



## Current Affairs of the Day

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## 13 more Collectors can grant citizenship

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has empowered 13 more District Collectors in Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab to grant citizenship certificates to applicants belonging to six minority communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

### Highlights:

1. The latest notification is a reiteration of similar orders issued in 2016 and 2018 and is not related to the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) that is yet to come into effect.
2. The CAA, passed in 2019, seeks to grant Indian citizenship to six undocumented communities that came to India till December 31, 2014.
3. The May 28 notification intends to benefit legal migrants (who entered on passport/visa) from the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have already applied for citizenship under Section 5 (by registration) and Section 6 (naturalisation) of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
4. The only way the CAA could have helped the legal minority migrants is in fast-tracking their applications as it reduced the mandatory requirement of 11 years aggregate stay in India to five for citizenship.
5. Since the rules for the CAA are yet to be framed, a minority applicant from the three countries, even if he or she came in 2014, becomes eligible for citizenship in the year 2025. But many have been residing in India for more than 20 years on long-term visas (LTV). An LTV is a precursor to citizenship.
6. The applicants will have to apply online and the citizenship certificate will be provided after a security check by the Central agencies and the State police.
7. Under the existing system, minority communities from the three countries who entered India before December 31, 2009, may or may not choose to provide a copy of their passports but they have to provide the date of the visa and may upload the visa document in place of the passport while applying for citizenship.
8. The Home Secretaries of Punjab (except Jalandhar) and Haryana (except Faridabad) have also been given such powers.



## Central subject

1. Citizenship is a Central subject and the Home Ministry periodically delegates powers to the States through gazette notification under Section 16 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
2. Indian citizenship can be acquired on eight grounds – based on registration made by a person of Indian origin, by a person married to an Indian, minor child, whose parents are registered as citizens of India, by a person whose either parent was a citizen of Independent India, overseas citizens of India, by naturalisation and registration of a child at an Indian consulate.
3. The fresh notification grants the power to Collectors of Morbi, Rajkot, Patan and Vadodara in Gujarat; Durg and Balodabazar in Chhattisgarh; Jalore, Udaipur, Pali, Barmer and Sirohi in Rajasthan; Faridabad in Haryana and Jalandhar in Punjab. These are the areas where the population of such migrants are concentrated.

## ₹10 lakh corpus fund for every child orphaned by COVID-19

### Timely support

The Centre has announced a comprehensive financial aid package for children orphaned during the pandemic

- Students can be enrolled in **Kendriya Vidyalayas** or private school with govt. taking care of expenses
- Students of 11-18 years can be enrolled in Sainik Schools or Navodaya Vidyalayas
- **Health insurance** cover of ₹5 lakh
- Corpus of ₹10 lakh per child to be created
- **Monthly stipend** will be offered from corpus after 18 years of age
- Lump sum to be disbursed once the age of 23 is attained



■ AFP

The Union government announced a special “PM-CARES for Children” scheme for all those orphaned due to COVID-19. It will include a corpus of ₹10 lakh for each child till he or she reaches the age of 18.



## Highlights:

1. Children who have lost both parents or the lone surviving parent or their legal guardian or adoptive parent due to COVID-19 will be supported under the scheme. The Women and Child Development Ministry have said that there are a total of 577 COVID-19 orphans identified across the country.
2. When a child turns 18, he or she will draw a monthly stipend from the corpus of ₹10 lakh in order to meet expenses for personal needs and higher education. On reaching the age of 23, the child will get the entire ₹10 lakh.
3. The government will also assist such children with school education. They will be given admission to the nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or in a private school as a day scholar.
4. If the child is admitted to a private school, the fees will be paid from the PM CARES Fund as per norms under the Right To Education Act, 2009. PM CARES will also meet the expenses on the uniform, textbooks and notebooks.
5. All children will be enrolled as a beneficiary under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme with a health insurance cover of ₹5 lakh, where the premium amount will be paid by PM CARES till a child turns 18. The government has also announced measures to help the families who have lost the sole earning member due to COVID-19.

## Chidambaram for CAG audit on vaccine production, supply

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram demanded a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)-driven audit of vaccine production and supply in the country to unravel the “mystery of missing vaccines” before public anger hits the streets.

