it a "stabbing in the back of our people" by the UAE. For the Palestinians, the Israeli commitment that it will not pursue its plan to annex the West Bank, is an empty concession – the deal does not address the Palestinian demand for statehood. Netanyahu floated the annexation plan recently – it means Israel will claim sovereignty of all land in the West Bank on which Jewish settlements have come up, literally cutting up the dream of a Palestinian state. It was not certain if Netanyahu would have gone ahead with it even without the UAE deal. Now, by agreeing not to, he has enabled the UAE to talk it up to its Arab allies as a major concession extracted from Israel, while Netanyahu himself can project it elsewhere abroad as a big give on his part, without compromising on the core issues of the conflict. An extreme pro-annexation section of the settler lobby in Israel is angry, but he has mollified domestic audiences that this is a "temporary" hold on the plan.



How Have the Arab States Reacted?

Saudi Arabia has said nothing so far, although the ruling family's Prince Turki al-Faisal had strongly rejected the proposals for Israel-Palestine peace unveiled by the US in January this year, which included a plan to hand over Jerusalem to Israel and permit it to extend its sovereignty to all Jewish settlements in the West Bank. But Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) has been hailed as an ally by the Trump administration. He has formed a solid friendship with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, the President's pointman in the Middle East, tasked with finding a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict. There is bound to be speculation that the UAE could not have taken its extraordinary decision on Israel without the backing and support of the House of Saud. Over the years, the Saudis have seen both the US and Israel as insurance against Shia Iran. But as the leader of the Arab world, and the custodian of Islam's holiest shrines, it might have preferred someone else to take the revolutionary first step on this. The smaller Gulf states of Oman and Bahrain have quickly fallen in line behind UAE, and it could be a matter of time before the others, including Saudi, do as well. That is the hope Trump expressed.



How Does the Region's Geopolitics Change?

If the Arab states do fall in line, it would dramatically bring all Sunni nations in the region in an anti-Iran alliance with Israel that they have secretly wished for all these years. Iran and its proxies and allies – in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen – have been weakened and broken by war, the ISIS and al-Qaeda. Hezbollah, which Israel has treated as enemy number 1 after Iran, faces a domestic backlash in Lebanon after the explosion that has destroyed Beirut. Russia, a staunch ally of Syria, has not yet reacted; neither has China. The deal will send ripples through other parts of the world. In South Asia, it will put Pakistan in a bind. Despite having toyed with the idea of establishing diplomatic ties with Israel for nearly two decades, Pakistan could never take the plunge for fear of a domestic backlash. The weak government of Imran Khan – who knows what it is to be accused of being part of a Jewish conspiracy after his first marriage to London socialite Jemima Goldsmith, the daughter of a Jewish millionaire – is already facing criticism at home for not being able to take on India over its 2019 decisions in Kashmir. Imran is unlikely to be seen as joining an Arab alliance that has effectively abandoned another "Islamic" cause dear to Pakistan, that of Palestine. But then, UAE is a good friend. Pakistan has already annoyed Saudi Arabia, another "biradar country", by showing its teeth at the OIC because it did not agree to hold a special session on Kashmir. The kingdom responded by asking for immediate repayment of a \$3 bn loan



given in 2018, and it has frozen a \$3.2 bn line of credit for oil purchases. Even if Pakistan does not join the Arab stampede towards Israel, it cannot rail against them for it. In Kashmir too, where pro-independence lobbies have compared stone pelting agitations of the last 10 years with the intifada, the isolation of Palestine is certain to mirror the isolation of Kashmir today.

How Severe Was the Mauritius Oil Spill?

- A week after Mauritius declared a national emergency over an oil spill near its coast, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth announced it had been cleaned up. The accident had been traced to a Japanese ship, anchored off the southern part of the island nation in the Indian Ocean. It had raised concerns over the ecological damage caused to the region.

What Caused the Mauritius Oil Spill?

A Japanese ship named *M V Wakashio*, which is owned by Nagashiki Shipping and operated by Mitsui OSK Lines Ltd, struck a coral reef resulting in an oil spill of over 1,000 tons into the Indian Ocean. The ship was carrying an estimated 4,000 tons of oil.

How Does the Oil Spill Compare to Others Around the World?

The BBC reported that rather than the size of the oil spill, it was the area where it happened which was a cause for concern. The accident had taken place near two environmentally protected marine ecosystems and the Blue Bay Marine Park Reserve, which is a wetland of international importance. Some of the world's largest oil spills include the Persian Gulf War oil spill of 1991, when more than 380 million gallons of oil was poured into the northern Persian Gulf by Iraq's forces. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is also considered to be among the largest known accidental oil spills in history. Starting April 20, 2010, over 4 million barrels of oil flowed over a period of 87 days into the Gulf of Mexico. In 2016, a United States Geological Survey (USGS)-NASA study found that the 2010 oil spill led to "widespread" shoreline loss along the heavily oiled areas along Louisiana's coast. "Erosion rates were highest along shorelines documented with heavy to moderate oiling, and were lower along shorelines that experienced low oiling," a USGS release noted.

How Dangerous Are Oil Spills?

Oil spills affect marine life by exposing them to harsh elements and destroying their sources of food and habitat. Further, both birds and mammals can die from hypothermia as a result oil spills, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). For instance, oil destroys the insulating ability of fur-bearing mammals, such as sea otters. It also decreases the water repellency of birds' feathers, without which they lose their ability to repel cold water.

How Are Oil Spills Cleaned?

There are a few ways to clean up oil spills including skimming, in situ burning and by releasing chemical dispersants. Skimming involves removing oil from the sea surface before it is able to reach the sensitive areas along the coastline. In situ burning means burning a particular patch of oil after it has concentrated in one area. Releasing chemical dispersants helps break down oil into smaller droplets, making it easier for microbes to consume, and further break it down into less harmful compounds. Natural actions in



aquatic environments such as weathering, evaporation, emulsification, biodegradation and oxidation can also help reduce the severity of an oil spill and accelerate the recovery of an affected area. But these occur differently in freshwater and marine environments, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notes in a report on oil spills.

Historic Ratification

→ The welcome decision by the **Kingdom of Tonga** to outlaw the worst forms of child Labour is the first time in the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s 101-year history that a Labour standard has been universally ratified. **Convention 182**, which was adopted in the 1999 annual international Labour conference, prohibits the sexual exploitation of children, trafficking, deployment in armed conflict and other conditions that compromise their overall well-being. The Convention complements the ILO's efforts under the 1973 Minimum Age Convention to prevent the employment of children below a lower age threshold. Under the influence of both these ILO standards, millions of young boys and girls have been rescued from hazardous conditions of work. Concomitantly, these have resulted in significant increases in enrolments in primary education. The landmark ratification, however, does not detract from the enormity of the challenge that remains. An estimated 152 million are trapped in child labour and 72 million of them are engaged in hazardous work. If anything, current efforts would have to be stepped up significantly to achieve the ambitious goal of total abolition of the scourge of child labour by 2025. But the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening a reversal of recent gains, with widespread job losses, deterioration in conditions of work, decline in household incomes and temporary school closures.

The historic first universal ratification of a global labour standard may be an occasion for celebration; it is nonetheless a moment for sober reflection. The two instruments on child labour are among the eight core ILO Conventions regarded as embodying the spirit of the 1998 declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work. Instruments relating to the freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation are among the others. These conventions provide the necessary framework to counteract the predominance of informality in the conditions of work and ought to be a priority for governments. Though belated, India has signalled its legal commitment to the elimination of child labour with its 2017 ratification of Convention 182 and the instrument prescribing the minimum age of work for children. As the world prepares to designate 2021 as the year to abolish child labour, governments must seize the moment to instill hope in the future generations.

Taking Nuclear Vulnerabilities Seriously

→ On the morning of August 6, at 8:15 am local time, a **B-29 bomber Enola Gay** dropped the atomic bomb called "**Little Boy**" with a force of over 20,000 tons of TNT on the city of Hiroshima, when most of the industrial workers had already reported to work, many were en route and children were in school. This was followed **three days later** by the dropping of '**Fat Man**' on Nagasaki, at 11:01 hours. The two nuclear bombs vaporized around 150,000 people who were going about their morning business; 130,000 others succumbed to burns, radiation sickness, and other ailments that the collapsed health system could not treat. Few, then, understood why their skin erupted wounds that would not heal, hair fell off in clumps, and stomach churned with pain and nausea. **Several hibakusha, or survivors of the atomic bombings**, have recounted how an ordinary day turned into one where they wished they too had died in that instant flash.

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



- After the conclusion of World War II in 1945, the relations between Japan and the US worsened, especially after Japan forces decided to take an aim at Indochina with the intention of capturing the oil-rich areas of the East Indies. Therefore, US president Harry Truman authorized the use of atomic bombs in order to make Japan surrender in WWII, which it did.
- One historian Gar Alperovitz argued in his 1965 book that the use of nuclear weapons on Japanese cities was “intended to gain a stronger position for postwar diplomatic bargaining with the Soviet Union, as the weapons themselves were not needed to force the Japanese surrender,” a US government website mentions.
- Truman decided that only bombing a city would make an adequate impression and, therefore, target cities were chosen keeping in mind the military production in the area and while making sure that the target sites did not hold cultural significance for Japan, like Kyoto did. This was because the aim was to destroy Japan’s ability to fight wars. Hiroshima was primarily a military target with a population of about 318,000 people. Hiroshima at the time was also the seventh-largest city of Japan and served as the headquarters of the Second Army and of the Chugoku Regional Army, making it one of the most important military command stations in Japan. It was also the site of one of the largest military supply depots and the foremost military shipping point for troops and supplies. The atomic bomb was a result of British and American scientific knowledge and was built at two plants in the US, while a scientific laboratory was maintained separately, all of which came under the ambit of the **Manhattan Project**, which was the codename for this research effort. Before Truman, President Franklin Roosevelt set up a committee to look into the development of a nuclear weapon after he received a letter from Albert Einstein in 1939, who warned him about the likelihood that Nazi Germany was developing a nuclear weapon.

While Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been the last two cities to be destroyed by nuclear weapons, we cannot be sure that they will be the last. Since 1945, the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea have armed themselves with nuclear weapons that have much more destructive power in comparison to those that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Damage and Vulnerability

Over 1,26,000 nuclear weapons have been built since the beginning of the atomic age. Over 2,000 of them have been used in nuclear tests, above and below the ground, to demonstrate their explosive power, causing grave and long-lasting damage to the environment and public health. But this damage is nothing compared to what might happen if some of the existing weapons are used against civilian populations. An appreciation of the scale of the potential damage and a realization that nuclear weapons could be launched at any moment against any target around the world should instill a sense of vulnerability in all of us. To appreciate why we are vulnerable, we should start by realizing that there is no realistic way to protect ourselves against nuclear weapons, whether they are used deliberately, inadvertently, or accidentally. During the Cold War, citizens of affected nations were made to undergo regular nuclear drills. As sirens blared, everyone had to rush to bunkers created in homes, schools, hospitals, etc. There were guidelines on what to equip these nuclear shelters with so as to be able to sustain lives in case mushroom clouds went up.

The invention of ballistic missiles at the end of the 1950s, with their great speed of delivery, has made it impossible to intercept nuclear weapons once they are launched. Neither fallout shelters nor ballistic missile defence systems have succeeded in negating this



vulnerability. Nuclear weapon states are targets of other nuclear weapon states, of course, but non-nuclear weapon states are vulnerable as well.

The Problems of Deterrence

Nuclear weapon states have reacted to this vulnerability by coming up with a comforting idea: that the use of nuclear weapons is impossible because of deterrence. Nuclear weapons are so destructive that no country would use them, because such use would invite retaliation in kind, and no political leader would be willing to risk the possible death of millions of their citizens. That was the idea of deterrence. Deterrence enthusiasts claim that nuclear weapons do not just protect countries against use of nuclear weapons by others, but even prevent war and promote stability. These claims do not hold up to evidence. Nuclear threats have not always produced fear and, in turn, fear has not always induced caution. To the contrary, nuclear threats in some cases have produced anger, and anger can trigger a drive to escalate, as was the case with Fidel Castro during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Moreover, the apparent efficacy of deterrence in some cases may have been due to the more credible prospect of retaliation with conventional weapons. Countries with nuclear weapons have in fact gone to war quite often, even with other countries with nuclear weapons, albeit in a limited fashion or through proxies. Countries, however, might not always show such restraint. Nor should nuclear deterrence be considered stable. Strategic planners routinely use worst-case assumptions about the intentions and capabilities of other countries to argue for the acquisition of greater destructive capabilities, driving endless upgrades of nuclear arsenals, and offering a rationale for new countries to acquire nuclear weapons. Implicitly, however, all nuclear weapon states have admitted to the possibility that deterrence could fail: they have made plans for using nuclear weapons, in effect, preparing to fight nuclear war. The disjuncture between the ideal of possessing nuclear weapons for deterrence and the practical reality of keeping these weapons primed for use has been eloquently clarified by General Lee Butler, former Commander-in-Chief of the United States Strategic Command. After years of having the top operational responsibility for all U.S. strategic nuclear forces, he observed: "The goal – the wish, really – might be to prevent nuclear war, but the operational plan had to be to wage war." It is thus an illusion to think that nuclear war is impossible.

The Illusion of Control

A related illusion concerns the controllability of nuclear weapons. In the real world, it is not possible for planners to have complete control. However, the desire to believe in the perfect controllability and safety of nuclear weapons creates overconfidence, which is dangerous. Overconfidence, as many scholars studying safety will testify, is more likely to lead to accidents and possibly to the use of nuclear weapons. In several historical instances, what prevented the use of nuclear weapons was not control practices but either their failure or factors outside institutional control. The most famous of these cases is the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. There are likely many more cases during which the world came close to nuclear war but because of the secrecy that surrounds nuclear weapons, we might never know. If deterrence has not prevented nuclear war so far, what has? While a comprehensive answer to this question will necessarily involve diverse and contingent factors, one essential element in key episodes is just plain luck. This is, again, best illustrated by the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, where nearly four decades of scholarship attest to the crucial role of luck. The consequences of bad luck, then or later, could make the COVID-19 pandemic seem benign by comparison. While humanity has



luckily survived 75 years without experiencing nuclear war, can one expect luck to last indefinitely?

Why People Are Using #Zimbabweanrightsmatter Tag in Online Campaign

→ Days after the Zimbabwean administration thwarted a peaceful street protest against economic turmoil and human rights violations by arresting scores of activists, opposition leaders and journalists, the people's movement shifted online – with a hashtag inspired by the global #BlackLivesMatter campaign. **More than 700,000 posts have been shared with the hashtag #ZimbabweanRightsMatter demanding the release of those arrested and condemning the President Emmerson Mnangagwa-led government for stifling dissent.** Meanwhile, in a public address beamed on television screens across Zimbabwe Tuesday, Mnangagwa called the opposition political parties “terrorist groupings” and accused them of working with foreigners to topple his administration. “The bad apples that have attempted to divide our people and to weaken our systems will be flushed out, Good shall triumph over evil,” the 77-year-old President said. **It was on July 31 that Mnangagwa had unleashed a legion of heavily armed soldiers and police on the streets of capital city Harare when hundreds of activists and opposition leaders were set to stage a peaceful protest against the ongoing economic crisis and human rights abuses in the country. At least 60 protesters, including 2020 Booker Prize long-listed novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga, were arrested by law enforcement authorities for participating in the protest, according to a Bloomberg report. According to local media reports, several of the unarmed protesters were tortured by the police and soldiers.**

What Led to The Online and Offline Protests in Zimbabwe?

The anti-government demonstration, slated to take place on July 31, was organized to protest against the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy as well as the wave of arrests of critics and opposition leaders that took place after Mnangagwa came to power in 2018. After Mnangagwa replaced the country's former strongman Robert Mugabe following a military takeover in 2017, he vowed to undo the damage that had been done to Zimbabwe's economy by the previous regime. However, the Mnangagwa administration failed to deliver. Two-and-a-half years later, rampant corruption and inflation of over 700 per cent has strangled the economy further. According to the World Food Programme, around 60 per cent of the population – amounting to approximately 8.6 million people – will be food insecure by the end of the year because of the “the combined effects of drought, economic recession and the pandemic”. **After 37 years of authoritarian rule under Mugabe, Mnangagwa had also vowed a “new democracy”. But after coming to power, he went back on his word and began his reign of repression.** According to a coalition of Zimbabwean rights groups, the number of critics of the government charged with treason within the first 21 months of his term far exceeded those arrested during Mugabe's three decades in office. **The recent spate of protests can be traced back to May when three female opposition activists were abducted, attacked and sexually assaulted by a group of government personnel in plainclothes,** the New York Times reported. Last month, the arrests of investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and leader of the opposition Transform Zimbabwe Party Jacob Ngarivhume sparked outrage among civil society in the country. Both men were prosecuted for alleged “public incitement to violence”. Chin'ono had recently exposed a corrupt government scheme involving the procurement of Covid-19 supplies by the health ministry. Meanwhile, Ngarivhume had called for street rallies against corruption across the country on July 31. When the protest was stalled by the



Mnangagwa administration, opposition leaders, activists and members of civil society took to social media to condemn the arrests and to demand justice using the hashtag #ZimbabweanRightsMatter. The campaign borrows from the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which took center-stage globally following the custodial killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, this May.

What Has Been the Global Response to The Protests in Zimbabwe?

Politicians, celebrities and other public figures from across the world have condemned the government crackdown on critics and activists in Zimbabwe. Responding to the violence and arrests in the country, **South African** politician Julius Malema urged the South African government to shut down the embassy of Zimbabwe in Pretoria. The **United Kingdom** Ambassador to Zimbabwe Melanie Robinson too, has condemned the recent arrests in the country. The recent #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign is not the first time that members of civil society have used social media to protest against the government. Even earlier, the hashtag #ZanuPFMustGo was used by activists to voice their dissent and demand the removal of the Mnangagwa-led **Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)**.

What's Behind Recent Tensions Between Turkey and Greece

- ➔ NATO allies Turkey and Greece have locked horns twice over the past two weeks – first after Turkey converted the 1,500-year-old Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque, and then over who gets to explore hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean. Relations between the two nations have seen a marked downturn this year. In February, Turkey had allowed thousands of migrants to cross the border into Greece and the European Union.

The Mediterranean Neighbours

For centuries, **Turkey and Greece** have shared a chequered history. Greece won independence from modern Turkey's precursor, the Ottoman Empire, in 1830. In 1923, the two countries exchanged their Muslim and Christian populations – a migration whose scale has only been surpassed in history by the Partition of India. The two nations continue to oppose each other on the decades-old **Cyprus** conflict, and **on two occasions** have almost gone to war over exploration rights in the Aegean Sea. Both countries are, however, part of the 30-member NATO alliance, and Turkey is officially a candidate for full membership of the European Union, of which Greece is a constituent.

The Hagia Sophia Row

Many Greeks continue to revere the Hagia Sophia, and view it as a key part of Orthodox Christianity. So, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordered the structure open to Muslim worship last month, tensions escalated. On July 24, when Friday prayers were held at the Hagia Sophia for the first time in 90 years, church bells tolled across Greece in protest. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called the site's conversion an "affront to civilisation of the 21st century", describing Turkey's move as a "proof of weakness". A day later, Turkey's foreign ministry hit back, saying, "Greece showed once again its enmity towards Islam and Turkey with the excuse of reacting to Hagia Sophia Mosque being opened to prayers".



The Eastern Mediterranean Dispute

For 40 years, Turkey and Greece have disagreed over rights to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, which covers significant oil and gas deposits. On July 21, Turkey announced that the drilling ship Oruc Reis would be exploring a disputed part of the sea for oil and gas. Greece responded by placing its air force, navy and coastguard on high alert. French President Emmanuel Macron expressed support for Greece, and said that Turkey should be “sanctioned” for its violations in the Aegean. After German Chancellor Angela Merkel intervened, Turkey said last week that it had halted the drilling operation, and that it was “ready to discuss” the issue with Greece.



Why Ecuador Was Angered by A Chinese Flotilla Near Its Waters

- ➔ Ecuador was on alert earlier this week as a flotilla of 260 mostly Chinese fishing vessels—what some called a “floating city”—was sighted near the **Galapagos archipelago**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, whose aquatic species such as **manta rays** and **sharks** have been endangered by commercial fishing. The **Galapagos Islands**, spread over almost 60,000 sq km, are a part of Ecuador, and are located in the Pacific Ocean around 1,000 km away from the South American continent. Every year, Ecuador faces the challenge of protecting its natural habitat from Chinese vessels.

Chinese Fishing Around Galapagos

According to the Madrid-based *El País*, the flotilla, which also consisted of some Liberia and Panama-flagged vessels, was detected in an international water corridor situated between two areas of Ecuadorian jurisdiction—200 miles away from both the Galapagos Islands and mainland Ecuador. Ecuador’s Defence Minister said the situation is **repeated every year**, when ships reach the outer limit of the archipelago, outside the country’s **exclusive zone**. Last year, 245 Chinese fishing vessels were sighted in the area where Ecuador’s writ does not extend. **In 2017**, when a Chinese ship did enter Ecuador’s waters, its authorities seized it and discovered 300 tons of wildlife on board, mostly the critically endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks – a delicacy in China. As per an *Economist* report, two-thirds of hammerhead shark fins found in Hong Kong markets come from the Galapagos area. According to the Guayaquil-based *El Universo*, Chinese ships frequent Ecuador’s waters this time of the year when the cold Humboldt Current brings in nutrients that lead to a high congregation of marine species. Chinese vessels have also run into



trouble with other countries in the region. In 2016, Argentina's coast guard chased and sank a vessel that it claimed had been illegally fishing in the South Atlantic.

Diplomatic Consequences

While Ecuador's navy announced that it had sighted the flotilla in international waters on July 16, it was only during this week that the matter escalated to a diplomatic level, when Ecuador officially expressed its "discomfort" to China. **President Lenin Moreno has said that Ecuador will discuss the "threat" with Peru, Chile, Colombia, and Panama – coastal countries of the region that have also been affected in the past. The United States, which is already opposing China on multiple fronts, expressed its support for Ecuador.** China on its part has maintained that it is a "responsible fishing nation" having a "zero tolerance" policy toward illegal fishing.

The Galapagos Islands

Renowned worldwide for its unique species, the islands host a wide array of aquatic wildlife, including **marine iguanas, fur seals, and waved albatrosses.** The **giant tortoises found here – 'Galápagos' in old Spanish – give the islands its name.** Ecuador made a part of the Galapagos a wildlife sanctuary in 1935, and the sanctuary became the Galapagos National Park in 1959. **In 1978, the islands became UNESCO's first World Heritage Site.** It was here that the **British naturalist Charles Darwin made key observations in 1835** that shaped his theory of evolution. **Darwin described the islands as a "world in itself".** According to an AP report, **the warming of oceans due to climate change is expected to further increase fishing pressure around the islands, which would offer a better catch than other regions.**

Mahinda Rajapaksa Sworn in as Sri Lankan PM

- **Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Sunday took the oath of office as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, following the ruling party's landslide victory in the August 5 general election.** Mr. Rajapaksa, 74, polled a record-breaking share of preferential votes – over five lakhs – this election, reflecting his popularity in the electorate 50 years after he first entered Parliament. The swearing in ceremony was held at the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara, at a revered Buddhist temple near Colombo, where his younger brother and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa administered the oath, after he bowed and took Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa's blessings. **The emphatic two-thirds majority to the ruling party in the recent poll, after Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's big win in November, allows the Rajapaksa brothers to amend the Constitution.** As part of their poll campaign, the brothers vowed to repeal a 2015 legislation capping presidency at two-terms and trimming the President's executive powers. **The ninth Parliament of Sri Lanka will not only see the siblings helm the country's two most powerful offices, but will have among its members, their third and elder brother Chamal Rajapaksa, a former Speaker, his son Shasheendra Rajapaksa and Namal Rajapaksa, son of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa and a popular former MP from the southern Hambantota district.**

The Tamil Question

Both the President and Prime Minister have underscored the need for greater development in the country's civil war-affected areas, while the Tamil leadership is also concerned about the minority's long-pending demand for greater political rights. In the decade following the



long civil war, Sri Lanka's northern Tamils have been demanding a lasting political solution, with a greater measure of power to self-govern. R. Sampanthan, Leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) – which suffered an electoral setback and secured only 10 of its 16 seats this election – said the people of the country had given the government a strong mandate. "It has the authority and power to do all that is necessary for the people. As far as we are concerned, we will extend to the government our fullest cooperation to everything done in national interest and in the interest of solving the country's problems," he told The Hindu. Much work has been done in the past, including the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 and the consequent 13th Amendment that speaks of power devolution, Mr. Sampanthan said. Discussions on improving the 13th Amendment continued with Presidents R. Premadasa, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Mahinda Rajapaksa in the past, and with the former government of Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe. The new government, he said, must "evolve a formula without delay" for the resolution of the lingering national question. "I believe it will be part and parcel of the new Constitution being contemplated," he told The Hindu. The inaugural session of the new Parliament is scheduled for August 20.

WHO Official Warns Against 'Vaccine Nationalism'

- ➔ With over 200 COVID-19 vaccine candidates in development and 27 of them on clinical trials across the world, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organisation (WHO) Soumya Swaminathan raised the need to have a multilateral or global approach to vaccine deployment and distribution, rather than a more nationalistic approach. **Noting that the term "vaccine nationalism" was being used to describe the fact that many countries are only thinking about their own population, she said, "The argument we are making is that the virus is everywhere in the world and it would be impossible for the world to go back to normal, and for the economy to recover if only pockets of people are protected..."** Dr. Swaminathan was delivering the Lawrence Dana Pinkham Memorial Lecture on "COVID-19 pandemic: What we know and the role of the media" – the commencement lecture for Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) class of 2020-2021 on Saturday.

Political Compulsions

However, she said it was a difficult issue because most political leaders would first think about protecting their own people. "It is true that they have a responsibility. At the same time, in this particular case, it is not enough to protect only their citizens. It is important to ensure that people around the world have access in an equitable way. What we are proposing is, if we have a limited supply of vaccines at the beginning of 2021, **let's say a few hundred million doses, how do we distribute that? Who should get it first? All frontline workers, health workers and social care workers, police and others at high risk of getting the infection. Should they not be prioritized before the otherwise healthy adult population,**" she stated.

Difficult Choice

Elaborating on this, Dr Swaminathan said there were two options – a few countries vaccinate their entire population, while others wait for a long time. "Today, 10% of all infections have occurred in healthcare workers. It would be unfair not to protect them **before everyone else gets a chance,**" she said. This was an ongoing dialogue happening globally, and getting a consensus was a challenge, she added. Referring to the WHO's Solidarity Trial in which 25 countries were participating and over 6,500 patients were



recruited, she said this was something that they wanted to promote for vaccines as well. "There are a large number of vaccine candidates in development. Some of them are big companies; multinationals have the resources and expertise to run their own trials, while smaller companies may not get the same opportunities. We want to provide a platform for vaccines to be tested," she said.

Bad Experiences

Stressing on equitable access, she said, "We have had bad experiences in the past in previous epidemics including the H1N1 pandemic when vaccines were cornered by high income countries, and very little left for low income countries. Only when the pandemic turned out not so serious that those countries, which had stockpiled vaccines, gave up some of their stock for distribution in low income countries. This could be a terrible thing to happen this time around." More than 4,000 clinical trials were registered with WHO, she said.

WHO Renews Call for Countries to Join Its COVAX Platform

- The World Health Organisation has renewed its invite to countries to join its COVAX facility, an international alliance aimed at accelerating the development and manufacture of novel Coronavirus vaccines, and ensuring equitable access to all. The COVAX facility, launched in the last week of April, is stitching together agreements with developers and manufacturers of vaccine candidates it thinks are most likely to succeed. The facility is trying to raise funds to support the rapid development of promising candidates, and the quick expansion of manufacturing capacities, so that the vaccines once approved, could be produced on mass scale. According to its initial estimates, US\$ 18.1 billion were required to cover the costs of research and development, manufacturing, and delivery of vaccines to different countries. The facility aims to procure at least two billion doses of a novel Coronavirus vaccine by the end of next year, for deployment and distribution mainly in the low- and middle-income countries. The latest announcement does not say how many countries had already joined the initiative. But in a July 15 statement, the WHO had said that 75 countries had submitted their expressions of interest in joining the COVAX facility, and had shown willingness to help raise the requisite funds. The countries who join the initiative are also assured supply of vaccines whenever they become successful. The countries will get assured supplies to protect at least 20 per cent of their populations. The WHO has been saying the COVAX facility, by backing multiple vaccine candidates, would ensure that it would have access to whichever vaccine candidate is finally approved for use. At the same time, countries that do not have the resources of the United States to get into individual bilateral agreements with multiple vaccine developers for securing supplies in advance, can still hope to get access to the vaccines by joining this facility. Last week's agreement between the Pune-based Serum Institute of India and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for production of 100 million doses of the vaccine for low and middle-income countries was part of the COVAX mechanism. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, along with GAVI (previously called Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations, now just GAVI), and CEPI (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) are working together with WHO in executing the COVAX mechanism. These 100 million doses would be provided to the eligible countries at a price of US\$ 3 per doses. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation agreed to provide US\$ 150 million to Serum to quickly increase its manufacturing capacity.



Foreign Affairs

Will Trump's Order to Buy American Medicines Impact Indian Pharma Industry?

- US President Donald Trump has signed an order aiming to boost domestic production of "essential medicines" and "critical" drug inputs. What would this move mean for India, which is one of the largest overseas suppliers of medicines to the US?

What Does Trump's Order Say?

The US President directed each executive department and agency involved in medicine procurement to identify vulnerabilities in supply chains for essential drugs. The order mandates the creation of a list of essential medical products and directs the fast-tracking of regulatory clearances for domestic producers. Federal agencies are to consider a "variety" of actions to increase their procurement of such products and their critical ingredients from domestic sources while protecting the country's service members, veterans and their families from increases in drug prices. They also have to ensure that the measures they implement do not interfere with America's ability to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak.

Why Led to The Move?

The US, like most countries, is dependent on countries like China and India for critical products like medicines. This dependence put the Trump administration in a tight spot during the pandemic, which highlighted the extent of their presence in global supply chains. For instance, when China's Hubei province went into lockdown earlier this year, it strained India's supply of certain critical medicines, including paracetamol, to the world. At that time, India restricted exports of 13 critical key ingredients, ranging from essential antibiotics to vitamins, as well as the medicines made from these. This is because India is heavily dependent on China for these ingredients and wanted to safeguard its own domestic supply until Hubei's lockdown was lifted. When Trump began touting hydroxychloroquine as a 'miracle' in Covid-19 treatment, India was found to be the largest supplier. Trump in April held calls with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to release stocks of this drug to the US and, at one point even threatened retaliatory action if restrictions were not lifted. Like India, the US seems to have realized the need to maintain domestic capacities of essential medicines. "These domestic supply chains must be capable of meeting national security requirements for responding to threats arising from CBRN threats and public health emergencies, including emerging infectious diseases such as COVID-19," stated Trump's order. "It is critical that we reduce our dependence on foreign manufacturers for Essential Medicines, Medical Countermeasures, and Critical Inputs to ensure sufficient and reliable long-term domestic production of these products, to minimize potential shortages, and to mobilize our Nation's Public Health Industrial Base to respond to these threats."

How Important Is the US as A Pharma Market for India?

The US is the largest market for India's pharmaceutical products. It is said that every third pill sold in America is made in India. According to the Pharmaceutical Export Promotion Council of India (PHARMEXCIL) India's pharmaceutical exports to the US are ex-factory valued at around \$6 billion. Unlike China, which is heavily present in the global



pharmaceutical supply chain as a producer of key drug ingredients, India is known as an exporter of finished pharmaceutical products. Its generic drugs are popular in the US due to their low cost, which makes them more affordable.

How Will This Order Impact Indian Drug Makers?

Trump's order does not specify any one country, though industry executives and government officials here claim it will mainly target China. Several experts tracking India's pharmaceuticals industry feel the move could also be posturing by Trump before the presidential election in November. Regardless of the motive, in the short term, the order is not likely to impact Indian pharmaceutical firms. For instance, the order will not apply in cases where procuring domestic essential medicines will bring costs for the agency up over 25%. Nor does it apply in cases where there are no sufficient domestic alternatives. However, some are cautious about possible larger consequences. "This won't be limited to federal procurement. There are other bills being worked on which will mandate CMS (the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services) to buy local. That is a very large segment. This order is just a sense of what is to come," said public health activist Dinesh Thakur, who studies the US and Indian pharma markets and their regulations.

Why @realDonaldTrump and @PMOIndia Are Not Affected as Twitter Starts Labelling Government Handles

- Twitter has just announced that it will start labelling accounts of key government officials and institution, as well as state-funded media. While the micro-blogging platform said it "is providing people with context so they can make informed decisions about what they see and how they engage on Twitter", this model seems to be a related to the impending US elections and the spread of misinformation along with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Which Accounts Will Twitter Be Labelling?

Twitter's blog said the labels will appear on "accounts of key government officials, including foreign ministers, institutional entities, ambassadors, official spokespeople, and key diplomatic leaders", and state-affiliated media entities, their editors-in-chief, and/or their senior staff. The blog said with the officials the focus now was "on senior officials and entities who are the official voice of the state abroad". So, the handles of the White House, @Potus and @Flotus are flagged "US government account" while China's @globaltimesnews and Russia's @GlobalTimesRus are labelled "state affiliated media" with the country specified.

Why Is President Donald Trump's Account Not Labelled?

For now, Twitter says it is "not labelling the personal accounts of heads of state, as these accounts enjoy widespread name recognition, media attention, and public awareness". But it thinks institutional accounts associated with their offices, that "changeover depending on election results", need to be labelled. Twitter's focus is however on "those within the respective administrations underneath the head of state that offer its policy perspective abroad".



Will Indian Twitter Handles Be Labelled Too?

No. To start with, Twitter is limiting its activity to the five countries that are permanent members of the UN Security Council. Twitter says it is limiting the feature to China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States now, "for transparency and practicality". However, it talks of expanding to a wider range of countries in the future. Till then, India's @PMOIndia and @rashtrapatibhvn will go without the labels.

How Does Twitter Define State-Affiliated Media Accounts?

Twitter is making a distinction between state-affiliated and state-funded media. So, a Global Times, where the Chinese state "exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution" will be labelled, and state-financed media organizations "with editorial independence", like UK's BBC and NPR in the US will not be. This is because Twitter thinks state-affiliated media "frequently use their news coverage as a means to advance a political agenda". Interestingly, tweets from these state-affiliated media accounts will no longer be amplified on the platform via "recommendation systems including on the home timeline, notifications, and search".

