





**LIVE**



# THE HINDU EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

- VOCAB
- GRAMMAR
- SPOKEN ENGLISH

**18 MAY 2021 | 7:30 AM**

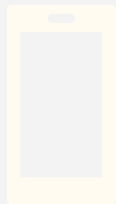
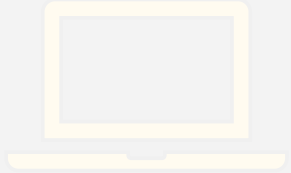


**WHEN YOU  
FEEL LIKE  
QUITTING...**

**THINK ABOUT  
WHY YOU  
STARTED.**

# TOPICS WE WOULD COVER

- **Discussion of articles (daily)**
- **Check your progress**
- **TUESDAY SPECIAL-  
PHRASAL VERB**



## 1) attributes— assign (निर्धारित करना)

# ARTICLE 1

## Counting the COVID toll in India

In order to understand the pandemic's extent, a district-wise estimation is the best bet to arrive at a national total

Last year, in these columns, I wrote about the many challenges in estimating deaths due to COVID-19 in India. While the challenges remain, the need for estimating COVID-19 deaths globally and in India to understand the magnitude of the pandemic is still there. Since direct counting of COVID-deaths is problematic, the approach most commonly used is the “excess” death approach which attributes all deaths beyond what is considered “normal” for that area and time to COVID-19. It includes deaths directly caused by COVID-19 as well as deaths indirectly caused due to the impact on access to care for other diseases during the pandemic and the lockdown.



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ANAND KRISHNAN

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## Global estimates released

While official or unofficial estimates are available for some countries, two estimates have been released globally. Based on the World Mortality Dataset – the largest international dataset of all-cause mortality encompassing 89 countries – researchers estimated excess mortality and reported that it exceeded the number of reported COVID-19 deaths in these countries by over 1.6 times. It also said that this ratio is likely to be conservative as undercounting is likely to be much higher in countries which are not part of this dataset (<https://bit.ly/3eQ3B3e>).

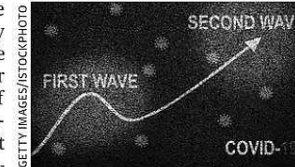
The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), a global leader in this area, recently re-

leased its estimates that put the global toll of COVID-19 deaths by May 3, 2021 at 6.93 million, a figure that is more than two times higher than the reported number of deaths of 3.24 million. India accounted for about 10% of them at 6,54,395 (only second to the United States with an estimated 0.9 million) which is about three times higher than the reported official figure (<https://bit.ly/3omaKtg>).

The lower number of reported deaths does not imply undercounting, deliberate or otherwise. Even if there had been no underreporting of COVID deaths in a country, this ratio is likely to be above one as excess deaths include not only those that are directly caused by COVID-19 and likely to be reported but also those where deaths occurred due to other diseases, either due to a lack of care or as a consequence of COVID-19. It is very difficult to tease out these proportions. We might have a better sense if we look at cause-specific deaths. But that kind of data is still more difficult to get.

## WHO classification

The World Health Organization classifies countries into three categories based on their data availability for COVID-19 excess death estimation. First are those countries that have good data available and excess death estimation is possible (most countries in the above mortality dataset). Second is the group of countries whose data, though not good, is acceptable for use through some process of harmonisation or adjustment for incompleteness leaving the third category of countries where the data on deaths are not available or usable, forcing the adoption of an indirect approach of using data from other countries or a multivariate approach using covariates to arrive at these estimates. India and



China, which together constitute a third of the world population, are currently in category three, and unless we manage to provide some source of usable data, India will have to be content with an estimate generated by an external agency using an indirect approach.

## Data for India

So, what do we know about the COVID-19 mortality in India? Data from Kerala, which is among the States with a very good vital registration system, showed that there has been a decline in deaths in 2020 as compared to previous years (<https://bit.ly/3eTBaj3>). While it will need a closer look, under-registration of all deaths due to the pandemic is a possibility.

