

MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS EBOOK

AUGUST 2021

YOUR GUIDE TO MOST IMPORTANT CURRENT AFFAIRS AND EVENTS OF THE MONTH.

IAS | BANKING | SSC | NDA/CDS | AND OTHER COMPETITIVE EXAMS

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Tokyo Paralympics: India's Avani Lekhara wins Gold medal in shooting - All you need to know

Tokyo 2020 Paralympics: Shooter Avani Lekhara on August 30, 2021, won India's first gold medal in the women's 10m Air Rifle Standing (SH1) event at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics Games. 19-year-old Lekhara created a Paralympics record by equaling the world record of Ukraine's Iryna Shchetnik with a score of 249.6 that was set in 2018. Lekhara became the first Indian woman who won India's first gold medal at Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

China's Cuiping Zhang won silver with a score of 248.9 and Ukraine's Iryna Shchetnik won bronze with a score of 227.5.

In the morning, Lekhara had finished 7th with a score of 621.7 in 10m AR Standing SH1 qualification. She has become the 5th Indian athlete who won a gold medal in the Paralympics Games.

India has so far won 19 medals overall across all 11 editions of the Tokyo Paralympics Games since its beginning in 1960, including 5 gold, 8 silver, and 6 bronze.

#IND's national anthem echoes across the arena as Avani Lekhara grabs a historic #Gold for her nation! #Tokyo2020 #Paralympics #ShootingParaSport @AvaniLekharapic.twitter.com/Agv5Wptrfi

— #Tokyo2020 for India (@Tokyo2020hi) August 30, 2021

Phenomenal performance @AvaniLekhara! Congratulations on winning a hard-earned and well-deserved Gold, made possible due to your industrious nature and passion towards shooting. This is truly a special moment for Indian sports. Best wishes for your future endeavours.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) August 30, 2021

Who is Avani Lekhara?

Avani Lekhara is an Indian Paralympic athlete in the shooting event. She currently ranks World No. 5 in Women's 10m Air Rifle standing (SH1). Lekhara became the first Indian woman who won India's first gold medal at Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

Paralympic Games: India's Gold Medal Winners - Full List

Sr. No	Athlete	Games	Event	Medal
1	Murlikant Petkar	Heidelberg 1972	Swimming, Men's 50m freestyle 3	Gold
2	Devendra Jhajharia	Athens 2004	Men's Javelin Throw F44/ 46	Gold
3	Mariyappan Thangavelu	Rio 2016	Men's High Jump F42	Gold
4	Devendra Jhajharia	Rio 2016	Men's Javelin Throw F46	Gold
5	Avani Lekhara	Tokyo 2020	Women's 10m air Rifle Shooting standing SH1	Gold

Tokyo Paralympics 2020: Nishad Kumar wins silver in high jump, Vinod Kumar wins bronze in discus throw

Indian para-athlete Nishad Kumar clinched silver in T46 high jump event at the ongoing Tokyo Paralympics at the Olympic Stadium on August 29, 2021. He became the second Indian to win a medal at Tokyo Paralympics.

Nishad Kumar won the silver medal with a jump of 2.06m. He also created an Asian Record. He had crossed the 2.02 mark in his first attempt.

US's Roderick Townsend won gold in the event with a jump of 2.15m, while Dallas Wise shared the second spot with Nishad after finishing on the same mark.

Another Indian para-athlete Rampal Chahar finished at the fifth spot with a jump of 1.94m.

Absolutely stellar performance by [@nishad_hj](#) to win 2nd for [#IND](#) at [#Tokyo2020](#) [#Paralympics](#)

His confidence & determination has won millions of hearts! Way to go Champ
is extremely proud of you! [#Cheer4India](#) [#Praise4Para](#) [@PMOIndia](#) [@ianuragthakur](#)
[@NisithPramanik](#) [pic.twitter.com/4HzrMF4E3L](#)

— SAI Media (@Media_SAI) [August 29, 2021](#)

Vinod Kumar wins bronze in discus throw

Vinod Kumar won the bronze medal in class F52 discuss throw event, creating a new Asian record at the ongoing Tokyo Paralympics on August 29.

The Indian para-athlete registered throws of 17.46m, 18.32m, 17.80m, 19.12m, 19.91m, and 19.81m in his six attempts. His best attempt of 19.91m came in the fifth try, which earned him the medal.

Poland's Piotr Kosewicz won the gold medal with his best throw of 20.02m in the second attempt while Croatia's Velimir Sandor won the silver with his best attempt of 19.98m.

It's raining medals for India at Tokyo [#paralympics](#) on [#nationalsportsday](#).

Congratulations to Vinod Kumar for bagging the [#Bronze](#) Medal in the Men's Discus Throw - F52 at the [#Paralympics](#) in [#Tokyo2020](#). pic.twitter.com/JH4YOnkWZd

— Biplab Kumar Deb (@BjpBiplab) [August 29, 2021](#)

Bhavina wins India's first silver at Tokyo Paralympics

Indian table tennis player [Bhavina Patel had won the silver medal](#) earlier in the day after losing the gold medal match to China's Zhou Ying 3-0 in Class 4 women's singles event.

She became the first Indian table tennis player ever to win a medal at the Paralympics and the second female athlete after Deepa Malik to win silver in any Paralympics event. Deepa Malik had won silver at the 2016 Rio Paralympics in women's shot put.

Taliban bans co-education in Afghanistan, calls it 'root of all evils'

Taliban has banned co-education in Afghanistan, merely days after it had assured to respect women's rights in the country. **'Men not allowed to teach girls,'** said the newly appointed Taliban Higher Education Minister Shaikh Abdul Baqi Haqqani.

Haqqani said that education activities will take place according to Sharia Law. He also stated that female lecturers would be allowed to teach only female students and not male ones.

"The move has effectively deprived girls from higher education because universities cannot afford to provide different classes nor there are enough human resources," tweeted Afghan journalist Bashir Ahmad Gwakh.

Taliban officially announce ban on coeducation. "Men not allowed to teach girls," Taliban Higher Education Minister says.

—
This will effectively deprive girls from higher education because universities cannot afford it nor there are enough human resources. [#Afghanishtan](#)

— Bashir Ahmad Gwakh (@bashirgwakh) [August 29, 2021](#)

The Taliban higher education minister during a speech at Loya Jirga Tent had said that all educational activities in the country will be conducted according to Sharia Law.

Last week, the Taliban officials in Afghanistan's Herat province had ordered that girls will no longer be allowed to sit in the same classes as boys in universities, calling it the root of all evil in society. The officials said that there is no alternative justification for continuing co-education and the practice must be halted.

Significance

This is the first fatwa that has been issued by the Taliban after its return to power in Afghanistan, following the fall of the Ashraf Ghani-led Afghan government. The order came a day after Shaikh Abdulbaqi Haqqani was appointed as the acting minister of higher education in Afghanistan.

The decision was reportedly taken after a meeting between the Taliban officials, private institution

owners and the university professors. The private universities owners reportedly objected to the Taliban order saying that there aren't enough female teachers.

Reaction to the ban

The move has been slammed by people as it will end up depriving girls of higher education as there are not enough resources to provide different classes.

This is one of the worst fears coming true as this is what the Afghan women have been fearing all along since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan once again after 20 years. Experts also believe that Afghan women are most likely to face an uncertain future under the Taliban's regime despite all their assurances.

The women in Afghanistan are scared that to some degree they are going to see a return of the brutal repression that was seen in the 1990s.

As per educationalists, government universities would not be affected by the decision but private institutes will be impacted as they already have a low number of female students.

Background

The Taliban after its swift takeover of the war-torn country had assured that it will respect women's rights during its first-ever presser. The Taliban assured that it is committed to providing women with their rights based on Islam.

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, in an effort to portray a more moderate stance, had stated that there will be no discrimination against women and they can continue to work in the health sector and other sectors where they are needed.

Afghanistan has only few days of medical supplies left: WHO

Afghanistan will soon run out of essential medical supplies. The war-torn nation has only a few days of medical supplies left to meet the health requirements of the people of the nation, as per the World Health Organisation (WHO).

As per media reports, Afghanistan is falling short of essential medical supplies including medicines for hospitals, medical equipment to contain COVID-19 and nutritional food for acutely malnourished children.

The demand for trauma kits is also high in the nation following the blasts at Kabul airport on August 26, 2021. The closure of the Kabul airport for commercial operations has forced WHO to explore other means to transport medical supplies, informed WHO's emergency director for the Eastern Mediterranean region, Rick Brennan.

Logistics constraints to bring in more medical supplies, Pakistan to support?

As per Brennan, there are several multiple security and logistics constraints to bring in more medical supplies. However, WHO hopes to solve the issue in the coming days, with the support of the Pakistan government.

WHO stated that since Kabul airport cannot be used to bring in medical supplies at this stage, the organisation is hoping to use Mazar-i-Sharif airport and the first flight is hopefully going to come in the next few days.

Afghanistan facing its worst-ever crisis

Afghanistan is currently facing its worst-ever crisis in decades after the Taliban took control of the country following the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani-led Afghan government.

Mass Migration

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated on August 28, 2021 that around 500,000 Afghans may be forced to leave the nation in the next 4 months due to political uncertainty prevailing across the nation.

As per UNHCR, there had not been mass migration from Afghanistan until now but the current evolving situation may force a large number of people to leave the country.

As per Afghan residents, the current political uncertainty along with security issues and unemployment have forced them to leave the country. The UN body has urged the neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to Afghan refugees.

Afghan women facing uncertain future

Several Afghans have shared that they are currently facing an uncertain future. They have worked and studied hard up until now but with the Taliban returning to power in the nation, they do not know what is going to happen to them.

There are already reports of some female healthcare workers not returning to work. There have also been reports of a decline in the attendance of women and children at some facilities.

Food uncertainty

The World Food Programme (WFP) has asked the United Nations to provide it with USD 12 million to provide food for the much-in need Afghans.

As per the UN, nearly 18 million people require global support and they include an estimated 3.5 million internally displaced people.

WHO has expressed its full commitment to assisting the displaced and vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

Background

The World Health Organisation has staff in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces and they are closely monitoring the health situation in the country. Most of the 2,200 health centres that are monitored by WHO are open in the nation.

Bhavina Patel wins India's first medal at Tokyo Paralympics 2020, clinches silver in Para Table Tennis

Tokyo Paralympics 2020: Bhavina Patel created history on August 29, 2021 by becoming the first Indian Table tennis player to win silver medal at Paralympics. She won silver in the women's singles class 4 at Tokyo Paralympics 2020.

She had stormed into the finals after beating China's Zhang Miao 3-2 in her Class 4 match. She ended with a podium finish after losing out China's Zhou Ying 11-7, 11-5, 11-6 in the Class 4 Para Table Tennis finals.

[#Paralympics](#) debut [#IND](#)'s first [#ParaTableTennis](#) medal

Bhavina Patel's maiden appearance ends with a [#Silver](#) medal!

[#Tokyo2020pic.twitter.com/tlNiLxkRLO](https://twitter.com/tlNiLxkRLO)

— [#Tokyo2020](#) for India (@Tokyo2020hi) [August 29, 2021](#)

Bhavina Patel becomes first Indian TT player to win silver in Paralympics

Bhavina Patel has become the first Indian to win silver in the Paralympic Games table tennis event. This is India's first silver in Para Table Tennis and first at Tokyo Paralympics 2020.

The Indian paddler had earlier entered the semifinals of women's singles after beating Serbia's Borislava Peric Rankovic in three straight sets of 11-5 11-6 11-7. She had entered the quarterfinals earlier in the day after defeating Brazil's Joyce de Oliveira in three straight sets (3-0) in the Class 4 round of 16 match.

A stellar match [@BhavinaPatel6](#)!! Not only have you made history by becoming 1st [#IND](#) woman to reach [@Paralympics](#) [#TableTennis](#) semifinal, you did this at your maiden Games defeating an experienced [#Paralympics](#) medalist & World no. 2!! Keep this momentum going [#Praise4Para](#) <https://t.co/YIFVxQhSSw>

— Paralympic India [#Cheer4India](#) [#Praise4Para](#) (@ParalympicIndia) [August 27, 2021](#)

Background

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Governing Board had in 2017 approved the International Table Tennis Federation's request to remove bronze medal play-off in all the medal events at Paralympics and award bronze to both losing semi-finalists.

Class 4 category para athletes have fair sitting balance and fully functional arms and hands. Their impairment may be due to cerebral palsy and a lower spinal cord lesion.

Bhavina Patel had entered the knock-off round after winning one and losing one match in the group round.

Another Indian paddler, Sonalben Manubhai Patel bowed out of the Tokyo Paralympic campaign after losing both of her group matches.

In Tokyo Paralympics table tennis event, there will be no bronze-medal play-off and both the losing semifinalists will be awarded a bronze medal.

BH Series vehicle registration: What is BH-series number plate? How will it benefit vehicle owners?

The Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways in vide notification dated August 26, 2021, introduced a new registration mark for new vehicles under the 'Bharat series (BH-series)' to facilitate seamless transfer of vehicles. Keeping in mind the cumbersome process of re-registration of vehicles when relocating or moving to another state, the Government rolled a new Bharat Series registration mark scheme which will not require an individual to get a new registration number for the vehicle if they move to another state.

The Ministry in a statement said that Bharat Series is an IT-based solution for vehicle registration is an effort by the Government to facilitate mobility. The effort for BH-series aims to ease the re-registration of vehicles while moving to another state.

Currently, the process of re-registration of vehicles while moving to another state requires the vehicle owners to obtain a no-objection certificate from the old state where the vehicle was earlier registered then get the vehicle registered in the new state and pay the road tax. Then file for a refund for the road tax already paid in the old state.

This IT-based solution for vehicle registration is part of a host of citizen-centric steps taken by MORTH to facilitate mobility. pic.twitter.com/XSyPYulAeC

— MORTHINDIA (@MORTHIndia) [August 28, 2021](#)

What is Bharat series (BH-series)?

Bharat series (BH-series) is an IT-based solution for vehicle registration by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to facilitate seamless transfer and re-registration of vehicles while moving from one state to another in India.

The registration facility will be available to Defense personnel, private organizations, individuals working at Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), Central or State governments, or private sector companies which have offices across four or more states/Union Territories.

How will Bharat series benefit vehicle owners?

Under Section 47 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, an individual is allowed to keep a vehicle for only 12 months in any state other than the state where the vehicle is registered. During those 12 months, the individual is required to obtain a new registration in the new state.

With the new Bharat series registration mark, an individual will not be required to apply for re-registration when moving the vehicle from one state to another.

Under the scheme, the motor vehicle tax will be levied for 2 years or in multiple of two. After the completion of the 14th year, the motor vehicle tax will be levied annually which will be half of the amount than the amount charged earlier for that vehicle.

Defence Ministry signs contract worth Rs. 1,349 crores to procure Integrated anti-Submarine warfare

The Ministry of Defence on August 27, 2021, signed a contract worth Rs. 1,349 Crores with Mahindra Defence Systems (MDS) Limited in order to buy 14 Integrated Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Defence Suits (IADS) for the Indian Navy.

Mahindra Defence System (MDS) in an official statement mentioned that the competitive bids from the Indian companies were invited by the Ministry of Defence through open tender wherein the systems fielded were put through detailed trials at the sea to prove their capability.

The Ministry of Defence has continued to demonstrate its resolve to expand the 'Make in India' initiative as well as the resolve of the country to become Atmanirbhar in advanced technologies with the induction of multiple equipment through the homegrown industry.

Ministry of Defence (MoD) has awarded a major contract to Mahindra Defence Systems Limited (MDS) worth Rs 1349.95 Cr for the manufacturing of Integrated Anti-Submarine Warfare Defence Suite (IADS) for modern warships of Indian Navy: Mahindra Defence Systems Limited (MDS)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

Integrated anti-submarine warfare Defence suits: Significance

- As per the Defence Ministry, the contract with an Indian company under the 'Buy and Make (Indian)' category of the defence procurement will be a significant boost to India's Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission.
- It will provide a major fillip to the indigenous defence industry in technology development and production.
- The anti-submarine warfare system will also enhance the anti-submarine warfare capability of the Indian Navy.

What is IADS?

Integrated Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Defence Suits (IADS) is high-end underwater

equipment that uses the latest technology. The system is designed to detect and protect warships from underwater threats.

IADS is a versatile system that is capable of operations from all sizes of warships- small, medium and large. Under it, the complex array of sensors in water undertakes surveillance and provides inputs for the signal processing and analysis, in order to enable necessary action.

Defence Ministry's first major contract with private sector:

The Chairman of Mahindra Defence Systems Limited, SP Shukla said that it is the first major contract with the private sector which is meant for underwater detection and protection from threats. The contract will once again epitomize the success of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

First of its kind technology system developed by Indian firm:

The Chairman of the Mahindra Defence System also informed that this advanced technology system will be the first of its kind which will be developed by an Indian company for the Indian Navy.

Mahindra Defence qualified the bid by proving the capability of the system through comprehensive testing by the Ministry of Defence in actual operations at sea before being announced as the winner. Mahindra Defence Limited will be supplying 14 IADS Systems to the Indian Navy warships.

Tamil Nadu CM Stalin announces Rs 317 crore package for welfare of Sri Lankan refugees

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin announced a **Rs 317.40 crore welfare package** on August 27, 2021 for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in special camps in the State.

The Chief Minister said that Rs 317 crores and 40 lakhs will be allocated to ensure housing and infrastructure in the Srilankan refugee camps in Tamil Nadu. He announced the same under Rule 110.

A special committee will be formed to ensure that sufficient assistance is provided to the refugees in order to improve the basic amenities in the camps.

... . , - . pic.twitter.com/2O190PttSY

— M.K.Stalin (@mkstalin) [August 27, 2021](#)

Key Highlights

- The Tamil Nadu state government will support construction of around 7,400 new houses in the Sri Lankan Tamil camp.
- The state will allocate Rs 30 crore to upgrade the basic facilities in the Sri Lankan refugee camps such as drinking water, toilets and electricity.
- The state will also annually allocate Rs 5 crore to the Sri Lanka Tamil Quality Development Committee to facilitate the development of essential facilities.
- The state government will also provide financial support to educate the children of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees.
- The state will also allocate Rs 10 crore to 5000 youth in the refugee camp to provide skill development training for employment.
- Around Rs 1,25,000 each will be provided to help improve the livelihood of Sri Lankan refugees

living in camps.

Monthly stipend for Sri Lankan Tamils

The Tamil Nadu government has already been providing a monthly stipend to the Srilankan Tamil refugees living in the camps. The monthly stipend will be increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 per head of household and Rs 750 to Rs 1,000 for other members and from Rs 250 to Rs 400 for children under 12 years.

The state government will also provide gas connections and free stove to every family of Sri Lankan Tamils. Besides this, the state will provide a subsidy of Rs 400 per family for 5 gas cylinders. The refugees will also be provided with free rice and utensils from the Salem Steel Plant.

Monitor Livelihoods

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has assured that all steps will be taken to ensure that the Srilankan Tamil refugees live in dignity.

The state will set up an advisory committee to monitor the livelihoods of those living in the camps. The committee will comprise Minorities and Foreign Affairs Minister, Member of the Legislature, Director of Rehabilitation and Secretary to the Ministry of Public Works along with NGO members and government officials.

Background

Around 3 lakh Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have been living in Tamil Nadu since 1983. Among them, around 58,822 members of 18,944 families are living in 108 refugee camps in 28 districts and 13,540 families are staying outside the camps.

50% eligible adults in India vaccinated with at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose: Health Minister

India on August 26, 2021, completed administering at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to half of its eligible adult population, as the country crossed 61.10 crores cumulative vaccinations all over the country.

The Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya via Twitter said that it was an unprecedented milestone as he shared the information.

He further added that this implies that a significant number of people in India have protection against the deadly COVID-19 virus.

India achieves unprecedented milestone!

50% of the eligible population inoculated with the first dose of [#COVID19](#) vaccine.

Keep it up India

Let us fight Corona pic.twitter.com/O6ufYrnUnO

— Mansukh Mandaviya (@mansukhmandviya) [August 26, 2021](#)

The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccination coverage crossed 61 crore landmark on August 26, with nearly 80 lakh vaccine doses being administered in the last 24 hours.

India had launched its mega COVID-19 vaccination drive on January 16, 2021, prioritizing the health care workers and frontline workers

50% adults in India vaccinated: Key Highlights:

- As per the government, based on the projected mid-year count for 2020, the total population of India aged 18 years and above is 94 crores. On August 26, the country completed administering 47.29 crores first doses- which is 50.30% of this projected adult population.
- Daily COVID-19 vaccinations in the country have so far averaged 52.16 lakh doses in August

2021 in comparison to 43.41 lakh doses administered in July 2021.

- As per the Health Ministry, 50% of the population in India above the age of 18 has received the first dose, while 15% is fully vaccinated.
- While single-dose vaccination cover is well and above the national average in smaller states such as Goa, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, the 4 big states- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra are yet to achieve 50% single-dose vaccination cover.

Vaccination of Healthcare and frontline workers:

- Official data has shown that 99% of the healthcare workers have received their first shot of the COVID-19 vaccine and 83% have been fully vaccinated. All the frontline workers have received their first shot and 79% are fully vaccinated.
- As of August 26, 1.03 crores healthcare workers had received their first dose, and 82 lakh had received both their doses.
- A total of 1.08 crores frontline workers had received their first dose and 1.28 crore their second dose.

#IndiaFightsCorona:

More than 31.1 crore doses administered in first 67 days of the World's Largest Free-For-All Vaccination Drive launched on June 21, 2021. (As on August 27, 2021)

But this fight isn't over yet, strengthen the country's endeavour by getting [#Vaccinated](https://twitter.com/bEGCEph7Ow)
[pic.twitter.com/bEGCEph7Ow](https://twitter.com/bEGCEph7Ow)

— #IndiaFightsCorona (@COVIDNewsByMIB) [August 27, 2021](#)

Full vaccination by December 2021:

India has been aiming to fully vaccinate 60% of the Indian population by December 2021 in order to prevent the third wave of COVID-19 pandemic.

For achieving the December target, India will have to administer 10.9 million doses per day across the country.

COVID-19 vaccine in India:

India has so far given approval to 6 COVID-19 vaccines to be administered to the population of the country.

The approved vaccines for adults aged 18 years and above are- **Covishield, Sputnik V, COVAXIN, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson.**

Vaccine for children-

Recently the regulatory authority in India has also given its approval to Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D for children above the age of 12 years.

COVID-19 infections in India:

On the morning of August 27, 2021, India reported 44,658 new cases and 496 deaths related to the infection.

As per the Health Ministry, India's current COVID-19 load stands at 3.26 crores, while the total fatalities are at 4.36 lakh.

Reliance Life Sciences to conduct trials of its recombinant protein-based COVID-19 vaccine

Reliance Life Sciences (RLS), part of India's biggest conglomerate Reliance Industries, will be conducting the trials of its recombinant protein-based COVID-19 vaccine candidate after the country's drug regulatory authority on August 26, 2021, approved the company's application.

The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) gave its approval after reviewing the application at a meeting on August 26, 2021. Reliance Life Sciences is required to approach the Drug Controller General of India seeking permission for conducting Phase-1 trials for its proposed two-dose recombinant protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

What is recombinant protein COVID-19 vaccine?

The recombinant protein COVID-19 vaccine uses the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 as the antigen that helps the human body to recognize and develop a strong booster response to fight off the COVID-19 infection.

What will Phase-1 trials of Reliance Life Sciences include?

The Phase-1 trials by Reliance Life Sciences of its recombinant protein-based COVID-19 vaccine will aid in obtaining data on the safety, pharmacokinetics (PK), tolerability, and mechanism of action of drugs with the objective of determining the maximum tolerated dose (MTD).

The Phase-1 trials will be conducted for 58 days to study the tolerated strength of its vaccine dose. Once the Phase-1 trials will be completed successfully, the company will apply for Phase-2/3 trials.

Where will Phase-1 trials be conducted?

The Phase-1 trials by Reliance Life Sciences of its recombinant protein-based COVID-19 vaccine will be conducted across 10 sites in India across Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

Other recombinant protein COVID-19 vaccine trials

Sanofi, a French pharmaceutical company, and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), a British pharmaceutical

company in July 2021 also received the approval to conduct Phase-3 trials of their adjuvanted recombinant protein Covid-19 vaccine candidate to assess its safety, efficacy, and immunogenicity.

Hyderabad-based company Biological E has also been developing CORBEVAX, a recombinant protein subunit COVID-19 vaccine.

Also read: [COVID-19 Vaccine: Sanofi, GSK receives approval for Phase 3 trials in India](#)

COVID-19 vaccines approved in India

So far, India has six COVID-19 vaccines that got Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Zydus Cadila's three-dose mRNA COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D became the 6th vaccine that got approval on August 21, 2021, and is now India's first vaccine for children between 12 to 18 years old. Other vaccines being administered in India are Serum Institute of India's Covishield, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, Russia's Sputnik V, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.

Also read: [ZyCoV-D: Zydus Cadila to begin vaccine trials for children aged 3-12 years](#)

WEP Nxt: NITI Aayog, Cisco partner to support women entrepreneurs in India

NITI Aayog and Cisco on August 26, 2021 launched the **next phase of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)** to build on their shared commitment to empower women entrepreneurs across India.

The next phase of NITI Aayog's flagship platform titled 'WEP Nxt' will use Cisco's technology and experience of working with India's startup ecosystem to foster more women-owned businesses in the country.

NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, Senior Adviser NITI Aayog Anna Roy, Cisco COO Maria Martinez, Cisco India President Daisy Chittilapilly and Harish Krishnan, Managing Director, Public Affairs and Strategic Engagements were present at the launch.

Women Entrepreneurship Platform

The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) is NITI Aayog's flagship initiative, which was initially launched in 2017. It is the first-of-its-kind unified portal that brings together women entrepreneurs from different backgrounds and gives them access to a wide range of support, resources and learning.

The platform aims to improve industry linkages and awareness about the existing programs and services and provide women more access to peer support, learning resources, fundraising opportunities and mentorship.

WEP aims to be the one-stop solution for all the information and services that are relevant to women entrepreneurs. It currently has over 16,000 registered users and 30 partners.

WEP Nxt

- WEP Nxt will boost the efforts of the Women Entrepreneurship Platform in providing support to women entrepreneurs.
- It will be driven by evidence-based decision-making, based on a focused study of the Indian women entrepreneurs
- It will aim to address the most urgent needs of the women entrepreneurs across six key verticals-

- Community and networking
 - Skilling and mentorship
 - Incubation and acceleration programs
 - Financial
 - Compliance
 - Marketing assistance
- The focused study, which is key in fuelling this transition will be made available for the benefit of the ecosystem.
 - WEP Nxt is aimed at bridging the existing gaps and forge new possibilities for women in India.

Additional initiatives

Cisco, in collaboration with Nasscom Foundation, DeAsra Foundation and Sattva Consulting will enable technology-led engagements to address challenges faced by women entrepreneurs at both individual and enterprise levels and create new growth opportunities.

Significance

The central government through initiatives such as WEP aims to realise the vision of a new India where both men and women will have equal opportunities to build and share in the glory of achievement, shared NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant.

He further added, ***“WEP Nxt will further catalyse this movement and I am confident with Cisco as our partner, this technology platform will soon be the personalized guide for every woman entrepreneur in the country to realize her dreams.”***

As per WEP focused study, up to 170 million jobs could be created by 2030 and India's annual GDP could rise by 1.5% if more women took up entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs in India

According to Sixth Economic Census, women only constitute 13.76% of the total entrepreneurs (8.05 million out of the 58.5 million entrepreneurs) in the country.

DGCA lifts ban on Boeing 737 Max jets in India – Explained

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on August 26, 2021, lifted its ban on Boeing 737 Max jets. India's aviation regulator DGCA lifted the ban on Boeing 737 Max jets approximately after two-and-half years. Since the two crashes of the Lion Air in Indonesia in October 2018 and another of an Ethiopian Airlines 737 Max plane on March 10, 2019, near Addis Adaba, the DGCA put a ban on all Boeing 737 Max planes on March 13, 2019.

In April 2021, the DGCA allowed the Boeing 737 Max jets to fly but with certain conditions in reference to the ban order dated March 13, 2019. Flying Boeing 737 Max jets for commercial purposes till now was prohibited in India. SpiceJet is the only airline in India that operates the Max jets aircraft model in its fleet.

The DGCA explained in its order lifting a complete ban that 17 regulators across the world have permitted operation of Max jet aircraft and 34 airlines with 345 planes of the Max jet model have been operating with over 2.89 lakh cumulative hours since December 2020 with no report of any untoward incident. However, the Max planes will only be allowed to fly 'upon satisfaction of applicable requirements for return to service', added DGCA.

Why was Boeing 737 Max jet aircraft banned?

In October 2018, the 737 Max jet aircraft of Lion Air crashed in the Java Sea right after taking off from Jakarta. In March 2019, an Ethiopian Airlines 737 Max plane crashed near Addis Adaba. Both the incidents left a total of 346 people dead.

Following the second crash, the aviation authorities across the world announced a worldwide ban on the Max jet aircraft model to investigate the cause of these crashes. China was the first country to ban the plane and other airline carriers across the world also put a ban on the 737 Max planes in their fleets.

What was the cause of crashes?

The investigations showed that a design flaw in the aircraft model was the main cause of the crashes. The modern Boeing 737 is installed with a Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), that pushes the aircraft's nose down at elevated Angles of Attack (AoA) leading

to aircraft to stall. During such a stall, the aircraft loses speed and crashes from the sky.

In simple terms, the MCAS will read the data from two Angle of Attack sensors to measure the angle of the wings of the plane. As per Boeing, the MCAS will only activate when both sensors are in sync.

In the cases of both crashes, the investigations revealed that the MCAS falsely read the aircraft's Angles of Attack and commanded the plane's nose down leading to a crash. The investigations also revealed that Boeing had several shortcomings in the MCAS processes.

Why did DGCA lift the ban on Boeing 737 Max jets?

After the investigations, Boeing took up corrective measures to rectify the MCAS and set up simulators and training centers to train the pilot about the MCAS. The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) lifted the ban on Boeing 737 Max in November 2020 followed by the UK, Europe, Japan, Canada, the UAE, Brazil, and Australia.

Rajasthan Government undertakes biodiversity conservation project with French assistance

The Government of Rajasthan, with the assistance of the French development agency **Agence Francaise de Developpement (AFD)**, has undertaken a biodiversity conservation project in the eastern districts of the state.

The State Government has already given its approval to the **Rajasthan Forestry and Bio Development Project** which has been planned by the Rajasthan Forest Department with the support of AFD.

A group of representatives on August 26, 2021, including India's AFD director Bruno Bosle, Rajasthan Principal Secretary forest Sreya Guha, Chief Secretary Niranjan Arya as well as various other state government officials discussed the details of the project in Jaipur.

- , pic.twitter.com/xJz2zWqiW5

— Government of Rajasthan (@RajGovOfficial) [August 26, 2021](#)

Objective:

The Rajasthan Forestry and Bio Development Project funded by the French agency aims to advance with the support of local communities.

The project has provisions to promote eco-tourism as well as other sustainable income generation activities in the target villages with assistance to nearly 1,200 Self-Help groups.

Rajasthan Forestry and Bio Development Project: Key details

- Community empowerment will be the key aspect of the biodiversity conservation project. It will include various efforts to increase the income of the local communities without adversely impacting the local natural ecosystem.
- The districts covered under the project will be Baran, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Bundi, Dholpur, Dausa, Jaipur, Karauli, Jhalawar, Kota, Tonk, and Sawaimadhopur with a focus to conserve the biological diversity.

- Under the project, afforestation will also be carried on 33,000 hectares of land along with the conservation of 40,000 hectares of the existing forest.
- In addition, nearly 3,000 hectares of sacred groves have also been proposed for conservation management under the project.

Other works for biodiversity conservation under project in Rajasthan:

The official release further informed that along with the promotion of the plantation work outside the designated forest areas, restoration of the degraded forest and the development of plant micro reserves will also take place under this project.

Modern technologies will be employed for real-time monitoring of the forest areas. A biodiversity park has also been proposed to be developed in Bharatpur as part of the project.

Tokyo Paralympics 2020: Indian paddler Bhavina Patel storms into quarterfinals

Indian paralympic table tennis player Bhavina Patel stormed into the quarter-finals of Tokyo Paralympics on August 27, 2021 after 3-0 win over Brazil's Joyce de Oliveira in the Class 4 round of 16 match in women's singles.

Bhavina Patel beat Joyce in three straight sets of 12-10, 13-11, 11-6 to clinch the match and move into the next round. The Brazilian player had started the game on a high as she early lead in the game but Bhavina made a strong comeback to save a game point and take the first set 12-10.

The Indian paddler continued to dominate the match in the second set and took the third set as well, coming back from 0-3 to seal the game 11-6 and proceed to the quarterfinals. Bhavina had earlier defeated Great Britain's Megan Shackleton 3-1 in a thrilling match on August 26.

India at Paralympics Update:

Bhavina Patel moves into QF of Women's Singles (Class 4) in Table Tennis with 12-10, 13-11, 11-6 win over Brazil's Joyce de Oliveira. [#Paralympics pic.twitter.com/IYXZOEot14](https://pic.twitter.com/IYXZOEot14)

— India_AllSports (@India_AllSports) [August 27, 2021](#)

Paddler Sonalben Patel loses against Lee Mi-gyu

India's paralympic table tennis player Sonalben Patel lost against South Korea's Lee Mi-gyu on August 26, 2021 in Group D of women's singles, Class 3 in the ongoing Tokyo Paralympics. Mi-gyu beat Sonalben 3-1 (10-12, 11-5, 11-3, 11-9) in a closely fought match.

Sonalben had also lost her opening Group D game against world no. 4, China's Qian Li by 3-2.

Tokyo Paralympics 2020: Other Results

Indian archer Rakesh finishes 3rd, Shyam finishes 21st

In the men's individual compound archery ranking round, ace Indian archer Rakesh Kumar finished 3rd, while Shyam Sundar Swami finished 21st on August 27, 2021.

Take a look at the results of Men's Individual Compound Open Ranking Round

India's [@RakeshK21328176](#) (Class-W2) finishes 3rd with a Personal Best score of 699/720 [@Shyamsu15152060](#) (Class-ST) finishes 21st with a Season Best score of 682/720 [#Cheer4India](#) [#Praise4Para](#) [pic.twitter.com/sVyAe0d2rS](#)

— SAI Media (@Media_SAI) [August 27, 2021](#)

Powerlifter Sakina Khatun finishes 5th

India's Sakina Khatun finished 5th in the final of women's 50 Kg powerlifting at Tokyo Paralympics on August 27. She successfully lifted 90 kg in her first attempt but was not able to go above that hence, missing out on a medal. Sakina Khatun had won a bronze medal in Commonwealth Games.

India at Paralympics Update:

Sakina Khatun secures 5th position in Women's 50kg Event (with best attempt of 93kg).

[#Paralympics](#) [pic.twitter.com/ikkZ48HUKT](#)

— India_AllSports (@India_AllSports) [August 27, 2021](#)

Jyoti Balyan finishes 15th in compound archery

Archer Jyoti Balyan finished 15th in the women's individual compound open ranking round with 671 points. She was ranked 11th out of 24 with 168 points in the first round.

Merger of three supermassive black holes discovered by Indian astrophysicists: All you need to know

In a major breakthrough, **Indian astrophysicists have discovered three supermassive black holes merging together to form a triple active galactic nucleus.** The three black holes have been discovered at the centre of a recently discovered galaxy that increases the possibility of further spotting such rare occurrences.

The study which was published as a letter in the Journal Astronomy and Astrophysics was primarily intended to investigate the nature of the nuclear emission from the galaxies in the interacting pair NGC 7733NGC 7734.

The researchers in the paper said that they have confirmed the existence of the third galaxy, NGC 7733N, in the NGC 773334 group. They added that it appears to overlap with the northern arm of NGC 7733.

Indian researchers discover three supermassive black holes from three galaxies merging together to form a triple active galactic nucleus in our nearby universe

Read more: <https://t.co/y8BDohOTg5> pic.twitter.com/1ekpWglTBQ

— PIB India (@PIB_India) August 27, 2021

What is a Supermassive black hole?

A black hole is formed from the death of a star with such a gravitational field that the matter gets sucked into the small space under it, trapping the light of the dead star.

Supermassive black holes are difficult to detect as they do not emit any light, however, they can reveal their presence by interacting with their surroundings.

When the dust and gas from the surroundings fall onto a supermassive black hole, some of the mass is swallowed by the black hole, however, some of it is converted into energy and is emitted as electromagnetic radiation that makes the black hole appear luminous.

They are called the Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN) and release a huge amount of energy

and ionized particles into the galaxy and its environment.

Triple merging galaxy:

A team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) came upon the rare occurrence while studying a known interacting galaxy pair, NGC7733, and NGC7734.

They detected the unusual emissions from the center of NGC7734, as well as a large, bright clump along the northern arm of NGC7733. As the researchers dug deeper, they found that the clump has been moving with a different velocity in comparison to the galaxy NGC7733 itself, indicating that it was not part of the galaxy instead it was a small separate galaxy behind arm.

Researchers led by a team comprising Mousami Das, Jyoti Yadav, and Sudhanshu Barway from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, used data from the Ultra-Violet Imaging Telescope (UVIT) onboard the first Indian Space Observatory ASTROSAT, infrared images from the optical telescope in South Africa, and the European Integral field optical telescope called MUSE mounted on Very Large Telescope (VLT) in Chile.

The researchers said in a statement that the UV and H-alpha images also supported the presence of the third galaxy by revealing the star formation along with the tidal tails, which could have formed from the merger of NGC7733N with the larger galaxy.

Interaction and merger of the galaxies: What do we know?

The interaction and the merger of the galaxies are the main drivers of galaxy evolution which leads to the growth of supermassive blackhole bulges and massive galaxies.

Interaction of the galaxies starts when they come close and exert **tremendous gravitational forces on each other, during which, the supermassive black holes can get further close and the dual black holes start consuming gas from their surroundings** and become dual AGN (Active Galactic Nuclear).

The paper mentioned that the galaxy interactions can also lead to triple merger systems, and if the SMBHs of the individual galaxies are accreting, a triple AGN system will form.

What happens during a collision between two galaxies?

The team from IIA explained that if two galaxies collide, their black hole will also come closer by

transferring the kinetic energy to the surrounding gas.

The distance between the black holes decreases with time until the separation between them is around parsec (3.26 light-years).

The two black holes are then unable to lose any further kinetic energy in order to get even closer and merge, it is known as the final parsec problem.

However, the presence of the third black hole can solve this problem as the dual merging black holes can transfer their energy to the third black hole and merge with each other.

What is ISIS-K? Terror Group who claimed responsibility for Kabul Bombings, How is it connected with Taliban?

Kabul Airport Blast: Two bombing attacks outside Kabul's airport on August 26, 2021, killed at least 13 US service members and 60 Afghans while left 18 US service members and more than 140 Afghans wounded, reported the Pentagon and Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health. Two suicide bombers and a gunman attacked one of the main entrances at the Hamid Karzai International Airport of Kabul and another bomber went off nearby at a hotel outside the airport followed by gunmen firing rounds. The blasts happened just a few hours after the US Intelligence Services and the US Embassy had issued a warning of an imminent threat at Kabul's airport from ISIS-K.

Earlier in the week, US President Joe Biden said, "Every day we're on the ground is another day we know that ISIS-K is seeking to target the airport and attack both US and allied forces and innocent civilians."

The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State Khorasan or ISIS-K has claimed the responsibility for the attacks and stated in its claims that the attacks targeted US troops and their Afghan allies. The battle between the US and the Taliban along with its militant partners in Afghanistan has been ongoing for the past 20 years. However, Islamic State Khorasan, also known as ISIS-K is the lesser-known rival but the biggest immediate threat to the Americans and their Afghans allies amid the fast-tracked evacuation by the US troops at the Kabul airport before August 31.

Who is ISIS-K?

The Islamic State Khorasan or ISIS-K was formed in 2014 whose founding members were militants who left the Pakistani Taliban and the Afghan Taliban. The group operates as an ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan. Khorasan refers to a historical term for a region that is present-day Afghanistan and parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. The group is also referred to as IS-K.

In 2015, the group's leader and other top commanders pledged their allegiance to the then Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and declared themselves as the leaders of a new ISIS

territory in Afghanistan.

The group has been known for its violent tactics, strict interpretation of Islamic Law, deadliest terror attacks in recent years, massacring civilians at mosques, hospitals, shrines, etc. In 2020, the ISIS-K carried out a gruesome attack at maternity ward run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

In 2016, ISIS-K lost its leaders during US raids and airstrikes. Since June 2020, new commander Shahab al-Muhajir has been leading the group, a UN report stated.

What is the relationship of ISIS-K and Taliban?

Both groups are hardline Sunni Islamist militants and have claimed to be hardcore supporters and flag-bearers of jihad, however, they two are actually enemies with massive differences relating to religion and strategy. The ISIS-K group even denounced the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. The Taliban was congratulated by several jihadist groups but ISIS-K did not.

The ISIS-K has also been critical of the deal that the Taliban and the US struck in Doha in 2020. After the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the ISIS-K accused the Taliban of abandoning the cause of the jihadist, as per the SITE Intelligence Group.

What threat does ISIS-K pose?

As per the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report, the ISIS-K could have between 500 to 10,000 fighters. The affiliate remains active and dangerous, the report said.

The UN Counterterrorism in its report in June 2020 reported that the ISIS-K has carried up to 77 attacks in Afghanistan in the first four months of 2021 compared to 21 attacks in the first four months of 2020. The attacks included a school bombing, a strike against Kabul University, and an attack on Kabul's airport in July.

Experts also speculate the ISIS-K is linked to the Haqqani network. Several ISIS commanders and fighters also have strong links to Al-Qaeda. Amid the withdrawal of US troops by August 31, the analysts strongly speculate the rivalry between the Taliban and the ISIS-K will escalate. The ISIS-K being a relatively weakened organization as of now will try to infuse chaos and more deadly attacks. With no US troops, spies, armed drones, analysts fear that manifesting the vision of US President Joe Biden of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups would be difficult.

India, UK COVID-19 study sets Guinness World Record for world's largest scientific collaboration

A worldwide COVID-19 study led by the experts of the UK and conducted at Indian hospitals among others around the world has been awarded **the 'Guinness World Records' title for the world's largest scientific collaboration**. The study involved over 1,40,000 patients in 116 countries.

The record for 'Most authors on a single peer-reviewed academic paper' is now held by the Birmingham and Edinburgh University after 15,025 scientists around the globe contributed to the major research into the impact of Coronavirus on surgical patients.

In India, the collaborative study on COVID-19 was conducted across 56 hospitals- among the largest alongside Italy and Germany.

A global research project led by our experts has been awarded the Guinness World Records title for the world's largest scientific collaboration - after 15,000 scientists explored the impact of COVID-19 on surgical patients <https://t.co/6RdGfYPBBx> pic.twitter.com/Jorfk558Wg

— UniBirmingham News (@news_ub) [August 26, 2021](#)

Objective:

The Indian-origin surgeon Aneel Bhangu from Birmingham University, the co-lead author of the study said that the study aimed at improving the understanding of the deadly virus and help in saving as many lives as possible.

Dr. Bhangu added that the study marks the commitment and the hard work of thousands of medical colleagues around the **world to understand the changes that are required in how surgery must be delivered if we are to beat the virus and reduce its impact on the surgical patients.**

World's largest COVID-19 study: Key takeaways

- The COVIDSurg Collaborative, launched in March 2020, has provided data needed to support

the changes to surgical delivery in the fastest time frame ever seen by a surgical research group.

- In the study funded by the UK Government's National Institute of Health Research, the researchers have concluded that **the patients waiting for the elective surgery must be treated as a vulnerable group and access COVID vaccines before the general population in order to avoid thousands of post-operative deaths linked to the virus.**
- The research has also explored the timing of the surgery after COVID infection, preoperative isolation, and risks of blood clots.
- The scientists, overall, estimated that the global prioritization of pre-operative vaccination for elective patients can prevent an additional 58,687 COVID-19 related deaths in one year.
- The COVIDSurg Collaborative international team of researchers published its findings in the 'British Journal of Surgery' which is also Europe's leading surgical journal, after studying data from 1,667 hospitals in the countries including the UK, India, Brazil, Australia, the UAE, China, and the US.

Why the collaborative COVID-19 study was significant?

The study was seen to be particularly significant for low and middle-income countries where the access to COVID-19 vaccination remains limited and the mitigation measures such as COVID-free surgical pathways and nasal swab screening to reduce the risk of virus-related complications are not available for many patients.

Co-Author James Glasbey, a surgical trainee from Birmingham University commented that every day there is news that waiting lists are growing and the patients are unable to access the surgery that they need.

The situation is sadly deteriorating all over the world and the policymakers can use the data from scientific collaboration to safely restart elective surgery.

As per the experts, during the first wave of the COVID pandemic, up to 70% of elective surgeries were postponed. It resulted in an estimated 28 million procedures being delayed or canceled.

How the world's largest COVID-19 study was conducted?

Co-author of the study James Glasbey has informed that over 15,000 surgeons and anaesthetists from across 116 nations came together in order to contribute to the study making it the largest every scientific collaboration. It surpassed even groundbreaking research from the Large Hadron

Collider at CERN in Switzerland.

Making of Indian Constitution e-exhibition launched: What will it showcase? - Know all about it

Making of the Constitution virtual photo exhibition was inaugurated on August 27, 2021 by Union Ministers GK Reddy, Anurag Thakur, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Meenakshi Lekhi and L Murugan. The virtual film poster exhibition “**Chitranjali @ 75**” was also inaugurated on the occasion at the National Media Centre.

Union Culture Minister GK Reddy, Information & Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur, and other ministers launch collage of 'Making of the Indian Constitution and 'Chitranjali @ 75'

pic.twitter.com/S7p6Sk8Xcd

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

The e-exhibition of '**Making of Indian Constitution**' aims to help youngsters not only know more about the Indian constitution but also familiarize them with their rights, said Union I&B Minister Anurag Thakur.

The Minister pointed out that it is little known that the Indian Constitution was not typed, it was handwritten.

It's little known that the Indian Constitution was not typed, it was handwritten. The launch of e-exhibition of 'Making of Indian Constitution' will help youngsters not only know more about it but also familiarize them with their rights: Union I&B Minister Anurag Thakur

pic.twitter.com/W6avcDtjz6

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

Making of the Constitution exhibition: Significance

The virtual Making of the Constitution photo exhibition will be in 11 regional languages. The exhibition comprises a unique collection of photographs comprising milestones with speeches, videos and interactive quizzes for public participation.

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur informed that the government will also soon launch programs like 'Know Your Constitution'.

'Chitranjali @ 75'- virtual film poster, is a reflection of 75 years of Indian Cinema, which is the mirror of our society and has contributed both before and after independence: Union Minister Anurag Thakur pic.twitter.com/FIjE40WRq3

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

What is Chitranjali @ 75?

Chitranjali @ 75 is a virtual film poster, which reflects 75 years of Indian Cinema that is a mirror of our society and has contributed both before and after independence, said Union Minister Anurag Thakur.

Other Details

A montage was played as a part of the inauguration of the virtual exhibition of 'Making of Indian Constitution' and Chitranjali @ 75.

Union Minister for Culture, G Kishan Reddy while speaking at the event lauded the efforts under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and said, **"Our preparations began in March and since August 15, celebrations continue across the country as 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'."**

The Minister stated that **"no matter who becomes the Prime Minister or Culture Minister in 2047, for the next 25 years from now when India turns 100, we should work for its development and see where it stands globally then (2047)."** The Minister urged the youth to contribute in the country's development.

No matter who is PM or Culture Minister in 2047, for the next 25 years from now when India turns 100, we should work for its development and see where it stands globally then (2047). I urge the youth to contribute in country's development: Union Minister GK Reddy pic.twitter.com/5X2HVGRLSP

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

Apurva Chandra, I&B Secretary said that the Making of the Constitution exhibition will propagate the 75 years of heritage of our constitution and our films to the youth. He continued by saying **"'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' will continue till 15th August 2023, which will be coordinated by Ministry of Culture."**

#WATCH | This e-exhibition will propagate the 75 years of heritage of our constitution and our films to the youth...'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' will continue till 15th August 2023, which will be coordinated by Ministry of Culture: Apurva Chandra, Secretary, I&B pic.twitter.com/ze8eUliD4s

— ANI (@ANI) [August 27, 2021](#)

Ten unknown facts about Indian Constitution

1. The Indian constitution is the longest written constitution of any country.
2. It was created and adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949 and became effective on January 26, 1950.
3. With the adoption of the constitution, India ceased to be a dominion of the British Crown and became a sovereign democratic Republic of India.
4. The day the constitution was adopted and signed by 284 members- November 26- is celebrated as National Law Day.
5. The original Indian Constitution was written in both Hindi and English language. It was written by Prem Behari Narain Raizada in a flowing italic style with beautiful calligraphy.
6. Each page of the constitution was uniquely decorated by artists from Shantiniketan including Beohar Rammanohar Sinha and Nandalal Bose.
7. The Constitution was published in Dehradun. Over 2000 amendments were made before it was finalised.
8. The original copies of the Indian constitution have been preserved safely in a helium-filled case at the Parliament House in New Delhi.
9. Two words "secular" and "socialist" were added to the preamble by the 42nd amendment act in 1976, during the Emergency.
10. **The Indian Constitution has borrowed provisions from constitutions of various other countries:**
 - India borrowed the concept of suspension of fundamental rights during Emergency rule from the Weimar Constitution of Germany.
 - India's Preamble was inspired by the US Constitution's Preamble and both start with "We the People".
 - The laws governing the Supreme Court were adopted from Japan's Constitution.

- The five-year plan's concept was borrowed from the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
- The ideals of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity that appear in the Preamble were borrowed from the French Constitution.

Kabul bomb blast: More than 60 Afghans, 12 US troops killed in Kabul airport attack; IS claims responsibility

Two suicide bombers and gunmen attacked the crowd of Afghans who were flocking to Kabul's airport on August 26, 2021. The attack transformed a scene of desperation into one of horror in the waning days of airlift for those who were trying to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

As per the Afghan and US officials, the Kabul bomb blast has killed more than 60 Afghans and 12 US troops.

The United States general overseeing the evacuation from Afghanistan vowed that the United States will go after the perpetrators of the bombings and also warned that more such attacks are expected.

The head of the US Central Command, Gen. Frank McKenzie said, **"We are working very hard right now to determine attribution, to determine who is associated with this cowardly attack. And we are prepared to take action against the."**

A ditch by Kabul airport was filled with bloodsoaked corpses after dozens of civilians were killed in attacks.

Officials put the U.S. death toll at 12 service members, making it one of the deadliest incidents for American troops of the entire 20-year war <https://t.co/5XA52tR6KL> [pic.twitter.com/dUilrSbzws](https://twitter.com/dUilrSbzws)

— Reuters (@Reuters) [August 26, 2021](#)

Islamic State group claims responsibility, US determined to evacuate Americans

Shortly after General McKenzie spoke, **the Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the killings on its Amaq news channel.**

However, Gen. McKenzie said that the **Kabul bomb blast will not stop the United States from evacuating the Americans and others out of Afghanistan and that the flights out were continuing.**

"We will not forgive. We'll not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay," US President Joe Biden to Kabul bombers pic.twitter.com/H3BFTLzZ77

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

McKenzie informed that there was a large amount of security at Kabul airport and that the alternate routes were being used to get the evacuees in. In addition to the many Afghans, the US State Department estimated that there were as many as 1,000 Americans in war-torn Afghanistan who may want help getting out.

We'll rescue the American citizens from Afghanistan. We'll get our Afghan allies out and our mission will go on: US President Joe Biden from White House pic.twitter.com/6f6ZfgxEqP

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Kabul Airport Bomb Blast

- The US officials have informed that 11 Marines and one Navy medic were among those who have been killed in Kabul Bomb Blast. Gen. McKenzie said that another 15 service members were wounded.
- Officials have further warned that the death toll could grow and more than 140 Afghans have been wounded.
- One of the bombers had struck people knee-deep in a wastewater canal under the sweltering sun, throwing bodies into the fetid water. Those who moments earlier were hoping to get out on flights were seen carrying the wounded to ambulances in a daze.
- An Italian Charity, Emergency, that operates hospitals in Afghanistan informed that it had received at least 60 patients wounded in the Kabul Airport attack, in addition to the 10 who were dead when they arrived.
- The Afghan official who has confirmed of 60 Afghans being killed in an attack had spoken on the condition of anonymity.

Kabul Bomb Blast: Where the attacks happened?

John Kirby, Pentagon spokesperson informed that one explosion was near the entrance of Kabul airport and another was a short distance away by a hotel.

Gen. McKenzie of the US said that clearly some of the failures at the airport allowed the suicide

bomber to get close to the airport gate.

He further said that the Taliban has been screening people outside the gates, though there has been no indication that Taliban has deliberately allowed the Kabul bomb blast to happen. The US has now asked the Taliban commanders to tighten security around the airport's perimeter.

The second blast was at or near the Baron Hotel, where many people, including Britons, Afghans, and Americans were told to gather in the recent days before heading to the airport for evacuation.

Warnings emerged from Western capitals about a threat from IS:

Before the deadly Kabul airport blast, warnings from the Western Capitals were already coming regarding a threat from the IS, which has seen its rank boosted by the Taliban's freeing of prisoners during its advance through Afghanistan.

The acting US ambassador, shortly before the attack, said that the security threat at the Kabul Airport overnight was clearly regarded as credible, as imminent as compelling.

The U.S. Embassy had also warned the citizens at three airport gates to leave immediately because of an unspecified security threat. Britain, Australia, and New Zealand had also advised their citizens not to go to the airport.

Before the Kabul airport blast, Taliban had sprayed water cannon at those who were gathered at one airport gate to try to drive the crowd away, as someone had launched the tear gas canister everywhere.

ISIS-K in Afghanistan behind Kabul Airport attack: Who are they?

The Islamic State Khorasan, or ISIS-K, the terrorist group's affiliate in Afghanistan is far more radical than the Taliban, who recently has taken control of Afghanistan in a lightning blitz and has condemned the attack.

The group which was created six years ago are the Sunni extremists of IS, with links to the group's more well-known affiliate in Syria and Iraq, have set out series of brutal attacks, targeting mainly the Afghanistan's Shiite Muslim minority, including a 2020 assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul in which they killed women and infants.

The Taliban militants have fought against the Islamic State militants in Afghanistan, where Taliban

took back control nearly 20 years after they were ousted in a US-led invasion. The US went in following the 9/11 attacks which Al-Qaeda had orchestrated while being sheltered by the group.

Countries condemn Kabul Bomb blast:

The **Prime Minister of UK, Boris Johnson** condemned the terrorist attack on Kabul. He informed that the majority of those eligible have been evacuated from Afghanistan and that the teams are trying to get people as fast as they can in the remaining hours.

The barbaric terrorist attack in Kabul shows the importance of continuing Operation PITTING to the end. The majority of those eligible have been evacuated and our teams are getting through to people as fast as they can in the hours that remain to us: UK PM Boris Johnson

pic.twitter.com/RGdtb9HG4X

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also condemned the terrorist attack on Kabul and said that the latest incident underscores the volatility of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan.

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemned the terrorist attack at the Kabul airport

"The incident underscores the volatility of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan," UN Secretary General Antonio pic.twitter.com/pUdlR0yOgc

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

India in a statement condemned the bomb blasts at the Kabul airport and extended heartfelt condolences to the families of victims of these terrorist attacks.

India strongly condemns the bomb blasts in Kabul. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of victims of this terrorist attack. Today's attacks reinforce the need for the world to stand unitedly against terrorism & all those who provide sanctuaries to terrorists: MEA

pic.twitter.com/PsDFOa7wuN

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Countries to continue engagement with Afghanistan:

Some countries have already ended their evacuation and have begun to withdraw their diplomats and soldiers, signaling the beginning of the end of one of the largest airlifts in history.

The Taliban in Afghanistan had insisted that the foreign troops must be out by the US's self-imposed deadline of August 31.

However, some countries, even though have ended the evacuation have said that they will continue the engagement with war-torn Afghanistan even after August 31.

Chancellor Angela Merkel from Germany said that the country will try to help Afghans who worked with its soldiers and aid organisations and wish to leave Afghanistan even after August 31.

Germany will try to help Afghans who worked with its soldiers and aid organizations and wish to leave Afghanistan even after an Aug. 31 deadline to end a U.S.-led military evacuation operation, Chancellor Angela Merkel said <https://t.co/5SwzqbJFx9> [pic.twitter.com/5LpVHnyana](https://t.co/5SwzqbJFx9)

— Reuters (@Reuters) [August 26, 2021](#)

Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau said that the country will continue its engagement in Afghanistan even as the Canadian forces in Kabul have ended evacuation efforts ahead of August 31.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country would continue its engagement in Afghanistan even as Canadian forces in Kabul ended evacuation efforts ahead of an August 31 deadline <https://t.co/hsL1ZNLKdU> [pic.twitter.com/dMm7LvBh4m](https://t.co/hsL1ZNLKdU)

— Reuters (@Reuters) [August 26, 2021](#)

Background:

Afghanistan has been facing a severe political crisis after Taliban took over the charge of the country. The events unfolded when the US decided to withdraw its troops from the country after 20 years, bring the militant regime of Taliban back to power.

PM Modi to dedicate renovated Jallianwala Bagh Smarak complex, museum galleries to nation on August 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will **be dedicating the renovated complex of Jallianwala Bagh Smarak** to the nation through video conferencing on August 28, 2021.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) released an official statement saying that the Prime Minister will dedicate the renovated monument to the nation at 6.25 pm.

PM Modi will also inaugurate four museum galleries at the Smarak. Several development initiatives undertaken by the government to upgrade the complex will also be showcased on the occasion.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate renovated complex of Jallianwala Bagh Smarak to the nation on Aug 28th via video conferencing. He will also inaugurate museum galleries developed at the Smarak. pic.twitter.com/xbjhOd9yNX

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Significance

Four Museum galleries have been created through reuse of redundant and underutilised buildings. The galleries will showcase the historical value of events that unfolded in Punjab during that period.

The galleries will have a fusion of audio-visual technology, including projection mapping and 3D representation, as well as art and sculptural installations. A 'Sound and Light' show will also be set up, which will showcase the events that took place on the fateful day, April 13, 1919.

Several development initiatives have been undertaken at the complex:

- Several elaborate heritage restoration works have been carried at the Smarak in line with Punjab's local architectural style.
- The Shaheedi well has also been repaired and restored with a redefined superstructure.
- The flame monument, also known as the heart of the Bagh, has also been repaired and

restored.

- Waterbody has been rejuvenated as a lily pond
- The pathways have also been made broader for better navigability.
- Besides this, several new and modern amenities have been added, including redefined paths of movement with appropriate signages.
- Illumination of strategic spots
- Landscaping and hardscaping with native plantation
- Installation of audio nodes throughout the garden
- Newer areas have been developed for housing Amar Jyot, Salvation Ground and Flag Mast.

The renovated complex of Jallianwala Bagh Smarak will be dedicated to the nation in the presence of Union Minister of Culture, Housing and Urban Affairs, Governor of Punjab, Chief Minister of Punjab, Chief Ministers of Haryana, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, Ministers of State for Culture and all Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha MPs from Punjab and members of Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial Trust.

Jallianwala Bagh massacre

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre, took place on 13 April 1919. On the fateful day, a large crowd had gathered peacefully at the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab in protest against the arrest of freedom fighters Dr. Satya Pal and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlu.

The Jallianwala Bagh had only one exit and was enclosed by buildings on the other three sides.

British Brigadier-General R. E. H. Dyer ordered his soldiers to surround the Bagh, block the exit and shoot at the crowd.

The soldiers on command continued to fire till their ammunition was exhausted even as protestors tried to escape the place.

Over 1000 people martyred in the fateful shooting and over 1,200 others were injured.

SAMRIDH Scheme: What is it? Know key features

SAMRIDH Scheme: The Ministry of Electronics and Information and Technology (MeitY) on August 25, 2021, launched the Start-up Accelerators MeitY for Product Innovation, Development, and Growth (SAMRIDH). The scheme aims to boost the start-up ecosystem in India and aid in creating a conducive platform for Indian Software Product start-ups to secure investments for scaling their products and business. The MeitY Start-up Hub (MSH) is implementing the SAMRIDH scheme.

PM Narendra Modi in his Independence Speech on August 15, 2021, had said that start-ups are the new types of wealth creators in our country. The Indian government is relentlessly working towards making Indian start-ups and the start-up ecosystem the best in the world. The Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in an event had said that the Indian government will support the start-ups and entrepreneurs in the initial risk phase.

What is SAMRIDH scheme?

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on August 25, 2021, launched the Start-up Accelerators MeitY for Product Innovation, Development, and Growth (SAMRIDH) scheme. Implemented by the MeitY Start-up Hub (MSH), the scheme aims at creating a conducive platform for Indian Software Product start-ups to secure investments for scaling their products and business.

How will SAMRIDH scheme select start-ups?

The scheme will select start-ups in India that are all set for the acceleration stage. The Government will offer financial assistance, mentorship, and other required support to the selected start-ups at this stage.

The scheme will initially aid in accelerating 300 start-ups by offering customer connect, international expansion opportunities, and investor connects in the next 3 years.

What will SAMRIDH scheme offer to start-ups?

(i) An investment of up to Rs 40 lakh to the start-up based on current valuation,

(ii) Provide growth state of the start-up through selected accelerators,

(iii) Facilitate equal matching investment by the accelerator/investor,

How will SAMRIDH scheme benefit India and its start-up ecosystem?

The scheme will aid in providing financial support to the start-ups and improving the level of skill sets required to be successful. Technology and energy of the youth and start-ups ecosystem is crucial for inclusive development, said Vaishnaw at the launch event of the SAMRIDH scheme

Society today, especially those living in the remote parts of the country, requires a lot of initiatives, new services, and new products that will induce a better life for the marginalized sections of society. Leveraging the potential of start-ups and schemes such as SAMRIDH will help in realizing the vision of better life and inclusive development across the country.

The scheme will further accelerate the growth of the start-up ecosystem in India. The Indian start-up ecosystem has witnessed the emergence of 63 unicorns. With a total valuation of \$168 billion, the Indian start-up ecosystem is now the 3rd largest unicorn hub. A Unicorn is referred to as a private start-up valued at over \$1 billion.

Fastest orbiting asteroid in solar system discovered by US astronomers: Know more in details

The Astronomers at the Carnegie Institution of Science (CIS) announced that they have discovered the **fastest orbiting asteroid ever spotted in the solar system**.

The research leader and an astronomer at the CIS, Scott Sheppard said in a statement that though telescope time for the astronomers is very precious, the international nature and the love of the unknown make astronomers very willing to override their own science and follow up new, interesting discoveries like this.

The latest work was reported to the Minor Planet Centre. It is an official body for observing and reporting on minor planets under the auspices of the International Astronomical Union.

Meet 2021 PH27, which is about 1 kilometer in size and orbits the Sun in just 113 days, the second shortest known orbital period of any object in the Solar System after Mercury.

<https://t.co/iY2EGXclbX> pic.twitter.com/F5bUH2bqDa

— Carnegie Science (@carnegiescience) [August 23, 2021](#)

Discovery of fastest orbiting asteroid:

The fastest orbiting asteroid, 2021 PH27, was first detected on August 13, 2021, by astronomers using the Dark Energy Camera (DEC). It is a powerful multipurpose instrument that uses the images taken in the near-ultraviolet, visible, and near-infrared for measuring the expansion of the universe.

The team of astronomers was able to pin down the asteroid's orbit over the next few days because of the observations by DEC and the Magellan Telescopes at the Las Campanas Observatory in Chile.

Fastest orbiting asteroid: Key details

- The fastest orbiting asteroid has been dubbed as "2021 PH27". It is 1 kilometer in diameter and completes its **orbit in just 113 Earth days**.

- The scientists noted that 113 Earth days is the shortest orbital period of any known solar system object except the Mercury planet, which takes only 88 days to orbit around the Sun.
- As per the scientists, the space rock also gets extremely close to the Sun by reaching proximity of about 20 million kilometers. In comparison to it, Mercury gets as close as 46 million km (approx.).

Is asteroid's close proximity to the sun dangerous?

The scientists explained that the fastest orbiting asteroid's such close proximity to the sun means that the **asteroid's surface at times burns up to 500 degrees Celsius**.

2021 PH27 is on an unstable orbit that crosses that of Mercury and Venus. This means that within a few million years it will likely be destroyed in a collision with one of these planets or the Sun, or it will be ejected from its current position. pic.twitter.com/AtbNNxrFqD

— Carnegie Science (@carnegiescience) [August 23, 2021](#)

The scientists have cautioned that the orbit is not stable. They added that there are chances that the asteroid will collide with the Sun, Venus, or Mercury a few million years from now if the asteroid does not get altered from its current path by a gravitational interaction first.

e-Shram Portal: Labour Ministry launches National Database for Unorganised Workers, who will benefit?

Union Labour Ministry launched **e-Shram Portal-National Database for Unorganised Workers** on August 26, 2021. The portal has been launched for the overall welfare of crores of unorganized workers of the country after seven decades of independence.

The **e-Shram Portal** will facilitate better implementation of various Social Security Schemes for the welfare of all unorganized workers of the country. Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Bhupender Yadav, had **unveiled the logo of e-SHRAM Portal–National Database of Unorganized Workers** on August 24, 2021.

Labour Ministry has approved a budget of approximately Rs 404 crores for the registration of the Unorganised Workers on the E-Shram portal.

E-Shram portal

Launched by [@LabourMinistry](#), the National Database of Unorganised Workers will facilitate better implementation of various Social Security Schemes for the welfare of all unorganized workers of the country. [#ShramevJayate](#) pic.twitter.com/LzEU6E9dfT

— MyGovIndia (@mygovindia) [August 26, 2021](#)

Significance

Union Minister Bhupender Yadav stated that targeted identification of the unorganized workers is a much-needed step and the **e-Shram Portal will be the national database of nation builders, 'Shram Yogis'**. It will help take welfare schemes to their doorstep.

The labour minister reached out to all trade unions to mobilise support and awareness about the e-Shram Portal among workers.

The e-Shram portal will cover all unorganised workers of the nation and help link them to social security schemes of the Government of India. The portal will prove to be a huge boost for the last-mile delivery of services. [#ShramevJayate](#) pic.twitter.com/wnEb0U85Uo

— Bhupender Yadav (@byadavbjp) [August 26, 2021](#)

Who will benefit from e-Shram portal?

The category of unorganised workers who will be covered under the National Database of unorganised workers include:

- Construction Workers
- Migrant Worker
- Gig and Platform Worker
- Street Vendor
- Domestic Worker
- Agriculture Worker
- Other Unorganised Worker

e-Shram Portal: All you need to know!

- The **e-Shram Portal, National Database for Unorganised Workers** will include migrant workers, construction workers, street vendors, gig and platform workers, domestic workers, agriculture workers and similar sub-groups of unorganised workers.
- The portal will bring millions of unorganised workers in the country on a common platform.
- As per estimates, around 92 percent of India's workforce of 500 million is unorganised and as a result, they are often deprived of minimum wages and any form of social security.
- The e-Shram Portal will enable authorities to reach out and track down the workers in the informal sector and offer welfare in times of crisis.

- The portal will be made easily accessible so that workers can self-enroll using their Aadhaar and mobile number.
- The workers will be able to visit and register themselves free of cost at the registration centres, which will be set up at select post offices and common service centres through its nationwide network of over four lakh centres.
- The work on the National Database for Unorganised Workers was fast-tracked after millions of workers returned to their home towns during the nationwide lockdown imposed due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in April-May 2020, which resulted in the loss of jobs and livelihood for millions.

What are the reservations of the trade unions?

The trade unions pointed out that the mere launch of the portal will not work, the government will have to increasingly focus on ensuring all workers are brought on board under the portal to ensure proper implementation and usage of the portal.

Greater Male Connectivity Project: India, Maldives sign pact for largest-ever infrastructure project

India and Maldives on August 26, 2021 signed a pact for the **largest-ever infrastructure project, Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)**.

The project will be funded under the Indian Grant and Line of Credit and will commence soon. A contract for the same was signed between AFCONS (Mumbai-based construction and engineering company) and the Maldives government.

The signing ceremony was attended by the foreign secretary of India, Harsh Shringla, Indian High Commissioner to Maldives Sunjay Sudhir and four Maldivian ministers.

The Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP) is concrete proof that India is a robust development partner of the Maldives in addition to being the first responder in times of any emergency in the Maldives: Sunjay Sudhir, Indian High Commissioner to Maldives

pic.twitter.com/kNltRHagzM

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Significance

The Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP) is one of India's biggest new development projects in the Maldives. It is also the biggest infrastructure project in the Maldives overall. The project is being considered as the economic lifeline for the people of Maldives and is expected to provide a major boost to the Maldivian economy.

The Indian High Commissioner to Maldives said that the Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP) is concrete proof that India is a robust development partner of the Maldives in addition to being the first responder in times of any emergency in the Maldives.

GMCP is not only the biggest project India is doing in the Maldives but also the biggest infrastructure project in the Maldives overall. This iconic project will give a major boost to the Maldivian economy: Sunjay Sudhir, Indian High Commissioner to Maldives

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

GMCP biggest Infrastructure project in Maldives

The Greater Malé Connectivity Project is expected to be even bigger than the 1.4 km-long Sinamalé Bridge, which was built under Chinese assistance that connected Male to the Maldives airport in Hulhule island and to the Hulumalhe island.

Greater Malé Connectivity Project (GMCP)

- Greater Male Connectivity Project will involve the construction of a 6.74 km long bridge and causeway link that will connect capital Male with the adjoining islands of Villingli, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi.
- The project will be funded by an Indian grant of \$100 m and a Line of Credit worth \$400 m.
- Greater Malé Connectivity Project will comprise three navigation bridges of 140 m main span across the deep channel between each island:
 - 1.41 km of the marine viaduct in deep water
 - 2.32 km marine viaduct in shallow water or on land
 - 2.96 km of at-grade roads
- The project will use solar power for lighting purposes in a push for use of renewable energy.

Background

The project has been undertaken upon the request of Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and foreign minister Abdulla Shahid during Union external affairs minister Dr. S Jaishankar's visit to the Maldives in September 2019.

India pips US to be 2nd most attractive manufacturing hub; China first

India has emerged as the 2nd most attractive and sought-after manufacturing destination globally, stated Cushman & Wakefield 2021 Global Manufacturing Risk Index. The Index assesses the most preferred locations for global manufacturing among 47 countries in Europe, the American, and Asia Pacific region. China retained the top position while India and the US ranked second and third respectively. In the last year's report, the US ranked second while India was third.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the manufacturing sector in the countries across the Asia Pacific region over the past 18 months resulting in total industrial output falling by approximately 7 per cent in the first half of 2020 before bouncing back. Asia-Pacific's largest manufacturing hubs have recovered due to the country's ability to restart its manufacturing sector. Countries such as China and India who have ranked first and second respectively on the Index have demonstrated economic conditions and infrastructure supportive of a faster recovery.

What is Global Manufacturing Risk Index?

Cushman & Wakefield 2021 Global Manufacturing Risk Index assesses the most preferred locations for global manufacturing among 47 countries in Europe, the American, and Asia Pacific region. The Index offers clients and manufacturers key information and statistical data to make optimal location decisions.

What are the parameters for Global Manufacturing Risk Index?

The countries are assessed on four key parameters:

(i) Bounce Back: This indicates the country's ability to restart its manufacturing sector. Countries with economic conditions and infrastructure supportive of a faster recovery rate are at the top of the ranking while ones facing obstacles in achieving a full recovery are at the bottom.

(ii) Conditions: This indicates the business environment, including the availability of labor and access to markets.

(iii) Costs: This indicates the operating costs including labor, electricity, and real estate.

(iv) Risks: This indicates the economic, environmental, and political risks.

How did India emerge 2nd most preferred manufacturing destination?

The rising interest in India as a preferred manufacturing hub has been attributed to the country's proven success in meeting outsourcing requirements, operating conditions, and cost competitiveness. As per the Index report, manufacturers in India could also benefit by relocating activities from China to other parts of Asia. However, further reforms to both land and labor laws are critical to maintaining India's success as a global manufacturing hub.

India's Manufacturing Sector – Key developments

In World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Ranking 2020, India jumped 79 positions from 142nd in 2014 to rank 63rd in 2019 among 190 countries.

With the improvement in the rank of Ease of Doing Business in India, growth and demand potential, subsidies and incentive schemes, industry-specific policies, supportive infrastructure, FDI relaxations, availability of skilled labor, strong macro-economic fundamentals have been fueling the growth of India's manufacturing sector.

The Indian government has been introducing ambitious initiatives to bring in reforms to boost the manufacturing sector such as:

- (i) Introducing tax reforms such as reducing corporate tax from 30 per cent to 22 per cent for existing manufacturing companies and from 25 per cent to 15 per cent for new manufacturing companies, and scrapping the Dividend Distribution Tax since April 2020.
- (ii) Introducing initiatives such as Skill India, Make in India, National Infrastructure (NIP), Credit Guarantee Scheme for Micro and Small Enterprises, ASPIRE, PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Atmanirbhar Bharat program, Industrial corridors that aid in creating a favorable growth ecosystem to emerge as a trusted supply chain partner and preferred manufacturing hub.
- (iii) Schemes to strengthen the manufacturing industry such as Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI), Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS), Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0).
- (iv) The Indian government is also looking into investor-friendly land reforms to boost the

manufacturing sector thus encouraging foreign companies to relocate their manufacturing centers to India.

Space agencies extend support for ISS extension; Russia to remain part of ISS: NASA Administrator

Russia will remain a part of the International Space Station through the end of the decade, said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson while speaking on a panel at the 36th Space Symposium with the heads of seven other space agencies on August 25, 2021.

The NASA Administrator said that the **"cooperation with the Russians, which has been there ever since 1975, will continue"** despite media reports claiming that its space agency, Roscosmos might end its participation on the ISS as soon as the middle of the decade to develop its own station.

He said that the evidence of this is the docking of a new Russian module, called **Nauka**, with the International Space Station last month.