Gaps in The Casting of India's Foreign Policy (T.P. Sreenivasan - Former Ambassador of India And Governor for India Of The IAEA, Chairman, Academic Council and Director, NSS Academy of Civil Services, And Director General, Kerala International Centre)

- At a time 'when sorrows come', not as 'single spies, but in battalions' with an unprecedented pandemic, Chinese soldiers squatting on India's side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), cartographic aggression by little Nepal, Iran joining a virtual alliance with China, Russia getting close to China, Pakistan shooting across the Line of Control (LoC), a looming financial crisis and other challenges, fundamental questions are being asked about the strategic depth of our foreign policy. Fervent calls are being made to go back to the drawing board and shape new policies in these and other cases. It goes without saying that the government will examine all these and other international developments and apply correctives wherever possible. Since the global situation itself is in a flux, there will be many surprises on the way and our own positions will also influence the shape of the post-COVID-19 world. Many in India have been taken by surprise at these developments because of the numerous fairy tales which surround international issues, a number of them having been created for the feel-good factor. The understanding of every issue is at three different levels. One is the real situation, which is known only to those at the higher levels and the interlocutors in the government. The second is the official version, properly calibrated for the guidance of spokespersons of the government, while the third is a rosier picture for the general public who should feel comfortable that the government that they have elected is doing well. The fairy tales are created by the official and friendly press and commentators and are lapped up by public opinion, with a sense that all is well with the world. The dream world gets disturbed occasionally when the reality pierces through the carefully created layers of positive impressions and the surprise turns into concern and even panic. Fire-fighting follows to reset relations and to bring back a sense of comfort and normalcy. The fundamental issues remain dormant, but a few high-level conversations, some business deals and carefully crafted joint statements take care of



concerns, which disappear as public memory is proverbially short. This is a game that all governments play, not only in India but around the world.

Dealing with China

The most recent example of a relationship clouded by fairy tales is the one with China. With all the investments made by the Prime Minister and our large galaxy of China experts, we had no inkling of the Chinese perfidy as we had romanticized the 'Wuhan Spirit' and the 'Chennai Connect' in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu. The Prime Minister who alone knew what transpired at these informal summits, said nothing, but his body language and enthusiasm lulled us into thinking that these leaders would never fight a war. It came as a complete surprise that the Chinese amassed troops on the LAC and the Prime Minister characterized the Chinese action as expansionist. But strangely, apart from calling for a reset of relations, we have begun to create a legend that China has committed a "Himalayan blunder" by its military adventure on the border. Even before the promised disengagement has taken place, we have concluded that China lost the battle, which it had begun after careful planning and preparations. We have declared victory in a battle that has not ended.

Russian Ties

We were surprised in 1962 that the erstwhile Soviet Union refused to intervene in the India-China conflict on the plea that "one was a brother and the other was a friend". Even with that experience, we had taken the support of Russia for granted this time, obviously because of the new relationship which has been established after the Prime Minister's visits to Sochi and Vladivostok. We now know that the rose-tinted glasses of reliability through which the general public sees Russia are unreal. A President of India had remarked that Russia is an exception to the rule that there are no permanent friends. Russia's quasi-alliance with China is a reality, while our perception of Russia has the veil of a fairy tale. Our close defence relationship, with 60% of our arms supply coming from Russia is explicable, but not sustainable. A ministerial meeting of India, China and Russia a week after the loss of 20 Indian soldiers at the LAC was intriguing to say the least.

UNSC High Table and NSG

The most celebrated fairy tale is the impression created that the UN Security Council will be expanded soon, and that India will be a permanent member. The impression is widespread even in informed circles because of the occasional optimistic reports emanating from New York. We have been campaigning for a reform of the Security Council since 1979 and there has been really no progress on the issue of new permanent members. Many reports have been written, but as of today there is no formula which can enjoy two-thirds majority of the General Assembly and the unanimous support of the permanent members. The vast majority of the members of the UN would want to abolish the veto rather than give it to more countries. To maintain the myth that India is likely to get a place on the high table with veto power is to keep an illusion alive. A former Foreign Secretary has recently clarified that there was no offer of a permanent seat to India during the days of Jawaharlal Nehru, hopefully ending the speculation on that score. Membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is another mirage that the public believes is a reality. India joining the NSG is like Russia joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization because the NSG was set up originally to deny India any nuclear material following India's nuclear tests



in 1974. Every member of the NSG is a signatory to the NPT and the best it could do was to give us an unconditional waiver, which we already have.

The Civil Liability Law

We hear about six American nuclear reactors being set up in Andhra Pradesh every time there is a discussion on bilateral relations. Here again, the presumption is that the hurdle of our Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, placing the responsibility of any damages being on the supplier, will wither away. Many formulae are being suggested, but a senior nuclear scientist admitted a couple of years ago that the United States was using the Liability Law as a smokescreen not to transfer nuclear technology to India. The Clinton White House was of the view that India could use the India-U.S. Agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation for acquiring technology and material from other countries, and the U.S. should refrain from strengthening India's nuclear capability. This position does not seem to have changed. There could be instances of other unsubstantiated expectations among the public because of repeated expressions of optimism which are considered harmless. The exaggerated faith in the value of soft power as an instrument of foreign policy and the theory that there is no point in nursing constituencies such as the Non-Aligned Movement may be some of them. But the danger of disillusionment when hopes are belied is greater than removing the cobwebs of fairy tales that shroud key foreign policy questions.

Isolating China, As Proposition and The Reality (M.K. Narayanan - Former National Security Adviser and A Former Governor of West Bengal)

- The latest round of talks, August 2, between the Military Commanders of India and China, did not produce any breakthrough, and the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh sector thus remains essentially unchanged. All that is evident is that China has indicated a willingness to resile from occupying territory beyond its 1960 Claim line. A return to the status quo ante prior to May this year, is nowhere in sight. Meanwhile, a war of words between India and China has broken out. India's External Affairs Minister has promulgated that "the state of the border and the future of our ties (with China) cannot be separated. That is the reality." China's riposte was to reiterate that their troops "were on its side of the traditional customary boundary line". This was followed, thereafter, by China wading into and criticizing what is essentially India's internal matter, viz., the changes effected to the status of Jammu and Kashmir in August last year.

China-U.S. Ties and Rhetoric

In the meantime, relations between the United States and China continue to deteriorate. Talk of a new realignment of forces taking place, with the U.S. and China leading different camps, is very much in the air. After years of cooperating with one another, the U.S. and China are currently at the stage of confrontation, with both seeking allies to join their camps. The rhetoric has begun to resemble the Cold War era and both sides are even willing to display their military muscle. This places several countries, especially in Asia, in a difficult position as most of them are loathe to take sides – especially with a belligerent China as neighbour. The contrast between the U.S. and China could hardly be greater. While the U.S. may not necessarily be the first choice for many countries of Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, in the case of China it is clearly more feared than loved. **No one in Asia (Pakistan is perhaps an exception) nurses any doubts about China's 'imperialist ambitions', or about Chinese President Xi Jinping's authoritarian world view. Beijing's**



virtual takeover of Hong Kong, paying scant regard to the concept of 'one country two systems', has only confirmed what had long been known about China's intentions under Mr. Xi. Well before this, the region had been a witness to China's rampant land grab in the South China Sea. In the 1970s, China grabbed control over the Paracel Islands from Vietnam. In the 1990s, it occupied Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands, an area of the South China Sea that the Philippines had always considered its territory. In the 21st Century, China has continued with the same tactics of taking control over territories belonging to smaller neighbours; one which attracted international attention was the Scarborough Shoal confrontation in 2012, when Chinese Marine Surveillance Ships came into direct confrontation with the Philippine Navy.

Aggressive and Expansionist

In March-April this year, while the rest of the world was wrestling with the COVID-19 pandemic, China further stepped up its aggressive actions, renaming almost 80 geographical features in the region as an index of Chinese sovereignty. Complaints galore also exist about China's expansionist attitudes beyond the South China Sea; Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and South Korea have all complained about China's menacing postures in their vicinity. China's favourite approach, it would seem, has been unilateralism rather than compromise, when dealing with its smaller neighbours. Implicitly also, it reflects the unwritten code of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road. Notwithstanding all this, China is far from being quarantined. Hardly any country in Asia is willing to openly confront China, and side with the U.S. Many countries, especially those in East Asia, are unwilling to be seen taking sides at this juncture, their explanation for this being that China was always known to be over-protective of the South China Sea, considering it a natural shield against possible hostile intervention by outside forces inimical to it. Neither the presence of U.S. aircraft carriers in the South China Sea, the presence of China's missile sites in recently reclaimed areas, or the wariness that most Association of Southeast Asian Nations display vis-à-vis China, has been enough to make countries in the region openly side with the U.S. and against China. Meanwhile, China is determined to press home its advantage, irrespective of international law or regional concerns.

In A Strong Grip

What is specially disconcerting is that despite a series of diktats from Washington to restrict economic and other relations with China, the United Kingdom's decision to end reliance on Chinese imports and call off its Huawei 5G project, and growing anti-China sentiments heard across Europe – all of which make for good copy – China remains unfazed. China seems confident that its stranglehold on the global economy ensures that it does not face any real challenge. It would be wise for India to recognise this. It is equally necessary to realize how fickle some of these countries can be when it comes to economic issues. Australia is a prime example. The latter is a member of the Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India), that is widely seen as an anti-China coalition. Nevertheless, at a recent meeting in Washington between U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, the U.S. Secretary of Defence Mark Esper, the Australian Foreign Minister and the Australian Defence Minister, Australia made it clear that China is important for Australia, that it would not do anything contrary to its interests, and a strong economic engagement was an essential link in the Australia-China relationship. Likewise, the U.K.'s Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Dominic Raab, recently stated in its Parliament, that



the U.K. wants a positive relationship with China, would work with China, and that there was enormous scope for positive constructive engagement. It is thus more than evident that few nations across the world are willing to risk China's ire because of strong economic ties that have been forged over the years. Economic ties are proving way stronger than military and strategic ones. Even in Asia, while a majority of ASEAN countries have grave concerns about China's predatory tactics, with the ASEAN having become one of China's biggest trading partners, it adopts a default position. viz., "not to take sides".

India And the Neighbourhood

At this time, when the dice should actually have been loaded against China, it is India that is finding many of its traditional friends being less than helpful. While India's relations with Pakistan had nowhere to go but downhill, India's present stand-off with China has provided Pakistan with yet another opportunity to fish in troubled waters, including the production of a "fake map" of Pakistan, which includes parts of Indian territory such as Siachen, Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat. India's relations with Nepal, meanwhile, have hit a road block. Relations have soured in recent months, and Nepal has gone to the extent of publishing new maps which show the 'Kalapani area' as a part of Nepal. In Sri Lanka, the return of the Rajapaksas to power after the recent elections does not augur too well for India-Sri Lanka relations. It is, however, the strain in India-Bangladesh relations (notwithstanding the warm relationship that exists between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Indian leaders), that is a real cause for concern, since it can provide a beachhead against Chinese activities in the region.

Beijing Moves Ahead

China is, meanwhile, busy 'stirring the pot' elsewhere in South Asia. In July, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi organized a virtual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Nepal, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Here, he proposed taking forward an economic corridor plan with Nepal, styled as the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, and expanding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, touting benefits of new economic corridors on the lines of the CPEC. China has also made headway in Iran to an extent, again at India's expense. Iran and China are reported to be currently pursuing an economic and security partnership that would involve massive Chinese investments in energy and other sectors in Iran, in exchange for China receiving regular supplies of Iranian oil for the next 25 years. China has also dexterously positioned itself to circumvent India's monopoly over the Chabahar Port, by providing a munificent aid package for the Chabahar-Afghanistan Rail link, thereby undercutting India's offer of aid and assistance for the rail project. Geo-balancing is not happening to China's disadvantage. This lesson must be well understood, when countries like India plan their future strategy.

Why Vivo's Withdrawal as This Year's IPL Title Sponsor Matters

- Chinese smartphone maker Vivo has announced its withdrawal as the 2020 Indian Premier League (IPL) title sponsor. Vivo had acquired the IPL title sponsorship in 2018 for Rs 2,199 crore in a five-year deal. Accordingly, the company gives the Indian cricket board Rs 439.8 crore per year as sponsorship commitment. Vivo had in fact, come to the IPL fold in 2016 itself – as a short-term sponsor after Pepsi pulled out of its five-year deal over a betting and spot-fixing scandal. Vivo's first two-year sponsorship was worth Rs 200 crore – before the company signed a fresh deal after the 2018 edition of the T20 league, outbidding its nearest rival, Oppo, which had bid Rs 1,432 crore. How will Vivo's departure hurt the BCCI

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



as well as the franchises? How do expenditures, income and profit work for the franchises in a normal season? In what other ways can Covid and an IPL away home affect the revenue streams of franchises?

Why are Confucius Institutes Under the Scanner?

- On July 29, India's Ministry of Education (previously the Ministry of Human Resource Development) sent a letter to several institutions seeking information about the activities of their Confucius Institutes (CIs) and Chinese language training centres. This was said to be part of a review of work being done by higher education institutions in partnership with foreign entities.

What Does the CI Review Mean for India-China Relations?

On August 6, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) suggested the government was merely following guidelines established in 2009 requiring Indian institutions entering into such agreements "supported/sponsored by an autonomous foreign Organisation, including any Confucius Centre" to seek the MEA's approval. In a statement on August 4, the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi pointed out that CIs and CCs had already been in India for more than 10 years and called on India "to avoid politicizing normal cooperation". Even prior to the June 15 India-China border clash, Indian authorities had viewed the CI arrangement somewhat warily and as treading a fine line with regard to its rules for how foreign educational institutions can operate in India, but the government has at the same time worked with Hanban in other areas, for instance, signing an agreement in 2012 to train 300 Indian teachers in Mandarin with a view towards encouraging the study of Mandarin in Central Board of Secondary Education schools. **Along with the new move to review CIs, Mandarin has been dropped from the list of foreign languages that can be taught in schools in the new National Education Policy. If the messaging from Delhi is that it cannot be business as usual with China after the border clash, less clear are the long-term objectives.** De-emphasizing learning Mandarin, experts say, is neither likely to impact China's stance on the border, nor help India in developing the expertise and resources it needs in dealing with China.

India Rejects China's UNSC Move on Kashmir

- A day after China prompted the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to discuss the Kashmir issue in a closed-door meeting, India "firmly" rejected the Chinese initiative and reiterated that Kashmir is a domestic issue. Veteran diplomats demanded that South Block launch a campaign to remove Kashmir from the agenda of the council. The Chinese move came on the first anniversary of the dilution of Article 370, which led to the creation of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and ended the special status for the region. China initiated a similar move on August 16 last year when it revived "The India-Pakistan Question" at the UNSC. **The issue had not been taken up at the council since it last figured in the world body before the India-Pakistan war of 1971.** The meeting had failed to generate a common statement or a consensus on the matter. China attempted a similar move in January this year as well, but it did not attract sufficient support from the UNSC members. The frequency of such attempts by China has prompted diplomats to highlight the unequal nature of the UN organ, where the agenda is set by the permanent members (P5) of the UNSC.



'Pakistani Bid'

Following Wednesday's development at the UNSC, India's Permanent Representative at the U.N., T.S. Tirumurti, described the move as an "attempt by Pakistan" that failed. "In today's meeting of U.N. Security Council, which was closed, informal, not recorded and without any outcome, almost all countries underlined that Jammu and Kashmir was bilateral issue and did not deserve the time and attention of the council," he said.

Pakistan Map and Border Disputes

- On August 4, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a new political map of Pakistan. With this, Pakistan became the third country to launch a new political map after India and Nepal did the same in November 2019 and May 2020, respectively. India had reiterated its territorial claims in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh with the new map; this triggered a reaction from Nepal which contested Indian claims in the Kalapani region of Pithoragarh district. The territorial claims of Pakistan are, however, of a far greater extent and challenge many of the past understandings and treaties.

What Are the Features of The New Map?

The new political map of Pakistan has claimed the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir stretching all the way to the edge of Ladakh. The map also claims **Junagarh** and **Manavadar**, a former princely State and territory, respectively, that are part of present-day Gujarat. It leaves out a claim line at the eastern end of J&K indicating Pakistan's willingness to make China a third party in the Kashmir issue. This clearly runs counter to the Shimla Agreement which treated Kashmir as a bilateral matter. At the launch of the map, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said the border in that area will be fixed after resolving the Kashmir issue. Pakistan also claimed the entire territory and water bodies that fall in the **Sir Creek region** in the westernmost part of India.

How Different Is It from Previous Ones?

A similar map has been part of school textbooks of Pakistan for many years which highlights the territorial aspiration of Pakistan over the northern part of the subcontinent. The document also maintains bits of reality on the ground as it shows the Line of Control in Kashmir in a red-dotted line.

What Will Be the Impact of This Cartographical Warfare?

The map is likely to lead to changes in Pakistan's position on territorial disputes with India. By demanding the entire Jammu and Kashmir region, Mr. Khan is changing the main features of Pakistan's Kashmir discourse as it includes the Jammu region prominently. The inclusion of Junagarh and Manavadar opens fundamental issues of territorial sovereignty of India. **Manavadar, a princely territory, joined India on February 15, 1948 and Indian troops marched into Junagarh in September that year incorporating it into Indian territory. By normalizing Islamabad's claims over these former princely territories, Pakistan is most likely to assert its rights over the former princely State of Hyderabad as well. The map may be used to provide legal cover for some of Islamabad's territorial ambitions, especially in Kashmir and Sir Creek.**



What Does Pakistan Plan to Gain by This Exercise?

Sir Creek is a collection of water bodies that extend from the Arabian Sea deep inside the territory of Kutch and is rich in biodiversity and mangrove forests. **India's position on Sir Creek is based on the Kutch arbitration case of 1966-69.** The new map can be used to reassert Pakistan's claims regarding the Rann which **it had lost in the arbitration conducted in Geneva.** India's position regarding Sir Creek is based on the fact that the arbitration had granted the entire Rann and its marshy areas to India while leaving the solid land across the Rann to Pakistan. By demanding the demarcation to shift towards the eastern bank, Pakistan appears to be going back also on the spirit of the Rann of Kutch arbitration where the overwhelming evidence of maps supported India's claims over the Rann and its marshlands.

Are There Any Claims on Its Western Borders?

The map is silent about territorial claims in the west and northwest of Pakistan. It indicates Islamabad's acceptance of the Durand Line as the border with Afghanistan. The reality on the ground however shows problems that continue to haunt Pakistan on that front as well where law and order has been difficult to maintain because of free movement of armed fighters. A deadly clash between Afghan civilians and Pakistani troops led to the loss of at least 20 Afghan lives during the last Eid ul Azha holidays when Afghans wanted to cross to the other side of the traditional Pakhtoon territory which is part of Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa province. The resultant situation has placed Afghan and Pakistani troops in a confrontational position.

Will the Map Trigger A Diplomatic Battle?

While launching the map, Mr. Khan described it as a document that depicts the aspiration of the people of Pakistan. However, by describing it as the new political map of Pakistan that will be showcased to the world, Mr. Khan has indicated that the map will eventually trigger diplomatic battles with India as it negates previous understandings. In Delhi, the Ministry of External Affairs said Pakistan's new political map is an exercise in "political absurdity".

When Junagadh Voted to Join India, And Pakistan Got Just 91 Votes

→ Junagadh's Accession to India

Junagadh was in the Kathiawar region, where most other princely states had already acceded to India. **The ruler of Junagadh was Nawab Mahabatkhan Rasulkhanji,** who V P Menon, Secretary in the Ministry of States under Patel, described in his book 'The Story of Integration of the Indian States (1956)' as "an eccentric of rare vintage". The state was not contiguous with Pakistan. **Eighty per cent of the population was Hindu. Somnath, where the famous Shiva temple was ransacked by Mahmud Ghazni, is located in Junagadh, near the port of Veraval.** In May 1947, the Dewan-ship of the state changed hands through palace intrigue to a Muslim Leaguer from Karachi, Shah Nawaz Bhutto (his son Zulfikar Ali Bhutto would become the Prime Minister of Pakistan). Under his influence, the Nawab decided to accede to Pakistan on August 15, though he had earlier given the impression that the future of his Kathiawari state lay in joining India. "Junagadh was an economic and administrative unit embedded in and deriving its sustenance from Kathiawar. Its detachment would turn it into a hothouse plant with no powers of survival. What worried me most were the immediate potentialities for turmoil when stability was the crying need



of the hour. The Nawab's action would have undesirable effects on law and order in Kathiawar as a whole. It would extend the communal trouble to areas where at present there was peace. There was also the fear that it would encourage the intractable elements in Hyderabad," Menon wrote. After failing over a month to get a response from Pakistan to an offer by Nehru "to accept and abide by the verdict of the people of Junagadh in respect of the accession of the State to either of the Dominions", starting from the last week of September to the end of October, India put in place a series of measures that held the threat of military action against Junagadh, mainly by deploying troops around the state, in an effective blockade. **The Nawab of Junagadh fled to Karachi by air, with his family, his favourite dogs and valuables. According to Menon, he took all the cash balance of the state and all the shares and securities in the Treasury. On October 27, Bhutto wrote to Jinnah about the precarious situation in Junagadh – no money, no food, and even the Muslims of Kathiawar were not interested in the promise that Junagadh's accession to Pakistan had initially held: "...The situation has therefore so worsened that responsible Muslims and others have come to press me to seek a solution of the impasse. I do not wish to say much more. ... The question is delicate but I feel it must be settled honourably to the satisfaction of all. It is impossible for me to court any further bloodshed, hardship and persecution of loyal people." In September, a parallel government of Junagadh called Arzi Hukumat had been formed in Mumbai, and when the Nawab fled, they began to take over parts of Junagadh, and some of them also indulged in looting and arson. On November 7, Bhutto held talks with Samaldas Gandhi, head of the Arzi Hukumat, asking him to take over the administration and restore law and order. But a day later, on the urging of Muslim residents, he asked the government of India to directly take over the administration of Junagadh through the regional commissioner at Rajkot. The handover to M N Buch, Rajkot Commissioner, took place on November 9. Pakistan characterized the takeover as a "direct act of hostility", and asked India to relinquish charge to the rightful ruler and withdraw its troops. India replied it had stepped in to restore law and order and prevent a complete breakdown of the administration only at the request of the Dewan of Junagadh who was acting on behalf of the Nawab, who was himself in Karachi. India had indicated that it would want to formalise the arrangement through a plebiscite. This was held on February 20, 1948. Of 2,01,457 registered voters, 1,90,870 cast their votes. Of this number only 91 cast their votes in favour of accession to Pakistan. A referendum was also held in five neighbouring territories. Out of 31,434 votes cast in these areas, only 39 were for accession to Pakistan. Sardar Patel visited Junagadh on November 13, 1947 four days after Bhutto relinquished charge to India to a "rousing reception" at Bahauddin College, where he publicly disclosed what the calculations around Junagadh were, by both sides. Rajmohan Gandhi wrote in his biography of Patel: "After complimenting Bhutto and Jones for their realism and the Indian forces for their restraint, he touched on Kashmir and Hyderabad: If Hyderabad does not see the writing on the wall, it goes the way Junagadh has gone. Pakistan attempted to set off Kashmir against Junagadh. When we raised the question of settlement in a democratic way, they (Pakistan) at once told us that they would consider it if we applied that policy to Kashmir. Our reply was that we would agree to Kashmir if they agreed to Hyderabad."**

A Pakistan Lawyer for Kulbhushan Jadhav And Other Developments

- ➔ More than four years after he was arrested by Pakistan in March 2016 and subsequently sentenced to death a year later, Kulbhushan Jadhav might get legal help – if a Pakistan court's order on Monday (August 3) is implemented. Jadhav, a retired officer of the Indian Navy, was arrested allegedly on March 3, 2016, but India was informed only on March 25,

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



2016, when the Pakistan Foreign Secretary raised the matter with the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad. New Delhi then moved the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague in the Netherlands in May 2017 against the “farical trial” of Jadhav by a military court in Pakistan. **In an order passed in April 2017, the military court had sentenced the 48-year-old Jadhav to death on charges of espionage and terrorism. In July last year, the ICJ, in its verdict, had directed Pakistan to allow consular access to Jadhav, and to effectively review the death sentence. The court had observed that Pakistan had breached international law by not granting him consular access.**

So, What Happened on Monday (August 3) Regarding Kulbhusan Jadhav?

The Islamabad High Court on Monday (August 3) said India should be given “another chance” to appoint a lawyer to defend him. Pakistan’s Attorney General Khalid Javed Khan said the court asked the Pakistan government to allow Indian authorities to appoint a lawyer who is licensed to practice in Pakistan.

And What Exactly Did the Order of The Court Say?

“The government of Pakistan shall once again inform Jadhav regarding his rights... he shall be specifically informed of his right to avail the statutory remedy... and to authorize the Government of India to arrange legal representation on his behalf,” the court said in its written order. “Pakistan government shall communicate this order to the Government of India, the latter shall be at liberty to make appropriate arrangements on behalf of Jadhav,” it said.

OK, So Can Indian Lawyers Assist a Pakistani Lawyer?

No such option has been given so far.

But Why Didn't India Appoint A Lawyer Earlier?

The Indian High Commission in Islamabad had indeed, hired a lawyer earlier. But things did not work out as planned.

And Why Did That Happen?

The lawyer needed a set of documents to file a review petition at the Islamabad High Court. The first and foremost was the crucial document, “a power of attorney” signed by Jadhav himself. And then there were documents such as FIRs, the charge sheet, and the orders and judgments of the Pakistani court, including a Field general court martial.

What Was the Problem with Getting A Power of Attorney from Jadhav?

Pakistan created problems. When Indian diplomats went to meet Jadhav on July 16, they were not given unimpeded and unhindered consular access. These diplomats were not allowed to hand over documents to him. They were also not allowed to obtain a power of attorney from Jadhav. The Ministry of External Affairs said that Pakistani officials with an “intimidating demeanour” were present in close proximity of Jadhav and the Indian diplomats, despite protests from the Indian side. A camera was visible and that indicated that the conversation with Jadhav was being recorded. Jadhav himself was visibly under stress and indicated that clearly to the diplomats, the MEA said. The arrangements did not permit a “free conversation” between them. The diplomats could not engage Jadhav on



his legal rights and were prevented from obtaining his “written consent for arranging his legal representation” – the power of attorney.

So, What Happened Then?

In the absence of “unimpeded” consular access to Jadhav, and to the relevant documents, India tried to file a petition on July 18. However, the Pakistani lawyer informed the Indian High Commission that a review petition could not be filed in the absence of a power of attorney and supporting documents related to Jadhav’s case. Which brings us back to square one. Yes, it does.

Straying into Troubled Waters (Jatin Desai Is with The Pakistan-India People’s Forum for Peace and Democracy)

- Along the coastal areas of Porbandar, Mangrol, Veraval in Gujarat and the Union Territory of Diu on India’s western coast are hundreds of families whose lives have been torn asunder, the men of their households missing with only stray hopes of their return, women and children struggling to make ends meet and see another sunrise. The men are currently in jail in Pakistan, their families barely aware of their health and welfare. Their only ‘crime’ was that they were doing their work in the waters between India and Pakistan. **These are fishermen who inadvertently crossed the invisible line in the water between the countries. As fishermen do not get ample fish on the Gujarat side, they have no option but to go farther and farther out into the sea. As they fish in mid-sea, they end up in waters controlled by Pakistan and are arrested for inadvertently entering into that country.** India and Pakistan exchanged lists of prisoners on July 1 as per which 270 Indian fishermen and 54 civilian prisoners are in Pakistan’s prisons. India has 97 Pakistani fishermen and 265 civilian prisoners in its jails. **In more friendly or less antagonistic circumstances, they would have been released after a formal procedure to check that they were really fishermen and not spies, but, in these times of suspicion, the value of their lives lies at the altar of bilateral relations.** Consequently, their families suffer. On average, these men would have spent one-and-a-half years in prisons. Uncertainty hangs over them like the proverbial Damocles’s sword, given that in their prison cells, they have little knowledge of when they will be released and repatriated.

The 2008 Proposal

This is not a new problem; it has dragged on for years together, without a resolution in sight. To address this issue, in 2008, India and Pakistan had formed a judicial committee consisting of four retired judges from each country. The committee used to visit prisons of the other country specifically to meet the prisoners, examine consular access, status of their cases, delay in release and repatriation, their health condition, and so on. It unanimously suggested release and repatriation of fishermen and a few women prisoners. The governments of both countries praised their work but did not implement the recommendations. The last meeting was held in October 2013. Five years later, there was a move to revive the panel. India nominated its four members but Pakistan did not. It is yet to take a step in that direction. Islamabad must do so urgently and call a meeting, given that the last meeting was held in India.



Returning Their Boats

Further, when fishermen are arrested, their boats are also confiscated. Their release means little till they get back possession of their boats from the other country. Both the countries should release those boats which can sail with some repair work. It is also time that the two countries now consider adopting a 'no-arrest policy' in the case of fishermen. In the coastal villages of both the countries, when men are imprisoned in the other country, women bear the brunt of the load, while somehow holding their families together. The pain is the same on both sides of the border. There are many examples across villages where the children of the arrested fishermen have lost their childhoods. As the COVID-19 pandemic wreaks havoc in both countries, there are growing concerns for the health of the arrested fishermen among their families. There is hardly any communication between the two except for some stray letters which are delayed. The families have no definite way to know that their loved ones are safe from the virus. For the arrested fishermen, it is an issue of survival. For India and Pakistan celebrating their Independence Days this month, it should become a humanitarian issue and an appropriate occasion to release and repatriate fishermen. Let the fishermen too have their freedoms back.

Nation

Thirty Years On: Is It Game Over for Mandal Politics in India?

- Thirty years ago, the then prime minister, V P Singh implemented the Mandal Commission report, initiating a "silent revolution," according to Christophe Jaffrelot, senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris. "It triggered a socio-political process that resulted in some social emancipation and the rise to political power of plebeians at the expense of the upper and dominant castes," he writes in his latest column in The Indian Express. **The Mandal moment was primarily political, even if what was at stake was the extension of positive discrimination through a 27 per cent quota for the OBCs in the civil service. The upper castes instantly mobilised to prevent a reform that would curb their public sector job opportunities, which was valuable prior to the economic liberalisation of 1991. Their resistance aroused indignation among the lower castes and resulted in a consolidation of OBC groups. Many OBCs stopped voting for upper-caste notables and preferred to elect representatives from their own social milieu to Parliament. In the Hindi belt, the percentage of OBC MPs nearly doubled from 11 per cent in 1984 to more than 20 per cent in the 1990s, whereas the proportion of upper-caste MPs dropped from 47 per cent in 1984 to below 40 in the 1990s. By 2004, upper-caste presence in the Lok Sabha had fallen to 33 per cent, while 25 per cent of MPs were OBCs. So, what's left of the "Mandal moment", politically and socially, now? "This 'silent revolution' brought on a counter-revolution, a revenge of the elite whose vanguard has been the BJP," says Jaffrelot. The BJP's Hindu nationalism had the advantage of transcending caste identities in the name of Hindu unity and its fight against the threat from Islam. This backlash culminated in 2014, when the Hindutva version of national-populism gained traction with some OBCs because of the alchemy achieved by Narendra Modi – for the first time, the leader of the BJP was a pure product of the RSS who belonged to an OBC caste. So, is it "game over" for Mandal politics? "Not necessarily," says Jaffrelot, "given the fact that if quotas have been granted to OBCs they are not fulfilled". In 2015, OBCs represented only 12 per cent of Class A employees in the**



central government services, 12.5 per cent of Class B and 19 per cent of Class C workers – which meant 18 per cent of the total workforce, almost 10 percentage points less than what they had been promised in 1990. “It is a deficit OBCs may consider worth fighting for,” he concludes.

The Contempt Case

- In the criticism against the Supreme Court’s ruling that held advocate Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt of court, his counsel has invoked the ‘**Mulgaonkar principles**’, urging the court to show restraint.

What Are the Mulgaonkar Principles?

S *Mulgaonkar v Unknown* (1978) is a case that led to a landmark ruling on the subject of contempt. By a 2:1 majority, the court held *Mulgaonkar*, then editor of *The Indian Express*, not guilty of contempt although the same Bench had initiated the proceedings. Justices P Kailasam and Krishna Iyer formed the majority going against then Chief Justice of India M H Beg. Justice Iyer’s counsel of caution in exercising the contempt jurisdiction came to be called the *Mulgaonkar principles*.

What Was the Case About?

An article by A G Noorani in the newspaper about certain judicial decisions during the Emergency period, especially the Habeas Corpus case, had displeased then CJI Beg. The Habeas Corpus case, often referred to as the “Supreme Court’s darkest hour” upheld the detention law, citing that even the right to life can be suspended during an emergency. Justices A N Ray, Beg, Y V Chandrachud and P N Bhagwati formed the majority while Justice H R Khanna was the sole dissenter. Initially, the SC Registrar wrote to the editor seeking a retraction and an apology, which did not happen. “Instead of publishing any correction of the mis-statement about the conduct of Judges of this Court, the Editor offered to publish the whole material in his possession, as though there was an issue to be tried between the Editor of the newspaper and this Court and the readers were there to try it and decide it,” Justice Beg wrote in the judgment explaining why contempt proceedings were initiated.

What Did Iyer’s Ruling Say?

Justice Iyer said he agreed to initiating contempt proceedings as CJI Beg was anguished but did not agree with pursuing it. A similar case involving *The Times of India* was decided just days earlier, in which Justices Kailasam and N Untwalia had disagreed with CJI Beg forming the majority opinion. Underlining his reasons for not exercising the court’s power to punish for contempt, Justice Iyer said the first rule in the branch of power is a “wise economy of use by the Court of this branch of its jurisdiction”. “The Court will act with seriousness and severity where justice is jeopardized by a gross and/or unfounded attack on the judges, where the attack is calculated to obstruct or destroy the judicial process. The court is willing to ignore, by a majestic liberalism, trifling and venial offenses-the dogs may bark, the caravan will pass. The court will not be prompted to act as a result of an easy irritability,” he wrote. He argued in favour of harmonising “the constitutional values of free criticism, the fourth estate included, and the need for a fearless curial process and its presiding functionary, the judge”. While CJI Beg’s opinion was that *Mulgaonkar*’s response to the Registrar was as if the case was between the newspaper and people, and not



between the newspaper and the court, Justice Iyer said that the people will have the last word. "Justice is not hubris; power is not petulance and prudence are not pusillanimity, especially when judges are themselves prosecutors and mercy is a mark of strength, not whimper of weakness. Christ and Gandhi shall not be lost on the judges at a critical time when courts are on trial and the people ('We, the People of India') pronounce the final verdict on all national institutions," he wrote.

