



## Current Affairs of the Day

### GS Paper II

- Why not buy 100% vaccines if you get a discount, SC asks the Centre
- Palestine flays India's abstention from the vote
- Caste categories for NREGS pay
- Vaccinators undertake trek on hills to inoculate tribes in Odisha
- Paid vaccination policy arbitrary, irrational: SC
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### GS Paper III

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## Why not buy 100% vaccines if you get a discount, SC asks the Centre

1. The Supreme Court has questioned the Centre's logic that manufacturers are selling COVID-19 vaccines for a hefty discount because it places bulk orders. The court then asked the government why it cannot buy 100% of the vaccines at a discount instead of leaving the States to fend for themselves.
2. The Centre can buy vaccines for ₹150, while the States have to shell out between ₹300 and ₹600.
3. If the Central government's unique monopolistic buyer position is the only reason for it receiving vaccines at a much lower rate from manufacturers, it is important for us to examine the rationality of the existing Liberalised Vaccination Policy against Article 14 [right to equality] of the Constitution since it could place severe burdens, particularly on States/Union Territories suffering from financial distress.
4. The court said the Centre had left the States with very little bargaining powers by pre-fixing with the manufacturers both the quantity and the price of vaccines for the States.
5. Besides, the court said the States were handicapped in their direct talks with foreign vaccine manufacturers as the latter preferred negotiating with federal governments.

## Palestine flays India's abstention from the vote

1. India abstained in the voting on the resolution at the Human Rights Council [HRC] that came up against the backdrop of the latest round of conflict between Israel and the Gaza strip, the coastal part of the Palestinian territories.
2. India expressed India's support to the "just Palestinian cause". India has maintained that a two-state solution to equal sovereign rights is the way forward to resolve the century-old crisis.
3. However, India abstained from voting on the resolution, which is aimed at securing Israel's compliance with international human rights.
4. The passing of the resolution led to the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the violation of international law by Israel.



## Caste categories for NREGS pay

1. The Centre has asked the States to split wage payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme into separate categories for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and others from this financial year.
2. The government of India has decided to provide separate budget heads for SC and ST categories under MGNREGS from the financial year 2021-22 for wage payment.
3. Workers' rights advocates said this will complicate the payment system, and expressed fears that it may lead to a reduction in scheme funding.
4. The Ministry may be thinking that this allocation is all being taken by the general category people, so they want to segregate based on the population of the district.

## Vaccinators undertake trek on hills to inoculate tribes in Odisha

1. They face challenges as COVID-19 cases emerge from PVTGs
2. After COVID-19 positive cases emerged from the Dongria Kondh, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), the State government had prioritised vaccinating the tribe even though it involves a tough and treacherous trek to the upper slopes of the Niyamgiri hill range where they live.

## Paid vaccination policy arbitrary, irrational: SC

1. The Supreme Court has called the Union government's paid vaccination policy for citizens 18-44 years of age as "prima facie arbitrary and irrational".
2. The onset of the second wave and expansion of the immunisation drive to cover the 18-44 age group saw the Centre give ground and take responsibility for only 50% of vaccine purchase and distribution, leaving the States and private hospitals to buy vaccines at a higher price, it stated.
3. The policy of the Central government for conducting free vaccination themselves for groups under the first two phases, and replacing it with paid



vaccination by the State/UT Governments and private hospitals for the persons between 18-44 years is, prima facie, arbitrary and irrational.

4. The Bench asked whether the Centre had taken a “means test” to ascertain beforehand whether even 50% of the 18-44 age group could afford to pay for their vaccines.
5. The digital registration and booking of vaccine slots through CoWIN, coupled with the current scarcity of vaccines, ensured that the rich got vaccinated first, it said.
6. To top it all, the “liberalised” vaccine policy did not prioritise people with comorbidities, disabilities or belonging to vulnerable groups within the 18-44 age group.

## Delhi lost 107 doctors, Bihar 96: IMA

1. Association updates toll from COVID-19 to 594
2. Doctors have to spend long hours in protective gear in the fight against COVID-19.
3. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has said that 594 doctors died in the second wave of COVID-19 across the country.
4. While no such count is available for other medical staff currently, the Central government earlier this week announced a new system of processing their insurance claims under the ‘Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) — Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19’.
5. The Union Health Ministry noted that the claims would be certified by District Collectors and settled 48 hours after approval.

## China, Pakistan, Afghanistan to hold talks amid U.S. withdrawal

1. The trilateral dialogue will address the ‘new uncertainties’ in Afghanistan
2. Beijing looks to step up its engagement with both Kabul and Islamabad amid the withdrawal of U.S. forces.
3. The trilateral dialogue, started by China, would address “new uncertainties” in the wake of “the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces at a critical stage” of the reconciliation process, the Ministry said.



4. The Afghan envoy appreciated China's offer to facilitate Afghan peace talks in the future.
5. It also called on India and China to work together despite their other bilateral problems.

## New IT rules don't apply to us, Google tells HC

1. Google told the Delhi High Court that the new Information Technology Rules 2021, which came into effect late last month, did not apply to the U.S.-based tech giant as it was a "search engine" and not a "social media intermediary" like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.
2. Google said the function of a search engine was to only "crawl and index existing information as available or published or hosted by independent third-party websites.
3. This process of search did not censor the findings — it found material that corresponded to the request of the search, hosted by other independent third-party websites that were beyond the control of search engines.

## Only Delta is a variant of concern: WHO

1. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said only B.1.617.2, one of the three strains of the B.1.617 COVID-19 variant first detected in India, is a "variant of concern" now and noted that lower rates of transmission have been observed for the other two lineages.
2. The B.1.617 variant was first detected in India and was divided into three lineages — B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2 and B.1.617.3.
3. Since then, it has become evident that greater public health risks are currently associated with B.1.617.2, while lower rates of transmission of other lineages have been observed.