The NASA Administrator has since long called for an extension of the ISS's term to 2030. The US Congress is yet to though formally authorize such an extension and any extension of the ISS would also require the agreement of the other station partners including Russia, Canada, Europe and Japan.

Other Space agencies support ISS extension

Director-General of the European Space Agency, Josef Aschbacher said in an interview on August 23, 2021 that he backed ISS extension. He said that personally, he would strongly support it but added that it would require support from ESA's member states.

He said that he would be happy to present a proposal for extending the use of ISS at the next ESA ministerial meeting in late 2022.

Walther Pelzer, head of the German space agency said that ISS from their point of view is tremendous infrastructure and Germany will support its extension as long as possible. Germany is one of ESA's largest member states. However, formal German support for ISS extension is likely to come to the German elections in late September.

NASA warns of emerging space race with China

- NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, while expressing optimism about continued cooperation with Russia, doubted that the cooperation will be extended to China. He warned saying that unfortunately, "we are in a space race with China."
- The NASA Administrator did offer a prospect for cooperation, but under terms that are unlikely to be accepted by China.
- He said that he would like for China to be a partner, drawing an analogy to space cooperation between the US and former the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
- However, he added saying that **"China is very secretive,"** and ***"part of the civilian space program is that you've got to be transparent."***
- The ESA has reportedly received an invitation from China and Russia to cooperate on their international lunar research station project, which was announced earlier this year.
- The ESA Director General said that a discussion about potential cooperation is ongoing among ESA members. He though emphasised that the ESA has a strong and excellent partnership with NASA.

International Space Station

The International Space Station (ISS) is a modular space station in low Earth orbit, which is a multinational collaborative project involving five participating space agencies: NASA (US), Roscosmos (Russia), ESA (Europe), CSA (Canada) and JAXA (Japan).

The ISS has been continuously occupied for 20 years and 297 days, which is the longest continuous human presence in low Earth orbit, having surpassed the previous record held by Mir space station of 9 years and 357 days.

In December 2018, ISS's operation authorization was extended till 2030 with funding secured until 2025. Russian space agency, **Roscosmos**, had announced in February 2015 that it would remain a part of the ISS till 2024.

Background

There have been calls to privatize ISS operations to pursue future Moon and Mars missions. Former NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine had stated that *"given our current budget constraints if we want to go to the moon and we want to go to Mars, we need to commercialize low Earth orbit and go on to the next step."*

Mother Teresa Birth Anniversary: Inspirational quotes by the Nobel Peace Prize laureate

Mother Teresa 111th Birth Anniversary: August 26 marks the 111th Birth Anniversary of Mother Teresa, also known as Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Born on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, Mother Teresa left Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto in Dublin at the age of 18 years in 1928. She came to India in 1929, where she worked at St Mary's High School for girls. Teresa took her first religious vow in 1931. She realized her calling was to help the poor and underprivileged. In 1950, she established the Roman Catholic religious congregation which later became the Missionaries of Charity.

Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her 'work in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress that also pose threat to peace'. But she did not take the cash prize of \$192,000, rather donated to the poor in India. In 1971, she was awarded the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize. In 1962, the Indian government conferred her with the Padma Shri.

Teresa was canonized on September 4, 2016, by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City during which she was declared as a saint.

On the 111th Birth Anniversary of Mother Teresa, here are some inspiring quotes by the Noble by Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.

Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than the hunger for bread.

If you judge people, you have no time to love them.

If you are humble nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are.

Love cannot remain by itself – it has no meaning. Love must be put into action, and that action is service.

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin.

What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.

I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.

I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.

I am not sure exactly what heaven will be like, but I know that when we die and it comes time for God to judge us, he will not ask, 'How many good things have you done in your life?' rather he will ask, 'How much love did you put into what you did?'

Indian teen Diksha Shinde has not been selected as NASA panelist, confirms US space agency

NASA clarified on August 26, 2021 that the 14-year-old Indian teen, who had claimed to be selected as a panelist on NASA's MSI Fellowships Virtual Panel, was short listed based on **"false information"** provided by her. The US space agency also clarified that the **Diksha Shinde had not received any sort of fellowship or funding from the agency.**

The Class 10 student who hails from Maharashtra's Aurangabad had told a news agency last week that **she has been selected as a panelist on NASA's MSI Fellowships Virtual Panel.** She said that she had written a theory on blackholes that was accepted by NASA after 3 attempts. She also mentioned that she was asked to write articles for NASA's website.

Social media users, however, had expressed their doubts on Shinde's credentials, claiming that it was fake and pointing out discrepancies, such as the fact that only American citizens can send in proposals to NASA.

NASA's official statement

NASA in an official statement to ThePrint said: **"NASA's Office of STEM Engagement sought applications through a third-party service for expert panelists to review a series of proposals and applications for NASA Fellowships with Minority-Serving Institutions."**

The space agency stated, **"The fellowships seek student-authored research proposals. Diksha Shinde was selected as a panelist based on false information regarding her background and credentials."** The statement further noted that NASA is currently reviewing the process of verifying potential panelists' backgrounds.

NASA clarified that the Indian teen is neither employed by the agency nor has it awarded her any fellowship. The space agency clarified that these opportunities are available only to US citizens.

The space agency also claimed that it has not accepted any scientific paper from Shinde or presented her with any other accolades. The claims that NASA is funding her trip to the US for a conference are also false.

Diksha Shinde's claims

- Diksha Shinde said that she had read books by Stephen Hawking and then submitted an essay to NASA titled '**Questioning the Existence of God**' in September 2020. Her essay was rejected in the first attempt. She revised the original essay by making some changes and submitted it again but it got rejected again.

- In December 2020, she claimed that she had submitted an article on "**We Live in a Black Hole?**", which was finally liked and accepted at NASA. She also claimed that the International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research accepted her paper on 'Black Hole' for publication in May 2021.

- She also claimed to win a research competition organised by International Astronomical Search Collaboration. She said that she had provisionally discovered the 'Main Belt asteroid' in the competition.

- She also claimed that she got an email from NASA, confirming her selection as a panelist for the MSI Fellowship panel in June and that her position entails assessing research ideas and presenting a collaborative approach to researching at NASA. She also said that she attends the research discussions every alternate day and is compensated for her role as a panelist.

While speaking on her selection, the 14-year-old said, ***"I just got an email from NASA about selection as a panelist on MSI Fellowship Panel. I was surprised to receive it. I will do my job between 1 am and 4 am on alternate days and also get a monthly honorarium for it."***

Maharashtra | Diksha Shinde, a 14-yr-old girl in Aurangabad, was selected as a panellist on NASA's MSI Fellowships Virtual Panel.

"I wrote a theory on black holes & God. It was accepted by NASA after 3 attempts. They asked me to write articles for their website,"she said (18.08) pic.twitter.com/yxDqApWKWm

— ANI (@ANI) [August 19, 2021](#)

- The 14-year-old also claimed that she would get training at NASA on attaining the age of 18 years and that she will also attend a conference that will be held in October 2021 with NASA bearing all her expenses.

All these statements have been claimed to be false by NASA.

SC directs Govt to get HC Nod before withdrawing cases filed against MPs/MLAs, Get Details Here

The Supreme Court on August 25, 2021, said that the Governments should take the approval of the respective High Court before withdrawing criminal cases filed against MLAs/MPs. The apex court further emphasized that there is nothing wrong with withdrawing the cases of malicious prosecution, however, the High Court must examine such cases.

A Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice N.V. Ramana said, ***"We are not against the withdrawal of cases if there is a malicious prosecution. But this needs to be examined by the judicial officer in the High Court. If the HC agrees then the cases can be withdrawn."***

The bench headed by the Chief Justice issued directions after **various instances of the proposed withdrawal of cases against the lawmakers of the ruling parties in states** were flagged by amicus curiae (friend of the court) Vijay Hansaria when the bench was hearing the progress in speedy disposal of cases against them.

Why SC has directed governments to get High Court nod?

Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appointed amicus curiae in a 2016 petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay seeking direction to fast track criminal trials against the sitting and former MPs/MLAs, has filed a report in the Supreme Court. Advocate Hansaria has been assisted by advocate Sneha Kalita in the matter.

According to the report, the State Government informed the amicus that 510 cases related to the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 were registered in 5 districts of the Meerut zone against 6,869 accused.

Out of these, in 175 registered cases, the charge sheet was filed, in 165 cases final reports were submitted and 170 cases were expunged (erased completely).

The report further states that thereafter **77 cases were withdrawn by the State Government under Section 321 of CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure). The government orders of withdrawing the cases do not give any reason for withdrawal of the case under Section 321 of CrPC. It merely states that the administration, after full consideration, has taken a decision of withdrawing the particular case.**

What amicus curiae suggests regarding the government's withdrawing cases?

The amicus submitted that the 77 cases, that were withdrawn by the State Government, may be examined by the High Court by exercising revisional jurisdiction under Section 401 of CrPC, in the light of the law laid down by the Supreme Court in the case of State of Kerala vs K. Ajith 2021.

Hansaria has submitted that the High Court may be directed to issue administrative instructions to speed up the trial of pending cases on a day-to-day basis in terms of Section 309 CrPC.

Some instances where ruling government withdrew cases against MPs/MLAs:

- The Karnataka Government, in August 2020, had issued instructions to withdraw 61 cases against MLAs. However, no further action can be taken as the HC order in PIL stayed the operation of notification.
- Uttarakhand had sought the withdrawal prosecution against sitting MLA Rajkumar Thukral who was accused in a murder case registered in 2012. The case is still pending before the trial court.
- Uttar Pradesh Government chose to withdraw prosecution in 2020 against Sadhvi Prachi and three other sitting MLAs Suresh Rana, Sangeet Som, and Kapil Dev for making inflammatory statements during the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots.
- In Maharashtra, the state government decided to withdraw the political cases against activists prior to December 31, 2019.

Lack of infrastructure, manpower in judiciary and probe agencies:

During the hearing, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court drew a parallel between the problems faced by the judiciary and probe agencies such as ED or CBI.

He said that just like the judiciary, probe agencies are also suffering from a lack of infrastructure and manpower. The Chief Justice added that we don't want to say anything about these agencies because we don't want to demoralize them, they are overburdened, and the same with the judges.

Drone Rules 2021: Government announces new drone rules to ease using drones in India

The Central Government on August 26, 2021, announced the **new Drone Rules 2021**. The new drone rules are the latest progressive ones that will significantly transform the Indian landscape for drones.

In a gazette notification, the Government said that the Civil Aviation Ministry has passed the New Drone Rules 2021 which will **replace the Unmanned Aircraft System Rules 2021**.

The New Drone Rules were announced by the Government on July 15, 2021, and the comments were invited from the industry and the stakeholders till August 5. The new rules were appreciated by the stakeholders for simplifying the procedures and for reducing the burden to operate a drone in India.

Prime Minister Modi on the announcement on the New Drone Rules 2021 via Twitter **said that the new rules will help the start-ups and the youths working in this sector**. It will open up new possibilities for innovation and business. '

The new Drone Rules will tremendously help start-ups and our youth working in this sector. It will open up new possibilities for innovation & business. It will help leverage India's strengths in innovation, technology & engineering to make India a drone hub.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 26, 2021](#)

Drone Rules 2021 in India:

1. The relaxation in New Drone Rules stipulates, no security clearance will now be required before any registration or license issuance for the operation of drones.

New Drone Policy announced. Under Drone Rules 2021, no security clearance is required before registration or licence issuance. Fees for permissions reduced to nominal levels.

Maximum penalty reduced to Rs 1 lakh, not applicable to penalties in respect of violation of other laws.

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

2. As per the new Drone rules, the fees for the permissions to operate drones in the country have

been reduced to nominal levels.

3. Drone corridors will be developed for cargo deliveries.

4. The coverage of drones under Drone Rules 2021 has been increased from 300 kilograms to 500 kilograms in order to include heavy payload-carrying drones and drone taxis.

Coverage of drones under Drone Rules 2021 increased from 300 kg to 500 kg to include heavy payload-carrying drones & drone taxis. No security clearance required before any registration or licence issuance. Fees for permissions reduced to nominal levels

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

5. Some of the approvals that are abolished under the new Drone Rules 2021 include a unique authorization number, certificate of conformance, unique prototype identification number, operator permits, certificate of maintenance, remote pilot instructor authorization, and authorization of research and development organization.

Approvals abolished: unique authorisation number, unique prototype identification number, certificate of conformance, certificate of maintenance, operator permits, authorisation of R&D organisation, remote pilot instructor authorisation..., as per Drone Rules 2021

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

6. The maximum penalty under the Drone Rules 2021 has been reduced to Rs. 1 lakh. It will, however, will not apply to the penalties in respect of violation of other laws.

7. The interactive airspace map with green, red, and yellow zones will be displayed on the digital sky platform. The yellow zone, under new rules, has been reduced from 45 km to 12 km from the airport perimeter. No permission will be required for operating a drone in the green zone and up to 200 feet in the area between 8 and 12 km from the airport perimeter.

8. Online registration of all the drones will happen through the Digital Sky Platform. The easy process has also been prescribed for the transfer and de-registration of drones.

9. Under new rules, an opportunity for the regularization of existing drones in India has now been introduced. No pilot license will now be required for operating nano-drones and micro-drones for non-commercial use.

10. Safety measures such as 'No permission- no take-off', geo-fencing, real-time tracking beacon, etc. to be notified in the future. Under new rules, a minimum of six months' time will be provided

for compliance.

11. All drone training and examination will be carried out by an authorized drone school. Directorate General of Civil Aviation will prescribe training requirements, provide pilot license online and oversee drone schools.

12. The import of drones will be regulated by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).

Unmanned Aircraft Systems Promotion Council to be set up to facilitate a business-friendly regulatory regime. Import of drones to be regulated by DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade). Drone corridors will be developed for cargo deliveries, under Drone Rules 2021

pic.twitter.com/1Nt4PJb8J

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Drone Rules 2021: Significance

- The Drone Rules, 2021, will facilitate investments in drone technology in India and will aid in simplifying the process of registration.
- The abolishment of restrictive practices and stringent license regime under the new Drone Rules by the government will offer flexibility to players in the sectors.
- An airspace map on the digital sky platform will provide access to real-time updates for drone operation in India in various zones.

Background:

The recent incidents at Jammu Air Force Station have put the focus of the government on safety and security risks associated with drone operations.

The need for the change in drone rules in India can be seen in the light of disappointment over older rules that were much stringent with over-regulation.

High Terror warning at Kabul airport, US & Allies warn citizens to leave immediately

The United States along with other western countries **warned their citizens** on August 26, 2021 **to leave the Kabul airport immediately after high terror threat**. The warning comes as thousands of people are trying to flee the nation in the wake of Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Around 90,000 Afghans and foreign nationals have been evacuated from Afghanistan through US-led evacuation missions. Several other nations including European countries and even India have been rushing to evacuate their own nationals as well as Afghans who are seeking to flee the nation ever since the Taliban insurgents took control of the nation on August 15, 2021.

The Kabul airport is still under the control of the US military and its allies. The airport has been a scene of chaos since the Taliban takeover with huge crowds gathering in and around the airport.

The crowds have become increasingly desperate after some foreign nations have ceased their flights ahead of the August 31 deadline set by US President Joe Biden to end the evacuations and withdraw US troops overseeing it.

Countries ceasing flights from Kabul

Turkey, which had more than 500 non-combat troops stationed in Afghanistan, said on August 25 that it has started pulling out its forces.

Belgium is also ending its evacuations after its military planes airlifted over 1,100 people in recent days including both Europeans and Afghans.

France will also end its flights from today, August 26.

French prime minister says France will no longer be able to evacuate people from Kabul airport after Friday night, reports AP[#Afghnaistan](#)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

High Terror Threat

- One of the hard reasons for setting the hard deadline has been an "*acute*" terrorist threat from the regional chapter of the Islamic State group.

- The US and its allies raised alarm on August 26 with specific advisories warnings for their citizens to avoid the Kabul airport.

- The US State Department issued a statement asking those at North Gate, East Gate and Abbey Gate to leave immediately, citing unspecified "security threats"

Because of security threats outside the gates of Kabul airport, we are advising US citizens to avoid traveling to the airport & to avoid airport gates at this time unless you receive individual instructions from a US govt representative to do so: US Embassy in Kabul

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

- Australia's foreign affairs department also issued a statement saying there was an *"ongoing and very high threat of terrorist attack"*. The department warned its citizens against travelling to Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport and said that if they are in the area of the airport, then move to a safe location and await further advice.

- The United Kingdom also issued a similar warning and urged its citizens to leave Afghanistan immediately if they can safely by other means.

What can be the possible terror threat?

The United States and its allies are reportedly wary of terror threat from the Islamic State's Afghanistan-Pakistan chapter, which has been responsible for some of the deadliest attacks in those countries in recent years.

ISIS has over the years massacred civilians in both countries at mosques, shrines, public squares and even hospitals. The group has specifically targeted Muslims from sects it considers heretical, including Shias.

The ISIS and the Taliban are reportedly rivals and oppose each other despite both being hardline Sunni terrorists.

Kabul airport to function post-August 31 withdrawal deadline?

The United States, which is managing all the operations at the Kabul airport, stated that it has to wind down evacuations several days before the August 31 withdrawal deadline. This is to give time to the US military to remove its own 6,000-plus troops, equipment and hundreds of US officials and Afghan security forces.

The Taliban have ruled out any extension to the August 31 deadline to pull out foreign troops, describing it as "a red line". Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, "They have planes, they have the airport, they should get their citizens and contractors out of here."

However, the United States on August 25, 2021 hinted that the Kabul airport can be kept open beyond the August 31 withdrawal deadline by regional countries.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a press briefing, "there are active efforts underway on the part of regional countries to see whether they can play a role in keeping the airport open once our military mission leaves or, as necessary, reopening it if it closes for some period of time."

There are active efforts underway on the part of regional countries to see whether they can play a role in keeping the airport open once our military mission leaves or, as necessary, reopening it if it closes for some period of time: US Secretary Antony Blinken on Afghanistan

pic.twitter.com/4VXwIXUWo3

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

He said, "The Taliban have made clear that they have a strong interest in having a functioning airport. We & rest of the int'l community have a strong interest in that, primarily for the purpose of making sure that anyone who wants to leave can leave past the 31st using the airport."

Blinken added saying, "Active efforts are underway. And again, with regard to our own potential presence going forward after the 31st (August), we're looking at a number of options."

Active efforts are underway. And again, with regard to our own potential presence going forward after the 31st (August), we're looking at a number of options: US Secretary Antony Blinken on Afghanistan pic.twitter.com/VBMDxWDB2A

— ANI (@ANI) [August 26, 2021](#)

Antony Blinken assured, **"People will continue to be able to leave the country after the military evacuation effort ends. This effort does not end on Aug 31. It will continue for as long as it takes to help get people out of Afghanistan who wish to leave."**

"Over 82,300 people have been safely flown out of Kabul since Aug 14. 6,000 American citizens identified in Afghanistan, at least 4,500 of them and their families have been evacuated," US Secy of State Antony Blinken said during a press conference pic.twitter.com/0S8Li1IOS

— ANI (@ANI) [August 25, 2021](#)

He said that around 1,500 Americans may still need evacuating from Afghanistan and added that they are still evaluating their decision to leave Afghanistan based on the situation on the ground.

Background

The Taliban after its takeover of the country has attempted to portray that they will undertake a softer rule this time, in comparison to their earlier regime when they had imposed a strict Sharia Law, taking away all freedom from women and subjecting them to their homes.

The Afghans though remember the Taliban's first regime and fear that the group will repeat its brutal interpretation of Sharia law. In their previous rule, the Taliban had been accused of giving sanctuary to the terrorist group -Al-Qaeda, which is why the United States and its allies invaded the nation to overthrow the Taliban after the 9/11 attacks.

Havana Syndrome: Mystery Illness found in Hanoi in Vietnam – Know Symptoms, Threat and Possible Impact

Havana syndrome: US Vice-President Kamala Harris' trip scheduled on August 25, 2021, from Singapore to Vietnam was delayed by three hours. Few reports of a case of Havana Syndrome came in right before Harris's departure. The cause of delay was determined as a mystery illness found in Hanoi in Vietnam which is referred to as Havana Syndrome. After a safety assessment, Harris resumed her trip to Vietnam.

Since the first report of the Havana Syndrome that was reported in Cuba in 2016, there have been several instances reported across Austria, Germany, China, and Russia. The US and Canadian embassies in Havana were affected by the Havana Syndrome for the first time in 2016 and 2017. Those impacted reported feeling intense pressure in the face and hearing a loud piercing sound.

Since the first report of the Havana Syndrome was reported in Cuba in 2016, there have been several instances reported across Austria, Germany, China, and Russia. In a 2019 US academic study, diplomats who had been impacted in Cuba in 2016 were found with brain abnormalities. The US National Academies of Science (NAS) in a report in 2020 stated directed microwave radiation as the most likely cause of the syndrome.

What is Havana Syndrome?

As per the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), over 200 people including American and Canadian diplomats, embassy staff, and spies all over the world have been affected by the Havana Syndrome. It is a mysterious health syndrome that was first reported in Cuba in 2016.

What are the symptoms of Havana Syndrome?

In 2016, several Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers at the American embassy in Cuba reported symptoms of sensation of pressure in their heads and sharp piercing sound. They also complained about nausea, fatigue, trouble remembering things, ear pain, and hearing loss. The brain scans of those impacted revealed tissue damage.

What causes Havana Syndrome?

There are several theories regarding the cause of Havana Syndrome, including microwave radiation exposure, sonic attack, pulsed radiofrequency, exposure to neurotoxic pesticides, intermodulation distortion caused by multiple inaudible ultrasonic signals from malfunctioning Cuban surveillance equipment, Jamaican field crickets, and psychogenic causes.

What do US investigations suggest?

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), US military, CIA, National Institutes of Health, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have been looking into the cause of Havana Syndrome have not reached any conclusive decision to determine the cause of the syndrome however, microwave weapons have been found as the most plausible mechanism that causes the syndrome.

The NAS in its report in 2020 had concluded that directed energy beams through microwave radiation are a plausible cause of the Havana Syndrome. Prepared by a committee of 19 experts in the medical and related fields, the NAS report titled 'An assessment of illness in US government employees and their families at overseas embassies' outlined four main possible causes which are microwave energy, infection, psychological factors, and chemicals.

Of these four, directed pulsed radio frequency (RF) energy was determined as the most likely cause of the syndrome. The words 'directed pulsed' in the report was to indicate that the exposure of victims was targeted and not simply continuous wave exposure to microwave energy such as a mobile phone.

How is US handling the threat of Havana Syndrome?

The US State Department in 2021 has stated investigation into Havana Syndrome as a 'high priority' task. The CIA, National Security Council, and Director of National Intelligence have established two panels, one to dig deeper into the causes of the syndrome and the other panel to build defensive countermeasures to protect US and Canadian personnel.

HAVANA Act

In June 2021, the Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks (HAVANA) Act was unanimously passed. Ten US Senators had proposed a Senate bill to offer financial support for personnel suffering brain injuries under the Act.

COVID-19 origin: Research to identify origin of SARS-CoV-2 stalled, says WHO experts; Get details here

Scientists charged with the task to study COVID-19 origin by the UN warned on August 25, 2021, that the **search for the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic** that killed millions and crippled economies **is at a standstill even as time is running out.**

An initial report made by the team of independent, international experts sent to China by the World Health Organisation in January 2021 concluded that it was most likely that the SARS-CoV-2 virus jumped from the bats to humans via an intermediate animal.

The statement by the WHO experts has come less than two weeks after the global health agency, in a bid to revive the probe, had urged China to hand over the information on the earliest COVID-19 cases.

What WHO experts are concerned about?

The hypothesis that the COVID-19 virus had somehow leaked from a lab, like the specialized virology laboratory in Wuhan, was deemed extremely unlikely in the report.

However, in a comment in the journal Nature, 11 of the 17 scientists on that mission had said that it was only intended as a first step in a process that has stalled.

They wrote that the search for the origins of SARS-CoV-2 is at a critical juncture and the window of opportunity for conducting the crucial enquiry is closing fast.

Tracing the biological trail back to the earliest pockets of COVID-19, which had surfaced in Wuhan in late 2019, has become more difficult as the evidence disappears or becomes more corrupted.

China pushes back as WHO demands 'second phase' of research

As the World Health Organization urged China to hand over the details of the earliest COVID-19 cases in the country, China pushed back against the request.

As per the WHO experts, the data demanded by WHO should include COVID data for 174 infections that were identified in December 2019 and that China failed to share during the initial investigation.

The investigators further mentioned that it was agreed at the time that the second phase of research will fill in this gap.

However, China pushed back against the request by WHO earlier in August 2021. The country said that the January investigation should suffice and that the calls for further data were motivated by politics, and not science.

Why WHO is encouraging second phase of research in COVID origin?

WHO has highlighted that the report by the international experts, which was published in March 2021 in coordination with their Chinese counterpart, had laid out a number of studies that should be conducted and had insisted that there was no reason to wait.

WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the agency has encouraged all the parties to pursue those studies.

Meanwhile, other WHO experts stressed that there was no need to wait for another international mission to China before delving into many further studies needed there. They pointed out that there were many capable Chinese scientists who can do the work.

Michael Ryan, WHO emergencies director agreed that there is no impediment right now for those studies to go ahead. In fact, many Chinese colleagues have reported that those studies are underway in China and that WHO looks forward to receiving data and reports.

Lab leak or animal transmission of COVID virus: No conclusion yet

China has especially restrained at the suggestion that the COVID-19 virus might have escaped from the Wuhan Virology Lab.

Recently, US Intelligence Agencies had presented President Biden with a report looking at both the animal transmission and 'lab-leak' hypotheses. The findings in the report were described as inconclusive. A piece in The Nature has also noted that the current data does not support the lab-leak scenario.

Study into COVID origin: What are the scientists suggesting?

Scientists and researchers have been emphasizing the need to trace the earliest cases of COVID-19 through disease reporting and antibody surveys, inside and outside China.

They have also called for the further investigation of wild bats and wildlife farms.

The scientists have said that as SARS-CoV-2 antibodies wane, collecting further samples and testing people who might have been exposed before December 2019 will yield diminishing returns.

They further added that many of the wildlife farms of interest for study have been closed and their livestock killed.

SUJALAM Campaign launched: What are ODF Villages? How are they part of this campaign - All You Need to Know

The Ministry of Jal Shakti on August 25, 2021 launched the '**SUJALAM**' campaign, which is a **100-day campaign** aimed to create more and more open defecation-free (ODF) villages across the country.

SUJALAM Campaign has been started by undertaking wastewater management at the village level through the creation of 1 million soak-pits and greywater management activities.

The campaign will help in the management of wastewater, which will in turn help revive the water bodies. The disposal of wastewater and clogging of water bodies in the villages remains to be one of the major problems.

Aim

The main aim of the SUJALAM Campaign is to achieve open defecation-free (ODF plus) status in a short time for villages across the country in an accelerated manner.

SUJALAM Campaign: Key Highlights

- SUJALAM Campaign will run for 100 days as a part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations.
- The campaign will mainly focus on building the desired infrastructure such as soak-pits for greywater management in villages.
- The campaign will also aim to enable sustainable management of water bodies.
- It will also boost the momentum of Swachha Bharat Mission Grameen (SBMG) phase-2 activities through community participation.
- It will also increase awareness about ODF-plus activities and ensure the long-term maintenance and sustainability of built infrastructure.

What is Grey Water?

Greywater refers to domestic wastewater that is generated in households or office buildings from streams without fecal contamination. Greywater includes all streams of water except wastewater from toilets. The sources of greywater include showers, sinks, baths, dishwashers and washing machines.

Key Action Points under SUJALAM Campaign

- The main activities that will be organised under the campaign in the villages include:
- Organizing community consultations, Khuli Baithaks and gram sabha meetings to analyze the current situation
- Pass resolution to maintain ODF sustainability
- Achieve desired number of soak-pits to manage the greywater
- Develop a '100-day' plan to undertake sustainability and soak-pit construction-related activities, the release added.
- Construct required number of soak pits
- Retrofit toilets where needed through IEC and community mobilization
- Ensure all newly emerging Households in the village have access to toilets

Significance

SUJALAM Campaign will aim to use the platform of awareness and behaviour change achieved under the first phase of the SBMG and focus on sustaining the same along with achieving visual cleanliness by the way of SLW Management.

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav is an initiative of the central government to commemorate 75 years of India's independence.

International Dog Day 2021: Know History, Significance and Quotes for your pawdorable friend

International Dog Day 2021: It is a universal fact that the most reliable friend existing on the planet Earth is a Dog. **International Dog Day** is celebrated every year on August 26 to recognize this friend, who never leaves your side.

International Dog Day gives us an opportunity to recognize and celebrate every dog, no matter what breed they are. It aims at drawing attention to the plight of canines as well as encourage adoption. Known as man's or woman's best friend, dogs love their owners unconditionally.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which took a toll on mental and physical health, the furry friends have played a significant role in helping their owners to get past some of the most difficult time. On International Dog Day 2021, learn more about your tail-wagging friend and love them more with some extra treats.

International Dog Day 2021 History

International Dog Day was founded by Colleen Paige in 2004. She is a pet & family lifestyle expert, conservationist, animal rescue advocate, Dog trainer, and author. The First International Dog Day was celebrated on August 26, 2004.

The date August 26 was chosen as the International Dog Day, as it's the date that her family adopted their first dog 'Sheltie' from an animal shelter home.

International Dog Day was first started as National Dog Day. The website of the National Dog Day described their mission 'to help galvanize the public to recognize number of dogs that need to be rescued each year and acknowledged family dogs and the dogs that work selflessly each day save lives, bring comfort, and keep us safe.'

National Dog Day celebrates dogs of all breeds.

International Dog Day Significance

Dog Day on August 26 gives an opportunity to rescue dogs who are surviving in a dangerous situation as local authorities and people do not take care of them. Dogs are often abused, kept in harsh situations and some are even brutally killed. International Dog Day raises awareness about such issues and encourages people to take better care of dogs, whether they are stray or pets at home.

Quotes on International Dog Day:

1. *"A dog is the only thing on Earth that loves you more than it loves themselves."*

- Josh Billings

2. *"If there are no dogs in heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went."*

- Will Rogers

3. *"Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen."*

- Orhan Pamuk

4. *"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."*

- Roger Caras

5. *"The better I get to know men, the more I find myself loving dogs."*

- Charles De Gaulle

World Bank suspends aid to Afghanistan after Taliban takeover

The World Bank has announced the **suspension of aid to Afghanistan**, following the Taliban's swift takeover of the country.

The World Bank said that it is **"deeply concerned"** by the situation in Afghanistan and the impact on the country's development prospect, especially regarding women's rights.

The World Bank spokesperson stated that the bank has paused disbursements in its operations in Afghanistan and are closely monitoring and assessing the situation in line with its internal policies and procedures.

The spokesperson added saying that the World Bank will continue to consult closely with the international community and development partners and explore ways to remain engaged to preserve hard-won development gains and continue to support the people of Afghanistan.

The World Bank has provided almost \$5.3 billion to Afghanistan since 2002, mostly in grants. It also has over two dozen ongoing development projects in the country.

World Bank evacuates Kabul-based team

The World Bank has pulled out all its staff and their immediate families from Afghanistan. The Kabul-based team of the World Bank was safely evacuated to Pakistan on August 20, 2021, as per sources.

Significance

- The World Bank's move of freezing aid to Afghanistan comes less than a week after the International Monetary Fund paused payments to Afghanistan.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has suspended operations with Afghanistan, including an existing \$370 million loan program and \$340 million that Kabul was due to receive from the release of Special Drawing Rights (SDR), the lender's basket of currencies.
- The United States also froze billions of dollars worth of assets from American accounts held in

Afghanistan's central bank. The US also announced that it will deny the Taliban access to the country's gold and cash reserves, most of which is held overseas.

Background

The suspension of funds follows the Taliban's forceful takeover of Afghanistan in the wake of the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from the country.

Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter: ISRO seeks proposals for scientific analysis of data of Orbiter

Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter: The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has released an 'Announcement of Opportunity' (AO) to seek proposals towards scientific analysis and utilization of payloads data from all experiments of the Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter. The AO is open to the Indian scientific community comprising researchers from recognized universities, institutions, colleges, and government organizations across the country. In the past, valuable scientific data from all experiments of Chandrayaan-1 was extensively utilized by Indian researchers for lunar science studies. The payload data from Chandrayaan-2 are being made available to the public and scientific proposals are invited for the same.

The Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter is currently placed in a 100 km x 100 km circular polar orbit around the Moon. The orbiter is carrying out experiments using its 8 state-of-the-art scientific instruments for providing data for studies including the composition of the Moon to exospheric measurements to surface geology.

What is Announcement of Opportunity (AO)?

The 'Announcement of Opportunity' (AO) has been issued by the Indian Space Organization (ISRO) to seek proposals towards scientific analysis and utilization of payloads data from all experiments of the Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter.

The payloads data from the Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter were released to the public for scientific analysis on December 24, 2020. The next sets of payloads data were released in July 2021. These data sets are available in the public domain on the PRADAN portal of the Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) of ISRO.

Who can submit proposal under AO?

The AO is open to the Indian scientific community comprising researchers from recognized universities, institutions, colleges, and government organizations across the country. Only those with a minimum remaining service of 4 years before superannuation are eligible to lead the project.

What is the project duration of the project?

The project is expected to be completed within 3 years. The project leads will be required to publish the results in a science workshop and scientific studies across national or international peer-reviewed journals.

What assistance will be offered to selected proposals?

The ISRO in its official release stated that limited financial assistance including salary of a research student, computational facility, contingencies, and limited support to attend project meetings and workshops will be provided to the selected proposals through the AO.

Chandrayaan-2 Mission: Background

The Chandrayaan-2 mission is the second lunar mission developed by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) in a bid to explore the South Pole of the Moon. The Orbiter was successfully launched on July 22, 2019, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh.

The Orbiter was placed in a 100 km lunar polar orbit on August 20, 2019. On September 2, 2019, the Vikram Lander separated from the Orbiter to descent on the Moon surface. However, the lander crashed while attempting to land.

The Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter, however, continues to move in a 100 km x 100 km circular polar orbit around the Moon sending payloads data through remote-sensing observations from a 100-km orbit.

The orbiter is carrying out experiments using its 8 state-of-the-art scientific instruments for providing data for studies including Moon's evolution and composition, mapping of water molecules and minerals in the Polar region to exospheric measurements to surface geology.

Also read: [India's Chandrayaan-3 mission to be launched during third quarter of 2022: Govt](#)

Indian Army receives multi-mode grenades made by private sector, replaces World War I-era ones

The first batch of **one lakh privately 'made in India' modern hand grenades** were handed over to the Indian Army by Economic Explosives Ltd. (EEL), a Nagpur based private company. The Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was also present.

According to a Defence release, the consignment of multi-mode hand grenades (MMHG) was handed over to the Indian Army at a function in Nagpur. **This is also the first instance of ammunition being manufactured by the private industry in India.**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handed over a scale replica of MMGH by Chairman of EEL SN Nuwal in order to mark the first delivery of ammunition from the private sector to the armed forces of India.

Visited the EEL factory and witnessed their amazing production capabilities. The handing over of Multi Mode Hand Grenade is a shining example of the increasing collaboration between the public & private sectors. It is a big step towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

pic.twitter.com/9VrmVr51np

— Rajnath Singh (@rajnathsingh) [August 24, 2021](#)

Key Highlights:

- On October 1, 2020, EEL had signed a contract with the Defence Ministry to supply 10 lakh modern hand grenades for use by the Army and the Indian Air Force.
- The deliveries of grenades will be spread over two years from the bulk production clearance which was accorded to EEL in March 2021.
- Chief of Army Staff General MM Naravane, Infantry DG Lt Gen AK Samantra and Chairman of DRDODr G Satheesh Reddy were also present on the occasion.

Multi-mode hand grenades: What do we know?

- The grenades have highly accurate delay time, very high reliability in usage and are

also safe for the carriage.

- **These modern hand grenades have been designed by the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory of DRDO. EEL in 2016 had taken the technology from DRDO.**
- The new multi-mode hand grenades will replace Grenade No 36 of World War I vintage design, which has been continuing in service to date.
- The grenades have a distinctive design giving flexibility of employment of both defensive (fragmentation) and offensive (stun) modes.

Successful trials of hand grenades by Army:

Indian Army and DGQA (Directorate General of Quality Assurance) had undertaken successful extensive trials of the grenades in 2017-18 in deserts, plains and high-altitude in summer and winters.

The grenades manufactured by EEL, against a General Staff Qualitative Requirement (GSQR) of 95% reliability, had held superior reliability of 99.8%.

The success story of Multi-Mode hand grenades has been further amplified by its usage of 100% indigenous content.

ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 Points Table: India tops WTC Points Table, Pakistan & WI tied for second place

WTC 2021-23 Points Table: The Indian men's cricket team has taken the top spot in the latest rankings of the ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 Points Table.

India tops the World Test Championship standings with 14 points after its huge 151-run victory over England in the second test of the ongoing five-test series.

India began its campaign in the World Test Championship with its test series against England. The Indian team's total percentage of points (PCT) is 58.33 after winning one match and drawing another.

England is at the fourth spot with two points, which they accumulated through the drawn Trent Bridge Test.

Pakistan and West Indies are tied at the second place with 12 points each. Both the teams claimed 12 World Test Championship points after winning one test match each in their two-match series.

Pakistan beat West Indies by 109 runs on the final day of the second test to level the two-match series at 1-1 and climb to the second spot in the WTC Points Table. West Indies had beaten Pakistan in the first test.

ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 Points Table

Rank	Teams	Percentage Points	Points
1	India	58.33	14
2	Pakistan	50.00	12

2	West Indies	50.00	12
4	England	8.33	2

ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 – Points distribution

The teams will be ranked on the basis of the percentage of points won by them.

	Points available per match	Percentage of points*
Win	12	100
Tie	6	50
Draw	4	33.33
Loss	0	0
Source: ICC		

Points available per series

As per ICC, the teams with slow over-rates will lose one championship point for each over short.

Matches in series	Total points available
2	24
3	36
4	48
5	60
Source: ICC	

FDA approves first COVID-19 vaccine – All you need to know

First FDA approved COVID-19 vaccine: Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has become the first COVID-19 vaccine to be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on August 23, 2021. The vaccine will be marketed as **Comirnaty** for the public for preventing COVID-19 infection in individuals 16 years old and above. The FDA's approval of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine is expected to instill additional confidence among the public that the vaccine meets the high standards for safety, efficacy, and quality of the FDA.

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) on December 11, 2020, for individuals 16 years old and above. On May 10, 2021, the EUA was extended across individuals between 12 and 15 years old. The vaccine also continues to be under EUA for administration in immunocompromised individuals.

All vaccines approved by FDA undergo a standard process for reviewing the safety, effectiveness, and quality. The FDA utilizes data and information provided by the manufacturer of a vaccine in the Biologics License Application (BLA).

What is Comirnaty?

Comirnaty is the new brand name of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine. It is the first COVID-19 vaccine that has received FDA approval to be administered against COVID-19 infection. Comirnaty contains messenger RNA (mRNA), which is a genetic material that instructs human cells to clone one of the spike proteins of the COVID-19 virus. This helps the human body to build an immune response when exposed to the actual coronavirus.

The formulation of Comirnaty is same as the Pfizer's original vaccine. The mRNA in the vaccine does not alter the genetic material of the individual receiving the vaccine shot. The vaccine is administered in two doses regimen, with an interval of three weeks from the first dose.

How did FDA approve Comirnaty?

The FDA puts all vaccines under its standard process of screening their safety, effectiveness, and quality and analyzes the data provided by the manufacturer of the vaccine in the Biologics License Application (BLA).

In the case of the Comirnaty vaccine, Pfizer has submitted the BLA that contains extensive data and information that supported the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). The data comprises preclinical and clinical trials information, data about the manufacturing process, vaccine testing results, inputs from the inspection visits of the vaccine manufacturing units.

The FDA analyzed data from approximately 20,000 vaccine and 20,000 placebo recipients aged 16 years and above who did not show COVID-19 infection within a week of receiving the second dose.

The safety of the vaccine was further evaluated from a total of 44,000 individuals aged 16 years old and above. These included 22,000 individuals who received the vaccine and 22,000 individuals who received a placebo.

The results from the trials showed that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, now known as Comirnaty, was 91 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19.

After analyzing the BLA submitted by Pfizer for its COVID-19 vaccine, the FDA successfully ascertained the safety and efficacy of the vaccine and was convinced that the vaccine meets FDA's standards.

What is BLA?

BLA, known as the Biologics License Application (BLA), is a comprehensive document that the manufacturer of the vaccine submits to the FDA with detailed specific requirements.

EASE 4.0: Finance Minister launches EASE 4.0 Agenda, What is it?- Know Key Features

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman launched **EASE 4.0 (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence agenda)** in Mumbai, Maharashtra on August 25, 2021.

What is EASE 4.0?

EASE 4.0 is a common reform agenda for Public Sector Banks (PSBs) aimed at institutionalising clean and smart banking.

Key Features of EASE 4.0

- Data enabled agricultural credit
- Collaboration amongst financial ecosystem players
- Accelerated push of technology, HR and governance reforms

Salient features of EASE 4.0 launched by Smt [@nsitharaman](#) in Mumbai

- data enabled agricultural credit
- collaboration amongst financial ecosystem players
- accelerated push of technology, HR and governance reforms

pic.twitter.com/VnPvHv8p2R

— NSitharamanOffice (@nsitharamanoffc) [August 25, 2021](#)

The Ease 4.0 (Enhanced Access and Service Excellence 4.0) launch event was organised by the Indian Banks Association (IBA).

IBA Chief Executive tweeted saying, *"PSBs automating processes to deliver variety of services instantly at anytime of the day! Digital documentation, artificial intelligence, new age technologies and customised user experience are all on the agenda."* He highlighted that this a new age banking. "

PSBs automating processes to deliver variety of services instantly at anytime of the day!

Digital documentation, artificial intelligence, new age technologies and customised user experience are all on the agenda.

New Age Banking![@PMOIndia](#) [@FinMinIndia](#) [@DFS_India](#) [@PIB_India](#)
pic.twitter.com/eFA7IkORdJ

— IBA_Chief_Executive (@ChiefIba) [August 25, 2021](#)

He further stated, *"Payments made easier! PSBs to bring services for quick and easy digital payments across India. PSBs striving to make payments in India convenient, instant and contactless!"*

Payments made easier! PSBs to bring services for quick and easy digital payments across India. PSBs striving to make payments in India convenient, instant and contactless!@PMOIndia @FinMinIndia @DFS_India @PIB_India pic.twitter.com/oFnGGImrBD

— IBA_Chief_Executive (@ChiefIba) [August 25, 2021](#)

He also shared, *"Simply Dial-a-loan for agricultural loans! Farmers will be able to request for a loan from home & mobile without waiting at branches & standing in queues. Getting a loan will now be simpler and quicker."*

Simply Dial-a-loan for agricultural loans!

Farmers will be able to request for a loan from home & mobile without waiting at branches & standing in queues. Getting a loan will now be simpler and quicker.@PMOIndia @FinMinIndia @DFS_India @PIB_India pic.twitter.com/2TzvJHfslf

— IBA_Chief_Executive (@ChiefIba) [August 25, 2021](#)

The Finance Minister also felicitated the award winners of EASE 3.0 on the occasions.

Smt [@nsitharaman](#) felicitates award winners of EASE 3.0 in Mumbai. pic.twitter.com/tKtgFuvGrZ

— NSitharamanOffice (@nsitharamanoffc) [August 25, 2021](#)

EASE 3.0

EASE 3.0 was launched in February 2020 with the aim of enhancing the ease of banking in all customer experiences, using technology, alternate data, as well as analytics.

The IBA Chief Executive tweeted saying, "EASE 3.0 was instrumental in enabling digital lending to customers."

EASE 3.0 was instrumental in enabling digital lending to customers. #PSBs now offering multiple loan products through faster, contactless & paper-free channels. INR 41,000 cr retail lending initiated through digital channels in FY21@PMOIndia @FinMinIndia @DFS_India @PIB_India pic.twitter.com/laQYhBdF4G

— IBA_Chief_Executive (@ChiefIba) [August 25, 2021](#)

Result of EASE 3.0

- PSBs now offering multiple loan products through faster, contactless & paper-free channels. Around Rs 41,000 crore retail lending was initiated through digital channels in FY21
- Banking has now been made available at customer's fingertips through enhanced mobile and internet banking.
- Besides this, best in-class features and services in regional languages are also offered on multiple PSB's apps as a part of EASE 3.0.
- The IBA Chief Executive added "PSBs are using data and digital in a big way for continued Financial Inclusion under EASE 3.0 initiatives."

Banking now available at customer's fingertips through enhanced mobile and internet banking. Best in class features and services in regional languages now offered on multiple PSB's apps as a part of EASE 3.0 [@PMOIndia](#) [@FinMinIndia](#) [@DFS_India](#) [@PIB_India](#) pic.twitter.com/YKwaCePKcw

— IBA_Chief_Executive (@Chieflba) [August 25, 2021](#)

EASE Agenda: Background

EASE Agenda is a common reform agenda for Public Sector Banks (PSBs), which is aimed at institutionalizing clean and smart banking.

The **first edition of EASE 1.0** was launched in January 2018 and EASE 2.0 followed this to build on the foundation laid in EASE 1.0.

EASE 2.0 was launched to further progress on reforms. The reform actions of EASE 2.0 were aimed at making the reforms journey irreversible, strengthening processes and systems and driving outcomes.

The Public Sector Banks showed significant improvement in the Action Points of the EASE Reforms Agenda since its introduction.

All Afghan nationals travelling to India must travel only on e-visa: Ministry of Home Affairs

The Ministry of Home Affairs, India, has said that owing to the prevailing security situation in Afghanistan and streamlining of the visa process by introduction of the **e-Emergency X-Misc Visa**, it has been decided that all the Afghan Nationals henceforth must travel to India only on e-Visa.

The Ministry in an official release said that keeping in view some reports that certain passports of Afghan nationals have been misplaced, previously issued visas to all the Afghans, who are presently not in India, stand invalidated with an immediate effect.

Owing to prevailing security situation in Afghanistan all Afghan nationals henceforth must travel to India only on e-Visa

Press release- <https://t.co/aU2UnZW5Tm> [pic.twitter.com/r7Hv6p6qfr](https://twitter.com/r7Hv6p6qfr)

— Spokesperson, Ministry of Home Affairs (@PIBHomeAffairs) [August 25, 2021](#)

Afghan nationals willing to travel to India may apply for an e-visa at the official website. The officials of the ministry have said that all Afghans, irrespective of their religion, can apply for the travel document.

Afghan Nationals applying for e-Visa: What will be the conditions?

- All Afghans, irrespective of their religion, will be able to apply for the **e- Visa** online and the applications will be processed in New Delhi.
- The issued visa to the Afghan National will initially be **valid for 6 months**.
- Security issues will be looked into while processing the applications and granting the visa to Afghan Nationals.

India introduces emergency e-visa category for Afghan Nationals:

Earlier on August 17, 2021, India has announced that it will issue an emergency e-visa to the Afghan Nationals who wish to come to India in view of the prevailing situation in Afghanistan after Taliban seized power there.

Irrespective of their religion, all Afghans, can apply for the **e-Emergency X-Misc Visa** online and the applications will be processed in New Delhi.

e-Emergency X-Misc Visa category was basically introduced to fast-track the visa applications of Afghans for their entry into India.

A spokesperson of the Home Ministry had said in a statement that the ministry reviews visa provisions in view of the current situation in Afghanistan. A new category of electronic visa called '**e-Emergency X-Misc Visa**' has been introduced to fast track the visa applications for entry into India.

Background:

The announcement by India regarding the **e-Emergency X-Misc Visa** category had come two days after Taliban had captured power in Afghanistan.

Thousands of Afghans had rushed into Kabul airport on August 16 to flee the country, some of them so desperate that they had held onto a military jet as it took off. The scenes were heartbreaking and were widely shared on social media.

The crowd gathered at the airport while Taliban had enforced their rule over the capital of 5 million people after advancing across the country that took just over a week to dethrone Afghanistan's western-backed government.

India may be entering endemic stage of COVID, says WHO Chief Scientist; What is endemic stage?

The Chief Scientist of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Dr. Soumya Swaminathan has said that COVID-19 in India may be entering some kind of stage of endemicity where there is a low or moderate level of transmission going on.

While talking about the clearance to India's homegrown COVID-19 vaccine 'COVAXIN', she said that she is confident that the technical team of WHO will be satisfied to give COVAXIN clearance to be one of its authorized vaccines and that can happen by mid-September.

Is India in an endemic stage of COVID-19?

The Chief Scientist of WHO, Dr. Swaminathan explained that given the size of India and the heterogeneity of the population and immunity status in various parts of the country, it is very very feasible that the situation in India may continue like this with ups and downs in various parts of the country.

She added that India may be entering some kind of stage of endemicity where there is a moderate or low level of transmission going on but there is no exponential growth or peaks that was seen a few months ago.

Dr. Swaminathan further said that she hopes by the end of 2022, we would be in that position that we have achieved vaccine coverage, say 70%, and then the nations can get back to normal.

What is endemic stage?

The endemic stage of any disease is when a population learns to live with a virus. It is very much different from the epidemic stage when the virus overwhelms the population.

COVID-19 among children:

While talking about the prevalence of COVID-19 among children, Dr. Swaminathan said that parents need not panic.

She explained that if we take from the Sero Survey and what we learnt from other countries, that while it is possible that children can get infected and transmit, they luckily have very mild illness most of the time.

There is a very small percentage that gets sick and gets inflammatory complications and few will die but much less than the adult population.

She added, however, it is good to be prepared. Preparing hospitals for paediatric admissions, paediatric intensive care is going to serve India's health system in many ways for other illnesses children that children have.

Use of drugs for COVID-19 treatment:

On the use of drugs such as HCQ, Remdesivir or Ivermectin, WHO Chief Scientists said that as of now there is no evidence that Ivermectin or HCQ have any role in reducing the mortality or morbidity in people infected with the COVID-19 virus, nor do these drugs have any role in preventing the infection, therefore, there are no grounds on which the recommendations can be made in the use of either of these drugs for prevention or treatment.

She further explained that solidarity trial had shown that Remdesivir does not reduce the mortality, it may have benefit in the subgroup of patients who were ill enough to need oxygen but not ill enough to be on ventilation, so there might be a marginal benefit but certainly, Remdesivir does not do much.

Is it possible to predict the third wave of COVID?

The one question that has led researchers and scientists to make various predictions is whether there will be the third wave. And if yes, then when?

Talking about the third, WHO Chief Scientist clarified that it is impossible to predict the third wave of COVID-19. It will be impossible to predict where and when the third wave will be upon us or if it will come at all.

However, one can make an educated guess on some of the variables that have an impact on the transmission of the virus.

Booster doses: What WHO Chief Scientist said?

While talking about the booster doses, Dr. Swaminathan said that there are both scientific and

moral, and ethical reasons for not rushing into the boosters.

It will also be in the self-interest of the nations globally who have excess doses now to send them out through COVAX to those countries that desperately need them.

Recently, WHO Chief had also condemned the developed nations around the world for approving booster doses for their own people, while a huge section around the world has no excess to even a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

The United States, Israel are among the nations that gave approval for the booster dose.

Narayan Rane Arrest: Can a Union Minister be arrested? Know what privileges do Indian MPs have – Explained

Narayan Rane Arrest: Union Minister of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Narayan Rane was arrested on August 25, 2021, over his remarks against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray. Rane during his speech at Raigad had said that he would slap Thackeray over his ignorance of the year of India's independence. Rane was arrested by the Ratnagiri police at Golwali in Ratnagiri district during his 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' and held at Sangameshwar police station. Later, he was taken to Mahad in Raigad district to be produced before the court.

Three FIRs were lodged against the Union Minister and Rajya Sabha member Rane under IPC sections 189 (threat of injury to public servant), 504 (intentional insult to provoke breach of public peace), and 505 (statements conducive to public mischief).

The Mahad police insisted on 7-day custody of Rane, however, the Union Minister was granted bail by the court. Narayan Rane's arrest sparked a political row with BJP supporters resorting to slogans shouting in support of Rane while Shiv Sena, BJP workers clashing during protests. BJP Chief Nadda termed the arrest of Union Minister Rane as a violation of constitutional values. Maharashtra BJP President Chandrakant Patil called the arrest of the Union Minister against protocol.

Jagran Josh explains if a Union Minister in India can be arrested, if yes then how? Know what privileges do Indian MPs have.

Can a Union Minister in India be arrested?

Yes, a Union Minister in India can be arrested in India.

A Union Minister is extended immunity from arrest only in cases of civil matters, however, he or she does not immunity from arrest in cases of criminal matters.

If the Parliament is not in session, a law enforcement agency can arrest a cabinet minister from anywhere in case of a criminal case registered him or her. For arresting from the premises of the

Parliament, permission from the Chairman of Rajya Sabha or Speaker of the Lok Sabha is required.

How is a Union Minister in India arrested?

The Section 22A of the Rules of Procedures and Conduct of Business of the Rajya Sabha states that in case of an arrest of a cabinet minister, the Police, Judge, or Magistrate would have to inform the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha in prior about the reason for arresting, the place of detention or imprisonment in detail.

What is the role of the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha in case of arrest of a Union Minister?

The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha must inform the Council if the House is in session. In case the House is not in session, the Chairman will get the information published in a bulletin or gazette for the knowledge of the members of the House.

As per law, if an arrest is to be made at the premises of the Parliament, the Chairman's approval is needed. In Rane's case, there was no need to seek approval from the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha since the House was not in Session. The Session was concluded on August 19, 2021.

What privileges do Indian MPs have? Do they immunity from arrest?

Section 135 of the Code of Civil Procedure states that as per the main privileges of the Indian Parliament, the Member of Parliament (MPs) enjoy immunity from arrest during the continuance of the House and 40 days before the commencement of its session and 40 days after the conclusion of its session in relation to civil cases.

These privileges do not grant immunity from arrest in relation to criminal offenses of cases of detention under preventive detention.

Who is granted immunity from arrest in India?

The President of the Republic (India) and Governors of the States are the only governmental figures who are immune from civil and criminal proceedings and are offered protection from arrests through the Constitution until their term is over, as per Article 361 in The Constitution Of India 1949.

In India, the Prime Minister can also be arrested if a criminal case is filed against him or her.

How to book slot for COVID-19 vaccine on WhatsApp?

The Ministry of Health and MyGov announced on August 24, 2021, that the **MyGov Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp** now allows users to locate their nearest COVID-19 vaccination centers and book vaccine appointments.

Earlier on August 5, WhatsApp and MyGov had introduced the ability for the users to download their vaccine certificates from the chatbot. So far, over 32 lakh COVID-19 vaccine certificates have been downloaded by users all over the country.

The Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in a tweet said, **“Paving a new era of citizen convenience. Now, book COVID-19 vaccine slots easily on your phone within minutes.”**

He further wrote, “Send ‘Book Slot’ to MyGovIndia Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp. Verify OTP. Follow the steps.”.

Paving a new era of citizen convenience.

Now, book [#COVID19](#) vaccine slots easily on your phone within minutes.

Send 'Book Slot' to MyGovIndia Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp
Verify OTP
Follow the steps

Book today: <https://t.co/HHgtl990bb>

— Mansukh Mandaviya (@mansukhmandviya) [August 24, 2021](#)

The latest facility to book a slot for the COVID vaccine on WhatsApp will definitely make life much easier. It will also help in the government's plan of ramping up the COVID-19 vaccination in the country amid the rising concerns of the COVID-19 third wave.

Book Slot for COVID vaccine on WhatsApp: Check steps

Step 1: To contact MyGov Corona Helpdesk Chatbot, users can save the WhatsApp number +91 9013151515

Step 2: Type Book Slot and this it to the above number on WhatsApp

Step 3: This will generate a six-digit-one-time password on the respective mobile phone number

Step 4: Users will be able to choose a preferred date and location, based on the Pincode and vaccine type. A confirmation will follow after that.

Step 5: All the users will be able to follow this sequence to get a confirmation of their centre and the day of their vaccine appointment

Now you can book your vaccination slot on WhatsApp!

All you have to do is simply send 'Book Slot' to MyGovIndia Corona Helpdesk, verify OTP and follow these few simple steps.

Visit <https://t.co/97Wqddbz7k> today! [#IndiaFightsCorona](#) [@MoHFW_INDIA](#) [@PMOIndia](#)
pic.twitter.com/HQgyZfkHfv

— MyGovIndia (@mygovindia) [August 24, 2021](#)

MyGov Corona Helpdesk: In what way it has been significant?

- Since its launch in March 2020, MyGov Corona Helpdesk on WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most authentic sources of COVID-19 relation information during the pandemic. It served as a critical instrument in fighting the public health crisis in the country.
- **MyGov Corona Helpdesk**, enabled with the support from Haptik and Turn.io, has evolved into a go-to platform that not only helps citizens but is now also aiding them in the process of vaccine booking on WhatsApp, finding vaccination centers, slots and downloading the COVID vaccine certificates.

COVID vaccine slot booking on WhatsApp: Ramping vaccinations before third wave

As per the experts, if the third wave of COVID-19 pandemic hits the country, India can be seeing 6,00,000 new covid infections every day if it fails to increase the pace of vaccination.

According to a recent study, daily infections can come down to 2,00,000, if the 10 million a day vaccination plan is executed successfully in the country.

Even though experts have predicted a new wave in the coming weeks, most of them see it as

weaker than the previous one.

Operation Devi Shakti: India evacuates over 800 people from Afghanistan under Devi Shakti operation

India on August 24, 2021 termed the Afghanistan evacuation mission as "Operation Devi Shakti". India has so far evacuated more than 800 people from Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover of Kabul and fall of the Afghanistan government.

Union External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar tweeted saying, ***"Op Devi Shakti continues. 78 evacuees from Kabul arrive via Dushanbe. Salute @IAF_MCC, @AirIndiain and #TeamMEA for their untiring efforts. #DeviShakti"***

Op Devi Shakti continues.

78 evacuees from Kabul arrive via Dushanbe.

Salute [@IAF_MCC](#), [@AirIndiain](#) and [#TeamMEA](#) for their untiring efforts. [#DeviShakti](#)

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 24, 2021](#)

Arindam Bagchi, official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry informed that an Air India flight 1956 carrying 78 passengers, including 25 Indian citizens arrived in New Delhi on August 24 from Tajikistan's Dushanbe under Operation Devi Shakti. The evacuees were flown in from Kabul on an IAF aircraft.

pic.twitter.com/N5t3wGzpnK

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 24, 2021](#)

Bringing Indians back from Afghanistan

An IAF special repatriation flight carrying 168 passengers including 107 Indian nationals, landed in Delhi from Kabul on August 22, 2021.

Evacuation continues!

IAF special repatriation flight with 168 passengers onboard, including 107 Indian nationals, is on its way to Delhi from Kabul. pic.twitter.com/ysACxCIVdX

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 22, 2021](#)

A second batch of 146 Indian nationals, who were evacuated from Afghanistan to Doha, were also repatriated to India on August 22, 2021.

Bringing Indians back from Afghanistan.

2nd batch of 146 Indian national, who were evacuated from Afganistan to Doha, being repatriated today to India.

Thank everyone involved for their support. [@MEAIndia](#) [@DrSJaisankar](#)
[pic.twitter.com/9Jr5XnieB5](#)

— India in Qatar (@IndEmbDoha) [August 22, 2021](#)

Prior to that, Air India flight 1956 carrying 87 Indians departed from Tajikistan for New Delhi. The passengers also included two Nepalese nationals. The passengers were evacuated from Kabul by an IAF aircraft.

The passengers were earlier evacuated from Kabul by an IAF aircraft.
[pic.twitter.com/03ZBOZEpvQ](#)

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 21, 2021](#)

Earlier, the first batch of 135 Indians who were evacuated from Kabul to Doha over the past days were repatriated to India. The embassy officials had provided consular and logistics assistance to ensure their safe return.

1st batch of 135 Indians who were evacuated 4m Kabul to Doha over past days being repatriated tonight to India. Emb officials provided consular&logistics asst to ensure their safe return. We thank Qatar authorities n all concerned for making this possible [@MEAIndia@DrSJaisankar](#)
[pic.twitter.com/xueNYg6K1F](#)

— India in Qatar (@IndEmbDoha) [August 21, 2021](#)

Three copies of Guru Granth Sahib brought back

India also brought back three copies (swaroop) of the Sikh sacred scripture Guru Granth Sahib, which were received by Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri. The Union Minister carried the holy Shri Guru Granth Sahib on his head after the arrival from Afghanistan in the evacuation flight.

Deeply privileged & fortunate to welcome the three holy Swaroop of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji from Kabul at [@DelhiAirport](#) along with Sh [@VMBJP](#) Ji, Sh [@dushyanttgautam](#) Ji & members of Sikh Sangat. pic.twitter.com/mWhTwpnoOs

— Hardeep Singh Puri (@HardeepSPuri) [August 24, 2021](#)

Background

The Indian authorities on August 23, 2021 evacuated 75 Sikhs amid the deteriorating situation in war-torn Afghanistan. India has not only evacuated Indian nationals but also Afghan nationals including Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan.

The people in Afghanistan are rushing to leave the nation after the Taliban gained control over the country following President Ashraf Ghani's escape to Tajikistan. All countries have launched evacuation missions to get their citizens out from Afghanistan.

However, the evacuation of citizens from Afghanistan has been an extremely difficult mission. India has been airlifting its citizens through Dushanbe in Tajikistan and Qatar due to the chaos at Kabul airport.

The situation in Afghanistan turned completely on August 15, 2021 when the Taliban closed in on Kabul, forcing the President to flee the nation.

The Indian Air Force has already evacuated roughly 180 passengers including its Ambassador to Afghanistan and other diplomats.

PM Modi, Russia's President Putin discuss Afghanistan situation, agrees to form channel for consultations

Prime Minister Modi and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, amid mounting global concerns over the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, on August 24, 2021, in a phone call discussed the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the region and the world.

The Prime Minister's Office said that the leaders were of the view that it was significant for the two strategic partners to work together and they also instructed their senior officials to stay in touch.

After the telephonic conversation between the two leaders, both the countries agreed to set up a **'permanent bilateral channel' for consultations** on the issues arising out of Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Modi in a tweet said, ***"Had a detailed and useful exchange of views with my friend President Putin on recent developments in Afghanistan. We also discussed issues on the bilateral agenda, including India-Russia Cooperation against COVID-19. We agreed to continue close consultations on important issues."***

Had a detailed and useful exchange of views with my friend President Putin on recent developments in Afghanistan. We also discussed issues on the bilateral agenda, including India-Russia cooperation against COVID-19. We agreed to continue close consultations on important issues.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 24, 2021](#)

Telephonic conversation between PM Modi and President Putin: What was discussed?

- Both sides noted the significance of coordinated efforts to 'establish peace & stability' in Afghanistan and to ensure security in the region as a whole.
- PM Modi and President Putin expressed intention to enhance cooperation on countering the dissemination of the terrorist ideology and the drug threat emanating from war-torn Afghanistan.
- Several issues pertaining to the further development of the Russia-India special and privileged partnership, including trade and economy, were part of the discussion.

- Forthcoming multilateral engagements were also touched upon, including the meeting of the Council of SCO Heads of State, BRICS Summit, and India's participation in the Eastern Economic Forum.
- PM Modi and Putin agreed to remain in touch on bilateral and global issues, in particular, the situation in Afghanistan.

PM Modi expresses gratitude to Russia for COVID assistance:

Prime Minister Modi expressed gratitude to Russian President Putin for the assistance in combating the COVID-19 infection. The assistance included the supply and production of the Russian vaccine in India and the shipment of the necessary medicines and medical equipment.

As per PMO, the leaders of India and Russia also expressed satisfaction at the progress in the partnership between the two nations, despite the COVID-19 challenge.

Why India & Russia is setting up a permanent bilateral channel' for consultations?

During the exchange of views between PM Modi and Russian President Putin, both the parties noted the significance of concerted efforts which will contribute to the establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan, also ensuring security in the region as a whole. Hence, it was agreed to establish a two-way channel for permanent consultations on this issue.

Meanwhile, Moscow had earlier praised the Taliban for restoring order following its takeover of Afghanistan.

National Security Advisors from BRICS countries meet on Afghan crisis:

National Security Advisor from the five BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) held a meeting virtually to discuss developments in Afghanistan.

The agenda of the discussion was cooperation among law enforcement agencies, healthcare. Health safety and counter-terrorism.

Background:

The ongoing discussion among the world leaders has been taking place as the Taliban takes control of Afghanistan, posing a global terror threat.

Apart from ensuring the safety and security of Afghans in the country, the leaders have also been facing challenges of recognizing Taliban as a governing body of Afghanistan.

India's first mRNA COVID vaccine gets DCGI nod for Phase 2/3 trials

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has given a go-ahead to the **Phase 2/3 trials of India's first mRNA-based COVID vaccine, HGCO19.**

The vaccine has been deemed to be safe by the **Vaccine Subject Expert Committee (SEC)**, which had reviewed the interim Phase I trial data. The committee found the vaccine to be safe, tolerable and immunogenic in the participants of the study.

HGCO19: India's first mRNA-based vaccine

- The mRNA-based vaccine has been developed in partnership with Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).
- Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd.**, which is a Pune-based biotechnology company, had submitted the interim clinical data of the Phase I study to the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Centre's National Regulatory Authority (NRA).
- The Vaccine Subject Expert Committee had then reviewed the interim Phase I data and found HGCO19 to be safe, tolerable and immunogenic among the participants of the study.

DCGI nod for Phase 2/3 trials

Gennova had also submitted the proposed Phase II/ Phase III study titled "A Prospective, Multicentre, Randomized, Active-controlled, Observer-blind, Phase II study seamlessly followed by a Phase III study to evaluate the Safety, Tolerability, and Immunogenicity of the candidate HGCO19 (COVID-19 vaccine) in healthy subjects."

The study was also approved by the office of the DCGI, CDSCO. The study will be conducted at approximately 10-15 sites in India under Phase II trials and 22-27 sites in Phase III trials.

The Pune-based company plans to use the DBT-ICMR clinical trial network sites for this study.

Funds

Gennova's mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine development program has been partly

funded by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) way back in Jun 2020.

The Department of Biotechnology further supported the program under the Mission COVID Suraksha- The Indian COVID-19 Vaccine Development Mission, which was implemented by BIRAC.

Significance

HGCO19 is expected to be an important vaccine for both India and the world. The vaccine's development is an important milestone in India's Indigenous Vaccine Development Mission and positions India on the global map for novel vaccine development.

North Eastern Region District SDG Index 2021-22 to be launched on August 26: All you need to know

NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MoDoNER) will launch the **first edition of the North Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index Report and Dashboard 2021-22** on August 26, 2021. The Ministry and MoDoNER have collaborated with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to develop a NER District SDG Index and Dashboard that will aid the State government of 8 northeastern states in monitoring the progress of their districts.

The North Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index Report and Dashboard 2021-22 is a significant milestone in NITI Aayog's efforts in localizing the SDGs from 'global to national to local'. The Index report is the result of the SDG Conclave of the eight Northeastern states that was held in Guwahati in February 2020 by NITI Aayog and MoDoNER. The State Indicator Frameworks of all eight Northeastern states were launched during the SDG Conclave.

Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog, Dr Inderjit Singh, Secretary, Ministry of DoNER, and Ms Nadia Rasheed, Resident Representative (i/c), UNDP India will present during the launch of the report by Dr Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog, G. Kishan Reddy, Union Minister, DoNER, Tourism and Culture, and B L Verma, Union Minister of State, DoNER and Cooperation.

What is North Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index?

The NER District SDG Index and Dashboard: Baseline Report 2021-22 is an innovative comprehensive, data-driven tool that measures the progress of all districts of states across the Northeastern region.

The NER District SDG Index and Dashboard is a collaborative initiative by NITI Aayog and the Ministry of DoNER along with technical support from UNDP. The NITI Aayog is the nodal agency for SDGs in India,

The report has utilized 84 indicators that cover 15 of the Global Goals across 50 targets. The report has worked towards localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 120 Districts across 8 states namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram,

Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.

How was the NER District SDG report prepared?

The methodology and construction of the report are based on the central objectives of measuring the performance of the 120 districts across the 8 states of the North Eastern Region on the SDGs and their corresponding targets and rank them accordingly.

The index of the report is based on NITI Aayog's SDG India Index which is the official tool for monitoring the progress on the SDGs at the national and State or Union Territory levels.

All the eight states of the North Eastern Region have been consulted extensively for finalizing aspects relating to the computation methodology and selection of indicators of the NER District SDG Index and Dashboard.

States offered to enrich localized insights and field experience during the feedback process that helped in the construction of the index better.

NER District SDG Index Report: Benefits

the North Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index Report and Dashboard 2021-22 will aid States in:

- (i) identifying crucial gaps and working on areas that need more attention, foster healthy competition among them,
- (ii) fast-tracking the progress to achieve the SDGs in the region,
- (iii) gauge the progress of districts on indicators covering the Global Goals on climate change and environment, economic growth, education, health, gender, institutions, etc.

India, ADB sign \$500 million loan to expand metro rail network in Bengaluru- Check details

The Central Government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on August 23, 2021, signed a \$500 million loan for the expansion of the metro rail network in Bengaluru. As per the Finance Ministry, two new metro lines will be constructed totaling 56 km in length.

The agreement for **Bengaluru Metro Rail Project** was signed between Rajat Kumar Mishra, Additional Secretary, Economic Affairs Department in the Ministry of Finance who signed for the Government of India, and Mr. Takeo Konishi, Country Director of ADB's India Resident Mission.

The Asian Development Bank has been committed to achieving an inclusive, prosperous, sustainable, and resilient Asia and the Pacific while also sustaining its efforts of eradicating extreme poverty.

Significance:

- The metro lines in Bengaluru, Karnataka will strengthen the safe, affordable, and green mobility in the city, having a positive impact on enhancing the quality of life, livelihood opportunities, and sustainable growth in urban habitat.
- The Bengaluru Metro Rail Project will support the urban transformation of the city into a more sustainable and livable one through the support of urban public transport and urban development with concepts of **Multi-Modal Integration (MMI) and transit-oriented development (TOD)**.
- The project will also bring various benefits including road de-congestion, environmental improvement, and better urban livability.

Construction of new metro lines in Bengaluru:

- The project will construct two new metro lines in Bengaluru, mostly elevated, along the outer Ring Road and National Highway 44 between the Central Silk Road and Kempegowda International Airport with 30 stations.

- It will help in decongesting traffic in the city area and will also provide seamless connectivity to the airport.

TOD based urban development model:

As per the Press Statement, the transit-orient development (TOD) based urban development model will target the realigning growth. It will also increase Bengaluru's economic productivity by creating compact, higher creativity, mixed-income, mixed-use, safe and resource-efficient, and inclusive neighbourhoods.

TOD aims at raising the land values along these corridors and will generate capital revenues for the State Government.

Multi-Modal Integration (MMI) on the other hand will aim at providing people-oriented, environment-friendly, and total mobility solutions for all the Bangalore residents through the smooth integration of different modes of public transport.

Additional grant of \$2 million:

An additional 2 million dollars technical assistance grant from ADB will help Karnataka Government in formulating the urban development plans. The grant from ADB will also be used to strengthen the capacity of the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited and other state agencies.

Ukrainian plane hijacked from Kabul, flown to Iran, claims Ukraine's Deputy FM Yevgeny Yenin; Iran denies

A Ukrainian plane that arrived in Kabul to evacuate Ukrainian citizens from Afghanistan last week was reportedly hijacked by unidentified people and flown to Iran.

Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Yevgeny Yenin claims that the plane had arrived in Kabul last Sunday to evacuate Ukrainians but it was stolen and flown to Iran on Tuesday. The plane has around 83 passengers on board, who are currently missing.

Yevgeny Yenin said, ***"Last Sunday, our plane was hijacked by other people. On Tuesday, the plane was practically stolen from us, it flew into Iran with an unidentified group of passengers onboard instead of airlifting Ukrainians. Our next three evacuation attempts were also not successful because our people could not get into the airport."***

A Ukrainian plane that arrived in Afghanistan to evacuate Ukrainians has been hijacked by unidentified people who flew it into Iran, Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Yevgeny Yenin says: Russian News Agency TASS pic.twitter.com/imHpp5bK6G

— ANI (@ANI) [August 24, 2021](#)

What exactly happened?

The deputy foreign minister of Ukraine has not informed about what happened to the plane and whether the nation will try to get it back. The plane though had landed in Kabul to evacuate Ukrainians, it did not airlift them and instead picked up an unidentified group of people.

According to Yenin, the hijackers were armed and the plane was practically stolen from them. He highlighted that a whole diplomatic service headed by Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba **"had been working in the crash test mode"** the whole week.

Iran denies Ukrainian plane was hijacked

The Iranian Civil Aviation Authority has denied that the Ukrainian plane was hijacked. The authority stated that the plane was refuelled in Mashhad and then it flew to Kiev.

Background

A military transport plane with about 83 people including 31 Ukrainians arrived in Kiev, Ukraine on August 22, 2021. The presidential office released a statement saying that about 12 Ukrainian military personnel returned home, while foreign reporters and public figures who had requested for help were also evacuated.

About 100 Ukrainians are still stranded in Afghanistan and are expecting to be evacuated.

Union Minister Narayan Rane arrested by Maharashtra Police: Know why here

Union Minister Narayan Rane has formally been arrested by the Ratnagiri police in Maharashtra for his slap remarks against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

The Minister had approached the Bombay High Court earlier seeking protection from arrest, after two FIRs were filed against him over his remarks. He had also sought quashing of the FIRs.

Two FIRs were registered against Narayan Rane, one in Pune and the other one in Nashik, in connection with the Minister's remarks against CM Uddhav Thackeray. The Nashik Cyber Police had registered an FIR against the Union Minister on Shiv Sena Nashik Chief's complaint.

The Police Commissioner then issued an order to arrest Narayan Rane and formed a team led by DCP Sanjay Barkund to arrest him. The team later detained the Minister amid large resistance from his supporters and took him to Sangameshwar police station in Ratnagiri.

As per reports, Union Home Minister Amit Shah called Narayan Rane and assured him of all the help.

