



Current Affairs of the Day

GS Paper II

- MEA hints at talks with Taliban
- EC has vast powers to act against the criminalisation of politics: experts
- The U.S. to donate 500 mn doses to world
- Biden, Johnson seek to sign 'new Atlantic Charter'



MEA hints at talks with Taliban

1. India is in contact with “various stakeholders” in Afghanistan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in response to specific questions about whether the government has opened direct talks with the Taliban.
2. So far, India has refused to open a direct dialogue with the Taliban leadership.
3. However, according to experts, India has reconsidered its position in the aftermath of the U.S. announcement that it would pull out all its troops by September this year.
4. An official, who asked not to be named, said India’s engagement with groups in Afghanistan was driven by a desire to “limit the damage” to its security interests as a result of the U.S.’s decision to leave and the Taliban gaining military strength in several key provinces.

EC has vast powers to act against the criminalisation of politics: experts

1. Legal and political experts said the Election Commission could do more to stop the criminalisation of politics, during a discussion on the implementation of the Supreme Court’s February 2020 directions to political parties on publicising criminal antecedents of candidates.
2. The EC and the judiciary would have to play their parts. He said the EC had “vast powers”, including under Article 324 of the Constitution.
3. The EC should issue show-cause notices to parties if it finds the reasons they give for selecting a candidate with criminal antecedents “not in consonance with the intent or purport” of the SC’s order.
4. Former Chief Election Commission O.P. Rawat, however, said he did not agree with the suggestion that the EC should use its plenary power. Citing the SC, he said the EC had “no locus standi to enter the political process per se”. He said the investigation and trial of cases should be expedited and there should be an effort to disseminate information to voters.



The U.S. to donate 500 mn doses to world

1. The U.S. will purchase half a billion doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and donate them to 92 low and middle-income countries and the African Union.
2. The vaccines will be shipped from August onwards, with 200 million doses distributed this year and 300 million by the middle of next year, according to a 'fact sheet' released by the White House.
3. Rich countries have come under increasing pressure to not sit on orders of excess vaccines as many in middle and lower-income countries remain unvaccinated.
4. The U.S. will work on delivering the vaccines via COVAX, an international coalition that is involved with global vaccine access.
5. Pfizer will sell the doses to the U.S. government at a "not-for-profit" price, the Washington Post reported.

India will benefit

1. Separately, the U.S. has already begun shipping 80 million doses of mostly AstraZeneca vaccines to other countries. Three-quarters of these are being allocated through COVAX and a quarter is being shared bilaterally.
2. However, regulatory issues remain even as supply chain issues are easing up, partly due to the U.S. releasing AstraZeneca, Novavax and Sanofi vaccines from the purview of its Defence Production Act, which had resulted in export controls for raw materials that go into manufacturing these inoculations.

Biden, Johnson seek to sign 'new Atlantic Charter'

1. The two leaders inspected documents related to the Atlantic Charter, a declaration signed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in August 1941, setting out common goals for the world after Second World War.
2. Those goals included freer trade, disarmament and the right to self-determination of all people. It is often cited as a cornerstone of the trans-Atlantic "special relationship."
3. The charter laid the foundation for the United Nations and NATO.



Finding common ground

The two leaders plan to sign what they're calling a new Atlantic Charter, pledging to "defend the principles, values, and institutions of democracy and open societies."