Data released by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, shows 22% excess deaths during 2020 in Mumbai region (<https://bit.ly/3hwwHEX>). An analysis of data from a panel of 2,32,000 households maintained by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt Ltd (CMIE) found that deaths from all causes between May and August 2020 numbered almost twice as many as compared with the same period in past years (<https://bit.ly/3wepv4m>).

These are crude estimates based on the number of extra deaths reported as compared to previous years. Estimation of excess deaths needs a more sophisticated statistical approach which first defines a baseline, before estimating excess. The simplest ap-

proach for defining a baseline would be estimation of mean and standard error based on data for the last five years to provide a plausible range for a baseline. We could then see whether the registered deaths are beyond that range to estimate “excess” deaths. There are other statistical approaches which use different data distribution assumptions to define a baseline. This analysis should be done by age and sex on a weekly or monthly basis and correlated to the peaks of the epidemic.

My team analysed data from the Civil Registration System (CRS) of district Faridabad in Haryana, which has been reporting 100% registration of deaths in the past few years. We found that 7% higher deaths have been reported in 2020 as compared to 2016-19, with a 17% increase in deaths above 60 years. By applying well-accepted statistical techniques, we found that the period of excess deaths correlated with the pandemic peaks in the districts. Our range of estimates for excess deaths by different approaches resulted in a ratio of reported to excess death estimate to be between 1.8 to 4. This is not very different from that reported by the IHME, though its ratio included part of the second wave. This estimate should be read in the context that 80% of the population for Faridabad is urban and the serological survey in October 2020 showed a 31% seropositivity.

It is not appropriate to extrapolate these estimates to India as even within India, there are enormous differences in the severity and timing of the epidemic and its health system capacity. Thus, combining data at higher levels is likely to lead to errors in estimation. A district-wise estimation is our best bet to arrive at a national estimate. An assessment of the quality of CRS data should enable

us to identify districts with an acceptable quality of registration and generate estimates for them. For districts which lack an acceptable quality of registration, we could use alternative approaches. We are seeking access to the CRS dataset from the authorities and are hopeful of being able to generate national estimates in the next few months.

## A continuing process

Our experience with an estimation of deaths in past influenza pandemics shows that different agencies come up with different estimates which leads to confusion among policy makers and the public. These are both due to data limitations and differences in statistical approaches. The long-term way out for countries is to address the data limitations while academics work on refining their approaches.

There will be more estimates of COVID deaths in the near future and the numbers will keep changing till some sort of a consensus emerges. However, putting up a number which is contested and debated is still good as it propels people to improve that estimate. The second wave has been deadlier, and undercounting is more likely to have occurred as the pandemic has spread to rural areas, and when access to testing has been adversely affected and many deaths are occurring outside hospitals. Refining our approaches using the first wave in 2020 would enable a much better estimation of the deaths in subsequent waves.

*Dr. Anand Krishnan is Professor of Community Medicine at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi and a Member of the World Health Organization/United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Technical Advisory Group on COVID mortality*

2) churn– stir (मन्थन करना)

3) embarked– begin (प्रारम्भ करना)

4) erstwhile– former (पूर्व)

# ARTICLE 2

## The Biden push-button to West Asia's diplomatic resets

Unprecedented interactions among the major powers are leading to a significant diplomatic churn in the region

Major West Asian nations have recently embarked on new diplomatic engagements with erstwhile rivals that could in time overturn existing regional alignments and possibly end ongoing conflicts that have wreaked havoc in several states.

The most dramatic interactions have been between senior Saudi and Iranian officials. After their meeting on April 9, the first since diplomatic ties were broken in January 2016, there have been other interactions, with technical committees set up to look at specific topics.



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TALMIZ AHMAD

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Again, since early this year, following the removal of the diplomatic and economic blockade on Qatar that was imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, Doha has made efforts to mend ties with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in tandem with similar initiatives of its doctrinal and political ally, Turkey.

On May 5, Turkey and Egypt had their first diplomatic meeting in Cairo after they had broken diplomatic ties in 2013, when Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi was overthrown in a military coup. The two countries, on opposite sides on almost all regional issues, are now exploring how to address their differences.