Maharashtra: Nashik Cyber police registered FIR on Shiv Sena Nashik Chief's complaint against Union Min Narayan Rane in connection with his statement against CM Thackeray. Police Commissioner issued an order to arrest Rane & formed a team led by DCP Sanjay Barkund to arrest him. pic.twitter.com/oyNmGaZIVq

— ANI (@ANI) [August 24, 2021](#)

As per reports, Union Home Minister Amit Shah called Narayan Rane and assured him of all the help.

First Cabinet Minister to be arrested in 20 years

Narayan Rane has become the first Union Minister to be arrested by the state police in 20 years after late Murasoli Maran & TR Baalu, who were dramatically arrested at midnight by Chennai Police in June 2001.

Shiv Sena workers show black flags

Shiv Sena workers staged a protest by showing black flags in Mumbai's Lalbaug against Union

Minister Narayan Rane. Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar, who was also present at the spot, said "we are demonstrating against the union minister who earlier held the post of Maharashtra CM & has now disrespected the current CM and his position."

We are demonstrating against the union minister who earlier held the post of Maharashtra CM & has now disrespected the current CM and his position: Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar
pic.twitter.com/rmUYA42ixd

— ANI (@ANI) [August 24, 2021](#)

We don't support Narayan Rane's statement: Former Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis

Former Maharashtra CM and BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said, "We don't support Narayan Rane's statement (against Uddhav Thackeray) but I, as an individual & the party stand with him. Sharijil Usmani abused Bharat Mata but no FIR was registered against him but you (state govt) filed FIR against Narayan Rane."

We don't support Narayan Rane's statement (against Uddhav Thackeray) but I, as an individual & the party stand with him. Sharijil Usmani abused Bharat Mata but no FIR was registered against him but you (state govt) filed FIR against Narayan Rane: BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis
pic.twitter.com/aHobvMGdYv

— ANI (@ANI) [August 24, 2021](#)

He added saying, "One can get angry for not remembering the Amrit Mahotsav year of India's Independence, this is natural."

What did Narayan Rane say against Uddhav Thackeray?

Union Minister Narayan Rane during his interaction in Mahad as a part of the 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' on August 23, 2021 claimed that the Maharashtra CM forgot the year of Independence during a public event on August 15. The BJP Rajya Sabha MP added that he would have slapped Thackeray had he been present on the occasion.

Paralympics 2020 India Schedule: Check full schedule of Indian athletes at Tokyo Paralympics

Paralympics 2020 India Schedule: India has sent a **54-member strong contingent** to compete at Tokyo Paralympic Games 2020. The Indian athletes will be competing in nine sporting disciplines including track & field, table tennis, archery, badminton, taekwondo and swimming.

Rio Paralympic Champions Javelin thrower Devendra Jhajaria and high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu will be competing at the 2020 paralympic games as well.

The Tokyo Paralympics Opening Ceremony will get underway today, on August 24, 2021. The Paralympic Opening Ceremony will be hosted at the Olympic Stadium, which also hosted the Opening and Closing Ceremonies for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. The Paralympic Games will begin on August 25 and conclude on September 5, 2021.

When and where can we watch Tokyo Paralympics 2020 live?

DD Sports will broadcast Paralympics Tokyo 2020 live every day 9 am onwards on all cable and DTH platforms.

Are you ready for the [#TokyoParalympics](#)?!

Watch the Opening Ceremony TOMORROW morning LIVE at 7 a.m. ET on NBCSN, <https://t.co/FmEtvutDRA> and the NBC Sports App. pic.twitter.com/oTeu96yLhZ

— #TokyoParalympics (@NBCOlympics) [August 23, 2021](#)

Check the full schedule of Indian athletes at Tokyo Paralympics

Paralympics 2020 India Schedule: Day-wise Schedule
August 25, Wednesday

Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Table Tennis	Individual C3	Sonalben Madhubhai Patel
	Individual C4	Bhavina Hasmukhbhai Patel
August 27, Friday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Archery	Men's Recurve Individual Open	Harvinder Singh, Vivek Chikara
	Men's Compound Individual Open	Rakesh Kumar, Shyam Sundar Swami
	Women's Compound Individual Open	Jyoti Baliyan
	Compound Mixed Team Open	Jyoti Baliyan & TBC
Powerlifting	Men's 65kg	Jaideep Deswal
	Women's 50kg	Sakina Khatun
Swimming	200 Individual Medley SM7	Suyash Jadhav
August 28, Saturday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Athletics	Men's Javelin Throw F57	Ranjeet Bhati
August 29, Sunday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Athletics	Men's Discus Throw F52	Vinod Kumar

	Men's High Jump T47	Nishad Kumar, Ram Pal
August 30, Monday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Athletics	Men's Discus Throw F56	Yogesh Kathuniya
	Men's Javelin Throw F46	Sundar Singh Gurjar, Ajeet Singh, Devendra Jhajharia
	Men's Javelin Throw F64	Sumit Antil, Sandeep Choudhary
Shooting	Men's R1 – 10 m air rifle standing SH1	Swaroop Mahavir Unhalkar, Deepak Saini
	Women's R2 – 10 m air rifle SH1	Avani Lekhara
August 31, Tuesday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Athletics	Men's High Jump T63	Sharad Kumar, Mariyappan Thangavelu, Varun Singh Bhati
	Women's 100m T13	Simran
	Women's Shot Put F34	Bhagyashri Madavrao Jadhav
Shooting	Men's P1 – 10 m air pistol SH1	Manish Narwal, Deepender Singh, Singhraj
	Women's P2 – 10 m air pistol SH1	Rubina Francis
September 1, Wednesday		

Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Badminton	Men's Singles SL3	Pramod Bhagat, Manoj Sarkar
	Women's Singles SU5	Palak Kohli
	Mixed Doubles SL3-SU5	Pramod Bhagat & Palak Kohli
Athletics	Men's Club Throw F51	Dharambir Nain, Amit Kumar Saroha
Shooting	Mixed R3 – 10 m air rifle prone SH1	Deepak Saini, Sidhartha Babu & Avani Lekhara
September 2, Thursday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Badminton	Men's Singles SL4	Suhas Lalinakere Yathiraj, Tarun Dhillon
	Men's Singles SS6	Krishna Nagar
	Women's Singles SL4	Parul Parmar
	Women's Doubles SL3-SU5	Parul Parmar & Palak Kohli
Para Canoeing	Women's VL2	Prachi Yadav
Taekwondo	Women's K44 -49kg	Aruna Tanwar
Athletics	Men's Shot Put F35	Arvind Malik
Shooting	Mixed P3 - 25 m pistol SH1	Akash & Rahul Jakhar
September 3, Friday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Swimming	50m Butterfly S7	Suyash Jadhav, Niranjan Mukundan
Shooting	Men's R7 - 50 m rifle 3	Deepak Saini

	positions SH1	
	Women's R8 – 50 m rifle 3 positions SH1	Avani Lekhara
Athletics	Men's High Jump T64	Praveen Kumar
	Men's Javelin Throw F54	Tek Chand
	Men's Shot Put F57	Soman Rana
	Women's Club Throw F51	Ekta Bhyan, Kashish Lakra
September 4, Saturday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Shooting	Mixed P4 – 50 m pistol SH1	Akash, Manish Narwal & Singhraj
Athletics	Men's Javelin Throw F41	Navdeep Singh
September 5, Sunday		
Sport	Events	Indian Athletes
Shooting	Mixed R6 – 50 m rifle prone SH1	Deepak Saini, Avani Lekhara & Sidhartha Babu

COVID-19: Israel launches antibody testing in children aged 3 to 12 years old

Israel on August 22, 2021, launched antibody testing for children between 3 years to 12 years old. The Israeli government has decided to alleviate any developmental and educational setbacks amid the coronavirus pandemic despite the rising number of COVID-19 cases caused by the Delta variant.

The antibody testing has been termed as the 'largest serological operation' by the Israeli government and has been launched during a time when students are preparing to return to schools for a new academic year.

The government has requested all parents to bring their children to avail the free test as quickly as possible to ensure successful implementation of the new academic years and classroom schedules. Israel has been vaccinating children aged 12 and above.

Israel's COVID-19 antibody testing in children

Aim

- The antibody testing has been devised to seek information on the number of unvaccinated children between ages 3 to 12 years old who have developed immunity or antibody protection against COVID-19 after having a latent or unrecorded case.
- There are approximately 1.5 million children in this age bracket in Israel who are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Procedure

- The antibody testing in children in Israel will be conducted by a 15-minute finger pin-prick method for free.
- The Health and Education Ministries and the Army's Home Front command have collaborated to conduct the testing.

Results

- If a child is tested positive for coronavirus antibodies, he or she will be allowed to go to school safely. Being tested positive for coronavirus antibodies means the child has developed immunity or antibody protection against COVID-19.

Why did Israel launch COVID-19 antibody testing in children?

- In July 2021, Yigal Slovik, Director, Education Ministry said that last year's closures caused 'emotional and social damage' to students.
- The lockdowns and remote learning have induced a 44 per cent rise in referrals for suicidal risk diagnosis, Slovik added.

COVID-19 Tracker: Israel

- Israel as of August 24, 2021, has reported approximately 9.99 lakh total confirmed COVID-19 cases and 6,856 deaths.
- As of August 23, 2021, over 5.4 million out of 9.3 million people in Israel have been completely vaccinated. This constitutes constituting 60 per cent of the total population.

Egypt closes Rafah crossing with Gaza amid friction with Hamas group

Egypt shut down its main border crossing point with the Gaza Strip on August 23, 2021, **amid tensions with the territory's militant Hamas rulers.**

It was the first time that the **Rafah crossing (crossing point between Egypt and Gaza strip)** was closed during a workday since early 2021. Egypt's Government had kept the crossing opened even during the 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in May 2021.

As per the Egyptian officials, the closure was connected to Egypt's efforts to broker a long-term cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. It has not been immediately clear that how long the closure will last.

Why Egypt has decided to close crossing with Gaza?

One of the Egyptian Officials informed that the decision of closing the crossing point with the Gaza strip meant to pressure Hamas because of the differences between the Hamas and Cairo over lack of progress in both the Egyptian-led indirect talks with Israel and also the efforts to reconcile Palestinian factions.

The closure was also announced for security reasons after an escalation on August 21 between Israel and Hamas, where Israeli aircraft had struck sites in Gaza after gunfire across Gaza's border with Israeli earlier in the day.

The closure of Rafah Crossing was announced hours after the news agency of Egypt reported that the crossing point was opened on August 22 after its weekly closing down for the Muslim weekend, Friday and Saturday.

Hamas notified of closure of Rafah crossing:

A spokesperson for the Hamas-run Interior Ministry, Iyad al-Bozum said that **Hamas (the Palestinian faction that controls Gaza)** has been notified of the closure of Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza strip. He added that they have been in contact with the Egyptian authorities to reopen Rafah.

He further said that the closure of the Rafah crossing exacerbates the humanitarian crisis inside the Gaza strip and that Hamas hopes that the crossing will return to work as soon as possible.

Violence erupted during protests organized by Hamas:

On August 21 violence had erupted during a protest organized by Hamas to draw **attention to the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the territory**.

Scores of Palestinians had approached the border fence with Israel, with one of them shooting and wounding the Israeli soldier. Reportedly, at least, 24 Palestinians were wounded by Israeli gunfire, two critically.

What is Rafah Crossing?

Rafah is the sole crossing between Egypt and Gaza, where an Israel-led blockade has placed several restrictions on the movement of people and goods for years.

In February 2021, Egypt had decided to reopen the crossing indefinitely, in what was described as an effort to encourage the negotiations between Palestinian factions at the time in Cairo (Egypt's capital).

During the war in May between Israel and Hamas group, Egypt had allowed the aid and construction convoys into Gaza in order to help rebuild the houses and infrastructure that was destroyed during the fighting.

What is Gaza Strip?

Gaza strip or Gaza is a self-governing Palestinian territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Gaza Strip borders Egypt on the Southwest for 11 km and Israel on the east and north along a 51 km border. Gaza and the West Bank have been claimed by the Sovereign State of Palestine.

The territories of the West Bank and Gaza have been separated from each other by Israeli territory. Both are under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, however the strip, since the Battle of Gaza in 2007, has been governed by Hamas, a Palestinian fundamentalist militant Islamic Organisation.

What is Egypt's role between Israel and Hamas?

Egypt has been a key mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group of the Gaza strip over the years. The Intelligence Chief of Egypt, Abbas Kamel also paid a rare visit to Israel last week in order to discuss the ceasefire deal with the newly appointed Prime Minister of Israel, Naftali Bennett. During his visit, he also invited Bennett to Egypt.

Afghanistan-Taliban crisis: G7 Leaders' to convene emergency meeting virtually

An emergency meeting of the G7 Leaders' will be convened virtually on August 24, 2021, by the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is also representing the G7's current presidency, to urgently deliberate on the situation in Afghanistan and coordinate a response to the Taliban crisis in the war-torn country.

UK PM Johnson in a tweet said that it is vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis, and support the Afghan people to secure gains of the last 20 years.

US President Joe Biden will also join virtually in the meeting of G7 Leaders' Meet on August 24, 2021, stated White House Press Secretary in a statement. The US has deployed troops temporarily till August 31, 2021, to execute the evacuation of US nationals and Afghans who have assisted the US government.

I will convene G7 leaders on Tuesday for urgent talks on the situation in Afghanistan. It is vital that the international community works together to ensure safe evacuations, prevent a humanitarian crisis and support the Afghan people to secure the gains of the last 20 years.

— Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson) [August 22, 2021](#)

Emergency meeting of the G7 Leaders: Afghanistan on Agenda

- The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will virtually convene an emergency meeting of the G7 Leaders' to:

- (i) discuss the ongoing Afghanistan crisis and coordinate an action plan for the evacuations,
- (ii) discuss the Afghanistan policy to provide humanitarian assistance and offer support to Afghan refugees,
- (iii) safeguard vulnerable Afghans who have assisted the governments of the member countries.

Also read: [Afghanistan: 12.2 million people acutely food insecure, says UN](#)

Afghanistan-Taliban Crisis: Background

- The Taliban on August 15, 2021, seized Afghanistan's capital Kabul. Since the withdrawal of the US army, the Taliban almost captured all major cities in Afghanistan within 10 days. As of now, the Taliban control approximately a fifth of the total 400 districts in Afghanistan.
- Thousands of Afghans are relentlessly trying to flee Kabul. On August 22, 2021, amid the continuous evacuation drills by countries across the world, the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid informed that the Taliban will soon be announcing a new government in Afghanistan.
- The Taliban is a hardcore Islamist group that came into being in the 1990s. The group comprises between 55,000 to 85,000 full-time fighters. The group is primarily made of the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

G7 Leaders: Background

- The G7 group, also known as the Group of Seven, is an international-governmental forum comprising leaders from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan.
- The 2021 G7 Presidency is with the United Kingdom (UK). The Presidency rotates annually among the member countries.

Also read: [Taliban in Afghanistan: How it funds itself? – Explainer of the Day](#)

Children above 12 with comorbidities to get COVID-19 vaccine first, says Panel Chief

The Chairman of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization, NK Arora, said on August 23, 2021, that the children with comorbidities will be given the priority in vaccination drive for those below the age of 18 years.

Arora said that the children with comorbidities will be given the preference when paediatric vaccines are introduced in the system, be it Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN, Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D, or the other one that the Serum Institute of India has been testing on children.

As per the Public Health Experts, children must get vaccinated against the disease when they become eligible in order to reduce the vulnerability in a possible third wave of infections as they are the only group that is completely unvaccinated.

The two COVID-19 vaccine candidates were tested among children in India: ZyCoV-D and COVAXIN. The two vaccines are also the only one of the six now approved in the country to be developed indigenously.

Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D vaccine approved for Children: What now?

ZyCoV-D, Zydus Cadila's COVID-19 vaccine, has become the first vaccine in India to receive emergency use approval for children above the age of 12 years.

NK Arora informed that the Government experts will be holding discussions and meetings on how to introduce Zydus's vaccine as it is a three-dose intradermal vaccine that is to be administered in a 28-days gap.

However, Zydus informed that it has also planned on seeking approval for a two-dose regimen of its vaccine in the country.

COVAXIN: Bharat Biotech's vaccine for children to be available soon

Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN is also likely to be available for use in children by the end of 2021. The regulatory approval process of the vaccine can start anywhere between September and October 2021.

Krishna Ella, Bharat Biotech's Chairman and Managing Director, and Dr. Priya Abraham, Director

of ICMR-National Institute of Virology informed that COVAXIN for children will likely be approved by September 2021.

The final phase of the clinical trial is over and by the next month, the firm will receive the license for the vaccine use in children in India.

Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN will also be the only vaccine in the world that can be given to children between the age of 2 and 18 years.

COVAXIN trials results in children:

The COVAXIN trial results in children can be expected soon and after that, they will be presented to the regulators.

The COVAXIN trial had 525 children volunteers while Cadila's ZyCoV-D trials- as part of phase II/III clinical studies- had included 1,000 volunteers in the 12-18 age group.

COVID-19 booster doses in India:

NK Arora while talking about the booster doses said that it is another area that is getting more and more attention and that studies have already been initiated in the country to determine that.

He added that the government will strictly rely on its own data that will be generated locally on the need for booster doses.

However, experts have asserted that the first priority must be to vaccinate all eligible people. The booster may be required, but it will happen later, first, it is significant to cover all the high-risk population groups and adults.

Japan plans to bring back soil samples from Martian moon by 2029

Japan's space agency has been planning on bringing soil samples back from the Mars region ahead of the Chinese and the US missions now operating on Mars, in hopes of finding clues to the origin of Mars and traces of possible life.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency plans to launch an explorer in the year 2024 to land on the Martian Moon 'Phobos' in order to collect 10 grams of soil and bring it back to Earth in 2029.

The Project Manager of the mission, Yasuhiro Kawakatsu said that the rapid return trip from Mars will put Japan ahead of China and the United States in bringing back the samples from the Martian region despite starting later from both the countries.

Why bringing back soil samples from Martian Moon is significant?

The scientists from Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency or JAXA believe that 0.1% of the surface soil on Phobos came from Mars and 10 grams can contain about 30 granules, depending on the consistency of the soil.

The Professor at Japan's Institute of Space and Aeronautical Science, Tomohiro Usui said that the soil on Phobos is likely to be a mixture of material from the moon itself and the material from Mars that was spread by sandstorms.

New CG video for MMX

Have you already checked the new CG video for the Martian Moons eXploration (MMX) Making use of Hayabusa2's technology and knowledge, we will collect a sample from [#Phobos](#) (one of the Martian moons) and bring it back to Earth <https://t.co/WKGZBRr0oc>

— JAXA Space Exploration Center (@jsec_jaxa_en) [August 23, 2021](#)

Collecting the samples from multiple locations on the Martian moon can provide a greater chance of obtaining the possible traces of life from Mars than obtaining the soil from a single location on Mars.

As per JAXA scientists, any life forms that might have come from Mars would have died due to the harsh solar and cosmic radiation on Phobos.

By studying the soil samples in Phobos including materials from Mars, the scientists hope of learning about the evolution of the Martian Biosphere.

Identifying potential life forms on Mars:

According to Tomohiro Usui, the Japanese research on Phobos and NASA's samples from the specific locations in the Martian Crater can complement each other. It can also lead to the answers to the questions such as how Martian life, if present, emerged and evolved in time and place.

The missions by NASA and the European Space Agency focus on the potential life forms and the evolution of the area of the Jezero Crater on Mars, which is believed to be an ancient lake.

Mission on Mars by other nations to bring back samples:

The Perseverance Rover of NASA has been operating in a Mars Crater where it plans on collecting 31 samples and bring them back to Earth with help from the European Space Agency as early as 2031.

In May 2021, China also landed a spacecraft on Mars and plans on bringing back samples around in the year 2030.

World's first successful return of an asteroid sample by Japan:

In December 2020, a JAXA probe, Hayabusa2, was able to bring back more than 5 grams (0.19 ounce) of the soil from the asteroid Ryugu, in the world's first successful return of an asteroid sample. The asteroid is more than 300 million kilometers from the Earth.

Tokyo Paralympics 2020: Javelin Thrower Tek Chand named India's flag bearer, Mariyappan Thangavelu in quarantine

Javelin Thrower Tek Chand has been named as India's flag bearer for the opening ceremony of Tokyo Paralympics 2020 today after Mariyappan Thangavelu was identified as a close contact of a Covid Positive person in his flight to Tokyo.

Mariyappan Thangavelu will now have to quarantine as precautionary measure and miss the opening ceremony. He though has tested negative upon reaching the Olympic village, the Organizing Committee has advised not to make Mariyaapan participate in the Opening Ceremony.

Thangavelu Mariyappan came in close contact with a [#COVID19](#) positive foreign passenger. Though on reaching the village he has tested negative, the Organizing Committee has advised not to make Mariyaapan participate in the Opening Ceremony.

— ANI (@ANI) [August 24, 2021](#)

He has been isolated along with five other members of the Indian contingent. The news came just few hours before the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Paralympics.

India has fielded its largest-ever contingent for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games with 54 athletes competing in nine disciplines at Tokyo. India had fielded 19 para-athletes including three women at the Rio Paralympics, which at the time was its largest-ever contingent.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympics are scheduled to begin from today evening.

Tokyo 2020 Paralympics: Key Highlights

- Javelin thrower Devendra Jhajaria and high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu had won gold at Rio Olympics.
- They will both be competing again this time and along with Rio bronze medallist high jumper Varun Singh Bhati.

- India will have its highest representation in track and field events at Tokyo Paralympics with 16 athletes having qualified for different disciplines including club throw, 100m sprint, javelin throw, discus throw, high jump and shot put.
- Prachi Yadav will be the first Indian Paracanoe athlete.
- Sakina Khatun will become the first female powerlifter to represent India at the Paralympics.
- It would also be the first time when women para shooters will represent India at the Paralympics. Two women shooters, Rubina Francis and Avani Lekhara will participate in the games as a part of the 10-member Indian shooting team.
- India will also have representation in events including archery, table tennis, badminton, swimming and taekwondo.

Rio Paralympic Games 2016

- India had won two gold medals, silver and a bronze at the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games.
- India had competed at the 2016 Summer Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro and won four medals including two gold medals, silver and a bronze.
- Rio Olympics was India's best-ever performance in the history of the summer Paralympic games. Devendra Jhajharia had broken the World Record to win a gold medal at the Paralympics.
- Mariyappan Thangavelu was the first gold medallist for India in the 2016 Paralympics.
- India has had representation in every edition of the Summer Paralympic Games since 1968. Overall, India has won 12 medals at Paralympic Games.

Swachh Survekshan 2021: Andhra Pradesh becomes first state with three 'Water Plus' certified cities

The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs awarded three cities from Andhra Pradesh with 'Water Plus' certification under the Swachh Bharat Mission and Swachh Survekshan assessment.

Andhra Pradesh has now become the first state to have more than one 'Water Plus' certified city. The three cities awarded are Greater Vishakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, and Tirupathi Municipal Corporation.

A total of nine cities across India were awarded 'Water Plus' certification. Earlier on August 11, 2021, Indore was declared as the first 'Water Plus' certified city of India under the Swachh Survekshan 2021.

How did three cities of Andhra Pradesh become 'Water Plus' certified?

- As per the protocol of the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, a city can only be declared 'Water Plus' certified after it has achieved the status of Open Defecation Free (ODF/ODF+/ODF++).
- As per CPCB norms, a city or municipal corporation can be certified as 'Water Plus' once it has successfully carried out the treatment and management of liquid waste from households, sewers, commercial establishments, etc at a satisfactory level before releasing the treated wastewater to the environment.
- The city or municipal corporation should also be maintaining an adequate capacity of wastewater or sewage treatment facilities as well as cost recovery through recycling and reuse of treated wastewater.

Indore declared as first 'Water Plus' certified city

- Under the Swachh Survekshan 2021, Indore was the first city that was declared as a 'Water Plus' certified on August 11, 2021.

- Manish Singh, District Collector, Indore explained that the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) had tapped 1,746 public sewer outfalls in 25 small and big nullahs and 5,624 domestic sewer outfalls in accordance with the Water Plus protocol of Swachh Survekshan. This, in turn, aided in freeing Kanh and Saraswati rivers from the sewer lines.
- Indore also used approximately 110 million litres per day (MLD) treated water from the 7 sewerage treatment plants, set up 147 special types of urinals across the city, and cleaned wells, ponds, and water bodies.

What is Swachh Survekshan?

- Swachh Survekshan is a part of the Swachh Bharat Mission. It is conducted as an annual survey of cities across India in terms of sanitation, hygiene, and cleanliness. The assessment was started with an aim to lead India towards a clean and open defecation-free country by October 2019.
- The first Swachh Survekshan was conducted in India in 2016 across 73 cities. In 2020, the assessment was conducted across 4,242 cities.
- Swachh Survekshan 2021 is the 6th edition of the world's largest urban sanitation and cleanliness survey.

Government launches new portal to facilitate geospatial planning of MGNREGA assets

The Central Government on August 23, 2021, launched a new geospatial planning portal, 'Yuktdhara'. As per Union Minister Jitendra Singh, the portal will help in facilitating the new MGNREGA assets (farm ponds, dams, plantation, roads, playgrounds etc.) using remote sensing and geographic information system-based data.

The 'Yuktdhara' portal by the government was launched by the Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Giriraj Singh.

Jitendra Singh, who is a Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office and is also in charge of the Department of Space, explained that the name given to the portal is also very apt as the word 'Yukt' is derived from 'Yojanam' (planning) and 'Dhara' indicates flow.

"Space and Satellite technology to improve the lot of rural <https://t.co/8zOPPN0sK> portal under Bhuvan "Yukt-dhara" will facilitate the planning of #MGNREGA assets using Remote Sensing and GIS-based information".

Read: <https://t.co/k8fLIHMxDv> [pic.twitter.com/bnOk5cHZYZ](https://t.co/bnOk5cHZYZ)

— Dr Jitendra Singh (@DrJitendraSingh) August 23, 2021

Objective:

Yuktdhara platform will serve as a repository of assets (geotags) created under the various National Rural Development Programmes, such as MGNREGA, Per Drop More Crop Programmes, Integrated Watershed Management Programme, and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, along with the field photographs.

What is Geospatial?

Geospatial information is geography and mapping. It is basically place-based and locational based information. Geospatial planning is the use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) that accurately store, collect, display and retrieve vast amounts of information in a spatial context.

Geospatial planning of MGNREGA assets: How will it work?

- The portal created under Bhuvan 'Yuktdhara' will facilitate the planning of new MGNREGA assets with the use of remote sensing and GIS (Geographic Information System) based information.
- The Union Minister Jitendra Singh highlighted that the portal will integrate a wide variety of thematic layers, multi-temporal high-resolution earth observation data with the analysis tool.
- Planners will be able to analyse previous assets under various schemes and facilitate the identification of new works using online tools. Prepared plans will be then evaluated by appropriate authorities under State Departments.
- Yuktdhara based plans will be prepared by the grassroots functionaries. They will be verified by the appropriate authorities for relevance and resource allocation. It will ensure the quality of the plan and enable the long-term monitoring of assets that have been created over the years.
- Before, during and after the geotagging of assets, there will be progress-based disbursement of funds.

ISRO's Geoportal Bhuvan:

The Union Minister Jitendra Singh while talking about the portal said that it is a culmination of untiring joint efforts of the Ministry of Rural Development and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) made towards realizing a G2G service for the rural planning in support of decentralized decision making.

He further acknowledged the services and potential of ISRO's Geoportal Bhuvan and mentioned that because of its rich information base, analytical capabilities and satellite images, Bhuvan has become a de-facto geospatial platform for the number of developmental activities in India.

For first time, Indian Army promotes five women officers to Colonel Time Scale rank

The Indian Army's Selection Board for the first time promoted five women officers to Colonel rank, post their completion of 26 years of service.

The women officers promoted to Colonel Time Scale rank are Lt Col Navneet Duggal and Lt Col Sonia Anand from the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Lt Col Sangeeta Sardana from Corps of Signals, and Lt Col Ritcha Sagar and Lt Col Reenu Khanna from the Corps of Engineers.

Earlier, only women officers serving in the Army Education Corps (AEC), Judge Advocate General (JAG), and the Army Medical Corps (AMC) were applicable for promotion to the Colonel Time Scale rank.

SC passed order to allow women take admission exam to NDA

- In another feat, the Supreme Court on August 18, 2021, passed an interim order to allow women to take the admission exam to National Defence Academy (NDA) where only men could appear. The exam is scheduled for September 5, 2021.
- The bench added that admissions, etc be subjected to its final order.
- A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S K Kaul passed the interim order in a writ petition filed by Kush Kalra for obtaining permission for women candidates to appear for the NDA exam.
- The bench has also asked the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to issue a corrigendum to generate due publicity.
- In February 2020, a bench of Justices Ajay Rastogi and D Y Chandrachud issued an order to ensure that SSC (Short Service Commission) women officers are granted permanent commission in the Army, including command postings.

Increasing career opportunities for woman officers

- The rise in promotion avenues to more branches of the Indian Army is the direct reflection of

increasing career opportunities for women officers.

- Along with permanent commission to women officers and allowing women to appear for NDA exam are steps of the Indian Army towards a gender-neutral Army.

What is National Monetization Pipeline 2021?

- All You Need to Know

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman launched **National Monetisation Pipeline** in Delhi on August 23, 2021.

While speaking on the occasion, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that **National Monetization Pipeline** talks about brownfield assets where investment is already being made, where there are assets either languishing or not fully monetized or under-utilized.

She said that *"by bringing in private participation, we are going to monetize it (assets) better and with whatever resource that you obtained by monetization, you are able to put in for further investment into infrastructure building."*

By bringing in private participation, we are going to monetize it (assets) better and with whatever resource that you obtained by monetization, you are able to put in for further investment into infrastructure building: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman pic.twitter.com/bkdLBxJxu8

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

Significance

The Finance Minister stated that it is important that India recognizes that the time has come for making the most out of our assets.

It is important that India recognizes that the time has come for making the most out of our assets: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman after launching National Monetisation Pipeline in Delhi pic.twitter.com/JHlnEB2pFj

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

She further said that asset monetisation, based on the philosophy of creation through monetisation, is aimed at tapping private sector investment for new infrastructure creation.

She continued by saying that this is necessary for creating employment opportunities, thereby enabling high economic growth and seamlessly integrating the rural and semi-urban areas for overall public welfare.

This is necessary for creating employment opportunities, thereby enabling high economic growth

and seamlessly integrating the rural and semi-urban areas for overall public welfare: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (2/2) pic.twitter.com/Bxz5AAvIJQ

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

The Minister said that at this point, the list of assets that are coming, are all the Central government's assets. We're not talking about states.

What is National Monetization Pipeline?

The National Monetisation Pipeline comprises a four-year pipeline of the Central Government's brownfield infrastructure assets. It will serve as a medium-term roadmap for the Asset Monetisation initiative of Centre, besides providing visibility to the investors.

The Finance Ministry stated, "The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) estimates aggregate monetization potential of Rs 6 lakh crores through core assets of the Central Govt, over a 4-year period, from FY 2022 to FY 2025."

The Ministry added, "Ministries of Roads, Transport & Highways, Railways, Power, Pipeline & Natural Gas, Civil Aviation, Shipping Ports & Waterways, Telecommunications, Food & Public Distribution, Mining, Coal & Housing & Urban Affairs are included in National Monetisation Pipeline."

Ministries of Roads, Transport & Highways, Railways, Power, Pipeline & Natural Gas, Civil Aviation, Shipping Ports & Waterways, Telecommunications, Food & Public Distribution, Mining, Coal & Housing & Urban Affairs are included in National Monetisation Pipeline: Finance Ministry

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant stated, "We are fully committed to delivering success to the National Monetisation Pipeline. We feel that it is very important to bring in the private sector for better operation & maintenance, therefore we are committed to very strong delivery on the ground."

We are fully committed to delivering success to the National Monetisation Pipeline. We feel that it is very important to bring in the private sector for better operation & maintenance, therefore we are committed to very strong delivery on the ground: NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant pic.twitter.com/4bCR95jaC7

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar said, "It's a remarkable step forward & it is all been

assured by the Finance Minister's budget of 2021-22, and also denotes the PM's unambiguous commitment that infrastructure growth & economic growth in India will be private sector-led."

He further added saying that the government is committed to making greater opportunities available for the private sector participation including in infrastructure. Infrastructure has huge multiplier effects. This is the next step in mobilising private capital for the development of infrastructure."

This govt is committed to making greater opportunities available for the private sector participation including in infrastructure. Infrastructure has huge multiplier effects. This is the next step in mobilising private capital for the development of infrastructure: Rajiv Kumar

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

What does this mean?

FM Nirmala Sitharaman explained that National Monetization Pipeline does not mean that the government will be selling away the lands. It talks about brownfield assets that need to be better monetized.

For those who have this question in mind -- are we selling away the lands? No. National Monetization Pipeline is talking about brownfield assets that need to be better monetized: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman pic.twitter.com/Mi9IoUABHR

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

However, the Minister clarified by saying that the ownership of assets will remain with the government and there will be a mandatory hand back. She added that the private sector partners will have to give it back after a certain time.

Ownership of assets remains with the government. There will be a mandatory hand back. They (private sector partners) will have to give it back after a certain time: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman after launching National Monetisation Pipeline pic.twitter.com/ZirIPHrL7n

— ANI (@ANI) [August 23, 2021](#)

Only under-used assets will be monetised. The Minister said that by bringing in private participation, the government would be able to monetise assets better and with the resources thus obtained, it would be able to pump more funds into infrastructure building.

What are brownfield assets?

A brownfield is an investment when a company or government entity purchases or

leases existing production facilities to launch a new production activity.

Background

The central government had paid a lot of emphasis on Asset Monetisation in the Union Budget 2021-22 to raise innovative and alternative financing for infrastructure and included a number of key announcements.

Researchers identify Covid antibody that protects against wide range of variants

Researchers have identified a **COVID antibody** that provides protection against a wide range of COVID-19 variants.

The Covid antibody works by attaching to a part of the virus that differs a little across the variants. As per researchers, this means that it is unlikely for resistance to arise at this spot.

The identified antibody is highly protective at low doses against a wide range of variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. The findings were posted in the journal Immunity.

Significance

- The findings could help develop new antibody-based therapies that are less likely to lose their potency as the virus mutates.
- As per the study's senior author Michael S Diamond, who is a professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, US, "current antibodies may work against some but not all variants."
- Professor Diamond said that the virus is likely to evolve over time and space and having broadly neutralising, effective antibodies that work individually and can be paired to make new combinations will likely prevent resistance.

How does COVID antibody work?

- The SARS-CoV-2 virus uses a spike protein to attach and invade cells in a person's respiratory tract. The antibodies prevent the spike protein from attaching to cells and thus, neutralise the virus and prevent the infection.
- However, many variants of COVID-19 have acquired mutations in their spike genes as well, which allow them to evade some antibodies generated against the original strain of the virus, which undermines the effectiveness of antibody-based therapeutics.
- The researchers had immunised mice with a key part of the spike protein known as the receptor-

binding domain (RBD) to find neutralising antibodies that work against a wide range of variants.

- The researchers then extracted antibody-producing cells and got 43 antibodies from them that recognise receptor-binding domain (RBD).
- They then screened all the 43 antibodies by measuring how well they prevented the original COVID-19 variant, which emerged in 2019, from infecting cells in a dish.
- Nine among the most potent neutralising antibodies were tested in mice to see whether they could protect animals infected with the original strain of the virus.
- As per researchers, multiple antibodies passed both tests with varying degrees of potency.
- They then selected two antibodies that were most effective at protecting mice from the virus and tested them against a panel of COVID-19 variants.
- The panel comprised viruses with spike proteins that represented all four variants of concern Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta and two variants of interest -Kappa and Iota and several unnamed variants that are being monitored as potential threats.

Conclusion

The researchers detected one antibody, SARS2-38, which easily neutralised all the variants. A humanised version of SARS2-38 protected mice against disease caused by two variants: Kappa and a virus containing the spike protein from the Beta variant, which is known to be notoriously resistant to antibodies.

As per senior author Daimond, the antibody is both highly neutralising which means it works very well at low concentrations and broadly neutralising, which means that it works against all variants.

As per the researchers, the antibody can be combined with another one that binds somewhere else to create a combination therapy that would be very difficult for the virus to resist.

ARMY-2021: DRDO to showcase India's Defence technology in Moscow – All you need to know

The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) is participating in the International Military-Technical Forum 'ARMY-2021' at Kubinka, Moscow, from August 22 to 28, 2021.

At the forum ARMY-2021, DRDO will showcase its indigenously built fighter aircraft LCA Tejas, Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK1A), Anti-Tank Guided Missiles among other products at the India Pavillion during the event.

Dr NK Arya, Director, Directorate of Public Interface (DPI), DRDO said, "India has a huge potential in terms of export of Defence systems."

What is ARMY-2021?

- The International Military-Technical Forum 'ARMY-2021' is organized by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation that offers the opportunity for exhibition and demonstration of military equipment.
- ARMY-2021 is the 7th International Military-Technical Forum that will be held from August 22 to 28, 2021, at Kubinka, Moscow.
- The Forum ARMY-2021 is a platform for India to showcase its state-of-art Defence technology by DRDO at India Pavillion during the event.

ARMY-2021: Aim of DRDO

- Dr NK Arya, Director, Directorate of Public Interface (DPI), DRDO stated that following explaining the aim of DRDO at the ARMY-2021:
- Defence exports from India have a huge potential to grow further. DRDO has been developing most of the indigenous Defence systems in India and it is imperative that it should showcase to the world.

- DRDO has been developing several indigenous advanced Defence technologies and systems such as missiles, multi-barrel rocket launchers, light combat aircraft, missile-based Air Defence systems, main battle tanks, life science, and naval systems-related products.

- The participation of DRDO at ARMY 2021 will further create the awareness that India is capable of exporting state-of-the-art Defence technology.

ARMY-2021: Defence technology for export at India Pavilion

- DRDO will be showcasing advanced Defence technologies and systems along with the Indian Defence Industries namely Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML), Ordnance Factories, and Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) at India Pavilion in the ARMY-2021.

- Eleven products by DRDO which can be exported will be on display at Indian Pavilion:

1. Beyond Visual Range Air to Air Missile (BVRAAM) 'ASTRA'
2. Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)-NAG and HELINA
3. Surface to Air Missile (SAM) 'Akash'
4. Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Tejas
5. Airborne Early Warning and Control System (AEW&C)
6. Identification of Friend and Foe (IFF)
7. Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)
8. Joint Venture Protective Carbine (JVPC)
9. Arjun Main Battle Tank MK1A
10. Rohini Radar
11. Air Defence Fire Control Radar (ADFCR)-Atulya Radar

India, Russia sign deal to procure 70,000 AK-203 Assault Rifles

India and Russia on August 19, 2021 signed a deal for the immediate procurement of **70,000 AK-200 series assault rifles**.

The agreement was signed at a time when both countries are working on a bigger project to jointly manufacture 6 lakh AK-203 rifles in India. The deal for the same has been pending since 2018.

India's initial plan was to directly import 20,000 of the 7.62×39mm AK-203 rifle and jointly manufacture around 6.5 lakh such rifles in India.

Due to delay in joint production, there is an immediate need to procure the rifles off the shelf. The off-the-shelf equipment could include multiple variants of the AK-200 series, as the basic difference is the accessories that are fitted to the rifle.

Key Highlights

- The procurement deal for the AK-203 Assault Rifles was signed between the Defence Ministry and Russian representatives in the presence of officials from Indo-Russia Rifles Pvt Ltd.
- Indo-Russia Rifles Pvt Ltd is a rifle manufacturing firm that will lead the indigenous production of AK rifles in India.
- The AK-200 series assault rifles are expected to start arriving in India from November 2021.
- AK-203 is the latest version of the AK-47 rifle. These rifles will replace the 5.56×45mm Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) rifles that are currently being used by the Indian Army, Navy and the Air Force besides other security forces.

Significance

- The AK-203 Assault Rifles are expected to become the mainstay of the armed forces for years to come.
- Besides this, the Indian armed forces use the American SIG716 rifles that were

procured by the Army under a fast-tracked process.

- The frontline infantry soldiers will be equipped with American SIG716 rifle, while the remaining will be using AK-203 rifles

Background

The Indian Army currently has a requirement of around 770,000 AK-203 rifles, among which about 100,000 are expected to be imported while the rest are planned to be manufactured in India. The current off-the-shelf procurement will be a part of 100,000 assault rifles.

Russia will provide the 70,000 AK-203 assault rifles to India in the next six months. A deal has also been finalised between India and Russia to upgrade Kamov lightweight multi-role military helicopters at India's requests to suit Indian conditions.

ZyCoV-D: Zydus Cadila to begin vaccine trials for children aged 3-12 years

Zydus Cadila's Managing Director Dr Sharvil Patel on August 21, 2021, announced that the company will now apply for COVID-19 vaccine trials in children aged 3 years to 12 years old in the next 7 to 10 days.

On availability of the three-dose ZyCoV-D vaccine, Patel informed that the vaccine roll-out could begin by mid or end of October 2021. He also mentioned Zydus Cadila's two-shot vaccine and said that the company is in talks with SECC and regulators on the steps to build its two-dose vaccine.

Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D, the world's first plasmid-DNA three-dose COVID-19 vaccine on August 20, 2021, had received Emergency-Use Authorization (EUA) from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to be administered in children 12 years old and above.

Gujarat-based Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D vaccine is now **India's first vaccine to inoculate the age group of 12 to 18 years against COVID-19**. Patel mentioned that 1,400 adolescents in the age group 12 to 18 years had participated in the vaccine trials for children during which no severe side effects were reported.

The company had announced its plans on starting clinical trials soon on children 5 years old and above.

ZyCoV-D has been developed in collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India under the 'Mission COVID Suraksha' and implemented through Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).

What is ZyCoV-D vaccine and How it works?

- ZyCoV-D vaccine is India's first indigenously developed and world's first plasmid-DNA three-dose COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine has developed by Ahmedabad-based Zydus Cadila. It has been approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI).

- ZyCoV-D vaccine incorporates a genetically engineered DNA code that uses non-replicating and non-integrating plasmids carrying the COVID-19 gene. The plasmids in the vaccine carry a

genetic code that makes the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to help the human immune system recognize and develop antibodies to neutralize the actual virus in case of exposure.

- ZyCoV-D vaccine is administered intradermally through a needle-free device in three doses, day zero, day 28, and day 56.

ZyCoV-D, World's first plasmid-DNA COVID-19 vaccine approval: Significance

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the approval of the ZyCoV-D vaccine as a momentous feat in the fight against COVID-19.

- Dr Renu Swarup, Chairperson, BIRAC and Secretary, DBT called it an important milestone in the Indigenous Vaccine Development Mission that positions India on the Global Map for Novel Vaccine Development.

India is fighting COVID-19 with full vigour. The approval for world's first DNA based 'ZyCov-D' vaccine of @ZydusUniverse is a testimony to the innovative zeal of India's scientists. A momentous feat indeed. <https://t.co/kD3t7c3Waz>

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 20, 2021](#)

ZyCoV-D vaccine: Clinical Trials, Efficacy, Safety, Storage – key highlights

- The COVID-19 Research Consortia through National Biopharma Mission supported ZyCoV-D vaccine for Preclinical studies, Phase I and Phase II clinical trials, and under the Mission COVID Suraksha for Phase III clinical trials.

- Phase III trials were conducted in over 28,000 volunteers that showed an efficacy of 66.6 per cent for symptomatic RT-PCR positive cases.

- The vaccine had earlier showcased safety, tolerability, and robust immunogenicity during the Phase I/II clinical trials that were conducted over 1,000 healthy adult volunteers on December 24, 2020.

- Clinical trials for the ZyCoV-D vaccine have been the largest vaccine trial for COVID-19 so far in India.

- ZyCoV-D vaccine can be stored at 2 to 4 degrees Celsius with no cold storage requirements.

Mission COVID Suraksha

- Mission COVID Suraksha is an Indian vaccine mission that was launched under the Atma Nirbhar Bharat package 3.0. The mission is implemented through the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC).
- The mission aims to develop safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccines for public health.

Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC)

- BIRAC, the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council is a not-for-profit Public Sector Enterprise set up by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India.
- The Council serves as an agency to encourage and enhance the biotechnology industry to undertake strategic innovation and research & development and offer support during the development of products needed in the country.

Evidence of solar-driven change found on moon- All you need to know

Tiny iron-nanoparticles unlike any found naturally on the Earth have been found nearly everywhere on the moon. A new study led by the scientists at Northern Arizona University has uncovered significant clues to help understand the surprisingly active lunar surface.

In an article published in Geophysical Research Letters, the doctoral candidate of Northern Arizona University, Christian J. Tai Udovicic in collaboration with the associate professor Christopher Edwards, both of NAU's Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science found that solar radiation can be a more significant source of lunar iron nanoparticles than previously thought.

Formation of iron nanoparticles on moon:

Asteroid impacts and solar radiation affects the moon in unique ways as it lacks the protective magnetic field and the atmosphere that protect us here on the Earth.

Both the asteroids and solar radiation break down the lunar rocks and soil, forming iron nanoparticles that are detectable from the instruments on satellites orbiting the moon.

The data from NASA and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) spacecraft was used to understand how quickly the iron nanoparticles form on the moon over time. As per Tai Udovicic, it was thought for a long time that solar wind has a small effect on lunar surface evolution, when in fact it may be the most significant process producing iron nanoparticles.

Solar radiation influence on moon:

Since iron absorbs a lot of light, very small amounts of these particles can be detected from very far away which makes them a great indicator of change on the moon.

Surprisingly, the smaller iron nanoparticles seemed to form at a similar rate as radiation damage in the samples returned from the Apollo Missions to the Moon which is a hint that the Sun has a strong influence in their formation.

Tai Udovicic said that when he saw the Apollo sample data and their own satellite data from side

to side for the first time, he was shocked. The study shows that solar radiation can have a much larger influence inactive change on the Moon than previously thought, not only for darkening its surface, but it might also create small quantities of water usable in future missions.

Significance of understanding solar radiation environment:

As NASA prepares to land the first woman and next man on the moon by 2024 as part of the Artemis Mission, understanding the solar radiation environment and the possible resources on the moon has become critical.

In future work, Tai Udovicic plans on broadening his targeted study to the entire moon but is also eager to take a look at mysterious lunar swirls. He will also study lunar temperature and the water ice stability to inform future missions.

What is Caste Census and why Nitish Kumar led 10-party delegation is demanding it now?

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led ten parties delegation including Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Janata Dal (JD), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), and others on August 23, 2021, has arrived at South Block to meet PM Narendra Modi to demand caste-based census.

The Centre however said that as a matter of policy, there is no plan to track caste-wise populations such as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India. The Census 2021 will provide only the count of the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) along with the count of the general population.

The 10-parties delegation includes RJD's Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, JD(U) leader Vijay Kumar Choudhary, who is also the minister for education and parliamentary affairs, former Chief Minister and President of Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) Jitan Ram Manjhi, CPI-ML legislature party leader Mahboob Alam, Suryakant Paswan of CPI, Akhtarul Imam of AIMIM, Mukesh Sahni of VIP, Ajay Kumar of CPM, BJP leader and Bihar minister Janak Ram, and Congress legislature party leader Ajeet Sharma.

Why demand for Caste-based Census?

- Bihar CM Nitish Kumar said a caste-based census should be conducted at least once as it is beneficial for the whole country. Other leaders of the delegation stated that the caste-based census will help to collate data on several small castes that have not been able to enjoy the benefits and aid the Government in making better policies for them.
- The leaders insisted on a caste-based census stating that it will curb social hatred, caste-based exploitation, and serve the primary purpose of reservation across all government sectors by reaching all the people of each class.
- Experts in favour of the caste-based census state that not knowing the number of OBCs is a policy blind spot. The need for a caste-based census count to include OBCs arises from the imbalance in terms of the communities and specific castes identified as OBCs that have benefited from the reservations. Reports state that out of the thousands of communities and specific castes listed as OBCs with the Central government, only a handful of them have benefited from the 27

per cent reservation that was recommended by the Mandal Commission.

Why Centre not in favor of Caste-based Census?

- Regarding including data on castes in Census 2021, the Centre has said that as a matter of policy, there is no plan to track caste-wise populations such as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India.
- The Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner Vivek Joshi said that the integrity of the Census exercise will be affected adversely if the enumeration of OBCs, SEBs is taken up hence it has been decided to not take it up in Census 2021.
- Joshi further stated procedural issues wherein the current total number of OBCs in India at 6,285 in the Central list will go up to 7,200 if we start taking the list prepared by the States and Union Territories (UTs). The procedure will further lead to misclassification of the castes as people use their clan, gotra, sub-castes, and castes names interchangeably and phonetic similarities in the names.
- Further, the UPA government during its reign raised some difficult scenarios in terms of caste classification such as some states have a list of OBCs, a sub-set of Most Backward Classes, and then open-ended categories such as orphans, migrants, children out of inter-caste marriage,

Caste-based Census Count in India – Background

- The concept of the Census began in India in 1800. The first complete Census count in India was conducted in 1872 during British rule. The last Census count was held in 2011 and the next will be conducted in 2021, which will be the 16th Census Count in India. The Census Count in India is held every 10 years.
- Till 1931, the British included a caste-based Census but from 1941 onwards, the caste count was excluded owing to reported administrative and financial issues with England during World War II.
- The last Caste-based Census Count showed the share of the population of OBCs for 1931 was 52 per cent. In 1980, the Mandal Commission took the same into account for recommending in the 1980 reservations for socially and economically backward classes in the Central government jobs.
- The British had introduced the concept of reservation of marginalized tribes and castes.

However, from 1951 onwards, any data for other castes except Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) was excluded.

India to add 100 more earthquake observatories by 2026: Government

Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said on August 21, 2021, that India will add 100 more observatories by 2026. The minister also informed that the country is going to have 35 more earthquake observatories by the end of this year.

While addressing the inaugural ceremony of the **Joint Scientific Assembly of International Association of Geomagnetism and Aeronomy (IAGA)- International Association of Seismology and Physics of the Earth's Interior (IASPEI)**, the minister said that India has been considered as one of the world's most disaster-prone areas in terms of landslides, earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and tsunamis and that the government has been taking all the necessary steps to meet these challenges.

The Union Minister further informed that India is going to have 35 more earthquake observatories by the end of 2021 and 100 more such observatories in the next 5 years.

Significance of geology as a recognized science

Jitendra Singh while speaking on the occasion said that the importance of geology as a recognized science of the composition, structure, and process, which govern the Earth, has probably reached its zenith today as human society struggles with the challenges at multiple levels of interactions with Mother Earth.

Joint scientific assembly of IAGA-IASPEI:

The Union Minister Jitendra Singh expressed hope that the joint scientific assembly will act as a catalyst in bringing on board a greater number of practitioners and researchers from a global community to work on the issues that are related to rendering science to society.

He mentioned that it is a fitting environment for the two scientific communities to come together to forward the research in their niche as well as pursue new avenues of cross-disciplinary investigations.

The IASPEI and IAGA have come together to hold a joint assembly in 2021, which is being hosted by the CSIR-NGRI with the support of the Earth Sciences Ministry.

Government to support projects on earth system:

Jitendra Singh impressed upon the Central Government's commitment to support various projects of earth system science in order to quantify the seismic hazard for better land use and urban planning and for creating disaster-resilient infrastructures to reduce risks and ultimately to pave the way to sustainable development.

He further added that in the last six and a half decades since Independence, India had only 115 observatories but now with PM Modi at the helm, there is going to be an increase in the number of earthquake observatories in India.

About National Centre for Seismology:

It is an office of India's Earth Sciences Ministry. The centre monitors earthquakes and conducts seismological research, particularly providing earthquake surveillance and reports to government agencies. It consists of various divisions-

- Earthquake monitoring and services
- Earthquake hazards and risks management
- Geophysical Observation systems

World Athletics U20 Championships: India's Shaili Singh wins silver in long jump, misses gold by 1cm

India's Shaili Singh won the silver medal in the women's long jump event at the World Athletics U20 Championships in Nairobi on August 22, 2021.

Shaili Singh jumped a distance of 6.59m in her third attempt, which was her best show at the event. She won the silver medal, narrowly missing the gold. Sweden's Maja Askag won the gold with a jump of 6.60m, while Ukraine's Mariia Horielova settled for bronze with a jump of 6.50m.

This is India's third medal at the World Athletics U20 Championships, after a bronze in the 4x400m mixed relay and Amit Khatri's silver in 10,000m racewalking event.

Key Highlights

- Shaili Singh had registered an identical jump of 6.34m in the first two attempts in the finals. She had gone first.
- In her third jump, she made a major improvement with a massive jump of 6.59m.
- Though wind assistance of +2.2m/s was registered along with that attempt but it took her to the top of the standings, going into the final three attempts.
- Shaili's 4th and 5th attempt was an X. In her last attempt as well, the Indian couldn't better her 3rd attempt.
- Triple jump champion Maja Askag from Sweden registered her personal best in the 4th attempt and took the lead with a jump of 6.60m. She won the gold by a mere difference of 1 cm.
- The 17-year-old Indian had jumped 6.40m in the third attempt to qualify for the finals in Group B earlier on August 20, 2021.
- She had topped the women's long jump qualifications by recording jumps of 6.34m and 5.98m respectively in the first and second attempts. The automatic qualification mark was 6.35m.

Significance

- With her silver medal, Shaili Singh has become India's latest Indian track and field prospect. She was just one centimetre short of winning the gold.
- If she would have won gold, she would have become the third Indian to win a gold medal at the Junior Worlds after Neeraj Chopra and Hima Das.
- Shaili Singh currently holds the Indian junior record of 6.48m. Her recent jump of 6.59m will not be included in the record books due to wind assistance.
- She is, however, getting close to Anju Bobby George's 17-year-old record of 6.83m, which she had set at the 2004 Athens Olympics.
- Anju Bobby George along with her husband Robert Bobby George coach Shaili and she is confident that she will break her record sooner or later.

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur tweeted saying, ***"Shaili Singh has won the SilverSecond place medal! A personal best, she registered a jump of 6.59m in the long jump event final. Shaili trains under Robert Bobby, the husband of Indian veteran Anju Bobby George, at the SAI NCE, Bangalore."***

Shaili Singh has won the Silver !

World Athletics U20 Championships,Nairobi

A personal best, she registered a jump of 6.59m in the long jump event final.

•Shaili trains under Robert Bobby, the husband of Indian veteran Anju Bobby George, at the SAI NCE, Bangalore. pic.twitter.com/2KiFmYY8K0

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 22, 2021](#)

Former Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju also tweeted saying, ***"I still remember Anju Bobby George told me that Shaili is a future star of India! I compliment @anjubobbygeorg1 and Robert Bobby who identified Shaili at very young age and started training her professionally with the support of SAI."***

I still remember Anju Bobby George told me that Shaili is a future star of India!

I compliment [@anjubobbygeorg1](#) and Robert Bobby who identified Shaili at very young age and started training her professionally with the support of SAI. <https://t.co/lbBst9E4c3>

pic.twitter.com/a3Ed9rn3JZ

— Kiren Rijju (@KirenRijju) [August 22, 2021](#)

Anju Bobby George also tweeted saying, ***"In 2017, Bobby and I came across a young girl from Jhansi. We scouted her later that year in the junior national competition and decided to induct her into the Anju Bobby Sports Foundation in 2018. Coach Bobby George has since then worked tirelessly to create a new star in athletics. From jumping 4.55m, creating national records to becoming world no. 1 (U18), with a jump of 6.48m, this little girl has come a long way."***

[#ShailiSingh](#), you make us all very proud as you add another feather to your cap at the [#WorldAthleticsU20Championships](#) by winning a silver medal.

This feat would not have been possible without the support of [@afiindia](#) [@Media_SAI](#), [@NsscSai](#), [@IndiaSports](#), [@OGQ_India](#) pic.twitter.com/x4wiulAy6z

— Anju Bobby George (@anjubobbygeorg1) [August 22, 2021](#)

US President Joe Biden hopes to conclude 'heartbreaking' evacuation from Afghanistan by August 31

The President of the United States on August 22, 2021, said that he hopes to complete the 'heartbreaking' evacuation from Afghanistan by the end of August but he warned of the potential terrorist attack against the crowded Kabul airport.

As the number of evacuees from war-torn Afghanistan steadily rose, Biden said that he has been aiming to complete the task by August 31 despite a volatile situation on the ground and the enormous logistical difficulties. The mentioned date is also agreed with the Taliban.

While speaking at the White House about the heartbreaking scenes at Kabul airport, where people can be seen trying to climb and running behind the US plane to leave the country, said that he hopes that we will not have to extend.

We are going to do everything that we can to provide safe evacuation for our Afghan allies, partners, and Afghans who may be targeted for their association with the United States.

And let me be clear: any American that wants to come home, we will get you home.

— President Biden (@POTUS) [August 20, 2021](#)

Joe Biden while acknowledging the scenes of Afghans crowding the Kabul airport in desperation to escape the militants said that this has to be accepted, given the situation.

He added that there is no way to evacuate this many people without any pain and loss and the heartbreaking images you see.

Why the US is keen on completing the mission in Afghanistan?

The US President, while underlining that why the US is keen on completing the mission in Afghanistan as soon as possible, warned that the Islamic State terrorists known as ISIS-K pose a constant threat.

The President said that the terrorists may seek to exploit the situation and it is still a dangerous

operation.

We have almost 6,000 of America's finest fighting at the Kabul airport.

They are putting their lives on the line in a dangerous place.

I talk to our commander there every day and I have made it clear: we will get them whatever they need to do the job.

— President Biden (@POTUS) [August 20, 2021](#)

US civilian aircrafts join Afghanistan evacuation

In an effort to speed up the airlift, the US Government has ordered six airlines- Atlas, American airlines, Omni, Delta, United, and Hawaiian- to provide 18 passenger planes, supplementing an armada of Air Force Cargo Planes.

The invoked Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) order will increase the flow of the people once they get out of Afghanistan to US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates and are then flown to the third countries in a rapidly expanding global operation. The US Civilian airlines will not be required to fly Kabul itself.

Earlier, the US had informed that there were about 15,000 American citizens and about 50,000 Afghan allies who needed to be evacuated from Kabul, Afghanistan.

Since August 14, the US has evacuated and facilitated the evacuation of approx. 30,300 people on the military and coalition flights. As per the White House Official, since the end of July 2021, the US has relocated approx. 35,000 people.

Access to Kabul airport

As per Biden, around 15,000 Americans need to be removed from Afghanistan as the administration wants to get at least 50,000 Afghan allies and their family members out of war-torn Afghanistan.

There have been reports of Taliban intimidating and beating people trying to reach the airport, however, the US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin said that Taliban militants have been largely American passport holders through safely.

Background:

President Biden's comments on the horrific situation at Kabul airport came after the Taliban alleged that the US has failed to bring order at the Hamid Karai International Airport in Kabul.

Afghanistan entered a political crisis after Taliban militants took over. People have been trying to flee the country to escape the gruesome ruling by the terror militants.

The crisis in the country started after US President Joe Biden decided to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan which were keeping the Taliban and other terror organisations in control.

COVID-19 Third Wave may peak in October, pediatric facilities nowhere close: MHA Panel

COVID-19 third wave could peak around October and children may be at a similar risk as adults, as per an expert committee constituted by the Home Affairs Ministry under the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM).

The expert committee has sought better medical preparedness for children while noting that pediatric facilities including staff, doctors and equipment like ventilators and ambulances are nowhere close to what may be required in case a large number of children become infected.

The committee's report titled "Third Wave Preparedness: Children Vulnerability and Recovery" has been submitted to the Prime Ministers' Office. The report mainly studied the possibility of COVID affecting children and required strategies to deal with the looming third wave.

The Report: Key Highlights

Prioritise vaccination for children with co-morbidities

The expert committee's report has called for prioritising vaccination among children with co-morbidities.

It has called for a special focus on children with disabilities.

Third wave's peak is expected by late October

- The expert committee's report stated that even n with "strict interventions", the peak of the third wave may arrive by late October.
- The expert committee's statements are concurring with earlier assessments by different institutions.
- Many studies previously have also spoken about the third wave peaking in September/ October.

Kids may be vulnerable

The report highlighted the vulnerability of kids as they haven't been vaccinated. Though many experts are of the view that children are not prone to severe infection but they can be carriers and pass the infection to others.

COVID-19 third wave less severe?

As per other estimates, the COVID-19 third wave may be less severe than the second.

Recommendations by the committee:

- The committee has suggested a holistic home care model, calling for prioritising mental health issues among children and an immediate increase in pediatric medical capacities.
- The moot has called for the structuring of COVID wards in such a way that allows children's parents or attendants to safely stay with them through their recovery.
- The expert drew attention to 82% shortage of pediatricians in primary health centres and 63% vacancies in community health centres. This data was cited from a parliamentary standing committee.
- The committee's report stated that the situation is already dire and may worsen due to lack of adherence to Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) along with delay in vaccination and insufficient medical facilities.
- The report pointed out that during the COVID-19 second wave, about 60-70 percent of children who had COVID-19 and had to be hospitalised as a result of it had comorbidities.
- The report noted that the low immunity of the children with comorbidities was the primary cause behind many developing MIS-C (Multi-system Inflammatory Syndrome), which is a rare but serious medical condition that is developed post-Covid recovery.
- The report highlighted that learning from the past two waves of COVID-19, preparedness is the key.
- The report stressed on taking proactive actions in the anticipation of the third wave.
- The report has urged states to start enhancing paediatric Covid care facilities for treatment such as medicine, paediatric ambulance, ICU and paediatricians.

Committee Composition

•Santosh Kumar, head of governance and public policy at NIDM, was the coordinator of the committee of experts.

The other members of the committee included:

- Anurag Agarwal: Director of CSIR-IGIB
- MC Mishra-Ex-director of AIIMS
- Naveen Thacker- President of the Indian Paediatricians Association
- Gagandeep Kang- Professor of CMC, Vellore
- AK Pandey- Chairman of state monitoring committee on shelter for urban homeless

As per the report, the third wave of COVID-19 is already upon us if we look at the rising R-value and the reproduction rate of Covid-19, which has increased from 0.9 to 1 over the last week of July.

India's highest herbal park inaugurated near Indo-China border- All you need to know

India's highest altitude herbal park was inaugurated on August 21, 2021, at Mana village close to the Indo-China border in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district. The herbal park is situated at a height of 11,000 feet.

Mana village in Uttarakhand is the last Indian village in Chamoli bordering China and is adjacent to the famous Himalayan Temple of Badrinath.

The research wing of the forest department of Uttarakhand has developed the herbal park over three acres of the land given by Mana Van Panchayat, under the Union Government's CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, Scheme).

India's highest herbal park: Key details

- The herbal park near the Indo-China border has around 40 species that are found in high-altitude alpine areas in the Himalayan region.
- As per the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the State biodiversity Board, many of the species in the Herbal Park are endangered and threatened. It includes many significant medicinal herbs also.

What are Herbal Parks?

The herbal parks in India are part of the government's efforts to protect and preserve the herbs from depletion and extension. The parks aim at keeping the country's traditional system of medicines alive.

Four sections of herbal park:

1. The first section of the park contains species associated with Badrinath (Lord Vishnu), which includes Badri ber, Badri Tulsi, Badri Tree, and the sacred tree of Bhojpatra.

Badri Tulsi, scientifically named *Origanum Vulgare*, is found in this area and forms a significant part of offering to Lord Badrinath. Various researchers have also mentioned its multiple medicinal benefits.

Badri Ber, scientifically known as *Hippophae Salicifolia* and locally known as Amaesh. It is another nutrition-rich food and is used widely.

2. The second section is dedicated to the Ashtavarga species. It is a group of eight herbs which are found in the Himalayan region namely Riddhi (*Habenaria Intermedia*), Jeevak (*Malaxis Acuminata*), Vriddhi (*Habenaria Edgeworthii*), Rishbhak (*Malaxis Muscifera*), Kakoli (*Fritillaria Roylei*), Ksheer kakoli (*Lilium Polyphyllum*), Maida (*Polygonatum Cirrhifolium*), and Maha Maida (*Polygonatum verticillatum*).

Out of these, four herbs belong to the lily family and the other four belongs to the orchid family.

3. The third section consists of Saussurea species. It also includes Brahmakamal (*Saussurea Obvallata*) which also happens to be the state flower of Uttarakhand.

Other *Saussurea* Species at the park are Phemkamal (*Saussurea Simpsoniana*), Nilkamal (*Saussurea Graminifolia*) and Koot (*Saussurea Costus*).

4. The fourth section at the park consists of the assorted alpine species including Meethavish, Ateesh, Choru, and Vankakdi. All of these are important medicinal herbs and are also in great demand.

Former UP CM Kalyan Singh passes away at 89; All you need to know about his political journey

Former Chief Minister of **Uttar Pradesh Kalyan Singh** passed away on August 22, 2021 after a prolonged illness. He was 89.

The senior BJP leader was admitted to Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow on July 4, 2021 following a deterioration in his health condition.

The hospital released a statement that read, ***"Former Chief Minister of UP and Ex-Governor of Rajasthan Kalyan Singh Ji breathed his last today. He was admitted on July 4 in the Intensive Care Unit in critical condition. He died due to sepsis and multi-organ failure."***

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who had met Kalyan Singh earlier in the day, said that Singh's last rites will be performed on the bank of Ganga in Narora on the evening of August 23. He had been on the ventilator and was undergoing dialysis.

PM Narendra Modi expressed his grief through a tweet that read, ***"I am saddened beyond words. Kalyan Singh Ji...statesman, veteran administrator, grassroots level leader and great human. He leaves behind an indelible contribution towards the development of Uttar Pradesh. Spoke to his son Shri Rajveer Singh and expressed condolences. Om Shanti."***

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 21, 2021](#)

The Prime Minister further tweeted, ***"Kalyan Singh Ji gave voice to crores of people belonging to the marginalised sections of society. He made numerous efforts towards the empowerment of farmers, youngsters and women. Generations to come will remain forever grateful to Kalyan Singh Ji for his contributions towards India's cultural regeneration. He was firmly rooted in Indian values and took pride in our centuries-old traditions."***

Kalyan Singh Ji...a leader who always worked for Jan Kalyan and will always be admired across India. pic.twitter.com/nqVlwIT7r

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 22, 2021](#)

Face of Ram Temple movement

The former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh was closely associated with the Ram Temple movement. He was one of the most prominent BJP leaders who helped shape rise of the movement in the most populous state of the country.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah while expressing condolences on the demise of the late leader said that he was the hero of Ram Janmabhoomi Andolan. Shah said, ***"I received the news of the demise of Kalyan Singh ji. Crores of people across the country including me are in pain due to his demise. Kalyan Singh ji had been a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party. He was the hero of Ram Janmabhoomi Andolan. He fought for the rights of people of the backward class. He always spoke for the underprivileged in Uttar Pradesh Assembly as well as in the Parliament."***

pic.twitter.com/ZvL3gAj7YI

— Amit Shah (@AmitShah) [August 21, 2021](#)

Top BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath paid their last respects to the former CM at his residence in Lucknow.

Kalyan Singh's Political Journey

- Kalyan Singh was a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
- He had served as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh twice from June 1991 – December 1992 and then from September 1997 – November 1999.
- He had also served as the Member of Parliament for Lok Sabha from 2009 to 2014 from Etah constituency in Uttar Pradesh.
- He then served as the Governor of Himachal Pradesh from January 2015 till August 2015.
- He was later appointed as the 21st Governor of Rajasthan from September 2014 till September 2019.
- He was serving as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh when the Babri Masjid was demolished in December 1992. He had resigned from the post after the demolition.
- He had served the second term as Chief Minister in 1997 but was removed in 1999.

- He was considered as an icon of Hindu nationalism and a prominent face to the movement to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya.
- He had been a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh while he was still in school.
- He entered the Uttar Pradesh legislature as a Legislative Assembly Member from Atrauli in 1967.
- He won nine more elections from the constituency as a representative of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, BJP, Janata Party and the Rashtriya Kranti Party.

Exit from BJP, then return

- Kalyan Singh left the BJP in 1999 to form his own party after being removed as Chief Minister. He returned to the BJP in 2004 and was elected a Member of Parliament from Bulandshahar.
- He left the BJP again in 2009 and successfully contested the 2009 Lok Sabha elections as an independent from Etah constituency. He returned to the BJP again in 2014 and was appointed as the Governor of Rajasthan.
- He served as a Governor for five years and re-entered active politics in 2019.
- He was among the leaders who were brought to trial in September 2019 for criminal conspiracy to demolish the Babri Masjid. He was acquitted by a special CBI court in 2020.

NTPC commissions India's largest floating solar PV project – All you need to know

The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Limited on August 21, 2021, commissioned India's largest floating solar PV project of 25MW on the reservoir of its Simhadri thermal station in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

Sanjay Madan, RED (WR2 & SR), NTPC inaugurated the 25MW solar PV project in Simhadri thermal station in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. NTPC has also announced its plan to set up a pilot project of a hydrogen-based micro-grid system at Simhadri.

NTPC in a tweet announced that with the commissioning of India's largest 25 MW floating solar PV project at NTPC Simhadri thermal station, the total installed capacity of NTPC has now reached 66,900 MW.

NTPC commissions India's largest 25 MW floating solar PV project

- NTPC has commissioned India's largest 25 MW floating solar PV project on the Simhadri thermal station in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The 2000 MW coal-based Simhadri thermal station is the first power project that implemented an open sea intake from the Bay of Bengal. The station has been functional for more than 20 years.
- The project is also the first solar project that will be set up under the Flexibilisation Scheme, notified by the Government of India in 2018.
- The project is spread across 75 acres in an RW reservoir. The anchoring design of the floating solar installation has been done uniquely.

Benefits:

India's largest 25 MW floating solar PV project on the Simhadri thermal station in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh will:

- Generate electricity from more than 1 lakh solar PV modules that will aid in lighting up approximately 7,000 households.

- Cut approximately 46,000 tons of CO2 emissions.
- Save 1,364 million litres of water per annum which in turn would aid in meeting the yearly water requirements of 6,700 households.

India's largest 100MW floating solar power plant to be set up in Telangana

- In another feat, NTPC is also building India's largest 100 MW floating solar power plant on the reservoir of its Ramagundam thermal power station in Tamil Nadu.
- The 100 MW floating solar project with 4.5 lakh photovoltaic panels will be spread across 450 acres.
- The project will cost approximately Rs 423 crores. The project will aid in achieving India's ambitious target of 175 GW of installed renewable energy capacity by 2022 including 100 GW solar installed capacity.

What are floating solar plants?

- Floating solar plants is the installation of photovoltaic panels on the water bodies such as lakes, basins, rivers, sea, ocean, etc as an alternative to land-based solar projects.
- Floating solar projects are found to be beneficial at countering challenges of land acquisition, grid connectivity, regulations. Floating solar projects aid in reducing water evaporation, interconnectivity costs, suppressing algae blooming.
- The cooling effect of the water bodies further enhances the performance of solar panels by 5 to 10 per cent.

About NTPC Limited

- Established in 1975, NTPC Limited, formerly known as National Thermal Power Corporation Limited is India's largest energy conglomerate that aims at accelerating the power generation sector in India.
- NTPC has become a Maharatna company in May 2010. It is headquartered in New Delhi.
- NTPC's initiative of installing floating solar plants across India aims at increasing its green energy production up to 30 per cent and reducing carbon footprints.

Huge asteroid 2016 AJ193 to fly closely past Earth on today: Everything you need to know!

A huge asteroid will fly past Earth very closely on August 21, 2021, reported Earthsky. It will not hit Earth.

The asteroid, **named 2016 AJ193**, is reportedly is rushing inward towards the sun in its 5.91-year orbit. Earth is in its approximated path but it will not hit the planet.

The asteroid will pass the Earth some 8.9 lunar distances away. It will be at its closest on August 21st.

Asteroid 2016 AJ193: Ten Important Facts

1. The asteroid is estimated to be 1.4 km wide.
2. It is travelling fast at about 94,208 km/h relative to Earth.
3. It will make its closed approach to the Earth on August 21, 2021 at around 11:10 am ET (8:40 pm IST).
4. The asteroid was **classified as a Potentially Hazardous Asteroid** by NASA/JPL but there is no risk of impact.
5. Asteroid 2016 AJ193 cannot be seen with the naked eye.
6. The asteroid is very dark, as it is not very reflective.
7. The asteroid's rotation period, pole direction and spectral class are unknown.
8. The asteroid orbits the sun every 5.9 years.
9. During its orbit, it gets relatively close to Earth's orbit, then travels beyond the orbit of Jupiter.
10. The flyby on August 21 will be the asteroid's closest approach to Earth in at least the next 65

years.

Can the asteroid hit the Earth?

No, **asteroid 2016 AJ193 will not hit Earth** as even at its closest approach, it will be some 8.9 times the moon's distance from the planet. The distance is a safe one but relatively close enough for a huge space rock.

Can the asteroid be seen with the naked eye?

No, it won't be visible to the naked eye but it will be close enough for astronomers to be able to spot it and study it. Even amateur astronomers equipped with telescopes will be able to see the asteroid and photograph it.

Why is it called Asteroid 2016 AJ193?

The asteroid is designated 2016 AJ193 because it was first spotted by the Panoramic Survey Telescope and Rapid Response System (Pan-STARRS) facility in Hawaii in January 2016.

NASA's NEOWISE spacecraft was then used to observe the asteroid in detail. However, many things are yet unknown about space rock.

Afghanistan: 12.2 million people acutely food insecure, says UN

The United Nations Humanitarians on August 19, 2021, stated that the relief crisis in Afghanistan is deteriorating rapidly, with 12.2 million people acutely food insecure.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said 7,35,000 individuals returned to Afghanistan this year from Pakistan, Iran, and other countries and they are in dire need of humanitarian aid.

The report comes in at a point when thousands of people are attempting to leave Afghanistan due to the Taliban takeover.

Humanitarian needs to deteriorate further in Afghanistan: UN

- As per the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Afghanistan, half of the population including more than nearly 10 million children and over 4 million women already needed humanitarian assistance at the beginning of 2021.
- In the second half of the year, humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are expected to deteriorate further due to drought. "Some 12.2 million people are already acutely food insecure and the majority of those will be further affected by drought," the OCHA.
- Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan requiring \$1.3 billion is only 37 per cent funded, with more than half a year gone by.
- The surge in displacement has urgently raised the need for funding for relief items and emergency shelter but only 4 per cent of the required funds have been received.

