Mains CURRENT QIP –E&Y **June-2020**

**4E:EXPLAINATION-ELABORATION-ENUMERATION-EXAMINATION**

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# Editorial & You

## QIP- Mains-2020

## June 2020

Aspire IAS

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**4E:EXPLAINATION-ELABORATION-ENUMERATION-EXAMINATION**

## 1. The dimming of a Chinese strongman's aura

### Introduction

- To the outside world, China seeks to project a picture of monolithic unity behind President Xi Jinping's highly centralised leadership. However, media tropes point to a greater scrutiny of his role and leadership style, especially during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan.
- Reports have surfaced alleging delays in reporting facts, conflicting instructions and tight censorship.
- Observers have drawn parallels between Mr. Xi and his powerful predecessors, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, perhaps a tad unfairly to both the iconic architects of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

### A timeline of change

### Mao

- Mao presided over the founding of the PRC in 1949.
- He consolidated his leadership during the Long March in the mid-1930s. Despite his many detractors, he remained the undisputed leader of China until his death on September 9, 1976 even if, towards the end, it was the Gang of Four, led by his wife Jiang Qing, which had usurped power in his name.
- Mao banished his adversaries frequently, whether it was Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, or even Deng Xiaoping.
- Mao's reign after the founding of the PRC lasted 27 years. By comparison, the 67-year-old Xi Jinping has been at the helm for just under eight years.

### Deng Xiaoping

- Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader who never held the posts of either Head of State or Head of Government, changed China's economic destiny with bold and far-sighted policy shifts, ushering in the Four Modernisations of agriculture, industry, defence, and science and technology.
- The open-door policy, beginning the late 1970s, enabled China to emerge as the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment and a trade behemoth.
- Deng generally favoured a collegial form of decision-making in consultation with a clutch of senior leaders – the Party's "Eight Elders".
- Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, both successive General Secretaries of the CPC, were for long Deng's "left and right hands", but when they were perceived as



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deviating from the CPC's line, they were packed off ignominiously by the party elders led by Deng.

- From 1990 until his death in 1997, Deng's only title was that of the Honorary Chairman of the Bridge Association of China.
- Yet, he remained the unquestioned leader, wielding great power even in his dotage, long after his successor Jiang Zemin had assumed the top posts.

**Spotlight on Xi**

- The history of the CPC suggests that Mr. Xi wields less power than either Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping.
- He perhaps evokes more fear than respect on account of his ruthless anti-graft campaign that has brought down even high-ranking People's Liberation Army (PLA) generals and Politburo members.
- In the consensus-driven system of the CPC developed after the Cultural Revolution, it was not uncommon to target the gofers of rivals, but top Party and PLA leaders were generally considered inviolable to avoid retribution when fortunes changed.
- In contrast, Mr. Xi has put behind bars "tigers" such as PLA Generals and political heavyweights .
- Since reining in the pandemic in China, the Chinese economy has had a head start, but it is clearly not out of the woods.
- Economic hardship could spark off public dissent and harsher security measures.
- Indignation could lead the Chinese people, nurtured on hubris, to quickly direct their ire against a leader who has abandoned Deng Xiaoping's advice, so well captured in the abbreviated aphorism, "hide our capacities and bide our time".
- Having steered through a constitutional revision in early 2018 that permits him to stay on in power beyond two terms, no doubt Mr. Xi would wish to preside over not just the centenary celebrations of the CPC in 2021 but also the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the PLA in 2027.

**Trouble areas**

- Any use of force by China could drag the U.S., and perhaps its allies too, into the maelstrom, a view supported by the recent passage of the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act by the U.S. which seeks to inter alia strengthen Taiwan's de facto independence.


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- Contrary to tradition, Mr. Xi has no anointed successor. When he assumes the mantle again beyond the 20th CPC Congress in 2022, he will thwart the ambitions of an entire "sixth generation" leadership.
- The only leader after Deng to have an extended stint was Jiang Zemin who was General Secretary from 1989-2002, President from 1993-2003 and Chairman of the CPC's Central Military Commission (CMC) from 1989-2004.
- A recently leaked internal report of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), a think-tank affiliated to the Ministry of State Security in Beijing, purportedly warns China's top leadership of a rising tide of anti-China sentiment in the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak, the worst since the Tiananmen incident of June 1989.
- The hope, that an economically rich and prosperous China would gradually become liberal and democratic, has been belied.
- For now, the face-off continues and demands for accountability for the outbreak are mounting, testing Mr. Xi's leadership.

## 2. Open with caution-Unlock 1 plan

### Introduction

- It is a truth universally acknowledged now that the severe restrictions to contain COVID-19 produced traumatic displacement of the weakest sections, while the check on infection spread was modest.

### Phased Unlocking

- The Centre's move for a phased unlocking of public activity after the rigorous lockdown since March 25 sets the stage for people to resume their jobs and undertake some travel.
- The 'Unlock 1' plan should ensure a careful restarting of activities, the most important of which is the delivery of goods and everyday services, including health services unrelated to COVID-19 infections.
- Latest data since the virus surfaced in the country show that 13 cities, including some of the biggest metros, host 70% of the cases, and many of the earlier restrictions will continue there.

### Solutions

- Retaining curbs on big gatherings, such as in religious places, is reasonable, given the history of these sites unwittingly becoming super spreaders.



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- But States must show diligence in actively testing and quarantining individuals in cities with high incidence to significantly control the spread.
- Half-hearted approaches to implementing the measures mandated by the National Directives for COVID-19 Management, such as those on face cover, physical distancing in public places, shops and establishments, spitting, and gathering in large numbers, can only worsen the crisis, especially with resumption of public transport.
- Citizens who have accepted severe curtailment of liberties during the lockdown can be persuaded to adopt a healthy public behaviour code using measures that are civil, yet firm.
- A genuinely universal PDS with adequate supplies of foodgrain, ensuring that no one is left behind, must be provided in all States.
- Cash supplements should reach all intended beneficiaries. This needs to be underscored, as surveys of workers who lost jobs after the pandemic indicate rising hunger levels and missing financial support.
- Some sections, such as Dalits, women, and low-skilled workers are even worse off. For the elderly, vulnerable individuals and children below 10, the Centre's advice is to shelter in place even during the relaxation phase.
- The course of COVID-19 in the weeks ahead is by no means predictable, and the Centre recognises the possibility of new rural clusters emerging due to large-scale return of migrants.
- Whether in the cities or the countryside, 'Unlock 1' must prioritise some actions: create public awareness that the virus is present, ramp up testing, provide health services, and intensively monitor relief measures.

### 3. SpaceX Crew Dragon: A new era in space exploration

- On Sunday night**, two American astronauts** flew to the **International Space Station**, the **world's only space-based laboratory**, located about **400 km from the earth**, in a journey that has been undertaken hundreds of times earlier.
- It was the **first time that astronauts** used a **spaceship built and launched by a private company,** and the event is being widely seen as the beginning of a new era in space exploration.
- Two NASA astronauts flew onboard a spaceship named **Crew Dragon** built by **SpaceX**.



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- The **rocket, named Falcon 9**, which carried the spaceship into the orbit, was also built by **SpaceX.**
- The **Florida launch facility** used for the flight still belonged **to NASA**, however, and had previously been used to **launch American spaceships** including the Apollo missions that took human beings to moon.
- The mission was **called Demo-2,** in keeping with the fact that it was still only a 'test flight', which if successful, would lead to more missions in the coming months.

**What's the big deal**

- For NASA, it was the first flight of its astronauts on an American spaceship, launched on American soil, after nine years.
- NASA used to have a fleet of five spaceships under its **Space Shuttle programme**, that were used to make a total of 135 of journeys into space, and the International Space Station (ISS), in the 30 years between 1981 and 2011.
- Two of these were destroyed in accidents, the **Challenger** in 1986 and **Columbia** in 2003, each resulting in the death of seven astronauts.
- After the 2003 accident, in which India-born astronaut Kalpana Chawla was among those killed, the US government had decided to close the Space Shuttle programme.
- The three remaining spaceships, **Discovery, Atlantis, and Endeavour**, were formally retired in July 2011, even though they were fit for many more flights.
- It was decided that it probably no longer made sense for NASA to build and operate these spaceships. It was not just **costly**, but was also **consuming a lot of scientific resources**.
- The transportation needs could easily be fulfilled by space vehicles that some private companies were promising to make. Accordingly, it was decided to help and support these companies in building these spaceships that can be **hired by other agencies** as well, and even private individuals.
- The NASA collaboration with SpaceX and Boeing was a result of this.
- In the meanwhile, NASA hitched rides on **Russian spaceships** to travel to the ISS, for which it paid tens of millions of dollars for every trip.
- The new option is expected to be cheaper than that, besides offering the comfort of operating from home soil and eliminating dependence on a foreign country.

**Private participation, so far**



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- The involvement of private industry in the space sector is nothing new.
- There are literally hundreds of private entities building commercial satellites for their clients.
- **Launch services** are still a somewhat **restricted zone,** considering that it requires elaborate facilities and deep pockets, but here too, there are several players apart from SpaceX and Boeing.
- Many, **like Virgin Galatic** of businessman Richard Branson, have been already made space flights and hope very soon to **start offering passenger rides to space** whoever can afford to pay.
- In fact, last year, a spacecraft built by **Scaled Composites**, a US company, even took a **human being for a very short ride into space**, becoming the **first private spacecraft** to do so.
- In India the private space companies collaborate with the **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO),** in **building and fabricating the components** that go into making rockets and satellites.
- There are several that have started making satellites for their own use, or for their clients.
- However, **launch services**, including the **building of rockets or launch vehicles** to take the satellites into space, is something that is still some distance away in India right now.

**Window to the future**

- Sunday's flight also underlines the fact that space research and exploration is now a much more collaborative enterprise than earlier.
- The International Space Station itself is a good example of **international cooperation** in the space sector.
- The **space facility is set to retire somewhere around 2028**, and its replacement being planned is likely to have participation from at least ten countries, and possibly private players as well.

**Way ahead**

- There is also a growing realisation that space agencies need to direct their energies and resources more towards **scientific research and deep space exploration**.
- Private players are expected to **infuse fresh investments**, and also **technological innovation** that will benefit everyone.

**4. It's time for a universal basic income programme in India**



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**Introduction**

- The ongoing crisis is creating changes that could end up **dividing society into pre- and post-COVID-19 days**.
- These changes are also likely to exacerbate the novel **challenges accompanying the fourth industrial revolution.**

**Disruptive technologies**

- Today, **disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence** are ushering in productivity gains that we have never seen before.
- They are also steadily **reducing human capital requirements**, making jobs a premium.
- A microcosm of these trends can be seen in Silicon Valley. The region is home to five of the world's eight most valuable companies.
- These giants, all technology companies, have a cumulative market cap of **over $4 trillion**, yet they together directly **employ just 1.2 million people**.

**Tool to eradicate poverty**

- Many consider a **universal basic income (UBI) programme** to be a solution that could mitigate the looming crisis caused by **dwindling job opportunities.**
- UBI is also deliberated as an effective **poverty-eradication tool**.
- Supporters of this scheme include Economics **Nobel Laureates Peter Diamond and Christopher Pissarides, and tech leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk**.
- UBI in its true sense would entail the provision of an **unconditional fixed amount** to **every citizen in a country**.
- Nevertheless, countries across the world, **including Kenya, Brazil, Finland, and Switzerland, have bought into this concept** and have begun controlled UBI pilots to supplement their population.
- **India's huge capacity and infrastructure-building requirements** will support plenty of hands in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, even before the pandemic, India was struggling to find **enough opportunities for more than a million job aspirants** who were entering the job market each month.
- The **2016-17 Economic Survey** and the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** had once proposed **quasi-basic income schemes** that leave out the



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well-off top quartile of the population as an **effective means of alleviating poverty and hunger**.

- The **fiscal cost of a UBI pegged at Rs.7,620, at 75% universality, was 4.9% of the GDP**.
- A UBI on par with the numbers suggested by the Economic Survey could lead to **targeted household incomes increasing by almost Rs.40,000 per annum**, since the average Indian household size is approximately five.

**Different times**

- The times now are very different. IMF has **projected global growth in 2020 to be -3.0%,** the worst since the Great Depression.
- **India** is **projected to grow at 1.9%.** The U.S. economy is expected to fall by 5.9%.
- The unemployment rate and unemployment claims in the U.S., since President Donald Trump declared a **national emergency**, is **the highest since the Great Depression.**
- **Lockdowns** in some format are expected to be the norm till the arrival of a vaccine.
- With almost **90% of India's workforce in the informal sector** without minimum wages or social security, micro-level circumstances will be worse in India than anywhere else.
- The frequent sight of several thousands of migrant labourers undertaking perilous journeys on foot in inhumane conditions is a disgraceful blight on India.
- One way to ensure their sustenance throughout these trying times is the introduction of **unconditional regular pay checks** at maximum universality, at least till the economy normalises. If universal basic income ever had a time, it is now.

**5. Land of the unfree: On U.S. unrest**

**Introduction**

- If ever there were a doubt that **racism in the U.S.** had outlived eight years under former President Barack Obama, the events of this week, including protests following the death of an **African-American, George Floyd**, in police action in **Minneapolis, Minnesota**, have set them to rest.

**U.S unrest**


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- Even as rallies and police crackdowns engulfed a wide swathe of American metros, **President Donald Trump** inserted himself into the controversy and triggered a broader debate on **censorship of posts by social media platforms**.
- On Friday, Twitter masked and attached a caution note to a tweet by Mr. Trump for "**glorifying violence**".
- In that tweet he had labelled protesters calling for action against police for Floyd's death "**THUGS**", adding "**when the looting starts, the shooting starts**", a **reference to a threat** by a **police chief**, who in **1967** declared "**war"** and vowed **violent revenge on African-Americans** in **Miami Beach.**
- This is hardly the first time that the U.S. President has fanned the flames of hatred. He has said, among other things, that **Mexicans were rapists and drug dealers**, and in early 2017 he **banned visitors from certain Muslim-majority countries.**
- It is almost inevitable that **racial tensions** will bubble to the surface in an election year and explode when incendiary remarks are made by leaders.
- The mere tokenism of including persons of colour as a vice-presidential candidate or in a potential Biden cabinet of 2021 will not suffice to heal the painful fractures in American society, riven by hateful rhetoric on race.
- The balm must include far-reaching **legislative reform** on the use of excessive force by **police against minorities, punishment for all hate crimes, workplace discrimination**, and **inhumane treatment** of migrants at the border.
- Unless such an agenda, focused on the complete reform of government institutions toward supporting a **pluralist ethos**, is adopted by the next occupant of the White House, the American dream will remain a mirage for many.

**6. Ominous signals: on slowdown of India's economy**

**Introduction**

- India's economy is in a **severe slowdown** that is only going to get worse in a pandemic-stricken world.



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- Three months after Finance Ministry mandarins prognosticated that India's growth slowdown had bottomed out, the latest economic data has belied that prediction.

**GDP estimates**

- Crucially, the **GDP growth estimates** for the **January-March quarter** and the full fiscal year barely reflect the impact of the public health crisis and the stringent lockdowns, which were imposed nationwide only from March 25.
- The **NSO's** estimates show fourth-quarter and fiscal 2019-20 growth slumped to 3.1% and **4.2%,** respectively, **the slowest pace in 11 years.**
- The government says the **lockdown impacted data flow**, and **with statutory reporting timelines extended the estimates** would likely undergo revision.
- However, the fact **that Gross Value Added** numbers for the **first three quarters** have been revised significantly d**ownwards shows that the economic malaise was deep and widespread even before the novel coronavirus** landed on Indian shores.
- **Four of the eight industry sectors** that together comprise the GVA are now revealed to be in far worse shape than was reported earlier.
- This includes **manufacturing**, which contracted for a third straight quarter and **shrank by 1.4%** in the fourth quarter; **construction**, a major job generating activity that continued to weaken and **contracted 2.2%;** and the two largest services categories.
- The revisions in the **trade, transport, hotels and communications, and financial, real estate and professional services sectors** have cut third-quarter growth figures by **1.6 and 4 percentage points,** respectively.
- The economy is visibly mired in a **demand drought** that is unlikely to abate any time soon.
- **Private consumption** spending, which accounts for **55-60% of GDP**, extended a downtrend as growth **slid to 2.7%.**
- **Investment activity** contracted for a third consecutive quarter and **shrank 6.5%.**
- Data coming in for the current fiscal are revealing the devastating impact that the lockdown has had.

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- **Output at the eight core industries** that represent 40% of the Index of Industrial Production **contracted by an alarming 38%** in April.
- **Merchandise exports shrank 60%** in the same month.
- The RBI, which cut interest rates on May 22, was categorical in its assessment that a recovery would likely start only from the October quarter.

**Way ahead**

- The Centre's package so far has been focused on credit enhancement measures that ease supply side constraints and structural reforms that may bear fruit over a longer horizon. But the imperative now is to bite the bullet and opt for a **massive fiscal stimulus** that actually puts cash in the hands of consumers and the millions of jobless youth in order to help revive demand.

**7. India, China and fortifying the Africa outreach**

**Introduction**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been a great leveller across the world. But its effects stand to be **devastating particularly in Africa**, where **economic and public health conditions** are extremely vulnerable.
- Although African countries are still woefully **ill-equipped to cope** with a public health emergency of such magnitude due to **shortages of masks, ventilators, and even basic necessities such as soap and water**.
- Such conditions have meant that **Africa's cycle of chronic external aid dependence** continues.
- Africa needs **medical protective equipment** and gear to support its front line public health workers.
- As **Asia's two largest economies** and **long-standing partners of Africa**, **India and China** have increased their outreach to Africa through **medical assistance.**

**Beijing's donation diplomacy**

- **China, being Africa's largest trading partner**, was quick to signal its intent to help Africa cope with the pandemic.
- It despatched **medical protective equipment, testing kits, ventilators, and medical masks** to several African countries. The **primary motive** of such donations has been to raise **Beijing's profile as a leading provider of humanitarian assistance** and "**public goods**" in the **global public health sector**.


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- China's billionaire philanthropy was also in full display when tech founder Jack Ma donated three rounds of anti-coronavirus supplies.
- Beijing's '**donation diplomacy'** in Africa aims to achieve **three immediate objectives**:

1. **Shift the focus** away from talking about the **origins of the virus in Wuhan**,
2. **Build goodwill overseas**, and
3. **Establish an image makeover**.

- For the most part, it succeeded in achieving these ends until China faced widespread backlash over the **ill-treatment of African nationals in Guangzhou city**.
- The issue quickly grew into a full-blown political crisis for Beijing. But for the most part, **China has been successful** in **controlling the Guangzhou** narrative due to the depth of its political influence in Africa.
- Beijing used **African support** for securing a win for **Chinese candidates** as the **head of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and in the World Health Organization (WHO).**
- On **Africa's part**, the **problem lies in the deep disjuncture and credibility gap** between Africa's **governing class, the people, the media** and civil society.
- Even when criticisms have been levelled against Chinese indiscretions, it has hardly ever surfaced at the elite level.

**New Delhi's focus**

- For India, the pandemic presents an opportunity to demonstrate its willingness and capacity to shoulder more responsibility.
- Reaching out to developing countries in need is testament to India's status as a **responsible and reliable global stakeholder**.
- Nowhere has India's developmental outreach been more evident than in **Africa** with the continent occupying a **central place in Indian government's foreign and economic policy** in the last six years.
- **Africa** has been **the focus of India's development assistance** and also **diplomatic outreach**, as evident in plans to **open 18 new embassies**.
- These efforts have been supplemented by an **improved record of Indian project implementation** in Africa.
- India's role as 'the **pharmacy of the world'**, as the supplier of low-cost, generic medicines is widely acknowledged.



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- **Pharmaceutical products along with refined petroleum products** account for **40% of India's total exports to African markets**.
- India is sending consignments of essential medicines, including **hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and paracetamol, to 25 African countries** in addition to **doctors and paramedics** at a total cost of around **?600 million ($7.9 million)** on a **commercial and grant basis**.
- The **initial beneficiaries** were the **African Indian Ocean island nations of Mauritius, the Seychelles, Comoros, and Madagascar under India's 'Mission Sagar'**.
- A timely initiative has been **the e-ITEC COVID-19** management strategies training webinars exclusively aimed at **training health-care professionals from Africa and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations** and sharing of best practices by Indian health experts.
- Across Africa, there is a **keen interest to understand the developments** and best practices in India because the two share **similar socioeconomic and developmental challenges**.
- There is also growing interest in **research and development in drugs and vaccines**.
- A few African countries such as **Mauritius** are pushing for health-care partnerships in **traditional medicines** and **Ayurveda** for boosting immunity.
- The **Indian community**, especially in **East African countries**, has also been playing a crucial role in helping spread awareness. **Prominent Indian businessmen** and companies in Nigeria and Kenya have **donated money to the respective national emergency response funds**.

**The contrasts**

- Both India and China, through their respective health and donation diplomacy, are vying to carve a space and position for themselves as reliable partners of Africa in its time of need.
- There are significant differences in the approaches.
- For China, **three aspects are critical**: **money, political influence and elite level wealth creation**; strong **state-to-state relations** as **opposed to people-to-people ties**; and **hard-infrastructure projects and resource extraction**.



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- India's **approach on the other hand** is one that focuses on **building local capacities** and an **equal partnership with Africans** and not merely with African elites concerned.
- As these two powers rise in Africa, their two distinct models will come under even greater scrutiny. And both New Delhi and Beijing might find that they need to adapt to the rising aspirations of the African continent.

**8. Seven to eleven: On India and G-7**

**Introduction**

- Dismissing the current configuration of the "**Group of Seven" or G-7 of the world's most developed nations as "outdated**", **U.S. President** Donald Trump announced over the weekend that he would like to **expand it to a G-11,** by adding **India, Russia, South Korea and Australia.**
- He followed that up with invitations to their leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, to attend the **G-7 summit in the U.S.** later this year.

**G-11 - a way for the U.S**

- **Australia and South Korea** have also welcomed the invitation, **while Russia**, that **lost its membership of the grouping in 2014** over its **annexation of Crimea**, said President Putin would attend "**if treated as an equal**".
- Notable by its **absence** in the **proposed grouping is China**, which had earlier, along with **India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa**, been invited regularly to **G-8 summits** as an **outreach by the developed world to the five emerging economies (called the G-8+5).**
- A **White House spokesperson** even explained that the G-11 would be a way for the U.S. to **bring together** its "**traditional allies to talk about how to deal with the future of China**".
- Predictably, **Beijing** has lashed out at the G-11 idea, as one that would be "**doomed to fail**".

**India's role**

- The proposed G-11 grouping would **recognise India's place** amongst the **world's richest nations, and acknowledge its global voice.**
- However, the government **must weigh the benefits** proposed along with some of the factors that are still unclear.

**Issues**


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- As **host, Mr. Trump can invite any country** as a **G-7 special invitee**, but **changing its composition will require the approval of the other members.**
- Already, there are some concerns over Russia, which could derail the entire G-11 plan, making any concrete decision by New Delhi on the issue premature.
- It is **unclear when the summit will actually be held**, given the **November polls in the U.S**., although Mr. Trump has indicated that he could hold it close to the UN General Assembly session in September.

**Way ahead**

- Despite its border tensions with Beijing, **India must also consider its objectives** in attending a grouping that appears **aimed at fuelling a new Cold War between the U.S. and China.**
- Finally, an **evaluation of the G-7's effectiveness** as a **multilateral forum** thus far is needed, given **deep member differences** on issues including **climate change, security contributions, Iran,** etc.
- In France, last year, the **grouping was unable to issue** a joint communiqué due to these differences — a first in its 45-year-old history.

**9. India's Parliament is missing in action**

**Introduction**

- **Parliaments** in democracies around the **world are meeting and questioning their governments on their responses** to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**<u>Examples of different Parliaments of the world who conducted meetings through video conferencing</u>**

# The **Canadian Parliament** had its **first lockdown** meeting towards the end of April, with roughly 280 of the 338 Members of Parliament attending **through video conference** and **questioning the government for three hours**.

# The **British Parliament** has adopted a **hybrid model of in-person and video attendance**.

# Several other countries have held sessions either with **physical distancing** (fewer MPs attend with agreement across parties) or **video conferencing or a combination of the two**.

# These include **France, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand**.



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# The **Inter Parliamentary Union(HQ: Geneva)** has documented the processes used by **various national parliaments** to meet during the pandemic.

**India's Parliament**

- India's Parliament, which prides itself as the **apex representative body** of the **world's largest democracy**, is a notable absentee from this list.
- Parliament has a **central role in our system of governance**. First and foremost, **it is the institution that checks and challenges the government** of the day.
- While introducing the draft Constitution, **B.R. Ambedkar** explained why the drafting committee had preferred a parliamentary form over the presidential system of governance.
- The reasoning was that while the **presidential system provides a higher level of stability**, **the parliamentary system is better at holding the government to accoun**t on a daily basis through **questions, motions and debates**.
- Over the decades, our **Parliament has evolved procedures of accountability** including hearings of committees.
- The fact that Parliament and its committees have **not met for over two months** indicates the **absence of scrutiny of government** actions.
- **National laws** are made by Parliament.
- The current steps by the central government are being taken under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**, which **was not designed to handle epidemics**.
- The reasoning is that the **central government had no choice** as there was **no other law** that provide it with powers **to impose a lockdown across the country**, which was needed to arrest the spread of the disease.
- This misses the point that **Parliament,** which was meeting till a day before the national lockdown was announced**, could have passed an appropriate Act**.
- This is what many other countries have done — an Act with suitable checks and an expiry date, which could be renewed by Parliament, if required.
- The **Constitution requires all expenditure by the government** to be **approved by Parliament**.



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- The government has announced a **series of measures** to address the economic crisis sparked by the health crisis and the lockdown. **These have not been subject to parliamentary scrutiny or approval.**

**The pressing issues**

- **MPs have a duty to shape policy and guide** the government in **national interest**.
- They represent the **concerns of people** by **raising issues** in Parliament.
- The country is **facing serious challenges** on many fronts as a consequence of the pandemic. These include **addressing questions** on **how to stall the epidemic** from spreading, **how to treat people** who are infected, and **how to minimise** the loss of life to the virus.
- There is also the question of **how the economy is impacted**, both from the supply side due to the lockdown, and from the demand side as incomes and spending contract.
- Then there is the **large humanitarian question** of mitigating the impact on the most **vulnerable sections** of the population, both the **urban poor and in rural areas**.
- There have been several news reports of **migrants being mistreated**, not provided transport, being harassed by the police — and **being stripped of their dignity**, even in cases where they have been provided with food and shelter.
- **Parliament is the forum** where such issues should be discussed and a plan of action agreed upon.

**How Indian parliament can hold its meetings ?**

- Our Constitution **does not prohibit meetings** that may require maintenance of physical distancing or remote meetings.
- It states that the **President may summon** Parliament "to **meet at such time and place as he thinks fit**".
- The **Rules of Procedure of both Houses** require the **Secretary-General** to **issue summons** to each member specifying the "**date and place for a session**" of the House.
- These enabling clauses can be used to **hold hybrid meetings** or **remote meetings**.
- The **Rules require parliamentary committees to sit within the "precincts"** of the House **but the Speaker may permit meetings** to be



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held outside; indeed, **subcommittees often go on study tours outside Delhi.**

- Thus, there is **no prior parliamentary action required to permit meetings through video-conferencing.**

**Secure connectivity**

- The question of security and secrecy may come up.
- The **meetings of the Houses** are **usually telecast live**, and there is no issue of confidentiality.
- **Committee meetings**, on the other hand, **may require secure remote working tools**.
- Given that large **global corporations** as well as **parliamentary committees** of several other countries seem to have solved this problem, there is no reason that the Indian Parliament cannot adapt these solutions.
- All **district headquarters** are **linked with fibre optic lines**, so even if there is a problem of connecting the constituency office of MPs, they could use such government facilities.
- Over the last three months, **central and State governments** have **issued over 5,000 notifications** to **deal** with the **COVID-19 pandemic**.
- The **appropriateness** of these **circulars need to be examined** by Parliament and its committees.

**Way ahead**

- In ordinary times, **Parliament would have its next session** in the second half of July. In today's extraordinary circumstances, **Parliament should meet sooner**, perhaps within a couple of weeks.
- India prides itself on being the **world's largest democracy** as well as **the information technology provider** to the world.
- It is imperative that Parliament harnesses the country's IT strengths to buttress our credentials as a performing democracy.

**10. Shine a light: On retraction of a research paper**

**About News**

- **Study in The Lancet, perhaps the most influential medical journal in the world, found no benefit from the use of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a well-known antimalarial**, to treat sick COVID-19 patients.


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- Today, that study stands retracted. As it had relied on a huge dataset of about 96,000 patients sourced from 671 hospitals in six continents, t**he World Health Organization, citing a 'do no harm' principle, suspended drug trials pending a safety review.** This led to some countries in Europe withdrawing the drug from their own trials.

**Important Points**

- **Another study involving some of the same authors and relying on the same data published in The New England Journal of Medicine, which sought to answer questions on the associations between cardiovascular disease,** COVID-19 and drugs that target the enzymes that play a role in facilitating the virus in attacking a host, has also been retracted.
- The Lancet study triggered a backlash from scientists who found problems with the methodology and, more importantly, the dataset.
- It emerged that mortality attributed to the disease in Australia did not match with the country's own estimates; there was no way to tally patient records and the hospitals they were sourced from; and there were problems with the statistics deployed and the conclusions about the potential risk from the drug.
- **The bigger concern was that the data was supplied by Surgisphere Corporation**, which had a handful of employees with limited scientific expertise, and claimed to have aggregated its numbers by compiling electronic health records in less than two months.
- **Experienced clinical trial specialists said this was a labour-intensive process.**
- Moreover, when aspersions about the data started to swirl, the company, citing client confidentiality, said it was unable to share its data sources for independent assessment.
- **In their retractions, the journals have blamed Surgisphere for being opaque with its primary data. So far, neither journal has introspected on the peer-review process that led to these studies being published in the first place**.
- In hindsight it seems obvious that a disinterested analysis would have raised eyebrows regarding data sourcing, but the post-COVID world is a panic-driven one that has left no institution or appraisal process untouched.
- The average peer-review takes weeks and the clinical trial process months, but now the expectation is that science delivers its results like magic.


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- For years now, questions have been raised on the effectiveness of the traditional, time-consuming peer-review process and this has launched a welcome culture of papers being uploaded as preprints for review. In the present instance of the HCQ imbroglio, it is the independent effort by external scientists that brought the blight to light.

**Way forward**

- **The key lesson is that it is a mistake to assume the scientific process as one divorced from the influence of power, privilege, finance and politics.** The means and methods to a scientific result matter more than results — only achieved through global scrutiny. Openness, more than blame game, is what the post-COVID world needs now.

**11. A right time to shift pharma gears**

**Background**

- **We are living in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic — anxious about our families, our friends and ourselves, depressed by worldwide suffering and anxiety, upset by knowing that once more the poor and marginalised are worse affected. Could the rules and practices organising health care around the world have been better suited to this outbreak**. Consider the Health Impact Fund as a plausible institutional reform of the current regime for developing and marketing new pharmaceuticals.

**Data**

- *Medicines are among humanity's greatest achievements.* They have helped attain dramatic improvements in health and longevity as well as huge cost savings through reduced sick days and hospitalizations.
- The **global market for pharmaceuticals is currently worth ?110 crore annually, 1.7% of the gross world product (IPFPA 2017, 5). Roughly 55% of this global pharmaceutical spending, ?60 lakh crore, is for brand-name products, which are typically under patent**.

**What to do**

- **Commercial pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) efforts are encouraged and rewarded through the earnings that innovators derive from sales of their branded products.**
- **These earnings largely depend on the 20-year product patents they are entitled to obtain in WTO member states.** Such patents give them a



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temporary monopoly, enabling them to sell their new products without competition at a price far above manufacture and distribution costs.

**Problem**

- **In the United States, thousandfold (100000%) markups over production costs are not atypical. In India, the profit-maximising monopoly price of a new medicine is much lower**, but similarly unaffordable for most citizens.
- To be sure, before such huge markups can yield any profits, commercial pharmaceutical innovators must first cover their large R&D costs, currently Rs.14 lakh crore a year (Mikulic 2020), including the cost of clinical trials needed to demonstrate safety and efficacy, the cost of capital tied up during the long development process, and the cost of any research efforts that fail somewhere along the way.

**R&D and concerns**

- While we should evidently continue funding pharmaceutical R&D, it is worth asking whether our current way of doing so is optimal.

**There are three main concerns**

- **First,** innovators motivated by the prospect of large markups tend to neglect diseases suffered mainly by poor people, who cannot afford expensive medicines. The 20 WHO-listed neglected tropical diseases together afflict over one billion people (WHO n.d.) but attract only 0.35% of the pharmaceutical industry's R&D (IFPMA 2017, 15 and 21). Merely 0.12% of this R&D spending is devoted to tuberculosis and malaria, which kill 1.7 million people each year.
- **Second,** thanks to a large number of affluent or well-insured patients, the profit-maximising price of a new medicine tends to be quite high. Consequently, most people around the world cannot afford advanced medicines that are still under patent. Every year, millions suffer and die from lack of access to medicines that can be mass-produced quite cheaply.
- **Third,** rewards for developing and then providing pharmaceutical products are poorly correlated with therapeutic value. Firms earn billions by developing duplicative drugs that add little to our pharmaceutical toolbox — and billions more by cleverly marketing their drugs for patients who won't benefit. These large R&D investments would be much better spent on developing new life-saving treatments for deadly diseases plaguing the world's poor.

***To address these problems, we propose a complement to the present regime: the Health Impact Fund*** as an alternative track on which


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pharmaceutical innovators may choose to be rewarded. Any new medicine registered with the Health Impact Fund would have to be sold at or below the variable cost of manufacture and distribution, but would earn ten annual reward payments based on the health gains achieved with it.

**On funding**

- **The Health Impact Fund could start with as little as ?20000 crore per annum and might then attract some 10-12 medicines, with one entering and one exiting in a typical year. Registered products would then earn some ?17000-?20000 crore, on average, during their first ten years.** Of course, some would earn more than others – by having greater therapeutic value or by benefiting more people.
- **Long-term funding for the Health Impact Fund might come from willing governments — contributing in proportion to their gross national incomes — or from an international tax, perhaps on greenhouse gas emissions or speculative financial transactions.** Non-contributing affluent countries would forgo the benefits: the pricing constraint on registered products would not apply to them. This gives innovators more reason to register (they can still sell their product at high prices in some affluent countries) and affluent countries reason to join

**Benefits**

- The Health Impact Fund would get pharmaceutical firms interested in certain R&D projects that are unprofitable under the current regime – especially ones expected to produce large health gains among mostly poor people.
- Such projects would predominantly address communicable diseases, which continue to impose devastating disease burdens mainly upon the poor.
- With the Health Impact Fund in place, there would be much deeper and broader knowledge about such diseases, a richer arsenal of effective interventions and greater capacities for developing additional, more targeted responses quickly. Pharmaceutical innovators would thus have been much better prepared to supply or develop suitable medicines for containing the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Health Impact Fund would make an important difference also by rewarding for health outcomes rather than sales. For selling a medicine, it helps, of course, if this medicine is known to be effective.

**Way Forward**


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- **For achieving health gains with their product, innovators need different strategies. They need to think holistically about how their drug can work in the context of, or in synergy with, other factors relevant to treatment outcomes.**
- **They need to think about therapies and diagnostics together, in order to identify and reach the patients who can benefit most.**
- **They need to monitor results in real time to recognize and address possible impediments to uptake or therapeutic success.**
- They need to ensure that high-value patients have affordable access to the drug and are properly instructed and motivated to make optimal use of it with the drug still in prime condition. In sum, a reward mechanism oriented towards health gains rather than high-markup sales would lead to a sustainable research-and-marketing system that is better prepared for fast and effective responses to outbreaks of unknown diseases, such as COVID-19.

**12. What is Gross Value Added, and how is it relevant when growth is announced in GDP terms?**

***Why are the GVA figures in focus now? How is the GVA data relevant when economic growth is announced in GDP terms?***

**Background**

- **The National Statistical Office (NSO), on May 29, released its provisional estimates of national income for the financial year 2019-20**.
- As per the NSO, real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the full fiscal year was estimated to have **expanded by 4.2% from a year earlier, the slowest pace of growth in 11 years**. And GDP growth for the January-March quarter was pegged at 3.1%.
- The release also detailed the estimates of the Gross Value Added, or GVA, at basic prices for the four quarters of 2019 as well as the comparable quarterly data for the two preceding years.
- Interestingly, the GVA numbers for the first three quarters revealed significant revisions from what the NSO had shared back in February, when it had announced estimates for the third quarter.
- While initial estimates are routinely revised based on the updated availability of information, the extent of these revisions has come into focus since they


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point to a sharper and more widespread slowdown in economic activity over the course of the last financial year than had been previously revealed.