- Lawyer and social activist Prashant Bhushan's conviction with god speed for contempt of court has revived the debate on the relevance of contempt law in a modern liberal democracy. The Supreme Court of India has said that his tweets, two of them, have undermined the dignity and the authority of the most powerful court and have the effect of destabilizing the very foundation of Indian democracy. This controversial judgment may be technically and legally correct but has it enhanced the stature of the Court? Is it right to punish critics of the judiciary in the name of the people? Should civil contempt be given more importance? And what reforms should be introduced in criminal contempt?

The Basis Is Opinion

The primary justification of contempt power has been people's opinions. **In the judgment, the word 'people' occurs 27 times. Consider this.** On June 27, 2017, there were huge protests against mob lynching under the campaign, 'Not in my name' in response to filmmaker Saba Diwan's social media call. Today, there are people who are opposed to invoking people's name to justify contempt law. The judgment tells us repeatedly that the object of contempt proceedings is not to afford protection to judges personally from the imputations. Instead, it is to protect people at large and to uphold the rule of law as distrust in the popular mind does impair the confidence of people in courts as such confidence is of huge importance for the protection of the rights and liberties of people. In paragraph 48 of the judgment, the three-judge Bench explicitly observes that 'when the court exercises this power, it does not do so to vindicate the dignity and honour of the individual judge who is personally attacked or scandalised but to uphold the majesty of the law and of the administration of justice.' The Bench goes on to say that 'the foundation of the judiciary is the trust and the confidence of the people'.

Gaps in The System

Strangely, in paragraph 71, the Bench has proclaimed itself to be the 'central pillar' of democracy but has rightly said that the 'trust, faith and confidence of the citizens of the country in the judicial system is sine qua non for the existence of rule of law'. This confidence is indeed strengthened not by the resort to contempt powers but by the Court's orders and judgments. Res ipsa loquitur is the old maxim, i.e. the thing speaks for itself. People have observed with an element of frustration not only the Court's reluctance in promptly hearing **habeas corpus petitions, the CAA and 370 petitions**, but also the **Court's initial observations on the plight of millions of poor migrant workers and stay of payment of wages order**. In an election year, **the Court did not consider it urgent enough to examine the validity of controversial electoral bonds but had time for an open court hearing in a review in 2019 of Sabarimala. Though no error in the judgment was pointed out, the review was still accepted.** The innovative '**sealed cover**' jurisprudence and the **Court's over-indulgence in Assam's National Register of Citizens** and then not saying a thing on its completion raised many an eyebrow. There were even four sitting judges of the top court who, on January 12, 2018, held an **unprecedented press conference** on a working day to 'discharge their debt to nation' as democracy, in their view, was under threat with the



'credibility of [the] court at stake'. This is what worries many independent observers of our judiciary that the courts, of late, have been behaving more like the executive courts of erstwhile socialist countries. The only major assertion of judicial independence in the recent past (other than the quashing of President's Rule in Arunachal Pradesh) was the National Judicial Appointments Commission judgment (2015) where the Court struck down the constitutional amendment and the NJAC Act, 2014. This writer does believe that the independence of the judiciary is indeed the right of people and not of judges. But then the fact remains that the top court in fact demonstrated its real mettle in basically asserting the collegium's power to select judges. Then why has the Court not shown similar resolve in upholding people's liberties? The High Courts in the meanwhile, just like in the 1975 Emergency, are widely applauded for passing some good orders though some of these orders eventually got stayed by the Supreme Court. Indian judges make excessive use of contempt powers. As in the Indian Judiciary Report (2016-17) published by the Supreme Court, High Courts had 96,310 civil contempt cases, i.e. willful disobedience of court judgments and orders on June 30, 2017. Thus, civil contempt is far more serious generally committed by the government than so-called 'Scandalising of court' by mere statement. Even the number of criminal contempt cases is also quite impressive with 586 cases. In **A.K. Gopalan (1950)**, the majority took the positivistic view of Article 21 and expressed their helplessness as preventive detention law satisfied the requirement of 'procedure established by law'. In **ADM Jabalpur (1976)**, a majority, like in the Prashant Bhushan case, took the highly legalistic view and held that since Article 21 is under suspension due to Emergency, the writ of habeas corpus cannot be claimed. Subsequent decades proved that in both the cases, majority decisions did disservice to the Court's reputation and it were dissenting judges such as **Justice Fazl Ali and Justice H.R. Khanna** who had really enhanced people's faith in the judiciary. **The Court itself overruled these two judgments in Maneka Gandhi (1978) and K.S. Puttaswamy (2018)**. In all contempt judgments, the Court has been using its powers in the name of the people and Justice Arun Mishra's Bench merely relied on them. **It cited the Brahma Prakash Sharma (1953) judgment, wherein the Supreme Court had justified contempt powers by observing that 'it is intended to be a protection to the public whose interests would be very much affected if by the act or conduct of any party, the authority of the court is lowered and the sense of confidence which people have in the administration of justice by it is weakened', and that contempt powers are to be invoked to restore this confidence.** The top court had further elaborated that 'such conduct is punished as contempt for this reason that it tends to create distrust in the popular mind and impair the confidence of the people in the courts which are of prime importance to the litigants in the protection of their rights and liberties'. Similarly, in HiraLal Dixit (1955), the top court again referred to the 'confidence of the people in the integrity of the judges. **The Bench also quoted Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer judgment in S. Mulgaonkar (1978) but preferred to overlook the learned judge's real message.** Justice Krishna Iyer had observed that the normative guideline for judges to observe in contempt jurisdiction is not to be hypersensitive even where distortions and criticisms overstep the limits, but to 'deflate vulgar denunciation by dignified bearing, condescending indifference and repudiation by judicial rectitude'. The Justice Arun Mishra-led Bench itself admitted that critics are the instruments of reform, but not those actuated by malice; instead by those inspired by public weal. Is Mr. Bhushan's long career as a public interest litigation lawyer not the testimony of 'public weal' and an absence of 'malice'? Is it right to determine 'good faith' on the basis of mere extent of publication? In a country of 1,312.2 million people (estimated in 2019), **Twitter users constitute an insignificant minority of an estimated number of over 34 million (2019), and Mr. Bhushan**



just has 1.6 million followers. In fact, tweets are not taken seriously by the people. One hopes the Court will consider these in determining the sentence.

For a Liberalism

Just like the Supreme Court's judgment on sedition in Kedar Nath Singh (1962), a mere scurrilous attack against the courts/judges should not be punished if it does not lead to an actual obstruction of the judicial process. In Shiv Shankar (1988) and Rachapudi Subba Rao (2004), the Supreme Court itself had held that criticism of the court that does not impair and hamper the administration of justice cannot be punished as contempt. Ideally, the Bench should have given little more weightage to Justice Krishna Iyer's observation that 'the court is willing to ignore, by a majestic liberalism, trifling and venial offences – the dog may bark, the caravan will pass.'

- **Section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971** defines criminal contempt as the publication of any matter or the doing of any other act which scandalises or lowers the authority of any court; or prejudices or interferes with the due course of any judicial proceeding; or obstructs the administration of justice.
- There is a thin line separating criticism and contempt. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right guaranteed to every Indian citizen under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, albeit subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2). In C.K. Daphtary v. O.P. Gupta (1971), the Supreme Court held that the existing law of criminal contempt is one such reasonable restriction. That does not mean that one cannot express one's ire against the judiciary for fear of contempt.
- The Supreme Court has held that if a comment is made against the functioning of a judge, it would have to be seen whether the comment is fair or malicious. If the comment is made against the judge as an individual, the Court would consider whether the comment seeks to interfere with the judge's administration or is simply in the nature of libel or defamation. The Court would have to determine whether the statement is fair, bona fide, defamatory or contemptuous. A statement would not constitute criminal contempt if it is only against the judge in his or her individual capacity and not in discharge of his or her judicial function. Criminal contempt does not seek to afford protection to judges from statements which they may be exposed to as individuals. Such statements would only leave the individual liable for defamation. Statements which affect the administration of justice or functioning of courts amount to criminal contempt since public perception of the judiciary plays a vital role in the rule of law. An attack on a judge in his or her official capacity denigrates the judiciary as a whole and the law of criminal contempt would come down upon such a person unless it is a fair critique of a judgment.

Various Examples

The same Justice Beg remarked post-retirement that Justice H.R. Khanna's famous dissent in the ADM Jabalpur case (1976) made no contribution to law but only to his popularity. The Allahabad High Court citing Brahma Prakash Sharma (1953) did not find Justice Beg guilty of contempt. Former Law Minister of India, P. Shiv Shankar, referring to landmark judgments of the Supreme Court, said once: "Mahadhipatis like Keshavananda and Zamindars like Golaknath evoked a sympathetic chord nowhere in the whole country except the Supreme Court of India. And the bank magnates... got higher compensation by the intervention of the Supreme Court in Cooper's case." He also said: "Antisocial elements i.e. FERA violators, bride burners and a whole horde of reactionaries have found their heaven in the Supreme Court." Speaking for the Supreme Court in 1988, Justice



Sabyasachi Mukherjee found that these statements did not impair the administration of justice. He only opined that the language could have been milder given the Minister's own legal background. He also said: "If antisocial elements and criminals have benefited by decisions of the Supreme Court, the fault rests with the laws and the loopholes in the legislation. The Courts are not deterred by such criticisms." Truth is also a defence in matters of criminal contempt if it is bona fide and made in public interest, as held by the Supreme Court in *Indirect Tax Practitioners' Association v. R.K. Jain* (2010). However, all these precedents did not come to the aid of activist **Arundhati Roy** when the Supreme Court found her guilty of contempt. A petition was filed against Ms. Roy, which was dismissed by the apex court. However, it was Ms. Roy's reply to the petition which was held to be in contempt. In that, **Ms. Roy had admonished the Supreme Court for acting with undue haste in a frivolous petition and attributed it to her strong critique of the apex court's decision in the Sardar Sarovar Dam case.** The Supreme Court held that a statement that the Court willingly issued notice on an unsubstantiated petition affected the reputation and credibility of the Court before the public and therefore found Ms. Roy guilty of contempt. The above cases would show that whether a comment would constitute criminal contempt or not depends entirely on the facts and circumstances of each case. In conclusion, tweets or remarks by conscientious citizens certainly do not affect the dignity of the Indian judiciary, to quote Lord Denning "that must rest on surer foundations".

→ How Did the Concept of Contempt Come into Being?

The concept of contempt of court is several centuries old. In England, it is a common law principle that seeks to protect the judicial power of the king, initially exercised by himself, and later by a panel of judges who acted in his name. Violation of the judges' orders was considered an affront to the king himself. Over time, any kind of disobedience to judges, or obstruction of the implementation of their directives, or comments and actions that showed disrespect towards them came to be punishable.

What Is the Statutory Basis for Contempt of Court?

There were pre-Independence laws of contempt in India. Besides the early High Courts, the courts of some princely states also had such laws. When the Constitution was adopted, contempt of court was made one of the restrictions on freedom of speech and expression. Separately, **Article 129 of the Constitution conferred on the Supreme Court the power to punish contempt of itself. Article 215 conferred a corresponding power on the High Courts.** The **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**, gives statutory backing to the idea.

What Are the Kinds of Contempt of Court?

The law codifying contempt classifies it as civil and criminal. Civil contempt is fairly simple. It is committed when someone willfully disobeys a court order, or willfully breaches an undertaking given to court. Criminal contempt is more complex. It consists of three forms: (a) words, written or spoken, signs and actions that "scandalise" or "tend to scandalise" or "lower" or "tends to lower" the authority of any court (b) prejudices or interferes with any judicial proceeding and (c) interferes with or obstructs the administration of justice. Making allegations against the judiciary or individual judges, attributing motives to judgments and judicial functioning and any scurrilous attack on the conduct of judges are normally considered matters that scandalise the judiciary. The rationale for this provision is that courts must be protected from tendentious attacks that lower its authority, defame its public image and make the public lose faith in its



impartiality. The punishment for contempt of court is simple imprisonment for a term up to six months and/or a fine of up to ₹ 2,000.

What Is Not Contempt of Court?

Fair and accurate reporting of judicial proceedings will not amount to contempt of court. Nor is any fair criticism on the merits of a judicial order after a case is heard and disposed of.

Is Truth A Defence Against A Contempt Charge?

For many years, truth was seldom considered a defence against a charge of contempt. There was an impression that the judiciary tended to hide any misconduct among its individual members in the name of protecting the image of the institution. **The Act was amended in 2006 to introduce truth as a valid defence**, if it was in public interest and was invoked in a bona fide manner.

The Verdict on Women's Right to Property

- On August 11, the Supreme Court of India held that daughters, like sons, have an equal right to inherit ancestral property. **The legislation that conferred coparcenary status on women dates back to 2005, when the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 was amended. The verdict answers the question whether the coparcenary right of daughters comes into effect only if the father – through whom the right is claimed – was alive on the day the amendment came into force. The top court ruled that a daughter's right flows from her birth and not by any other factor.**

What Is Coparcenary Property in Hindu Law?

A Hindu joint family consists of lineal descendants of a common ancestor. In other words, a male head and his descendants, including their wives and unmarried daughters. A coparcenary is a smaller unit of the family that jointly owns property. **A coparcenary consists of a 'propositus', that is, a person at the top of a line of descent, and his three lineal descendants – sons, grandsons and great-grandsons. Coparcenary property is named thus because the co-ownership is marked by "unity of possession, title and interest". The English term itself is borrowed from common law, but the concept is found in Hindu law. In the Mitakshara school, which prevails in most parts of India, a male's right to be a coparcener is by birth. But if a newborn male is the fifth lineal descendant – that is a great-great-grandson, while the common ancestor, his son, grandson and great-grandson are alive – the right to be included in the coparcenary will ripen only when the common ancestor dies. In other words, a coparcenary has succession up to four degrees of lineal descent. It is believed that this is based on the Hindu tenet that only males up to three degrees can offer spiritual ministrations to ancestors. And only males can be coparceners.**

What Was the Traditional Position and How Was It Changed by Codified Law?

In Mitakshara law, on the death of a coparcener, his interest became merged with that of the surviving coparceners. Sons inherited property only by virtue of being or becoming coparceners. **When the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, was enacted, this position was largely preserved by Section 6. The law applied to everyone who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion. Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and followers of Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj are**



also considered Hindus for the purposes of this law. In a Hindu Undivided Family, several legal heirs through generations can exist jointly. Traditionally, only male descendants of a common ancestor along with their mothers, wives and unmarried daughters are considered a joint Hindu family. The legal heirs hold the family property jointly. Women were recognised as coparceners or joint legal heirs for partition arising from 2005. Section 6 of the Act was amended that year to make a daughter of a coparcener also a coparcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”. The law also gave the daughter the same rights and liabilities “in the coparcenary property as she would have had if she had been a son”. The law applies to ancestral property and to intestate succession in personal property – where succession happens as per law and not through a will. The 174th Law Commission Report had also recommended this reform in Hindu succession law. Even before the 2005 amendment, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu had made this change in the law, and Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family System in 1975.

What Changes Did The 2005 Amendment Bring?

In its statement of objects and reasons for the amendment, the Union government said the recognition given in the 1956 Act to the rule of devolution by survivorship and its retention of the Mitakshara coparcenary property without including women in it meant that women could not inherit ancestral property in the same way as men. It said: “The law by excluding the daughter from participating in the coparcenary ownership not only contributes to her discrimination on the ground of gender but also has led to oppression and negation of her fundamental right of equality guaranteed by the Constitution...” Therefore, it amended Section 6 to remove the discrimination and confer equal rights on daughters too. It declared that a coparcener’s daughter would become a coparcener in her own right by birth, in the same manner as a son; and would have the same rights that she would have, had she been a son. The amendment came into force on September 9, 2005, but it contained a proviso that it would not invalidate any disposition of property by partition or will that had taken place prior to December 20, 2004 – the day the amendment was introduced in the Rajya Sabha.

How Did the Case Come About?

While the 2005 law granted equal rights to women, questions were raised in multiple cases on whether the law applied retrospectively, and if the rights of women depended on the living status of the father through whom they would inherit. Different benches of the Supreme Court had taken conflicting views on the issue. Different High Courts had also followed different views of the top court as binding precedents. In *Prakash v Phulwati (2015)*, a two-judge Bench headed by Justice A K Goel held that the benefit of the 2005 amendment could be granted only to “living daughters of living coparceners” as on September 9, 2005 (the date when the amendment came into force). In February 2018, contrary to the 2015 ruling, a two-judge Bench headed by Justice A K Sikri held that the share of a father who died in 2001 will also pass to his daughters as coparceners during the partition of the property as per the 2005 law. Then in April that year, yet another two-judge bench, headed by Justice R K Agrawal, reiterated the position taken in 2015. These conflicting views by Benches of equal strength led to a reference to a three-judge Bench in the current case. The ruling now overrules the verdicts from 2015 and April 2018. It settles the law and expands on the intention of the 2005 legislation “to remove the discrimination



as contained in section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 by giving equal rights to daughters in the Hindu Mitakshara coparcenary property as the sons have”.

How Did the Court Decide the Case?

The court looked into the rights under the Mitakshara coparcenary. Since Section 6 creates an “unobstructed heritage” or a right created by birth for the daughter of the coparcener, the right cannot be limited by whether the coparcener is alive or dead when the right is operationalized. The court said the 2005 amendment gave recognition of a right that was in fact accrued by the daughter at birth. “The conferral of a right is by birth, and the rights are given in the same manner with incidents of coparcenary as that of a son and she is treated as a coparcener in the same manner with the same rights as if she had been a son at the time of birth. Though the rights can be claimed, w.e.f. 9.9.2005, the provisions are of retroactive application, they confer benefits based on the antecedent event, and the Mitakshara coparcenary shall be deemed to include a reference to a daughter as a coparcener,” the ruling said. The court also directed High Courts to dispose of cases involving this issue within six months since they would have been pending for years.

What Was the Government’s Stand?

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued in favour of an expansive reading of the law to allow equal rights for women. He referred to the objects and reasons of the 2005 amendment. “The Mitakshara coparcenary law not only contributed to discrimination on the ground of gender but was oppressive and negated the fundamental right of equality guaranteed by the Constitution of India,” he submitted.

EWS Quota Law: What A Five-Judge Constitution Bench Will Look Into

- The Supreme Court has referred to a five-judge Constitution Bench a batch of petitions challenging the 103rd Constitution Amendment of 2019 that provides 10% reservation for Economically Backward Section (EWS).

What Is the Amendment?

It provides for 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions for EWS, by amending Articles 15 and 16 that deal with the fundamental right to equality. While Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, Article 16 guarantees equal opportunity in matters of public employment. An additional clause was added to both provisions, giving Parliament the power to make special laws for EWS like it does for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes. The states are to notify who constitute EWS to be eligible for reservation.

What Does the Reference Mean?

A reference to a larger Bench means that the legal challenge is an important one. As per Article 145(3) of the Constitution, “the minimum number of Judges who are to sit for the purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution” shall be five. The Supreme Court rules of 2013 also say that writ petitions that allege a violation of fundamental rights will generally be heard by a bench of two judges unless it raises substantial questions of law. In that case, a five-judge bench would hear the case. Laws made by Parliament are presumed to be constitutional



until proven otherwise in court. The SC had refused to stay the 103rd Amendment. A reference will make no difference to the operation of the EWS quota.

What Are the Grounds of Challenge?

The law was challenged primarily on **two grounds**. First, **it violates the Basic Structure of the Constitution**. This argument stems from the view that the special protections guaranteed to socially disadvantaged groups is part of the Basic Structure and that the 103rd Amendment departs from this by promising special protections on the sole basis of economic status. Although there is no exhaustive list of what forms the Basic Structure, any law that violates it is understood to be unconstitutional. **The petitioners have also challenged the amendment on the grounds that it violates the SC's 1992 ruling in Indra Sawhney & Ors v Union of India, which upheld the Mandal Report and capped reservations at 50%. In the ruling, the court held that economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion for identifying backward class.** Another challenge has been made on behalf of private, **unaided educational institutions. They have argued that their fundamental right to practice a trade/profession is violated when the state compels them to implement its reservation policy and admit students on any criteria other than merit.**

What Are the Government's Arguments?

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment filed counter-affidavits to defend the amendment. When a law is challenged, the burden of proving it unconstitutional lies on the petitioners. The government argued that under **Article 46 of the Constitution, part of Directive Principles of State Policy**, it has a duty to protect the interests of economically weaker sections. "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation," the law says. **On the challenge that the amendment violates the Basic Structure, the government argued that "to sustain a challenge against a constitutional amendment, it must be shown that the very identity of the Constitution has been altered".** **Countering the claims that the amendment violates the Indra Sawhney principle, the government relied on a 2008 ruling— Ashok Kumar Thakur v Union of India, in which the SC upheld the 27% quota for OBCs. The argument is that the court accepted that the definition of OBCs was not made on the sole criterion of caste but a mix of caste and economic factors, to prove that there need not a sole criterion for according reservation.** For the unaided institutions, the government argued that the Constitution allows the Parliament to place "reasonable restrictions" on the right to carry on trade.

What Are the Terms of Reference Framed by The Court?

The SC agreed that the case involved at least three substantial questions of law, whether: **economic criteria alone cannot be the basis to determine backwardness; the EWS quota exceeds the ceiling cap of 50% set by the court; the rights of unaided private educational institutions.** Although Chief Justice of India S A Bobde heads the Bench that made the reference, the case could wait to be heard by a larger Bench. The timing depends on the court's resources as it would have to spare five judges and allocate time to the larger Bench hearing. As of July 1, there are at least pending 46 cases that require hearing by a minimum of five judges.



G.C. Murmu Takes Charge as New CAG

- Former Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Lieutenant-Governor (L-G), **Girish Chandra Murmu** on Saturday took charge as the new **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**. Mr. Murmu was sworn in by President Ram Nath Kovind, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a communiqué. Mr. Murmu, a 1985-batch IAS officer of the **Gujarat cadre**, will have a **tenure up to November 20, 2024**. Appointed as the first L-G of the newly created Union Territory of J&K, Mr. Murmu resigned on August 5, the first anniversary of the Centre abrogating special status for J&K under Article 370. **He was then appointed the CAG to replace Rajiv Mehrishi, who was completing his tenure this week.**

How Delhi Hopes to Become India's Electric Vehicle Capital

- The **Delhi Electric Vehicles Policy** was notified on **August 7**, over eight months after the state Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal approved it. Following the notification, Kejriwal described it as a step towards reducing pollution levels. **Delhi is among the world's most polluted cities, with its air quality turning particularly hazardous with the onset of winter as gaseous pollutants from vehicular emissions are joined by soot-laden smoke from the fields of Punjab and Haryana where farmers set alight farm residue after harvesting. The bursting of firecrackers during Diwali also aggravates the problem.** The policy has been notified for a period of three years, following which it can be renewed in the present form or after suitable amendments.

What Is the Primary Objective of The Policy?

The policy, according to its bare text, **aims to make Delhi the Electric Vehicle (EV) capital of India. It has set an ambitious target of ensuring that by 2024, EVs account for 25% of all new vehicle registrations in the national capital to bring about a "material improvement" in Delhi's air quality by reducing emissions from the transport sector.**

What Is the Share of Vehicular Emissions in Delhi's Pollution?

According to an IIT-Kanpur study, which remains the most authoritative source apportionment analysis (share of specific sources of pollution) of Delhi's air pollution till date, **vehicles are the second largest and the "most consistent" – around 20-25% – contributing source of pollutants PM10 and PM2.5, which are fine particulates measuring up to 30 times finer than the width of human hair.** The Supreme Court-monitored Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority had also pointed out that **industrial and vehicular pollution account for the greatest share of Nitrate particles formed from nitrogen oxides and sulphate particles formed from Sulphur dioxides in the city.**

What Promise Does the EV Policy Hold in Cleaning Up Delhi's Air?

Currently, the share of EVs is negligible in Delhi, be it two-wheelers, autos or cars. Within the next one year, the Delhi government aims to induct at least 35,000 EVs across segments and the five-year plan envisages induction of 5 lakh EVs.

What About the Creation of Charging Infrastructure to Support This Major Transition?

The policy recommends changes in building bye-laws so that all new homes and workplaces are 'EV ready' with 20% of all vehicle holding capacity/parking equipped with **Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur**



charging points. The purchase of charging points will also be incentivized to the tune of Rs 6,000 per charging point for the first 30,000 such points. The existing building owners and RWAs will be “encouraged” to follow suit through similar incentives as well. The policy lists as its key objective the creation of public charging facilities within three km travel from anywhere in Delhi by inviting companies to set up charging and battery swapping stations at “bare minimum lease rentals” and full reimbursement for purchases of swappable batteries by them.

What About Recycling of Batteries?

The policy acknowledges that lack of adequate reuse or recycling of batteries shall have a “high environmental cost”. Typically, an EV needs two batteries in its life span of around 10 years. However, the policy does not have details on ways and means to recycle batteries. It merely states “the policy shall encourage the reuse of EV batteries that have reached the end of their life and setting up of recycling businesses in collaboration with battery and EV manufacturers that focus on ‘urban mining’ of rare materials within the battery for re-use by battery manufacturers.”

Who Will Fund the Incentives?

The policy refers to the ‘**feebate**’ concept, which refers to the concept under which inefficient polluting vehicles incur a **surcharge**, while efficient ones receive a **rebate**. Accordingly, it seeks to create an **EV fund** made up of pollution Cess on, additional road tax on petrol and diesel vehicles, “especially luxury cars”, congestion fee on rides taken using cab aggregators (except those running on batteries). Currently, a Rs 25 paise per litre Cess is levied on sale of diesel in the city, which makes up the air ambience fund. Every month, 50 per cent of the amount collected in that fund will be transferred to the EV fund. And if the government still falls short of money, the Supreme Court’s assistance will be sought in using the Environment Compensation Charge fund, made up of tax imposed on commercial vehicles entering Delhi.

How India Got Its National Flag

- ➔ On July 22, 1947, when members of the Constituent Assembly of India met in the Constitution Hall in Delhi, the first item on the agenda was reportedly a motion by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, about adopting a national flag for free India. It was proposed that “the National Flag of India shall be **horizontal tricolor of deep saffron (Kesari), white and dark green in equal proportion**.” The white band was to have a wheel in navy blue (the charkha being replaced by the chakra), which appears on the abacus of the **Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka**. While the finer nuances were subsequently discussed in the meeting, the final design of the Indian National Flag, hoisted by Prime Minister Nehru on August 16, 1947 at Red Fort, had a history of several decades preceding independence.

The First National Flag of India

While an Indian flag was reportedly designed by Sister Nivedita, an Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, between 1904-1906, arguably the first national flag of India is said to have been hoisted on August 7, 1906, in Kolkata at the Parsee Bagan Square (Green Park). It comprised three horizontal strips of red, yellow and green, with Vande Mataram written in the middle. Believed to have been designed by freedom activists Sachindra Prasad Bose and Hemchandra Kanungo, the red strip on the flag had symbols of the sun and a crescent



moon, and the green strip had eight half-open lotuses. Next year, in 1907, Madame Cama and her group of exiled revolutionaries hoisted an Indian flag in Germany in 1907 – this was the first Indian flag to be hoisted in a foreign land. In 1917, Dr Annie Besant and Lokmanya Tilak adopted a new flag as part of the Home Rule Movement. It had five alternate red and four green horizontal stripes, and seven stars in the saptarishi configuration. A white crescent and star occupied one top corner, and the other had Union Jack.

The Origins of The Present-Day Flag

The design of the Indian tricolor is largely attributed to **Pingali Venkayya**, an Indian freedom fighter who reportedly first met Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa during the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), when he was posted there as part of the British Indian Army. Years of research went into designing the national flag. In 1916, he even published a book with possible designs of Indian flags. At the All India Congress Committee in Bezwada in 1921, Venkayya again met Gandhi and proposed a basic design of the flag, consisting of **two red and green bands to symbolise the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims**. Gandhi arguably suggested adding a white band to represent peace and the rest of the communities living in India, and a spinning wheel to symbolise the progress of the country. Several changes continued to be made till a decade later, when in 1931 the Congress Committee met in Karachi and adopted the tricolor as our national flag. Red was replaced with saffron and the order of the colors was changed. The flag was to have no religious interpretation.

A Flag for Independent India

The Tricolor was altered to become the flag of Independent India. Saffron on top symbolizes “strength and courage”, white in the middle represents “peace and truth” and green at the bottom stands for “fertility, growth and auspiciousness of the land”. The Ashok Chakra with 24 spokes replaced the spinning wheel as the emblem on the flag. It is intended “to show that there is life in movement and death in stagnation”.

Controversies Regarding Its Creator

In 2013, a controversy arose when historian Panduranga Reddy stated that the national flag was designed by Hyderabad-born Surayya Tyabji. With the resolution in the Constituent Assembly mentioning no names, the attributions are open to argument. While there is no consensus on who recommended the change from charkha to the Ashok Chakra in 1947, in 2018, in an article titled “How the Tricolor and Lion Emblem Really Came to Be”, Laila Tyabji, founding member of crafts NGO Dastkar, wrote that her parents, Badruddin and Surayya Tyabji, had suggested the change. The website of the Flag Foundation of India, a non-profit organization formed by industrialist and Congress politician Naveen Jindal, states, “The design of the National-flag for Independent India submitted by Mrs. Suriaya Badr-ud-Din Tyabi was finally approved and accepted by the Flag Committee on 17th July 1947. She was an artist of repute and her husband B.H.F. Tyabji (ICS) was then a Deputy Secretary in the Secretariat of the Constituent Assembly.” Venkayya, who passed away in 1963, was posthumously honored with a postage stamp in 2009 for his contribution towards Indian freedom struggle. In 2014, his name was also proposed for the Bharat Ratna.



How Quit India Movement Gave A New Direction to India's Freedom Struggle

- On August 8, 78 years ago, Mahatma Gandhi gave the call for British colonizers to "Quit India" and for the Indians to "do or die" to make this happen. Soon after, Gandhi and almost the entire top Congress leadership was arrested, and thus began a truly people-led movement in our freedom struggle, eventually quelled violently by the British, but leaving behind a clear message – the British would have to leave India, and no other solution would be acceptable to its masses.

What Led to The Events of August 1942?

While factors leading to such a movement had been building up, matters came to a head with the failure of the Cripps Mission. The World War II was raging, and a beleaguered British needed the cooperation of their colonial subjects in India. To this end, in March 1942, a mission led by **Sir Stafford Cripps** arrived in India to meet leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League. The idea was to secure India's whole-hearted support in the war, in return for self-governance. However, despite the promise of "the earliest possible realization of self-government in India", the offer Cripps made was of **dominion status**, and not freedom. Also, there was a provision of the **partition of India**, which was not acceptable to the Congress. **The failure of the Cripps Mission made Mahatma Gandhi realize that freedom would be had only by fighting tooth and nail for it.** Though initially reluctant to launch a movement that could hamper Britain's efforts to defeat Fascist forces in the World War, the Congress eventually decided to launch a mass civil disobedience. At the **Working Committee meeting in Wardha in July 1942**, it was decided the time had come for the movement to move into an active phase.

The Gowalia Tank Address by Gandhi

On August 8, Bapu addressed the people from Mumbai's Gowalia Tank maidan. "Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. Imprint it on your hearts, so that in every breath you give expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die trying; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery," Gandhi said. Aruna Asaf Ali hoisted the Tricolor on the ground, and the Quit India movement had been officially announced. By August 9, Gandhi and all other senior Congress leaders had been jailed. Bapu was kept at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, and later in the Yerawada jail. It was during this time that **Kasturba Gandhi died at the Aga Khan Palace.**

People's Movement

The arrest of the leaders, however, failed to deter the masses. With no one to give directions, people took the movement into their own hands. In Bombay, Poona and Ahmedabad, lakhs of people clashed with the police on August 9. On August 10, protests erupted in Delhi, UP and Bihar. There were strikes, demonstrations and people's marches in defiance of prohibitory orders in Kanpur, Patna, Varanasi, and Allahabad. The protests spread rapidly into smaller towns and villages. Till mid-September, police stations, courts, post offices and other symbols of government authority were attacked. Railway tracks were blocked, students went on strike in schools and colleges across India, and distributed illegal nationalist literature. Mill and factory workers in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Poona, Ahmednagar, and Jamshedpur stayed away for weeks. In some places, the protests were violent, with bridges blown up, telegraph wires cut, and railway lines taken apart. **Ram Manohar Lohia, describing the movement on its 25th anniversary, wrote: "9th August was**

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



and will remain a people's event. 15th August was a state event... 9th August 1942 expressed the will of the people – we want to be free, and we shall be free. For the first time after a long period in our history, crores of people expressed their desire to be free..."

The Slogan 'Quit India'

While Gandhi gave the clarion call of Quit India, the slogan was coined by Yusuf Meherally, a socialist and trade unionist who also served as Mayor of Mumbai. A few years ago, in 1928, it was Meherally who had coined the slogan "Simon Go Back".

Outcome

The Quit India movement was violently suppressed by the British – people were shot, lathi-charged, villages burnt and enormous fines imposed. In the five months up to December 1942, an estimated 60,000 people had been thrown in jail. However, though the movement was quelled, it changed the character of the Indian freedom struggle, with the masses rising up to articulate as they had never before – the British masters would have to Quit India.

Language of Unity

→ By rejecting the three-language formula advocated in the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami has only reiterated the State's unwavering position on an emotive and political issue. Its two-language policy, implemented decades ago after a historic agitation against the imposition of Hindi, remains non-negotiable for almost the entire political class. Opposition from the State had last year forced the Centre to amend the draft NEP and withdraw a proposal to teach Hindi as a third language in schools in non-Hindi speaking States. Yet in the NEP, approved by the Union Cabinet last week, it chose to push for the three-language formula, packaging it as a means to promote multilingualism and "national unity". Though the policy said that no language will be imposed on any State, it has expectedly cut no ice with parties in Tamil Nadu, which have risen in near unison to oppose the proposal. In fact, Mr. Palaniswami, citing "collective sentiments" of the people, noted that the proposal was "saddening and painful" and appealed to the Prime Minister to allow States to follow their own language policy. In a State that resisted multiple attempts to impose Hindi since 1937, political parties are understandably wary of any mandate to impart an additional language in schools. They fear this would eventually pave the way for Hindi to enter the State through the back door. Since 1985, the State has even refused to allow Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas to be set up as they teach Hindi.