## The Biden challenge

The driving force behind these unprecedented engagements is the advent of the Biden administration at the helm of politics in the United States. Within his first 100 days

in office, Mr. Biden has signalled a fresh U.S. approach to West Asian affairs. He has taken a tough line on Saudi Arabia, indicating a closer scrutiny of its human rights record and strong opposition to the war in Yemen.

Egypt too has concerns on the human rights issue, while seeking regional support for its differences with Ethiopia. It now seems the U.S. could re-enter the nuclear agreement, but Iran has concerns about the limitations to be imposed on its regional role.

Turkey could also experience fresh winds from Washington. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has built close ties with Russia, while threatening U.S. allies in Syria, the Kurds, with military force. Mr. Biden is expected to be less accommodative; his recent recognition of the Armenian "genocide" is already a fresh rebuke.

Besides concerns in West Asian capitals about a new U.S. approach to each of them, the broader message from Washington is that the U.S. is now likely to be less engaged with the region's quarrels. Mr. Biden seems to be reiterating earlier messages from his predecessors Barack Obama and Donald Trump that regional states should be responsible for regional security.

These signals of new U.S. policies have occurred even as the novel coronavirus pandemic is devastating West Asia. Besides the widespread infections and deaths, the viral epidemic has severely damaged regional economies, while oil prices remain in the doldrums, creating uncertainties for the producer states.

Finally, one major factor that is encouraging these unprecedented interactions among rivals is the recognition that the ongoing regional conflicts, in Syria, Yemen and Libya, despite the massive death and destruction, have yielded no mili-



tary outcome and now demand fresh diplomatic approaches.

## Recent engagements

Following the first meetings in Baghdad, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have made efforts to improve the atmosphere. In a recent interview, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman spoke of seeking a "good and special relationship" with Iran. The Iranian spokesman responded by referring to a "new phase of cooperation and tolerance".

The priority for the kingdom is to end the Yemen conflict: the lethal attacks from the precision missiles of the Houthis, said to have been provided by Iran, are a threat to national infrastructure and morale. The recent Houthi attack on oil-rich Marib is also a Saudi concern, while Iran would like the blockaded Hodeidah port which is partially open, to be used to rush humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Houthis. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has supported the Saudi offer of a ceasefire in Yemen.

Both countries also share concerns relating to the political impasse in Lebanon and the security of the waters of the Gulf and the Red Sea where a "shadow war" on oil and merchant vessels could escalate into a larger conflict. So far, both have paid a heavy financial price for their rivalry: Iran's role in Syria costs its exchequer a few billion dollars every month, while Saudi Arabia has spent several hundred billion dollars in buying

weaponry to sustain its partnership with the U.S.

Turkey is also exhibiting diplomatic dexterity. Despite differences with Egypt over Libya, the East Mediterranean waters and Turkey's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, Turkey now sees Egypt as a valuable partner to promote peace in Libya and pursue their interests jointly in the East Mediterranean by challenging Greece, Israel and Cyprus.

Turkey has also made overtures to Saudi Arabia. Besides accepting the Saudi court verdict on the Khashoggi murder case (<https://bit.ly/3w5QwGS>), Turkey has indicated it could work with the Saudis against the Houthis and facilitate the post-war political process through the Islamist Al-Islah party. Turkey has also offered the kingdom its advanced drones to be used against Houthi missiles.

Qatar's outreach to Egypt has been well received, since it appears to have moderated its ties with the Brotherhood, toned down anti-Egypt broadcasts on Al Jazeera television, and is a major potential investor in Egypt's flagging economy. To promote regional peace, Qatar's Foreign Minister has called for a structured dialogue of the Gulf countries with Iran, affirming its view that Iran is a major presence in the regional security scenario.

## Regional security

These are very early days and all sides concerned have a long way to go in resolving their differences. Egypt remains uneasy about Turkey's ties with the Brotherhood and its regional ambitions. Saudi Arabia has similar concerns about Turkey's doctrinal affiliations and its relations with Iran.