Severe acute malnutrition increased by 16 per cent

- The OCHA further stated that severe acute malnutrition has increased by 16 per cent that has impacted 9,00,000 people while moderate acute malnutrition has increased by 11 per cent that has impacted 3.1 million children.
- The livestock yield is forecasted to be weak due to poor feed and pastures availability. Below-

harvest wheat is also expected.

- Drought and conflict in the region have reduced agricultural activities by 28 per cent.
- Prices for food commodities continue to rise. Conflict-related movement restrictions are causing temporary inflationary effects thus affecting the prices of staples.
- Cooking oil, sugar, rice, and wheat prices have increased by more than 50 per cent compared to pre-COVID-19 prices. The monthly increase in prices in 2021 has been estimated between 1 to 4 per cent.

Facebook launches 'Small Business Loans Initiative' in 200 cities in India

Facebook India announced on August 20, 2021, a new programme called “**Small Business Loans Initiative**”. The programme has been launched in the partnership with online lending platform Indifi, to help Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs) that advertise on Facebook to get quick access to credit through independent lending partners.

India has become the first country where Facebook has launched this programme. The initiative is opened to businesses registered across 200 cities and towns in India.

As per the 'Future of Business' survey conducted by Facebook in collaboration with OECD and the World Bank in 2020, almost a third of operational SMBs on Facebook said that they expect cash flow to be one of their primary challenges.

Getting access to timely credit has been particularly challenging for micro and small businesses that just started out and might not have a long history of credit.

With [@FacebookIndia](#)'s new Small Business Loans Initiative, our partners can get access to timely credit. Thanks to [@amitabhk87](#) & [@ushanx](#) for supporting us on our shared vision of helping small businesses drive big growth in India and around the world. <https://t.co/I1BWLzLPdZ>

— Ajit Mohan (@secondatticus) [August 20, 2021](#)

Objective:

The aim behind launching the 'Small Business Loans Initiative' by Facebook India is to make business loans more accessible to small businesses and to reduce the credit gap within India's MSME sector.

Small Business Loans Initiative by Facebook: Key details

- Through Facebook's partnership with Indifi, small businesses in India that advertise with Facebook will be able to get loans at a predefined interest rate of 17-20% per annum.
- The Program by the tech giant will also enable small businesses to apply for loans without collateral through a quick online application.

- Small businesses applying under the initiative will not be charged a processing fee by Indifi. The online lending platform will also disburse the loan amount within the five working days of the borrower completing the documentation formalities after the acceptance of the offer made by the lending firm.
- Many small businesses that face challenges in securing loans of lower ticket size will be able to get loans between Rs. 5 lakh to Rs. 50 lakh.
- **Small businesses that are wholly or partly owned by women will be able to get a special 0.2% reduction per annum on the applied loan interest rate from Indifi.**

Other initiatives by Facebook to support small businesses:

The Vice-President and Managing Director of Facebook India, Ajit Mohan said that the company will not be monetizing this partnership and will help in connecting Indifi to small businesses.

The businesses will have no obligation to advertise on Facebook or its companies as part of the initiative.

Facebook, in the last one year, has taken steps to support the economic recovery of small businesses. Some of these include offering grants to small businesses as well as expanding the company's industry-leading skilling initiatives to support the offline to online journeys of small businesses.

Ismail Sabri Yaakob becomes Malaysia's new Prime Minister

Former Deputy Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob on August 21, 2021, was appointed as the new Prime Minister by Malaysia's King Al-Sultan Abdullah.

Ismail will be sworn-in on August 21, 2021, as Malaysia's third Prime Minister in three years. He received the support of 114 out of 222 members of Parliament, which is more than the 111 required for a simple majority, the Palace said.

Ismail will be taking charge as PM during a time when Malaysia, despite a lockdown since June 2021 and a seven-month state of emergency, has been reporting double the number of daily new cases of COVID-19 infections. The former PM Muhyiddin government has been widely criticized for the way of handling Malaysia's worsening COVID-19 pandemic.

Ismail will be succeeded Muhyiddin Yassin, who resigned after he lost the majority in the lower house of the Parliament due to fighting in his coalition. Ismail was Deputy Prime Minister under Muhyiddin. His appointment as PM means the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malaysia's longest-governing political party, will reclaim its reign after it lost in the 2018 elections.

The UMNO has been the governing political party in Malaysia since its independence from Britain in 1957.

Who is Ismail Sabri Yaakob?

- Ismail Sabri Yaakob is a Malaysian politician who will be sworn in as the country's 9th Prime Minister on August 21, 2021.
- Prior to this, Ismail has served as the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister under the former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin.
- Ismail is also Vice-President and member of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO).
- Ismail was elected to Parliament in the 2004 election. He has been Youth and Sports Minister (2008-2009), Domestic Trade, Co-operatives and Consumerism Minister (2009-2013), Agriculture Minister (2013-2015), Rural Development Minister (2015-2018), Defence Minister (2020-2021),

and Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister (2021).

- Ismail has also been serving as the Deputy President of UMNO since 2018.

Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa researchers to study intersection of COVID, Tuberculosis pandemics

The Ministry of Science and Technology, India informed that a consortium of researchers and doctors from Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa have partnered to conduct a study on the epidemiological impact and intersection of Tuberculosis and COVID pandemic in these countries.

Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa currently rank 2nd to 5th in the number of cases of Coronavirus and also belong to 24 nations that are recognized by the World Health Organisation with the highest burden of Tuberculosis in the world.

Moreover, BRICS nations have the largest number of cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis. Hence, the research will be conducted in these 4 countries where one of the highest-burden rates of both tuberculosis and COVID have been recorded simultaneously.

4 BRICS nations study intersection of Tuberculosis and COVID: All you need to know

- Under the joint research, the teams from these 4 countries will explore the negative impact of COVID-19 on the epidemiological impacts of TB infection. They will also search for the mechanisms that are responsible for the interaction of these two processes.
- The 4 countries will search for strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic and will individual recommendations for each participating country. It can further help overcome the impact of epidemics of respiratory viral diseases on the epidemic of tuberculosis.
- As per the Science Ministry, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictive measures on morbidity and TB-related mortality will be assessed with the use of mathematical modeling.

Significance:

- The collaborative research will provide a differentiated country-based assessment of the negative consequences of Coronavirus on the provision of anti- TB care, its consistency, continuity, and adequacy through a comparative analysis of the inter-country and the differences

in the interaction of two epidemics at the population and individual level.

- The analysis by the countries will also be providing insights into the most significant points of application for medico-social, epidemiological, socioeconomic, and clinical interventions. They are expected to reduce mortality and morbidity from the interaction of TB and COVID-19 in both the short and long term.
- The approach used by the researchers will also allow the development of a unique platform for the mathematical modeling of the epidemic tuberculosis process, which will also enhance and support the epidemic modelling capabilities in BRICS nations, therefore providing a solid foundation for future collaborative modelling research.

Ubharte Sitaare fund: FM Nirmala Sitharaman to launch Alternate Investment Fund for export-oriented companies

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to launch a **Rs 250 crore worth alternate investment fund (AIF)** on August 21, 2021 for small and mid-sized export-oriented companies.

The Alternate Investment Fund has been named "**Ubharte Sitaare**". It will be jointly sponsored by the Exim Bank of India and SIDBI. While the fund size is Rs 250 crore, it will have a greenshoe option of Rs 250 crore.

Exim Bank of India and SIDBI will invest in the fund by way of equity and equity-like products in export-oriented units, in both manufacturing and services sectors.

What is the green-shoe option?

A **greenshoe option** is an over-allotment option, which is a term that is commonly used to describe a special arrangement in a share offering for example an initial public offering (IPO) that will enable the investment bank to support the share price after the offering without putting their own capital at risk.

Alternate Investment Fund: Key Details

- The Alternate Investment Fund will be launched in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
- The fund will identify Indian enterprises with potential advantages that are currently underperforming or unable to tap their latent potential to grow.
- Alternate Investment Fund will offer a mix of both financial and advisory services and structured support through investments in equity or equity-like instruments, debt (funded and non-funded) and technical assistance (advisory services, grants and soft loans) to the Indian companies.
- A press release from **Exim Bank's Ubharte Sitaare Programme (USP)** identified Indian companies that have the potential to be future champions in the domestic arena while meeting global demands.

- Exim Bank and SIDBI have together already developed a robust pipeline of over 100 potential proposals across a range of sectors, such as pharma, auto components, engineering solutions, agriculture and software.

Background

Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech last year had mentioned that MSMEs are vital to keeping the wheels of the economy moving, as they create jobs, innovate and are risk-takers.

The finance minister will also release the India Exim Bank's study on '**Exports from Uttar Pradesh: Trends, Opportunities and Policy Perspective**'.

The study highlights the importance of boosting sports in economic growth and analyses the global and Indian sports goods industry, identify the export potential of the segment and discuss the challenges faced by exporters.

Defence India Startup Challenge (DISC) 5.0 – All you need to know

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on August 19, 2021, launched Defence India Startup Challenge (DISC) 5.0 under Innovations for Defence Excellence – Defence Innovation Organization (iDEX-DIO) initiative during a video conference.

Singh lauded the efforts of iDEX-DIO and called the launch of DISC 5.0 during the 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' as a step towards creating an 'AtmaNirbhar' Defence sector. Singh also recalled the previous four editions of DISC and highlighted that more than 80 startups, individual innovators, MSMEs have been winners across more than 40 technological areas.

Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, Defence Secretary Dr Ajay Kumar along senior officials from the Ministry of Defence were present during the launch. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Army Staff General MM Naravane, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhadauria along with young innovators participated virtually.

What is DISC 5.0?

- DISC 5.0, also known as Defence India Startup Challenge is a project under the iDEX-DIO initiative to leveraging the startup ecosystem in India to develop the country's Defence technologies, manufacturing capabilities, and equipment design.
- DISC 5.0 has been launched after three years after the launch of the first edition of DISC.

Significance of DISC 5.0

- Given the rapidly changing security and geo-political scenario in the world, the defence minister noted that it is crucial to create a modern, strong, well-equipped military and self-reliant defence industry.
- For this purpose, iDEX offers a platform for the Government, think tanks, services, industry, innovators, and startups can come together to help the country's Defence and Aerospace sectors expand their potential.
- DISC 5.0 under the iDEX-DIO initiative showcased 35 problem statements, 13 from the Services

and 22 from Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) for innovators and startups to come up with solutions.

- These 35 problem statements range across Drone SWARMS and Data Capturing, Underwater domain awareness, 5G network, Non-lethal devices, Aircraft-trainer, Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, and Situational awareness.

iDEX initiative

- iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) initiative is to achieve self-reliance and promote the development of innovation & technology in India's Defence and Aerospace sectors. PM Modi had launched iDEX in April 2018.

- iDEX has been successful at bridging the gap between talent and demand in the country while offering a strong foundation of R&D, and innovation to the industry.

- iDEX will be supporting 5 times more startups over the next 5 years to complete procurement procedures in a timely manner, accelerate progress, and reduce costs.

- iDEX4fauji is another similar initiative that offers opportunities to service personnel to showcase their talent in the fields of Defence innovation and technology.

COVID-19 vaccine for children: Johnson & Johnson seeks approval for vaccine trials for 12-17 group in India

Johnson & Johnson has applied for permission to conduct COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials in India on children aged between 12 to 17 years.

The US pharma giant in a brief statement released on August 20, 2021, informed that it had submitted its application on August 17. The firm added that it is imperative to ensure all the sections of the population, including children, are vaccinated against the COVID-19 as quickly as possible to control the virus.

The statement by Johnson & Johnson read, ***'To ultimately achieve herd immunity it is imperative to that COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials continue to move forward in this population, and we remain deeply committed to the critical work needed to make our COVID-19 vaccine equitably accessible for all age groups.'***

COVID-19 vaccine for children in India: When it will be available?

On August 19, 2021, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya informed that COVID-19 vaccines for children will be available very soon in the country.

Clinical trials of the COVID vaccine in India focusing on the vaccine safety and efficacy for children have been in talks in recent weeks and months, amid the fears that the future waves of infection might target those below the age of 18 years.

Reopening of schools & colleges increases concern-

The concern for the COVID-19 infection in Children has also increased as schools and colleges across the country re-open.

Several states in India have already begun scaling up the pediatric infrastructure, including stocking up on medicines and medical oxygen and increasing the number of hospital beds.

COVID-19 vaccine trials for children in India:

- While talking about the COVID-19 vaccine trials for children in India, the Union Health Minister had informed that two trials- conducted by Zydus Cadila and Bharat Biotech- are already underway and that the results are due in September 2021.
- In July 2021, the Indian drug regulator's SEC had recommended that permission must also be given to the Serum Institute of India to conduct Phase II/III trials of COVOVAX on 920 children between the age of 2-17 years.
- The Chief of AIIMS, Dr. Randeep Guleria had also informed that the COVID vaccines for children can be made available by September. He added that the vaccination to children will be a big boost to break the chain of transmission.

Johnson & Johnson vaccine in India:

Johnson & Johnson has recently received Emergency Use Authorization, or emergency use approval, for its single-dose vaccine in India. It will be supplied via an agreement with Hyderabad-based Biological E. Limited.

Studies have shown that the single-dose vaccine has 66% efficacy in preventing moderate to severe illness due to COVID and 85% efficacy against severe cases.

AstraZeneca's antibody cocktail therapy successful at preventing COVID-19: Study

AstraZeneca, a UK-based biopharmaceutical company, on August 20, 2021, announced that its PROVENT Phase-III prophylaxis trial of its antibody cocktail therapy AZD7442, a combination of two long-acting antibodies (LAAB), met the primary goal of preventing COVID-19 in late-stage cases.

In its trial, AstraZeneca showed that antibody cocktail AZD7442 reduced the risk of developing symptomatic COVID-19 in high-risk people by 77 per cent. More than 75 per cent of participants had chronic conditions, including a reduced immune response to vaccination.

What is antibody cocktail therapy AZD7442?

- AZD7442 is a combination of two long-acting antibodies (LAAB) that have been extracted from the B-cells donated by recovering COVID-19 patients.
- The Vanderbilt University Medical Center discovered its first and licensed it to AstraZeneca in 2020 for human monoclonal antibodies study.
- AstraZeneca with its YTE half-life extension technology optimized AZD7442 thereby enabling it to offer protection from COVID-19 up to 12 months. The extension technology enhances the durability of AZD7442 compared to conventional antibodies.

How does antibody cocktail therapy AZD7442 work?

- AZD7442 is administered through intramuscular injection in a single dose. The human monoclonal antibodies bind to distinct sites on the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the patient.

What is PROVENT Phase-III prophylaxis trial?

- PROVENT Phase-III prophylaxis trial is being conducted by AstraZeneca to assess the efficacy and safety of a single dose of AZD7442 in the prevention of COVID-19.
- Data from the preclinical experiments published in Nature journal in 2020 showed that the LAABs

were efficient at blocking the binding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to human host cells and offered protection against infection.

- AstraZeneca is working out details with governments across the world to make AZD7442 accessible to high-risk populations once approved and rolled out.

When will antibody cocktail therapy AZD7442 be available?

- AstraZeneca will work on regulatory submission of the PROVENT Phase-III prophylaxis trial data to health authorities for emergency use authorization or conditional approval of AZD7442.

WHO condemns wealthy nation's rush towards COVID-19 vaccine boosters

The World Health Organisation on August 18, 2021, **condemned the rush by the wealthy nations to provide COVID-19 booster shots to their citizens, while millions around the world are yet to receive a single dose of the vaccine.**

WHO experts, while speaking before the US authorities who announced that all the vaccinated Americans will soon be eligible for additional doses, insisted that there has been no scientific evidence that COVID-19 vaccine boosters are needed.

Earlier in August 2021, the global health agency had called for a moratorium on COVID vaccine booster shots to help ease the drastic inequity in the dose distribution between the rich and the poor nations.

However, that has not stopped a number of countries from moving forward with the plans to add a third vaccine jab, as they struggle to thwart the Delta variant.

It is not in the best interests of leaders just to focus on narrow nationalistic goals when we live in an interconnected and the [#COVID19](#) virus is mutating quickly. Our mutual resilience is only as strong as our weakest bond. [#VaccinEquity](#)

— Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (@DrTedros) [August 18, 2021](#)

What WHO said on wealthy nation's rush for vaccine boosters?

The World Health Organisation experts argued that providing the COVID -19 booster shots while so many around the world still waiting to be immunized was immoral.

WHO's emergency director Mike Ryan said that the wealthy nations have been planning to hand out extra life jackets to people who already have the life jackets while leaving other people to drown without a single life jacket.

The fundamental ethical reality is that we have been handing out second life jackets while leaving millions and millions of people without anything to protect them.

The experts further insisted that ensuring the people in low-income countries where the

vaccination has been lagging received jabs is far more important.

The WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the divide between the have and have nots will only grow larger if the manufacturers and the leaders prioritize booster shots over supply to low and middle-income countries.

COVID-19 booster shots authorized by wealthy nations:

The United States of America-

The US authorities on August 18, 2021, warning that the COVID-19 vaccination efficacy has been decreasing over time, authorized the booster shots for all the Americans from September 20.

The booster shots will start eight months after an individual has been fully vaccinated.

As per the US officials, while the vaccine **remains remarkably effective** in reducing the risk of serious disease, death, and hospitalization from the effects of COVID-19, protection can diminish in the months ahead without boosted immunization.

US had already authorized an extra dose for people with weakened immune systems

Israel-

Israel already began administering third doses to the citizens aged 50 years or above.

What is a booster dose?

A booster shot, in medical terms, is an extra administration of a vaccine after an earlier dose. After an initial immunization, a booster dose or injection is a re-exposure to the immunizing antigen.

The booster dose aims at increasing the immunity against that antigen back to the protective levels after the memory against that antigen has declined through time. The requirement for a booster dose after a primary vaccination is evaluated in several ways.

Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana Health Cards launched in Odisha: All you need to know!

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launched **Smart Health Cards under the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana for 3.5 crore people** in the state on August 20, 2021. He had announced them after hoisting the National Flag on the occasion of 75th Independence Day on August 15, 2021.

The Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) cards will cover 3.5 crore people of the state out of a total population of 4.3 crores. The initiative aims to transform the health service delivery system of not only the state but also create history in the health sector of the Country.

Odisha: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launches the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) cards from Malkangiri. It will cover 3.5 crore people of the state out of a total population of 4.3 crores.

pic.twitter.com/T2IBWF3JgC

— ANI (@ANI) [August 20, 2021](#)

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said that the move will usher in a new era in the state's health sector. The Chief Minister said, ***"all the people of the entire Odisha are my family. The news of people selling land, jewellery or stop sending children to school to manage their treatment costs pains me. Therefore I decided that this type of distress must go."***

Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana Health Cards

- The state government has redesigned the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana to provide Smart Health Cards to people. Under Smart Health Cards, people will get hassle-free quality treatment at the best available health care facilities.
- The Smart Health Cards will work like debit cards for a certain amount.
- Odisha is the first state in the country to provide such Smart Health Cards to the people. The initiative is expected to benefit about 3.5 crore people and 96 lakh families in a phased manner.

Who will get the Smart Health Cards?

The beneficiaries of National and State Food Security Schemes and Annapurna and Antodaya beneficiaries will get smart health cards.

Key Highlights

- The smart health cards will enable each family to avail treatment up to Rs 5 lakh per annum.
- The women members of the family will be able to avail the benefit up to Rs 10 lakh every year.
- The beneficiaries will be able to avail health services in more than 200 hospital chains of the country including Odisha.

Background

The Odisha state has been setting new milestones in various spheres, as per Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. He said that Odisha is better-placed than many other states in the fight against COVID-19.

The state had supplied oxygen to 17 states for two months during the second wave. The state is also sponsoring the Indian national hockey teams since 2018 and has pledged support for 10 more years.

Around 32,000 schools will be transformed in the state under the 'Mo School Abhijaan', of which 1,072 were developed in the first phase.

China formally approves three-child policy to prevent demographic crisis

China's national legislature **formally approved a three-child policy** on August 20, 2021, marking a major policy shift to prevent a steep decline in the birth rate.

The move marks an end to the world's most populous country's strict two-child policy rule. Chinese President Xi Jinping had approved the end of the two-child policy earlier after China's population data over the past decade showed the slowest population growth in decades.

China's revised Population and Family Planning Law will allow Chinese couples to now have three children. The law was passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC).

China's three-child policy: Key Highlights

- China has approved the three-child policy along with social and economic support measures to address the reluctance of Chinese couples to have more children due to mounting costs.
- As per the new law, China will take supportive measures including those in finances, taxes, insurance, education, housing and employment, to reduce families' burdens as well as the cost of raising and educating children.
- The revised Population and Family Planning Law will implement the central leadership's decision to cope with new circumstances in social and economic development and promote balanced long-term population growth.

China ends two-child policy

- The ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) had approved a relaxation of its strict two-child policy in May 2021 to allow all couples to have up to three children.
- Prior to this, China had shifted away from its decades-old one-child policy to allow all couples to have two children in 2016.
- This came after the draconian one-child policy invited criticism from policymakers for the demographic crisis in the country.

•Chinese officials have claimed that the three-decade-old one-child policy prevented over 400 million births.

China's Demographic Crisis

- China's once-in-a-decade population census, which was released in May 2021, revealed that China's population grew at the slowest pace to 1.412 billion.
- It revealed that around 12 million babies were born in 2020, which is down by 18 percent from 2019's report of 14.6 million births and a significant decrease from 18 million births in 2016.
- The number of births in 2020 was also the lowest recorded since the 1960s.
- On the other hand, the population of people above 60 years grew to 264 million, up by 18.7 percent from last year.
- The slowing birth rate and aging population is feared to lead to a major demographic crisis.
- China's demographic time bomb has become a huge worry for the economy as well, as there has been a fall in its working-age population and an increase in those aged above 60 years.
- China's working-age population is expected to fall further in the coming years due to a decline in birth rates.
- There are fears that if the nation's population gets too old then it would have a huge impact on the nation's economic growth hence the issue needs to be dealt with at an early stage.

EAM S Jaishankar, US Secretary of State Blinken discusses Afghanistan situation, agree to continue coordination

Amid the Afghanistan crisis as Taliban takes over the charge, the External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken over a phone call discussed the ongoing crisis in the war-torn country. This was the second phone call between the two diplomats ever since Taliban takeover.

As per the US State Department, both India and the US have agreed to continue coordination in Afghanistan.

The call between Blinken and Jaishankar also takes place at a time when several countries around the world including India and the US have been evacuating their citizens from Afghanistan.

Productive call with [@DrSJaishankar](#) today about Afghanistan. We agreed to continue our close coordination.

— Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [August 20, 2021](#)

India- US communication on Afghanistan:

Antony Blinken termed the phone call with EAM S. Jaishankar as productive.

The US State Department spokesperson Ned Price in a short statement on the phone call mentioned that Secretary Blinken and EAM Jaishankar have discussed the ongoing situation in Afghanistan and both the ministers have agreed to continue coordination in the disputed region.

Earlier on August 17, the External Affairs Minister of India had informed that he had spoken to Blinken over the latest developments that took place in Afghanistan on August 15.

US tries to develop consensus on Afghanistan situation:

In recent days amid the fast unfolding situation in Afghanistan, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has made phone calls with several counterparts around the world including Sergey Lavrov of Russia and FM Wang Yi of China in order to develop a consensus on a volatile situation in war-torn Afghanistan.

What India said on Afghanistan situation?

EAM S. Jaishankar, during a press conference after a recent UNSC meet in New York on August 19, 2021, said that India has been following the events in Afghanistan very carefully and that the focus is on ensuring the security and the safe return of the Indian nationals who are still in the war-torn country.

The Minister also mentioned that the situation in Afghanistan is really what has been very much of the focus of his own engagements in the US where he talked to the UN Secretary-General, the US Secretary of State as well as other colleagues who were there.

He further added that at the current moment, India is like everybody else, very carefully following the developments in Afghanistan. The main focus of the Indian Government is to ensure security in Afghanistan and the safe return of Indian Nationals.

Afghanistan Crisis:

The future of Afghanistan has been hanging in balance as the country's government collapsed on August 15, 2021, soon after President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul to avoid more bloodshed by Taliban militants.

Taliban had entered the Presidential Palace in Kabul and had declared its victory over the Afghan Government.

Efforts are continuously being made to maintain stability in the country which has now come under the terror group. However, thousands of people have been rushing to the Kabul airport to flee the country as they are afraid of the Taliban's brutal atrocities in the nation.

The latest situation in Afghanistan unfolded after the US decided to withdraw its troops from the country.

G7 Ministers on Afghanistan: Taliban must hold their commitments to ensure civilians' safety

The Group of Seven (G7) Ministers on August 19, 2021 stressed that the Taliban must hold on to their commitments to ensure the protection of civilians.

The leaders also expressed their concerns over reports of violent reprisals in parts of Afghanistan. This was stated by UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in a statement on August 19.

Dominic Raab had chaired a call of Foreign and Development Ministers of G7 countries- Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States to discuss the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. The High Representative of the European Union was also a part of the call.

Dominic Raab tweeted after the meeting saying, ***"Today the UK Flag of United Kingdom convened a meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers on Afghanistan. G7 Ministers discussed coordination of the ongoing evacuation efforts and how the G7 can forge an international strategy to address the challenges we now face in Afghanistan."***

Today the UK convened a meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers on Afghanistan. G7 Ministers discussed coordination of the ongoing evacuation efforts and how the G7 can forge an international strategy to address the challenges we now face in Afghanistan.

pic.twitter.com/iLMqxnWNoo

— Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) [August 19, 2021](#)

G7 Ministers on Afghanistan: Key Highlights

- The Group of Seven Foreign Ministers stated that the Afghanistan crisis requires an international response including intensive engagement with most affected Afghans, UNSC, parties to the conflict, G20 international donors and Afghanistan's regional neighbours on critical questions facing Afghanistan and the region.
- UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab stated that the G7 has called for the Taliban to guarantee safe passage to foreign nationals and Afghans who wish to leave the nation.

- The G7 also assured that they are doing everything possible to evacuate vulnerable persons from Kabul airport.
- G7 ministers also vowed to engage with partners in the coming days to secure an inclusive political settlement that will enable life-saving humanitarian assistance and support in Afghanistan and the region and prevent any further loss of life.

G7 Ministers extend support to UNSC statement

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said in a statement that the G7 Ministers also spoke about the significant loss of life and internal displacement in Afghanistan over recent days. He stated that the G7 Ministers support statement of UNSC made on August 16.

Dominic Raab further in his capacity as chair of G7 foreign and development ministers' meeting said that the G7 affirm their commitment in particular to urgent need for the cessation of violence, respect for human rights including for women, children & minorities, inclusive negotiations about the future of Afghanistan.

"And affirmed our commitment in particular to urgent need for the cessation of violence, respect for human rights including for women, children & minorities, inclusive negotiations about the future of Afghanistan," UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (file pic) added. pic.twitter.com/TbHx1l6PTF

— ANI (@ANI) [August 20, 2021](#)

The UK Foreign Secretary also discussed the situation in Afghanistan with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and they both agreed on the importance of addressing security concerns, regional stability and addressing the humanitarian crisis.

Discussed Afghanistan with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi today. We noted the importance of addressing security concerns, regional stability and addressing the humanitarian crisis.

— Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) [August 19, 2021](#)

The UK Foreign Secretary also informed that the United Kingdom and Turkey are working closely together in Afghanistan to ensure that evacuations continue safely.

UK & Turkey are working closely together in Afghanistan to ensure evacuations can continue safely. I expressed gratitude for Turkish foreign minister [@MevlutCavusoglu](#)'s commitment to safeguarding Kabul airport alongside our troops.

— Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) [August 19, 2021](#)

Background

All major blocs across the world are currently holding talks to avert the crisis in Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power. Afghanistan's future is currently hanging in balance after the country's government collapsed on August 15, 2021 following the escape of Afghanistan president Ashraf Ghani from Kabul.

The Taliban entered the presidential palace in the Afghan capital and declared its victory over the government. The insurgent group is currently in talks with former Afghan officials to form a new government under its regime.

Several countries have offered refuge to Afghans who wish to leave Afghanistan due to terror of the Taliban's brutal past atrocities in the nation.

Prime Minister Modi lays foundation stone & inaugurates multiple projects in Gujarat's Somnath

Prime Minister Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple projects in Somnath, Gujarat on August 20, 2021, via video conferencing.

The Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy, Chief Minister of Gujarat Vijay Rupani, and Deputy Chief Minister Nitin Patel were also present on the occasion.

The projects inaugurated by PM Modi in Gujarat included the Somnath Exhibition Center, Somnath Promenade, the reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath and the foundation stone of Shree Parvati Temple will also be laid.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone of multiple projects in Somnath, Gujarat via video conferencing.

The projects include Somnath Promenade, Somnath Exhibition Centre, Parvati Temple and reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath pic.twitter.com/Tcvx3XTmjm

— ANI (@ANI) [August 20, 2021](#)

Projects inaugurated by PM Modi in Gujarat's Somnath:

1. Somnath Promenade

According to the PMO release, the Somnath Promenade has been developed under PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive) Scheme at a cost of Rs. 47 crores.

Reportedly, it will be 1 km long- promenade 'Samudra Darshan' walkaway behind the temple which will be decorated with spiritual paintings, colorful lightings, and benches. Tourists will be able to see the beauty of the Arabian Sea.

2. Somnath Exhibition Centre

The Centre has been developed in the premises of 'Tourist Facilitation Center'. It will display the exhibits from the dismantled parts of the Old Somnath Temple and its sculptures having Nagar-style temple architecture of Old Somnath. The exhibition centre has been constructed at a cost of Rs. 75 lakhs.

3. Reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath

Prime Minister Modi will inaugurate the reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath. The reconstruction has been completed by Shree Somnath Trust with a total outlay of Rs. 3.5 crores.

The temple is also referred to as Ahilyabai Temple since it was built by Queen Ahilyabai of Indore when she found out that the old temple was in ruins.

The entire old temple complex has been now historically redeveloped for the safety of the pilgrims and with an augmented capacity.

Foundation stone for construction of Shree Parvati Temple

During the virtual event, Prime Minister Modi will also lay the foundation stone of Shree Parvati Temple. The temple has been proposed to be constructed with a total outlay of Rs. 30 crores. This will also include the construction of the temple in Sompura Salats Style, development of Nritya Mandap and Garbha Griha.

DRDO develops advanced chaff technology to safeguard IAF fighter aircrafts

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) informed on August 19, 2021, that it has developed an advanced Chaff Technology that to safeguard the fighter jets of the Indian Air Force against hostile radar targets.

Chaff technology has been given to the industry for production in large quantities in order to meet the annual rolling requirement of the Indian Air Force. Chaff is a critical defence technology that is used to protect fighter aircraft from hostile radar targets.

The Indian Air Force has already started the process of induction of the technology after the completion of successful user trials.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh IAF, DRDO and the industry for the successful indigenous development of this critical defence technology. He termed it as one more step of DRDO towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat in strategic defence technologies.

Advanced Chaff technology for fighter jets:

The advanced Chaff material and chaff cartridge-118/I has been developed by the Defence Laboratory, Jodhpur, in collaboration with the High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL), Pune, meeting the qualitative requirements of the Indian Air Force.

DLJ developed advanced Chaff material & chaff cartridge-118/I in collaboration with High Energy Materials Research Laboratory, Pune meeting qualitative requirements of IAF, which has started process of induction of this technology after completion of successful user trials: DRDO

pic.twitter.com/yCgS2NTjWd

— ANI (@ANI) [August 19, 2021](#)

The Advanced Chaff Technology is an electronic countermeasure technology that the militaries globally use to safeguard their assets, such as aircraft, naval vessels. The technology protects the assets from the radio and radar frequency.

As per DRDO, in today's electronic warfare, the survivability of the fighter aircraft was of prime concern as there is an advancement in modern radar threats.

DRDO further explained that their survivability, Counter Measure Dispensing System was used that provides the passive jamming against the infrared and radar threats.

Chaff Technology for IAF jets: Significance

The significance of Chaff Technology lay in the fact that a very less quantity of chaff material deployed in the air acts as decoys to deflect the enemy missiles for ensuring the safety of the aircraft.

Similar technology by DRDO for Navy ships:

The Advanced Chaff technology has been developed months after the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) developed a similar technology in three variants for Navy Ships in order to protect them from missile attacks.

The trials of all three variants have been conducted by the Indian Navy in the Arabian Sea on Indian Naval Ship. The performance was successful.

The Navy vessels had used Chaff rockets that are deployed in the air. These acted as multiple targets for missile guided systems.

N K Singh elected as President of IEG Society

N K Singh, the Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, has been elected as the President of the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) Society during a meeting on August 16, 2021, IEG said in a statement.

IEG further in the statement said that Singh will be succeeding former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who retired from the Presidency of IEG Society earlier in August 2021. Dr Manmohan Singh had recommended Singh for the General Assembly of the IEG to consider for Presidency of the Society.

Dr Manmohan Singh has served as the President of IEG since 1992. Currently, Tarun Das, former Director-General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is the Chairman, Board of Governors, and Professor Ajit Mishra is the Director of IEG.

Who is N K Singh?

- N K Singh is an Indian economist, administrator, academician, and policymaker. Singh is currently the Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission.
- Prior to this, Singh has been the Chairman of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Review Committee (FRBM). He has been a member of the Rajya Sabha from 2008 to 2014 during which he contributed significantly to several Parliamentary Standing Committees such as the Committee on Human Resource Development, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Public Accounts Committee.
- Singh also has been a distinguished member of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) in his home cadre in Bihar, where he held posts such as the Industrial Development Commissioner and Deputy Chairman, Bihar Planning Board.
- Singh has vast international experience through interactions with multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, OECD, IMF, and ADB.
- Singh has been awarded the "Order of the Rising Sun - Gold, and Silver" in 2016 by the Emperor of Japan for his work as First Minister, Economic, and Commercial, Indian Embassy, Japan (1981–85).

- Singh has a Bachelor's in Economics from St. Stephens's College, Delhi, and a Master's in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics.

BRICS nations sign deal for remote sensing satellite data sharing

BRICS nations- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa signed an agreement on August 18, 2021 for cooperation in remote sensing satellite data sharing, as per the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

The deal will enable building a virtual constellation of specified remote sensing satellites of BRICS space agencies and their respective ground stations will receive the data.

ISRO said in a statement that ***"this will contribute in strengthening multilateral cooperation among BRICS space agencies in meeting the challenges faced by mankind, such as global climate change, major disasters and environmental protection."***

The BRICS agreement was signed under India's Chairmanship of the bloc. The Secretary & India's BRICS Sherpa, Ministry of External Affairs, Sanjay Bhattacharyya, was present on the occasion.

Sanjay Bhattacharyya tweeted saying, ***"BRICS reached major landmark today with the signing of Agr on BRICS Satellite Constellation by Heads of Space Agencies. It will promote cooperation & use space data & applications for development & social objectives outlined in SDGs, providing benefit to citizens."***

[#BRICS](#) reached major landmark today with signing of Agr on BRICS Satellite Constellation by Heads of Space Agencies

It will promote cooperation & use space data & applications for development & social objectives outlined in SDGs, providing benefit to citizens [#BRICSIndia2021](#) pic.twitter.com/5IfY4hieD8

— Sanjay Bhattacharyya (@SecySanjay) [August 18, 2021](#)

Significance

- The agreement will promote cooperation and use space data and applications for development and social objectives outlined in SDGs, providing benefit to citizens.
- The agreement will help in facing challenges faced by humankind such as climate change and

major disasters. It is expected to result in more cooperation between BRICS members and their space agencies.

Who signed the agreement?

Director-General of Russia's State Space Corporation Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, signed the agreement along with ISRO Chairman and Secretary in Department of Space, K Sivan, CNSA Administrator Zhang Kejian, CEO of South African National Space Agency, Valanathan Munsami and Brazilian Space Agency President Carlos Augusto Teixeira de Moura.

UNSC Open Debate: EAM Jaishankar proposes four-point framework to secure UN peacekeepers

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar on August 18, 2021, while chairing the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Technology and Peacekeeping said that the UN peacekeeping missions continue to operate in a variety of challenging settings involving terrorists, armed groups, and non-state actors.

During the open debate, Jaishankar also announced India's support to the UN in the rollout of the UNITE AWARE platform across select peacekeeping missions.

Since the deployment for the first time in 1948, the nature of peacekeeping missions and their attendant threats have become more complex, and hence it is vital to secure the peacekeepers to keep pace, he said.

In the presence of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, EAM Jaishankar emphasized the role of technology in the safety of UN peacekeepers and the role the peacekeepers play in maintaining peace and tranquillity.

During a media briefing after the UNSC Open Debate in New York, EAM Jaishankar also responded on the situation in Afghanistan that India, currently, is very carefully following developments in Afghanistan. Ensuring security in Afghanistan and the safe return of Indian nationals is the prime focus.

India is preparing to send another Air Force plane to evacuate stranded Indian nationals in Afghanistan, he added.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar on August 17, 2021, had reached New York to preside over two high-level signature events of the United Nations (UN) during India's presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

During his visit, on August 18, 2021, EAM Jaishankar will chair an open debate on 'Protecting the Protectors: Technology and Peacekeeping' followed by a high-level briefing session on 'Threats

to International Peace and Security caused by Terrorist Acts' the next day.

Chaired the UNSC Open Debate on Technology and Peacekeeping.

As a country with a tradition of Peacekeeping and at forefront of Technology, proud to partner UN on a situational awareness platform-UNITE AWARE.

Gratified by the overwhelming support for this initiative. pic.twitter.com/rfETYsDLNq

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 18, 2021](#)

UNSC Open Debate on Technology and Peacekeeping: Key Points by EAM Jaishankar

- India as one of the largest troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions has contributed over 2,50,000 troops in 49 missions over the years.
- EAM Jaishankar during the UNSC Open Debate on Technology and Peacekeeping proposed a four-point framework that outlines the roadmap to secure UN peacekeepers.

1) Focus on reliable and field-serviceable technologies

- There is a need to focus on operationally proven, cost-effective, widely available, reliable, and field-serviceable technologies.
- Prioritizing mobility, both in the sense of the use of mobile digital/ IT platforms, and agile maneuverability of mission assets.
- Deployment of environment-friendly technologies using renewables and fuel efficiency and environmentally friendly construction materials.

2) Create an information and intelligence foundation

- There is also a need for an information and intelligence foundation that will ensure early warning.
- A reliable, high-fidelity means to gather, use, process, and share data and information will prove beneficial from the very beginning of peacekeeping missions.
- Overhead visualization and precise positioning of mission environments is significant in providing intelligence and enhancing the safety and security of the personnel of the peacekeeping missions.

- At the open debate, India announced its support to the UN in the rollout of the UNITE AWARE Platform across select peacekeeping missions that will aid complete visualization, coordination, and monitoring of peacekeeping missions on a real-time basis.

3) Contribute to ensure regular technological improvements

- Ensuring continuous technological improvements in the gear of the peacekeepers, their weapons, and tools are critical to enhancing their performance, mobility, range, endurance, and load-carrying capabilities along with their safety and security.
- These improvements also aim to strengthen communication within peacekeeping missions and enhance the decision-making capacity of personnel at the operational or tactical level.

4) Consistent technological training and capacity building of peacekeepers

- There is a significant need for consistent training and capacity building of peacekeepers in the field of technology.
- India in collaboration with the UNC4ISR Academy for Peace Operations in Entebbe, Uganda, is committed to its goal to help meet the training needs.
- India has signed an MoU with the United Nations in support of the "Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping' initiative and to UN C4ISR Academy for Peace Operations (UNCAP).

'Protecting the Protectors: Technology and Peacekeeping': First Event

- The first event is an open debate on 'Protecting the Protectors: Technology and Peacekeeping' that will be held tomorrow on August 18, 2021.
- The 'Protecting the Protectors: Technology and Peacekeeping' open debate will focus on deliberating the use of modern technological tools to enhance the security and safety of Peacekeepers and to aid Peacekeeping missions.
- India, in collaboration with the UN, will launch a situational awareness programme 'UNITE AWARE Platform' that will aid a Peacekeeping Operations Centre to gauge the ground situation in a conflict zone on a real-time basis.
- India and the UN are expected to sign an MoU in support of the 'Partnership for Technology in

Peacekeeping' initiative during the visit.

'Threats to International Peace and Security caused by Terrorist Acts': Second Event

- The second event will be a high-level briefing session on 'Threats to International Peace and Security caused by Terrorist Acts' that will take up the six-monthly report of the UN Secretary-General on the threats by ISIL.

India's presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- India's two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC began on January 1, 2021. India's Presidency of the UNSC in August is the country's first Presidency in 2021-22. After August, India's Presidency will next be in December 2022.
- This is India's 10th tenure as UNSC Presidency. Since the establishment of the UNSC in 1945, India has held Presidency of the UNSC for 9 times: June 1950, September 1967, December 1972, October 1977, February 1985, October 1991, December 1992, August 2011, and November 2012.
- As per the UNSC protocol, the Council Presidency rotates among each of the 15 members of the UNSC in alphabetical order.
- For the month of August 2021, India's Presidency has outlined three high-level meetings on peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and maritime security. The monthly programme of India's Presidency will deliberate on situations in the neighborhood and the world, including developments in Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, and the Middle East.

Historic relationship with Afghan people to continue: EAM S Jaishankar on Indian investment in Afghanistan

Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on August 18, 2021 that India's historic relationship with the Afghan people will continue and that will guide its approach in the coming days. He said this upon being asked about the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

Responding to the question '**how will India deal with Taliban**' at UNSC, Jaishankar said that India like everybody else is at the moment very carefully following developments in Afghanistan. He said India's focus is on ensuring security in Afghanistan and the safe return of Indian nationals.

At the moment, we are, like everybody else, very carefully following developments in [#Afghanistan](#). Our focus is on ensuring security in Afghanistan and the safe return of Indian nationals: EAM S Jaishankar at UNSC on being asked 'how will India deal with Taliban' (18.08.2021) pic.twitter.com/WuWI4bq68n

— ANI (@ANI) [August 19, 2021](#)

What about Indian investment in Afghanistan?

Speaking about Indian investment in Afghanistan, S Jaishankar said that, ***"For us, it reflected what was our historical relationship with Afghan people. That relation with Afghan people obviously continues. That will guide our approach to Afghanistan in the coming days."***

For us, it (Indian investment in [#Afghanistan](#)) reflected what was our historical relationship with Afghan people. That relation with Afghan people obviously continues. That will guide our approach to Afghanistan in the coming days: EAM S Jaishankar at UNSC in New York (18.08) pic.twitter.com/3vaeSgxPD9

— ANI (@ANI) [August 19, 2021](#)

Further, while answering to the question on whether India has had any communication with the Taliban in recent days, the external affairs minister said that at this point, India is looking at what is the situation in Kabul. He said, ***"Obviously, the Taliban & its representatives have come to Kabul. So we need to take it on from there."***

At this point of time, we're looking at what is the situation in Kabul. Obviously, Taliban & its representatives have come to Kabul. So we need to take it on from there: EAM S Jaishankar on being asked 'had India has any communication with Taliban in recent days' (18.08)

pic.twitter.com/r2txnCZCJ7

— ANI (@ANI) [August 19, 2021](#)

Background

- The External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had chaired the United Nations Security Council briefing on "threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts" earlier today. India is the president of the United Nations Security Council for August month.
 - Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, India has been evacuating its citizens from the war-torn nation with the support of the Indian Air Force. India is expected to send another Air Force plane to evacuate other stranded people in Afghanistan. Many Indians still continue to be stranded in Afghanistan.
 - The Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan along with his staff were evacuated earlier aboard IAF aircraft. The External Affairs Minister had tweeted saying that the movement of the Indian Ambassador and the Embassy staff from Kabul to India was a difficult and complicated exercise. Movement of the Indian Ambassador and the Embassy staff from Kabul to India was a difficult and complicated exercise. Thank all those whose cooperation and facilitation made it possible.
- Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 17, 2021](#)

•**The Ministry of External Affairs 24x7 Special Afghanistan Cell has also been reinforced. The details are in the below tweet.**

MEA's 24x7 Special Afghanistan Cell has been reinforced.

UPDATED contact details:

Phone numbers: +91-11-49016783, +91-11-49016784, +91-11-49016785

WhatsApp number: +91-8010611290

Email: SituationRoom@mea.gov.in <https://t.co/Suc9eF4hDw>

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 17, 2021](#)

Situation in Afghanistan

While the Taliban is currently having negotiations with former Afghan officials including former president Hamid Karzai to form a new government in Afghanistan, former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani says that he is 'in talks to return' home.

Ashraf Ghani said in a statement that he had left Kabul to prevent bloodshed. At the same time, all the Afghan troops and officials, who had not surrendered to the Taliban, are reportedly regrouping in Panjshir to join 'Resistance 2.0' that has been launched by famed anti-Taliban leader's son Ahmad Massoud against the Taliban's return. Former Afghanistan Vice President Amrulla Saleh, who has declared himself 'Caretaker President' of Afghanistan by invoking the constitution, has also joined Massoud in Panjshir.

Afghanistan crisis: Taliban stops import, export from India through Pakistan

The Federation of Indian Export Organisation has informed that **the taliban rebels, after their recent takeover in Afghanistan, have stopped all the imports and exports from India through the transit routes of Pakistan**

The Director-General of the Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO) Ajay Sahai said that the terror group has stopped the movement of cargo through transit routes of Pakistan, thereby stopping the imports from Afghanistan.

Imports from the country come through the transit routes of Pakistan and as of now, Taliban has stopped the movement of cargo to Pakistan, so virtually imports have also been stopped.

He further added that as far as exports are concerned, some of the goods have been exported through the international north-south corridor route which is going fine now. While some other goods go through the Dubai route which is also working fine.

India-Afghanistan trade relations:

- India has long-standing relations with Afghanistan, particularly in trade, and also has larger investments in the country.
- **India is one of the largest partners of Afghanistan and its exports to Afghanistan are worth around USD 835 million for 2021. India has also imported goods from the country worth around USD 510 million.**
- Besides trade, India also has a sizeable investment in Afghanistan. The country has investments of around USD 3 billion, as well as there, are 400 odd projects of India in Afghanistan, some of which are currently going on.
- In trade, both India and Afghanistan enjoy healthy relations. Currently, the Indian export profile includes pharmaceuticals, sugar, tea, apparel, coffee, transmission tower, and spices.
- Imports have been largely dependent on dry fruits. India also imports little gum and onions from them.

Will new Taliban rule impact India-Afghanistan trade relations?

The DG of FIEO while talking about the latest development said that despite the fast-evolving situation in Afghanistan, he is optimistic about India's trade relations with it.

He mentioned that over a period of time Afghanistan will also realize that economic development is the only way to move forward and they will decide to continue with that kind of trade.

The new Taliban regime in Afghanistan will like to have political legitimacy and for that India's role will be significant for them.

Background:

The latest development in the trade relations between India and Afghanistan has come in the wake of a new militant regime that has taken over the country. As Taliban takes over the political power in Afghanistan and establishes its own rules and laws, it will be interesting to see how the new economic and social dynamics of Afghanistan will fit with the other countries.

Resistance 2.0: Legendary anti-Taliban leader's son Ahmad Massoud launches Panjshir resistance against Taliban

The war in Afghanistan is not over yet! Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud has declared the start of armed resistance, "Resistance 2.0" against the Taliban's return from Panjshir Valley. He is joined by former Afghanistan Vice President Amrulla Saleh who has declared himself as caretaker president of Afghanistan.

The Panjshir resistance has sparked hope for Afghans to gain freedom from the Taliban, who are currently seeking to form the new government in Afghanistan. Panjshir is the last and only one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces that have not been taken by the Taliban.

All anti-Taliban commanders and Afghan soldiers who did not surrender to the Taliban are reportedly regrouping in Panjshir to join Amrulla Saleh and Ahmad Massoud's resistance against the Taliban's return from Panjshir. All the loyalists of Amrulla Saleh have been seen moving to Panjshir.

Nations must respect the rule of law , not violence. Afghanistan is too big for Pakistan to swallow and too big for Talibs to govern. Don't let your histories have a chapter on humiliation and bowing to terror groups. <https://t.co/nNo84Z7tEf>

— Amrullah Saleh (@AmrullahSaleh2) [August 19, 2021](#)

Read: [Amrullah Saleh declares himself 'Caretaker President'](#)

The Panjshir resistance is reportedly receiving strategic and tactical support globally. Ahmad Massoud has called on western countries to stand up for them and send weapons to his fighters. The 'Northern Alliance' flag has also been reportedly hoisted in Panjshir.



"Whatever happens, my mujahideen fighters and I will defend Panjshir as the last bastion of Afghan freedom. Our fighting spirit is unharmed. We know from experience what awaits us. But we need more weapons, more ammunition and more equipment," Ahmad Massoud was quoted saying.

Ahmad Massoud offers deal to Taliban

As per reports, Ahmad Massoud has offered a deal to the Taliban with conditions that the Taliban not enter Panjshir Valley and give voice to other parties in the government. This is yet to be confirmed though. The precise details of the deal are reportedly confidential.

Important Fact about Panjshir Valley

- Panjshir Valley, located towards north of Kabul in the Hindu Kush, in Afghanistan means **"five lions"**. The valley is named after the five Pandavas who were believed to have attained Mahaprasthan there according to the native folklore.
- The valley was a resistance stronghold for decades, first against the Soviets in the

1980s and then against the Taliban in the 1990s.

- It is the only province that has not fallen to the Taliban in the present-day and still standing strong.

Who is the Lion of Panjshir?

- Ahmad Shah Massoud was called the “Lion of Panjshir”. He was a famed Afghan resistance commander during the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s.

- His groups had given a tough fight to the Taliban and did not let them capture the entire country. Panjshir remained one of the very few territories that never surrendered to the Taliban under its earlier regime.

- He was assassinated in 2001 by Taliban-allied Al Qaeda operatives posing as television journalists.

- Now his son and others have launched resistance 2.0 from the very place.

Background

Former Vice President vowed to fight against the Taliban after he declared himself “**caretaker**” head of state under the Afghan constitution in the wake of former president Ashraf Ghani’s unexpected departure from Kabul.

India decides to ratify Kigali amendment to phase down HFCs; What is Kigali amendment to Montreal Protocol?

India, following the footsteps of the United States and China, has decided to ratify the Kigali amendment to the 1989 Ozone saving Montreal Protocol negotiated five years ago.

Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol enables the phase-out of the hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

The decision by India to ratify the amendment was taken at a Union Cabinet meeting on August 18, 2021. The country also said that it will draw up a national strategy for the phase-down of HFCs by 2023, in consultation with all the industry stakeholders.

The latest announcement by India comes close to the similar decisions by China and the United States, which are the world's largest producers and consumers of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

What is Kigali Amendment to Montreal Protocol?

The Kigali Amendment to Montreal Protocol was made in 2016. The amendment has been named after Rwanda Capital where it was negotiated. The amendment enables the phase-out of the hydrofluorocarbons, a set of chemicals with a capacity to warm the planet.

Significance:

The Kigali amendment, enabling the phase-out of HFCs, was seen as one of the most significant breakthroughs in the global efforts to fight climate change.

The hydrofluorocarbons, the set of 19 gases that are used extensively in the refrigerant and air-conditioning industry, are known to be thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide in their ability to cause global warming.

This instrument is therefore crucial in achieving the target of restraining the increase in global temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial times.

As already pointed out by the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the average temperature of Earth has already risen by about 1.1 degrees Celsius.

What is Montreal Protocol?

The 1989 Montreal Protocol is not a climate agreement but instead, it aims at protecting the earth from ozone-destroying chemicals such as Chlorofluorocarbons or CFCs, that were used earlier in refrigerant industry and air conditioning.

The widespread use of Chlorofluorocarbons caused a hole in the Ozone layer of the atmosphere, which further allowed some harmful radiations to enter the Earth. They were also considered potential health hazards.

The Montreal Protocol led to the replacement of CFCs with Hydrofluorocarbons which do not destroy the Ozone layer. However, HFCs were later found to be extremely potent in causing global warming, so basically HFCs were solving one problem but were contributing to another.

However, the theses cannot be eliminated under the original provisions of the Montreal Protocol which was meant to phase out the ozone-destroying chemicals only. The introduction of the Kigali Amendment enabled the Montreal Protocol to mandate the elimination of Hydrofluorocarbons as well.

Where does India stand on its HFCs production and consumption?

Under the Kigali Amendment, China, United States, and India stand in separate groups of countries, with different time schedules to phase out their Hydrofluorocarbons and replace them with climate-friendly alternatives.

India has to reduce its HFCs use by 80% by the year 2047, while the US and China have to achieve the same target by the years 2034 and 2045 respectively.

The Government of India while informing about the latest decision of ratifying the Kigali Amendment, said that the existing domestic laws that govern the implementation of the Montreal Protocol will be amended by the middle of 2024 in order to facilitate the HFC phase-down.

The reduction by India in the consumption and production of hydrofluorocarbons has to begin only by 2028.

COVID-19 Delta Variant infects both vaccinated and unvaccinated people, confirms ICMR Study

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in Chennai has shown in its study that the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is capable of infecting both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, however, the mortality rate is low among the former group.

The Institutional Ethics Committee of ICMR- National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai approved the study which was published in the Journal of Infection on August 17, 2021.

The study advised that the scale and rate of administration of COVID-19 vaccines be increased to alleviate possibilities of further waves of the pandemic. Systematic genomic surveillance should be conducted to keep track of any emerging new variants and assess their capabilities to escape immunity or vaccine protection.

COVID-19 Delta variant: ICMR Study – Key findings

- The prevalence of Delta variant or B.1.617.2 of the SARS-CoV-2 virus was not different among the vaccinated and unvaccinated groups.
- The progression of the infection among the vaccinated group was slow as well as the mortality rate was also low.
- Breakthrough COVID-19 infections (post-vaccine infections) in fully vaccinated people have been reported in India during the second wave of the pandemic due to the emergence of the Delta variant that showed capabilities of escaping the immune response.
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions must be carried out to reduce the transmission of the infection.

Delta variant major cause for 'breakthrough infections' in fully vaccinated people: INSACOG

- Meanwhile, the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG) also in its August issue said that the breakthrough COVID-19 infections in fully vaccinated people have been mostly

caused by the Delta variant of the coronavirus.

- INSACOG further said that the Delta variant is a major Variant of Concern (VOC) in India and noted that vaccination reduces the severity of the infection as well as decreases the rate of mortality.
- The consortium noted that since April 2021, the UK with a population of 6.7 crores reported approximately 18 lakh cases and 1.2 lakh cases of breakthrough infections due to Delta variant among fully vaccinated people. Hence, breakthrough COVID-19 infections in fully vaccinated people are a common trend during the Delta variant outbreaks and are expected in India as well.
- Investigations into any new variants of COVID-19 are underway owing to the rising concern due to increasing breakthrough COVID-19 infections among fully vaccinated people.
- INSACOG, the consortium of 10 National Laboratories established by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, works on conducting genomic sequencing and analysis of COVID-19, assesses epidemiological trends with emerging variants of coronavirus.

Meet Afghanistan's New Rulers – From Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar to Sirajuddin Haqqani - Know Who's who of Taliban

Twenty years after it was driven out, the Taliban has returned to power in Afghanistan following the capture of Kabul after Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani fled to Tajikistan on August 16, 2021. The Taliban declared that the war is over after they entered the capital and took hold over the presidential palace.

Ashraf Ghani reiterated in his first appearance since leaving Kabul that he had left in order to spare the country more bloodshed. He said in a recorded message that he had no intention of staying in exile and was in talks to return home.

Former Afghan president Ashraf Ghani says he will 'speak to the nation', reports AFP news agency

— ANI (@ANI) [August 18, 2021](#)

While there is an attempt to start negotiations between the Taliban leadership and top Afghan officials, the Taliban is seeking to build a new government and create an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan like it had done under its rule when it was in power previously from 1996-2001.

Know the Taliban leaders who are likely to be a part of the new Afghan government:

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar is likely to be the new head of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. He is the number 2 leader of the Taliban movement and in charge of their political wing. He had participated in the first press conference of the new regime earlier this week.

Mullah Baradar is the co-founder of the Taliban along with Mullah Muhammad Omar, the main founder of the Taliban movement.

Maulvi Haibatullah Akhundzada

Maulvi Haibatullah Akhundzada is the supreme leader of the Taliban since 2016. He, however, may not take up a direct position in the Taliban government. He could though be a likely choice

for an Iranian-style Supreme Leader if such a post is made.

Mullah Muhammad Yaqoob

Mullah Muhammad Yaqoob is the 31-year-old son of Mullah Omar, the main founder of the Taliban. Yaqoob is the operational head of the military wing of the Taliban. He is likely to play an important figure in the new government.

Mullah Khairullah Khaikhwa

Mullah Khairullah Khaikhwa was the interior minister in the previous Taliban regime.

Mullah Mohammad Fazl

Mullah Mohammad Fazl was the deputy defence minister in the previous Taliban regime.

Both Mullah Khairullah Khaikhwa and Mullah Mohammad Fazl were among the five Guantanamo Bay detainees who were captured after the Taliban were ousted and were released in May 2014 in exchange for the US soldier Bowe Berghdal, who was captured by the Haqqani network.

Sirajuddin Haqqani

Sirajuddin Haqqani is the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani and leader of Haqqani network. He has played a significant role in the Taliban's recent military push. He could be a part of the new Taliban regime. Sirajuddin Haqqani's father has been a designated terrorist under UNSC resolution 1272 since 2007.

The Haqqani network is a militant organisation that is reportedly allied with the Taliban. It is said to have links to the al-Qaeda.

Zabiullah Mujahid

Zabiullah Mujahid is the chief spokesperson of the Taliban.

Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai

Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai was one of the chief negotiators on behalf of the Taliban in Doha. He had also led the Taliban's talks with the United States.

Anas Haqqani

Anas Haqqani is the youngest Haqqani brother and the public face of the Haqqani network. He had led the Taliban delegation on August 18, 2021 in a meeting with former Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai and officials of the deposed Ashraf Ghani government for negotiations about government formation.

Abdullah Abdullah

Abdullah Abdullah had led the High Peace Council of in the previous Taliban government. He along with former mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was also present during negotiations with former Afghan officials.

US Congress to award Gold Medal to Mahatma Gandhi – What is Congressional Gold Medal and Why is it significant?

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney from New York on Friday 13, 2021, reintroduced legislation in the US House of Representatives to posthumously award the prestigious Congressional Gold Medal to Mahatma Gandhi in recognition of his ways and contributions through non-violence and peace.

In every session of the Congress in the US, the legislation for awarding Congressional Gold Medals is introduced. As per the Congressional Research Service (CRS), 52 bills were introduced in the 113th Congress session (2013-2014), 42 bills were introduced in the 114th Congress session (2015-2016), and 55 bills were introduced in the 115th Congress session (2017-2018), and 57 bills were introduced in the 116th Congress session (2019-2020).

If the legislation receives the vote, Mahatma Gandhi would become the first Indian to be conferred the Congressional Gold Medal.

What Congressional Gold Medal?

- Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian award in the US. The award is given by the United States Congress.
- As per the History, Arts, and Archives section of the US House of Representatives, the Congressional Gold Medal is Congress's highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions by individuals or institutions.
- The practice to confer gold medals to honor individuals from the military began during the American Revolution. Later, the congressional practice was extended to individuals and institutions from all walks of life.
- The Second Continental Congress awarded the first medal in 1776 to General George Washington. Though the military participants in the American Revolution, the Mexican-American War, and the War of 1812 were the first recipients of the medal.

- The American Red Cross was the first organization that was given the medal in 1979.
- The medal has been given to Robert F. Kennedy, George Washington, Nelson Mandela, and the 1980 US summer Olympics team among many others.
- On January 6, 2021, the US Capitol Police and those who protected the US Capitol were given the gold medal.
- All legislations introduced for the Congressional Gold Medal must be co-sponsored by at least two-thirds of the House Members.
- Currently, there is no statutory limit on how many medals can be awarded during a year despite the introduction of legislation on the same previously.

Why did US Congresswoman Maloney reintroduce the legislation?

- Earlier in 2018, US Congresswoman Maloney had introduced the legislation to give the Congressional Gold Medal to Mahatma Gandhi. Four Indian-American lawmakers co-sponsored the Legislation, namely Pramila Jayapal, Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, and Ami Bera.
- In 2019, the bill was introduced in Congress but did not get a vote.
- Maloney in her statement noted, "Mahatma Gandhi's historic Satyagraha movement of nonviolent resistance inspired a nation and the world." She further said that Gandhi's energy motivates us to devote ourselves to the service of others.
- The legislation to give the Congressional Gold Medal to Mahatma Gandhi is Maloney's expression to encourage all to follow Gandhi's directive to be the change we wish to see in the world.
- As a member of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, Maloney has also been instrumental in leading the US Postal Service (USPS) to create a Diwali stamp.

DMart owner Radhakishan Damani enters World's 100 Richest People List, Know his net worth, businesses here

Radhakishan Damani, a reclusive investor, and billionaire, who owns the retail chain DMart has **entered the list of the world's 100 richest people**. Damani, who grew up in a humble background has been ranked at 98 on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index **with a net worth of \$19.2 billion**.

The other Indians in the top 100 list are Gautam Adani, Mukesh Ambani, Pallonji Mistry, Azim Premji, Lakshmi Mittal, and Shiv Nadar. The Bloomberg Billionaire Index is a daily ranking of the richest people in the world.

In 2020, Radhakishan Damani had also become the richest in India with a net worth of \$16.5 billion. He was ranked at 117 on the global list of billionaires.

Radhakishan Damani's net worth:

As per the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Radhakishan Damani is now the 98th richest person in the world. **The total net worth of the promoter and the owner of Avenue Supermarts, the company that runs DMart retail, is \$19.3 billion or Rs. 1.43 lakh crores.**

Over the last 18 months, the net worth of Damani has increased by nearly 60% from \$12 billion as on March 1, 2020, to \$19.3 billion now.

Notably, **the shares of the Avenue Supermarts have rallied 61% in the last one year** as the company has almost recovered from the impact of the pandemic, which had led to a nationwide lockdown in 2020 and the localized lockdowns in the second wave of COVID-19 earlier in 2021.

Radhakishan Damani's Businesses: What do we know?

- The Avenue Supermarts of Radhakishan Damani is one of the favourite stocks of the investors and the mutual fund houses on the back of the consistent financial performance, low-cost operating model, and quality management. The company's digital services have been making good strides to compete with the established e-commerce giants.

- **As per the latest reports by Goldman Sachs, DMart enjoys better pricing power than its competitors both in the offline and online space.**

- In a recent report, Brokerage mentioned that DMart's price offering vs Jio Mart has been currently the strongest since the latter's launch in 2020.

- In comparison to its online competitor, Big Basket, the pricing basket of DMart remains competitive and the gap is almost highest in comparison to the historical range.

- In Avenue Supermarts, Damani and the promoter group holds a 74.90% stake. He also has investments in some other firms which have helped him in the net worth gain. Damani holds a 26% stake in VST Industries, 11.3% in India Cements, 2.4% in Sundaram Finance.

About Radhakishan Damani:

- Radhakishan Damani was raised in a Marwari family in a single-room apartment in Mumbai. He studied Commerce at Mumbai University but dropped out after one year.

- After the death of his father who worked on Dalal Street, Damani decided to leave his ball-bearing business and became a stock market broker and investor.

- In 1992, after the Harshad Mehta scam came into the limelight, Damani saw a major rise in his income because of the short-selling profits during the time.

- In 2000, he quit the stock market and started his own hypermarket chain, DMart, setting up the first store in 2002 in Powai.

- In 2010, the chain had 25 stores, after which the company grew rapidly and went public in 2017.

- Radhakishan Damani who rarely gives any interviews and keeps a low profile also taught his stock trading techniques to the Indian billionaire Rakesh Jhunjhunwala.

World Humanitarian Day 2021: Theme, Significance & History

World Humanitarian Day 2021: World Humanitarian Day is commemorated annually on August 19, 2021 to **honour those who are working for a humanitarian cause across the world**. The day is observed to pay tribute to all the people who lost their lives working for humanitarian causes and those who continue to provide protection and life-saving support to people in need.

The theme of World Humanitarian Day is decided every year based on particular humanitarian crisis to raise awareness about it around the world.

World Humanitarian Day 2021 Theme

The World Humanitarian Day 2021 theme is #TheHumanRace. The Human Race is a global challenge for climate action in solidarity with the people who need it most. The theme aims to put the needs of the most climate-vulnerable people front and centre at the UN climate summit (COP26).

The United Nations has invited everyone to join the human race and show solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people.

World Humanitarian Day 2021 Hashtags

People can join the climate action movement by using these hashtags on their social media platforms- **#TheHumanRace** and **#WorldHumanitarianDay**

How to participate in the Human Race global challenge?

People can walk, run, ride, swim or do any activity of their choice for a total of 100 minutes between August 16 and August 31 in solidarity with vulnerable people and to tell world leaders that they expect developed countries to deliver on their decade-old pledge of \$100 billion annually for climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

Significance

World Humanitarian Day 2021 aims to highlight the immediate consequences of the climate emergency for the world's most vulnerable people and ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are taken up as top agenda at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in November 2021.

Why is World Humanitarian Day important?

Climate emergency has been wreaking havoc across the world at a scale that people cannot manage. Time is already running out for the world's most vulnerable people, who have contributed the least to the global climate emergency but are hit the hardest. Millions are already losing their homes, their livelihoods, and their lives due to extreme climate events.

World Humanitarian Day 2021 History

World Humanitarian Day was designated by the United Nations in memory of the August 19, 2003 bomb attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, which killed 22 people including the chief humanitarian in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

The United Nations General Assembly formally established the day as World Humanitarian Day in 2009. The day focuses on a particular theme every year to bring together partners from across the humanitarian system to advocate for the survival and well-being of people affected by crises and for the safety and security of aid workers.

World Photography Day 2021: Know History, Significance and 5 photos that went viral this year

World Photography Day 2021: World Photography Day was observed on August 19, 2021. The day is celebrated every year to recognize and celebrate the art of photography. Those who share photography as their passion come together to discuss various techniques of photography and how much the methods have evolved.

Photographers, like historians, also preserve moments for future generations to understand the past. **World Photography Day 2021 is a day to celebrate creativity as well as to acknowledge the adverse situations that the photographers have to go through sometimes to capture the perfect shot.**

In today's world, Photography Day also takes a special place as clicking pictures have become a lot linear with everyone holding a camera. On World Photography Day 2021, let's know a bit about this day's history and the pictures that went viral in 2021.

World Photography Day 2021 History

World Photography Day was first celebrated in 1837 with the invention of the daguerreotype. It was the first successful photographic process developed by Frenchman Louis Daguerre in association with Joseph Nicéphore Niépce.

Two years later, the French Academy of Sciences acknowledged the invention and called it 'a gift to the world'.

The Government of France bought the patent of the daguerreotype and since then, photography has witnessed a number of key changes including the introduction of color photography in 1861.

World Photography Day 2021 Significance:

World Photography Day 2021 is significant in many ways. In today's world, where 9 to 5 job is a new norm, youngsters have been opting for photography as their new hobby or as a full-time profession and this day recognizes the opportunities.

World Photography Day acknowledges the creativity and the vision that a photographer puts while clicking the moments that even the words cannot capture.

World Photography Day also motivates the experts and the professionals to motivate the next generation to learn about this special art form and the ways in which they can explore their skills in photography.

5 viral photos of 2021:

1. Olympian Diver Tom Daley knitting

The image of Olympic diver Tom Daley knitting went viral on social media. Shared on the Olympics Twitter page, the image was widely appreciated. Given the fact that the Olympics were held amid the pandemic when mental health had taken a toll, Daley described knitting as something which makes him feel calm and helps him to concentrate. He won gold in synchronized 10 m platform diving.

2. 600 Afghans in US plane

With the Taliban taking over Afghanistan, the people of the country started rushing to save themselves and their families from the horrific and barbaric rules of the militant group. After the images and videos of Afghans on Kabul airport trying to get on US airplane went viral, another image that was widely circulated on social media was of 600 Afghans in the US plane showing the plight of the people living in the country.

3. Myanmar Nurse



Earlier in 2021, when the military coup took place in Myanmar, replacing the democratically elected government, an image of sister Ann Rose Nu Twang went viral. She can be seen kneeling before a group of heavily armed police officers. She was begging them to spare the children and took her life instead. The picture showed the hope of compassion and courage in the conflict zone.

4. Mass cremation in India

The past few months were one of the worst ones that India witnessed. Losing loved ones and hearing the increasing number of deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic almost became a norm. The horrific images of mass cremations taking place in Delhi as well as in other parts of the country went viral. These images were particularly in contrast with the official numbers of reported deaths that the Government was actually showing.

5. Taliban militants take control of Afghanistan



Afghanistan which has come under the control of militant Taliban is going to pose a new challenge for only to the middle east but also for the rest of the countries. Amid this, the picture which was widely circulated was that of the militants taking control of the Capital of Afghanistan, Kabul. Sitting in what seems to be an official place, the image shows the complete authority of the militant group.

COVID-19: Centre allocates Rs 1,353 crores package to Northeastern states to fight pandemic

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya announced on August 17, 2021, that the Centre will provide a financial package of Rs 1,352.92 crore for eight states of the Northeastern region to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government of India is constantly monitoring the situation in the Northeastern region and is working to provide all necessary financial assistance and enough vaccines to the states in this region. The special financial package for the Northeastern states to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic is a part of the pan-India package of over Rs 23, 000 crore.

Initially, various factors such as difficult terrain and vaccine hesitancy along with other factors were keeping the vaccination rate low in the Northeastern region, Mandaviya noted. "However, in the last two weeks, the cases have started to decline in the Northeast, and this a good sign," he added.

COVID-19: Special financial package for Northeastern states to tackle pandemic

- Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has announced a special financial package of Rs 1,352.92 crore for eight states of the Northeastern region to aid them in enhancing their health infrastructure to tackle the pandemic and expedite the implementation of the ECRP - II package.
- The special financial package will help to create the necessary infrastructure for COVID testing, medicine storage, COVID beds, pediatric units, ventilators & oxygen storage, among other medical facilities.
- Union Minister Mandaviya reviewed the pandemic situation, vaccination & implementation of ECRP - II in the North-Eastern States, along with all the Health Ministers of NE States.

COVID-19 Special Financial Package: Breakdown of funds for 8 states in NE region

- Of the Rs 1,352 crores, each of the 8 states in the Northeast region will get the following funds:

- Assam:** Rs 812.46 crore,
- Arunachal Pradesh:** Rs 141.94 crore,
- Tripura:** Rs 93.02 crore,
- Meghalaya:** Rs 91.94 crore,
- Manipur:** Rs 85.95 crore,
- Nagaland:** Rs 62.46 crore,
- Mizoram:** Rs 44.30 crore,
- Sikkim:** Rs 21.85 crore.

UK to start trade talks with India by the end of 2021

The United Kingdom said on August 17, 2021, that it aims to start the trade negotiations with India by the end of 2021.

A spokesperson for Britain's Department for International Trade informed that **UK is currently in the pre-negotiation scoping phase of an FTA (Free-Trade Agreement), with an aim of starting the negotiations by the end of this year.**

A trade accord with India can be seen as a keen target for post-Brexit Britain. Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson had earlier reluctantly called off his trip to India in April 2021 after COVID-19 cases were on the peak in India.

Why trade deal with India will be significant for the UK?

According to the spokesperson for Britain's Department for International Trade, with bilateral trade valued at 23 billion pounds in 2019, **a trade deal with India will help to boost British exports through lower tariffs as well as increased opportunities.**

Ever since completing its exit from the European Union at the end of 2020, Britain has been keen to secure trade deals and has been particularly pursuing ties with nations in the Indo-Pacific region which is home to some of the fastest-growing economies.

UK's 'interim' trade deal with India:

The Government of the United Kingdom has also been looking at wrapping up a quick 'interim' trade deal with India, which can see tariffs slashed on products such as Scotch, Whisky before a full agreement is in place.

The Government of Britain will try to strike an interim agreement that will allow for free trade between India and the UK under the terms of a World Trade Organisation Charter.

The producers in India for products such as rice will be able to get greater access to the UK market under the interim deal between the two countries.

Background:

In May 2021, British Government had informed that it will be launching a 14-week consultation on the future trade deal with India. The government was planning on seeking views from the public and businesses on the deal.

RBI partially lifts digital ban on HDFC Bank

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on August 18, 2021 **partially lifted the digital ban on HDFC Bank**. The move has allowed the bank to start issuing new credit cards again.

The comes as a huge relief to the private lender, as it was placed under an embargo by the regulator in December 2020 that banned it from issuing new credit cards.

The restrictions on the bank's new offering under its Digital 2.0 strategy will however remain. The HDFC Bank said in a statement, "the Reserve Bank of India has lifted the restriction placed on sourcing of new credit cards".

How will this benefit HDFC?

- Due to the embargo by the RBI, HDFC Bank had started losing its digital business and now with the lifting of the ban, it will be looking to regain its lost ground.
- The bank said it is all prepared to come back with a bang on credit cards rolled out in the coming time.
- HDFC is planning to build a bank within the bank as per a report by Bernstein Research titled 'HDFC Bank: A digital bank within the bank with Zeta?'
- The bank is planning a major revamp within the bank to create a digital bank to get new customers on board.

What restrictions will remain?

Restrictions will continue on all new launches of digital business generating activities planned under Digital 2.0 until further review by the Reserve Bank of India.

Background

HDFC Bank is known to be one of the biggest issuers of credit and debit cards in the country with around 14.8 million credit card users and 37.7 million debit card users.

The Reserve Bank of India had asked HDCF Bank in December 2020 to halt its digital launches and stop selling new credit cards on a temporary basis. The central bank had also asked the

private lender to stop the launch of digital business generating activities that are planned under Digital 2.0.