The two-language policy of Tamil and English, piloted by former Chief Minister C.N. Annadurai in 1968, has thus far worked well in the State. In a liberalized world, more windows to the world are being opened up for those proficient in English, a global link language. The State's significant human resources contribution to the ever-expanding IT sector is also attributed to the English fluency of its recruits as much as to their technical knowledge. There is this counter-argument that Tamil Nadu is depriving students of an opportunity to learn Hindi, touted as a national link language. However, its voluntary learning has never been restricted and the growth over the past decade in the number of CBSE schools, where the language is taught, would bear testimony to this. The patronage for the 102-year-old Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, based in Chennai, also proves this. In the Sabha's centenary year, Tamil Nadu accounted for 73% of active Hindi pracharaks (teachers) in South India. Out of necessity, many in the State have picked up



conversational Hindi to engage with the migrant population that feeds the labour needs from factories to hair salons. Only compulsion is met with resistance. India's federal nature and diversity demand that no regional language is given supremacy over another.

Why Is August 7 Called National Handloom Day

- With the partition of Bengal, the Swadeshi Movement gained strength. It was on August 7, 1905 that a formal proclamation was made at the Calcutta Town Hall to boycott foreign goods and rely on Indian-made products. More than a century later, in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first National Handloom Day. It was a salute to weavers and others in the industry to promote the handmade and the handwoven.

What is Handloom?

Be it Tamil Nadu's famous Kanchipuram saris or Assam's Muga (golden silk) mekhela sadors, the Paithani weaves of Maharashtra or Benarasi brocades of Uttar Pradesh, India has the largest and widespread weaving industry in the world. While different definitions for the word have evolved since the Handloom (Reservation and Articles for Production) Act, 1985, where 'handloom' meant "any loom other than power loom", in recent years it has become more elaborate. In 2012, a new definition was proposed: "Handloom means any loom other than power loom; and includes any hybrid loom on which at least one process of weaving require manual intervention or human energy for production." It basically made room for a relaxed entry for power loom weavers.

What Is the Negative Imports List for Defence Announced by Rajnath Singh?

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced a list of 101 items that the Defence Ministry will stop importing. It essentially means that the Armed Forces—Army, Navy and Air Force—will only procure all of these 101 items from domestic manufacturers. The manufacturers could be private sector players or defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs). For years India has been among the top three defence importers in the world, the government wants to reduce the dependence on imported items in defence and give a shot in the arm to the domestic defence manufacturing industry. By denying the possibility of importing the items on the negative list, the domestic industry is given the opportunity to step up and manufacture them for the needs of the forces. As per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which tracks defence exports and imports globally, India has been the second largest importer between 2014 and 2019 with US\$ 16.75 billion worth of imports during this period. The private players and the DPSUs, Singh said are given a "great opportunity" to manufacture the items in the negative list "by using their own design and development capabilities or adopting the technologies" that can be designed by the government Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) "to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces". Announcing the policy, Singh said that the Defence Ministry is "now ready for a big push to Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative" and the ministry will introduce "import embargo on 101 items beyond given timeline to boost indigenization of defence production". The government has been hoping that the defence manufacturing sector can play a leading role in boosting the economy, not just for the domestic market, but to become an exporter as well. However, Sunday's embargo list is meant for the domestic market, largely. Singh called the negative import list a "big step towards self-reliance in defence".



What Does It Include?

The list, shared by the government on Sunday, has a range of items. From simpler items to advanced technologies. The items mentioned in the negative imports list include **water jet fast attack craft to survey vessels, pollution control vessels, light transport aircraft, GSAT-6 terminals, radars, unmanned aerial vehicles, to certain rifles, artillery guns, bullet proof jackets, missile destroyers, etc.** Singh said that “almost 260 schemes of such items were contracted” by the Armed Forces at an “approximate cost of Rs 3.5 lakh crore between April 2015 and August 2020” and **the government expects that “contracts worth almost Rs 4 lakh crore will be placed upon the domestic industry within the next 6 to 7 years”.**

Were the Army, Navy and The Air Force Consulted?

Yes. The government announced that the list was announced after due consideration by all stakeholders involved, including the three services who use the equipment, weapons and platforms that will be embargoed. Announcing the negative imports list, Singh said that the Defence Ministry prepared the list “after several rounds of consultations with all stakeholders, including the Armed Forces” and also the public sector and private players “to assess current and future capabilities of the Indian industry for manufacturing various ammunition & equipment within India”.

Will It Come into Effect Immediately?

Not immediately, but starting this year, yes. However, **not all the 101 items mentioned in the list will be embargoed starting this year. The list is progressive.** Singh said that the “embargo on imports is planned **to be progressively implemented between 2020 to 2024**” and the government wants to “apprise the Indian defence industry about the anticipated requirements of the Armed Forces so that they are better prepared to realize the goal of indigenization”. He added that **the list is likely to grow as “more such equipment for import embargo would be identified progressively”** by the Department of Military Affairs headed by the Chief of Defence Staff after consulting all stakeholders. “A due note of this will also be made in the DAP (Defence Acquisition Procedure) to ensure that no item in the negative list is processed for import in the future”. As the list shows, **of the 101 items mentioned 69 have an indicative embargo of December 2020. Another 11 have an indicative embargo of end of next year. The 12 are likely to be embargoed by December 2023, another 8 by end of 2024, and one item Long Range – Land Attack Cruise Missile will not be allowed to be imported after December 2025.**

Is This A New Policy?

It was announced in May. Singh has taken cue from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “clarion call” of **“a self-reliant India based on the five pillars, i.e., Economy, Infrastructure, System, Demography & Demand and announced a special economic package for Self-Reliant India named ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’”.** But the announcement was not unexpected as the government had already declared that it will come out with a negative imports list for the defence sector in May. In her fourth presentation about the package for an Atmanirbhar Bharat, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced on May 16 that **the government was working on a negative imports list.** In her fourth presentation on the package for creating the ecosystem for a self-reliant India, to bring Indian economy back on the path of growth, Sitharaman had mentioned that the government will “notify a list of weapons/ platforms for ban on import with year-wise timelines” and work on



“indigenization of imported spares”. Sitharaman had stated that the government will create a “separate budget provisioning for domestic capital procurement” all of which will together “help reduce the huge defence import bill”. The Defence Minister announced that the ministry “has also bifurcated the capital procurement budget for 2020-21 between domestic and foreign capital procurement routes” and a “separate budget head has been created with an outlay of nearly Rs 52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year”.

How Move to Open Up City Gas Distribution Will Benefit Customers, Impact Incumbents

- City gas distribution companies may soon face competition from third parties, with the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) set to notify regulations to allow competition for these companies, which have thus far enjoyed exclusive marketing rights in their respective geographies. Indraprastha Gas Ltd. in Delhi, Mahanagar Gas Ltd. in Mumbai and Gujarat Gas Ltd. are three city gas distribution companies set to be affected by the opening up of these markets and their pipeline infrastructure to third parties.

What Is the Current Scenario?

These players currently have exclusive right to lay, operate and expand gas distribution infrastructure in their respective geographies as well as market both Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and Piped Natural Gas (PNG) in these areas. The government had decided to grant exclusivity to gas distribution companies to incentivize them to invest in infrastructure to deliver PNG and CNG widely across cities. These companies supply PNG to household, industrial and commercial use and CNG for vehicles through retail sites of state-owned oil marketing companies Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Hindustan Petroleum Corporate Ltd.

What Is the Proposed Change?

Under the proposal by the PNGRB, distribution companies would have to provide access to third-party companies to pay to use their infrastructure to market CNG and PNG based on a transportation tariff set by the incumbent players but regulated by the PNGRB in case of disputes. The PNGRB has sought comments from stakeholders on how the tariff for use of the pipeline network of the city gas distribution companies should be decided.

What Is the Likely Impact on Consumers?

According to experts, the end of marketing exclusivity may lead to some competition and lower prices for CNG. City gas distribution companies’ market CNG at the retail pump sites of state-run oil marketing companies. CNG sales are the most profitable market segment for city gas distribution companies with margins at around 30% of the retail price of the fuel, according to experts. OMCs which currently receive a commission on the sale of CNG sold through their retail points may seek to take some market share in the CNG distribution business by using the distribution network of the city gas distribution companies to retail CNG directly to customers. Oil-marketing companies may not seek to take up the opportunity that arises from the end of the exclusivity period immediately as they are currently enjoying risk-free commissions on the sale of CNG at their retail sites. The expert noted that the CGD companies and OMCs may decide to increase the commissions



provided to OMCs once gas distribution companies lose marketing and infrastructure exclusivity.

What Would Be the Impact on The CGD Companies?

According to the experts, the profitability of city gas distribution companies would be affected significantly if their market share is taken up by competitors and it may even reduce their ability to invest further in expanding gas distribution infrastructure. **The CGD companies have opposed the opening up of CGD infrastructure for use by third parties. IGL has challenged the proposal by the PNGRB to end marketing exclusivity in the Delhi High Court and have argued that any reduction in market share in any of its marketing segments including CNG and PNG would impair their ability to invest in infrastructure to expand its PNG network to supply natural gas to a larger number of households.** DK Saraf, chairperson of the PNGRB recently noted that the regulator would notify regulations for the opening up of competition in CGD areas as there had not been any stay issued by the high court in the case.

Why Shah Faesal Can Return to IAS Despite Entering Politics

- A year and a half after he resigned from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in protest against the “unabated” killings in Kashmir, Shah Faesal this week stepped down as president of the party he founded, the Jammu and Kashmir People’s Movement (JKPM), and also quit politics altogether. The resignation in January 2019 of Faesal, the first Kashmiri to top the Civil Services Examination, had not been accepted by the government, pending the investigation into some of his posts on social media. That his resignation was never accepted means “the door is open for him” to rejoin the IAS, a senior government official told The Indian Express. He will, however, have to withdraw his resignation first, another official said.

What Are the Rules for Resignation of An IAS Officer?

Resignation is an intimation in writing by the officer of his/her intention to leave the service. Guidelines of the Department of Personnel, the cadre controlling department for the IAS, say that a resignation has to be clear and unconditional. The resignation from service of an officer of any of the three All India Services (Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and Indian Forest Service) is governed by Rules 5(1) and 5(1)(a) of the All India Services (Death-cum-retirement benefits) Rules, 1958. There are similar rules for other central services as well.

To Whom Must an Officer Submit His/her Resignation?

An officer serving in cadre (state) should submit his/her resignation to the chief secretary of the state. An officer who is on central deputation is required to submit his/her resignation to the secretary of the concerned Ministry or Department. The Ministry/Department then sends the officer’s resignation to the concerned state cadre, with its comments/recommendations. Last month, a principal secretary to the Punjab government submitted his resignation, but it was rejected by Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh.



What Is the Process After the Resignation Is Submitted?

While dealing with the resignation, the state sees if there are any dues outstanding against the officer, and the vigilance status of the officer. Before forwarding the resignation to the central government, the concerned state is supposed to send information on these two issues, along with its recommendation. The resignation of the officer is considered by the competent authority, i.e., the central government, only after the recommendation of the concerned cadre has been received. The competent authorities are: Minister of State at the Department of Personnel & Training in respect of IAS, Minister of Home Affairs in respect of IPS, and Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change in respect of the Forest Service.

Under What Circumstances Is A Resignation Accepted?

The guidelines say that it is not in the interest of the government to retain an unwilling officer. As per the guidelines, resignation of a member from service is accepted, except in the following circumstances: Where an officer who is under suspension, submits a resignation, the competent authority should examine with reference to the merit of the disciplinary case pending against the member of service, whether it would be in the public interest to accept the resignation. There have been cases in which resignations were rejected because there were disciplinary cases pending against officers. In such cases, concurrence of the Central Vigilance Commission is also obtained. It is also seen whether the officer had executed any bond for serving the government for a specified number of years on account of being given specialized training, a fellowship, or scholarship for studies.

Can A Resignation Be Withdrawn?

The rule was amended in 2013 to allow a resignation to be withdrawn within 90 days of its acceptance. Rule 5(1A) (i) says the central government may permit an officer to withdraw his/her resignation "in the public interest". However, "Request for withdrawal of resignation shall not be accepted by the Central Government where a member of the Service resigns from his/her service or post with a view to be associated with any political parties or any organization which takes part in politics, or to take part in, or subscribe in aid of, or assist in any other manner, any political movement or political activity or to canvass or otherwise interfere with, or use his/her influence in connection with, or take part in, an election to any legislature or local authority."

What About Withdrawal of Resignation Before Acceptance?

The guidelines say that if an officer who has submitted his/her resignation sends an intimation in writing to withdraw it before its acceptance by the competent authority, the resignation will be deemed to have been automatically withdrawn. Shah Faesal resigned on January 9, 2019, but his resignation is yet to be accepted. The DoPT website still shows him as a "serving" officer. This is despite the fact that he tried his luck in politics for a year and a half. DoPT sources said his resignation is yet to be processed – and he can withdraw his resignation at any time.

How Will Restoration Of 4G Internet Services In J&K on Trial Basis Work?

- A special committee set up by the Supreme Court has recommended restoration of 4G internet services in Jammu and Kashmir and access to high speed internet on "trial basis



in a calibrated manner in specified limited areas to assess the impact on the security situation” after August 15. However, the Centre and the Union Territory administration told the Supreme Court Tuesday that as security concerns and threat from the region continued to remain high, 4G internet services would not be made available in Jammu or Kashmir as of now.

Why Was 4G Suspended in Jammu And Kashmir?

On August 5, 2019, when the central government moved to abolish Article 370 which gave special rights to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, internet and voice services were snapped throughout the valley. The government had then said that the same was being done in order to avoid violence.

How Will the Lifting Of 4G Suspension Proceed?

According to the recommendations of the high-powered committee, internet could be restored in one district each of Jammu and Kashmir, which are away from the international border or line of control, and has low intensity of terrorist activities. “The authorities presumably want to do a small “test run” in a less conflict-prone area to understand whether 4G services pose any risk,” Com First (India) director and telecom expert Mahesh Uppal said. Telecom operators in the districts which are allowed to have 4G services on a trial basis may also have to submit reports of data usage volume and which apps are being used the most.

What Could Be the Impact of Lifting The 4G Ban?

Most commercial activities have come to depend on high-speed internet. From e-commerce, travel bookings to even filing of GST and income tax returns, resumption of 4G in the valley will be beneficial for citizens wanting do these activities.

A Politician Returns to The Helm In J&K

- The appointment of former Union Minister Manoj Sinha as Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) sees the return of a politician in the Srinagar Raj Bhavan. Mr. Sinha, 61, was the Minister of State for Railways and Minister for Communications in the first Modi government, before hitting a patch of political wilderness after he lost the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh.

A calm personality, Mr. Sinha is considered to be a discreet politician and enjoys Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s confidence, a fact that will help him in his current appointment. It is also hoped that his down to earth personality will help in reaching out to people in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr. Sinha had also been rumoured to have been tipped off for the post of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister when the BJP won a majority in that State in 2017, but that job finally went to Yogi Adityanath. After losing the polls in 2019, it was expected that he would be brought into the Union Cabinet via the Rajya Sabha route, considering his performance as Communications Minister in the first Modi government. That was not to be. His appointment as Lieutenant-Governor points to the need to bring in a seasoned politician rather than a bureaucrat, a uniformed person or even someone with an Intelligence background.



Why Organic Matter in Soil Is Crucial for A State Like Punjab

- In the past five decades, the state had achieved several firsts in the field of agriculture and even became the **first state in the country to install soil fertility map in each village to improve soil health**. But the soil of Punjab has always been an issue of debate because the state is **not only the highest consumer of chemical fertilisers per hectare in the country, but also the third highest pesticide consumer while accounting for just 1.53 per cent of the total area of the country**.

What Is Organic Matter and Why It Is Required in The Soil?

Organic matter is the very foundation of good soil health. It consists of plants, animal material which gets converted into humus after decomposing. According to the agriculture department, it improves soil quality and fertility. Organic matter can even improve the fertility of sandy soils. It supplies nutrients, increases water-holding capacity, prevents soil erosion. Supplication of organic matter into the soil decreases with frequent tilling of the land. In Punjab, farmers usually plant three crops a year which means the land gets disturbed every time they till, leading to a decrease in organic matter in the soil. "Soil having good amount of organic matter has **great water holding capacity** which in turn needs lesser irrigation and even helps arrest floods by alloying increased infiltration into the soil," said Joint Director (Fertilisers), Agriculture department, Jagtar Singh Barar.

What Is the Ideal Organic Matter Content in Soil?

'Organic matter' content in the soil of the state is way below what it needs to be so as to call the soil healthy. While PAU said that .75 per cent organic matter in the soil is sufficient, Punjab agriculture department said it should be at least 1 per cent. International standards suggest having around 2-3 per cent in the soil. Dr Lal, who received an award for his work helping millions of farmers improve their soil health, had opined in his published interviews that organic matter should be around 2-3 per cent.

How Much Organic Matter Is Present in The Soil of Punjab And Has It Increased Over the Years?

According to experts, organic matter presence in the soil was .33 per cent during the Green Revolution in 1966-67, which has increased to .51 per cent at present. In the past over 50 years that have elapsed between the Green Revolution, the state registered a .18 per cent increase of organic matter (OM) in its soil. "Punjab's soil falls in the 'medium' category as for as availability of OM is concerned,". "In Punjab, 54.7 per cent land has medium organic carbon in the soil between .40 and .75 per cent, while 31.4 per cent of the land witnesses low OM below .40 per cent and only 13.9 per cent land witnesses high .75 per cent and above organic matter, which means on an average our soil had witnessed .51 per cent organic matter in this decade from 2011 to 2020."

How Much Time Does It Take to Increase Organic Matter in The Soil?

With the collective efforts of Punjab government, experts and farmers, it can be increased up to .50-1 per cent in a decade's time, even though the increase was between .3 and .11 per cent in the past five decades. "We at PAU had done experiments in our fields where we had incorporate wheat and paddy residue in the fields and had also done green manuring, as a result of which the organic matter has increased from .42 per cent a decade back to



.67 per cent now in our fields,” said Dr Choudhary, adding that they had increased it by .25 per cent in a decade and the same can be replicated across Punjab.

What Steps Can Be Taken to Increase Organic Matter in Soil in Punjab, When Most Farmers Sow Three Crops A Year?

By tilling the land again and again, organic matter gets disturbed and decreases. Experts advised farmers to opt for two crops a year and grow green manure as a third crop, which is ploughed into the field only to improve soil fertility. The best time to grow it is after wheat harvesting in April, and then ploughing it in the fields before paddy sowing in June. Putting cow dung in the fields, incorporating paddy and wheat stubble in soil, growing pulses like summer moong are methods to enhance it. “When majority farmers are sowing three crops a year and fields are not free to grow green manure, incorporation of wheat and paddy stubble is the best way to enhance organic matter,” said Director, Punjab Agriculture Department, Dr Sutantra Airi, adding that with incorporating crop residue in fields, usage of fertilizers would also decrease and land would become healthy.

Why Is Increasing Organic Matter Important for Punjab?

When Punjab has already witnessed high productivity in several crops, enhancing this further with existing land holdings is possible when soil is enriched. For instance, paddy productivity in Punjab varies between 4.9 tons to 7.4 tons per hectare and wheat production is between 3.8 tons to 5.7 tons per hectare. **If organic matter in the soil is enhanced to the desired level, the fertility of the soil of low production areas can be enhanced manifold to bring it at par with soil giving the highest production in the state.** Fertility of soil with high productivity can also be enhanced further by increasing organic matter to around 1 per cent, said experts. “Good OM also leads to proper utilization of fertilisers put in the fields,” said joint director Brar. “For example, **if we have hybrid seeds of any crop with the capacity of giving 50 quintals of yield per acre, we also need quality soil with required OM to get that yield, otherwise farmers may end up getting a much lower yield than the claimed 50 quintals,**” said Madan Lal Khurana, soil expert and retired deputy director of Agriculture Soil Testing Karnal (Haryana). He added that good OM means getting better fertility, good quality crops, as poor OM results in stagnating the yield of the crop despite putting required fertilisers year after year.

Toxic Brew

- Once again, the scourge of illicit liquor has struck, this time in Punjab, killing more than 100 people and leaving many crippled. The victims, in Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur districts, were sold hooch that apparently had a large amount of denatured alcohol. The State government, which is responsible for both excise and law and order, has sanctioned financial relief for the affected families, and suspended some policemen and officials in charge of excise enforcement. Wiser after the fact, the police claim that there was an inter-district racket in operation and made several arrests; on the other hand, the kith and kin of those who died say the illicit brew was peddled virtually in the open by small-time vendors, some of whom have now been arrested. There are echoes in the tragedy of last year’s two major incidents involving Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and Assam, both witnessing large-scale loss of life. Moreover, there have been fatal outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people desperate for alcohol consumed hand sanitizer as a substitute, most recently in Andhra Pradesh. **Almost every year, India’s moonshine market inflicts**



tremendous destruction in the form of blindness, tissue damage and death, as commercial alcohol becomes expensive for the less affluent, and corrupt bureaucracies allow that void to be filled by illicit liquor vendors who almost invariably use toxic methanol instead of ethanol. Policies that fail to contain illicit alcohol produce long-term health impacts, as people tend to consume brews that have higher concentrations of alcohol, or toxic substances such as methanol. This should be particularly alarming for Punjab, which continues to simultaneously battle significant levels of narcotic drug use. From a medical viewpoint, the availability of licit spirits that contain lower alcohol levels, combined with a sustained public health campaign to wean people away from the drinking habit and to warn them about the effects of contaminants are key interventions. **Health communication about harm from alcohol is particularly relevant during the pandemic, since there is evidence of reduced immunity to viruses among those who are chronic alcohol consumers.** As the World Health Organization points out, governments should regulate the quality of legal alcoholic drinks, while actively tracing and tracking illicit alcohol. This can be achieved only through cooperation from the community, particularly from women's groups. Tragically, several States give low priority to revamping the excise administration and policing, paving the way for episodic death and misery. They must show determination to end the flow of toxic brews that kill scores almost every year. **The capability of the health system in every district needs to be raised, to reduce the damage from methanol through immediate, simple detoxification therapies.**

What is Clause 6 of Assam Accord?

- Several committees have been set up over the years to make recommendations on implementation of Clause 6. None of them made headway on the provision's contentious issues, however, until the latest one that was set up by the Home Ministry in 2019. Following widespread protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, now an Act, in December and January, the government gave an urgent push to Clause 6 to pacify the Assamese community. In February, a government-appointed committee had submitted its recommendations for implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, a key provision that has been contentious for decades. Headed by retired High Court judge Biplab Kumar Sarma and including members of the legal fraternity, retired civil servants, scholars, journalists and AASU office-bearers, the committee was asked to fast-track its report. It submitted its report in February. Since then, the government has not made the report public. On Tuesday, with six months having passed, a few members of the panel – Arunachal Pradesh Advocate General Nilay Dutta and three members of All Assam Students' Union (AASU)— released the report independently.

But What Is Clause 6?

Part of the Assam Accord that came at the culmination of a movement against immigration from Bangladesh, Clause 6 reads: "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people." For recognition as citizens, the Accord sets March 24, 1971 as the cut-off. Former Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta, one of the signatories to the 1985 Accord as then AASU president, explained to The Indian Express last year that immigrants up to the cut-off date would get all rights as Indian citizens. Therefore, he said, **Clause 6 was inserted to safeguard the socio-political rights and culture of the "indigenous people of Assam".**



But Who Is A Migrant?

In popular conversation, the idea of “indigenous” is taken to mean communities who trace their histories in Assam before 1826, the year when the erstwhile kingdom of Assam was annexed to British India. Large-scale migration from East Bengal took place during British rule, followed by further waves after Independence. The 1979-85 Assam Movement was triggered by fears that these Bengali Muslim and Bengali Hindu migrants would one day overrun the indigenous population, and dominate the resources and politics of the state. During the agitation, the demand was for the detection and deportation of those who had migrated after 1951. Was this demand accepted? Not 1951. The Assam Accord was settled at a cut-off of March 24, 1971; anyone who arrived in Assam before that cut-off would be considered a citizen of India. This date was also the basis of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), published last year. Because the Accord legalized additional migrants (1951-71) against the original demand of 1951, Clause 6 was incorporated as a safeguard for the indigenous people.

How Has Clause 6 Been Taken Up Since?

Because of the complexities involved, previous efforts to work out a framework made little headway. The matter got urgency last year amid protests by the Assamese against the Citizenship Amendment Bill (now an Act) which makes it easier for certain categories of migrants to get Indian citizenship – the key here being Hindus from Bangladesh. The Home Ministry set up a new committee, which submitted its report in February, but the government sat on it for months. This led to four of the committee’s 14 members making its contents public on Tuesday.

What Has It Recommended?

Its brief was to define the “Assamese people” and suggest measures for the safeguard of their rights. The definition of “Assamese people” has been a subject of discussion for decades. The committee has proposed that the following be considered Assamese people for the purpose of Clause 6:

All citizens of India who are part of:

- ❖ Assamese community, residing in the Territory of Assam on or before **January 1, 1951**; or
- ❖ Any indigenous tribal community of Assam residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951; or
- ❖ Any other indigenous community of Assam residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951; or
- ❖ All other citizens of India residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951; and
- ❖ Descendants of the above categories

Why 1951?

During the Assam agitation, the demand was for detection and deportation of migrants who had illegally entered Assam after 1951. The Assam Accord, however, set the cutoff at March 24, 1971. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was updated based on this cutoff. Clause 6 is meant to give the Assamese people certain safeguards, which would not be available to migrants between 1951 and 1971. If the recommendation is accepted, those



who migrated between 1951 and 1971 would be Indian citizens under the Assam Accord and NRC, but they would not be eligible for safeguards meant for “Assamese people”.

What Are These Safeguards?

Among various recommendations, key is reservation of seats in Parliament, Assembly and local bodies; reservation in jobs; and land rights. The panel recommends the Assamese people be given:

- ❖ 80 to 100% reservation in the parliamentary seats of Assam, Assembly seats and local body seats be reserved for the “Assamese people”.
- ❖ 80 to 100% of Group C and D level posts (in Assam) in central government/semi-central government/central PSUs/private sector
- ❖ 80 to 100% of jobs under Government of Assam and state government undertakings; and 70 to 100% of vacancies arising in private partnerships
- ❖ Land rights, with restrictions imposed on transferring land by any means to persons other than “Assamese people”. Several other recommendations deal with language, and cultural and social rights. On language, it recommends:
- ❖ Assamese language shall continue to be official language throughout the state with provisions for use of local languages in Barak Valley, Hill Districts and the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts.
- ❖ Mandatory provision of an Assamese language paper for recruitment in state government services with alternatives for Barak Valley districts, BTAD and Hills Districts.
- ❖ To set up Academies for all-round development of each of the indigenous tribal languages including, Bodo, Mishing, Karbi, Dimasa, Koch-Rajbongshi, Rabha, Deuri, Tiwa, Tai and other indigenous languages.

What Issues Does This Raise?

Some find it too inclusive. The committee had received some public suggestions that had proposed a base year of 1826 for anyone being considered Assamese, Nilay Dutta said. Hafizul Ahmed, president of the Sadou Asom Goria-Moria-Deshi Jatiya Parishad that speaks for indigenous Assamese Muslims, told The Indian Express that there should not be a base year for identifying the indigenous people of Assam. The organisation had sought that only communities living in Assam during Ahom rule (pre-1826) be included in the definition, based on their cultural identities. Others find it exclusionary. The All Assam Minority Students’ Union, which is identified with Bengali Muslims, had been demanding that the 1971 cutoff be used for deciding Clause 6 eligibility too. Its adviser Azizur Rahman said: “How will you prove that a person has been in Assam prior to 1951?” (The 1951 NRC is not available in several parts of the state.) Sadhan Purkayastha, general secretary of the Citizens’ Right Protection Committee, said lakhs of people in Assam’s Barak Valley stand to lose their rights if the report is implemented. A large number of Bengali Hindus and some Bengali Muslims had migrated from Sylhet to Barak Valley in the 1950s and 1960s.

What Is the Way Forward?

“Several issues come up: for both the state and central government, the key issue is whether it will stand the test of judicial scrutiny because it is bound to be challenged in the courts; and will it stand the test of constitutional validity?” said Sanjoy Hazarika, International Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, and a journalist who has written extensively on migration.



Among the issues Hazarika raised were:

Does the definition of an Assamese – a social, historic, ethnic, linguistic, political and cultural and not just religious entity – or a Bengali or a Punjabi or a Tamil also define her/his Indian-ness or Indian citizenship? “This is a key legal and constitutional issue that needs to be considered. It is connected to the NRC process as the Assam Accord cannot be reviewed in isolation of one clause or the other,” he said.

How will pre-1971 migrants be accommodated? “There isn’t a magic wand to solve the problem which has challenged the core of Assam for over 70 years... I have been an advocate of constitutional reservations and work permits. But we also need to acknowledge the demographic reality in the state and its diversities,” he said.

Pokkali Rice Seedlings Travel from Kerala To the Sundarbans

- Two farmers in South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal are betting on the Pokkali variety of rice from Kerala to tide over a crisis-like situation created by severe seawater incursion into paddy fields in vast areas of the Sundarbans after cyclone Amphan hit West Bengal on May 20. The Pokkali variety, known for its saltwater resistance, flourishes in the paddy fields of coastal Alappuzha, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts. The uniqueness of the rice has brought it the Geographical Indication (GI) tag and is the subject of continuing research.
- Pokkali rice had been in the news because of its uniqueness and also because a group of people in Kerala have been trying to revive the cultivation of that variety in the State. Dr. Banerjee said the science society was aware of the problem facing the Sundarbans farmers and it was decided that Pokkali seeds could be tried out as saltwater incursion had been quite serious in vast areas of the Sundarbans. About 80% of the rice paddies in the Sundarbans faced the problem of saltwater incursion and if the Pokkali experiment succeeded, it would be a good step to turn around the fortunes of the farmers. He said that the seedlings were doing well so far.

Vyttila-11 Variety

Five kilos of **Vyttila-11** variety of Pokkali seedlings were sent by post by Francis Kalathungal, who is part of the **Pokkali Samrakshana Samithi**, which has been at the vanguard of a movement to revive Pokkali cultivation and prevent it from dying out. He said on Tuesday that the success of the experiment in the Sundarbans will be a big boost to Pokkali cultivation even in Kerala. **Vyttila-11 is the latest variety to come out of Kerala Agricultural University’s field station in Vyttila**, said Dr. A. K. Sreelatha of the Rice Research Station. She said that Vyttila-11 promises better yield of about 5 tons per hectare than the previous varieties, and is crossed with the Jyoti variety of rice popular in Kerala. The crop duration is about 110 days.

Hospitals Afire

- The shocking deaths of at least 19 people in special facilities for COVID-19 management in Vijayawada and Ahmedabad have exposed the deep rot in regulatory processes for institutional and commercial building safety. While 11 died in the Andhra Pradesh incident, where a hotel had been taken over by a private hospital to run a COVID-19 care center, nine patients perished in the blaze in a Gujarat hospital intensive care unit (ICU). These ghastly incidents which claimed the lives of those who were getting treatment or recovering from an infection in supposedly secure conditions lay bare the lack of preparedness among



States to manage the expanding pandemic, and hasty contracting procedures. In a familiar pattern, civic and fire authorities who were expected to monitor the safety of such buildings have sought to pin responsibility for the carnage on the owners of the properties. They are being held responsible for failure to obtain a no objection certificate or, in the case of the hotel-turned-COVID-19 care center, carrying out electrical upgrades for safety. This is clearly untenable, as the Supreme Court of India observed about a decade ago in the Uphaar cinema fire tragedy case in Delhi, pulling up authorities including the Union Home Ministry for abdicating responsibility and passing the buck on to the management of the institution. In the Ahmedabad ICU blaze, patients expected the institution to offer the highest levels of safety, but suffered as it was ill-equipped to fight a fire.

Safety regulation of buildings used for health-care delivery is a subset of the overall need to regulate hospitals, and States should use the recent deadly fires as the occasion to launch much-delayed reform. In the absence of safety systems, many died of fire and smoke inhalation, while those who survived had nothing but luck to count on. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. The **National Building Code** of India, with additional fire safety provisions for hospitals, is the basis for hospital accreditation systems, but these should be made mandatory and enforced in all States. **If smoke alarms and sprinkler systems, along with local fire-fighting aids are available, loss of life can be eliminated.** All patients should also be covered by substantial life insurance. Evacuation systems for ICU patients need to be part of the building design. Often, hospital buildings are regularized for unapproved constructions by State governments acting thoughtlessly. Schemes introduced to regularize building violations are clearly anti-social in character. The many fires in institutional buildings and their terrible toll should lead to a full inspection of all such facilities for safety, with civil society keeping up the pressure on governments to act.

The Ayodhya Ram Temple Journey, From November 9, 1989 To August 5, 2020

- From November 9, 1989, when the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) conducted a shilanyas here, to Wednesday, August 5, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay a 22.6 kg silver brick to begin the construction of the Ram temple, Ayodhya has witnessed a medley of historical, cultural, religious and political events. If the Shilanyas marked the beginning of the fall of the Congress, then India's leading political party, the Ram Mandir Bhumi Poojan ceremony signifies the emergence of the new politics brought in by the BJP.

VHP's Shilanyas

Exactly three decades before, on the same day the Supreme Court approved the construction of the Ram Temple at the disputed site, on November 9, 1989, the VHP had put the first stone for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. At a time when then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who had stormed to power with a brute majority in the Lok Sabha, was on a slippery wicket – due to his mishandling of Sri Lanka and the Kashmir situation as well as the intensifying attack against him by the Opposition on the Bofors scandal – the VHP was charged at the ground over the cause of Ram Mandir. Ever since it had announced a foundation laying ceremony at Ayodhya, Hindus from across the world started sending it financial assistance for the cause. The VHP was all set, but the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court ordered a status quo. Determined to defy the court order, VHP collected funds and bricks with Shree Ram written on them, organized kar sevaks and held prayers to go ahead with the Shilanyas. Rajiv Gandhi's government, apparently hoping to cash in on Hindu sentiments to tide over the intensifying political agitation and public anger against his government, decided to let the VHP conduct the ceremony. Then-Home



Minister Buta Singh, who met VHP leader Ashok Singhal, granted him permission to go ahead. Later, as the fervour and communal tension escalated, the Centre and the state governments tried to get the VHP leaders to agree on conducting the Shilanyas outside the disputed site. But on November 9, a congregation of VHP leaders, including Sadhus, dug a 7x7x7 ft pit to lay the singhdwar (main entrance) of the sanctum sanctorium, clearly on the disputed land, defying the agreement they had made with the authorities.

[L.K Advani's Rath Yatra](#)

The most important milestone in the BJP's political journey. The BJP had campaigned heavily over the Ram Temple on the disputed site issue ahead of the 1989 elections, in which it won 89 seats, a giant leap from its tally of two in the previous Lok Sabha polls. Sensing the political opportunity the Ram Temple could create – Lord Ram is the most revered and a uniting figure for Hindus, who follow different rituals and practices across the country – Advani, in September 1990, decided to go for a yatra to educate people about the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which had so far been propagated by the VHP mainly. Advani's Toyota-turned-chariot procession from Somnath, Gujarat, to Ayodhya via central India stirred Hindu sentiments and mobilised the community behind him. Advani almost attained the image of a saint and a savior. It led to the events in December 1992.