**What is Gross Value Added (GVA)?**

- In 2015, in the wake of a comprehensive review of its approach to GDP measurement, India opted to make major changes to its compilation of national accounts and bring the whole process into conformity with the **United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA) of 2008** (**PT**).
- As per the SNA, gross value added, is defined as **the value of output minus the value of intermediate consumption and is a measure of the contribution to GDP** made by an individual producer, industry or sector.
- At its simplest it gives the rupee value of goods and services produced in the economy after deducting the cost of inputs and raw materials used.
- GVA can be described as the main entry on the income side of the nation's accounting balance sheet, and from an economics perspective represents the supply side.
- While India had been measuring GVA earlier, it had done so using 'factor cost' and GDP at 'factor cost' was the main parameter for measuring the country's overall economic output till the new methodology was adopted.
- In the new series, in which the base year was shifted to 2011-12 from the earlier 2004-05, GVA at basic prices became the primary measure of output across the economy's various sectors and when added to net taxes on products amounts to the GDP.
- As part of the data on GVA, the NSO provides both quarterly and annual estimates of output — measured by the gross value added — by economic activity.

The sectoral classification provides data on **eight broad categories that span the gamut of goods produced and services provided in the economy.** These are:

1) Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing;
2) Mining and Quarrying;
3) Manufacturing;
4) Electricity, Gas, Water Supply and other Utility Services;
5) Construction;
6) Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication and Services related to Broadcasting;
7) Financial, Real Estate and Professional Services;
8) Public Administration, Defence and other Services.


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**Why are the latest GVA numbers attracting attention?**

In February, the NSO announced estimates of national income and expenditure for the fiscal third quarter along with its second advance estimates of GDP for 2019-20. Those estimates had pegged year-on-year GVA growth rates in the first three quarters at 5.4%, 4.8% and 4.5%, respectively.

- **The February estimates also suggested that manufacturing, construction, electricity and utility services and the trade, hotels and transport (another services category) sectors apart**, the other four sectors were faring at about the same level or better than the comparable year earlier periods.
- However, last month's estimates saw significant downward revisions in the GVA data pertaining to the first three quarters for five of the eight sectors, dragging down the Q1, Q2 and Q3 GVA growth rates to 4.8%, 4.3% and 3.5%.
- The revisions, combined with a lacklustre performance in the fourth quarter, including a sharp weakening in momentum at two of the largest services sectors ultimately lowered the overall annual GVA growth estimate for 2019-20 by as much as 1 percentage point to 3.9%, from the 4.9% forecast in February.
- A closer look at some of the sectoral revisions point to a deeper weakness in the service sectors than had been previously factored in.
- Take Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communications and Services related to Broadcasting. As a sector it contributes almost 20% to GVA and is the largest GVA component after the other major services category, Financial, Real Estate and Professional Services.
- While in February Q1, Q2 and Q3 growth for the sector was estimated at 5.7%, 5.8% and 5.9%, respectively, in the latest estimates they have been cut to 3.5%, 4.1% and 4.3%, respectively.
- Similarly, the growth estimates for the largest services sector, which contributes almost one-fourth of the overall GVA, too have been reduced sharply. Q1, Q2 and Q3 growth has been cut from 6.9%, 7.1% and 7.3%, respectively to 6%, 6% and 3.3%, respectively.

The revisions, however, show two other key sectors in a more positive light. Agriculture's growth for the first three quarters has been marginally increased while Public Administration too as a category has had its numbers boosted for the second and third quarters. The latter sector's Q1, Q2 and Q3 growth have been revised from 8.7%, 10.1% and 9.7%, respectively, to 7.7%, 10.9% and 10.9%.


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**How relevant is the GVA data given that headline growth always refers to GDP?**

- **The GVA data is crucial to understand how the various sectors of the real economy are performing. The output or domestic product is essentially a measure of GVA combined with net taxes.**
- While GDP can be and is also computed as the sum total of the various expenditures incurred in the economy including private consumption spending, government consumption spending and gross fixed capital formation or investment spending, these reflect essentially on the demand conditions in the economy.
- From a policymaker's perspective it is therefore vital to have the GVA data to be able to make policy interventions, where needed. Also, from a global data standards and uniformity perspective, GVA is an integral and necessary parameter in measuring a nation's economic performance, and any country which seeks to attract capital and investment from overseas does need to conform to the global best practices in national income accounting.

**What are the drawbacks in using GVA to measure economic growth?**

- As with all economic statistics, the accuracy of GVA as a measure of overall national output is heavily dependent on the sourcing of data and the fidelity of the various data sources in capturing the vast labyrinth of activities that constitute a nation's economic life.
- **To that extent, GVA is as susceptible to vulnerabilities from the use of inappropriate or flawed methodologies as any other measure. In a June 2019 research paper titled 'India's GDP Mis-estimation: Likelihood, Magnitudes, Mechanisms, and Implications,' former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian of Harvard University** and the Peterson Institute for International Economics posited that the change in methodology and data sources when India switched its base year to 2011-12 had led to a significant overestimation of growth. Specifically, he argued that the value based approach instead of the earlier volume based tack in GVA estimation had affected the measurement of the formal manufacturing sector and thus distorted the outcome.
- The paper triggered much debate and prompted the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation to assert in a response that the Ministry's GDP



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estimates were based on **"accepted procedures, methodologies and available data and objectively measure the contribution of various sectors in the economy"**.

**13. Has Google been misrepresenting data practices?**

**Background**

- A proposed **class action lawsuit filed against Google** alleges that the Internet search giant **tracks and collects browsing data "no matter what" steps users take to safeguard their privacy.**
- The plaintiffs, **Chasom Brown, Maria Nguyen and William Byatt**, have filed the lawsuit on behalf of "millions of individuals" (Google users in the U.S.) at the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California.
- They allege **Google has violated the federal wiretap law as well as a California privacy law**.

**What, according to the plaintiffs, is wrong with what Google is doing?**

- The plaintiffs allege that **Google tracks, collects, and identifies the browsing data of even those users who browse the Web privately via, say, the Incognito mode.** Google, they claim, "accomplishes its surreptitious tracking" through near ubiquitous tools such as Google Analytics, Google Ad Manager, and other plug-ins. Google Analytics and other tools are implemented only when their code is embedded into the code of existing websites.
- T**he petitioners reckon "over 70% of online websites and publishers on the internet" employ Google Analytics**.
- The point of Brown and others is, when a user accesses websites that employ these Google tools, **Google automatically gets information about the user's IP address, URL of the site, and many, many more details**. "Google designed its Analytics code such that when it is run, Google causes the user's browser to send his or her personal information to Google and its servers in California," the petitioners say in the lawsuit. And, they say, it doesn't matter if a user is on private viewing mode.

**That's not all. They also allege that Google has been misrepresenting its data collection practices**.

**What does the lawsuit say about the misrepresentation?**


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- The petitioners charge **Google with giving false assurances about the ability of users to control what they share with the search engine**. They say that users not only don't know that Google is collecting information even when they are in a private view mode but also have no means to avoid its scrutiny.

**How, according to the petitioners, do the actions of Google violate the provisions of the Federal Wiretap Act and privacy laws of California?**

- **The Federal Wiretap Act disallows any intentional interception of any wire, oral, or electronic communication.** The petitioners have invoked this Act, saying the following: "Google's actions in intercepting and tracking user communications while they were browsing the internet using a browser while in **'private browsing mode' was intentional.**
- On information and belief, Google is aware that it is intercepting communications in these circumstances and has taken no remedial action."
- They have also contended that the acts of Google violate the **California Invasion of Privacy Act**, which prohibits intentional tapping of communication. Further, they say, the right to privacy has also been violated.

**What has Google's response been?**

- Reuters has reported Google spokesperson Jose Castaneda as saying that the company will defend itself against the claims. He has been cited as saying, "As we clearly state each time you open a new incognito tab, websites might be able to collect information about your browsing activity."
- **The petitioners also use the example of the recent Arizona v. Google case to bolster their arguments. What is the case about and how is it relevant?**
- **This case against Google was filed by Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich in May. The allegation was one of privacy violation by Google**, the specific charge being that the company was tracking user location even when the user had turned off location tracking. Brnovich had tweeted on May 28: "Today we filed a consumer fraud lawsuit against Google for deceptive and unfair practices used to obtain users' location data, which Google then exploits for its lucrative advertising business." Petitioners Brown and others referred to this case while elaborating on the "*passive data*


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*collection practices employed by Android, Google applications (e.g., Chrome and Maps), Google Home, and other Google applications and services ....*"

**Has Google been sued in the past for wiretapping law violations?**

- **Yes. One of the long-running cases ended last year when Google agreed to a $13 million settlement. The allegation was its "Street View mapping project captured data from private Wi-Fi networks," according to a Bloomberg report.**
- Later, media reports suggested that some nine States were against this settlement as it contributed to massive privacy violation. In 2016, it reportedly settled a case where it was accused of "surreptitiously scanning Gmail messages for advertising revenues".
- It was reported then that it had agreed to stop the practice.

## 14. Swarms of extremism

### Introduction

- As if the COVID-19 crisis were not enough, we now have swarms of locusts invading us.
- Clouds of locusts have overrun western India.
- As with COVID-19, country borders and barriers put up by proud sovereign nations have been crossed without difficulty, as the locusts have travelled from Africa to South Asia.

### Swarm intelligence

Are locusts intelligent?

- **Individual locusts are not. However, their swarms are swift, focused, responsive to stimuli and dangerously effective in their depredations.**
- Biologists call this phenomenon **'swarm intelligence'**, where the individuals that make up a colony of living creatures are singularly unintelligent and are driven by programmed instinct, **but their collective actions make their entire colony intelligent as an entity by itself**.
- **Swarm intelligence is common amongst insects; bees, ants and locusts** demonstrate it amply. Yet, it is not unknown amongst higher animals as well. Migrating birds and shoals of fish display high degrees of swarm intelligence too.

### How does swarm intelligence work?


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- **An important point to note is that they are leaderless**.
- A queen bee is not a royal in our human sense; she is just a vast progeny-producing machine.
- **It is fascinating to see how a shoal of fish, without a 'king or queen' fish, when attacked at one flank by a predator, almost instantly displays an avoidance reaction.**
- How did the fish furthest away from the attacked flank know that the shoal was in danger in less than a microsecond and veer away from the predator?
- Scientists put it down to the fact that within a swarm, individuals are constantly communicating with each other through actions, signals or otherwise, in a binary manner.
- Through binary communication, the fact that the swarm is in danger reaches all individuals in an instant and thereby, the instant response. Millions and billions of binary communications add up to a sum larger than the whole.
- This phenomenon is no biological curiosity. **It is the very essence of the logic behind understanding brain function, as also the design of artificial intelligence**.
- If the human brain was considered a colony of independently alive neuron cells, then it can be imagined that all its nuanced thought emerges from simple, binary synapse mediated conversations between individual neurons.
- **The atomisation of complex thinking as emerging from binary signals also lies at the foundation of computer science**.

**So, what does all this have to do with the peculiar effectiveness of extremist political movements, whether of the right or of the left?**

- They combine swarm intelligence with the more conventional leadership models shown by higher-level animals.
- We see all around us, **for example, the resurgence of powerful right-wing movements**, all fuelled by leaders who provide the focus of attention, then upscaled by swarms of followers, engaged in binary conversations.
- **A leader signals something, whether it is the need to distort history, create a false sense of assurance in a faltering economy, fuel hate against somebody, or signal success when strategies fail**.
- From then on, the swarms take over the creating of simple messages, fake news, sloganeering and hate.



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- **Individuals down the ladder, shorn of individual capabilities for critical thinking, share messages, amplify them and make hashtags trend**.

Is there any political future for the critical, thinking mind then? **At first sight, liberals who are ruggedly individualistic are especially unsuited for being a part of any swarm.** They reject binary communications, and see their proximate supporters **as competitors rather than as part of a larger, coordinated order**. Yet leaderless movements are not unknown in the liberal, freedom-loving world either. Think Hong Kong, the Arab Spring, and you have the elements of swarm intelligence backing the flowering and upscaling of pro-freedom movements. **Eliminating political locusts is neither practical nor desirable. What we need are more compassionate, thinking and inclusive locusts**.

**15. Addressing the elephant in the room**

**Introduction**

- **While there is outrage over the death of an elephant, there are no protests against environmental destruction**
- The news last week about a **pregnant elephant having her mouth blown** caused outrage on social media. It's impossible not to empathise with the pain of the elephant, which stood impassively in a river and died a slow death. **But the wide narrative about the death of humanity is oversimplified**. While people are demonising the farmer responsible for the incident, it is important to note that the elephant was an unintended target. **Most crackers are aimed at wild boar that destroy small farmers' crop**.

**Problems with the narrative**

- With the absence of large predators outside forests and the huge availability of easily accessible food crops, deer, monkeys, boar and other species inevitably fill this space.
- In almost all developed nations these species are kept in control so they don't destroy large crop areas. In **less developed countries, local people take matters into their own hands**.
- **Studies show this "reciprocity"** — boars eating crops, people eating boar — is what allows farmers tolerate these otherwise problematic animals.


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- **India does not allow rural people to hunt animals, but neither does the government cull animals regularly despite their numbers shooting up**.
- While the government has the provision to **declare overabundant animals "vermin", and cull them under the Wildlife Protection Act,** it very rarely does this.
- Vocal urban wildlife activist groups generally create a social media storm when such decisions are taken and challenge the order in court. These groups have no empathy for the farmers who struggle to make their ends meet while growing food for all of us. **Kerala had declared boar "vermin", but very few have been killed over the years**.

**Administrative problems**

Given the widespread destruction of crop by these animals, **farmers urgently need a safety net**.

- **Compensation schemes are one part of the solution,** but in India this is always only a fraction of the market value of the crop, which is already precariously low. Poor farmers spend a lot of time navigating bureaucratic processes to get it. And there is no end to this process — some animal numbers just keep going up, linked to the availability of agricultural food crops, and the government cannot sustain an exponential growth in compensation.
- **Second, this incident is far from new. The start of the monsoon is when animals move into human habitation more, partly on account of jackfruit and other crops/fruits.** Incidents like this take place as it is notoriously hard to identify the culprits, since the event occurs much before the injured elephants are found. While there are dozens of calls to charge the culprits, it is far from easy for the forest department and police to do this.
- **The third problem with the narrative around this incident is that all humans are grouped together. While some people are indeed over-exploiting the planet,** everyone is far from being equally culpable for the ecological disaster that we are now in. Modern, developed, urban humans are in fact disproportionately responsible since we consume infinitely more resources. It is our greed that has destroyed vast tracts of forests and thousands of elephants and other animals over the last few decades. The poor farmer who inadvertently kills one elephant in an attempt to feed us while making enough money for himself is much less responsible.



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***If arresting the person responsible is not going to be the solution, what can we do?***

This is best answered at two levels: one, how do we make sure that elephants don't die in this way, and two, how do we reduce negative human-elephant interactions?

- **The first problem is relatively simpler to solve:** we should c**ontrol the population of wild boar** to minimise the impact they have on farmers. This is untenable to most people, since conservation in India is arguably mixed up with animal rights.
- **Boars are classified "least concern", and are in absolutely no danger of going extinct.** If they are causing the death of much more threatened species like elephants, that gives us all the more reason to control their numbers.
- The modalities of this have to be worked out carefully to ensure there is no over-hunting and local extinction in some areas that have governance or enforcement problems. But the inability to enforce rules should not be used as an excuse for not taking decisive action about the expanding boar population.

***What can we do about the problem of elephants destroying crops, damaging property and killing people in accidental encounters?***

- The modern conservation movement aims to s**eparate human and wildlife spaces. When there is an overlap,** there is a mistaken assumption that "conflict" is inevitable. This is arguably at odds with the reality in India, where the majority of animal range is outside protected areas. For elephants only about 25% of their range is within protected areas.
- The extent of distribution of other species is not even fully known.
- **One study in central India by Majgaonkar and others found that only 2.6% of the range of leopards, hyenas and wolves in central India was within protected areas.**
- So animals and people, particularly elephants, have always been interacting with each other. While there have always been problems, most interactions are peaceful, and there is a deep cultural tolerance not found in other parts of the world. However, as animals and human numbers grow and there is more pressure on land, the challenges of living together will also increase.

**Way forward**

- **At a policy level, a good starting point would be to reorient the forest department to do away with the wildlife-territorial dichotomy of management that currently exists**, especially since



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nobody has managed to inform animals that they are only allowed to stay in wildlife divisions.

- Beyond that there are no universal solutions. Solutions vary based on the context, the kinds of crops grown, density of people, socioeconomic status, etc.
- **Farmers should be empowered and subsidised to better protect their land rather than wait for compensation or be forced to resort to these extreme**, illegal measures out of desperation.
- India has done well in saving nature given its high population density. But as it continues to develop, there is going to be huge pressure on the natural world.
- While it is heartening to see everyone get upset about the death of the elephant, the hope is that there will also be large-scale protests about the large-scale destruction of the environment.
- **The National Board for Wildlife and the Forest Advisory Committee are meant to scrutinise and minimise the large-scale diversion of forest land for development projects**, but they have been reduced to rubber-stamping bodies. Even a coal mine inside an elephant reserve in Assam was recently cleared.
- The government is easing up environmental clearances and opening up forests for destruction to boost a post-COVID economy.
- When industrialists like Ratan Tata, who are angry and easily condemn the farmer, also start to protest about these bigger concerns on Twitter, we can pat ourselves on the back for being a truly environmentally conscious society.

**16. In Persian Gulf littoral, cooperative security is key**

**Introduction**

- **India's interests would be best served if stability in the region is ensured this way**
- **The United Nations defines this body of water as the Persian Gulf.**
- **The lands around it are shared by eight countries (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates)(PT SHOT**), all members of the UN.
- There is a commonality of interest among them in **being major producers of crude oil and natural gas, and thereby contributing critically to the global economy and to their own prosperity.** This has added to their geopolitical significance. At the same time, turbulence has often characterised their *inter se* political relations.


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**A framework**

- For eight decades prior to 1970, this body of water was a **closely guarded British lake, administered in good measure by imperial civil servants from India.** When that era ended, regional players sought to assert themselves. Imperatives of rivalry and cooperation became evident and, as a United States State Department report put it in 1973, '**The upshot of all these cross currents is that the logic of Saudi-Iranian cooperation is being undercut by psychological, nationalistic, and prestige factors**, which are likely to persist for a long time.'
- The Nixon and the Carter Doctrines were the logical outcome to ensure American hegemony.
- An early effort **for collective security, attempted in a conference in Muscat in 1975, was thwarted by Baathist Iraq.**
- The Iranian Revolution put an end to the **Twin Pillar approach and disturbed the strategiWc balance**.
- The Iraq-Iran War enhanced U.S. interests and role. Many moons and much bloodshed later, it was left to t**he Security Council through Resolution 598 (1987) to explore 'measures to enhance the security and stability in the region**'.

**Related questions**

- Any framework for stability and security thus needs to answer a set of questions: security for whom, by whom, against whom, for what purpose?
- Is the requirement in local, regional or global terms?
- Does it require an extra-regional agency?
- Given the historical context, one recalls a Saudi scholar's remark in the 1990s that 'Gulf regional security was an external issue long before it was an issue among the Gulf States themselves.'

**The essential ingredients of such a framework would thus be to ensure:**

- conditions of peace and stability in individual littoral states;
- freedom to all states of the Gulf littoral to exploit their hydrocarbon and other natural resources and export them;
- freedom of commercial shipping in international waters of the Persian Gulf;
- freedom of access to, and outlet from, Gulf waters through the Strait of Hormuz;
- prevention of conflict that may impinge on the freedom of trade and shipping and:



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- prevention of emergence of conditions that may impinge on any of these considerations.

**The GCC and the U.S. link**

- The past two decades have **revalidated William Fulbright's observation that statesmen often confuse great power with total power and great responsibility with total responsibility**. The war in Iraq and its aftermath testify to it.
- **The U.S. effort to 'contain' the Iranian revolutionary forces, supplemented by the effort of the Arab states of the littoral (except Iraq) through the instrumentality of the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC (May 1981)**, to coordinate, cooperate and integrate to 'serve the sublime objectives of the Arab Nation' initially met with success in some functional fields and a lack of it in its wider objectives.
- In the meantime, g**eopolitical factors and conflicts elsewhere in the West Asian region — Yemen, Syria, Libya — aggravated global and regional relationships and hampered a *modus vivendi* in U.S.-Iran relations** that was to be premised on the multilateral agreement on Iran's nuclear programme agreed to by western powers and the Obama Administration but disowned by U.S. President Donald Trump whose strident policies have taken the region to the brink of an armed conflict.
- Perceptions of declining U.S. commitment to sub-regional security have been articulated in recent months amid hints of changing priorities.
- This is reported to have caused disquiet in some, perhaps all, members of the GCC, the hub of whose security concern remains pivoted on an Iranian threat (political and ideological rather than territorial) and an American insurance to deter it based on a convergence of interests in which oil, trade, arms purchases, etc have a role along with wider U.S. regional and global determinants.

**An evolving transformation**

- It is evident that a common GCC threat perception has not evolved over time and has been hampered by the emergence of conflicting tactical and strategic interests and subjective considerations.
- The current divisions within the organisation are therefore here to stay.
- These have been aggravated by the global economic crisis, the immediate and longer term impact of COVID-19 on regional economies, the problems in the


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Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the decline in oil prices.

- One credible assessment done recently suggests that in the emerging shape of the region, 'Saudi Arabia is a fading power, UAE, Qatar and Iran are emerging as the new regional leaders and Oman and Iraq will have to struggle to retain their sovereign identities.
- The GCC is effectively ended, and OPEC is becoming irrelevant as oil policy moves to a tripartite global condominium.
- None of this will necessarily happen overnight and external intervention could interfere in unexpected ways ... But it is fair to say that the Persian Gulf as we have known for at least three generations is in the midst of a fundamental transformation.'
- With the Arab League entombed and the GCC on life-support system, the Arab states of this sub-region are left to individual devices to explore working arrangements with Iraq and Iran.
- The imperatives for these are different but movement on both is discernible. With Iran in particular and notwithstanding the animosities of the past, pragmatic approaches of recent months seem to bear fruit.
- Oman has always kept its lines of communication with Iran open; Kuwait and Qatar had done likewise but in a quieter vein, and now the UAE has initiated pragmatic arrangements.
- These could set the stage for a wider dialogue. Both Iran and the GCC states would benefit from a formal commitment to an arrangement incorporating the six points listed above; so would every outside nation that has trading and economic interests in the Gulf. This could be sanctified by a global convention.

Record shows that the alternative of exclusive security arrangements promotes armament drives, enhances insecurity and aggravates regional tensions. It unavoidably opens the door for Great Power interference.

**India's ties**

- How does India perceive these developments and how do they impact our strategic interests and concerns. Locating the Persian Gulf littoral with reference to India is an exercise in geography and history.
- **The distance from Mumbai to Basra is 1,526 nautical miles and Bander Abbas and Dubai are in a radius of 1,000 nautical miles.**
- The bilateral relationship, economic and political, with the GCC has blossomed in recent years.


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- The governments are India-friendly and Indian-friendly and appreciate the benefits of a wide-ranging relationship.
- This is well reflected in the **bilateral trade of around $121 billion and remittances of $49 billion from a workforce of over nine million**.
- GCC suppliers account for around 34% of our crude imports and national oil companies in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi are partners in a **$44 billion investment in the giant Ratnagiri oil refinery.**
- In addition, Saudi Aramco is reported to take a 20% stake in Reliance oil-to-chemicals business.
- The current adverse impact of the pandemic on our economic relations with the GCC countries has now become a matter of concern.

**Way Forward**

- **The relationship with Iran, complex at all times and more so recently on account of overt American pressure, has economic potential and geopolitical relevance on account of its actual or alleged role in Pakistan and Afghanistan.**
- *Iran also neighbours Turkey and some countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region*. Its size, politico-technological potential and economic resources, cannot be wished away, regionally and globally, but can be harnessed for wider good.
- **India has eschewed involvement in local or regional disputes. Indian interests do not entail power projection; they necessitate in their totality, peace and regional stability, freedom of navigation and access to the region's markets in terms of trade, technology and manpower resources.**
- Indian interests would be best served if this stability is ensured through cooperative security since the alternative — of competitive security options — cannot ensure durable peace.

**17. Resume dialogue with Nepal now**

**Background**

- **The time of a pandemic is not the time to have a hostile neighbourhood**. At this moment, India should ideally **lead in creating momentum for deeper regional and sub-regional cooperation in South Asia.** Ironically, the recent developments with Nepal have been the


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opposite of that. India and Nepal have **reached a new low** in bilateral relations when both countries are facing a humanitarian crisis.

**Official statements**

- On May 8, the Defence Minister of India tweeted: **"Delighted to inaugurate the Link Road to Mansarovar Yatra today**. The BRO achieved road connectivity from **Dharchula to Lipulekh (China Border) known as Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route** (**PT**).
- Also flagged off a convoy of vehicles from **Pithoragarh to Gunji t**hrough video conferencing." The announcement and its timing surprised even the keen observers of India-Nepal relations.
- No one thought that a road project in this territory would get inaugurated so urgently and through video conferencing.
- The announcement immediately put the Nepal government, the people and political players there on high alert. **The Oli government's sharp reaction was unexpected** — the road was being built for years, so for it to pretend that it was unaware of this development and therefore surprised at its inauguration defies logic.
- **In a statement, the Nepalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed regret at India's move.**
- It said, "As per the **Sugauli Treaty (1816), all the territories east of Kali (Mahakali) River, including Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipu Lekh, belong to Nepal**.
- This was reiterated by the Government of Nepal several times in the past and most recently through a diplomatic note addressed to the Government of India dated 20 November 2019 in response to the new political map issued by the latter."
- **It cautioned the Indian government against carrying out "any activity inside the territory of Nepal"**.
- It stated that "Nepal had expressed its disagreement in 2015 through separate diplomatic notes addressed to the governments of both India and China when the two sides agreed to include Lipu Lekh Pass as a bilateral trade route without Nepal's consent in the Joint Statement issued on 15 May 2015 during the official visit of the Prime Minister of India to China."
- Nepal said it believed in resolving the pending boundary issues through diplomatic means. It said that Kathmandu had proposed twice the dates for holding the Foreign Secretary-level meeting between the two countries.


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**Problem**

- There was a long-awaited response to this from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The delay is not understandable.
- Why can't discussions take place over video conferencing? India's response to Nepal's note said: "The recently inaugurated road section in Pithoragarh district in the State of Uttarakhand lies completely within the territory of India.
- The road follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra. **India and Nepal have established mechanism to deal with all boundary matters.**
- **The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing.** India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal."
- Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali asked **why talks on this important matter could not take place under lockdown when the 'inauguration' of the road could take place during the COVID-19 crisis**. We also believe that it should take place without wasting even a day.
- The strain in ties also reflects the tensions in Nepal's politics. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli stepped out of diplomatic nicety when he **indulged in reactionary nationalism and termed the "Indian virus"** as more damaging than the "Chinese virus". **He also questioned India's faith in 'Satyameva Jayate'**.
- On India's part, the problem lies in overlooking the past realities of Lipulekh region. The Army Chief's statement that **"there is reason to believe" that Nepal's recent objection was "at the behest of someone else", hinting at China's possible role**, was eminently avoidable. This too drew sharp reactions from Nepal.

**A unique relationship**

- India and Nepal enjoy a unique relationship that goes beyond diplomacy and the governments of the day. **Both countries are interdependent through shared social, cultural, economic and other civilisational links**. Here, the ties are not between the governments alone. **Over three million Nepalese live in India and lakhs of Indians live in Nepal**.
- **The Gurkha Rifles, known for the best in warfare, are incomplete without the Nepalese**. They fight to keep India secure, so where is the scope



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for conflict? The people of Nepal fought for India's independence. **B.P. Koirala and many more Nepalese made enormous sacrifices during the freedom struggle**. Both countries have open borders and unique ties. **This reminds us that both countries have shared interests while respecting each others' sovereignty**.

- **There is no place for a 'big brother' attitude**. The regimes in New Delhi and Kathmandu have to exercise caution and restraint. **The boundary controversy on Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura should be seen in retrospection**. It must be admitted that Nepal's kings had neglected this territory for decades. The area attained prominence only with Nepal's tryst with parliamentary democracy beginning in 1990.
- The consistent neglect for the area is evident in the fact that the **last official record of any government work that happened there was in 1953**. A census was conducted in this area by the royal regime of Nepal and the land records from there were archived at the **Darchula district office.**
- **Article 8 of the India-Nepal Friendship Treaty, 1950 says, "So far as matters dealt with herein are concerned, this Treaty cancels all previous Treaties, agreements and engagements entered into on behalf of India between the British Government and the Government of Nepal"**, though the treaty does not define the India-Nepal boundary.
- On the issue of defining the boundary, **the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) and the 1960 agreement between India and Nepal on the four Terai districts prevail**. The Sugauli Treaty outlines the east of Mahakali River as Nepal's territory, and the west of it as India's territory. **The dispute today is with regard to the origin of the Kali River**.
- Nepal claims that the origin is in the higher reaches of this hilly territory which would establish its claim on Kalapani and Lipulekh. The Boundary Committee constituted in the year 2000 failed to resolve the issue.

**Way Forward**

- **There is a need to renew it to end the cartographic tussle** between the two countries.
- It is time to r**epose faith in constructive dialogue with empathy** to resolve any matter that disturbs the calm between the two countries. **In good and bad times, India and Nepal have to live together**.


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- Diplomatic dialogue should be resumed at the earliest possible. Embassies on both sides should be allowed to function freely. Nothing of the sort that happened in 2015 should be repeated now. India should not shy away from a dialogue even during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **The MEA's latest statement should materialise in action and restore trust and confidence through constructive dialogue**.

**18. Fighting sea blindness**

**Background**

- This newspaper (TH) recently carried an article, "**Third aircraft carrier not required as military's focus is on land borders: sources**". In it defence sources questioned the need for a third aircraft carrier citing budgetary constraints.
- **They propounded the immediate requirement of a strong Army supported by a capable Air Force**. There can be no two views about this.
- **What needs deliberation is whether**

**(a) naval warfare is undertaken just for the sake of naval warfare; and**
**(b) a maritime country like India can ever be strong without a strong Navy, since it depends on the sea for over 97% of its trade**.

**An incomplete understanding**

- One source said the Indian Navy "**has seen action only twice, 1965 and 1971, on the sidelines of the land operations and the aircraft carrier had minimum role**". India has seen classic naval action only once, in 1971, which was also a decisive victory.
- The political directions available on record indicate that the involvement of the Navy in 1965 was kept to the minimum; in fact, **it was prevented from operating beyond the north of Okha**.
- That the 1971 war was land-centric is belied by documentary evidence. Both adversaries viewed sea communications as central to the war.
- **Notwithstanding the attacks on Karachi by small missile boats, the 'centre of gravity' was on the Eastern front**, where the carrier was deployed. Terming carrier involvement as peripheral displays an incomplete understanding of military history.
- **In *An Odyssey in War and Peace*, Lt Gen J.F.R Jacob noted the maritime orientation of the briefing by Gen Sam Manekshaw and**


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**the Director of Military Operations, Maj Gen K.K. Singh, who identified the ports as "prime objectives"**.

- It reads: "At the meeting, held in the operations room, Manekshaw, K.K. Singh, Arora and I were present... KK Singh spelt out the objectives, maintaining that if we captured **Khulna and Chittagong**... the war would come to an end". Gen Jacob recommended utilising "our naval superiority" to have an "effective naval blockade".
- The official history of the Pakistan Navy *(The Story of the Pakistan Navy*) acknowledges that "the success of Pakistan's counter-plans hinged largely on reinforcements and resupply of the eastern theatre of war by sea... (by) breaking India's naval blockade".
- If the Indian Navy had not effectively stymied this plan, Pakistan was hopeful of a "stalemate" followed by international intervention.
- Almost a lakh Pakistani soldiers would possibly not have surrendered unless they had lost their "will to fight".
- The Indian Navy, using its lone carrier, ensured that no reinforcements or supplies were forthcoming and no escape route was possible.

**Indian Naval history (*Transition to Triumph*)** also records that "by themselves the ships of the Eastern Fleet were too few and too slow to enforce contraband control and help would be needed from **Vikrant's aircraft**. But the extraordinary extent to which Vikrant's aircraft actually succeeded in assisting ships in contraband control and apprehending merchant ships, over and above their air strikes against East Pakistan, came to be fully realised only after the war."

**The contemporary argument that a carrier's utility in "future war scenarios will be short and swift" is interesting**. Pakistan Navy history laments "vague concepts" such as "a short, sharp war" leading to it being accorded a lower inter-service priority. This rendered it incapable of "providing protection to the sea lines of communication between the two wings" and led to the 1971 debacle.

**Impact of parochialism**

- First, stating that **China went in for a carrier only after building its army is a narrow interpretation**. This may have been Hobson's choice. Aircraft carrier operations take years to master even if a ship is available.
- Further, **China's 2015 defence white paper states that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned".**


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- Even as China is reducing its land forces to focus on the sea, 'sources' are propounding that India do the exact opposite. Second, forgoing a carrier due to budgetary constraints is counterproductive.
- An indigenously constructed carrier can galvanise the economy given the large number of industries and MSMEs involved in the supply chain. Third, carriers being required only for global powers is debatable. India had initiated procurement of INS Vikrant within a few years of independence. Carriers cannot be built overnight.
- Planning for the future requires foresight. Parochialism and sea blindness in an era of COVID-19 budget cuts can have a long-term impact on comprehensive national power.

**19. The e-diplomacy experiment**

**Background**

- **The first India-Australia virtual leaders' summit on June 4** had a lot on the menu, **ranging from military interoperability to jointly tackling COVID-19**. The two countries upgraded their relations to a **'comprehensive strategic partnership'**. The summit was noteworthy for its novel modus operandi.

**Adapting to the times**

- **Prime Minister and the Indian delegation were on a video conference call with Prime Minister Scott Morrison** and the Australian delegation.
- The dangers posed by COVID-19 have compelled the traditionally glad-handing, backslapping and tourism-promoting art of summit diplomacy to adapt.
- Just as corporations and educational institutions have migrated to online mediums, nation states are left with no choice but to do the same.
- **E-summits are physically safer for leaders and also time-saving and economising events** where costly physical journeys with entourages can be avoided.
- Mr. Modi has engaged in a f**ew multilateral 'e-diplomacy' rounds since the COVID-19 outbreak.**
- He convened the **SAARC leaders' video conference on March 15, joined the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit via video link on**



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**March 26,** and made his maiden appearance at the **Non-Aligned Movement virtual summit on May 4**.

- These were **all single-issue focused and brief affairs**. But the bilateral summit with **Australia was elaborate and involved the exchange of multiple agreements**.
- It has been a maxim in diplomacy that face-to-face interactions at the highest level mark the zenith of foreign relations.

**Concern**

- **The British scholar Ernest Satow dubbed** "summits a permanent feature of diplomatic topography". The formal negotiations during summits, the closed-door restricted sessions, the fireside chats, the walks in the woods, the photo-ops and the outreach to live audiences in the host and home countries are all part of the package.
- **But now without all the protocols and structured dialogues in cozy settings, it is doubtful if major breakthroughs or deals requiring direct intervention of leaders can happen**. There is a danger that **'e-diplomacy' will become less productive in terms of deliverables**, especially where crucial sticking points need ironing out.
- While the backroom legwork and minutiae of agreements can be hashed out by lower-level bureaucrats communicating remotely, online summits will **simply not satisfy the broader political goals and bigger objectives that heads of state carry with them**.

**Threat to cyber security**

- Another threat to virtual summits comes **from cyber insecurity**. In pre-COVID-19 times, summit venues used to be thoroughly sanitised and debugged to prevent **sensitive foreign policy content from being spied upon or leaked**. **E-diplomacy is riskier and could be subject to hacking of classified content**, making the leaders warier.
- This could reduce the spontaneity and candour of their conversations. It is arguable whether new ideas or proposals which entail geo-strategic alignments can emanate out of e-summits.

**Conclusion**

- **Yet, having some summit is better than no summit at all**. However artificial and unsatisfying the video conferencing medium is, key partners like India and Australia have to get on with it and hold high-level meetings as part of their strategic signaling. With Australia and India trying to forge coalitions


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of middle powers in sustaining the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, gaps in diplomatic summits can convey weakening of collective resolve.

