

# CURRENT AFFAIRS for UPSC

30TH May TO 5TH June, 2021

DreamIAS



## INTERNATIONAL

### BIDEN EXPANDS LIST OF CHINESE FIRMS OFF-LIMITS FOR U.S. INVESTORS

*U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday expanded a blacklist of Chinese firms that are off-limits to American investors over their links to Beijing's "military-industrial complex," in a sign of Washington's continued pressure campaign against the Asian power. Former President Donald Trump in November issued a list of 31 Chinese companies that were deemed to be supplying or supporting China's military and security apparatus, later adding even more firms. But after legal challenges put the sanctions in doubt, Mr. Biden's team reviewed the blacklist, removing some names and ultimately expanding it to 59 firms that Americans are prohibited from having a stake in. Many are subsidiaries of companies already included. The sanctions target companies involved in Chinese surveillance technology used to "facilitate repression or serious human rights abuses," which "undermine the security or democratic values of the United States and our allies," according to a White House statement. The initial list published under Mr. Trump included major **telecoms, construction and technology firms, such as China Mobile, China Telecom, video surveillance firm Hikvision, and China Railway Construction Corp. China National Offshore Oil Corporation was added to the list in January. The investment ban takes effect on August 2 and current shareholders have a year to divest.***

### US INVESTIGATION INTO DIGITAL SERVICES TAX, AND WHAT IS THE CASE AGAINST INDIA?

*The United States government Wednesday announced further suspension of punitive tariffs for six months on India, Austria, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom while it continues to resolve the digital services taxes investigation amid the ongoing multilateral negotiations at the OECD and the G20. "The United States is focused on finding a multilateral solution to a range of key issues related to international taxation, including our concerns with digital services taxes. The United States remains committed to reaching a consensus on international tax issues through the OECD and G20 processes. **Today's actions provide time for those negotiations to continue to make progress while maintaining the option of imposing tariffs under Section 301 if warranted in the future,**" US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement.*

#### **What is the US investigation regarding digital services taxation?**

*The US has conducted a year-long investigation into digital services taxes imposed by countries, stating that they are against tech companies like Apple, Amazon, Google and Facebook. The investigation began in June 2020 and in January 2021, following investigations the USTR determined that the digital services taxes adopted by **Austria, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom** discriminated against US digital companies and were inconsistent with principles of international taxation and burdened US companies. **The US on Wednesday announced 25 per cent tariffs on over \$2 billion worth of imports from these six countries but then immediately suspended the duties to allow time for international tax negotiations.***



### What's the case against India?

*In the case of India, the USTR's proposed course of action includes additional tariffs of up to 25 per cent ad valorem on an aggregate level of trade that would collect duties on goods of India in the range of the amount of DST that India is expected to collect from US companies. Around 26 categories of goods are in the preliminary list of products that would be subject to the additional tariffs. This includes shrimps, basmati rice, cigarette paper, cultured pearls, semi precious stones, silver powder and silver articles of jewelry, gold mixed link necklaces and neck chains and certain furniture of bentwood.*

### What are the digital services taxes in India?

*The NDA government had moved an amendment in the Finance Bill 2020-21 imposing a 2 per cent digital service tax on trade and services by non-resident e-commerce operators with a turnover of over ₹2 crore, effectively expanding the scope of equalisation levy that, till last year, only applied to digital advertising services. The new levy that became applicable from April last year has expanded the ambit of the equalisation levy for non-resident e-commerce operators involved in supply of services, including online sale of goods and provision of services. E-commerce operators are obligated to pay the tax at the end of each quarter. Estimates by the USTR indicate that the value of the DST payable by US-based company groups to India will be up to approximately \$55 million per year.*

## DIGITAL TAX TUSSELES

The United States announced and then immediately suspended a whopping 25% tariff rate on over \$2 billion of imports from six countries including India, signalling Washington's intent to act punitively on its long-held grouse with these nations for their digital services taxes primarily impacting Silicon Valley tech giants. The office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai said that the tariff proposed on goods from Austria, India, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the U.K. was approved following a "Section 301" investigation that found these digital taxes to be discriminatory. With the threat of tariffs hanging over these six economies when most of them are limping through a feeble post-COVID-19 recovery, the USTR appeared to project a softening of the blow by adding that the tariffs would be suspended pending ongoing tax negotiations to "provide time for those negotiations to continue to make progress while maintaining the option of imposing tariffs under Section 301 if warranted in the future". The backstory is that the investigation was initiated by the Trump administration in June 2020, and the deadline for approving tariff action based on the investigation would have lapsed this week. The latest policy action comes a few months after the Biden administration similarly approved, then suspended, tariffs on France retaliating for its tax impacting firms such as Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft. One thing is clear: if the Biden administration did not subscribe to the notion that taxes on digital services by the titans of Silicon Valley, a significant portion of whose revenues are generated on foreign soil, were discriminatory, it could have distanced itself from the Trump-era investigation into this allegation without any serious political fallout. The fact that Mr. Biden has chosen to use the stick of tariffs to force the pace of negotiations on digital services tax with seven nations suggests that the current White House subscribes strongly to the idea of expanding the global playing field for American tech firms to dominate without fear of being slapped with tax liabilities. In the case of India, that was a mere 2% digital service tax on trade and services by non-resident

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



e-commerce operators with a turnover of over ₹2 crore. Even more, Washington appears to be unafraid to throw serious political heft behind this venture even to the point of risking another tariff war outbreak, compounding the tensions generated by tax skirmishes between the Trump White House and Beijing on this count. The cost for India could be potentially high, as \$118 million worth of its exports will fall under this proposed tariff, and a range of sectors could be impacted. At this point in the fragile, post-COVID-19 recovery, the world can hardly afford another tariff war, and that too one waged to protect a sector that has enjoyed low-tax or tax-free operations across the world for decades.

#### U.S. SETS, STAYS TARIFF ON 6 NATIONS FOR DIGITAL TAXES

The United States on Wednesday announced 25% tariffs on over \$2 billion worth of imports from six nations over their digital services taxes, but immediately suspended the duties to allow time for international tax negotiations to continue. The U.S. Trade Representative's office said it had approved the threatened tariffs on goods from Britain, Italy, Spain, Turkey, India and Austria after a "Section 301" investigation concluded that their digital taxes discriminated against U.S. companies. USTR said it would impose 25% tariffs on a range of goods from the six countries including \$118 million worth from India. The potential tariffs aim to equal the amount of digital taxes that would be collected from U.S. firms, a USTR official said. The move underscores the U.S. threat of retaliation as finance leaders from G7 countries prepare to meet in London on Friday and Saturday to discuss the state of tax negotiations, including taxation of large technology companies and a U.S. proposal for a global minimum corporate tax.

#### REPUBLICANS BLOCK CAPITOL RIOTS PROBE

*Senate Republicans blocked creation of a bipartisan panel to investigate the deadly January 6 attack on the Capitol, displaying continuing party loyalty to former President Donald Trump and firm determination to shift the political focus away from the violent insurrection by his GOP supporters. The Senate vote on Friday was 54-35 — six short of the 60 needed — to take up a House-passed Bill that would have formed an independent 10-member commission evenly split between the two parties.*

#### Call for support

It came a day after emotional appeals for the commission from police who fought the mob, the family of an officer who died and lawmakers in both parties who fled Capitol chambers in the worst attack on the building in two centuries. The Republicans were mostly but not totally united: Six voted with Democrats to move forward. Eleven Senators — nine Republicans and two Democrats — missed the vote, an unusually high number of absentees for one of the highest-profile votes of the year. At least one of the missing Republicans would have voted in favour of considering the commission, according to his office. *The GOP opposition means that questions about who should bear responsibility for the attack could continue to be filtered through a partisan lens — in congressional committees — rather than addressed by an outside, independent panel modelled after the commission that investigated the September 11, 2001, terror attacks.*



## REMEMBERING THE TULSA RACE MASSACRE 100 YEARS LATER

*This week, U.S. President Joe Biden became the first sitting American head of state to officially recognise one of the worst incidents of violent racial hate in the country's modern history — the Tulsa Race Massacre of May-June 1921. The widespread killings in Tulsa, Oklahoma, targeting relatively well-to-do African Americans, and the extensive damage to their property by rampaging white mobs at the time shocked the nation and world.* Over the decades since then, it has led to introspection and policy actions that have sought to bridge the racial chasm that continues to haunt American society. *In 1921, it was the affluent, predominantly African American neighbourhood of Greenwood, Tulsa, founded by descendants of slaves and having earned a reputation as the "Black Wall Street" of the U.S., that faced the carnage unleashed on May 31 and June 1.* Tulsa was especially known for being an unofficial sanctuary city for African Americans suffering the consequences of harsh segregation or Jim Crow laws in pre-civil rights America. It appears that deep resentment that a community of colour, and one subject to centuries of oppression, had risen to the higher echelons of the economic pyramid blended with historical racist hatred, resulting in lethal violence culminating in the deaths of hundreds, bodily injury to thousands and millions of dollars of damage to the homes and neighbourhoods burned down by the rampaging mob.

For years, the massacre was barely mentioned in government circles, and in newspapers and textbooks. It was only in 2000 that it finally made an appearance in the Oklahoma public schools' curriculum. Immediately after the massacre, the Tulsa police chief reportedly ordered officers to confiscate from photo studios all the pictures taken of the violence unfolding. Further, according to historians who have studied the events surrounding the massacre closely, not only did Tulsa city officials cover up the crimes committed, they also "deliberately shifted the narrative of the massacre by calling it a 'riot' and blaming the Black community for what went down". While the Tulsa "Race Riot" Commission was formed to investigate the events in 1997 and officially released a report in 2001, it is clear that much has remained buried — quite literally.

### Towards reconciliation

It is this painfully sordid, and as yet unresolved history of racist hatred that has prompted Mr. Biden to say, "We do ourselves no favours by pretending none of this ever happened... *We should know the good, the bad, everything. That's what great nations do: They come to terms with their dark sides.*" Yet the greater challenge for Mr. Biden's government is to go beyond the question of reparations to survivors and address the root causes of disparity that continue to plague American society.

## EUROPE DEMANDS EXPLANATION AFTER U.S.-DANISH SPYING CLAIMS

*France, Germany and other European countries demanded answers on Monday following reports the U.S. spied on its allies using Danish underwater cables, as questions mounted over whether Denmark knew about the operation.* In an investigative report on Sunday, *Danish public broadcaster Danmarks Radio (DR) and other European media outlets said the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) had eavesdropped on Danish underwater Internet cables from 2012 to 2014 to spy on top politicians in France, Germany, Norway and Sweden.* The NSA got access to text messages, telephone calls and Internet traffic, including searches, chats and messaging services — including



those of Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, DR said. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Monday they expected explanations from both Washington and Copenhagen. "This is not acceptable between allies, and even less between allies and European partners," said Mr. Macron after the two leaders talked via video conference. "There is no room for suspicion," said Mr. Macron, as he stressed the value of the ties between Europeans and Americans. "That is why what we are waiting for complete clarity," from both Denmark and the U.S., he added. "We are awaiting these answers." Ms. Merkel said she "could only agree" with Mr. Macron's comments, adding she was "reassured" by *Danish Defence Minister Trine Bramsen's condemnation of any such spying. Ms. Bramsen, who took over the defence portfolio in June 2019, has neither confirmed nor denied DR's report, but told AFP that "systematic eavesdropping of close allies is unacceptable".* Denmark's neighbours also demanded explanations. "It's unacceptable if countries which have close allied cooperation feel the need to spy on one another," Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg told public broadcaster NRK. She said Norway had asked Denmark "for all the information they have". Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist said he had been "in contact with Denmark's Defence Minister to ask if Danish platforms have been used to spy on Swedish politicians".

#### AS PUTIN HOSTS LUKASHENKO, U.S. HITS BELARUS WITH SANCTIONS

*The United States on Friday announced punitive measures against Belarus targeting the regime of strongman President Alexander Lukashenko, who met with Russian leader Vladimir Putin amid a global outcry over the forced diversion of a European plane. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki called for "a credible international investigation into the events of May 23," which she called "a direct affront to international norms." Belarus scrambled a military jet to divert a Ryanair plane and arrested 26-year-old opposition journalist and activist Roman Protasevich who was onboard, triggering a global outcry.* The White House announced it was working with the EU on a list of targeted sanctions against key members of Mr. Lukashenko's regime. Meanwhile, economic sanctions against nine Belarusian state-owned enterprises, reimposed by Washington in April following a crackdown on pro-democracy protests, will come into effect on June 3. Further U.S. moves on Belarus could target "those that support corruption, the abuse of human rights, and attacks on democracy," Ms. Psaki said. The White House also issued a "Do Not Travel" warning for Belarus to U.S. citizens, and warned American passenger planes to "exercise extreme caution" if considering flying over Belarusian airspace.

#### WINDS OF CHANGE

In Israel's fractious political landscape, Benjamin Netanyahu has been known as the master of survival. In power since 2009, he has seen allies come and go, protégés turning out to be rivals, and elections happening in the shortest intervals. But he hardly missed an opportunity to turn crisis into political gain, which *allowed him to become the longest serving Prime Minister, overtaking David Ben-Gurion.* However, this may be ending. *A coalition of eight parties, under the leadership of Opposition politician Yair Lapid, could oust Mr. Netanyahu from power and form a 'change' government.* In this, Mr. Lapid, who leads the centrist Yesh Atid party, has joined hands with the right-wing Yamina of Naftali Bennett, and other parties ranging from pro-settlers to left-wing and Arab parties. According to the coalition agreements, Mr. Bennett, who was part of the far-right Jewish Home before founding Yamina, would be the PM for two years followed by Mr.

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



Lapid. Mr. Lapid says his coalition has the support of 61 Members of the Knesset (MKs) — a razor-thin majority in the 120-member Parliament. Messrs. Lapid and Bennet are now pushing for a quick vote in the Knesset, while Mr. Netanyahu is putting pressure on the right-wing MKs of the coalition to vote against the government. *Even if the coalition does sail through the Knesset vote, it might, with its conflicting ideological views, remain fractious and feeble.* But that does not diminish the importance of the political changes that are under way. *The country has seen four elections in the last two years, with no party winning a majority on its own in any.* Last year, Mr. Netanyahu formed a short-lived unity government with the Opposition leader, Benny Gantz. Mr. Gantz, leader of the centrist Blue and White, is now with Mr. Lapid. It is Mr. Netanyahu's repeated and failed attempts to form a stable right-wing government that have led the anti-Netanyahu parties from across the spectrum to come together. Also, *this is the first time in Israel's history that an Arab-majority party has signed a government coalition agreement. Till last year, Arab parties were considered untouchables by the mainstream Jewish parties. But now, the United Arab List (Ra'am), which has 4 MKs, has officially joined the coalition, breaking a political separation wall. If voted out of power, Mr. Netanyahu will have to fight a corruption trial and possible leadership challenges within the Likud without the shield of premiership.* When the Gaza fighting broke out on May 10, coupled with riots in Israeli cities, many thought it would help him politically. But the Gaza fighting appears to have weakened his position among his right-wing allies, who alleged that his government surrendered to Hamas by agreeing to the ceasefire. Mr. Netanyahu is now caught between unhappy right-wing allies and a united opposition.

#### LABOUR VETERAN HERZOG ELECTED ISRAEL PRESIDENT

Israel's Parliament elected the even-keeled Labour veteran Isaac Herzog as its 11th President on Wednesday, a vote that came as Opposition lawmakers scrambled to forge a coalition to unseat Benjamin Netanyahu. *Mr. Herzog, 60, beat former headmistress Miriam Peretz to replace President Reuven Rivlin, who was elected in 2014 to the largely ceremonial position decided by the Parliament, or Knesset.* Wednesday's presidential vote came as Israeli politicians from across the spectrum were holding 11th-hour negotiations to cobble together a new administration aimed at ending Prime Minister Netanyahu's 12 straight years in office. *The presidency exerts little power, primarily meeting with party leaders after legislative elections and tasking candidates with forming governments. It is the Prime Minister who wields actual executive authority.* The scion of one of Israel's most prestigious families, Mr. Herzog was first elected to Parliament in 2003, but was most recently leading the para-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel, an organisation focused on relations with Jewish immigrants and the diaspora.

#### PALESTINE FLAYS INDIA'S ABSTENTION FROM VOTE

*India's abstention from the latest resolution on the Palestinian issue suppresses human rights of "all people",* Palestine's Foreign Minister Riad Malki has said. In *an unusually strong letter sent to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar* on May 30, Dr. Malki said the resolution titled "Ensuring respect for international human rights law and humanitarian law in Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and in Israel" was a product of long years of multilateral negotiation. *"Republic of India missed an opportunity to join the international community at this turning point, both crucial and long overdue, on the path to accountability, justice and peace,"* he stated. *India abstained in the voting on the resolution at the Human Rights Council [HRC] on May 27*

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



*that came up against the backdrop of the latest round of conflict between Israel and Gaza strip, the coastal part of the Palestinian territories.*

#### Death of Indian citizen

India had condemned the death of an Indian citizen in the rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza but in a rare United Nations Security Council meeting on May 17, Permanent Representative T.S. Tirumurti expressed India's support to the "just Palestinian cause". India has maintained that two-state solution to equal sovereign rights is the way forward to resolve the century-old crisis. However, *India abstained from voting on the resolution, which is aimed at securing Israel's compliance with international human rights.*

The resolution was adopted with the vote of 24 members. Nine voted against, and 14, including India, abstained. *The passing of the resolution led to the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate violation of international law by Israel.* Dr. Malki said the Palestinian people were deprived of applicability of international law. The "root causes of the injustice" against the Palestinian people was "dispossession, displacement, colonisation" by Israel, the Minister noted.

#### THE INDIAN MODEL OF COEXISTENCE (NAJMUL HODA - AN IPS OFFICER)

The cycle of violence between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian public is neither the first nor likely to be the last of its kind. The Palestinians have been losing not only their lives and livelihood but also the very land for which this violence has been raging for over a century now. The territory in question is The Holy Land to the three religions of *Abrahamic monotheism*, viz., Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One can't be a Jew or a Christian or a Muslim and deny that it is the Promised Land of the Beni Israel branch of the descendants of Abraham. The Al-Aqsa mosque in Quran is Solomon's Temple which was the first Qibla (direction of prayer) of the Muslims. The Islamic claim on Jerusalem comes only through its association with Judaism and Christianity.

#### A brief history

Britain renounced its *Mandate* over Palestine in 1948, paving the way for the United Nations to divide Palestine between the Jews and Arabs, *giving them about 55% and 45% of the land*, respectively. The Jews, meanwhile, had declared the establishment of the state of Israel for which they had been working for long. The Palestinians, who lacked the resources to conceive of a state, failed to form a state of their own in the land allotted to them. Instead, a coalition of Arab countries invaded the nascent state of Israel to nip it in the bud. Israel not only defeated the Arab armies, but also unleashed what the Palestinians call *Nakba*, an Arabic word which means holocaust. Israel destroyed about 600 Palestinian villages and expelled about 80% of Arabs from its territory. In *1967, in the Six-Day War*, Israel captured not just more Palestinian land but also Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights. During the *Yom Kippur War of 1973*, the Arabs came to realise that Israel is here to stay. But the Arab states, while washing their hands off Palestine, failed to impress the same realisation upon their Palestinian brethren, a sizeable number of whom remain committed to seeking a solution through counter-violence. *Non-Arab Muslim countries, while being of no help to the Palestinians have been the greatest cheerleaders of the violent section of the struggle.* This vicious cycle of violence is not going to end unless there is realism on both sides. The Hamas should know that Israel will not give up on holding on to land it has held for years, and





Israel should understand that total subjugation, expulsion or even decimation of Palestinians will not make it any safer. Both the sides will have to seek a solution through non-violence. A solution based on the common humanity of all stakeholders, one that is not riven by racial and religious schisms, needs to be explored. Secularisation of the discourse is an inescapable prerequisite for any workable solution. This is especially more applicable for the weaker side.

#### Accommodation of all

*The Indian model of democracy and secularism, which accommodates religious, ethnic, linguistic and other diversities, could be a viable model for the peaceful coexistence of formerly antagonistic groups. The European model of the annihilation of natives in the Americas and Australia, last tried on the Jews in Nazi Germany, is not a solution which we can morally countenance and practically resort to. India, on the other hand, evolved a unique model of accommodating the victors and the vanquished, without ever resorting to the latter's decimation.* A modus vivendi has to evolve on the basis of hard realities, the first of which is that neither the Jews nor the Palestinians are going to vanish into thin air. The Palestinians missed the bus to form a state in 1948, and have missed many since then. Now, they are sparsely spread over the land in scores of non-contiguous pockets, making a cohesive state unviable. *The two-state solution can be possible only if Israel frees the occupied territories and removes the Jewish settlements from there, an unlikely scenario in the foreseeable future. If the two-state solution is nowhere in the offing, a single state after the Indian model, i.e., a secular, democratic and pluralistic state, may be the only feasible option.* A nation state only for the Jews would be a relapse into the ghetto mode, with all its concomitant implications. The Palestinian refugees have a right to return. That the altered demographics would impinge on the religio-racial character of Israel is not an argument which behoves a modern democratic state founded on common humanity with equal rights and opportunities for everyone. It is true that a nation state belongs to the group which constituted itself into a nation. Therefore, the group's ethos would reflect in national life without it rubbing it in. *A nation is an imagined community. As imagination expands, the foundations of the nation become deeper.* For this, there could be no better model than India. Israel might not offer the right model of conflict resolution for India, but India presents a model of peaceful coexistence for Israel.

#### NIGERIA SAYS IT SUSPENDS TWITTER DAYS AFTER PRESIDENT'S POST REMOVED

*Nigeria said on Friday it had indefinitely suspended Twitter's activities, two days after the social media giant removed a post from President Muhammadu Buhari that threatened to punish regional secessionists. Information Minister Lai Mohammed said the government had acted because of "the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence". Mohammed did not spell out what form the suspension would take or give more details on the undermining activities. His ministry also announced Twitter's suspension on Twitter.* When asked about the details of the suspension, a ministerial aide told Reuters: "Wait and see how things will turn out." Twitter's website and app continued to work in Nigeria's capital Abuja and commercial hub Lagos on Friday. On Wednesday, the U.S. tech firm said Buhari's post threatening to punish groups blamed for attacks on government buildings had violated Twitter's "abusive behaviour" policy. In April, the information minister reacted angrily when Twitter chose neighbouring Ghana for its first African office. He said the company had been influenced by media misrepresentations of Nigeria, including reports of crackdowns on protests last year.



Demonstrators calling for police reform had used social media to organise, raise money and share alleged proof of police harassment. Twitter's CEO, Jack Dorsey, tweeted to encourage his followers to donate. In the protests' wake, Mohammed called for "some form of regulation" on social media to combat "fake news". A spokesperson for Airtel, one of Nigeria's largest mobile carriers, on Friday declined to say whether the company had received any government directives about the suspension. MTN, the largest mobile carrier, did not respond to calls and a message seeking comment.

#### WEST AFRICAN LEADERS MEET TO DISCUSS MALI

*West African leaders were due to meet in Ghana on Sunday to discuss a response to Mali's second coup in nine months, which has sparked warnings of fresh sanctions and deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region. Mali's new President Colonel Assimi Goita arrived in Accra on Saturday for preliminary talks ahead of the extraordinary summit of regional bloc ECOWAS, (Economic Community of West African States) which was due to start at 1400 GMT. Presidents Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso's Marc Christian Kabore were among those attending the summit, which came as another deadly jihadist attack underscored Mali's chronic instability. Col. Goita led the young Army officers who overthrew Mali's elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita last August over perceived corruption and his failure to quell a bloody jihadist insurgency. After the takeover, the military agreed to appoint civilians as interim President and Prime Minister under pressure from ECOWAS, which has served as a mediator.*

#### Broken promises

But on Monday, soldiers detained transitional President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane, releasing them on Thursday while saying that they had resigned. The twin arrests triggered a diplomatic uproar and marked Mali's second apparent coup within a year. Mali's constitutional court completed Col. Goita's rise to full power on Friday by naming him transitional president. With the junta going back on its previous commitment to civilian political leaders, doubts have been raised about its other pledges, including holding elections in early 2022.

#### UNGA HEAD: INDIA TO VOTE FOR MALDIVES

*India will vote in support of Maldives' Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid in the election of the President of the United Nations General Assembly next week, a decision which will disappoint another close neighbour, Afghanistan, which has former Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul in the running. The race between the South Asian neighbours for the post, which is being chosen this time from the Asia-Pacific grouping, will be decided in the election on June 7. According to a senior official in Kabul, the Ghani government has formally requested India to vote for Mr. Rassoul, and was still hopeful of securing support. However, at least three government officials aware of the process here have said that India has made it clear that it cannot vote for Afghanistan as it had committed support for the Maldives, and suggested that Mr. Rassoul's candidature had been announced only in January, which was quite late for the race. "Normally it takes about a year to canvass for a position like the UNGA President," said one official. "While Afghanistan had sounded us out earlier, they did take very long to announce the candidate, and by then we had already taken a call [on the Maldives]." Sources suggested that the announcement of Mr. Rassoul's decision to run had taken many in Delhi by*



*surprise, as they had hoped that Mr. Shahid to be a consensus candidate in the Asian grouping, which gets its turn once every five years. "A vote for the President of the GA is always very divisive both for the concerned regional group, as well as for the wider membership of the UNGA.* Such a situation allows the major powers who have veto privileges outside the UNGA to use the elections to pursue their own agendas," former Indian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Asoke Kumar Mukerji told The Hindu. *In 2016, Fiji won the election after a bitter contest with Cyprus that saw the U.S. and China taking different sides.* Officials suggested that in the current contest, China could support Afghanistan. While most countries have not disclosed their vote yet, India had confirmed its support to the Maldives during a virtual meeting between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Mr. Shahid in August 2020, and Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla had made a public statement during a visit to Male last November. "With his vast diplomatic experience and leadership qualities, Foreign Minister Shahid has the best credentials to preside over the General Assembly in these tumultuous times," Mr. Shringla had said. Given major global moves on Afghanistan as the U.S. prepares to pull out all troops in September this year, New Delhi is keen that its stand is not seen as taking a position against Afghanistan, and officials stressed that the vote was not an indicator of bilateral ties with either country.