[Babri Masjid Demolition on December 6, 1992](#)

Frenzied karsevaks, inspired by the calls of the BJP and VHP leaders, clambered up the domes of the 16th century Babri Masjid and pulled it down, again breaking the assurances given to the Centre and the state governments. The communal violence this sparked across the country left almost 2,000 people dead. President's Rule was imposed in several states, dismissing the BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. But it embarked the BJP on a wider political path that led to its emergence as the most prominent and widespread political party in the country, replacing the decades-long dominance of the Congress.

[Liberhan Commission](#)

The justice M S Liberhan Commission of inquiry was appointed within two weeks of the demolition and was asked to submit a report within three months. The Commission availed 48 extensions and finally submitted its 10,000-page report on January 30, 2009

[The Legal Battle Is Back in April 2002](#)

The matter was back at the courts and yet another legal battle began. A three-judge Bench of the Allahabad High Court was hearing to determine the ownership of the disputed land. The HC ordered the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to excavate the site and determine if it was a temple earlier. In 2003, ASI found evidence of the presence of a temple under the mosque. This re-energized the VHP, and its chief Ashok Singhal asked the then-BJP government to make a legislation to hand over the site to the Hindus so that the construction of the temple could begin. In September 2010, the High Court, which took the ASI's findings along with other evidence before it into consideration, ruled that the disputed land should be divided into three parts – a third should go to Ram Lalla Virajman, represented by the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha; one-third to the Sunni Waqf Board; and the remaining to the Nirmohi Akhara. In December, the parties moved Supreme Court. Neither the VHP-BJP nor the Muslims was happy with the order. In May 2011, the apex court stayed the High Court order. Meanwhile, the VHP continued its campaign with vigour.



But the BJP's coming to power and its silence over the temple as well as the RSS leadership's advice not to escalate pressure over the Ram Temple forced them to lie low. Towards the end of 2018, the VHP again raised its pitch, with hundreds of thousands of Hindu seers and followers assembling in Ayodhya. It along with Shiv Sena organized Dharma Sabha's in different parts of the country and pressed the government to issue an ordinance for the construction of the temple. They were later backed by even the RSS leaders. BJP's senior leaders had to hold several rounds of discussions with the RSS' top leadership to convince them that the government had to wait for the Supreme Court verdict.

On November 9, 2019

A five-judge Supreme Court bench led by then Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi ruled in favour of Ram Lalla, and said the entire disputed land spread over 2.7 acres will be handed over to a trust formed by the government, which will monitor the construction of the Ram Temple at the site.

February 5, 2020

The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of the Trust, with the Prime Minister making the announcement in the Lok Sabha. The Trust, named Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra, is to take decisions independently on the construction of the Ram temple and related issues. It has been handed over the whole 67.703 acres acquired "to maintain the sanctity of Ayodhya and for the construction of the temple, keeping in mind the needs of crores of devotees," Modi said. VHP leader Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Trust, announced that there would be no change to the Ram Temple from the model suggested by the VHP 30 years ago. The prayers and the ceremony started on Tuesday morning with the worship of Lord Hanuman's mark in Ayodhya, as he is believed to preside over the city. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra has invited 175 people, including 133 saints and seers from 36 spiritual traditions all over the country, along with RSS, VHP and BJP leaders, including the party Faizabad MP Lallu Singh for Wednesday's event. VHP's representatives have sent holy soil from Uttarakhand's Char Dham shrines and water from Ganga for the Bhumi Pujan.

The Significance of Ayodhya, August 5

- On May 28, 1996, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee told Lok Sabha that the reason his 13-day government had omitted references to the Ram temple, Article 370, and Common Civil Code in the President's Address to the joint sitting of Parliament was that the BJP did not have a majority. "...Yeh hamare iss samay ke karyakram mein nahin hai... aur isliye nahin hai ki hamare pass bahumat nahin hai. Baat sahi hai. Koi chhupane ki baat nahin hai. (There is nothing to hide. These issues are not on our agenda because we do not have a majority.)" The country's first BJP-led government fell that day – but within a fortnight, on June 11, while opposing the motion of trust moved by Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Sushma Swaraj said Vajpayee's resignation had set the stage for establishment of Ram Rajya in India. "Ram Rajya aur surajya ki niyati hi yahi hai ki who ek bade jhatke ke baad milta hai... Jis din mere neta ne pradhan mantri ke pad se tyagpatra ki ghoshna ki thi, Hindustan mein us din Ram rajya ki bhoomika taiyar ho gayi thi. (It is the destiny of Ram Rajya that it is achieved only after a struggle. But the preface to Ram Rajya was written the day my leader gave up his post.)" Armed with the majority that had eluded Vajpayee and L K Advani, PM Narendra Modi's BJP has achieved two of the three components of its



original core agenda: the virtual abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019 and, exactly a year later, the beginning of the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. August 5, 2020 marks the final demise of an old political consensus and the beginning of a new journey for the nation, the contours of which have been worked upon by the Sangh for decades now.

[A fundamental Faultline](#)

The political landscape of India has been shaped by the tussle between two competing and mutually antagonistic grand ideas: composite nationalism and cultural nationalism. Initially, the dominant idea of Indian nationalism was the one the Congress championed. India's composite culture, shaped by influences from different cultures over the centuries, was its leitmotif. The BJP, its predecessor Jana Sangh, and their parent the RSS, rejected the idea of composite nationalism as a ploy by the post-Independence ruling elite to hide out of sight the impulses that had resulted in Partition. Indian nationalism, the Sangh argued, was a continuous stream flowing for thousands of years, based on the Hindu culture of South Asia. In this understanding, concepts such as composite culture appeared as an attempt to deny Hindu cultural nationalism its rightful place.

[Contradiction in Practice](#)

Given the history of Partition, the modernist-conservative tussle often played out in the contradiction between modern secularism and the promotion of symbols of "Indian culture" such as cows and temples. Even within the Congress, there were strains – Jawaharlal Nehru and other progressives disapproved of the support that Sardar Patel, K M Munshi and President Rajendra Prasad lent to "Hindu revivalism", which was on display during the opening of the rebuilt Somnath Temple. Indeed, Advani's decision to start his first Rath Yatra from Somnath in September 1990 was imbued with political symbolism. Patel's demise and Nehru's electoral successes checked this tussle within the Congress. Outside, the Jana Sangh fought political battles over cow protection and the promotion of Hindi. These issues contributed significantly to its success in 1967, the first elections in which the Congress suffered setbacks in states. The popularity of Indira Gandhi reduced the electoral space for the Jana Sangh; the Emergency, and Indira's introduction of the word 'secularism' in the Preamble, however, opened new windows of opportunity. The Jana Sangh merged with the Janata Party, Vajpayee and Advani became ministers in the central government, and its leaders got power in post-Emergency governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.

[Birth and Growth of BJP](#)

The gains for the erstwhile Jana Sangh triggered a response in its ideological opponents. The RSS sympathies of the Jana Sangh elements within Janata became a sticking point – and their expulsion contributed to the collapse of the first non-Congress Union government. The expelled RSS sympathisers reinvented themselves as the BJP in April 1980. The BJP under the leadership of Vajpayee experimented with Gandhian socialism, and suffered a humiliating defeat in the elections after Indira's assassination. Its appetite for further experimentation gone, the party, guided by the RSS and VHP, chose to build its politics around mobilisation for the Ram Temple. The responsibility for leading the BJP was assigned to Advani. The Shah Bano case and steps taken by Rajiv Gandhi's government revived the old tussle between secular nationalism and cultural nationalism. After pandering to the Muslim orthodoxy, the Congress sought to appease Hindu



conservatives through tentative steps on the Ram Temple – and Advani called out this “pseudo-secularism”. The BJP positioned itself more aggressively and, in 1989, formally adopted the Ram Temple resolution.

[A Foot in The Door](#)

The gains of the 1989 elections set the BJP firmly on the path of pursuing its core agenda. Advani’s Rath Yatra and the kar seva in Ayodhya strongly polarised the politics of North India, and led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. In 1996, the other parties put aside their disagreements to pull down Vajpayee’s 13-day government. But the instability of the United Front gave cultural nationalist politics another chance – and Vajpayee returned in 1998, and 1999. Carrying the burden of coalition politics, the BJP governments of 1998-2004 had no room to push the cultural nationalism project. But the RSS was in a hurry. From the end of 2001, the VHP began fresh mobilisation for the temple. Vajpayee was caught between his coalition and RSS. The burning of the train carrying kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya exploded in the form of the Gujarat riots of 2002.

[Return to Power and Agenda](#)

After Modi led the BJP back to power in 2014, the BJP got busy consolidating its gains in Assemblies. The compulsions of coalition that had held back Vajpayee had disappeared, but the Ram Temple was in the Supreme Court. Article 370, however, was within the government’s control. Once the party returned to power with an enhanced majority in 2019, it moved quickly. First came the criminalization of triple talaq, the low hanging fruit on the way to a Uniform Civil Code. Then Jammu & Kashmir was stripped of its special status under Article 370. The government lent its weight to demands that the Supreme Court expedite hearing on the Babri title suit challenge. Once the court had given its verdict, the BJP was able to drop every hesitation in claiming the victory of its political-ideological agenda. The language and attitude of BJP spokespersons now betray the heady awareness of victory. The Bhoomi Pujan by the Prime Minister in Ayodhya on Wednesday marks a bend in the stream of India’s political consciousness, even as the champions of composite (secular) nationalism falter in their opposition. By drawing parallels between August 5 and August 15, the Prime Minister has placed the idea of liberation from cultural subjugation on the same pedestal as the political independence of India nearly 73 years ago.

[Meet the Sompuras, Master Architects Who Are Building The Ram Temple In Ayodhya](#)

- The Ram Temple in Ayodhya, whose ‘bhoomi puja’ will be performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday (August 5) is **being built by the Sompura family of temple architects**, led by the **patriarch Chandrakant Sompura** who first visited the site where the Babri Masjid once stood more than 30 years ago.

[From Somnath To Ayodhya, A Family of Temple Builders](#)

Chandrakant Sompura, 77, had started work on the temple to Ram Lalla in Ayodhya 30 years ago, after he first visited the site with then Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) president Ashok Singhal. Industrialist Ghanshyamdas Birla asked him if he would take up the Ram Mandir project, and introduced him to Singhal. Sompura had worked on several of the Birla



temples then. From then to today, August 5, is the longest time a project commissioned to the Sompuras has taken for the ground-breaking, says the patriarch, whose family has designed around 200 temples in India and abroad. Sompura has decided not to go to the site because of his age and the coronavirus pandemic. But his son, Ashish, 49, who has made the site plan of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, is in Ayodhya to work out the details with Larsen & Toubro, the company that has been awarded the contract to build the temple. The art of temple building came to Ashish largely from his father and great grandfather Prabhashankar, who built the Somnath Temple in Prabhas Patan on the Gujarat coast inaugurated by the first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, in 1951. Prabhashankar, who was later honoured with the Padma Shri, lost his son, Balwantrao, who was then 51, in an accident while Balwantrao was returning from a renovation project of the Badrinath temple. But for the family, the Somnath temple is the closest to their heart. The Sompuras believe that their ancestors were taught the art of temple building by the divine architect Vishwakarma himself. The Sompuras, who come from Palitana town of Bhavnagar, consider themselves to be 'residents of the moon' (Som = moon and Pura= city). Their ancestor Ramji built the Jain temple complex on the Shetrunjay hills of Palitana, commissioned to him by a sugar merchant from Bombay who named the main dwar 'Ram pol' after him, says Sompura. He did not go to any formal school of architecture, having learnt it from his grandfather and father and the shastras, he says – his sons and others who joined in the temple project are, however, trained engineers or architects. Among Ashish's projects has been the private temple in the Ambani home at Antilla in Mumbai. The family has built the Akshardham temples in the country, as well as the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purshottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) Sanstha temple in Neasden, United Kingdom. The head of the BAPS, Mahant Swami, is among the seven saints who have been invited for the 'bhoomi puja'.

What the Ram Temple Will Look Like

The temple has been planned in the Nagar 'shaili' (a style of temple architecture where the temple tower is built over the sanctum sanctorum. The other major style is the Dravidian, which includes gopurams), and is far bigger than what had been originally planned. The unique feature of the Ram Mandir will be the octagonal shape of the sanctum sanctorum, in keeping with the design provided in the shastras for a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The Ram temple, will be on a raised platform, and will have the four features of a typical Hindu temple: the 'chauki' (verandah), 'nritya mandap' (semi covered porch), 'gudh mandap' (covered porch), and 'garbha griha' (sanctum sanctorum), aligned on a single axis. The original would have used up to 3 lakh cubic feet of sandstone; an additional 3 lakh cubic feet will now be needed, which will be mined at Bansi Paharpur in Rajasthan. The Sompuras had initially estimated the construction to be completed in three and a half years, but the pandemic could push it back by another 6-8 months. The VHP had commissioned the building of the temple to three contractors, who have now been replaced by L&T.

Time Capsules: What They Contain, How They Are Installed, And Why

- Ahead of the laying of the foundation stone for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, claims and denials have emerged about plans by the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to put in a time capsule, or 'kaal patra'. While Trust member Kameshwar Chaupal said the "capsule would carry a message about Ayodhya, Lord Ram and his birthplace and it will be



preserved so as to last thousands of years”, the Trust’s general secretary Champat Rai has dismissed reports of a time capsule being installed on August 5.

What Is A Time Capsule?

It is a container of any size or shape, which accommodates documents, photos and artefacts typical of the current era and is buried underground, for future generations to unearth. The time capsule requires special engineering so that the contents don’t decay, even if pulled out after a century. While the term “time capsule” was coined in the 20th century, among the earliest examples of one date back to 1777, found by historians inside the statue of Jesus Christ in a church in Spain during restoration work in December 2017. The International Time Capsule Society (ITCS), based in the US and formed in 1990, is now defunct but continues estimating the number of time capsules in the world. As per its database, there are “10,000-15,000 times capsules worldwide”.

Are There Any Time Capsules in India?

There have been a number of prominent examples. One-time capsule, outside the Red Fort and placed underground in 1972 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was dug out by the subsequent government. Other time capsules are at a school in Mumbai, IIT-Kanpur, Lovely Professional University in Jalandhar, and Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar. The Red Fort time capsule was supposed to be dug out after 1,000 years. Professor Salil Misra, a historian who currently teaches at Delhi’s Ambedkar University, said, “In 1972, Mrs. Gandhi decided to create a repository. These were huge, cylindrical shaped cases made of metal which could endure the test of time. Inside, there were written records, data and artefacts. In 1977, when the Janata Party came in to power, they dug out the time capsule.” JD(U) national spokesperson K C Tyagi, who was 22 at the time the capsule was installed, told The Indian Express that the Opposition of the time, including Hiren Mukherjee, Jyotirmoy Basu and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, protested against the move. “The apprehension was that only those aspects of India’s history which are related to her or her family were being preserved in the time capsule. There was a lot of opposition to this inside Parliament and outside it too. She was accused of only preserving the contribution of her family in the Freedom Movement, in post-Independence India, and in nation building,” said Tyagi. He said that the contents were not made public after the time capsule was dug out.

What Have the Other Time Capsules Preserved?

On March 6, 2010, President Pratibha Patil buried the time capsule on the IIT Kanpur campus. An aerial map of the institute, annual reports of 1961, 1984 and 2008, menu of the hostel mess, the blazer crest, a DVD of a film on IIT Kanpur, some photographs, and oral records of the interviews conducted by Sunil Shanbag are inside the time capsule. IIT Kanpur deputy director Manindra Agarwal told The Indian Express, “All the documents were printed on acid-free paper... A lot of information was put on pen-drives and external hard-drives, put in the capsule, and then oxygen was taken out so that no decay happens. It is made of brass and the encasing is an inch thick, so no oxygen goes in. We suggested that when the institute completes a centenary, the capsule may be taken out but it all really depends on the set of people then because none of us will be around!”

How Significant Are Time Capsules?

Historians often criticise the idea as being motivated. Professor Misra said, “This exercise is inevitably a subjective exercise, geared towards glorification not to construct the real



picture. All historians look at this time capsule exercise with suspicion. It's not a valid historical method – who decides what matter, what artefacts, written documents are going in to it?" Historian Aditya Mukherjee said, "When kings and queens of the past had their whole stories written by courtiers, historians don't take that to be the fact. You use other sources to verify it." He said it would be "far more sensible to form a committee for people with different opinions to make the time capsule if at all." Political scientist Zoya Hasan, Professor Emerita, JNU, said historical research is based on critical inquiry and evidence. "No historian worth his or her name will rely on a capsule to write history. But who cares for evidence and facts when political message becomes the function of history and so-called academic research", she said? Misra also said that historians of future generations are going to find all kinds of data and records in order to reconstruct our current time, "so if historians a century from now want to write about the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, there will be enough data in newspapers and other written records... No one needs to artificially create a preserved record about it".

The Process of Renaming Roads, When Such Requests Are Entertained

- A day before the bhoomi puja for Ram Temple in Ayodhya, former union minister Vijay Goel defaced the Babar Road signboard in Central Delhi, pasting a new board over what exists, demanding that it be called 5 August Marg instead. Goel said Babar was an "invader who attacked Hindustan and demolished Ram Mandir". This is not the first time that such demands for changing a road name has been put forward. However, there is a channel and process through which any name change request goes.

What Is the Process of Renaming A Road?

Requests to change names of roads comes to agencies that have jurisdiction over the space, in this case New Delhi Municipal Council, from various places, such as the Home Ministry, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), different organizations and groups and local residents. Once the request is received, it is sent to the general administration department of NDMC. Thereafter, an agenda is put up before the NDMC council, which is a 13-member body headed by the council Chairperson, that takes the decision. If the resolution is passed, it is sent to the state road naming authority of the urban development department of the Delhi government for approval. If the decree directs for the changing of the road name, a letter is also sent to the postmaster general of Delhi by the NDMC indicating that a change has been accepted.

What Are The Criteria To Accept Or Reject A Change?

The council has laid down criteria for entertaining such requests as per the guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Such requests should have historical relevance, respect the sentiments of people, it must be felt that there is a need to recognise the personality whose name has to be given to the street. The new names should not create confusion for the post offices and the public and deprive the people of a sense of history. Also, renaming is an exception, states the NDMC guideline.

Is Renaming of Roads A Recent Phenomenon in Delhi?

No, the first such instance was the renaming of Kingsway Road to Raj Path and Queensway to Janpath, post-Independence. Kingsway Road is where the Republic Day parade is currently held. Thereafter, Curzon Road was changed to Kasturba Gandhi Marg. Later,

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



several other road names were changed, like Ratendone Road was renamed Amrita Shergil Marg and Kitchener Road was renamed Sardar Patel Marg. Some names drawn from India's colonial past, such as Hailey Road, Chelmsford Road, still survive. Back in 2015, **Aurangzeb Road was named after former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam**, amid some controversy. The name of **Race Course Road was also changed to Lok Kalyan Marg**. After the road was renamed in 2016, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) changed the name of the Race Course Road metro station in line with the new name.

How Is This Practice Viewed?

There are different schools of thoughts. Historians believe that this exercise deprives people of a sense of history. They say the names like Aurangzeb road (recently changed) alongside a cluster of other roads were named after Mughal rulers by the British when they designed the capital in early 20th century to reflect a sense of Delhi's history. This, despite being at conflict with Mughal rulers including Bahadur Shah Zafar who was tried and sent to exile by them. They also advocate that a ruler's act should be judged in the context in which they had ruled. There is another school of thought that advocates these changes that believes that rulers like Aurangzeb and Babar were cruel administrators and that there is no reason to honour them by naming a road after them. Some believe that such exercises are unnecessary diversion of resources and energy and only create confusion. In the case of Connaught Place, for example, which was named Rajiv Chowk, the change has not made much of a difference as people continue to use the old name.

What Are the Processes After the Name Is Changed?

The main expense is related to repainting street signs and making the names of civic corporations consistent with the city's name. One has to paste the letters in with reflective tape or engrave it. The banks, schools or other institutions on the road change their postal addresses on their own after a direction is given.

Why Mayawati Is Wooing the Brahmins Again Ahead Of 2022 Assembly Elections

- Two days ago, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati said that if voted to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2022, the party will build a grand statue of Lord Parshuram. A similar announcement was made by the Samajwadi Party a day earlier. Before this, when gangster Vikas Dubey was killed in police encounter early July, Mayawati accused the Yogi Adityanath government of harassing the Brahmins in the state. On August 8, too, she referred to the incident again and accused the state government of doublespeak: "Muh mein ram, bagal mein churi (running with the hare and hunting with the hounds)." Earlier in 2018, after the killing of Apple executive Vivek Tiwari allegedly by two policemen in Lucknow, Mayawati had said: "Atrocities against Brahmins have increased in the BJP rule." Such statements are reminiscent of the BSP chief's famed social engineering formula that involved wooing the Brahmin community that propelled her party to power in UP with an absolute majority in 2007. Moreover, Brahmins in UP have also been accusing the Yogi Adityanath government of sidelining them, a sentiment that all opposition parties are eager to exploit ahead of the 2022 elections

When the Postman Rings with Cash

- The postal department's new service of delivering money home – with the postman acting as a human ATM – has turned out to be a big hit countrywide, with more than one lakh

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



transactions being recorded across India on a daily basis, according to a top official. The service began shortly before the COVID-19-forced lockdown was imposed in late March but back then the number of transactions merely stood at double digits.

Relief for The Elderly

Its demand soared in the following weeks, when people were stranded at home but needed cash to buy essentials. This free service allows people to withdraw — through the postman — up to ₹10,000 at a time from any of their Aadhaar-linked bank accounts. **The postman carries a portable biometric device to match fingerprints. All a person needs to do is to use the Postinfo app or simply call the local post office or spot the postman.** Every postman typically carries ₹50,000-₹60,000 in cash and in case he runs out of money, he can deliver the following day. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu are among the States where this service has turned out to be most popular, with more and more of the elderly and people living in rural areas availing of it.

Facing Limitations

The service has been catching on at a time when the postal department itself is facing limitations due to the spread of COVID-19 and the series of lockdowns. “Attendance has been hit, and we are outsourcing staff for loading and unloading of mail bags, driving of parcel vans and sorting of mails,” Mr. Singh said. Despite the limitations, the department carried out a special delivery of rakhis in all districts. It has also been reaching monthly pension to those eligible during the lockdown period, he added.

Air India Express Plane Crash: Tabletop Runway A Challenge, No Fire Was Saving

Grace

- Plane crash at Kozhikode in Kerala involving an Air India Express flight with 190 people on board is the first major accident since the 2010 crash at Mangaluru airport. **The Air India Express-operated Boeing 737-800 aircraft overshot Kozhikode airport’s runway — a tabletop runway like Mangaluru’s — and fell 35 feet down a slope, resulting in the aircraft splitting into two.** Kozhikode’s runway is surrounded by deep gorges on both sides. **Tabletop runways are generally constructed by chopping off the top of a hill, and are often thought of as tricky for landings because of the lack of any margin for overshooting the runway.** According to senior government officials, the Air India Express aircraft at Kozhikode did not catch fire upon crashing, thereby minimising casualties. An official at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said **the aircraft seemed to have touched down at higher than usual speed, giving pilots less time to bring it to a halt at a runway that is shorter than usual.** In addition to the airports at Kozhikode and Mangaluru, the Lengpui airport in Mizoram, Pakyong airport in Sikkim, and Simla and Kullu in Himachal Pradesh are built on tabletops. Other tabletop airports outside India include **Paro in Bhutan and Kathmandu in Nepal.** In 2010, an Air India Express plane overshot the runway at Mangaluru airport in Karnataka and crashed into a valley before bursting into flames, killing 158 people. Last year, another Air India Express flight from Dubai veered off the runway at Mangaluru and halted in soft ground, causing a scare for 181 passengers on board. **According to pilots, landing on tabletop runways requires precision approach with little to no room for errors.** In fact, soon after the Mangaluru incident in 2010, the DGCA had banned wide-bodied aircraft from landing at Kozhikode airport, which require longer distances to slow down because of their higher payloads. At 2,860 meters, Kozhikode’s



runway is only about 400 meters longer than Mangaluru but the crash could put a spotlight on other airports that see regular narrow-bodied aircraft operations with comparatively shorter runways like Patna, which is 2,072 meters in length. Delhi's Runway 29/11 is the longest in the country at 4,430 meters. Poor weather at Kozhikode airport at the time the Air India Express plane was attempting to land could have worsened the situation. *A runway that is subjected to a downpour causes a layer of water to form over the surface that reduces the friction and causes the plane to skid if the brakes are applied.* Without full brakes at the crew's disposal, stopping the aircraft in time becomes even more difficult for the pilots.

Why the Air India crash would have been much worse had the aircraft caught fire

- Even as investigations are underway, the primary difference between the Mangalore crash of an Air India Express aircraft in 2010 and the one in Kozhikode on Friday evening was that there was no post-crash fire in the latter incident. This minimized the casualties at Kozhikode.

What Are the Causes for A Post-Crash Fire?

An aircraft is usually carrying large quantities of highly inflammable aviation turbine fuel, which is stored in tanks in its belly and two wings. When an aircraft makes an uncontrolled impact with the ground or an object, the structural damage to the hull could cause the tanks to rupture, leading to leakage of fuel or oil, which, if sparked off, could result in an explosive fire. Additionally, a fire can also be ignited in case the aircraft is carrying goods that are flammable, such as batteries and chemicals.

What Happens When There Is A Post-Crash Fire?

When an aircraft is engulfed in flames after crash-landing, it becomes all the more difficult for people on board to evacuate the plane. It also restricts the ability of first responders to carry out the evacuation process. Given that most modern airliners carry large amounts of fuel, whenever the cockpit crew foresees a problem with the aircraft, such as engine failure or landing gear problem – something that could lead to an unusual landing – the Air Traffic Control informs emergency services, including the fire brigade, to expect a fire. Plus, the pilots attempt to jettison the fuel before a crash landing.

Why Black Boxes Are Important to An Air Crash Investigation

- In a significant development towards ascertaining the reasons behind the Air India Express crash at Kozhikode on Friday evening, investigators have found the “black boxes” of the ill-fated Boeing 737-800 aircraft. These boxes will help investigators weave together the crucial events that led to the crash, which killed at least 18 people on board, including both pilots.

What Are Black Boxes?

The black boxes, which are actually two orange metallic boxes containing the recorders, date back to the early 1950s, when, following plane crashes, investigators were unable to arrive a conclusive cause for the accidents and deemed it necessary to install the said recorders on aircraft. In the initial days of the black box, the information was recorded on



to a metal strip, which was then upgraded to magnetic drives succeeded by solid state memory chips.

Why Are Black Boxes Important to An Air Crash Investigation?

Most aircraft are required to be equipped with **two black boxes** – the **cockpit voice recorder (CVR)** and the **flight data recorder (FDR)** – that record the information about a flight and help reconstruct the events leading to an aircraft accident. While the CVR records radio transmissions and other sounds in the cockpit such as conversations between the pilots and engine noises, the flight data recorder records more than 80 different types of information such as altitude, airspeed, flight heading, vertical acceleration, pitch, roll, autopilot status etc.

How Do the Black Boxes Survive the Crash?

The recording devices are stored inside a unit that is generally made out of strong substances such as **steel or titanium** and are also insulated from factors such as extreme heat, cold or wetness. **To protect these black boxes, they are equipped towards the tail end of the aircraft – where usually the impact of a crash is the least.** There have been cases where planes have crashed into water bodies. **To make black boxes discoverable in situations where they are under water, they are equipped with a beacon that sends out ultrasound signals for 30 days.** However, in certain cases – like the Malaysian Airlines MH370 flight – the recorders aren't found despite all the redundancies.

How Soon Will the Analysis from The Black Boxes Be Available?

It usually takes at least 10-15 days to analyse the data recovered from the black boxes. Meanwhile the investigators will be looking for other clues such as taking accounts from air traffic control personnel and recordings of the conversation between ATC and the pilots' moments before the crash. This will help the investigation team understand if pilots were aware that they were in a situation that was headed to such an eventuality and if so, whether they had reported any problems regarding controlling the aircraft. **Additionally, the investigators will also be looking at various data recorders at the airport, which would tell them about the precise point of touchdown on the runway and the speed at which the aircraft touched down.**

Why Air India Express Is Liable to Pay Rs 1.19 Crore to Each Victim of Kozhikode Crash

- The crash of the Air India Express plane at Kozhikode on August 7 that killed 18 people including both pilots could make the airline liable to pay compensation of Rs 1.19 crore per passenger in case of death or bodily injury, according to the charter of passenger rights notified by the Central government in February last year.

How Is This Amount Calculated?

As per the charter of passenger rights for air travelers, the compensation is calculated based on payment of damages of up to **1,13,100 Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)**, or around Rs 1.19 crore, for international flights. As on Friday, **1 SDR was equivalent to \$1.41**, while Indian Rupee closed at Rs 74.75 to the US dollar Monday. The limits of liability during international flights for airlines have been defined under **The Carriage by Air (Amendment)**



Act of 2016, based on India's adoption of the Montreal Convention in 2009, which unifies rules governing compensation to passengers globally. The liability limit for damage in case of death or bodily injury for each person was raised to 1,13,100 SDR from 1,00,000 SDR after the amendment to the law in 2016. Compensation for lost, delayed or damaged cargo was also revised upwards in 2016.

How Does India's Adoption of The Montreal Convention Pan Out?

For domestic carriage within India, the government applied a modified version of the Montreal Convention with regard to compensation. As per a January 17, 2014 notification in the official gazette by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, for death or bodily injury during domestic flights, airlines are liable to pay up to **Rs 20 lakh per passenger**. In case of **death inside an aircraft due to natural cases, airlines are not liable to pay any compensation on both international and domestic flights**. Air India officials did not respond to calls and an email seeking comments on how much compensation will be paid to passengers on board Air India Express plane flight coming from Dubai to Kozhikode, which crashed last Friday. So far, Air India Express has announced an interim compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased passengers of age 12 years and above, Rs 5 lakh to passengers below age of 12, Rs 2 lakh to passengers who are critically injured and Rs 50,000 to other passengers injured in the incident.

Floods to Plane Crashes, The Role National Disaster Response Force Plays in India

→ Teams of rescuers from the **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)**, in their **orange uniforms**, are now a familiar sight at most of the natural calamities or man-made disasters in India. On Friday, you might have seen images of personnel conducting rescue operations after an Air India Express flight crash landed in Kerala's Kozhikode. You also may have noticed personnel helping out in Mumbai, when the heavy rains cause waterlogging in several parts of the city. The NDRF is equipped and trained to handle a range of difficulties, from borewell accidents to chemical, biological and radioactive emergencies. Amid a busy season for the agency, a look at how it came into being, how personnel are deputed from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), and how they are trained.

Origins Lie in The National Disaster Management Act, 2005

Parliament passed the **National Disaster Management Act in 2005** as a much-needed step towards determining responsibility and accountability for disaster response, something which was highlighted by major calamities like the 2001 earthquake and 2004 tsunami. The legislation was also the result of ongoing discussions about disaster management on international forums at the time. The law laid down a legal framework for disaster response at the national, state and district level. **The Act paved way for establishing Disaster Management Authorities at the national, state and district levels, setting up the National Disaster Response and Mitigation Funds, and formation of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF). The National Disaster Management Authority is chaired by the Prime Minister.**

The Constitution of NDRF And Its Structure

The NDRF was raised in 2006, initially with eight **battalions**, and now has **12 spread across the country**. Each battalion, which has a sanctioned strength of 1,150 rescuers, caters to particular states as their areas of responsibility. In case required, teams from other



battalions are moved for emergency response. Battalions are divided into rescue teams which are self-contained emergency response units with specialist search and rescue groups, engineering, technical, electrical experts along dog squads and paramedics. **NDRF functions under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and is headed by a Director General.** NDRF officials believe that the strategies of preemptive availability and pre-positioning of teams anticipating emergency situations, facilitated by nationwide presence of its battalions, has made sure that damages are contained. In many cases, NDRF teams have been airlifted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) for deployment. It has been recently announced that four more NDRF battalions will be raised, and teams of women rescuers will also be inducted.

Personnel and Training of the NDRF

The NDRF gets personnel and officers on deputation from the CAPF for a period of seven years. After serving their tenure, personnel go back to their force. Currently, NDRF has battalions staffed by personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB). After personnel and officers are deputed to the NDRF, they undergo a first responder course for five months. Subsequently, sections of personnel get advanced specialized training in deep diving, special search and rescue, collapsed structure search and rescue, Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear emergencies and also psycho-social intervention. Some of the personnel further undergo specialized training with national and international institutions including those on chemical and biological warfare situations. There are some very specific and specialized training modules like the borewell rescue course – because of a number of incidents across India where children fall into uncovered borewells.

NDRF Operations

The agency has conducted relief, rescue, evacuation operations during all the major natural or man-made disasters in the country, including floods, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, structure collapses and even some cases of retrieval or radiological materials. NDRF teams have also responded to road and train accidents, and also boat capsizes. The NDRF has received global appreciation for aiding Japan in 2011, when it was struck by an earthquake, tsunami and a nuclear emergency. It was also praised for its efforts in the 2015 Nepal earthquake. While the NDRF has been able to keep upgrading its technology, officials say more needs to be done. For example, the agency acquired Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in the past, but officials say an all-weather UAV which can even function in extreme conditions is the need of the hour. Officials said they also require upgraded versions of life detection systems, which will further enhance capabilities during structure collapse responses. **While the NDRF will remain the main national agency, there is urgent need to build efficient State Disaster Response Forces (SDRFs) across states.**

Leopard Poaching Highest in Uttarakhand, Maharashtra

- A recent study by TRAFFIC India on the seizure and mortality of 'common leopards' (*Panthera pardus fusca*) revealed that of the total of 747 leopard deaths between 2015-2019 in India, 596 were linked to illegal wildlife trade and activities related to poaching. **TRAFFIC is a leading wildlife trade monitoring network across the world** and the paper has been authored by Saket Badola, head of the TRAFFIC India office, and Astha Gautam. **The paper titled "SPOTTED" in Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Peek into Ongoing Poaching and Illegal**

Shatabdi Tower, Sakchi, Jamshedpur



Trade of Leopards in India' also said that the highest numbers of poaching incidents were reported from the States of Uttarakhand and Maharashtra. "It is also believed that bones of the leopard are possibly traded as tiger bones as they have a larger international demand for traditional medicines," the report states. Another concern raised in the paper is the incidence of live animal trade involving leopard cubs in seizures in Chennai and in Maharashtra.