**20. The critical role of decentralised responses**

**Context**

- The **novel coronavirus pandemic** has brought home **the critical role of local governments** and **decentralised responses**. In terms of ***information, monitoring and immediate action***, local governments are at an **advantage,** and eminently, to meet any disaster such as COVID-19.
- While **imposing restrictive conditionalities on States** availing themselves of the enhanced borrowing limits (**3.5% to 5% of Gross State Domestic Product, or GSDP**) for 2020-21 **is unwarranted**, the recognition that local governments should be fiscally empowered immediately is a valid signal for the future of local governance.

This article makes ***some suggestions to improve local finance and argues that the extant fiscal illusion is a great deterrent to mobilisation***.

**Core issues**

**COVID-19** has raised home **four major challenges**:

- **economic,**
- **health,**
- **welfare/livelihood and**
- **resource mobilisation.**

These challenges have to be **addressed by all tiers of government in the federal polity**, jointly and severally. **Own revenue is the critical lever of local government empowerment**. Of course the several lacunae that continue to bedevil local governance have to be simultaneously addressed.

**One**, the new normal demands a paradigm shift in the delivery of health care at the cutting edge level.

**Two**, the parallel bodies that have come up after the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments have considerably distorted the functions-fund flow matrix at the lower level of governance.

**Three,** there is yet no clarity in the assignment of functions, functionaries and financial responsibilities to local governments. Functional mapping and responsibilities continue to be ambiguous in many States. Instructively, Kerala attempted even responsibility mapping besides activity mapping.


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**Four**, the critical role of local governments will have to be recognised by all. A few suggestions for resource mobilisation are given under **three heads: local finance, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, or MPLADs, and the Fifteenth Finance Commission (FFC).**

**Local finance**

- **Property tax collection with appropriate exemptions should be a compulsory levy and preferably must cover land.**
- The Economic Survey 2017-18 points out that urban **local governments, or ULGs, generate about 44% of their revenue from own sources as against only 5% by rural local governments,** or RLGs. Per capita own revenue collected by ULGs is about 3% of urban per capita income while the corresponding figure is only 0.1% for RLGs.
- There is a yawning gap between tax potential and actual collection, resulting in colossal underperformance. When they are not taxed, people remain indifferent.
- LGs, States and people seem to labour under a fiscal illusion. In States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, local tax collection at the panchayat level is next to nil. Property tax forms the major source of local revenue throughout the world.
- **All States should take steps to enhance and rationalise property tax regime.** A recent study by Professor O.P. Mathur shows that the share of property tax in GDP has been declining since 2002-03. This portends a wrong signal.
- **The share of property tax in India in 2017-18 is only 0.14% of GDP as against 2.1% in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries**. If property tax covers land, that will hugely enhance the yield from this source even without any increase in rates.
- **Land monetisation and betterment levy may be tried in the context of COVID-19 in India**. To be sure, land values have to be unbundled for socially relevant purposes.
- **Municipalities and even suburban panchayats can issue a corona containment bond for a period of say 10 years, on a coupon rate below market rate but significantly above the reverse repo rate to attract banks.** We are appealing to the patriotic sentiments of non-resident Indians and rich citizens. Needless to say, credit rating is not to be the weighing consideration. **That the Resurgent India Bond of 1998 could**



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**mobilise over $4 billion in a few days encourages us to try this option**.

**MP fund scheme**

**The suspension of MPLADS by the Union government for two years is a welcome measure.** The annual budget was around **?4,000 crore**. The Union government has appropriated the entire allocation along with the huge non-lapseable arrears. **MPLADs, which was avowedly earmarked for local area development, must be assigned to local governments, preferably to panchayats on the basis of well-defined criteria.**

- A special COVID-19 containment grant to the LGs by the FFC to be distributed on the basis of SFC-laid criteria is the need of the hour.
- The commission may do well to consider this. **The local government grant of ?90,000 crore for 2020-2021 by the FFC is only 3% higher than that recommended by the Fourteenth Finance Commission**.
- For panchayats there is only an increase of ?63 crore. The commission's claim that the grant works out to 4.31% of the divisible pool and that it is higher than the 3.54% of the FC-XIV is obviously because the size of the denominator is smaller.
- Building health infrastructure and disease control strategies at the local level find no mention in the five tranches of the packages announced by the Union Finance Minister. The claim for a higher award to LGs is loud and clear.
- **The ratio of basic to tied grant is fixed at 50:50 by the commission. In the context of the crisis under way, all grants must be untied for freely evolving proper COVID-19 containment strategies locally**.
- Further the **13th Finance Commission's recommendation to tie local grants to the union divisible pool of taxes to ensure a buoyant and predictable source of revenue to LGs** (accepted by the then Union government) must be restored by the commission.

**Flood, drought, and earthquakes are taken care of by the Disaster Management Act 2005 which does not recognise epidemics,** although several parts of India experienced several bouts of various flus in the past. The new pandemic is a public health challenge of an unprecedented nature along with livelihood and welfare challenges. The first Report speaks of mitigation funds and even prepared a disaster risk index, to map out vulnerable areas. These are redundant in the present context. The 2005 Act may have to be modified to accommodate the emerging situation.



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**COVID-19 has woken us up to the reality that local governments must be equipped and empowered. Relevant action is the critical need**.

**21. The anatomy of anti-black racism**

**Context**

- **Despite the civil war over slavery, and the civil rights movement for dignity and equality, systemic discrimination and violence against blacks persists. Racism continues unabated.**
- **Of course, noticing the physical characteristics of a person, say the colour of her skin, is not itself racist.** Good writers are expected to provide a vivid description of a character's physical features, including skin-colour.
- This need not imply the idea of race, leave alone racism. For instance, Indian epics describe Krishna as having *shyam varna*, being the dark-skinned one. This description has no evaluative connotation. Being conscious of the colour of a person, your own or that of the other may be pretty innocent.

**Idea of race**

- However, **when specific bodily features (colour, shape of nose, eye, lips) are permanently clumped together and human beings are classified in terms of these distinct biological clusters**, and if, further, it is believed that these shared features are **inter-generationally transmitted**, then we possess the idea of race, i.e. a group with a common biological descent.
- Every single human being is not only seen then to be assigned to separate biologically-determined groups but also as born with traits directly inherited from biological ancestors.
- Each race is then believed to be **fundamentally, permanently different from others — differences that are innate and indelible, for one can neither cease to have what one has inherited nor acquire characteristics which one does not already have**.
- The idea of race is deeply problematic. Despite many attempts, particularly in the **1930s to demonstrate its scientific basis, race or racial classifications have virtually no scientific foundation**.
- If anything, the only conclusion from available evidence is that the whole of humanity has the same lineage, that there are no races within humans but only **one single human 'race'**.



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- Yet, while scientifically speaking, race is a fiction, a large number of people believe in the existence of races. Race is very much a cultural and social reality.
- The classification of humans into different races **is a necessary but far from sufficient ingredient of racism which depends on two additional, deeply troublesome features. First**, a given set of biological characteristics is believed to be necessarily related to certain dispositions, traits of character and behaviour. Biological descent fixes a person's culture and ethics. Our capacity for reasoning, for 'civilization', our propensities towards sexual lasciviousness or ability to make money, can all be read off by examining our face and body.
- **Second,** these racial cultures and ethical systems are hierarchically arranged. Those on top are intrinsically superior to those at the bottom.

**What exactly is the Race or Racism?**

- Racism, then, **is a systematic ideology, a complex set of beliefs and practices that, on the presumed basis of biology, divides humanity into the 'higher' us and a lower 'them'**.
- It not only sustains a **permanent group hierarchy** but deeply stigmatises those designated as inferior.
- This sense of hierarchy provides a motive for say, whites to treat blacks in ways that would be viewed as cruel or unjust if applied to members of their own group.
- For instance, contact with them is often regarded as contaminating, polluting. It should therefore be avoided or kept to a minimum.
- To prevent **sexual contamination through inter-marriage, the southern States of America had the severest laws sanctioning public lynching**.
- How else could the **'colour line' be scrupulously maintained?** This explains something important. Though colour-consciousness should not be problematic in theory, in reality, an acute awareness of colour is almost always a symptom of racism lurking somewhere unnoticed.

**Racism distinguishes even inferior races into two kinds:**

- One i**nferior race is considered so much beyond the pale that it cannot be lived with**, and must be exterminated. This is infamously illustrated by the virulent a**nti-Semitism in Nazi Germany** that led to the final solution, the Holocaust.

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- **The second type of race is fit only to be controlled, subordinated, enslaved.** Anti-black racism, our main concern here, is an obvious example. Closer home, some Varna-related ideologies (in the Dharmashastras from 1st ACE onwards) that stigmatised the ***pratiloma*** **castes,** particularly the **'Chandalas',** function as virtual equivalents of racism as do the now somewhat scarce Christian anti-Judaism or contemporary Islamophobia.

**An ideology on display**

**Racism naturalises a person's belief, character and culture.** For example,

- **being uneducated is seen not as socio-economic deprivation but a sign of inherited low IQ;**
- **blacks are predatory and are also seen to have an innate streak of savagery**, which unless kept down by brute force from time to time, might explode and destroy civilisation.

**It is this ideology of anti-black racism that was brazenly on show in the 9- minute video clip of the merciless, life-extinguishing force used by the police on George Floyd**.

Some Americans notice and seem shell-shocked by racism only when such violence occurs. **Hasn't the civil rights movement been successful in damaging racism, they ask?** Is it not difficult now to justify any act by explicit reference to race? Is this not good reason to believe that racism will disappear from America by good laws, education and rational argument? Alas, the very success of the movement that helped develop a motivated blindness to how open discrimination of blacks has been displaced by another system of hidden discrimination.

**A systematic constraint on avenues for improving the quality of life forces their descent into pretty crime, incarceration, stigma attached to imprisonment and the severe discrimination and exclusion** that follows the charge of felony. All these, as scholars such as Jane Hill have shown, have made the criminal system produce results as vicious as generated by colour-based slavery and racial segregation.

**For example, in a number of southern States in America, once declared a felon, a person is disqualified from voting**. So, once the criminal justice system labels people of colour as "criminals", whites have the sanction to engage in all the practices of subordination that they had apparently abandoned. **The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, surpassing those in highly repressive regimes such as China and Iran.** The figures related to African-Americans are shocking. In several States, they are 10 times more


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likely to go to prison than whites. **According to the Death Penalty information Center of the U.S., between 1976-2019, black defendants sentenced to death for killing whites numbered 291, while white defendants killing blacks were only 21**, a staggering figure close to 14 times more! (For a quick overview, also see the Netflix film, "13th").

**Racialised criminal system**

- **It is amply clear that the feel-good anti-racism of some Americans that views racism as an aggregate of mistaken beliefs held by individuals that can be dissipated by education and rational argument simply does not work**. True, good education helps in dismantling racism but the fact remains that much of it lies hidden within the social structure, in habits, practices and institutions.
- **Vulnerabilities amassed over centuries of anti-black racism leave African-Americans facing multiple, intersecting hurdles to a good life.**
- As mentioned, the current criminal system that awards unfair advantage and privilege to whites, while inflicting unmerited and unjust disadvantages on blacks exemplifies this invisible monster.
- **Only a peaceful movement to end institutionalised racism, with both blacks and white participants, quite like the recent protests after Floyd's murde**r, can break the back of this evil. But can such a movement be sustained? Will it be allowed to?

**22. Flattening the climate curve**

**Context**

- **Two interrelated curves** began their upward trend two centuries ago with the advent of the industrial age.
- The **first curve was the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide** (or, more generally, all greenhouse gases, GHGs) and the **second was the average global temperature curve**.

**An upward trend**

- Actually, **the CO2 curve began its upward march about 18,000 years ago when it was a little under 200 parts per million (ppm)** and earth was much colder. **By the time it reached 270 ppm about 11,500 years ago, the warmer conditions accompanying this curve made it possible for the emergence of agriculture**.


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- Over the past million years, CO2 levels **never exceeded 280-300 ppm**. They always went back to 200 ppm before rising again in a cyclical fashion.
- They remained steady at close to **280 ppm for 10,000 years until, beginning in the mid-19th century**, they began to rise again as humans burnt coal and oil to fuel the industrial revolution, and burnt forests to expand agriculture and settlements.
- F**rom a mere 0.2 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions in 1850, annual emissions increased to 36 billion tonnes by 2018**.
- If **all this CO2 had accumulated in the atmosphere, we can say that human life would have been altered beyond recognition**.
- Nature has been rather kind to us so far — about **one-half of all CO2 emissions have been sanitised from the atmosphere, equally by growing vegetation on land and by absorption in the oceans**.
- Thus, t**he levels of CO2 in the atmosphere reached 407 ppm in 2018**, a level last experienced by earth some three million years ago.

**Second curve**

- The second curve of **direct consequence to us is the global average temperature curve**. From **1850 onwards, for over a century, the global temperature showed a slight warming** trend. But there was nothing suggestive of anything serious.
- From **1975 onwards**, the temperature graph has shown a distinct, upward trend.
- By **2015, the globe had heated by a full degree Celsius relative** to a hundred years previously.
- Climate modellers unequivocally project that under **the current trends of emissions the globe will heat up by 4?C by the end of the century**.

**What climate change includes**

- Climate change **involves not just a change in temperature but every other component of weather, including rainfall, humidity and wind speed**.
- **Indirect effects follow, such as a rise in sea levels from melting glaciers**.
- Globally there have been several extreme weather events such as **hurricanes, heat waves or droughts**.
- While no single event can be directly attributed to climate change, the collective trends are consistent with climate change predictions.



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**For the sake of illustration, let us focus only on temperature change**

- The **2003 European heat wave killed over 70,000 people**.
- The years **2015-19 have globally been the warmest years on record**.
- Leave aside the **Amazon fire of 2019, the bush fires of 2019-20 in Australia** were unprecedented in their scale and devastation.
- While our attention has been on COVID-19, news has just come in that **March 2020 has been the second warmest March on record**.
- **The Climate Impact Lab at the University of Chicago put out a warning for India last year that if global CO2 emissions continue to gallop at the present rate, average summer temperatures would rise by 4?C** in most States.
- Extremely hot days (days above 35?C), which were only five days in 2010, **would increase to 15 days by 2050 and to 42 days by 2100 on average across all districts.**
- A more moderate emissions scenario, as a result of countries largely fulfilling their commitments under the Paris Agreement, would keep average global temperature rise below 2?C compared to pre-industrial levels.

**Tackling the climate crisis**

- The most **common excuse is that the world cannot afford to curb GHG emissions for fear of wrecking the economy**. An article in ***Nature*** **in 2019 highlighted the financial dimensions of tackling the looming climate crisis**.
- Apparently, **the wealthy nations are spending over $500 billion** each year internally on projects aimed at reducing emissions.
- **The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, however, estimates that a sustained annual investment of $2.4 trillion** in more efficient energy systems is needed until **2035** in order to keep warming below the more ambitious 1.5?C relative to pre-industrial levels.
- To put this in perspective, that is about **2.5% of the global GDP**.
- **Some of the wrangling over money relates to the amounts that the wealthy nations, which have caused most of the GHGs resulting in global warming, agreed to pay other countries to cope with climate change**.
- At the UN Climate Conference i**n 2009, the richest nations had pledged to provide $100 billion** in aid each year by 2020 to the poorer countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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- **In 2017, for which data are available, only $71 billion had been provided, with most of the money going towards mitigation and less than 20% towards climate adaptation**.
- Such numbers had been challenged prior to the **2015 Paris Summit by many countries, including India, because much of the so-called aid provided did not come out of dedicated climate funds but, rather, development funds or simply loans which had to be repaid**.
- It thus seems unlikely that the rich countries will deliver $100 billion in tangible climate finance during 2020.

**Covid and Climate change**

- COVID-19 has unwittingly given humanity a brief respite from the climate change curve. **Carbon emissions from fossil fuels have surely reduced in recent weeks**.
- **How long this respite will last ironically depends on the extent to which the global economy has been wrecked** by COVID-19.
- Commentators are already talking about a **paradigm shift in the structure and functioning of societies** once the pandemic subsides.
- This is also a make-or-break moment for the **climate trajectory which has to be flattened within a few years if we are to avoid dangerous climate change**.
- **Nature's kindness is not expected to last beyond a 2?C rise in temperature as the carbon sequestered into vegetation will be thrown back into the atmosphere**.
- **Also remember that earth has already warmed by 1?C** and we really have only another 1?C (or 0.5?C if we are concerned about island nations) as a safety margin.

**Conclusion**

- COVID-19 has **elicited an unprecedented response worldwide**. Only **cognitive psychologists can explain why the spectre of dangerous climate change impacting human civilizations** has not yet evoked a comparable response.
- There seems to be **wishful thinking that technology can be used to suck out billions of tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere and store this safely somewhere**, but available ones are extremely slow and expensive.



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- **Harebrained schemes to regulate solar radiation by geo-engineering are bound to bring nasty surprises**. There is no substitute to reducing GHG emissions.
- Technologists, economists and social scientists must plan for a sustainable planet based on the principles of equity and climate justice within and across nations. **It is the responsibility of leaders to alter their mindset and act on the looming climate crisis with the same alacrity they have shown on COVID-19**.

**23. Needed, a transfusion for public health care**

**Context**

- A news channel in India alleged recently that **several private hospitals in the country were "exposed" by a "sting operation" to be levying fees in excess** when **COVID-19** patients went to them for care.
- It is not clear why a "sting operation" was necessary; **the high cost of medical care in the top hospitals of the country is well known**. Anyone who has had major surgery or received intensive care in any of the hospitals can testify to that.
- **The debate now is whether such exorbitant rates are justified during a pandemic** such as the one we are in the midst of, or indeed, ever.

***Why do we have so many private hospitals in a poor country such as India?***

- We have **more hospital beds in the private sector than in the public sector**. It is estimated that there are **19 lakh hospital beds, 95,000 ICU beds and 48,000 ventilators in India**. Most of these are **concentrated in seven States, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana and West Bengal. Except for Tamil Nadu, Delhi and West Bengal,** there are far more beds and ventilators in the private sector than in the public, according to the **Center For Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy**.

**A mirror to public care**

- **The reason for this abundance of private health care is obviously the lack of adequate public health care**. This situation has developed **due to two main reasons**.
- Since Independence, India has, quite rightly, focused attention on the larger picture. **The priority in a developing country would be the provision**



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**of primary care at the peripheral level, preventive measures, immunisation, maternity and paediatric care as well as dealing with common infections such as tuberculosis**. We have done this well, resulting in impressive improvements in many health-care indices in the last few decades. However, **not enough hospital beds and specialised facilities** were provided by the public sector during this time. At the same time, **the burgeoning middle class and increasing wealth produced an explosion in the demand for good quality health care**. Private medicine was quick to capitalise on this demand.

- **The second reason** for the dominance of private medicine in India is the **lack of adequate investment in public health**. The Indian government spends an abysmally low **1.3% of GDP on public health care,** which is woefully inadequate. Allocation has to be at least double this to address some of our pressing needs. **Greater transparency and tighter administration are necessary to ensure that our resources are utilised appropriately**. Specialists should be adequately compensated to obviate their need for private practice.

**Other points**

- **Private medicine in India is by no means uniform**. It is estimated that there are more than one million unqualified medical practitioners, mostly in the rural areas.
- **Most of them provide basic health care, charging a modest fee**. Some may have claims of expertise (often unproven) in alternative systems of medicine such as ayurveda and homoeopathy.
- It is not unheard of them to sometimes venture into minor surgery.
- **At the other end of the spectrum are state-of-the-art corporate hospitals, that are well equipped and well-staffed** and which provide excellent service at high cost.
- These are often set up in metro cities at huge cost and have successfully engineered a reverse brain drain of many specialists from pursuing lucrative jobs abroad and staying back in or returning to India.
- **Between the two extremes are a large number of private practitioners and institutions providing a wide range of services of varying quality**.
- Some are run by trusts, charitable organisations and religious missions, often providing excellent quality at modest costs.


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- The wide range of quality in medical services in India reflects the wide range of income and wealth in India. It is estimated that the **wealth of the top 1% in India is four times the combined wealth of the bottom 70%.**
- The wealthy demand, pay for, and often get, world-class health care. The middle class, seeing what is possible, is beginning to demand similar care at affordable cost.
- The poorer 70% are left to the vagaries and mercy of an unpredictable public health-care system and low cost charlatans.

**What needs to be done??**

- The **public health-care system desperately needs higher government spendin**g. **Health care cannot be left to private medicine** in a developing country, or indeed, in any country.
- The **United States, despite spending more than 15% of its enormous GDP** on health care in the form of largely **insurance-based private medicine**, has **poorer health-care indices than Europe, where government-funded universal health care (e.g. The National Health Service of the United Kingdom) is available,** though the per capita health-care expenditure in Europe is substantially less than in the U.S.
- Health-care spending by the government must be appropriate, **based on evidence, and transparent and accountable**.
- **Training of doctors** and health-care workers also need to be the responsibility of the government mainly.
- Recent reforms in the selection of medical students need to be scrutinised to see if they are having the desired result.
- Private hospitals and institutions will need to be regulated. Costing and auditing of care and procedures need to be done by independent bodies.
- This will not only ensure appropriate care at the right cost but also prevent unreasonable demands of suspicious patients and family.

**Conclusion**

- **No hospital, business, institution or individual should profiteer from a national calamity such as the COVID-19 pandemic.** Hospitals, like any other institution, have a social responsibility to provide care in times of need.
- **But one should be also aware of the actual costs involved which have to be met.**



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- **The cost of medical care often follows the law of diminishing returns; as the treatment gets more sophisticated, further and further increments, although small, cost enormously more.** Some of the drugs used in the care of severely-ill COVID-19 patients may cost more than ?50,000 a shot, for example, and may provide only a marginally better outcome.
- **"Capping" costs may necessitate sacrificing some of these expensive options.**
- **Private hospitals should, and will, be prepared to forego profits and even suffer losses during a national disaster.**
- But if losses become unsustainable, they may be forced to lay off employees, close beds or even entire hospitals, like any other business. That will hardly benefit anyone.

## 24. An unravelling of the Group of Seven

**Context**

- The **next G7 summit, tentatively scheduled in Washington DC in mid-June**, has been **postponed** by the host, U.S. President Donald Trump. His decision followed German Chancellor **Angela Merkel's decision to stay away** from the meeting, ostensibly because of restrictions on travel imposed by COVID-19. She may not have wanted to go just for a photo opportunity. The recent meetings of G7 have had desultory results.

**Logic of expansion**

- While postponing the summit "to at least September", Mr. Trump declared that in any case, the G7 "is a **very outdated group of countries" and no longer properly represented "what's going on in the world"**. He asked, rhetorically, why not a **G10 or G11 i**nstead, with the inclusion of **India, South Korea, Australia and possibly Russia**.
- Elaborating this logic, the White House Director of Strategic Communications said the U.S. President wanted to include other countries, including the ***Five Eyes countries (an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States)***, and **to talk about the future of China**. A Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official immediately reacted, labelling it as **"seeking a clique targeting China"**.


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- China's objection to an expanded G7 is no reason for India to stay away from it, if invited to join.
- India has attended several G7 summits earlier too, as a special invitee for its outreach sessions.
- India's Prime Minister was guest **invited to Biarritz, France to the G7 summit last year**, along with other heads of government (**Australia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Egypt, Rwanda, Senegal, Spain, and South Africa**).
- The G7 emerged as a restricted club of the rich democracies in the **early 1970s**. The quadrupling of oil prices just after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, when members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo against Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States, shocked their economies.
- Although the French were spared the embargo, the chill winds of the OPEC action reverberated around the world.
- French President **Valéry Giscard d'Estaing invited the Finance Ministers of five of the most developed members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development**, the United States, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the United Kingdom, for an informal discussion on global issues.
- This transformed into a **G7 Summit of the heads of government from the following year, with the inclusion of Canada (1976)**, and the European Commission/Community (later Union) attending as a non-enumerated member, a year later.
- **On the initiative of U.S. President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the G7 became the G8, with the Russian Federation joining the club in 1998.** This ended with **Russia's expulsion following the annexation of Crimea in 2014**.

**Economic circumstances**

When constituted, **the G7 countries accounted for close to two-thirds of global GDP**. According to the 2017 report of the accountancy firm, PwC, **"The World in 2050", they now account for less than a third of global GDP on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis**, and less than half on market exchange rates (MER) basis.

- The **seven largest emerging economies (E7, or "Emerging 7"), comprising Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and**



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**Turkey, account for over a third of global GDP on purchasing power parity (PPP) terms,** and over a quarter on MER basis.

- India's economy is already the **third largest in the world in PPP terms, even if way behind that of the U.S. and China**.
- By 2050, the PwC Report predicts, **six of the seven of the world's best performing economies will be China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, and Russia.**
- Two other E7 countries, Mexico and Turkey, also improve their position.
- It projects that India's GDP will increase to $17 trillion in 2030 and $42 trillion in 2050 in PPP terms, in second place after China, just ahead of the United States.
- This is predicated on India overcoming the challenge of COVID-19, sustaining its reform process and ensuring adequate investments in infrastructure, institutions, governance, education and health.

**The limitations of G7**

The success or otherwise of multilateral institutions are judged by the standard of whether or not they have successfully addressed the core global or regional challenges of the time. **The G7 failed to head off the economic downturn of 2007-08**, which led to the rise of the G20. **In the short span of its existence, the G20 has provided a degree of confidence, by promoting open markets, and stimulus, preventing a collapse of the global financial system**.

- The G7 has not covered itself with glory with respect to contemporary issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the challenge of the Daesh, and the crisis of state collapse in West Asia.
- It had announced its members would phase out all fossil fuels and subsidies, but has not so far announced any plan of action to do so. The G7 countries account for 59% of historic global CO2 emissions ("from 1850 to 2010"), and their coal fired plants emit "twice more CO2 than those of the entire African continent".
- Three of the G7 countries, France, Germany, and the U.K., were among the top 10 countries contributing volunteers to the Daesh, which had between 22,000-30,000 foreign fighters just two years ago.
- West Asia is in a greater state of turmoil than at any point of time since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, leading to a migrants crisis that persuaded many countries in Europe to renege on their western liberal values, making the


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Mediterranean Sea a death trap for people fleeing against fear of persecution and threat to their lives.

**Need for a new institution**

- **The world is in a state of disorder. The global economy has stalled and COVID-19 will inevitably create widespread distress**. Nations need dexterity and resilience to cope with the current flux, as also a **revival of multilateralism**, for they have been seeking national solutions for problems that are unresolvable internally. Existing international institutions have proven themselves unequal to these tasks. A new mechanism might help in attenuating them.
- **It would be ideal to include in it the seven future leading economies, plus Germany, Japan, the U.K., France, Mexico, Turkey, South Korea, and Australia**. If Mr. Trump loses his re-election bid, this might have to wait for a few years. **The 2005 ad hoc experiment by Prime Minister Tony Blair in bringing together the G7 and the BRICS countries was a one-off**.
- A new international mechanism will have value only if it focuses on key global issues.
- **India would be vitally interested in three: international trade, climate change, and the COVID-19 crisis**. A related aspect is how to push for observing international law and preventing the retreat from liberal values on which public goods are predicated.
- Global public health and the revival of growth and trade in a sustainable way (that also reduces the inequalities among and within nations) would pose a huge challenge.
- **Second order priorities for India would be cross-cutting issues such as counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation.** An immediate concern is to ensure effective implementation of the 1975 Biological Weapons Convention and the prevention of any possible cheating by its state parties by the possible creation of new microorganisms or viruses by using recombinant technologies.
- **On regional issues, establishing a *modus vivendi* with Iran would be important to ensure that it does not acquire nuclear weapons and is able to contribute to peace and stability in Afghanistan, the Gulf and West Asia.** The end state in Afghanistan would also be of interest


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to India, as also the reduction of tensions in the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

**25. Remaining non-aligned is good advice**

**Context**

- For weeks, the India-China stand-off dominated newspaper headlines, warning about the possibility of a major conflict along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh and Sikkim** sectors.
- With both India and China agreeing to step back marginally from positions adopted at the beginning of May, and "reaching an agreement", the newspapers and most other believe that tensions have abated. The reality is, however, very different.

**Behind the statements**

# Confirmed facts about **incursions during May** are that **Chinese forces** came in sizeable numbers and crossed the **undemarcated LAC** at quite a few points in the **Ladakh and Sikkim** sectors.

# These were in the vicinity of **Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector.**

# Talks at the level of **military commanders**, from **lieutenant generals to brigadiers** and lower formations, have produced, to repeat the official jargon, a "**partial disengagement**".

# This time, it would appear, the **Chinese are here to stay** in places such as the **Galwan Valley**.

# It is also unclear, as of now, whether the Chinese would withdraw from Pangong Tso, any time soon.

# Another bone of contention also seems unlikely to be resolved for quite some time, viz., **China's insistence** that **India stop road construction** in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory.

# **Public attention** has been **deflected** from **China's sizeable military presence** along the LAC, (comprising **armoured vehicles, artillery units** and **infantry combat vehicles** in far larger numbers than at any time in recent years.

**More weightier reasons**


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# India needs to undertake a **detailed analysis** of recent events to find proper answers to many vexed questions.

# To merely affirm that **India's decision to strengthen** its **border infrastructure** was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic.

# Both **India and China** have been **strengthening** their **border infrastructure** in recent years, and while the strengthening of the **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road** may have angered the Chinese.

# Admittedly, Chinese **President Xi Jinping disdains Deng Xiaoping's aphorism**, "**to keep your head low and bide your time"**, but Mr. Xi is not known to act irresponsibly.

# A **demonstration of military strength**, merely because **India was improving its border infrastructure**, would fall into this category.

# Nor does this action fit in with western assertions that such steps demonstrate China's newly assertive post-pandemic foreign policy.

# There have to be far weightier reasons for China's actions, and India needs to do a deep dive to discern whether there is a method behind China's actions, viz., as for instance, the existence of certain **geopolitical factors**, an increase in **bilateral tensions** between India and China, **economic pressures**, apart from China's internal dynamics.

# China's action clearly belies the **code of conduct** drawn up at the **Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu)** summits by the leaders of India and China, and the recent incursions do convey the imprimatur(a person's authoritative approval) of the top Chinese leadership.

**The American orbit**

# If we were to examine **geopolitical factors**, it is no secret that while India professes to be non-aligned, it is **increasingly perceived** as having **shifted towards the American orbit** of influence.

# Whenever there is a conflict of interest between U.S and China , India tends to side with the U.S. and against China.

# An evident degree of **geopolitical convergence** also exists between the **U.S. and India** in **the Indo-Pacific**, again directed against China.

# India is today a member of the **Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India)** which has a definite **anti-China connotation**.

# U.S. President Donald Trump's **latest ploy** of **redesigning the G-7**, including in it countries such as India **(India has conveyed its acceptance)**, but **excluding**



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**China**, provides China yet another instance of India and China being in opposite camps.

# A recent editorial in **China's Global Times** confirms how seriously China views the growing **proximity between Delhi and Washington.**

# India is almost the last holdout in Asia against China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI).

# India also loses no opportunity to declaim against the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).**

# China further views India's assertions **regarding Gilgit-Baltistan**, as an **implicit attack on the CPEC,** China's flagship programme.

# More recently**, India was one of the earliest countries** to put **curbs and restrictions** on **Chinese foreign direct investment**.

# Adding to this, is the rising crescendo of **anti-China propaganda** within India.

# The **Global Times(China)** has implied in one of its editorial pieces recently, that **China's friendly policy towards India should be reciprocated**, and that India "**should not be fooled by Washington**".

# On the eve of the **recent high-level border talks** between top military leaders, China again made an elliptical reference to the **need for India to maintain equidistance between the U.S. and China.**

# **Such sentiments** do **impact border matters**.

# As the **Special Representative for Border Talks with China (2005 to 2010)**, this sentiment was an ever present reality during all border discussions.

# The document, "**Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question" (2005)**, one of the very few documents relating to the China-India border, reflects this reality.

**China's internal dynamics**

# One should also not ignore the **impact of internal pressures** that have been generated within China .

# Mr. Xi has, no doubt, **accumulated more power than any other Chinese Communist leader** since Mao, but there are reports of **growing opposition within party** ranks to some of his policies, **including the BRI**.

# As the full impact of the **most serious health crisis** that China has faced since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 becomes evident, and alongside this the Chinese economic miracle is also beginning to lose steam, the **current Chinese leadership** is faced with an **unique crisis**.



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# The coupling of **political and economic tensions** have greatly aggravated pressures on Mr. Xi, and the situation could become still more fragile, given the rising tide of anti-China sentiment the world over.

**History and the present**

# India is being increasingly **projected as an alternative model to China**, and being co-opted into a wider **anti-China alliance** which China clearly perceives as provocation.

# We cannot ignore or forget the circumstances that led to the unfortunate **India-China war** of **1962.**

# Faced with the disaster of the **Great Leap Forward**, and increasing isolation globally (with even Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev trading barbs), Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West.

# A **single misstep** could lead to a **wider conflagration**, which both sides must avoid.

**Way Ahead**

# This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place — even the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO,** now seems to be joining the anti-China bandwagon under prodding from the U.S.

# India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains **truly non-aligned** and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India's long-term interest.

**26. In pandemic crisis, bridging the gulf with West Asia**

**Context**

# As the world continues to collaborate in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic , the **post-pandemic architecture** may look drastically different from what we have been used to.

# For India and its foreign policy, the **West Asia/Gulf region** holds a significant court for **strategic, economic and even domestic political agendas**, ranging from **migration to energy security**.

# The pandemic has initiated a **reverse migration of Indian blue-collar workers** as projects in oil-rich States stall, and infrastructure development halts amidst a contracting global economy that some say may **be worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s.**

**The stakes in numbers**


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# India would **repatriate more than 100,000 of its citizens** between May 17 and June 13 from 60 countries, a **majority of whom** are expected to be from the **West Asia region**.

# Between June 10 and June 16,there were around 20 flights scheduled to bring Indian citizens back between India and Saudi Arabia alone.

# In neighbouring **United Arab Emirates (UAE), more than 3.4 million Indians work**.

# Overall, an estimated figure of close to **nine million Indians work in West Asia**, responsible for sending back more than **56% of India's annual infusion of $80 billion in remittances**.

# The **UAE alone** is responsible for **$19 billion in remittances**, being the **third largest trade partner of India after the United States and China.**

# The **oil price crash**, triggered by expectations of **oversupply** following a **dispute on output caps between Saudi Arabia and Russia**, exacerbated by the **crash in demand due to COVID-19,** will carry massive costs to the West Asian economies, and, by association, to foreign workers employed there.

# According to a **Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry survey**, more than **70% of businesses classified as small and medium-sized enterprises in Dubai, many owned by Indian nationals, may not survive over the months** to come as **labour critical industries** such as **tourism, conventions, hospitality and airlines** bear the immediate brunt.

# To put it in perspective, according to a **2019 U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council report**, the **UAE's hospitality sector** itself **contributes 4.6% of the country's GDP**, making nearly **600,000 jobs** that are **mostly fulfilled by foreign workers**.

# Some reports suggest that up to 30% of these jobs could be lost.

# In **Saudi Arabia**, consumer spending for April 2020, compared to the same time last year, was **reportedly down by 34.6%.**

# However, beyond the immediate effects, the **oil price crash** is expected to have a significant **blow on the reform plans** initiated by **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman,** specifically mega-projects such as the envisioned $**500 billion futuristic mega-city of Neom** planned on **the coast of the Red Sea**, and other more structural efforts to open up the Saudi economy and move the country's financial ecosystem away from its overt dependence on petro dollars.

**Oil and investment**

# India gets **around 60% of its hydrocarbon requirements from West Asia**.



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# On an annualised basis**, India saves up to $1.35 billion for each $1 drop in oil prices**.

# **With Brent still hovering under $40**, the softening oil prices have helped cushion the impact of the national lockdown on the **balance of payments**.

# India has also taken advantage of the low prices to build up its **strategic reserves** and is looking at **offshore storage options**.

# The major **sovereign wealth funds** and other financial institutions in West Asia have been **hit hard by COVID-19** as well.

# India is well-placed to attract a significant amount of **capital from West Asia** and reports of investment by **UAE's Mubadala** and **Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF)** are a case in point.

# The **economic reforms** announced by the Finance Minister in the week of May 13 bring much needed clarity to industrial and agricultural policy.

# A strong, positive message to West Asian investors from New Delhi is now the need of the hour.

**Steps to take**

# As a starting point, working with the government of **Maharashtra** to expedite land acquisition for the **$50 billion mega-refinery project** could be an important first step.

# **Saudi Aramco and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company** have committed to investing **$25 billion** in the project.

# **Fast-track resolution** of **endless litigation** that has bedevilled the sale of a major stake of Mumbai airport by GVK to a consortium that includes the UAE sovereign fund, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) will also send out a positive signal to the markets.