The General Assembly is entrusted in the United Nations Charter with electing members to various organs within the United Nations system. The procedure for these elections can be found in Section 15 of the Rules of Procedure for the General Assembly

#### CHINA JAILS BLOGGER FOR GALWAN COMMENTS

Chinese authorities have sentenced a once popular blogger to eight months in prison "for defaming martyrs" over his comments questioning the government's account of last year's clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Galwan Valley. Qiu Ziming "received a jail term of eight months for defaming martyrs on Monday", the Communist Party-run Global Times reported, adding that this was "China's first such reported case since a new amendment was attached to the Criminal Law" that introduced penalties for "insulting" or "slandering" national heroes or martyrs. The court said the sentence was "lighter" than the maximum possible three-year sentence because he had "confessed to his crime". Mr. Qiu was among at least half a dozen people known to have been detained for comments questioning the government over the June 15, 2020 clash in the Galwan Valley in which 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives. At least four Chinese soldiers died in the clash, with China announcing military honours for them — its only confirmation so far of casualties — eight months after the clash took place. Mr. Qiu, 38, an investigative journalist formerly with The Economic Observer, was arrested in Nanjing in February after posting messages to his 2.5 million followers on Weibo, the Twitter-equivalent used in China.

#### 'Higher death toll'

*He suggested that China's fatalities would have been higher than four because as per the official account, some of the soldiers died coming to the aid of troops in difficulty, who, in his view, would have suffered losses as well. He also questioned why the announcement took eight months, while India had, in contrast, promptly recognised the 20 Indian soldiers who died. India's prompt announcement, he wrote, suggested that "in India's view they won and paid a lesser price".* The police in Nanjing had said he was arrested for "releasing false information and smearing the four heroes who died and one who was wounded when dealing with the Indian military's illegal trespassing".

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



Last week, Wang Jinyu, 19, a resident of Chongqing who is also a U.S. permanent resident and is wanted by China for similarly commenting on the Galwan clash, was freed after being detained in Dubai, the Associated Press reported. Asked about his detention in Dubai, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Monday that "competent Chinese authorities are investigating and handling the case in accordance with law".

#### SRI LANKA CARGO VESSEL FIRE EXTINGUISHED AFTER TWO WEEKS

The fire aboard a Singapore-registered cargo ship off Colombo was finally extinguished after about two weeks following a concerted international operation, the Sri Lankan Navy said on Tuesday. *"Experts from the [Dutch] salvage company SMIT boarded the vessel [MV X-Press Pearl] and said the engine rooms are flooded. Our divers are yet to obtain clearance to check if there is any leak. The Indian Coast Guard vessels are also still here, assisting us," Captain Indika De Silva told The Hindu. Flames broke out aboard the vessel on May 20, and spread rapidly after an onboard explosion on May 25, leading to what Sri Lanka's environmentalists fear could be the country's worst environmental disaster.* The vessel, which left the Hazira port in Gujarat on May 15, was headed to Singapore via Colombo, carrying 25 tonnes of nitric acid, other chemicals and 28 containers of plastic raw material. Much of the cargo reportedly fell into the sea, while tonnes of plastic pellets were found deposited along Sri Lanka's coastline, prompting authorities to restrict access to the sea and impose a fishing ban. Sri Lanka's Marine Protection Authority chairperson Dharshani Lahandapura said: *"This is probably the worst beach pollution in our history." Many social media users shared photographs of plastic pellet heaps and dead fishes along the country's southern beaches.*

#### Statement recorded

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan investigators questioned the crew of the cargo ship, even as the vessel smouldered for over 12 days. The Criminal Investigation Department recorded a statement from the captain for 14 hours on Monday, Colombo-based The Morning newspaper reported. The Colombo Magistrate's Court issued an order preventing the captain, chief engineer, and the deputy chief engineer of the vessel from leaving the country.

#### AS BIRTHS DECLINE, CHINA TO ALLOW COUPLES TO HAVE THIRD CHILD

*China will for the first time allow couples to have a third child, the country's government said on Monday, in a further relaxation of family planning rules five years after a "two-child policy" largely failed to boost birth rates.* The announcement followed a meeting of the 25-member Politburo, chaired by China's President and Communist Party of China General Secretary Xi Jinping, "to hear reports on major policy measures to actively address the ageing of population during the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025)", State media said. *The change comes less than three weeks after the release of China's once-in-a-decade population census that painted an alarming picture of declining births. The National Bureau of Statistics said on May 11 that 12 million babies were born last year, the lowest number since 1961, a time when Mao's China was in the midst of a four-year famine, and down from 17.86 million in 2016. The census said China's population was 1.41 billion in 2020, an increase of 72 million since the last census in 2010, reflecting a 5.38% growth in this period*



*and a 0.53% annual growth. Forecasts say the population could peak in the next couple of years and most likely by 2025, when India will become the world's most populous country.*

#### Dire situation

Some Chinese demographers said the announcement on Monday, coming so soon after the census, suggested the situation could be more dire than the official numbers indicated. "Maybe it's because the real population data is too scary," Yi Fuxian, a demographer, told the South China Morning Post (SCMP). "Even if they have not published it, it probably frightened the decision makers." *The census recorded 264 million in the age group of 60 and over, up 5.44% since 2010 and accounting for 18.70% of the population. Those in the 15-59 age group were 894 million persons, down by 6.79% since 2010 and accounting for 63.35% of the population.* China's workforce in the 15-59 age bracket peaked at 925 million in 2011, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said previously. That number was down to 894 million in this census and would drop to 700 million by 2050.

It is, however, unclear if the new announcement may address the problem, at least if the past five years are any indication. China introduced a "two child policy" in 2016, but the wide consensus is that it failed to have the desired impact. Surveys carried out by Chinese media attributed *financial pressures* as one main reason. A 2015 survey by the government said *70% of respondents attributed financial reasons for choosing to not have many children.* An online poll on Monday of 31,000 respondents conducted by the official Xinhua news agency found 28,000 "would not consider at all" having three children, while 1,600 said they would, the SCMP reported. The poll was subsequently removed, the newspaper said.

#### VIETNAM DETECTS NEW HYBRID VARIANT

*Authorities in Vietnam have detected a new coronavirus variant that is a combination of the Indian and U.K. COVID-19 variants and spreads quickly by air,* the Health Minister said on Saturday. After successfully containing the virus for most of last year, *Vietnam is grappling with a spike in infections since late April that accounts for more than half of the total 6,713 registered cases. So far, there have been 47 deaths.*

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified four variants of SARS-CoV-2 of global concern. Officials at the WHO did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding the new variant identified in Vietnam.

#### CHINA REPORTS HUMAN CASE OF BIRD FLU STRAIN

*China reported the world's first human infection of the H10N3 bird flu strain on Tuesday but said the risk of it spreading widely among people was low.* A 41-year-old man was admitted to hospital with fever symptoms in Zhenjiang on April 28 and was diagnosed with H10N3 a month later, the National Health Commission (NHC) said in a statement. "The risk of large-scale spread is extremely low," the NHC said, adding that the man was in a stable condition. *It described H10N3 as low pathogenic — less likely to cause death or severe illness — in birds. Several strains of bird flu have been found among animals in China but mass outbreaks in humans are rare. The last human epidemic of bird flu in China occurred in late 2016 to 2017, with the H7N9 virus.*



THE CAUTIONARY TALE IN OSAKA'S EXIT (PROF. K. SRINATH REDDY, A CARDIOLOGIST AND EPIDEMIOLOGIST, IS PRESIDENT, PUBLIC HEALTH FOUNDATION OF INDIA (PHFI))

Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open tennis championship after the organisers would not accept her request to be excused from post-match interactions even as she cited a history of suffering from bouts of depression and severe anxiety while facing the media. Indeed, the organisers had imposed a fine of \$15,000 after Osaka excused herself from the post-match press conference after her first-round victory. This despite the fact that she had already communicated her concerns about her mental health to the organisers at the beginning of the tournament. They, in turn, threatened her with expulsion if she did not participate in post-match media interactions. Osaka was as gracious in her exit statement as she is in her tennis. She said she did not want to be a distraction to other players because of the continuing controversy. *She explained that she had suffered long bouts of depression since the US Open in 2018. "Anyone who knows me knows that I am introverted and anyone that has seen me at tournaments will notice that I'm often wearing headphones as that helps dull my social anxiety," she said, adding, "I am not a natural public speaker and get huge waves of anxiety before I speak to the world's media."*

#### Deep hypocrisy

The French Tennis Federation did not cover itself in glory when it displayed an utter lack of empathy towards a vulnerable young woman who rose to the top of the game because of her immense talent and not because of her speaking abilities. *What would the Federation do if a player with a severe speech impediment requested to be excused from answering questions at a press conference?* Would they be as unyielding in dealing with a physical disability as they were while dealing with a serious mental health concern? *To add irony and insult to injury, Gilles Moretton, the president of the French Tennis Federation, made a statement to the press about Osaka's withdrawal and left without fielding questions. The incident lays bare deep hypocrisy.*

#### The example of Norway

Contrast this with the experience of a Norwegian Prime Minister, who took leave to address his mental health issues while still serving in office. *Kjell Magne Bondevik was Prime Minister of Norway from 1997 to 2000 and from 2001 to 2005. He was diagnosed with depression in 1998 during his first term in office. The pressure of an intense workload and the recent deaths of three close friends, all from brain cancer, weighed heavily on his mind. He revealed his illness to the public and went on medical leave for three weeks to recuperate, while a colleague became the acting Prime Minister.* In an interview with Ben Jones, published in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2011, Mr. Bondevik revealed the reasons for the public disclosure. He said, "I could contribute to more openness about mental health problems and help to combat the stigma attached to them." *He came back from his leave better equipped with greater mental tranquillity to lead his nation as Prime Minister, not once but twice. Not only does his candour deserve appreciation, but the understanding shown by the people of Norway also calls for applause. The unstinted support extended by his ministerial colleagues, who did not see this as an opportunity to replace him, is unusually generous and upright in the world of politics, which is notorious for high ambition and low intrigue.* In recent years, we have had several celebrities open up about their mental health concerns, from Deepika Padukone and J.K. Rowling to Beyonce and Meghan Markle.



That is because *the world has started responding with greater empathy and replacing stigma with solidarity. But for the 23-year-old Osaka, not only such support was unavailable, but she was also made to publicly expose her vulnerabilities and pay the price of severe damage to her mental health.* Such conduct by unfeeling officials is callous, cruel, and characteristic of the highly commercialised sport. *The high priests of tennis tournaments must be reminded that Osaka was there to demonstrate her sporting talent in an open court, not for a gladiatorial display of psychological wounds in the enclosed arena of a press room under the glare of flashing lights. Even if media interaction was written into her contract, special circumstances must merit exceptions. The WHO Special Initiative for Mental Health, which was launched in 2019 and will extend till 2023, aims to bring to attention the high global burden of disability arising from disorders of mental health, and accelerate a multi-sectoral response to improve care for a whole range of mental health problems.* The Naomi Osaka episode comes right in the middle of the period chosen for this special initiative. Will the WHO speak up for her and other sportspersons who face similar challenges? Many other prominent sportspersons have extended support to Osaka. However, as the leading global public health agency of the world, the WHO's open support would add weight to the cause of mental health in tennis and other competitive sports.

*Naomi Osaka* speaks her mind beyond sport, be it on racism or on her mixed lineage of being born to a *Haitian father and Japanese mother* while *growing up in the United States*. It looked as though the baton of success had passed from the great Serena Williams to Osaka.

The odd tennis press conference was skipped in the past with Serena and Novak Djokovic being guilty of such violations.

There have been instances of the odd insensitive question but the athlete can always offer a counter or stick to a 'no-comments' response. Osaka deciding to constantly pay a fine for not honouring her media commitments at the French Open has set a terrible precedent and it is fitting that the consortium of Grand Slams have hinted at harsher measures including ejecting her from the tournament.

### **Another opinion on this issue**

*Besides excellence on the turf, commerce off the field equally drives sport. Corporate sponsors, who get some play through advertorial material as background screen in press-conferences, are obviously aggrieved. Legends such as Rafael Nadal have also spoken about how sport evolves through the symbiosis between athletes and the media. It is a pity that Osaka has suddenly turned blind to this reality.*



## NATION

### COMMENTS TO AVOID IN LONG-STANDING TIES (KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN - FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER TO BANGLADESH AND FOREIGN SECRETARY)

*The Chief Minister of Delhi last month warned the Union government about a new strain of the novel coronavirus that has been observed in Singapore that was said to be extremely perilous for children and could visit India as part of a third wave.* This triggered a strong denial from the authorities in Singapore that there was any 'Singapore variant', and they reserved the right to invoke against the Chief Minister a domestic law, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, against the online circulation of fake news. During this excessive over-reaction to a comment by the Chief Minister, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, declared that "irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships" — a wise and pertinent observation.

#### **Inappropriate statements**

It is improbable, however, that Mr. Jaishankar similarly cautioned his Cabinet colleague, the Home Minister, against the latter's many derogatory statements with reference to Bangladesh prior to and during the Bharatiya Janata Party's unsuccessful campaign in the election for the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. *The Home Minister had described illegal Bangladeshi immigrants as vermin that he would push into the Bay of Bengal, and then implied that poor people in Bangladesh were starving, which drew a stinging public rebuke from the Bangladesh Foreign Minister.* In this year, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bangladesh's liberation and the birth centenary of the father of the nation Sheikh Mubibur Rahman, irresponsible comments from those who should know better are profoundly inappropriate.

#### **Diplomacy with Bangladesh**

India's relations with Bangladesh, one of the most populous Muslim countries in the world, are acutely sensitive. *As a neighbour nearly surrounded on all territorial sides by India, there are the inevitable bilateral problems of long duration, including a perennially favourable balance of trade for India, drought and flood in the 54 transboundary rivers flowing from India to Bangladesh, and the smuggling of goods and vulnerable human beings across the approximately 4,100 kilometre land border.* The turbulent history of Partitions; East Bengal that became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh, attended by enormous bloodshed and the abuse of human rights, has left emotional wounds that will take many generations to heal. There are those in Bangladesh who believe that separation from Hindu India in 1947 was more significant than the break with Pakistan in 1971, there remain about three lakh 'Biharis' in Bangladesh who have failed thus far to be resettled in Pakistan, and there is the presence of militant Islamist groups such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, that have linkages and support from outside Bangladesh. In contrast to these circles, who take confrontation with India as part of their basic credo, are those who regard their Bengali roots and traditions as being of equal validity as their religious affiliation, and treasure the linguistic and cultural ties with adjacent India. It will take time for these inherent fractures in Bangladeshi society to be resolved, and it is for India to show patience and sympathy to this entirely internal process of healing. As quid pro quo for India's benign attentions and support, New Delhi's





expectations are that a neighbour will keep India's concerns in mind when devising and pursuing its policies, and this understanding is implemented with severity or laxity depending on the regime in New Delhi.

#### **Favourable steps**

*After decades of pro-Pakistani military and civilian governments following 1975, Mujibur Rahman's daughter Sheikh Hasina, elected for a third consecutive term since 2008, has consolidated her position as unquestioned leader in Bangladesh. She has maintained vigilant supervision over Muslim fundamentalist terrorists as well as on Northeast militant movements sheltering in Bangladesh, with the result that the pacification of India's Northeast has been greatly facilitated. She has permitted a considerable degree of connectivity between India and its Northeast by land, river and the use of Bangladeshi ports, and Indian investments in Bangladesh have been encouraged.* There are at least 100,000 Indian nationals now living and working in that country. To complete the ties of economic integration, the day will come when, along with free movement of commerce and capital, the movement of persons on the lines of Nepal and Bhutan will have to be considered.

#### **For India to note**

As the leading mid-wife of Bangladesh's liberation struggle and its sole economic supporter in that nation's early years of independence, New Delhi should view with satisfaction Bangladesh's coming graduation in 2026 from 'least developed' to 'developing country' status, and its steady progress as one of South Asia's leading performers in human development indicators. Its eventual membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership cannot be ruled out. To a certain degree, both India and Bangladesh depend on each other for security and stability. *Responsible individuals on both sides of the border, whether in government or the Opposition, must be actively discouraged from words and actions detrimental to the consolidation of the existing cordiality.* This is where Mr. Jaishankar's dictum is applicable to members of his own party as well as the Opposition. What is sauce for the goose is equally sauce for the gander.

#### **HC IMPOSES FINE ON JUHI CHAWLA IN 5G CASE**

The Delhi High Court on Friday rejected Bollywood actor Juhi Chawla's suit against the rollout of 5G technology in India, terming it a "publicity stunt" done without any personal knowledge of the issue. Justice J.R. Midha also imposed a cost of ₹20 lakh on the petitioners — Ms. Chawla, Veeresh Malik and Teena Vachani — for wasting the court's time. "The plaint is stuffed with unnecessary, scandalous, frivolous and vexatious averments which are liable to be struck down," the court said. The petitioners admitted to having knowledge with regard to only certain paragraphs of the petition, and a major portion of it was "based on information and legal advice". It also issued a contempt notice to an unidentified person who disrupted the online hearing on Wednesday by singing hit songs from Ms. Chawla's movies.

#### **EXPEDITE PROCESS OF FILLING UP JUDICIAL VACANCIES, CJI TELLS CJS**

*The Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, asked the Chief Justices of High Courts to ensure that recommendations for judicial appointments to the High Courts reflect the social diversity of the*



*country.* Chief Justice Ramana said this during his first-ever live and direct interaction with High Court Chief Justices. The discussion spanned two days and four sessions. *The CJI also placed before the Chief Justices of High Courts the representations made by various Bar bodies to include lawyers primarily practising in the Supreme Court in the zone of consideration while recommending the names of judges for their High Courts.*

#### JUSTICE MISHRA LIKELY TO HEAD NHRC

Former Supreme Court Justice Arun Kumar Mishra is likely to be the new Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) after a high-powered recommendation committee proposed his name on Monday, a source informed The Hindu. Former Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, Mahesh Mittal Kumar, and former Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Rajiv Jain, had also been recommended by the high-powered panel as members of the NHRC, but the official notification is yet to be out until the filing of this report. *The selection panel consisted of Prime Minister Narendra Modi; Home Minister Amit Shah; Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Harivansh; Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla; and the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge. Mr. Kharge is learnt to have registered his dissent after the committee didn't accept his suggestion to appoint a member from either the Dalit, Adivasi or minority communities.* The Congress leader is learnt to have argued that since most complaints at the NHRC pertained to these socially disadvantaged groups, there should be at least one representative from these communities in the Commission. When other members pointed out that the concerned Act on the NHRC did not make any specific provisions about any group except a woman member, Mr. Kharge is learnt to have pointed out that there was no specific bar in appointments. He then suggested that the panel meet again in a week's time with more names from these communities. He recorded his dissent when the committee decided to go ahead with the shortlisted names instead of looking for fresh names. *For over five months now, the NHRC has been without a full-time head after Justice H.L. Dattu retired last December.* A highly-placed source said while 12 names were shortlisted for the two vacancies, the shortlisted candidates for the position of Chairperson included three former Chief Justices of India (CJIs). As a sitting judge of the top court, Justice Mishra, while addressing an international conference, had described Mr. Modi as an "internationally acclaimed visionary who could think globally and act locally".

#### JOURNALISTS NEED PROTECTION AGAINST SEDITION CHARGES

*The Supreme Court on Thursday quashed a sedition case registered against senior journalist and Padma Shri awardee Vinod Dua for his critical remarks against the Prime Minister and the Union government in a YouTube telecast, underscoring its 59-year-old verdict that "strong words" of disapproval about the ruling regime did not amount to sedition.* A Bench, led by Justice U.U. Lalit, upheld the right of every journalist to criticise, even brutally, the measures of the government with a view to improving or altering them through legal means. The free speech of a journalist should be protected from charges of sedition. The time is long past when the mere criticism of governments was sufficient to constitute sedition. The right to utter honest and reasonable criticism is a source of strength to a community rather than a weakness, the judgment said. *It upheld the spirit and intent of the 1962 Kedar Nath Singh verdict, which said, "Commenting in strong terms upon the measures or acts of government, or its agencies, so as to ameliorate the condition of the people or to secure the cancellation or alteration of those acts or measures by lawful means, that*

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR

17

Telegram: [http://t.me/DreamIAS\\_Jamshedpur](http://t.me/DreamIAS_Jamshedpur)



is to say, without exciting those feelings of enmity and disloyalty which imply excitement to public disorder or the use of violence is not sedition". Justice Lalit declared, "Every journalist is entitled to protection under the Kedar Nath Singh judgment." *The 1962 judgment said Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (sedition) was intended only to punish subversion of a lawfully established government through violent means.* The court acknowledged the submission made by Mr. Dua, who is currently recovering from COVID-19, that "there is a recent trend against the media where State governments who do not find a particular telecast to be in sync with their political ideologies register FIRs against persons of the media primarily to harass them and to intimidate them so that they succumb to the line of the State or else face the music at the hands of the police". *However, the court rejected Mr. Dua's plea that FIRs should not be registered against journalists of 10 years' experience unless cleared by a committee constituted by the State government concerned. Mr. Dua had said the committee should comprise the Chief Justice of the High Court or a judge designated by him, the Leader of the Opposition and the Home Minister of the State.* The court said such a committee was outside the present statutory framework. By granting the prayer, it would be encroaching into the legislature's domain. *The complaint against Mr. Dua was filed by a BJP leader. The senior journalist was accused of spreading fake news.* Besides sedition, the other charges include causing public nuisance, printing of defamatory matter and making statements conducive to public mischief.

#### 'IT'S TIME TO DEFINE LIMITS OF SEDITION'

*The Supreme Court on Monday said "it is time to define the limits of sedition" even as it protected two Telugu channels from any coercive action by the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led Andhra Pradesh government for their reportage of the COVID-19 pandemic in the State.* A three-judge Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud flagged indiscriminate use of the sedition law against critics, journalists, social media users, activists and citizens for airing grievances about the governments' COVID-19 management, or even for seeking help to gain medical access, equipment, drugs and oxygen cylinders. *"We are of the view that the ambit and parameters of the provisions of Sections 124A (sedition), 153A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code 1860 would require interpretation, particularly in the context of the right of the electronic and print media to communicate news, information and the rights, even those that may be critical of the prevailing regime in any part of the nation,"* the court noted in its order.

#### 'Muzzling the media'

"This is muzzling the media," Justice L. Nageswara Rao, another judge on the Bench along with Justice S. Ravindra Bhat, said about the manner in which A.P. had tried to "silence" channels TV5 and ABN. "It is time to define the limits of sedition," *Justice Chandrachud said. The court issued notice to the A.P. government and directed that "there shall be a stay on the respondents [the State] adopting coercive proceedings against the two TV channels". Justice Chandrachud pointed out that the court had categorically told the States not to initiate penal action against the critics of COVID-19 management measures in an April 30 order.* Justice Chandrachud referred to how, in an earlier suo motu hearing, he had wondered whether sedition charges would be launched against a news channel that had published a photograph of two persons throwing the body of a COVID-19 patient into a river from a bridge in Uttar Pradesh. "I had this case [Andhra] in mind when I said that," he said. The court acknowledged the argument that the media was well within its rights to air critical



programmes about a prevailing regime without attracting sedition. TV5, represented by senior advocate Shyam Divan and advocates Vipin Nair and P.B. Suresh, and ABN Andhrajyothi argued that the sedition FIR against them was an “unfortunate assault”. The State had accused them of sedition for reporting news about the pandemic in an “unbiased manner”. “Merely because the content of the news reported in an unbiased manner is critical of a government or not to its liking, it cannot be said that the news outlet has committed an act of sedition or inciting hatred. To do so would be directly contrary to the freedom of Press,” ABN, represented by Guntur Pramod Kumar, said in the petition. TV5 said the “vague” FIR had a chilling effect on free speech in the media. Both channels urged the Supreme Court to initiate contempt proceedings against the senior officials of the State government for violating the April 30 order of the Supreme Court to “immediately cease any direct and indirect threats of prosecution and arrest to citizens, who air their grievances”. Here the Andhra government had “gone one step ahead” to penalise the media, the channels said.

#### NO LEGAL BASIS FOR GAMBHIR CLEAN CHIT IN COVID DRUG DISTRIBUTION CASE: DELHI HC TO DRUG CONTROLLER

*The Delhi High Court on Monday rapped Delhi's Drug Control Department for giving a clean chit to BJP MP Gautam Gambhir without a proper enquiry into how his foundation was able to procure a Covid drug in bulk, and asked the Drug Controller to file a revised status report before it by Thursday. The court said its confidence was completely shaken and observed that the report is not worth the paper it is written on. "If your Drug Controller is not interested in doing the job, then we will ask that he be removed and let somebody else take over. What investigation? This is trash. There is no legal basis to it," said the bench during the resumed hearing of a case alleging illegal distribution of Covid medicines by political leaders during the pandemic. **The Drug Controller, in the report, told the court that the distribution of Fabiflu strips by the Gautam Gambhir Foundation appears to be covered by an exception mentioned in the Drugs and Cosmetics Act since the drugs were given away during an event which is being treated as a medical camp organised under the supervision of a doctor of Garg Hospital.** Exemption 5 of Schedule K of the Act, which was cited by the Drug Controller, grants an exemption to a medical practitioner in the supply of drugs to his own patients under the law. "How could such a large stock of medicine be given to a Foundation which is not a medical practitioner? Even medical practitioner...could a medical practitioner have gone to a dealer and said 'give me 4000 strips of this medicine'?" said the court, questioning how in the absence of a license the purchase has been treated as a closure case by the Drug Controller. **The court also pulled up the counsel representing the Drug Controller and said it does not want to be told that so many lives have been saved.** "Have you taken the trouble to go through the rules or have you just simply accepted this status report prepared by them and placed it before us?" the court asked Additional Standing Counsel Nandita Rao. "If you are arguing for the Drug Controller, please argue for the Drug Controller." When the Drug Controller submitted that dealers from which the Fabiflu was procured by the Foundation had ample stock to supply to other retailers and there was no shortage, the court said, "Please do not tell us there was no shortage. We all know there was a shortage." **The court also took exception to Gambhir's statement that he "will do it again".** It said that if he does it again, the court knows how to deal with the issue and it will do so. "This tendency of people trying to take advantage of a situation of a crisis in the city or in the country and then trying to appear as saviours while they are actually creating the problem...This is a pernicious activity which has to be denounced," it said. The court added, "He (Gambhir) may have had good intentions but then you have to be mindful of the kind of steps you*

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



are taking. What is the good to be achieved and what are the pitfalls? There are always two sides to the coin." *It said that thousands of needy people would have otherwise gone to the chemist shop and bought it.* "On the day they needed it, they were not able to. Time was of essence. People who needed it on the day when they were purchased by this gentleman, they were not able to. 286 strips are left which shows he brought more than what is required," observed the court. *The court said it wanted the Drug Controller to probe how the dealer sold it to a Foundation and whether the dealer was not legally bound to only sell it to a retailer.* It also said the purchase in the case has not been done by a hospital and there is a fundamental flaw in the Drug Controller's approach in probing the matter.

