

## Current Affairs of the Day

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## Harsimrat Kaur quits Cabinet in protest against two agri Bills

- Farmers groups, especially in Punjab and Haryana, have risen in protest against the **Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020**, and the **Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020**, which replace the Ordinances promulgated in June.

### Concerns:

- The proposed legislations seek to promote barrier-free trade of farm produce by facilitating contract farming as well as agricultural marketing outside notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis.
- Farmers are worried about the dilution of the existing Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime, as well as the entry of corporates with greater bargaining power than small farmers.

## First regulate digital media, govt. tells SC

- The government said web-based news portals, YouTube channels as well as Over The Top (OTT) platforms had huge potential to become viral. Unlike mainstream publication and telecast, digital media was perpetually widening its viewership, like in a loop, through multiple web and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook.
- Hence, what was written or shown in digital media had “serious impact and potential”, the government said.
- The government reasoned, “While in a mainstream media [whether electronic or print], the publication / telecast is a one-time act, the digital media has faster reach.”

On September 15, the court underlined that “journalistic freedom is not absolute”.

## U.S. keen on finalising BECA at 2+2 dialogue

- The U.S. is keen that India sign the last foundational agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA), at the next India-U.S. 2+2 ministerial dialogue likely to held in October end, a defence source said on Thursday.



- A meeting of the Quad Foreign Ministers is scheduled to take place in Tokyo in October, the source said. Earlier, the meeting was expected to be held in New Delhi.

### Significance:

- “The U.S. wants BECA to be signed at the ministerial 2+2 in October. Indian draft with our suggestions has been sent to them,” the source said stating negotiations are far from over and it is unlikely to be signed by October. The timing of the 2+2 comes just before the U.S. elections in November and there is still no clarity on the dates.
- A maritime information agreement is also under active deliberation between India and the U.S., the source said. Once concluded, India will have such arrangements with all Quad countries — Australia, Japan and the U.S.

### India has signed three foundational agreements:

- Beginning 2016, India has signed three foundational agreements: **the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) while the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)** was signed a long time ago. An extension to the GSOMIA, the **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)**, was signed at the last 2+2 dialogue.

There has been a sharp increase in India’s maritime interactions with the Quad countries on a bilateral basis centered around information sharing for improved **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** in the Indian Ocean Region and Indo-Pacific.

### India, Pakistan to attend SAARC meet

- Days after India-Pakistan tensions spilled over into a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi are expected to meet via a videoconference at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting on September 24.



## Revival of ties:

- An official also pointed to the revival of SAARC cooperation due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, including the creation of an India-led SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund, and exchanges between regional health professionals this year.
- Speaking at the SAARC Finance Ministers' meet on Wednesday, Nepal's Foreign Minister Gyawali said that the COVID-19 crisis has meant the region will experience a contraction of at least 2.7% this year, and will "experience the worst economic performance in the last 40 years", which adds to the need for SAARC cooperation.
- The SAARC Foreign Ministers meeting scheduled for next Thursday is part of an old practice of holding an informal lunch meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. Last year, both Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Qureshi attended the meeting, but skipped each other's speeches. Mr. Jaishankar left early, while Mr. Qureshi entered only after he left.
- The meeting's agenda includes opening remarks by Mr. Gyawali followed by a brief overview by the current SAARC Secretary General, Sri Lankan diplomat Esala R. Weerakoon. Following that, country statements will be made by participating Foreign Ministers, in alphabetical order.

## 'U.S. to strengthen relationship with India'

- China's recent actions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) have caused the U.S. to develop its partnership with India to counter Chinese aggression, a top Trump administration National Security Council (NSC) official said.
- China's recent actions on the LAC have "further reinforced the importance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership and it has strengthened the U.S. resolve to work towards building that relationship as a bulwark against Chinese aggression," NSC Director for South and Central Asia Lisa Curtis said. The U.S. had provided India with "strong and unambiguous support" throughout the crisis and the two countries' cooperation had "certainly" grown closer, according to Ms. Curtis. Her comments were made during a webinar organized by the Carnegie Endowment, a think tank.

## Policy differences:



- Ms. Curtis said India and the U.S. should focus on the issues where there are converging interests, and operationalize their cooperation around those specific issues, and accept that there will be policy differences between them on other issues.
- Responding to a question on burden sharing in the Indo-Pacific and whether India would be comfortable making contributions to aid U.S. objectives, Ms. Curtis said, “When it comes to the South Asia region, we have seen India reluctant, I think, for the U.S. to become more involved, but I think you will see that changing because of the situation that we are finding ourselves in.”
- She referred to China becoming more involved in the political dynamics of South Asian countries.
- Last week, India had welcomed the decision of the Maldives to sign a military agreement with the U.S.
- Ms. Curtis said countries would have to become more comfortable with cooperating and burden sharing towards similar goals.
- “We are starting to see more openness from India in particular in discussing these issues,” she said. India had started helping countries — such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh — with their economic issues, as per the White House adviser.
- Ms. Curtis said cooperation and burden sharing was becoming inevitable not only in the military and maritime areas but also in terms of the economies, countering the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and so forth.

## **Pak. to make Gilgit-Baltistan a full-fledged province: report**

- Pakistan has decided to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan’s status to that of a full-fledged province, a Pakistani media report on Thursday quoted a senior Minister as saying.
- India has clearly conveyed to Pakistan that the entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of the country by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession.



- According to a report in the Express Tribune, Minister for Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan Affairs, Ali Amin Gandapur, on Wednesday said that Prime Minister Imran Khan would soon visit the region and make the formal announcement to elevate Gilgit-Baltistan to the status of a full-fledged province with all constitutional rights.
- Mr. Gandapur said Gilgit-Baltistan would be given adequate representation on all constitutional bodies, including the National Assembly and the Senate.
- After consultation with all stakeholders, the federal government has decided in principle to give constitutional rights to Gilgit-Baltistan, the Minister told reporters.

### India's objections:

- India has said the Government of Pakistan or its judiciary has no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it.
- India completely rejects such actions and continued attempts to bring material changes in Pakistan occupied areas of the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Instead, Pakistan should immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation, the Ministry of External Affairs said in May while protesting Islamabad's efforts to bring material change in Pakistan occupied territories.

### China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):

- Mr. Gandapur also said that work on the **Moqpondass Special Economic Zone** would begin under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- **The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).**
- The CPEC is a collection of infrastructure and other projects under construction throughout Pakistan since 2013.

## Proposed Amendment to Railways Act 1989

- Recently, the Ministry of Railways has proposed to decriminalise begging on trains or railway premises.



- It has also proposed to compound the offence of smoking by levying spot fine.

**Key takeaways:**

- These changes are part of an exercise to decriminalize/rationalize penalties under the provisions of the Railway Act, 1989.
- **Section 144 (2) of the Act:** If any person begs in any railway carriage or upon a railway station, s/he shall be liable for punishment of either imprisonment for a term that may extend to one year, or with a fine that may extend to Rs. 2,000, or with both.
- **Proposed Amendment:** No person shall be permitted to beg in any railway carriage or upon any part of the Railway.
- **Section 167 of the Act:** No person in any compartment of a train shall, if objected to by any other passenger, smoke therein. Irrespective of any objections raised, the railway administration may prohibit smoking in any train or part of a train. Whosoever contravenes these provisions shall be punishable with a fine that may extend to Rs.100.
- **Proposed Amendment:** If the person liable to pay the fine is willing to pay it immediately, the officer authorised may compound the offence by charging the maximum fine which will be paid to the railway administration. Provided that, the offender shall be discharged and no further proceeding shall be taken against him/her in respect of such offence.