## Highlights:

“The proper thing to do is direct a CAG driven full-scope audit of capacity, production, despatch, supply and customers’ lists of the two domestic manufacturers. Better unravel the mystery of the missing vaccines now before public anger over shortage of vaccines pours into the streets,” he added.





## Monsoon onset over Kerala delayed: IMD

The arrival of the southwest monsoon over Kerala has been delayed to June 3, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The agency had last month forecast that the onset would be on May 31.

### Weak onset: Skymet

1. Skymet, a private weather forecast agency, however, said the monsoon had arrived. This was because two of the three criteria — as defined by the IMD — had been met. This is certainly a weak onset Skymet said.
2. The IMD and Skymet have forecast a normal monsoon from June-September this year. To herald the onset, initial rains first occur over the south Andaman Sea and the monsoon winds then advance across the Bay of Bengal.
3. Since 2005, the monsoon has arrived within the error margin of the IMD's weather models, except in 2015.

## China's space station plans gather pace with cargo docking

China took another step towards completing the construction of its first space station by the end of next year following the launch and docking of a cargo spacecraft.

### Highlights:

1. The Tianzhou-2 cargo spacecraft, described by China's state media as "the delivery guy for China's space station", was launched recently.
2. The Tianzhou-2 spacecraft carried a range of supplies, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) said, and will be followed by the launch of another cargo spacecraft, Tianzhou-3, and two manned missions, Shenzhou-12 and Shenzhou-13, this year, each carrying three astronauts who will spend several months in orbit.
3. The six missions to follow this year, including for the space station's second and third modules, Wentian and Mengtian, will close to complete the construction of China's first space station, expected to be finished in 2022.



## The Centre-WhatsApp tussle over new IT rules

**The story so far:** Facebook's messaging platform WhatsApp moved the Delhi High Court against India's new Information Technology rules.

### What is WhatsApp's problem with the new rules?

The rules require WhatsApp and those offering messaging services and having a user base of over 50 lakh to be able to trace 'problematic' messages to their originators. The requirement is one of traceability, and WhatsApp is opposed to it.

### Why is WhatsApp opposed to traceability?

1. WhatsApp's messaging system is end-to-end encrypted, which means, in its own words, "only you and the person you're communicating with can read what's sent, and nobody in between, not even WhatsApp". This has been the case since 2016.
2. Traceability, according to WhatsApp, is a threat to user privacy. It argues that traceability would end up "breaking the very guarantees that end-to-end encryption provides".
3. It says, "In order to trace even one message, services would have to trace every message." The reason it says this is because there is no way to know what a government would want to investigate in the future.
4. Requiring messaging apps to 'trace' chats is the equivalent of asking us to keep a fingerprint of every single message sent on WhatsApp, which would break end-to-end encryption and fundamentally undermines people's right to privacy and also open it for hackers and impersonators.
5. Further, in its blog, WhatsApp has said that traceability violates human rights. It says, Innocent people could get caught up in investigations, or even go to jail, for sharing content that later becomes problematic in the eyes of a government, even if they did not mean any harm by sharing it in the first place.
6. WhatsApp also says traceability doesn't work. It gives an example: "If you simply downloaded an image and shared it, took a screenshot and resent it, or sent an article on WhatsApp that someone emailed you, you would be determined to be the originator of that content." And that is why it reckons that "tracing messages would be ineffective and highly susceptible to abuse".



## Helping law enforcement

Even without traceability, WhatsApp says, they respond to valid requests by providing the limited categories of information available, consistent with applicable law and policy. They also have a team devoted to assisting law enforcement 24/7 with emergencies involving imminent harm or risk of death or serious physical injury.

## How has the Government of India responded to this?

1. The government “is committed to ensuring the Right of Privacy to all its citizens but at the same time it is also the responsibility of the government to maintain law and order and ensure national security.”
2. A release by the Ministry of Electronics and IT elaborates on two legal points related to the traceability requirement. The first is regarding reasonable restrictions or the conditions that could trigger a traceability order by a court.
3. The second legal argument is about the test of proportionality, the cornerstone of which, as the release says, “is whether a lesser effective alternative remedy exists”. The traceability measure will be a measure of “last resort”, according to the release, which cites the rule in this regard.
4. Any operations being run in India are subject to the law of the land. WhatsApp’s refusal to comply with the guidelines is a clear act of defiance of a measure whose intent can certainly not be doubted.
5. It also makes a reference to another issue where WhatsApp and the government have a difference of opinion. It says, At one end, WhatsApp seeks to mandate a privacy policy wherein it will share the data of all its users with its parent company, Facebook, for marketing and advertising purposes.
6. On the other hand, WhatsApp makes every effort to refuse the enactment of the Intermediary Guidelines which are necessary to uphold law and order and curb the menace of fake news.