Israel fires missiles in Southern Syria, explosions heard in Quneitra: Syria State Media

Syrian State Media has reported that **Israel on August 17, 2021, carried out a missile attack on Southwestern Syria targeting an unspecified military position.** There was no comment from the Israeli Government.

The State Media reported that the **explosions were heard in Quneitra province in Southwestern Syria near the border with Israel.** It is an area where the military defectors say Iranian-backed militias are dug in.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, informed that the missiles struck areas where Iran-backed fighters are based.

The area where the United Nations peacekeepers maintain a long-standing ceasefire between Israel and Syria has a strong presence of Iranian-backed militias led by the Lebanese Hezbollah group.

Where Israel has fired missiles in Syria?

The report by the Syria State Media did not specify if there were any casualties due to the missile attack.

It mentioned that two missiles were fired towards the military position near the Southern town of Quneitra, on the edge of Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

The pro-Damascus Mayadeen television channel reported that Israeli missiles struck an area near the Druze frontier town of Hadr. It is a particularly sensitive zone as it lies next to the Golan Heights which was captured by Israel from Syria in 1967.

Conflict between Israel and Syria:

Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in the war-ravaged Syria over the years. However, the country has rarely acknowledged or discussed such operations.

Israel has viewed Iranian entrenchment on its northern frontier as a red line. It has repeatedly struck the Iran-linked facilities and the weapons convoys destined for Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group.

Israel expands airstrikes on Syria:

Over the last two years, Israel has dramatically expanded its airstrikes on the suspected Iranian targets in Syria in order to repel what it sees as a stealthy military encroachment by its regional arch-enemy.

Israel says that it will not allow Iran and its militias to establish a permanent military presence along with its borders that will allow Hezbollah to pose a major threat to its security.

Hezbollah Group:

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and the militant group which is led by Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. The idea of the militant group had arisen among Lebanese clerics after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Afghanistan's former Vice-President Amrullah Saleh declares himself 'Caretaker President'

Afghanistan's First Vice President Amrullah Saleh declared himself as the **legitimate caretaker President of Afghanistan** on Tuesday, 17 August 2021. Saleh announced that he is in the country and vowed a new fight with the Taliban.

The former Afghan Vice President tweeted saying, ***"I will never, ever & under no circumstances bow to d Talib terrorists. I will never betray d soul & legacy of my hero Ahmad Shah Masoud, the commander, the legend & the guide. I won't dis-appoint millions who listened to me. I will never be under one ceiling with Taliban. NEVER."***

I will never, ever & under no circumstances bow to d Talib terrorists. I will never betray d soul & legacy of my hero Ahmad Shah Masoud, the commander, the legend & the guide. I won't dis-appoint millions who listened to me. I will never be under one ceiling with Taliban. NEVER.

— Amrullah Saleh (@AmrullahSaleh2) [August 15, 2021](#)

He also tweeted, ***"In my soil. With d people. For a cause & purpose. With solid belief in righteousness. Opposing Pak bcked oppression & brutal dictatorship is our legitimacy."***

In my soil. With d people. For a cause & purpose. With solid belief in righteousness. Opposing Pak bcked oppression & brutal dictatorship is our legitimacy.

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— Amrullah Saleh (@AmrullahSaleh2) [August 15, 2021](#)

His tweet further read, ***"Clarity: As per d constitution of Afg, in absence, escape, resignation or death of the President the FVP becomes the caretaker President. I am currently inside my country & am the legitimate caretaker President. Am reaching out to all leaders to secure their support & consensus."***

Clarity: As per d constitution of Afg, in absence, escape, resignation or death of the President the FVP becomes the caretaker President. I am currently inside my country & am the legitimate caretaker President. Am reaching out to all leaders to secure their support & consensus.

— Amrullah Saleh (@AmrullahSaleh2) [August 17, 2021](#)

Amrullah Saleh tweeted this on August 15 before going underground. His remarks came shortly before the Taliban addressed their first press conference after overthrowing the Ghani government.

Can Amrullah Saleh hold up against the Taliban?

- The former Vice-President had been spotted with the son of his former mentor and famed anti-Taliban fighter Ahmed Shah Massoud.
- Ahmed Shah Massoud's son commands a militia force and they appear to be putting together a guerilla movement to take on the Taliban insurgents.
- The regrouping of fighters is reportedly taking place in Panjshir — a mountainous redoubt tucked into the Hindu Kush.
- The Panjshir Valley, famed for its natural defence, had not fallen to the Taliban during the civil war of the 1990s. It had not even been conquered by the Soviets before that.
- The residents of Panjshir have determined to resist the Taliban with all their might and power.
- The battle would be the latest in Saleh's long struggle against the Taliban.

Who is Amrullah Saleh?

- Amrullah Saleh formerly served as the fifth first vice president of Afghanistan in 2020.
- He had served as the Minister of Interior Affairs of Afghanistan in 2018 and 2019.
- Before that, he served as the head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) from 2004 until his resignation in 2010.
- Before that, he was a member of Ahmad Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance. He was appointed by Massoud to serve as Northern Alliance's liaison officer inside the Afghan Embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in 1997.
- Saleh created a pro-democracy and anti-Taliban movement called Basej-e Milli (National Mobilization) in 2010 after resigning from National Directorate of Security.
- He was appointed as State Minister for Security Reforms by President Ashraf Ghani in March 2017 and was appointed as the Interior Minister in December 2018.
- He resigned as the Interior Minister in January 2019 and was appointed as the first Vice

President of Afghanistan.

Background

Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani fled to Tajikistan on August 15, 2021. This was followed by the capture of Kabul by Taliban insurgents who took over the presidential palace and claimed that the war was over.

The Taliban spokesperson said that normalcy would soon be restored in the country and that Afghanistan would no longer remain a battlefield. The Taliban is now poised to form the next government and Abdul Ghani Baradar has been declared as Afghanistan's new President.

Taliban has reportedly pardoned all those who fought against them on behalf of the Ghani-led Afghan government and the United States. The group announced that no one will be interrogated and even women will be given their freedom in their new approach.

Vriksharopan Abhiyan 2021 by Coal Ministry to be launched on August 19 – All you need to know

The Ministry of Coal in India is set to launch the **Vriksharopan Abhiyan 2021** on August 19, 2021, as a part of the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav. Pralhad Joshi, Union Minister of Coal, Mines and Parliamentary Affairs will launch the Abhiyan via video conferencing in the presence of Raosaheb Patil Danve, Minister of State for Coal, Mines, and Railways.

The coal/lignite Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) of the Ministry of Coal, Government of India has an ambitious target under the Go Greening drive to bring 2,385 hectares of land under bio-reclamation or plantation.

The Abhiyan is expected to give the right stimulus to the **Go Greening** drive and thereby connecting more than 300 plantation sites in and around coalfields in India.

What is Vriksharopan Abhiyan 2021?

- Vriksharopan Abhiyan 2021 is one of the key initiatives of the Ministry of Coal as a part of Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav celebrations in the coal sector of India.
- The Abhiyan aims to aid India's coal sector to achieve environmental and social license to operate and induce environmental stability in the mining sector.
- The Abhiyan is also expected to drive the citizens of India to launch more afforestation initiatives in their neighboring areas.

India's Energy Sector: Challenges

- In the past four decades, India's commercial primary energy consumption has increased by 700 per cent. India's current per capita commercial primary energy consumption is approximately 350 kgoe per year.
- As a fast-emerging economy, India is presented with two challenges of meeting its goals of decarbonizing the energy sector and fulfilling the rising demand for energy in the country, which is

primarily dependent on coal due to its indigenous presence and affordability due to limited reserve of natural gas and petroleum, geopolitical perception of nuclear power, eco-conservation on hydel project.

India's Coal Sector: Efforts

- Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in India. India fulfills 55 per cent of its energy demand through coal.
- Since India is highly dependent on the coal sector for meeting its energy demand, the country has been adopting several innovative initiatives for sustainable mining in the coal sector to fulfill the energy demand and simultaneously be conscious towards to environment.
- Go Greening drive is one of the key initiatives that are set up in and around coal mining fields that not only boost the ecosystem but also create additional carbon sinks to alleviate the causes of climate change.
- Coal companies in India are also working on achieving carbon neutrality through various environmentally friendly initiatives such as adopting clean coal technologies and extensive plantations.

PM Modi chairs cabinet meeting on Afghanistan, asks officials to ensure safe evacuation of Indians

As Afghanistan comes under the rule of Taliban, the countries around the world are figuring out ways to ensure the safe evacuation of their citizens, officials, diplomats who have been stuck in a war-torn country.

Prime Minister Modi on August 17, 2021, also chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) to discuss the ongoing Afghanistan crisis. In the meet, the Prime Minister has instructed all the officials to undertake the required measures for the safe evacuation of the Indian Nationals from Afghanistan in the coming days.

The High-level cabinet meeting was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Home Minister Amit Shah. The External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is out of the country, was unable to attend the meeting.

Meeting of Cabinet Committee on Security:

Reportedly, the Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by PM Modi was briefed in detail regarding the current and evolving political situation in Afghanistan.

The cabinet was also briefed on the recent evacuations of the officials of the Indian Embassy and some members of the Indian Community as well as Indian media.

The senior officials including NSA Ajit Doval, Principal Secretary to PM PK Mishra, and Cabinet Secretary Rajeev Gauba were also present during the meeting.

Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and India's Ambassador to Afghanistan Rudrendra Tandon were also there. Tandon was on the evacuation flight from Kabul that landed in Jamnagar on August 17.

PM Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security today. The meeting was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, HM Amit Shah & FM Nirmala Sitharaman. The External Affairs Minister is out of the country and hence did not attend the meeting

— ANI (@ANI) [August 17, 2021](#)

What did PM Modi say during meeting on Afghanistan?

- Prime Minister Modi said that India must not only protect its own citizens but also must provide refuge to those Hindu and Sikh minorities who want to come to India.
- Indian Government must also provide all the possible help to Afghan brothers and sisters who are looking towards India for assistance.
- PM Modi has also been constantly in touch with the officials regarding the situation in Afghanistan. He took stock of the situation till late evening on August 17 and was also updated when the evacuation flight took off from Kabul.

India evacuates officials, embassy personnel from Afghanistan

On August 15, 2021, as Kabul fell into the hands of Taliban, **India evacuated its staffers from the embassy in Kabul. The embassy personnel, including the Indo-Tibetan border police on the security duty, were flown back on the two Air Force Planes. The second one took off on August 17.**

The first transport aircraft had left Kabul under the challenging circumstances and amid the chaos at the airport, where thousands of Afghans have been desperately trying to fly out of the country. The rest of the Indian diplomatic and security contingent were not able to leave because of the curfew announced by Taliban.

More than 120 people, including India's Ambassador to Afghanistan Rudrendra Tandon, were able to leave in the morning of August 17. Reportedly, their departure is suspected to have been helped by an overnight conversation between Foreign Minister S Jaishankar and US secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Jaishankar in a tweet wrote, **“Movement of the Indian Ambassador and the Embassy staff from Kabul to India was a difficult and complicated exercise. Thank all those whose cooperation and facilitation made it possible.”**

Movement of the Indian Ambassador and the Embassy staff from Kabul to India was a difficult and complicated exercise. Thank all those whose cooperation and facilitation made it possible.

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 17, 2021](#)

What will be India's biggest challenge in Afghanistan?

As Taliban takes control of Afghanistan, the biggest challenge for India is seen to be the

repatriation of Afghan nationals who have been of help during the occupation.

The Indian Government assured that it will stand by the Afghans who have been India's partners in the promotion of mutual development, educational and people-to-people endeavours. The Government also said that Sikhs and Hindus from Afghanistan will be given priority for repatriation.

Reportedly, more than 1,650 people have applied to return to India from Afghanistan. The Indian embassy in Afghanistan is currently run by the local staff who have been providing consular services.

India has been closely monitoring all the latest developments in Afghanistan and has also been issuing periodic advisories for the safety and security of the Indian Nationals in Afghanistan including calling for their immediate return to India.

Background:

Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, 2021, and took control of the Presidential Palace, sealing its militant rule over Afghanistan. The former President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani fled the country, leading to the fall of the government.

What is National Hydrogen Mission launched by PM Modi on 15th August 2021?

PM Narendra Modi on August 15, 2021, launched the National Hydrogen Mission on India's 75th Independence Day. The Mission aims to aid the government in meeting its climate targets and making India a green hydrogen hub, said PM Modi during his Independence speech from the Red Fort.

"India is not energy independent," he added. Currently, India spends over Rs 12 lakh crore on importing energy. The government aims to make India an energy-independent country before 100 years of independence is completed.

Given the favorable geographic landscape and availability of natural elements of India, the country has a huge edge in effectively integrating renewable energy sources into its energy mix.

What is National Hydrogen Mission?

- The National Hydrogen Mission proposal was announced in the Union Budget 2021-22 to harness the potential of hydrogen in the energy area and enable generating hydrogen from green power sources.
- The mission will focus deeply on the generation of green hydrogen which is extracted from clean and green power sources and enable its commercial viability as a transportation fuel.
- However, technology to produce hydrogen and using it commercially is one of the biggest challenges. The technology for producing green or blue hydrogen using hydrogen fuel cell technology and carbon capture and storage (CCS) is quite expensive.

How can Hydrogen help India in becoming low-carbon economy?

- Former Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan during the Hydrogen Round Table on 'Hydrogen Economy: New Delhi Dialogue 2021, said that policymakers find hydrogen fuel an attractive energy source as it aids in controlling emissions.
- Whether hydrogen is burned to generate heat or used in a fuel cell, it aids in slowing down global warming, Industries such as fertilizer and refinery, iron, chemicals, steel, transport, and heat and

power can utilize hydrogen as a 'decarbonizing agent'.

- Hydrogen is the most abundant element found on Earth that can lead to a clean energy transition. It is found in complex molecules such as hydrocarbons or water. As an energy carrier, it can be produced, extracted, stored.
- Hydrogen usage will aid in achieving environmental goals under the Paris Agreement and reducing carbon emissions generated from the burning of fossil fuels.
- Hydrogen fuel unlike other combustion fuels produces only water as a byproduct. The World Energy Council (WEC) has noted that combusting one kilo of hydrogen released three times more energy than a kilo of gasoline and only water as a byproduct. Hydrogen fuel that converts the chemical energy of hydrogen and oxygen into electricity also produces water as the only waste product.

Commercial usage of hydrogen as a fuel in India

- India has been working on several pilot projects such as Green Hydrogen, Blue Hydrogen, Hydrogen CNG for introducing hydrogen for use in transportation and industries.
- 18 per cent blend of Hydrogen with CNG (H-CNG) was declared as an automotive fuel in September 2020.
- As a part of the Hydrogen CNG pilot project, 50 buses in Delhi have been rolled out with blended hydrogen in Compressed Natural Gas (CNG).
- Two hydrogen refueling stations have also been set up, one at the National Institute of Solar Energy, Gurugram, and another at the Indian Oil R&D Centre, Faridabad.

Types of Hydrogen

- As per the World Energy Council (WEC), 96 per cent of hydrogen is produced from fossil fuels through carbon-intensive processes. Hydrogen is classified into three forms: Green, Grey, and Blue.
- Green Hydrogen:** Green hydrogen is extracted through the electrolysis of clean energy sources such as renewables. This hydrogen type releases zero carbon (CO₂) emissions but is expensive and commercially not viable yet. The government is working on projects to produce green

hydrogen.

- Grey Hydrogen:** Not an expensive type but releases a lot of CO₂ emissions as it is extracted through the burning of fossil fuels.
- Blue Hydrogen:** The CO₂ released during the production of hydrogen is trapped through carbon capture and storage (CCS) processes to turn grey hydrogen into blue hydrogen.

Push towards a hydrogen future – Way Forward

- The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is extending support for several projects being carried out in academic institutions, research and development (R&D) organizations research for developing and implementing hydrogen and fuel cells across the country. 14 RD&D projects for the hydrogen economy are currently being pursued.
- IIT Delhi, Banaras Hindu University, Mahindra & Mahindra, etc are exploring and addressing challenges in the production of hydrogen from renewable energy sources, its safe storage, and utilization as energy fuel across transportation, fuel cells, combustion, etc.
- The Centre has committed Rs 800 crores between 2021 to 2024 towards pilot projects, R&D, and projects to bring down the cost of hydrogen production and push India towards a hydrogen future.

Aligarh to be renamed as Harigarh? Aligarh Zila panchayat passes new proposal to rename city

The Zila Panchayat Parishad of Aligarh passed a resolution on August 16, 2021 seeking to **rename Aligarh as Harigarh**. The proposal was passed unanimously by the newly elected district panchayat in its first meeting.

The proposal has now been sent to the Uttar Pradesh government, which will take the final decision. This was informed by the local body's chief.

If the proposal to rename Aligarh is cleared by the Yogi Adityanath-led UP government, it would add to a long list of places that have been renamed under his rule, the most prominent being the renaming of Allahabad to Prayagraj, a few months before the Kumbh Mela in January 2019.

Proposal to rename Aligarh as Harigarh: Key Highlights

- The resolution to rename Aligarh as Harigarh was passed in the first meeting of Aligarh Zila panchayat with the support of 50 out of 72 members in attendance.
- The members of the district panchayat said that it was a long pending demand. The proposal was approved unopposed.
- The Aligarh district panchayat chief Vijay Singh said that the proposal has now been forwarded to the Uttar Pradesh state government for its approval.
- The proposal to rename Aligarh to Harigarh was first presented to the panchayat by the Kshatriya Mahasabha and later supported by elected block panchayat leaders Kehri Singh and Umesh Yadav.
- The Zila panchayat also cleared another proposal to rename the Dhanipur airstrip in Aligarh to the Kalyan Singh airstrip. Kalyan Singh is a resident of Aligarh and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.
- Many organisations had appealed to the UP government earlier asking it to change Aligarh's

name.

Mainpuri to be renamed as Mayan Nagar?

- The Mainpuri Zila panchayat also passed a resolution on August 16, 2021 seeking to rename Mainpuri as Mayan Nagar after sage Mayan who founded the present day Mainpuri.
- The proposal was passed with 23 members voting in favour and two opposing it. The proposal had been moved by one of the Zila panchayat members.
- This was informed by Mainpuri Zila panchayat chairperson Archana Bhadoria.
- Mainpuri is the stronghold of Samajwadi Party (SP) patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, who has won five elections from the constituency.

Proposal to rename Firozabad as Chandra Nagar.

Firozabad district panchayat had passed a resolution earlier this month seeking to **rename Firozabad as Chandra Nagar**. The proposal was pushed forward as the locals believed that King Chandrasen lived in Firozabad and because of this it was known earlier as Chandrarav Nagar till about 1560 AD.

Later the place was named after a representative of emperor Akbar, Firoz Shah, who visited the area. The demand to rename Firozabad as Chandra Nagar has been raised time and again.

Background

The Uttar Pradesh government has already changed the name of several places such as **Faizabad to Ayodhya, Allahabad to Prayagraj** and **Mughalsarai to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Nagar**. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had indicated in November 2019 that the government would like to keep up with renaming places across the state. He said that where this is a need, the government will take the steps required.

Tamil Nadu becomes third state to present separate agricultural budget, fulfills poll promise- Check details

The DMK Government in Tamil Nadu, in sync with its poll promise, presented a separate agricultural budget in Tamil Nadu Assembly on August 14, 2021. With this, **Tamil Nadu has become the third state to present a separate farm budget.**

The budget by the Tamil Nadu Government exclusively featured agricultural schemes for the overall development of the farm sector, including one for farm growth and self-sufficiency in the villages.

While presenting the budget, the Minister for Agriculture and farmers' Welfare M R K Panneerselvam informed that the views of the farmers and the experts were sought and that the budget was prepared on the basis of their views.

This was the first time that a separate budget on agriculture was presented in Tamil Nadu.

[#TNBudget2021](#) [#TNBudget](#) [#AgricultureBudget2021](#) pic.twitter.com/LQhAJCCTxh

— CMOTamilNadu (@CMOTamilnadu) [August 14, 2021](#)

Tamil Nadu presents Agricultural budget: Key details

- During the fiscal year 2021-22, Rs. 34,220.65 crores have been provided for the agriculture and related departments such as fisheries, husbandry, irrigation, rural development, dairy development, sericulture, and the forest.
- The government has allocated Rs. 4,508.23 crores to the state-run electricity entity, the Tamil Nadu generation and distribution corporation, to provide the free cost of electricity to farm pump sets.
- In order to bring prosperity to the farmers in the Cauvery delta region, the government has proposed to declare the area an agro-industrial corridor. The region was declared a protected agricultural zone by the previous AIADMK government. In the region, pulses, rice, coconut, banana are produced throughout the year.

- To increase the income of the farmers (depending on rainfed farming), the CM's Dry Land Development will be implemented in three lakh hectares.

TN Government introduces a scheme for overall agricultural development:

- DMK government in Tamil Nadu under their new agricultural budget has also introduced a scheme with a total outlay of Rs. 1,245.45 crores. It will be implemented to ensure the overall agricultural development and self-sufficiency in all villages of the states.
- The scheme which has been named after the former CM of Tamil Nadu M Karunanidhi (Kalaigharin Anaithu Grama Orunginaintha Velaan Valarchi Thittam) will be implemented in a total of 2,500 village panchayats in 2021-22.
- Out of the 12,524 villages in the state, each year, one-fifth of them will be identified and the scheme will be implemented in all of the panchayats areas in five years.

Organic farming development scheme

To promote organic farming, the Tamil Nadu government will implement the 'Organic Farming Development Scheme' at a cost of Rs. 33.03 crores.

Inputs for organic farming will be made available in Agricultural Extension Centers and among the several measures that have been proposed under the scheme. Farms will be certified as organic.

Background:

As Tamil Nadu presented its own agricultural budget under DMK Government, it became the third Indian state to do so. Before TN, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka were the only states that had presented their separate farm budget.

Scientists find possible origin of asteroid that killed dinosaurs

The asteroid that was responsible to wipe out the dinosaurs from the face of the Earth had hit near Mexico. The large rocky object, dubbed as Chicxulub impactor, had an estimated width of roughly 6 miles (10 km).

The asteroid produced a crater that covered an area of around 90 miles and the impact has been credited with not just the extinction of the dinosaurs, but also for around 75% of total species at the time.

The mass extinction of dinosaurs and several other species took place 66 million years ago and has come to be widely accepted as the end of the Mesozoic era.

SwRI in the news: Scientists locate likely origin for the dinosaur-killing asteroid <https://t.co/8myNh88HX8>

— Southwest Research Institute (@SwRI) [August 16, 2021](#)

Discovery of dinosaur-killing asteroid: What do we know?

The scientists have been able to figure out where the marauding asteroid originated.

With the use of computer models, the researchers studied 1,30,000 model asteroids and concluded that this one had orbited the Sun with others in the main asteroid belt before crashing into the Earth.

According to the researchers at the Texas-based Southwest Research Institute, the impactor likely came from the outer half of the main asteroid belt which is between Mars and Jupiter.

They further added that the processes that deliver the large asteroids to Earth from that region occur at least 10 times more frequently than previously thought.

The lead researcher **Dr. David Nesvorny and the colleagues Dr. Simone Marchi and Dr. William Bottke** also informed that several studies were conducted over the past decade on the mass extinction that ended dinosaurs but each study had led to new questions.

Asteroid that killed dinosaurs: Latest discovery answers critical questions:

According to Dr. Bottke, two critical questions had remained unanswered. One of them was regarding the source of the impactor and another one was about the frequency of these Earth-crashing events.

So, the scientists started knowing more about the asteroid, which further led them to identify the Chicxulub impactor as a carbonaceous chondrite. Several objects surrounding the Earth have similar compositions to the impactor but these were much smaller in size.

Dr. Nesvorny further adds that the team decided to look for where the siblings of the Chicxulub impactor might be hiding.

The researchers then used Pleiades Supercomputer of NASA and **to their surprise, they found that the 6-mile wide asteroids from the outer half of the asteroid belt strike the Earth at least 10 times more frequently than were previously found.**

RBI's first financial inclusion index reads at 53.9

The Reserve Bank of India on August 17, 2021 introduced its **first financial inclusion index** to measure and improve the extent of financial inclusion in the country.

RBI's financial inclusion index (FI-Index) is published annually in July. It is a comprehensive index that incorporates details of banking, insurance, investments, postal as well as the pension sector. It is created in consultation with the government and sectoral regulators.

The annual Financial Inclusion (FI) Index's first reading for the period ending March 2021 has come in at 53.9 as against 43.4 for the period ending March 2017.

Financial Inclusion Index: Key Highlights

- The Financial Inclusion Index has captured information about different aspects of financial inclusion in a single value ranging between 0 to 100.
- While zero represents financial exclusion, 100 indicates full financial inclusion.
- The Financial Inclusion Index has been framed based on three broad parameters—
 1. Usage (45 percent)
 2. Access (35 percent)
 3. Quality (20 percent)
- The parameters were computed based on 97 indicators.
- The Financial Inclusion Index will be responsive to ease of access, availability and usage of services, and quality of services.

Significance

According to RBI, a unique feature of the index is the quality parameter that captures the quality aspect of financial inclusion as reflected by financial literacy, consumer protection and inequalities and deficiencies in services.

The Index has been constructed without any 'base year', as it reflects the cumulative efforts of all stakeholders over the years towards financial inclusion.

Tamil Actor, VJ Anandha Kannan passes away at 48

Popular Tamil television actor and VJ Anandha Kannan passed away on August 16, 2021. Anandha Kannan died at the age of 48 years after suffering from rare bile-duct cancer.

Anandha Kannan had been detected with the rare form of cancer few months ago and had been undergoing treatment for the same since then.

Anandha Kannan, who was a native of Singapore, had started his career as an actor and television host in the nation. He had later moved to Chennai and started hosting shows for a local music channel there in the 2000s.

Kannan had become especially popular among the children of the 90s due to his shows. He had been away from television and broadcasting for more than 7 years.

Condolences poured in for the late actor from celebrities across the Tamil industry.

A great friend a great human is no more!! [#RIPanandakannan](#) my deepest condolences pic.twitter.com/6MtEQGcF8q

— venkat prabhu (@vp_offl) [August 16, 2021](#)

Rest in peace ... Forever u will be remembered for ur sweet smile and kind words [#RIPanandakannan](#) you fought your battle hard A very nice person gone too soon pic.twitter.com/jlFsVamyJE

— DD Neelakandan (@DhivyaDharshini) [August 17, 2021](#)
[#RIPanandakannan](#)

Darling brother too early to leave A pure soul with very positive mind may God give strength to ur family Aathma namasthey pic.twitter.com/HaVBjsGQew

— Actress Harathi (@harathi_hahaha) [August 17, 2021](#)

About Anandha Kannan

- Anandha Kannan was an Indian film actor and television host, who was popular for his shows that were broadcasted on channels of Sun Network.

- He was one of the most popular video jockey's of his time.
- He later did a Tamil movie titled **Adhisaya Ulagam**, which was a 3D Tamil science fantasy film. The film was one of his most appreciated films.
- Anandha Kannan also played the lead in two Tamil films- Mullum Malarum and Ithanai Naalai Engirunthai but both were never released to audiences.
- He had also done a guest appearance in the movie Saroja.
- He had also essayed the lead role in two television shows - **Sindubad and Kadhal Channel**.
- He had also hosted seasons 1-5 of the Savaal Singapore show.

New Zealand imposes snap national lockdown, first locally-transmitted COVID case detected in six months

New Zealand on August 17, 2021 **recorded its first locally transmitted case of Covid-19 in six months.** This immediately led the New Zealand government to **impose a three-day snap national lockdown.**

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said that the nation, which had not recorded any infections in the community for six months, could not take any chances with the **"game-changer" Delta strain.**

Arden said in a televised national address, ***"We have seen what can happen elsewhere if we fail to get on top of it. We only get one chance."***

#BREAKING New Zealand moves into snap national lockdown over first locally transmitted case of Covid-19 in six months pic.twitter.com/68ZGEEVYpp

— AFP News Agency (@AFP) [August 17, 2021](#)

Where has the COVID case been detected?

The single case has been identified in New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, as per the nation's health department. The health authorities are still tracing the origin of the case and no link has yet been established between the case and the border.

New Zealand's response to first locally-transmitted case

- The New Zealand Ministers would meet on August 17 to determine how to respond to the nation's first community case since February 28.
- The New Zealand health department said that a hard and early response is the best tool to stamp out any potential spread. Each person in New Zealand has been asked to stay calm, be kind and play their part while the health department gathers more information on the potential case.

Further details on the same are awaited.

New Zealand lockdown

- Auckland has been forced earlier into several brief periods of lockdown since the initial national lockdown in 2020 that successfully halted the virus at the border.

- The most recent lockdown orders in the city, which is home to two million people, had ended in March 2021.

Health officials had though warned last week that the presence of the Delta variant in New Zealand would trigger "a short, sharp lockdown".

Background

- New Zealand is one of the very few nations that had battled COVID-19 successfully and made the country largely free of the virus. The nation had won worldwide praise for its response to COVID-19.

- New Zealand has so far recorded just 26 deaths in a population of five million. The nation had not needed to impose a national lockdown for more than a year and life had almost returned to normal in the country with no limits on social gatherings and limited mask use.

- The nation, however, maintained strict border controls with mandatory two-week quarantine for international arrivals.

- The nation's vaccine rollout has though not been up to mark, as only around 20 percent of the population is fully vaccinated.

Wildfires in France: Thousands evacuated, hundreds of firefighters sent to tackle wildfire in Southern France

France Wildfires: The fire service in France has informed that thousands of people in Southern France have been evacuated as a wildfire rages near the plush resort of Saint-Tropez.

The quickly spreading wildfire in France, which broke out on August 16, 2021, about 100 km from the Mediterranean City Toulon, has already razed more than 3,500 hectares of forest and scrub land as of the morning of August 17.

Much of the Mediterranean Region has been facing bouts of extremely hot weather in the recent weeks but Southern France was till now able to escape any big blazes.

People evacuated due to fierce wildfire in France:

A fire service spokeswoman informed that thousands of people have been evacuated as a precautionary measure, but there are no reports of victims. However, she further added, that the fire was still very fierce.

Evacuation in Southern France due to wildfires has mainly taken place around Saint-Tropez and the villages of Grimaud and Le Mole.

It was also confirmed that, due to the wildfires in France, several campsites were cleared and the citizens were asked to avoid congesting the roads around the Gulf of Saint-Tropez so emergency services can access the area.

Firefighters dispatched to tackle France wildfires

The Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin informed that France has dispatched hundreds of firefighters to tackle a wildfire that broke out in the Var Region of Southern France.

Un important incendie est en cours dans le Var avec des conditions météorologiques très défavorables. Le préfet du Var est sur place et je suis attentivement la situation. Tout mon soutien aux 650 sapeurs-pompiers mobilisés cette nuit pour protéger les habitants. @SDIS83
pic.twitter.com/BqmVpLOVvg

— Gérald DARMANIN (@GDarmanin) [August 16, 2021](#)

The minister said that 650 firefighters had been deployed to protect the residents in the areas and multiple water-bombing aircraft were also involved in the operation to contain the wildfires that have already burned several hundred hectares.

The fierce fire was burning near the village of Gonfaron which is about 50 km west of the Riviera town of Saint Tropez.

What is the reason behind increase in wildfires?

France is a new addition to a number of Mediterranean countries which are hit by extreme weather and wildfires.

Climate scientists have warned that these wildfires and other forms of extreme weather conditions are going to be increasingly common because of man-made global warming.

Fierce wildfires have already flared this summer in a number of Mediterranean countries, including Turkey, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Algeria, and Morocco.

In Europe, two wildfires because of the strong winds had raged out of control near Athens forcing the evacuation of villages.

Centre imposes restrictions on export of COVID-19 Rapid Antigen testing kit, know why

COVID-19: The Government of India on August 16, 2021, imposed restrictions on the export of COVID-19 Rapid-Antigen Testing kits amid the warning of a possible third-wave of coronavirus in the country, informed the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a notification.

Earlier in May 2021, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) suggested using Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits across the country for mass screening. The council had also suggested that all government and private healthcare facilities in India should use RAT for screening the presence of COVID-19.

The ICMR had also issued an advisory for COVID-19 home testing with Rapid Antigen testing kits, especially in the rural areas where the availability of RT-PCR testing labs is a challenge.

Restriction on export of COVID-19 Rapid Antigen testing kit: Why?

- On August 4, 2021, the Indian government received data with warning signals showing India's R-value above 1, which means every COVID-19 infected person is infecting more than one person.
- This rise in R-value could indicate a warning of a possible third wave of COVID-19. The Health Ministry has reported a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases across 18 districts, majorly in Kerala (10 districts), Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Maharashtra.
- The restriction on the export of the COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Testing kit will increase the availability of the kits in the country.

How will exporters conduct shipping?

- Exporters will have to apply for a license or get approval from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) for shipping items under the restricted category.

COVID-19: India

- As of August 17, 2021, the Health Ministry reported 3,22,50,679 total number of confirmed

COVID-19 cases in India, of which 3,69,846 are active cases, 3,14,48,754 are cured/discharged/migrated cases and 4,32,079 are death cases.

- India achieves the highest single-day record in administering #COVID19 vaccine doses. The country administered 88.13 lakh vaccine doses in the past 24 hours. India's vaccination drive has crossed the 55.47 crore mark.

World's second largest refurbished gene bank in India- All you need to know

The Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar on August 16, 2021, inaugurated the world's second-largest refurbished state-of-the-art National Gene Bank at the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, Pusa in New Delhi.

While speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister mentioned that the farmers in India are completely capable of accepting the challenges faced by the agriculture sector and can also conquer them.

He further added that the Indian farmers are skilled human resources even without any major educational degree.

According to the release by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmer Welfare, the revamped state-of-the-art National Gene Bank is a powerful step in the direction of helping the farmers of India.

(@INbpgR), , - ... pic.twitter.com/0wtLM03LEr

— Narendra Singh Tomar (@nstomar) [August 16, 2021](#)

National Gene Bank in India: Key details

- The National Gene Bank was established in 1996 for preserving the seeds of Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) for future generations.
- The bank has the capacity to preserve about one million germplasm in the form of seeds.
- Presently, the National Gene Bank has been protecting 4.52 lakh accessions, of which 2.7 lakh are the Indian germplasm while the rest have been imported from other countries.
- The National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources is meeting the need of in-situ and ex-situ germplasm conservation through the Delhi Headquarters and ten other regional stations in the country.

Why there is a need for Gene Bank?

The Union Minister while speaking on the occasion said that today the need for biofortified crops

is being felt. He pointed that somewhere there is an imbalance and the government has been trying to overcome it by taking the farmers along.

The agriculture farmers will be greatly benefited by the new gene bank with state-of-the-art facilities at germplasm. The goal is to make the farmers of the country self-reliant and the government has been making every effort in that direction.

Agricultural production in India in current times:

In ancient times there were no resources or technology, however, the fabric of nature was strong, there was complete coordination because of which there was neither malnutrition nor death due to hunger.

But when this fabric broke, the country started facing difficulties and was required to make special efforts. Because of the successful efforts of the Central Government with the farmers and the agricultural scientists, the production and the productivity of food grains in India are increasing continuously.

The Minister further added that if proper attention had been given to the development of agriculture in the country 20-30 years ago, the world today would have been dependent on India for the agriculture and allied sectors.

COVID-19: Researchers develop COVID-19 testing kit that uses pencil lead

COVID-19 Testing: Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania in the US have developed a new cheaper, faster, and more accurate COVID-19 diagnostic test that incorporates electrodes made of graphite, a material found in pencil lead, to detect the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The research published in the journal PNAS stated that graphite electrodes in the new low-cost COVID-19 detection test known as the **Electrochemical Advanced Diagnostic (LEAD) test** aid in reducing the cost to \$1.50 per test and take only 6.5 minutes to detect the COVID-19 virus.

COVID-19: What is LEAD test?

- The Electrochemical Advanced Diagnostic (LEAD) test is a new low-cost test that uses graphite electrodes to detect coronavirus in humans.
- The test is found to generate results with an accuracy of 100 per cent from samples of saliva and 88 per cent from nasal samples, the researchers stated.
- The test has been developed by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania in the US. Previously, the same research team worked on a COVID-19 detection kit known as RAPID that uses screen-printed electrodes.
- The Electrochemical Advanced Diagnostic test is also based on the same concept as RAPID but costing less than the latter.

COVID-19: How does the LEAD test work?

- The Electrochemical Advanced Diagnostic test consists of materials such as human angiotensin-converting enzyme-2, modified graphite leads, and a plastic vial.
- The electrodes attach to the samples to generate a chemical signal. The height of the signal's peak determines if the sample is positive or negative.

COVID-19: Benefit of LEAD test

- The LEAD test aids in saving time, money and achieving accurate results than most tests which

are expensive and require external administration to analyze results.

- The Electrochemical Advanced Diagnostic (LEAD) test aid in reducing the cost to \$1.50 per test and take only 6.5 minutes to detect COVID-19 virus.

Why did researchers use lead?

- The researchers stated that lead is easy to assemble, anybody can use it, and it is cheap and more accessible than those of RAPID.
- The use of lead is also significant because the researchers wanted to use an abundant material such as graphite which is found in pencil lead to develop the graphite electrodes of the LEAD test so that the lower-income communities could also access the test.
- Further, the functionalization of lead and sample diagnosis takes less than a few hours and cost less.

Who are Taliban? What is their ideology and What do they want? – Afghan Crisis Decoded

The Taliban took over Afghanistan's capital Kabul on August 15, 2021, almost 20 years after they were driven out of power by US-led NATO troops.

The Taliban had previously ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, during which they had imposed a strict Islamic law in the country.

The insurgent group retook control after the capital city fell following the surrender of Afghan troops and escape of Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani to Tajikistan. The Taliban's advances became bolder with the complete withdrawal of the US troops, marking an end to America's 20-year-long war.

Who are the Taliban?

- The Taliban refers to itself as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban is a Deobandi Islamist movement and military organization in Afghanistan.
- The Taliban had first emerged in 1994 as one of the prominent factions in the Afghan Civil War. Mullah Mohammed Omar, a local imam, had founded the Taliban and Abdul Ghani Barabar was the co-founder. Mullah Mohammad Omar had led the Taliban militants until his death in 2013.
- The Taliban then largely consisted of students (talib) from the Pashtun areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan who had been educated in traditional Islamic schools.
- Under the leadership of Mohammed Omar, the Taliban movement spread throughout most of Afghanistan during the Afghan-Soviet war and successfully drove out the Russians in 1992 after the fall of the Soviet-backed regime of Mohammad Najibullah.
- The Soviet Union had intervened and occupied Afghanistan in 1979. Following this the Islamic mujahideen fighters had engaged in war with those Soviet forces.
- The Taliban had held power over roughly three-quarters of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.
- The Taliban had established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996 and the Afghan capital

was transferred to Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban.

- The military goal of the Taliban during the period was to return the order of Abdur Rahman (the Iron Emir) by the re-establishment of a state with Pashtun dominance within the northern areas.
- They held control of most of the country until they were overthrown during the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in December 2001 after the September 9/11 attacks.
- After the invasion, the Taliban regrouped as an insurgency movement to fight the US-backed Hamid Karzai administration and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the War in Afghanistan.

Which countries had recognised the Taliban previously?

Only four countries had formally recognised the Taliban's government in Afghanistan previously and they included Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

What was the Taliban's ideology during their previous rule?

The Taliban during their previous rule enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law. The Taliban's ideology had combining an "innovative" form of sharia Islamic law based on Deobandi fundamentalism and the militant Islamism with Pashtun social and cultural norms.

Most of the Taliban is known are Pashtun tribesmen.

Why are the Taliban so feared?

- During their previous rule, the Taliban had introduced strict punishments in line with their strict interpretation of the Sharia law and this included public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers and amputations for found guilty of theft.
- Under the Taliban's rule, the men in Afghanistan were required to grow beards and women were required to cover themselves fully with a burqa.
- The Taliban have also been accused for various human rights violations and cultural abuses. They had enforced brutal repression of women, which invited widespread international condemnation. They had forbidden women from being educated, forcing young girls to leave schools and colleges.

- The Taliban had discouraged girls aged 10 and above from going to school. They had also banned music, cinema and television. Women were required to be accompanied by a male relative while leaving their homes and had to wear an all-covering burqa.
- The women who were found to be disobeying these strict rules were publicly beaten.
- Male medics were also prohibited from treating women and girls. There was also a ban on the employment of women. This had also led to the widespread closure of primary schools, as most of the primary school teachers before the Taliban's rise were women.
- The period is considered as the worst for the women in Afghanistan, as they were largely restricted to the boundations of their homes.
- Hence, it is a common fear that with the Taliban's return to power, history will repeat itself and the women in Afghanistan will be subjected to such brutal suppression yet again.
- The Taliban was also accused of providing safe haven to Islamist militants such as al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, which is what led to the US invasion of Afghanistan to remove the Islamist group from power.

What does the Taliban want in Afghanistan now?

- The Taliban have clarified that they want to form an "inclusive, Islamic government" in Afghanistan along with other factions. They are currently holding negotiations with senior politicians, including leaders from the former government.
- The Taliban have pledged to enforce Islamic law but have assured that they will provide a secure environment to enable return to normalcy in the nation after decades of war.
- The Taliban insists that under their latest regime, women would be allowed to work and go to school and foreign journalists would be safe.
- They have announced 'general amnesty' for government officials and have urged them to return to work.

#UPDATES "A general amnesty has been declared for all ... so you should start your routine life with full confidence," says statement from the Taliban, two days after they took power following a lightning sweep through the country pic.twitter.com/knKDIjdCfm

— AFP News Agency (@AFP) [August 17, 2021](#)

- However, many Afghans who remember the earlier brutal repression of the Taliban distrust the group and fear that it will return to its earlier repressive and authoritarian



rule.

- The Taliban want to rename Afghanistan as Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is what they had called it the last time they ruled. This has raised more fears and the country descended into total chaos after the Taliban took over Kabul.
- People are scared that the Taliban like earlier will carry out revenge attacks against those who worked with the Americans or the government.

Afghanistan crisis: India announces new category of e-visa to fast-track requests

The Government of India on August 17, 2021, has announced a new category of electronic visas to fast-track the applications from Afghans who wish to leave the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The new visa category by the government is called “e-Emergency X-Misc Visa”.

The Spokesperson of the Union Home Ministry tweeted ***“MHA reviews visa provisions in view of the current situation in Afghanistan. A new category of electronic visa called ‘e-Emergency X-Misc Visa’ introduced to fast track the visa applications for entry into India”.***

MHA reviews visa provisions in view of the current situation in Afghanistan. A new category of electronic visa called “e-Emergency X-Misc Visa” introduced to fast-track visa applications for entry into India. [@HMOIndia](#) [@PIB_India](#) [@DDNewslive](#) [@airnewsalerts](#)

— Spokesperson, Ministry of Home Affairs (@PIBHomeAffairs) [August 17, 2021](#)

Thousands of Afghans who are desperate to flee the land-locked country have been rushing to capital Kabul’s airport since August 15, 2021, after the capital city was seized by the Taliban. The chaos that occurred at the airport on August 16 led to the death of five- it is still not known whether by US firing or stampede.

The unprecedented scenes have shown people trying to board the few flights available to get out of the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The widely circulated videos on social media have shown people climbing onto the fuselage of some aircraft before it took off.

India on Afghanistan: Who will be welcome from a war-torn country?

The Indian Government while commenting on the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan said that it will facilitate the repatriation to India of those who wishes to leave Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

The government further added that the Hindus and Sikhs from the country will be given **priority**. Arindam Bagchi, Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry, said that the Government of India will take all the steps to ensure the safety and security of the Indian Nationals and our interests in Afghanistan.

India has evacuated its ambassador and the Indian embassy staff in Kabul and they are being brought home in a special air force flight.

In view of the prevailing circumstances, it has been decided that our Ambassador in Kabul and his Indian staff will move to India immediately.

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 17, 2021](#)

Taliban in Afghanistan:

The rapid conquest of Kabul by the Taliban was followed after US President Biden's decision of withdrawing the US forces after 20 years of war that he described has cost more than \$1 trillion.

The speed at which the Afghan cities have fallen, in days rather than months as expected by the US Intelligence, the fear of Taliban on freedom of speech and human rights, particularly women rights, has sparked criticism from all over the world. However, US President, in his televised address on Afghanistan, said that he did not regret his decision of withdrawing US troops from the country.

Meghalaya – HNLC Crisis: Who was Cherishterfield Thangkhiew? Why his death caused upheaval in north-eastern state?

Meghalaya – HNLC Crisis: After the death of Cherishterfield Thangkhiew, a former militant of the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), during a police operation, Shillong witnessed arson, stone pelting, and vandalism on August 15, 2021, and has been put under curfew till August 18, 2021.

Meghalaya's Home Minister Lahkmen Rymbui on August 15, 2021, resigned and called for a judicial probe to uncover the truth behind the killing of Thangkhiew of the HNLC during a police operation on August 13.

Amid the unrest, the Meghalaya government has suspended internet services for 72 hours in four districts, East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, South-West Khasi Hills, and Ri-Bhoi district beginning from 6 pm on August 15, 2021.

Important Update regarding the recent IED explosion in Laitumkhrah.

An operation was launched in the early hours of 13th August to arrest one Cherishterfield Thangkhiew and his associates, who attacked the Police team in an attempt to escape.

pic.twitter.com/NGvhjojLuv

— Meghalaya Police (@MeghalayaPolice) [August 13, 2021](#)

Who was Cherishterfield Thangkhiew?

- Thangkhiew, 57, was the founding General Secretary of the separatist Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC).
- Thangkhiew had entered militancy in 1987 and was the co-founder of the first prominent separatist militant tribal organization Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC) in Meghalaya. He surrendered to the government in October 2018.
- Thangkhiew was gunned down at his residence in Shillong during a police encounter on August 13. The encounter was reportedly carried out by the police team of East Khasi Hills and East

Jaintia Hills. The Police team in their statement said that Thangkhiew came upon the team with a knife to which the police team in their defense fired a single shot at him.

- Meghalaya police further stated that they had strong incriminating evidence of Thangkhiew's involvement in the IED blasts in the past two months.

Political Aftermath: Resignation of Meghalaya's Home Minister Rymbui

- Meghalaya's Home Minister Lahkmen Rymbui belonging to the United Democratic Party, an ally of CM Sangma's National People's Party resigned on August 15, 2021, and called a judicial probe into the killing of Thangkhiew.

- CM Sangma in a press conference said that he is yet to make a decision. He will investigate all aspects of the State's security.

- On August 16, 2021, the Cabinet announced a judicial inquiry in Thangkhiew's death. It has also announced a Peace Committee that will be chaired by ministers and members from religious organizations, community heads, civil society, etc.

- A 'Security and Law & Order' subcommittee headed by CM Sangma will also be formed to deal with aspects of law & order in the state.

Separatist militancy in Meghalaya: Background

- Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC) was formed as the first prominent separatist militant tribal organization in the mid-1980s as an anti-outsider movement. Thangkhiew was the cofounder of the council.

- Hynniewtrep represented the Khasi and Jaintia communities and Achik represented the Garo community.

- HALC was later divided and Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) came into being that represented the Khasi and Jaintia communities and the Achik Matgrik Liberation Army that represented the Garo community. The Achik Matgrik Liberation Army was later replaced by the Achik National Volunteers Council (ANVC).

- The HNLC has been known for frequently calling bandhs, extortions, boycotting Independence Day, etc in the early 2000s. The ANVC since 2004 has been under an extended ceasefire

agreement with the government while the HNLC has been trying to talk peace with the government but on a conditional basis.

- Overall, as per experts, insurgency in Meghalaya has been declining. In 2018, the Centre withdrew the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from Meghalaya after almost 27 years post witnessing a decline by 80 per cent in insurgency-related incidents.

Taliban in Afghanistan: US President Joe Biden stands squarely behind Afghanistan decision

The President of the US Joe Biden on August 16, 2021, said that **he stands squarely behind his decision of withdrawing the US troops from Afghanistan as he acknowledged the horrific images coming out of the country after the swift Taliban takeover of the Afghanistan government.**

In a televised address to the nation from the White House East Room, the US President said that he faced a choice between sticking to a previously negotiated agreement of withdrawing the US troops from Afghanistan this year or sending thousands more US service members back into the country for the third decade of war.

He added that he will not repeat the mistakes of the past and that he did not regret his decision to proceed with withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The statement by the US President comes in wake of criticism of the President over the Taliban's conquest of the war-torn country.

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban declared victory in Afghanistan after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country and his government collapsed forcing Afghanistan into complete anarchy.

We went to Afghanistan almost 20 years ago with clear goals: get those who attacked us on September 11, 2001—and make sure al Qaeda could not use Afghanistan as a base from which to attack us again.

We did that—a decade ago.

Our mission was never supposed to be nation building.

— President Biden (@POTUS) [August 16, 2021](#)

Disagreement over Biden's decision on Afghanistan

Many have disagreed with Joe Biden's decision of withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan. The

Afghan residents in the US also protested against the President, angered by the chaos that the world witnessed as the Taliban ultimately captured Kabul, the capital city, and Afghanistan's President left the country.

However, President Biden clarified that after 20 years, he has learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw the US forces from Afghanistan.

He said that he would rather take the criticism over the fallout than pass the decision of how and when to withdraw to a fifth US President.

President further added that the decision of leaving Afghanistan is the right one for the US as keeping a US presence in the country was no longer a US National Security interest.

'Gut Wrenching': US President on images coming out of Kabul

President Biden described the images coming out of Afghanistan- especially at the Kabul airport, where the Afghans descended in hopes of fleeing the country- as 'gut wrenching'.

Videos of the people of Afghanistan clinging to a US Air Force Plane and running alongside as it prepares to take off were circulated widely on the internet.

Chaos at Kabul Airport:

The chaos at the Kabul airport left seven people dead, including some who fell from a departing American military transport jet.

The people in Afghanistan had rushed onto the tarmac as thousands were trying to escape after the Taliban seized power in the country. Some clung to the side of a military plane of the US before it took off.

Another widely circulated video showed the Afghans falling as the plane gained altitude over Kabul. The US troops resorted to firing warning shots and using the helicopters to clear a path for the transport aircraft.

The Pentagon has also confirmed that the US forces shot and killed two individuals it said were armed. Mr. Biden has ordered another battalion of troops of about 1,000 to secure the airfield, which was closed to the arrivals and the departure on August 16 because of the civilians on the runway.

US withdrawal from Afghanistan: What it means for President Biden?

The speed at which the Afghan Government collapsed ensuing chaos has posed the most serious test yet for President Biden as Commander in Chief. He has come under intense criticism from the Republicans who said that he has failed.

Yet the US President has maintained that the rapid end of the Afghan Government has only vindicated his decision, noting how the Afghan army surrendered to the Taliban.

He said that the American troops should not be fighting the war and dying in a war that the Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves.

Joe Biden, who is viewed as an experienced foreign policy hand has expressed confidence in his decision and has said that he is ready to take the heat. He said that he was deeply saddened by the facts but does not regret his decision.

President Biden is the fourth president of the US to confront challenges in Afghanistan and had insisted that he will not hand America's longest war to his successor. But he is still under pressure to explain that how the security in Afghanistan unraveled so quickly, particularly since he and the others had insisted that it will not happen.

Biden not the first President to face Afghanistan challenge:

Former Presidents of the US Barack Obama and Donald Trump had also yearned to leave Afghanistan, however, they ultimately stood down in the face of the resistance from the military leaders as well as other political concerns.

On the other hand, President Biden had been steadfast in his refusal to change the August 31 deadline (to withdraw the US troops), in part because of his belief that the American citizens are on his side.

For instance, a late July poll has shown that 55% of the Americans had approved Biden's handling of the US Troop withdrawal.

Background:

As the Taliban takeover Afghanistan, chaos and violence have escalated with people trying to flee the country from the oppressive rules that the Taliban will soon introduce.

The situation is expected to be more ghastly for women in Afghanistan with Taliban rule in the country. From the eradication of women's education to forced child marriages, the latest development will force the country into an absolute regressive structure.

Taliban Commander Abdul Ghani Baradar declared Afghanistan's new President: Who is Abdul Ghani Baradar?

Taliban Commander Abdul Ghani Baradar has been declared the new President of Afghanistan after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled to Tajikistan and Taliban fighters took control of the presidential palace in Kabul on the intervening night of August 15 and 16, 2021.

Afghanistan has also been renamed as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The Taliban released a statement saying, ***"This is a takeover and no interim arrangement."*** ***"We want all missions to stay and we assure them that they are safe here."***

The Taliban asked the Afghan citizens not to come out of their homes or leave the country. The US-led NATO forces are still in control of the Hamid Karzai Airport in Kabul and it is being used by countries to evacuate their citizens.

Kabul Falls

The Afghanistan government collapsed on August 15, 2021 after **Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani fled to Tajikistan** and Afghan military troops surrendered the capital city, Kabul. **Taliban leader Abdul Ghani Baradar is likely to be the new President of Afghanistan.**

Ghani said in a statement after his escape, ***"In order to avoid the bloodshed, I thought it was best to get out."*** He also stated in a statement on Facebook, ***"The Taliban have won with the judgement of their swords and guns, and are now responsible for the honour, property and self-preservation of their countrymen."***

This was followed by complete chaos in Kabul with shots sounding in the Kabul airport amidst efforts by other countries to evacuate their citizens from Afghanistan.

As uncertainty hovers over Kabul with the [#Taliban](#) at the city gates, here is a look at what's happening on the streets of [#Afghanistan's](#) capital. <https://t.co/j4iK9kxYD3>

— Twitter Moments (@TwitterMoments) [August 15, 2021](#)

The Taliban are killing our people, women will not have any freedom there and there is no one to

look after the people: Farzana Hafiz, one of the protesters broke down while narrating the ordeal of Afghanistan people after the country fell to the Taliban pic.twitter.com/ZLBcx0BDmf

— ANI (@ANI) [August 16, 2021](#)

Civilians were seen fleeing Kabul the moment it became clear that the Taliban is taking over the capital. India also started the process of evacuation of its nationals from Afghanistan with Air India flight AI-243 taking off from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International airport for Kabul on the morning of August 15th. The flight returned without 129 stranded passengers.

Govt has told Air India to put two aircraft on standby for emergency evacuations from Kabul. Air India has prepared a set crew for emergency operations from Kabul to New Delhi: Govt Sources pic.twitter.com/b8TFQfojbg

— ANI (@ANI) [August 16, 2021](#)

Nations such as the US, UK, Germany and Canada are using their troops to evacuate their nationals from Afghanistan. The US Embassy in Kabul has suspended all operations and told Americans to take shelter in the place.

What will happen to Afghanistan now?

Taliban leaders declared on August 16, 2021 that "the war is over." Taliban Commander Abdul Ghani Baradar is likely to become the new President of Afghanistan. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar is the co-founder of the Taliban insurgent group.

The Taliban has taken control of Afghanistan nearly 20 years after the US-led coalition marched into Kabul. Baradar had said in a statement earlier that the Taliban's victory that saw all cities of the country fall to them in just 10 days was unexpectedly swift and had no match in the world.

Who is Abdul Ghani Baradar?



- Abdul Ghani Baradar is the co-founder of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was the deputy of Mullah Mohammed Omar. While Haibatullah Akhundzada is the Taliban's overall leader, Baradar is the political chief and most public face.
- He had been captured in Pakistan by a team of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers in February 2010.
- He was released at the request of the United States three years ago on October 24, 2018.
- Baradar has not only emerged as a victor of Afghanistan's 20-year war but his return to power embodies Afghanistan's inability to escape the bloody shackles of its past.
- Baradar was born in Uruzgan province in 1968 and raised in Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban.
- He had served the Afghan mujahideen during the war against the Soviet-backed Afghan government in the 1980s. The Russians were driven out in 1992.

- He helped his former commander and brother-in-law Mohammad Omar found the Taliban in southern Afghanistan in 1994.
- Baradar had played various military and administrative roles in the five-year regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was deputy minister of defence when the Taliban was ousted by the US and its Afghan allies.

Who are the Taliban?

The Taliban is a Deobandi Islamist movement, which is led by young Islamic scholars who are dedicated to the religious purification of the country and the creation of an emirate.

Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada is reportedly the leader of the Taliban since 2016.

Latest Updates from Afghanistan

The Taliban fighters have entered the presidential palace in Kabul, while Ashraf Ghani and his close aides have fled to Tajikistan. There is a complete collapse of the government, which has triggered panic and chaos in the capital, Kabul.

The Kabul airport is a scene of complete chaos with nations scrambling to evacuate their citizens. Many of the frantic Afghans are also searching for a way out of the fallen nation.

The United States has been airlifting its embassy personnel to the Kabul airport to evacuate them from the city. The Pentagon is sending additional 1000 US troops to Kabul to help with the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan's capital city.

As per official sources, commercial flights out of Kabul have been cancelled due to chaos at the Kabul airport.

US troops fire shots in air at Kabul airport as crowd mobs tarmac, reports AFP quoting a witness [#Afghanistan pic.twitter.com/PXALp4lwa9](https://twitter.com/PXALp4lwa9)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 16, 2021](#)

[#UPDATE](#) Commercial flights from Kabul have been cancelled after chaotic scenes at the airport with thousands looking for a way out after the Taliban re-take power in Afghanistan.

"Please do not rush to the airport," Kabul airport authority says in message to reporters [pic.twitter.com/rEGgKqUfqd](https://twitter.com/rEGgKqUfqd)

— AFP News Agency (@AFP) [August 16, 2021](#)

Afghanistan's Takeover by Taliban: India's Key Infrastructure Projects and Investments over the last 20 years

Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan: On Sunday, 15th August 2021 – Taliban fighters seized the prize it has long sought by taking complete control of Kabul. With the fall of Kabul, the militant Islamist group has announced an end to the 20-year war and declared its victory.

A hasty retreat by the US forces coupled with the fleeing of Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani marked the collapse of the Western-backed government in Afghanistan. With Taliban troops taking control of the presidential palace in Kabul after seizing province after province, all in a matter of weeks; India also finds its strategic interests threatened in the war-torn country.

India's role in Rebuilding of Afghanistan

As the US launched Operation 'Enduring Freedom' in the post 9/11 world, India, like much of the world, looked at the country which is popularly known as 'Graveyard of Empires' with hope for a better tomorrow. When in 2014, the Operation ended, India extending a friendly hand to the Afghan Government as both, long-term strategic interest and immediate humanitarian effort to support and safeguard the fragile democratic experiment installed by the West.

Over the last two decades, India shared a robust relationship and solid people-to-people contacts with the SAARC nation. India built vital roads, dams, electricity transmission lines and substations, schools and hospitals, etc. India's development assistance is now estimated to be worth well over \$3 billion.

However, the recent developments have put India's strategic interests at a major risk, be it in terms of infrastructure projects such as Stor Palace and Salma Dam or the 2011 India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement. Let's assess how the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan will impact India's foreign policy.

2011 India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement

The first major step by India in helping rebuild Afghanistan after the US-led war against Taliban came in the form of the 2011 India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement. The agreement

reiterated India's commitment to helping rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions; education and technical assistance for capacity-building in many areas. Furthermore, the agreement also encouraged investment in Afghanistan and provided duty-free access to the Indian market. Thanks to this agreement, the bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan is now worth USD 1 billion.

Salma Dam

One of the biggest infrastructure projects launched by the Indian effort in Afghanistan is the 42MW Salma Dam in Herat province. Popularly known as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, it is a hydropower and irrigation project which got completed in 2016. The province has already seen a violent takeover by Taliban fighters, especially in the area surrounding the dam. Taliban has declared that they have taken control of the area around the project.



Afghan Parliament

Probably the most significant and noticeable contribution by India to Afghanistan is in the form of

building the Afghan Parliament, which was built for USD 90 million. The Afghan Parliament building was inaugurated by Indian PM Narendra Modi in 2015. In a spirited speech delivered at the inauguration function, PM Modi said the new building was India's tribute to democracy in Afghanistan. A block in the building is named after former PM AB Vajpayee.



Image via nytimes.com

Stor Palace

Stor Palace was originally built in the late 19th Century as a tribute to the setting for the 1919 Rawalpindi Agreement by which Afghanistan became an independent country. The building housed the offices of the Afghan foreign minister and the ministry until 1965.

Since then, during the war period, the palace was ravaged during the Soviet invasion and Taliban regime. In 2009, India, Afghanistan, and the Aga Khan Development Network signed a tripartite agreement for its restoration. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture completed the project between 2013 and 2016. Thereafter, the palace was restored to its former glory by India and inaugurated in 2016 by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Indian Prime Minister



Modi.

Image via archnet.org

Zaranj Delaram Highway

The most beneficial infrastructure project undertaken by India in Afghanistan would be the 218-Km Zaranj Delaram highway, which has been built by the Border Roads Organisation at the cost of USD 150 million. Over 300 Indian engineers and workers toiled alongside Afghans to build the road. The highway runs close to the Afghanistan-Iran border and connects Delaram to the northeast of Zaranj, covering some important strategic locations including Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, and Herat. The highway is of strategic importance for India as it granted an alternative route to Afghanistan via Iran's Chabahar port, as Pakistan denies India access to the landlocked



nation.

Image via mrunal.org

Healthcare Facilities

India had built the Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health in 1972, which was left in shambles during the war years. Following the installation of democracy, India rebuilt and restored the institute and also several Indian Medical Missions throughout the country. India has built clinics in the border provinces of Badakhshan, Balkh, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nooristan, Paktia and Paktika, as per reports.

Power Infrastructure

India has also contributed to building a strong telecom and power infrastructure in Afghanistan to aid its overall economic growth and development. As part of this, India has built the 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province, which supplies electricity to the national capital Kabul.

Transportation Support

According to the MEA, India gifted 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army, and 10 ambulances for public hospitals in five cities. It also gave three Air India aircraft to Ariana, the Afghan national carrier, when it was restarting operations.

Explosion in Lebanon: At least 28 die in fuel tank explosion amid severe fuel shortage

Fuel explosion in Lebanon killed at least 28 people and injured nearly 80 people in northern Lebanon early on August 15, 2021.

As per military sources, the army had seized a fuel storage tank that was hidden by black marketeers and was handing out gasoline to residents when the explosion occurred.

The explosion scalded a crowd that was clamoring to grab the fuel. Lebanon has grappling with a severe fuel shortage, which has extended blackouts and led to long lines at gas stations.

What happened exactly?

- A 60,000-liter fuel tank that had been stored illegally in a warehouse in Tleil town near the Syrian border exploded while the area's residents had gathered to collect gasoline. The explosion triggered a stampede.
- The fuel was hidden illegally and it had been seized by the Lebanese armed forces.

How many casualties have been reported?

Around 20 bodies have been recovered from the blast site and about 79 people have been injured. Search is on for more casualties. **As per Lebanon Health Ministry, the death toll has been increased to 28.**

What caused the explosion?

- The exact reason for the explosion is not known, the Lebanese authorities are still investigating the cause.
- The Lebanese army has been distributing fuel to local residents amid a severe shortage.
- As per the local media, it is not known how much fuel was left in the tank when it ignited. The owner of the land from where the fuel was confiscated has been arrested.

Background

- Lebanon has been suffering from a severe fuel crisis and one of the worst economic collapses. The nation has been suffering from electricity cuts for decades, mainly due to corruption and mismanagement.
- The nation has been facing severe power and fuel shortage in recent weeks, as the economic crisis has left the government unable to import enough fuel.
- The latest tragedy has overwhelmed medical facilities in the country's remote north area. It has also revived the bitter memories of the major explosion that had taken place at Beirut port in August 2020, which had killed more than 200 people and destroyed large parts of Lebanon's capital.

COVID-19 Vaccine: Bharat Biotech's first nasal covid vaccine gets approval for phase 2/3 trial

India's Bharat Biotech has received the approval to conduct a phase 2/3 human clinical trial for its nasal COVID-19 vaccine, BBV154. Phase 1 trial of the vaccine has shown that its doses were 'well tolerated' and there was no report of serious adverse events.

Bharat Biotech's intranasal vaccine is the first in the country to receive the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council's approval for the late-stage human clinical trials.

As per the statement, previously, the nasal vaccine was found to be immunogenic, safe, and well-tolerated in the pre-clinical toxicity studies. The nasal vaccine was able to elicit high-level neutralizing antibodies in animal studies.

The first nasal [#COVID19](#) vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech has got regulatory approval for phase second and third trials.

This is the first of its kind COVID-19 jab to undergo human clinical trials in India.

pic.twitter.com/vjK3eFeNQe

— All India Radio News (@airnewsalerts) [August 13, 2021](#)

Significance:

Bharat Biotech's nasal vaccine for COVID-19 will be significant as it will save on medical equipment such as syringes and will also be able to save time taken for the vaccination of the candidate.

First nasal covid vaccine by Bharat Biotech: Key details

- BBV154, the adenoviral intranasal vaccine is the first of its kind vaccine to undergo human trials in India.
- As per the Ministry of Science and Technology, the phase 1 trial of the vaccine in the healthy volunteers of age group ranging from 18 to 60 years was well-tolerated.

- The vaccine has now received approval to conduct the phase 2 randomized clinical trial of the heterologous prime-boost combination of Sars-CoV-2 vaccines in order to evaluate the immunogenicity and the safety of COVAXIN with BBV154 in healthy volunteers.
- Bharat Biotech's nasal COVID vaccine has been developed with the support of the Department of Biotechnology and Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council.

Mission COVID Suraksha:

It was launched to reinforce and accelerate the COVID-19 vaccine development efforts as part of the third stimulus package, Atmanirbhar 3.0.

Dr. Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology stated that the department through the Mission COVID Suraksha has been committed to developing safe COVID-19 vaccines.

BBV154 COVID vaccine of Bharat Biotech is the first nasal vaccine being developed in India to enter into late-stage clinical trials.

Background:

Bharat Biotech, in January 2021, had sent a proposal to the Drugs Controller General of India to conduct the phase 1 trials of the nasal vaccine.

On the other hand, Bharat Biotech, till now has delivered over 4 billion doses of COVAXIN worldwide. COVAXIN was one of the two vaccines that India used to launch its massive nationwide Covid inoculation program in January 2021.

How will Taliban's rise in Afghanistan impact India?

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani relinquished his power to the Taliban on August 15, 2021 after he fled to Tajikistan with his close aides.

There has been utter chaos since the fall of Kabul with thousands scurrying to flee Afghanistan via Hamid Karzai Airport in Kabul. The US military have taken charge of the Kabul airport, from where all civilian commercial flights have been suspended as countries continue the evacuation of their citizens.

The Indian government also told Air India to put two aircraft on standby for emergency evacuations from Kabul. Air India flight AI-243 brought back 129 stranded passengers to India on August 15. For now, all commercial flights have been suspended at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

How will the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan impact India?

- With the fall of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan looks inevitable. Thousands have been fleeing the capital city ever since Taliban fighters entered the presidential palace and took control of the city.
- Just in a day, the scenario in Afghanistan changed completely. As per media reports, the demoralised Afghan troops surrendered to the fighting with Taliban militants around the capital city and withdrew from their posts, paving way for the Taliban to enter Kabul.
- Kabul fell the moment Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani escaped to Tajikistan. In his statement after fleeing, Ghani said that the Taliban are now responsible for the honour, property and self-preservation of their countrymen.
- Taliban now has control over almost 80 percent of the mountainous land-locked nation, especially the north and west regions. They had initially captured provinces in the south of Afghanistan, including its birthplace Kandahar. Then, the Taliban militants had moved to the West and then to the north.
- Besides impacting the people of Afghanistan, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan will

impact the entire world including India.

Impact of Taliban's rise in Afghanistan on India:

1. Taliban's proximity to J&K

- With the takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban is now only 400 km away from the Line of Control in India's Jammu and Kashmir region.
- The proximity of the Taliban to Jammu and Kashmir puts them in a position to export further terrorism to the Indian territory.
- The Taliban have captured the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, which is at the border of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

2. Rise in Terrorism

- Successive United Nations reports have said that militant groups like the Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba are operating alongside the Taliban. As per reports, the Taliban also continues to harbour Al Qaeda. Its close fighting arm, the Haqqani network also has close links with the Islamic state that has trained many Indian nationals to take up arms and even prepared them for suicide attacks.
- The resurgence of the Taliban could mean expansion of training facilities and bases for these militant groups in Afghanistan, expanding their lethality and reach leading to rise in terrorism in the region.

3. Pakistan's support to Taliban

- As per reports, the Taliban has the support of Pakistan and this would not be favourable for India.
- The Taliban has also taken control of districts that are bordering other nations including Tajikistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

4. China's challenge

- China has reportedly said that it is willing to develop friendly relations with Afghanistan's Taliban, which again may pose a big challenge for India, as its relations with China have been at its worst since last year's border standoff.

- China is also reportedly one of the biggest investors in Afghanistan and the Taliban would want to hold on its strong position, for which it will need the Chinese funds, as almost all other nations have refused to recognise an Afghan government that is formed by force.

5. India's investment in Afghanistan down the drain?

- India has invested over \$2 billion in aid in Afghanistan since 9/11. Some of the major investments by India in Afghanistan include the new Parliament building, Salma Dam in western Afghanistan and the Delaram-Zaranj highway, which may now prove to be useless.

- Even investments made in the Chabahar port in Iran to create a new trade route and free landlocked Afghanistan from the chokehold of Karachi may now prove to be useless with the Taliban taking over Afghanistan.

- The Chabahar port may though also give India a degree of leverage, as the Taliban would not want to be completely dependent on Pakistan.

India's history with the Taliban

- India had funded the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance along with Iran and Russia.
- The Taliban had also lent its support to the terrorists who had hijacked the Indian Airlines Flight 814, which was en route from Kathmandu in Nepal to Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi. The flight had been hijacked on December 24, 1999 and flown to several locations before landing in the Taliban-controlled Kandahar.

What would be the best move for India now?

- The wisest move for India right now would be to sit on the sidelines and observe how the situation unfolds in Afghanistan.
- All major western nations have condemned the Taliban's takeover and are scurrying to evacuate their citizens from the nation.
- The Taliban spokesperson reportedly said that it expects India to change its stance and support the group.

Zambia's opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema wins Presidential election

Zambia's opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema won the country's presidential election with a landslide victory over incumbent President Edgar Lungu, stated the Electoral Commission of Zambia on August 16, 2021.

Zambia's Electoral Commission reported that Hichilema secured 2.8 million votes against Lungu who got 1.8 million votes from 156 constituencies, except one barred. There were 7 million registered voters in the country.

This marks the third shift of power from a ruling party to the opposition since Zambia's independence from Britain in 1964.

Hichilema's supporters celebrated the win by wearing the red and yellow of his United Party for National Development (UNPND).

Zambia's ruling party Patriotic Front's Lungu has been facing public discontent due to unsustainable fiscal policies, falling copper prices, major unemployment among youth, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who is Hakainde Hichilema?

- Hakainde Hichilema, 59, is a former CEO at an accounting firm who ran for the presidency for the sixth time this year. In 2021, he became the President of Zambia after a successful campaign that took a dig at Lungu's way of handling the economy.
- Hichilema has run against Lungu three times before for the post of President of Zambia.
- Hichilema is a member of the opposition party United Party for National Development in Zambia. He was appointed as the party's new president after the death of Anderson Mazoka in 2006.
- Hichilema has been presented with the Africa Freedom Award by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in October 2017.

Zambia: Key Challenges

- Hakainde Hichilema faces dire challenges in reviving the country's democratic and economic landscape.
- Zambia has become Africa's first pandemic-era sovereign default in November 2020 after the country failed to keep up with a \$42.5 million sovereign debt payment.
- Zambia's economic debt is a major challenge. Under Lungu's leadership, Zambia's debt jumped from 36 per cent to 110 per cent of GDP. Among other issues are corruption, executive dominance, and increased violent extortionary by cadres under the Patriotic Front.

Zambia Presidential Election 2021

- The Presidential Election of Zambia was held on August 12, 2021, wherein Zambia's opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema was declared the winner.
- The 2021 Zambian Presidential Election saw a close competition between Hakainde Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UNPND) and Edgar Lungu of the Patriotic Front.
- Edgar Lungu of the ruling party Patriotic Party has been Zambia's President since 2015. Lungu ran for a third term that the opposition stated as unconstitutional as he has been elected twice already in the 2015 and 2016 elections. However, the Constitutional Court dismissed any opposition stating that Lungu served only for a year in his first term.

Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin resigns after failing to get majority support

The **Prime Minister of Malaysia, Muhyiddin Yassin, resigned and his government collapsed on August 15, 2021, after just 17 months in office.** The event has thrown a country into fresh political turmoil as Malaysia battles a serious COVID-19 outbreak.

PM Yassin's tumultuous period in office came to an end after his allies withdrew support making him the shortest-serving premier in the history of Malaysia.

Malaysia, with an election unlikely and no obvious successor on the horizon, is set for a period of intense political horse-trading before the workable coalition in the country takes shape.

The National Palace of Malaysia confirmed that the Monarch, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah has accepted Yassin's resignation. The monarch appoints the premier.

The Palace in a statement informed that Muhyiddin will serve as a caretaker Prime Minister until a replacement is found. The monarch is not yet in the favour of polls due to the outbreak.

Allies withdrew support

The 74-year old Yassin, after submitting his resignation to the king, took a parting shot at the enemies within his coalition.

In a televised address, Yassin said that he could have taken an easy way out by casting aside his principles to remain as the Prime Minister of the country but that is not his choice.

Muhyiddin Yassin has claimed that several MPs who decided to pull their support from his coalition- including scandal-plagued ex-leader Najib Razak-had been angered that the Prime Minister refused to get the corruption cases dropped against them.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in power: Details

- Yassin came to power in March 2020 without an election at the head of a scandal-plagued coalition which followed the collapse of a two-year-old reformist government led by Mahathir Mohamad.

- However, Yassin's government faced turmoil from day one. His majority in Parliament was in doubt, its legitimacy is constantly questioned and he also faced a constant challenge from the opposition chief Anwar Ibrahim.
- Apart from its legitimacy, Yassin's government faced criticism over its failure to keep the virus under control.
- In January 2021, he persuaded the king to declare the first nationwide state of emergency in Malaysia for over half a century, ostensibly to fight the pandemic.
- But with this, the Parliament was also suspended for months which led to the criticism that Muhyiddin was using the crisis to avoid the no-confidence vote.
- His position in power finally became untenable after a group of once allied MPs withdrew their support and deprived him of a Parliamentary majority.
- Yassin made his last bid to stay in power on August 13, 2021, by appealing to the MPs to back him in a no-confidence vote, however, his offer was rejected.