# Some of **the UAE's** largest companies such as **Etisalat, Emaar and Etihad** have previously had a **tough time with their investments in India**.

# By creating a few immediate success stories, India has the opportunity to transform the landscape and attract the kind of **long-term capital** that the economy needs.

# The government has announced that it has set up an **empowered group** headed by **Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba** to take necessary steps to **attract FDI** into India. Hopefully, this mechanism can take up West Asia on priority.

**Reverse migration and jobs**

# If the economic prophecies come true till a certain degree, India will also share the brunt with West Asia, and both are well placed to help each other in this regard.



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# Arguably, more than the loss of trade revenue and remittances, the **return of semi-skilled** and **skilled workers** alike into an economy already struggling with jobs may become a point of worry.

# To mitigate the same, the government has tried to soften the blow by launching the **Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support (SWADES)** which attempts to **capture the skills profile** of returning workers and house them in a central portal that can be **accessed by Indian and foreign companies**.

# However, much more needs to be done with regard to reverse-migration and the economics attached to it, as globally, bilateral and multilateral trade-diplomacy is set to witness a tectonic shift towards the unknown.

## 28. Building trust: On India-Pakistan ties

**Context**

- The **shelling and the retaliations** along the **Line of Control** with Pakistan are a matter of consternation, because it has been allowed to go on so long as to become an everyday occurrence.

**Shelling amidst the Pandemic**

# The unfortunate death **of Sepoy Lungabui Abonmli**, and the airlifting of two other soldiers, Lienkhothien Senghon and Sepoy Tangsoik Kwianiungar, to the Command Hospital in Udhampur because of injuries due to **shelling in Poonch sector** are the latest grim reminders of this phenomenon.

# Sepoy Abonmli is the third soldier to succumb to shelling in this area.

# All of May the **Pir Panjal range**, which **fronts the Kashmir Valley**, has seen mortar and small arms firing.

# On Saturday, splinter injuries from shelling in Haji Pir in Uri, claimed the life of Akhtar Begum, **a civilian**.

# When the shells reach deeper they **fall in residential areas**, in villages such as **Churunda and Silikote**.

# When shells begin raining, **villagers panic**, **leave their homes and run further**, to temporary shelters.

# This additional disruption to life in the aftermath of the **dilution of Article 370** last August and the **COVID-19 lockdown,** is something that should be addressed with urgency.

# **Shelling should not be allowed to be a regular occurrence**.

**India and Pakistan**


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**# Ceasefire with Pakistan** along the Line of Control is obviously **not working**, and the government needs to **build bomb shelters for civilians** until normalcy returns.

# Unfortunately, aspects of relations with Pakistan in other spheres are in poor repair as well.

# The **two personnel from the Indian mission** in Islamabad going **suddenly missing** for a while points to further breakdown in relations.

# It makes evident that India and Pakistan are unable even to adhere to reciprocal protocols regarding staff posted in the missions.

# Whether or not it is a **tit-for-tat reaction** for India having **expelled two Pakistan High Commission officials,** Abid Hussain Amid and Mohd Tahir Khan, on **charges of espionage,** India must take steps **to ensure its diplomatic personnel are spared such harassment**, which is always present and episodically on show.

**Way ahead**

- As the pandemic rages, with travel curbs and reduced face-to-face opportunities, it might be prudent to temporarily maintain **only essential mission staff in Pakistan** till India is able to **obtain trust and stability** in the ties.

**29. Call for action: On ICMR antibody test study**

**Context**

The results of a **serological test** conducted across 69 districts by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) have indicated that the confirmed numbers of COVID-19 infections reported from the **RT-PCR tests** are **likely an undercount**.

**<u>Serological or antibody tests</u>**

# **Serological or antibody tests are not as accurate as the PCR tests**, but they are **useful indicators of the spread of the novel coronavirus among people**.

# The ICMR study found that **0.73% of the population**, examined for **antibodies produced** specifically for **SARS-CoV-2 via an ELISA test**, had evidence of **past exposure to the virus.**

# In a population with a **low infection rate**, there is a **higher possibility of "false positives"** being reported.


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# A **number of respondents** could have been found to have **released antibodies** specific to coronaviruses, but **without actual exposure to SARS-CoV-2 alone**.

# But **the ICMR** in its methodology note in a paper in its online publication, **Indian Journal of Medical Research**, had said that the **actual results** would account for the limitations of the ELISA test.

# If this is accepted, then the number of people found to have been exposed to the virus would **be 7 lakh people or more, if** the overall population of these districts is considered, much higher than the 35,000 people who had tested positive in the entire country during this period.

# The full paper detailing the results of the study by the ICMR is still not out in the public domain.

# **Serological tests**, despite inaccuracies, can be a **useful guide** of the **extent of the infections among vulnerable people** and within hot spots, and periodic tests of this kind are a must amid the rise of cases that have now crossed the 3.2 lakh mark.

# The clear takeaway from this report is not what the Director-General of the ICMR claimed that there is **no evidence** of "**community transmission**", but that there has not been **adequate testing by the more accurate RT-PCR method**.

**Inadequate testing**

# While the **"lockdown" strategy** might have **slowed down the rise in cases** and fatalities in the early period of the outbreak in the country, the **severe effect it had on the economy,**.

# India **continues to register among the highest daily rises** in COVID-19 cases and **fatalities world-wide** and this has now burdened the health institutions in many urban centres following the easing of the lockdown.

# Yet, authorities continued to **test at relatively low levels** with a **lot of variance** across States.

# Some States such as **Maharashtra and Gujarat have tested at a higher rate** (tests per million population) than many others, but have not increased the overall testing to account for the relative rise in the size of the outbreak.

**# Telangana has still not ramped up testing numbers** adequately and has been opaque in the release of testing data.

**Way ahead**

# **Testing, tracing and treatment** at a higher order across the population besides measures such as mask wearing and practising hand hygiene, as the experience of


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several countries that have **considerably slowed down the rise in the case count shows**, is the clearest way to address the outbreak.

**30. Lessons for Yogi from Gandhi and Lee**

**Context**

# Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister **Yogi Adityanath** is determined to bring all **migrant workers** back to his State. He says he **does not want U.P.'s citizens to migrate in future**.

# He has a vision of **providing homes and jobs to all of them** .

# Moreover, he will be **competing with neighbouring States** (Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, etc.) and also States further away, which will also be working harder to grow jobs.

# **He needs a good plan**. He would do well to take **some lessons from Lee Kuan Yew**, the **founding father of modern Singapore**, and from **Mahatma Gandhi**, the father of the Indian nation.

**Developing Singapore**

**# Lee declared that Singapore would become the first 'developed' country in Asia**, when it was founded in **1965**.

# His **measure of development** was the **per capita incomes of Singaporeans** which would rise to the same levels as citizens in more advanced economies.

# **Singapore did not have any natural resources**, like **oil or minerals**, which it could sell to the West to bring in money for its citizens.

# All that it could offer large Western companies to **use was its strategic location** on **shipping routes between the East and West, and its people**.

# **Lee invited companies from the U.S., Europe, and Japan** to set up **manufacturing facilities** in **Singapore and use Singapore labour.**

# The **companies were attracted** by the large pools of **low-cost labour in ASEAN countries**.

# Amongst these countries, **Singapore was the most attractive** for its location.

# **But Lee had a condition** they were not prepared for.

# He did not want them to merely set up labour-intensive assembly factories. **Lee wanted wages to rise in Singapore,** so that per capita incomes would rise. Therefore, he wanted the **companies to train Singaporeans to do higher-value work**.


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# **Global supply chains were forming** then: **MNCs were on the lookout for lower-cost sources**.

# MNCs could '**plug and play'** in larger labour markets. If **wages rose in Singapore,** which Lee wanted, **he feared they would move their assembly operations** to the **neighbouring countries.**

# **Lee promised the companies world-class infrastructure**, an **efficient administration**, and **low taxes**.

# In return, he wanted the companies to help the government by investing in **continuous upgradation of their employees' skills,** so that Singaporeans would earn more and Singapore would become **fully 'developed'**.

# The **companies were not willing** to make such **long-term investments** in Singapore's people.

# Lee **turned to J.R.D. Tata** to set up a **training centre** and a **precision tool room** in partnership with the Singapore government, and help **build foundations for Singapore's industrial growth**.

# Thus, the **Tatas were pioneers in Singapore in the 1970s**; other, much larger companies then came along.

# The **rules of globalisation** have made life **easy for migrant capital**, **not for migrant labour**.

# They make it easy for migrant capital to come into a country, make profits, and leave when it wishes to. It has been hard for migrant labour to join the global party.

# They have died in hundreds while crossing the seas to Europe, and walls are shutting them out from the U.S.

# Tragically, even when they leave India's globalising cities to go back to their villages, after being used and discarded, they are dying on the way out too.

# **Governments** must listen to and **care for their citizens and workers more than to investors.**

# They must **encourage only those investors** who care as **much for citizens and workers** where they invest as for their own investors back home.

# Economists who advise governments must be clear that **humans are not tools to produce returns for investors**; rather, **money is a tool to produce benefits for humans**.

**<u>Gandhian economics</u>**

# U**.P. is more complex than Singapore.**

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# Singapore is a city state with **about 6 million citizens**, while **U.P.,** with a population of more than **200 million**, has dozens of towns and thousands of villages.

# Migrants are returning from India's cities to villages in U.P. and other States. They are returning to a world Gandhi knew well.

# **Gandhi said** that **unless people in India's villages have economic and social freedom**, India cannot be a free country.

# This was his vision of **'poorna swaraj'**.

# For him**, political freedom** from the British was a step on the way.

# Gandhi is often dismissed as an impractical romantic. However, Gandhi and his economic advisers understood the **economic and social problems in India's villages** better than the **economists in India's Planning Commission** did.

# Gandhi also knew the **potential of India's poorest people**, who were merely statistics for the economists.

# Above all, he believed that the **economy must serve human needs, rather than human beings becoming fodder for the GDP.** This was a vision that Lee Kuan Yew had too: for him, the ultimate measure of Singapore becoming fully developed was not the size of its GDP, but the incomes of its citizens.

# U.P. does not have a **'migrant' problem**. It has a '**citizen' problem**.

# All citizens of the State (and India too) **deserve jobs, livelihoods and a good life** with **dignity**, whether they are migrants or not.

# In Lee's, Tata's, and Gandhi's books, diluting the rights of workers to make life easier for investors was not done.

# The world has been '**deglobalising**' since the **financial crisis of 2008**.

# Many countries have **raised barriers** against migrants from other countries.

# The **World Trade Organization** is very sick.

**# COVID-19** has sharply accelerated a trend **towards localisation** that was already under way. **Supply chains have broken up**. Barriers against movement of people have gone up everywhere.

# '**Gandhian' economics**, which **E.F. Schumacher (author of Small is Beautiful)** and **J.C. Kumarappa (sometimes referred to as Gandhi's Planning Commission)** articulated very well, is based on simple principles.

1. One, **human beings and local communities** must be the **means for human progress** — and their well-being must be the purpose of progress too.

2. Two, **governance must be strengthened at the local level**, in villages and cities.



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3. Three, wealth is good, but **wealthy people must be only trustees of a community's wealth, and not its owners.**
4. Four, the **alienation of owners from workers** must be reduced with the creation of new models of **cooperative capitalist enterprises**, where the workers, not remote capitalists, or the state, are owners of the enterprises.
# India had come to a fork in the road in 1947: it could run behind the West to catch up; or it could take a path less taken, using a **'Gandhian' approach for human development**.
# It chose to run behind the others. Now, we are back at the crossroads. The health crisis and the economic crisis have made people everywhere consider what path we should take after this crisis.

**31. No longer special: On India-Nepal ties**

**Context**

# After months of brinkmanship, India and Nepal have brought their relations to the edge of a precipice.
# The **Oli government's decision** to pass the **constitutional amendment** ratifying a change in its maps that include **Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura**, territories that India controls, marks a decidedly new phase in ties.

**Disputed territory**

# While the issue is an old one, it **resurfaced in 2019** when **New Delhi published new political maps** to reflect the changes following the decision on August 5 to **reorganise the State of Jammu and Kashmir,** and Nepal objected to the **depiction of disputed territory**.
# In **2000 and 2014**, India and Nepal agreed to hold talks about **Kalapani and Susta**, without much success.
# Matters snowballed when India's Defence Minister inaugurated a **surfaced road** over the territory; when Nepal protested, Indian Army Chief, General Naravane, suggested it was at the "behest" of China.
# While New Delhi contends that it was willing to discuss matters "at a mutually convenient date", **Kathmandu says the MEA** has rejected two dates suggested by the Nepal MoFA, and has **routinely dismissed requests** from the **Nepal Ambassador** for a meet with the Foreign Secretary.
# That the **MEA said Kalapani talks could wait** until both countries had dealt with the **coronavirus pandemic first**, further enraged the Oli government, which


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has pointed out India's participation by videoconference in bilateral and multilateral meetings.

# Meanwhile, **Mr. Oli's purposeful manner** in pursuing the amendment at exactly the same time as the **India-China border stand-off bolsters** the belief among some in New Delhi that he is speaking with confidence borne from **Beijing's backing.**

# Regardless of the truth of those accusations, or who is more responsible for the downslide in ties, the speed with which the **constitutional amendment** was passed has left little space for diplomacy now.

# It is necessary the **two nations resolve** their issues **through dialogue** lest they face more serious consequences.

# The Modi government has in the past not flinched from taking tough measures, including the **2015 blockade** that **severely affected India's land-locked neighbour**.

# The Oli government, which seeks to build its legacy by overturning what it calls "**unequal" agreements made by the monarchy**, could also cause a **security nightmare** for India if it **opens up other parts of their long boundary**, and **reverses old commitments** on open and unsecured border posts.

# Both sides moved quickly this week to manage the fallout of **border firing by Nepali police on a group of Indians that left one dead**.

# The same alacrity is needed to manage the fallout of Saturday's **amendment vote**, on the once celebrated "**special" relationship between the two countries**.

## 32. Making public transport safe during COVID-19

**Context**

# Central to India's lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19 was a **complete shutdown of the transport system.** Now, as the country emerges from the lockdown, a proper ramping up of the transport system is needed. This should not be done in haste, however.

**Can COVID-19 spread through public transport systems**?

- It is difficult to answer this question with numbers. A **recent paper** from the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** argued that **New York's subways seeded the epidemic in the city.**


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- It is commendable that **India shut down public transport** before it could contribute to the spread, with an **early lockdown**. We now need to consider what can ensue on a restart, especially of metro rail.

**COVID-19 and public transport**

- Fearing **crowd infections**, commuters prefer travelling in **private modes** like two-wheelers.
- Cities like Delhi, that resumed services nearly four weeks ago, **observed less ridership** than the allowed **20 passengers per bus**, despite the limited frequencies on many routes.
- Although **bus crowding** is seen in some cities such as Mumbai, it is **temporary** and due to a **lack of alternatives.**
- A significant **drop in public transport ridership** can be expected for months after resumption, based on opinion surveys. That means measures are needed to **gain the public's confidence** in mass transport modes, to avoid a **significant modal shift to road traffic.**
- The **Delhi Metro Rail Corporation** has released **guidelines to tackle several social distancing and sanitisation concerns**, and to address the possibility of **viral transmission through tokens, push buttons** on lifts, and handrails at the station elevators.
- Unfortunately**, public transit agencies** around the **world** face the problem of a **dearth of research by scientists** on the specific modality of COVID-19 transmission during public transport commute.

**Need for contact tracing data**

- **Confidentiality laws** usually prevent the **availability of contact-tracing data** to **extract the precise details** of how any individual got infected.
- There have been **some notable research efforts**, currently under peer review, that did use **detailed contact-tracing data** from **China and Korea**.
- One study says that **SARS-CoV-2** does **not seem to get transmitted much outdoors**.
- In fact, **only a single cluster of two cases** out of nearly a thousand was traced to an outdoor infection in China.
- Correlation to the **effect of air conditioning airflow** has also been established based on precise seating locations of those infected at a restaurant and at a call centre.

**Is it safe to travel via Metros ?**



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- Indian authorities who were already working under similar assumptions on the effects of **AC** will be proven justified by the conclusion of such research that there is **clearly high risk in indoor areas under AC with focused air flow.**
- From the above research we can conclude that a **non-AC bus** with **open windows** offers a **much less risky outdoor-like environment**.
- However, it would be **wrong to conclude** that an **AC metro rail coach is risky** – for a different reason, in that contact-time is also very important in viral transmission in indoor spaces.
- A majority of **metro rail trips** in Indian cities are no more than **20 minutes long**, and there is research indicating that this **may not be long enough** for **significant viral densities** and **inhalation of sufficient viral particles**, even **without social distancing**.
- It is unlikely for any **significant level of public transport infections** to happen via **inhalation or even crowding and clothed-body contact**, though we cannot say it with certainty.
- However**, hand contact** with **common surfaces** must be considered, as it is well-known to **cause significant COVID-19 spread**.
- However, they leave out certain key elements that should be taken very seriously – the **handgrip rings** and **handrails from the ceilings**, the stanchion poles, and any grabrails on the seatbacks.
- If an infected asymptomatic person **deposits viral particles** on such surfaces, and another person grabs the same spot even briefly, the **viral particles could be picked** up by their hand.
- The second person could later deposit the particles on his/her face.
- The handgrip rings. Their surface is potentially the most dangerous inside a coach. Every successive individual who hangs on to the handgrip where one infected person **deposited the virus can pick up the virus at a high density** from the same spot.
- Then the probability is quite high that, **within an hour**, two or three others could pick up the virus left by one person on a handgrip. There is also a **high probability** that those people will touch their faces soon after.

**<u>Suggestions for more safety</u>**

- The first is to **employ staff** to **wipe the handgrips** at frequent intervals, constantly moving from **end to end** in the train.



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- Another is to give **wet sanitising wipes** to **every traveller** entering a metro rail coach with a suggestion to **have it in their palms** before touching or gripping anything. **Wipe disposal bins** will be needed in the coaches.
- The metro rail agencies' focus may need to **shift to the egressing(going out) passengers**, as it is important to **prevent them** from transferring what is on their hands to their faces after egress.
- We should expect a **lot of passengers** to **leave in a hurry** and to **not bother with cleaning their hands,** even if hand sanitiser dispensers are available.
- **Paid staff or volunteers** dispensing **hand sanitisers** on platforms can be an option.
- Offering **contact-less wash basins** with **soap dispensers** at the platform level could be effective. Signs on hand hygiene vis-a-vis touching surfaces are needed.
- There are **possible options** in metro trains to **create external airflow** to **dissipate viral particles**.
- **Metro rail authorities** are planning to **leave the doors open** at the terminal before the next run of each train.
- Since a majority of metro rail stretches in India are elevated, there are other creative options, if safety considerations will allow them. One would be to have **staff onboard** to **direct passengers away from a certain coach to other coaches**.
- The **doors of the empty coach can be opened** during **a run for two or three minutes**. We are not aware of such operations anywhere, so any attempt must only be after careful experimentation.
- Eventually, **metro rail AC systems** could be changed to **High Efficiency Particulate Air filters** with frequent circulation of fresh air.
- **Actions are needed from both authorities and the public** to keep our **public transport systems safe**.
- If no such actions are taken and a serious level of viral transmission is later traced to public transit, the result will be a **mode shift to private vehicles**.
- As pollution and accidents kill more people in India than COVID-19 does now, a mode shift away from public transport will have long-term consequences. Our buses and trains must be perceived as safe, so it is vital to assure ourselves that public transport is for the public – not the virus.

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## 33. Nepal ties and the Benaras to Bengaluru spectrum

**Context**

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

**A changing Nepal**

- The obvious **change in Nepal** is that it is **now a democratic republic** after nearly **250 years** of being a monarchy. The Nepali **Congress and Maoist leader, Prachanda**, claim democracy **(1990)** and the **abolition of monarchy (2008)** as their legacies.
- More pervasive is the **societal change** from Nepal's exposure to globalisation.
- **Geography**, too, stands to change, with the **Chinese now having the potential** to bore through the **Himalayas** and exhibiting their presence in Kathmandu in economics and politics.
- The **constant in Nepal is a nationalism** which is really a **mask for anti-India sentiment**. Politicians use it for personal gain, and it is deeply ingrained in the bureaucracy, academia and the media.
- Today, Prime Minister **K.P. Sharma Oli** is cementing his legacy as a nationalist by **extending Nepal's map into Indian territory**.
- The **cartographic aggression** and the embedding of the **new map in the country's national emblem and Constitution** are untenable and should have been avoided under all circumstances.
- But this **is not the first time** Nepal has thumbed its nose at India, even at the cost of its people's well-being. **In 2015, the Nepali Congress government** adopted the **new Constitution, ignoring India's concerns**.



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- This instinct to **cut off the nose** to spite the face is visible in the **lack of progress** on the game-changing **5,000 MW Pancheshwar hydroelectric project**.
- Nepal's viable **hydro-electricity potential is 40,000 MW**; the **country generates only 1,000 MW and must import 600 MW from India**.
- **Identity politics** with India is also visible within the country where **Nepali citizens from the Terai (Madhesis) feel discriminated as being "Indian**".

**Shift with globalisation**

- After democracy was restored in **1990, passports were more liberally issued**, and Nepalis began looking for **work opportunities globally**, beyond just India. **West Asia and South-East Asia** specifically became major destinations for labour migration.
- **Security uncertainties** with the **Maoist insurgency** at home also propelled **the trend of migration**.
- Students and skilled personnel began **moving to Europe, the United States, Australia, Thailand and even to Japan and South Korea.**
- As of **2019, nearly a fifth of Nepal's population**, from all parts of the country, were **reportedly overseas**. At an estimated **$8 billion, global remittances** account for nearly **30% of Nepal's nominal GDP**, making it one of the **most remittance-dependent countries** in the world.
- **Leftist ideology** and the prominent presence of international non-governmental organisations — ostensibly there to resolve conflict and alleviate poverty — have added to Nepal's exposure to the world.
- Underreported is the presence of **Christian missionaries** who entered Nepal during and in the aftermath of the Maoist insurgency. "**Faith Houses", as churches** are euphemistically called in Nepal, can be **found in villages and towns** across the country, **including the Terai**, and represent not only **European and American organisations but Korean** too.
- Moreover, posters advertising education opportunities in Australia, the United States, Canada and South-East Asia adorn Nepal.
- Nepal's **2011 Census** shows that over **80% of its 28 million-strong population** were **Hindus**, and since 1962, it had formally been a **Hindu kingdom**. The **new Constitution in 2015 makes Nepal a secular country.**

**A link despite diversification**



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- Kathmandu has continued its long-standing efforts to spread **Nepal's options beyond India**.
- **Multilateral development banks** are by far the **biggest lenders** and players in the country's development efforts. And in fact, one of **Nepal's largest aid donors is the European Union.**
- India and China are not the only players for big projects either. A **long-delayed project** to **pipe water into Kathmandu** was with an **Italian company**, major investments in **the telecom sector are coming from Malaysia**, and the **largest international carrier in Nepal is Qatar Airways.**
- The outward movement of students, along with with the **growth of institutions of higher learning at home**, has meant that most young people in Nepal, including emerging contemporary leaders in politics, business or academics, **have not studied in India**.
- This **lack of common collegiate roots** removes a natural bond of previous generations that had provided for better understanding and even empathy.
- Today, while most Nepalis understand Hindi, because of the **popularity of Bollywood,** articulation is quite another matter.
- **Nepal's trade with India** has grown in **absolute terms** and continues to account for more than **two-thirds of Nepal's external trade** of around **$12 billion annually**.
- **India continues to be the largest aggregate investor in Nepal**.
- The massive **under-construction Arun-III 900 MW hydro-electric project** is slated to singly produce as much power, when completed in five years, as Nepal produces today.
- Moreover, the **peg with the Indian Rupe**e provides unique stability to the **Nepali Rupee.**
- Nepal's **per-capita income** is just above $1,000. While the **huge remittance economy** has brought a semblance of well-being, the country has a long way to go in reaching prosperity.
- The relationship with India, with **open borders** and Nepalis being allowed to live and work freely, provides Nepal a **unique advantage** and an **economic cushion.**

**Focus areas**



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- India for its part should also focus on **developing its border areas with Nepal**, with better **roads and amenities of interest** (such as shopping malls) to the burgeoning Nepali middle class.
- This would have **economic plusses** for both sides and keep ties strong at the **people's level.**
- We must not forget the past nor turn away from it but, instead, must be mindful of the realities of a changing India and a changing Nepal.

## 34. A quota case: On quota politics

**Context**

- The Tamil Nadu's Cabinet's nod on Monday, for an o**rdinance to create a horizontal 7.5% reservation** of the State's quota of seats in **medical colleges**, is a well-intentioned move to address the problem of **poor representation from government schools in MBBS/BDS** courses which has been in existence **even prior to the introduction of NEET** for admission.

**Horizontal reservation**

- The **issue of inequity** has come in for criticism **against NEET** which came into operation in Tamil Nadu in 2017.
- Since then, there has been a high-decibel campaign, against NEET on the ground that the design and form of the test are **loaded against students of rural areas**, **government schools, Backward and Most Backward Classes, and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.**
- Like in the case of other **professional course entrance tests**, most candidates clearing NEET in Tamil Nadu are invariably those who **undergo private coaching**.
- The campaign appears to have had an impact during the **2019 Lok Sabha polls** as the DMK-led front won 38 out of 39 seats. The State's latest decision comes in the backdrop of this factor and also of next year's Assembly election.
- It is unclear whether the horizontal reservation will pass legal scrutiny.
- In February 2002, the **Madras High Court quashed the horizontal quota of 25%** in **professional courses for higher secondary students** from schools in village panchayats.
- This time, the State has acted on a **panel recommendation**, which concluded that there was a "**cognitive gap**" among students of government **greater advantage in NEET** than students of the State board.



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- Those backing the latest quota cite **special reservation** for the **differently-abled** and an arrangement in **Karnataka**, of **15% of seats being set apart for rural students** seeking professional courses.
- Apparently, there **is nothing in NEET's rules against States providing "special reservation**" out of their quota of seats, a position articulated, in 2017, by former Union Health Minister and BJP president, J.P. Nadda, in favour of **rural students.**
- The trend of **horizontal reservation** is happening with respect **to national law universities** for students **from the host States**.
- It is debatable whether the test of backwardness can be stretched to any extent although the **equity principle** is important.

**Way ahead**

- While poor representation in professional courses from the vulnerable sections is a symptom, the causes are deep-rooted. A holistic and sustained approach to improve school education will alone pave the way for a lasting solution.

## 35. Rural India, the new viral flash point

**Context**

- The initial misplaced optimism that India is somehow protected from the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be illusory, with rapidly escalating numbers of cases and deaths in **urban India**.
- The medical services in these urban areas — **Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai** to cite the three major epicentres of the epidemic — have been overwhelmed

**Clearly unprepared**

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


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the **stage for the inevitable** and even more **dangerous wave of this epidemic**.

- Just as **importations from other countries through air traffic** set the stage for the **urban blight, importations from urban to rural India will set the stage for the rural wave**.

**Contrasts in health care**

- There has always been an **urban-rural divide** in India **in health care and education**, two vital indices of human development.
- This deficiency has been very costly not only in terms of rural lives and livelihoods but also overall **national wealth creation**.
- The **lockdown of the entire country led to a paralysis** of **urban and rural life synchronously** while the **urban and rural waves** of this epidemic are clearly asynchronous.
- **The rural wave is just beginning** while the **urban wave is about to peak**.
- We find that **rural people are going about without masks** or **physical distancing, congregating in marketplaces and places of worship.**

**SOLUTIONS (V.Important)**

**Administer the social vaccine**

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


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**Proceeding step by step**

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

**Way ahead**

- If we are caught napping at this crucial hour, it will be a monumental error for which we can never forgive ourselves. State health administrators and the medical fraternity have the knowledge and skills to tackle the rural wave with courage and wisdom.

**36. Can a COVID-19 vaccine be developed soon?**

**Purpose of a vaccine**

- The great hope in the control of infectious diseases is always a vaccine.
- A vaccine could be a **weakened biological or synthetic agent** administered to humans that will protect them from contracting



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infectious diseases by **supplying specific antibodies** to **neutralise the disease-causing pathogen**, while not making a person actually sick from it.

- Vaccines have always sounded the bugle of **relief from morbidity and mortality** for societies.
- They have played an **important role** in the **reduction of communicable diseases** from the **second half of the 20th century**.
- In the last two decades with new infectious diseases emerging, particularly post the **H1N1 influenza**, global vaccine development activity has been rather frenetic.
- The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** site lists **10 vaccine candidates** in clinical evaluation and 126 candidate vaccines in preclinical evaluation, as on June 9.

**What is the process of vaccine development?**

- **Vaccine technology** has **significantly evolved in the last decade**, including the development of **several RNA (ribonucleic acid) and DNA vaccine candidates**, **licensed vectored vaccines**, **recombinant protein vaccines** and **cell-culture-based vaccines**.
- However, despite the many advances, including using **artificial intelligence** to determine **potential vaccine candidates**, the core principles of ensuring safety and efficacy of the vaccine for use in humans remain unchanged.
- While technology might have quickened some of the processes, the **trials for the vaccine** need to stick by these principles that **are time consuming** for a reason.
- According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC**) website, the general **stages of the development cycle** of a vaccine are:
    1. exploratory stage,
    2. pre-clinical stage,
    3. clinical development,
    4. regulatory review and approval,
    5. manufacturing and quality control.
- If vaccine candidates do make it to the **third stage, clinical development** is a three-phase process.

It says:

1. During **Phase I**, **small groups of people receive the trial vaccine**.



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2. In Phase II, the clinical study is expanded and vaccine is given to people who have **characteristics** (such as age and physical health) similar to those for whom the new vaccine is intended.
3. In Phase III, the vaccine is given **to thousands of people** and tested for efficacy and safety.

- If a vaccine is approved by a licensing agency, then it can move into the manufacturing stage, but constant monitoring of the process and quality control measures must be put in place.
- Vaccine production should comply with the current **Good Manufacturing Practice standards** to ensure constant quality and safety of vaccine.

**What is the status of a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine?**

- To start with, the **primary advantage with SARS-CoV-2** was that it was identified in record time, and its **genomic sequence** was made **globally available** by January.
- Amanat and Krammer say: "In addition, we know from studies on SARS-CoV-1 and the related MERS-CoV vaccines that the S protein on the surface of the virus is an ideal target for a vaccine...
- The **structure of the S protein** of SARS-CoV-2 was solved in record time at high resolution, contributing to our understanding of this vaccine target. Therefore, we have a **target antigen** that can be incorporated into advanced vaccine platforms."

Two important steps that are typically needed before bringing a vaccine into clinical trials.

- **First,** the vaccine is tested in appropriate **animal models** to see whether it is protective. However, animal models for SARS-CoV-2 might be difficult to develop...
- Even in the absence of an animal model that replicates human disease, it is possible to evaluate the vaccine because serum from vaccinated animals can be tested in in vitro neutralisation assays
- **Second,** vaccines need to be **tested for toxicity in animals**, e.g., in **rabbits.** Usually, viral challenge is not part of this process, because only the safety of the vaccine will be evaluated. This testing, which has to be performed in a manner compliant with **GLP (Good Laboratory Practice)**, typically takes **3–6 months to complete**."



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- The **10 candidates in clinical evaluation**, as per WHO's list, are based on **five platforms — non-replicating coral vector, RNA, inactivated, protein sub unit, and DNA**.
- The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in a paper, **defined platform** thus: "**The process under which a vaccine is manufactured qualifies it as platform-based. If it has the capacity to form the basis of myriad other vaccines using some conserved structure, it can be classified as a platform. The spectrum of different platforms ranges from viral vectored vaccines to nucleic acid vaccines**."
- In all, 126 candidate vaccines are in various stages of pre-clinical evaluation, including some in India. In mid-May, **K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Union government,** said there were nearly 30 'attempts' from India to develop vaccines.
- The leading attempts among them are: the **Pune-based Serum Institute of India** tie-up with **Oxford University** operating with a weakened adenovirus; the **Indian Council of Medical Research's collaboration with the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech** to develop a vaccine based on a SARS-CoV-2 strain isolated at the National Institute of Virology, Pune.
- Bharat Biotech is also involved in two other vaccine development projects with different groups, according to officials.
- The New York Times, meanwhile, has an updated status report on vaccines, as of June 12: 125-plus are in the pre-clinical stage (not yet in human trial phase, seven in the first phase (vaccines testing safety and dosage), another seven in the second phase (vaccines in expanded safety trials) and two in phase three trials (vaccines in large-scale efficacy tests). Some coronavirus vaccines are now in phase I/II trials, for example, in which they are tested for the first time on hundreds of people.

**<u>What about current projections and what happens next?</u>**

- The development of vaccines for human use takes years normally. Many additional steps are needed before these vaccine candidates that have shown promise can be used in the population, and this process might take months.
- Experts say, some of the **other concerns** for the development of an effective vaccine are the prospect of the **virus mutating**, and a **waning of the antibody response**.
- It is known that **infection with human coronaviruses** does **not always produce long-lived antibody responses,** and **re-infection**, likely to be



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mild [symptoms] in a fraction of individuals, is **possible after an extended period of time**.

- Any **effective vaccine** must **overcome all these issues** in order to ensure protection against a virus that seems to have taken the world by surprise.
- However, current projections indicate that the **virus is likely to become endemic** and cause **recurrent seasonal epidemics**. In such a scenario, a vaccine will be the most effective tool to battle a virus the world is yet to fully understand.

**37. What must schools do before reopening?**

**Context**

- Schools in India have been shut since the first 21-day national lockdown from **March 25,** some from a week or two earlier, due to the **novel coronavirus pandemic**.
- With the number of COVID-19 cases spiking this week, there is a growing clamour to protect children from going to examination centres and keep them away from school for some time longer. Many schools are offering **online classes**, but that has its own perils.

**What are India's schoolchildren doing now?**

- There are an estimated **25 crore schoolchildren in 15 lakh Indian schools** (from the **Unified District Information System for Education, or UDISE, 2018-19**), who have all been at home since classes stopped across the country from March 16.
- Their current educational situation varies wildly, depending on age, location and socio-economic status.
- The Central Board of Secondary Education **(CBSE)** has largely left the decision on how to proceed to its affiliate schools, but has promised a **syllabus reduction**.
- For the **33% of students in private schools,** classes have gone **online with teachers** attempting to maintain a regular schedule.
- For others, the **Centre** has brought out an **educational calendar** with lesson plans and learning activities, and is also beaming classes through **dedicated television channels** in multiple languages, **especially for older children.**


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- **Teachers in government schools in Delhi** are giving out **assignments via WhatsApp**, while **class 10 students** in **corporation schools in Chennai** were to have got an **Android phone** so that classes can continue.
- However, given that this kind of **distance education requires digital access and/or self-motivation and parental involvement,** the vast majority of children in government schools have spent the last three months on an **extended summer holiday**.

**When will schools reopen?**

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



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**What is the health protocol that needs to be in place before schools reopen?**

- The Centre is expected to **release guidelines** on this issue next week.
- HRD officials say some **likely steps** include **temperature screening** at the entrance to schools and classrooms, **monitoring to ensure mask** or shield-wearing and **social distancing**, **sanitisation routines** to clean all furniture and facilities, **isolation and hospitalisation** protocols for infected students and staff, as well as plans for **staggered attendance** and **blended learning** to limit the number of students on the premises on any given day.
- **Public Health Foundation of India** president **K. Srinath Reddy** says that **children** are at **more risk for clinical symptoms** than earlier understood, and have been seen to develop a **paediatric multi-system inflammatory condition** associated with COVID-19, although they usually recover.
- The **bigger danger** is that because **social distancing may be difficult for children**, they will act as transmission agents to staff and older adults back home.
- **Dr. Reddy** has also raised the issue of **mental health risks** from COVID-19 stress, due to **economic or medical crises at home**, or the **psychological impact of increased isolation** and **treating everyone as a potential threat**.

**Is online education a viable alternative?**

- The Centre is **preparing guidelines** on **digital education**, including **cybersafety**.
- It is likely to include **limiting the number of hours** a child is online, with a **one to three hour cap** on synchronous interaction.
- Currently, some schools are trying to maintain a **seven-hour teaching schedule**, which **creates stress and distraction**.
- Educational **apps are largely in English**, although multi-lingual apps are being developed.
- **Equity and access** are the bigger problems with online education in India.
- **Only 11% of Indian households** have a **computer.**
- Although **smartphone penetration is higher**, **only 24% have Internet facilities**, which drops to **15% in rural areas**, according to the latest **National Sample Survey**.