**The Ministry release also refers to a communiqué issued by the governments of the U.K., the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Canada in 2019. What did the communiqué say?**

While welcoming strong encryption as a means of safeguarding user privacy, the communiqué, however, said, “We are concerned where companies deliberately



design their systems in a way that precludes any form of access to content, even in case of the most serious crime. This approach puts citizens and society at risk by severely eroding a company's ability to identify and respond to the most harmful illegal content... Tech companies should include mechanism[s] in the design of their encrypted products and services whereby governments, acting with appropriate legal authority, can obtain access to data in a readable and usable format.”

## Declining forest bird species in Western Himalaya

**Low diversity:** The researchers noted a drastic loss of pollinator birds and insectivores in the degraded forests, monocultures and urbanised sites. Invasion by non-native species, land-use changes led to a decrease in the abundance of important birds.

### Highlights:

1. With extremely cold winters and pleasant summers, the State of Uttarakhand is home to the Western Himalayan temperate forests which harbour a large number of endemic bird species.
2. A new study that analysed these natural oak-dominated forests and modified forests have noted that there was a drastic loss of bird species in all modified landscapes.
3. The results showed that there was a low diversity of species in monoculture areas and urban sites. They also noted a drastic loss of pollinator birds and insectivores in the degraded forests, monocultures and urbanised sites. The results were published recently in Global Ecology and Conservation.

### Habitat guilds

1. Researchers also noticed a strong decline in some of the habitat guilds in the areas that experienced land-use change.
2. Habitat guilds are groups of bird species that have common habitat preferences. For instance, forest specialists include species that forage and breed only in dense protected oak forests at this altitude, while forest generalists can adapt to modified habitats such as orchards and degraded forests.





3. The researchers noticed that many of the species that dropped out of the modified land areas were recognised oak forest specialists such as Rufous-bellied woodpecker, greater yellow nape, rufous sibia, white-throated laughing thrush and black-faced warbler.
4. Another paper published by the group looked at woodpeckers in the region to understand how they can be used as indicators of bird diversity and also to understand habitat degradation

### Woodpeckers enhance

1. They found that the higher the number of woodpeckers at a site, the higher was the richness of all other birds. The cavities that woodpeckers make on trees are used by a number of other birds to nest in. This may be the primary reason how woodpeckers enhance the diversity in a region.
2. They also noted that two species (Rufous-bellied woodpecker and greater yellow nape) showed great potential as indicators of forest quality as they were most likely to be found in dense canopied forests with larger and taller trees on which they preferred to forage.
3. With tourism and other anthropogenic activities increasing in the region, we are witnessing rapid invasion by non-native species. One would not expect to see pigeons and Black Kites in these altitudes, but with increasing concrete urban ghettos, these birds have become a common sight now.

## Our inheritance from the Neanderthals

**Decoding history:** Modern human population in the Bacho Kiro cave region had interbred with the 'locals' and produced a cross-bred group of people. Modern humans acquired varying skin, hair colour, immunity from them.

### Modern humans

1. 'Modern' humans have populated the earth from long before the Iron Age, for some 300,000 years, cohabiting Mother Earth along with other pre-human hominins.
2. Because bones of one of these 'others' were first discovered in the Neander valley, just east of Dusseldorf in Germany, they were called 'Neanderthals'.



3. This hominin arose about 430,000 years ago and did not evolve in Africa, as Homo sapiens did. Early humans first encountered them when they migrated out of Africa.

### **Conferring immunity**

Having adapted to colder regions for 400,000 years, the Neanderthals gave us out-of-Africa humans variations in skin and hair colour better suited to the cold, as well as adaptive variants for metabolism and immunity – to help better adjust to strange new food sources and to unfamiliar disease-causing viruses in the new environment.