

Brent crude vs WTI

- The price of Brent crude, the main international oil contract, fell more than 5% on Tuesday as new Chinese pandemic lockdowns revived recession concerns
- Brent Crude may refer to any or all of the components of the Brent Complex, a physically and financially traded oil market based around the North Sea of Northwest Europe
- In trading, Brent is one of the benchmarks for oil in the wider market.
- WTI usually refers to the WTI Crude Oil futures contract traded on the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX).
- The WTI oil grade is also known as Texas light sweet, although oil produced from any location can be considered WTI if the oil meets the required qualifications.
- Spot and futures prices of WTI are used as a benchmark in oil pricing. This grade is described as light crude oil because of its somewhat low density, and sweet because of its low sulfur content
- WTI is lighter and sweeter, containing less sulfur than Brent, and considerably lighter and sweeter than Dubai or Oman.

World Bank report on pandemic

- The COVID-19 pandemic devastation seemed to have not deterred fraudulent business practices, with a company from Singapore trying to dispatch millions of substandard Chinese KN95 masks to India in 2021 by forging a third-party inspection certificate.
- The issue is sub judice, noted the latest discussion paper released on Tuesday by the World Bank titled “India COVID-19 procurement: challenges, innovations, and lessons”.
- India was not the only target of fraud.
- The report also pointed out that 200 million substandard, soiled and second-hand medical nitrile gloves were purchased by the U.S. from a Thailand-based company during the pandemic.
- The report says India managed to get many things right in its management of the pandemic including putting in place a central procurement agency (HLL Life care Ltd., finalized in February 2020).
- It added that an expert panel was also put in place to develop specifications for overalls, goggles, and N95 masks which supported the Health Ministry’s long-term market development and production of

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THE HINDU

Special marriage act

- The story so far: The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a writ petition challenging provisions of the Special Marriage Act (SMA), 1954 requiring couples to give a notice declaring their intent to marry 30 days before their marriage.

What does the petition seek?

What did the court say?

- The writ petition has called these provisions violative of the right to privacy guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution as they require

couples to give a notice of 30 days before the date of marriage inviting objections from the public.

- The writ petition filed said that the provisions contravene Article 14 on prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, and sex as well as Article 15 on right to equality as these requirements are absent in personal laws.

What are the provisions that have been challenged?

- Section 5 of the SMA requires couples getting married under it to give a notice to the Marriage Officer 30 days before the date of marriage.
- The writ seeks striking down of provisions that follow in Section 6 to Section 10.
- Section 6 requires such a notice to be then entered into the Marriage Notice Book maintained by the Marriage Officer, which can be inspected by "any person desirous of inspecting the same."
- Section 7 provides the process for making an objection such as if either party has a living spouse, is incapable of giving consent due to "unsoundness of mind" or is suffering from mental disorder resulting in the person being unfit for marriage or procreation.

- Section 8 specifies the inquiry procedure to be followed after an objection has been submitted.
- These public notices have been used by anti-social elements to harass couples getting married.

THE HINDU

Iraq crisis

The story so far:

- Iraq's political crisis took a violent turn on Monday when at least 24 people were killed and about 200 injured in clashes between the supporters of influential Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and the country's security personnel.
- Mr. Sadr's supporters breached the concrete walls of Baghdad's highly fortified Green Zone, stormed the Republican Palace of the government and fought the security personnel with mortars and grenades after Mr. Sadr announced that he was quitting politics amid a political deadlock.
- Iraq has failed to form a government after the October 2021 parliamentary elections in which Mr. Sadr's bloc won the most number of seats
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Sadr's bloc won the most number of seats.

- A bitter power struggle between the country's dominant Shia parties have since then plunged the country into a deepening crisis.

What triggered the political crisis?

- The Constitution requires a new Parliament to pick a President first, who then should ask the largest parliamentary bloc to nominate someone for the post of Prime Minister.
- The PM nominee should then form a government and get parliamentary approval.
- For the Presidential election to take place, two-thirds of the representatives should be present in the House.
- The subsequent Presidential votes failed to go through as the quorum was not met as different blocs boycotted parliament sessions once by the Sadrist Movement as the candidate Mr. Sadr supported, Hoshyar Zebari, was barred from running for presidency by the Supreme Court due to corruption charges, and twice by the Shia Coordination Framework, to stop Mr. Sadr's bid to form a majority government.

- Therefore, without a new President, a new government could not be formed.
- In protest against the rival parties' continued boycott of Parliament, Mr. Sadr, in June, asked all the 73 legislators of the Sadrist Movement to resign.
- According to Iraq's electoral laws, if a parliamentary seat becomes vacant, it will be filled by the candidate who receives the second-highest number of votes in their electoral district.
- The Coordination Framework took advantage of the resignation of the Sadrist lawmakers and got them replaced by those who finished second.
- In the new parliamentary make-up, the Coordination Framework became the largest bloc and they went ahead with plans to form their government. Mr. Sadr, now out of Parliament, called for protests in the streets.
- They demand the dissolution of Parliament, early elections and Constitutional amendments to clear blockades that stand in the way of Mr. Sadr forming a majority government.

THE HINDU

India and Sri Lanka

- India has provided assistance of nearly \$4 billion to its neighbour. However, there is a strong case for greater Indian engagement with Sri Lanka, which is still struggling to tackle the crisis.
 - Such engagement need not be confined to liberal loans; it could also include sharing technical expertise or knowledge, or helping the country upgrade skills in different areas of economic activity.
 - According to a cross-section of people in Sri Lanka, agriculture and allied activities are the priority areas where India can make a difference.
 - For instance, Sri Lanka imports a considerable quantity of milk powder.
 - On average, Colombo annually imports dairy products worth \$315 million.
 - Even though this accounts for about 1.5% of its total imports, Sri Lanka's
- What do Sadrists want?**
- Mr. Sadr since then, has called on his loyal supporters to apply pressure through protests.
 - The protestors stormed the Parliament building in the Baghdad's Green Zone several times.

self-sufficiency in dairy production would not only have saved precious foreign exchange, but also reduced despondency among the people during the peak of the crisis. India can help Sri Lanka develop its dairy sector.

- Given Sri Lanka's natural conditions, including an average annual rainfall of around 185 cm, its enormous potential in dairy development remains untapped.
- The poultry sector, which is also in a state of crisis, deserves special treatment because it is unable to come to terms with rising input costs and shortages in animal and veterinary medicines.
- The domestic production of maize, which is largely used as the primary ingredient in domestic poultry feed, is still insufficient to fulfill the demand. This has compelled feed producers to fall back on high-cost alternatives.
- In this area, through its host of agricultural universities, India can share its knowledge on ways to increase both production and productivity.
- Agricultural machinery is another area where Sri Lanka needs a helping hand.
- India's participation in energy projects will be desirable

- School education is another area where India's presence could be more felt.
- India can expand its scheme of establishing smart classrooms and modern computer labs to cover all those institutions teaching children of hill country Tamils
- India can arrange for greater numbers of Buddhist monks to visit places of religious importance here.
- Helping is in India's interest too
- Sri Lanka's political class and civil society, which would have observed closely the efficacy of the country's constructive engagement with India in recent months, should facilitate the success of the programme instead of allowing themselves to be carried away by the anti-India rhetoric of a few groups.

THE HINDU