India's Population Data and A Tale of Two Projections (Sonalde Desai - Professor of Sociology at The University of Maryland And Professor and Centre Director, NCAER National Data Innovation Centre)

→ A new study (<https://bit.ly/30JzoKd>), published in the highly regarded journal, The Lancet, and prepared by the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), has shaken up the world of population policy. It argues that while India is destined to be the largest country in the world, its population will peak by mid-century. And as the 21st century closes, its ultimate population will be far smaller than anyone could have anticipated, about 1.09 billion instead of approximately 1.35 billion today. It could even be as low as 724 million. They predict that by the year 2100, on average, Indian women will have 1.29 children. Since each woman must have two children to replace herself and her husband, this will result in a sharp population decline. Contrast this predicted fertility rate of 1.29 for India with the projected cohort fertility of 1.53 for the United States and 1.78 for France in the same model. It is difficult to believe that Indian parents could be less committed to childbearing than American or French parents. Until 2050, the IHME projections are almost identical to widely-used United Nations projections. The UN (<https://bit.ly/2PGYALh>) projects that India's population will be 1.64 billion by 2050, the IHME projects 1.61 billion by 2048. It is only in the second half of the century that the two projections diverge with the UN predicting a population of 1.45 billion by 2100, and the IHME, 1.09 billion. Part of this divergence may come from IHME model's excessive reliance on data regarding current contraceptive use in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and potential for increasing contraceptive use. Research at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) National Data Innovation Centre by Santanu Pramanik and colleagues shows that contraceptive use in the NFHS is poorly estimated, and as a result, unmet need for contraception may be lower than that estimated by the IHME model, generating implausibly low fertility projections for 2100.

Fertility Decline

Regardless of whether we subscribe to the UN's projections, or the IHME projections, India's demographic future contains a peaking and subsequently declining population driven by a sharp reduction in fertility. In the 1950s, India's Total fertility rate (TFR) was nearly six children per woman; today it is 2.2. Ironically, the massive push for family planning coupled with forced sterilization during the Emergency barely led to a 17% decline in TFR from 5.9 in 1960 to 4.9 in 1980. However, between 1992 and 2015, it had fallen by 35% from 3.4 to 2.2. What happened to accelerate fertility decline to a level where 18 States and Union Territories have a TFR below 2, the replacement level? One might attribute it to the success of the family planning programme but family planning has long lost its primacy in the Indian policy discourse. Between 1975 and 1994, family planning workers had targets they were expected to meet regarding sterilizations, condom



distribution and intrauterine device (IUD) insertion. Often these targets led to explicit or implicit coercion. Following the **Cairo conference on Population and Development in 1994**, these targets were abandoned. If carrots have been dropped, the stick of policies designed to punish people with large families has been largely ineffective. Punitive policies include denial of maternity leave for third and subsequent births, limiting benefits of maternity schemes and ineligibility to contest in local body elections for individuals with large families. However, as Nirmala Buch, former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, wrote, these policies... were mostly ignored in practice.

Aspirational Revolution

If public policies to encourage the small family norm or to provide contraception have been lackadaisical, what led couples to abandon the ideal of large families? It seems highly probable that the socioeconomic transformation of India since the 1990s has played an important role. Over this period, agriculture became an increasingly smaller part of the Indian economy, school and college enrolment grew sharply and individuals lucky enough to find a job in government, multinationals or software services companies reaped tremendous financial benefits. Not surprisingly, parents began to rethink their family-building strategies. Where farmers used to see more workers when they saw their children, the new aspirational parents see enrolment in coaching classes as a ticket to success. The literature on fertility decline in western countries attributes the decline in fertility to retreat from the family; Indian parents seem to demonstrate increased rather than decreased commitment to family by reducing the number of children and investing more in each child. It is not aspirations for self but that for children that seems to drive fertility decline.

In Language of The Past

Ironically, even in the face of this sharp fertility decline among all segments of Indian society, the public discourse is still rooted in the language of the 1970s and on supposedly high fertility rate, particularly in some areas such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar or among some groups such as women with low levels of education or Muslims. This periodically results in politicians proposing remedies that would force these ostensibly ignorant or uncaring parents to have fewer children. Demographic data suggest that the aspirational revolution is already under way. What we need to hasten the fertility decline is to ensure that the health and family welfare system is up to this challenge and provides contraception and sexual and reproductive health services that allow individuals to have only as many children as they want.

Will environment regulation be weakened?

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has published the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2020, with the intention of replacing the existing EIA Notification, 2006 under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The government wants to incorporate modifications made to the regulations through amendments in the interim period. An EIA makes a scientific estimate of the likely impacts of a project, such as a mine, irrigation dam, industrial unit or waste treatment plant. There is also a provision for public consultation in the rules, including a public hearing at which the local community and interested persons can give opinions and raise objections, based on the draft EIA report prepared by experts for the project.



How Does the Draft EIA Notification Differ from The One Now in Force?

Among the major departures from existing regulations is the **removal of several activities from the purview of public consultation**. A list of projects has been included under **Category B2, expressly exempted from the requirement of an EIA (Clause 13, sub cl. 11)**. The projects under this category include offshore and onshore oil, gas and shale exploration, hydroelectric projects up to 25 MW, irrigation projects between 2,000 and 10,000 hectares of command area, small and medium mineral beneficiation units, small foundries involving furnace units, some categories of re-rolling mills, small and medium cement plants, small clinker grinding units, acids other than phosphoric or ammonia, Sulphur acid, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in dye and dye intermediates, bulk drugs, synthetic rubbers, medium-sized paint units, all inland waterway projects, expansion or widening of highways between 25 km and 100 km with defined parameters, aerial ropeways in ecologically sensitive areas, and specified building construction and area development projects. The projects in this list are, under existing norms, identified on the basis of screening by Expert Appraisal Committees, rather than being exempted through listing in the Schedule. Also, coal and non-coal mineral prospecting and solar photovoltaic projects do not need prior environmental clearance or permission in the new scheme.

What Are the Apprehensions?

There is apprehension that the exemption from EIA and public consultation for listed B2 category activity and expansion and modernization projects will seriously affect the environment, since these will be carried out without oversight. Combined with a new provision for **post-facto environmental clearance** (of projects executed without prior clearance), this would further weaken protections. Moreover, **the notice period for public hearing has been cut from 30 days to 20 days**. This will make it difficult to study the draft EIA report, more so when it is not widely available or provided in the regional language. Similarly, for project modernization and expansion, the norms in Notification 2020 are liberal, with only those involving more than 25% increase requiring EIA, and over 50% attracting public consultation. Under the proposed changes, project proponents need to submit only one annual report on compliance with conditions, compared to the existing two. The move is seen as retrograde, because the CAG found in 2016 that the deficiency in semi-annual compliance reporting was between 43% and 78%, while failure to comply with conditions ranged from 5% to 57%. Non-compliance was encountered particularly in river valley and hydroelectric power projects and thermal power projects. After the gas leak at LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam on May 7, the Environment Ministry told the National Green Tribunal that the unit lacked environment clearance, exposing the low effectiveness of rules.

How Would the New Rules Enable Post-Facto Approval of Violations?

The MoEF&CC cites its own order of March 14, 2017 enabling appraisal of projects involving violations – where construction had begun or expansion or modernization was carried out without clearance – and an order of the Jharkhand High Court asking for consideration of a case on merits, independent of penal action for violation, to introduce a beneficial scheme for violators. **The EIA Notification 2020 excludes reporting by the public of violations and non-compliance**. Instead, the government will take cognizance of reports only from the violator-promoter, government authority, Appraisal Committee or Regulatory Authority. Such projects can then be approved with conditions, including remediation of



ecological damage, which, again, will be assessed and reported by the violator (and not an unconnected agency), although Central Pollution Control Board guidelines must be used.

How Does the Draft Notification Compare with Global Norms?

EIA rules must meet the requirements of the precautionary principle of avoiding harm, and intergenerational equity. The European Union, as an evolving example, has modified its processes in accordance with the Aarhus Convention, 1998, which stipulates that environmental rights and human rights are linked, the present generation owes an obligation to future generations, sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders, government accountability and environmental protection are connected, and interactions between the public and public authorities must take place in a democratic context. The EU Directive on EIA includes climate change and biodiversity concerns. The rules in India, including EIA 2006, it can be argued, privileged the interests of the project proponent by whittling down public consultations, accepting flawed and faulty EIA reports resulting from external influences, and ignoring the non-renewable nature of resources. Notification 2020 deepens the impact of that paradigm.

A Look at How the Idukki Landslide Happened

- The landslide happened at 10:45 pm on August 6 at Pettimudi, a hamlet in Rajamala ward under Munnar village panchayat in Kerala's Idukki district. Workers of Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company (P) Ltd were living in Pettimudi. Rajamala includes Eravikulam National Park, and the landslide was triggered from a shola forest region in the national park. Rocks, slurry and sludge crashed down a distance of around 1½ km to a patch of valley in Pettimudi, crushing the single-room houses of estate workers that stood in two rows, face to face.

Vulnerable Area

The location where the landslide was triggered, according to the Kerala Geology Department, has a 40° slope, and any slope above 20° is vulnerable to slipping during heavy rain. The soil has a high content of sand, which absorbs more water, takes a loose form, and is at risk of slipping down. An analysis of landslides in Idukki by the State Disaster Management Authority has shown that high-intensity rainfall saturates the soil on the slopes. Soil with higher clay content has high water retention capacity and low drainage capacity, leading to high water pressure in the slope material. Human interventions such as heavy loading on the slopes caused by buildings on cut-and-fill ground, without adequate protective measures on the uphill and downhill sides, have made the area particularly vulnerable. Frequent slides have resulted in blockage of river channels and changed the river's course.

The Victims

Officials said 83 people were living in 30 single-room, sheet-roofed quarters, provided by the estate. 12 of them were rescued by residents of another settlement. So far, 49 bodies have been recovered in laborious rescue operations. Local people said more are missing as many had come as guests from other areas. Only a handful of residents, who were away, have survived. The victims included 31 persons of one extended family who lived in adjacent quarters, and six temporary staff at the Eravikulam National Park. Nineteen schoolchildren have either died or are still missing.



Sushant Singh Rajput Probe: Can Two Police Forces Investigate the Same Case?

- The death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput has seen a lot of controversy with his family now alleging foul play and even filing an abetment to suicide case in Patna. But can two different police forces investigate the same case? What is a Zero FIR?

Can Two Police Forces Investigate the Same Case?

No. A case can be formally transferred to another agency like the CBI, but two agencies cannot probe the same FIR simultaneously. In cases where a money laundering aspect emerges, the Enforcement Directorate registers an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) and restricts its probe to the money laundering aspect of it. Even in the Sushant Singh Rajput case, after his father alleged to Bihar Police that money had been transferred to unidentified accounts from Rajput's bank account, the ED registered an ECIR under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). However, under regular crimes, if an offence has taken place in Mumbai and the family is in Bihar, as per law, they can go to the nearest police station in Bihar and register a FIR. The police station is duty bound to register a "zero FIR" and transfer the case to the police station under whose jurisdiction the crime has taken place.

What is Zero FIR?

In order to ensure that a citizen does not have to run from one police station to another to register a FIR, the law has allowed any police station across the country to register a FIR as soon as a cognizable offence is disclosed to them. The Ministry of Home Affairs had first issued an advisory to this effect on May 10, 2013 following the National Commission of Minorities Annual report 2011 -12 that recommended among other things prompt registration of FIR. Advisories to this effect were later sent by MHA on February 5, 2014 and October 12, 2015. The latest advisory said, "...as per Section 154 of the Criminal Procedure Code, a police officer is duty bound to register the case on the basis of such information disclosing a cognizable offence and FIR to be registered irrespective of territorial jurisdiction."

So, What Is the Controversy in The Sushant Singh Rajput Case?

In the current case, after registering the FIR, the Bihar Police themselves came to Mumbai to investigate the case instead of transferring the case to the local police. There are political undertones to this as it is being alleged that the Mumbai Police is not taking action against those responsible for Rajput's death. Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh has, however, clarified that they have registered 56 statements so far and no one has made any allegations as yet.

What Investigation Has the Bihar Police Conducted So Far?

A four-member team of the Bihar Police has recorded statements of ten witnesses since it arrived in Mumbai on July 27. However, it has been denied access to the post-mortem report, earlier witness statements and crucial documents by the Mumbai Police. Bihar Director General of Police Gupteshwar Pandey has claimed that his force is duty-bound to probe the death as parts of the offence registered in the FIR took place in his jurisdiction. Pandey, however, has claimed that his investigation has been scuttled by the "selective quarantine" on Sunday night of Vinay Tiwari, Superintendent of Police, Patna City (Central) by the BMC. Tiwari was sent to Mumbai on Sunday to lead the investigations.



What Happens to The Case Next?

Rhea Chakraborty has moved the Supreme Court seeking that the FIR be transferred to the Mumbai Police from the Bihar Police. There is also a demand from several quarters like former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis that the case be transferred to the CBI.

A Fearless Voice and People's Poet

- Eminent Urdu poet Rahat Indori who succumbed to COVID-related complications on Tuesday was an unwavering light who kept the 'mushaira' poetry alive for generations, a fearless voice who unflinchingly showed a mirror to the establishment. A people's poet, he was not meant to be read in literary journals; he was made to be experienced in poetic 'soirees' where his unique style of delivery kept the audience hooked for hours.

Sharp Imagery

Known for his sharp visual imagery, the poet, who grew up in Indore and worked as a Urdu professor in Devi Ahilya Bai University, knew how to reach out to the last man in the row without undermining the presence of the purist. "If I recite five couplets in a soiree, you may not like all of them but each of them will find an audience. And it is a matter of satisfaction for me," he once said. He didn't consider it as dilution and maintained poetry should be done in the language of the generation that one is catering to. Rahat was against all kinds of inequality, including intellectual inequality. Son of a mill worker, he had pain and pathos integral to his romantic poetry but maintained that it didn't reflect his personal pain. Instead, he would say it reflects the pain of the world and changed with time. So, he wrote "Bichhad Ke Tujhse Kisi Doosre Se Milna Hai, Yeh Faisala Bhi Isi Zindagi Main Karna Hai", which captured the fickleness of modern-day love as the practical lover wants to move on.

Contemporary Issues

There was more to his poetic universe than just love and longing. He wrote extensively on contemporary issues such as globalisation, the status of women in society and communalism that reflected in his literary collections such as Rut, Mere Baad and Do Kadar Aur Sahi. His couplet, "Mujhe Khabar Nahin Mandir Jalein Hai Ya Masjid Meri Nigaah Ke Aage To Bas Dhuaan Hai Miyan", continues to live on. Here without taking sides he talks of the damage that communal fire could cause to society. He dabbled into Bollywood as well and stitched a successful partnership with Anu Malik and Mahesh Bhatt with songs such as Aaj Humne Dil Ka Har Kissa (Sir) and Dil Ko Hazar Baar Roka (Murder). In the last few years, he became an independent voice who mirrored the feelings of those who wanted to talk against religious polarisation. His "Kisi Ke Baap Ka Hindustan Thodi Hai" became a popular hashtag during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The How and Why of Age Fraud and Verification

- The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the launch of the Voluntary Disclosure Scheme. Its motive is singular – to provide an incentive for players with fudged dates of birth, playing in junior categories, to come clean with the assurance that the governing body will not sanction bans against them. This is the latest step the cricketing body has taken to quell the menace of age-cheating at junior levels. Last month, the All



India Tennis Association (AITA), under pressure due to a case in Chandigarh, made it compulsory for all junior players competing at the nationals to undergo an age-verification test. These are all arguably useful measures in curbing an age-old problem across sports in India, as the documented age of an athlete is often different from the real age. That's when technology, the age verification tests, come in.

Can Science Determine the Exact Age of a Child?

Up until the age of 17 for boys and 15 for girls, science can provide a rough estimate about the true age of a child, give or take a year. "These tests are not 100 per cent accurate, and there's a disclaimer that it can be off by a year,"

What's the Most Prominent Test?

The most popular age-verification test is called the **Tanner-Whitehouse 3 (TW3)**, being used by the BCCI and proposed by AITA. The BCCI uses the TW3 for those up to the age of 16, along with verifying the documents they submit. For those over 16, the BCCI verifies documents. "For under-16, it is the documents as well as the bone test. It is only documents for those over 16, like birth certificates, school documents. If somebody says I don't go to school then we would ask for additional documents," Dr Abhijit Salve, BCCI's anti-doping, age-verification and medical consultant says.

What Does TW3 Look For?

It essentially involves an x-ray of the left wrist to check what stage of bone fusion a child has reached. "You are born with over 300 bones in the body. For example, your thigh bone is in three pieces and once you start to grow, these plates fuse. Once it's fused your height is stabilized," Lately explains. "X-rays can see how much fusion these gaps have undergone and based on that; you can get an approximation of the age." By the time a boy is 17 and girl 15, on average, the bones would have fused completely. But before that age, this test can give an approximate age. What makes this test popular is that it is cheaper and quick to conduct. "Thirteen bones are evaluated on the left hand," says Dr Ashok Ahuja, former head of Department of Sport Medicine and Science at the National Institute of Sports (NIS) in Patiala. "Every bone is checked and there's a point system based on mathematical calculation that is given to each bone. The system is the same, but scoring is different for boys and girls because they mature at different ages."

Why isn't TW3 100 Per Cent Accurate?

Since the test deals with bone fusion and pubertal growth, it is important to understand that people do not start to develop at the same time and at the same rate. For example, if you have two 12-year-old boys born on the same date, one might have hit puberty when he was 11 and the other may still not have. Therefore, their x-rays will show different bone fusion rates despite them being the same age. "We have seen different results even in identical twins, on multiple occasions," says Ahuja. Nutrition also plays a key role in bone fusion. "If your nutrition is poor, your growth slows down. If you're not eating well, not sleeping well, not drinking enough water, your growth slows down," Lately says. These tests become redundant after the age of 17 for boys and 15 for girls, because a child at that age is considered to have a matured body with complete bone fusion.



Are There Other Types of Tests?

Yes. The Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan is also used on the left wrist. However, unlike the TW3 which looks at 13 bones in the wrist, an MRI will study only one, the distal radius. These tests, however, are expensive – approximately Rs 8,000 in India, but much more expensive abroad. Additionally, MRI scans do not give specific results. “They can only tell if the child is under 17 or over 17. But TW3 can give you ages of maybe 13-and-a-half, 14, etc. So, it is more specific,” Ahuja adds. Another potential test is a DNA analysis to check the Telomere Length. The telomere is the end of a chromosome, and its length deteriorates with age. “You can technically understand someone’s age with it, but there has not been enough research in this age group to find conclusive evidence that this is accurate,” says Latey. “This test is normally done in the 35-40 age group, so there is information for that age, but not much for younger age groups. It’s also very expensive, around Rs 25,000 per test.” Meanwhile, blood marker tests have been unreliable to determine age.

Why Is Age-Fraud Prevalent in India?

It is mandatory to register the birth of a child with local authorities under the provisions of the **Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969**. In certain pockets of the country, however, there remain a large number of undocumented births – cases where, for example, a child is born at home rather than at a hospital where documents would be provided. “A lot of the times, in tribal belts particularly, what happens is that the child is not three years old when he or she starts kindergarten. The child is normally older,” says Latey. “So when those children enroll in a school, they’re given a birth certificate for March 1 in the closest year, because normally, that’s the month when school starts.” In a report by The Indian Express in December, arguably triggered by Assam publishing the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Malegaon Municipal Corporation saw a rise from 2,000 birth certificate applications in August, to 12,000 in September, 12,500 in October and 12,800 in November. Another reason for age-fraud in India, according to Latey, is to gain admission in universities abroad. “I’ve had parents telling me that they want their child to do well and win national medals now, because they want to pursue studies abroad,” he says. “For scholarships, universities abroad don’t just look at your marks, they also see what extra-curricular activities you have. Being good in sports adds weight to your CV. So, this can give rise to people indulging in age-fraud.”

How Covid-19 Has Helped the Groundnut Stage A Comeback

- ➔ As the novel coronavirus has forced Indians to eat more home-cooked food – eateries haven’t fully reopened, while the ban on weddings and social functions remains – it is also showing up in the pattern of edible oil consumption. On the one hand, imports of palm oil – the predominant frying medium used by hotels, restaurants/dhabas, canteens and caterers as well as namkeen and mithai makers – have fallen by almost 40% year-on-year during April-June. On the other, oils directly used in home kitchens – whether soyabean and sunflower or indigenous mustard, groundnut, coconut and sesame – have reported no decline, if not increase, in consumption.

The Groundnut Rally

One example of “consumer-facing”, as opposed to “institution-consumed”, oils faring well in lockdown/unlock down India is groundnut. According to the Union Agriculture Ministry,



production of this oilseed in 2019-20, at 93.47 lakh tones (lt), was more than the previous year's 67.27 lt and the highest since the record 97.14 lt of 2013-14. Yet, it is currently trading in Rajkot's wholesale market at Rs 5,300-5,400 per quintal, as against Rs 4,900-5,000 a year ago and the government's minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 5,275. The oil is also fetching around Rs 130/kg, up from Rs 105-110 last year at this time. "Groundnut oil prices had been rallying since early this year in line with other vegetable oils. But unlike, say, palm oil, its consumption and prices have remained steady even post lockdown. In Gujarat especially, people had to switch entirely to eating at home and they chose groundnut oil, which is their traditional cooking medium," says Sameer Shah, president of the Jamnagar-based Saurashtra Oil Mills Association (SOMA). But it's not just oil. An equally significant factor that is keeping groundnut prices firm is exports. In 2019-20 (April-March), India exported 6.64 lt of groundnuts – both kernels and in-shell – valued at Rs 5,096.38 crore, compared to 4.89 lt worth Rs 3,298.33 crore the previous fiscal. **These shipments were mainly to Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and China. An interesting fact about groundnut is that its importance as an oil source has diminished vastly in recent times. Till the mid-seventies, groundnut accounted for over 50% of India's edible oil consumption. But today, more than half of the country's groundnut kernels are used for table consumption or exported, leaving little for oil extraction. That makes it more of a dry fruit than an oilseed.**

Behind the Comeback

So, what accounts for this comeback, especially in Gujarat where the crop is mainly grown in the Saurashtra region? One reason, of course, is prices expected to remain firm, supported by rising home consumption of the oil post-Covid and steady export demand for the kernels. SOMA's Sameer Shah is confident that domestic groundnut oil rates will not fall way below the present levels of Rs 2,000 per 15-kg tin. But prices apart, there are also the comparative returns vis-à-vis other crops. **In Saurashtra, where the major groundnut-cultivating districts are Rajkot, Junagadh, Jamnagar and Devbhoomi Dwarka, the competing crop is basically cotton. Saurashtra farmers this time have sown just 14.87 lh area under cotton, as against the 16.50 lh under groundnut. The latter has clearly gained at the former's expense. For farmers, groundnut can be harvested in 90-110 days by October-November, whereas a full cotton crop cycle can take up to 180 days over 3-4 pickings. The shorter duration gives the flexibility to plant wheat, chana (chickpea), jeera (cumin) or coriander during the rabi winter-spring season. Not only are groundnut cultivation costs lower, their stems are very good fodder for cattle and buffaloes. Yields per hectare, at 10-20 quintals, are more or less similar both for kapas (raw un-ginned cotton) and groundnut-in-shell. Yields of the fibre crop have actually fallen in the last 5-6 years due to repeated pink bollworm attacks.** What has really tilted the balance, on top of the above, is prices. These, in the case of groundnut, hit a record Rs 6,000/quintal early this year, overtaking the average Rs 5,000 levels for kapas. Regular MSP-based procurement by government agencies has further boosted farmers' confidence to plant. The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India or NAFED procured 2.16 lt of the oilseed from Gujarat alone in 2016-17, which rose to 8.28 lt, 4.25 lt and 5 lt in the following three cropping years. **Gujarat is, incidentally, also the country's largest cotton producer.** But procurement of kapas through the Cotton Corporation of India hasn't been on the scale of groundnut purchases undertaken by NAFED. If the monsoon remains normal – Saurashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have received excellent rains – and there is no damage from pests and diseases (white grub insect, leaf spot and



rust fungi, etc.), a record groundnut crop is in the offing. And that, according to SEA president Atul Chaturvedi, could also restore its status as an oilseed and not just dry fruit.

Business & Economics

Making Up for Shortfalls in GST Collection (M.R. Madhavan - President of PRS Legislative Research, New Delhi)

- Two weeks ago, the Central government announced that it has released the Goods and Services Tax (GST) compensation dues to States for 2019-20. The total compensation was ₹1,65,302 crore while the compensation Cess fund collected was ₹95,444 crore. The shortfall was made up by excess collections in earlier years as well as some of the balance of inter-State GST from earlier years. This raises the question of how the compensation will be made in the current year.

Background of The Cess

The GST compensation Cess has an interesting background. GST subsumed several taxes, including those which were the preserve of the States, such as sales tax, and therefore required an amendment to the Constitution of India. As the amendment affected the Seventh Schedule (which delineates the jurisdiction of the Centre and the States), it required ratification by the legislatures of half the States. That is, this Constitution Amendment needed wide political support. Prior to GST, States exporting goods to other States collected a tax. GST is a destination-based tax, i.e., the State where the goods are sold receive the tax. This implies that manufacturing States would lose out while consuming States would benefit. In order to convince manufacturing States to agree to GST, a compensation formula was created. The Constitution Amendment Bill, introduced in 2014, and passed by the Lok Sabha, had two provisions. First, it provided for a 1% tax on inter-State trade, which would be assigned to the supplying State. Second, it made provisions for a law to be passed by Parliament to provide compensation to States for loss of revenue for a period up to five years. However, a Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha recommended that the compensation be guaranteed for a period of five years. This was accepted when the Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha, and subsequently by the Lok Sabha. As tax receipts of manufacturing States had been protected by the guarantee, the provision of the 1% tax on inter-State trade was dropped.

The Cess Fund

The modalities of the compensation Cess were specified by the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017. This Act assumed that the GST revenue of each State would grow at 14% every year, from the amount collected in 2015-16, through all taxes subsumed by the GST. A State that had collected tax less than this amount in any year would be compensated for the shortfall. The amount would be paid every two months based on provisional accounts, and adjusted every year after the State's accounts were audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. This scheme is valid for five years, i.e., till June 2022. A compensation Cess fund was created from which States would be paid for any shortfall. An additional Cess would be imposed on certain items and this Cess would be used to pay compensation. The items are pan masala, cigarettes and tobacco products, aerated water,



caffeinated beverages, coal and certain passenger motor vehicles. The Act states that the Cess collected and “such other amounts as may be recommended by the [GST] Council” would be credited to the fund. In the first two years of this scheme, the Cess collected exceeded the shortfall of States. In the third year, 2019-20, the fund fell significantly short of the requirement. This was on account of slowdown in tax collections as the economy slowed down coupled with negative growth in sectors such as motor vehicles which contributed to the Cess fund.

Issue and Possible Resolution

Most economists expect negative real GDP growth this year, and nominal GDP to be close to last year's level. As indirect taxes are levied on the nominal value of transactions, this is likely to result in significant shortfall for States from the assured tax collection. A key source of the problem is that the 2017 Act guaranteed a tax growth rate of 14%, which is unachievable this year. Whereas no one could have foreseen the pandemic and its impact on the economy, the 14% target was too ambitious to start with. Given the government's inflation target at 4%, this implied a real GDP growth plus tax buoyancy of 9%. That this was an unrealistic target is evident from the shortfall last financial year, when the lockdown was for less than two weeks. As we have discussed above, the Central government is constitutionally bound to compensate States for loss of revenue for five years. The assumed rate of growth of a State's GST revenue is set at 14% by Parliament through the 2017 Act. There are several possible solutions to this issue. First, the Constitution could be amended to reduce the period of guarantee to three years (thus ending June 2020). This would be difficult to do as most States would be reluctant to agree to this proposal. It could also be seen as going back on the promise made to States when they agreed to subsume their taxes into the GST. Second, the Central government could fund this shortfall from its own revenue. States would be happy with this proposal. However, the Centre's finances are stretched due to shortfall in its own tax collection combined with extra expenditure to manage the health and economic crisis. It may not be in a position to give further support to States. Third, the Centre could borrow on behalf of the Cess fund. The tenure of the Cess could be extended beyond five years until the Cess collected is sufficient to pay off this debt and interest on it. Fourth, the Centre could convince States that the 14% growth target was always unrealistic. The target should have been linked to nominal GDP growth. If the Centre can negotiate with States through the GST Council to reset the assured tax level, it could then bring in a Bill in Parliament to amend the 2017 Act. The Constitution makes it obligatory for the Centre to make up for shortfall by the States. The Cess collected will not be sufficient for this purpose. The GST Council, which is a constitutional body with representation of the Centre and all the States, should find a practical solution.

Breaking Down GST: Slabs, Payments, Dispute

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST), rolled out in July 2017, marked a major shift from the traditional production-linked tax to a consumption-based tax. The new regime subsumed state levies such as VAT, sales tax, octroi/entry tax together with central levies such as central excise and service tax. States gave up some of their taxation rights in lieu of the Centre passing on their revenue share under GST and also compensating them for potential revenue losses in the first five years. The tussle between the Centre and the states, which has escalated in recent weeks, involves the passing on of this share, and the payments under the compensation Cess head.



What Does GST Include?

GST includes a tax levied by the Centre on the intra-state supply of goods and/or services called Central GST (CGST), and a corresponding tax levied by states/UTs called the State GST (SGST/UTGST) on these goods and services. CGST and SGST are levied simultaneously on every purchase of goods and services, except exempted ones. The consumer pays an overall rate under one of the major tax slabs – 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% – out of which half accrues to the Centre and half to the state where consumption happens. Integrated GST (IGST) is the GST levied on inter-state transactions and exports/imports of goods and services. IGST is a combination of SGST and CGST and is first levied and administered by the Centre, which then distributes it between the consuming state and itself. In addition, a compensation Cess – ranging from 1-200% – is levied on sin and luxury goods like cigarettes, pan masala and certain categories of automobiles, over and above the topmost slab of 28%.

How Does All This Work?

Take spoons and forks, for which the GST is 12%. A consumer will pay 12% on the price of the spoons and forks if she buys from a manufacturer in the same state (intra-state transaction). Then, 6% will be the Centre's share as CGST and 6% the state's share as SGST. For a wholesale (B2B) transaction, the GST allows the seller to claim input tax credit (ITC) by setting off the tax liability against the tax already paid. For example, a manufacturer in Andhra Pradesh sells spoons and forks to a shop in Andhra Pradesh (intra-state transaction). The shop-owner pays 12% to the manufacturer. When a customer buys these from his shop, she pays 12% GST on the final price. The shop-owner then takes ITC for the 12% he has already paid and deposits 12% GST with the authorities, removing the cascading effect of taxation. In the whole transaction, GST of 12% is in effect applied only once after availing ITC. However, if the spoons and forks are manufactured in Andhra Pradesh and sold to a shop-owner in Maharashtra, the inter-state transaction attracts 12% IGST (6% CGST, 6% SGST). The IGST is levied and collected by the Centre, and the division with the consuming state happens later. Now, if a consumer buys from the shop in Maharashtra, she pays 12% GST (6% CGST, 6% Maharashtra GST). The shop-owner has already paid IGST on the input. Since GST is a destination-based tax, the state share in IGST from the transaction should accrue to the consumption state, Maharashtra, and not the exporting state, Andhra Pradesh. Therefore, the shop-owner can make use of the IGST as a credit to pay for the CGST and Maharashtra GST. The final apportionment of the IGST thus happens between the consuming state (Maharashtra) and the Centre, after setting off the credit from the IGST payment made earlier in the exporting state.

What Expanded List of Transaction Under the New Tax Regime Means

- Hotel bills over Rs 20,000, life insurance premium payment over Rs 50,000 and health insurance premium payment over Rs 20,000 along with donations and payment of school/college fees over Rs 1 lakh a year may come under the scanner of the Income-tax Department as it plans to expand the scope of reportable financial transactions under the **Statement of Financial Transactions (SFT)**. The new list of proposed transactions was released Thursday, a day when **Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced measures aimed at easing compliance and rewarding honest taxpayers by launching the 'Transparent Taxation – Honouring the Honest' platform.**



Which Transactions Are Proposed to Be Added?

As part of the proposed expansion of reportable transactions under SFTs, the following transactions would be under scanner

Payment of educational fee/ donations above Rs 1 lakh per annum

Payment to hotels above Rs 20,000

Purchase of jewellery, white goods, marbles, paintings, etc. above Rs 1 lakh

Life insurance premium over Rs 50,000

Payment of property tax above Rs 20,000 per annum

Electricity consumption above Rs 1 lakh per annum

Health insurance premium above Rs 20,000

Deposits/credits in current account above Rs 50 lakh

Deposits/ credits in non-current account above Rs 25 lakh

Domestic business class air travel/ foreign travel

Share transactions/ demat accounts/ bank lockers

The government also proposes compulsory filing of returns by a person having bank transactions over Rs 30 lakh, payment of rent over Rs 40,000 and all professionals and businesses having turnover over Rs 50 lakh.

Existing Reportable Transactions

Banks and financial institutions used to share information about high-value transactions recorded in SFTs with tax authorities. In July, the government had launched a revised Form 26AS which included high-value transactions from SFTs from this assessment year, which would be now directly visible to the taxpayer at the time of filing of Income-tax returns. In their SFTs, banks and other reporting financial institutions record details of transactions involving cash deposits aggregating Rs 10 lakh or more in a year, in one or more accounts (other than a current account and time deposit), cash payments made by any person totaling over Rs 1 lakh, and payments of bills for one or more credit card of Rs 10 lakh or more by a person in a financial year. Further, investment in bond/debentures, shares, mutual funds, buyback of shares exceeding Rs 10 lakh in a financial year, along with purchase or sale of immovable property of Rs 30 lakh and above, by a person are recorded in the SFTs.

What Does It Imply?

The government states these measures are aimed at widening the tax base. For taxpayers, this implies enhanced flow of information to tax authorities. When implemented, it would also reflect in Form 26AS, the consolidated annual statement showing tax deductions/ collections and advance tax against an individual's PAN. This would create greater onus on the taxpayers to comply in a voluntary manner. Prime Minister Modi had Thursday said that people paying taxes in this country are "too less". While filing income tax returns has increased by about 2.5 crore in the last 6-7 years, only 1.5 crore people pay taxes in a country of 130 crore, Modi had said, asking more people to come forward to pay taxes.