Malaysia's Political background

In 1957, after the independence from the British, the country was ruled for over six decades by a coalition that was dominated by Malaysia's ethnic Malay Muslim majority.

However, corruption scandal, increasingly authoritarian rule, and the unpopular race-based policies prompted the voters to boot the coalition and its leader Najib out of power in 2018.

The victory of Mahathir's opposition alliance had fuelled hopes for a new era, but it collapsed amid the bitter infighting.

Google doodle celebrates 117th birth anniversary of Subhadra Kumari Chauhan

Google on August 16, 2021, paid a tribute to Indian activist, freedom fighter, and poet Subhadra Kumari Chauhan on her 117th birth anniversary with a creative doodle.

The Google doodle was illustrated by a New Zealand-based guest artist Prabha Mallya. The doodle shows Chauhan dressed in a saree sitting holding a pen with several notes. The doodle showcases a Jhansi Ki Rani and freedom fighters.

Google in a statement described Chauhan as a 'trailblazing writer and freedom fighter' who earned a national prominence during an era of literature dominated by men.

Who is Subhadra Kumari Chauhan?

- Subhadra Kumari Chauhan was an Indian activist, freedom fighter, and poet whose work gained national recognition during a male-dominated era of literature.
- Chauhan was born in Nihalpur village in Uttar Pradesh on August 16, 1904. Her first poem was published when she was only 9-years-old.

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan: Her Work

- Chauhan's poem 'Jhansi ki Rani' is one of the most recited poems in Hindi literature. 'Balika ka Parichay' and 'Khilonewala' are among the list of her remarkable poems.
- Google further said that her poetry and literature work primarily threw light on the hardships of Indian women such as caste and gender discrimination.

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan: Role during India's Freedom Movement

- With her steadfast nationalism, Chauhan became a part of the Indian Nationalist Movement in 1921 and used her poetry as a medium to urge people to join the fight for their nation.
- In 1923, Chauhan became the first woman satyagrahi, a member of the Indian collective of non-violent anti-colonialists who was arrested in the Independence struggle.

- Google further in its statement stated that during the 1940s, she published a total of 88 poems and 46 short stories in the fight for India's independence.
- Chauhan has also been the author of 'Jallianwala Bagh Mein Vasant', 'Veeron Ka Kaisa Ho Basant', 'Rakhi Ki Chunauti', and 'Vida'.
- She died in 1948 during a car accident.

Haiti Earthquake: Massive 7.2 magnitude quake struck Haiti, death count jumps to over 1,200

Haiti was struck by a massive 7.2 magnitude earthquake on August 14, 2021, killing at least 1,297 people. The tremor in Haiti was struck about 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the west of the densely populated capital Port-au-Prince, which was earlier devastated in a massive 2010 quake.

On August 15, 2021, the death count in Haiti jumped over 1,200 as the crews desperately dug through the collapsed buildings for the survivors in the Caribbean nation which is still reeling from its President's assassination.

In Les-Cayes, another hard-hit city on the Southwestern Peninsula, most of the population had spent the night sleeping outdoors in front of their houses, amid the fears of aftershocks.

The streets were filled with the grinding sound of heavy equipment lifting debris from the collapsed buildings. There were also quieter sounds of the people pulling away the rubble by hand in desperate searches for the missing.

A severe earthquake in [#Haiti](#) has collapsed hospitals, schools and homes, taken hundreds of lives and left communities in crisis. [@UNICEFHaiti](#) is delivering emergency medical supplies and working to keep children and families safe in the difficult hours ahead.

pic.twitter.com/HT1DGzD4IZ

— UNICEF (@UNICEF) [August 15, 2021](#)

According to the latest update by Haiti's Civil Protection Agency, some 13,600 buildings have been destroyed and over 13,700 damaged, trappings hundreds under rubble and leaving more than 5,700 people injured.

Nations come forward to help Haiti:

- According to the US National Weather Service, rescuers in Haiti face new pressure as the Tropical Depression Grace approaches, raising fears of the torrential rainfall, mudslides, and flash floods from late August 16.

- The US and other nations have pledged to help Haiti cope with this latest disaster. The head of USAID Samantha Power had tweeted that her agency had deployed a 65 person urban search and rescue team who are equipped with specialized tools, medical supplies, and equipment to join an earthquake disaster response team already in Haiti.
- The Dominican Republic, neighbour of Haiti, said that it will be shipping 10,000 food rations and medical supplies.
- Mexico has also sent an aid shipment while Cuba and Ecuador have dispatched the medical or the search-and-rescue-team.
- Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, and Peru have also offered to help, as did the United Nations.

Haiti's president assassination

The latest earthquake in Haiti comes just over a month after the President of Haiti Jovenel Moise was assassinated in-home by a team of gunmen. The event shook the country which has already been battling poverty, COVID-19, and spiraling gang violence.

As per the Haiti police, they have arrested 44 people so far in connection with the killing of Haiti's President.

Haiti Earthquake 2010:

The Prime Minister of Haiti while talking about the rescue operations mentioned that the government plans a better-adapted response than in 2010 after the earthquake.

In January 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake had left much of Port-au-Prince and the nearby cities in ruins and had killed more than 2,00,000.

More than 1.5 million people in Haiti were made homeless after the disaster, which had also destroyed 60% of Haiti's healthcare system and had left the island authorities and the international humanitarian community with a colossal challenge.

Taliban in Afghanistan: How it funds itself? – Explainer of the Day

Taliban was listed as the fifth richest with an annual turnover of \$400 million among the top 10 'Terrorist Organizations' by Forbes in 2016. Another report by NATO reported a \$1.6 billion annual budget of the Taliban in 2019-20.

The NATO report further mentioned that the Taliban is on its way to become an independent military and political entity by becoming self-sufficient.

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban captured Afghanistan's capital Kabul. In fact, the Taliban has captured most of the territories in war-torn Afghanistan as the US and North-Atlantic Treaty Organization have pulled their military forces out of the country.

Maintaining this level of military control and insurgency requires a hefty amount of funding and support as well. Here is how the Taliban group funds itself, recruits its fighters, controls, and enjoys support on the ground.

Taliban: How it funds itself?

- As per a report by NATO cited by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Taliban earned an estimated \$1.6 billion in the fiscal year ending March 2020. The group expanded its profits through illegal mining, illicit drug trade, and exports.

- The report further gave a breakdown of how the Taliban funds itself.

Mining: \$464 million,

Drugs: \$416 million,

Foreign Donations: \$240 million,

Export: \$240 million,

Taxes: \$160 million,

Real Estate: \$80 million

- Over the years, the group has also reduced its dependency on foreign donations to 15 per cent by 2020. The group had reportedly received \$500 million or a half of its total funding from foreign donations in 2017-18.

- A UN report in June 2021 further stated that Opium trading represents the most significant source of income for the Taliban, estimating a total of approximately \$460 million in 2020 from illicit heroin supply worldwide. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of Opium.

Taliban: Background

- Formed in the 1990s, the hardcore Islamist group Taliban has between 55,000 to 85,000 full-time fighters. The group's capabilities have grown exponentially over the last 20 years of fighting, as per a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) report.

- Experts further state that the group has a well-organized recruitment network inside Afghanistan and it closes approximately 2 million Afghan refugees in neighboring Pakistan to grow its strength.

- A report by the Combating Terrorism Centre at the US Military Academy stated that the Islamic group has approximately 60,000 core fighters, plus or minus 10 to 20 per cent. The estimates back in 2017 suggested that the total manpower of the group exceeds 200,000 individuals apart from the core fighters. The group also includes another 90,000 members of local militias and tens of thousands of support elements.

Taliban: How it enjoys control over Afghanistan?

- The Taliban group is made of primarily the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union troops from Afghanistan, the group expanded its support base among Afghans. The group to date enjoys support from Pashtuns in the country.

- The group with such massive support and funding controls approximately a fifth of the total of 400 districts in Afghanistan, cited the CFR report. With the US troops withdrawing from the region, the group is expected to increase its control over the country.

Taliban: Role of Pakistan

- As per UNODC reports, the Taliban group draws a major chunk of manpower from various refugee camps in Pakistan.

- It is also common knowledge that the Taliban has found refuge in Pakistan for the past two decades. There have been extensive reports about Pakistan's support towards the Taliban relating to logistical, medical, and weapons.

Afghanistan Crisis: Why US withdrawal from Kabul is being compared to fall of Saigon? – What is Saigon and why is it relevant?

The fall of Kabul has drawn comparison to the fall of Saigon in 1975. Is it Saigon all over again? The Fall of Saigon refers to the capture of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, by the People's Army of Vietnam in 1975.

Saigon's capture had marked the end of the Vietnam War and the start of a transition period to the formal reunification of Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The US withdrawal from Kabul has been compared with the US withdrawal from Saigon. In fact, a photo comparison is making the rounds that shows US evacuation from Kabul in 2021 and US evacuation from Saigon in 1975.

Another "Saigon 75 - Kabul 21" comparison. pic.twitter.com/loNFaaRahp

— Julian Röppcke (@JulianRoepcke) [August 15, 2021](#)

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has, however, insisted that the Afghan mission to be 'successful' and has rejected the comparison between Kabul and Saigon.

Kabul like Saigon pic.twitter.com/3617tlvfvU

— Matthieu (@Simabras1) [August 15, 2021](#)

What is Saigon?

Thousands of Afghans fleeing Afghanistan, especially evacuation by the United States, have brought back ghosts from the past like Saigon, which also witnessed similar evacuations as North Vietnamese troops overran the city.

Phnom Penh was also similar when the US ambassador had fled the city with some 200 other Americans just five days before the city fell to fanatical Khmer Rouge.

Saigon is another name for Ho Chi Minh City, which is the largest city in Vietnam, situated in the south.

Fall of Saigon

- The Fall of Saigon was the capture of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam by the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) on April 30, 1975.
- The capture of Saigon marked the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of a transition period that led to the formal reunification of Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- The People's Army of Vietnam under the command of General Vn Tin Dng had begun their final attack on Saigon on April 29, 1975.
- The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces commanded by General Nguyn Vn Toàn suffered a heavy artillery bombardment.
- The People's Army of Vietnam finally occupied the important points of the city and raised their flag over the South Vietnamese presidential palace.
- The government of unified Vietnam renamed Saigon as H Chí Minh City, to honor late North Vietnamese President H Chí Minh.
- The capture of Saigon was preceded by Operation Frequent Wind, which comprised evacuation of almost all American civilian and military personnel in Saigon. Thousands of South Vietnamese civilians were also evacuated.
- The capture of Saigon followed a similar pattern to the capture of Kabul, as the Taliban increased its advances in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops. Similarly in Saigon, the US ground combat units had left South Vietnam two years before the fall of Saigon and were not available to defend Saigon or assist in the evacuation.
- The evacuation from Saigon is known to be the largest helicopter evacuation in history.

Why is Saigon-Kabul comparison relevant now?

The biggest question now is that what will happen to Afghanistan under Taliban rule. Will the Taliban return to its old ways and act like the Vietnamese communists, who ordered mass executions. Will the women in Afghanistan be seen again as possessions of male members and be forbidden from gaining access to education, or will there be a more liberal approach, as promised by the Taliban.

Afghanistan-A Brief History: From US's Post 9/11 'Operation Enduring Freedom' to Taliban's takeover – Explained

Afghanistan, the mountainous landlocked country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, is seeing a disastrous Taliban takeover. **The Government of Afghanistan collapsed on August 15, 2021, as President Ashraf Ghani left the country after the Taliban sealed a nationwide military victory.**

After the withdrawal of the troops by the United States from Afghanistan, the country witnessed a spike in violence as the Taliban intensified its efforts to gain control over the entire region in the wake of withdrawal. The final straw came when the militant group captured the capital city (Kabul) forcing thousands of people to flee the country along with various other nations worrying about the strong foothold of the Taliban in Afghanistan and how it may impact the international discussion to counter-terrorism.

But firstly, it is significant to understand how Afghanistan got here. What happened in one of the most strategic nations in South Asia and what is the four-phase journey which led the country here. Have a look.

Phase 1: What happened in Afghanistan in the post 9/11 world?

1. Al-Qaeda Challenged the United States

The events on September 11, 2001, changed the global political landscape forever. Two planes flew into the famous twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and turned the skylines that never sleeps into gloomy, wrapped with smoke and flames.

What unraveled between 2001 and 2021 is still continued. After 9/11, the former President of the United States George W Bush announced that the US army will launch an attack against Al-Qaeda and Taliban targets.

Since then, the world's one of the mightiest superpowers, in terms of economy as well as weaponry, started hunting for the world's most wanted man Osama Bin Laden. On May 2, 2011,

Navy SEALs of US Special Warfare Development Group raided the Al-Qaeda compound in Pakistan and killed the Al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden.

However, the fight against the Islamist Militant groups did not end there. In February 2020, after more than 18 years of war in Afghanistan, former President of the US Donald Trump and the Taliban leadership signed a peace deal to withdraw the US troops.

2. People of Afghanistan must decide their own future: US President

To bring the US's longest-running war to a close, the incumbent US President Joe Biden announced on April 14, 2021, that the US will withdraw the army forces by September 11.

To control the territory, the Islamist Militant group Taliban increased its violence over the last two weeks and the actions prompted the US and other countries to urge their citizens to leave the country immediately.

As the Taliban continued its advances in Afghanistan, the spokesperson of the US State Department commented that the US expects to draw down a core diplomatic presence in Afghanistan in the coming weeks.

Taliban, in its mission of acquiring the region, has claimed to capture Kandhar and other 12 provinces while the Afghan President claimed the worsening situation on the US pullout from Afghanistan.

3. Afghanistan crisis: How much does it cost the US?

Human cost- In the two-decades-long US combat mission in Afghanistan, the US forces have suffered more than 2,300 deaths.

Economic cost- As per the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, to date, the war by the US in Afghanistan has cost the country \$2.261 trillion.

4. What the US planned on achieving in Afghanistan?

In 2001, when the United States entered Afghanistan, the country promised Afghans modernity, democracy, sovereignty, social justice and to bridge the ethnic divide.

5. Who is nurturing the Taliban?

The Islamist Fundamentalist Organisation (Taliban) has grown its strength and has survived 20 years of war.

- Reportedly, Pakistan Army has a history of military support to different tribal factions within Afghanistan, however, Pakistan has repeatedly denied any form of military support to Afghanistan.
- In order to reduce Pakistan's own vulnerability, the Pakistani army trained Mujahideen had fought against the Soviet intervention during the 1970s and the 1980s.
- Pakistani Army and ISI have provided logistical, financial, military as well as direct combat support to the Taliban.

6. Objective of Taliban-

The Islamist Militant Group wants to establish an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in accordance with the Hanafi School of Islamic Jurisprudence (one of the four traditional major Sunni schools of Islamic Jurisprudence).

7. What can happen next in Afghanistan?

- **Negotiated settlement-** With the Taliban's latest advances in the country, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani had said that the country's situation will change in 6 months.
- **The collapse of the Afghanistan Government-** It already happened as President Ghani left the country on August 15 amid the growing violence in Kabul. Also, the Taliban assured that there will be no peace in Afghanistan until Ghani is removed.
- **Taliban Takeover-** Taliban's forces are capable of isolating Afghanistan's capital in 30 days and take it over soon.
- **Refugee Crisis-** The ongoing war between the Taliban and the federal government will force the citizens to flee from the country.
- **Increase in Terrorism-** As the Taliban gains momentum, the possibility of regional and international terrorism will increase.
- **Full-scale civil war-** Even though currently, Afghans will not be able to clean their own mess,

the possibility of civil war will continue.

8. Who will pay the price of the Afghanistan crisis?

The most vulnerable section and the most impacted one will be the –

- **Afghan Youths**
- **Curbs on women's human rights**
- **Restrictions on freedom of the Press**
- **Progress made in the fight against global terrorism**

Phase 2: What happened in Afghanistan between 1989 to 2001?

Taliban had achieved its first success in 1994 under the patronage of Naseerullah Babar and Maulana Fazlur Rahman. When the ultraconservative political and religious factions consolidated their power in Afghanistan, they tried to impose their own versions of the Sharia and indoctrinated people.

1. Taliban in Afghanistan

The Taliban, during the five-year period, captured 80% of the areas. Between 1996 to 2001, only Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the USE recognized the government which had raised the legitimacy of the Taliban government in Kabul.

2. Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan between 1996 to 2001- Key events

- Burhanuddin Rabbani had served as the President of Afghanistan from 1992 to 2001. Rabbani was in exile from 1996 to 2001.
- Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was founded by Mohammed Omar in 1996.
- Mohammed Najibullah became the President of Afghanistan from 1987 until his resignation in 1992.
- Sibghatullah Mojaddedi started serving as the interim President after the fall of Najibullah's government.

- From 1992 to 2001, Burhanuddin Rabbani served as the President of Afghanistan

3. Curbs on basic civil rights under a fundamentalist regime

- Sports for women were not allowed
- Men were also required to wear a head covering
- Girls were prevented from going to schools
- Women were denied the right to work
- Beard trimming for men were banned
- Ban on TV
- Legal executions took place in public

Phase 3- War between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, 1979 to 1989

On December 24, 1979, the USSR (undivided Russia) entered Afghanistan and after that, nearly 1,00,000 soldiers of the Soviet Union took control of the major cities in the country.

1. Operation Cyclone by the US against Soviets in Afghanistan

The former President of the US Jimmy Carter started 'Operation Cyclone'. It was the code name of the CIA Programme to arm and finance the Afghan Mujahideen in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. The move was against the Soviet Union amid the cold war.

Thousands of tons of weaponry worth billions of US dollars were delivered to Mujahideen to combat the Soviets. Reportedly, more than \$20 billion in US funds was funneled into Afghanistan to finance Afghan rebels.

2. Soviet Union withdrawal from Afghanistan

In 1989, Soviet forces started the withdrawal from Afghanistan after a 9-year conflict. During the fight between the anti-communist Islamic guerrillas and the Afghan communist government, fifteen thousand Soviet soldiers were killed and the war leads to the collapse of the government in 1992.

Phase 4- Afghanistan before the 1979 invasion, its powerful tribes

In the last 300 years, Pashtun has run Afghanistan. The Pashtun community in Afghanistan is 42% of the Afghan population, Hazara 9%, Tajik 27%, and Uzbek 9%.

1. Saur Revolution: 1978 coup

- Hafizullah Amin, Afghan Communist revolutionary, led the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan had toppled Afghan President Mohammed Daoud Khan's government in the country in April 1978. Hafizullah was recognized as the architect of the Saur Revolution.
- Daoud Khan was President of Afghanistan from 1973 to 1978.
- After that, Nur Muhammad Taraki was a far-left People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan who had served as the President of the country from 1978 to 1979.

2. Afghanistan in 40 years

For a period of over 40 years, during the Cold war era, the fight between the eastern bloc and the western bloc (Communism vs Capitalism) was head to head.

The mountainous landlocked country, even 40 years later, is still in mess and is as divided as ever.

The Kingdom of Afghanistan was ruled by Mohammed Zahir Shah between 1933-1973, marking a unique phase for South Asia politics.

The next 40 years were very turbulent for Afghanistan. First, during the Soviet withdrawal, the United States took a different position.

Secondly, after 9/11, the US foreign policy took 360 degrees turn when former President GW Bush announced the war against terrorism.

Thirdly, after the announcement of US troops' withdrawal, the future of Afghans remains as uncertain as ever.

What do the people of Afghanistan want?

Half of the Afghans prefer the Taliban and hope that the Islamist group will take over soon, while

the other half do not want to live under the Taliban rule.

In September 1996, when the fundamentalist organisation rose to power, the Taliban government did not have recognition and support from many countries so it was pushed into the corner. However, this time, China, the US, Turkey, and other global players have different positions.

Is it possible to end 40 years of turmoil? Conclusion

With Afghanistan being riddled with conflict over the last 4 decades, peace talks are the only way out for the war-torn nation.

The country requires global forces to come together to announce their rejection of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

PM Modi announces 'fortified rice' under all schemes by 2024 – Know its significance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2021, during his Independence speech, announced rice distributed under several government schemes including the Public Distribution System (PDS) and mid-day meals (MDM) in schools will be fortified by 2024.

In his speech from the Red Fort on the 75th Independence Day, PM Modi addressed that Malnutrition and lack of essential nutrients in children and women living in poor conditions pose a major obstacle towards their development.

Significance of fortified rice in India

- The fortification of rice is a government's countermeasure to tackle malnutrition in the country. As per the Food Ministry, fortified rice is a cost-effective strategy to increase mineral and vitamin content in diets.
- The Indian government has decided that "Rice being distributed through all government schemes will be fortified by 2024, be it the rice being sold at the ration shops, or the rice being served to children in their mid-day meals".
- The fortification of rice in a country like India is significant. The Food Ministry states that every third child stunted and every second woman is anaemic in the country.
- As per the Global Hunger Index (GHI), India ranks 94 out of 107 countries and finds itself in the 'serious hunger' category.
- Fortification of rice in India is also significant in countering malnutrition as the government distributes over 300 lakh tonnes of rice through various government schemes under the National Food Security Act, 2013, to address malnutrition.
- For 2021-22, approximately 328 lakh tonnes of rice allocated by the Centre is being distributed through schemes under the National Food Security Act such as Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mid-Day Meals (MDM), and Targeted Public Distribution System (PDS).
- India produces over one-fifth of the world's rice. The country is also the largest consumer of rice,

accounting for 6.8 kilograms per month as per capita rice consumption.

What is the Fortification of rice?

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) defines fortification as deliberately increase the essential micronutrients content in food to enhance its nutritional quality to offer public health benefits with minimal health risk.
- As FSSAI parameters, 1-kg fortified rice contains iron (28mg-42.5mg), Vitamin B12 (0.75-1.25 microgram) and folic acid (75-125 microgram). Additionally, per-kg rice may also be fortified to increase the micronutrients level, single or in combination such as Vitamin B6 (1.5mg-2.5mg), Vitamin B3 (12.5mg-20mg), Vitamin B2 (1.25mg-1.75mg), Vitamin B1 (1mg-1.5mg), Vitamin A (500-750 microgram RE), and zinc(10mg-15mg).

Fortification of Rice and its Distribution under PDS

- The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution in 2019-20 had launched a centrally sponsored pilot scheme on 'Fortification of Rice and its Distribution under PDS' for three years with a budget of Rs 174.64 crores.
- The pilot scheme includes 15 districts across 15 states, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh.
- As per the Food Ministry, Gujarat and Maharashtra along with 6 states started distributing fortified rice under the PDS scheme, approximately 2.03 LMT fortified rice till June 2021. Four more states are expected to begin the distribution by September 2021.
- From April 1, 2022, the Food Ministry has proposed including 250 high-burden districts under the scheme.
- The Government of India funds the scheme in the ratio of 90:10 for the North-Eastern, Hilly, and Island regions and 75:25 for the rest.

Rice Fortification in other countries

- The Food Ministry states that seven countries in the world have mandated rice fortification including the USA, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.

Navroz Mubarak 2021: History, Significance and other details about Parsi New Year

The **Parsi New Year** is a regional festival which is observed on the first day of Farvardin which is the first month of the Zoroastrian Calendar. **The festival is also known as Navroz which is derived from the Persian words 'Nav' and 'Roz' which means a 'New Day'.**

The celebrations for Parsi New Year occur around the Spring Equinox around March 21 every year.

However, the Parsi Community in India follows the Shahenshahi Calendar which does not account for leap years, and hence the celebration for Navroz has now shifted for 200 days from its original date of the Spring equinox.

In India, the Parsi New Year is celebrated later in July and August. Navroz 2021 in India will be celebrated on August 16, 2021.

Navroz Mubarak! People of Parsi community have made immense contribution to several aspects of India's growth & development. May the Parsi New Year bring unity, prosperity & happiness in everyone's life and further strengthen the spirit of harmony & fraternity among our citizens.

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 16, 2021](#)

Parsi New Year History

One of the earliest known monotheistic faiths, Zoroastrianism is practiced by Parsis. The creation of the faith dates back to 3,500 years ago in ancient Iran by prophet Zarathustra.

Zoroastrianism was the official religion of Persia (now Iran) from 650 BCE until the emergence of Islam in the 7th century. It was also the most significant faiths in the ancient world for over 1,000 years.

When the Islamic troops invaded Persia, several Zoroastrians fled to the lands like Gujarat in India and Pakistan. The Parsis are the largest single group in India, with an estimated 2.6 million Zoroastrians worldwide.

Significance

The Bastnai/Fasli Calendar, which marks the beginning day of the year on the Spring Equinox, was used by the Zoroastrians in several Middle Eastern Countries including Iran to celebrate the Persian New Year.

Many people and cultures in Persia, despite the fact that they are not Zoroastrians, celebrate Navroz which is a popular festival.

Navroz Mubarak: How the day is celebrated

On Parsi New Year, Parsis clean their homes and decorate them with flowers and rangoli and invite guests for the festivities.

The Parsi community attends the Fire Temple after breakfast and is dressed in traditional Parsi costume. They conduct a prayer known as Jashan to convey thanks to the Lord, seek pardon, and pray for prosperity. As offerings on this day water, milk, flowers, fruits, and sandalwood are placed in the sacred fire.

In addition, individuals also mark the Parsi New year by making philanthropic contributions on this day.

Watch Independence Day 2021 Speech Live Streaming: When and Where to watch Prime Minister Modi speech live

When and where to watch PM Modi Independence Day Speech live: Prime Minister Modi will address the nation on the occasion of **India's 75th Independence Day** from Red Fort on August 15, 2021.

This Independence Day speech will be Prime Minister Modi's eight consecutive address as the Prime Minister of India since 2014. Elaborate security arrangements have already been made by the Delhi Police on Independence Day across the Red Fort and National Capital of India.

Prime Minister Modi will likely address the nation on Independence Day 2021 at 7.30 am on August 15. Red Fort has also already been enclosed for the public because of Independence Day.

PM Modi will deliver his speech on the 75th Independence Day of India after unfurling the National Flag at the rampart of the Red Fort.

While addressing the nation on Independence Day, **Prime Minister Modi is likely to talk about the steps taken by the government to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and the welfare schemes of the ruling government.**

Where to watch PM Modi Independence Day speech?

Prime Minister Modi's speech on Independence Day will be live broadcasted by Doordarshan and All India Radio in the morning of August 15, 2021.

There are also several other platforms from where one can listen and watch PM Modi's address on Independence Day.

Watch Independence Day Speech and celebrations on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook

1. Doordarshan will live stream PM Modi's speech and the entire Independence Day event on its YouTube Channel.
2. FM Gold Channel of All India Radio can also be tuned in for the Independence Day Speech. AIR will also broadcast the speech by PM Modi live on its YouTube channel.
3. The live link of PM Modi's Independence Day Speech will be available on the Twitter handle of Prime Minister Modi.
4. The live broadcast of Independence Day celebrations will also be available on PIB India's Twitter Handle.
5. Apart from this, watch the live Independence Day speech by PM Modi and the live broadcast of Independence Day 2021 on the Facebook pages of AIR, Doordarshan, and Prime Minister Modi.

Live webcast of Independence Day 2021 celebrations on app by Defence Ministry

The live webcast of the Independence Day 2021 celebrations will also be available on the website and the app developed by the Defence Ministry. The name of the website is **indianidc2021.mod.gov.in**.

As the nation gears up for the 75th anniversary of the Independence Day, which also coincides with the Amrut Mahotsav, the Ministry of Defence will be bringing the celebrations directly to your phones and other other electronic gadgets. pic.twitter.com/vamRRJgGRE

— Rajnath Singh (@rajnathsingh) [August 12, 2021](#)

Independence Day 2021: PM Modi invites Indian Olympics Contingent

Prime Minister Modi on the occasion of India's 75th Independence Day has invited the entire Indian Olympics Contingent to the Red Fort as special guests for their outstanding performance in Olympics 2020. PM Modi will also meet the athletes and will interact with them.

Independence Day 2021: 'Nation First, Always First' theme for 75th year of India's Independence

Independence Day 2021 theme: The theme of India's 75th Independence Day celebrations will be '**Nation First, Always First**'. The country will celebrate its 75th year of Independence at Red Fort from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on August 15, 2021.

All the athletes who won medals at Tokyo Olympics 2020 have also been sent special invites to attend Independence Day 2021.

Like Independence Day was celebrated in 2020, this year's celebrations will also be restricted to the public and no cultural performances and events will be staged by the children. As per an officer, a group of NCC Cadets will be attending the event.

Reportedly, during the Independence Day 2021 celebrations, from paintings to floral arrangements, all aspects of the programmes will bear the 'Nation First, Always First' theme.

Precautions during Independence Day 2021 celebrations:

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs, after the recent drone attacks in Jammu, has asked the Delhi Police to strictly follow the Standard Operating Procedures for drone operations.
- A Police Officer while talking about the Independence Day celebrations informed that the police have increased the total number of secured rooftops from which the Red Fort or the potential route to PM's cavalcade is remotely visible.
- Personnel have also been directed to take down the drones or the aerial objects in case anyone sees one approaching the Red Fort.
- A makeshift wall of containers has also been erected at the periphery of the Red Fort. It will rule out any form of security breach owing to the ongoing farmers' protest.

President Kovind addresses India on Independence Day, says we must strive for more equality in an unequal world

President of India Ram Nath Kovind addressed the nation at 7 PM on the eve of 75th Independence Day on August 14, 2021.

The President's speech on eve of Independence Day will be broadcasted from 7 PM on the entire national network of All India Radio. The address by the President on eve of Independence Day will also be telecasted over all the channels of Doordarshan in Hindi followed by the English version.

The broadcast of President Kovind's address in Hindi and English on Doordarshan will be followed by the broadcast in regional languages by the regional channels of DD. All India Radio will broadcast the regional language versions at 9.30 PM on its regional networks.

Watch LIVE: President Kovind addresses the nation on the eve of the 75th Independence Day.

<https://t.co/aFdghwNwJ>

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

President Ram Nath Kovind addresses nation: Highlights

- President Ram Nath Kovind on the occasion of 75th Independence Day extended his greetings to all the Indians living in India and abroad.
- While talking about the 75th Independence Day, President mentioned that this year's Independence Day has special significance as this year we all are celebrating Amrit Mahotsav of Independence.

Happy Independence Day to all Indians living in India & abroad. This day is a day of great joy & happiness for all of us: President Ram Nath Kovind in his address to the nation

pic.twitter.com/WVrW8U5iPR

— ANI (@ANI) [August 14, 2021](#)

- President Ram Nath Kovind while addressing the nation on the eve of Independence Day

mentioned that this day is a festival of freedom for all of us. Our dream of freedom was realized through the struggles of many generations of known and unknown freedom fighters.

Independence Day is a festival of freedom for us. Our dream of freedom was realized through the struggle of many generations of known and unknown freedom fighters. They made great sacrifices. I bow in respect to the pious memory of those brave martyrs: President Ram Nath Kovind pic.twitter.com/vhTBTza9VZ

— ANI (@ANI) [August 14, 2021](#)

- While talking about India's Independence, President Kovind highlighted that the speciality of India's freedom movement was that it was based on Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and truth.
- Looking back at these 75 years, India has made a lot of progress. In the recent Olympics 2020, Indian participants made the country proud as they made history. India's daughters also achieved the international feat in these games.
- Talking about the impact of Coronavirus on the country, President informed that like last year, this year as well Independence Day celebrations will be toned down. He mentioned the pain that he feels for those several people who lost their lives during the Second wave of COVID-19.
- The intensity of the COVID-19 pandemic has come down in India, but the virus has still not gone away. President added that we are yet to come out of the devastating effects of its recurrence this year.

The intensity of the pandemic has come down, but the coronavirus has not yet gone away. We are yet to come out of the devastating effects of its recurrence this year.

pic.twitter.com/ruehjTKozF

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- Talking about the Corona warriors, President Ram Nath Kovind acknowledged that doctors, nurses, health workers, administrators, and others have risked everything to contain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our corona warriors, the doctors, nurses and health workers, the administrators, and others, risked everything to contain the impact of the second wave. pic.twitter.com/nr9OHeXBJn

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- President Kovind while addressing the nation on the eve of Independence Day urged all the

eligible citizens of India who are yet to get vaccinated to do so at the earliest and also inspire others. He mentioned that vaccines are the best possible protection science has offered to us.

I urge all eligible citizens who are yet to get vaccinated to do so at the earliest and also inspire others. pic.twitter.com/hK9pMyWR3I

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- Talking about the development of the agricultural sector in India, President in his address noted that rural India, particularly the agricultural sector has kept growing against all the odds.

It is heartening to note that rural India, particularly the agriculture sector has kept growing against all odds. pic.twitter.com/og2StzcvgZ

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- The Central Government, with an abiding faith in the inherent capacity of the economy, has opened up health, defence, civil aviation, power, and other sectors. If there is an improvement in ease of doing business then it has a positive impact on the ease of living as well.

If there is an improvement in the ease of doing business, it has a positive impact on the ease of living for all. pic.twitter.com/548QH73zau

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- While highlighting India's role in protecting the climate, President Kovind mentioned that the country is proud of not only adhering to the Paris Climate agreement but also for doing more than what the country has committed to protect the climate.

India is proud of not only adhering to the Paris climate agreement but doing more than what the country has committed to protect the climate. pic.twitter.com/g8ylclks3r

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- India lives in its villages which cannot be allowed to lag behind in the development. The psychological distance between rural and urban India is now much less as compared to the past. For the development of rural areas, campaigns such as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi are also being implemented for the farmers of the country.

India lives in its villages which cannot be allowed to lag behind in development. pic.twitter.com/nuzqJnfvIA

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

- India must strive for more equality in an unequal world and for more justice in unjust

circumstances. The Constitution of India neatly summarizes the dreams in four words- Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

We must strive for more equality in an unequal world, more justice in unjust circumstances.

pic.twitter.com/DexiRf33eA

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav

To commemorate India's 75 years of Independence, the Central Government has taken up an initiative 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'. It was inaugurated by PM Modi and he flagged off Dandi March from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad on March 12, 2021.

75th Independence Day: President Kovind hosted Indian Olympics Contingent over High Tea

President Ram Nath Kovind on August 14, 2021, hosted the Indian Olympics Contingent over a high tea at Rashtrapati Bhavan cultural center.

President Ram Nath Kovind hosted the Indian Contingent of the Tokyo Olympics 2020 over a 'High Tea at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre. The President interacted with the players and said that the entire country is proud of our Olympians for bringing glory to the nation.

pic.twitter.com/3gbDOW9tFY

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 14, 2021](#)

As per the statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan, President will host the Indian Contingent of Tokyo Olympics 2020.

India had put up its best performance in the recently-concluded Tokyo Olympics, winning seven medals including one Gold in the Javelin throw.

Independence Day: Indian Army to scale 75 mountain passes

In order to instill a sense of pride and confidence among the Indian citizens, the teams of the Indian Army will scale 75 mountain passes to mark the 75 years of India's Independence.

The passes will include Stakpochan Pass in the Kargil Region, Saserla Pass in the Ladakh region, Satopanth, Uttarakhand, Harshil, Sikkim, Phim Karla, and Point 4993, Tawang Region of Arunachal Pradesh.

Independence Day 2021: Five nations that celebrate Independence Day on August 15

Independence Day 2021: India will celebrate its 75th independence day on August 15, 2021. India gained its independence after a long struggle through the persistent efforts by the Indian freedom fighters who forced the British Raj to finally leave India.

The theme of India's 75th Independence Day is '*Nation first, always first.*'

India's independence followed its partition and creation of Pakistan, which celebrates its independence just a day before India, on August 14th.

However, India is not the only nation to celebrate Independence Day on August 15. There are five other nations that celebrate their Independence Day on August 15. Here is a full list.

Nations that celebrate Independence Day on August 15:

1. Bahrain

Bahrain declared independence from British Rule on August 15, 1971 though the Shah of Iran was still claiming historical sovereignty over Bahrain. Bahrain eventually signed a new treaty of friendship with the United Kingdom and later joined the United Nations and the Arab league.

2. North Korea & South Korea

- North Korea and South Korea were formed after the division of Korea at the end of World War II in 1945 after the surrender of Japan.

- Japan's surrender had led to the division of Korea at the 38th parallel, with the Soviet Union occupying the north and the United States occupying the south.

- However, both Soviet Union and the United States failed to agree on a way to unify the country. They established two separate governments in 1948, the Soviet-aligned Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Western-aligned Republic of Korea. Each of the two governments claimed to be the legitimate government of the whole of Korea.

- Kim Il-sung led North Korea until his passing in 1994 and he was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il's third son Kim Jong-un was introduced as his successor in September 2010. Kim Jong-un formally took over the power after his father's passing on December 17, 2011.

- South Korea was also formed with the Japanese surrender on September 2, 1945. Both South Korea and North Korea are entirely different countries, despite having same people and the same peninsula.

3. Liechtenstein

Liechtenstein, which is one of the smallest countries of the world, gained independence from German rule in 1866. The nation celebrates August 15 as its Independence Day since 1940. The government of the Principality of Liechtenstein officially had declared August 15 to be the country's national holiday on August 5, 1940.

4. Republic of Congo

The Republic of Congo was under French colonial rule since the late 1800s. It finally gained independence on August 15, 1960. The country is bordered by Gabon to the west, Cameroon to its northwest and Central African and Central African Republic to the northeast and DR Congo to the southeast.

Independence Day 2021: 5 Interesting Facts You Need to Know!

Independence Day 2021: India will celebrate its 75th Independence Day on August 15, 2021. India attained freedom on August 15, 1947, after ending 200-years of British rule.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will kick off grand celebrations on August 15, 2021, from Red Fort. All central ministries and concerned departments will present projects and programmes to showcase India's development, governance, progress and policy, and technological reforms.

This year's celebration of 75 years of independence, India will launch year-long celebrations of independence starting from August 2021, including from the launch of a website with a Virtual Reality (VR) feature for the first time to the Indian Army hoisting the tallest National Flag in J&K.

The theme of India's 75th Independence Day celebrations is '**Nation First, Always First**'.

5 Interesting Facts

India's Independence Day

2021 Celebrations

1. Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav: Celebrations began 75 weeks before 75th Independence Day

- Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav is an intensive, countrywide initiative of the Government of India to celebrate 75 years of Independence of India from 200-years of British Rule. The Mahotsav is an embodiment of India's development, governance, progress and policy, technological reforms, and economic identity.

- PM Narendra Modi flagged off the Padyatra (Freedom March) from Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad while inaugurating the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav on March 12, 2021, which is 75 weeks prior to 75th Independence Day. The Mahotsav will run throughout 2022 and end on August 15, 2023.

2. In a first, Indian govt unveils a website with VR feature for 75th Independence Day

- Defence Secretary Dr Ajay Kumar on August 3, 2021, unveiled a website to mark the 75th

Independence Day celebrations across the country.

- The website (<https://indianidc2021.mod.gov.in/>) aims to connect Indians from across the world to participate in the celebrations of India's Independence Day.
- The website is installed with a Virtual Reality (VR) feature for the first time that will showcase the real-time celebrations from the Red Fort in New Delhi in a 360-degrees format. People can access the show with or without a VR gadget.

3. Indian Army installs 100-ft tall Indian National Flag in J&K

- The Indian Army on August 10, 2021, installed a 100-ft tall Indian National Flag in Gulmarg, Jammu & Kashmir. The Armed Forces hoisted the flag on August 15, 2021, to mark the 75th Independence Day in the country.
- Lt. Gen. Y K Joshi, Army Commander Northern Command, conducted the ceremony.

4. Indian Diaspora Organization to Hoist Biggest Indian National Flag at Times Square

- Federation of Indian Associations – New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut in the US will hoist the biggest Indian National Flag at Times Square in New York on August 15, 2021.
- The Indian National Flag will measure 6 feet by 10 feet and 25 feet tall. The Indian Association had the first time unfurled the Indian tricolor at Times Square in New York on August 15, 2021.

5. India shares its Independence Day with other countries that got independent on August 15

- Liechtenstein**, the smallest nation in the world celebrates its Independence Day on August 15 to commemorate its freedom from German rule in 1866.
- South Korea and North Korea** celebrates National Liberation Day of Korea to commemorate their independence of the Korean Peninsula from the Japanese occupation by the US and Soviet Forces till 1945.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo** celebrates the Congolese National Day to mark its independence from France after 80 years of subjugation in 1960.
- Bahrain** declared freedom from British rule in 1971 after a UN survey of the Bahraini population.

Kaziranga becomes India's first National Park with satellite phones worth Rs. 16 lakh

Kaziranga National Park (KZP) in Assam has become the **first National Park in India to be equipped with satellite phones.**

In a first-of-its-kind move to provide assistance to prevent poaching and ensure coordinated functioning, the officials of Kaziranga National Park have been provided with satellite phones.

The Chief Secretary of Assam Jishnu Barua on handed over 10 satellite phones to the forest personnel of Kaziranga National Park. The decision was taken at a meeting which was chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the National Park on May 27.

The meeting was also attended by Parimal Suklaibaidya, Minister for Environment and Forest, minister Atul Bora and Keshab Mahanta, director of Kaziranga National Park, deputy commissioners of adjoining districts as well as other senior department forest officials.

Significance:

Kaziranga National Park which has been spread over a massive 430 sq km area and divided into six ranges in upper Assam, has certain areas with poor to no connectivity.

The satellite phones, given to the officials of Kaziranga Parks, which draw signals from the satellites instead of mobile towers will ensure connectivity in most of the remote locations. The move will also boost anti-poaching measures undertaken by the park.

Key Highlights:

- The Assam State Disaster Management Authority has procured the 10 satellite phones for the National Park at an estimated cost of Rs. 16 lakh.
- BSNL will be the service provider and the park authorities will bear the monthly expenses.
- BSNL has also trained the forest personnel to operate the satellite phones in the shadow areas where the mobile phones do not function.

Satellite phones give an edge to forest personnel:

Forest and Environment Minister Parimal Suklaibaidya thanked the Chief Minister of Assam for his promptness in providing the satellite phones.

He thanked the CM for realizing the communication bottlenecks and taking prompt action to provide satellite phones to park officials. He added that these phones will be immensely useful for coordination as they are a necessity in the sprawling Kaziranga National Park.

The satellite phones to the forest personnel will give an edge to them over the poachers and also during the emergencies like floods.

Delhi High Court to resume physical hearings from September 6 – All you need to know

Delhi High Court on August 12, 2021, announced that the physical hearings in the High Court to be resumed in a restricted manner effective from September 6, 2021, and from August 31, 2021, in the district courts.

The High Court further stated that the physical hearings in the High Court and district courts are subject to the scale and magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic in the capital.

The orders further stated that the courts shall permit hybrid or video conferencing hearing if any parties make a request to such effect.

Physical Hearings in the High Court: Key Points

- As per the directions of Hon'ble Chief Justice, a suitable number of Benches of the High Court shall be constituted for physical hearings.
- The remaining Benches shall continue to take up matters through video conferencing as per the existing system of listing.
- The courts of Registrar and Joint Registrar (Judicial) of the High Court shall take up matters as per their respective cause lists w.e.f September 6, 2021.
- A roster shall be drawn for the above courts to enable to hold physical hearings once a week w.e.f September 6, 2021.
- Regarding urgent matters, the High Court said that all the Benches of Delhi High Court, as well as the Courts of Registrars and Joint Registrars (Judicial), will take up urgent matters through video conferencing as per the existing arrangement till September 3, 2021.
- Whereas non-urgent or pending routine matters from August 16 to September 3, 2021, stand adjourned en bloc.

Physical Hearings in District Courts and Family Courts: Key Points

- Physical hearings in the District Courts in Delhi will be resumed in a restricted manner from August 31, 2021, subject to the scale and magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Principal District and Sessions Judges, Principal Judge, Family Court are ordered to prepare a roster of judicial officers so that every judicial officer holds physical court once a week w.e.f August 31, 2021, while remaining shall take up matters through video-conferencing as per the existing arrangement.
- All the Principal District and Sessions Judges and Principal Judge, Family Court are to issue directions to ensure COVID-appropriate behavior and social distancing before entering the courts.
- All necessary arrangements to produce UTPs to be made in coordination with Prison and Lock-up authorities.

Courts exercising criminal jurisdiction during physical hearings

- The courts exercising criminal jurisdiction during the physical hearings will give top priority to the cases where the accused is in custody and to cases that are 5-years-old.

Courts exercising civil jurisdiction during physical hearings

- The courts exercising civil jurisdiction during physical hearings will give top priority to the cases which are more than 5-years-old or are time-bound.

Suspension of Delhi High Court during COVID-19

- The Delhi High Court on March 23, 2020, had suspended its functioning following the COVID-19 lockdown during the first wave. The court later resumed taking urgent matters through video conferencing and physical hearing of limited benches.
- The Delhi High Court on April 8, 2021, had again suspended its physical hearings till April 23, 2021, amid the second wave of the pandemic. The suspension was later extended on intervals.

US approves extra COVID-19 vaccine dose for people with weakened immunity

The United States on August 12, 2021 **authorized an extra dose of Covid vaccine for people with weakened immune systems.** The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulator granted emergency use authorisation for the third vaccine dose of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines.

This comes as the United States is witnessing a surge in Delta variant cases. Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock said that the United States has entered yet another wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The FDA has noted that immunocompromised people are particularly at risk for severe disease in the wake of Delta variant spread.

Who will receive the additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine?

The US FDA has stated that the additional vaccine dose of Pfizer and Moderna will be administered to organ transplant recipients or those with equivalent weakened immune systems such as people with certain cancers or disorders.

Will all vaccinated individuals require the additional vaccine dose?

As per Acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, those individuals who are fully vaccinated are adequately protected and do not need an additional dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at this time.

When will the additional vaccine dose be given?

Those with compromised immunity will receive the third dose of the vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna roughly 28 days after getting their second shot.

What about those who have received a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine?

The FDA has made no mention of those people with weakened immunity who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. They will not be getting the additional vaccine dose as of now.

Why is the additional vaccine dose required?

- As per US health authorities, it is harder for vaccines to work on an immune system suppressed

by certain medications and diseases hence, those patients don't always get the same protection as otherwise healthy people.

- Hence, the extra has been allowed to boost immunity in certain immunocompromised individuals who need extra protection from COVID-19.

- This comes amid ongoing debate among the US health authorities whether a third vaccine dose may be required.

- Around one million Americans may have had unauthorised third doses in an attempt to increase protection against Covid, as per US media.

- This comes after several countries, including France and Israel, made similar recommendations. Small studies also suggest that an extra dose may be a solution for at least some people.

Israel approves COVID-19 booster shots

- Israel recently became the first country to approve booster shots of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for those with a compromised immune system. This means that those with pre-existing medical conditions such as those who have recently undergone an organ transplant can receive a third shot of the vaccine to increase their protection against COVID-19.

- France and Germany have also recommended a third dose of the two-dose vaccines for organ transplant recipients, dialysis patients and those on strong immunosuppressant medication.

Background

The United States has approved the additional vaccine dose of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines at a time when there is a surge of the extra-contagious delta variant of COVID-19 in the country. The mutant version of the coronavirus has pushed up cases in the nation yet again, lead to a major surge in hospitalizations and deaths.

The US FDA's decision of the extra dose will only apply to the high-risk group, which is estimated to be no more than 3 percent of US adults. It is not the same as the booster that has been in consideration for the general population.

Over 619,000 people have died due to COVID-19 in the United States and the case numbers are rising sharply again in recent months due to the spread of the Delta variant, going up to a daily average of more than 100,000 cases, a level not seen since last year's surge.

Swachh Survekshan 2021: Indore becomes first 'Water Plus' certified city – All you need to know

Indore has been declared as the first 'Water Plus' certified city of India under the Swachh Survekshan 2021, said Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan on August 11, 2021.

Madhya Pradesh's Indore is the state's commercial capital and the country's cleanest city. CM Chouhan tweeted to express his heartiest congratulations to the citizens of Indore for exhibiting determination and dedication towards cleanliness.

Heartiest congratulations to the citizens of Indore as it becomes the first SBM Water+ certified city under [#SwachhSurvekshan2021](#). Indore has been an example for the whole nation for its determination and dedication towards cleanliness. May it continue bring glory to the state!

— Shivraj Singh Chouhan (@ChouhanShivraj) [August 11, 2021](#)

How did Indore become first 'Water Plus' certified city?

- Indore District Collector Manish Singh explained that as per the guidelines of the Water Plus Protocol of Swachh Survekshan, 5,624 domestic sewer outfalls and 1,746 public sewer outfalls in 25 small and big nullahs were tapped by the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) that helped in freeing Saraswati and Kanh rivers from the sewer lines in the city.
- Indore Civic Commissioner Pratibha Pal explained that approximately 110 million litres per day (MLD) treated water from the 7 sewerage treatment plants set up in the city is being used.
- 147 special types of urinals have also been set up in the city as per the guidelines of the Water Plus Protocol.
- Cleaning of ponds, wells, and all water bodies in the city is also conducted.

How is a city declared as Water Plus certified?

- The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in its protocol and toolkit states that a city can only be declared as Water Plus after the city has achieved a satisfactory level of treating the wastewater released from households, commercial establishments, etc, before releasing the

treated wastewater into the environment.

What is Swachh Survekshan?

- Swachh Survekshan is an annual survey of cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene in cities and towns across India.
- Swachh Survekshan was launched as a part of the Swachh Bharat Mission which aimed to make India clean and free of open defecation by October 2019.
- First Swachh Survekshan was held in 2016 across 73 cities. In 2020, the survey was held across 4,242 cities.
- Swachh Survekshan 2021 marks the completion of the 6th edition of the largest urban sanitation survey.

Water on moon? Chandrayaan-2 detects presence of water molecules on lunar surface

Chandrayaan-2, the second lunar mission of the Indian Space Research Organisation, has **detected the presence of water molecules on the moon**. Data obtained from the mission revealed the latest details.

In a paper co-authored by A S Kirankumar, former Chairman of ISRO, stated that imaging infrared spectrometre (IIRS) is one of the payloads onboard Chandrayaan -2, which has been placed in a 100 km polar orbit to acquire the global scientific data.

The latest development that came to light regarding Chandrayaan-2 has also been assumed as significant considering that the mission did not yield the desired results.

Presence of water molecules on the moon: What do we know?

The paper which was recently published in the Current Science journal stated that the initial data analysis from the imaging infrared spectrometre (IIRS) clearly demonstrates the presence of widespread lunar hydration and the unambiguous detection of OH and H₂O signatures on the Moon between 29°N and 62°N lat., after incorporating the physics-based thermal correction to reflectance data.

Plagioclase-rich rocks have also been found to have higher OH (hydroxyl) or possibly H₂O (water) molecules when compared to the mare regions, which were found to have more dominance of OH at the higher surface temperature.

Chandrayaan-2: India's second lunar mission

- Chandrayaan-2 which was planned to land on the South Pole of the moon was launched on July 22, 2019.
- It was the second lunar exploration mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), after Chandrayaan-1.
- Chandrayaan-2 consists of a lunar orbiter. It also included a Vikram lander and the Pragyan lunar rover, all of which were developed in India.
- However, lander Vikram hard landed on September 7 and crashed India's dream of becoming

the first nation to successfully land on the lunar surface in its maiden attempt.

- The orbiter of the Chandrayaan-2 mission has been working fine. It has also been sending data to Chandrayaan-1, the first lunar mission, showing evidence that there was water on the moon.

About Chandrayaan-1:

Chandrayaan-1 was the first Indian lunar probe under the Chandrayaan program. It was launched by ISRO in October 2008 and it operated until August 2009.

Chandrayaan-1 was a major boost to India's space program, as the country researched and developed its own technology in order to explore the moon. On November 8, 2008, the vehicle was inserted into the lunar orbit.

India's total installed renewable energy capacity crosses 100 GigaWatts

India's total installed renewable energy capacity has crossed the milestone of 100 GigaWatts. This was informed by the Power Ministry.

The total installed renewable energy capacity in India, excluding large hydro, has crossed the mile-stone of 100 GW. Today India stands at 4th position in the world in terms of installed RE capacity, 5th in solar and 4th in wind in terms of installed capacity: Ministry of Power

pic.twitter.com/ajRkKTRgq3

— ANI (@ANI) [August 12, 2021](#)

The Union Power and New and Renewable Energy Minister R K Singh said in a tweet that another landmark day in the history of the Indian Power Sector.

The Minister said, "Our installed Renewable Energy capacity (excluding large Hydro) has crossed 1,00,000 Megawatts. Under the visionary leadership of PM @narendramodi ji, we shall continue to be global leaders in Energy Transition."

He stated that the milestone of achieving 100 GigaWatts of installed renewable energy capacity is an important landmark in India's journey towards achieving its target of 450 GigaWatts by 2030.

Another landmark day in the history of the Indian Power Sector. Our installed Renewable Energy capacity (excluding large Hydro) has crossed 1,00,000 Megawatts. Under the visionary leadership of PM @narendramodi ji, we shall continue to be global leaders in Energy Transition.

— R. K. Singh (@RajKSinghIndia) [August 12, 2021](#)

Significance

India currently stands at the fourth position in the world in terms of installed renewable energy capacity.

India stands fifth in solar energy and fourth in terms of installed wind energy capacity.

India's total installed renewable energy capacity

- The Union Power Ministry stated that while 100 GigaWatts has been installed, 50 GigaWatts is under installation and 27 GigaWatt is under tendering.

- The Ministry said that if large hydro is included, the installed renewable energy capacity will increase to 146 GigaWatt.

The achievement of installed RE capacity of 100 GW is an important milestone in India's journey towards its target of 450 GW by 2030: Ministry of Power

— ANI (@ANI) [August 12, 2021](#)

India to double renewable energy capacity by 2022

- A forecast report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) had stated in 2017 that India's renewable energy capacity will be more than double by 2022.
- India's installed renewable energy capacity in 2017 was around 58.30 GW. The Indian government had then set the ambitious target of raising it to 175 GW by 2022, including 100 GigaWatts of solar energy and 60 GW of wind energy.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi while addressing the Climate Ambition Summit 2020 had highlighted that India's renewable energy capacity is the fourth largest in the world and it will reach 175 GigaWatts in 2022.
- PM Modi had also informed then that India has an even more ambitious target of achieving 450 GigaWatts of renewable energy capacity by the year 2030.
- India's installed solar energy capacity had alone grown from 2.63 Gigawatts to 36 Gigawatts in 2020.

Background

India is set to build the largest solar power park of 4.75 Gigawatt (Gw) in Rann of Kutch in Khavada, Gujarat. The renewable energy park will be built by NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd, a subsidiary of National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC).

NTPC is also developing India's biggest floating solar plant that will have a power generation capacity of 100MW in its thermal power plant at Ramagundam in Peddapalli district of Telangana.

COVID-19 origin: WHO forms new expert group to continue studies into origins of Coronavirus

The World Health Organisation informed that the next step in the search of the origins of COVID-19 will be the creation of a new advisory group. It will develop a global framework to study pathogens with pandemic potential.

WHO in a statement on August 12, 2021, said that **the International Scientific Advisory Group for origins of Novel pathogens, or SAGO**, will be a new advisory group for World Health Organisation.

The global health agency in July 2021 had proposed a second phase of studies into the origins of Coronavirus in China, including the audits of markets and laboratories in the city of Wuhan. Meanwhile, Beijing had rejected the proposal of WHO.

For [#COVID19](#) virus origins, The International Scientific Advisory Group for Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO) will support the rapid undertaking of recommended studies outlined in the March 2021 report.

— World Health Organization (WHO) (@WHO) [August 12, 2021](#)

Objective of new expert group by WHO

The agency will be responsible for advising the global health agency on the development of a global framework to systematically study the emergence of the future emerging pathogens with pandemic potential.

The statement further added that for SARS-CoV-2, the group will support the rapid undertaking of the recommended studies that were outlined in the March 2021 report.

WHO calls countries to depoliticize the situation:

The World Health Organisation, in a recently released statement, has called all the governments to depoliticize the COVID-19 situation.

[.@WHO](#) calls for all governments to depoliticize the situation and cooperate to accelerate the

#COVID19 origins studies, and importantly to work together to develop a common framework for future emerging pathogens of pandemic potential.

— Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (@DrTedros) [August 12, 2021](#)

The statement read that in order to move forward, **WHO calls all the governments to depoliticize the situation and cooperate to accelerate the origin studies of COVID-19 and most importantly work together to develop a common framework for the future emerging pathogens of pandemic potential.**

The global health agency also expressed hope that all the countries globally, including China, must collaborate and put in place the conditions for more missions to be sent to Wuhan to duly probe the 'lab hypothesis'.

Probe into COVID-19 origin: What happened till now?

The first World Health Organisation fact-finding mission to China's Wuhan had released its report in March 2021. Wuhan in China was the first city in the world where the first COVID-19 outbreak was reported in late 2019.

A WHO-led team of scientists and researchers had also struggled to get a clear picture of what research China was conducting beforehand. The team faced constraints during its visit to China and also had little power to conduct thorough and impartial research. Ultimately there was no conclusion regarding the probe into COVID-19 origin in China.

Background:

The World Health Organisation had declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

According to John Hopkins University, to date, more than 205 million people have been infected with the infection worldwide, and more than 4.3 million died.

SCO Agriculture Ministers Meeting: India's agriculture sector performed well even during COVID-19

SCO Agriculture Ministers meeting was organized virtually in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on August 12, 2021, on strengthening cooperation in food security and nutrition especially in this challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar during the 6th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Agriculture Ministers Meeting said, "Agriculture has always been a high priority for India. India's agriculture sector performed well even during the severe Covid-19 pandemic".

The meeting reflected on the possibility that COVID 19 pandemic may have impacted food security and supply chain, therefore close interaction and cooperation among countries holds significant importance to ensure the functioning of the food supply chain to safeguard food security and nutritional intake.

The Indian delegation at the 6th SCO Agriculture Ministers Meeting was led by Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shobha Karandlaje, and other senior officials.

Minister of Agriculture of Tajikistan, Ziyozoda Sulaymon Rizoi, Chairman of the Food Security Committee under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan Fayzullozoda Muhammadsaid Ubaydullo, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China Tang Renjian, FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, and SCO Secretary-General Norov Vladimir Imamovich attended the meeting.

6th SCO Agriculture Ministers' meeting: Key highlights from India's agriculture sector

- India's agriculture sector performed well even during the severe Covid-19 pandemic. Food production and exports have registered significant growth, in turn contributing to global food security.

- The Government has implemented several initiatives to develop innovative technologies and enable their dissemination from Lab to Land to empower rural youth and farmers.
- With an aim to double farmer's income by 2022, the Government has launched several programs to:
 - (i) create new infrastructure for irrigation,
 - (ii) enhance optimal utilization of water resources,
 - (iii) conserve soil fertility with balanced use of fertilizers,
 - (iv) provide connectivity from farm to market,
 - (v) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) linkage besides building infrastructure, organic farming, etc.

India has achieved several milestones towards success in agriculture sector: Agricultural Minister

- India is a leading producer of several food commodities like vegetables, fruits, cereals, milk, eggs, and fish.
- In addition to the Green Revolution, the White revolution, the Blue revolution, the Public Distribution System, and the Price Support System for farmers are unmatched in the World.

India efforts to ensure food security and curb malnutrition

- Government is determined to attain UN's Sustainable Development Goal 2 of End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- India has been able to become self-sufficient and accumulate surplus in food grains with the help of the vision of policymakers, agricultural scientists, and farmers in the country.
- To curb the issue of malnutrition in the country, consumption of bio-fortified staple crops and diets are being promoted to provide micronutrient-rich intake.
- With a tremendous growth trajectory in the field of agriculture, "India will continue to share best practices and build capacities of other developing countries, both bilaterally as well as through

collaboration with international organizations to enable them to also become self-sufficient and to ensure food security,” said India’s Union Agriculture Minister Tomar at the SCO meeting.

India and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- India has been a permanent member of the SCO since 2017 and has exhibited a keen interest in honoring its relationship with SCO to promote multilateral, political, security, economic and people-to-people interaction in the region.

Investor Summit 2021: PM Modi launches National Automobile Scrappage Policy

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched **National Automobile Scrappage Policy** through video conferencing during the Investor Summit in Gujarat on August 13, 2021.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari stated during the launch of the policy that around 99 percent of recovery of metal waste can be done with regular scrapping. He said that it will bring down the cost of raw material by approx 40 percent.

He said that it will make the components less expensive and increase competitiveness in the international market. He added saying that with increased sales of automobiles, the government will get a profit of Rs 30,000-40,000 cr in GST.

The Minister said that the state government will also get a profit of Rs 30,000-40,000 cr in GST.

As per an estimate, with increased sale of automobiles, Govt will get a profit of Rs 30,000-40,000 cr in GST. State Govts will also get a profit of Rs 30,000-40,000 cr in GST: Union Min Nitin Gadkari at launch of National Automobile Scrappage Policy at Investor Summit in Gujarat

— ANI (@ANI) [August 13, 2021](#)

PM Modi at Investor Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said while addressing the event that the manner in which technology is changing, be it our lifestyle or our economy, there will be a lot of changes in both of them. He said that amid these changes, it is important to protect our environment, our land, our resources, our raw material.

The Prime Minister said that we are about to enter the 75th year of Independence and the next 25 years are very important for the country. He said *"in these 25 years, changes are going to take place in our way of working, in our daily lives, in our businesses."*

The manner in which technology is changing, be it our lifestyle or our economy - there will be a lot of changes in both of them. Amid these changes, it is also important to protect our environment, our land, our resources, our raw material: PM Narendra Modi

— ANI (@ANI) [August 13, 2021](#)

PM Modi said that the effort is to make development a sustainable one, an environment-friendly one. He said, *"we are experiencing the challenges of climate change. So, in the interest of its citizens, India has to take major steps."*

PM Modi stated that we can work on technology and innovation in the future but the natural resources we get from mother earth are not in our hands. "So, on one hand, India is looking for new possibilities through Deep Ocean Mission & on the other hand, it is also encouraging Circular Economy," PM Modi said.

The effort is to make development a sustainable one, an environment-friendly one. We are experiencing the challenges of climate change. So, in the interest of its citizens, India has to take major steps: PM Narendra Modi at Investors Summit in Gujarat

— ANI (@ANI) [August 13, 2021](#)

Investor Summit: Key Highlights

- The Investor Summit was organized by the Gujarat government and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to attract investment to set up vehicle scrapping infrastructure under the Vehicle Scrapping Policy, as per the notification released by Prime Minister's Office (PMO).
- The Investor Summit is expected to draw focus on the synergies presented by the ship-breaking industry at Alang, for the development of an integrated scrapping hub
- It saw participation from potential investors, industry experts and concerned central and state government ministries.

About Vehicle Scrapping Policy

- The Vehicle Scrapping Policy has been introduced to create an eco-system to phase out old, unfit and polluting vehicles in an environmentally friendly and safe manner.
- The policy aims to bring transformational change in the automobile sector by reducing vehicular emissions of pollutants. The policy was first announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2021 during her budget speech at the Parliament.
- Under the policy, all personal vehicles will have to undergo fitness tests in automated centres after 20 years while commercial vehicles will have to undergo the fitness test after 15 years.

Vehicle Scrapping Policy: Objective

The main objective of the Vehicle Scrapping Policy is to phase out vehicles older than 15 or 20 years to reduce urban pollution levels. The private vehicles will be de-registered after 20 years under the policy if found unfit and commercial vehicles will be de-registered after 15 years if they fail to meet the fitness requirement.

Taliban claims capture of Kandahar, second-largest city in Afghanistan

Taliban on August 13, 2021 claimed capture of **Kandahar, the second-largest city in Afghanistan**. Kandahar is the twelfth provincial capital to fall to the Taliban, among the total 34 provincial capitals.

Kandahar has fallen after more than two months of fighting. All districts except one is under Taliban control in southern Kandahar province.

A Taliban spokesperson tweeted saying, ***"Kandahar is completely conquered. The Mujahideen reached Martyrs' Square in the city."*** The Afghan government forces appeared to have withdrawn en masse to a military facility outside the city.

Kandahar's fall strategic victory for Taliban

- The fall of Kandahar is a strategic victory, as it is home of the Taliban. Mullah Omar, the founder and first emir of the Taliban had begun his takeover of Afghanistan from Kandahar in the 1990s.
- Mullah Omar had ruled from 1996 to 2001 from Kandahar. With the fall of Kandahar, three other cities - Lashkar Gah, Tarin Kot, and Qalat- are expected to fall at any time.
- Taliban has already claimed that it has captured Lashkar Gah as it continues the rapid capture of major cities in Afghanistan. Lashkar Gah is the capital of Helmand province in the southwest near Afghanistan's western border with Iran.**
- Taliban has claimed at least 12 provincial capitals in less than a week as a part of its relentless offensive in the wake of the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from war-torn Afghanistan.

Other cities that fell today

Besides Kandahar, the Taliban also took control over three other provincial capitals including Herat City, which is the country's fourth-largest City, Qala-I-Naw in Badghis province and Ghazni City, which is on the road to Kabul.

The Herat, Ghazni, and Badghis provinces are now fully under the control of the Taliban. With

this, the Taliban controls 11 provinces and 12 provincial capitals. It now controls 7 out of 9 provinces in the north, all four in the west and Kandahar and Ghazni in the south.

What is the aim of the Taliban?

The Taliban aims to re-establish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Taliban Captures Pul-e-Khumri

- The Taliban on August 10, 2021 captured the **eighth provincial capital in Afghanistan, Pul-e-Khumri, the capital of Baghlan province in the north**. The city fell as the pro-government militias retreated to the Afghan army's largest base in the Kelagi desert.
- The Taliban had already gained control over six provincial capitals, mostly in the north of Afghanistan- **Kunduz, Taluqan city, Sheberghan, Zaranj and Aybak**, capital of Samangan province. This was followed by the capture of **Farah city and Pul-e-Khumri**.
- The capture of Pul-e-Khumri, the provincial capital of Baghlan province is significant as it is located about 200km from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan.
- Pul-i-Khumri is on the highway that connects the northern provinces to Kabul**. It will not only increase pressure on the security forces to keep the Taliban militia away from the country's capital but also pose a great risk of complete isolation of the north of the country.
- The Taliban militants have been attacking Kabul over the past few days.

Is Kabul under threat?

- Taliban is currently pushing to choke off Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan and cut its linkage with the rest of Afghanistan. The capture of Ghazni has cut off a crucial highway that linked the city with the southern provinces.
- It is expected that once the Taliban takes control over the entire south, it will move towards Kabul. Taliban has intensified its fighting to push towards the same goal.
- Kabul isn't directly under threat yet but the battles elsewhere further tighten the grip of Taliban insurgents, who are currently estimated to hold control over two-thirds of the country.

Taliban advances in Other Areas

- Taliban has been making advances on the outskirts of Faizabad, the provincial capital of

Badakhshan, a remote Northern Province that was considered as an anti-Taliban stronghold.

- The fighting has also intensified on the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif, which is the capital of Balkh province and the fourth largest city of Afghanistan.
- However, the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF) are determined to not let the Taliban take the city. They have successfully pushed back the insurgents' offensive and regained control over Nahr-e-Shahi.

They've got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation: US President Joe Biden

- US President Joe Biden on August 10, 2021 **ruled out any change in the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan** despite the latest advances made by the Taliban over large parts of Afghanistan.
- Biden had set the deadline for complete US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11. The United States has already withdrawn more than 90 percent of its troops from the war-torn country.
- When asked if the current plan to withdraw US troops could change at all given the current situation in Afghanistan, US President Joe Biden said 'no'.**
- Biden explained saying, *"Look, we spent over a trillion dollars over 20 years. We trained and equipped over 300,000 Afghan forces. Afghan leaders have to come together. We lost thousands — lost to death and injury — thousands of American personnel. They've got to fight for themselves, fight for their nation."*
- Biden asserted that the United States will continue to keep the commitments it made of providing close air support and making sure that their air force functions and is operable, resupplying their forces with food and equipment, and paying all their salaries. *"But they've got to want to fight. They have outnumbered the Taliban,"* Biden said.
- He continued by saying that he does not regret his decision but is going to continue to keep their commitment. He said that the Afghans are beginning to realize they've got to come together politically at the top.

We lost thousands of American personnel. Afghan leaders have to come together. They have to fight for themselves and the nation. We are going to continue to keep our commitments, but I do not regret my decision (on pulling out forces from Afghanistan): US President Joe Biden

pic.twitter.com/pj8lXKhofX

— ANI (@ANI) [August 10, 2021](#)

•The White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki had informed the reporters earlier that the US had gone to Afghanistan to deliver justice to those who attacked them on September 11 and to disrupt terrorists seeking to use Afghanistan as a safe haven to attack the United States. *"We achieved those objectives some years ago,"* Psaki said.

•She also noted that the United States has provided a range of assistance to the Afghan National Security Defence Forces and also proposed a significant amount of funding in the FY 2022 budget request for \$3.3 billion for the Afghan Security Forces.

•She added that **these are difficult decisions to make but it is time to bring our troops home.** The US will continue to be a partner and supporter of Afghan Security efforts on the ground.

India starts evacuation of its diplomats from Mazar-e-Sharif

India on August 10, 2021 began the evacuation process of its diplomats and nationals from Mazar-e-Sharif, capital of Balkh province. India requested **all Indian nationals in and around Mazar-e-Sharif to evacuate the city on a special flight arranged from Mazar-e-Sharif** to New Delhi on August 10th. This comes a month after India undertook the evacuation of its officials and security persons from the consulate in Kandahar.

The Indian Embassy in Afghanistan has also advised Indians to make 'immediate' travel arrangements to return to India. It has 'strongly advised' Indian companies to 'immediately withdraw' their Indian employees out of project sites in Afghanistan.

In a security advisory, Indian Embassy in Afghanistan has advised Indians to make 'immediate' travel arrangements to return to India; 'strongly advised' Indian companies to 'immediately withdraw' their Indian employees out of project sites in Afghanistan

pic.twitter.com/kbA6gTkNEz

— ANI (@ANI) [August 10, 2021](#)

Canada sending special forces to close Afghan embassy

The Canadian government will reportedly send special forces to Afghanistan to evacuate the staff at Canada's embassy in Kabul.

US to send troops to evacuate personnel from Afghanistan

The United States will also send troops to evacuate its personnel from Afghanistan. The US Embassy in Kabul has urged Americans to evacuate Afghanistan immediately, in the wake of the capture of Kandahar. There are fears that Kabul would fall soon.



Background

Afghanistan has been witnessing a spike in violence as the Taliban has intensified its efforts to gain control over regions in the wake of US troop withdrawal. The US troops will be out of Afghanistan by August 31, 2021, way before the deadline of September 11.

Independence Day 2021: Government launches official website for 75th Independence Day celebrations

The Government of India has announced a new website for the 75th Independence Day celebrations <https://indianidc2021.mod.gov.in/>.

As per the government release, the website was launched on August 3, 2021, by Defence Secretary Dr. Ajay Kumar to mark the upcoming Independence Day 2021 celebrations.

The website by the Indian Government will serve as a platform to connect Indians all over the world in the celebrations of the National festival. The official release also informed that a mobile app for Independence Day 2021 celebrations will also be launched by the government soon.

The Independence Day celebrations platform will be accessible to all and will provide updates and information regarding the activities centered around India's 75th Independence Day.

Objective:

According to the official release by the government, the website is an attempt to engage people of all ages, particularly youth as if they were part of the celebrations in person.

The aim of the Independence day celebration platform is to imbibe the culture of togetherness among the masses so that they can celebrate this occasion and unite under the common identity of being Indian.

Website for Independence Day 2021 celebrations: Features

- The website by the government will be integrating for the first time ever Virtual Reality (VR) feature to show off the celebrations on Independence Day from the Red Fort in New Delhi in a 360 degree format. People will be able to use this feature without having a VR gadget.
- The other features on the Independence Day celebrations platform will also include a special IDC radio, interactive filters, gallery, 50 years of 1971 victory, e-books on deeds of gallantry, and blogs on the freedom movement, wars, and war memorial.

- Once logged in, the users will be able to know every single detail related to the event of Independence Day including route map, programme, parking details, RSVP, and the details of various other activities.
- On the Independence Day celebrations platform, a programme calendar or all the initiatives taken by various ministries to mark the occasion will also be available.

Independence Day celebrations platform: How does it work?

- The website for Independence Day 2021 celebrations will be utilizing a unique web-based RSVP system. It will generate a QR Code for each invitation card.
- The invitee will be able to use their smartphone devices to scan the said code and proceed further on the relevant web portal through the web link which will be automatically generated.
- The invitees will also be allowed to submit their willingness whether they want to function through the same portal.

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur launches Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 - Know how you can register?

Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Anurag Thakur on August 13, 2021, launched a nationwide program of Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 to celebrate the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav.

Union Youth Minister Thakur along with Minister of State for Sports Nisith Pramanik flagged off the Freedom Run 2.0 from Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, New Delhi. The Freedom Run has been launched at 75 iconic locations on August 13.

As per the official release by the Ministry, the event will witness 75 physical events at different historical locations on the launch day of the program. Rendering of National Anthem, Pledge, Freedom Run, spreading awareness among youth volunteers to participate and organize Freedom Runs in their villages, etc are some of the key activities of Fit India Freedom Run 2.0.

What is Fit India Freedom Run 2.0?

- The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has organized the Fit India Freedom Run 2.0 as a part of the celebration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav – India @ 75.
- The Freedom Run 2.0 will commemorate the 75th Independence Day across the country.
- The campaign is based on the concept that one can run anywhere, anytime.
- Individuals can register themselves on the Fit India web portal (<https://fitindia.gov.in>) run by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

When will it be held?

- This year, the Fit India Freedom Runs 2.0 will be held from August 13, 2021, till October 2, 2021.
- The first Fit India Freedom Run was held from August 15, 2020, till October 2, 2020.

How it will be conducted?

- Each week programs will be held in 75 districts and at 75 villages in each district till October 2, 2021.
- Fit India Freedom Runs will be organized in 744 districts, 75 villages in each of the 744 districts, and 30,000 educational institutions across the country.
- The Initiative will reach more than 7.50 crores youth and citizens.

