



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- India at 142nd rank on press freedom index
- India should be a 'country of particular concern': U.S. panel
- Sri Lanka detects nuclear material on China-bound vessel
- U.S. lawmakers back \$100 bn science push to take on China

GS Paper III

- Very few post-vaccine infections: ICMR



India at 142nd rank on press freedom index

The World Press Freedom Index, 2021, produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a French non-governmental organisation, has again ranked India at 142nd out of 180 countries. This is despite the fact that for a year an index monitoring cell worked to improve the rankings.

Highlights:

1. In 2016, India's rank was 133, which has steadily climbed down to 142 in 2020.
2. The RSF report says India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their job properly. They are exposed to every kind of attack, even police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials.
3. Last year, fearing such an adverse assessment, the cell was set up in 18 Ministries to find ways to improve the position on 32 international indices. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry was delegated to look at the freedom of press index.
4. The RSF representatives questioned the Internet ban in Jammu and Kashmir from August 5, 2019, which went on for nearly a year.

India should be a 'country of particular concern': U.S. panel

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bipartisan commission, has recommended for the second year in a row that the State Department put India on a list ('Countries of Particular Concern' or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.

Highlights:

1. The USCISRF recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for "severe violations of religious freedom".
2. A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral [the Quad].



3. Another recommendation was to raise issues in the U.S.-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.
4. The USCIRF recommendations are non-binding and the Trump administration had rejected the USCIRF recommendation to designate India a CPC last year.
5. The key concerns of the 2021 report include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).
6. Efforts to prohibit interfaith marriage — such as those in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh — are also highlighted as a concern.
7. In an apparent reference to the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz in March 2020, the USCIRF says, “At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and hateful rhetoric — including from government officials — often targeted religious minorities, continuing familiar patterns.”

Sri Lanka detects nuclear material on China-bound vessel

Sri Lanka on Tuesday detected radioactive material on a China-bound vessel berthed at the southern Hambantota Port. The vessel has been asked to leave the Port, according to officials, as the shipping company failed to obtain prior clearance for “dangerous cargo”, as per Sri Lankan law.

Highlights:

The vessel was found to be carrying uranium hexafluoride, which is classified under “dangerous cargo”, according to officials. Uranium hexachloride is nuclear material that is commonly transported from one country to another.

U.S. lawmakers back \$100 bn science push to take on China

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday introduced legislation calling for \$100 billion in government spending over five years on basic and advanced technology research and science in the face of rising pressure from China.

High Tech race:

1. The measure would also authorise \$10 billion to designate at least 10 technology hubs and create a supply chain crisis response programme.



2. The Bill called the “Endless Frontier Act,” represents a significant effort by the government to shore up the private sector and university research efforts in advanced technologies with federal funding.

Very few post-vaccine infections: ICMR

The Indian Council of Medical Research said only a “small” fraction of people who had been vaccinated with either Covaxin or Covishield had tested positive for COVID-19. However, these instances of “breakthrough” infections did not undermine the efficacy of the vaccines.

Highlights:

1. “These vaccines definitely, definitely protect against disease. However, the immune response begins to develop usually two weeks after every dose and there are variations within individuals, too. Even after the first dose, if exposure to the virus happens, one can test positive,” ICMR said.
2. Of the 9.3 million who received the first dose of Covaxin, 4,208 tested positive; and of the 1.7 million who received the second dose, 695 tested positive.
3. This is roughly around two in 10,000 and is a very, very small fraction. We have seen similar rates of reinfection internationally, too, from the use of other vaccines.

Key reasons

1. Two key reasons for this were that healthcare and frontline workers, who were among the first to be vaccinated, were as a population far more exposed to the virus and therefore, more susceptible.
2. Second, the emergence of “the highly transmissible second wave (newer variants)” may have contributed to instances of infection among those vaccinated.
3. Several variants, which have mutations that have been shown to avoid detection by the immune system and in some cases, reduce the efficacy of vaccines, have been reported globally, including in India.