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- A **single device** in a **household cannot help multiple children**, while **poor students** in an **economically weaker section (EWS) quota** in a **privileged school may be the worst hit**.
- If a government or school wants to run an online education programme, it must ensure equal access to all participant.

**How can evaluation be done?**

- This is the immediate battle, given that **several boards,** including **the CBSE** are yet to conclude examinations from the previous 2019-20 academic year.
- The **Board** has exponentially **increased the number of examination centres to 13,000** and is **developing screening protocols**, but the question of whether Class 12 examinations can be safely conducted in the first two weeks of July is currently in the **Supreme Court**.
- **Children's health is more important than any academic advancement**.
- Schools are experimenting with **multiple choice tests** and **uploaded answers** for at-home evaluation options.

**Way ahead**

- If a zero academic year is considered, **conceptual teaching and learning** may continue through **varied modes** through the year, but **without the pressure of evaluation and grading.**

## 38. History, the standoff, and policy worth rereading

**Context**

# The deadly clashes at **Galwan** and the **ongoing standoff between India and China** on the **ridges** or "fingers" around the **Pangong Tso** are a metaphor for the wider conflict between the two countries over all the areas that Chinese strategy **refers** to as the "**five fingers of the Tibetan palm**".

**Five Fingers of Tibetan palm**

# According to the construct, attributed to **Mao** and cited in the 1950s by Chinese officials, **Xizang (Tibet) was China's right palm**, and it was its responsibility to "**liberate**" **the fingers, defined as Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA, or Arunachal Pradesh).**

# Sixty years ago, India began to set about ensuring that all five fingers were more closely attached to India, not China.

**India's countermove**



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# India and China signed the **Panchsheel agreement in 1954** and **before the 1962 China-India war**, the Nehru government had begun to worry about some of **China's proclamations**.

# Especially after the flight of the **Dalai Lama to India in 1959**, China began to demand **"self-determination in Kashmir.**

# The **Chinese press and radio** launched a **propaganda war** against Indi.

# The Chinese government **allowed Naga and Mizo dissidents** into China for **refuge and training**.

# More importantly, **school textbooks** there began to depict the "**five fingers**" as a part of **China**, wrote Mr. Kaul, who was posted in Peking (Beijing) and then as Joint Secretary (East) overseeing the China relationship, in the 1950s.

# While Prime Minister Nehru's military miscalculations and India's defeat in the 1962 war have been studied in great detail, what is perhaps not so well understood is the **three-pronged foreign policy New Delhi** set into motion at the time, that provided an effective counter to Mao's five finger policy over the course of the century.

**1. Managing the borders (3 pronged strategy in 1960s by Nehru)**

# The first was a push for building **border infrastructure and governance**.

# In the **mid-1950s** the government **piloted a project to build** the **Indian Frontier Administrative Services (IFAS)** for overseeing **NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh)** and other areas along the **India-China frontier**.

# The **Foreign secretary was the Chair of the IFAS selection board**, and many who enlisted in the cadre **overlapped between the Indian Foreign Service**, the **Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service**, and rotated between postings in the most remote tribal areas and embassies in the region.

# A **special desk** was created in the **Ministry of External Affairs** for officers who would tour all the regions from NEFA to Ladakh in order to make **suggestions for the rapid development** of these areas.

# While India's border infrastructure is only now catching up with the infrastructure China built in the course of the next few decades, its **base** was made during the brief period the IFAS existed, before it was **wound up in 1968.**

# An idea before its time, the **IFAS's role** has since been **transferred to the Indian Army** and the **Border Roads Organisation**, but it is an idea worth revisiting, especially as areas along the frontier continue to complain of neglect and



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a lack of focus from the Centre (**in 2019, the Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram called for the resurrection of the IFAS**).

**2. Outreach and treaties**

# The second prong were a **series of treaties** that were signed with neighbours such as **Nepal and Bhutan**, and the **consolidation of control, militarily and administratively**, of other territories that acceded to India, including **Ladakh as a part of Jammu and Kashmir (1947), and NEFA (1951)**.

# In **1950, India signed a treaty with Sikkim** that made it a "**protectorate"**, and by 1975 the Indira Gandhi Government had annexed Sikkim and made it the **22nd State of India**.

# Each of these treaties built unique relationships with New Delhi, **tying countries** such as **Nepal and Bhutan** in ways that were seen as a **"win-win**" for both sides at the time.

# However, over time, the **treaties have outlived their utility**, and the benefits of **unique ties with Nepal and Bhutan,** including **open borders and ease of movement, jobs and education for their youth** as well as India's influential support on the world stage, have **waned in public memory.**

# One of the **reasons that China** has been **able to make inroads into Nepal and not with Bhutan,** is that the **government renegotiated its 1949 Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan of 1949** with **the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty in 2007**, dropping an **article** that had **committed Bhutan "to beguided**" by India **on its external affairs policy**.

# This has held **India and Bhutan** ties in good stead thus far, even during the **Doklam stand-off between India and China in 2017** in the face of severe pressure from China.

# However, **despite years of requests from Kathmandu, New Delhi has dragged** its feet on reviewing its **1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship** between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal, and on accepting a **report the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG)** on Nepal-India relations has produced that **recommends a new treaty**.

**3. The Tibet issue**

# For the third prong, **India's policy towards the "palm" or Tibet**, itself should be looked at more closely as well.

# While **New Delhi's decision to shelter the Dalai Lama** and **lakhs of his followers since 1959** is a policy that is lauded, it does not change the need for


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New Delhi to look into the future of its relationship, both with the **Tibetan refugee community in India**, which has lived here in limbo for decades, as well as with its **future leadership**.

# At present, the **Dalai Lama has the loyalty of Tibetans** worldwide, **but in the future**, the question over who will take up the political leadership of the community looms large.

# The **Karmapa Lama,** who lived in India after his flight from China in 2000, and was groomed as a **possible political successor**, has now taken the **citizenship of another country** and lives **mostly in the United States**.

# Meanwhile, China will without doubt try to force its own choice on the community as well. Given that it is home to so many Tibetans, India must chart a more prominent role in this discourse.

**On J&K**

# Finally, it is **necessary to introspect** on how **India's own reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019** has changed the **security matrix** and **threat parameters** for India, and its neighbours.

# Beijing issued a statement decrying the impact on Jammu and Kashmir, and another one specifically on **Ladakh,** calling it an attempt to "**undermine China's territorial sovereignty by unilaterally changing its domestic law**" and warning that the **move was "unacceptable and will not come into force".**

# Home Minister Amit Shah's vow in Parliament, in August last year, to take back Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin was not taken lightly either, as **China's stakes in PoK** now go beyond its historical closeness with Pakistan, to its **investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor** that runs through it.

## 39. A prescription of equitable and effective care

**Context**

**# Medical care** has been **disrupted** by the novel coronavirus.

# **Fear, anxiety, uncertainty and confusion** have all **overtaken clinical services**.

# **The private sector**, which delivers the **major part of medical services**, is now functioning at a **skeletal level** and patients have **considerable difficulty in accessing medical care**.


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# **Tamil Nadu** has one of the **better health systems** in the country and has demonstrated that it can provide **high quality care** through **public-private collaboration** in the areas of **maternity, cardiac and trauma care**.

**A neglect of the primary task**

# Until now, the **focus of the government** has been on **prevention of the epidemic** through **testing of suspects, isolation of cases and institutional quarantine** of contacts.

# **Hospitals have focused** their efforts on **prevention by admitting asymptomatic contacts** and mild infections.

# With the focus on prevention, **doctors have been unable to** attend to their **primary task** of providing good clinical care to **reduce morbidity and prevent deaths**.

# The **majority of COVID-19 infections** are **mild and resolve on their own**.

**# Serious illness occurs in the elderly** and those with **multiple co-morbidities** such as **diabetes, heart disease and respiratory problems**.

# The **primary cause of death in COVID-19 pneumonia** is **respiratory failure.**

# The **mainstay of treatment** in **moderate and severe illness** is **clinical monitoring, oxygen therapy to correct hypoxemia** (low oxygen levels in the blood), and **good supportive care**.

# Even in those **above the age of 80 years**, the **mortality rate is only 15%.**

# Patients who **require ventilator** treatment have a **mortality rate of over 50%.**

# **Good supportive care for sick patients** is essential in preventing deaths.

# Hospital services **have to focus** on **in-patient management of moderate and severe pneumonia**, **prioritising intensive care unit (ICU) beds** for potentially reversible illness.

# We need to ensure that **every patient with moderate and severe COVID-19 pneumonia** has access to the **optimum level of care**, to prevent deaths and ameliorate suffering.

**Combating fear**

# Because of the labelling and **stigmatisation** of those diagnosed with COVID-19, the public are **reluctant to come to hospital** and may **come late or die at home**.

# We need to **send out a clear message** that **hospitals will provide good quality care** for COVID-19, at **affordable cost and ensuring confidentiality**.



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# For this to happen, the government **must work with the private sector** to make care **accessible and affordable**.

# The **Tamil Nadu government's** efforts to **cap the cost for different levels** of **COVID-19 care** in private hospitals is a positive step.

# The **government** should **financially assist** the private sector **by reimbursing basic patient care costs** for providing COVID-19 care.

# **Medical staff** taking care of COVID-19 patients are **anxious** that they may acquire the infection and transmit it to their family members.

# **Deaths of hospital staff** due to COVID-19 have been reported, although **the mortality risk** is **lower than that of the general population**.

# **Medical staff** involved in COVID-19 care should be **adequately protected** with appropriate personal protective equipment, or **PPE**, and should be **trained in infection control** and **clinical care protocols**.

**A wish list**

# In **Tamil Nadu,** we should **shift** the discourse from the **focus on prevention and reducing** the number of cases to an **equal priority for providing COVID-19 care**.

# Towards this we suggest that:

a. **all private hospitals** which have the potential, should take care of COVID-19.

b. They should be given **requisite incentives** and **subsidies to that end**;

c. **every patient** should be able to **access medical care** for COVID-19 from a **private or public** hospital;

d. **only patients with moderate to severe COVID-19** pneumonia should be admitted;

e. **ICU care should be prioritised** for COVID-19 patients who have potentially reversible illness;

f. **confidentiality of the patient** should be protected;

g. **the government should support the basic cost** of COVID-19 care in private hospitals as well;

h. **city hospitals should pool their** ICU resources for the care of COVID-19 pneumonia;

i. **staff providing COVID-19 care**, should receive **adequate training** and be provided appropriate PPE, and,

j. finally, **families of staff** who die due to COVID-19 should receive appropriate **compensation.**

**Way ahead**



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# These initiatives can only be realised with **appropriate leadership** from the government.

# The **private sector** has to **be fully involved** in clinical care of the COVID-19 epidemic.

# We should work towards making **COVID-19 treatment available, affordable and effective.**

# Our response to the epidemic must combine **good science, clinical reasoning and a humane response** to save the lives of the people of our country.

## 40. Disorder at the border: On India-China face-off

**Context**

# With the **deaths of at least 20 Indian soldiers**, and **reports of Chinese soldier** casualties in clashes at the **Galwan valley** in Ladakh, India and China have entered **uncharted territory** on the **Line of Actual Control**, the **first combat deaths since 1975,** and the **first such in the Galwan Valley since the 1962 war**.

**The stand-off**

# The brutality of the clashes, with **severe injuries and deaths** incurred despite the fact that **no shots were fired**, is all also unheard of thus far.

# The deaths occurred when the two armies had agreed to "**disengage" and "de-escalate**" the month-long stand-off, which makes the clashes particularly shocking.

# China has **now claimed sovereignty** over the **entire Galwan Valley**, indicating that it is **unlikely to pull back** from this crucial and hitherto non-contentious area, unless it is forced to.

# **Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi** appeared to countenance this new position, and even called on India to "**punish those responsible**" for **crossing the LAC**, prompting India to accuse China of attempting to "alter" the LAC with this "**premeditated and planned action**" by its forces.

# Meanwhile, reports that **Chinese troops** continue to be **well entrenched** in the **Fingers area (Finger 4-8)** or **the ridges around Pangong Tso (lake)** that India has always patrolled, and **remain inside the LAC** at **Nakula Pass** are worrying indicators of a hardening Chinese position.

# While **Prime Minister Modi's strong statement** on Wednesday of a "**befitting reply**" and of the sacrifices of the soldiers that "would not go in vain", is a much needed expression of the **national sentiment,** simply **extracting revenge** does not appear to be the answer to the altered situation across the LAC.


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**Steps to be taken by the Government**

# The first step the government must take is to **apprise the nation** of exactly what has occurred since late April along the LAC, including incidents in Ladakh and Sikkim.

# Monday's clashes have put an end to claims that Chinese troops have not entered Indian territory (they have), that troops have disengaged, and that the situation was being de-escalated.

# The **government must conduct** a **full investigation** of **the Galwan clash** and put out **clearer details** of the lives lost.

# A true tribute to those soldiers will not only include ensuring accountability from Beijing but also enforcing a **full troops withdrawal** from all the areas occupied in the last few weeks.

**Way ahead**

# Both the **MEA and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs** have **reaffirmed** their **commitment to dialogue** as a means of restoring peace.

# Both sides must also acknowledge that the **situation is precarious**, and that the recent days in particular have undone decades of painstakingly negotiated **confidence-building mechanisms.**

# Without a **full restoration of the status quo** ante, reparations for the casualties, as well as some **honest commitment** to abide fully by any agreement, talks with Beijing at this point might not mean more than empty words.

**41. Multilateralism post COVID-19**

**Context**

# **Change is often touted as being the only constant**.

# However, in the hard-nosed world of **multilateral diplomacy**, seasoned practitioners often say that **only babies with wet nappies delightfully accept change**.

# Even at the best of times, when there was **great power cooperation** rather than **great power rivalry like now,** multilateralism has belied the ability to update swiftly.

# For example**, Resolution 50/52** adopted unanimously during the **50th session**, "to initiate the procedure set out in Article 108 of the Charter of the United Nations to amend the Charter, with prospective effect, by the deletion of the **'enemy**



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**State' clauses** from **Articles 53, 77 and 107** at its earliest appropriate future session" awaits action, nearly 25 years later.

**Multilateralism 0.1**

# The **COVID-19 outbreak** has placed **all international institutions** under a magnifying glass.

# By any measure, **most have performed below par**.

# Such is the caution espoused that **multilateralism today** seems to have **reverted** to its **version 0.1.**

# The **General Assembly** now **passes resolutions** through **no objection procedure**.

# The **Security Council** has been found wanting in no small measure. The **75th session's** '**leaders week'** runs the risk of being reduced to **a video playback session.**

# It is true that **functioning of multilateral institutions**, like much else, **requires reform**.

# They need to **adapt to new realities**.

# However, **the pursuit of change** by **threatening to leave multilateral institutions** is a phenomenon we witnessed **only during the period of the League of Nations**. One state followed another in bidding goodbye, until the League's final demise.

# The **post Second World War multilateral institutions** have **survived such departures**.

# The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization **(UNESCO) in Paris** and the **Human Rights Council in Geneva** have **survived the departure of the U.S**.

# The United Nations Industrial Development Organization **(UNIDO) in Vienna** continues despite the **withdrawal of the U.S**. and many others.

# The World Health Organization **(WHO),** notwithstanding its visible shortcomings, will **survive U.S. threats**.

# The **reasons are simple. Multilateral organisations** serve desperately **felt global needs** of the **vast membership.** The **pandemic has reinforced the desire for greater global cooperation amongst most states.**

**Gulliver and the Lilliputians**

# So, as the **current multilateral order** is unlikely to capsize, will it fall **prey to the 'wolf warriors'** of **China posing as the new defenders of the established order?**



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# It is true that **Chinese nationals head four multilateral organisations**.

# It is also true that **Chinese nationals** have **failed in campaigns** to **head UNESCO** and the World Intellectual Property Organization **(WIPO).**

# Despite **contributing nearly 10% of the UN's budget**, **Chinese nationals** are **not exactly overrepresented** in terms of **staff positions**, unlike many other countries whose personnel occupy more than half of the percentage of their financial contribution.

# Take the **Chinese language interpreters** out and there is a **further decline**.

# If the **head count of senior staff** from **UN regular and peacekeeping budgets** is taken together, that **percentage falls dramatically,** although **China contributes 14%** of the **peacekeeping budget.**

# **China** has certainly risen up the **multilateral pantheon** and is able to **better promote** its **interests**.

# It has **warded off attacks** against it in **multilateral fora**, at times with the **aid of the heads of these organisations.**

# However, it is **yet to display an ability** to set the **multilateral agenda** and **dominate** the discourse on an array of issues, in the manner that the U.S. once indispensably did.

# China's flagship venture, the **Belt and Road Initiative**, remains **only on the fringes of multilateral fora.**

# Amidst this, **multilateral bodies** are populated by a **plethora of small and middle states** quietly working to **restore equilibrium**, when the **balance tends to shift**.

**Not binary choices**

# The choices for the **evolving multilateral order** are not binary, as portrayed sometimes.

# Between **collapse and capture** there are other pathways.

# **Multilateral architecture** places premium on structures over functions, processes over substance. **It slows down change of any sort**.

# The **'pluri-laterals'** and the emerging '**mini-laterals'** each have their place in terms of international agenda setting, but global norm-setting requires an inclusivity that they lack.

# Being able to shape the discourse at an incipient stage is a good perch to be on.

# Issue-specific '**coalitions of the willing'** are catalysts.

# As a growing power, **India needs to avail** of such avenues.

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# Responses of states during the COVID-19 crisis point to **more emphasis** on **sovereign decision making** than before.

# On myriad issues, from sustainable development to the environment, from climate change to pandemics and cyberspace to outer space, the demands for **'nothing about us without us'** are **likely to increase.**

# Since stakeholders perceive that their stakes have risen, they will **call for enhanced engagement.** Convening such stakeholders in pursuit of global goals is the essence of multilateralism.

**Way ahead**

# Since we visualise the world as **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, support for multilateralism will have to remain a **primary pursuit**.

# Unlike in other realms where quantum leaps are common, in **multilateral diplomacy**, **incrementalism pays dividends**.

# To unseat a permanent member from the International Court of Justice took us seven decades. To get Masood Azhar designated as a terrorist took us a decade.

# We need to **patiently promote reforms** while **building partnerships** to avail opportunities which may arise for more fundamental change.

**42. Maternal health matters**

**Context**

# In a shocking incident earlier this month, **a pregnant woman died** in an **ambulance in Noida** after **being turned away** from a number of private and government hospitals.

**Questions to be raised**

# This raises a chilling question for all of us: if this can happen somewhere so close to the nation's capital, what is happening in the corners of the country?

# A second question that comes to mind is: when the lockdown was suddenly announced and then extended, what exactly was the plan for the millions of women who were/are due for childbirth?

**Maternal Health**

# Over the last 15 years, the **state has been promising maternal well-being** to pregnant women provided they **turn up at public hospitals** during labour, and has been providing a **cash incentive** to those that have **institutional birth.**

# Consequently, it has become almost **routine for all pregnant women** to reach health facilities during labour.


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# **Elaborate tracking systems** have been i**nstituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** to **track every pregnant woman, infant and child until they turn five.**

# However, during lockdown, the **state appeared to have forgotten** those women expected to give birth.

# Even though recent epidemics have **identified pregnant women** as people being **'high risk**', no reference was made this time on the need to provide emergency services for pregnant women.

# **Frontline workers** were **pressed into community surveillance**, **monitoring and awareness** building for COVID 19.

# **The public health system was overburdened** with handling the pandemic: **most secondary and tertiary hospitals were either those designated as COVID-19 facilities** or those unequipped with enough PPE kits.

**Adverse fallout on pregnant women**

# There was the **20-year-old in Telangana** with **anaemia and high blood pressure**, who died after being **turned away by six hospitals**.

# Similarly, **a 25-year-old woman** in **labour coming from a COVID-19 containment area** in Delhi was **turned away by at least six hospitals and clinics**.

# She finally **gave birth outside the All India Institute of Medical Sciences**.

# These indicate that in these **12 weeks, the approximately 9,00,000 pregnant women** (15% of the six million women giving birth) who n**eeded critical care had to face enormous hurdles** to actually obtain treatment at an appropriate hospital.

# Added to this were the women who have had miscarriages or sought abortions: that would be another 45,000 women every single day.

# The **government rather belatedly issued a set of guidelines** a **month after lockdown** started, but that **only compounded the confusion**.

# Pregnant women had to be **'recently' tested** and **certified COVID-19-negative** to **enter a 'general hospital'** but it was not clear how this can happen once they are in labour, as the **test results need a day's turnaround** at the very least.

**Need to scrutinise private sector**

# The **health policymakers** need to **acknowledge** the shortcoming of an overstretched and under-resourced system in responding to the critical care needs of pregnant women during crises.



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# Although **80% doctors and 64% beds** are in the **private sector**, **clinics have closed down** and **private hospitals have stepped back fearing infections**, while **larger hospitals** have begun **charging exorbitant amounts**.

# The role of the private sector therefore **needs to be scrutinised.**

# **India's Maternal Mortality Ratio came down to 122 deaths per 1,00,000 live births** (SRS 2017), **from 167 per 1,00,000 births in 2011-13**.

# Much effort and investment over many years have led to this decrease. As India struggles to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, the hard-won gains of the last 15 years can be erased with one stroke.

# The pandemic has **amplified many inequalities** and shows up sharply the state's **abdication of responsibility for prevention of lives lost**, putting the **entire responsibility** of **health protection on the individual citizen**.

**Way ahead**

# In order to win back the trust of pregnant women, the **state will have to account publicly** for how the millions of deliveries took place; or how abortions, miscarriages and childbirth complications were handled.

# As the country slowly emerges from a total lockdown into a longer-term management strategy, it is time to consider doing things differently for improving maternal well-being.

## 43. India-China: the line of actual contest

**Introduction**

- The ongoing military standoffs with China at multiple points along the India-China border has turned the spotlight to the single most important element that has helped keep the peace across the Himalayas: **the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Yet, what exactly the LAC is remains a source of much confusion.**
- They are different in one crucial way. With Pakistan, India has an international boundary, which has been agreed upon, and the LoC, Line of control which has been delineated on a map by both sides.In contrast, the alignment of the LAC has never been agreed upon, and it is has neither been delineated nor demarcated.
- There is no official map in the public domain that depicts the LAC. In a strange irony, if the LAC is far less clear than the LoC, it has remained much more peaceful, with not a shot fired since **1975 at Tulung La**.

**Where does the LAC run?**



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- For the most part, in the western sector, it broadly corresponds with the border as China sees it.
- There are differences in several points here, including at the very start of the LAC, which India reportedly pegs northwest of the **Karakoram Pass**, but China further south.
- In the eastern sector, it broadly corresponds with the border as India sees it, along the **McMahon Line that separates Arunachal Pradesh from Tibet.**
- In the middle sector and Sikkim, the LAC is broadly aligned with the borders as India and China see it, with minor differences here.
- Following the Tulung La incident, Delhi's China Study Group set patrolling limits that India would stick to, in order to assert its LAC alignment — limits that are still being followed today.
- The problem is India and China do not agree on the alignment of the LAC everywhere.
- Differences in perception, particularly in **13 spots in the western, middle and eastern sectors of the border,** often lead to what are called "face offs", when patrols encounter each other in these grey zones that lie in between the different alignments.
- Some of these areas are **Chumar, Demchok and the north bank of the Pangong lake in the western sector, Barahoti in the middle sector, and Sumdorong Chu in the east.**
- Both sides agreed to protocols in 2005 and 2013 that describe the rules of engagement to handle such situations, but as the current stand-off at Pangong Tso reminds us, they haven't always been followed.
- **At Pangong Tso, India's LAC runs at Finger 8, and China's at Finger 4. T**he "fingers" from 1 to 8 refer to mountain spurs that run from west to east on the lake's northern bank. Currently, Chinese troops have erected tents in the Finger 4 area and are preventing India from reaching its LAC at Finger 8, leading to a stand-off.

**Genesis**

- In a **November 7, 1959 letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai suggested the armed forces of both sides withdraw 20 km, as he put it, "from the so-called McMahon Line in the east, and from the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west**".



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- Yet where exactly each side believed it exercised control was a matter of debate, complicated by the fact that China's alignments kept changing.
- The "LAC" it referred to in **1960 and 1962 wasn't the same as 1959.** When India and China signed the landmark **Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA) in 1993**, the first legal agreement that recognised the LAC, they avoided this problem by referring to the LAC at the time, and not the LAC of 1959, 1960 or 1962, all of which had different meanings.
- It isn't widely known that many of the ideas in the BPTA had, in part, a Russian genesis.
- Following Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to China, both sides were optimistic of pushing ahead on talks on the boundary. In this time, they were exploring regimes to maintain peace and tranquillity, and looked at, among others, the ongoing China-Russia boundary negotiations.
- "It was not that we came to some Nirvana moment," recalls Nirupama Rao, a former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China who had, in 1991, engaged with the Russians on this question as the then Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs. "For instance, the concept of mutual and equal security, which we included in the agreement, was a Russian term. This was a borrowed idea, like Eve being born from the rib of Adam."
- As Mr. Menon writes, this unqualified reference to the LAC created "the unintended side effect of further incentivising the forward creep to the line by both militaries", a consequence that both sides are currently dealing with at multiple points on the LAC.

**Clarification**

- Both the 1993 BPTA agreement and the subsequent agreement on confidence-building measures in 1996 acknowledged that both sides would ultimately clarify the LAC.
- That process has, however, **stalled since 2002, when China walked away from exchanging maps in the western sector.**
- During a 2015 visit to China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a pitch to revive the process, saying in a speech in Tsinghua University that "a shadow of uncertainty always hangs over the sensitive because neither side knows where the LAC is in these areas," he said. China rebuffed his request.
- Ms. Rao, the former Foreign Secretary, said that it wasn't a surprise, and China had, in several territorial disputes, intentionally left its claims ambiguous.



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"The Chinese are masters at it. They don't stick to positions, and their actions on the ground constantly defy things they have done in the past.

- The Chinese line has kept shifting. There is always scope for redrawing, and we have never had the chance to look at their maps."
- **The current stand-offs, Ms. Rao said, have underlined the challenge India faces on its borders.**
- "If a problem has lasted so long, and there is no settlement in sight, we may need another generation or two to settle it. The only answer for us is to be prepared, continue to build our roads and improve our infrastructure, keep ourselves ready to deal with these contingencies, and play the game in a way that safeguards our interests." The contest across the line isn't going anywhere.

**44. At the high table: On India's U.N. Security Council win**

**Context**

# India's **election to the U.N. Security Council** as a **non-permanent member** is a significant **diplomatic victory** for the country, which has long been pushing for reforms at global institutions.

**UNSC Election for non-permanent seat**

# The victory wasn't unexpected as **India was the only contestant for the Asia Pacific seat**.

# But the Indian foreign policy establishment took no chances as the **election** would be done by **secret ballot** at the UN General Assembly and **two-thirds of the votes** were needed for **victory**.

# India secured the seat **with 184 votes in the 193-strong General Assembly**.

# **Mexico, Norway and Ireland were also elected as non-permanent members**.

# While Mexico won **the Latin American seat** uncontested, **Norway and Ireland** emerged victorious from a three-way contest for the **Western Europe and Others Group seat**.

# **Canada failed to win enough votes** in this group.

# Neither Kenya nor Djibouti, which were contesting the seat from Africa, won a two-thirds majority.

# They will face another vote.

**India's proposed reforms in UNSC**

# India sought the support of **member countries** by highlighting its **commitment to multilateralism and reforms**.



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# Ahead of the vote, India had **launched a campaign brochure** which **highlighted its demand** for **transparency in mandates** for **UN peacekeeping missions** and push for the India-led **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism**, and called for joint efforts for UN reform and expansion of the Security Council. A "**new orientation for a reformed multilateral system" (NORMS)**, would be India's overall objective during the **two-year tenure** that will begin next year.

**Steps to be taken by India**

# Achieving this would depend on how India will conduct **diplomacy in the global body**, build **alliances** and **raise issues** that go beyond the interests of the big five.

# India has long been of the view that the **structure of the UN Security Council** doesn't reflect the **realities of the 21st century**.

# It has also got **increasing support from member countries** for its push for reforms.

# But the **five permanent members** of the Security Council have **resisted these attempts**.

# The COVID-19 pandemic has already shaken up the global order and **sharpened the rivalry between the U.S. and China.**

# It has also opened up **fresh debates** on **strengthening multilateralism and multilateral institutions.**

**Challenges before India**

# In this context, the challenges before India are many. The **Security Council** is one of the most important **multilateral decision-making bodies** where the contours of global geopolitics are often drawn.

# India **should avoid the temptation** of **taking sides** at a time when the Security Council is getting **more and more polarised**.

**Way ahead**

# To serve its interests and push for its **agenda of multilateralism and reforms**, India should adopt **value-based positions** that are **not transactional**, **aspire for the leadership** of the non-permanent members of the Council and be the **voice of the weaker nations**.

**45. Mediation in the age of COVID-19**

**Context**

# We live in **strange times**. Old certainties have given way to new uncertainties.



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# Down the ages, **Lady Justice**, sword in one hand and eyes blindfolded, has been pretty much like the Rock of Gibraltar, ensuring stability, but also **being resistant to change**.

# One bug, christened COVID-19, comes along and the Lady is reeling.

# At the heart of the **adversarial system** is advocacy performed in **open setting,** in full gaze of clients and fellow lawyers, and that has **dictated modes of thought and approach** and behaviour, all **integral to the system**.

# Justice must not only seem to be done, but judges must also be seen while they are engaged in the task of doing it.

# But presence in numbers necessitates proximity, and now **proximity spells danger.**

# Deprived of their natural setting of the courtroom, judges and lawyers have fallen back to talk of **virtual courts**, so that the **bare essential is achieved** — the judge being able to hear the particular lawyer.

# All other features of the courtroom are eschewed, and thus an **essentially public setting is converted to a closed door one.**

**A new kid on the block**

# There is, however, another **tool** in the dispute resolution armoury, which is **resistant to COVID-19**, and perhaps could even thrive on it.

# That is **mediation**, which is the polar **opposite of the court process**.

# As a process, structured **mediation is a new kid on the block**, with an existence of barely **two to three decades in India**, and just a few more worldwide.

# **Conventional litigation and arbitration** are vintage, spanning hundreds of years and generations of judges and lawyers.

# Mediation, however, is an **idea** whose time has come and is rapidly gaining ground.

# Legislation has given it the **legal structure** and safeguards, and provided the assurance that the courts will **implement mediation agreements**.

**Online mediation**

# **Online mediation** will enable the **mediator and the parties** to assemble together, each on their computer screens perhaps hundreds of miles away.

# Discussion can be guided, giving parties and lawyers the opportunity to put forth their views. When separate meetings are required, the mediator can, at the click of a button, move the other party and its lawyer to another virtual room.

**Advantages of Online Mediation**



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# The **great advantage** of online mediation is that it is **convenient, cost-effective and an efficient use of time.**

# Parties do not have to bear costs, do not have to travel, do not have to wait long hours, and do not have to undergo adjournments and multiple visits to the mediation centre.

# What will **be missing** in this process is the **immediacy**, **directness and complete contact** that is possible only in face-to-face meetings.

# On the other hand, it may also be that in an online process, we are giving the **participant a little cocoon of safety,** when we create this **grainy barrier** of two screens and an intermediate world of Internet and WiFi.

# It will certainly be of **benefit in cases** where **emotions run high** and face-to-face confrontation may **increase the conflict.**

# That happens **often** in **matrimonial cases, and in family business disputes,** where **tempers and emotions** arising from frayed domestic situations and settings can edge out sensible business logic.

# Similarly, where parties are located in **different countries**, we would have done away with difficulties of distance when we adopt this mode. As the new rash of webinars shows, it is easy to get people from **different locations on to one platform.**

**Disadvantages of Online Mediation**

# Online mediation has a host of advantages, but also bears some cautioning.

# **Confidentiality** can be **compromised** since hearings could be **recorded;** service providers have to be vigilant, and rules will have to penalise participants for breach.

# **Technical glitches** have to be minimised, and **Internet services** must gear up for providing **screen clarity and uninterrupted feed.**

# But above all, there is the apprehension that **online communication** will **exclude the underprivileged**, those who **cannot afford access to Internet** or do not have the capacity or assistance to use it.

# Such **exclusion** will be tantamount to **denial of access to justice**.

**Way ahead**

# If the State and its Courts are going to allow and encourage online mediation to resolve disputes, weaker parties must be assisted and enabled to avail of this facility.

# As we meander in the dark to find out what the new normal is going to consist of, we may well discover that a good part of the world of dispute resolution has been



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flipped, and that COVID-19 is the harbinger of change taking online consensual resolution to a higher level. Perhaps, this cloud too has a silver lining.

**46. The gross abuse of the Manipur mandate**

**Context**

# The **10th Schedule** — was introduced in **1985 by the 52nd amendment** of the Constitution, but when the loopholes in the law were being exploited to make it irrelevant, it was **toughened in 2003** by the **91st amendment** of the Constitution.

# That a country's leaders have to be restrained thus is itself a disgrace, but in recent times, it is no longer a question of dodging the law, but of **overturning** the very idea of the **rule of law by those in power.** The **Manipur cases** illustrate this very well.

**Government formation**

# In the **March 2017 Assembly election**, Manipur saw a **hung verdict**, with the Indian National Congress emerging as the single largest party with **28 seats in the 60-member** House (now 59, after one disqualification).

# The Bharatiya Janata Party was second, with **21**.

# For inadequately unexplained reasons, the **State Governor, Najma Heptulla**, decided the more **stable post-poll alliance** would be the **one the BJP led**, though the party needed the support of at least 10 non-BJP MLAs to be in a majority position, rather than the Congress which **needed just three**.

# The BJP did manage to **forge an alliance** that **exceeded the majority mark**, but at a cost which it is discovering is too dear only now.

# The ceiling on the **Manipur cabinet** set by the **10th Schedule is 12** including the Chief Minister.

# Of the remaining 11, seven had to be given away to the allies to secure their loyalty, (four to National People's Party (NPP) and one each to the Naga People's Front, the Lok Janshakti Party and the first Congress MLA to defect to the BJP), leaving only three cabinet berths for the BJP's own legislators besides the Chief Minister.

**Partisan politics**

# Many BJP MLAs are now obviously concerned with the reduced prospect of re-election from their constituencies if they went to the polls as **mere camp followers.**

# Hence, **the internal friction** within the ruling party has been visible for the past few months.


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# The tipping point was reached on June 17, when **three of their MLAs** decided to quit the party and Assembly membership to **align with the Congress**.

# The resultant loss of esteem for the law in the eyes of the public is predicted to have very long term and grave social consequences in this sensitive, insurgency-torn border State.

# Another development after the BJP assumed power was that **seven more Congress MLAs defected to the ruling side**, bringing up the total number of Congress defectors to eight.

# They were also obviously hoping for some official position to share the spoils of power, but nothing has been forthcoming for them.

# Hence, other than the first defector who was absorbed as a cabinet minister, the latter seven continued to sit in the **Opposition benches** but **voted all along with the ruling (practice of defection).**

# Petitions for the **disqualification of the eight** were **left unheeded by the Speaker** for more **than three years**, but on the intervention of the Supreme Court of India, the **first defector was disqualified on March 28 this year**.

# When the seven other defectors remained unpenalised, the Congress moved the **Manipur High Court**.

# The High Court took the cue from the earlier Supreme Court ruling to direct the Speaker to dispose of the case at the soonest but after the election to the **State's lone Rajya Sabha** seat that was scheduled yesterday. Till this was done, the High Court placed a ban on the seven MLAs from entering the Assembly.

**Jumping ship**

# The BJP, however, has more to worry now. It is also beginning to lose its partners. The biggest of these is the NPP, which has four MLAs in the Assembly.

# The party **walked out of the BJP-led alliance** and pledged **support to the Opposition Congress on June 17**.

# Along with them, one MLA of the Trinamool Congress and an independent MLA also jumped ship and joined the Congress camp.

# Almost at the same time, in a curious turn of events, four of the seven Congress defectors also decided to return to the Congress camp.

# If they remained not disqualified and if they were allowed to vote, it had become a foregone conclusion that the BJP would lose the Rajya Sabha seat.

# But yesterday, in the morning, the Speaker has heard and disposed of the case of the three defectors still in the BJP camp although there is a High Court directive that the hearing should not be before the Rajya Sabha election, and exonerated(release)



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them so they could vote. However, the names of the other four were missing from the list of voters.
# Even if the BJP, with the help of the Speaker's controversial rulings, wins the Rajya Sabha seat, the trouble for the coalition can hardly be said to be over.
# One, it is extremely likely that intervention would come from the High Court on the election and **selective disposal of the disqualification cases** as well as **the Speaker's tribunal overruling the High Court directive.**
# Two, the Opposition is now demanding a **no-confidence motion** against the government.
# It remains to be seen where this will lead to, or if those with the reins of power will allow a non-partisan decision of the Assembly.
# There can be no dispute there is danger in the law being made a subordinate function of power.