#### SC FLAGS DIGITAL DIVIDE IN VACCINE ACCESS

*The Supreme Court on Monday asked the government to "please wake up and smell the coffee" about the digital divide hampering vaccine access in the country. A three-judge Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud highlighted the farfetchedness of an illiterate villager from rural India crossing the "digital divide" to register for COVID-19 vaccination on the CoWin portal where slots disappear in the blink of an eye. Justice Chandrachud said the government should be aware of the ground realities in 'Digital India'. Vaccination policy today is entirely exclusionary of the rural areas, the court said. One of the judges on the Bench, Justice S. Ravindra Bhat said he had received distress calls from across the country from people unable to register on CoWin. The court asked why the marginalised section should not be treated on par with people having co-morbidities for early vaccination. On the difference in prices for procurement between the Centre and States, Justice Chandrachud said, "Article 1 of the Constitution says Bharat is a Union of States. When the Constitution says that, we will follow the federal rule. Then the Government of India has to wholly procure the vaccines and distribute them. Here, individual States are left in a lurch..."*

#### PAID VACCINATION POLICY ARBITRARY, IRRATIONAL: SC

*The Supreme Court has called the Union government's paid vaccination policy for citizens 18-44 years of age as "prima facie arbitrary and irrational". The court said the Centre's "liberalised vaccination policy", which covered the age group, expected them to pay through their noses. The first two phases of the vaccination drive had the Centre in the driver's seat. The vaccination was also free of cost. However, the onset of the second wave and expansion of the immunisation drive to cover the 18-44 age group saw the Centre give ground and take responsibility for only 50% of vaccine purchase and distribution, leaving the States and private hospitals to buy vaccines at a higher price, it stated. "The policy of the Central government for conducting free vaccination themselves for groups under the first two phases, and replacing it with paid vaccination by the State/UT Governments and private hospitals for the persons between 18-44 years is, prima facie, arbitrary and irrational," a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in a 32-page order released on Wednesday. The Bench asked whether the Centre had taken a "means test" to ascertain beforehand whether even 50% of the 18-44 age group could afford to pay for their vaccines. The digital registration and booking of vaccine slots through CoWIN, coupled with the current scarcity of vaccines, ensured that the rich got vaccinated first, it said. To top it all, the "liberalised" vaccine policy did not prioritise people with comorbidities, disabilities or belonging to vulnerable groups within the 18-44 age group. The court directed the Centre to place on record a road map of projected availability of vaccines till December 31, 2021. It ordered the Centre to submit all the "relevant*

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



*documents and file notings reflecting its thinking and culminating in the vaccination policy” along with an affidavit in two weeks.* It asked the Centre to come clean on the preparedness with respect to specific needs of children in the event of a third wave. The Bench sought details on the percentage of population vaccinated (with one dose and both doses). “This shall include data pertaining to the percentage of rural population as well as the percentage of urban population so vaccinated,” it clarified. It asked the government to outline how and when it would vaccinate the remaining population. *The court sought the complete data on the Centre’s purchase history of COVID-19 vaccines till date (Covaxin, Covishield and Sputnik V). It ordered the government to specify steps being taken to ensure the availability of the drug for mucormycosis.*

#### WHY NOT BUY 100% VACCINES IF YOU GET DISCOUNT, SC ASKS CENTRE

*The Supreme Court has questioned the Centre’s logic that manufacturers are selling it COVID-19 vaccines for a hefty discount because it places bulk orders. The court then asked the government why it cannot buy 100% of the vaccines at a discount instead of leaving the States to fend for themselves.* “The Central government justifying its lower prices on account of its ability to place large purchase orders for vaccines raises the issue as to why this rationale is not being employed for acquiring 100% of the monthly CDL [Central Drugs Laboratory] doses,” a Bench, led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, noted in a 32-page order. The Centre can buy vaccines for ₹150, while the States have to shell out between ₹300 and ₹600. “If the Central government’s unique monopolistic buyer position is the only reason for it receiving vaccines at a much lower rate from manufacturers, *it is important for us to examine the rationality of the existing Liberalised Vaccination Policy against Article 14 [right to equality] of the Constitution since it could place severe burdens, particularly on States/Union Territories suffering from financial distress,*” the court held. It said the Centre, with a ₹35,000 crore budget to buy vaccines, has money to spare unlike the States which have suddenly been burdened with the task to cough up funds for vaccines. “The Union Budget for 2021-2022 earmarked ₹35,000 crore for procuring vaccines. In the light of the Liberalised Vaccination Policy, the Central government is directed to clarify how these funds have been spent so far and why they cannot be utilised for vaccinating persons aged 18-44,” the court ordered. The Centre’s liberalised vaccination policy gives it only a 50% role to purchase COVID-19 vaccines. The other half is equally shared between the States/Union Territories and private hospitals. *The court said the Centre had left the States with very little bargaining powers by pre-fixing with the manufacturers both the quantity and the price of vaccines for the States. “Prima facie, the only room for negotiation with the two vaccine manufacturers [Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech] was on price and quantity, both of which have been pre-fixed by the Central government,” the court reasoned.* Besides, the court said *the States were handicapped in their direct talks with foreign vaccine manufacturers as the latter preferred negotiating with federal governments.* The court also sought confirmation from the States about the Centre’s claim that “every State/UT government shall provide vaccination free of cost to its population.” “It is important that individual State/Union Territory governments confirm/deny this position before this court. Further, *if they have decided to vaccinate their population for free then, as a matter of principle, it is important that this policy is annexed to their affidavit, so that the population within their territories can be assured of their right to be vaccinated for free at a State vaccination centre,*” the court explained. The Bench directed the States and UTs to file their affidavits in this regard within the next two weeks and clarify their individual policies for free vaccination. The court has asked the Centre to place on record its



“written policy” to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines, and how this would factor into the rationale of equal apportionment between State/UT governments and private hospitals.

## 9 PVT HOSPITALS CORNER 50% DOSES, RAISE QUESTIONS OF VACCINE EQUITY AND ACCESS

*IN WHAT both reflects and accentuates the problem of vaccine inequity, just nine corporate hospital groups in big cities have cornered 50 per cent of the Covid-19 vaccine stock meant for the private sector in the month of May. These nine corporate hospital groups cumulatively bought 60.57 lakh doses of the total 1.20 crore doses of vaccines procured by private hospitals in the first full month since the Central government revised its vaccine policy and opened it to the market. The balance 50 per cent of the vaccine stock was procured by 300-odd hospitals, located mostly in the country's urban centres, with hardly any of them serving regions beyond the Tier-2 cities.* The Centre had allowed state governments and private players to buy 50 per cent of total output directly from vaccine manufacturers from May 1. It had confined itself to purchasing 50 per cent of the output from May 1, to be distributed to states to vaccinate the 45-plus age group. The purchases by private hospitals in May added up to 1.20 crore doses or 15.6 per cent of the total procurement of 7.94 crore doses. Of this, they administered only 22 lakh doses or 18 per cent of the doses received during the month. States procured 33.5 per cent (or 2.66 crore) and the Centre 50.9 per cent (or 4.03 crore) of the vaccine doses. The top nine private entities are Apollo Hospitals (nine hospitals of the group procured 16.1 lakh doses); Max Healthcare (six hospitals, 12.97 lakh doses); Reliance Foundation-run HN Hospital Trust (9.89 lakh doses); Medica Hospitals (6.26 lakh doses); Fortis Healthcare (eight hospitals bought 4.48 lakh doses); Godrej (3.35 lakh doses); Manipal Health (3.24 lakh doses); Narayana Hrudalaya (2.02 lakh doses) and Techno India Dama (2 lakh doses). These groups have their presence mostly in metros, state capitals and Tier-I cities. Compared with a price of Rs 150 per dose that Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech charge the Central government for Covishield and Covaxin, respectively, the price charged from private hospitals for Covishield is Rs 600 per dose and for Covaxin is Rs 1,200 per dose. Tejal Kantikar, Associate Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore, said, “Manufacturers will prefer to sell stock to private players and hospitals that have more bargaining power.” On their part, hospitals charge consumers in the range Rs 850-1000 for Covishield and Rs 1,250 for Covaxin. While this may be affordable for a section of city residents, it is not so for those in the lower middle class and the poor. Besides affordability, the other key aspect relates to accessibility — these doses are being administered in cities even for age groups 18-44 years: While The Indian Express sent detailed queries to hospitals about the geographical spread (urban and rural) of their vaccination delivery in May, it is yet to receive their response. So, it is not clear if these hospitals have transported vaccines across their chain, or have tied up with corporates, housing societies or smaller clinics in other cities or relatively less urban areas for administering doses. *The data shows the private sector has purchased less than 25 per cent of the total stock procured.* Given their current daily immunisation capacity, most have enough supply to last another fortnight. In a suo motu hearing on vaccination, the Supreme Court on Wednesday rapped the Centre on its vaccine policy, calling the decision to make 18-44 year olds pay for their doses “arbitrary and irrational.” It asked the Centre to review the vaccine policy while observing that the digital divide had hampered vaccination in rural areas. *But it is not just the digital divide. May's procurement data shows most stock purchased by the private sector is concentrated in urban regions.*



## ODISHA, JHARKHAND WANT CENTRE TO PROCURE JABS

*Days after Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan urged the Chief Ministers to come together to persuade the Centre to procure and distribute COVID-19 vaccines free for the whole nation, Odisha and Jharkhand have also called for centralised procurement.* Both underline the fact that *vaccine manufacturers outside India are unwilling to deal directly with the States.* After receiving a lukewarm response to its global tender, the Odisha government said on Tuesday that it would be better if the Centre took the responsibility of dealing with the vaccine manufacturers. It said *a major hurdle in procurement was the issue of indemnity sought by global manufacturers such as Pfizer and Moderna.* According to officials, only the Centre could assure indemnity. According to the State government, manufacturers were willing to deal only with federal-level Central procurement, at this stage. *Global vaccine manufacturers would require the Central government's statutory clearances for supplying to the States,* said Odisha Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Kisor Das in a letter to Union Health and Family Affairs Minister Harsh Vardhan on Tuesday.

### Flexibility of coverage

In his letter of May 31 to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren urged him to provide “free vaccines for beneficiaries of all age groups”. He also requested that the State be given the “freedom to define priorities for vaccination coverage”. *On the issue of asking States to procure vaccines on their own, Mr Soren said it “stands against the principle of co-operative federalism”. Mr. Soren said, “It is requested to provide to the State free vaccines for all age groups and also give us freedom to define priorities for vaccination coverage,” adding, “this would help in achieving the target of full vaccination in a timely manner.”* While the Naveen Patnaik government said it did not want free vaccines for the 18-44 age-group, it also demanded flexibility in distribution as it planned to do away with online registration issues to help the poor and people in rural areas. Mr Soren also highlighted the difficulties in procuring vaccines.

## ONLY A GLOBAL EFFORT CAN TAME COVID-19

India has been witnessing an unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases, largely due to the new variants. The variant found initially in the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7) was found in parts of north India earlier this year and began to spread across the country. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently declared the variant first found in India (B.1.617) as a variant of global concern as it has already spread to more than 40 countries. This underscores the fact that *no one is safe until everyone is safe.* It calls for globally coordinated efforts to build herd immunity through mass vaccination and to develop new vaccines or tweak the existing ones to become effective against the new variants. Experts have been doubtful about the effectiveness of some of the COVID-19 vaccines against the new variants of the virus.

### Vaccine nationalism

*An immediate outcome of the second wave in India is that many people are no longer hesitant to take the vaccine.* However, vaccine shortages have been reported in many parts of the country. Several people have criticised the government's Vaccine Maitri policy. The government has already imposed temporary restrictions on the export of COVID-19 vaccines from India. Although there is a need for these temporary restrictions to meet domestic demand, any definite move towards

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR





vaccine nationalism will be detrimental to global efforts to contain the virus. *The pandemic needs to be checked globally in a coordinated manner. If this is not done, the virus will keep mutating and no country will remain isolated.* From May 1, all those aged 18 and above became eligible in India to receive the COVID-19 vaccines. *This means that 595 million people who require 1,190 million doses were added to the 344 million people in the 45 and above age group requiring 688 million doses.* Inoculating this huge population calls for massive production capacities. Only a little over 12% of the population has received one dose and 3.2% has received both the doses in India so far. The current production capacity of Covishield and Covaxin is just over 70 million doses per month. The government has allocated ₹45 billion as an advance commitment to Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech for enhancing their production capacity. By June-July, in the best-case scenario, the combined production capacity of the two companies is expected to rise to 158 million doses per month. The 50 million imported Sputnik doses will add to this. This vaccine will be available only in major private hospitals for now. It is reported that the Sputnik vaccine will be produced in India from July with an annual capacity of 156 million doses, which, according to the Russian Ambassador to India, will be gradually increased to 850 million doses. *Even if all the three vaccines are exclusively used for domestic supply, the anticipated production in the near future will not be sufficient to meet the enormous vaccine demand.*

### Pharmacy of the world

Being the pharmacy of the world, India needs to rise to the occasion and cater to the demand for vaccines in the country as well as facilitate inoculation of the global population, especially in poorer countries. In the first week of May, *the Indian Council of Medical Research said it was willing to share the know-how to produce Covaxin with any company interested in production. Allowing multiple producers will lead to more competition and a reduction in prices.* The government can easily task the public sector vaccine manufacturers with the production of Covaxin by providing support to them. *In its attempt to enhance the production of Covaxin from 12.5 million doses to 58 million doses a month, the Government of India has involved three public sector enterprises — Haffkine Biopharmaceutical Corporation, Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Corporation Limited, and Indian Immunologicals Limited.* While raising an alarm on the spread of infectious diseases, a 2020 report of the WHO on the urgent health challenges for the next decade expressed concern on the lack of access to medical products, including medicines and vaccines. As infectious diseases are expected to increase in the coming years, India needs to frame a long-term strategy to enhance supply at the domestic and international level. Public sector enterprises should be an integral part of that strategy. *Unfortunately, the Public Sector Enterprise Policy, released in February, has not identified public sector enterprises in the pharmaceuticals sector as strategically important, and therefore, all central public sector enterprises will subsequently be privatised.* What we need now is the mass production of COVID-19 vaccines for the mass vaccination of the global population in order for us to develop herd immunity against the virus. India still has options left for scaling up production. *The National Health Profile 2019, published by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, shows that India has an installed capacity of 8,151.7 million doses of vaccines annually, in the private and public sectors. A few of these facilities can be re-purposed for the production of COVID-19 vaccines.*



### International co-operation

*Scaling up production of existing vaccines and producing new vaccines is not easy. Unavailability of raw materials, complexities in the transfer of technology, and intellectual property barriers all hinder production. Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech have faced constraints in continuing production due to the lack of raw materials.* Intellectual property rights act as a major barrier in scaling up production. *About 1,800 patents cover the single-use plastic reactors which are used in the production of some of the COVID-19 vaccines.* Similarly, other equipment and materials used in the production of vaccines are patent-protected and therefore supplied by only a few players. India and South Africa had led an initiative at the World Trade Organization (WTO) for the waiver of intellectual property rights over products required for treating COVID-19. Recently, after coming under pressure, the U.S. extended support to this proposal covering only vaccines. However, Germany said it is opposed to it. Therefore, *it is unclear how this IP waiver proposal will help enhance the global production of vaccines.* Besides, the U.S. support, which is limited to vaccines, may also limit the benefits deriving from the intellectual property waiver, if the proposal comes through the WTO. *An article published in Nature points out the benefits of mRNA vaccine technology compared to conventional vaccine technologies. The key advantage of this technology is easy scalability in production. At present, the WHO has approved two mRNA COVID-19 vaccines produced by Pfizer-BioNtech and Moderna, and those vaccines have proven to be more effective than other vaccines.* Global cooperation is needed to create an environment where those companies interested in producing the mRNA vaccines get open licence from the innovators. *Global cooperation is also required for the sequencing of the viral genome to track and control the multiple variants.* Only if we tame the virus together and quickly will the world benefit both in terms of health and economy.

### COVID DIPLOMACY 2.0, A DIFFERENT ORDER OF TASKS

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi's words on Buddha Purnima, that in times to come the planet will remember events as either "pre-Covid or post-Covid" (<https://bit.ly/2SIywUO>) could not hold truer than for India's diplomatic structure worldwide.* In the past month, the focus for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Missions abroad has shifted. *While the focus in 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic, was on coordinating exports of COVID-19 medicines, flights to repatriate Indians abroad (the 'Vande Bharat Mission') after the lockdown, and then exporting vaccines worldwide ('Vaccine Maitri'), after the second wave, Covid Diplomacy 2.0 has a different order of tasks, both in the immediate and the long term.*

#### The health crisis

The immediate imperative was to deal with oxygen and medicine shortages that claimed the lives of thousands in the matter of a few weeks across the country. In Delhi alone, more than 3,000 people died in the last week of April, including some from Delhi's diplomatic community, which comprises officials, retired diplomats and foreign diplomats. The Ministry of External Affairs has had to deal with internal health concerns while galvanising help from abroad for others. It did not help that medical protocols to treat COVID-19 have changed constantly; if the first rush was about bringing in Remdesivir and favipiravir from the United States and Russia, Indian missions are now requesting black fungus medication, as the previous ones have been dropped from the protocol.



Despite all this, the Ministry of External Affairs has completed the task of bringing in supplies in a timely manner, and with success.

### Handling vaccine shortages

The rest of the year, if not much of 2022 will focus on bringing in vaccines. *The shortage of vaccines in the country has arisen from three factors: the failure of the Government to plan and place procurement orders in time; the failure of the two India-based companies to produce vaccine doses they had committed to, and the MEA's focus on exporting, not importing, vaccines between January and April this year.* The challenge now for diplomats has been made all the more imperative by these failures, and much harder, as the visit of the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, to Washington last week showed. With the companies manufacturing AstraZeneca and Sputnik-V stretched as far as future production is concerned, and Chinese vaccines a non-starter given bilateral tensions, it is clear that the Narendra Modi government is looking to the U.S. to make up the shortfall. The aim is to do this in several ways. These include *requesting the U.S. to share a substantial portion of its stockpile of AstraZeneca doses and to release more vaccine ingredients which are restricted for exports; to buy more stock outright from the three U.S. manufacturers, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, and to encourage production in India of these vaccines.* On each of these issues, the MEA has had to negotiate a difficult route. The U.S. government is holding up its AstraZeneca exports until its own United States Food and Drug Administration approves them; while it has released a small amount (20 million doses) of vaccine ingredients and components, it has not changed the policy yet. *Production of Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccines in India, as had been announced during the Quad summit (<https://bit.ly/3ySd112>), will take some time.* And as they were originally meant for distribution in South East Asia, it is unclear how many will be provisioned for India. *Even buying vaccines directly will need nimble negotiations as the U.S. companies seem set on getting both an indemnity waiver from India as well as Emergency Use Authorisation prior to supplying them.* While the government has relaxed its rules for American and other foreign manufacturers, waiving the need for bridge-trials prior to clearance, these demands will need considerable backtracking from firmly held principles. The Government may also need to make a U-turn from its publicly announced policy that States in India will need to negotiate purchases directly, as the U.S. manufacturers want centralised orders, with payments up-front. Diplomats working to help tie up contracts have their work cut out as time is of the essence for India to complete its vaccination goals ahead of a possible third wave of the pandemic.

### Patents, diplomatic fallout

Nor will the promise of patent waivers, from India's joint proposal at the World Trade Organization (WTO) reap early benefits, despite support from world leaders such as the U.S., Russia and China. As Mr. Modi during his virtual summit meet with European Union leaders in early May, or as diplomats negotiating to bring Quad partners Japan and Australia, and BRICS partner Brazil on board have found, *many countries are still holding out on the idea of freeing up intellectual property rights on vaccines for three years.* That could ultimately hold up proceedings at the WTO, as it works by consensus. The third big challenge for Indian diplomacy is to manage the fallout of the vaccine collapse. *Domestically, the Government has defended its decision to export more than 66 million vaccines doses to 95 countries between January and April this year, pointing out that only 11 million were grants from India, 35 million were commercial exports and 20 million were sent as part of the global COVAX coalition commitments. Its adding that all exports were*



*stopped as soon as cases in India began to soar is an argument that does not wash internationally. Both India's neighbours and partners in Africa as well as global agencies depending on India for vaccines have been left in the lurch by the Government's failure to balance its vaccine budget. Perhaps the most egregious case is that of Bhutan and its vaccine drive which depended entirely on India's promise of vaccines for its whole population. In March, once India completed delivery of the first batch, of 550,000 Covishield doses, Bhutan completed the administration of the first dose to 93% of its population in a record 16 days. Two months later, Bhutan does not have any vaccines to complete the second dose and has been left requesting other countries for vaccines so it does not miss the deadline amidst a rising number of cases there. Others in the neighbourhood and further afield have fully-paid-up-but-unfulfilled orders. It is no surprise that each of India's neighbours has now sought help from China and the U.S. to complete their vaccination drives. Making amends and regaining trust for India's vaccine and pharmacy exports in the future is going to be a challenge left to the MEA and its missions in several capitals.*

#### U.S. VACCINE 'GIFT' MAY NOT BE SUBSTANTIAL

The government on Friday welcomed the U.S. decision to lift restrictions under its Defence Production Act on the export of vaccine ingredients to AstraZeneca vaccine manufacturers worldwide, which would help the Serum Institute of India produce more doses. However, *Washington's announcement of gifting India and dozens of other countries with a first tranche of 25 million doses of assorted American vaccines could run into regulatory delays, as issues of indemnity and authorisation have not been resolved at present.* "Indian diplomacy is focussed on securing the vaccine supply chain," said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who had raised the issue of easing U.S. exports of vaccine ingredients and components to India during his visit to Washington last week. On Thursday, *the U.S. White House announced that it was relaxing export restrictions for U.S. companies to supply manufacturers of AstraZeneca, Novavax, and Sanofi vaccines.* "This policy change will hopefully increase the supply of raw materials globally and to India; boosting our vaccine production capacity and strengthening our united fight against this pandemic," tweeted SII CEO Adar Poonawalla, thanking Mr. Jaishankar and U.S. President Joseph Biden for the move. While the government said the U.S.'s decision on vaccine ingredients was a big relief, officials questioned whether the U.S. government's other big announcement of plans to gift 25 million doses of Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines would have a major impact, as it is not expected to be a substantial number. According to the White House "Factsheet" on regional distribution, *India is one of 16 Asian countries that will receive a total of seven million (70 lakh) vaccines, and also part of a grouping of another 13 high priority countries that would receive a total of six million vaccines.*

#### Supply of doses

*"As a result, India's dose will not be more than about two to three million doses in total," estimated one government official, pointing out that India is vaccinating about 2.8 million people a day at present.* It is also unclear how quickly these vaccines could be distributed in India, given procedures and approvals required. In a notification on June 1, the government amended its previous order of April 15, further easing the Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) trial and testing requirements for all vaccines that have received clearances from the U.S. FDA, WHO, United Kingdom, Japan and Europe. However, the three American companies will still need to apply for



and be granted the Authorisation. *At present, India has granted EUA only for Covishield, Covaxin and Russian-developed Sputnik, and according to a press note by National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC) Chairman Dr Vinod Paul last week, "No application of any foreign manufacturer for approval is pending with the drugs controller."* Meanwhile, *the issues over granting indemnities or a waiver of liabilities in case of adverse effects of the vaccines have not yet been resolved between the government and U.S. manufacturers.* According to MEA sources, the government expects that Washington will help in ensuring that the vaccines being gifted will adhere to local regulations on indemnity. The government also hopes that the U.S. will redouble efforts to disburse the bigger tranche of 60 million AstraZeneca vaccines at the earliest, as these have the approvals needed.

#### CO-WIN, CASINOS AND LUCK (ANAND DAMANI - BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST AND PARTNER AT BRIEFCASE)

The experience of booking an appointment to get vaccinated in India has been rewarding for some but frustrating for most. The procedure for a citizen to get vaccinated is to register on the Co-WIN website or Aarogya Setu app and schedule an appointment at a preferred centre. It sounds easy until you try it. Soon you realise that no matter how fast you click the confirm button, it's not easy to get an appointment. That's because vaccines are in short supply. And that is because the Government of India hasn't placed enough orders. People who have been trying to get an appointment find someone or the other in their social network who got lucky with an appointment. That motivates them to keep trying. The system of getting vaccine appointments has become gamified with vaccination centres releasing alerts of slot openings on social media. These alerts inform people about the openings of vaccination slots at any time of the day or night. They keep people hooked on to the game of 'fastest finger first' to book an appointment.

#### Vaccination and gambling

The psychology behind why random alerts and repeated log ins into the website to try one's luck at booking an appointment works is the same as why people gamble money in casinos or buy lottery tickets. At a casino, people put money in the slot machine and press the button. People don't know if they'll win. They can't predict it. *But they believe that the odds of winning increase the more they play.* So, they keep gambling. Of course, most people lose more than they win because the odds are always in favour of the casino, which makes most of the money. In the case of trying their luck at getting a vaccination appointment, people eagerly wait for alerts of slot openings, log in and press the confirm button. People don't know if they'll 'win' an appointment. They can't predict it. But people believe that the odds of 'winning' an appointment increase the more they log in. So, people keep trying. Of course, most people don't 'win' appointments because the odds are not in their favour. *The only difference between gambling at casinos and booking vaccination appointments is that in gambling, the casino wins most of the time. But regarding vaccination, both the government and the people lose.*

#### Active conditioning

In *Ivan Pavlov's* experiment of classical conditioning, the dogs in the experiment would start drooling when they heard the sounds associated with food preparation. They would drool when the bell rang even though no food was present. After a while, the dogs would stop responding if



no food appeared after the bell was rung. But psychologist *B. F. Skinner found that rats and pigeons would continue doing the task much longer if they were rewarded occasionally rather than every time*. Both are types of conditioning, but *Skinner's conditioning was active, whereas Pavlov's was passive*. The dog didn't have to do anything conscious to get the reward, whereas the rat and pigeon had to undertake a task. *Making the animal take an explicit action produced a stronger, longer lasting effect on behaviour*. Humans respond in similar ways as rats and pigeons when given an occasional reward for repetitive behaviour. Casinos give players the illusion of control by letting players place chips and play their cards. *Giving them choices and making people take action makes them feel like they have some control, as opposed to giving purely luck-based unpredictable rewards*. *In case of vaccinations, the government is giving people the illusion of control by encouraging people to log in and try their luck at booking an appointment*. Giving people the choice to take action towards booking an appointment makes people feel like they have some control, even though the odds are highly stacked against 'winning' an appointment. There is an element of surprise or uncertainty, so people are never sure when the appointment will come through. This is keeping people engaged. The question is, should the government be operating vaccinations like a casino?