Why the RBI Has Left Interest Rates Unchanged

- The Reserve Bank of India kept interest rates on hold, seeking to contain a rise in retail inflation even as growth remains a concern. The RBI has slashed policy rates by 115 basis points since February this year, and pumped close to Rs 10 lakh crore liquidity into the



financial system. In its bi-monthly monetary policy review, it has also given the green signal to a **loan restructuring** scheme to bail out stressed borrowers.

Why Did the Monetary Policy Committee Not Slash Interest Rates?

While Governor Shaktikanta Das said the RBI's **accommodative stance** continues, the holding of rates runs counter to broad market expectations of a slash in policy rates to enable banks to lend more. **Retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, rose in June to 6.09% from 5.84% in March, breaching the RBI's medium-term target range of 2-6%.** That seems to have been a major red flag that prompted the MPC's unanimous decision. Moreover, Das flagged concerns over **domestic food inflation remaining elevated.** Given the uncertainty surrounding the inflation outlook and the weak state of the economy amid the pandemic, the policy panel decided to keep the policy rate on hold, while remaining watchful for a durable reduction in inflation to use the available space to support a revival of the economy.

Why Is RBI Worried About Inflation?

The RBI Governor made it clear that the headline retail inflation prints of April-May 2020 require more clarity. **The inflation objective itself is further obscured by the spike in food prices because of floods in eastern India, lockdown-related disruptions and cost-push pressures in the form of high taxes on petroleum products, hikes in telecom charges, and rising raw material costs reflected in rise in steel prices and gold prices on safe haven demand.** Headline inflation in June after a gap of two months, and imputed prints of inflation for April-May, have added uncertainty to the inflation outlook. **Supply chain disruptions on account of Covid-19 persist, with implications for both food and non-food prices. While price pressure in key vegetables is yet to abate, protein-based food items could also emerge as a pressure point, given the tight demand-supply balance in the case of pulses.** The RBI observes that the inflation outlook of non-food categories is fraught with uncertainty. **Volatility in financial markets and rising asset prices also pose upside risks to the outlook.** Headline inflation may remain elevated in the second quarter of 2020-21, but may moderate in the second half of 2020-21 aided by large favorable base effects.

Is the Previous Interest Rate Cut Working?

The RBI has claimed that cumulative reduction of 250 basis points in the repo rate since February 2019 is working its way through the economy, lowering interest rates in money, bond and credit markets, and narrowing down spreads. **In May, the MPC had cut the repo rate by 40 bps to 4%, while maintaining its accommodative policy stance.** In effect, over the last seven months, the MPC has already slashed the repo rate by 115 bps, although transmission by banks to customers is still to kick in fully. However, the RBI says transmission to bank lending rates has improved, with the weighted average lending rate on fresh rupee loans declining by 91 bps during March-June. On the other hand, deposit rates have also fallen, hitting savers.

What Is the RBI Assessment of The Economy?

The RBI and many experts, including HDFC Chairman Deepak Parekh, have said the recovery in the rural economy is expected to be robust, buoyed by the progress in kharif sowing. Manufacturing firms responding to the RBI's industrial outlook survey expect domestic demand to recover gradually from Q2 and sustain through Q1 of 2021-22. **For 2020-21 as a whole, real GDP growth is expected to be negative.** Early containment of the



pandemic may improve the outlook. A more protracted spread, deviations from the forecast of a normal monsoon, and global financial market volatility are the downside risks.

Is the RBI depending on the liquidity push to bring down rates and boost growth?

The liquidity measures announced by the RBI since February 2020 aggregated to about Rs 9.57 lakh crore – equivalent to about 4.7% of the 2019-20 nominal GDP. The RBI said the liquidity measures so far have helped in significant lowering of interest costs for corporate borrowers, resulting in effective transmission of lower policy rates and improvement in financial conditions. The situation for non-banking financial companies and mutual funds has stabilized since Covid-19 first jolted markets in March. The RBI on Thursday announced an additional special liquidity facility of Rs 10,000 crore at the policy repo rate – Rs 5,000 crore each to the National Housing Bank and NABARD. This is expected to improve fund flow to the housing sector, NBFCs and microfinance institutions. Measures like loan restructuring are aimed at improving the liquidity position of companies and individuals.

What Is the New Loan Restructuring Framework for Stressed Assets?

As the moratorium on loan repayments will end on August 31, banks and the RBI expect a spike in bad loans. Non-performing assets could rise to as high as 14.7% of total loans in the worst-case scenario by March 2021. In a big relief to stressed sectors hit by the pandemic, the RBI has opened an across-the-board, one-time restructuring window for those who are in default for not more than 30 days as on March 1, 2020. For restructuring of corporate and large loans, strict monitoring and adherence to norms have been specified to prevent ever-greening of bad loans. For corporate borrowers, banks can invoke a resolution plan until December 31, 2020 and implement it until June 30, 2021. In a major relaxation for the banks, the RBI said loan accounts should continue to be standard till the date of invocation. Restructuring of large exposures will require independent credit evaluation by rating agencies and a process validation by an expert committee to be chaired by K V Kamath. To mitigate the impact of expected loan losses, banks need to make a 10% provision against such accounts under resolution. In the case of multiple lenders to a single borrower, banks need to sign an Inter-Creditor Agreement (ICA). The loan recast plan is expected to keep the bad loan level under check.

What About Resolution of Personal Loans?

For these, the RBI has put in place a separate framework. Only those personal loan accounts which were classified as standard, but were not in default for more than 30 days as on March 1, 2020, are eligible for resolution. However, credit facilities provided by lenders to their own personnel/staff are not eligible. The resolution plan for personal loans can be invoked until December 31, 2020 and shall be implemented within 90 days thereafter. Unlike in the case of restructuring of larger corporate exposures, there will not be any requirement for third party validation by the expert committee, or by credit rating agencies, or need for ICA in case of personal loans. The term of the loans under resolution cannot be extended by more than two years. Resolution plans may include rescheduling of payments, conversion of any interest accrued, or to be accrued, into another credit facility



Life & Science

The Perseids Meteor Shower, Set to Peak in Mid-August

- The **Perseids meteor shower** is going to be active from August 17-26. The **annual celestial event** is considered the best meteor shower, thanks to the many bright meteors and fireballs shooting through the sky making it easy for people to watch it from Earth.

What Are Meteor Showers?

Meteors are bits of rock and ice that are ejected from comets as they manoeuvre around their orbits around the sun. For instance, the Orionids meteors emerge from the comet 1P/Halley and make their yearly presence in October. Meteor showers, on the other hand, are witnessed when Earth passes through the trail of **debris left behind by a comet or an asteroid**. When a meteor reaches the Earth, it is called a **meteorite** and a series of meteorites, when encountered at once, is termed as a **meteor shower**. According to NASA, over 30 meteor showers occur annually and are observable from the Earth. As meteors fall towards the Earth, the resistance makes the space rocks extremely hot and, as meteorites pass through the atmosphere, they leave behind streaks of glowing gas that are visible to the observers and not the rock itself.

What Is the Perseids Meteor Shower?

The Perseids meteor shower peaks every year in mid-August. It was first observed over 2,000 years ago. The Perseids occur as the Earth runs into pieces of cosmic debris left behind by the comet **Swift-Tuttle**. The cloud of debris is about 27 km wide, and at the peak of the display, between 160 and 200 meteors streak through the Earth's atmosphere every hour as the pieces of debris, travelling at some 2.14 lakh km per hour, burn up a little less than 100 km above the Earth's surface.

Where Do the Perseids Meteor Showers Come From?

The comet Swift-Tuttle, which was discovered in 1862 by Lewis Swift and Horace Tuttle, takes 133 years to complete one rotation around the sun. The last time it reached its closest approach to the sun was in 1992 and will do so again in 2125. Every time comets come close to the sun, they leave behind dust that is essentially the debris trail, which the Earth passes through every year as it orbits around the Sun.

How Can One View the Perseids Meteor Shower?

According to NASA, these meteor showers are best viewed from areas in the Northern Hemisphere in pre-dawn hours. However, at times, it may be possible to view the meteor showers as early as 10 pm. Further, meteors are best visible on a cloudless night, when the sky is visible and when the Moon is not extremely bright. But this year, the showers are coinciding with the last quarter of the moon phase, which it reached on August 11 (the last quarter moon is half-lit by sunshine and its own shadow, it rises during midnight and sets at noon) due to which, the view of the showers may be restricted as a result of the Moon's brightness, reducing the visible meteors from about 60 per hour to 15-20 per hour, NASA has said. Chances of a successful viewing are higher from locations far away from the lights of cities. Pollution and monsoon clouds make the Perseids difficult to view from India. **But in areas where there is no light or air pollution, viewers do not need to use any**

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special equipment to view the showers and one should make sure to give enough time to let the eyes adjust to the darkness, which can take about 30 minutes. Additionally, viewers should try to stay away from their phones as looking at bright screens affects night vision.

Sunspots, And Why They Occasionally Spark Worry

→ A massive **Sunspot group, AR2770**, was observed last week, spaceweather.com claimed using images of the Sun's surface from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO). According to the report, a few minor space flares have been emitted by this particular Sunspot group already, which has not caused anything major other than "minor waves of ionization to ripple through Earth's upper atmosphere". Solar flares, when powerful enough, can disrupt satellite and radio transmission, and more severe ones can cause 'geomagnetic storms' that can damage transformers in power grids.

Sunspots

A Sunspot is an area on the Sun that appears dark on the surface and is relatively cooler than surrounding parts. These spots, some as large as 50,000 km in diameter, are the visible markers of the Sun's magnetic field, which forms a blanket that protects the solar system from harmful cosmic radiation. On the photosphere– the outer surface of the Sun which radiates heat and light– Sunspots are the areas where the star's magnetic field is the strongest; around 2,500 times more than the Earth's magnetic field. Most Sunspots appear in groups that have their own magnetic field, whose polarity reverses during every solar cycle, which takes around 11 years. In every such cycle, the number of Sunspots increases and decreases. The current solar cycle, which began in 2008, is in its 'solar minimum' phase, when the number of Sunspots and solar flares is at a routine low.

Why Sunspots Appear Dark

Because Sunspots have high magnetic pressures, the atmospheric pressure in the surrounding photosphere reduces, inhibiting the flow of hot gases from inside the Sun to the surface. Due to this, the temperatures of Sunspots are thousands of degrees lower than the surrounding photosphere, which has a temperature of 5,800 degrees Kelvin. Sunspots temperatures are around 3,800 degrees Kelvin. Because they stop the convective flow of heat and light, Sunspots appear dark. They typically consist of a dark region called the 'umbra', which is surrounded by a lighter region called the 'penumbra'.

Solar Flares and Coronal Mass Ejections

When a Sunspot reaches up to 50,000 km in diameter, it may release a huge amount of energy that can lead to solar flares. The flares are caused by explosions that are triggered due to the twisting, crossing or reorganizing of magnetic field lines near Sunspots. At times, solar flares are accompanied by Coronal Mass Ejections (CME)– large bubbles of radiation and particles emitted by the Sun that explode into space at high speed. CMEs can trigger intense light in the sky on Earth, called auroras. The solar flare explosion's energy can be equivalent to a trillion 'Little boy' atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Damage Caused by Solar Flares

Solar flares can have a major effect on radio communications, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) connectivity, power grids, and satellites. In **1967, a major solar flare almost led to a**

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nuclear war during the Cold War, as per a space.com report. In May that year, the US Air Force's Ballistic Missile Early Warning System radar sites in Alaska, Greenland and the UK got jammed due to the flare, causing US officials to mistakenly hold the Soviet Union responsible for the radar failures. It was only after scientists at the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) informed US leaders of the solar flare that the matter deescalated. Recently, scientists have developed a new model that can successfully predict seven of the Sun's biggest flares from the last solar cycle, out of a set of nine with the help of NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory.

- Though the core of the Sun is at a temperature of about 15 million degrees, its outer layer, the photosphere is a mere 5700 degrees hot. However, its corona or outer atmosphere, which stretches up to several million kilometers beyond its surface, is much, much hotter than the surface. It is at a temperature of one million degrees or more. What causes the atmosphere of the Sun (corona) to heat up again, though the surface (photosphere) is cooler than the interior. That is the question which has baffled solar physicists. Popular attempts to explain this puzzle invoke the magnetic field of the corona.

SpaceX With NASA Crew Is Back Home

- Two NASA astronauts returned to Earth in a dramatic, retro-style splashdown, their capsule parachuting into the Gulf of Mexico to finish an unprecedented test flight by Elon Musk's SpaceX company. It was the first splashdown by U.S. astronauts in 45 years, with the first commercially built and operated spacecraft to carry people to and from orbit. The return clears the way for another SpaceX crew launch as early as next month and possible tourist flights next year. Test pilots Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken returned to earth in their SpaceX Dragon capsule named Endeavour, less than a day after departing the International Space Station and two months after blasting off from Florida. The last time NASA astronauts returned from space to water was on July 24, 1975, in the Pacific to end a joint U.S.-Soviet mission known as Apollo-Soyuz.

How Dangerous Is the Volcanic Eruption in Indonesia's Mount Sinabung?

- Indonesia's Mount Sinabung volcano erupted, sending a column of ash and smoke more than 16,000 feet into the air. The volcano became active in 2010, erupting after nearly 400 years of inactivity. According to the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), USA, generally, there are about 20 volcanoes actively erupting every day. As per the weekly volcanic activity report prepared by The Smithsonian and US Geological Survey's (USGS) Volcano Hazards program, for the week ending August 4, 2020, there were 17 volcanoes across the world with continuing eruptions. As per USGS, there are about 1,500 potentially active volcanoes worldwide. Indonesia is home to many active volcanoes, due to its position on the "Ring of Fire", or the Circum-Pacific Belt, which is an area along the Pacific Ocean characterized by active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes. The Ring of Fire is home to about 75 per cent of the world's volcanoes and about 90 per cent of its earthquakes.

The Current Eruption

According to a report in the Jakarta Post, Monday's eruption was the third since Saturday, with the volcano spewing 5000-metre high column of ash and smoke into the air, followed by another eruption that produced a 2000-metre high column. The ash from explosion



covered three districts and “turned the sky dark”, the Jakarta Post reported. More eruptions are likely in the coming days.

What Are the Recent Eruptions?

The volcano, which is situated in **North Sumatra**, has been active since 2010. Another eruptive phase for the volcano began in September 2013, which continued uninterrupted until June 2018, according to information maintained by the National Museum of Natural History’s Global Volcanism Program. During the 2018 eruption, the volcano released ash 5-7 km into the air, coating villages.

Why Do Volcanoes Erupt?

A volcano can be **active, dormant or extinct**. An eruption takes place when magma (a thick flowing substance), formed when the earth’s mantle melts, rises to the surface. Because magma is lighter than solid rock, it is able to rise through vents and fissures on the surface of the earth. **After it has erupted, it is called lava**. Not all volcanic eruptions are explosive, since explosivity depends on the composition of the magma. **When the magma is runny and thin**, gases can easily escape it, in which case, the magma will flow out towards the surface. On the other hand, **if the magma is thick and dense**, gases cannot escape it, which builds up pressure inside until the gases escape in a violent explosion.

When Do Volcanic Eruptions Become Dangerous?

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the most common cause of death from a volcano is suffocation, making people with respiratory conditions such as **asthma and other chronic lung diseases especially susceptible**. People living in areas close to the volcano, or in low-lying areas downwind, are also at higher risk in case of an explosion, since the ash may be gritty and abrasive and small ash particles can scratch the surface of the eyes. Further, **volcanic eruptions can result in additional threats to health such as floods, mudslides, power outages, drinking water contamination and wildfires**. Lava flows, however, rarely kill people, since they move slowly, giving enough **time to escape**. In a 2018 interview to Stanford News, Stanford geologist Gail Mahood noted that one reason why volcanic eruptions can be dangerous in places such as **Indonesia, Guatemala and the Philippines is that in these countries, large populations are packed on and around volcanoes**.

Three States Rank High in Dhole Conservation

- **Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh rank high in the conservation of the endangered dhole in India, according to a new study**. Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society-India, the University of Florida, the Wildlife Conservation Trust, and the National Centre for Biological Sciences found that these three States were adequately equipped to maintain their high ranks in consolidating forest habitats and recover dhole populations by increasing prey density and reducing pressure on forests. On the other hand, the study said, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana and Goa will need to increase financial investments in the forest and wildlife sectors, and reduce the ease of granting forest clearances for infrastructure projects. It also found that improving habitat conditions and prey densities in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha would “strengthen the link” between dhole populations in the Western Ghats and central India. The paper titled ‘A strategic road map for conserving the endangered



dhole Cuon alpinus in India', was published recently in Mammal Review. Through the study, the scientists explored the conservation tenets of retention, recovery and restoration of dholes in India, said to be a global stronghold for the species, in the context of large carnivores facing high extinction risk. "Dholes play an important role as apex predators in forest ecosystems. Besides the tiger, the dhole is the only large carnivore in India that is under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's 'endangered' category. As a country that perhaps supports the highest number of dholes in the world, we still do not have targeted management plans for scientific monitoring of the species.

Odisha Turns to Seed-Bombs to Fight A Jumbo Problem

→ Encouraged by germination and subsequent growth in bamboo plantations, Odisha's Athagarh Forest Division has begun casting seed-balls inside different forests to enrich food stock for elephants. The growth in bamboo plantation is expected to meet food requirement of elephants, which often stray out of the forests and raid human habitations in search of food. Villagers who bear the brunt of the elephant attacks have come forward to prepare bamboo seed balls and scatter them in 38 reserve forests under the Athagarh Forest Division. A vigorous monsoon with copious rains has helped the villagers and forest department personnel ensure that the seed-balls have germinated. "They will not stray out of the forest in search of food," said Sasmita Lenka, Athagarh Divisional Forest Officer. For restoration of bamboo forests, a massive awareness campaign was launched in all the villages hit by elephant depredation. One quintal of bamboo seeds was brought from Jashipur in Mayurbhanj district. Making seed balls and scattering them in the forest is quite a time-consuming task. However, the villagers joined the campaign hoping to ensure the bamboo plants will keep the elephants in the forests rather than straying into their villages. "Elephants love chewing bamboo shoots. Once the shoots come out of the plants, the animal depredation in villages will definitely come down," said Ms. Lenka. Athagarh Forest Division is one of the worst-hit areas as far as man-elephant conflict is concerned. "Elephants frequently raid villages coming under Athagarh and Khuntuni range and damage standing paddy crops. "Even fruit-bearing trees and vegetable plants are not spared. The situation becomes extremely volatile when any human gets killed by a marauding elephant," the DFO said. Last year, the division had thrown seed balls using 950 kg of bamboo seeds inside the forest. "The survival rate ranged between 50 and 60%. The man-elephant conflict is complex. No one has simple solution. We are looking at a long-term solution. We will keep on creating bamboo plantation inside forests," said Ms. Lenka.

Why Apple and Google Removed Epic Games' Fortnite From Their App Store

→ Both Apple and Google have removed popular game **Fortnite** from their app stores. The move has been triggered by Fortnite developer Epic Games' update of the app that let users initiate direct in-app purchases. Both Apple and Google take a 30 per cent share from in-app revenue purchases in games and this new update would have bypassed that, a policy violation as per the two tech giants. Fortnite is a free game, but players are required to pay for various in-app purchases of weapons and skins.

→ Apple was the first to take action, followed by Google. Despite the removal, Fortnite will still be available on Android, but not through the Play store. Google said **Android users will be able to install and play Fortnite from other app stores like Epic Games app or Samsung Galaxy Store on Samsung devices**. In an official statement Google said, "while Fortnite remains available on Android, we can no longer make it available on Play because it



violates our policies.” The tech giant said it welcomes the opportunity to continue discussions with Epic and bring Fortnite back to Google Play. For Apple users, there are no such options available to play the game. Commenting on the matter Apple issued a statement. “Epic Games took the unfortunate step of violating the App Store guidelines that are applied equally to every developer and designed to keep the store safe for our users. As a result, their Fortnite app has been removed from the store. Epic enabled a feature in its app which was not reviewed or approved by Apple, and they did so with the express intent of violating the App Store guidelines regarding in-app payments that apply to every developer who sells digital goods or services.” Apple, however, stated that it will make every effort to work with Epic to resolve these violations so they can return Fortnite to the App Store. As a response to the matter, Epic Games filed a lawsuit against both Apple and Google calling their practices anti-competitive. Epic’s lawsuit against Google state, “Epic does not seek monetary compensation from this Court for the injuries it has suffered. Epic likewise does not seek a side deal or favorable treatment from Google for itself. Instead, Epic seeks injunctive relief that would deliver Google’s broken promise: an open, competitive Android ecosystem for all users and industry participants. Such injunctive relief is sorely needed.” Meanwhile, Epic has released a protest video on YouTube as well as within Fortnite app mocking Apple’s iconic “1984” ad and calling gaming fans to #FreeFortnite by supporting its fight against Apple. **The 30 per cent cut the two tech companies take on the revenues gained on their stores has been a bone of contention with some other apps too. In 2019, Spotify had complained to the European Commission about Apple’s 30% cut.** In a blog post, Spotify founder and CEO Daniel Ek had explained that if they paid this 30%, “it would force us to artificially inflate the price of our Premium membership well above the price of Apple Music. And to keep our price competitive for our customers, that isn’t something we can do”. He claimed that if they chose to opt out of Apple’s payment system, the, Apple “applies a series of technical and experience-limiting restrictions on Spotify. For example, they limit our communication with our customers—including our outreach beyond the app”.

Why Wikipedia, One of World’s Most Popular Websites, Is Asking Users for Donations

- Since it first went online in 2001, Wikipedia has grown beyond the seemingly boundless online library of information it is today, to leave behind a distinct cultural imprint. For millions across the world, the website is the first stop for answers to some of their most pressing questions. So, when an alarming red and white banner began to appear across the top of every Wikipedia page earlier this year — asking for donations to keep the site up and running — many users in India were left puzzled. The fundraising drive sparked heated debates amongst social media users — some of whom questioned whether one of the world’s most popular websites really needed donations to stay afloat. “We ask you, humbly: don’t scroll away,” the message, now pinned atop every Wiki page, reads. “We depend on donations from exceptional readers, but fewer than 2% give. If you donate just ?150, or whatever you can...Wikipedia could keep thriving. Thank you.” Wikipedia’s mission, according to its founders, is to ensure that everyone can share in and access free knowledge. With the website’s recent call for donations, Wikipedia users in India are quickly realizing the heavy cost involved in keeping knowledge free. “Wikipedia is unlike other free sites that have had to change their business model over the years to ensure their survival by selling ads, instead it has become one of the few successful free knowledge sites left on the Internet, in large part because it’s supported by readers around the world,”



a spokesperson for Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia's parent organisation, told The Indian Express. According to SimilarWeb, Wikipedia.org has 5.2 billion visits in July 2020 and was the eight most popular site in the world.

[So, Why Is Wikipedia Asking for Donations?](#)

In a recent blog post, Pat Pena, Director of Payment and Operations for Wikimedia Foundation, offered a few clarifications about the fundraising campaign launched in India recently. "Reader donations are critical to supporting Wikipedia's global presence," Pena wrote. "To meet the needs of readers in India and around the world, we operate an international technology infrastructure comparable to the world's largest commercial websites." Hosted by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation, Wikipedia uses a network of volunteer contributors, editors and engineers to expand its ever-growing repository of information and to make it available to users across the world for free. Since Wikipedia does not carry any advertisements, it depends almost entirely on donations made by its millions of readers around the globe. A tiny slice of the website's total revenue is generated from merchandise, including t-shirts, pencils, notebooks, and pins embossed with Wikipedia's branding. The website also has several corporate contributors. Notably, last year, E-commerce giant Amazon made a \$1 million donation to the Wikimedia Foundation. "The Alexa team shares a similar vision with Wikipedia and the Wikimedia Foundation: To make it easier to share knowledge globally," Amazon had then said in a statement. With the money it generates through these contributions, Wikipedia is able to keep its servers running and also maintain the site and ensure that it is secure, loads quickly, and protects user data. Generous donations from its massive user base also helps the site maintain its independence. "Donations also allow us to dedicate engineering resources to ensure that you can access Wikipedia in your preferred language, on your preferred device, no matter where you are in the world – from a dial-up modem to a brand-new smartphone," Pena's recent blog post read. The website is run entirely by a team of around 250 employees and over 250,000 global volunteers. In 20 years, Wikipedia has amassed over 50 million articles in nearly 300 languages. While donations help pay the salaries of its staff members, the volunteers contribute their services to the website for free. "The site's volunteer editors contribute to the platform, and oversee Wikipedia's rigorous editorial standards including verifying the information added to the site," the Wikimedia Foundation spokesperson explained to The Indian Express. "This volunteer community has developed strict guidelines for identifying [reliable sources] (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reliable_sources) of information that support updates to an article."

[Does Wikipedia Really Need Donations from Its Readers?](#)

When the banners requesting donations began to pop up on computer and smartphone screens, some users feared that the online encyclopedia was on the brink of bankruptcy. Its balance-sheet however, tells a different story. According to a Wiki page on its fundraising statistics, the website was able to raise \$28,653,256 between 2018-2019, bringing its total assets to \$165,641,425. The previous financial year, it garnered \$21,619,373 – a marked rise from the \$56,666 it earned through donations in 2003. Over the years, through fundraising campaigns and generous corporate endowments, Wikipedia's assets have grown exponentially. **Given its considerable net worth, many have criticised the website for the doomsday-esque tone it adopts in its call for donations.** Asked about the same, the spokesperson for the Wikimedia Foundation said, "As a website



that hundreds of millions of people have come to rely on, we have a duty to ensure Wikipedia remains accessible, up to date, and relevant for its readers.” “We hope the public in India, and in other countries, will consider making a contribution to Wikipedia with the same goal, and with an eye towards the future; it’s also the reason why our messages are written in that spirit.” A charitable website of this scale needs a constant influx of donations. According to a detailed report shared by Wikimedia Foundation in 2019, about 49% of its annual financial gains was spent as direct support to the website; 32% was used for training, tools, events and partnerships for its network of volunteers; 13% was spent to recruit and pay its staff members; and the remaining 12% was used for its various fundraising initiatives. It is not uncommon for large nonprofits like Wikipedia to continuously add funds to its reserve, which acts as a safety net if required, a Washington Post report stated. Charitable organisations are encouraged to maintain an adequate cash reserve in excess of their annual expenditure in case of an adverse situation. So, if a donor suddenly pulls out or if costs increase, the nonprofit isn’t left high and dry, as the Nonprofits Assistance Fund has pointed out in the past. While the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has choked businesses across industries, it has presented a new opportunity for the website. Wikipedia has found an uptick in the number of people turning to the site as a reliable source of information during the health crisis. “Billions of people around the world are set to come online in the next few years. This pandemic has accelerated that trend, and the Foundation’s fundraising program is meant to help us address the new and pressing challenges that will come with that wave,” the spokesperson said.

[Is This the First Fundraising Drive Wikipedia Has Conducted?](#)

Wikipedia’s recent donation drive is most certainly not its first. The charitable website is supported by its readers across the world and depends on their donations to survive. Fundraising campaigns are carried out at specific times every year in most parts of the world. According to Pena’s blog post, readers in India flock to Wikipedia more than 750 million times a month, the fifth highest number of views the site receives from any country. Given the readership garnered in India, it is rather surprising that Wikipedia launched its first full-fledged fundraising drive in India only this year. “As with other campaigns that we’ve launched in other regions, we wanted to ensure that we were delivering the same valuable experience to readers in India as we have in other countries,” Wikimedia Foundation told The Indian Express. “In order to meet that standard, to provide a convenient way to donate, we needed to implement new payment methods in India, which we didn’t have until now.” Due to the coronavirus pandemic, which seems to have brought life to a grinding halt for millions across the world, Wikipedia was forced to delay the fundraising campaign it had scheduled for spring, this year. “The reality is that we’re now only into the first eight months of a pandemic that the World Health Organisation has said will last longer than they originally thought. So, this crisis has forced us to approach our fundraising program with an abundance of caution,” the spokesperson said.

[What is BeiDou, China’s Version of GPS](#)

- China has recently completed its BeiDou Navigation Satellite System constellation, coming up with a product that can potentially rival the US Global Positioning System (GPS), and will provide positioning services to transportation, emergency medical rescue and city planning and management areas. China’s President Xi Jinping officially commissioned the navigation system at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The US has provided GPS signals to users worldwide free of cost since the 1980s.



What is The BeiDou Navigation System?

China's navigation system uses a network of satellites and can provide positional accuracies of under ten meters (GPS provides positioning accuracies of under 2.2 meters). China initiated BeiDou in 1994 with aims to integrate its application in different sectors, including fishery, agriculture, special care, mass-market applications, forestry and public security. BeiDou offers services including accurate positioning, navigation and timing as well as short message communication. Ceremony was followed by a declaration that the 55th and final geostationary satellite in the constellation, which was launched on June 23, was operating successfully. This satellite is a part of the third iteration of the BeiDou system called BDS-3 and began providing navigation services in 2018 to countries taking part in the "Belt and Road" initiative, the Associated Press reported.

Which Other Countries Are Working on Building Their Navigation Systems?

The GPS is owned by the US government and operated by the US Air Force. Apart from this, Russia has its navigation system called **GLONASS**, the European Union (EU) has Galileo, while **India's is called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)**. It was reported last year that the Bengaluru-based Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was in talks with processing chip manufacturers such as Qualcomm to substitute the existing GPS with the Indian version of satellite navigation.

What Does This Mean for China?

By completing BeiDou, China now has its own navigation system, which will compete with systems developed by other countries. Out of these navigation systems, the GPS is the most widely used for both personal navigation and for more sensitive military purposes. Significantly, **as ties between US and China deteriorate, it becomes more important for China to have its own navigation system that the US does not have control over.**

Why Is August 13 Celebrated as International Left-Handers Day?

- Every year, to celebrate left-handers in a world dominated by right-handers, and to raise awareness about everyday issues that lefties face, August 13 is marked as 'International Left Handers Day'. **The day, which honors 'sinistrality' or left-handedness, was first observed in 1976 by Dean R. Campbell, the founder of Left-Handers International Inc., and has been celebrated every year since. Studies show that around 10 per cent of the world's population is left-handed, with men more likely being so.** According to the Indian Left Hander Club, the country's famous left-handers include Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, actors Amitabh Bachchan and Rajinikanth, cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and industrialist Ratan Tata. Other famous left-handed personalities include scientist Sir Isaac Newton, French leader Napoleon Bonaparte, painter Pablo Picasso, former US President Barack Obama and media personality Oprah Winfrey.

Left-handed Troubles

Throughout the ages, natural left-handers have faced several disadvantages. In several cultures, including in India, such persons have faced discrimination owed to superstitions, and have often been punished to "cure" their left-handedness. **A prominent example is Britain's former monarch George VI, who was born left-handed but was forced to use his right hand. It is believed that his famous stammering problem— subject of the 2010 film 'The King's Speech'— is attributable to this compulsion he faced in childhood. The**



historical bias against left-handers is best reflected by the English word 'sinister', synonymous with evil or menacing; its Latin root 'sinestra' meaning 'on the left'. Among the everyday struggles that left-handers continue to face are while using objects designed for right-handed folk, such as scissors, keyboards, right-handed desks, guitars, and even video game consoles.

How Language Leads to Gender Bias in Science

- For decades, researchers have examined why women are underrepresented in science and associated fields, whether in college and university or at the workplace. Studies have found that the reason is often cultural: Girls grow up believing that boys are better at these fields, even when they are capable of excelling themselves. A new study has now examined whether these cultural stereotypes are rooted in the languages that people speak. It has found that gender associations in a language do predict people's implicit gender associations. In other words, the findings suggest that linguistic associations may be related to people's implicit judgement of what women can accomplish. The study is published in the journal Nature Human Behavior.

Words & Connections

The researchers examined 25 languages for gender stereotypes that undermine efforts to support equality across career paths in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). English and Hindi were among the 25 languages. Specifically, researchers Molly Lewis of Carnegie Mellon University (Pennsylvania) and Gary Lupyan of University of Wisconsin-Madison examined how words co-occur with women compared to men. "The implicit biases don't come from any particular phrases. The bias that we find comes from looking at which words co-occur next to each other in a lot of text, and what words tend to have the same neighbours," Lewis told The Indian Express by email. By training machine learning models on large corpora of texts in each language, the researchers examined, for example, how often 'woman' is associated with 'home', 'children' and 'family', whereas 'man' is associated with 'work,' 'career' and 'business'. "We find, for example, that the words 'man' and 'career' tend to co-occur with each other more often than 'woman' and 'career' in nearly all 25 languages that we looked at," Lewis said.

Psychological Bias

To quantify implicit gender bias in people, the researchers measured their performance in a psychological task called the Implicit Association Test. The results suggested that if one speaks a language with high gender bias, then one is more likely to have a gender stereotype that associates men with career and women with family. "Our study shows that language statistics predict people's implicit biases – languages with greater gender biases tend to have speakers with greater gender biases," Lupyan said in a statement. Curiously, countries with a larger older population were found to have a stronger bias in career-gender associations. Given that India has a young population, did speakers of Hindi – the only Indian language among the 25 studied – show lower implicit bias than others? Lewis replied: "Participants in India had a relatively low bias to associate men with career and women with family on the Implicit Association Task."



The STEM Connection

The study used a gender equality metric reported by UNESCO – the percentage of women among STEM graduates in tertiary education. It found that countries with weaker associations between men and career tended to have more women in STEM fields. However, there was no relationship between the percentage of women in STEM fields and the language's explicit gender association measure, as quantified in the study.

Limitations

The results are correlational, although the researchers said the findings do suggest a causal influence. They also noted that the Implicit Association Test used in the study has been criticised for low reliability. They have called for additional work to explore language statistics and implicit associations with gender stereotypes.

What Is the New Tick-Borne Virus Spreading in China?

→ As governments across the world continue to grapple with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, China – where cases of the deadly infection were first reported – is now facing a new health threat. A disease called **Severe Fever with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (SFTS)**, caused by a **tick-borne virus**, has killed seven and infected at least 60, setting off alarm bells among health officials in the country. A large number of the cases reported were concentrated in East China's Jiangsu and Anhui provinces, local media reported. While the disease is transferred to humans through tick bites, Chinese virologists have warned that human-to-human transmission of the virus cannot be ruled out. Unlike SARS-CoV-2 however, this is not the first time the SFTS virus has infected people. The recent spate of cases merely marks a re-emergence of the disease.

What is the SFTS Virus?