There are difficulties in reshaping Saudi-Iran relations as well. Iran may ease the pressure on the kingdom in Yemen and gradually

yield ground in Iraq; the latter has already conveyed its desire to be free from all external influences. However, Syria will test their diplomatic skills as they explore how to accommodate their competing strategic interests in that devastated country.

Still, this is truly a historic period for West Asian diplomacy: the major states are displaying an unprecedented self-confidence in pursuing initiatives without the heavy hand of western powers that have dominated regional affairs for at least a couple of centuries, and, in pursuit of their own interests, have nurtured deep animosities between many of them. This has left a pervasive sense of insecurity across West Asia and made the countries dependent on western alliances to ensure their interests.

## A role for India?

Today, states in West Asia appear poised to negotiate their strategic interests without outside intrusion. But, given that regional contentions are inter-connected, third-party facilitators will be needed to promote mutual confidence and prepare the ground for a comprehensive regional security arrangement which will bring together regional and external states with a stake in West Asia security.

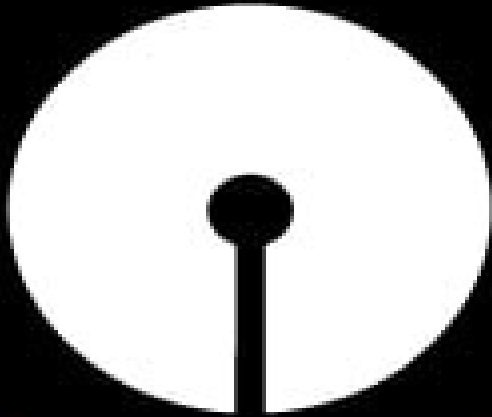
This arrangement will have provisions for participating states to uphold regional peace and promote mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, economic and logistical connectivity areas.

Given its close ties with all the regional states, India is well-placed to build an association of like-minded states – Japan, Russia, South Korea – to shape and pursue such an initiative for West Asian peace.

*Talmiz Ahmad is a former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE*



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5) grave –serious (संगीन)

6) sedition –revolt (विद्रोह)

7) dissenters– protestor(विरोधी)

8) detractor– critic (निन्दक)

9) diatribe– criticism (निंदा)

# ARTICLE 3

## Unwarranted arrest

**The casual resort by the police to the sedition clause continues to cause concern**

The arrest of K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, an MP from Andhra Pradesh, on the grave charge of sedition, is yet another instance of the misuse of the provision relating to exciting “disaffection” against the government. The police in different States have been invoking sedition, an offence defined in Section 124A IPC, against critics of the establishment and prominent dissenters. It is not surprising that Mr. Raju, a vocal detractor of A.P. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, is sought to be prosecuted. However, his arrest is unwarranted, considering that he is being accused of only speech-based offences relating to his diatribe against his party leader and CM. It has predictably, and not without justification, invited charges of political vendetta.

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Mr. Raju has alleged ill-treatment while in CID custody. The Supreme Court has directed that he be examined at the Army hospital in Secunderabad in neighbouring Telangana. His bail petition is likely to be taken up later this week. It is unedifying to note that the CID has also named in the FIR, two television channels to which he gave interviews. While the legal process will take its course, it is once again time for a reflection on the need and relevance of the offence of sedition, a colonial-era provision used to imprison people for political writings in support of Indian independence, to remain on the statute book. That State governments and various police departments are known for the casual resort to prosecution under this section is a poor reflection of the understanding of the law among civil servants everywhere. It is now fairly well known that the section is attracted only if there is an imminent threat to public order or there is actual incitement to violence – ingredients that are invariably absent in most cases. In addition, it remains vaguely and too broadly defined (the term ‘disaffection’ is said to include ‘disloyalty’ and ‘feelings of enmity’), warranting a total reconsideration. Recently, the Supreme Court decided to revisit the constitutionality of this section. While a judicial verdict will be welcome, it would be even more protective of free speech if the Centre abolished the provision.