## SEROSURVEY LEARNINGS

*Since the pandemic began in 2020, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) conducted three countrywide serosurveys to measure the spread of infection due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus*. The third one (from December 17-January 8) showed that 21.5% of the population had been exposed to the virus. Up to May 23, India has been able to fully vaccinate only 3% of the population and only 10.9% had received one dose. There are indications that the ICMR is unlikely to immediately undertake a fourth national serology survey to estimate the extent of exposure to the coronavirus since January this year.

### Why are serology surveys important?

*Serology surveys take blood samples from participants and measure antibodies to check past exposure to the virus. From about 10 days after infection, antibodies grow to sizeable numbers in most patients. As some studies show, they start to decline after five to six months*. Researchers are more interested in a class of antibodies called *Immunoglobulin G (IgG)*, that persist the longest and latch onto the coronavirus to prevent them from proliferating and so their longevity and numbers are proxies to immunity against future infection. Because the SARS-CoV-2 virus is new, there is uncertainty on how long these antibodies actually last. *Serology surveys are thus a crude measure of what proportion of a population is likely to be protected from a second infection; this can be used by planners to decide on future health-care capacity and opening up the economy*.

### How many serology surveys have been conducted so far?

The ICMR has conducted three national serology surveys since May 2020 and found that the exposure to the virus was several times that reported by confirmed cases. The third serosurvey that measured the spread of infection from December to early January found that 21.5% of India's adult population and 25% of those between 10-17 years old may have been infected. Before that in August-September, it was 7% and the first survey, May-June 2020 estimated infection rate at 0.73%. *The ICMR survey spanned 70 districts, across 21 States, that were meant to include high and*



*low prevalence of the infection as well as the spread of the infection in rural and urban India and enrolled about 28,000 individuals. Subsequent surveys were conducted in the same districts but included those from 10-17 years as well as health-care workers.* There have also been several city specific surveys in Pune, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai — sometimes several rounds — to assess spread among various districts. Many of these surveys, at least before the second wave struck, appeared to suggest that over 50% of the population in urban clusters may have been exposed to the virus.

#### **Why is the ICMR not likely to conduct a fourth serology survey?**

India's devastating second wave began around mid-March amidst a vaccination programme that prioritised health-care and front-line workers, and senior citizens. *The antibodies that are triggered after a SARS-CoV-2 virus infection are structurally indistinguishable from those after one is vaccinated.* However, *studies do show that those vaccinated after being exposed to the virus have much higher levels of antibodies than those vaccinated.* Add to it the complication of waxing and waning antibody numbers. Dr Balram Bhargava, Director General, ICMR, told The Hindu, "Serosurveys lose their scientific relevance once vaccination starts in the population." In theory it could be possible to adjust for this by eliminating those who have been vaccinated from the survey. However, health officials claimed that due to the vicious second wave, hospitals and health-care infrastructure in several districts were overwhelmed by dealing with the surge in cases. A serology survey is a logistically demanding exercise as detailed interviews need to be undertaken with participants, trained phlebotomists have to be available and dedicated laboratories have to be earmarked to analyse the blood work. This would require extensive inputs from the districts. Apart from the infections, the focus at the regional level should be on vaccination, and by all accounts, India is struggling to keep up with demand. Only 10.9% of the population has got a single dose in spite of nearly 20.4 crore vaccines having been administered. It is quite possible that the ICMR might consider a future survey when the situation is more amenable.

#### **Can serology surveys reveal more than just exposure?**

Surveys provide information on the questions they are designed to ask. Tellingly, the second serology survey did point to an increase in infections in rural India. These surveys showed that large parts of the country were unexposed to the virus and hence at risk of infection — as the second wave underlined. *The specific blood-analysis tests, called assays, can be used to check if antibodies produced by the body are targeting the spike region of the coronavirus or an inner envelope containing its genetic material called the nucleocapsid. The antibodies against the spike are believed to be more relevant to preventing future infections and hence a better proxy for immunity. They can also thus provide inputs for improving vaccines.*

#### **SERUM INSTITUTE TOO SEEKS INDEMNITY FROM LIABILITY**

*With the Central government favourably considering the grant of indemnity against legal proceedings to foreign vaccine-makers Pfizer and Moderna prior to their rollout in India, the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) had also sought indemnity from liability, expressing the hope that rules would be the same for everyone,* said sources on Thursday. The Adar Poonawalla-led SII, which manufactures Covishield (Indian name for the AstraZeneca-Oxford jab), had conveyed to the Centre that all vaccine makers, whether Indian or foreign, ought to be granted the same



protection (against the cost of compensation in the event of severe side-effects), the company sources said. Besides Covishield and Novovax's Covovax, the SII has also applied to the Drug Controller General of India to manufacture Sputnik V. Sputnik V is currently being manufactured by Dr Reddy's Laboratories. *According to reports, the Centre is considering granting indemnity to vaccine manufacturing companies if they applied for the Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA). Till date, no Indian vaccine company has ever paid indemnity and neither has the Union government, the biggest vaccine user, done so.*

#### NORMS FOR FOREIGN-MADE VACCINES EASED

*To ease the supply of imported COVID vaccines, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) on Tuesday waived the requirement of conducting bridging clinical trials and testing of every batch of vaccine by the Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL), Kasauli for foreign-made vaccines.* The decision applies to vaccines that have the approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; European Medicines Agency; Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, U.K.; Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency, Japan; or those listed in WHO Emergency Use Listing. *As millions of individuals have already been vaccinated with them, the requirement of conducting post-approval bridging clinical trials and of testing every batch of vaccine by CDL, Kasauli can be exempted, if the batch/lot has been certified and released by the National Control Laboratory of the country of origin, the DCGI said.*

#### INDIA RECORDS MOST CASES WORLDWIDE

India recorded 1,13,261 new COVID-19 cases and 2,059 new deaths till 9.40 p.m. on Friday. *The country has so far reported a total of 2,86,86,764 cases and 3,42,790 deaths.* Though the new infections are declining, *India continues to record the most number of daily cases in the world. It accounts for one in every three new infections worldwide.* The country continues to record the *most number of average daily deaths in the world.* It accounts for one in every three new deaths worldwide. Tamil Nadu reported 22,651 new infections, followed by Kerala (16,229) and Karnataka (16,068). Tamil Nadu recorded 463 new casualties on the day, followed by Karnataka (364) and Maharashtra (289). The figures do not include cases and deaths from Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Punjab, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Ladakh. The data are sourced from the respective States' health bulletins. *Around 20.75 lakh samples were tested in the country on Thursday (the results for which were made available on Friday). India's average daily test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. It was 5.5% on June 3 compared to 10.4% recorded a week earlier. About 28.75 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the country in the 24 hours ending 7 a.m. on Friday, which is 4.5 lakh doses higher than what was recorded in the previous 24 hours. However, it is 45,000 fewer doses than what was recorded during the same period a week ago. The seven-day rolling average of daily vaccination in India stood at 26.26 lakh on June 3, more than the 18.09 lakh recorded a month ago. About 19% of adults in India, 39.6% of those aged above 45 and 44.1% of senior citizens, have been administered with at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, as of 8 p.m. on Friday. The figures are based on the estimated population in 2021. Only 11% of adults in Uttar Pradesh, 12% in Bihar and 13% in Tamil Nadu have been administered with at least one dose. Whereas 28% each in Gujarat and Rajasthan, 29% in Uttarakhand, and 38% in Himachal Pradesh*





*have been jabbed with at least one dose. Overall, 13.2% of the total Indian population have got at least one dose and 3.3% have got both doses.*

#### DELTA VARIANT LED TO MOST POST-VACCINE INFECTIONS IN DELHI

*Variant Delta (B.1.617.2), the most pervasive variant of the coronavirus in India, constituted nearly three in four breakthrough infections in Delhi, according to a research study by scientists in Delhi. The variant was also characterised by high transmissibility, an accelerated surge in infections and, the scientists say, "...prior infections, high seropositivity and partial vaccination were insufficient impediments to its spread." Breakthrough infections are instances of people testing positive for the virus after getting vaccinated. The study is yet to be peer-reviewed and appears as a pre-print and was authored by scientists at the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB) and the National Centre of Disease Control — two key labs of the Indian Sars Cov-2 Genomic Consortium (INSACOG) that tracks the emergence of key variants of the coronavirus. In 27 instances of breakthrough infections analysed, the scientists found that two lineages dominated. B.1.617.1 (Kappa) comprised 8%, Delta was 76% and the remaining linked to variants that belonged to broader "B.1 lineages". However international variant Alpha, that in previous studies has been associated with a spike in cases in Delhi in February and March was absent in vaccination breakthrough-cases analysed. The study also reports a new mutation in Delta called T478K that the scientists believe has a role to play in allowing the coronavirus to better infiltrate human cells. "Our data indicates B.1.617.2 shows high transmissibility and surges without any increase in the Case Fatality Ratio (CFR). We estimate the transmissibility to be as much as 50% greater than B.1.1.7. Viral load of B.1.617.2 appears to be higher than B.1.1.7 and based on data from India and UK, so does vaccination break-through rate. B.1.617.2 is capable of creating very fast rising outbreaks with vaccination breakthroughs," they note in their study. Anurag Agrawal, Director, CSIR-IGIB and among the authors of the paper said that while the variant was extremely transmissible, there was no single super spreader event that contributed to the rise of the Delta variant in Delhi. Previous studies had shown that the farmer protests and religious gatherings had contributed to amplifying the Alpha variant in North India. The latter variant has now been outcompeted by the Delta. "We should be doing more studies on the vaccine effectiveness in India against various strains. We must also assess the risk to various populations, by age, to decide on the dosage of vaccine." Dr Agrawal said.*

#### SETTLE CLAIMS IN 1 HR, ENSURE AGREED RATES: INSURERS ASK HOSPITALS

*With the Delhi High Court and insurance regulator Irdai directing insurance firms to complete settlement of Covid claims within an hour after discharge, the General Insurance Council — the representative body of 34 general insurers in the country — has laid down a basic framework for seeking cooperation from hospitals to implement the directives. It has asked hospitals to submit all the patient discharge documents in one go without having to be reminded of the missing documents like cashless treatment approval reference, copy of case sheet, prescriptions, diagnostic reports, bills, discharge summary, Covid positive and subsequent Covid negative reports. They were also advised to ensure billing at pre-agreed rates and provide justification with supporting medical records for any co-morbidities necessarily treated. According to the GI Council, when a patient's progress is good and discharge is planned for the next day, hospitals*



should inform the insurance company or third party administrator (TPA) of the impending discharge the soonest and submit the available documents and bills.

Currently, insurers take up to five or six hours for settlement of hospital claims and patients are held up in the hospital during this period. Hospitals refuse to discharge patients without getting the insurer's approval.

## PENSION GAG

As gag orders go, this one is blatant. *The Centre's new pension rules bar officers who retire from intelligence and security organisations from writing/publishing anything related to their work or career — even an oped on a matter of public importance, let alone a book — without a clearance from the current head of the organisation.* The failure to do so might put their pension benefits at risk — a harsh threat to dangle over a citizen for the exercise of her freedom of expression and speech. *The law will apply to officers who retire from the Intelligence Bureau, R&AW, CBI, ED, Narcotics Control Bureau, DRDO and all central armed police forces such as the CRPF and BSF, among others.* Worse, this bar will apply in perpetuity. *The government could well have, but chose not to, set a cooling-off period from the date of an officer's retirement — whether two or five years — in which she would be forbidden from writing about her work experience.* While it is understandable for the state to have concerns about matters of national security, this is *too blanket and vaguely worded a restriction.* As a former R&AW chief told this newspaper, "The way the rule has been worded, *even if I have to say that first R&AW chief RN Kao was a great man, I will have to take permission from the current R&AW chief.*" The Centre's move reeks of an all-too-familiar need *to control and micro-manage ideas, facts and narratives — in the name of national interest* — in ways that only end up making it look insecure. The same mistrust of ideas was evident in orders such as the one that *sought to bar virtual "international conferences and seminars" on matters of India's security, the Northeastern states and Jammu and Kashmir in universities — a circular so undemocratic in its spirit that it had to be withdrawn after an outcry.* The current gag order, in effect, forces officers who have spent decades in the trenches of officialdom, shaping and determining national policy at crucial moments of Indian history, outside the pale of public discourse. Their experience and knowledge do not need to be barb-wired by oaths of secrecy, but must be judiciously brought into the public realm — to enrich history writing, institutional memory, and academia. Moreover, does this ban also apply to retired officers joining think-tanks and speaking at seminars? How much control is adequate control? *For a knowledge society, discussions and deliberations are key to moving forward.* The Centre's move is one more example of how it may be getting these basics wrong. It must withdraw this order.

## LEGAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN BRINGING MEHUL CHOKSI BACK TO INDIA

Fugitive jeweller Mehul Choksi, key accused in the Rs-13,000-crore PNB loan fraud case, was recently arrested in Dominica by authorities there after he was found to have illegally entered the country from Antigua, where he had been staying since 2018. India has now sent a team of eight officials, including from the CBI and the Ministry of External Affairs, to secure Choksi's deportation to India. A private jet is said to have reached Dominica on May 28 to ferry him back to India. But the matter is now facing a legal hurdle with the jeweller's lawyers approaching Dominica's



Supreme Court, which has stayed his movement out of the country and is set to hear the matter on Wednesday.

#### **What is the legal hurdle?**

Choksi's legal team has asserted that contrary to claims made by Antiguan authorities, the jeweller did not flee Antigua but was abducted by laying a honey trap. The legal team has claimed Choksi was befriended by a woman over the last six months, called to an apartment in Antigua on May 23, and abducted by a group of men from there. He was then allegedly beaten up and forced into a yacht before being ferried to Dominica. While Antiguan PM Gaston Brown has told media that Choksi can be deported to India from Dominica itself, Choksi's lawyers have argued that he cannot be sent back to India as he is not an Indian citizen anymore. Choksi acquired Antiguan citizenship in 2017, just over a month before he fled India in January 2018, and has even surrendered his Indian passport.

#### **What is India's case then?**

Sources in Indian agencies pursuing Choksi say he may have surrendered his passport, but India has not accepted this and a certificate of surrender of passport has not been issued. More importantly, they say Interpol has issued a Red Notice against Choksi for financial crimes committed in India, and this would be argued in court. India has already sent all relevant case papers to Dominica.

#### **What does the law say?**

As far as Choksi's citizenship is concerned, the law is very clear: India does not allow dual citizenship. *According to Section 9 of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, any Indian citizen who acquires foreign citizenship ceases to be an Indian citizen. "Any citizen of India who by naturalisation, registration, otherwise voluntarily acquires, or has at any time between the 26th January, 1950 and the commencement of this Act, voluntarily acquired the citizenship of another country shall, upon such acquisition or, as the case may be, such commencement, cease to be a citizen of India," Section 9 says. The only exception when this law does not apply is when the two concerned countries are at war with each other. Neither the Act nor the Citizenship Rules of 2009 specify any procedure required for termination of citizenship in case of acquisition of foreign citizenship.* Legal experts say the law is clear that Indian citizenship will cease to exist the moment one acquires foreign citizenship. *So, for all practical purposes, Choksi remains an Antiguan citizen even though the government there has begun a legal process to revoke his citizenship; this has been challenged in an Antiguan court by the jeweller.*

#### **What about his Indian passport?**

*According to the Ministry of External Affairs, as per the Passports Act 1967, it is mandatory for all Indian passport holders to surrender their passports to the nearest Indian Mission/Post immediately after acquisition of foreign nationality. Misuse of Indian passports constitutes an offence under Section 12(1A) of the Passports Act 1967. "The Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, does not allow dual citizenship... The Government of India has prescribed imposition of penalty on a graded scale, depending on number of trips made on Indian passport after acquiring foreign nationality, for the violation of Passport Rules and retention of Indian Passport for more than three years after*



acquiring of foreign nationality,” the Ministry says on its website. Sources, however, said the law’s intent is to prevent a person from using an Indian passport for travel after acquiring foreign citizenship. “Some countries, which do not allow dual citizenship, insist on surrender of the Indian passport before formalising citizenship of their country. However, this is not the case with Antigua. In any case, it is immaterial whether you have surrendered your Indian passport or not. If a foreign country has granted you citizenship, under Indian law you cease to remain an Indian citizen,” said a former official of the Ministry of External Affairs who has dealt with passport issues.

#### What can India hope for then?

*India’s best chance of getting Choksi back to India is to convince the Dominican court that it has a strong legal case against him and that he is a fugitive.* Sources said India would also argue that his sole intention of acquiring Antiguan citizenship was to escape the clutches of the law in India. “That he has an Interpol notice against him is good enough ground to hand him over to India. As far as the issue of his being beaten up is concerned, it is not associated with us. We don’t know who has beaten him up,” an official said. *Another official argued that even Christian Michel, accused in the VVIP helicopter case, was brought to India from the UAE where he was staying as a British citizen. There, however, India followed extradition proceedings in court that dragged on for over a year. India does not have an extradition treaty with Dominica. The Indian team could face hurdles in the face of Choksi’s legal team alleging human rights violations and suggesting a planned extra-judicial extraction on part of Indian and Antiguan authorities.* Wide media coverage of the entire episode and serious injuries sustained by Choksi could also play a part in court.

#### MARATHA COMMUNITY BROUGHT UNDER EWS QUOTA

In a bid to extend relief to *the Maratha community in the State, the tripartite Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra on Monday extended the benefits of reservation for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) to the Socially and Economically Backward Class (SEBC).* Previously, the government had decided that the Maratha community could not take advantage of the 10% EWS category as Maratha reservation was in force in the State. The Supreme Court, however, scrapped the SEBC reservation in jobs and education, making it possible for the State government to extend the benefit of the EWS quota to the Marathas. *As per the government resolution, a person fulfilling the criterion for EWS would be eligible for 10% reservation in educational institutes, barring minority institutes. This would also be applied for State government recruitment.* The resolution said the reservation would be above the existing reservation. It also stated that the benefit would be available from September 9, 2020, when the apex court brought an interim stay on the reservation, to May 5, 2021, when the final verdict was announced.

#### FOUND SELLING COVAXIN TO PVT HOSPITALS, PUNJAB GOVT NOW WANTS DOSES RETURNED

*Cornered over selling Covid vaccines to private hospitals at a profit, the Punjab government on Friday ordered that the doses be returned with immediate effect. The government had sold 42,000 doses of Covaxin — out of the 1.14 lakh it bought on May 27 from Bharat Biotech at Rs 420 per dose — to over 20 private hospitals for Rs 1,060 each. The hospitals had, in turn, charged recipients Rs 1,560*



*for a dose. The government had thus made a profit of Rs 5.28 crore — buying the vaccines for Rs 3.20 crore, and selling them for Rs 8.48 crore.* As the issue snowballed into a controversy, Nodal Officer for Vaccination Vikas Garg issued an order asking private hospitals to return the vaccines. “The order providing one-time limited vaccine doses to 18-44 years age group population through private hospitals has not been taken in the right spirit, and is hereby withdrawn. Further, it has been decided that the private hospitals should return forthwith all the vaccine doses available with them...” Reacting to the controversy, Punjab Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu told The Indian Express, “Sometimes wrong decisions are taken without any wrong intent. We will probe the matter.” He said the amount deposited by the private hospitals for the vaccines would be refunded to them. Sidhu said that out of the 42,000 doses that the government gave to private hospitals, 600 vaccines had been administered by the time the government issued its recall order. “The remaining 41,400 vaccines will reach us by today evening and tomorrow morning,” he said, adding that these vaccines will now be administered free of cost to those in the 18-44 age group at government vaccination centres. *The 42,000 vaccines were part of the state’s quota for those in the 18-44 age group with co-morbidities, for construction workers and families of government healthcare workers.* Government vaccination centres had, citing vaccine shortage, opened vaccination in the 18-44 age group only for select priority groups. The minister said private hospitals will now get direct vaccine supplies from manufacturers. *On May 15, Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan had tweeted, “#Privatehospitals Max Mohali and @fortis\_hospital have procured vaccines & have begun #vaccinating 18-44 years in #Punjab. Max is charging Rs. 900 for covishield and Fortis Rs. 1250 for Covaxin. Please register on #CwinPortal to book a slot at these hospitals.” Mahajan’s tweet had prompted SAD chief Sukhbir Badal to call her a “brand ambassador of private hospitals”. On Friday, talking to the media, Sidhu said, “It was wrong for her to tweet about the vaccine availability in private hospitals.” He also said that he was not in the loop about the decision to provide the vaccines to private hospitals.* The vaccine row has put the government and the party, which is already battling internal fights, in a tighter spot. Minister of State Anurag Thakur and SAD chief Sukhbir Badal have already hit out at the government. On Friday, Congress Rajya Sabha leader Partap Singh Bajwa wrote a letter to the CM, demanding a probe into the matter and calling it a “fraud on the people of Punjab”.

#### WHEN HEIGHT BLOCKS DOCTOR’S IPS DREAM

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu has asked the Centre to amend a service condition that requires an eligible candidate to be of a certain height to become an IPS officer. He wrote to Union Minister for Personnel, Grievances, DoNER and Pensions Jitendra Singh seeking the amendment after the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) dismissed a petition by an Arunachal Pradesh doctor whose hope of becoming an IPS officer fell short by 2.5 cm. Ojing Dameng, from Milang village in the State’s Upper Siang district bordering China, was ranked 644th in the Civil Services Examination of 2017. Selected for the Indian Revenue Service (IRS), he is posted in Kolkata. Mr. Dameng was placed second in the provisional list of IPS officers in the Scheduled Tribes category. But a medical examination conducted by the Central Standing Medical Board (CSMB) found him unfit for the IPS because he is 162.5 cm tall, which is 2.5 cm less than the required minimum height of 165 cm for male candidates for the IPS. He challenged the CSMB’s decision at the CAT in August 2018. He argued that candidates belonging to the ST category and races such as Gorkha, Assamese, Kumaoni, Naga, Garhwali, etc., are entitled to a relaxation of 15 cm in the minimum height required for the IPS. But the CAT dismissed his petition on May 27

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



pointing out that he did not belong to the communities eligible for height relaxation. According to Mr. Khandu, the condition on height would deprive aspirants of Arunachal Pradesh. *“This service condition was framed in 1951 and apparently, not updated. Arunachal Pradesh came into existence as a Union Territory in 1972 and attained statehood in 1987. You will appreciate that when the All India Services Act was framed, the present-day Arunachal was under Assam administration and when the benefit was extended to ‘Assamese’ in the Act, the spirit would have been to include the tribes of Arunachal too,”* he wrote to Mr. Singh. Mr. Dameng, who plans to challenge the CAT decision in a High Court, said it would be unfair for a certain category of candidates who clear the exams conducted by the UPSC and medical tests only to be stumped by the height clause. “This needs to be done, at least for the future generations of people in Arunachal Pradesh and others places who are not tall enough,” he said.

#### SOME STATES TOO CANCEL CLASS 12 EXAMS

*Following the decision to cancel the CBSE Class 12 exams due to the pandemic, several State boards have followed suit. The BJP-ruled Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat were the first to announce cancellation on Wednesday, but Central officials expect a majority of States to follow their cue.* “During the consultation with State governments last week, most of them indicated that they were looking to the CBSE as a reference point. A majority of State boards are now likely to cancel their exams as well,” a senior Education Ministry official told The Hindu. “If they instead choose to hold their own board exams later, and postpone it too much, it is their own students who will suffer once the higher education admission season begins. That is one reason this [cancellation] was done, so that the next academic session is not too badly impacted. We have learnt the lesson from last year,” said the official. States such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh said they are still considering their options and will take a decision in a day or two. Maharashtra Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad tweeted her appreciation of the CBSE cancellation, and said the State board would also take a decision “keeping students’ health and safety in mind”. The State has previously said the Centre and States need to follow a uniform policy. Punjab Education Minister Vijay Inder Singla also called for the Centre to coordinate better with States. “Out of the blue, they come out with a decision which was half-baked. We agree exams are cancelled in the interests of children, but they should have consulted and rolled out a plan on the alternative assessment formula and then made an announcement,” he told The Hindu. “The Government of India should convene a meeting, so States can give inputs for whatever formula is being worked out. Every State board looks up to the CBSE, and we want to ensure that our children are not being left behind,” he said.

#### Evaluation criteria

CBSE officials say it will take a few days to structure the criteria for Class 12 evaluation. “There is no need for students to panic. Tomorrow, we will inform the Supreme Court of the decision to cancel. Then we will start working on the assessment methodology. It will take some days,” said Controller of Examinations Sanyam Bhardwaj. Another CBSE official indicated that two main options are being considered. “One option is to grade students based on their internal assessment and practical exam marks in Class 12, just as we are doing for Class 10 students. To prevent mark inflation by schools, the students’ grades would be rationalised based on the last three years’ board examination performance of the school. The mark distribution given by the school should



be in tune with the historical data,” said the official. “The other option is to use the average of the Class 9, 10 and 11 marks. But this may not be reliable, because there may not be consistency over three years, plus the subjects taken by students in Class 11 and 12 are different,” said the official. The senior Education Ministry official said school boards must also strengthen their continuous assessment methods going forward, considering the possibility that COVID may prevent Class 12 exams even in 2022. “In a way, this can be seen as a blessing in disguise, if school boards are forced to realise it is possible to grade children without a singular focus on the year-end exam alone,” said the official.