Severe fever with thrombocytopenia syndrome virus (SFTSV) belongs to the Bunyavirus family and is transmitted to humans through tick bites. The virus was first identified by a team of researchers in China over a decade ago. The first few cases were reported in rural areas of Hubei and Henan provinces in 2009. The team of researchers identified the virus by examining blood samples obtained from a cluster of people exhibiting similar symptoms. According to a report by Nature, the virus killed at least 30 per cent of those infected. Due to the rate at which it spreads and its high fatality rate, SFTS has been listed among the top 10 priority diseases blue print by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Virologists believe an Asian tick called **Haemaphysalis longicornis** is the primary vector, or carrier, of the virus. The disease is known to spread between March and November. Researchers have found that the total number of infections generally peaks between April and July. Farmers, hunters and pet owners are particularly vulnerable to the disease as they regularly come in contact with animals that may carry the **Haemaphysalis longicornis** tick. Scientists have found that the virus is often transmitted to humans from animals like goats, cattle, deer and sheep. Despite being infected by the virus, animals generally do not show any symptoms associated with SFTSV.

What Are the Symptoms of The SFTS Virus?

According to a study conducted by a team of Chinese researchers in 2011, the incubation period is anywhere between seven and 13 days after the onset of the illness. Patients suffering from the disease usually experience a whole range of symptoms, including, fever,



fatigue, chill, headache, lymphadenopathy, anorexia, nausea, myalgia, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, gingival hemorrhage, conjunctival congestion, and so on. Some of the early warning signs of the disease include severe fever, **thrombocytopenia or low platelet count** and **leukocytopenia, which is low white blood cell count**. The risk factors observed in more serious cases include multi-organ failure, hemorrhagic manifestation and the appearance of central nervous system (CNS) symptoms.

Have Cases of SFTS been Recorded Outside China?

The virus eventually travelled to other East Asian nations, including Japan and South Korea. Since the virus was first discovered, the total number of cases has risen significantly. While in 2013, as many as 36 cases were reported in South Korea, the number rose sharply to 270 by 2017. Meanwhile, China registered 71 cases in 2010 and 2,600 in 2016. The number of infections reported in Japan increased by 50 per cent between 2016 and 2017, a Nature report stated. When the number of cases began to rise in all three countries, public health officials began educating local doctors and ordinary citizens about the health risks posed by tick bites. As more people became aware of the virus and the disease it causes, the fatality rate of the infection began to drop significantly, scientists found.

How is SFTS Treated?

While a vaccine to treat the disease is yet to be successfully developed, the **antiviral drug Ribavirin** is known to be effective in treating the illness. In order to avoid contracting the illness, various government authorities, including China's Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), urges the general public to **avoid wearing shorts while walking through tall grass, the woods, and any other environment where ticks are likely to thrive**.

Studying P. Vivax Malaria

- The parasite Plasmodium vivax, responsible for 7.5 million malaria cases worldwide, remains understudied. Not much is known about its dormant stage in the liver. An international team has developed a system to breed these parasites in the lab and then infect cultured human liver cells with it. This can help establish a robust liver stage assay in P. vivax-endemic regions such as India. **Mosquitoes inject the sporozoite (spore-like) stage of the parasite into the skin when they bite, and the sporozoites travel to the liver. "Imagine some 50 parasites enter our liver, each infect one liver cell or hepatocyte and multiply enormously to 10,000 or more. These can then move out and infect blood cells,"** explains Varadharajan Sundaramurthy, from National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), one of the corresponding authors of the work published in Malaria Journal.

Silent Parasite

As the number is very low in the liver, our immune system barely notices it. "The parasite can remain in the liver in a dormant stage and relapse later. So, there is an urgent need to find drugs for P. vivax which will kill both the blood and liver stages," he adds.

Improved Method

Susanta Kumar Ghosh, who recently retired from ICMR-National Institute of Malaria Research, Bengaluru Centre, and is one of the corresponding authors, developed an improved method for breeding Anopheles stephensi mosquitoes in the lab. The females



were fed with blood collected from Indian patients with the *P. vivax* infection. Two weeks later, the mature sporozoites were taken from the mosquitoes' salivary glands, added to cultured liver cells (multiple human hepatocyte platforms) and studied. This approach can be used to further study the liver stage. "Another complication is the emergence of drug-resistant malaria parasites. **Certain malaria-endemic countries have even abandoned chloroquine for *P. vivax* treatment. Fortunately, chloroquine is still effective in India. But the currently used anti-relapse drug, Primaquine, has many undesirable side-effects, especially in patients with a genetic defect called G6PD deficiency.** Moreover, it takes 14 days to administer this drug for radical cure... there is an urgent need for development of a new class of drugs," adds Dr. Ghosh. The researchers add this assay could also be used to test if a specific anti-malarial drug would work for an individual.

Gene Variants and Susceptibility to Schizophrenia

→ Schizophrenia is a constellation of symptoms such as hearing voices, false beliefs and trouble with thinking and concentration, and its cause is not exactly known. In that sense, schizophrenia is still an enigma. Studies of schizophrenia among groups of varied ethnicities across the world have shown **associations of the disease with alleles (variant genes) related to the human leukocyte antigen – an important part of the immune system and related to a group of genes on chromosome six.** However, the specific allele that was found to be associated with schizophrenia varied from group to group. Recently, a pilot study on a south Indian, Tamil-speaking group consisting of 97 people with schizophrenia and 103 controls was carried out by Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF) and Jeevan Stem Cell Foundation, in Chennai.

Different Variants

Earlier studies indicate that different variants of specific genes (these variants are called alleles) may be involved in different ethnic groups. "Studies done in **Saudi Arabia and Tunisia** have shown a particular **HLA allele (DRB1*03)** to be a risk factor for schizophrenia but in [a study involving a] **Japanese population** it was a different **allele (DRB1*01)** which predisposed to the disease condition," says Dr S. Vani Laboratory Director, Jeconomics, Jeevan Stem cell Foundation, Chennai, in an email to The Hindu. She is a principal investigator of the present study along with Dr. Vijaya Raghavan. **The occurrence of different variants itself is not a problem, as HLA genes are extremely variable and are very different across human populations,** they also found a negative correlation with some alleles (HLA-B*35:03:01 and HLA-DRB1*04:03:01) which were found in lower frequency in individuals with schizophrenia. These could be protective alleles in schizophrenia.

Why Onions Are A New Cause of Concern in US and Canada

→ Onions have become a cause of concern in the United States and Canada. Over the past week, health agencies in both countries have put out alerts asking its citizens to discard onions supplied by California-based Thomson International Inc, linking a **salmonella bacteria infection with the bulb.** What is this infection, and how does it transmit through onions? We explain:

What is Salmonellosis?

The salmonella bacteria reside in animals. When it enters a human body it causes **salmonellosis, an infection that attacks the intestine, and can cause diarrhea, abdominal**



pain, fever, vomiting, bleeding in stool and nausea. The symptoms of the infection last anywhere between 2 and 7 days. However, bowel function could sometimes take months before returning to normalcy. In some cases, it spreads the infection from the intestine to the blood stream. The infection hits children, below the age of five, and senior citizens the worst. The good news is less than 1 per cent of infected people succumb to the infection. **Salmonella can transmit to humans through contaminated water or food.** In this case, the bacteria were transmitting through contaminated onions, cultivated by Thomson International.

What Is the Extent of Infection Spread?

The US Food and Drug Administration reported on August 1, 2020 that Thomson International recalled red, yellow, white, and sweet yellow onions shipped since May 1. The onions were given to distributors, wholesalers, and major supply in all 50 states of the US, Canada and parts of Columbia. Some of the big chains included Walmart and Kroger. Thomson International said the onions were sold in mesh sacks and cartons. They were also part of a multi-ingredient food product making it difficult to assess which packages were contaminated. Initially, only red onions were suspected to be infected, but, fearing cross-infection with other varieties, the company recalled the entire produce from California. In the US, **the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed there were 640 cases across 43 states till August 6, 2020.** The maximum cases were in Utah (90), Oregon (85) and California (76). At least 85 people were hospitalized, but there were no deaths. In Canada, 239 confirmed cases were reported by the Public Health Agency. People reported sick between mid-June and July. At least 29 required hospitalization in the country, its public health agency reported.

R-Value Has Fallen Below 1 In Delhi

- The reproduction number, or the number of people getting infected by an already infected person on an average, has fallen below 1 in Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, for the first time since the novel Coronavirus outbreak began in India in March. When that happens, it usually signals the beginning of the decline of an epidemic in a population group. The latest projections, made by Sitabhra Sinha and his research group at Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai, thus offer hope, at a time when India is discovering more than 50,000 new cases of infection every day. But there are important caveats. It is only in case of Delhi that this trend (of reproduction number R remaining below 1) has held on for some time, and therefore only in case of Delhi can it be used to make some reliable estimates about a future scenario. In case of Mumbai and Chennai, the present low R-values could just be part of normal variations.

How Punjab Police Is Using the Tale Of 'Typhoid Mary' To Battle Covid-19

- To ensure that Covid-19 does not cook up a pandemic in the force, the Punjab Police is briefing its mess staff about Irish woman Mary Mallon, who is believed to have infected 53 persons with typhoid fever in the last century. She is identified as the first asymptomatic carrier of the disease in the US, which earned her the sobriquet of 'Typhoid Mary'. In a recent standard operating procedure (SOP) for cooks and staff in the force's mess facilities accessed by The Indian Express, Punjab Police has directed officials to "give the example of Typhoid Mary" to cooks and other staff working in every mess.



Who was Mary Mallon?

As per Encyclopedia Britannica, Mary was born on September 23, 1869 in Cookstown, County Tyrone, Ireland. "Mary immigrated to the United States in 1883 and subsequently made her living as domestic servant, most often as a cook. It is not clear when she became a carrier of the **typhoid bacterium (Salmonella typhi)**. However, **from 1900 to 1907 nearly two dozen people fell ill with typhoid fever in households in New York City and Long Island where Mary worked. The illness often occurred shortly after Mary began working in each household, but by the time the disease was traced to its source where she had recently been employed, Mary had disappeared,**" as per britannica.com.

How Was Mary Tracked Down and Isolated?

In 1906, after six people in a household of 11 where Mary had worked in Oyster Bay, New York, became sick with typhoid, the home owners hired New York City Department of Health sanitary engineer George Soper, whose specialty was studying typhoid fever epidemics, to investigate the outbreak. According to britannica.com, "Other investigators were brought in as well and concluded that outbreak likely was caused by contaminated water. Mary continued to work as cook, moving from household to household until 1907, when she resurfaced working in a Park Avenue home in Manhattan. The winter of that year, following an outbreak in the Manhattan household that involved a death from the disease, Soper met with Mary. He subsequently linked all 22 cases of typhoid fever that had been recorded in New York City and the Long Island area to Mary. Again, Mary fled, but authorities led by Soper finally overtook her and had her committed to an isolation center on North Brother Island, part of Bronx, New York. There she stayed until 1910, when the health department released her on condition that she never again accept employment that involved handling of food. Four years later, Soper began looking for Mary again when an epidemic broke out at a sanatorium in Newfoundland, New Jersey, and at Sloane Maternity Hospital in Manhattan, New York. Mary had worked as cook at both places. She was at last found in a suburban home in Westchester County, New York, and was returned to North Brother Island, where she remained the rest of her life. A paralytic stroke in 1932 led to her slow death six years later."

What Is Drive-Through Covid-19 Tests, Where Are They Offered in India?

- As India ramps up its Covid-19 testing capacity, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledging one million tests per day over the next few weeks, several private labs identified by the ICMR have started drive-through centres for sampling – a method pioneered by South Korea for which it has received praise. **At the drive-through centres, passengers and drivers go through the entire Covid-19 testing process in a matter of minutes without ever having to get out of their vehicles.** Besides limiting the exposure of frontline workers to the virus, the process also prevents asymptomatic patients from contaminating a public health facility. So far, according to the Union Health Ministry, India has tested a total of 2,33,87,171 samples for Covid-19, with more than half a million tests being conducted daily.

How Did the Idea of Drive-Through Covid-19 Testing Centres Come into Being?

Way back in February 26, when Covid-19 was yet to be declared a pandemic, South Korea set up drive-through test stations as it focused on rapid and widespread testing to successfully blunt spread of the disease. The idea was inspired by the drive-through



counters at McDonalds and Starbucks. Thus, when cases started growing in March, South Korea had close to 50 drive-through centres, which screened more than 100,000 people. Results were relayed to the person in three days via SMS. The first drive-through test was implemented in Goyang, Gyeonggi province. **The test, which included registration, symptom check, swab sampling, and car disinfection, lasted 10 minutes on average for each person, whereas previous testing procedures took about 30 minutes.** The government also launched an app that mapped all the drive-through test centres. Following South Korea, such centres have sprung up in the US, the UK, France, Israel, South Africa, Ireland and Spain.

How Are Covid-19 Tests Conducted at Drive-Through Centres?

The tests are conducted at the parking lot of the Covid-19 center or lab, where a 30-40-metre-long stretch is turned into drive-through premises. The sample is collected with the patient sitting in his car itself. However, no two-wheelers or taxis are allowed. For example, the drive-through center of a testing lab in Delhi has four stations. At the first station, there is a banner with the lab's name. At the second station, personnel in personal protective equipment (PPE) checks the registration number, the colour and the make of the car as per the details submitted to the lab and the suspected patient's ID. At the third station, about 10 meters away, the car has to be parked inside a white box. This is placed next to a structure that has double-sided ventilation. Here the person is asked to roll down the window pane and tilt his/her head back. A medical officer in full PPE collects the swab sample from the throat and then another one from nose. At the fourth station, the vehicle is allowed to exit.

Where All in India Have Driven-Through Centres Come Up?

The country's first drive-through Covid-19 testing center was set up in April in Delhi's Punjabi Bagh by Dr Dang's Lab, one of the private labs allowed to test for coronavirus by ICMR. Around 20 minutes are allocated for one test and the lab can test 30-50 patients in a day. In May, SRL Diagnostics established such centers in Chandigarh, Gurgaon and Mumbai. To get tested, a potential patient needs three things. First is a government ID such as Aadhaar card, passport etc., the second is a doctor's prescription advising a Covid-19 test while the third is a patient proforma form.

What Are the Benefits?

Drive-through tests are more time saving than walk-in tests and ensures minimum exposure to both the patients and the sample collectors. Moreover, since the person doesn't have to leave the vehicle, it reduces the risk of spreading the infection in a testing center or lab. It also is a safer option than home collections since people have apprehensions that the person coming to test must have gone to several houses to collect those samples.

Anxiety, Depression Among Hospitalized Covid-19 Patients

- ➔ Researchers from the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, Italy have found that from the number of Covid-19 patients they surveyed, a significant proportion were experiencing mental illnesses. The findings of their new study, which is expected to be published in the journal Brain, Behaviour and Immunity, documented at least 402 cases of patients experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, among other illnesses.



Who Were More Likely to Show Psycho-Pathological Symptoms?

The authors found that females, especially those with a previous psychiatric diagnosis, scored more on most measures. Younger patients showed higher levels of depression and sleep disturbances. The authors also found that the duration of hospitalization inversely correlated with PTSD, depression, anxiety and symptoms of OC disorders.

How does COVID-19 Lead to Psychiatric Manifestations?

There are two possible pathways for psychopathological manifestations of the disease, one is when the virus directly affects the central nervous system (CNS) and the other is indirect, via an immune response. Significantly, the study notes that when an infection triggers the immune system it could add to the psychological stress of enduring a fatal disease and to stress-associated inflammation. Further, “cytokine storms”, which are an immune system response to coronaviruses, can also cause psychiatric symptoms in those infected. Apart from immune system mechanisms, COVID-19 patients’ stress might be exacerbated by the fear of the illness itself, uncertainty of the future, stigma, traumatic memories of severe illness and social isolation that they experience during treatment.

Novel Coronavirus Circulated Unnoticed in Bats for Decades

- The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), which has so far infected over 17.6 million people and killed nearly 6.8 million across the world, has been circulating unnoticed in bats for decades. Bats have been the “primary reservoirs” for novel coronavirus. The SARS-CoV-2 virus is likely to have diverged from closely related bat viruses called the Sarbecovirus, 40-70 years ago, a study published in Nature Microbiology says. In early February, Chinese researchers had found that SARS-CoV-2 is most closely related to RaTG13 Sarbecovirus, which was isolated from a horseshoe bat in Yunnan province in 2013. Based on the nearly 96% genome sequence identity between SARS-CoV-2 and RaTG13, a team led by Zheng-Li Shi from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Wuhan, China said in a paper published in February in Nature that an origin in bats is probable for the COVID-19 outbreak. The current study by Prof. Maciej Boni from the Pennsylvania State University in the U.S. and others not only confirms the findings of Dr. Shi but also suggests the probable time when SARS-CoV-2 diverged from RaTG13. The authors analyzed the evolutionary history of SARS-CoV-2 using genomic data on Sarbecovirus. They employed three approaches to identify regions in the virus that had not undergone recombination and that could be used to reconstruct its evolution. All approaches suggest that RaTG13 and SARS-CoV-2 share a single ancestral lineage and estimate that SARS-CoV-2 genetically diverged from related bat Sarbecovirus in 1948, 1969 and 1982, respectively. “The findings demonstrate how critical it is to undertake genomic analysis of bat viruses,” says Prof. Satyajit Mayor, Director of the Bengaluru-based National Centre for Biological Sciences. “Many species of bat harbour several viruses which can cross over to new hosts. When we disrupt habitats, we will face more such threats.”

No Recombination

Importantly, Prof. Boni and co-authors say that novel coronavirus itself has not arisen from recombination of any Sarbecovirus. The ability of the spike protein in the virus to bind to ACE2 human receptors had emerged within bats and is an ancestral trait shared with bat viruses and “not one acquired recently via recombination”. According to them, the results suggest the presence of a “single lineage” circulating in bats with properties that allowed



it to infect human cells. This was also the case with the bat Sarbecovirus related to the 2002 SARS lineage. The Nature Microbiology paper also challenges the notion that pangolins would have served as an intermediate host where the virus would have acquired its ability to infect human cells thus facilitating the jump into humans. They conclude that it is plausible that pangolins could have been a conduit for transmission to humans, but there is “no evidence that pangolins facilitated adaptation to humans” by being an intermediate host. While pangolins or other species might have served as an intermediate host before the virus jumped into humans, “current evidence is consistent with the virus having evolved in bats” and rendering the virus the ability to replicate in the upper respiratory tract of both humans and pangolins, they say. Before pangolins, snakes were thought to have served as intermediate hosts of SARS-CoV-2. But the present study found no evidence to support this hypothesis. Days after this was hypothesized, the scientific community had nearly ruled it out.

Lurking Danger

The researchers also caution that the long divergence period raises the possibility of other undocumented virus lineages circulating in horseshoe bats that have the potential to jump from bats to humans. Different and yet unstudied bat Sarbecovirus that have descended from the SARS-CoV-2/RaTG13 common ancestor forms a clade with properties to infect many different mammals, including humans. “Without better sampling, however, it is impossible to estimate whether or how many of these additional lineages exist,” they write. The diversity and dynamic process of recombination amongst lineages in the bat reservoir makes identifying viruses that can cause major outbreaks difficult. “This underscores the need for a global network of real-time human disease surveillance systems... for pathogen identification and characterization,” they say.

Biological E Signs Two Deals for Production of Coronavirus Vaccines

- Hyderabad-based Biological E has entered into two agreements for development of novel Coronavirus vaccines, one with drug giant Johnson & Johnson, and the other with Houston-based Baylor College of Medicine. Biological E is the second major pharmaceutical player in India to announce agreements with vaccine developers for the manufacture of these candidate vaccines. It could facilitate the deployment of these vaccines in India after they are approved for use. Earlier, Pune-based Serum Institute of India, the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines by volume, has entered into similar agreements with AstraZeneca, which is developing a vaccine with Oxford University, and with US-based Novavax. The candidate vaccines of AstraZeneca and Novavax are both in phase-3 human trials. With Johnson & Johnson, the agreement is about creating new or upgrading existing infrastructure at Biological E for manufacturing ingredients (“drug substance”) as well as the final vaccine (“drug product”). The Johnson & Johnson candidate vaccine is in combined phase-1 and phase-2 human trials. It expects to enter into phase-3 trials in September and is aiming to be ready with the vaccine early next year. The J&J vaccine has already received a US\$ 1 billion backing from the United States government which has secured 100 million doses of the vaccine whenever it is ready. In the second agreement, the Hyderabad company has licensed the recombinant protein-based vaccine being developed by the Baylor College of Medicine. This vaccine is in pre-clinical trials right now. The agreement will enable Biological E to manufacture the vaccine, and also collaborate on its further development. The production of the vaccine at



Biological E could facilitate its deployment in India and other middle and low-income countries, the company said in a statement.

When Will Russian Vaccine Be Available?

- Russia has delivered on its promise to develop the world's first vaccine for novel Coronavirus. It announced that it had approved a vaccine being developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute. The announcement has been met with excitement as well as skepticism due to the fact that the vaccine has been cleared without phase-3 human trials. Even the phase-1 and phase-2 trials have been rushed, all of it being completed within two months. However, it still might be some distance away from becoming generally accessible, especially to people outside Russia. The vaccine is likely to get into production immediately. Apart from the facility at the Gamaleya Institute itself, it is supposed to be manufactured by Sistema, a big Russian business house. In a statement, Sistema said the first batches of the vaccine were ready, and would be shortly shipped to Russian provinces to be administered first to doctors and healthcare workers who are at high risk of infection. However, the Sistema facility has the capacity to produce only 1.5 million doses of a vaccine in a year, a woefully inadequate quantity considering that the immediate global demand is of billions of doses. As a result, Russia's capability to service the demand in other countries looks severely limited, as of now. Russia has, however, said it had entered into international agreements to produce 500 million doses of the vaccine annually. It has also said that it had received requests for 1 billion doses of the vaccine from foreign countries. But even if the manufacturing issue is taken care of, there is regulatory hurdle to be crossed in the deployment of the Russian vaccine in countries like India. There are two ways in which this vaccine can be approved for use in India. The Indian regulatory system requires at least late phase human trials to be conducted on local population before any vaccine, or drug, developed in other countries, is approved for use in India. That is because a vaccine generally elicits different immune responses from different population groups. That would mean that the Russian developers, or their partners in India, would have to carry out phase-2 and phase-3 trials on the vaccine on Indian volunteers. This is the process that was recently followed in the case of the vaccine being developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca. Pune-based Serum Institute of India, which has a manufacturing agreement with the developers to produce the vaccine, recently received the regulator's nod to conduct phase-2 and phase-3 trials on the vaccine in India. Only if these tests are satisfactory that the Oxford University vaccine would be allowed to be used on Indian people. Even in the current fast-paced environment, phase-2 and phase-3 trials of the Russian vaccine in India would take at least two to three months. That is, after someone moves an application before the drug regulator asking for permission to conduct the trials. So far, no such application has been moved. But considering the current urgent situation, the Russian vaccine can also get an emergency authorization from India's drug regulator. That would allow the vaccine to be used without the late phase trials. The drug regulator can say that it is satisfied with the results of the human trials conducted in Russia, and considering the gravity of the prevailing situation, it can grant emergency approval to the vaccine, without the need for human trials in India. Recently, the drug Remdesivir was granted such emergency approval, to be administered to novel Coronavirus patients. But this is a route that experts believe is unlikely to be taken in the case of Russian vaccine. That is because, unlike a drug that is given only to patients, and that too only at the consideration of the doctor, the vaccine is supposed to be administered to general public. More so in the case of the current pandemic. For most of the other



diseases, only children are vaccinated these days, because the older populations have already been vaccinated earlier. But for novel Coronavirus, everyone needs to be vaccinated. The risk of using a vaccine on such large number of people without having conducted late phase trials are much higher. Also, Remdesivir was an already approved drug that was just being re-purposed to treat Coronavirus patients. Its safety was never in doubt. Only its effectiveness on treating Covid-19 disease was uncertain. In the case of the Russian vaccine, however, even the safety of the vaccine would be uncertain if the late phase trials are not conducted.

Russian Vaccine Is Not the First One – A Chinese Vaccine Is Already in Use

Incidentally, the Russian vaccine against novel Coronavirus is the not the first one to be approved. A Chinese vaccine, developed by CanSino Biologicals, was approved in June itself. But it was meant only for limited use, to be administered on soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences is a co-developer of the vaccine. It is not known how many soldiers of the Chinese army have already been given this vaccine. Like the Russian vaccine, this one too was approved without phase-3 human trials. A couple of days, the company announced that it would getting ready to conduct phase-3 trials in a hospital in Saudi Arabia.

How Does the Russian Covid-19 Vaccine Work?

Russia's vaccine is based on the DNA of a SARS-CoV-2 type adenovirus, a common cold virus. The vaccine uses the weakened virus to deliver small parts of a pathogen and stimulate an immune response. Speaking to Sputnik News, Alexander Gintsburg, director of the Gamaleya National Research Centre, maintained that the coronavirus particles in the vaccine cannot harm the body as they cannot multiply.

When Will the Russian Vaccine Hit the Market? Who Will Receive First?

Russia's health minister said members of "risk groups" such as medical workers might be offered the vaccine this month and a mass vaccination programme would be launched in October. He said doctors and teachers would be among the first groups to be vaccinated. Russia's elite has been given the experimental vaccine as early as April. Russia has not yet declared the price of the vaccine.

Serum Institute gets expert committee go-ahead to test Oxford vaccine in India

Just three days after it had held back its approval, an expert committee of India's drug regulatory body has given its go-ahead to Pune's Serum Institute to test the Oxford University vaccine candidate in India, after the company revised its application and provided more information. Serum Institute, the world's largest producer of vaccines by volume, has struck an agreement with Swedish-British pharmaceutical major AstraZeneca, which is co-developing a novel Coronavirus vaccine with Oxford University, to manufacture the vaccine for middle and low-income countries at its Pune facility. The company had sought regulatory approval to carry out phase-II and phase-III trials of the vaccine on Indian volunteers later this month. The vaccine, to be called 'Covishield' in India, is currently undergoing phase-III trials elsewhere as well. In India, the clinical trials are sought to be done on about 1,600 participants. At the previous hearing, the expert committee had sought more information from the company about the trials. After this, the committee has recommended that Serum be allowed to conduct the trials. The recommendation has to be approved by the Drug Controller General of India.



More Than A Vaccine, It Is About Vaccination (T. Jacob John - Retired Professor of Clinical Virology, CMC Vellore, And Past President, Indian Academy of Pediatrics. M.S. Seshadri - Retired Professor of Medical Endocrinology, CMC Vellore, And, Medical Director, Thirumalai Mission Hospital, Ranipet, Tamil Nadu)

- Everyone eagerly asks: will we get a COVID-19 vaccine this year or only next year? During a pandemic, expecting vaccines the same year or the next, illustrates the power of technology, human hope, media hype – all at unprecedented frenzy.

Where India Stands

Globally, innumerable vaccine trials are progressing; in India, two candidates have advanced considerably. An inactivated coronavirus vaccine was created by Hyderabad's Bharat Biotech. It is safe and immunogenic (stimulates anti-coronavirus antibody) in laboratory animals and humans, to be re-confirmed in a phase 2 trial; phase 3 will assess the vaccine's safety and protective efficacy against COVID-19. Pune's Serum Institute of India (SII) is testing Oxford University-AstraZeneca's vaccine using a Trojan horse approach – spiking chimpanzee adenovirus type 5 with coronavirus spike glycoprotein genes. When injected, adenoviruses are detected and devoured by immune system cells patrolling for invading microbes. The smuggled genes force these cells to synthesize and spew out spike protein that is immunogenic. This adenovirus is harmless in humans. The SII is ready to upscale production after regulatory clearances in the United Kingdom and India. Both company-owners have invested heavily, without extramural research support, or advance purchase contract by the government. Both seem to have the best interests of fellow Indians first in their hearts; profit comes second. Risks are a part of the game. Neither company has all its eggs in one basket – confidence in their flagship antigens is not absolute, both are pursuing alternate vaccine candidates also. Some wealthy nations made bilateral financial agreements with manufacturers in order to hog vaccines. Such vaccine nationalism is 'measles of the world', borrowing the phrase from Einstein. Global public good should not be hijacked by wealthy nations. Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, created COVAX – a funding facility to ensure up-scaling vaccine production and its access to low income countries as soon as regulatory approvals emerge. COVAX will support the SII with funds to bring down selling-price to \$3 per dose. With good news on supply side, what about the delivery side? India's Universal Immunization Programme is a vaccine-delivery platform for children and pregnant women, funded by the central government but implemented by State governments. However, the COVID-19 vaccine is for all age groups, necessitating an innovative platform, prioritized on the basis of need.

Define Policy for Clarity

The first step is policy definition leading to a plan of action blueprint. The time to create them is now – it costs nothing, but will save time when a vaccine becomes available. Policy emerges from objective(s) for vaccine use in individuals and community. Priority for individual need is to protect those at high risk of death (senior citizens and those with medical co-morbidities) and front-line workers who expose themselves to infection while providing health care. Children may be vaccinated before schools reopen to protect them and prevent infection from being carried home. Vaccine availability will be limited at first, when we must ensure that those on the priority list receive it. Those who already had COVID-19 or novel coronavirus infection require no vaccination; but how can we ascertain



that? Past COVID-19 or infection cannot be readily identified unless we track archival information of all laboratory tests and medical records. Information should be made available to the individual and the health management system, for which computerized data are critical. A nationwide database with unique identification details already exists, a valuable resource to identify those who need not be vaccinated. Identifying past asymptomatic infections requires systematic screening for IgG antibody. Antibody positives need not be vaccinated (no harm if vaccinated). All data should be saved permanently. Area-wise estimates of the numbers who need vaccination on a priority basis are necessary. Now is the time for State governments to capture all such data. A community's need for vaccination is two-fold. **All those who must rebuild essential activities, i.e. economic, educational, trade, transport, sociocultural and religious, must be protected. A more ambitious aim is to break the novel coronavirus transmission and eradicate the disease altogether.** With India's notable representation in decision-making bodies of the World Health Organization, India is uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in advocating global eradication of COVID-19.

Getting A Plan Ready

We need a vaccine-delivery platform to fulfil all such needs. A practical method is vaccination camps, supervised by a medical officer, staffed by health management and local government, and having the list of people who need vaccination. Information should be updated regularly, deleting those who got infected recently. Enumeration and registration of eligible persons can be started now. Vaccination by appointments will ensure that vaccination is without overcrowding and with minimum waiting time. **Post-injection, vaccinated subjects should wait for half-an-hour in case of immediate side effects; emergency drugs to tackle side effects should be readily available. Vaccine trials document the absence of serious side effects. Minor and inconsequential reactions are self-limiting fever, pain and swelling at the injection site.** As it would be a new vaccine, all side effects must be documented for first and second doses; medical events during the month following each dose must be captured through phone calls, and analyzed to check full safety of the vaccine. Phase 3 trial is usually in healthy volunteers, hence efficacy and safety profile in others will not be available when a vaccine is rolled out. However, senior citizens and those with co-morbidities must be vaccinated by/on priority. Some countries require that a proportion of volunteers should be the elderly and the vulnerable. **In India, careful documentation of all side effects in all individuals, senior citizens, those with co-morbidities, and children must supplement trial data on vaccine safety.** This 'post-marketing surveillance' must be built into the vaccine roll-out. **The vaccine regulatory agency should take a call on the special question of vaccine safety during pregnancy.** One vaccine is an inactivated virus and the second is a live virus but non-infectious. Both may be assumed to be safe; yet safety in pregnancy must be ascertained in bridge studies that must be conducted as soon as possible.

The New and Quicker Covid-19 Tests Approved Under the US RADx Scheme

- With experts predicting the demand for Covid-19 tests in the US to be millions more per day above current levels in the coming weeks, the government has awarded contracts worth \$248.7 million to seven biomedical firms to produce next-generation tests under its **Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics (RADx) initiative.** The aim behind the initiative is to significantly increase the number, type and availability of tests by millions per week by fall.



The NIH launched the RADx programme on April 29 days after receiving an emergency appropriation of \$1.5 billion from Congress to support innovative technologies to make millions of rapid Covid-19 tests. The seven firms were chosen from over 650 applicants and 31 projects.

Profiteering during a pandemic (M.P. Nathanael - Inspector General of Police (Retd), Central Reserve Police Force)

- Soon after the government imposed a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19, prices of essential items shot up in several places across the country. The sudden demand for masks saw even an ordinary mask being sold at ₹150 a piece, though it turned cheaper weeks later when there was mass production. Slowly, as cases grew, reports were published of private hospitals overcharging patients, even after State governments capped COVID-19 treatment charges. In some private hospitals, patients were asked to pay lakhs even before being allotted beds. Even doctors working in these hospitals reported that they thought their patients were being fleeced. Compassion was nowhere to be seen. All that mattered was making money. For instance, after a patient's family lodged a complaint with the West Bengal Clinical Establishment Regulatory Commission that the patient had been overcharged, the Commission directed the private hospital where she had been admitted to refund ₹1.4 lakh of the ₹1.84 lakh charged for Personal Protection Equipment. The hospital was charging ₹7,000 a day for the cost of PPEs used by the doctors against the cap of ₹1,000 fixed by the West Bengal government. Not all patients who have been overcharged have been able to file complaints and received refunds, however. The cost of medicines too shot up. In Srinagar, Remdesivir was being sold for as much as ₹36,000 against the normal rate of ₹6,000. The poor could not afford the medicine and looked to government agencies for help. In some places, those who could afford it purchased more than the required quantity leading to shortage. In Mumbai, seven persons were arrested for selling a vial of injection of Remdesivir at ₹30,000 against the actual price of ₹5,400. Ambulance owners too chose to make good money in these pandemic times. For transporting patients up to a distance of about 10-15 km, they charged as much as ₹30,000 in Mumbai. During the lockdown, poor migrants who wanted to go home had to spend large amounts to hire vehicles. Buses operated by private agencies charged exorbitant fares. Most migrants could not afford these rates and had to trudge hundreds and hundreds of kilometers on foot. Many met with accidents and lost their lives in the process. Similar scenes of extortion were witnessed in December 1984 when hundreds of residents around the Union Carbide pesticide plant fled Bhopal to escape inhaling the poisonous gas that had leaked from the unit. Way back in 1897, the British enacted the Epidemic Diseases Act which empowered the government to implement any measures that would prevent the outbreak or spread of any disease. According to the law, anyone disobeying the orders of any public servant can be punished under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code. However, this is not enough. Since exploiting the common man in such times has to be sternly dealt with, a provision ought to be incorporated in the Disaster Management Act of 2005 to make overcharging the public a punishable offence. There are several instances of the general public having been subjected to misery and agony in the months following enforcement of the lockdown; I have cited only a few. Denying admission in hospitals, refusing to bury the dead in cemeteries, etc. need to be made punishable offences. The horror stories of this pandemic give us an opportunity to do so.



DreamIAS