Purpose of Fit India Freedom Runs 2.0

- The aim of Fit India Freedom Runs 2.0 aims to encourage people to take up fitness regimes such as sports and running in their daily lives and attain freedom from laziness, obesity, anxiety, diseases, stress, etc.
- The campaign aims to motivate citizens to make a resolve to do a physical activity of at least 30 minutes daily in their lives and live by the motto 'Fitness ka Dose, Aadha Ghanta Roz'.

About Fit India Movement

- The Fit India movement was launched by PM Narendra Modi on August 29, 2019, with a mission to promote fitness, spread awareness about fitness activities through campaigns, promote indigenous sports, aid in making fitness regimens reach every school, college, universities, village, etc.

Nag Panchami 2021: Check Date, Timings, Puja, History and Significance of this auspicious day

Happy Nag Panchami 2021: Nag Panchami is celebrated as a day in India which is devoted to the Nag Devta or Snake God in Hindu tradition. According to Hindu Calendar, every year Nag Panchami is celebrated in the auspicious month of Sawan.

Nag Panchami is known to be a significant day for the devotees of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. In Hindu mythology, these gods are associated with snakes- Lord Shiva can be seen with a snake coiled around his neck while Lord Vishnu is known to use sheshnag or snake as his vehicle.

Nag Panchami 2021 Date

Nag Panchami in 2021 will be celebrated on August 12 and 13. The festivities of Nag Panchami will commence on August 12 at 3.38 PM and will end on August 13 at 1.44 pm.

Nag Panchami Puja Muhurat-

On August 13, 2021, Nag Panchami Puja Muhurat will be from 6.07 AM to 8.38 AM.

Nag Panchami Puja

On Nag Panchami, offering milk to the snake god is the main ritual. It is believed that people offering to Nag Devta on this day protect their families from any form of evil.

Many also observe fast on Nag Panchami and some make idols of snakes at home. Flowers and milk are offered to the idols on Nag Panchami and they are placed near snake holes and burrows.

Nag Panchami 2021 Puja Vidhi

Devotees on the auspicious day of Nag Panchami take bath in the morning and create images of Nag Devta with the use of clay or cow dung on their house doors. Then kusha, durva, and flowers are offered to the Nag Devta.

The main food on Nag Panchami is everything milk-based which is then offered to the deity.

On Nag Panchami Vedic astrology also calls for the performance of Kal Sharp Yog rituals. On this day, Hindus buy serpents made of stone, silver, or wood, and paintings featuring snakes having bath in milk are also brought on Nag Panchami.

Nag Panchami 2021 Significance

As per Vedic astrology, Nag Devta is the resident lord of Panchami Tithi, and the serpents on the neck of Lord Shiva are worshipped by Hindus in Nag Panchami.

As per the Hindu Mythology, worshipping Lord Shiv along with Nag Devta on Nag Panchami removed all troubles from one's life. Because of various beliefs and stories, serpents are revered as Gods.

Garuda Puran also mentioned that worshipping snakes on the auspicious day of Nag Panchami brings prosperity and good fate to the devotees.

Nag Panchami History

The mention of snake gods can be seen in several Hindu scriptures. Snake Vasuki of Lord Shiva has been mentioned in many scriptures where it played a significant role during Samudra Manthan.

In one another tale, a deadly snake was found poisoning the waters of the Yamuna river which troubled the Brijwasis. Lord Krishna (an avatar of Lord Vishnu), to alleviate their suffering, defeated the snake and forced it to take back its poison from Yamuna River.

Thereafter, Lord Krishna blessed that whoever should pray and offer milk to the snake god will be protected from evil.

World Athletics Rankings: Olympics gold medalist Neeraj Chopra rises to No. 2 in world rankings

Neeraj Chopra, an Indian javelin thrower, has gained 14 places to become world No. 2 in the latest World Athletics Rankings after his sensational performance in the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

Neeraj Chopra on August 7, 2021, had created history by becoming the first Indian to win a gold in track and field in the Olympics. Chopra threw the javelin to a distance of 87.58m and picked the yellow metal at the Tokyo Games.

As per the latest update issued by the World Athletics, the 23-years old Neeraj Chopra is only behind Johannes Vetter who has a 1396 score.

On the other hand, Neeraj Chopra has a score of 1315 in men's javelin throw after winning his Tokyo Olympics Gold. The historic golden throw by the star athlete in the Olympics has also been listed as one of the 10 magical moments of athletics (track and field) in the Tokyo Olympics by the World Athletics.

Neeraj Chopra's fan following sky-rocketed:

According to the World Athletics Website, most keen followers of the sports had heard of Neeraj Chopra before the gold medal at Olympic Games 2020.

However, after winning the javelin in Tokyo Games, and in the process of becoming India's first athletics gold medalist in the Olympics History, Neeraj Chopra's profile sky-rocketed.

Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra had 1,43,000 followers on Instagram but now has a staggering 3.2 million, making him the most followed and track and field athlete in the world.

Still processing this feeling. To all of India and beyond, thank you so much for your support and blessings that have helped me reach this stage.

This moment will live with me forever pic.twitter.com/BawhZTk9Kk

— Neeraj Chopra (@Neeraj_chopra1) [August 8, 2021](#)

Top 10 World Athletics Men's Javelin Throw Ranking:

Place	Competitor	Score
1	Johannes Vetter	1396
2	Neeraj Chopra	1315
3	Marcin Krukowski	1302
4	Jakub Vadlejch	1298
5	Julian Weber	1291
6	Keshorn Walcott	1267
7	Andrian Mardare	1265
8	Vitezslav Vesely	1260
9	Anderson Peters	1259
10	Aliaksei Katkavets	1240

National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021 – All you need to know

Parliament on August 11, 2021, passed the National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021. The Bill will be sent to the President for his assent.

The bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on August 9, 2021, which the lower house cleared on August 10, 2021. The National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021, aims at amending the National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020.

Moved by Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister of Ayush, the National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021, aims to save the actions done, decisions made, liability incurred by the Board of Governors constituted as per the provisions of the Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021, till the constitution of National Commission under National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020.

National Commission for Homeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- The National Commission for Homoeopathy (Amendment) Bill, 2021, amends the National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020, and thereby provides a medical education system that improves access to quality and affordable medical education.
- On July 5, 2021, the National Commission for Homoeopathy was constituted to supersede the Central Council constituted under the 1973 Act. On the same date, the 1973 Act was also repealed.

National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020

- The National Commission for Homoeopathy Act, 2020, provides for a medical education system that improves access to quality and affordable medical education, ensures the availability of adequate and high-quality Homoeopathy medical professionals in all parts of the country.
- The 2020 Act replaced the Homoeopathy Central Council Act, 1973, and the Central Council of Homoeopathy that was set up under the 1973 Act for regulating homeopathic education and

practice.

Homeopathy Central Council Act, 1973

- The Homeopathy Central Council Act, 1973, is a repealed Act of the Parliament of India. The Act comprised 5 chapters at the time of passing. The Act was repealed and replaced by the National Commission for Homeopathy Act, 2020.

Delhi Government launches faceless transport services- All you need to know

The Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal on August 11, 2021, launched the **faceless transport services in the National Capital**.

Under the initiative by the Kejriwal Government, the **33 transport services will go completely faceless and online, except for the driving tests and fitness tests for the vehicles**.

During the launch, the CM of Delhi locked the doors of the IP Estate Regional Transport Office (RTO). He said that after the introduction of faceless transport services, the government of Delhi has shut down its four RTOs.

Apart from the IP Estate RTO, RTOs in Janakpuri, Sarai Kale Khan, and Vasant Vihar have also been closed. The Chief Minister of Delhi also termed the faceless transport services as a revolutionary step for 21st Century India.

RTO

pic.twitter.com/vM0rReGB1p

— Arvind Kejriwal (@ArvindKejriwal) [August 11, 2021](#)

Faceless Transport Services in Delhi: Key Details

The Department of Transport of the Delhi Government has issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) explaining how these faceless services can be availed. The SOPs will also mention the name of all the services.

Who will be able to use these services?

Any individual with an Aadhaar Card will be able to use the faceless transport services in Delhi. Know your Customer (KYC) can be completed through a One Time Password and documents and e-sign can be verified through Aadhaar authentication.

Those who do not have Aadhaar Card will also be able to apply online. But it will be necessary for them to upload the photos, signatures, and documents.

What will be the procedure for an e-learner license?

An e-learner license can be obtained through an online test. In the first phase of the application, the applications will be screened and documents will be verified and then they will be approved by the motor vehicle inspector or the motor licensing officers for further processing.

Transport services availed without visiting transport office:

The Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal said on the occasion that services in the different departments will also be soon made online and faceless as done with the Transport Department.

He added that it is a step towards India of 21st century and the use of technology. All the Transport-related services in Delhi can now be availed without visiting the Transport offices, taking leaves, or surrendering to the middlemen.

The Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gehlot informed that the faceless Transport services have been launched after a rigorous trial of 5 months. While highlighting the success of the trials, the minister informed that the trials started from February 19 and in the last five months of the trials, more than 3 lakh requests were handled with a success rate of more than 80%.

India's Deep Ocean Mission: What is it and its significance – Explained

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by PM Narendra Modi on June 16, 2021, approved the proposal of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) on the 'Deep Ocean Mission', which aims to explore the deep ocean for resources and develop deep-sea technologies for sustainable use of ocean resources.

Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology and Earth Sciences said even private institutions will be invited in the development process of technologies for the mission to explore the opportunities of mining, energy, biodiversity, freshwater, etc in the deep ocean and to support the Blue Economy Initiatives of the Indian Government.

The Deep Ocean Mission will be implemented in a phase-wise manner at a cost of Rs 4,077 crores for 5 years from 2021 to 2026. The first phase of the mission from 2021 to 2024 is estimated to cost Rs 2,823.4 crores.

What is Deep Ocean Mission?

- Deep Ocean Mission is an initiative by the Government of India to explore the deep ocean for resources and develop deep-sea technologies for sustainable use of ocean resources.
- The Mission will send a manned submersible 'Matsya-6000' up to a depth of 6,000 metres in the ocean with three people aboard. The submersible will be equipped with technologies such as scientific sensors, and tools for deep-sea mining, exploration of deep-sea marine biodiversity and mineral resources.
- The manned submersible 'Matsya-6000' has been designed by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) in an MoU signed with the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) which is responsible for the navigation and electronics aspect of the submersible.

Deep Ocean Mission: Significance

- The Mission aims to support India's Blue Economy Initiatives. The Mission is a multi-ministerial, multi-disciplinary program that emphasizes developing deep-sea technology, including the development of manned submersible, the acquisition of a research vessel for exploring the ocean,

and capacity building in Marine Biology.

- The Ministry of Earth Sciences has a 15-year contract with the International Seabed Authority (ISA), an UN-backed body in charge of regulations for ocean floors, to explore 75,000 sq. km in the Indian Ocean for Manganese Nodules, also known as Polymetallic Nodules.

- A preliminary study indicated 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules comprising Manganese, Cobalt, Iron, Lead, Zinc, and Copper in the Central Indian Ocean basin. These metals are estimated to be \$110 billion.

Deep Ocean Mission: Six Components

- Development of Technologies for Deep Sea Mining, and Manned Submersible:** A manned submersible will be sent up to a depth of 6,000 metres in the ocean with three people aboard. The submersible equipped with technologies such as scientific sensors, and tools for deep-sea mining, exploration of deep-sea marine biodiversity, and mineral resources will aid in mining Polymetallic Nodules.

- Development of Ocean Climate Change Advisory Services:** The Mission will aid in developing observations and models for exploring future projections of climate variables on seasonal to decadal time scales which in turn also support the priority area of coastal tourism under the Blue Economy Initiative.

- Technological innovations for exploration and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity:** The mission will aid in exploring deep-sea flora and fauna including microbes as well as sustainable utilization of deep-sea bio-resources. This in turn will support the priority area of Marine Fisheries and allied services under the Blue Economy Initiative.

- Deep Ocean Survey and Exploration:** The mission will explore and identify potential sites of multi-metal Hydrothermal Sulphides along the Indian Ocean ridges. This in turn will support the priority area of deep-sea exploration of ocean resources under the Blue Economy Initiative.

- Energy and freshwater from the Ocean:** The mission will aid in engineering detailed studies and design for offshore Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) powered desalination plant. This in turn will support the priority area of off-shore energy development under the Blue Economy Initiative.

- Advanced Marine Station for Ocean Biology:** The mission will aid in developing human

capacity and enterprise in ocean biology and engineering and enable translating research into product development and industrial application through on-site business incubator facilities. This in turn will support the priority area of Marine Biology, Blue trade, and Blue manufacturing under the Blue Economy Initiative.

Daddy Long Leg Spiders genetically engineered by scientists to get shorter legs- Know how it happened

Scientists have done something with the species of house spider, **Daddy Long Legs**, that no one probably has ever seen before. **By tinkering with the DNA of Daddy Long Leg Spiders, the researchers have developed 'Daddy Short legs' individuals.**

Some find the Daddy Long Leg spiders attractive, while others find them extremely disturbing. Regardless of how people feel, daddy long leg spiders can be easily spotted scurrying up a wall or through its web someplace. However, the familiar spider species is not harmful at all.

Scientists curated the **'Daddy Short Legs' with the goal of studying the evolutionary process** that causes their legs to grow so far out in the natural circumstances.

How Daddy Long Spider's legs became short?

Guilherme Gainett of the Wisconsin-Madison University along with his team of researchers primarily traced the genome of 'Phalangium Opilio' which is technically not a spider but a close relative.

As per Macroecology of Harvestman Mating System, 'Phalangium Opilio' is thought to be among the most widespread of more than 6,000 different species of daddy long legs noted worldwide.

According to Unilad, the scientists used an RNA interference approach to turn off effectively a pair of genes that is involved in leg development in hundreds of daddy-long-legs embryos.

Six of the animals' eight legs were roughly half the size of their natural, un-engineered counterparts because of the procedure.

Gainett explained that the genome of the daddy long legs has a lot of potentials to explain the complicated history of the spider genome evolution and the body design and in revealing how the Daddy Long Legs spiders get their distinctive feature.

How it will help in developing genetics?

As per the researchers, the study on Long legs spiders will aid in the development of more

advanced functional genetics techniques.

Gainett said that they are interested in figuring out how the genes give birth to the unique arachnid characteristics such as scorpion pinchers and spider fangs and in using the genome for creating the first transgenic harvestmen.

The recent study will help the researchers in tracking the evolution of 'Phalangium Opilio' and other arachnids in the future also determining if the long and spindly legs developed individually in each group of arthropods.

Researchers have also noted that the efficacy of the single and double RNAi in this system offers 'Phalangium Opilio' an appropriate point of reference for the future research of arachnid body plan evolution.

Parliament passes 127th Constitution Amendment Bill restoring state's power to make their own OBC list

The Constitution (127th Amendment) Bill, 2021, was passed by the Parliament on August 11, 2021, with Rajya Sabha giving its approval to the bill. The Rajya Sabha approved the bill with the majority of the strength of the house and not less than the two-thirds majority of the members present in the house.

187 members in Rajya Sabha voted in favour of the 127th Constitution Amendment Bill while none against it. The house also neglected the amendments moved by some of the opposition members.

Lok Sabha on August 10, 2021, had passed the Constitution (127th Amendment) Bill, 2021, unanimously. The bill was passed in the Lower House of Parliament with more than two-third majority of the house strength as well as the members present in the house.

The legislation aims at restoring the power of the States and the Union Territories to make their own OBC list. During the division of the votes, 385 members in Lok Sabha voted in the favour of the bill, and none were against it.

The Central Government on August 9, 2021, had introduced a **key constitution amendment bill in Lok Sabha that seeks to restore the state's power to make their own OBC lists.**

The Constitution (127th Amendment) Bill, 2021, was introduced by the Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar.

The Government introduced the bill in the Parliament **to clarify some provisions in the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Bill to restore the power of the states to identify the backward classes.**

As per the Indian Constitution, Articles 15 (4), 15 (5), and 16 (4) confer power on the State Government to declare and identify the list of socially and educationally backward classes. As a practice, separate OBC lists are drawn up by the Central Government and each State concerned.

127th Constitution Amendment Bill: Why is it needed?

The latest amendment was necessitated after the Supreme Court in its Maratha reservation ruling in May 2021 upheld the 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act but stated that the President, based on the recommendations of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), will determine which communities will be included on the state OBC list.

The 102nd Constitution Amendment Act of 2018 had inserted the Articles 338B and Article 342 A (with two clauses) after Article 342.

Articles 338B deals with the structure, powers, and duties of the National Commission for Backward Classes. Article 342A says that the President, in consultation with the Governor, will specify the educationally and socially backward classes.

The 127th Amendment is required to restore the powers of the State Governments in order to maintain the state list of OBCs which was taken away by the Supreme Court interpretation.

In case the state list is abolished, nearly 671 OBC communities will lose access to the reservations in educational institutions and in appointments which will adversely impact nearly one-fifth of the total OBC communities.

Why did the Supreme Court intervene?

The Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018, has had a rollercoaster ride till it was held to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in its May judgement.

The first challenge to the quota was filed in Bombay High Court after the legislation was passed by the State Government. Petitioners had argued that the quota violated the SC order in the Indira Sawhney Case in 1992 that ruled that any reservation in any state must not exceed the 50% mark.

The Bombay High Court, in 2018, refused to put an interim stay on the quota, and eventually, on its judgment in 2019, the high court upheld the Maratha Quota but asked the Maharashtra Government to reduce it from 16 to 12 to 13 percent.

On the question of breaching the 50% mark, the High Court stated that the ceiling imposed by the

Supreme Court can only exceed in exceptional circumstances.

Notably, at least three Indian States- Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Chhattisgarh- have introduced quotas that breach the total 50% ceiling. On the other hand, states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Karnataka have asked the Supreme Court to hike the quota ceiling.

127th Constitution Amendment Bill: What it will introduce?

The Amendment Bill will amend clauses 1 and 2 of Article 342A and will also introduce a new clause 3. It will also amend Articles 366 (26c) and 338B (9).

The 127th Constitution Amendment Bill is designed to clarify that the State Governments can maintain the 'state list' of OBCs as was the system prior to SC judgment. Articles 366 (26c) define the socially and educationally backward classes.

The latest 'State List' will be taken out completely of the ambit of the President and will be notified by the State Assembly as per the proposed bill.

Why opposition is supporting the amendment bill?

The opposition in Parliament stated that it will extend its support to the 127th Constitution Amendment Bill which gives power to the States to identify the OBCs.

The amendment bill has political ramifications as restoring powers of State Governments to identify the backward classes has been demanded by many regional parties.

The ruling BJP and the opposition parties, including Congress plans to get support among OBC communities in poll-bound states, particularly in politically crucial Uttar Pradesh.

The political angle of the bill has forced the opposition parties to be on the same page as the Ruling party.

World Elephant Day 2021: History, Significance and All you need to know

Every year, August 12 is observed as World Elephant Day to draw focus towards conservation and protection of elephants across the world amid poaching, human-elephant conflict, mistreatment in captivity, and habitat loss.

World Elephant Day aims to accelerate efforts to offer better protection to elephants, improving enforcement policies, prevent the trade of ivory, illegal poaching, conserve elephant habitat, better captive environments for elephants, and reintroduce the captive elephants back in their natural sanctuaries.

In 2020, Former Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar had released the booklet on 'Best practices of Human-Elephant Conflict Management in India' and launched the national portal on human-elephant conflict known as 'Surakshya'.

In 2021, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav tweeted that India has a large population of wild Asian elephants. He will release the population estimation protocol for all-India elephant and tiger population estimation in 2022 on World Elephant Day.

World Elephant Day: History

- The Elephant Reintroduction Foundation of Thailand along with Canadian filmmaker Patricia Sims co-founded World Elephant Day on August 12, 2012.
- Since the inception of the day, the duo has partnered with 100 elephant conservation organizations across the world to create and support conservation solutions for elephants.

World Elephant Day: Significance

- Patricia Sims, one of the co-founders of the World Elephant Day said that this day calls out to people to offer support to organizations to aid in stopping illegal poaching and trading of elephant ivory and other wildlife products, provide sanctuaries for elephants to live freely.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of threatened species has listed African elephants as 'Critically Endangered' and Asian elephants as 'Endangered'.

- As per the current assessment released by the IUCN Red List in 2020, the Asian elephant population over the last three generations has reduced by 50 per cent.
- During an assessment of African forest and savanna elephants as separate species by the IUCN in 2021, the number of African forest elephants was found to have fallen by more than 86 per cent over 31 years and the number of African Savanna elephants fell by at least 60 per cent over 50 years across the world.
- The current population estimation of Asian elephants ranges between 40,000 to 50,000 across the world. More than 60 per cent of wild Asian elephants have been recorded in India.
- In February 2020, the Conference of Parties of CMS 13 held at Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat, listed Indian elephants in Appendix I of the Convention of the Migratory species.
- The Government of India in 2010 declared elephants as the Natural Heritage Animal of India.

Project Elephant: What is it?

- The Government of India in 1992 had launched Project Elephant as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to protect elephants and their habitats, address issues of human-elephant conflict, and ensure the welfare of captive elephants.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change provides funding for the project across the country.
- The project has been implemented in 16 states across India namely Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Did you know?

- India has 32 Elephant reserves, as stated by the Government of India. The Singhbhum Elephant Reserve of Jharkhand was the first elephant sanctuary in the country.
- In 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Forests collaborated with Wildlife Trust of India to launch the campaign 'Hathi Mere Sathi'.

Scientists develop new method to identify proteins in the living brain; Check details

Researchers, for the first time, have come up with a new and successful approach to identify the proteins inside different types of neurons in the brain of a living animal.

The new study which was led by Northwestern University and the University of Pittsburgh offers a giant step in understanding the brain's millions of distinct proteins.

As the building blocks of all the cells including neurons, proteins hold keys to better understanding complex brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, which can further lead to the development of new treatments.

Identifying proteins: What happened under the new study?

Researchers in the new study designed a virus to send an enzyme to a precise location in the brain of a living mouse. The enzyme, derived from soybeans, genetically tagged its neighbouring proteins in a predetermined location.

The researchers after validating the technique by imaging the brain with fluorescence and electron microscopy found that their technique took a snapshot of the entire set of proteins inside the living neurons, which can then be analyzed postmortem with mass spectroscopy.

By chemically tagging the proteins and their neighbours, researchers are now able to see how the proteins work within a specific, controlled area and how they are able to work with one another in a proteome.

Along with the virus carrying the soybean enzyme, the scientists also used their virus to carry a separate green fluorescent protein.

Kozorovitskiy from Northwestern University who is also a senior author of the study stated that the virus essentially acts as a message that we deliver and in this case, the message carried this special soybean enzyme.

Then again, in a separate message, the scientists sent the green fluorescent proteins to show them which neurons were tagged. If the neurons are green, then it is understood that the soybean

enzyme was expressed in those neurons.

Protein targeting lagged behind:

While genetic targeting has transformed neuroscience and biology, protein targeting has lagged behind.

Researchers are able to amplify and sequence genes and RNA to identify their exact building blocks but proteins cannot be amplified and sequenced in the same manner.

Instead, scientists have to divide the proteins into peptides and then put them back together.

However, Kozorovitskiy states that even though proteins have been out of the loop, everyone recognizes the significance of proteins as they are the ultimate effectors in the cells.

Understanding where the proteins are, how they work, and how they work relative to each other is extremely important.

How identifying proteins can help in understanding brain diseases?

As the new system has been validated, the researchers will be able to apply it to mouse models for the diseases to better understand neurological illnesses.

The researchers hope to extend this approach to identify the biochemical modifications on neuronal proteins that occur during the specific patterns of brain activity or with the changes induced by the neuroactive drug to facilitate clinical advances.

Kozorovitskiy stated that the researchers look forward to taking this to the models related to brain diseases and connect those studies to the postmortem proteomics work in the human brain.

ISRO's GISAT-1 satellite fails to reach orbit, mission to be re-scheduled

Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on August 12, 2021, launched the Geo-Imaging Satellite (GISAT-1) 'EOS-03' on the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle- F10 (GSLV-F10) at 5.43 am IST from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

However, the GSLV-F10/EOS-03 satellite mission failed to reach orbit due to a technical setback in the Cryogenic Upper Stage ignition. The performance of the rocket's first and second stages went as planned.

Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State Science & Technology and Earth Sciences (Independent Charge) after speaking with Dr K Sivan, Chairman, ISRO, said that the GSLV-F10/EOS-03 satellite mission can be re-scheduled.

Spoke to Chairman [#ISRO](#), Dr K.Sivan and discussed in detail. The first two stages went off fine, only after that there was a difficulty in cryogenic upper stage ignition. The mission can be re-scheduled some time again. <https://t.co/U5C0wTEHHv>

— Dr Jitendra Singh (@DrJitendraSingh) [August 12, 2021](#)

ISRO: Countdown for launch of GSLV-F10/EOS-03 satellite mission commences

Countdown for the launch of GSLV-F10/EOS-03 satellite mission had commenced on August 11, 2021, at 3.43 am IST from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota.

ISRO in a series of tweets informed that filling of the oxidizer and propellant for the second stage (GS2) as well as the filling of propellant for the liquid strap-on (L40) of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle- F10 (GSLV-F10) has been completed. Further updates are awaited from the Indian space agency.

The Geo-Imaging Satellite (GISAT-1) 'EOS-03' has been accorded the status of India's eye in the sky. The satellite has been given a strategic and civilian importance as it will aid India in monitoring areas of interest and provide real time data while moving in sync with the rotation of the Earth unlike other remote sensing satellites that only cover areas at regular intervals.

Countdown for the launch of GSLV-F10/EOS-03 mission commenced today at 0343Hrs (IST)

from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota [#GSLVF10 #EOS03 #ISRO](#)
pic.twitter.com/ICzSfTHMBI

— ISRO (@isro) [August 10, 2021](#)

ISRO to launch Geo-Imaging Satellite 'EOS-03' on GSLV-F10 on August 12

- The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) on August 10, 2021, had announced that the Geo-Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) 'EOS-03' will be launched on the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle- F10 (GSLV-F10) on August 12, 2021.
 - The GISAT-1 'EOS-03' satellite will be launched from the Second Launch Pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota at 5.43 am IST.
 - The GSLV-F10 launch vehicle will place the GISAT-1 'EOS-03' satellite in the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit and the satellite will further use its onboard propulsion system to reach the final geostationary orbit.
 - The GISAT-1 'EOS-03' satellite is the first GSLV flight that will be carrying a 4-metre diameter Ogive-shaped payload fairing (OPLF). This launch will mark the 14th flight of GSLV.
- GSLV-F10 carrying EOS-03 satellite on its way to the launch pad

Stay tuned for more updates [#GSLVF10 #EOS03 #ISRO](#) pic.twitter.com/YuQFQCWJpf

— ISRO (@isro) [August 10, 2021](#)

ISRO's Geo-Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) 'EOS-03' to be launched in third quarter of 2021

Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State Science & Technology and Earth Sciences (Independent Charge), on July 29, 2021, had announced that the Department of State is prepared to launch ISRO's Geo-Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) 'EOS-03' in the third quarter of 2021.

What is GISAT-1 'EOS-03'?

- The EOS-03 is a Geo-Imaging Satellite-1 (GISAT-1) is the first state-of-the-art agile Earth Observation Satellite that has been developed by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) for Earth Observation purposes.
- The Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle- F10 (GSLV-F10) will place the GISAT-1 'EOS-03' in the Geostationary Transfer Orbit.

- The GISAT-1 'EOS-03' satellite is the first GSLV flight that will be carrying a 4-metre diameter Ogive-shaped payload fairing (OPLF). This launch will mark the 14th flight of GSLV.

Significance of GISAT-1 'EOS-03'

The GISAT-1 'EOS-03' satellite will enable:

- Real-time monitoring of natural disasters such as cyclones and floods in the country.
- Real-time imaging the entire country at least four to five times every day
- Aid in monitoring the crops, water bodies, forest cover changes, vegetation condition, cloud properties, oceanography, snow, and glaciers.

ISRO's Earth Observation Satellites

- Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) launched its first Earth Observation Satellite in 1988 which is known as IRS-1A.
- ISRO has placed several Earth Observation Satellites in the Sun-synchronous orbit and Geostationary orbit.
- EOS-01 was launched on November 7, 2020. The EOS-01 is an Earth Imaging Satellite is a part of India's RISAT series. The satellite is used for agriculture, forestry, and disaster management support.
- Other Earth Observation Satellites are OCEANSAT-2, RISAT-1 and 2, CARTOSAT-1, 2, 2A, 2B, RESOURCESAT-1, 2, 2A, SCATSAT-1, SARAL, Megha-Tropiques, INSAT-3D, INSAT -3DR, INSAT 3A, and Kalpana.

First developmental flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)

- Singh further stated that the first developmental flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) will be conducted in the fourth quarter of 2021 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.
- SSLV has been developed by ISRO as a cost-effective, three-stage launch vehicle with a payload capability of 500-kg to 500-km planar orbit or 300-kg to Sun-synchronous Polar orbit.

- With flexible nozzle control, electro-mechanical actuators for all stages, velocity trimming module, and miniaturized avionics make SSLV an ideal launch vehicle for on-demand, quick launch sessions of small satellites.

International Youth Day 2021: Date, theme, and why the day is significant

International Youth Day 2021: Every year, International Youth Day was observed on August 12. Governments and citizens all over the world come together to celebrate the youth on International youth day and to recognize and bring attention to the problems faced by them.

The International Youth Day was commemorated by the United Nations on August 12 in 1999.

The decision of declaring the International Youth Day was taken based on the recommendation made by the World Conference of Minister Responsible for the youth in Lisbon to the United Nations General Assembly.

Young people must be full partners in our efforts to build an inclusive, fair and sustainable world for all.

I will do all I can to be an ally, and help ensure sure they are engaged, included and understood.
<https://t.co/Xn9fHdPEdR> #YouthDay pic.twitter.com/UarE2CEYQH

— António Guterres (@antonioguterres) [August 11, 2021](#)

International Youth Day 2021 theme:

The theme of International Youth Day 2021 is “Transforming Food System: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health”.

Every year, the theme of the International Day is decided by the United Nations that is relevant to all the global communities and citizens.

This year’s theme of the International Youth Day highlights the crucial need for inclusive support mechanisms that ensure that the youths all over the world continue to amplify their efforts collectively and individually to restore the Earth and protect life while also integrating the biodiversity in the transformation of food systems.

International Youth Day aim:

According to the United Nations, International Youth Day 2021 aims to provide a platform for the

young people to continue the momentum for ECOSOC Youth Forum in the lead-up to the high-level food systems summit. It can be done through youth engagement, education, entrepreneurial solutions, and innovation.

International Youth Day aim: According to the United Nations, International Youth Day 2021 aims to provide a platform for the young people to continue the momentum for ECOSOC Youth Forum in the lead-up to the high-level food systems summit. It can be done through youth engagement, education, entrepreneurial solutions, and innovation.

"I urge everyone to guarantee young people a seat at the table as we build a world based on inclusive, fair and sustainable development for all."

-- @antonioguterres on Thursday's #YouthDay. <https://t.co/eLUcgJsfNS>
pic.twitter.com/lKbjuU01vW

— United Nations (@UN) [August 12, 2021](#)

International Youth Day 2021 Significance:

On the occasion of International Youth Day, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that youth day is significant as it highlights the youngsters who were on the frontlines of the struggle to build a better future for all.

He further added that the highlight of International Youth Day 2021 will be on the solutions that have been developed by the young innovators to address the challenges in our food systems.

Guterres also urged everyone on International Youth Day to guarantee young people a seat at the table as well all build a world based on inclusive, fair, and sustainable development for all.

RDIF proposes to start joint trial of Pfizer and Sputnik Light for booster shot

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) informed on August 11, 2021 that it **has proposed to Pfizer to start joint combination trials with Sputnik Light for a booster COVID-19 vaccine shot.**

RDIF said in a tweet, *"Delta cases surge in US & Israel shows mRNA vaccines need a heterogeneous booster to strengthen & prolong immune response. Sputnik V pioneered mix & match approach, combo trials & showed 83.1% efficacy vs Delta. Today RDIF offers Pfizer to start a trial with Sputnik Light as a booster."*

RDIF stated that Sputnik V is the world's first vaccine to offer combo trial to AstraZeneca in November 2020. It has co-sponsored mix and match trials with AstraZeneca, Moderna and Sinopharm.

The data collected by the Ministry of Health of the Buenos Aires demonstrates that both the combination of Sputnik Light with other vaccines and vaccination with two injections of only Sputnik Light shows high safety profile with no serious adverse events related to vaccination.

— RDIF (@rdif_press) [August 5, 2021](#)

The official data collected by the health ministry showed that Sputnik V offers protection against newly detected variants as well and retains one of the best safety and efficacy parameters.

Sputnik V's safety & efficacy

- As per the data published by the Russian Ministry of Health, Sputnik V demonstrated 97.6 percent efficacy based on the analysis of data from 3.8 million vaccinated individuals in Russia. The results obtained during mass vaccination were better than those obtained during clinical trials (91.6% efficacy).
- Sputnik V also showed 83.1 percent efficacy against the Delta variant and 6x reduction of infection risk. It was also seen to be 94.4 percent effective against hospitalizations with 18x reduction in hospitalisation risk.
- The real-world data collected during mass vaccinations in countries including Russia, UAE,

Argentina, Hungary, Bahrain, Mexico, Serbia and the Philippines also demonstrated a lack of serious adverse events such as CVTs or myocarditis.

- Sputnik V has reportedly demonstrated best safety and efficacy parameters in the countries where multiple vaccines have been used.
- Both two-dose Sputnik V vaccine and the single-dose Sputnik Light vaccine have demonstrated high safety and efficacy results in Argentina.

Sputnik Light

- Sputnik Light includes the first dose component of Sputnik V.
- As per the real-world data collected by the Ministry of Health of the Buenos Aires province (Argentina), the Sputnik Light COVID-19 vaccine had demonstrated 78.6 percent to 83.7 percent efficacy among the elderly.
- The Phase-III trials of the vaccine were carried out in Russia, UAE and Ghana and they also showed the vaccine's efficacy to be 79.4 percent.

Background

RDIF had announced on August 4, 2021, that the combination of the first component of the Sputnik V vaccine with other COVID vaccines by Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, and Moderna has shown favourable results.

Sputnik V vaccine was given emergency use authorisation in 69 countries across the world with a total population exceeding 3.7 billion people, which is nearly half of the global population.

BREAKING: Today is 1 year since world's 1st [#COVID](#) vaccine was registered in Russia. It is now authorized in 69 countries with population of over 3.7 bn people. Check out the latest data from [#SputnikV](#) real-world use showing its highest safety & efficacy pic.twitter.com/KZpxHy3Wsa

— Sputnik V (@sputnikvaccine) [August 11, 2021](#)

Landslide in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh: 10 bodies recovered, 14 people rescued so far from debris

Himachal Pradesh Landslide: A total of 10 bodies have been recovered and 14 people have been rescued from the landslide site in Nugulsari area in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh.

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) informed that ***"no traces of passengers & the bus that was suspected to be trapped in the debris have been found after clearing the road in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh."*** The ITBP teams have gone towards the river bed from multiple directions to find the bus.

No traces of passengers & the bus that was suspected to be trapped in the debris have been found after clearing the road in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh. ITBP teams have gone towards the river (which flows near the landslide site) bed from multiple directions to find the bus: ITBP

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Landslide in Himachal Pradesh

Several people are feared to be buried after a landslide in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur trapped several vehicles under the debris including a Himachal Road Transport Corporation (HRTC) bus carrying over 40 passengers.

The landslide reportedly occurred on Reckong Peo- Shimla Highway at around 12.45pm. The teams of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) were rushed to the area for rescue operations.

The ITBP tweeted saying, ***"A landslide reported on Reckong Peo- Shimla Highway in #Kinnaur District in Himachal Pradesh today at around 12.45 Hrs. One truck, an HRTC Bus and few vehicles reported came under the rubble. Many people reported trapped. ITBP teams rushed for rescue. More details awaited."***

A landslide reported on Reckong Peo- Shimla Highway in [#Kinnaur](#) District in Himachal Pradesh today at around 12.45 Hrs. One truck, a HRTC Bus and few vehicles reported came under the rubble. Many people reported trapped. ITBP teams rushed for rescue. More details awaited.

pic.twitter.com/ThLYsL2cZK

— ITBP (@ITBP_official) [August 11, 2021](#)

PM Narendra Modi has spoken to Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur regarding the situation and assured all possible support in the ongoing rescue operations.

PM Narendra Modi spoke to Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur regarding the situation in the wake of the landslide in Kinnaur. PM assured all possible support in the ongoing rescue operations: Prime Minister's Office (PMO) pic.twitter.com/UjBt6rilqa

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Rescue Operations & Casualties

- The ITBP personnel of the 17th battalion, 19th battalion & 43rd battalion reach the landslide site on Reckong Peo-Shimla Highway near Nugulsari in Kinnaur. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has also been called in.

- According to ITBP, four vehicles including a bus and a truck reported trapped in the rubble, casualties are feared.

- Around 200 jawans of 3 battalions of ITBP are the spot where landslide is happening. The teams are waiting for more than one hour for the shooting stones to stop.

- Around 40-42 people are feared to be trapped in the massive landslide.

Around 200 jawans of 3 battalions of ITBP are the spot where landslide is happening. The teams are waiting for more than one hour for the shooting stones to stop. It is believed that around 40 people are trapped. The area is currently very dangerous: ITBP Spokesperson Vivek Pandey <https://t.co/4kvFbprYEa> pic.twitter.com/ahH0sKdffe

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur informed that 4 people have been rescued so far and taken to the hospital. The NDRF, ITBP, CISF, Police teams are present at the spot and efforts are on for rescue operation but rubbles are still dropping from height. As soon as it comes under control, rescue teams will get in action.

4 people rescued so far & taken to hospital. NDRF, ITBP, CISF, Police teams present at the spot. Efforts are on for rescue operation but rubbles are still dropping from height. As soon as it comes under control, rescue teams will get in action: Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur pic.twitter.com/XLRqTfluG4

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

The Chief Minister informed, "50-60 people could be trapped in the debris following a landslide on a road in Nugulsari area of Kinnaur district. Four people including driver & conductor of the bus trapped in the debris have been rescued."

50-60 people could be trapped in the debris following a landslide on a road in Nugulsari area of Kinnaur district. Four people including driver & conductor of the bus trapped in the debris have been rescued: Himachal Pradesh CM Jai Ram Thakur pic.twitter.com/fQVejUn0PH

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Home Minister Amit Shah also spoke to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur in view of the landslide on Reckong Peo-Shimla Highway in Kinnaur district and all possible help. The Home Minister also spoke to ITBP DG, team deployed for evacuation, to take stock of the situation.

Home Minister Amit Shah also spoke to ITBP DG, team deployed for evacuation, to take stock of the situation.

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur said, "I've directed police and local administration to carry out rescue operations. NDRF has also been put on alert. We have received information that one bus and a car could have been hit; awaiting detailed information."

Kinnaur MLA JS Negi released a statement saying, "The landslide incident has taken place near Nigulsari. A bus is buried under the rubble there. Few cars & a truck are suspected to be trapped. The bus driver & one more person rescued. ITBP rescue teams at the spot, operation hindered due to falling boulders."

The landslide incident has taken place near Nigulsari. A bus is buried under the rubble there. Few cars & a truck are suspected to be trapped. The bus driver & one more person rescued. ITBP rescue teams at the spot, operation hindered due to falling boulders: Kinnaur MLA JS Negi pic.twitter.com/c6QoK2BEVi

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

DRDO developed indigenous technology cruise missile successfully test fired

India has successfully test-fired the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) developed indigenous technology cruise missile off the coast of Balasore district in Odisha.

Reportedly, the missile flew for around 150 km with an indigenous cruise engine. More tests will also be conducted in the near future.

Balasore, Odisha: India today successfully tested the DRDO-developed Indigenous Technology Cruise Missile off the coast of Odisha. The missile flew for around 150 km with an indigenous cruise engine. More tests would be conducted in near future: Sources

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Successful test firing of AKASH-NG:

Earlier on July 23, 2021, India had also successfully test-fired the indigenously developed New Generation Akash Missile (AKASH-NG) in Balasore, Odisha. It was a Surface to Air Missile Defence System.

The test-firing of AKASH-NG was also the second test firing of the 30 km strike-range air defence missile systems in two days.

India's economy picking up pace again: Prime Minister Modi at CII Annual Meeting 2021

Prime Minister Modi virtually addressed the **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Annual Meeting 2021** on August 11, 2021, at 4.30 pm.

The Annual Meeting of CII will be held over two days of 11-12 August. The Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies, Singapore, Heng Swee Keat also addressed the meeting as a Special International Guest Speaker.

The annual event will also see the participation of many ministers, academics, senior officials as well as prominent representatives of the Indian Industry.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the CII Annual Session 2021, via video conferencing. pic.twitter.com/p0gYixdsDT

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

While addressing the annual meeting of CII, Prime Minister Modi highlighted all the friends and organizations in the industry are a major part of India's growth story. With everyone's efforts, India's economy is picking up pace once again.

All friends & orgs in Industry are a major part of India's growth story. With efforts of all of you, India's economy is picking up pace once again. There is rarely a day when a CEO doesn't issue a statement or there's not a report on new opportunities: PM at CII Annual Session'21 pic.twitter.com/lpqygKf1jH

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Prime Minister further added that new India is committed and ready to grow with the new world. India, which was once apprehensive of foreign investments is now welcoming all forms of investments. The country has been taking major leaps in ease of doing business ranking today.

The New India is ready and committed to growing with the new world. India, which was once apprehensive of foreign investment, is today welcoming all types of investments. India is taking major leaps in ease of doing business ranking today: PM Narendra Modi

pic.twitter.com/SQH4NzXEVa

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Sentiments of citizens lie with Made in India product: PM Modi

While talking about the significance of Made in India products, Prime Minister Modi mentioned that the situation in the country is changing rapidly as today, the sentiments of the Indian citizens lie with the products that are Made in India. He added that it is not necessary for it to be an Indian company, but every Indian now wants to use products that are made in India.

The situation is changing rapidly. Today, the sentiments of citizens lie with products that are made in India. It is not necessary for it to be an Indian company, but every Indian now wants to use products that are made in India. The nation has made up its mind: PM Narendra Modi

pic.twitter.com/UstVVqpSh1

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

The Indian industry needs to need to make its policies and strategies in accordance with this. This will help in going ahead with the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan.

Efforts to connect farmers with domestic and global markets

Prime Minister Modi said that once the agriculture sector was just considered to be a medium of livelihood but now the efforts are being made to connect the Indian farmers with global and domestic markets through the reforms in the agriculture sector.

The agriculture sector was once considered to be just a medium of livelihood. But now, efforts are being made to connect Indian farmers with the domestic and global markets through historic reforms in the agriculture sector: PM Narendra Modi at CII Annual Session 2021

pic.twitter.com/fYMoKbXEOV

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

India receiving record FDIs: PM Modi

Prime Minister gladly informed that today, India has been receiving record FDIs and FPI investment is also making new records because of several efforts of the government.

Today, India is receiving record FDIs. FPI investment is also making new records due to several efforts of the government. Today, the country's forex reserve is on an all-time high: PM Narendra Modi at CII Annual Session 2021 pic.twitter.com/ej9TNNG0fm

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

Theme of CII Annual Meeting 2021:

As per the official release by the Prime Minister's Office, **the theme of the Confederation of Indian Industry Annual Meeting will be India@75: Government and Business working together for Atmanirbhar Bharat.**

About Confederation of Indian Industry:

The Confederation of the Indian Industry is a non-governmental trade association and advocacy group. It was founded in 1895.

The Confederation engages academic, business, political and other leaders of the society to shape regional, global, and industry agendas. CII is a membership-based organization.

Leadership of CII-

For 2021-22, CEO and Managing Director of Tata Steel Limited, T.V. Narendran is the President, CII.

Chairman and the Managing Director of Bajaj Finserv, Sanjiv Bajaj is the President-Designate, CII.

Chairman and CEO of Hero Motorcop Ltd. Pawan Munjal are the Vice-President, Confederation of Indian Industry.

Membership of CII-

The Confederation of Indian Industry has a direct membership of over 9,000 organisations and an indirect membership of over 3,00,000 from around 265 regional and national sectoral associations.

Maharashtra government announces Rajiv Gandhi Award for excellence in IT sector

Maharashtra government announced on August 10, 2021 that it has decided to introduce **Rajiv Gandhi Award for firms that are excelling in the Information Technology (IT) sector in the state.**

The state government's resolution stated that the awards will be conferred upon the firms for best work in the IT sector. The awards have been named after former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The resolution stated that late Rajiv Gandhi had stressed on results-oriented usage of Information technology and science technology for the nation and the usage of science and technologies is the center point for the social and economic development of the country. Hence, it was decided that it would be composite to introduce an award that would be named after Rajiv Gandhi.

The decision was taken during a meeting headed by the Minister of State for Information and Technology in the Maharashtra government, Satej Patil on July 7, 2021.

Rajiv Gandhi Award for excellence in IT sector

- The Rajiv Gandhi Award for excellence in the IT sector will be conferred upon institutions and companies for their outstanding performance in the IT sector on August 20, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the late Rajiv Gandhi.

- Congress leader Satej Patil tweeted saying, *"As the Minister of State for IT, Maharashtra, it fills my heart with pride to announce that MVA government has declared an award in the name of Late Shri Rajiv Gandhi ji to encourage organizations excelling in the IT sector in Maharashtra. The award, which will be announced on August 20, will be a lasting tribute to Late Shri Rajiv ji for his pioneering work in the technology sector in India."*

- The Minister of State will speak to various organisation bodies such as NASSCOM to finalise the modalities of the award.

The award will be a lasting tribute to Late Shri Rajiv Ji for his pioneering work in the technology sector in India. [@CMOMaharashtra](#) [@AjitPawarSpeaks](#) [@Subhash_Desai](#) [@nasscom](#)

— Satej (Bunty) D. Patil (@satejp) [August 10, 2021](#)

- The award will be given to companies/ institutions that excel in the field with their new ideas and innovations.
- It will be conferred by Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.
- Maharashtra IT Corporation Limited (MAHA-IT) has been appointed as the nodal agency to propose the award.

Selection Procedure

- This year, the Rajiv Gandhi Award for excellence in the IT sector will be announced on August 20.
- The selection procedure for the award will be completed and the Award will be given before October 30, 2021.
- From next year onwards, the award will be conferred on August 20th.

Background

Rajiv Gandhi had served as the sixth Prime Minister of India between 1984 and 1989.

He is credited for bringing an IT revolution in the country, as several of his policy decisions helped India in availing the computers at a reduced price, which spread the telecommunication network across the country.

Recently, another award named after the late Prime Minister was renamed after hockey legend, Major Dhyan Chand. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award will now be called Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award after several requests from the public.

Vinesh Phogat temporarily suspended by Wrestling Federation of India for indiscipline: Know why here!

Vinesh Phogat, India's star wrestler has been temporarily banned by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for indiscipline during her Tokyo Olympics campaign.

The Wrestling Federation of India issued a notice to Vinesh on August 10, 2021 announcing the temporary ban on three charges, most importantly for a breach of contract. Vinesh Phogat has been given time until August 16 to reply to the notice.

The Wrestling Federation of India has also issued notice to Sonam Malik for misconduct.

Why has Vinesh Phogat been temporarily suspended?

The Wrestling Federation of India has temporarily banned Vineet Phogat on three charges-

1. Refusing to stay with the Indian team in the Olympics village
2. Refusing to train with the Indian team.
3. Refusing to wear an Indian Olympic Association wrestling singlet with the team sponsor's logo and competing in a singlet with a personal sponsor Nike's logo, which was a breach of contract.

What does the temporary ban mean?

Vinesh Phogat has been temporarily banned from competing in any national or domestic event until she files a reply and WFI takes a final decision.

What was the issue?

- Vinesh Phogat had expressed displeasure at not being allowed a physiotherapist to accompany her and other athletes to the Games before the start of the Tokyo Olympic Games.
- Vinesh Phogat, who had travelled to Tokyo from Hungary, had also "created a ruckus" when she was allotted a room near the rooms of her teammates from India including Sonam Malik, Anshu Malik and Seema Bisla.

- She had argued that she might contract COVID-19 as these wrestlers had travelled to Tokyo from India.
- Vinesh was one of India's medal hopes at the Tokyo Games but she suffered a shock defeat at the hands of Belarus' Vanesa Kaladzinskaya in a freestyle 53-kg event.

Background

- Vinesh Phogat was training with the Indian wrestling contingent in Bulgaria, Poland and Estonia towards the end of her training cycle. She then went to Hungary with her coach Woller Akos for 15 days during the final leg of her training before reaching Tokyo.
- She had mainly done this to avoid seven days of daily Covid-19 tests that Indian athletes were subjected to before being allowed to leave for Tokyo.
- The Sports Authority of India had requested all Indian athletes training abroad to fly directly to Tokyo.
- Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu had also flown directly to Tokyo from the United States.

Project Lion: Gujarat seeks Rs. 2,000 crores from Central Government

The Government of Gujarat has sought the assistance of Rs. 2,000 crores from the Central Government for Project Lion. As per a senior government official, the request is under active consideration for approval.

Project Lion was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2020. It is to be modeled on Project Elephant and Project Tiger.

The Chief Minister of Gujarat Vijay Rupani, while participating in an event organized by the State forest department to celebrate World Lion Day on August 10, 2021, informed in a video address that the allocation process of Rs. 2,000 crores by the Central government was underway.

Significance:

The Chief Minister of Gujarat informed that in the coming years under Project Lion, the link between lion conservation and breeding will be strengthened.

He also added that the optimal use will be made of the hospitals, rescue centers, breeding centers, and laboratories. Radio collars and other modern technology will also be used well.

Project Lion in Gujarat: Essential details

- The State Government, under Project Lion, aims at establishing a National Wildlife Disease Diagnostic Center for a projected investment of Rs. 71 crores.
- A lion cell at the Union Ministry of environment, forest, and climate change is also envisioned for an investment of Rs. 31.65 crores under the proposed plan.
- Gujarat Government has also taken up the task of maintaining the health of the lions and their conservation by developing a new concept of an advanced lion hospital.
- Other features will be lion ambulance, trackers, rescue and rapid action team, and Vanyaprani Mitras in Sasan Gir with the public participation.

Key Highlights:

- The funding proposal by Gujarat Government for the project involves Rs. 712 crores for the habitat and the population management. Rs. 375 crores for the communities as stakeholders under the Sinh Mitra Yojana.
- Other aspects are Rs. 203 crores for lion health management, Rs. 152 crores for surveillance and monitoring, Rs. 120 crores for human-wildlife conflict management, and Rs. 74 crores for research and learning.
- 54 cores will be required for Information Learning and communication while the development of the potential lion habitat and future lion migration or the dispersal will require Rs. 117 crores.
- The mitigation of human-wildlife conflict envisages funds of Rs. 22.5 crores.

Increase in Asiatic Lion Population in Gujarat:

The Forest Department of Gujarat had informed in June 2020 that the Asiatic Lion population has increased by 29% over the last five years- from 523 in 2015 to 674 in 2020.

The distribution range of lions in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat has increased by 36% from 22,000 sq km in 2015 to 30,000 sq km.

DGCI gives nod for conducting study on mixing Covaxin & Covishield

The Drugs Controller General of India has approved conducting a study on **mixing Covaxin and Covishield vaccines**. Dr V K Paul, Niti Aayog Member informed during a press briefing that permission has been granted for a research study by CMC Vellore (Tamil Nadu) on mixing of vaccines doses.

Permission has been granted for a research study by CMC Vellore (Tamil Nadu) on mixing of vaccines doses: Dr V K Paul, Niti Aayog during a press briefing on Tuesday

pic.twitter.com/QogE9UwBWz

— ANI (@ANI) [August 11, 2021](#)

A study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) previously revealed that the combination of Covaxin and Covishield vaccines can yield better safety results.

The study results have come at a time when there is increased research on the mixing of vaccine doses globally.

The Study: Key Highlights

- During the study, ICMR had compared the safety and immunogenicity profile of those who had received either Covaxin or Covishield and it showed better results.
- The study was conducted on individuals in Uttar Pradesh who had received Covishield as the first dose followed by inadvertent administration of Covaxin as the second dose at an interval of six weeks.
- The Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases, ICMR, Dr Samiran Panda said "it was like a natural experiment when second time these individuals inoculated with different doses inadvertently."
- The ICMR had decided to conduct the study so that people do not get anxiety or vaccine hesitancy.
- The medical council collected samples of individuals.

Results

- There were a total of 18 participants in the heterologous group, out of which two participants were unwilling and were excluded.
- Others included 11 male and seven female participants with a median age of 62 years. Hypertension was reported in one person.
- Overall, 40 individuals were included in both the homologous groups.
- The safety and immunogenicity profile of these people was compared with those who received either Covishield or Covaxin.
- Lower adverse events following immunization in all three groups underlined the safety of the combination vaccine regime.
- The vaccine immunity against Alpha, Beta, and Delta variants in the heterologous group was noted to be superior.
- The IgG antibody and neutralising antibody response of the participants was also significantly higher compared to that in the homologous groups.

Conclusion

- The study revealed that vaccination with a combination of an adenovirus vector platform-based vaccine followed by an inactivated whole virus vaccine was not only safe but it also yielded better immunogenicity.
- Upon comparison with the heterogeneous group and homologous group, the study found better immune response, if somebody gets Covishield first and Covaxin second.
- This is the first study on the combination of Adenovector and whole variant vaccines.

Background

Denmark's State Serum Institute had earlier stated that combining the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine with the second dose of mRNA vaccines either Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccines offers a 'good protection'.

West Africa reports first case of Marburg Virus – All you need to know

West Africa on August 9, 2021, confirmed the first case of the extremely contagious and deadly hemorrhagic Marburg virus in the Guinea region, reported the World Health Organization (WHO).

Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO's Regional Director for Africa said, "We are working with the health authorities to implement a swift response." Guinea has experience and expertise in handling the Ebola virus, which is also transmitted in the same way as the Marburg virus does.

The Marburg virus belongs to the family of the Ebola virus. Marburg virus was detected in a male patient in Guinea. The patient was getting treatment in the Gueckedou province in southeast Guinea. Later, he died.

As per WHO, the patient exhibited symptoms on July 25. On August 1, he went for treatment at a small health clinic near his village. The next day, he succumbed to the infection.

What is Marburg virus?

- As per WHO, the Marburg virus is a highly virulent disease that causes hemorrhagic fever, with a fatality rate of up to 88 per cent.
- WHO has listed the Marburg virus as a top 10 priority disease along with Ebola, Zika Lassa fever which has the potential to cause a pandemic.
- Marburg belongs to the same family as the Ebola virus. In 1967, two epidemics outbreaks occurred in Marburg and Frankfurt in Germany, and in Belgrade in Serbia. The outbreak was caused during laboratory work being done on African green monkeys that were imported from Uganda. The outbreaks led to the identification of the Marburg virus.
- Later, sporadic outbreaks were reported in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa.

Marburg virus: Symptoms

- The incubation period of the virus ranges between 2 to 21 days. The symptoms stated by WHO

are sudden very high fever, severe headache, malaise, muscle aches, pains, diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting.

- Patients are reportedly found dead between 8 to 9 days after the onset of the symptoms in cases of severe hemorrhagic cases.

Marburg virus: How it can spread?

- Marburg virus can spread through prolonged exposure to caves or mines inhabited by Rousettus bat colonies.

- Once infected, the virus can spread from human-to-human contact through broken skin, blood, organs, bodily fluids, secretions, or surfaces such as bedding, clothing contaminated by the infected person.

Marburg Virus: Treatment

- There are currently no antivirals or vaccines to treat the Marburg virus. Supportive care such as relief for certain symptoms is available.

What is Delhi Government's color-coded system to tackle COVID-19?

The Government of Delhi, amid rising concerns of the COVID-19 outbreak in the National Capital, imposed a **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** on August 8, 2021, in order to control any rise in fresh Coronavirus cases in the city.

Kejriwal Government notified a color-coded action plan under which the level of restrictions in industries, markets, offices, and public transport will be determined on the basis of the COVID-19 test positivity rate, occupancy of the beds in hospitals, and the new COVID-19 cases.

What is a color-coded action plan in Delhi?

As per the Delhi Government, **the restrictions in the city will be based on three parameters: cumulative new positive cases, test positivity rate (TPR), and occupancy of oxygen beds in the hospitals.**

And the restrictions by the government have been classified under Yellow, Amber, Orange, and Red alerts.

While Yellow is the lowest level of alert, Red will be the highest bringing the city under a complete lockdown. Most social, economic activities and public transport facilities will come to a halt with Orange alert itself.

Color-coded action plan in Delhi: Significance

As there was no clear-cut policy in the National Capital, there were instances of the government announcing the restrictions only after a major surge in cases.

The Color-coded Graded Response Action Plan in Delhi will prevent the administrative delays, which happened during the second wave, in announcing the preventive measures.

The Chief Secretary Vijay Dev on August 8 notified a plan which was earlier approved by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on July 9, 2021.

However, with Delhi's hospitalization and positivity rate currently are well below the parameters that necessitate the sounding of an alert, no fresh restrictions are being imposed immediately.

Yellow alert triggered: What will be the restrictions?

The yellow alert will go out if the Test Positivity Rate (TPR) remains over 0.5 for two consecutive days or the cumulative new cases (for one week) touch 1,500 or the average occupancy of the oxygen beds in hospitals remains 500 for a week.

Restrictions-

- Auditoriums, Cinemas, banquet halls, gyms and entertainment parks, spas, gyms, and yoga centers will be shut down.
- There will be a complete ban on religious/political/social/entertainment/festival-related gatherings.
- Sports complexes, stadiums (except National/International Sports events) will be shut.
- Night Curfew will come into effect under which the movement of people will be restricted between 10 pm to 5 am.

What will be allowed?

- Shops in malls and markets dealing with the non-essential goods open and services will be allowed to open as per the odd-even formula from 10 am to 8 pm. One weekly market will be allowed per municipal zone at half the vendor capacity.
- Restaurants will be able to operate at 50% capacity from 8 am to 10 pm, bars from 12 pm to 10 pm, also at 50% capacity.
- Delhi Metro and buses will be allowed to operate at 50% capacity.
- Delhi Government offices will be able to call 100% Grade I officers, while private firms can call 50% of staff between 9 am to 5 pm.
- Gardens, public parks, industrial establishments and construction activities, barbershops, e-commerce, beauty parlors, and salons will be allowed to open.

Amber alert triggered: Restrictions and what will be allowed?

Delhi will enter the next phase of restrictions under Amber Alert if the TPR remains over 1 for over

two consecutive days or 3,500 new cases are reported in a week, or in case an average oxygen beds occupancy remains over 700 over the course of a week.

Restrictions-

- Apart from the restrictions under yellow, restaurants and bars will close, but takeover and home delivery will be permitted.
- Timings of shops in malls and markets will be from 10 am to 6 pm.
- Public parks and gardens will be closed, along with salons, barbershops, and beauty parlours.
- Metros will be allowed at 33% capacity, while buses will run at 50% capacity.
- Apart from the night curfew, the weekend curfew will also start from 10 pm Friday to 5 am Monday.

Allowed-

Manufacturing units and construction activities and e-commerce will have no restrictions.

When will be the Orange alert and what will be the restrictions?

The orange alert will be sounded if the TPR remains over 2 for two straight days or in the case of 9000 new cases over a week's time or the average occupancy of the oxygen beds remain 1,000 or above for seven consecutive days.

Restrictions-

- Malls, Delhi Metro, and markets will close and only shops dealing with essential goods such as milk booths, groceries, and chemists will function.
- Buses in Delhi will be able to operate with 50% capacity only with the passengers engaged in essential activities.
- Construction activities will be halted and only those sites offering accommodation facilities to labourers will be allowed.
- For factories, only those producing the essential commodities will be allowed if workers can live

on the site.

- E-Commerce will be permitted only in the case of essential items such as health equipment and medicines.
- Delhi Government offices will be opened, however, the private offices, except those falling under exempted categories, will be shut.
- Night and weekend curfew will remain enforced.

When the Red Alert will kick in?

If the Test Positivity Rate in the city breaches 5 for two days in a row or Delhi records 16,000 new cases in a week or the average occupancy of the oxygen beds in hospitals remains 3,000 or above for a week, the Red alert will kick in.

Delhi will go under lockdown in Orange alert itself. The additional restrictions of the Red alert will mainly be on the movement of vehicles and people s a total curfew will be imposed.

Restrictions for Marriage and Funeral-related gatherings:

A maximum of 20 people will be able to take part in these events under Yellow and Amber alerts. In the case of Red and Orange alerts, it will be 15.

Sectors to remain open irrespective of level of alerts:

- Hotels and lodges will remain open under all four levels of alerts.
- Places of worship will remain open but no visitors will be allowed.
- In the case of intra-state movement of buses, only those under the exempted categories will be permitted and the seat occupancy will be capped at 50% from the yellow alert itself.

What are the restrictions on people coming to Delhi from other states?

For those who will be entering Delhi from other states, a negative RT-PCR report not older than 3 days will be mandatory or the full vaccination certificate will be mandatory when the city is under the Red Alert and the travelers are from states with a TPR above 5.

Those individuals who will be coming from states where a new COVID strain has been found will

also have to produce the vaccination certificate or a negative RT-PCR report.

Former New Zealand all-rounder Chris Cairns in ICU

Former New Zealand all-rounder Chris Cairns is on life support in an intensive care unit at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney after he suffered an aortic dissection in the heart last week.

As per media reports, 51-year-old Cairns suffered an aortic dissection, wherein a tear occurs in the inner layer of the body's main artery (aorta), in Canberra last week.

He was transferred to St. Vincent's Hospital on August 10, 2021. He has been reportedly undergone several operations but has not responded to treatment as doctors had hoped.

Who is Chris Cairns?

- Chris Cairns is a former New Zealand cricketer and former ODI captain. He has been the all-rounder of the New Zealand cricket team.
- Cairns has played 215 ODIs, 62 Test matches, and two T20Is for New Zealand between 1989 and 2006.
- In Test matches, he has knocked out 218 wickets at an average of over 29 and accumulated 3,320 Test runs at an average of over 33. In ODIs, he knocked out 201 wickets at 32.80 and accumulated 4,950 runs at 29.46.
- In 2000, Cairns was named as one of five Wisden Cricketers of the Year.
- In 2004, Cairns took retirement from the New Zealand Test team.
- In 2005, Cairns was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services as to the sport of Cricket.
- In 2006, Cairns retired from the ODIs.
- Cairns last played a Twenty20 match against the West Indies in 2006.
- Cairns is the son of former New Zealand cricketer Lance Cairns.

Allegations of match-fixing

- Cairns has also been subject to match-fixing allegations in India when he was captain of the Chandigarh Lions during the Indian Cricket League in 2008. He later won the libel case against former IPL chairman Lalit Modi in 2012.
- In 2015, Cairns also cleared his name in a libel case filed against him by Britain's Crown Prosecution Service.

Khudiram Bose death anniversary: Why was India's young revolutionary executed?

Khudiram Bose was a freedom fighter who laid down his life for India's Independence from British rule. On August 11, 1908, he was executed by the British Colonial state for his involvement in the Muzaffarpur Conspiracy Case.

As India is all set to celebrate its 75th Independence Day on August 15, 2021, it is important to acknowledge the sacrifices made to achieve that Independence. Read more about Khudiram Bose and what inspired him to sacrifice himself at such young age.

Who was Khudiram Bose?

Khudiram Bose was born on December 3, 1889, in Mohobani Village of West Bengal's Medinipur (then Midnapore) district. **He was just 18 years old when he was executed by the British Colonial State.**

Khudiram Bose was just 6 years old when he lost his mother and his father passed away one year later. Bose then came in contact with the revolutionaries such as Barindra Kumar Ghosh of Calcutta.

He later became a volunteer in the freedom struggle when he was only 15 years old.

The British rulers had nabbed Khudiram for distributing the anti-British booklets to the local people. When he was just 16 years old, Bose also targeted the British Colonial States' Officials and participated in planting the bombs near police stations.

Khudiram Bose: What led to the execution of a young revolutionary?

Khudiram Bose, in April 1908, along with his fellow revolutionary Prafulla Chaki threw a bomb on a carriage in Muzaffarpur, with an intention of assassinating the Chief Presidency Magistrate Douglas Kingsford.

However, the duo erroneously killed two women who were traveling in the carriage.

Prafulla Chaki shot himself before being caught by the police while Khudiram Bose was arrested

and put on trial.

He was later sentenced to death after being held guilty of making an attempt on the life of a British judge.

On August 11, 1904, Khudiram was executed at the Muzaffarpur jail. Newspapers, at the time, reported that 18 years old Bose went to the gallows with Bhagavad Gita in his hands and a smile on his face.

Hariyali Teej 2021: Date, Timings, Significance and other details of the festival

Hariyali Teej 2021: The month of Sawan brings with it several auspicious festivals which are celebrated by the Hindu community all over the country and Hariyali Teej is essentially observed in the Indian States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand.

Hariyali Teej festival was observed on August 11 and is celebrated with colorful bangles, songs, mehendi, swings, and of course food.

Hariyali Teej is a part of the three teejs, which are celebrated by married women during the Sawan months. The other two are Hartalika Teej and Kajari Teej.

In some of the states in India, hariyali Teej is also called Sawan Teej as the festival takes place during the monsoon season. Hariyali or greenery also signifies the time when the Indian farmers sow their crops.

Hariyali Teej 2021 Date and Timings

In 2021, Hariyali Teej will be celebrated on August 11, 2021. As per Drik Panchang, the Tritiya Tithi started at 6.05 pm on August 10 and will end at 4.53 pm on August 11.

Hariyali Teej 2021: Did you know?

Hariyali Teej is dedicated to Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva. The auspicious festival falls on the Shukla Paksha Tritiya and usually two days before the Nag Panchami.

Significance:

Hariyali Teej symbolizes the union between Lord Shiva and Parvati, and such, married women pray and worship the Goddess for marital bliss and happiness.

Hariyali Teej celebration:

During Teej, married women visit their parents' house, wear new clothes, bangles and sing teej songs, Katha or folklore of Shiv and Parvati.

In return, the parents of the woman give her 'Sindhara'. It is a gift bucket and has henna, homemade sweets, bangles, etc.

Hariyali Teej food:

The traditional Hariyali Teej food, like any other Indian festival, is popular for the items like ghevar. Other popular sweets and food which is offered during Teej are Laddoo, shakkar para, balushahi, and jalebi.

Rajya Sabha returns Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill after discussion

The Rajya Sabha on August 9, 2021 returned the **Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021** after a brief discussion. Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to withdraw tax demands made under the 2012 retrospective tax legislation to tax the indirect transfer of Indian assets

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that the bill was brought in the wake of Supreme Court's judgments. She said that the Sovereign rights of India to tax will remain intact and there will be no dilution in it with this legislation.

The Opposition including Congress, TMC, DMK and Left parties had staged a walkout during the discussion and passage of the bill saying that there was not enough time for members to prepare for a discussion on the legislation.

The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to amend the Income-Tax Act, 1961, and the Finance Act, 2012 and withdraw contentious retrospective tax demand provision.

The Lok Sabha had passed the bill earlier on August 6, 2021. The bill proposes to amend IT Act to provide that "no tax demand shall be raised in future on basis of said retrospective amendment for any indirect transfer of Indian assets if transaction before 28th May, 2012". The Finance Act 2012 had received the assent of the President on May 28, 2012.

Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021: Key Highlights

- Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 seeks to withdraw tax demands made under the 2012 retrospective legislation to tax the indirect transfer of Indian assets
- The bill proposes that any demand raised for indirect transfer of Indian assets made before May 28, 2012 shall be nullified on fulfilment of specified conditions such as withdrawal or furnishing of undertaking for withdrawal of pending litigation and furnishing of an undertaking to the effect that no claim for cost, damages, interest shall be filed.
- The bill proposes to refund the amount paid in these cases without any interest.
- It also proposes to amend the Finance Act, 2012 to provide that the validation of demand under

section 119 of the Finance Act, 2012 shall cease to apply on fulfilment of specified conditions.

- The Bill states that the issue of taxability of gains arising from the transfer of assets located in India through the transfer of shares of a foreign company was a subject matter of protracted litigation.

Significance

- The bill is likely to benefit many companies including Vodafone and Cairn Energy who had to pay tax based on the retrospective tax demand provision.
- The amendment will have a direct bearing on the long-running tax disputes with Cairn Energy Plc and Vodafone Group.
- As per the amendment, the centre will withdraw all back tax demands on companies such as Cairn Energy and Vodafone and will refund the money collected to enforce such levies.
- This is crucial as the country stands at a juncture today when quick recovery of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic is the need of the hour and foreign investment will play a significant role in promoting faster economic growth and employment.

Background

- The Supreme Court had in 2012 given a verdict that gains arising from indirect transfer of Indian assets are not taxable under the existing provisions of the Income Tax Act 1961.
- The provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1961 were amended by the Finance Act, 2012 with retrospective effect, to overturn the Supreme Court verdict and clarify that gains arising from the sale of shares of a foreign company is taxable in India if such shares, directly or indirectly, derive their value substantially from assets located in India.
- The amendments made by the Finance Act, 2012 invited criticism from stakeholders mainly with respect to the retrospective effect given to the amendments.
- There were arguments that such retrospective amendments militate against the principle of tax certainty and damage India's reputation as an attractive destination.
- While the Indian government has brought major reforms in the past few years in the financial and infrastructure sector to create a positive environment for investment, the retrospective clarificatory amendment continued to be a sore point with potential investors.

Russian President Vladimir Putin suggests creation of maritime security body in UNSC

Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 9, 2021 suggested the creation of a **maritime security body** in the United Nations Security Council to address all issues regarding piracy, maritime crimes and terrorism.

Putin was speaking at the UNSC maritime security conference chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Russian President vowed that Russia will ensure security in the Persian Gulf and the Atlantic Ocean amid an increase in piracy-related incidents across the globe.

Putin also mentioned that Russia is interested in building productive relations with the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Indian Ocean Commission.

Maritime Security Body

The Russian president stated the maritime security body could rely on the support of UN member states. He added that the maritime security body could actively cooperate with experts, representatives of civil society, scientists and even business people.

There have been several piracy-related incidents across the world including robbery at sea accompanied by taking of hostages.

Russian President's statement

•Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a UNSC meet, *"To achieve real success in this area (maritime security), it's necessary to unite efforts of all interested states, as well as international organisations, regional structures - with the central coordinating role of UN & Security Council."*

•He said that Russia stands for strict observance of key norms and principles of international law enshrined in UN Charter, such as respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, resolution of disputes through dialogue.

Russia stands for strict observance of key norms & principles of int'l law enshrined in UN Charter, such as respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, resolution of disputes through dialogue.: Vladimir Putin at UNSC meet

— ANI (@ANI) [August 10, 2021](#)

- He added saying that Russia is doing a lot to preserve & strengthen legal order in maritime security and it is ready to share its experience in anti-terrorist operations, crime prevention, detection & neutralisation of bandit formations, including in maritime areas.

- He further thanked India for such a useful initiative in holding the meeting. He also wished India to continue to successfully fulfill the functions of the President of the United Nations Security Council this month.

I thank our Indian friends for such a useful initiative in holding this meeting, and I would like to wish India to continue to successfully fulfill the functions of the President of the United Nations Security Council this month: Russian President Vladimir Putin at UNSC on Monday

— ANI (@ANI) [August 10, 2021](#)

Background

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had chaired a high-level debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security - A Case for International Cooperation at the UNSC through a video conference on August 9, 2021.

The meeting saw in attendance by several heads of state of UNSC member states and high-level briefers from the UN System and key regional organizations.

UP Government renames Kakori Conspiracy as Kakori Train Action

The Uttar Pradesh government has renamed the landmark freedom movement event “**Kakori Train Conspiracy**” as “**Kakori Train Action**” in a tribute to the revolutionaries who were hanged for robbing a train at Kakori to buy weapons in 1925.

The new name was used in all the official communications to refer to the event in the state. As per a government official, it was derogatory to describe the Kakori train robbery that was a part of the freedom movement as “conspiracy”. The event is usually described as Kakori train conspiracy or Kakori train robbery.

The government official highlighted that 'The revolutionaries were a bunch of passionate people, and their single goal was the independence of the country from the British. They did not commit any 'kand' (conspiracy), while fighting to gain freedom from the British. Their act was a glorious one, and using the derogatory word 'kand' would only malign their image. Hence, a decision was taken to replace 'kand' with 'action'."

A programme was held on August 9, 2021 to commemorate the anniversary of the event at Kakori-based Kakori Shaheed Smarak on the outskirts of Lucknow, which saw in attendance UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and UP Governor Anandiben Patel. The programme honoured the family members of the freedom fighters on the occasion and an art exhibition was also held.

Kakori Train Robbery: All important facts

- The Kakori Train Action was a train robbery that took place on August 9, 1925 .
- The train robbery took place in Kakori, a village near Lucknow.
- The robbery was planned by Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan who belonged to the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA).
- The HRA was established to carry out revolutionary activities against the British Empire in India to help India gain independence.
- The train robbery was planned as the organisation needed money for the purchase of weaponry.

- Hence, Bismil and his party decided to plunder a train on one of the Northern Railway lines.
- The robbery was executed by Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan, Rajendra Lahiri, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sachindra Bakshi, Keshab Chakravarty, Manmathnath Gupta, Mukundi Lal, Murari Lal Gupta and Banwari Lal.
- Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqulla Khan and Roshan Singh were hanged to death for their involvement in the robbery on December 19, 1927.

European Union to leave safe travel list unchanged for now, says official

European Union Official has said that the EU will not change its safe travel list this week and will allow non-essential travel from the United States to continue for the time being despite a surge in Coronavirus cases in the country.

Last week an official from European Union had stated that the inclusion of the United States in the safe travel list might be reconsidered due to rising COVID-19 cases.

As per the officials, the EU safe travel list will be reviewed again in two weeks or even earlier if the COVID-19 situation changes.