## EMBRACING CHILDREN

Well begun is not always half done, and, in any case, half done is never good enough. *The Centre's response to the Supreme Court that the modalities of the expansive assistance programme for children orphaned by COVID-19, announced by the Prime Minister, were yet to be formulated comes as a disappointment.* While rightly feted for its announcement of a comprehensive programme for the most vulnerable section of the population during this COVID-19 pandemic, children, the Centre did not lay down procedural formalities for implementation. It is clear from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights' submission in the Supreme Court that nearly 10,000 children are in need of immediate care and protection. They include children aged between zero and 17 years orphaned or abandoned during the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. The total was 9,346 children who have been affected, including 1,742 children who lost both parents, 7,464 who have lost one parent, and 140 who have been abandoned from March 2020 to May 29, 2021. It further told the apex court that these children run a high risk of being pushed into trafficking and the flesh trade. There is thus no doubt that time is of the essence here. Given the urgency of rescuing these children, *the Government cannot dawdle over figuring out implementation strategies. A swift laying down of processes and monitoring mechanisms to kick start rescue and relief, besides undertaking the continuing process of estimating beneficiaries is needed.* Children have little or no agency of their own and are still dependent on adults to get by, and the disruption that COVID-19 has wrought on their lives is devastating. *The experience of States that sprang to the assistance of children orphaned by the Indian Ocean tsunami can be factored in — they were embraced into the safety net of the social security system, and funds were placed in a trust for them for use when they reach a certain age.* While the plans announced under the PM CARES Fund include this, and are far more expansive looking at funding schooling, higher education, even health insurance, *a promise is nothing if not fulfilled.* The responsibility of the Government now is to go the full mile to ensure that these benefits reach every child fitting the criteria, besides making sure that the children are not exploited with an eye on the eventual bounty. Several States have announced their child-care packages on similar lines too, with some setting up monitoring committees to ensure implementation. Sincere implementation through committed staff, and using existing systems such as 1098 for periodic identification of children in need would be the cornerstones of such a project, especially at a time when the onslaught of COVID-19 is far from over.



BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CHILD LABOUR IS IN INDIA'S HANDS (DAGMAR WALTER - DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION INDIA COUNTRY OFFICE)

The true extent of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child labour is yet to be measured but all indications show that it would be significant as children are unable to attend school and parents are unable to find work. However, *not all the factors that contribute to child labour were created by the pandemic; most of them were pre-existing and have been exposed or amplified by it.*

#### What the data show

As the world enters the third decade of the *21st century, 152 million children around the world are still in child labour, 73 million of them in hazardous work. A Government of India survey (NSS Report No. 585, 2017-18, Statement 3.12, p.35) suggests that 95% of the children in the age group of 6-13 years are attending educational institutions (formal and informal) while the corresponding figures for those in the age group of 14-17 years is 79.6%*. Hence, a large number of children in India remain vulnerable, facing physical and psychological risks to a healthy development. *The Census of India 2011 reports 10.1 million working children in the age group of 5-14 years, out of whom 8.1 million are in rural areas mainly engaged as cultivators (26%) and agricultural labourers (32.9%). While multiple data vary widely on enrolment/attendance ratios in India, UNESCO estimates based on the 2011 Census record 38.1 million children as "out of school" (18.3% of total children in the age group of 6-13 years). Work performed may not appear to be immediately dangerous, but it may produce long-term and devastating consequences for their education, their skills acquisition, and hence their future possibilities to overcome the vicious circle of poverty, incomplete education and poor quality jobs. A Rapid Survey on Children (2013-14), jointly undertaken by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and UNICEF, found that less than half of children in the age group of 10-14 years have completed primary education.* These remain challenges we must overcome.

#### A decrease in India

One piece of good news is that child labour in India decreased in the decade 2001 to 2011, and this demonstrates that the right combination of policy and programmatic interventions can make a difference. *Policy interventions such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005, the Right to Education Act 2009 and the Mid Day Meal Scheme have paved the way for children to be in schools along with guaranteed wage employment (unskilled) for rural families. Concerted efforts towards convergence of government schemes is also the focus of the implementation of the National Child Labour Project.* Ratifying International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 in 2017, the Indian government further demonstrated its commitment to the elimination of child labour including those engaged in hazardous occupations. *The Ministry of Labour and Employment-operated online portal (www.pencil.gov.in) allows government officials, law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations to share information and coordinate on child labour cases at the national, State and local levels for effective enforcement of child labour laws.* While child labour has declined during the past decade globally, estimates indicate that the rate of reduction has slowed by two-thirds in the most recent four-year period. These positive and negative trends have to be taken into account when developing India's policy and programmatic response during and after the novel coronavirus pandemic. *The economic contraction and lockdowns ensuing from the pandemic have*





*affected all countries in Asia, leading to income reductions for enterprises and workers, many of them in the informal economy. The large number of returned migrant workers has compounded the socio-economic challenges. India experienced slower economic growth and rising unemployment even before the pandemic. Subsequent lockdowns have worsened the situation, posing a real risk of backtracking the gains made in eliminating child labour. With increased economic insecurity, lack of social protection and reduced household income, children from poor households are being pushed to contribute to the family income with the risk of exposure to exploitative work.*

### Challenges in education

With closure of schools and challenges of distance learning, children may drop out leaving little scope for return unless affirmative and immediate actions are taken. *As many schools and educational institutions are moving to online platforms for continuation of learning, the 'digital divide' is a challenge that India has to reconcile within the next several years. The NSS Report No. 585 titled 'Household Social Consumption on Education in India' suggests that in 2017-18, only 24% of Indian households had access to an Internet facility, proportions were 15% among rural households and 42% among urban households.* The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020 survey highlights that a third of the total enrolled children received some kind of learning materials from their teachers during the reference period (October 2020) as digital mode of education was opted for. The challenges are significant and manifold but it is not impossible to meet them if the right level of commitment among all the relevant stakeholders and the right mix of policy and programmatic interventions are present. It is through strategic partnerships and collaborations involving government, employers, trade unions, community-based organisations and child labour families that we could make a difference building back better and sooner. As we reinforce the commitment to protect children from unacceptable forms of work, our focus to mitigate the aftermath of the pandemic also remains. *We need a strong alliance paving our way towards ending child labour in all its forms by 2025 as countries around the world have agreed to in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7. We — governments, employers, unions, civil society organisations and even individuals — must rise and pledge to 'Take Action against Child Labour' as a part of the UN's declaration of 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.* Our actions today will determine the future of children tomorrow.

ADVERSE CHANGES, FEDERALISM IMPERILLED (KALAIYARASAN - FULBRIGHT-NEHRU POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW AT THE WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, BROWN UNIVERSITY, U.S., AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT THE MADRAS INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, CHENNAI. M. VIJAYABASKAR - PROFESSOR AT THE MADRAS INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES)

When Dr. Vinod K. Paul, NITI Aayog Member (Health), asserted last week that it was the lack of centralisation that has led to poor management of the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination drive, States joined issue with this statement. Going by the response to this assertion from State governments, it was clear that this claim was not backed by good evidence. Not many could have misread the subtext of this claim for centralisation. It lies within, and simultaneously contributes to, a narrative and practice of the growing centralisation of power by the current government. This sits well with the growing incursions of the Union government into sectors where State governments have a primary responsibility to govern such as health, education and agriculture. *Slogans such as*

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



*'one nation-one tax, one market and one ration' are again part of such appeals to a narrative of a strong nation state rather than one of governance.*

### Union encroachment

To be sure, such moves to erode the powers of State governments are not new. In post-independent India, the Centre, on several occasions, has used its powers to dismiss or use the Governor to intimidate democratically elected governments. *During the Emergency, education was moved to the Concurrent list which was until then a State subject under the constitutional division of responsibilities.* However, *the adverse changes to federal relations at present are more systemic. To understand what has changed, at the risk of repetition, there has been increasing centralisation in resource allocations and welfare interventions. The gap between the revenue that State governments are allowed to generate and the expenditure that they are expected to incur has been widening, particularly with the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST). The shortfall of GST this year and the Centre's lackadaisical response to demands for compensation by State governments are again known.* On the other hand, the Centre has been encroaching into domains under State government control through centrally sponsored schemes in sectors such as *education and health where States are required to spend about 85% and 82%* of public expenditure, respectively (<https://bit.ly/3z734Ai>). Though some of these have been initiated and supported by previous governments, the intensification of this process is aligned strongly with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014. This is particularly visible across the following three domains. While we identify these domains based on Tamil Nadu's experience, they are equally relevant to States such as Assam, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal.

### State-capital relations

While coalition governments in the past enabled the rise and the visibility of regional businesses in post-reform India, the *current dispensation is working towards centralising economic power in conjunction with political centralisation.* It is becoming clear that aligning politically with the BJP is critical to do business. While the rise of yoga guru Baba Ramdev's business empire is indicative of this, the decline of business groups from southern India over these last few years suggest the reverse of this process. *We can also see the consolidation and expansion of a few big business groups seen to be close to the BJP, probably at the expense of smaller players. On the one hand, the Centre has sought to insulate Indian big business from global competition by choosing not to enter into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), but has eroded the power of small businesses through support for GST and the call for a single national market.* Clearly, *bigger players are more likely to benefit from a removal of State-level barriers to trade at the expense of smaller regional players.* This *re-calibration of State-capital relations works against smaller entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.* The BJP also seeks to centralise rent-seeking in parallel to restrict the political financing of regional parties. *Regional parties tend to rely on region-specific rent-thick sectors for political funding such as mining and real estate.* The BJP has sought to curtail this through a levelling of corruption allegations and the use of central agencies to keep them in check. The reduced avenues for accumulation among regional capital weaken the ability of regional parties to compete with the BJP electorally.



### **Institutional transgression**

The second challenge is in the use of executive and legislative aggression. Central institutions are increasingly weakening the policy levers of State institutions. *Institutions such as the Income Tax Department, the Enforcement Directorate and the National Investigation Agency are being used to intimidate opponents. Appointments are not untouched either. For instance, the Centre has been meddling with the appointments of vice-chancellors in universities funded and run by State governments. Direct transfers to beneficiaries of welfare schemes bypassing States are also contributing to this dynamic. Further, as recent events suggest, the Centre is increasingly ignoring elected representatives of State governments, holding meetings with State secretaries and district collectors on issues that are primarily under State control. An example was a recent meeting by Minister of Education Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank with State Education Secretaries on implementation of the New Education Policy. Such transgressions, often with the help of Governors, allow the BJP to actively control administrative decisions including faculty recruitments to align with a majoritarian agenda. Governors perform active administrative roles instead of their signatory roles. Importantly, such moves are also meant to ensure national uniformity in educational institutions. One such example is NEET, or the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test in medical education, which subverts the affirmative action policies developed at the regional level in response to local political demands. This is evident in the domain of health as well. Apart from imposing a national lockdown during the first wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic without consulting State governments, the Centre has now put State governments at a disadvantage in vaccine usage by fixing differential pricing for procuring vaccines for them. This forces State governments to pay more even as they are deprived of their revenue shares.*

### **Socio-cultural foundation**

The third and crucial challenge lies in *the social-cultural foundations of federalism*. As Partha Chatterjee argues, beside the legal-constitutional aspects of federalism, it is diversity in cultural foundation of regions that sustains Indian federalism. *Regional identities and cultural traditions have worked against the homogenisation agenda of the BJP.* However, this diversity is being challenged at present. Markers of regional identities and regional socio-cultural practices are now interpreted as belonging to a pan-Indian Hindu tradition. *Tamil, which has stood as a symbol of an anti-Vedic tradition, is now seen as a segment of that Hindu past, with Tamil Muslims and Christians becoming outsiders. 'Dravidian' is attacked as a creation of the British with support from Christian missionaries, emptying the term of its anti-caste politics. Tamils, therefore, need to be mainstreamed by reuniting them with their 'Hindu' past. A similar narrative is being built in other regions — Muslims and Christians become less Malayalee, less Bengali and less Assamese. In Bengal, the BJP tried a strategy of linking "Sonar Bangla" to a Hindu past.*

### **Key variables**

This erosion of federal relations is often countered through appeals to restore the constitutional powers of States. However, history tells us that such calls may not amount to much in the absence of regional political assertion. *Constitutional powers including fiscal relations are inherently biased towards the Centre. Vesting of all residuary powers with the Centre and giving over-ruling powers to the Centre on matters in the Concurrent list are the primary sources of this bias.* What is seldom recognised is that the degree of federalism in India has depended largely on two variables: the



nature of political coalitions at the Centre and role of States in such coalitions (the period 1996 to 2014 for example), and the cultural diversity of regions. Hence, what is needed is a federal coalition that looks beyond the legal-constitutional aspects of federalism to preserve the idea of a plural India in terms of both culture and politics.

A FATAL WAR ON TRANSPARENCY (ANIKET AGA TEACHES AT ASHOKA UNIVERSITY; CHITRANGADA CHOUDHURY IS A JOURNALIST ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF ARTICLE 14)

In August 2020, the Modi government constituted the *National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC)* as a nodal agency on all matters related to vaccine administration and rollout. Asked under the Right to Information (RTI) Act for details of the NEGVAC's meetings, the Health Ministry, which anchors the expert group, replied that it does not know where the concerned documents are. Asked for the dates and minutes of meetings of other task forces constituted to deal with the pandemic, Dr. Nivedita Gupta of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) denied the request with this bizarre logic: "The information is not in the public domain". Asked for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ICMR and Bharat Biotech for the rollout of Covaxin, she gave the same response. Through seven years in power, the Modi government has systematically hobbled the RTI Act. In the face of the pandemic, its war on transparency brings fatal consequences. Brazen denials mark its responses to RTI requests filed over the past year. Such secrecy runs through the full spectrum of COVID-19-related matters — from vaccine manufacturing and pricing decisions, to last year's lockdown planning and the establishment and running of the ₹10,000 crore-plus PM CARES fund. Opacity serves as a cover for large-scale over-centralisation and misgovernance.

#### Botched up vaccination programme

Despite thousands of daily deaths, the government continues to withhold information on critical life-saving policies and decisions. Take, for example, India's botched up vaccination programme. On January 3, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) approved Covaxin. Until today, Bharat Biotech has not published peer-reviewed interim efficacy analyses from Phase 3 clinical trials. The DCGI has denied RTI requests about its decision to grant emergency approval to Covaxin and Covishield, claiming that information about efficacy and safety constitutes confidential commercial information. But such data are routinely published in peer-reviewed journals and disclosed to the public by regulators. Effectively, the DCGI is keeping secret decision-making on what it called a "110% safe vaccine". But people being administered Covaxin had to consent to a declaration that in case of serious adverse impacts, compensation will be awarded only if a causal link to the vaccine is established. Second, the rollout of vaccines is badly hit by shortages. Against the target of 30 crore Indians being vaccinated by July, only over 4 crore have been fully vaccinated so far. Covaxin is developed with the help of the ICMR's National Institute of Virology (NIV) and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), and co-owned by the ICMR. Its production is the easiest for the government to ramp up, and massive vaccine production capacity in the public sector is lying idle. So, what explains the government-enabled scarcity of vaccines? Like the ICMR, the NIV too refuses to disclose the MoU with Bharat Biotech, and the full extent of public investment into Covaxin's research and development. Similarly, asked for details of the research collaboration with Bharat Biotech, and investment of public funds in Covaxin, the IICT too denies information, calling the request "an unwarranted invasion of privacy". Meanwhile,



Covaxin has reached private hospitals as among the most expensive vaccines in the world, at over ₹1,200 a dose. And the ICMR is earning 5% royalties on the vaccine. This and other scraps of information are public only thanks to the Supreme Court hearing a suo motu PIL on the pandemic. The government's summary dismissals not just violate citizens' fundamental right to information but also push RTI requests into an appeal process that can take over two years. Time and resources go waste as citizens have to approach Information Commissions and High Courts to access basic information.

### Information blackhole

*Effective planning and administration cannot occur in the dark, and experts attribute the death toll and suffering to mismanagement and lack of preparation as much as the virus itself. Official secrecy is undermining the capacity of scientists, public health and policy experts to provide timely feedback and suggestions to the government.* Such is the information blackhole that over 900 scientists have appealed to the Prime Minister for access to information and data. But little has changed. The *Supreme Court should order the government to suo motu disclose information related to COVID-19 policies, in line with Sections 4 and 7 of the RTI Act, which deal with proactive and urgent disclosures with consequences for life and liberty.* Writing about famines in colonial India, Amartya Sen argued that mass hunger and death do not occur where information flows freely. Ditto for pandemic management.

A NEW HOME FOR OLD ARTEFACTS (VINOD DANIEL - BOARD MEMBER, INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS AND CHAIRMAN, AUSHERITAGE)

*The National Museum in Delhi is a repository of India's rich history and proud heritage.* Over the past few months, many critical pieces have been written about the government's decision to move the museum to the North and South Blocks. However, examples from other countries show that a planned move can serve the collection, comfort, and audience experience needs of the National Museum better. *In addition to Egypt, where the impressive Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza will replace the crowded Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square in Cairo, many national museums have moved to new premises.*

### Limitations

The current building, though impressive, has limitations in being a national institution. The new location will provide a space that is over four and half times bigger than the current space. The museum has over 2,00,000 cultural collections and less than 6% of them are in display. The move can provide an opportunity to bring more collections from storage to be displayed through the creation of several more galleries. Additionally, it will also provide much more space for storage, especially with more collections being constantly added from excavations, donations and repatriations. From the time an exhibition of Indian art was organised at the Royal Academy in London, and later in Rashtrapati Bhavan, which led to the creation of the National Museum, the collection numbers have been increasing manifold. They will only increase further in the next few decades. The North and South block buildings are a prominent part of Delhi's landscape. Once they are retrofitted to provide a fitting external façade (without compromising on heritage), international standard exhibition and collection storage areas, and spaces for education and visitor services, they can become a landmark location. The increase in space would allow for more

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



gallery spaces to include both ancient and contemporary Indian art and culture. The current museum also struggles in terms of finding a space with adequate environmental controls for travelling exhibitions. There will be an opportunity in the new location, with the increased space available, for accommodating both international and national travelling exhibitions. *The National Museum as the nodal agency for all outgoing and incoming cultural collections, including repatriated collections, will be able to serve these collection needs better.*

#### Key skills for students

The National Museum Institute (NMI), whose highly skilled graduates not only serve the needs of the museum but also the broader needs of India's cultural sector, will benefit much from the move. The students could gain a lot from the collections, their storage, conservation and interpretation. They can greatly benefit with a large increase in laboratory, gallery and teaching facilities. There is also an interest to expand NMI and incorporate its *programmes in Museology, Art History and Conservation along with other programmes in Archaeology, Archival Studies and so on, under a new institute.* The benefits would only be greater from an expanded operation. The exhibition areas in the current building are still operational. *A new Buddhist gallery is being opened at the adjoining Archaeological Survey of India building.* In this context, keeping the collections safe in the current building and getting the new location ready before carefully moving the collections with safe packing and transport is important. The risks of damage to collections during transit can be greatly minimised. A better designed and new collection storage area in the new location will minimise risks from the environment, disasters and pests. A revamped National Museum that looks at both people and collection comfort; has galleries that provide excellent audience experience; good education spaces; and uses technology creatively for interpretation, outreach and education could become a 'must visit' for every visitor. In fact, it could become the anchor for a vibrant museum movement in India.

#### NEW IT RULES DON'T APPLY TO US, GOOGLE TELLS HC

*Google told the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that the new Information Technology Rules 2021, which came into effect late last month, did not apply to the U.S.-based tech giant as it was a "search engine" and not a "social media intermediary" like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.* On April 20, the High Court issued a slew of directions on a petition by a woman who claimed her photographs and images, though not in themselves obscene or offensive, were taken from her Facebook and Instagram accounts without her consent, and uploaded on a pornographic website with derogatory captions added to them. Google urged the High Court to quash its April 20 order which applied the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 to it, while dealing with an issue related to removal of offending content from the Internet. It said the *High Court in its April 20 order had "generally" observed that for removal or access disablement of offending content, they must be blocked throughout the world. This observation, it said, was "overbroad and cannot apply to all takedown orders for all grievances". "Global removal is applicable to such objectionable content which is universally recognized as unlawful (for eg. child pornography).* However, there may be content which is prohibited in India but is lawful in other countries," Google said. Acting on Google's plea, a bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh issued notice to the Centre, Delhi government, Internet Service Providers' Association of India, Facebook, the pornographic site and the woman on whose plea the April 20 order was



passed. The bench said it was not going to issue any interim order at this stage and posted the case for further hearing on July 25. *Google said the function of a search engine was to only “crawl and index existing information as available or published or hosted by independent third-party websites”.* This process of search did not censor the findings — it found material that corresponded to the request of the search, hosted by other independent third-party websites that were beyond the control of search engines.

## VACCINE AND DEATH: GOVT REBUTS CLAIM, FACEBOOK TAKES IT DOWN, THEN RESTORES IT

*Triggering another showdown between the Centre and social media platforms, late last month, Facebook and Instagram took down a fact-check post by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), in which it had rebutted a false claim linking Covid vaccinations to death. The post was restored on both platforms following the government’s intervention.* On May 25, the ‘PIB Fact Check’ handle shared a post on Facebook and Instagram, in which it had debunked a claim attributed to French Nobel Prize winner Luc Montagnier that people getting vaccinated against Covid-19 would die within two years. Attaching an image of the alleged claim, the post said, “An image allegedly quoting a French Nobel Laureate on #COVID19 vaccines is circulating on social media... The claim in the image is #FAKE... #COVID19 Vaccine is completely safe... Do not forward this image.” A day later, the post was taken down by both the online platforms without any explanation. *Facebook, which also owns Instagram, followed it up with a warning that PIB’s page could be unpublished for posting “false news”,* sources said. PIB officials then reached out to the IT Ministry, who in turn, got in touch with senior executives from Facebook and Instagram through a series of emails, complaining about the lack of transparency on appeals and the fact-check process. Following their intervention, the post was restored on both platforms. A Facebook spokesperson confirmed to The Indian Express that the platform had “temporarily blocked the content by mistake” but later restored it. The incident has also led to *the IT Ministry raising concerns about the lack of transparency in the appointment of fact-checkers.* In internal meetings with other government departments who had flagged the issue, the Ministry is learnt to have assured the officials of being “aware of the issue”. “Both the platforms claim to have robust fact-checking mechanisms in place. When we reached out to them on this, they said that this was done inadvertently since a machine flagged it as false news. We have asked them as to why it was not cross-checked by a human fact checker,” an IT Ministry official said. *The IT Ministry is also likely to write to the social media intermediaries to be more transparent about the fact-checking process and share details of fact-checkers they have appointed. This issue of fact-checkers on social media platforms had come up last month too, when Twitter tagged posts by BJP members on an alleged Congress “toolkit” as “manipulated media”.* The ministry had then written a letter to Twitter seeking that the tag be removed as local law enforcement agencies were already pursuing the matter.

Micro-blogging site Twitter told The Indian Express it does not employ any fact-checkers in India and that it engages fact-checking agencies certified by *the IFCN (International Fact Checking Network) in India “only for knowledge-sharing around relevant updates to Twitter Rules”.* *The IFCN network has members from India as well, including fact-checking websites such as BOOMLive, The Quint, and Digit Eye India. Alt News, which was a signatory to the IFCN Code of Principles, has not renewed its verified signatory status.* On the lines of Twitter, Facebook too had last month announced new ways to inform people if they are interacting with content that has been rated by



a fact-checker. "Whether it's false or misleading content about Covid-19 and vaccines, climate change, elections or other topics, we are making sure fewer people see misinformation on our apps," Facebook had said in a blog post.

## PUSH FOR CITIZENSHIP TO MINORITY MIGRANTS

*Migrants belonging to six non-Muslim minority communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India on valid documents before 2014 are eligible to apply online for citizenship from any part of the country, a senior government official said.* In March, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) wrote to all States, including Assam, sensitising them of the relevant provisions under the Citizenship Act, 1955 that could help the six communities- Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis, who entered India before 2014 and are here on long term visa (LTV), expedite their citizenship application. *The official asserted that this particular awareness drive was not related to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) that is intended to benefit undocumented (illegal migrants) from the six persecuted communities who entered India before December 31, 2014. The CAA is yet to come into force as the rules that govern the law have not been notified by the Ministry yet.* "A survey was done and it was found that such migrants live in many parts of the country. The States have been made aware that provisions exist that could help the migrants in acquiring citizenship if they fulfil the criteria. This is to help the applicants who have applied online from any part of the country, as the verification is also done by the local police who have to send the report to the Home Ministry," said the official.

### Assam NRC

Assam is the only State where a National Register of Citizens (NRC) has been compiled. More than 19 lakh of the 3.29 crore applicants in the State have been excluded from the final register. The State government has demanded reverification of the process as a large number of Hindus were left out. The excluded persons from the six communities, who are yet to be declared illegal migrants, will benefit from the CAA as and when it is implemented as legislation benefits such migrants from the three neighbouring countries who entered India illegally before 2014. A day ago, leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly Debabrata Saikia said in a statement that just before the Assembly elections, the State government, on March 19, citing a letter from the Centre, instructed deputy commissioners, superintendents of police, Foreigners Registration Officers "to disseminate information regarding grant of citizenship to migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who hold Long Term Visas." Mr. Saikia alleged that since the *CAA was introduced for migrants from these three specific countries, there was reason to suspect that the State government's latest instruction was nothing but a ploy to implement the Act in a roundabout way. On May 28, The MHA empowered 13 more District Collectors in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab to grant citizenship certificates to applicants belonging to the six communities under Section 5 (registration) and Section 6 (naturalisation) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.* Earlier in 2016, 16 Collectors were granted such powers that was extended again in 2018. *Citizenship is a Home Ministry subject but it can delegate powers to States for specific objective.* Though the precise number of such migrants who availed the LTV and are eligible for citizenship is not known, officials estimate the number to be around two lakh.