**47. Crisis in the peninsula: On the Koreas**

**Context**

- By **blowing up a joint liaison office** on the **border with South Korea** and threatening to **deploy troops** along the **demilitarised zone**, North Korea is back to what it is best at — aggressive posturing with the **threat of war**.

**Troubles in the peninsula**

# Troubles began in the peninsula early this year after a **deadline the North** dictated to the **U.S.** to achieve progress in the **denuclearisation talks** expired on December 31.
# North Korea has **conducted missile tests** this year, sending **warning signals to Seoul** and Washington.
# The **latest crisis** was triggered by **anti-North defector groups** that sent **out propaganda** leaflets **via balloons across the border**.
# Angered by the **South's refusal to crack down** on them, **Pyongyang has severed hotlines**, **demolished the liaison office,** and is planning to **deploy troops along the border**.
# Tensions now risk rolling back whatever little was achieved through engagement over the past two years.
# South Korea's Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul resigned on Friday and Seoul has also **moved to charge the defector groups**.


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# But these moves are unlikely to ease tensions as the **real problem is the stall in the talks**.

**Singapore Summit,2018**

# Two years after U.S. **President Trump** and North Korean **leader Kim Jong-un** met in **Singapore to discuss denuclearisation**, **little has been achieved** in that direction.

# It is likely that the North is now trying to get back Mr. Trump's attention.

# There were no high hopes of a quick solution to the **U.S.-North Korean rivalry** — it goes back to the **1950-53 Korean war** — when Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim met.

# **Mr. Kim** had in principle **agreed to denuclearisation** in **return for the lifting of American sanctions.**

# But talks stalled as the **U.S. insisted on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization"** by North Korea in return for any concession.

# The North Koreans were wary, particularly because of the **U.S.'s history** of going after **dictators such as Saddam Hussein of Iraq** and **Muammar Gaddafi of Libya** or its **breaching of the Iran nuclear deal**.

# Mr. Kim's regime **offered a staged approach**.

# It put a **freeze on nuclear tests** and offered to **shut its Yongbyon nuclear complex**.

# The U.S. and South Korea could have responded to these measures and kept the talks on track.

# On less contentious issues, such as declaring a **formal end to the Korean war** — both Koreas are **still technically at war** — an agreement could have been achieved as a confidence-building measure.

# But that road was not taken. Worse, the **U.S. and South Korea went ahead** with their **joint military exercise.**

# Mr. Trump is now grappling with **many problems at home** — from the **coronavirus** outbreak and a **sagging economy**, to **anti-racism protests**.

# Still, if he does not want his two summits with Mr. Kim to be mere footnotes of history, he should take measures to revive talks with North Korea and push the peninsula back to normalcy.

**48. Who does Galwan Valley belong to?**

**Context**



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

**Where is Galwan Valley?**

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

**Where does the Line of Actual Control lie?**

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

**Are China's claims new?**



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

**What do maps tell us?**

- In 1959, then **Premier Zhou Enlai** said a **1956 map** portrayed the correct alignment.
- This **showed the entire Galwan Valley as a part of India**.
- However**, in June 1960** China put out a map **claiming sovereignty over the valley**.
- A Chinese map from November 1962 also claims the entire valley, but subsequent maps have not shown the western tip of the river as a part of China.

**By citing its territorial claims, can China alter the Line of Actual Control?**

- Territorial claims and LAC claims are not the same.
- Regardless of whether or not China claims territorial rights to the valley, the LAC that both countries abided by until recently ran through the valley.
- The **distinction between territorial claims and LAC** claims is sometimes **blurred**.
- The **LAC refers to territory** under the **effective control** of each side, not to their entire territorial claim.
- For instance, **India's territorial claims** extend **38,000 sq km on the other side** of the LAC **across all of Aksai Chin**, but the LAC India observes runs through the valley.
- It is true that the **LAC has never been demarcated** and there are differences in perception of where it lies in more than a dozen spots, but there have not been previous incidents in the valley.



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- By now staking a claim to the entire Galwan Valley and up to the confluence of the rivers, China is, in India's view, **unilaterally altering the LAC here**.
- According to the **1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA),** India and China agreed to "**strictly respect and observe the LAC** between the two sides".
- This referred to the LAC at the time, rendering irrelevant the line of actual control in 1959 or 1962.
- It also says that "when necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of the line of actual control where they have different views as to its alignment."
- Clarifying the LAC has also been explicitly codified in the **1996 agreement** on confidence-building measures and subsequent agreements.
- China, however, has refused to exchange maps in the western sector to take this process forward.
- The BPTA also said "the two sides agree that references to the line of actual control in this agreement do not prejudice their respective positions on the boundary question."

**49. How are elections to the Rajya Sabha held?**

**Context**

- Another round of Rajya Sabha elections has been completed. Polls to some seats were postponed in view of the situation caused by the novel coronavirus outbreak. There was a hint of controversy about who ought to have been allowed to vote or barred from voting in **Manipur.**
- Such issues arise mainly due to the **interpretation of rules and features** peculiar to the **Rajya Sabha elections**.

**Concerns which are raise in present RS elections**

- **Cross-voting**, **breach of confidentiality** by showing the ballot/vote to a person other than the member's own party's agent, and **eligibility to vote** under certain conditions are common grounds for objections to be raised.

There are several features that distinguish elections to the Council of States, or the Upper House of Parliament, from the general elections.

**What is peculiar to the Rajya Sabha polls as far as the electorate is concerned?**

- **Only elected members** of the **State Legislative Assemblies** can vote in a Rajya Sabha election.



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

**What is the voting process?**

- Polling for a Rajya Sabha election will be held only if the number of candidates exceeds the number of vacancies.
- Since the strength of each party in the Assembly is known, it is not difficult to estimate the number of seats a party would win in the Rajya Sabha poll.
- For instance, if there are four seats to be filled up, and the ruling party and its allies command a two-thirds majority, and the Opposition a third, it will mean that the election will go three seats to one in favour of the ruling party.
- In many States, parties avoid a contest by fielding candidates only in respect to their strength. Where an extra candidate enters the fray, voting becomes necessary.
- Candidates fielded by political parties have to be **proposed by** at least **10 members of the Assembly or 10% of the party's strength in the House, whichever is less.**
- For **independents**, there should be **10 proposers**, all of whom should be members of the Assembly.

**What is Single transferable vote?**

- A single transferable vote means electors can vote for any number of candidates in order of their preference. A candidate requires a specified number of **first preference votes** to win.



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**Value of 1 vote**

- Each first choice vote has a **value of 100** in the first round.
- To qualify, a candidate needs one point more than the quotient obtained by dividing the total value of the number of seats for which elections are taking place plus one.
- For instance, if there are four seats and 180 MLAs voting, the qualifying number will be 180/5= 36 votes or a value of 3,600. Normally, the results are clear after one round itself. The extra candidate is eliminated for want of enough first preference votes.

**2nd round of counting**

- However, **counting may go to the second round**, if more than one candidate fails to get the specified number.
- In such a situation, the **second preference polled** by the candidates (in ballots where the first preference has gone to those already qualified) will be transferred to their kitty, but with a diminished value.
- The total value of the votes polled by the remaining candidates both as first and subsequent preferences would be used to decide the winner.

**Why do not the Rajya Sabha polls have a secret ballot?**

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

**Why does not none of the above, or NOTA, apply to the Rajya Sabha polls?**

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** issued two circulars, on January 24, 2014 and November 12, 2015, giving Rajya Sabha members the option to press the **NOTA button** in the Upper House polls.



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- However, in **2018,** the **Supreme Court of India struck down the provision**, holding that the 'none of the above' option is **only for general elections** held on the **basis of universal adult suffrage**, and cannot be applied to indirect elections based on proportional representation.

**Does cross-voting attract disqualification?**

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

**Can a legislator vote without taking oath as a member of the Assembly?**

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

## 50. Has Google failed to protect its Chrome browser?

**Context**

- A few days ago, Reuters reported a "**newly discovered spyware effort**" targetting users of Google's browser **Chrome.**
- The spyware, it said, has been pushed through at least **111 malicious or fake Chrome browser extensions**, which have been **downloaded** some 32 million times.

**(Browser extensions are add-ons that provide additional capabilities to the user.)**

- The report also said Google had taken off more than 70 extensions from its official Web Store last month after being alerted to their malicious nature by researchers at **Awake Security**.

**How do these malicious extensions get in to the Chrome store in the first place?**


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Short answer: they seem harmless, to being with.

- According to the report by **Awake Security**, which brought this issue to light, these "**sleeper agent extensions**" **appear to do nothing** in the beginning.
- The "**malicious payloads**" are **only pushed** on to the extensions much after the "**clean" versions have been approved**.

**What do the malicious extensions do?**

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

**How has Google reacted to this?**

- As mentioned above, Google has **recently removed the malicious extensions**.

**It has been mentioned that some of the fake extensions were never in the Chrome Web Store. How were they made to work then?**

- This is due to the misuse of an **open-source browser project**, **Chromium** — installing it can lead to **malicious add-ons.**
- This works as a rogue browser when users unwittingly give it the okay to run when prompted.

**Are browser extensions a vulnerability?**

- A significant part of what we do on the computer these days is via the browser.
- Also, the research report points out that it has been a **challenge for security** solutions to **spot malicious activity** that is happening within the browser.
- The Awake Security report says, "Rogue access to the browser therefore frequently means rogue access to the 'keys to the kingdom' — from **email and corporate file sharing** to customer relationship management and **financial databases**."

**How are users fooled?**

- **Watch out for prompts** that urge you to make a **new browser as default**.
- The security firm has also documented some standard characteristics of malicious campaigns. For starters, some of these malicious players have **professional-looking web sites** that peddle false promises. An example recorded is that of a security extension that **certifies a page** with **malicious content as secure.**

**Identifiers of a malicious web extensions**

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- Security experts can visually figure out if an extension is malicious or fake, says the Awake Security report, listing out the following easy identifiers:
- These extensions, for an **unknown brand** and **little information**, have a huge following; the **user reviews are always great**; these extensions have a **huge following despite being relatively new in the market.**

**What other vulnerability has this finding revealed?**

- The Awake Security report ends with a question mark on the conduct and practices of a small Israel-based **domain registrar** called **Galcomm**, formally known as CommuniGal Communication Ltd according to Reuters.
- Its report says **60% of its domains** are **high risk for organisations**.
- These malicious domains have managed to evade categorisation as unsafe because their actions depend on where the client is connecting to it from.
- They act maliciously only if the client connects from a broadband or cable network.
- They act benignly if the request comes from a data centre or virtual private network.
- It says, "This registrar, who also maintains a **Registrar Accreditation Agreement** with **ICANN (The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers),** is **responsible** for **putting far more malicious domains, malware, and exploitative content on the internet than legitimate content**.
- We believe the research and analysis summarized in this report proves that Galcomm is at best complicit in malicious activity."
- The bigger issue raised by the report is one of **lack of oversight by ICANN**, which oversees domain name standards.

**What has been Galcomm's response?**

- Reuters reported that Galcomm owner Moshe Fogel has denied any wrong-doing.

**51. Fighting a double pandemic**

**Context**

# Waking up to screams, thuds, angry shouting and the sickening sound of someone crashing into a wall, a table, a door. This is the cruel reality of many **children and young people** across our Commonwealth.

**Gender based violence on increase**


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# There is a dangerous escalation in the risk to the millions of people caught in the clutches of **domestic and gender-based violence.**

**#** The crisis has led to an alarming **escalation of violence** in the home, with women bearing the **brunt of the frustration and anger.**

# In some areas, there have been reports of women being prevented from seeing doctors, and female doctors being spat on while testing other women for COVID-19.

# We are seeing surging numbers **of emergency calls** to helplines — with rises of anything between **25% and 300%,** dramatic increases in **Internet searches** for support for those **affected by domestic violence**, and higher numbers of **domestic homicides**. These are extremely disturbing trends, which must not be ignored.

**Barriers to care**

# Experience teaches us that **women tend often to be at a disadvantage during crises**, epidemics and now this pandemic, and that domestic violence tends to increase.

# In **West Africa, 60% of total deaths in the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak were women.** Following the **Canterbury earthquake in New Zealand**, there was a **53% rise in domestic violence.**

# In many cases this is because gender roles and harmful practices, including **customs such as early and forced marriage**, limit **women's access to health services.**

# Women do three times as much **unpaid care work** at home compared to men, and make up **70% of workers in the health and social care sectors**. They are squarely in infection's path.

# During the present COVID-19 pandemic**, mass school closures** are tending to entrench **learning gaps between girls and boys**, and putting many more girls at **risk of sexual exploitation**, **early pregnancy and early or forced marriage**.

# They also mean that **children are unable to report abuse to a trusted teacher**.

# And with **restrictions on home visits by police** and health workers, **violence shelters being converted into health facilities**, and **courts being forced to close**, many victims may find themselves trapped and feeling abandoned.

# Mitigating the devastating impacts of this hidden pandemic of domestic violence requires strong and concerted action. So the **Commonwealth Secretariat** is



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working alongside partner organisations on measures which will help our **54 member countries** to stem the rising tide of **gender based violence**.

# In meetings with counterpart organisations such as the **Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Council of Europe** and the Community of Spanish Language Countries, we have explored collaboration and mechanisms to ensure that women are at the centre of post-COVID-19 recovery planning.

**Health systems link**

# It is clear, for example, that an important priority is the provision of **basic health care** to all individuals and communities **free of charge** at the point of delivery.

# There is a clear link **between weak health systems and vulnerabilities to domestic violence**. So urgent action needs to be taken to ensure that during this COVID-19 pandemic, victims of abuse are able to access the health care they need, including mental health services.

**Financial independence**

# It is also key that **post COVID-19 strategies** include **dedicated funding and support** for **micro, small and medium sized businesses** and the informal sector, which are **predominantly led by women** — many of whom need the assurance of financial independence to escape from dangerous domestic situations.

# I would lay particular **emphasis on the importance** at present of **creating opportunities through virtual meetings** and seminars for Commonwealth countries to **share knowledge**, **resources and experience** on how best to navigate through the rapidly evolving processes and circumstances within which we now operate.

# Some governments have been able to provide **additional resourcing and funding** to **organisations supporting victims**, so they can upscale operations and continue providing services in a safe manner. Other useful innovations such as **virtual hearings and legal advice**, are allowing survivors to continue to access justice.

# Sadly, children living in violent homes not only witness violence but may themselves **suffer abuse.**

# **Violence in the home is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges** of our time.

# So, the Commonwealth collectively stands ready to bring the power of its advocacy and support to the **planned UN Declaration on Women and COVID-19.**

**Way ahead**


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# We are increasing our **ongoing advocacy** through a range of initiatives, including creating a strong economic case for addressing gender-based violence by identifying the significant economic costs if we fail to act.

# **Research** from the Commonwealth project, The Economic Cost of Violence against Women and Girls: A Study of the Seychelles, carried out in 2019 before the pandemic, shows that **gender-based violence leads to estimated costs of 4.625% of GDP.**

# We will also hold a virtual follow-up session to the Women Affairs Ministerial Meeting that was held last September, to set out an action plan to support women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis, because we simply cannot allow victims of domestic abuse and gender-based violence to feel trapped and helpless during this hidden parallel pandemic.

## 52. China policy lacks perspicacity

### Introduction

# There is a **resemblance** between what is going on now on the India-China border with the events in the run-up to the **1962 war.** The debacle in that war was rightly blamed on the Nehru government for its military unpreparedness and for its inability to fathom China's larger strategic objectives.

# With **India much better prepared now to face China's challenge on the ground**, the situation in terms of the **military equation is not the same as in 1962** but that is a secondary issue.

### China's strategic objectives

# In both cases New Delhi failed to fully understand China's fundamental strategic objectives regarding India.

# Nehru could be impugned for his **idealistic notion of Afro-Asian solidarity** and his suspicion of **America's strategic designs that influenced his thinking on China**.

# However, the present government, which by its own admission is firmly committed to national security above everything else and whose foreign policy actions are driven by transactional rather than idealistic considerations, seems to be equally naïve about Beijing's long-term strategic objectives.

# New Delhi has compounded its failure by indulging in reckless rhetoric regarding **Aksai Chin** and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir **(PoK)** that have painted the image of India as a **revanchist power** in utter disregard of the country's capabilities that preclude any attempt at changing the status quo on either front.


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# Senior Cabinet Ministers' **declamations about liberating Aksai Chin and recovering PoK**, while justifiable in terms of India's legal rights to these territories, were **ill-timed**.

# They **were made** when **Beijing was feeling alarmed at the Indian government's decision to separate Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir** that augmented its perception that it was a **prelude to India's attempt to change the status quo in Aksai Chin**.

# Beijing was also worried about India's renewed assertion of its claims on PoK that in China's perception **threatened the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.**

# But these missteps were merely the icing on the cake. While the military is more cognisant of **China's tactical goals** in terms of **creating facts** on the ground and making them the base line for future negotiations, the political leadership, it appears, has failed to fully comprehend China's strategic objectives.

# These strategic goals include

(a) ensuring that India understands that **it is not in the same league as China** and driving home the lesson by periodic localised assaults across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) if it tries to assume a position of equality;

(b) **warning India** not to actively oppose Chinese designs to **dominate the Indo-Pacific region** by aligning with the **U.S. and its allies** — Japan and Australia, in particular — in an attempt to contain China;

(c) **keeping India preoccupied** with **problems in its immediate neighbourhood** so that it cannot act as an alternative pole of power to China in the broader Asian region; and

(d) as part of the last objective, **supporting Pakistan economically and militarily,** including the sharing of **nuclear weapons designs**, to neutralise India's conventional power superiority vis-à-vis that country.

# An understanding of these objectives is essential to fashioning a realistic Indian response to China's aggressive policies in Ladakh and elsewhere along the LAC. **Pakistan** is at best an irritant for India that can be managed with the **use of diplomatic tools**, international opprobrium, and **superior military force**. In fact, the Pakistani challenge to India has become magnified because of its nexus with China.

**<u>What India should do</u>**

# China is undoubtedly India's principal **long-term adversary**.



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# India's main strategic goal should be the **adoption of carefully calculated policies** that **neutralise China's diplomatic and military clout in the Asia-Pacific region** without making India appear as a surrogate for other powers and without sacrificing India's autonomy of decision-making in foreign policy.

## 53. A way out of undelineated borders

**Context**

# The Galwan face-off should focus minds on resolving, not managing, different perceptions of the northern border, **relying first on 'samadhaan'**, as Kautilya suggested.

# The **root of the misunderstanding** between **India and Nepal** lies in a **treaty** to end a **territorial war** to which no map was attached and the negotiators had no idea of the geography of the area, except that **devout Hindus** on the way to **Mansarovar** considered the **springs at Kalapani,** at the base of the **Lipulekh pass**, as the **source of the Kali river**.

**Historical facts**

# The **Treaty of Sugauli in 1815-16**, which ended the **Anglo-Nepalese War**, stipulated that "**the Kali River**" would mark **Nepal's western border** with the British East India Company.

# The demarcation undertaken by **W.J. Webb** later in 1816, covered '**the entire Byans region** both to the east and west of the river, on the ground that it had traditionally been part of Kumaon prior to the 25-year-old occupation by Nepal'.

# In **1817,** Nepal made a 'representation to the British, claiming that it was **entitled to the areas east of the river**. The British Governor-General in Council accepted the demand', and the villages of Tinkar and Chaggru were transferred to Nepal, **dividing the Byans area.**

# The **drainage of the Kalapani and Lipulekh** was considered **wholly within British territory**, and it was stated that a short way below the springs, the Kali formed the boundary with Nepal.

# Nepal later '**extended a claim to the Kuthi valley** further to the west, stating that the **Kuthi-Yankti stream**, the western branch of the head waters, should be considered the **main Kali river'**.

# The Himalayan Gazetteer records that the surveyor, W.J. Webb, made known to Bam Shah, the Governor of Doti, who had negotiated the Treaty, 'that the **lesser stream flowing from the Kalapani springs** had always been **recognised as**


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**the main branch of the Kali** and had in fact given its name to the river. The British **retained the Kuthi Valley'** and the **Limpiyadhura Pass.**

# The **first British Resident in Nepal**, Edward Gardner, laid this out to the Nepal Durbar, in correspondence (February 4, 1817 to October 10, 1817). The matter was considered settled as only the lowland lying between the Kali and Gorakhpur that were ceded in 1815 were restored to Nepal by the **Treaty of 1860.**

# To **establish the boundary**, initially, the Deputy Commissioner of Almora would each year **travel to the Lipulekh Pass** to open trade.

# The northern boundary of Byans was stated as the line of water parting between India and 'Hundes' in the **Settlements of Trail in 1828** and **Batten in 1840-41.**

# The first Settlement, under the British government of Beckett between 1863 -1873, measured each cultivated field, reiterated this, and, as The Himalayan Gazetteer points out, was used to input local names into the new map prepared by the Survey of India, correcting earlier sketchy maps. The British Government did not shift the British East India Company boundary, as Nepal alleges.

**Agreed tri-junction**

# In 1905, Charles A. Sherring, Deputy Commissioner of Almora, recorded his **travels across Lipulekh into Tibet**.

# He **camped at Kalapani** and noted its **half dozen springs** and the Nepal boundary at the **Tinkar Pass.**

# Trade through Lipulekh, amounting to £26,000 annually, had grown ten-fold since 1816, and was regulated by the British.

# The **1954 Trade Agreement between India and China** mentions **Lipulekh as one of the passes** that could be used for trade and pilgrimage traffic; a **police post was established by India at Kalapani in 1956.**

# The **China-Nepal Boundary Treaty**, October 5, **1961,** in its Article 1 states: "The Chinese-Nepalese boundary line **starts** from the point where the **watershed between** the **Kali River and the Tinkar River** meet the watershed between the tributaries of **the Mapchu (Karnali) River** on the one hand and the Tinkar River on the other hand."

# The China-Nepal Boundary Protocol of January 20, 1963 established permanent boundary markers "as numbered 1 to 79 in serial order from west to east." The first marker of the Sino-Nepal border is at **Tinkar.**

# The **tri-junction,** though not delineated, corresponds to the border claimed by India and shown on the **British map of 1879**, and in subsequent ones, is about 5 km east-southeast of Lipulekh and **20 km from the Limpiyadhura pass.**


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**International law**

# Principles of **international law support the British and India's claim**.

# Borders are established **through political agreements**; delimitation gives specific meaning to the verbal description and is considered part of the negotiations and demarcation is the setting up of **boundary markers.**

# In the case of **Lipulekh and Kalapani, and now Limpiyadhura**, the political agreement in 1817 has been acted upon and not open to challenge now.

# A treaty has to be interpreted with reference to the circumstances prevailing at the time the treaty was concluded.

# In considering the general significance of map evidence, the basis of Nepal's claim, if that evidence is inconsistent, its value is reduced by any delimitation done at that time and textual interpretation as well as legislative, administrative or judicial assertions of authority over the area. There are also clear legal grounds and reasons for corrections in names in the maps.

# The militarisation of this un-delineated part of the border has made it imperative for India to respond early to **Nepal's selective reference** to certain maps of the British East India Company — **first raised in 1997** — with a white paper and discuss **giving Byansis in Nepal** all facilities, as those villages are cut-off from the rest of Nepal.

# Equally important is the need for **another white paper on Aksai Chin** where the border is also not delineated. **Resolution is a part of political negotiation and overlapping** "patrolling points" are grossly inadequate substitutes for boundary pillars.

# Civilisational states should rely on the **power of persuasion** to settle misapprehensions left over by colonialism based on historical facts and summit diplomacy.

**54. Transparency during a crisis**

**Context**

# Right to Information (RTI) applications **seeking information** pertaining to the **PM CARES Fund** have been stonewalled.

# **No information** exists on the **official website** of the Fund regarding the **amount collected**, **names of donors**, **expenditur**e incurred, or details of beneficiaries.



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# The trust deed of the fund chaired by the Prime Minister is not available for public scrutiny. Reports suggest that **donations of over $1 billion** have been made, including contributions from foreign sources.

**Access to information is crucial**

# Relief and welfare programmes **funded through public money** are the sole lifeline of millions who suddenly lost income-earning opportunities during the lockdown.

# If the **poor and marginalised affected** by the public health emergency are to have any hope of obtaining the benefits of government schemes, they **must have access** to relevant information.

# Ironically, however, a **corrosive narrative** seems to have emerged that **public scrutiny** of government actions is **undesirable during the crisis** and citizens must **unquestioningly trust** the state.

# This undermines the **basic democratic tenet** that **citizens' participation** and **oversight** is necessary to ensure they are able to access their rights. Without information, peoples' ability to perform that role is eviscerated and **corruption thrives**.

# The **RTI Act, 2005**, has empowered citizens to **access information** from **public authorities** and hold them accountable.

# During the COVID-19 crisis, **proper implementation of the law** has assumed greater significance than ever before. It is crucial that information related to implementation of relief measures announced by governments be **widely disseminated.**

**Importance of information dissemination**

# For instance, **to ensure food security** for the needy, **Central and State governments** have put in place **schemes to provide subsidised rations**.

# For effective delivery of foodgrains and other essential commodities, **information must** be **made available in the public domain** about the **quantity and price of commodities**, details of beneficiaries and the **list of ration shops** along with their stock position.

# Ground reports have revealed that in the **absence of information**, it is **impossible for intended beneficiaries to get their due —** ration shopkeepers siphon foodgrains and keep their shops closed on the pretext that they have no stocks.

# **Greater openness** would **prevent controversies** of the kind exemplified by faulty testing kits and fake ventilators.



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# Following complaints from various States about **rapid COVID-19 testing kits** imported from **China,** the **Indian Council for Medical Research halted their use**.

# Serious questions arose about the government's decision to order the kits from China, especially in the backdrop of countries like **Spain and the Netherlands returning faulty Chinese kits**.

# Numerous instances have been reported of COVID-19-positive patients requiring treatment in intensive care units being shunted from one hospital to another.

# This could be prevented if hospitals and health centres **publicly provide real-time** information **about availability of beds and other facilities**.

# To **ensure easy accessibility** to those who need it the most, **relevant information** must be made available in **local languages** and widely disseminated.

# In fact, this is a **statutory obligation** of public authorities under **Section 4 of the RTI Act.**

**Role of transparency watchdogs**

# In the current scenario the role of **information commissions** is crucial. While in the midst of a pandemic it is reasonable to expect delays in processing information requests, **public authorities must not be allowed to interpret the crisis as a justification for not complying with the RTI Act.**

**#** Unfortunately**, an assessment** of the **functioning of the transparency watchdogs** revealed that **21 out of 29 commissions** in the country did **not hold a single hearing** during the first three stages of the lockdown.

# While the **Central Information Commission and some State commissions used audio** and **video conferencing** to **hear and dispose cases**, most commissions did not make provision for hearing even urgent matters.

**Way ahead**

# At a time when incentives for secrecy are great, and the scope for discretionary actions wide, it is critical to **create a culture of openness** to empower people to participate meaningfully in the decisions that have profound effects on their lives and livelihoods.

# People must be able to obtain information **about how and where their money is being spent** in the efforts to combat the pandemic and whether funds are reaching the intended beneficiaries.

**55. Right to Information Act,2005**



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### Historical Background

- The right to information gained power when **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was adopted in 1948 providing everyone the right to seek, receive, information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
- The **International Covenant on Civil and Political rights 1966** states that everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression, the freedom to seek and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- According to **Thomas Jefferson** "Information is the currency of democracy," and critical to the emergence and development of a vibrant civil society. However, with a view to set out a practical regime for the citizens to secure information as a matter of right, the Indian Parliament enacted the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- Genesis of RTI law started in 1986, through judgement of Supreme Court in **Mr. Kulwal v/s Jaipur Municipal Corporation** case, in which it directed that freedom of speech and expression provided under **Article 19** of the Constitution clearly implies Right to Information, as without information the freedom of speech and expression cannot be fully used by the citizens.

### Objectives of the Act

- To empower the citizens
- To promote transparency and accountability
- To contain corruption and
- To enhance people's participation in democratic process.

### Reasons for Adoption of Information Act

The factors responsible for adoption of information act are as follows-

- Corruption and scandals
- International pressure and activism
- Modernization and the information society

### Features of the Act

- **Section- 2 (f):** "Information" means any material in any form, including Records, Documents, Memos, e-mails, Opinions, Advices, Press releases, Circulars, Orders, Logbooks, Contracts, Reports, Papers, Samples, Models, Data material held in any electronic form and information relating to any private body which can be accessed by a Public Authority under any other law for the time being in force.

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- **Section- 2(j) : "Right to Information"** means the right to information accessible under this Act which is held by or under the control of **any public authority** and includes the right to:
  - Inspection of work, documents, records;
  - Taking notes, extracts or certified copies of documents or records;
  - Taking certified samples of material;
  - Obtaining information in the form of diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts where such information is stored in a computer or in any other device.

**What is Public Authority?**

**"Public authority"** means any authority or body or institution of self government established or constituted—

- by or under the Constitution;
- by any other law made by Parliament/State Legislature.
- by notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any—
  - body owned, controlled or substantially financed;
  - non-Government organisation substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.
- **Section 4** of the RTI Act requires **suo motu disclosure of information** by each public authority. However, such disclosures have remained less than satisfactory.
- **Section 8 (1)** mentions exemptions against furnishing information under RTI Act.
- **Section 8 (2)** provides for disclosure of information exempted under **Official Secrets Act, 1923** if larger public interest is served.
- The Act also provides for appointment of **Information Commissioners** at Central and State level. Public authorities have designated some of its officers as Public Information Officer. They are responsible to give information to a person who seeks information under the RTI Act.
- Time period: In normal course, information to an applicant is to be **supplied within 30 days** from the receipt of application by the public authority.
  - If information sought **concerns the life or liberty of a person,** it shall be supplied **within 48 hours.**

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- In case the application is sent through the Assistant Public Information Officer or it is sent to a wrong public authority, five days shall be added to the period of thirty days or 48 hours, as the case may be.

**Importance**

- The RTI Act, 2005 **did not create a new bureaucracy for implementing the law.** Instead, **it tasked and mandated officials in every office to change their attitude** and duty from one of secrecy to one of sharing and openness.
  - It carefully and deliberately empowered the Information Commission to be the highest authority in the country with the mandate to order any office in the country to provide information as per the provisions of the Act. And it empowered the Commission to fine any official who did not follow the mandate.
- Right to information has been seen as the key to **strengthening participatory democracy** and ushering in people centred governance.
- Access to information **can empower the poor and the weaker sections of society** to demand and get information about public policies and actions, thereby leading to their welfare. It showed an early promise by exposing wrongdoings at high places, such as in the organisation of the Commonwealth Games, and the allocation of 2G spectrum and coal blocks.
- Right to information opens up government's records to public scrutiny, thereby arming citizens with a vital tool to inform them about what the government does and how effectively, thus **making the government more accountable.**
- **Improves decision making by public authority** by removing unnecessary secrecy.

**Challenges**

- Different types of information is sought which has no public interest and sometimes can be used to misuse the law and harass the public authorities. For example-
  - Asking for desperate and voluminous information.
  - To attain publicity by filing RTI
  - RTI filed as vindictive tool to harass or pressurize the public authority
- Because of the illiteracy and unawareness among the majority of population in the country, the RTI cannot be exercised.


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- Though RTI's aim is not to create a grievance redressal mechanism, the notices from Information Commissions often spur the public authorities to redress grievances.

**RTI vs Legislations for Non Disclosure of Information**

- Some provisions of **Indian Evidence Act** (Sections **123, 124, and 162**) provide to hold the disclosure of documents.
  - Under these provisions, **head of department may refuse** to provide information on affairs of state and only swearing that it is a state secret will entitle not to disclose the information.
  - In a similar manner no public officer shall be compelled to disclose communications made to him in official confidence.
- The **Atomic Energy Act, 1912** provides that it shall be an offence to disclose information restricted by the Central Government.
- The **Central Civil Services Act** provides a government servant not to communicate or part with any official documents except in accordance with a general or special order of government.
- The **Official Secrets Act, 1923** provides that any government official can mark a document as confidential so as to prevent its publication.

**RTI vs Right to Privacy**

- Conceptually, RTI and the right to privacy are both complementary as well as in conflict to each other.
- While RTI increases access to information, the right to privacy protects it instead.
- At the same time they both function, as citizen rights safeguarding liberty, against state's overreach.

When the question of harmonising the contradicting rights arises, it should

- give justice to the larger public interest
- advance the public morality

**RTI vs OSA**

The OSA was enacted in 1923 by the British to keep certain kinds of information confidential, including, but not always limited to, information involving the affairs of state, diplomacy, national security, espionage, and other state secrets.

- Whenever there is a conflict between the two laws, the provisions of the **RTI Act override those of the OSA.**
- **Section 22 of the RTI Act** states that its provisions will have effect notwithstanding anything that is inconsistent with them in the OSA.


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- Similarly, **under Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, a public authority may allow access to information covered under the OSA,** "if the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to the protected interest".

**RTI and Political Parties**

Why activists want political parties to be brought under RTI?

- To contain corruption
- Huge donations from corporates which lead to favouritism or crony capitalism
- Illegal foreign contribution
- The leader of the opposition is statutorily mandated to be part of the select committees to choose Chairperson for CIC, Lokpal, CBI Director and CVC
- Various members of the opposition are also part of various parliamentary committees
- They enjoy multiple benefits like concessional office spaces, free airtime on DD & AIR from govt

**Stand of Political Parties**

- PP's are not public authorities, hence cannot be brought under RTI Act.
- Disclosed information can be misused.
- Can disclose financial information under the IT Act.

**Recent Amendments**

- The RTI amendment Bill 2013 removes political parties from the ambit of the definition of public authorities and hence from the purview of the RTI Act.
- The draft provision 2017 which provides for closure of case in case of death of applicant can lead to more attacks on the lives of whistleblowers.
- The proposed RTI Amendment Act 2018 is aimed at giving the Centre the power to fix the tenures and salaries of state and central information commissioners, which are statutorily protected under the RTI Act. The move will dilute the autonomy and independence of CIC.
- The Act proposes to replace the fixed 5 year tenure to as much prescribed by government.

**Other Issues**

- Information commissioners do not have adequate authorities to enforce the RTI Act.
- In case of award of compensation to activist by public authority as ordered by commision, compliance cannot be secured.
- Poor record-keeping practices



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- Lack of adequate infrastructure and staff for running information commissions
- Dilution of supplementary laws like the whistleblowers protection Act.

**56. Downing the shutters: On H1-B visa halt**

**Context**

# The White House has made a proclamation **restricting the issuance** of **non-immigrant work visas (H1B)** across the board, purportedly to clamp down on **American jobs** going to foreign workers, a consistent policy priority of the Donald Trump administration.

**Halted Visas**

# The broad-brush order includes the **H-1B visa for skilled workers**, which is widely garnered by Indian nationals, the **H-2B visa issued to seasonal workers** in the landscaping and hospitality industries, the **L-1 visa for intra-company transfers**, and the **J-1 visa for students on work-study summer programmes**.

# It will also impact the **H-4 visa for dependents of H-1B visa holders**.

# The proclamation will enter into force on June 24 and be **applicable until the end** of the **calendar year**, which notably includes the November 3 presidential election.

**Objective of the order**

# It is intended as a follow-on order **reducing the number** of foreigners entering the U.S., as it comes on the back of the **60-day halt** in **legal migration** that began on April 23.

# The latest restrictions **will not apply to visa-holders** who are **already within the U.S.,** or those who are outside it and have already been issued valid visas.

**Reason for this order**

# The reasoning offered by the White House is that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has "**significantly disrupted Americans'** livelihoods," to the extent that the overall **unemployment rate** in the country nearly quadrupled between February and May 2020 to **13.3%.**

# There is little doubt that the policies of the Trump White House are likely to genuflect to the broader requirements of the 2020 presidential campaign, one of which is a sharp focus on **"America First**," or in this case the need to project aggressive action against American jobs allegedly being lost to foreign workers.


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# This week's proclamation offered data to bolster that claim, noting that between February and April, "more than 20 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in key industries where employers are currently requesting H-1B and L workers to fill positions".
# Already Google **CEO Sundar Pichai** has responded by tweeting, "**Immigration has contributed immensely to America's economic success**, making it a global leader in tech, and also Google the company it is today.

