

Current Affairs of the Day

PAPER 2:

➤ Polity & Governance:

1. New grievance redress system unveiled in J&K
2. PM to unveil a slew of projects in Bihar
3. Questions over FCRA nod for PM CARES
4. ₹300-crore package for Odisha farmers
5. Let virtual courts stay: law panel

➤ International Relations:

1. India, China agree on 5-point action plan
2. India, China hold another round of Brigadier-level talks



India, China agree on 5-point action plan

➤ After a two-and-a-half-hour meeting that went into the night in Moscow, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart

Face to face

A timeline of the stand-off between India and China at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh

MAY 5: Scuffle reported after Chinese mobilisation on the north bank of Pangong Tso, several soldiers injured

MAY 5-MAY 15: PLA transgressions, clashes with Army reported at Pangong, Galwan, Depsang, Sikkim, and other points on LAC

JUNE 6: Corps Commanders hold meeting, agree on disengagement plan. Four rounds held since

JUNE 15: Twenty Indian soldiers killed in clashes at the Galwan Valley, no word on Chinese casualties

JUNE 19: PM holds all-party meet, says 'no one has transgressed India's borders'



Crucial talks: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Moscow. ■ ANI

JULY 5: Ajit Doval and Wang Yi speak, agree to expedite disengagement process. Troop build-up continues

JUNE-AUGUST: Four meetings of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China border affairs

AUG. 29/30: Clashes on the south bank of Pangong; Indian troops dominate peaks

SEPT. 4: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meets his Chinese counterpart in Moscow

SEPT. 7: Army says PLA fired gunshots; tensions escalate

Wang Yi said they agreed on a five-point course of action to disengage and reduce tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), where Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a four-and-a-half-month-long stand-off.

Five-point Action Plan:

- The five-point plan is: following the consensus between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to “not allow differences to become disputes”, disengaging quickly to ease tensions, abiding by the existing India-China border protocols and avoiding escalatory action, continuing the dialogue between the Special Representatives, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Mr. Wang, as well as the other mechanisms and working towards new confidence-building measures (CBMs).
- Both sides also issued separate notes detailing their positions, indicating that several differences still remain in their agreement of the situation at the LAC, which has seen violent clashes, deaths of soldiers and gunfire exchanges for the first time in 45 years.

New grievance redress system unveiled in J&K

Jammu and Kashmir Integrated Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (JK-IGRAMS):

- Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) Manoj Sinha on Friday launched the Jammu and Kashmir Integrated Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (JK-IGRAMS), in a bid to create an interface with the public and focus on governance issues in the Union Territory.
- “It’s a step towards gaining peoples’ trust. JK-IGRAMS will be an effective grievance redressal mechanism, which is the life and blood of any good governance system. A common citizen wants a sympathetic, courteous, responsive, and helpful administrative set-up,” Mr. Sinha said.
- The system is being launched on a pilot basis in three districts — Jammu, Srinagar, and Reasi — and will gradually be rolled out in the remaining districts by October 2. It will replace the current portal that was launched in 2018.
- Mr. Sinha said JK-IGRAMS will make the existing mechanism more robust and efficient. “There will be a minute by minute status update of the grievances on the portal. If any laxity is found, we can talk to the concerned elders of the district and the concerned officers. Action will follow if any delay or callousness is found while addressing people’s grievances.”
- District Collectors and Deputy Commissioners will be the primary nodes for receiving, disposing and monitoring grievances.
- It will be available round the clock with applicant OTP authentication, acknowledgement to applicant at each stage, feedback by complainant, and grievance submission through call centre by making a phone call between 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on all days except Sunday.

India, China hold another round of Brigadier-level talks

- India and China held another round of Brigadier-level talks at Chushul on Friday as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) Bipin Rawat and the three service chiefs to discuss the situation along the disputed boundary in Ladakh.
- The two sides have already agreed to hold another round of Corps Commander-level talks, but the dates are yet to be finalised, the source said.



Five rounds of Corps Commander-level talks have so far been held. The situation along the north and south banks of Pangong Tso remains tense after the recent build-up of troops by both sides.

PM to unveil a slew of projects in Bihar

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be launching a blitzkrieg of projects in the next 10 days amounting to ₹16,000 crore in poll-going Bihar.
- Government sources said the projects were aimed at “improving infrastructure and ease of living for the people of Bihar”.
- On September 13, Mr. Modi will launch the Durgapur-Banka section of the PHDPL project, a liquid petroleum gas (LPG) bottling plant at Banka, and a new LPG plant at Sugauli.
- A sewage treatment plant under the **Namami Gangey project**, water supply schemes, river front development projects, railway bridge electrification project, new railway lines and bridges and construction of highways and bridges are also slated to be inaugurated in the State.
- The Election Commission (EC) had clarified a few days ago that Bihar polls and bypolls to various Assembly and one Lok Sabha seats will be conducted by November end, the statutory period within which a new Assembly has to take charge in the State.

Questions over FCRA nod for PM CARES

- The PM CARES Fund has received exemption from all provisions of the law meant to regulate foreign donations, although it does not seem to meet the precondition of being a body established and owned by the government whose accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG).
- Responding to a recent query under the Right to Information (RTI) Act asking for details and documents on the exemption, the Home Ministry said it had to “seek the consent” of PM CARES before giving out the information, as it would be considered a “third party” under the RTI Act. It also invoked the clause that allows information to be denied if it is held as part of a fiduciary relationship.