10) convening—assemble  
(आयोजन)

11) acrimony—bitterness  
(कड़वाहट)

# ARTICLE 4

## Avoiding breakdown

The much-delayed convening of the GST Council comes at a critical juncture

After a gap of over seven months, the GST Council will now meet on May 28, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced last Saturday. That the Council, expected to meet every quarter, has taken possibly the longest pause in its functioning does not set a good precedent. Given the acrimony that transpired in its last few meetings over how the States' GST compensation dues for the pandemic-induced lockdown-dented 2020-21 were to be met, the long break makes Centre-State equations even more awkward. States later reluctantly agreed to the Centre's proposal to raise ₹1.1 lakh crore of GST recompense dues through special market borrowings, after the Finance Ministry backed off from insisting that States raise these loans directly.

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Having ignored the call by several States for a Council meet all these months, citing the Assembly polls, the Centre will now also have to contend with a slight change in equations. The elan of re-elected State governments apart, a large State such as Tamil Nadu can

no longer be expected to toe the Centre's line. There is much big ticket pending work on the Council's plate, but from the States' perspective, it would be necessary to get clarity on the modalities for receiving the ₹63,000 crore GST compensation still due to them, along with this year's dues, in a timely manner. Cash flow visibility would help them gear up better, be it for vaccines or subsequent COVID-19 waves. Even more pressing is the demand to drop GST on material to battle the pandemic, including the 12% tax on oxygen concentrators, 5% on vaccines, and on relief supplies from abroad. Ms. Sitharaman responded with a tweet storm to a missive on the issue from the West Bengal CM to the PM. This suggests an irascible approach on an issue that more States are raising. Tax experts believe solutions are possible to reduce the GST burden. The Centre had dropped the GST on sanitary napkins after strongly defending the tax, with one stated worry being cheap imports. In the case of vaccines and critical supplies, the more the imports, the merrier it is now. That the GST revenue will be shared with the States may be factually correct, but surely, neither the States nor the Centre are eyeing COVID-19 expenses as a fat source of revenue. An accommodative approach from the Centre could ensure India's fiscal federalism framework does not suffer an irretrievable breakdown at this calamitous juncture.





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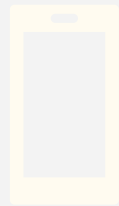
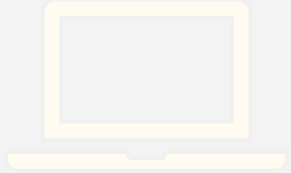
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# Check your progress

# CHECK YOU PROGRESS

1) The cash had been **earmarked** for a big expansion of the programme.

1:00

**Meaning:** set aside (verb)

**Synonyms:** reserve, appropriate

**Antonyms:** use up

2) She **belittled** my riding and driving skills.

**Meaning:** disparage (verb)

**Synonyms:** denigrate, run down

**Antonyms:** praise

# CHECK YOU PROGRESS

3) The ministry proposed for the **abrogation** of the electoral law of 1850.

1:00

**Meaning:** repudiation (noun)

**Synonyms:** revocation, repeal

**Antonyms:** institution

4) Her birthday parties were **raucous** but fun.

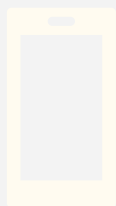
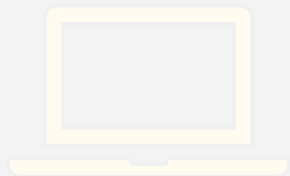
**Meaning:** noisy (adj)

**Synonyms:** discordant, loud

**Antonyms:** mild, quiet



# TUESDAY SPECIAL- PHRASAL VERBS



# VOCABULARY TEST

## 1. abide by

To respect or obey a decision, a law or a rule

## 2. blow up

1. To explode 2. To get angry

## 3. boil down to

To be summarized as



# VOCABULARY TEST

## 4. boot up

To start a computer by loading an operating system or program

## 5. break away

To separate from a crowd

## 6. break down

1. To go out of order, cease to function

2. To lose control of one's emotions



# VOCABULARY TEST

## 7. break into

To enter by force

## 8. break out

To start suddenly

## 9. break out of

To escape from a place by force

## 10. break up

To come to an end (marriage, relationship)







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