**57. China, Kashmir and the ghost of August 5**

**Context**

# What is becoming clear now is that by "inventing" a rhetorical position around the issue of **Aksai Chin**, a territory India may never have intended to take back by force from China, New Delhi seems to have **aggravated the existing Chinese sensitivities** on it.
# Put differently, **India's infrastructure-building activities** on its side of **the LAC** and the **China's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** connectivity to Pakistan were already on a collision course, and it seems the **reorganisation of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) on August 5** last year, and the rhetoric surrounding it, may have finally **triggered a conflict** that was building up for a long time.

**The ground reality**

# The **impact of August 5** has been felt on two fronts — **China and Pakistan**.
# Official data show a **steady rise in violence** in Kashmir since 2014, and the **August 2019** decision has done little to reduce this despite the restrictions of movement and a heavy security presence in Kashmir.
# Early trends on violence in 2020 show that the levels of violence will indeed cross those of 2019.

**End of Shimla Agreement,1972**

# The impact of August 5 goes **beyond a mere spike** in **violence in Kashmir**. Since August, retired **Pakistani officials** close to the establishment have argued that in the wake of India's Kashmir decision, the **Simla Agreement of 1972** — which forms a **key basis of bilateral** relations, including the **management of the Line of Control (LoC)** in Kashmir — **is not valid anymore.**
# The Pakistani side argues that the Indian decision vis-à-vis Kashmir goes **against the spirit of the Simla Agreement** since the agreement states that "**pending**


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**the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation….".**

# This of course does not take away from the fact that **Pakistan has altered the situation** in **Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)** several times over in the past.

# If this indeed reflects an emerging official thinking within Pakistan, this might have serious implications. For one, this would mean that the **agreement governing** the **India-Pakistan border in J&K** will **no longer be the Simla Agreement** but would, as a result, have to be the one signed between the two sides in **Karachi in 1949**, at the **end of their first war in 1948**.

# Since the Simla Agreement **formalised several territorial changes** which took place after 1949 and until December 1971, such **territorial adjustments** could become **null and void.**

**Future Impacts**

# This raises two specific issues. For one, since the **current ceasefire agreement** between India and Pakistan (**declared in 2003**) is essentially **a reiteration of the ceasefire agreement declared at the end of the 1971 war**, this could mean **an end to the existing ceasefire agreement** between them.

# Second, if "Simla is dead", does it mean that the **LoC** that came into being (**replacing the ceasefire Line in 1971**) also stands nullified? In other words, the **entire basis of India-Pakistan negotiations on J&K** since **1972 may cease to exist if Pakistan decides to undermine the Simla Agreement**, or accuse India of having done so by the August decision and then decide not to abide by it.

**The China challenge**

# Let us return to the impact of August 5 on the current **India-China stand-off**.

# It was clear soon after the August decision that **Beijing was deeply uneasy** about India's decision for at least two reasons.

1. One, India's strong **official claim about a territory**, **Aksai Chin**, that has been under the **Chinese control**; and
2. Two, bringing **Ladakh under India's central rule** annoyed Beijing **since it considers Ladakh's borders** to be **disputed between them**.

# Pakistani appeals to Beijing to push back against India may have sharpened the Chinese reaction. There is also some **similarity between the Pakistani and Chinese positions** on India's August decision: **both sides argue** that



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India **changed the status of a territory (J&K) whose borders were still being negotiated**.

# Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's visit to Beijing in August 2019 and his assurances to China that **India's decision** had "**no implication for the external boundaries** of India or **the Line of Actual Control** with China.

# India was **not raising any additional territorial claims**.

# The Chinese concerns in this regard were misplaced" did not calm Beijing.

# Mr. Jaishankar was right about the implication of the reorganisation of J&K, but not the **Home Minister's statement about Aksai Chin**.

# China took the position that India "**continued to damage China's territorial sovereignty** by **unilaterally modifying** the form of **domestic law**" and that it was "unacceptable".

**Fallout of India's official stand**

# Cut to June 19, 2020. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after an all-party meeting to discuss the LAC stand-off, stated: "Neither is anyone inside the Indian territory nor any of our border posts captured."

# We do not know. What we do know, however, is that the climbdown, if indeed that was the case, was not only ineffective but may also have had the opposite effect. Going by the Chinese statements thereafter, the **Prime Minister's clarification has clearly been used** by **Beijing to justify its position on the LAC**.

# It could now further embolden China to undertake **more border raids and land capture attempts.**

# For both India and China, the region is of great **strategic importance**.

# For India, **Chinese aggression** close to **Eastern Ladakh** could frustrate its hold over **Siachen glacier** and compromise its security in the western frontier given the close partnership between Islamabad and Beijing.

# For **China**, the region is **important for the CPEC** and **its access to Central Asia**, both of which are part of its "**Belt and Road**" grand strategy.

**More worry**

# From being somewhat neutral on the Kashmir question in the 1990s and 2000s, China today is an **aggrieved party**, or so it claims, in the Kashmir conflict.

# If Pakistani involvement in the Kashmir conflict were not enough, we now have China in the game as well as a much more powerful third party.

# Furthermore, we have always known that **China and Pakistan** shared a formidable **strategic alliance** and yet, by wisely deemphasising that and dealing



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with them separately — not as a strategic alliance — New Delhi had contained their combined effect on itself to a great extent.
# Not anymore. Our strategy should have been to **continue to weaken the China-Pakistan** alliance by **engaging China economically**, **multilaterally and regionally**.
# The lesson is self-evident. A country the size of India **can ill-afford** to be narrowly tactical in its foreign and security policy decision making.
# **Geopolitics in Southern Asia** is changing way faster than we previously imagined and, therefore, **our decisions should not** be made based on **tactical and political considerations**, but on **cold, clear-headed strategic assessment**.

**58. The perils of follow the leader syndrome**

**Context**

**# André Gide**, the French writer, once said, "**Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and begin all over again**."

**Listen to the inner voice**

# The reason for its most painful blow by the Corona virus is its **handling or mishandling** by the government of the day, affecting not only **the economy** but also the very **livelihoods** of lakhs of Indians.
# We need to stir up our collective conscience, the inner voice that warns us that things are not normal. But how do we do it?
# We must remind ourselves of what B.R. Ambedkar said on November 25, 1949: "'The second thing we must do as to observe the caution which **John Stuart Mill** has given to all who are interested in the **maintenance of democracy,** namely, **not 'to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with power which enable him to subvert their institutions.'**
# For in India**, Bhakti** or what may be called the path of devotion or **hero-worship**, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world.
# Bhakti in religion may be a **road to the salvation of soul**. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure **road to degradation** and to eventual dictatorship'.

**Managing disaster**


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# COVID-19 has posed a grave threat to India right from the the time of the national lockdown. And yet, even now, the **planners in the country do not have a national plan** to combat the disease.

# The **Disaster Management Act, 2005** expressly **defines "Disaster**" as "**a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man made causes**, or by **accident or negligence** which results **in substantial loss of life or human suffering** or damage to, and **destruction of, property, or damage** to, or **degradation of, environment**, and is of such a nature or **magnitude** as to be **beyond the coping capacity** of the **community of the affected area**".

# The **Act is comprehensive** and provides for, inter alia, the **constitution of a National Authority,** a **National Executive committee**, the constitution of an **advisory committee of experts** in the field to make **recommendations and to prepare a national plan**.

# This plan must provide for **measures for prevention or mitigation**.

# The Act lays down "**guidelines for minimum standards of relief,** including "**ex gratia assistance on account of loss of life**... and for **restoration of means of livelihood**".

# It enables the creation of a **National Disaster Response Fund** in which the **central government must make due contribution** and requires "any grants that may be made by **any person or institution** for the purpose of disaster management" to be credited into the same Fund.

# It also provides for a **National Disaster Mitigation Fund**, **exclusively for mitigation**.

# The Act also provides for **State and local-level plans** and for **creating State Disaster Response Fund** among others.

# The **Act was not enforced** for a long time even by the United Progressive Alliance/Congress government which enacted it.

# The Supreme Court of India i**ntervened** at the instance of **Swaraj Abhiyan (Swaraj Abhiyan vs Union Of India And Ors) and Prashant Bhushan.** Justices Madan Lokur and N.V. Ramanna directed, in **2016,** that the **Act be implemented**, and in particular the **preparation of a National Plan, a National Disaster Response Fund, or NDRF, and a National Disaster Mitigation Fund, or NDMF**.



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# So, for the **first time**, the **government came out** with a **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP), 2016**, which dealt with various kinds of disasters; it was amended in 2019.

# So why is this National Plan not even in place? Without it, the fight against COVID-19 is ad hoc, and has resulted in thousands of government orders, **confusing** those who are to enforce them as well as the public.

**Obtuse steps**

# Worse still, the **NDRF is inactive.** On **April 3, 2020**, the government of India agreed to contribute its share to the NDRF.

# But curiously, "keeping in mind the need for a **dedicated national fund** with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation, like [that] posed by COVID-19", a **public charitable trust** under the name of **Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund)** was set up to receive grants made by persons and institutions out of the NDRF, in **violation of Section 46 of the Act.**

**#** The crores being sent to this fund are **not even audited** by the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India**.

# It is a totally **opaque exercise**. Curiously on May 22, the government of India issued a notification to fight the **locust menace** by **extending relief under the NDRF** as **also the SDRF.**

**#** So, according to the government, the **threat of locusts** is **more severe** than the novel coronavirus. Clearly, the government of the day has not only ignored the binding law but also circumvented it.

# The government has decided to fight the crisis in an **ad hoc and arbitrary manner** instead of the **organised steps** as mandated by the Act.

# **Unilateral decisions** without the advice of others only cause problems, two classic examples being demonetisation that was forced on the nation in November 2016, and the national lockdown of March 25 that was thrust upon a one billion-plus people at **four hours notice.**

# With **Parliament not in session** and the **judiciary virtually silent**, despite its suo motu intervention in the migrants' crisis, no one is even demanding the **implementation of an immediate National Plan for COVID-19**.

# The media and civil society have to step in to guard the nation as they are the last bastions of a vibrant democracy. One can only think of the poem by **Josiah Gilbert Holland**, with the line, "...**A time like this demands, Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands**."



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# As **Albert Einstein** once said, "**The strength of the Constitution lies entirely in the determination of each Citizen to defend it**."

## 59. Bad to worse: On India-Pakistan ties

**Context**

# In another round of tit-for-tat manoeuvres, **India, followed by Pakistan**, has decided to **halve the strength of diplomatic missions** in each other's capital.

# The government's decision, conveyed in a démarche to the Pakistani Chargé d'affaires on Tuesday, follows the **ill-treatment and torture of Indian personnel posted in Islamabad**, in **clear violation** of their diplomatic rights.

**Thaw in India-Pakistan ties**

# **Pakistan's contention** was that the **two men arrested were carrying fake currency**, but it is more likely the action was a response to **arrests and the expulsion of two Pakistani High Commission officials** accused of **espionage last month**, who were also taken into custody by Indian security officials.

# New Delhi also **accused Pakistan High Commission officials** of maintaining "**links to terror** organisations" as a reason for its decision.

# While **expulsions of diplomats** are not **uncommon between countries** as inimical to each other as India and Pakistan are, this is the **first time** such a measure has been taken since 2001.

# Then, the **Parliament attack in December 2001**, and the **largest military mobilisation** of the time along the **India-Pakistan border**, **Operation Parakram**, were the triggers.

# Eventually, after a thaw in ties, and Prime Minister **Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan** for the **SAARC summit in 2004,** the move was reversed and diplomats were gradually taken back to a **full strength of over a 100** in each High Commission.

# The latest decision follows not one event, but a general **downslide in relations** in the past year.

# After the **Pulwama attack** last February, the **Balakot air strike** and the **August 5 decision** to amend Article 370 of the Constitution and **reorganise Jammu and Kashmir**, India and Pakistan have snapped all trading ties, downgraded missions — now without High Commissioners — and shut down most diplomatic activities.



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# India and Pakistan **have had no talks since 2015,** when PM Modi visited Lahore, and the External Affairs Ministers met a few months later.
# All **sporting and cultural exchanges are at an end**, and **visas are rarely granted**, apart from **the rare exception** being made for the **Kartarpur corridor** inaugurated last year.
# From the LoC, where **ceasefire violations** continue to claim lives of soldiers and civilians on both sides, to practically every multilateral forum India and Pakistan are a part of, both sides are at daggers drawn.
# Even on **non-contentious issues** such as cooperating on the **coronavirus pandemic** as a part of the SAARC grouping, or collaborating against the recent locust invasion that affected the region, Islamabad and New Delhi are unable to find common cause.
# While the present seems bleak, the **future does not augur** well for a change, particularly as **India-China tensions occupy New Delhi's** concerns and focus.
# The decision to **reduce mission strengths** is unlikely to impact working relations between India and Pakistan at present. It is a sign, however, that just when it seems ties between the two neighbours cannot get much worse, they do.

## 60. Signalling intent: On Government e-Marketplace

**<u>New guidelines for GeM platform</u>**

# The **Centre's decision** to make it **mandatory for vendors** on the Government e-Marketplace **(GeM)** procurement platform to **specify the country of origin** of new products listed by them is on the face of it unexceptionable, aimed as it is at **promoting India-made goods.**
# Apart from the **place of manufacture**, the platform's administrators have also sought details on the **extent of local content** and set guidelines on the **percentage of localisation** for enabling procurement in the case of bids of a specified value.
# However, the timing and thrust of the announcement — set in the backdrop of the government's new-found push for self-reliance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on the global economy, coupled with the recent heightened border tensions with China — raises several questions.
# The government's attempts to **raise the share** of **manufacturing** in the economy through the '**Make in India'** programme have so far failed to significantly **boost investment in new, cutting-edge technology-driven or export-oriented industries** and instead only taken the country back to **import**


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**substitution** plants making goods **predominantly for domestic consumption.**

**Demerits of this policy**

# To that extent, the drive for self-reliance and greater localisation risks once again eroding Indian industry's global competitiveness by placing a premium on '**Indianness**' over quality or cost.

# The Centre's move with its **GeM portal** has also predictably kindled and amplified a gathering clamour for the **identification and subsequent boycott of Chinese products** including on **private e-commerce platforms**.

# The **weaponisation of trade ties**, especially one where **India's reliance on imports from China** now extend?s beyond smartphones and low-cost electronics to **heavy machinery** and **active pharmaceutical ingredients**, is a **double-edged sword** and fraught with risks for the Indian economy as well.

# India's **drug makers**, who are seeking to entrench themselves as a **pharmacy to the world** amid the pandemic and accompanying rush for **affordable generic treatments**, depend on the northern neighbour for about **70% of their requirements of bulk drugs** and **intermediates.**

**Way ahead**

# For India to wean itself off these dependencies will take time.

# The fact is that **enhancing manufacturing capacities** with improved **efficiency** and **reduced cost** would require an overhaul of **bureaucratic processes.**

# Attaining genuine self-reliance is a long and capital intensive process that would require far greater **investment in education, skill-building and infrastructure**.

# The GeM move on country of origin is at best symbolic. For now, policymakers ought to tone down any trade-linked rhetoric and give diplomats and military negotiators the room to smoothe ties.

## 61. The U.S. trial at The Hague

**Introduction**

# U.S. President Donald Trump's authorisation of **new sanctions** on the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** is an act of **retaliation against the UN body's high-profile investigation** to bring justice to victims **of war crimes and crimes against humanity**.


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# In March, the **Hague Court's Appeals Chamber** unanimously **authorised investigation** into **alleged atrocities by U.S. troops in Afghanistan since May 1, 2003** as well as other **alleged crimes committed since July 1, 2002** in **the Central Intelligence Agency's so-called black sites in Poland, Romania and Lithuania**.

# The **court overturned a 2019 pre-trial chamber decision** and admitted the 2016 preliminary findings of the **ICC's chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda.**

# **Ms. Bensouda's report** claims **systematic atrocities of torture**, **summary executions**, **forced disappearances and rape**, in which the **Taliban, the Haqqani Network and Afghanistan's defence forces** were also implicated.

**Decrying the probe**

# Mr. Trump's June 11 executive order, which decries the investigations of U.S. personnel as a **threat to American national security** and **foreign policy**, slapped **asset freezes and family travel bans on investigators.**

# The curbs build on the State Department's revocation last year of **Ms. Bensouda's U.S. visa.**

# At the time, the move was widely viewed as an **attempt to pre-empt the decision** over the Afghanistan probe, which the pre-trial chamber declined to authorise the following month.

# Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also said that the new measures would be deployed to **shield Israel,** which faces a **separate inquiry** following **Ms. Bensouda's application** last December.

# It relates to **Israel's settlements on the West Bank** and the **2014 invasion of Gaza,** resulting in hundreds of **Palestinian casualties.**

# The latest sanctions could in theory apply to victims and witnesses, besides lawyers and researchers assisting investigators.

# But their effectiveness is doubtful, say commentators, since the presence of the Hague staff and others on U.S. soil may not be required for progress in the case.

# The U.S. has always refused to recognise **ICC jurisdiction over U.S. personnel** on the grounds that it is **not party to the Rome Statute** that underpins the court.

# In **2002, the George W. Bush** administration **suspended its signature to the Statute**, when it failed to win backing to restrict the **court's remit solely to cases** where the accused belonged to a ratifying state.



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

**Situation in Kabul**

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

## 62. Getting out of the 'guns, germs and steel' crisis

**Context**

# India faces a "guns, germs and steel" crisis. There are **Chinese "guns**" on the borders. There are **coronavirus "germs**" in our bodies. There are "**steel" makers** and other businesses on the verge of bankruptcy.
# Arguably, this is the **gravest confluence of military, health and economic crises** threatening our nation in more than a generation.


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# The **Chinese military threat calls** for **immediate and strategic action** by our defence and foreign affairs establishments. The **COVID-19 health epidemic** is here to stay and needs **constant monitoring by the Health Ministry** and local administration. The **economic collapse** is an enormous challenge that needs to be overcome with **prudent policy.**

**Standoff and Kargil parallel**

# The **common thread** across these is that its resolution requires significant **financial resources**. Standing up to a **military threat** by a superpower neighbour will pose an **inevitable drain on the finances** of the government.

# India's war against Pakistan in **Kargil in May 1999** provides hints of **the financial burden** of a military threat.

# **India's defence expenditure** in the **war year** shot up by nearly **20%** from the previous year. It also forced the then **government to increase India's defence budget** for the next financial year to **2.7% of nominal GDP**, the **highest in decades.**

# China is a **far mightier power than Pakistan**. In this face-off, 20 Indian soldiers have been brutally killed and many more injured by the Chinese Army.

# A **portion of India's land in Ladakh** has been **grabbed by China**.

# Surely, India is bound to assert its rights, which will necessitate higher expenditure.

# **India's defence budget** has been whittled down to **just 2% of GDP for** the financial year **2021.**

# **China's defence budget is nearly four times larger**. In all likelihood, the Chinese conflict will stretch central government finances by an additional **one to two percentage points** of GDP, as India staves off the current threat and shores up its defence preparedness.

**Health care and economy**

# The health pandemic has exposed India's woefully **inadequate health infrastructure**. The **combined public health expenditure** of States and the central government in India is a mere **1.5% of GDP,** compared to **China's at 3% and America's at 9%.**

# The **COVID-19 epidemic** is expected to linger on for **another two years** until a suitable vaccine is available at large.

# Many public health experts are of the **opinion that the central government** will need **additional funds** of the equivalent of at least **one**



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**percentage point of GDP** to continue the fight against COVID-19.**(i.e.2.3% of GDP)**

# It is no secret that the **extreme national lockdown** has thrown **India's economy** into utter disarray.

# India's **economy has four major drivers** — people's spending on **consumption, government spending**, **investment and external trade.**

# **Spending by people** is the largest contributor **to India's economic growth every year**.

# For every ?100 in incremental GDP, ?60 to ?70 comes from people's consumption spending. (**60-70 % is our consumption expenditure**)

# The lockdown shut off people from spending for two full months, which will contract India's economy for the **first time in nearly five decades,** regardless of a strong agriculture performance.

# Even prior to COVID-19 when the global economy was robust, **India's trade levels** had fallen from **55% of nominal GDP** in **2014 to 40% in 2020**.

# Now, with the global economy in tatters, **trade is not a viable alternative to offset** the loss from consumption. **Investment is also not a viable option** at this stage since the demand for goods and services has fallen dramatically.

**Incremental funds needed**

# The **only options** then are to either **put money** in the hands of the needy to stimulate immediate consumption or for the government to embark on a massive spending spree, **akin to the "New Deal"** which was a series of programmes and projects instituted by **U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt** during the **Great Depression of the 1930s**.

# Based on estimates of **loss of consumption, incomes** and its **multiplier impact**, my estimate is that the government will need to **inject incremental funds** of **five percentage points of GDP** to absorb the economic shock and kick start the spending cycle again.

# The government had expected a **nominal GDP growth of 10% this year**. It is clear now that GDP will not grow but shrink.

# There is much hullabaloo about a '**V' shaped economic recovery**, which is a **mere illusion.**

# A 5% fall now and a 10% growth next year will be hailed as a sharp 'V' shaped recovery by economists and the International Monetary Fund. But as your local grocery store-keeper will elucidate, it only means that his total sales is a tad higher than two years ago.



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# Central government revenues for this year were budgeted at 10% of GDP which will not be achieved. Revenues will likely fall short by two percentage points of GDP.

# In sum, the government needs to spend an **additional eight percentage points of GDP** while revenues will be lower by two percentage points of GDP, a combined gap of 10% of GDP.

# Potential **new sources of revenue** such as a **wealth tax or a large capital gains tax** are ideas worth exploring for the medium term but will not be of much immediate help.

**The 'junk rating' risk**

# The only option for the government to finance its needs is to **borrow copiously**, which will obviously **push up debt** to ominous levels.

# When government debt rises dramatically, there will be a fourth dimension to the "guns, germs and steel crisis"; a "junk" crisis.

# With rising debt levels, **international ratings agencies** will likely **downgrade India's** investment rating to "junk", which will then **trigger panic among foreign investors**.

# Some economists argue that there is a magical third choice – to **simply print** how much ever money the government needs to overcome these crises.

# **Economic theory states** that if money is printed at will, it can **lead to a massive spike** in prices and inflation.

# This theory has **fallen flat** in the past decade in **developed nations such as America** where the **creation of phantom money** has not led to inflation.

# Hence, the **Reserve Bank of India** can just **create money** at will and transfer them to government coffers electronically, is the argument.

# There are **multiple problems** with this argument but the most important one is that regardless of whether money is printed or borrowed from others, it will still be counted as **government debt** and not escape a potential downgrade to a "junk" rating.

# The U.S dollar, by virtue of being the world's reserve currency, has an **in-built protection** against a **currency crisis** that can be triggered by **at-will printing of money**, that other developing nations such as India do not possess.

# If there were indeed no costs to printing money whenever governments need, then why tax citizens at all? **Countries could just print money** for all their expenses every year. The magical third choice is not a magic wand that can give the Indian government the money it needs and, also prevent a ratings downgrade.



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**63. The pandemic imposes a steep learning curve**

**Flaws in Online education**

# Across the world, **education has been drastically affected** by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most instruction has moved **online;** across the country, schools, colleges, universities and research establishments have been shut with no idea of when it will be possible to safely reopen. **Higher education has gone digital** where possible; or else it has simply been put on hold.

# In the wake of the pandemic, **other countries have embraced** online education with mixed enthusiasm.

# Many universities in the **United Kingdom and the United States** have announced that the **coming academic year will be held mainly online**. At the same time, educationists and policy makers **advise caution**. **Online education has not lived up to its potential.**

# Given our **diversity in institutions of higher education — private and governmental** colleges and universities, **research institutes**, professional colleges, State and central universities and so on — the **Indian education system** has had a very **heterogeneous** response to the pandemic.

# The reactions also reflect the contrast in **rural versus urban infrastructure,** the variable **quality of staff,** and the **diverse types of subjects** that are taught.

# There will surely be serious long-term effects, considering the scale of **the social, political and economic changes** that have been occurring these past several months.

**Subject-specific**

# However, it will be highly **subject-specific**. Courses that **traditionally need a laboratory or practical component** are an obvious example where **online classes cannot offer** an alternative.

# The adoption or **integration of technology in education** also depends on the specific institution and its location: there is a **huge digital divide** in the country in terms of **bandwidth and reliable connectivity**, as well as very **unequal access to funding**.

# Beyond classroom lectures and courses, there has been a serious **impact on academic research** in all disciplines.

# There is need for **close personal interaction** and **discussion in research supervision**, and it is not clear when and how doctoral research and supervision can resume.



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# In addition, the related economic crisis has **consequences for funding,** both of research as well as for the **maintenance of research infrastructure**. These are very long-term effects.

**The hard truths**

# Some things are self-evident. **Not all students have equal access to the Internet**, and more than half in any class in any institution are simply **not able to attend lectures** in real time for want of the required combination of **hardware and electrical connectivity** in their homes.

# This is **more pronounced in rural areas and non-metro cities**, and for lower income groups as well.

# Most teachers in India **view online instruction with caution**.

# The shift online is in response to a crisis and was **poorly planned**.

# **Online teaching** is a separate didactic genre in itself — one that **requires investment** of **time and resources** that very few teachers could come up with in a hurry.

# Many online classes are **poorly executed video versions** of regular classroom lectures.

# **Online higher education** using **MOOCs**, or massive open online classrooms, has been encouraged by the Ministry of Human Resource Development for some time now via the **National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) and SWAYAM platforms**. (SWAYAM is a Hindi acronym for "Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds".)

# There is a positive aspect of even a partial move to online education: making lectures available online in public and open websites accelerates **democratisation of knowledge** and the **wide distribution of learning opportunities**.

**An opportunity for change**

# This is a chance to **re-imagine higher education** in India. For long this has been elitist and exclusionary; **education** has been less about learning and **more about acquiring degrees**.

# Our higher education system **can be more inclusive**. If going online **loses the human touch,** the advantage of becoming available to many many more people who aspire to learn is worth the trade.

# If giving **proctored examinations** in a socially distanced world is more difficult, what needs to change is the idea of proctored examinations.



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# There are simpler ways to **validate pedagogy**, some of which can be found in our own traditions. **Gandhiji's "Nai Talim"** put a high premium on **self study** and **experiential learning**, for instance.

# Digital tools such as **artificial intelligence (AI)** — already used in teaching language — can be adapted to deliver **personalised instruction** based on the learning needs for each student.

# The use of AI can improve learning outcomes; in particular, this can be a boon for teaching students who are differently-abled.

# The adoption of online education needs to be done with sensitivity. What is needed at this time is **imagination and a commitment** to **decentralisation in education**.

# **Pedagogic material** must be made available in our **other national languages**; this will **extend access,** and can **help overcome staff shortages** that plague remote institutions.

# The state will have to bear much of the responsibility, both to **improve digital infrastructure** and to ensure that every **needy student has access to a laptop or smartphone.**

**Way ahead**

# Estimates are that COVID-19 will be seasonal, recurring every so often till 2022 or maybe 2024. So when these institutions reopen, they must do so with **extreme caution**.

# **Blended modes of education** will be unavoidable: **online instruction where possible**, and **limited contact for laboratory instruction** and individual mentoring.

# If this can lead to the emergence of a **new pedagogic paradigm**, we would have made the sweetest use of this adversity.

## 64. Senseless deaths: On Tamil Nadu custodial deaths

**Introduction**

# Even for a country as inured to **custodial violence** as India, the **death of a father-son** duo arrested for a **lockdown violation in Tamil Nadu** is distressingly senseless.

# P. Jayaraj, 58, a timber trader, and his son, J. Benicks, 31, who ran a mobile phone service and sales centre, were arrested for allegedly keeping their outlets open after permitted hours at **Sattankulam town** in Thoothukudi district and remanded to **judicial custody**.



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# The police claim they took ill on successive days while being lodged in a sub-jail and breathed their last in hospital.

# In a swift response, the **Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court**, which took **suo motu** cognisance of their death, has decided to monitor the progress of the **statutory magisterial probe.**

# It has asked for a **status report** from the police and also directed that the **autopsy be video-graphed**.

# The mere suspension of police personnel involved is an inadequate response to an incredibly wrongful **abuse of authority** by the law enforcement machinery.

# The police should **register a case of murder** and the matter taken over by **an independent agency** for a fair investigation.

# **Custodial deaths** are often the result of the **pervasive use of torture** in India's police stations for **extracting admissions of crime**, but it is not uncommon, regrettably, for the police to use their **power and authority** to settle personal scores.

# If the death of Jayaraj and Benicks are ultimately established as custodial murder as a result of torture or assault by the police, it would only mean that the problem is much deeper than the mere lack of professionalism in investigative methods.

# It might indicate a **different pathology** among police officials that makes them **inflict violence and harm against the weak**.

# Since the early days of the current lockdown, there have been **innumerable reports**, often backed by video footage, of the **police and officials attacking citizens** in the name of enforcing restrictions, and awarding **personalised punishment** on violators, and sometimes kicking and overturning carts containing items for sale.

# In this case, the **father was thrashed** even before being taken to the police station. Their offence would have only attracted **Section 188 of IPC** (for disobeying the time restrictions ordered by a public servant), but they **were also booked under Section 383** (extortion by threat) and **Section 506** (ii) (criminal intimidation).

# It is well known that the **police include 'intimidation' in the FIR** solely to obtain an order of remand, as it is **non-bailable,** if they are bent upon sending someone to jail.

# The inclusion of **non-bailable sections** for a **lockdown violation** indicates a perverse and prior inclination to harass the two and cause suffering.



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# The top brass of the police too will have to bear responsibility for this atrocity as it indicates a signal failure to lay down norms for policemen on the field to handle lockdown violations with humaneness.

**65. Drug abuse amidst pandemic**

**Introduction**

# More people are **using drugs, and more illicit drugs** are available than ever.
# The **economic downturn** caused by the global pandemic **may drive more people to substance abuse** or leave them vulnerable to **involvement in drug trafficking** and related crime.
# In the **global recession** that followed the **2008 financial crisis**, **drug users** sought out **cheaper synthetic substances** and patterns of use shifted **towards injecting drugs**, while **governments reduced budgets to deal with drug-related problems**.
# **Vulnerable and marginalised groups**, youth, women and the poor have been **harmed the most.**
# Now facing the gravest **socio-economic crisis** in generations, governments cannot afford to ignore the **dangers illicit drugs** pose to public health and safety.
# All over the world, the **risks and consequences of drug use** are **worsened by poverty**, limited opportunities for education and jobs, stigma and social exclusion, which in turn helps to deepen inequalities, moving us further away from achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**
# While **more people use drugs in developed countries** than in developing countries, and **wealthier segments of society** have a **higher prevalence of drug use**, people who are socially and economically disadvantaged are more likely to develop drug use disorders.
# Only **one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it**, according to the **World Drug Report 2020 (UNODC).** Some **35.6 million people suffer** from **drug use disorders globally.**

**The affected segments**

# **One out of three drug users** is a **woman** but women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
# People in **prison settings, minorities, immigrants** and displaced people also **face barriers** to treatment due to **discrimination and stigma**.
# Around **269 million people used drugs in 2018**, up 30% from 2009, with **adolescents and young adults** accounting for the largest share of users.


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# While the **increase reflects population growth** and other factors, the data nevertheless indicate that illicit drugs are more diverse, more potent and more available.

# At the same time, **more than 80% of the world's population**, **mostly living in low- and middle-income countries**, are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.

# Governments have repeatedly pledged to work together to address the challenges posed by the world drug problem, in the SDGs, and most recently in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

# But **data indicate** that **support has actually fallen over time**, imperilling government commitment as well as regional and global coordination.

# **Development assistance** dedicated to **drug control fell by some 90% between 2000-2017.**

**Solutions**

# Funding to address drugs may be provided under other budget lines, but there is **little evidence of international donor attention to this priority.**

# Assistance for **alternative development** — creating viable, **licit forms of income** to **enable poor farmers to stop growing illicit opium poppy or coca** — also remains very low.

# Leaving no one behind requires **greater investment** in **evidence-based prevention**, as well as **treatment and other services** for **drug use disorders, HIV, hepatitis C** and other infections.

# We need **international cooperation** to increase **access to controlled drugs** for medical purposes, while preventing diversion and abuse, and to **strengthen law enforcement action** to dismantle the transnational **organised crime networks.**

# **Health-centred**, **rights-based and gender-responsive approaches** to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes.

# We need **drug strategies** addressing the country-level, as well as regional challenges.

## 66. 1921 Malabar Rebellion

**Context**

# Malayalam film director Aashiq Abu, on June 22, announced a new film project, Variyamkunnan, on **Variyamkunnath Kunhamed Haji**, the main protagonist of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 who was executed by the British.



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**Why does the rebellion still stoke passions?**

# The Malabar Rebellion (also called the **Mappila or Moplah Rebellion** by the British) broke out in the **southern taluks of Malabar** in August 1921.

# By the time the government troops **captured Haji in January 1922**, the rebellion had fizzled out. It largely took the shape of **guerrilla-type attacks on janmis** (feudal landlords, who **were mostly upper caste Hindus**) and the police and troops.

# **Mappilas** had been among the **victims** of **oppressive agrarian relations** protected by the British.

# But the **political mobilisation of Muslims** in the region in the aftermath of the launch of the **Khilafat agitation** and Gandhi's non-cooperation struggle served as an opportunity for **an extremist section** to **invoke a religious idiom to express their suffering**, while working for a change in the **oppressive system of administration**.

# There **were excesses on both sides** — rebels and government troops. Incidents of **murder, looting and forced conversion** led many to discredit the uprising as a manifestation of **religious bigotry**. **Moderate Khilafat leaders** lamented that the **rebellion had alienated the Hindu sympathy.**

**How did Kunhamed Haji emerge as the leader?**

# Haji, who was one of the three most important **rebel leaders**, was the face of the rebellion. **British officers viewed** him as the "**most murderous**".

# Born in 1866 in a family with relatives involved in one of the Mappila "outbreaks" or "outrages" in the 19th century, he was familiar with the commemoration of shaheeds (martyrs) who fought against the tyranny of landlords and their helpers, mostly upper caste Hindus in the region.

# There were **several such outbreaks** in the region during the **19th and early 20th centuries**.

# The main actors of the outbreaks were individuals on **suicide missions**. The **Khilafat movement** launched in **1919** provided a fresh stimulus to the **grievances of Mappilas**.

# Now their sense of **local injustice** was sought to **be linked with the pan-Islamic sentiments** created in the aftermath of the **collapse of the Ottoman Empire** that rendered the **Ottoman caliphate irrelevant**.



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# Haji was among those in the Malabar region inspired by the zeal of the agitation. During the rebellion, he led **many attacks on individuals**, **including Muslims**, who had been loyal to the British. Some contemporary accounts, however, deny that he favoured conversion of Hindus.

**What was the impact of the protests?**

# The **rebellion of Mappilas** inspired by **religious ideology** and a conception of an **alternative system of administration — a Khilafat government** — dealt a **blow** to the **nationalist movement in Malabar**. The fanaticism of rebels, foregrounded by the British, fostered communal rift and **enmity towards the Congress**.

# The exaggerated accounts of the rebellion engendered a **counter campaign** in other parts of the country against '**fanaticism' of Muslims**.

# That said, the traumatic experience of the uprising also **persuaded educated sections** of the **Muslim community in Malabar to chalk out ways** to save the community from what they saw as a pathetic situation.

# The community's stagnation was attributed to **religious orthodoxy** and **ignorance**. The thrust of the **post-rebellion Muslim reform movement** in Malabar was a **rigorous campaign against orthodoxy.**

**67. Why is there a stress on randomised controlled trials?**

**Context**

# On June 23, the claim by **Patanjali Ayurved** [Haridwar (Uttrakhand)] that its preparations, **'Coronil' and 'Swasari'**, would cure COVID-19 in only seven days, was met with robust disbelief in some quarters, even as it hogged media space soon after the announcement.

# Ramdev, the yoga guru, and who is associated with the company, claimed that a **randomised controlled trial (RCT) among COVID-19** positive patients had proved favourable results.

# The government, through the Ministry of AYUSH (ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) responding a short while later, **told the company to stop advertising the drug as a cure for COVID-19,** pointing out that it would **attract provisions of Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954**

**What has the government said?**


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# The Ministry, in a statement, said the details of the study were not known to it and it has asked Patanjali Ayurved "to **provide at the earliest details** of the name and composition of the medicines being claimed for COVID treatment; site(s)/hospital(s), where the research study was conducted for COVID-19; protocol, sample size, Institutional Ethics Committee clearance, CTRI registration and results data of the study (ies) and stop advertising/publicizing such claims till the issue is duly examined".

# The Ministry has also "requested the **State Licensing Authority** of the Uttarakhand government to **provide copies of the licence** and **product approval details** of the Ayurvedic medicines being claimed for the treatment of COVID-19".

# It is learnt from media reports on the yet-to-be **published RCT conducted** on behalf of the company, that **100 patients** who had tested positive were **given the medicine** (five dropped out midway).