## BENGAL CHIEF SECRETARY STEPS DOWN

*In a day of dramatic developments, West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay on Monday opted to retire after the State government refused to release him to the Centre despite a letter from the appointments committee of the Cabinet. He was later appointed Chief Adviser to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for three years.* Earlier in the day, Ms. Banerjee wrote a five-page letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to rescind the order asking the Chief Secretary to report to Delhi on Monday. In the letter, she said the “Government of West Bengal cannot release and is not releasing its Chief Secretary”. However, later in the day, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) shot off a letter asking Mr. Bandyopadhyay to comply with the May 28 order and report at its North Block office at 10 a.m. on Tuesday. *This prompted Mr. Bandyopadhyay, who had been given a three-month extension from May 31, his original date of retirement, to opt for superannuation.* Since Mr. Bandyopadhyay chose to retire on Monday and not avail the three-month extension given to him at the request of the State, it was not immediately clear what action the Centre would initiate. A senior official said on condition of anonymity, “The Centre or the DoPT is not the disciplinary authority for an officer posted in the State. They cannot initiate disciplinary proceedings against him.” H. K. Dwivedi, who was Additional Chief Secretary (Home) will be the new Chief Secretary and B.P. Gopalika the Additional Chief Secretary (Home). The developments concerning Mr. Bandyopadhyay, whom the Centre had asked to report to Delhi on May 31, had brought the Centre-State ties to a new low. *According to reports, the Centre had taken exception to him not being present at the review meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Kaliakunda air base on cyclone ‘Yaas’ on May 28. The CM and Mr. Bandyopadhyay had met the Prime Minister at the same venue on May 28.*

## RECALL OF CHIEF SECRETARY UNPRECEDENTED

*On May 28, the department of personnel and training (DoPT) under Ministry of Personnel directed that West Bengal Chief Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay report to its office at North Block in Delhi by 10 a.m. on May 31.* The order came hours after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly skipped a review meeting on Cyclone Yaas with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kalaikunda. Ms. Banerjee has refuted the allegation saying she handed over a detailed report on cyclone to the Prime Minister and after seeking his permission thrice, she proceeded to another meeting at Digha with Mr. Bandyopadhyay. The order read that the appointments committee of the Cabinet has approved the “placement of services” of Mr. Bandyopadhyay as per provisions of the Indian Administrative Service (cadre) Rules, 1954 with the Government of India with “immediate effect.” The ACC is headed by the Prime Minister, and Home Minister Amit Shah is the other member. The 1987 batch IAS officer has never been on Central deputation and is to superannuate on May 31. Earlier, on the request of the State government, Centre had approved three-month extension in service to the officer, top bureaucrat in West Bengal.

### What is the rule cited by DoPT ?

The DoPT order said that the ACC has approved Mr. Bandyopadhyay’s transfer to Delhi under Rule 6(I) of the IAS (cadre) Rules, 1954. The said rule pertains to “deputation of cadre officers.” It says that a cadre officer may, with the concurrence of the State governments concerned and the Central government, be deputed for service under the Central government or another State government.



It however adds, “provided that in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central government and the State government or State governments concerned shall give effect to the decision of the Central government.”

#### **When were the rules framed?**

*After the All India Services Act, 1951 came into existence, the IAS cadre rules were framed in 1954. The said rule on deputation giving more discretionary powers to the Centre was added in May 1969.*

#### **What has been the practice so far?**

*Before any officer of All India Services (AIS) is called for deputation to the Centre, his or her concurrence is required. The Establishment Officer in DoPT invites nominations from State governments. Once the nomination is received, their eligibility is scrutinised by a panel and then an offer list is prepared, traditionally done with the State government on board. Central Ministries and offices can then choose from the list of officers on offer. AIS officers are recruited by the Centre and they are lent to States. The publication of offer list on DoPT's website was discontinued by the government in 2018 amid reports that not many State government officers were willing to come to Centre for deputation.*

#### **Is the current order one of its kind?**

According to Vappala Balachandran, former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, the order is not only “unprecedented” but also vindictive. “Legally speaking it is the Centre that holds ultimate control. But *there is also a custom that an officer will not be deputed against his/her own will.* This order is unilateral and an awkward step, unbecoming of the Central government specially after they gave due extension. This officer superannuates on May 31, if he refuses to join, can the Centre exercise its right on a retired officer? Mr. Balachandran asked. *Earlier in December 2020, the Home Ministry had attached three Indian Police Service (IPS) officers of West Bengal cadre — Rajeev Mishra, Praveen Kumar Tripathi and Bholanath Pandey — but the State government did not relieve them.* The attachment order came after the cavalcade of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) president J.P Nadda was attacked in Diamond Harbour area. Home Ministry is the cadre controlling authority of IPS officers.

#### **What if the officer refuses to comply with the order?**

The All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969 are not clear on the punishment in such cases. But Rule 7 says the authority to institute proceedings and to impose penalty will be the State government while he or she was “serving in connection with the affairs of a State.” The case is peculiar as Mr. Badyopadhyay retires on May 31 and is not on deputation to the Central government. The Chief Minister can write to the Centre to reconsider its decision.

DM ACT IS OF 2005 VINTAGE, WAS FIRST ENFORCED DURING PANDEMIC

*Hours before he retired on May 31, former Chief Secretary of West Bengal Alapan Bandyopadhyay was served a show-cause notice by the Union Home Ministry under Section 51 of the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005, punishable by imprisonment of up to two years or a fine or both. The Section pertains to “punishment for obstruction” for refusal to comply with a direction given by the*

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR

49

Telegram: [http://t.me/DreamIAS\\_Jamshedpur](http://t.me/DreamIAS_Jamshedpur)



*Central government. The DM Act, 2005, came into existence after the 2004 tsunami. It was invoked for the first time in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 24, 2020, the Centre, through the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) headed by the Prime Minister, invoked the provisions of the Act to streamline the management of the pandemic, empowering district magistrates to take decisions and centralise other decisions on the supply of oxygen and movement of vehicles. The Act has been extended across the country till June 30 and it is enforced by the Home Ministry.*

#### Earlier use

Through the particular provision, the Home Ministry made spitting in public a punishable offence in April last year. The guidelines issued by the Ministry under the DM Act, binding on the States, made “wearing of face masks in public places mandatory”. On March 30, 2020, when thousands of migrants gathered at the Anand Vihar railway station in Delhi due to the sudden announcement of the countrywide lockdown, two Delhi government officers were suspended and two others were served show-cause notice by the Centre under the Act for dereliction of duty.

### TWO STATES, ONE BRAND: HOW KERALA WON BATTLE AGAINST KARNATAKA FOR KSRTC TRADEMARK

*For decades, the neighbouring states of Kerala and Karnataka have used the same abbreviation for their respective State Road Transport Corporations — KSTRC. After a seven-year legal battle for the trademark, Kerala has announced that the Trade Marks Registry’s final verdict on Wednesday gave it the right to use the abbreviation KSRTC, its emblem, and even the nickname ‘Anavandi’, which means elephant vehicle. Karnataka has said it has not yet received the order and that it is exploring legal options.*

#### Side by side

In Kerala, the erstwhile Travancore State Transport Department was re-established as Kerala State Road Transport Corporation on April 1, 1965. And in Karnataka, the Mysore Government Road Transport Department (MGRTD), started in 1948, became Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation in 1973. The Kerala RTC is the state’s largest public sector employer, with 28,000-odd permanent employees and 38,000-odd pensioners (2020). But trade unionism and mismanagement have caused it major losses. The previous LDF government spent Rs 5,000 crore in five years to meet salary and pension bills. *The two RTCs have been operating services to each other’s states for decades. They use the same space for parking, operations and booking offices.*

#### How trademarks are registered

*The Office of the Controller General of Patents, Design and Trade Marks is the apex body in charge of supervising the working of regulations related to patents and trademarks and advising the government on these matters. It comes under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. The Controller General heads the offices of the Trade Marks Registry, created to administer the Trade Marks Act, 1999. While the Controller General functions as the Registrar, from time to time, he can assign this function to other officers. The current Controller General is DPIIT joint secretary Rajendra Ratnoo, given this role as an additional charge.*



## How Kerala won

*In 2014, Karnataka State RTC applied for registration of the KSRTC trademark with the office of the Trade Mark Registrar, in Chennai. After getting it registered, it served a notice to the Kerala RTC against the use of the trademark. The Kerala RTC approached the state Trade Mark Registrar, which pointed out the name has already been registered by the Karnataka RTC. Kerala eventually won by relying on Section 34 of the Trade Mark Acts deals with the "first user" rule. It provides that a proprietor of a trademark does not have the right to prevent the use by another party of an identical or similar mark where that user commenced prior to the user or date of registration of the proprietor. As Kerala RTC was the first user (from 1965), it got the right established to use that trade mark.* Kerala RTC furnished photographs of old buses, bus depots, pages from memoirs of former Transport Ministers, write-ups and reports. Among the evidence presented was visuals from a Malayalam film of 1969, Kannur Deluxe, showing a KSRTC (Kerala) bus plying between Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram.

## What now

Kerala Transport Minister Antony Raju's office issued a press statement saying the Registrar of Trademarks has ruled in the Kerala RTC's favour. On Friday, Karnataka SRTC issued a statement, saying the "reports are factually incorrect as we have not received any such notice or order from the Central Trade Mark Registry as claimed until today". Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Transport Minister Laxman Savadi said: "Without any notice from the Controller General of Patents Design and Trade Marks we can't go ahead with Kerala's claim. We will discuss with our KSRTC legal team and explore all possibilities."

## 'RISE IN DIVORCES', GOA TO START PREMARITAL COUNSELLING

Goa Law Minister Nilesh Cabral Monday announced that the state will start premarital counselling sessions for couples registering for marriage, saying there was a rise in the number of divorces and annulments of marriage. *The Department of Registration will carry out the programme in the 15 days between registration and solemnisation of marriages. "Annulment of marriage is a concern. A lot of marriages are getting annulled in a matter of two to four months, a year or three years. Within our department, we were worried," Cabral told The Indian Express. The minister said while official data on the number of divorces or annulments of marriage was compiled by the department, it was not immediately available. "The annulment of a marriage has to be notified. If you go to the Gazetteer of Goa, you will see that there are at least 10-15 marriages annulled every 15 days," said Cabral. He said that as a "social responsibility" of the Department of Registration, they then decided to come up with a premarital counselling programme. "We should also take responsibility to sit with the couples after the first signature and tell them what their duty towards each other is, what their duties and responsibilities towards their children are, what their duties towards their in-laws are. We have made a small programme," Cabral said. He said that it will be a half-day classroom programme and couples will be issued their marriage certificate immediately after attending it. Cabral said the Catholic community in Goa already has premarital counselling for couples held by the Church. However, the government will now be holding counselling sessions for couples across religions and this will be a first in Goa. "Ours is a Uniform Civil Code in Goa. We were worried about divorces. We have not considered what other states are doing. We are a unique state," said Cabral. To introduce the programme, however, an amendment will have*

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



to be brought about in the existing laws for which the government may bring about an ordinance in the next session of the Goa Legislative Assembly slated to be held in July. "We are getting in touch with counselors who may have studied this. What we want to do is to help couples in understanding each other and tell them what the value of family in Indian circumstances is," said Ashutosh Apte, Registrar-cum-Head of Notary Services. The Goa government will rope in the Goa Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development (GIPARD) for designing the programme which, officials said, the government had been thinking about for about a year. "We have asked GIPARD if they can arrange for counselors. We don't want everyone to come to Panaji or Margao. We want to do it at the taluka-level so that it becomes easy for people to attend. Or there may be hesitation or resistance from the public to go all the way just for attending this (counselling session)," said Apte.

#### IMD INCREASES MONSOON RAIN OUTLOOK TO 101%

*The India Meteorological Department (IMD) expects more rain in the monsoon months of June-September than its April estimate. On Tuesday, it said monsoon rain would be 101% of the Long Period Average (LPA) of 88 cm. On April 16, it said the rain would be 98% of the LPA.* In the agency's parlance, this still constitutes 'normal' rainfall, which is anywhere from 96-104% of the LPA. The agency also said in its update that rainfall in *the northeast would likely see a 5% shortfall whereas over central India, which constitutes the core rainfed agricultural region, there would be a 6% increase over the usual for the monsoon.* Rainfall over the northwest would be 'normal' though this is a wide range from 92-108% of the LPA and that in the southern peninsula 93-107% of its normal. Seasonal rainfall is most likely to be below normal over the northeast (<95%) and above normal over central India (>106%), the update noted. "This year we expect a good monsoon and especially over the core agricultural region," M. Mohapatra, Director General, IMD, said at a press conference on Tuesday. *The latest global model forecasts say the sea surface temperatures at the Equatorial Pacific conditions are unlikely to significantly rise. There are also 'negative' IOD (Indian Ocean Dipole) conditions over the Indian Ocean during the monsoon season.* Put together, they mean that these larger climate factors are, as of now, unlikely to have a significant influence over the prevailing monsoon. "As sea surface temperature (SST) conditions over the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are known to have strong influence on the Indian monsoon, IMD is carefully monitoring the evolution of sea surface conditions over these Ocean basins," the statement said. The monsoon was to have arrived in Kerala on May 31 but the IMD, on May 30, said its advent would be delayed to June 3 because windspeeds and cloud formation over the Kerala coast hadn't picked up yet.

#### DECLINING FOREST BIRD SPECIES IN WESTERN HIMALAYA

With extremely cold winters and pleasant summers, the State of Uttarakhand is home to the Western Himalayan temperate forests which harbour a large number of endemic bird species. A new study that analysed these natural oak-dominated forests and modified forests has noted that there was a drastic loss of bird species in all modified landscapes. The researchers studied an area of about 1,285 square kilometres between the altitudes of 1,700 and 2,400 metres. Six major land-use types which included natural oak forest, degraded oak forest (lightly used), lopped oak forest (intensively used), pine forest, agricultural cultivation area and sites with buildings were studied. The results showed that there was a low diversity of species in monoculture areas and urban sites. They also noted a drastic loss of pollinator birds and insectivores in the degraded forests,

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



monocultures and urbanised sites. The results were published recently in *Global Ecology and Conservation*.

#### Habitat guilds

Ghazala Shahabuddin, first author of the paper *from the Centre for Ecology, Development and Research, Dehradun*, adds: “We also noticed strong decline in some of the habitat guilds in the areas that experienced land-use change. Habitat guilds are groups of bird species that have common habitat preferences. For instance, *forest specialists include species which forage and breed only in dense protected oak forests at this altitude, while forest generalists can adapt to modified habitats such as orchards and degraded forests.*” *The researchers noticed that many of the species that dropped out of the modified land areas were recognised oak forest specialists such as rufous-bellied woodpecker, greater yellownape, rufous sibia, white-throated laughingthrush and black-faced warbler.* Another paper published by the group looked at woodpeckers in the region to understand how they can be used as indicators of bird diversity and also to understand habitat degradation

#### Woodpeckers enhance

*They found that the higher the number of woodpeckers at a site, the higher was the richness of all other birds. “The cavities that woodpeckers make on trees are used by a number of other birds to nest in. This may be the primary reason how woodpeckers enhance the diversity in a region. Woodpeckers are known to abandon their cavities and even be chased away from their own cavity by other birds,” explained Tarun Menon, one of the authors of the paper who is currently a PhD student at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. They also noted that two species (rufous-bellied woodpecker and greater yellownape) showed great potential as indicators of forest quality as they were most likely to be found in dense canopied forests with larger and taller trees on which they preferred to forage.* “With tourism and other anthropogenic activities increasing in the region, we are witnessing rapid invasion by non-native species. One would not expect to see pigeons and Black Kites in these altitudes, but with increasing concrete urban ghettos, these birds have become a common sight now,” adds Rajkamal Goswami who was associated with the Centre for Ecology, Development and Research, Dehradun, while carrying out the field surveys. He is currently working with the Ashoka Trust for Research and the Environment (ATREE) and is one of the authors of the paper.

### IN NASHIK’S BUDDHIST CAVES COMPLEX, A CHANCE NEW FIND

Almost two centuries after a British military officer documented the *Trirashmi Buddhist caves — also known as Pandav Leni — in a hill in Nashik, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has found three more caves in the same area.* The antiquity of the caves — which may have been dwellings of Buddhist monks — is yet to be established; archaeologists studying them, however, believe they could be older than the Trirashmi caves. *The Trirashmi or Pandav Leni caves are a group of 25 caves that were carved out of Trirashmi Hill between the 2nd century BC and 6th century AD. The caves complex was documented in 1823 by one Captain James Delamaine;* it is now an ASI protected site and a tourist destination. Salim Patel, a ‘multi-tasking staffer’ at the ASI’s Nashik division, stumbled upon two of the caves on May 22. Following the chance finding, a wider search of the area by Senior Conservation Assistant Rakesh Shende, who heads ASI Nashik, led to the discovery

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



of the third cave. *ASI officials said the first two caves were discovered during the annual pre-monsoon cleaning of a drainage line on the hill. Patel was looking for a place to dump the soil, dry grass and dry wood that had been removed, when he spotted a cavity. "I went closer and removed the tree branches covering the cavity. I saw two cave-like structures that had been carved out of the rock. I immediately informed my seniors, including Shende sir, who were at the spot," Patel said. "I was thrilled. This is the first time something like this has happened to me in 25 years of my service," he told The Indian Express. Shende said immediately after the discovery, the site was cleaned and secured. "We will be documenting the three caves, and send the details to our head office for notification in the gazette. The public can't reach the caves now, since there are no pathways or safety railings. We will make the necessary arrangements once the caves are notified," Shende said. Atul Bhosekar, director of the Mumbai-based Trirashmi Research Institute of Buddhism, Indic Language and Scripts, who has been studying the caves for nearly three decades, said he had visited the site of the new discovery. The third cave, located close to the first two, was discovered when he was there with the ASI team, Bhosekar said. "These caves are on the opposite side of the current complex, and 70-80 feet above the existing complex. The caves have been carved out of a steep hill, and looking at the style of carving, it looks like these were monks' dwellings, older than the current complex," Bhosekar said. Two of the caves, he said, appear to have been shared dwellings; the third was perhaps occupied by just one monk. "All the caves have verandahs and the characteristic square stone platform for monks. There are special arrangements for monks to meditate, similar to the Kanheri and Wai caves," Bhosekar said. "The Buddhist sculptures and caves (in Nashik) are a significant early example of Indian rock-cut architecture representing the Hinayana tradition of Buddhism," he said. "The caves have images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and sculptures with designs of Indo-Greek architecture." Bhosekar's daughter Maitreyee Bhosekar, a Nashik-based professional archaeologist who is documenting the newly discovered caves, said: "Looking at the layout and architecture of these caves, it is possible that they were carved before the existing caves; however, their precise age can be ascertained only after proper study and comparison with the existing caves."*

#### WHAT IS THE SDG INDIA INDEX, AND HOW DOES YOUR STATE RANK?

*Kerala has retained the top rank in NITI Aayog's SDG India Index 2020-21, while Mizoram, Haryana, and Uttarakhand are the top gainers in terms of improvement in their rankings from 2019, according to a report released by the government think tank Thursday. Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam were the worst performing states in this year's India index.*

#### What is SDG India Index?

The Index for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) evaluates progress of states and Union Territories (UTs) on various parameters including health, education, gender, economic growth, institutions, climate change and environment. First launched in December 2018, the index has become the primary tool for monitoring progress on the SDGs in India. It has also fostered competition among the states and UTs by ranking them on the global goals. The SDG India Index scores range between 0-100, higher the score of a State/UT, the greater the distance to target achieved. States and UTs are classified in four categories based on their SDG India Index score — aspirant: 0-49; performer: 50-64; front-runner: 65-99, achiever: 100. *Currently, there are no*



*states in the aspirant and achiever category; 15 states/UTs are in the performer category and 22 states/UTs in the front runner category.*

#### What is the significance of the SDG India Index?

*The index is developed in collaboration with the United Nations in India.* It tracks the progress of all states and UTs on **115 indicators** aligned with the National Indicator Framework (NIF) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. *The index is a key tool for focused policy dialogue, formulation and implementation through development actions, in line with the global SDG framework.* It helps in identifying crucial gaps related to tracking the SDGs and the need for India to develop its statistical systems. "It remains a rare data-driven initiative to rank our States and Union Territories by computing a composite index on the SDGs. We are confident that it will remain a matter of aspiration and emulation and help propel monitoring efforts at the international level," NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar said. *From covering 13 Goals with 62 indicators in its first edition in 2018, the third edition of the index covers 16 Goals on 115 quantitative indicators.*

#### What are its latest findings?

*The country's overall SDG score improved by 6 points — from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2020-21 — on accounts of improvement in performance in providing facilities including clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy among others.* While Kerala retained its rank as the top with a score of 75, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu both took the second spot with a score of 74. Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam were the worst performing states in this year's India index. Chandigarh maintained its top spot among the UTs with a score of 79, followed by Delhi (68). Mizoram, Haryana and Uttarakhand are the top gainers in 2020-21 in terms of improvement in score from 2019, with an increase of 12, 10 and 8 points, respectively. While in 2019, 10 states/UTs belonged to the category of front-runners (score in the range 65-99, including both), 12 more states/UTs find themselves in this category in 2020-21. Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh graduated to the category of front-runners (scores between 65 and 99, including both).

#### TWO CHEERS

India's push in the right direction in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to clean energy, urban development and health has helped it improve its overall SDG score from 60 in 2019 to 66 in 2021, according to NITI Aayog's SDG India Index 2020-21. Besides SDGs on eradication of poverty and hunger, measures related to the availability of affordable, clean energy in particular, showed improvements across several States and Union Territories. The campaign to improve the access of households to electricity and clean cooking fuel has been shown to be an important factor. While this is cause for cheer, the Index reveals that there has been *a major decline in the areas of industry, innovation and infrastructure besides decent work and economic growth*, again made worse by the lockdowns imposed by the governments seeking to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. But the *stark differences between the southern and western States on the one hand and the north-central and eastern States on the other in their performance on the SDGs, point to persisting socio-economic and governance disparities*. These, if left unaddressed, will *exacerbate federal challenges and outcomes*, as seen in the public health challenges during the second wave





across some of the worse-off States. Notwithstanding the improvement in key indicators, *the Index has curiously made some methodological changes that render comparisons on some SDGs over previous years moot. The SDG on inequality shows an improvement over 2019, but the indicators used to measure the score have changed. The 2020-21 Index drops several economic indicators and gives greater weightage to social equality indicators such as representation of women and people from marginalised communities in legislatures and local governance institutions, and crimes against SC/ST communities. By dropping the well-recognised Gini coefficient measure and the growth rate for household expenditure per capita among 40% of rural and urban populations (instead, only the percentage of population in the lowest two wealth quintiles is used), the SDG score on inequality seems to have missed out on capturing the impact of the pandemic on wealth inequality.* This could be a significant miss as a UN assessment of the impact of COVID-19 had said that the South Asian region may see rising inequality. Methodological issues on measuring other SDGs have been flagged before, but the lack of adequate measurement of economic inequality seems to be a glaring miss. Like in the first wave, the second wave, with more fatalities, has had similar outcomes on livelihoods and jobs. *While the better score for India in its endeavour to achieve SDGs will bring some cheer, governments must work on addressing pressing issues such as increased inequality and economic despair.*

#### INS SANDHAYAK DECOMMISSIONED

*Hydrographic survey ship INS Sandhayak, the first of its class indigenously designed and built, was decommissioned after 40 years of service, at the Naval Dockyard Visakhapatnam on Friday in a low-key event attended only by in-station officers and sailors, in line with COVID-19 protocols.* At sunset, the Naval Ensign and the Commissioning Pennant were brought down for the last time onboard INS Sandhayak in the presence of Vice Adm A.B. Singh, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C), Eastern Naval Command (ENC), symbolising the decommissioning, a Navy statement said. The ship was conceptualised by the then Chief Hydrographer to the Government of India, Rear Adm FL Fraser, who had a strong desire for indigenously designed and built hydrographic survey vessels in India, the Navy said. *The design was finalised by Naval Headquarters and the construction began at Garden Reach Ship Builders Limited (GRSE) Kolkata (then Calcutta) by laying the keel in 1978. The ship was commissioned into the Navy on February 26, 1981, by Vice Adm M.K. Roy, then FOC-in-C, ENC. "Since commissioning, the ship has been the alma mater, nurturing the hydrographers of the Navy and laying the foundation for a complete hydrographic coverage of the peninsular waters,"* the Navy said. Also, the success of her design paved the way for all the survey ships in various modifications till recently, it stated. It said the ship had undertaken approximately 200 major hydrographic surveys and numerous minor surveys in both the east and west coasts of the country, the Andaman seas and neighbouring countries too. *The ship has also been an active participant in many significant operations such as Op Pawan (assisting the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka in 1987), Op Sarong, and Op Rainbow (rendering humanitarian assistance post 2004 Tsunami) and participated in the maiden joint Indo-US HADR Exercise 'Tiger-Triumph'.*

#### DAC NOD FOR BUILDING 6 CONVENTIONAL SUBMARINES

*The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Friday approved the issuance of a Request For Proposal (RFP) for the construction of six conventional submarines under Project-75I at an estimated cost of ₹43,000 crore.* At a meeting, it also approved

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



the procurement of air defence guns and ammunition for the Army at an approximate cost of ₹6,000 crore. “This is a landmark approval, being the first case processed under the *Strategic Partnership (SP) model*. This would be one of the largest ‘Make in India’ projects and it will create a tiered industrial ecosystem for submarine construction in India,” Mr. Singh said on Twitter on the submarine deal. *With this approval, India would be enabled to achieve its 30-year submarine construction programme envisioned by the government to acquire national competence in their building and for Indian industry to independently design and construct them*, he noted. *The SP model of the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) aims to promote the role of Indian industry in manufacturing and build a domestic defence industrial ecosystem.*

#### **MDL, L&T shortlisted**

The RFP is expected to be issued in the next couple of months, a defence official said. It would take at least two to three years for the deal to be concluded, and given the high technology and the long timelines, the cost would be spread over many years, a defence official added. *Last January, the DAC shortlisted Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T) as the Indian partners for the deal. The Navy will now issue the RFP to them, who would respond to it in partnership with a foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM).* As per the Navy’s requirements, *the submarines, all of which will be built in India, should be equipped with Air Independent propulsion (AIP) modules and be able to fire land attack cruise missiles.* Five foreign OEMs- Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME) (South Korea), Naval Group (France), Navantia (Spain), Rosoboronexport (Russia) and TKMS (Germany), have been selected. The delay in the deal was the extra caution at each step of the process as this was being done for the first time, officials had said. *The modernisation of the Army’s air defence guns has been a long pending proposal and the DAC accorded approval for the procurement of the guns and ammunition under the Buy & Make (Indian) category of the procurement procedure.* The Defence Ministry said that responses from about a dozen Indian companies had been received and “all of them have expressed their willingness and commitment to manufacture this complex gun system and associated equipment by ensuring technology assimilation in India.”

**DreamIAS**



## BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

### INDIA'S GDP FALL, IN PERSPECTIVE

On Monday, the Indian government released its latest estimates of economic growth for the last financial year that ended in March 2021. *India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 7.3% in 2020-21.* To understand this fall in perspective, remember that *between the early 1990s until the pandemic hit the country, India grew at an average of around 7% every year.* There are two ways to view this contraction in GDP. One is to look at this as an outlier — after all, India, like most other countries, is facing a once-in-a-century pandemic — and wish it away. The other way would be to look at this contraction in the context of what has been happening to the Indian economy over the last decade — and more precisely over the last seven years, since the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government just completed its seventh anniversary last week. Seen in this context, the latest GDP data suggests that it is not an outlier. Instead, if one looked at some of the most important variables in the data, *India's economy had been steadily worsening during the current regime even before the Covid-19 pandemic.*

#### **So has the Indian economy fared better during the seven years of the present government?**

Perhaps the best way to arrive at such a conclusion is to look at the so-called “fundamentals of the economy”. This phrase essentially refers to a bunch of economy-wide variables that provide the most robust measure of an economy's health. That is why, during periods of economic upheaval, you often hear political leaders reassure the public that the “fundamentals of the economy are sound”. Let's look at the most important ones.

