

Current Affairs of the Day

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Russia inks pact to test, supply Sputnik V vaccine to India




- The Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which is piloting Russia's Sputnik V candidate vaccine, currently in Phase 3 trials, has partnered with the Hyderabad-based Dr. Reddy's Laboratories to test, and subject to regulatory approvals in India, supply 100 million doses of the vaccine.

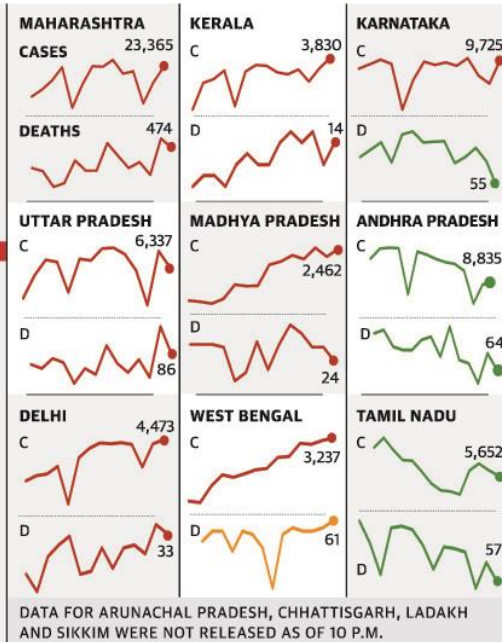
Viral tracker

With 94,732 COVID-19 cases recorded on Wednesday, India's tally stood at 51,12,806. As many as 1,108 deaths were added, taking India's toll to 83,222. A total of 5.94 crore samples have been tested as of September 15, according to the ICMR

NEW CASES AND DEATHS



The graphs depict the new cases and deaths in the last 14 days in select States. If average cases and deaths in the last seven days are higher than the previous seven days, then the cases and deaths are rising ; if they are lower, then dropping ; if they are similar, then cases and deaths are flatlining  in that State



- The RDIF said in the statement, "The Sputnik V vaccine, which is based on well-studied human adenoviral vector platform with proven safety, is undergoing clinical trials for the coronavirus pandemic. Deliveries could potentially begin in late 2020 subject to completion of successful trials and registration of the vaccine by regulatory authorities in India."
- The agreement does not include manufacturing the vaccine in India. An RDIF spokesperson said the organisation was still looking for manufacturers.
- The Dr. Reddy's-RDIF agreement constitutes the second major international deal for supplying a potential vaccine after the agreement between British company AstraZeneca and the Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII).
- On August 11, the Sputnik V vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, was registered by the Ministry of Health of Russia and became the world's first registered vaccine against COVID-19 based on the human adenoviral vectors platform.

LS nod to amend banking Act

Significance:

- The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed an amendment to the **Banking Regulation Act, 1949**, which will bring cooperative banks under the direct supervision of the RBI and bring them under some of the same governance norms as commercial banks.
- It will also allow the RBI to amalgamate or reconstruct a stressed cooperative bank without first imposing a moratorium, thus protecting the interests of the depositors, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, moving the Amendment Bill in the House.
- The Bill replaces an ordinance to the same effect promulgated on June 26.

SC for quick trial in cases against politicians

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday resolved to ensure that pending criminal trials against sitting and former legislators, which run to over 4,000 across the country, will be completed in a time-bound manner.
- “Are you serious about completing these trials in a time-bound manner?” a three-judge Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre.
- “We are 100% serious,” Mr. Mehta replied emphatically.
- There are over 2,500 criminal cases pending against sitting legislators.
- The Bench specifically asked about the status of cases registered by the Central agencies such as the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate against politicians. Cases range from corruption to money laundering.
- Amicus curiae and senior advocate Vijay Hansaria and advocate Sneha Kalita replied that some of these cases were stuck at the stage of framing of charges.
- In his latest report to the apex court, Mr. Hansaria suggested the setting up of one special court in each district to exclusively try politicians.
- He recommended that chief justices of each high court be requested to furnish an action plan for expeditious disposal of these cases within a year.
- He said corruption cases should be given “topmost priority.”



- Mr. Mehta recommended various measures such as expiration of any stay orders within one month, appointment of more special court judges, infrastructure, etc.

3,974 arrested under UAPA in three years

- A total of 3,005 cases were registered in the country under anti-terror law **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** in 2016, 2017 and 2018, and 3,974 people were arrested under the Act, Union Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy informed the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.
- In a written reply to a question, he said the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** is the central agency that compiles the data on crimes as reported by the States and Union Territories, and publishes the same in its annual publication Crime in India.
- According to information received from the NCRB, there are 232, 272 and 317 cases, wherein chargesheets have been filed under the UAPA in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively.