# The clinical trial tested the drug on 45 people and another 50 were given a placebo. The claim was that 69% (31 persons) of those on the drug tested negative on the third day, and 25 of those on the placebo arm of the trial had also tested negative.0

**What is the place of RCTs place in clinical trials?**

# As per definition, a randomised controlled trial, or **RCT**, is a study in which people are **allocated at random,** entirely by chance, to **receive one of several clinical interventions**.

# One of these interventions is the standard of comparison or control.

# **The control** may be **standard practice/treatment options, a placebo** (a drug without an active substance, or a 'sugar pill'), or **no intervention at all**. The idea is to **measure and compare the outcomes against the control** after the participants receive the treatment.

# RCTs are based on **multiple factors**, including **type of interventions** being evaluated, and **number of participants**.

# In **single-blind trials**, the **participants, or the investigators do not know** who is assigned what; in **double-blind trials**, **both participants and investigators do not know**; and **triple and quadruple-blind trials**, **where three or four of the relevant groups** are not aware of the treatment assignment.

**Is an RCT a good tool to employ during the throes of an epidemic? Why do we need RCTs?**



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# Nancy Cartwright, writing in one of the Springer journals, in October 2009, argues that RCTs are widely taken as the **gold standard** for establishing causal conclusions.

# S.P. Kalantri, professor of medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram, Maharashtra, answers this question with a resounding yes. He says, "We need studies that get data that we can trust." This means, **clear and robust evidence** about benefits and risks.

# A good RCT (for COVID-19) should **enrol enough numbers**, **define clinical endpoints**, including mortality and morbidity, also whether intubation was needed and days of stay in hospital.

# In well-designed RCTs, **researchers, after random assignment of participants**, assess whether randomisation was done sufficiently to **eliminate the influence** of confounding factors, and avoid selection bias.

# Researchers **follow the groups over days, weeks, years** and observe major clinical end points.

# In the end, all other things being equal, it will be possible to measure what benefit a particular group X got, in comparison to Y group.

# It is possible to estimate if there were any differences between the two groups, say, in mortality, and if this was because of strategic effect of the cause, or due to pure chance. RCTs remove the impact of chance in cause and effect relationships, says Dr. Kalantri.

# But ethically, an **RCT can only be employed** when **researchers think/hope** that the interventions will offer benefits.

# Participants can be enrolled in a randomised controlled trial that is expected to leave them better off. The **dexamethasone study** where mortality was reduced by a third, is a classic example here.

# The **Solidarity and RECOVERY (or Randomised Evaluation of COVid-19 thERapY)** trials are examples of large-scale RCTs done with multiple partners at many locations, bang in the middle of an epidemic.

# They have already been instrumental in setting the standard of care — for instance, hydroxychloroquine was hyped up as a drug but studies conclusively proved no ameliorative effect in using it. The **Remdesivir study**, on the other hand, showed some improvement in **reducing intensive care unit** stay, while there was no great impact on mortality, says Dr. Kalantri.

**What is the future?**



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# Strident science should be the basis of any interventions in therapeutics or vaccinology, experts emphasise. The over **200 projects in the pipeline**, listed in the **Clinical Trials Registry of India (CTRI),** might produce results over time, but as in the case of Patanjali Ayurved, the regulator's immediate and scientific response to unpublished claims will be essential, they urge.

**68. How will the U.S. visa ban impact India?**

**Context**

# On June 22, the White House made a proclamation **halting the processing** and **issuance of non-immigrant work visas** of several types, with the stated aim of this sweeping policy being to **stop foreign workers** snagging American jobs, especially at a time of deep economic distress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

# **The order** by the Donald Trump administration **includes the H-1B visa for skilled workers**, a large proportion of which goes to Indian nationals, **dependents of the H-1B** who are seeking the **H4 visa**, the **H-2B visa issued to seasonal workers** in the landscaping and hospitality industries, **the L-1 visa** for **intra-company transfers** and their dependents on the **L-2 visa,** and the **J-1 visa for students on work-study summer programmes and related occupations.**

**Why is the Trump administration tightening the screws on its immigration policy?**

# It had earlier instituted a **ban on visitors** from **certain Muslim-majority countries** and periodically engaged in rhetoric on **building a wall** to stop **undocumented workers** from entering the U.S. from across its southern border.

# On April 21, the White House announced a **60-day halt in legal migration** — effectively a **ban on "green card" issuance**.

# The gaping hole in this policy was the fact that the **number of jobs** purportedly saved from immigrants for U.S. persons was **relatively small compared** to the number of jobs going to **foreign nationals who enter the U.S. on non-immigrant visas**.

# **Unemployment claims** filed since the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. economy in March have crossed **40 million**.


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# Analysts argued that **out of the million or so green cards** that the U.S. issues annually, approximately **only 358,000** would likely be impacted by the pause in immigration processing.

# It appears that the **Trump administration** has been seized of this fallacy in its immigration policy in this regard, and the proclamation of June 22 is likely to have been a remedial measure to bring non-immigrant work visas under the purview of the ban.

# The reasoning offered by the White House is that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has "significantly disrupted Americans' livelihoods", to the extent that the overall **unemployment rate** in the country nearly **quadrupled between** February and May 2020 to a little over **13%.**

**To what extent is the motive behind the visa ban political?**

# It is still unclear **that tangible economic benefits** of this sort can be achieved at this juncture. The reason is that the **latest restrictions do not apply to visa-holders** who are **already within the U.S**., or those **who are outside the country** and have already been issued valid visas.

# Given that the ban will **remain in force until the end of the 2020** calendar year, this implies that **U.S. firms or others with U.S**. operations **who rely on skilled foreign nationals** working in the U.S. will be **unable to make new hires** as long as the ban stands.

**What further policies do we expect on the visa ban?**

# Mr. Trump seeking, in the months ahead, to build political capital in the name of the "**America First"** mantra — a foregone conclusion given his outspokenness on the subject to date.

# The **proclamation supplies** hints on the likely tenor of this policy plank of Mr. Trump's administration. It noted that between February and April of 2020, "**more than 20 million U.S. workers** lost their jobs in **key industries** where employers are **currently requesting H-1B** and **L workers to fill positions**", noting that similar or higher numbers could be found in the other visa categories included in the proclamation.

# **Google CEO Sundar Pichai** wasted little time in responding to Mr. Trump's latest visa proclamation tweeting, "**Immigration has contributed immensely to America's economic success**, making it a **global leader in tech**, and also



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Google the company it is today. Disappointed by today's proclamation — we'll continue to stand with immigrants and work to expand opportunity for all."

# **Elon Musk**, SpaceX founder and Tesla CEO, and Apple CEO Tim Cook, posted similar messages on social media.

**Will Indian corporations be hit?**

# The prospects of **Indian IT majors** building up their **order books** as they limp back through an economic recovery in India are, in the interim, likely to be **seriously undermined** by this move.

# What is more, this may come at a crucial inflection point for the Indian economy, even as restrictions on the movement of people and goods slowly lift after India passes its peak viral case numbers, thus leading to a **knock on effect from IT to other sectors.**

# India's **IT services exports to the U.S**., which depend **significantly on the H-1B visa**, have been an important constituent element of **bilateral economic trade. U.S.** imports of services from India were an estimated **$29.6 billion** in 2018, 4.9% more than in 2017, and 134% greater than 2008 levels, according to the U.S. Trade Representative.

# The **major services exports** from India to the U.S. are in the **telecommunications, computer and information services, research and development, and travel sectors.**

# Until now, the **U.S. issued 85,000 H-1B** visas annually, of which 20,000 went to graduate students and **65,000 to private sector applicants**, and Indian nationals would garner approximately **70% of these**.

# Now **the Migration Policy Institute** has been cited predicting that up to **219,000 workers would be blocked** as a result of Mr. Trump's proclamation.

**What is the Indian government saying?**

# Its response has so far been muted, limited to **highlighting the importance** of **highly-skilled Indian professionals** to imparting a **competitive edge to the U.S. economy**.

# Nevertheless, that the **high-skilled non-immigrant visa ban** is a **double-edged sword** is amply demonstrated by the fact that the **unemployment rate** in the "Professional and Business Services" super-sector, which includes IT services, unemployment actually dropped between April and May 2020, and there remained



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almost **950,000 job openings** in this sector nationwide despite the sharp hike in overall unemployment filings.
# If there is one assumption of the Trump administration's immigration policies that is most likely to fail, it is that there are sufficient numbers of U.S. persons with the requisite skill set to perform the jobs that Mr. Trump is "protecting" for them.

## 69. Making sense of China's calculations

**Context**

# The number of casualties**, 20 on the Indian side was the highest since 1967**, and included that of a **high ranking Colonel of the Bihar Regiment**. The number of casualties on the Chinese side has not been formally indicated, though they have conceded that at least one Colonel was among those killed.

**No aberration**

# There was a flicker of hope when apparently the **Corps Commanders** of India and China on June 22-23 appeared to reach a "**mutual consensus**" to **disengage** and embark on **lowering "tensions**" through a "**gradual and verifiable disengagement**".
# This proved shortlived, with the **Chinese post in the Galwan area** not only being **restored**, but also, from satellite images available, **bigger in size** than before.
# What occurred in the Galwan heights on June 15, must not, hence, be viewed as an aberration. It would be more judicious to view it as signifying a **new and fractious phase** in **China-India relations**. Even if the situation reverts to what existed in mid-April (highly unlikely), India-China relations appear set to witness a "**new and different normal**".
# Former Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh** for instance, **accused China** of "brazenly and illegally seeking to **claim parts of Indian Territory** such as the **Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso**".
# Adding spice to the debate was the Prime Minister's statement at an all-party meeting on June 19 to discuss the border issue, that "there was no intruder on our land now and no post in anyone's custody", which raised the Opposition's hackles.
# **China's reaction has been consistent** — India **must move out of Galwan**.
# What took place in the **Galwan heights** cannot be viewed as a mere replay of what took place in **Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014) and Doklam (2017).**


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# This is a **new and different situation** and India must not shrink from addressing the core issue that relations between India and China are in a perilous state.

# **China's assertion** of its claim to the **whole of the Galwan Valley** needs close and careful analysis.

# For one**, Point 14** gives **China a virtual stranglehold** over the newly completed, and strategically significant**, Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie Road**, which leads on to the **Karakoram Pass.**

# For another, the **strategic implications** for India of China's insistence on keeping the whole of the Galwan Valley are serious as it fundamentally **changes the status quo**.

# Finally, by laying claim to the **Galwan Valley,** China has reopened some of the issues left over from the 1962 conflict, and demonstrates that it is willing to embark on **a new confrontation.**

# Ambiguity has existed regarding the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in this sector; the Chinese "**claim line**" is that of **November 1959**, while for **India the LAC is that of September 1962**.

**Importance of Aksai Chin**

# A charge that could be levelled against successive administrations in Delhi in recent years is that **while China has consistently asserted** its claims over the **whole of Aksai Chin**, India has **chosen to overlook China's more recent postures** in this region.

# The **importance of Aksai Chin** for China has greatly increased of late, as it provides **direct connectivity** between two of the most troubled regions of China, viz., **Xinjiang and Tibet**.

# While Indian policy makers saw the reclassification of Ladakh as purely an internal matter, they **overlooked the fact** that for **China's military planners**, the carving out of Ladakh into a Union Territory (followed later by Home Minister Amit Shah's statement last year laying claim to the whole of Aksai Chin) posited a **threat to China's peace and tranquillity**.

**On intelligence assessment**

# It is in this context, that questions are now being raised about the **failure of intelligence**.

# The timing and nature of China's actions should have aroused keen interest in intelligence circles about China's strategic calculations.



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# The **Chinese build-up in the Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso and Hotsprings-Gogra** did not require any great intelligence effort, since there was little attempt at concealment by the Chinese.

# India also **possesses high quality imagery intelligence (IMINT)** and **signals intelligence (SIGINT)** capabilities, distributed between the **National Technical Research Organisation, the Directorate of Signals Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence** and other agencies, which made it possible to **track Chinese movement.**

# Where, perhaps, intelligence can be faulted is with regard to **inadequate appreciation** of what the build-up meant, and what it portended for India.

# This is indicative of a **weakness in interpretation and analysis** of the **intelligence available**, as also an inability to provide a coherent **assessment of China's real intentions**.

# It is at the same time true that while India's **technological capabilities for intelligence collection have vastly increased** in recent years, the **capacity for interpretation and analysis has not kept pace** with this.

# Advances in technology, specially **Artificial Intelligence** have, across the world, greatly augmented efforts at **intelligence analysis**. It is a moot point whether such skills were employed in this instance.

# The **failure to decipher China's intentions** in time is no doubt unfortunate, but it has to be understood that **deciphering China's intentions**, understanding the Chinese mind (which tends to be contextual and relational), and trying to make sense of Chinese thinking, are an extremely difficult task at any time.

# Even so, since last year when **China's economy** began to **show signs of a decline** followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, China is known to **have become extremely sensitive** to what it perceived as **efforts by others to exploit its weakness**.

# It has often felt **compelled to demonstrate** that **no nation should attempt to exploit** the situation to China's disadvantage. **India's intelligence and policy analysts** obviously failed to analyse this aspect adequately, while trying to make sense of China's latest forward push.

# Another of China's current preoccupation, viz. that India is feeling emboldened because of its growing **strategic alignment with the United States**, should also have been adequately considered by the analysts, in any assessment of putative Chinese responses.



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# The **principal responsibility** for **intelligence assessment and analysis** concerning China, rests with the **National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and India's external intelligence agency**, the **Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW),** and to a lesser extent, the **Defence Intelligence Agency**.

# In the case of the R&AW, **lack of domain expertise**, and an **inadequacy of China specialists** might also have been a contributory factor.

**Limitations of summit meets**

# The **preference given recently to Summit diplomacy** over **traditional foreign policy making** structures proved to be a severe handicap.

# **Summit diplomacy cannot be a substitute** for **carefully structured foreign office policy making.**

# **Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain** of Great Britain was one of the **earliest victims of Summit diplomacy**. The disastrous meeting between **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and U.S. President Richard Nixon** had long-term adverse implications for India-U.S. relations. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and U.S. President George W. Bush did establish a rapport through frequent Summit meetings, but this was the exception rather than the rule.

# Currently, India's Summit diplomacy has **tended to marginalise the External Affairs Ministry** with regard **to policy making**, and we are probably paying a price for it.

# As it is, the Ministry of External Affairs's (MEA) stock of **China experts** seems to be dwindling, and its general **tilt towards the U.S**. in most matters, has resulted in an **imbalance in the way the MEA perceives problems and situations.**

**70. Grain aplenty and the crisis of hunger**

**Context**

# With the **economic crisis** continuing on the one hand and the **health system crumbling** under the burden of rising COVID-19 cases on the other, unemployment is high and it will take a while for lost livelihoods to be rebuilt, especially given the fact that India was already facing an **economic slowdown** along with **high levels of inequality**.

# It is absolutely essential that **food support** in the form of **free/subsidised grains** is made available to all without any disruptions.

**An inadequate response**


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# As a measure to address hunger, the central government announced as part of the **?1.70-lakh crore** relief package under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)** in the last week of March that it would provide **5kg of foodgrains** and **1 kg of pulses** for free to all those who are beneficiaries **under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) for three months**.

# As it became obvious that **many were not part of the NFSA**, the government, in May, **almost two months** after the lockdown was initiated, announced its expansion to **cover an additional eight crore** individuals for two months to ensure that **migrants are included** under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package**.

# This basically meant **each State** being given foodgrain to the tune of **10% more than what they normally get under the NFSA**.

**What needs to be done**

# What is required is a **universal Public Distribution System (PDS)** to ensure that nobody is excluded.

# What is also an urgent need now is for **the food support** announced as part of the **PMGKAY and Atmanirbhar package** to be extended for **a longer period**, as both end in June.

# Rather, the government seems to be indicating that all problems of exclusion will be resolved once the **One Nation One Ration Card scheme** is expanded across the country, which is supposed to be achieved by **March 2021**.

# Under ONOC, a **beneficiary can receive ration** entitlements as **under the NFSA** from **any fair price shop in the country** using her/his **Aadhaar number and biometric authentication**.

# This will apparently be possible **once the Aadhaar numbers** of all members enlisted in ration cards are s**eeded**, which will enable transactions under the **Public Distribution System** across the country to be brought on to **one digital platform**.

# It has been announced that **ONOC is operational in 20 States.**

**Biometric authentication**

# **Portability across States** is an important and valid concern that needs to be ensured so that **migrant workers** can access their entitlements.

# ONOC, however, has a **number of problems** in the way it has been conceived, being **Aadhaar-based**.

# The experience of **biometric authentication** using **electronic point of sale (ePoS) machines** so far suggests that it results in **exclusion** of some of the **most**



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**marginalised** because of multiple reasons including **network issues, authentication failure** and so on.
# Keeping these concerns aside for now, it must be noted that ONOC is definitely not a solution to the immediate crisis of hunger that continues in the aftermath of the lockdown.
# The integrated management of PDS **(IM-PDS) portal,** which gives **real time data** on **transactions under ONOC**, shows that for the month of May, there were a total of 378 transactions (3,077 beneficiaries) under ONOC and 479 transactions (3,856 beneficiaries) in June (as on June 29, 2020).

**Overflowing granaries**

# The real issue is of burgeoning food stocks along with widespread hunger.
# If we include unmilled paddy, foodgrain stock in the Food Corporation of India has now risen to almost **100 million MTs** while the **buffer stock norms is 41 million MTs.**
# This will increase even more as there is another week of procurement open in the rabi marketing season; there will be another round of procurement of kharif crop in a few months (49.9 million MTs of rice was the procurement during the kharif marketing season in 2019-20).
# A **universalised PDS giving 10kg of foodgrains per person per month** for another four months requires about 47 million tonnes in total, assuming that nearly 85% of the population actually lifts their rations.
# It can be safely assumed that the rich will automatically self-select themselves out of the system. This is indicative and the actual requirements would most likely be lower.
# It is unfathomable why the PDS is not being universalised immediately especially when food stocks are at such a historic high.
# The government seems to be hoping to get rid of grain through the **Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS)** where it sells the grains at **prices lower than the procurement cost** but **much higher than the issue prices under PDS**, so that the **fiscal consequences** can be contained.
# Earlier experiences with the OMSS do not spell much hope that this plan of the government will be successful.
# In the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 (up to first week of June), **only 16.6** million tonnes of **rice and wheat** have been **sold under the OMSS**.
# The **quantity sold each year** was **less than the quantity offered.**


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# Moreover, **one-third of all sales was to State governments** (almost all the rice) thereby **shifting the subsidy burden to State governments**.
# If not OMSS to private buyers, the only other options left are to either export them or let the grain go waste. Needless to say, choosing any of these options while people go hungry is nothing less than criminal.

## 71. Legitimate concern: on law and order in Nagaland

**Context**

# By writing a strong letter to **Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio**, alleging that "**law and order has collapsed**" in the State and that **armed gangs** "who question the **sovereignty and integrity** of the nation" had challenged its authority by engaging in blatant "**extortion" and siphoning off funds** meant for **development work**, **Governor R.N. Ravi** has thrown down the gauntlet to the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party-led government, in which the BJP is a coalition partner.

**Slide in Law and Order**

# The Governor went on to write that functions such as "**transfer and posting of officials**" who are in **charge of law and order** above the district level will be **done with his approval**, as proposed under **Article 371A(1)(b)** of the Constitution.
# In a way, he was only voicing the **concerns of sections of civil society** over the slide in law and order; **illegal collections** by armed groups have been an issue for several years.
# In its response to the letter, the insurgent **National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM),** which has been observing a **ceasefire** with the government for the **last 23 years**, has said the group was **only engaged** in **collecting "taxes**".
# The much touted **peace accord** with the **insurgent groups** involved in the long-standing Naga conflict is **yet to be achieved,** despite the Centre's push to conclude it last year.
# Mr. Ravi has remained the **Centre's interlocutor**, a position he took up in **2015,** even after **becoming the State Governor** in August 2019.
# Despite the Centre's heady statements heralding a **Naga peace accord** since 2015, it is **nowhere close to finalising** it with the groups.
# In some ways, this is due to the **NSCN-IM's obstinacy** such as its **insistence on retaining** a **separate flag** and a **Constitution** for the State of Nagaland and


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its **unwillingness to dismantle its parallel administrative and paramilitary structure**.
# The **distrust it invokes** among other **Naga organisations** besides other north-eastern governments because of its **core ideology** of a **"greater Nagalim**", and the **inherent difficulties** in getting other insurgent actors on board have made this a conflict that persists despite the ceasefire and a problem that does not lend itself to a quick solution.
# Yet, without an agreement to rein in all the insurgent groups, the State government will have **little leeway** in **imposing its will** and prevent the **blatant extortion** that is hampering development and law and order.

**Way ahead**

# The ball is therefore in the Centre's court, and by extension its interlocutor, Mr. Ravi's, in finding a way to address this knotty issue.
# This the Governor must do, not by usurping the authority of the State government in governance matters, but by patiently **refocusing on the peace process.**

## 72. The World Bank's STARS project needs an overhaul

**Context**

# **Atmanirbhar Bharat** calls for an India that is **able to produce** and **deliver local goods** and services to its citizens. This **applies equally** to **education for all children**.
# **Delivering a service**, like education, requires a **capable state**, especially given the **scale and complexity** of its **large and diverse population**.
# **Building state capability** involves a **process of learning** to do **things on one's own.**
# In other words, **state capability** is **about getting things done** in the **government**, and by the government, by ensuring **effective implementation** that is **responsive to local needs**, but also about being able to design and conduct reforms.
# However, the **World Bank's STARS project**, a **$3 billion project** to **improve education in six Indian States**, has the mistaken understanding that **state capability** should be **built by giving a larger role to non-state actors** and by **increasing the use of technology.**
# Both these premises are misguided as they **do not contribute** to the **capability of the state to deliver better education**.


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# The reason is that there are **some preconditions** for **effective governance** within the public sector that must be met before either technology or non-state actors can be useful.

**For effective governance**

# First, the **administration** must be **equipped with adequate physical, financial and human resources**.

# An **overburdened bureaucracy** with **vacancies** and **without basic equipment** cannot be expected to be effective.

# Often one hears that **increasing inputs** is a **waste of resources** as they are used inefficiently.

# This criticism neglects the fact that for efficiency, a **critical minimum level of resources** is a precondition. Unfortunately, in the **education sector** we are **short of that level in all areas.**

# Second, **administrative or governance reforms** must give **greater discretion** to the **front-line bureaucracy to address local issues and innovate** if required.

# This is as much a **function of better resources** at the **local level** as of **greater decentralisation** of **decision-making** or political authorisation.

# The **movement against corruption** and **towards accountability** has had an **unfortunate fallout** on innovation for **fear of misuse** of an **increased room** for manoeuvre.

# Yet, for reforms to be successful, **public sector entities** need to be able to **try new things**, and at times, to fail.

# Outsourcing to non-state partners not **just takes away discretion** from state actors but **also a sense of accountability and ownership towards their job.**

# Third, there needs to be **trust within the administration** among peers and across different levels **within the administration**.

# If suspicion is the guiding principle, **institutional arrangements** will be geared to **monitoring and surveillance**, **not support and improvement.**

**A flawed approach**

Why is the STARS approach to build state capacity flawed?

# First, it **fails to address** the **basic capacity issues**: **major vacancies across the education system from District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs),** district and block education offices, to teachers in schools, remain unaddressed.



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# **Without capable and motivated faculty**, teacher education and training cannot be expected to improve.

# Similarly, at the **block level**, an already **overburdened bureaucracy** cannot be expected to **perform miracles** without a **substantial increase in trained manpower**, support staff and other forms of institutional support.

# Second, the **Bank ignores** that **decentralising decision-making** requires the **devolution of funds** and **real decision-making power**.

# **Greater decentralisation** can allow **accountability t**o flow to the people rather than to supervising officers.

# It requires not just **investment in the capacity of the front-line bureaucracy** but also in **increasing their discretionary powers** while fostering social accountability.

# The **issue of discretion** hinges crucially on **trust** – the third, important element requiring attention if state capability is to be enhanced.

# Trust, which implies **listening and collaborating** across different levels within the administration, is entirely **ignored in the World Bank** project.

# Instead, the **Bank displays** yet again an **over-reliance on Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** as a panacea that **lacks any backing in evidence.**

# It is based instead on the **idea that a flawed system** can be fixed merely through the **injection of more and better technology**.

# In fact, **technology does not address** most of **the systemic or governance challenges**; it simply by-passes them.

# This is not to deny that technology has its uses, but **its usefulness** depends on whether preconditions for an **effective use of ICT-systems have been put in place**.

# Otherwise the **likelihood of exacerbating**, rather than solving, problems increases. Technology as a short-cut to creating a capable state has not worked in the past.

# Fourth, measurement is seen as a way to improve performance. Yet, just like fever does not go away by checking the temperature more frequently, **service delivery does not improve by measurement alone**.

# **Schools in India need improvement**.

# Lastly, **outsourcing basic governance functions** by "expanding private initiatives" and "**reducing government tasks**" will not make education "**more**



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**relevant to local needs**" or "**democratically promote people's participation** by empowering local authorities" as stated in the project document.
# New **private initiatives do not** have these **institutional memories**, nor do they have a grasp of **socio-cultural realities** that play an **important part in the delivery process**.
# **While state structures** need to develop **more skills** to enable them to solve both **local and structural problems** more effectively, it is not clear how they can be imparted by agencies that are extraneous to both the context and the system.
# If we want DIETs, block and community resource centres, and schools to be atma nirbhar, we need to enable them to **develop their own capability to reform themselves**.
# Outsourcing**, an over-reliance** on measurement by standardised assessments, and an **excessive use of ICT** will not get us closer to an Atmanirbhar Bharat.
# The **World Bank** would do well **to learn from its past mistakes** and **use evidence**, often times generated by its **own research arms**, to formulate projects.
# In its current form, **STARS is bound to fail to deliver** its core objective: to reform the governance architecture in order to improve the quality of education.

**73. A new era of accessibility: on persons with disabilities in the post-COVID world**

**Context**

# During the lockdown, a father, left with no choice but to steal a bicycle, transported his disabled son from rural Rajasthan to Uttar Pradesh. A professor and wheelchair user in West Bengal, with no means of transport, has no access to medical care during this period, even in an emergency.
# In the wake of the **pandemic and the lockdown**, the already arduous quest for health, safety, and security for many has been exacerbated by a **lack of accessibility.**

**Impact of the crisis**

# **The pandemic reveals** how **exacerbated inequities** have become, particularly in **low- and middle-income countries.**
# In India, **a study, "Locked Down and Left Behind,**" documents the plight of persons with disabilities during this crisis.
# Of the **1,067 respondents, 73% are facing severe challenges**, namely with **financial stability**, access to **essential items**, adequate **accommodation**, and availability **of healthcare**.


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# Second, thousands of families **lack access to critical care takers** and **domestic help,** who play crucial roles in caring for a child or family member with a disability.

# Finally, there are **significant impacts** on the **well-being** of persons with disabilities. In particular, **social isolation** and **limited access** to **accessible, adequate sanitation or isolation facilities** threaten the health and safety of this already vulnerable population.

# We have seen parents and families taking on herculean tasks to deliver interventions and therapies for their children, with telephone support from therapists or other support workers.

# However, underlying these efforts to address the impact of the pandemic at a community level is the **fundamental challenge** of **accessibility.**

# Persons with disabilities **already struggle** for **equitable access** to **education, healthcare, transportation, and economic opportunities**. The pandemic has further decreased access to these **basic services and rights.**

# The pandemic simultaneously presents an **unprecedented challenge** and an **opportunity to change** the **course of accessibility** in low- and middle-income countries in the post-pandemic world.

# In **low- and middle-income countries** that have battled pressing challenges (**mass migration, concurrent infections like TB, limited health infrastructure,** etc.), COVID-19 recovery plans include **investments in urban planning, health facilities, and social spaces.** If accessibility is considered, these efforts can catalyse the vision of an **inclusive world.**

**Filling the gaps**

# To address this **growing fissure between** the **accessible and non-accessible world**, the international community will have to close some of the gaps and blunt some of the edges by **building accessibility across all sectors**.

# Such **efforts must engage people** to **promote education** and awareness on including persons with **disabilities**; implementing **accessibility laws and regulations**; improving **physical accessibility** and universal design; **reducing stigma**; and developing the **tools for individuals and communities** to engage meaningfully with persons with disabilities.

# Ultimately, one of the key ways to achieve this is to begin **including and involving persons with disabilities in decision and policymaking**, for COVID-19 recovery and beyond, which can ensure representation on the matters that govern their lives.



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# There is **rarely an opportunity** where **policymakers** have an ability to change the physical and social world drastically.

# Using this **moment to implement universal accessibility** should be central to the vision of the **post-COVID era**.

# Accessibility is a **vital human right**, and an **accessible post-COVID world** is one that will **deliver justice to the minority population**, without whom the path towards **Sustainable Development Goals** realisation and universal health coverage will remain a distant goal.

**74. Share public data with the public**

**Systemic discrepancies**

# The **unsatisfactory state** of **India's data collection** and **processing system** is among the many **systemic deficiencies** exposed by the pandemic.

# It was highlighted by the recent upward revisions to the COVID-19 death toll in some States.

# Apart from this implicit acknowledgement of the discrepancies in the **data-handling process**, there are **also allegations** of **under-reporting COVID-19 cases.**

# In general, on every issue encountered during the last three months, from the **migrants's travails** to the **inadequate fiscal package**, **lack of reliable data** in the public domain has hampered the search for policy alternatives.

# From 2006 onwards, several **open-source software enthusiasts and civil society activists** came together in the **U.S. and U.K**. with a demand to **unlock the data** gathered by governments for unfettered **access and reuse by citizens**.

**Principle of Open Data Charter**

# After all, the **data collected at public expense must belong to the people**. This principle is the basis for the **Open Data Charter** adopted **by 22 countries since 2015**.

# It calls **upon governments to disseminate public data** in **open digital formats.** In return, the **Charter argues**, governments can expect "**innovative, evidence-based policy solutions**".

**Making data accessible**

# In India, a step towards making **non-sensitive government data** accessible online was **taken in 2012** with the adoption of the **National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP).**

# However, the implementation has lagged far behind its stated objectives.



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# The **main thrust of the policy** is to "**promote data sharing** and enable **access to Government of India owned data for national planning, development and awareness**".

# The **implementation guidelines** for **NDSAP** include lofty ideals such as "**openness, flexibility, transparency, quality**" of **data**, and aim to facilitate "**access to Government of India shareable data** in **machine-readable form**".

# The guidelines prescribe **open digital formats** suitable for **analysis and dissemination**.

# Opaque formats such as the **portable document format** and the **image format are discouraged**. As part of the **Open Government Data (OGD) initiative**, data.gov.in, was launched in 2012.

# In the current climate, the **OGD initiative** could potentially have made a **substantial difference to India's COVID-19 response**.

# Had the **district-wise, demographic-wise case statistics** and anonymous contact traces been released in the public domain, reliable **model forecasts of disease spread** and **targeted regional lockdown** protocols could have been generated.

# **Model forecasts** have limitations, but b from empirical data are even more unreliable.

# Principles of **OGD notwithstanding**, sufficiently granular infection data are not available.

# Ironically, **violating the data format guidelines**, OGD portal provides COVID-19 data only as a graphic image unsuitable for any analysis.

# The **other official data sources** (the Indian Council of Medical Research and mygov.in) fare no better.

# They too **do not publish district-wise statistics**, and the available data are not in usable formats.

# Such **half-hearted attempts** throttle any possibility of **data-driven research, innovation and useful outcomes.**

# In contrast, the **data portals of Canada, the U.K. and the U.S**. present **district-wise COVID-19 cases data**, and also the emergent **effects on mental health, jobs and education**.

# According to the **latest report** of the **Open Data Barometer**, an **independent group measuring the impact of open data**, these nations lead the pack while India is a contender to reach the top bracket and not a laggard.



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# The government must **provide the impetus and incentive** to exploit this voluminous data by invigorating the dated national data portal.

**Creating social impact**

# **Every department** must be **mandated t**o share **substantive data** respecting privacy concerns.

# Much of the **Census and socio-economic data**, publicly funded research data, and scientific data are either **not open** or rotting in **unusable formats.**

# The government should look within for examples of creative outcomes of opening up the database.

# **Start-ups** have built novel applications using Indian Railways data to provide **ticket confirmation prediction** and **real-time train status.** Sharing public data is a way to create **beneficial social impact.**

**72. In 24 hours, Palestine faces an existential threat**

**Context**

# On June 24, the **UN Secretary General António Guterres** told a virtual meeting of the **United Nations Security Council** that the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** is at a "watershed moment" and that the **Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank** have alarmed the Palestinians, many Israelis and the international community.

# Such annexation would be "a **most serious violation of international law**".

# He called upon the Israeli government to abandon its annexation plans and asked the **Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN)** to resume its mandated mediatory role.

**A violation**

# The UN Secretary General's alarm has been sounded in the context of the **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's** reported plan to annex on July 1 around **30% of the Occupied West Bank**.

# This will include **annexation of all the existing** (post-1967) settlements in addition to areas surrounding them and access roads.

# Under international law, **annexation is forcible acquisition** of territory by one state at the expense of another state.

# According to **Prof. Nathaniel A Berman** of Brown University, U.S., such an act even if sanctified by Israeli law is **illegal under international law** and would violate the **universally acknowledged** principle of the "**inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force**".


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**# This, according to him, is the accepted** position of all international legal bodies including the **International Court of Justice**.
# The **same position** has been taken by the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights).**
# In a statement on June 16, it **described the annexation** of occupied territory as a **serious violation** of **the Charter of the United Nations and the Geneva Conventions,** and contrary to the fundamental rule affirmed many times by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly that acquisition of territory war or by force is inadmissible.
# It pointed out that the **53-year-old Israeli occupation** is a source of profound human rights violations of the Palestinian people and said "these **human right violations** would only **intensify after annexation**.
# What would be left of the West Bank would be **Palestinian Bantustan**, **islands** of disconnected land completely surrounded by Israel and with **no territorial connection** with the **outside world**.
# Israel has recently promised that it will **maintain permanent security** control **between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River**.
# Thus, the morning after the annexation would be the crystallisation of an already unjust reality: two peoples living in the same space, ruled by the same state, but with profoundly unequal rights. This is a vision of a **21st century apartheid.**

**The Israeli pulse**

# Despite Mr. Netanyahu's bravado, an opinion poll conducted by the **Israeli newspaper, Haaretz**, in March last year showed that while 28% of the Israelis opposed annexation, **11% supported full annexation** with political rights for the Palestinians and 16% full annexation with no political rights for Palestinians.
# An interesting, unprecedented, entrant in the debate is an opinion article, titled "It's either Annexation or Normalization", written in Hebrew by the United Arab Emirates Ambassador in Washington and published in an **Israeli newspaper, Yediot Ahronot**. It urged the Israeli government to desist from the contemplated move.

**The effect of the plan**

# Israel, by its foundational proclamations, "is not a Jewish state only because most of its inhabitants are Jews. It is **state for the Jews wherever they may be**, and **for any Jew who wishes to be here**".
# Its **official ideology of Zionism** (somewhat analogous to other doctrines of **strident nationalism** of the 20th century) was described much earlier


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by **Vladimir Jabotinsky** as "**a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force**".

# Ever since the **war of June 1967**, the **Israeli effort** has been to **procrastinate a settlement** and change ground realities.

# Israel today is member of the international community and contributes to international cooperation. It has **succeeded in normalising its relations** with a wide range of countries.

# A concomitant of this is the observance of globally accepted norms of state conduct. **A reluctance** to do this is premised on the support of **"powerful friends**" and **imperatives of geopolitics**.

# Jean Jacques **Rousseau** said a long time back, "**the strongest is never strong enough to be always master unless he transform his power into right, and obedience into duty".**

**For New Delhi**

# India has a **substantive relationship**, reaching strategic dimensions, **with Israel**.

# It is **mutually beneficial**. India's **amity with the Palestinian people**, and its principled support to their cause, predates India's own independence.

# On the global stage, we have invariably supported the UN Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions supportive of the Palestinians.

# At this critical juncture, and now that we are back on the Horse Shoe Table, would we support an annexation in contraventions of international legality and of our own commitments?

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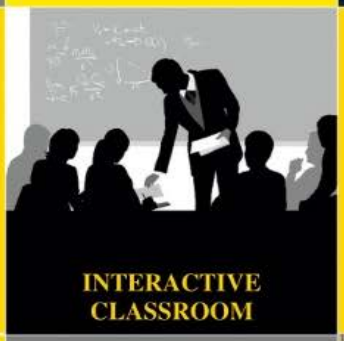

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