- According to the frequently asked questions (FAQ) section on the PM CARES website, the fund “has received exemption from operation of all provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010” or FCRA.
- On January 30, 2020, the Home Ministry issued a fresh order “to exempt organisations (not being a political party), constituted or established by or under a Central Act or a State Act or by any administrative or executive order of the Central Government or any State Government and wholly owned by the respective Government and required to have their accounts compulsorily audited by the CAG or any of the agencies of the CAG”.
- The PM CARES Fund is a public charitable trust registered under the Registration Act, 1908. It was not set up through a Central or State Act. It has argued that it is not a public authority under RTI; all bodies established by the government are public authorities under that Act. The Fund is audited by an independent auditor, not by the CAG.
- Although it does not seem to fulfil the conditions in the January order, PM CARES has been granted exemption from FCRA.
- The MHA also referenced Section 8(1)(e), which allows denial of information “available to a person in his fiduciary relationship, unless the competent authority is satisfied that the larger public interest warrants the disclosure of such information”.

₹300-crore package for Odisha farmers

- Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday announced a special package of ₹300 crore as livelihood support to farmers affected by the recent floods.
- Agriculture input subsidy will be provided to small and marginal farmers who have sustained a crop loss of 33%. Farmers will get subsidy at ₹6,800 per hectare in non-irrigated areas, ₹13,500 per hectare in areas under assured irrigation and ₹18,000 per hectare for all types of perennial crops. Perennial crops will include mango, cashew, coconut, kewra and betel vine.
- Assistance will be provided to actual cultivators. Agricultural input subsidy to any affected farmer will not be less than ₹2,000 for perennial crops and ₹1000 for other crops. Twenty of the 30 districts of Odisha were affected by incessant rain and the consequent floods during the last week of August.



- About 20,000 pulse-seed kits will be provided to flood-affected farmers during the rabi season. One lakh farmers will be trained on seed treatment programme with free supply of chemicals and bio-pesticides to cover one lakh acres for increasing production of rabi crops.
- As part of the immediate steps for arranging and distributing quality certified seeds in sufficient quantity, special assistance will be provided to farmers with higher subsidy of around 75% on certified quality seeds. According to the government, expeditious steps will be taken for crop loss assessment and steps will also be taken for invoking mid-season adversity under the crop insurance scheme.

Let virtual courts stay: law panel

- Parliamentary Panel on Law and Justice headed by BJP MP Bhupender Yadav has recommended continuation of virtual courts even in a post-COVID scenario but also sounded a word of caution that infrastructure needs to be upgraded especially in district courts to implement this.
- This is the first report to be presented by any parliamentary panel on the impact of the pandemic.

Key observations of the report:

- In its report “Functioning of the Virtual Courts/ Courts Proceedings through Video-Conferencing”, the panel has argued that transfer of certain categories of cases, like cases pertaining to traffic challans or other petty offences, from regular court establishments to virtual courts will reduce the pendency of cases. It has suggested that a full fledged virtual court should be piloted in the first instance. Currently there are 30 million pending cases.
- The committee further stressed that, “It is time, the courtroom which is often regarded as the last bastion of antiquated working practices opens its doors to latest technology.”
- During the pre-COVID period, the video-conference (VC) set up was primarily used for conducting remand matters to prevent movement of prisoners between courts and jails. Such VC facilities have been operationalised between 3,240 court complexes and corresponding 1,272 prisons.



Concerns:

- Stakeholders including Bar Association members and others who met the committee have noted that the present infrastructure does not support virtual court proceedings. The committee was informed that 3,477 court rooms are supported with facilities for virtual proceedings while 14,443 are still to be provided with them.
- A representative of the Bar deposing before the panel said, “As far as e-Courts and Virtual Courts are concerned, I can say with certainty and with an element of responsibility that in India, almost 50% lawyers, particularly in district courts, do not have any laptop or computer facility. How can we assume and presume that they would participate in these Virtual Courts and e-Courts?”
- The Calcutta Bar Association cited another instance before the committee. “There are 38 judges in the Calcutta High Court but there is not sufficient infrastructure to enable all Hon’ble Judges to undertake virtual hearings. For example, on 03.08.2020 only 8 Hon’ble Judges were able to take up matters virtually both in Division Bench as well as singly,” Association representatives said.
- Many witnesses said the virtual court hearings, especially during peak hours when many people log into the video-conferencing system, was subject to frequent crashes of the system and said entire proceedings can be vitiated by one glitch.

Privacy concerns:

- There were also concerns that virtual courts will compromise privacy of data as well as confidentiality of discussions and court proceedings. For instance, courts in the United States had to deal with Zoom bombing — an unwanted intrusion by hackers and internet trolls into a video conference call — while conducting court proceedings through Zoom, which is a third party software application. Currently, third-party software applications such as Vidyo, Cisco and Jitsi are being used in India for conducting hearings through video-conferencing.
- Third-party software is not only an unviable option but also poses a major security risk as such software programs and applications are prone to hacking and manipulation. The Committee recommends the Ministry of Law and Justice and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to address data privacy and data security concerns while developing a new platform for India’s judicial system.