#### **Gross Domestic Product**

Contrary to perception advanced by the Union government, the GDP growth rate has been a point of growing weakness for the last 5 of these 7 years. After the decline in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, the Indian economy started its recovery in March 2013 — more than a year before the present government took charge. But more importantly, this recovery turned into a secular deceleration of growth since the third quarter (October to December) of 2016-17. *While RBI does not state it, the government's decision to demonetise 86% of India's currency overnight on November 8, 2016 is seen by many experts as the trigger that set India's growth into a downward spiral.* As the ripples of demonetisation and a poorly designed and *hastily implemented Goods and Services Tax (GST)* spread through an economy that was already struggling with massive bad loans in the banking system, *the GDP growth rate steadily fell from over 8% in FY17 to about 4% in FY20*, just before Covid-19 hit the country. In January 2020, as the GDP growth fell to a 42-year low (in terms of nominal GDP), PM Modi expressed optimism, stating: “The strong absorbent capacity of the Indian economy shows the strength of basic fundamentals of the Indian economy and its capacity to bounce back”. As an analysis of key variables suggests, the fundamentals of the Indian economy were already quite weak even in January last year — well before the pandemic. For example, if one looks at the recent past, India's GDP growth pattern resembled an “*inverted V*” even before Covid-19 hit the economy.



### GDP per capita

Often, it helps to look at GDP per capita, which is total GDP divided by the total population, to better understand how well-placed an average person is in an economy. *At a level of Rs 99,700, India's GDP per capita is now what it used to be in 2016-17 — the year when the slide started. As a result, India has been losing out to other countries. A case in point is how even Bangladesh has overtaken India in per-capita-GDP terms.*

### Unemployment rate

This is the metric on which India has possibly performed the worst. First came the news that *India's unemployment rate, even according to the government's own surveys, was at a 45-year high in 2017-18 — the year after demonetisation and the one that saw the introduction of GST.* Then in 2019 came the news that between 2012 and 2018, the total number of employed people fell by 9 million — the first such instance of total employment declining in independent India's history. *As against the norm of an unemployment rate of 2%-3%, India started routinely witnessing unemployment rates close to 6%-7% in the years leading up to Covid-19.* The pandemic, of course, made matters considerably worse. *What makes India's unemployment even more worrisome is the fact that this is happening even when the labour force participation rate — which maps the proportion of people who even look for a job — has been falling.* With weak growth prospects, unemployment is likely to be the biggest headache for the government in the remainder of its current term.

### Inflation rate

*In the first three years, the government greatly benefited from very low crude oil prices. After staying close to the \$110-a-barrel mark throughout 2011 to 2014, oil prices (India basket) fell rapidly to just \$85 in 2015 and further to below (or around) \$50 in 2017 and 2018. On the one hand, the sudden and sharp fall in oil prices allowed the government to completely tame the high retail inflation in the country, while on the other, it allowed the government to collect additional taxes on fuel.* But since the last quarter of 2019, India has been facing persistently high retail inflation. *Even the demand destruction due to lockdowns induced by Covid-19 in 2020 could not extinguish the inflationary surge.* India was one of few countries — among comparable advanced and emerging market economies — that has witnessed inflation trending consistently above or near the RBI's threshold since late 2019. Going forward, inflation is a big worry for India. It is for this reason that the RBI is expected to avoid cutting interest rates (despite faltering growth) in its upcoming credit policy review on June 4.

### Fiscal deficit

The fiscal deficit is essentially a marker of the health of government finances and tracks the amount of money that a government has to borrow from the market to meet its expenses. Typically, there are two downsides of excessive borrowing. *One, government borrowings reduce the investible funds available for the private businesses to borrow (this is called "crowding out the private sector"); this also drives up the price (that is, the interest rate) for such loans.* Two, *additional borrowings increase the overall debt that the government has to repay. Higher debt levels imply a higher proportion of government taxes going to pay back past loans. For the same reason, higher levels of debt also imply a higher level of taxes.* On paper, India's fiscal deficit levels were just a tad



more than the norms set, but, in reality, even before Covid-19, it was an open secret that the fiscal deficit was far more than what the government publicly stated. *In the Union Budget for the current financial year, the government conceded that it had been underreporting the fiscal deficit by almost 2% of India's GDP.*

### Rupee vs dollar

The exchange rate of the domestic currency with the US dollar is a robust metric to capture the relative strength of the economy. *A US dollar was worth Rs 59 when the government took charge in 2014. Seven years later, it is closer to Rs 73. The relative weakness of the rupee reflects the reduced purchasing power of the Indian currency.* These were some, not all, of the metrics that often qualify as the fundamentals of an economy.

### What's the outlook on growth?

The biggest engine for growth in India is the expenditure by common people in their private capacity. This "demand" for goods accounts for 55% of all GDP. The per capita level of this private consumption expenditure, which has fallen to levels last seen in 2016-17. This means if the government does not help, India's GDP may not revert to the pre-Covid trajectory for several years to come. It is for this reason that the latest GDP should not be viewed as an outlier.

## SERVICES PMI SHRINKS, JOB CUTS ACCELERATE

*Activity in the dominant services industry contracted in May for the first time in eight months as lockdowns to curb the second wave of COVID-19 dampened demand, prompting firms to cut jobs at the fastest pace since October, a private survey showed. Despite a recent slowdown in reported infections, India is still recording well over 1,00,000 cases and more than 3,000 deaths a day, forcing most States to keep tight restrictions on business activity in place. The Nikkei/IHS Markit Services Purchasing Managers' Index fell to a nine-month low of 46.4 in May, from 54.0 in April, sliding below the 50-level that separates growth from contraction for the first time in eight months.*

Although Asia's third-largest economy grew at an annual pace of 1.6% in the first three months of 2021, just before the devastating second wave hit, economists are pessimistic about this quarter's growth prospects. Services firms intensified their job cutting spree last month, laying off workers at the fastest pace since October, bad news for a labour market that has already seen millions thrown out of work in the past year. *A decline in business expectations to its lowest in nine months may lead firms to reduce payrolls further in the coming months.* Input costs continued to surge, but firms were only able to pass on some of the increase due to weakening demand. *Despite an expansion in manufacturing, albeit at the slowest pace in 10 months, the contraction in services activity led an overall composite index to decline to a nine-month low of 48.1 in May, from 55.4 in April.*

## DEFENCE MINISTRY NOTIFIES 108 NEGATIVE IMPORTS

*The Defence Ministry on Monday notified the second negative import list — now renamed as the 'positive indigenisation list' — of 108 items that can now be only purchased from indigenous sources. The new list takes the total number on the list to 209. It is planned to be implemented progressively*



*with effect from December 2021 to December 2025*, the Defence Ministry said. “The second list lays special focus on weapons and systems which are currently under development/trials and are likely to translate into firm orders in the future. Like the first list, import substitution of ammunition which is a recurring requirement has been given special focus,” a statement said. The ‘second positive indigenisation list’ comprises complex systems, sensors, simulator, weapons and ammunitions like helicopters, next generation corvettes, Air Borne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) systems, tank engines, medium power radar for mountains, Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM) weapon systems and many more such items, it stated. The second list has been prepared after several rounds of consultations with government and private manufacturing industry confederations to assess future capabilities of Indian Industry which will be able to meet requirements of the armed forces, the statement said. “Not only does the list recognise the potential of local defence industry, it will also invigorate impetus to domestic Research and Development by attracting fresh investment into technology and manufacturing capabilities,” it said. The list also provides an excellent opportunity for ‘start-ups’ as also Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the statement said.

#### EXPORTS SURGE 67% NARROWING TRADE GAP

*India exported merchandise worth \$32.21 billion in May 2021, 67% higher on a year-on-year basis and almost 8% more than May 2019's pre-pandemic shipments. The country's merchandise trade deficit shrank to an eight-month low. Imports grew 68.6% to \$38.53 billion, compared with May 2020, but were 17.5% lower than the same month in 2019.* Major sectors that saw a spurt in exports in May, compared with the pre-COVID times, included *cereals, iron ore, cotton yarn and handloom products, jute, rice and ceramics.* However, *leather, tea, readymade garments, oil seeds, handicrafts and gems and jewellery, saw a significant dip over the same period.* The Federation of Indian Exporters' Organisations (FIEO) chief Sharad Kumar Saraf said that 19 out of 30 major product groups had recorded impressive growth over May 2020, and that the gradual opening up of major global markets was bolstering orders. ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar attributed the contraction in the trade deficit to \$6.3 billion in May from \$15.1 billion in April to the *State-level restrictions that widened over May and curbed domestic demand for both gold and oil.*

#### FISCAL DEFICIT NARROWER THAN FORECAST AT 9.2%

*India recorded a fiscal deficit of 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21, narrower than the revised estimate of 9.5%, as per data from the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) and official GDP figures released on Monday.* Total revenue receipts were about ₹88,000 crore higher than estimated, driven largely by higher excise and customs collections, while total expenditure was ₹61,000 crore more than the revised estimate, according to CARE Ratings chief economist Madan Sabnavis. *The CGA projected the revenue deficit at 7.42% of GDP, which had been assumed at ₹194.82 lakh crore in the Union Budget. Budget 2020-21, presented before the COVID-19 lockdowns, had set a fiscal deficit target of 3.5% of GDP.* The slightly better-than-expected fiscal performance doesn't necessarily bode well for this year's fiscal pressures, the Reserve Bank of India's significantly higher-than-anticipated dividend of ₹99,000-odd crore notwithstanding, opine economists. *The government has set a target to reduce the fiscal deficit this year to 6.8%.* Mr. Sabnavis pointed out that the higher-than-estimated expenditure in 2020-21 was actually driven by higher revenue expenditure of ₹75,000 crore. “Interestingly, capex was cut by ₹14,000 crore. Expenditure control



will be important for FY22, as pressures will be there on tax revenue due to lockdowns, while non-tax receipts will be higher due to RBI transfer of ₹99,000 crore this year,” he said. ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar attributed the spurt in revenue spending to the release of food subsidies, but higher-than-anticipated tax revenues helped curtail the deficit to ₹18.2 lakh crore from the estimated ₹18.5 lakh crore.

## WHAT DOES RBI’S LATEST CIRCULAR ON CRYPTOCURRENCIES MEAN?

Days after some leading banks cautioned people against dealing in cryptocurrencies, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Monday said banks and other regulated entities cannot cite its April 2018 order on virtual currencies (VCs) as it has been set aside by the Supreme Court of India in 2020.

### What did the RBI say and what was the trigger?

“In view of the order of the Supreme Court, the circular is no longer valid from the date of the Supreme Court judgement, and therefore cannot be cited or quoted from,” the RBI said in a notification to banks. *The RBI clarification came after State Bank of India and HDFC Bank cautioned their customers against dealing in virtual currencies such as Bitcoin citing the April 2018 order of the RBI.* Banks also warned customers that failure to adhere to the advisory may lead to cancellation or suspension of their cards.

### Does it clarify the policy position for cryptocurrency holders?

*The clarification from the RBI, which is developing its own virtual currency, is expected to give some relief to customers who have invested in cryptocurrencies.* As many Indians have invested in cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum, the RBI move will be a big respite for them and their money – estimated to be around Rs 10,000 crore — won’t be blocked.

### What are banks expected to do now?

Banks, as well as other entities addressed above, may continue to carry out customer due diligence processes in line with regulations governing standards for Know Your Customer (KYC), Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Combating of Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and obligations of regulated entities under Prevention of Money Laundering Act, (PMLA), 2002 in addition to ensuring compliance with relevant provisions under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) for overseas remittances, the RBI said. In other words, banks can’t take action against investors in virtual currencies following the court and RBI directives.

### What’s the RBI’s position?

The RBI’s 2018 position was more restrictive. “In view of the associated risks, it has been decided that, with immediate effect, entities regulated by the Reserve Bank shall not deal in VCs or provide services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling VCs,” the RBI had said in its April 2018 circular. “Such services include maintaining accounts, registering, trading, settling, clearing, giving loans against virtual tokens, accepting them as collateral, opening accounts of exchanges dealing with them and transfer / receipt of money in accounts relating to purchase or sale of VCs,” the RBI had said. The RBI had said regulated entities which already provide such services should exit the relationship within three months from the date of the circular. However,



the RBI which is against other virtual cryptocurrencies has warned people against such currencies several times in the past. RBI has indicated it's "very much in the game", and getting ready to launch its own digital currency. "Central bank digital currency is a work in progress. The RBI team is working on it, technology side and procedural side... how it will be launched and rolled out," Governor Shaktikanta Das said recently.

#### RBI HOLDS RATES, CUTS GDP FORECAST

*The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday left benchmark interest rates unchanged and reiterated that it would retain its accommodative stance for "as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis", as it cut its GDP growth forecast for the fiscal year by 100 basis points to 9.5%.* The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee, after taking stock of the evolving macro-economic and financial conditions as well as the impact of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, voted unanimously to keep the *policy repo rate unchanged at 4%*, Governor Shaktikanta Das said. Acknowledging that the sudden rise in COVID-19 infections and fatalities had impaired the nascent recovery that was underway, Mr. Das said the second wave had, however, "not snuffed it out". "The impulses of growth are still alive," he asserted. Ramping up the vaccination drive and bridging the gaps in healthcare infrastructure could mitigate the pandemic's devastation, he stressed. *The bank also marginally raised its projection for CPI inflation during 2021-22 to 5.1%.* Explaining the rationale behind the MPC's decision, the RBI Governor said the forecast of a normal monsoon, the resilience of agriculture and the farm economy, the adoption of COVID compatible operational models by businesses and the gathering momentum of global recovery could all provide tailwinds to revival of domestic economic activity when the second wave abated. "On the other hand, the spread of COVID-19 infections in rural areas and the dent on urban demand pose downside risks," he observed. *Noting that the retail inflation reading for April at 4.3% had brought some relief and policy elbow room, Mr. Das said a normal south-west monsoon along with comfortable buffer stocks should help to keep cereal price pressures in check.* On the other hand, the *rising trajectory of international crude prices* within a broad-based surge in international commodity prices and logistics costs was worsening cost conditions. These developments could keep core price pressures elevated, although weak demand conditions may temper the pass-through to consumer inflation, he said. Emphasising that upside risks to inflation emanate from persistence of the second wave and consequent restrictions on activity on a virtually pan-India basis, he said insulating prices of essential food items from supply side disruptions would necessitate active monitoring and preparedness for coordinated, calibrated and timely measures by both the Centre and States to prevent emergence of supply chain bottlenecks and increase in retail margins.

#### MOODY'S CUTS GDP FORECAST

*Moody's Investors Service cut its 2021-22 India GDP growth forecast to 9.3%, from 13.7% earlier, while noting that longer-term risks to the economy would increase if the second COVID-19 wave lasted beyond June and the vaccination roll-out remained a challenge.* "At this stage, we expect an outright decline in economic activity to be limited to the April-June quarter, followed by a rebound in the second half of the year," the ratings agency said on the impact of the second wave. *Following the 7.3% contraction in GDP last year, the second wave would push a recovery to the country's pre-*





*pandemic level out even further*, Moody's said, with a 'catch up' unlikely till the end of 2021. *In 2022-23, the agency now expects growth of 7.9% compared with its earlier expectation of 6.2%.*

While Moody's did not expect the government to enhance spending much from its Budget plans, revenue shortfalls and diversion of more funds to countering the pandemic would push the general government fiscal deficit to 11.8% of GDP this year instead of 10.8% projected earlier. The combined impact of slower growth and a wider deficit would drive the general government debt burden to 90% of GDP in FY22. Citing structural constraints and the limited effectiveness of reforms, Moody's said it expects India's real growth rate to average about 6% over the medium term.

#### RBI TO PURCHASE G-SECS WORTH ₹1.2 LAKH CR. IN SECOND QUARTER

*The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will purchase G-Secs worth ₹1.2 lakh crore in Q2 of FY22 under G-SAP 2.0 (Government Securities Acquisition Programme) to facilitate the smooth evolution of the yield curve.*

*The RBI would also purchase G-Secs worth ₹40,000 crore, including ₹10,000 crore of State Development Loans, under G-SAP 1.0 on June 17.* Previously, the Governor had indicated that *in addition to G-SAP, the Reserve Bank would continue to deploy regular operations under the liquidity adjustment facility, longer-term repo/reverse-repo, forex and open market operations (OMOs), including special open market operations, to ensure liquidity conditions evolved in consonance with the stance of monetary policy and financial conditions remained supportive for all stakeholders.* In the current year, the RBI had undertaken regular OMOs and injected additional liquidity to the tune of ₹36,545 crore (up to May 31) in addition to ₹60,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0. A purchase and sale auction under *Operation Twist* was also conducted on May 6. The RBI will continue to conduct regular operations for liquidity management, he added.

#### RBI ADDS HOSPITALITY SECTOR AID WITH ₹15,000 CR. CREDIT WINDOW

*The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opened a separate On-tap Liquidity Window to help mitigate the adverse impact of the second wave of the pandemic on certain contact-intensive sectors.* The move would provide liquidity of ₹15,000 crore till March 31, 2022, with tenors of up to three years. Under the scheme, *banks can provide fresh lending support to hotels and restaurants; entities related to tourism — travel agents, tour operators and adventure or heritage facilities; aviation ancillary services — ground handling and supply chain; and others including private bus operators, car repair services, rent-a-car service providers, event/conference organisers, spa clinics, and beauty parlours/salons.* Banks will be permitted to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the loan book created under this scheme with the RBI at a rate which is 40 basis points (bps) higher than the reverse repo rate. The hospitality sector welcomed the decision.



**PROVISIONING, CAPITAL BUFFER FOR BANKS, NBFCs MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER:  
SHAKTIKANTA DAS**

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday called upon banks to further strengthen capital buffers and build provisions to combat any possible stress that might emanate from the second wave of the pandemic.

*As RBI's annual report released last week pointed out, the capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of banks rose to 15.9 per cent in December 2020 from 14.8 per cent in March 2020.*

When asked about the NPA position for banks, the RBI Governor said "our expectation is that whatever projections we had given in our last financial stability report, it will be within that." *In its January financial stability report, the RBI had projected gross NPAs for banks at 13.5 per cent of their advances by September 2021 in its baseline scenario.* In its annual report last week, the Reserve Bank had said that the asset quality of banks would need "close monitoring."

**INSIDER TRADING: SEBI BARS 2 INFOSYS EX-STAFF; CO TO INITIATE PROBE**

*The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has restrained two Infosys employees and six other entities from trading in the stock market for insider trading in the company's scrip during the quarter ended June 30, 2020.* The market regulator in an interim order said it found that two Infosys employees — Venkata Subramaniam, senior principal, corporate accounting and Pranshu Bhutra, company's senior corporate counsel along with partners of Capital One and Tesora Capital — allegedly indulged in insider trading. *Sebi said illegal gains of Rs 3.06 crore has been impounded from Capital One, Tesora and their owners.* "The company will extend full cooperation as required to Sebi on the matter. Additionally as a result of the order, an internal investigation is being initiated and appropriate action will be taken on conclusion of such investigation," said Infosys in a statement. *Infosys said it has a well-defined code of conduct covering all its employees and an insider trading policy that governs dealing with unpublished price sensitive information.* Sebi said in its order Pranshu Bhutra had procured unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) from Venkata and was constantly in communication with Amit Bhutra of Capital One. According to Sebi, Capital One and Tesora had traded in Infosys in the F&O segment just prior to announcement of financial results for the quarter ended June 30, 2020 and, subsequently, squared off their positions such that their net positions were zero. Sebi said both Venkata and Pranshu had prima facie violated the provision of Sebi Act and PIT Regulations.

**EPFO BREATHER: MEMBERS CAN AVAIL SECOND COVID ADVANCE**

*Retirement fund body EPFO has allowed its over 5 crore subscribers to avail the second Covid-19 advance in view of the second wave of the coronavirus infections in the country.* Earlier last year, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) had allowed its members to withdraw Covid-19 advance to meet exigencies due to the pandemic. The members were allowed to withdraw three months basic wages (basic pay + dearness allowance) or up to 75 per cent of amount standing to their credit in their provident fund account, whichever is less.



*The provision for special withdrawal to meet the financial need of members during the pandemic was introduced in March 2020, under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), it said. An amendment to this effect was made by the Ministry of Labour & Employment in Employees' Provident Funds Scheme, 1952 by inserting therein sub-para (3) under paragraph 68L, through notification in the Official Gazette.*

The Covid-19 advance has helped EPF members during the pandemic, especially for those having monthly wages of less than Rs 15,000. As on date, the EPFO has settled more than 76.31 lakh Covid-19 advance claims thereby disbursing a total of Rs 18,698.15 crore. Members who have already availed the first Covid-19 advance can now opt for a second advance also. The provision and process for withdrawal of second Covid-19 advance is same as in the case of first advance, it said. Considering urgent need of members for financial support in these trying times, it has been decided to accord top priority to Covid-19 claims. *The EPFO is committed to settle these claims within three days of their receipt. For this, the EPFO has deployed a system driven auto-claim settlement process in respect of all such members whose KYC requirements is complete in all respects. Auto-mode of settlement enables EPFO to reduce the claim settlement cycle to just 3 days as against the statutory requirement to settle the claims within 20 days.*

#### EPFO, GOVT BODIES CAN'T REVISE CLAIMS ONCE RESOLUTION PLAN APPROVED: NCLAT

*The Chennai Bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has ruled that once a resolution plan for a debt-laden corporate entity is approved, even government-bodies like the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) cannot revise their claims. The case relates to insolvency proceedings against GVR Infra Projects Limited, which had not paid its EPFO dues since April 2014, including interest and damages, even though the same was deducted from employees share. As per rules of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), EPFO dues are part of workmen salaries and dues, which are accorded the highest priority and are to be paid in full by the resolution applicant when bidding for the company under corporate insolvency resolution process. The Chennai Bench of NCLAT, however, held that since the regional provident commissioner of EPFO had, while filing the claim with the resolution professional, quoted a certain sum, the same cannot be revised later, even if the total dues outstanding is higher than the sum quoted. In its judgment, the NCLAT held that since the provident commissioner had quoted a certain sum, the same was considered by the bidders while formulating the resolution plan, which was then approved by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). Once the said resolution plan is approved, a revision in claims cannot be permitted as that would mean changing the structure of the approved plan once again. "Once a resolution plan is duly approved by the Adjudicating Authority (NCLT) the claims as provided in the resolution plan shall stand frozen and will be binding on the corporate debtor and its employees, members, creditors, including the central government, any state government or any local authority, guarantors and other stakeholders," the NCLAT held. The Chennai Bench also said that once the plan is approved, all claims made by any persons or authorities stand extinguished. "No person is entitled to initiate or continue any proceeding regarding a claim that is not part of the Resolution Plan," the Bench said. EPF is a statutory due paid to every employee working in a corporate organisation with at least 20 employees. As per the rules of EPFO, both the employee and the employer contribute an equal sum towards a corpus. This corpus is maintained and looked after by the EPFO. When the said employee retires, a lump sum amount, which includes the contributions made by both the parties and includes the interest earned on the money deposited,*



is then paid the employee. *As per the current rules, employees earning less than Rs 15,000 per month of basic pay have to mandatorily become a member of the EPF, while those earning above that sum can choose to become a member with permission from the assistant provident fund commissioner, if both the employee and the employer agree. The current norms say that the employer has to pay 12 per cent of basic wages plus dearness and retaining allowance into the EPF of the employee, which is to be matched by the employee.*

#### GOVT SETS UP EXPERT PANEL TO FIX MINIMUM PAY, NATIONAL FLOOR WAGE

*The Labour and Employment Ministry on Thursday constituted an expert group to provide technical inputs and recommendations on fixation of minimum wages and national floor for minimum wages. This is the second expert committee on minimum wages formed by the government within the last two years. The earlier panel, headed by Anoop Satpathy, Fellow, VV Giri National Labour Institute, was set up by the ministry on January 17, 2018, to undertake an evidence-based analysis to determine methodology for fixing national minimum wage. The recommendations, which weren't accepted by the Centre, included setting the national floor wage at Rs 375 per day (Rs 9,750 per month) as per July 2018 prices. The expert group announced on Thursday has been constituted for a period of three years and is chaired by Ajit Mishra, Director, Institute of Economic Growth. It includes Tarika Chakraborty, IIM Calcutta; Anushree Sinha, Senior Fellow, NCAER; Vibha Bhalla, Joint Secretary; H Srinivas, Director General, VVGNI as the members and DPS Negi, Senior Labour and Employment Advisor as the Member Secretary. To arrive at the wage rates, the group will look into international best practices on the wages and evolve a scientific criteria and methodology for fixation of wages, a statement said. Under the Code on Wages, which is yet to be enforced, a National Floor Level Minimum Wage will be set by the Centre to be revised every five years, while states will fix minimum wages for their regions, which cannot be lower than the floor wage. The current floor wage, which was fixed in 2017, is at Rs 176 a day, but some states have minimum wages lower than it.*

#### MODEL TENANCY ACT: WHAT CHANGES FOR PROPERTY OWNERS AND TENANTS

*After releasing the draft in 2019, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Model Tenancy Act (MTA) to streamline the process of renting property in India and aid the rent economy in the estate sector.*

##### **Why this Act**

*As per Census 2011, more than 1 crore houses were lying vacant in urban areas. "The existing rent control laws are restricting the growth of rental housing and discourage owners from renting out their vacant houses due to fear of repossession. One of the potential measures to unlock the vacant house is to bringing transparency and accountability in the existing system of renting of premises and to balance the interests of both the property owner and tenant in a judicious manner," says the new Act, piloted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. States can adopt the Act as it is with fresh legislation, since it is a state subject, or they can amend their existing rent acts to factor in the new MTA. States and Union Territories have MoUs with the Centre under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban which has this provision. The government says the Act aims to formalise the shadow market of rental housing, unlock vacant properties, increase rental yields, ease/remove*



exploitative practices, reduce procedural barriers in registration, and increase transparency and discipline.