Value Added Information

What is Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)?

- The UAPA, an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA (lapsed in 1995) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act – POTA (repealed in 2004) was passed in the year 1967
- It aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities associations in India.
- Till 2004, “unlawful” activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory.
- The **2004** amendment, added “terrorist act” to the list of offences.
- Under the act, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
- **Powers to Union Government:** If Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.
- It has death penalty and life imprisonment as highest punishments.



2019 Amendment of UAPA:

- The act was amended to **designate individuals as terrorists** on certain grounds provided in the Act.
 - Earlier only organisations could be declared as such
 - Not designating individuals as terrorists, would give them an **opportunity to circumvent the law** and regroup under different name
- It empowers the Director General of NIA to grant approval of **seizure or attachment of property** when the case is investigated by NIA
 - Earlier it required the consent of State Police which delayed the process
- It empowers the officers of the NIA, of the **rank of Inspector or above**, to investigate cases of terrorism
 - This will help solve the human resource crunch in the NIA.

Criticism of UAPA

- Experiences of Anti-terror laws in India such as POTA and TADA reveals that they are **often misused and abused**.
- The law could also be used against political opponents and civil society activists who speak against the government and **brand them as “terrorists.”**
- Critics argue that the law, especially after 2019 amendment gives **unfettered powers to investigating agencies**.
- Some experts feel that it is **against the federal structure**, given that ‘Police’ is a state subject under 7th schedule of Indian Constitution.

Importance of Civil Society Groups/ Social Activists:

- Acts as a conduit between people and authority
- They help in interest articulation and interest aggregation in a Democratic setup
- Collaboration with the government in welfare delivery programmes especially in remote places where administrative machinery is thin
- Constructive criticism of government actions which leads to improvements in governance
- Helps in preventing the excesses of executive through their active civic participation



- Holds the government accountable for their action and ensures transparency in government functioning
- Promotes brotherhood and harmony in society
- Promotes environmental consciousness among people
- Ensures that government keep humans at the centre of development strategy

‘India’s presence at Afghan talks vital’

- The Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN) under way in Doha are an “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned” process at last, U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said, calling India’s decision to take part in the event involving the Taliban an “important step”. However, he said neither the U.S. nor India can ‘impose’ what political system Afghan representatives choose to adopt after the talks, nor is it yet certain that the start of talks will see the declaration of a ceasefire soon.
- “India has always said there should be an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process and [External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar] repeated that stand,” Mr. Khalilzad said.

Maldives defends ties with India

- Apparently responding to the growing anti-India refrain from the political opposition in the Maldives, Foreign Minister Abdulla has said that those “unable to stomach” the strengthening bilateral ties were resorting to such criticism.
- Speaking at an event to launch a street-lighting project supported by India, the Foreign Minister said: “This connection is with the people of the two countries. A connection indicating a heart-to-heart relationship. We acknowledge that.”
- His remarks come at a time when the jailed former President Abdulla Yameen-led Progressive Party of Maldives-People’s National Congress (PPM-PNC) combine has been protesting “foreign military presence in Maldivian soil”.
- Following a recent agitation by a group of youth, the PPM-PNC said it was “appalled by Police crackdown and indiscriminate mass arrests at peaceful motorbike rally”.



- Amid speculation among sections that Indian military might arrive at Hanimaadhoo in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, in addition to the Indian officers that are already in Maldives to operate the helicopters gifted to Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) by the Indian military, the Chief of Defence Force Major General Abdulla Shamaal has asserted that “no foreign armed forces” are present in the Maldives.
- In the last few weeks, some Maldivians also took to Twitter, beginning an “#Indiaout” campaign that trended for some time.
- Given that during President Yameen’s time in office, Malé-New Delhi relations turned rather sour, while his government was accused of an evident China slant, ruling party sources accuse the political opposition for triggering the social media campaign.
- China has been a close development partner and lender. Malé has been trying to renegotiate some \$1.4 billion it owes to Beijing.
- On the other hand, India’s engagement has significantly grown since President Solih came to power, particularly in development partnerships.
- Last month, India announced a \$500 million package — including a grant of \$100 million — in addition to New Delhi’s earlier line of credit of \$800 million announced in 2018.
- However, countering the recent anti-India rhetoric, largely from its political rivals, is only one of the many challenges facing President Solih’s government.

Economic impact:

- Two years into office, the Solih administration has a massive challenge in the economic impact of Covid-19 that has brutally hit the Indian Ocean island nation’s high-revenue tourism sector.
- India has announced \$250 million special financial assistance to help the Maldives as it tries to cope with the economic strain gravely aggravated by the pandemic. According to the UNDP, the Maldives is amongst the worst affected countries in Asia region and potentially globally, due to the impact of Covid-19.