#### How it was conceived

*In 2015, before the Housing for All by 2022 Mission (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban) was launched, it was decided that 20% of the two crore houses to be created should be exclusively for rent.* The decision was based on a 2013 report by a Task Force for Rental Housing, which held that affordable rental housing “addresses the issues of the underprivileged and inclusive growth, in an even more direct manner than affordable ownership housing”. The Expenditure Finance Committee cleared an outlay of Rs 6,000 crore for a rental component in PMAY-U; the Centre would bear 75% with the rest borne by states, urban local bodies, or through NGOs or CSR activities of the private sector.

#### Where it applies

*After enforcement of this Act, no person can let or take on rent any premises except by an agreement in writing. Repeal of local rent control Acts has been a politically sensitive issue in cities with high-value rent markets, such as especially South Mumbai, where old properties in prime locations have been occupied for decades by tenants at negligible rent.* The Model Act has been in the making since 2015, but has been held up on this point. The new Act will be applicable prospectively and will not affect existing tenancies. The Act seeks to cover urban and as well as rural areas.

#### What's new

*States will set up a grievance redressal mechanism comprising of Rent Authority, Rent Court and Rent Tribunal to provide fast-track resolution of disputes. Disposal of a complaint/appeal by the Rent Court and the Rent Tribunal will be mandatory within 60 days. There is no monetary ceiling.* At present, in many old properties let out under archaic rent-control Acts, such ceilings have left landlords stuck with outdated rent amounts. *A digital platform will be set up in the local vernacular language or the language of the State/Union Territory for submitting tenancy agreement and other documents.* Rent Authority will keep a tab on these agreements. *Verbal agreements will be out of the picture, as the MTA mandates written agreement for all new tenancies which is to be submitted to Rent Authority. Tenant will continue to pay the rent even during the pendency of a dispute with a landlord. Subletting of premises can only be done with the prior consent of the landlord, and no structural change can be done by the tenant without the written consent of the landlord.*

#### Practices enshrined in the Act

*The security deposit to be paid by the tenant should not exceed two months' rent for residential property (six months' rent in case of non-residential property), and should be a minimum of one month's rent for non-residential property. The Act lists the kinds of repairs each party would be responsible for, with the proviso that money for repairs can be deducted from the security deposit or rent, as applicable, if a party refuses to carry out their share of the work. No arbitrary eviction of a tenant can be done during currency of the tenancy period, except in accordance with provisions of the Act. The Rent Court can allow repossession by the landlord if the tenant misuses the premises, after being served a notice by the landowner. Misuse of the premises, as defined, includes public nuisance, damage, or its use for “immoral or illegal purposes”. If the tenant refuses to vacate, the*



*landlord can claim double the monthly rent for two months, and four times the monthly rent thereafter.* In case of a *force majeure* event, the landlord shall allow the tenant to continue in possession until a period of one month from the date of cessation of such disastrous event, on the terms of existing tenancy agreement.



# DreamIAS



LIFE & SCIENCE

(M)THE TIME TO LIMIT GLOBAL WARMING IS MELTING AWAY (ALOK SHARMA - COP26 PRESIDENT)

This is an incredibly difficult time for the world. The world is facing two momentous challenges: *COVID-19 and climate change. Both need us to come together globally to find a way forward. World Environment Day (June 5) is an important moment to take stock on climate change.* When I was in India earlier this year — my first visit to Asia in my new role — I saw first-hand India's ambitious work on renewable energy, and held vital discussions with government leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, businesses and civil society. I was inspired by the resolve I saw.

**India's response**

*India has a strong record on tackling climate change, including impressive domestic targets to have 450GW of renewable energy by 2030, and establishing the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). India played a critical role in delivering the landmark Paris Agreement and we are working just as closely with India in the run-up to COP26, the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, to be hosted by the United Kingdom in Glasgow from November 1-12, 2021. Last month, Mr. Modi and the U.K.'s Prime Minister Boris Johnson committed through the 2030 UK-India Roadmap to work closely together on the best ways to drive the green growth agenda. They reaffirmed their personal commitment to work together for an ambitious outcome in November and sustained action beyond. When the U.K. welcomes the countries of the world to Glasgow in five months' time, it will be a moment to get the world on track to address the enormous threat of climate change and build a cleaner, brighter future for everyone. In 2015, the world signed the Paris Agreement, to limit global temperature rises to well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C, because the science tells us that would avoid the worst effects of climate change.*

**Emissions have to be cut**

*In terms of limiting warming, every fraction of a degree makes a difference. An average global temperature rise of 2°C, compared to 1.5°C, would see hundreds of millions more people affected. The Climate Action Tracker estimates that countries' current emissions reduction targets have us on course for average temperature rises of 2.4°C. To limit warming to 1.5°C, we must halve global emissions by 2030. So this is the decisive decade. This is what makes this year's COP so critical, and as hosts of COP26, the U.K. is pressing for urgent action around four key goals. First, to keep 1.5°C within reach, globally, we need to reach net zero by the middle of this century. To achieve this we will need to take strong action over the next decade. In the U.K. we have found that setting ambitious short-term targets backed up by a net zero target has given a clear signal that the future is low carbon. India will reach its own decisions, but I firmly believe India has an opportunity to show that a different development path is possible. An opportunity to be at the forefront of a new global green transition with all the benefits of jobs and cleaner air that brings. India has already proved it has the innovation and political will to do this. India has quadrupled wind and solar capacity in the last decade. Our second goal is to protect people and nature from the worst effects of climate change. Even as the world has been dealing with the novel coronavirus pandemic, the dangers of global warming have continued to become more evident. Having been born in India and having spent*



*time as the U.K.'s Secretary of State for International Development, I am committed that this COP will deliver for the communities most vulnerable to climate change. The two cyclones, Tauktae and Yaas, that hit India last month, show that we must act on the very real need for flood defences, warning systems and other vital efforts to minimise, avert and address the loss and damage caused by climate change. India's CDRI, which the U.K. is proud to partner on, is already a great initiative towards this.*

#### **Funding promise**

*Our third goal is for developed countries to deliver the \$100 billion they promised annually to support developing countries. The U.K. is pushing for all developed countries to increase their climate finance commitments ahead of COP26, to deliver the right flow of finance and technology to meet the needs of countries such as India in their transition. This is a personal priority for me, one that I am committing to work tirelessly to deliver — we need all developed countries to step up, as it is a matter of trust.*

#### **Working as a team**

*Fourth, we must work together to deliver on these goals. That includes building consensus among governments for an ambitious, balanced and inclusive outcome — so that the negotiations in Glasgow are a success. As well as bringing businesses and civil society on board behind our COP26 goals, and building up international collaboration in critical sectors. We must act now, to launch a concerted effort to reduce emissions throughout the next decade. And use the COVID-19 recovery to reimagine our economies, building a better future. I call on all countries to step up efforts on these goals, because COP26 is our last chance for keeping hopes of limiting global warming to 1.5°C alive, and our best chance of building a brighter future; a future of green jobs and cleaner air. This is our moment. There are no second chances. Let us seize it together.*

#### **(M)STRONG POLICIES ON BLACK CARBON CAN SHARPLY CUT GLACIER MELT**

*Black carbon (BC) deposits produced by human activity which accelerate the pace of glacier and snow melt in the Himalayan region can be sharply reduced through new, currently feasible policies by an additional 50% from current levels, a study by World Bank (WB) specialists has said. The research covers the Himalaya, Karakoram and Hindu Kush (HKHK) mountain ranges, where, the report says, glaciers are melting faster than the global average ice mass. The rate of retreat of HKHK glaciers is estimated to be 0.3 metres per year in the west to 1.0 metre per year in the east. BC adds to the impact of climate change. Full implementation of current policies to mitigate BC can achieve a 23% reduction but enacting new policies and incorporating them through regional cooperation among countries can achieve enhanced benefits, the WB said in the report titled "Glaciers of the Himalayas, Climate Change, Black Carbon and Regional Resilience" released on Thursday. "BC is a short-lived pollutant that is the second-largest contributor to warming the planet behind carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). Unlike other greenhouse gas emissions, BC is quickly washed out and can be eliminated from the atmosphere if emissions stop," the publication says. Unlike historical carbon emissions, it is also a localised source with greater local impact. Some of the ongoing policy measures to cut BC emissions are enhancing fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, phasing out diesel vehicles and promoting electric vehicles, accelerating the use of liquefied petroleum gas for cooking and through clean cookstove programmes, as well as upgrading brick kiln technologies,*

**3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**





says the publication, edited by Muthukumara Mani, lead economist, South Asia Region, World Bank. However, with all existing measures, water from glacier melt is still projected to increase in absolute volume by 2040, with impacts on downstream activities and communities. At a virtual panel discussion on the release of the report, Hartwig Schafer, vice-president, South Asia Region, World Bank Group, said regional integration and collaboration was one way to address the question of melting glaciers. Glacier melt produces flash floods, landslips, soil erosion, and glacial lake outburst floods.

#### Air temperature

Deposits of BC act in two ways hastening the pace of glacier melt: by decreasing surface reflectance of sunlight and by raising air temperature, the researchers point out. "Specifically, in the Himalayas, reducing black carbon emissions from cookstoves, diesel engines, and open burning would have the greatest impact and could significantly reduce radiative forcing and help to maintain a greater portion of Himalayan glacier systems. *More detailed modelling at a higher spatial resolution is needed to expand on the work already completed," says the study, calling upon regional governments to review policies on water management, with an emphasis on basin-based regulation and use of price signals for efficiency, careful planning and use of hydropower to reflect changes in water flows and availability, and increasing the efficiency of brick kilns through proven technologies. There must also be greater knowledge sharing in the region.* The WB publication says "Industry [primarily brick kilns] and residential burning of solid fuel together account for 45–66% of regional anthropogenic [man-made] BC deposition, followed by on-road diesel fuels (7–18%) and open burning (less than 3% in all seasons)" in the region.

#### (M) BLUE-FINNED MAHSEER OUT OF IUCN RED LIST

*The blue-finned Mahseer, which was on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) red list of endangered species, has now moved to the 'least concern' status, a statement from Tata Power said. The group is involved in conservation of the blue-finned and golden mahseer for 50 years in Lonavala. However, the golden mahseer is still in danger of going extinct. "The Golden Mahseer is still on that list, and... we... will not lie back till this endangered species too swims out of the red..."* a statement issued by Tata Power said. Around five lakh mahseer are bred at the Walvan Hatchery in Lonavala, where an artificial lake has been created. "It is here that the Blue-Finned and Golden species of Mahseer congregate. Once the eggs hatch, they remain in the lake for 4-6 months. They are then handed over to various fisheries departments across the country, who in turn introduce them into lakes and rivers in their states," the statement said.

#### SAVING BIODIVERSITY, SECURING EARTH'S FUTURE (KAMAL BAWA - PRESIDENT OF THE BENGALURU-BASED ASHOKA TRUST FOR RESEARCH IN ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT (ATREE), AND CURRENTLY LEADS THE BIODIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE)

On this World Environment Day (June 5), with the novel coronavirus pandemic raging across our vast country, we must reflect on the ways to rebuild our relationship with nature. India's vast and rich biodiversity gives the nation a unique identity, of which we can be proud. The varied ecosystems across land, rivers, and oceans, feed our people, enhance public health security, and



shield us from environmental disasters. *Our biodiversity also serves as a perpetual source of spiritual enrichment, intimately linked to our physical and mental well-being.*

### Staggering value of forests

And while the precise economic value of all ecosystem services provided by biodiversity may not be known, *estimates suggest our forests alone may yield services worth more than a trillion rupees per year.* Imagine how much greater this *value will be with grasslands, wetlands, freshwater, and marine added.* *Sadly, today, we face not only one of the worst public health crises but also worldwide declines in biodiversity.* Globally, we have *lost 7% intact forests since 2000, and recent assessments indicate that over a million species might be lost forever during the next several decades.* *Our country is not an exception to these trends. Climate change and the ongoing pandemic will put additional stresses on our natural ecosystems even though it is becoming clear that repairing our dysfunctional relationship with nature is one of the ways to mitigate climate change and curtail future outbreaks of infectious diseases that can bring unimaginable misery.* Thus, preserving biodiversity is directly relevant to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of our people. *We must rethink and reimagine the concept of One Health for all living organisms, including the invisible biota in soils that sustain our agricultural systems.*

### Investments in the field

Fortunately, our government is considering major investments in biodiversity science to meet societal needs. *In 2018, the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC) in consultation with the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change and other Ministries approved an ambitious National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being (NMBHWB).* A Bengaluru-based *Biodiversity Collaborative is working with the National Biodiversity Authority to hold consultations and prepare road maps of the Mission that will be steered by a core of the country's leading biodiversity science and conservation organisations, from public, academic, and civil society sectors.* *The Mission will strengthen the science of restoring, conserving, and sustainably utilising India's natural heritage; embed biodiversity as a key consideration in all developmental programmes, particularly in agriculture, ecosystem services, health, bio-economy, and climate change mitigation; establish a citizen and policy-oriented biodiversity information system; and enhance capacity across all sectors for the realisation of India's national biodiversity targets and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).* Furthermore, the Mission will allow India (*home to nearly 8% of global biodiversity on just 2.3% of global land area, and containing sections of four of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots*) to emerge as a leader in demonstrating linkage between conservation of natural assets and societal well-being.

### An important framework

*The ongoing spread of COVID-19 places this Mission among the most significant national initiatives. The pandemic has exposed the dysfunctional relationship between humanity and nature, and we must urgently address the issues it has laid bare: the emergence of infectious diseases; lack of food and nutritional security; rural unemployment; and climate change, with all its stresses on nature, rural landscapes, and public health. In response to these critical and interrelated issues, the Mission offers a holistic framework, integrated approaches, and widespread societal participation.* The Mission's comprehensive efforts will empower India to restore, and even increase, our natural



assets by millions of crores of rupees. Mitigation programmes will lessen the impacts of climate change and other natural disasters, such as pandemics and floods. *We can rejuvenate agricultural production systems and increase rural incomes from biodiversity-based agriculture while also creating millions of green jobs in restoration and nature tourism. Restoration activities across India's degraded lands, which amount to almost a third of our land area, alone could generate several million jobs.* The Mission will help India meet its commitments under the new framework for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and UN SDGs related to pressing social issues including poverty alleviation, justice and equity, and protection of life. It will generate a strong national community committed to sustaining biodiversity, promoting social cohesion and uniting the public behind an important goal. Mission programmes will offer nature-based solutions to numerous environmental challenges, including degradation of rivers, forests, and soils, and ongoing threats from climate change, with the goal of creating climate-resilient communities. Scientific inputs, especially related to geospatial informatics and policy, can guide the development of strategies for conservation and ecosystem management. *Equally important, the Mission's "One Health" programme, integrating human health with animal, plant, soil and environmental health, has both the preventive potential to curtail future pandemics along with the interventional capability for unexpected public health challenges.* Additional programmes, directed at food and nutritional security, will in turn also influence public health outcomes.

#### Need for a cadre

The planned Mission recognises that we need a strong and extensive cadre of human resources required to meet the enormous and complex environmental challenges of the 21st century. This will require training professionals of the highest calibre in sustainability and biodiversity science, along with an investment in civil society outreach. The gains of environmental change will be upheld and carried forward by the cultural change from environmental education for millions of students, from kindergarten to postgraduate levels. *Finally, biodiversity is everywhere, and we interact with biodiversity all the time in our daily lives. Public engagement, whether it is in the policymaking arena, or in exploration, restoration and conservation of biodiversity, is a critical component of the planned Mission.* Today, on the heels of the International Day for Biological Diversity celebrated last month, nothing could be more important than to renew our pledge to nurture all life on earth.

#### OUR INHERITANCE FROM THE NEANDERTHALS

*'Modern' humans have populated the earth from long before the Iron Age, for some 300,000 years, cohabiting Mother Earth along with other pre-human hominins. Who were these other people? Because bones of one of these 'others' were first discovered in the Neander valley, just east of Dusseldorf in Germany, they were called 'Neanderthals'. This hominin arose about 430,000 years ago and did not evolve in Africa, as Homo sapiens did. Early humans first encountered them when they migrated out of Africa.*

#### Compete or co-operate

Did they compete with us Homo sapiens, or was there cooperation? Answers to such questions have come, one fragment at a time, from studies on the genetics of populations from Asia and Europe in places where migration brought the two species face to face. The techniques for these



analyses are also advancing rapidly – all you need today is a bone fragment or, even better, a tooth – these are drilled to remove a few milligrams of powder, from which DNA is extracted and sequenced. Sometimes, you don't even need the fragment, dwelling places like caves have extractable DNA in their sediments! *Notable driving forces behind all these technical and intellectual advances in this field include the Swedish geneticist Svante Pääbo and the biochemist Johannes Krause.* 'Modern' humans *interbred with the locals* in these regions. *Recently a thigh bone of such a cross-bred individual became available*, as Dr Ann Gibbs points out in her column titled, 'When modern humans met Neanderthals',. *A more recent genetic analysis of one set of samples from the region showed that Neanderthals came to the Bacho Kiro cave in Bulgaria first, more than 50,000 years ago and left their stone tools.* Next came modern humans in two or more waves, and littered the cave with beads and stones about 45,000, and then 36,000 years ago. *Genome-wide data of three human males who lived in this cave 45,000 years ago show that all three had Neanderthals in their family lineage, from just a few generations ago.* This clearly showed that the modern human population in that region had interbred with the 'locals' and produced a cross-bred group of people – modern with Neanderthals. This cross-bred group had 3.4%–3.8% Neanderthal ancestry (in modern non-Africans it is about 2%). *The inheritance was in the form of long chunks of chromosomal segments, which grew shorter with each generation.* By measuring the size of these chunks, it is estimated that these three residents had a Neanderthal ancestor 6–7 generations ago. In another study, *a nearly intact feminine skull from the Zlatý kůň hill in the Czech Republic, roughly as old as the Bacho Kiro gentlemen, was found to have Neanderthal ancestors going back about 70 generations (2,000 years).*

#### Genetic connections

*Tracing the genetic lineages of these four individuals, it is somewhat surprising that no traces are to be found among today's Europeans. However, they are connected to present-day East Asians and Native Americans. The descendants of these Eurasian cave dwellers appear to have packed up and moved eastward, finally enduring the hardship of crossing an ice-age Bering Strait, and the luxury of visa-free travel, into the Americas.*

#### Conferring immunity

Further studies on the genomes of the Neanderthals themselves allow a comparison with those of modern humans and give us a glimpse of the genetic changes in the DNA sequences of the two. *The chunks inherited from Neanderthals were whittled down to 2%*, but what advantages did these newly acquired genes confer on humans? *Having adapted to colder regions for 400,000 years, the Neanderthals gave us out-of-Africa humans variations in skin and hair colour better suited to the cold, as well as adaptive variants for metabolism and immunity – to help better adjust to strange new food sources and to unfamiliar disease-causing viruses in the new environment.*

### THE LIMITS OF LIFE

A curious side-effect of sentience is the awareness of death. Medicine, wellness, meditation, philosophy, neural transfers, even literature and the arts — a great deal of human endeavour is tasked with either trying to prolong life, or deal with the reality of its end. It turns out that even the best efforts — at least those that aim at corporeal immortality and longevity — are bound to be futile. *According to a study published in the journal Nature Communications, the human body*



*cannot survive beyond the age of 150 years, eating right and exercising notwithstanding.* Researchers used a combination of data from blood tests from over five lakh people as well as mathematical modelling to conclude what we all know already: Everyone is going to die. *The body will deteriorate to such an extent that it will not be able to fight disease or recover from even minor injuries.* Despite the obviousness of the finding, its implications are serious. *Prolonged old age — already, human beings are, on average, living longer than ever before — means that the burden on the working population is bound to increase, and that retirement will have to wait for many.* After all, if you're going to live to 150, it's hardly possible to stop earning at 60. And, *to make matters worse, there is no guarantee that the quality of life at 150 will really be something worth living for.* The fear of death, and the futility of life, is of particular resonance now — the pandemic has made people confront their own mortality on a scale not seen since World War II. In the aftermath of that war, the absurdity of social norms and ambition was articulated by the existentialists. This time, perhaps, the lessons that are drawn will be a little more hopeful: At the end of it all, people may simply give up the race against death and see that there's more in the moment than planning for a future that can be robbed by a microbe.

#### POPE UPDATES CANON LAW TO ADDRESS PAEDOPHILIA BY PRIESTS

*Pope Francis updated the Catholic Church's criminal code on Tuesday by adding details on punishing sexual abuse crimes of minors by priests, measures long sought by activists against paedophilia.* Revision of the penal sanctions within the Code of Canon Law followed a years-long process involving input from canonist and criminal law experts and came after repeated complaints by victims of sexual abuse and others that the code's previous wording was outdated and intransparent. The purpose of the revision, the most comprehensive since 1983, is "restoration of justice, the reform of the offender, and the repair of scandal" wrote Pope Francis in introducing the changes. *Since becoming pope in 2013, the Argentine pontiff has striven to tackle the decades-long sexual abuse scandals involving Catholic priests around the globe, although many activists against paedophilia insist much more needs to be done. He convened an unprecedented summit on clerical sex abuse in 2019 while lifting secrecy rules that hindered investigations of abusing priests, among other measures.* The new code falls short of explicitly spelling out sexual offences against minors yet refers to offences against the sixth commandment, which prohibits adultery. Under the new heading of "Offences against human life, dignity and liberty", the code specifies that a priest is to be stripped of his office and punished "with other just penalties" if he commits offences against the sixth commandment with a minor. Similarly, a priest who grooms or induces a minor "to expose himself or herself pornographically or to take part in pornographic exhibitions" will be similarly punished. *One aim of the revision, wrote Pope Francis, was to reduce the number of penalties left to the discretion of judges, especially in the most serious cases.*

#### WHO'S NEW NAMING SYSTEM FOR COVID-19 VARIANTS USES LETTERS OF THE GREEK ALPHABET

*In the backdrop of communication from several countries and agencies to consider 'easy to pronounce' and 'non-stigmatising' labels for SARS-CoV-2 variant of interest (VOI) and variant of concern (VOC), the WHO Monday announced that it will be using Greek letters as labels for the two categories of mutations.* The WHO has said the *VOC B.1.1.7*, samples earliest documented in United Kingdom (September 2020) will be called *Alpha*; *VOC B.1.351*, samples earliest documented in

3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR AND 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



South Africa (May 2020) will be called *Beta*; VOC *P.1*, samples earliest documented in Brazil (November 2020) will be called *Gamma*; and *B.1.617.2*, samples earliest documented in India (October 2020) will be called *Delta*. The WHO, however, said that the established nomenclature systems for naming and tracking SARS-CoV-2 genetic lineages by GISAID, Nextstrain and Pango are “currently and will remain in use by scientists and in scientific research”. “To assist with public discussions of variants, WHO convened a group of scientists from the WHO Virus Evolution Working Group, the WHO COVID-19 reference laboratory network, representatives from GISAID, Nextstrain, Pango and additional experts in virological, microbial nomenclature and communication from several countries and agencies to consider easy-to-pronounce and non-stigmatising labels for VOI and VOC. At the present time, this expert group convened by WHO has recommended using labelled using letters of the Greek Alphabet, i.e., Alpha, Beta, Gamma, which will be easier and more practical to discussed by non-scientific audiences,” the WHO said. Significantly, on May 12, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare had issued an official statement that WHO has not associated the term “Indian Variant” with B.1.617— a VOC. “Several media reports have covered the news of World Health Organisation (WHO) classifying B.1.617 as a variant of global concern. *Some of these reports have termed the B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus as an ‘Indian Variant’. These media reports are without any basis, and unfounded. This is to clarify that WHO has not associated the term ‘Indian Variant’ with the B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus* in its 32 page document. In fact, the word “Indian” has not been used in its report on the matter.” MoHFW had earlier said.

## HOW CORBEVAX IS DIFFERENT

India has placed an advance order to block 300 million doses of a new Covid-19 vaccine, *Corbevax*, from Hyderabad-based company Biological E. What is this vaccine, and why is it important for India?

### How Corbevax works

*Corbevax is a “recombinant protein sub-unit” vaccine, which means it is made up of a specific part of SARS-CoV-2 — the spike protein on the virus’s surface. The spike protein allows the virus to enter the cells in the body so that it can replicate and cause disease. However, when this protein alone is given to the body, it is not expected to be harmful as the rest of the virus is absent. The body is expected to develop an immune response against the injected spike protein. Therefore, when the real virus attempts to infect the body, it will already have an immune response ready that will make it unlikely for the person to fall severely ill. Although this technology has been used for decades to make hepatitis B vaccines, Corbevax will be among the first Covid-19 vaccines to use this platform. Novavax has also developed a protein-based vaccine, which is still waiting for emergency use authorisation from various regulators.*

### How Corbevax was made

When the genetic sequence for SARS-CoV-2 was made available in February 2020, researchers at the School pulled out the sequence for the gene for the spike protein, and worked on cloning and engineering it. *The gene was then put into yeast, so that it could manufacture and release copies of the protein.* “It’s actually similar to the production of beer. Instead of releasing alcohol, in this case, the yeast is releasing the recombinant protein,” Dr Hotez said. After this, *the protein was purified*



*to remove any remnants of the yeast "to make it pristine". Then, the vaccine was formulated using an adjuvant to better stimulate the immune response.* Most of these ingredients are cheap and easy to find. In August, BCM transferred its production cell bank for this vaccine to Biological E, so that the Hyderabad-based company could take the candidate through trials. The vaccine has received approval for phase 3 trials, which the government expects will be over by July. Biological E is also expected to scale up production for the world.

#### WHO GIVES NOD TO CHINA'S SINOVAQ JAB

*The World Health Organization on Tuesday approved the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use — the second Chinese vaccine to receive the WHO's green light.* The UN health agency signed off on the two-dose vaccine, which is already being deployed in several countries around the world. "WHO today validated the *Sinovac-CoronaVac* vaccine for emergency use," it said in a statement. The move gives countries, funders, procuring agencies and communities "assurance that it meets international standards for safety, efficacy and manufacturing". *Last month Sinopharm became the first Chinese vaccine to be approved by the WHO.* The WHO has also given emergency use listing to vaccines being made by Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, and the AstraZeneca jab being produced in India, South Korea and the EU, which it counts separately. The listing paves the way for countries to quickly approve and import a vaccine for distribution, especially those states without an international-standard regulator of their own. It also opens the door for the jabs to enter the Covax scheme, which aims to provide equitable access to doses around the world, particularly in poorer countries.

  
**DreamIAS**