EU Safe Travel List:

The safe travel list by the European Union currently comprises two dozen nations, including Japan, United States, and Australia. These countries are considered safe from the health perspective under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

EU has recommended to the member states to remove the entry ban on the non-essential entry for the residents of the following countries:

S. No.	Countries
1	Albania
2	Armenia
3	Australia
4	Azerbaijan
5	Bosnia and Hercegovina
6	Brunei Darussalam
7	Canada
8	Israel

9	Japan
10	Jordan
11	Lebanon
12	Montenegro
13	New Zealand
14	Qatar
15	Republic of Moldova
16	Republic of North Macedonia
17	Saudi Arabia
18	Serbia
19	Singapore
20	South Korea
21	Ukraine
22	US
23	China (subject to confirmation of reciprocity)

EU demands Washington to let in EU citizens:

The European Union has repeatedly asked the United States to let in the EU citizens after the US was added to the so-called White List in June 2021.

The list is non-binding, even though the EU governments tend to apply it. They can however ignore the list.

The 27-nation bloc is also divided among the states that have been pushing for reciprocity from the US, and the others that are more reliant on tourism and are reluctant to remove the United States from the list.

Is India on the EU safe travel list?

India is still not part of the European Union Safe Travel List despite the drastic fall in the COVID-19 cases across the country.

Also, recently, UK has removed India from the Red List and has put the country on the Amber list allowing travel from both sides to re-commence with caution.

ICC to push for cricket's inclusion in 2028 Los Angeles Olympics

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has confirmed that it is planning to push for **cricket's inclusion in the Olympic Games. The ICC aims to bid for the sport's inclusion in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.**

The International Cricket Council has assembled a working group to lead the bid. The ICC said in a statement that 30 million cricket fans live in the United States, making LA 2028 Olympics the ideal Games for cricket to make its return.

Cricket has only been included once in the Olympics till now, that too in 1900 Paris Olympic Games when only two cricket teams had competed- hosts France and Great Britain.

ICC to push for cricket's inclusion in the Olympic Games going forward, starting preparations for a bid on behalf of the sport with the primary target being its addition to the Los Angeles 2028 itinerary: International Cricket Council [pic.twitter.com/iXxblu2IRw](https://twitter.com/iXxblu2IRw)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 10, 2021](#)

Significance

- If cricket is included in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games, it would mark the end of the sport's 128-year absence from the Games.
- ICC Chairperson Greg Barclay said that the addition of cricket to the Olympic Games would be beneficial to both the sport and the Games.

ICC Official statement

ICC Chairperson Greg Barclay congratulated IOC, Tokyo 2020, and the people of Japan for staging such an incredible Games in such difficult circumstances. He stated, *"It truly was fantastic to watch and captured the imagination of the world and we would love for cricket to be a part of future Games."*

He continued by saying, *"Our sport is united behind this bid, and we see the Olympics as a part of cricket's long-term future. We have more than a billion fans globally and almost 90 percent of them want to see cricket at the Olympics."*

He added saying that clearly, cricket has a strong and passionate fanbase, particularly in

South Asia from where 92 percent of fans come while there are also 30 million cricket fans in US. He said that *"the opportunity for those fans to see their heroes competing for an Olympic medal is tantalising."*

ICC stated that cricket would be a great addition to the Olympic Games, but it won't be easy to secure the inclusion of the sport in the Olympics as there are so many other great sports wanting to do the same. The council feels that it is time to put their best foot forward and show what a great partnership cricket and the Olympics are.

ICC Olympic Working Group

- The ICC Olympic Working Group will be chaired by England and Wales Cricket Board Chair Ian Watmore and other members include ICC Independent Director Indra Nooyi, Chair of USA Cricket Parag Marathe, Chair of Zimbabwe Cricket Tavengwa Mukuhlani and ICC Associate Member Director and Asian Cricket Council Vice President Mahinda Vallipuram.
- The Chairperson of USA Cricket, Parag Marathe said that he believes the time is now for cricket to make its long-awaited return to the Olympics. He also expressed confidence that the sport's inclusion at the Olympics would accelerate the growth of the game in the USA.
- He stated, *"USA Cricket is thrilled to be able to support cricket's bid for inclusion in the Olympics, the timing of which aligns perfectly with our continuing plans to develop the sport in the USA."*

Background

In a momentous occasion, cricket will be included in the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. This will serve as a perfect showcase for what the sport can bring to the Olympics.

Wildfires in Greece: Evia island residents forced to flee as wildfires continue to rip the Greek Island

Greece Wildfires: The deadly wildfires are continuing to rip through Evia Island in Greece, prompting residents of the island to flee to safety by sea. More than 2,000 people from the island have been evacuated, with elderly residents carried on to the ferries.

As per the local officials, more help was needed to fight the fires that have destroyed the parts of the island. The European Union has informed that it has mobilized one of the biggest responses to tackle the wildfires affecting Greece and several other European nations.

Greece and its neighbouring Turkey have been battling the devastating blazes for nearly two weeks now as the region suffers its worst heatwave in decades. In Greece, temperatures have risen to 45C (113F).

A number of wildfires have struck Greece in recent days. One blaze which was in the northern suburb of Athens is said to have subsided.

Heatwaves, such as in Greece and Turkey, are becoming more likely and more extreme because of the human-induced climate change and the subsequent dry-hot weather is likely behind fueling the wildfires.

Wildfires burning on Evia Island in Greece:

Evia which is a large island to the north and east of Athens has been facing two fire fronts that have destroyed thousands of hectares of land, along with a number of businesses and houses.

Firefighters have also been struggling to keep fires at bay in a number of villages on the island. Images have shown more people being evacuated including the elderly people which can be seen carried on to the ferries.

With no signs of fire subsiding, officials and residents have been calling for more help. The Mayor of the Municipality of Istiaia in the northern part of Evia Island informed that it is already too late and the area has been destroyed.

The mayor, Giannis Kontzias further appealed for more help from water-bombing planes and helicopters.

However, Civil Protection Chief Nikos Hardalias stated that planes faced a number of problems including the poor visibility caused by the fires.

People facing distress due to wildfires:

Some people have been finding it hard to breathe as there is so much smoke and ash in the air.

Reportedly, people on Evia Island are on high alert and there is also a lot of distress. There is also a feeling among people that the authorities are letting them down and not helping enough, however, the government says it is doing all it can.

Countries respond to Greece's call for help:

A number of nations have responded to Greece's call for help including Germany, France, and the UK.

The European Union stated that the member countries have deployed 9 planes, close to 200 vehicles, and 1,000 firefighters to Greece.

Prime Minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis also expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the countries that had sent the assistance and thanked the countries for standing by Greece during these trying times.

On behalf of the Greek people, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the countries that have sent assistance and resources to help fight the wildfires. We thank you for standing by Greece during these trying times. pic.twitter.com/POrWlIVJsU

— Prime Minister GR (@PrimeministerGR) [August 8, 2021](#)

Wildfires in Greece and Turkey: What is the present situation?

- In Greece, fires in the Peloponnese region are reportedly stable and the fires in the Northern Athens Suburb have also subsided.
- The situation in Attica (which encompasses Athens) is better but there is still a danger of flare-ups. The military has also been patrolling the area amid concerns that the fire can restart.
- Turkey has also been battling a series of wildfires which have also been labeled as the worst in

the country's history. Eight people died and thousands have been forced to flee their homes.

- According to Turkey's Agriculture and Forestry Minister, Bekir Pakdemirli, 235 fires had been contained and 5 were still ongoing.

World Lion Day 2021: World Lion Day 2021 Theme, Significance, History-All you need to know!

World Lion Day 2021: World Lion Day is celebrated every year on August 10 to raise awareness about lions and mobilise support for their protection and conservation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted on the occasion saying, ***"The lion is majestic and courageous. India is proud to be home to the Asiatic Lion. On World Lion Day, I convey my greetings to all those passionate about lion conservation. It would make you happy that the last few years have seen a steady increase in India's lion population."***

The lion is majestic and courageous. India is proud to be home to the Asiatic Lion. On World Lion Day, I convey my greetings to all those passionate about lion conservation. It would make you happy that the last few years have seen a steady increase in India's lion population.

pic.twitter.com/GaCEXnp7hG

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 10, 2021](#)

The Prime Minister continued by saying that when he was serving as Gujarat Chief Minister, he had the opportunity to work towards ensuring safe and secure habitats for the Gir Lions. He said, ***"A number of initiatives were taken which involved local communities and global best practices to ensure habitats are safe and tourism also gets a boost."***

When I was serving as Gujarat CM, I had the opportunity to work towards ensuring safe and secure habitats for the Gir Lions. A number of initiatives were taken which involved local communities and global best practices to ensure habitats are safe and tourism also gets a boost.

pic.twitter.com/0VEGmh7Ygj

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 10, 2021](#)

World Lion Day 2021 Theme: "Slow elimination of the African lion"

World Lion Day Significance

World Lion Day is observed to raise awareness about the declining population of lions and need for conservation. Lions are vulnerable species as per the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

World Lion Day History

The first World Lion Day was celebrated in 2013. Since then, the day has become a symbol in the fight to protect the majestic species.

According to the World Wide Fund for animals (WWF), though the lion is often referred to as the “king of the jungle,” it actually only lives in grasslands and plains and not in the forest surrounded by trees.

Lion Population in India

- India is home to the Asian lion with four Royal Bengal tigers, the Indian leopard, the clouded leopard and the snow leopard.
- As per a census conducted by the Gujarat government in June 2020, there has been a rise of magnificent big cats.
- According to the census, India had witnessed one of the highest growth rates of 28.87 per cent in the population of Asiatic Lions last year in June.
- The number of Asiatic lions has gone up from 523 to 674 in five years from the last population estimation done in 2015.
- The Gujarat Chief Wildlife Warden informed that the last population estimation exercise was conducted in May 2015, which estimated the lion numbers to be at 523, which was a 27 per cent increase from the 2010 estimation.
- The population of Asiatic Lions has thus shown a steady increase in the last five years with an increase rate of 28.87 per cent, one of the highest growth rate so far.

India's first Internet Governance Forum to be held in October

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on August 9, 2021, informed that India will host the first Internet Governance Forum in the country for three days beginning October 20, 2021.

Anil Kumar Jain, CEO, National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, and also the Chairman of Coordination Committee, India Internet Governance Forum (IIGF) 2021 announced the launch of IIGF during a press conference at Electronics Niketan, New Delhi.

Pre-IIGF engagement events will begin from August 2021 at several colleges and universities. The pre-events aim to engage students and youth to participate in the main event in October and further involve them in the policy formation stages.

Theme of IIGF 2021

- The theme of IIGF 2021 is Inclusive Internet for Digital India.

What is IIGF?

- IIGF expanded to India Internet Governance Forum is an Internet Governance policy discussion platform. It is the Indian chapter of the Internet Governance Forum under the United Nations.
- India is the second-largest broadband subscription country in the world. It has the highest data consumption per user per month.
- The IIGF aims to take into account the aspirations of the Indians in their International policy formation and stakeholder discussion.
- The IIGF aims to ensure that the growth of broadband adheres to the lifestyle and requirements of the Indian community.
- The Indian Chapter of IGF will also adopt the multi-stakeholder concept to organize the event.

- The coordination committee of the IIGF comprises apt representation from the Government, civil society, industrial association, industry, trust, and other stakeholders.
- Anil Kumar Jain, CEO, National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as Chairman, TV Ramchandran as Vice Chairman, Jaijeet Bhattacharya as Vice Chairman, Dr Rajat Moona as Vice-Chairman along with around 12 members representing Government, Industries, Civil Society, Associations, Trust, etc. will make up the Coordination Committee of the IIGF.

What is IGF?

- IGF expanded to Internet Governance Forum is a United Nations forum that incorporates multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on issues relating to Internet Governance.
- The United Nations Secretary-General in July 2006 had announced the establishment of the IGF. The first meeting of IGF was held in October-November 2006 in Athens, Greece. Thereafter, the forum has been holding annual meetings since then.
- The 16th annual IGF meeting will be held in Katowice, Poland from December 6 to 10, 2021 with the theme 'Internet United'.
- The forum gathers representatives from various groups such as government, civil or private sector, academicians, all at par to deliberate on internet governance or public policy issues relating to the internet.
- The forum's mode of engagement is based on the multi-stakeholder model of Internet Governance. The model is well adopted by United Nations and by Internet Cooperation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Foreign nationals now eligible for COVID-19 vaccination in India: Government

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on August 9, 2021, **permitted the foreign nationals residing in India to get registered on the Co-WIN portal to receive their Coronavirus vaccination.**

The Health Ministry also informed that the foreign nationals will be able to use their passports as identity proof for the purpose of the registration on the Co-WIN portal.

Once they will be registered on the portal, foreign nationals will be able to get a slot for the Coronavirus vaccination.

[#IndiaFightsCorona](#)

Foreign nationals are now eligible for Vaccination in India

Passport of Foreign nationals residing in India to be identity document for registration on [#CoWIN](#) portal [#LargestVaccinationDrive#We4Vaccine](#)

Details: <https://t.co/gwBd9SukN4> pic.twitter.com/nZanZq45TY

— [#IndiaFightsCorona \(@COVIDNewsByMIB\)](#) [August 9, 2021](#)

Significance

According to the Health Ministry, a significant number of foreign nationals have been living in India, particularly in large metropolitan areas.

In these areas, the potential of the spread of Coronavirus is high due to the higher population density. In order to counter any possibility of such occurrence, it is important to vaccinate all the eligible individuals in the country.

The Ministry further added that the initiative will ensure the safety of the foreign nationals residing in India and will also bring down the possibilities of further transfer of infection from unvaccinated people in the country.

It will also ensure the overall safety from the further transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme in India:

The National COVID-19 Vaccination programme is being implemented in the States and UTs all over the country since January 16, 2021.

The ongoing vaccination programme in India, in its current phase, covers all the citizens aged 18 years and above.

As of August 9, 2021, India has administered more than 51 crore vaccine doses all over the country.

COVID-19 vaccines in India:

Currently, India has been administering five COVID-19 vaccines which have been given Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the drug regulatory body of the country.

These five vaccines are- Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, Covishield, COVAXIN and Sputnik V.

The COVID-19 vaccine for children in the country is still undergoing clinical trial.

In the most latest update, Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D Covid-19 vaccine is also expected to receive emergency use approval in India later this week.

Zyklus Cadila likely to get emergency use approval this week for its COVID-19 vaccine

Zyklus Cadila's three-dose COVID-19 vaccine, ZyCoV-D is expected to get emergency use approval later this week, informed sources. ZyCoV-D is the **world's first plasmid DNA vaccine** against COVID-19.

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had informed last week during the question hour in the Rajya Sabha that the government expects four more Indian pharmaceutical companies to start production of indigenous COVID-19 vaccines in October-November that will help to meet the domestic demand.

He had informed that while Zyklus Cadila will soon get an emergency use nod from Expert Committee, Biological E and Novartis vaccines will also be available in the market in the coming days.

Earlier, during a press briefing as well, NITI Aayog member Dr V K Paul had said that the DCGI is examining Zyklus Cadila's COVID vaccine for children. However, emergency use approval is expected to be given to adults first. The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) had earlier asked the Ahmedabad-based firm to return with more data on its ZyCoV-D.

ZyCoV-D: Ten Facts You Must Know!

1. ZyCoV-D is the world's first indigenously made plasmid DNA vaccine against COVID-19.
2. The vaccine's efficacy will be similar to that of other mRNA COVID vaccines including Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.
3. The Zyklus Cadila COVID-19 vaccine will deliver a specific set of instructions to the cells that instruct our immune system to recognise and respond to the virus.
4. The main advantage of DNA vaccines is that they can be stored at higher temperatures, making them more suitable for countries like India.
5. The Zyklus Cadila vaccine can be stored at a normal refrigeration temperature of 2 to 8 degrees.

6. ZyCoV-D will be the fifth COVID-19 vaccine to get emergency use authorisation in India after Serum Institute of India's Covishield, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, Russian vaccine Sputnik V and Moderna.
7. The ZyCoV-D vaccine doses will be given intradermally and not intramuscular, making them painless.
8. It is a three-dose vaccine and will be administered in a gap of 0-28-56-days. Other COVID-19 vaccines that have received emergency approval so far are mostly two dose vaccines or one dose.
9. The phase III trials of the Zydus Cadila vaccine covered more than 28,000 volunteers across the country including 1000 volunteers in the 12-18 years age group.
10. ZyCoV-D has reportedly showed both safety and efficacy during these trials, even against the new mutant strains especially the Delta variant.

Background

Zydus Cadila had informed on July 1, 2021 that it has sought emergency use authorisation (EUA) for its three-dose COVID-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI). The drugmaker plans to manufacture 10-12 crore doses annually. The drugmaker has conducted the largest clinical trial for its COVID-19 vaccine in India so far in over 50 centers.

Zydus Cadila had received permission to initiate human clinical trials last year. The company had submitted the results of Phase I/II clinical trials that were conducted over 1000 healthy adult volunteers on December 24, 2020.

The drugmaker had received approval from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to start Phase III Clinical Trials on January 3, 2021.

PM Modi chairs debate at UN Security Council, puts forth 5 basic principles for maritime security

PM Modi virtually presided over a **high-level open debate on maritime security at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** on August 9, 2021.

The debate was titled "**Enhancing Maritime Security- A Case for International Cooperation**" and it focused on ways to effectively counter maritime crime and insecurity and strengthen the coordination in the Maritime domain.

The dialogue was attended by several heads of state and representatives of the United Nations Security Council. Key regional organisations also attended the debate.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation". pic.twitter.com/QDTgOZ4uZm

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

Oceans are shared heritage: PM Modi at UNSC debate

Prime Minister Modi while presiding over the UNSC High-Level Open Debate stated that Oceans are our shared heritage and our maritime routes are the lifelines of international trade. He further added that these oceans are extremely significant for the future of Earth.

Oceans are our shared heritage & our maritime routes are the lifelines of international trade. These oceans are very important for the future of our planet: PM Modi at UNSC High-Level Open Debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation' pic.twitter.com/pfH9vWhNbF

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

PM Modi while speaking at the debate further added that this shared heritage of oceans is facing severe challenges as maritime routes are being misused for piracy and terrorism.

This shared heritage of ours (oceans) is facing several types of challenges. Maritime routes are being misused for piracy and terrorism: PM Narendra Modi at UNSC High-Level Open Debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation' pic.twitter.com/kq7VEsEG7K

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

PM Modi puts forth 5 basic principles for maritime security

1. Free maritime trade sans barriers so as to establish legitimate trades.
2. Settlement of the maritime disputes should be peaceful and on the basis of the international law
3. Responsible maritime connectivity must be encouraged
4. The need to collectively combat the maritime threats that are posed by the non-state actors and the natural calamities
5. The need to preserve the maritime environment and maritime resources.

For maritime security, I would like to put forth 5 basic principles...1) Free maritime trade sans barriers so as to establish legitimate trade. 2) Settlement of maritime disputes should be peaceful and on the basis of international law only: PM Modi at UNSC pic.twitter.com/npVWGSbY9m

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Modi further added that the barriers to maritime trade must be removed. The prosperity depends on the active flow of maritime trade & barriers in this path can challenge the entire global economy. Free maritime trade is associated with the culture of India for time immemorial.

We should remove barriers to maritime trade. Our prosperity depends on the active flow of maritime trade & barriers in this path can pose a challenge to the entire global economy. Free maritime trade is associated with the culture of India for time immemorial: PM Modi at UNSC pic.twitter.com/1rLI3T4In9

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

Inclusive framework on maritime security

Prime Minister Modi while speaking at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate said that India wants to make an inclusive framework on the maritime security in our region based on the vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region). This vision is for a secure, safe, and stable maritime domain.

We want to make an inclusive framework on maritime security in our region based on the vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region). This vision is for a safe, secure, and stable

maritime domain: PM Narendra Modi at a UNSC High-Level Open Debate

pic.twitter.com/ALhVn2SNV6

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

First Indian PM to preside over UNSC debate:

Arindam Bagchi, the spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs, said that it will be **the first time an Indian Prime Minister will chair an open debate at the United Nations Security Council.**

For the first time, maritime security will be discussed in a holistic manner as an exclusive agenda item at such a high level. Oceans have played a significant part in India's history right from the time of the Indus Valley Civilization.

India as a non-permanent member of UNSC:

India assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council for August. The country commenced its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council on January 1, 2021.

It is also India's seventh term on the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member. The country has previously been a member of the UNSC in 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, and 1991-92.

India assumes UNSC presidency: What will be on agenda?

India assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council on August 1, 2021. The country took over the rotating presidency of the 15-nation UNSC from France.

The last time India had assumed the presidency was ten years ago. This will also be the country's first presidency during its 2021-22 tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC.

On taking up the position, India stated that it will focus mainly on peacekeeping, maritime security and counterterrorism, during its Presidency at UNSC.

India's representative to the UN TS Tirumurti informed that India will be organizing events in three key areas- peacekeeping, maritime security, and counterterrorism.

About UN Security Council:

- The UN Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- The council is charged with ensuring international peace and security, approving any form of changes to the UN Charter, and recommending the admission of new UN members to the General Assembly.
- The powers of the UNSC include establishing peacekeeping operations, authorizing military action, and enacting international sanctions.
- Security Council is also the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions on the member states.

UNSC Members:

UNSC Permanent Members-

The five permanent members of the UNSC have the power to veto any substantive resolution. The members are;

S. No.	Permanent Members
1	China
2	France
3	Russia
4	United States
5	United Kingdom

Non-Permanent Members-

Along with 5 permanent members, UNSC also has temporary members that hold their seats on a rotating basis by geographic region.

These members may also be involved in global security briefings. Initially, there were only 6 non-permanent members, but in 1965, the number was expanded to 10. The non-permanent members are elected by UN General Assembly for two-year tenure starting on January 1, with 5 replaced each year.

The current 10 members are;

S. No.	Non-permanent members
1	Estonia
2	India
3	Ireland
4	Kenya
5	Mexico
6	Niger
7	Norway
8	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
9	Tunisia
10	Vietnam

Parliament passes Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2021- All you need to know

The **Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2021**, was passed by Rajya Sabha on August 9, 2021. The bill sets at abolishing as many as nine appellate tribunals, including the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT), set up under various acts. The bill was earlier passed by Lok Sabha on August 3.

The bill was earlier passed in the Lower House by voice vote without a debate amid the ongoing protests by the opposition parties over the Pegasus row and several other issues.

The Tribunal Reforms Bill which seeks to replace the **Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021**, was introduced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on August 2, 2021, in Lok Sabha.

Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2021: Key details

- The bill provides for the abolition of the tribunals or the authorities under various Acts by amending the Copyrights Act, 1957, Cinematograph Act, 1952, the Customs Act, 1962, the Airport Authority of India Act, 1994, the Patents Act, 1970, and the Trade Marks Act, 1999.
- The tribunals under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act, 2001, Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, and the Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2002, will also be wound up.
- All the pending cases before such tribunals or the authorities will be transferred to the High Court or Commercial Court.
- The Tribunal Reforms Bill will also provide for the uniform terms and the conditions of service for Chairperson and members of various tribunals.

Why the bill has been introduced?

The bill stated that the analysis of the data of the last three years has shown that the tribunals in various sectors have not necessarily led to faster justice delivery. These tribunals are also at the considerable expense to the exchequer.

The Supreme Court of India had also deprecated the practice of tribunalisation of justice and filing of appeals directly from the tribunals to the apex court in many of its judgments.

Therefore, further streamlining of tribunals was considered necessary. It could save considerable expense to the exchequer and at the same time, also lead to the speedy delivery of justice.

Background:

The Central Government had started the process of the rationalization of Tribunals back in 2015.

Seven tribunals were abolished or merged by the Finance Act, 2017 on the basis of their functional similarity. The total number of tribunals was reduced from 26 to 19.

The reason that followed in the first phase was to close down the tribunals which were not necessary and to merge the tribunals with similar functions.

Accordingly, the Tribunal Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2021, was introduced in Lok Sabha on February 13, 2021. It proposed to abolish the more authorities and tribunals as well as to provide for a mechanism to file a direct appeal to the High Courts and Commercial courts, as the case may be.

However, the bill could not be passed during the Budget Session in February and the President had promulgated the Ordinance. While introducing the bill on August 2, 2021, Finance Minister also withdrew the earlier bill introduced in February 2021.

PM-KISAN Scheme: PM Modi releases next installment of financial benefit under farmers welfare scheme

Prime Minister Modi on August 9, 2021, released the **9th installment of financial benefit** under the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme** via video conferencing.

PM Modi also interacted with the farmers on the occasion and addressed the nation. The Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar also attended the virtual event.

While speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister stated that the nation is a witness to the fact that Prime Minister Modi has been continuously working for the all-around development of the country.

PM Narendra Modi releases the 9th instalment of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme, via video conferencing. pic.twitter.com/eiAcByLKje

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

Farmers, villagers to play crucial role in deciding India's future: PM Modi

Prime Minister Modi while addressing the nation after releasing the ninth installment of the PM-KISAN Scheme, said that the farmers and villages in India will be playing a crucial role in deciding the country's future when it will complete 100 years of its independence in 2047.

Speaking during the event, Prime Minister said that on 15 August, India is going to celebrate its 75th Independence Day and this important milestone is not only a matter of pride but it is also an opportunity for new resolutions.

The nation will be celebrating its 75th Independence Day this year. This important milestone is not only a matter of pride for us but also an occasion for new resolutions & goals. On this occasion, we have to decide that where do we want to see India in the next 25 years: PM Modi

pic.twitter.com/WDSmi65hAt

— ANI (@ANI) [August 9, 2021](#)

He further added that in 2047, Indian farming, farmers, and villages will be playing a significant

role in deciding the condition of the country.

Small farmers on priority while finalizing agricultural policies:

PM Modi said that small farmers are now given utmost priority in the formulation of agricultural policies in India.

While addressing the nation, Prime Minister stated that in the last few years, serious efforts have been made to provide security and convenience to these small farmers.

Under PM-KISAN Scheme, Rs. One lakh sixty crores have been given to the farmers so far. Out of which Rs. One lakh crore was transferred to the small farmers during the pandemic period. More than 2 crore Kisan Credit Cards have also been issued during the Corona period, most of them to small farmers.

He further added that small farmers will also be benefitted from the connectivity infrastructure and agriculture infrastructure that is coming up in the country.

PM-KISAN Scheme:

Under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, a financial benefit of Rs. 6,000 per year is provided to the eligible beneficiary farmer families. The amount is payable in three equal four-monthly installments of Rs. 2,000 each.

The fund is directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries. Under this scheme, Samman Rashi of over Rs. 1.38 lakh crores have already been transferred to farmers' families so far.

The 8th installment of the financial benefit was released by PM Modi on May 14, 2021, under PM-KISAN Scheme via video conferencing.

PM Modi announces National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a **National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)** on August 9, 2021 to make India self-sufficient in cooking oils, including palm oil. The Prime Minister made the announcement while he was stressing on reducing the dependence on imports during a virtual event on PM Kisan scheme.

The Prime Minister said that over Rs 11,000 crore will be invested in the edible oil ecosystem. He also transferred over Rs 19,500 crore into the accounts of 9.75 crore farmers under the government's flagship PM-Kisan scheme.

PM Modi highlighted during the event that India has become self-sufficient in the production of rice, wheat and sugar, but it is not enough as the country is still largely dependent on huge imports of edible oils.

Hence, to make India self-reliant in edible oil too, the Prime Minister announced National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm.

National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm

- Under the National Edible Oil Mission-Oil Palm, the central government will ensure that farmers get all facilities including quality seeds and technology to promote farming to produce palm oil and other oil seeds.
- The mission will promote the cultivation of oil palm.
- It will also promote the expansion of the cultivation of other traditional oilseeds crops.

Background

- India is the world's biggest importer of edible oils. India is highly dependent on imports of edible oil to meet domestic demand. Out of India's total edible oil imports, palm oil constitutes about 55 percent.
- As per official data, India imported \$10 billion worth of vegetable oil in 2019-20, making it the

country's fifth most valuable import.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi also pointed out that India has spent thousands of crores of rupees on edible oil imports and this money rather should go to farmers.
- The Prime Minister said that north-eastern states and Andaman and the Nicobar Islands could be promoted for palm oil farming.

About Palm Oil

Palm Oil is one of the cheapest edible oil available naturally and it is relatively stable at high temperatures. It is, therefore, suitable for reuse and deep-frying.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2021: Theme, Significance and History

Every year on August 9, International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed to encourage protection and promotion of the rights of the indigenous peoples across the world.

Indigenous peoples account for 6.2 per cent of the global population. There are over 476 million indigenous peoples spread across 90 countries in the world. They hold a significant relationship with lands, unique cultures, languages, traditions, and knowledge systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected populations across the world that were already fighting poverty, discrimination, instability, etc. The indigenous peoples have been exposed to severe challenges over their sustainability. Therefore, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2021 will focus on a new social construct.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2021: Theme

- The theme for International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2021 is 'Leaving no one behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract'.
- A social contract here means a non-written agreement among the members of societies for cooperation to bring social and economic benefits to ensure no one is left behind, including indigenous people.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2021: Significance

- Especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the social contract needs revision, rebuilding, redesigning that fosters equal opportunities and acknowledges the rights of all, including indigenous peoples.
- The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will hold a virtual commemoration of the day to discuss reconstruction and redesigning a new social construct for indigenous peoples, wherein the governance and ways of life of indigenous peoples will be respected and their free and informed consent will be taken into consideration.

International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples: History

- The United Nations General Assembly on December 23, 1994, decided in its resolution that August 9 every year will be observed as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.
- The first meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations was held on August 9, 1982.
- On July 28, 2000, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) was established as a high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council to deal with indigenous issues relating to culture, education, human rights, health, and economic and social development of indigenous peoples.

IPCC Climate Change 2021 Report: Human activities are making extreme weather events more frequent, severe

IPCC Climate Change 2021 Report: The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a **landmark climate change 2021 report** on August 9, 2021. The report was released in a virtual event ahead of the COP26 climate summit in November 2021.

The climate change 2021 report is the world's largest report on climate change. The study analysed over 14,000 scientific papers and involved more than 234 researchers from over 65 countries.

Key takeaways from Climate Change 2021 Report

1. It is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change and making extreme weather events more frequent and severe.
2. Climate change is affecting every region on the planet.
3. Strong, rapid and sustainable reduction in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions will be required to limit global warming.

UN Secretary General António Guterres tweeted saying, ***"The evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions are choking our planet & placing billions of people in danger. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible. We must act decisively now to avert a climate catastrophe."***

The evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions are choking our planet & placing billions of people in danger.

Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible.

We must act decisively now to avert a climate catastrophe. <https://t.co/TQlgp1D9AV>

— António Guterres (@antonioguterres) [August 9, 2021](#)

Read: [List of extreme weather events in world in 2021](#)

Climate Change 2021 Report: In Detail

The Climate Change 2021 report states that the rapid climate changes that we see today are widespread, intensifying and unprecedented in thousands of years or never seen before.

1. Human influence on Climate Change

- The climate change report states that it is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change, warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land.
- Almost all observed warming from the late 1800s is human-caused, driven by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.
- The report noted that human influence has warmed the climate at an unprecedented rate in the last 2000 years.
- To measure how the climate is changed, the scientists looked at a key indicator- **the average temperature of the earth's surface over a period of at least a decade** compared to the average temperature in the late 1800s.
- The average surface temperature was 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer in the last 10 years.
- Each of the last ten decades have been the warmest since the late 1800s.
- The report, however, states that temperature has not been the only aspect that has been altered. The levels of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere also continued to increase fast.

2. Current Climate Assessment

- Current CO₂ concentrations are the highest they have been in at least 2 million years.
- Over the past 100 years, the sea level has risen at a faster rate than it ever did in at least 3000 years.
- The Arctic sea ice area is at the lowest level since at least 1000 years.
- The retreat of glaciers on a global scale since 1950 is unprecedented in at least 2000 years. |

The warming we have already experienced has far-reaching consequences:

- a) Climate change is contributing to an increase in extreme heat, heavy precipitation events and

drought.

- b) Since the 1950s, hot extremes including heatwaves over land and marine heatwave have become more frequent and more intense.
- c) Heavy precipitation events have become more frequent and more intense.
- d) There is also an increase in drought in some regions.

The report revealed that these consequences to the heat, rainfall and drought impact our whole planet, not just people but also plants and animals.

- e) Fire weather, the combination of dry and hot conditions that produce wildfire, is becoming more frequent in many parts of the world.
- f) A notable change is also taking place in the oceans, which is warming, acidifying and losing oxygen affecting ocean life and livelihoods dependent on it.

3. Future Climate Projections

- The Climate Change 2021 report shows that there will be further warming in the coming decade
- Unless there are immediate, strong and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the limiting of warming to 1.5 degree Celcius will be beyond reach.
- The report further shows that in the next 20 years, global warming- the average surface temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celcius.

What can we do to stop global warming?

- If we rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, if we can reach global net-zero CO₂ emissions around 2050, it is extremely likely that we can keep global warming well below 2 degree Celcius.
- The report states that if we do this, it is more likely that temperature will gradually decline to below or around 1.5 degree Celcius by the end of the century with a temporary overshoot of no more than 0.1 degree Celcius.
- But if global greenhouse gas emissions remain around today's levels in the coming decades, we would reach 2 degrees of global warming by the middle of this century.

- With every additional amount of global warming, we will see greater changes in the climate.
- The report warns that every additional half degree of warming will cause increases in the intensity and frequency of hot extremes, heavy precipitation and drought.

What will happen at 2 degrees of global warming?

- Heat extremes would more often reach critical and turbulent thresholds for agriculture and human health.
- Extreme daily rainfall events at a global scale will intensify by about 7 percent for each additional 1 degree Celcius of global warming.

Threat to human rights highest in police stations: Chief Justice of India

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana said on August 8, 2021, that the threat to **human rights is highest in police stations as the custodial torture and other police atrocities still prevail in India and even the privileged are not spared of the third-degree treatment.**

CJI was batting for a nationwide effort for the sensitization of police officers. He was speaking at the launch of a legal service mobile application and the vision and the mission statement of NALSA at Vigyan Bhawan.

The mobile app aims at further helping the needy and poor people in applying for legal aid and seek victim compensation.

Project Access to Justice:

The Chief Justice of India, while terming the project Access to Justice as an unending mission, said that for becoming the society that is governed by the rule of law, it was essential to bridge the gap of accessibility to justice between the most vulnerable and highly privileged.

He further added that, if as an institution, the judiciary wants to achieve the faith of the citizens, it has to make sure that everyone feels assured that we exist for them. For the longest time, the vulnerable population has lived outside the system of justice.

Threat to human rights and bodily integrity highest in police stations:

While talking about the legal aids, the CJI highlighted that the threat to human rights and bodily integrity are highest in the police stations. Police atrocities and custodial tortures are also the problems that still prevail in our society.

In spite of the constitutional declarations and the guarantees, the lack of effective legal representation at the police stations is a huge detriment to detained/arrested persons.

CJI also said that the decisions taken in these early hours determine the ability of the accused to defend himself.

Gap of accessibility to justice between highly privileged and most vulnerable:

The CJI, while stressing the need for bridging the gap of accessibility to justice between the highly privileged and most vulnerable, stated that realities of the socio-economic diversity which prevail in India, cannot ever be a reason for the denial of rights.

Furthermore, the prevailing obstacles such as internet connectivity and lengthy, expensive, and painstaking justice process add to the woes of realizing the goals of access to justice in India. The majority of those who lack access to justice are from remote and rural areas suffering from a lack of connectivity.

What does CJI suggests should be done to ensure legal aid services?

- The Chief Justice of India, who is also the Patron-in-Chief of NALSA (National Legal Services Authority), stated that to keep the police excesses in check, dissemination of the information regarding the constitutional right to legal aid and the availability of free legal aid services is necessary.
- The installation of the outdoor hoardings and display boards in every police station/prison is a step in this direction.
- The CJI further suggests that NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) must also actively carry out the nationwide sensitization of the police officers.
- The postal network can also be utilized to spread awareness regarding the availability of free legal aid services as well as to increase the outreach of the legal services to persons residing in far-flung areas in the country.
- The Chief Justice of India has also asked the lawyers, particularly seniors, to help those in need of legal assistance and has urged the media to spread the message of service of NALSA.

Government asks States/UTs to stop using tricolor made of plastic ahead of Independence Day

The Central Government, ahead of the Independence Day celebrations, has asked the States and UTs to ensure that people don't use plastic national flags.

The step has been taken as ensuring the appropriate disposal of the tricolor made of the non-biodegradable items is a practical problem.

The Union Home Ministry, in a communication to all the states and UT Government, said that the National Flag represents aspirations and hopes of the people of the country and hence it must occupy a position of honour.

Why the decision has been taken?

The Home Ministry stated that there is universal affection and respect for, and loyalty to, the national flag. Yet, a perceptible lack of awareness is often noticed among people as well as the agencies and organisations of the government, in regard to the practices, laws, and conventions that apply to the display of the National Flag.

It further added that the States and UTs on the occasions of significant cultural, national, and sports events, the national flags made of plastic are also being used in place of national flags made of paper.

Since plastic bags are not biodegradable like paper flags, they are not able to decompose for a long time. Ensuring the appropriate disposal of the national flags made of plastic commensurate with the dignity of the flag is a practical problem.

Only flags made of paper to be used by public: Home Ministry

After giving the reasons above, Home Ministry further mentioned that the governments must ensure that on the occasions of cultural, national, and sports events, flags made of paper are used by the public in terms of the provisions of the "Flag Code of India, 2002" and such paper flags are not discarded or thrown on the ground after the event.

Such flags must be disposed of, in private, consistent with the dignity of the flag.

A copy each of the “Flag Code of India, 2002” and “The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971”, which govern the display of the National Flags, was also given.

PM Modi to launch Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana 2.0 on August 10

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana 2.0 at Mahoba district of Uttar Pradesh on August 10, 2021, through video conferencing.

As per an official release by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Ujjwala 2.0 scheme will help achieve PM's vision of universal access to LPG. The PM will interact with the beneficiaries of the Ujjwala scheme.

Significance of Ujjwala 2.0

- A provision for an additional 1 crore LPG connections was announced under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana scheme in the Union Budget for the FY 2021-22.
- These 1 crore LPG connections under the Ujjwala 2.0 scheme will help in providing deposit-free LPG connections to the low-income families who could not be covered under the Ujjwala 1.0 scheme.

What will Ujjwala 2.0 offer?

The Ujjwala 2.0 scheme will offer:

- Deposit-free LPG connection,
- First refill and hot plate free-of-cost to beneficiaries,
- The enrolment procedure will not require ration cards or address proofs. Beneficiaries can submit a self-declaration for 'family declaration' and 'address proof'.

About Ujjwala 1.0

- The Ujjwala 1.0 scheme was launched in May 2016 by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MOPNG) as a flagship scheme to provide clean cooking fuel such as LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas) to the rural and below poverty, households to avoid them from using firewood, cow-dung, coal, etc for cooking purposes.

- PM Narendra Modi had launched the Ujjwala 1.0 scheme on May 1, 2016, in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh.

The scheme had a target to provide LPG connections to five crore women of Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.

- In April 2018, the target was revised to offer the connections to 8 crores women belonging to SC/ST, PMAY, Most Backward Classes, AAY, Forest Dwellers, Tea Garden, and Islands).

- The revised target of 8 crores LPG connections aided in increasing the LPG coverage from 62 per cent in 2016 to 99.8 per cent in 2021.

Hiroshima Day 2021: 76 years of two atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki- All you need to know

Hiroshima Day was observed on August 6 to mark the anniversary of **two atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki**. Today is the 76th year of destruction that led to the **surrender of Japan during World War II**.

Hiroshima day aims at raising awareness about the devastating power of the two atom bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which led to the ending of the Second World war.

On August 6, 1945, **an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima** in Japan by an American B-29 bomber killing nearly 80,000 people instantly while tens of thousands died later due to the radiation exposure.

Three days later, a second B-29 dropped an atom bomb on Nagasaki killing another 40,000 people. These bombings, on the two Japanese cities, were the first time that the atomic bomb was used.

The atom bombings on Japan forced the country on August 15, 1945, to announce that it was surrendering unconditionally during the Second World War.

During the war, Japan was part of the Axis Group, which included Nazi Germany and the Kingdom of Italy, along with other small and significant regions.

History of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945

On the morning of August 6, 1945, an American B-29 bomber dropped an **atom bomb, called 'Little Boy'**, with a force of 12-15 Kilotons of TNT on Hiroshima. The city was the manufacturing hub of more than 3,50,000 people and about 500 miles from Tokyo.

The blast destroyed 500 square miles of the city immediately. The bomb was dropped by an American plane by parachute in the morning at 8.15 and exploded 2,000 feet above the city.

That day, it was the first time when most industrial workers had reported to work and were in

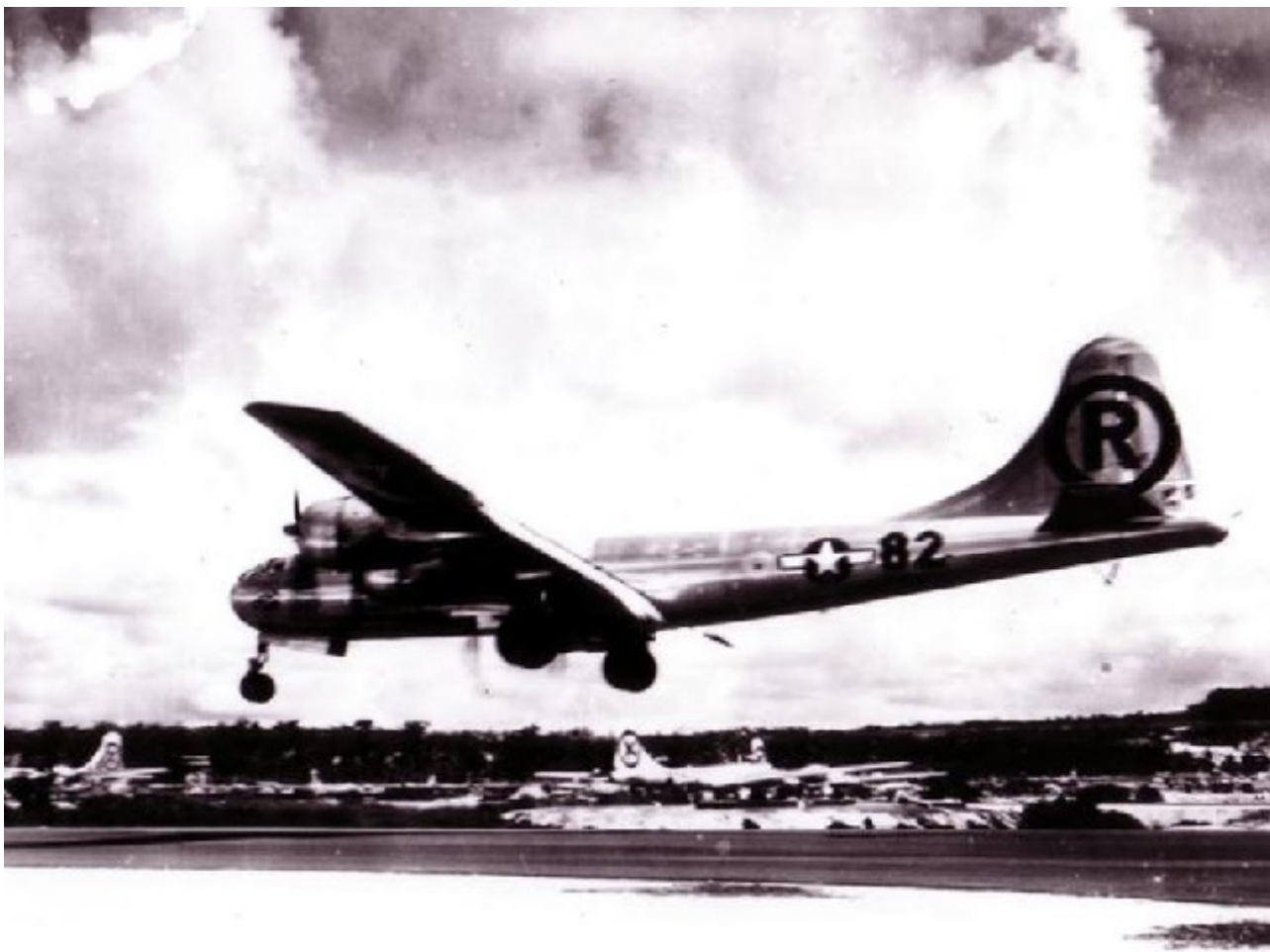
transit. Children were also en route to school and some had even arrived.

What happened in Nagasaki?

Even after the devastation that took place in Hiroshima due to the atomic bombing, Japan did not surrender from the Second World War.

Three days later, on August 9, 1945, the United States sent another B-29 to the primary target of the city of Kokura. However, thick clouds over the city, prevented the pilot from dropping the atomic bomb so he flew to the secondary target, Nagasaki, which was nestled between the mountains.

The pilot dropped '**Fat Man**' over the city at 11.02 am. This plutonium bomb was even powerful than the one dropped on Hiroshima, three days earlier. The bomb produced 1 22-Kiloton blast.



Why Hiroshima was chosen for bombing?

During the Second World War, Japanese fighters, who were in alliance with Germany,

deployed the Kamikaze tactics and pilots undertook suicide missions to hit the US Warships directly.

In order to prevent more damage from such attacks and to force Japan to back down, the then President of the US Harry Truman authorized the use of the devastating nuclear weapon.

Hiroshima, in Japan, was chosen because the US not just wanted to force Japan to back down but also planned to end its ability to fight wars.

The seventh-largest city of Japan then served as the headquarters of the Second army and also had strategic military supply depots.

When Japan surrendered?

On August 15, 1945, 6 days after the Hiroshima bombings, emperor Hirohito announced the surrender in a radio broadcast, and the formal agreement was signed on September 2.

As most of the infrastructure from Hiroshima and Nagasaki were wiped out, the actual number of deaths because of the atomic bombings was never known.

Hiroshima Day: Why is it in news?

As the Olympic Games 2020 are being held in Tokyo, Japan, Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui had sent a letter to the President of the International Olympics Committee (IOC), Thomas Bach, asking for a moment of silence to be observed to mark Hiroshima Day on August 6.

However, reportedly, IOC has no plans to call for a moment of silence during the games on August 6 but has been planning to honour the day during the closing ceremony of the Olympic games.

Islamic New Year 2021: When is Muharram 2021? Know Muharram 2021 Date, Significance

Muharram 2021 Date: The Islamic New Year 2021 will begin on August 10, 2021. The Islamic year begins with Muharram, the second holiest month for Muslims after Ramadan.

Muharram 2021 will begin on August 10th, marking the beginning of the new Muslim lunar calendar, 1443. The Islamic calendar has 354 or 355 days, roughly 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar.

The Islamic New Year is also known as Hijri New Year. The Islamic calendar year starts with Muharram and ends with Dhul al-Hijjah, which is the month when devotees undertake the holy Hajj pilgrimage.

When is Muharram 2021?

The first of Muharram will fall on August 10th across most Islamic countries.

Muharram 2021 Significance

Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. Muharram is one of the four sacred months overall that are mentioned in the Quran. The other three sacred months include the seventh month of Rajab, the eleventh month of Dhul-Qadah and the twelfth month of Dhul-Hijjah.

How is Muharram Date decided?

- Muharram date is decided with the sighting of the new moon by moon sighting committees in Saudi Arabia and UAE. The new moon was not sighted on August 9, as per religious authorities in Saudi Arabia.
- The religious authorities in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and other regions in the Middle East generally decide the date for Muharram.

Muharram 2021 in India

- Muharram will begin in India and other parts of the world on August 10th only if the full moon is

sighted on August 9th. If the full moon is not sighted today, Muharram will begin from August 11.

•However, the official Twitter account of The Holy Mosque's updates from Haramain (Masjid Al Haram and Masjid An Nabawi) stated that August 10th will mark the beginning of the Islamic New Year 1443.

The Moon was NOT sighted this evening.

Therefore Tuesday will be the beginning of the new year 1443.

1st Muharram 1443 will correspond with Tuesday 10th August 2021

May Allah Accept pic.twitter.com/7AdhslN16p

— (@HaramainInfo) [August 8, 2021](#)

•As per the calculations made by Astronomy Center also, the first day of the Islamic New Year will fall on August 10. August 9 will mark the 29th of Dhul Qadah.

Islamic New Year Significance

- The Islamic New Year is based on the lunar system, while the Gregorian New Year is based on the solar system. The Islamic Hijri months have either 29 or 30 days.
- The Islamic New Year began in 622 AD with the migration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, as per Islamic Mythology.
- This is why Islamic Year 2021 will be considered as Hijri 1443 AH.
- Many countries including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia declare a public holiday to mark the beginning of the Islamic Year.
- The first 10 days of the holy month of Muharram are considered to be extremely important, as, during this period, Muslims mourn the death of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husayn Ibn Ali al-Hussein, who died at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.

Google Doodle honours Sarla Thukral on her 107th birthday, first Indian woman to fly an aircraft

Sarla Thukral, the first Indian woman to pilot an aircraft, was honoured by Google on August 8, 2021, on her 107th birth anniversary. She was honoured with a unique Doodle that showcased her extraordinary achievement.

Sarla Thukral who was an Indian pilot, designer, and entrepreneur was often best known for being the first woman from India to pilot an aircraft. **Her doodle was illustrated by artist Vrinda Zaveri.**

While explaining the Doodle art, the company said that Sarla Thukral left such a lasting legacy for women in aviation that Google decided to run the doodle this year in honour of her 107th birthday.

At the age of 21, Sarla Thukral soared to new heights by taking her first solo flight and becoming India's first woman pilot

Today's [#GoogleDoodle](#) honours this incredible pilot, designer, and entrepreneur, on her 107th birth anniversary.

<https://t.co/5dF5JBxUY2>. pic.twitter.com/UBeh7LuJkz

— Google India (@GoogleIndia) [August 8, 2021](#)

Who was Sarla Thukral?

- Thukral was born in Delhi, British India, on August 8, 1914. She later moved to Lahore in present-day Pakistan.
- Inspired by her husband, who was an airmail pilot from a family of fliers, Sarla Thukral began training to follow in their footsteps.
- **Sarla Thukral**, at the age of 21, dressed in a traditional sari, stepped into the cockpit of a small-double-winged plane for her first solo flight. Soon, the word was spread in the newspapers that skies were no longer exclusive to men.

- Sarla Thukral's ascent did not just stop with her first achievement. As a student at the Lahore Flying Club, Thukral completed 1,000 hours of flight to achieve her A License, which was also another first for an Indian woman.
- Later that year, she started preparations to become a commercial pilot, however, World War II had put a halt on civil aviation training.
- Sarla Thukral later took up fine arts and painting at Mayo School of Arts, Lahore (now known as the National College of Arts).
- She later returned to her native place in Delhi. There she continued her painting and also moved on to build a successful career designing clothing and jewelry.

BRO constructs world's highest motorable road in Ladakh – All you need to know

The Ministry of Defence on August 4, 2021, announced that the Border Roads Organization (BRO) has completed the construction of the world's highest motorable road at Umlingla Pass in Eastern Ladakh.

The motorable road has been built at an altitude of 19,300 feet, has been constructed at an elevation greater than the Mount Everest base camps. The north base camp in Tibet is situated at 16,900 feet and the south base camp in Nepal is situated at 17,598 feet.

The road is also located way above the Siachen Glacier, which is at an altitude of 17,700 feet, and the Khardung La Pass in Leh, which is at an altitude of 17,582 feet.

The Ministry in a statement said, "The Umlingla Pass is now connected with a black top road to enhance the socio-economic condition and promote tourism in Ladakh."

..And we reached the last milestone over the Mighty Umling La Pass by constructing the World's Highest motorable road.

The National Flag unfurls with Pride and Elan, telling the world -
pic.twitter.com/OQyNFmUo3S

— (@BROindia) [August 2, 2021](#)

World's highest motorable road at Umlingla Pass

- With the world's highest motorable road stretching 52-km and at an altitude of 19,300 feet, India has surpassed the record of a Bolivian road connecting the Uturuncu volcano at 18,953 feet.
- The road will help in providing connectivity to all important towns in Eastern Ladakh's Chumar sector and provide the residents with an alternate route to Demchok and Chisumle from Leh.
- The road is also expected to boost the socio-economic conditions and tourism prospects in Ladakh.

- The road was being built since 2017. The temperature in this region drops to -40 degrees Celsius, and the oxygen level is almost half that at lower altitudes.

Border Roads Organization (BRO)

- Formed on May 7, 1960, the Border Roads Organization (BRO) is India's transnational construction organization that works under the Ministry of Defence.
- BRO specializes in developing and maintaining the road networks in the north and northeast regions near the border.
- BRO has also constructed the 8.8-km-long Atal Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh at an altitude of 3,000-km.

PM Daksh portal and mobile app launched to promote skill development- All you need to know

The Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr. Virendra Kumar on August 7, 2021, launched **PM-Daksh Portal and PM-Daksh mobile app to make the skill development schemes accessible to the target groups.**

The app has been developed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with the National e-Governance Division (NeGD).

Through the PM-Daksh portal and app, the youth of the target groups will be able to avail the benefits of the skill development training programmes by the government more easily.

(PM-DAKSH) [@MSJEGOI](#) “PM-DAKSH” pic.twitter.com/vieLLx4Fpt

— Dr. Virendra Kumar (@Drvirendrakum13) [August 7, 2021](#)

About PM-DAKSH Yojana:

The **Pradhan Mantri Dakshta Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgarhi (PM-DAKSH) Yojana** has been implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment from the year 2021-22.

Under this, eligible target groups are provided with the skill development training programmes on Short Term Training Program; Up-Skilling/Re-Skilling; Entrepreneurship Development Programme, and Long Term Training Programme.

These training programmes under PM-Daksh yojana will be implemented through the government training institutes, sector skill councils that have been constituted by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and other credible institutions.

Key Highlights:

- Through the PM-Daksh portal and app, anyone will be able to get the information related to the skill development training at one place by visiting the PM-Daksh portal.
- With one click, one can get the information about the skill development training happening near

him/her and he/she can be easily able to register themselves for the skill training.

- The portal is available on the official website while the PM-Daksh app is available at the Google Play Store.

Features of PM-Daksh Portal and app:

- Availability of all the information related to the skill development at once places for Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Safai Karamcharis.
- Facility to register for the training program and institute of interest.
- Facility to upload the desired documents providing personal information.
- Facility to register the attendance of the trainees through eye and face scanning during the training period.
- Monitoring the facility through photo and video clips during training etc.

Corporations providing training for skill development:

Under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, three apex corporations have been functioning-

1. National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation
2. National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation
3. National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation

These corporations have been constantly working to make the target groups socially and financially self-reliant, both through skill development training and loans.

Reportedly, skill development training has been imparted to 2,73,152 people of the target groups in the last 5 years by these three corporations. It enabled the target groups to support themselves and their families through self-employment and wage employment.

A target, during the year 2021-22, target has been set to provide the skill development training to appx 50,000 people of the target group through these three corporations.

Veteran actor Anupam Shyam passes away at 63

Mann Kee Awaaz Pratigya actor, **Anupam Shyam** passed away on August 9, 2021 due to multiple organ failure. He was 63.

Anupam Shyam was admitted to the hospital last week due to a kidney infection and was put on the ventilator in the intensive care unit (ICU). The actor was hospitalised last year in March as well after he developed serious kidney issues. Though he had recovered, he had to undergo dialysis on a regular basis.

He went back to work when Mann Kee Awaaz season 2 was launched in 2021, essaying the role of as **Thakur Sajjan Singh**. His friend actor Yashpal Sharma confirmed the news about his death. He said that the funeral will take place later in the day.

Condolences poured in after the news of the actor's death broke. Actor Manoj Joshi tweeted saying, "Saddened by the demise of my friend and very talented actor Anupam Shyam ji. We have lost a great man. My deepest condolences to his family and friends."

Saddened by the demise of my friend and very talented actor Anupam Shyam ji. We have lost a great man.

My deepest condolences to his family and friends. pic.twitter.com/bzRMUpqVQL

— Manoj Joshi (@actormanojjoshi) [August 8, 2021](#)

Anupam Shyam's Acting Journey: 'From Lagaan to Slumdog Millionaire'

- Anupam Shyam was best known for his work on the TV show "Mann Kee Awaaz: Pratigya".
- He is also known for his roles in films like Slumdog Millionaire and Bandit Queen.
- He has also featured in films like Lagaan, Dil Se, Golmaal, Satya, Lajja, Nayak and Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi.
- He had received critical acclaim for his role as Thakur Sajjan Singh in "Mann Kee Awaaz Pratigya", which had first been released in 2009 on Star Plus.

- He had recently resumed shooting for "Mann Ki Awaaz: Pratigya" season 2. He had reportedly taken up the role despite not keeping well, as people had loved his character and he did not want to let his fans down.
- He has also done other tv shows like Doli Armaano Ki, Rishtey, Krishna Chali London, Hum Ne Li Hai- Shapatha and Amaravati ki Kathayein by Shyam Benegal.
- Anupam Shyam hailed from Pratapgarh in Uttar Pradesh and had started his acting career in 1993.
- He is an alumnus of Bhartendu Academy of Dramatic Arts, Lucknow, where he studied from 1983 to 1985.

What is Rule 267 in Rajya Sabha? Why is it in news?

Rajya Sabha Chairperson M Venkaiah Naidu has been receiving almost 10-15 notices from MPs under Rule 267 in Rajya Sabha. The Chairperson has been rejecting all these written notices from opposition Members of Parliament.

The Rajya Sabha Chairperson has rejected several hundred notices under Rule 267 since 2016, on subjects ranging from the Rafale deal to the implementation of GST and more recently on Pegasus, farmers' protests and fuel price rise.

Congress MP KC Venugopal had given a notice under rule 267 in Rajya Sabha to suspend the business and discuss the rise in the price of fuel and essential commodities.

CPI(M) MPs Dr V Sivadasan and Elamaram Kareem had also given a suspension of business notice under rule 267 to discuss the farmers' protest in Rajya Sabha.

DMK Rajya Sabha MP Tiruchi Siva had also given a suspension of business notice under rule 267 over demand to discuss the Mekedatu Dam issue in the House.

Trinamul member Sukhendu Sekhar Ray and a dozen members had given notices under Rule 267 to discuss Pegasus allegations.

What is Rule 267 in Rajya sabha?

Under Rajya Sabha's Rule 267, any member, can with the consent of the Chairperson, move that any rule may be suspended in its application to a motion related to the business listed before the Council of that day and if the motion is carried, the rule in question shall be suspended for the time being.

What this means is that a notice issued under rule 267 seeks to set aside the upper house's listed business of the day to discuss the subject raise by one or more members.

Exception

The rule will not apply where specific provisions already exist for suspension of a rule under a particular chapter of the Rules.

Who can issue a notice under Rule 267?

Any member of Rajya Sabha can issue a notice to the Chairperson for a discussion on any subject under Rule 267.

Why is Rule 267 rarely invoked in Rajya Sabha?

No notice under rule 267 has been accepted by the Rajya Sabha Chairperson since November 2016, informed Sukhendu Sekhar Ray of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). He stated this while urging the Rajya Sabha Chairperson to allow them to discuss the issues highlighted by the opposition MPs under the rule.

Rajya Sabha Chairperson M Venkaiah Naidu said that Rule 267 is rarely used and suggested that the matter be taken up by the House's General Purposes Committee, "whenever" it met. He said he wants the house to function and discuss the issues.

When was Rule 267 last invoked?

The Rajya Sabha has not allowed discussions under Rule 267 for nearly five years. The last time the Rajya Sabha witnessed a discussion under Rule 267 was on **November 16, 2016, when it allowed the issue of demonetisation to be taken up.**

Rule 267 was invoked one other time as well on April 23, 2015 when the Rajya Sabha had discussed the agrarian crisis. Both times, Hamid Ansari was the Chairperson of the Upper House of the Parliament.

Is there a similar provision in the Lok Sabha?

The Lok Sabha has the **adjournment motion**, through which members may demand discussion on unlisted matters they deem important. The last adjournment motion was allowed six years ago in August 2015.

Drones not allowed to fly within 25km of international borders including LOC, LAC: Civil Aviation Ministry

The Union Civil Aviation Ministry confirmed on August 5, 2021 that no Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) shall be allowed to fly within 25 kilometres from India's international border including the Line of Control (LoC), Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL).

This was informed by Minister of State for Civil Aviation VK Singh in a reply to a question regarding regulation of drones in the Lok Sabha. He said that Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021 have been notified on March 12, 2021.

He said that the rules cover the various aspects of the usage of drones namely their ownership, registration, transfer, import and operation of drone traffic management including payment of fees and penalties.

The Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021 regulate all civilian drone activities, as per the Civil Aviation Ministry.

Does the government distinguish between drones used for professional videography and UAVs for defence purposes?

Replying to this query, the Civil Aviation Ministry clarified that the Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021 are application to all Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) for civilian purposes including professional videography.

However, the rules do not cover operation of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for defence purposes.

Responding to the question of whether the government proposes to regulate the usage of drones more strictly in border states and UTs like Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as compared to hinterlands and other major tourist destinations, the Civil Aviation Ministry said that as per Rule 37(2)(e) under UAS Rules, 2021, no Unmanned Aircraft System can be flown within 25 kilometre from the international border which includes Line of Control (LoC), Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL).

As per the rule, the usage of drones in restricted areas is allowed only after the

approval of the Central Government, in exceptional circumstances.

Further, the Ministry said that necessary Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) had been issued on May 10 2019 by the Home Ministry to counter the threat of non-compliant drones in the country.

The SOPs include measures to be taken by the Central and the State Governments as well, in consultation with security agencies.

Background

The matter is being brought up as there have been cases of drone attacks at the Indian military facility at the Air Force base in Jammu Airport. There have been other suspected drone activity as well in the region.

India at Tokyo Olympics 2020, Aug 7

Highlights: Neeraj Chopra wins India's first gold, Bajrang Punia takes bronze

India at Tokyo Olympics 2020: Neeraj Chopra created history by grabbing the gold medal in men's javelin throw finals with a throw of 87.58m at the Tokyo Olympic Games on August 7, 2021. The 22-year-old became the first-ever Indian athlete and second Indian to win an individual gold at the Olympics.

India ended its campaign at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in style with seven medals, including one gold, two silver and four bronze medals, which makes up India's highest-ever medal tally. The previous best medal haul for India was six at the 2012 London Olympics.

Read: [Neeraj Chopra wins India's first gold in Athletics](#)

History has been scripted at Tokyo! What [@Neeraj_chopra1](#) has achieved today will be remembered forever. The young Neeraj has done exceptionally well. He played with remarkable passion and showed unparalleled grit. Congratulations to him for winning the Gold. [#Tokyo2020](#)
<https://t.co/2NcGgJvfMS>

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 7, 2021](#)

Bajrang Punia also grabbed the bronze medal in the men's wrestling freestyle 65kg bronze medal event after defeating three-time Asian Champion Daulet Niyazbekov 8-0.

Aditi Ashok also put up a stunning performance in golf earlier today. She was tied at the 2nd place in the first three rounds and narrowly missed the bronze medal after finishing fourth in the fourth round.

Aditi Ashok not only made a strong comeback from her 41st place finish in Rio Olympics but also created a historic moment, as no other Indian golfer has ever achieved this before. Though she missed the bronze, her performance will be remembered for a long time to come.

India's 1st woman golfer
to finish 4th at Olympics Games!

Aditi Ashok, deserves a standing ovation for her exemplary performance at [#Tokyo2020](#).

You played consistently well, had us holding our breath till the end [@aditigolf](#) !

You created history, best wishes ahead. pic.twitter.com/ZirJgzcgFw

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 7, 2021](#)

Well played, Aditi Ashok! One more daughter of India makes her mark!

You have taken Indian golfing to new heights by today's historic performance. You have played with immense calm and poise. Congratulations for the impressive display of grit and skills.

— President of India (@rashtrapatibhvn) [August 7, 2021](#)

The Indian women's hockey team also fell just one goal short of bronze after they lost 3-4 to Great Britain in the women's bronze medal match on August 6th. It was a heartbreaking loss for the women's team, who put up their best fight. The team broke down after their narrow loss. Their achievements, however, will be remembered for years to come as it was the first-ever time that India entered the semifinals in women's hockey. India is also world no. 4 now, which is an achievement in itself.

!

Don't break down girls, you all played superb at [#Tokyo2020](#) by reaching top 4 in the world!

I appreciate our Women's Hockey for making India proud. [#Cheer4India](#) !!

<https://t.co/74J5QwxrYN> pic.twitter.com/xMaGC3yLg6

— Kiren Rijiju (@KirenRijiju) [August 6, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, ***"We narrowly missed a medal in Women's Hockey but this team reflects the spirit of New India- where we give our best and scale new frontiers. More importantly, their success at #Tokyo2020 will motivate young daughters of India to take up Hockey and excel in it. Proud of this team."***

We narrowly missed a medal in Women's Hockey but this team reflects the spirit of New India- where we give our best and scale new frontiers. More importantly, their success at [#Tokyo2020](#) will motivate young daughters of India to take up Hockey and excel in it. Proud of this team.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 6, 2021](#)

PM Modi added by saying, ***"We will always remember the great performance of our Women's***

Hockey Team at #Tokyo2020. They gave their best throughout. Each and every member of the team is blessed with remarkable courage, skill and resilience. India is proud of this outstanding team."

We will always remember the great performance of our Women's Hockey Team at [#Tokyo2020](#). They gave their best throughout. Each and every member of the team is blessed with remarkable courage, skill and resilience. India is proud of this outstanding team.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 6, 2021](#)

India at Tokyo 2020 Olympics: August 7 Full Highlights

Declared Results

Golf

Aditi Ashok narrowly missed the bronze medal after she finished fourth in the last round (Round 4) of women's individual stroke-play. Diksha Dagar finished tied at the 50th place.

Wrestling

Bajrang Punia vs TBD in men's freestyle 65kg bronze medal match. He will fight the winner of the repackaged round at around 3.15pm

Athletics

Neeraj Chopra will compete in Men's javelin throw final at around 4.30pm.

Matches yet to happen

Athletics

Amoj Jacob, Naganathan Pandi, Arokia Rajiv, Nirma Noah Tom, and Muhammed Anas in heat 2, Men's 4x400m relay.

PM Modi wishes India's athletes

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, ***"Wishing Japan PM and Japan the very best for Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. We look forward to a season of incredible performances by the world's best sportspersons! "***

Wishing PM [@sugawitter](#) and the very best for [#Tokyo2020](#) [@Olympics](#) and [@Paralympics](#). We look forward to a season of incredible performances by the world's best sportspersons!

[@Tokyo2020](#)

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [July 23, 2021](#)

Union Minister for I&B and Youth Affairs & Sports Anurag Thakur also posted an inspiring video to wish the Indian contingent at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

[#Tokyo2020](#) Olympic Games begin today!

130 crore Indians will be cheering for [#TeamIndia](#) !

Indian Olympics Contingent is 127 members strong, spread across 18 sports disciplines.

Largest & most diverse Indian Contingent ever!

, | [@WeAreTeamIndia](#) [pic.twitter.com/kmyRsT34j9](#)

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [July 23, 2021](#)

Neeraj Chopra clinches gold, becomes first-ever Indian athlete to win gold at Olympic Games

Neeraj Chopra became the first-ever Indian athlete to win individual gold at the Olympic Games on August 7, 2021. He is the second Indian-ever to win an individual gold after Abhinav Bindra, who won gold in Men's 10m air rifle in shooting in 2008 Olympic Games.

Neeraj Chopra won India's first gold medal at Tokyo Olympics with a throw of 87.58m, finishing at the top of the table. This is a historic achievement, as it is the 22-year-old's first-ever Olympic Games.

Neeraj Chopra's gold medal has taken India's medal tally at Tokyo Olympics 2020 to seven, which is India's highest-ever medal haul at the Olympics after the 2012 London Olympic Games.

India's previous-best medal tally was six medals at the 2012 London Olympic Games, which included two silver and four bronze medals.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, "History has been scripted at Tokyo! What @Neeraj_chopra1 has achieved today will be remembered forever. The young Neeraj has done exceptionally well. He played with remarkable passion and showed unparalleled grit. Congratulations to him for winning the Gold. "

History has been scripted at Tokyo! What [@Neeraj_chopra1](#) has achieved today will be remembered forever. The young Neeraj has done exceptionally well. He played with remarkable passion and showed unparalleled grit. Congratulations to him for winning the Gold. [#Tokyo2020](#)
<https://t.co/2NcGgJvfMS>

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 7, 2021](#)

Records Broken

- This is India's first-ever Olympic medal in Athletics since 1928 Olympic Games.
- This is India's first-ever medal in javelin throw.

- This is India's first gold medal since the 2008 Olympic Games.
- It is India's second-ever gold medal in an individual event.
- This is India's highest-ever medal tally at the Olympic Games.

Former Union Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju tweeted saying, "History has been made, Milkha Singh Ji's wish is fulfilled as India wins first ever Olympic medal in Athletics! "

History has been made, Milkha Singh Ji's wish is fulfilled as India wins first ever Olympic medal in Athletics!

A golden moment 4 India as Neeraj Chopra won Olympic Gold medal for India at [#Tokyo2020](#)

Congratulations [@Neeraj_chopra1](#) on this historic achievement! [#Cheer4India](#)
pic.twitter.com/Uyz2JX06VE

— Kiren Rijiju (@KirenRijiju) [August 7, 2021](#)

India's medal tally at Tokyo Olympics 2020

Athlete	Medal	Event
Neeraj Chopra	Gold	Men's Javelin Throw
Mirabai Chanu	Silver	Women's 49kg weightlifting
Ravi Kumar Dahiya	Silver	Men's 57kg wrestling
Lovlina Borgohain	Bronze	Women's welterweight boxing
PV Sindhu	Bronze	Women's singles badminton
Indian hockey team	Bronze	Men's hockey
Bajrang Punia	Bronze	Men's 65kg wrestling

About Neeraj Chopra

- Neeraj Chopra is a 2016 World Junior Champion, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games champion.
- He beat his own national record in March 2021 with a throw of 88.07m throw. His previous best was 88.06m at the 2018 Asian Games , his first Asian Games appearance.

- He had set the world under-20 record of 86.48 m when he became the 2016 World U20 champion. He was the first-ever Indian athlete to win a World title in Track and Field at U-20.
- He had won the gold at the 2016 South Asian Games with a throw of 82.23 m, where he equaled the Indian national record.
- He had after that registered the season's best effort with a throw of 86.47 meters in men's javelin throw at 2018 Commonwealth Games and won the gold. He had joined an elite group of Indian athletes to win the gold on their CWG debut.

Awards

Neeraj Chopra is the only track and field athlete to be recommended for the country's highest sports award in the year 2018.

He was conferred with the Arjuna Award in 2018 after winning gold in the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

Bajrang Punia clinches bronze, India equals best-ever Olympic medal tally

Bajrang Punia has clinched the bronze medal after defeating three-time Asian Champion Daulet Niyazbekov 8-0 in men's wrestling freestyle 65kg at Tokyo Olympics 2020 on August 7, 2021. This is historic as this is India's sixth medal at Tokyo Olympics 2020.

India has equaled its best-ever medal tally at Olympic Games, as previously it had won six medals, including two silver and four bronze at the 2012 London Olympics.

Bajrang Punia has become the sixth wrestler in Indian history to win an Olympic medal. Punia is the top-ranked wrestler in his weight category.

Significance

This is India's fourth medal at the Tokyo Olympics including one from the Indian men's hockey team, Lovlina Borgohain in boxing and PV Sindhu's bronze in badminton.

India has won two silvers, Ravi Kumar Dahiya's silver in wrestling and Mirabai Chanu's silver in weightlifting.

This is the second medal in wrestling in Tokyo Olympics after Ravi Kumar Dahiya's silver.

Former Indian Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju tweeted, "India strikes 6th Olympic medal at #Tokyo2020 !Congratulations to our star wrestler @BajrangPunia bhai on winning Olympic Bronze Medal! We are so proud of you!"

India strikes 6th Olympic medal at [#Tokyo2020](#) !

Congratulations to our star wrestler [@BajrangPunia](#) bhai on winning Olympic Bronze Medal! We are so proud of you! [#Cheer4India](#) pic.twitter.com/BYkjeQJY3U

— Kiren Rijiju (@KirenRijiju) [August 7, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also tweeted, "Delightful news from #Tokyo2020! Spectacularly fought @BajrangPunia. Congratulations to you for your accomplishment, which makes every Indian proud and happy."

Delightful news from [#Tokyo2020](#)! Spectacularly fought [@BajrangPunia](#). Congratulations to you

for your accomplishment, which makes every Indian proud and happy.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 7, 2021](#)

List of Indian wrestlers who won medals in Olympics:

- 1. KD Jadhav- Bronze, 1952**
- 2. Sushil Kumar- Bronze, 2008 & Silver, 2012**
- 3. Yogeshwar Dutt- Bronze, 2012**
- 4, Sakshi Malik- Bronze, 2016**
- 5. Ravi Kumar Dahiya- Bronze, 2021**

Bajrang Punia at Tokyo Olympics

Bajrang Punia had lost his semifinal bout 11- 5 to Azerbaijan's Haji Aliyev in men's freestyle 65kg semifinal on August 6, 2021. He had earlier beaten Iran's Morteza Ghiasi Cheka in the quarterfinals.

COVID-19 vaccine: Johnson & Johnson's single dose vaccine approved in India for emergency use

Johnson & Johnson's single-dose COVID-19 vaccine has been given approval for emergency use in India. With this, India now has 5 approved COVID-19 vaccines- COVAXIN, Covishield, Sputnik V, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna.

The global healthcare major **Johnson & Johnson** announced on August 6, 2021, that it has applied for the **Emergency Use Authorization (EUA)** of its single-dose Coronavirus vaccine in India.

Earlier, the company had mentioned that it remained committed to bringing its single-dose vaccine to India and also looks forward to the ongoing discussions with the Government of India.

Johnson & Johnson in an official statement stated that the company looks forward to concluding its discussion with the Indian Government in order to accelerate the availability of its single-dose vaccine to help the pandemic.

Johnson and Johnson's single-dose [#COVID19](#) vaccine is given approval for Emergency Use in India, tweets Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya [pic.twitter.com/5217zHP7qC](https://twitter.com/5217zHP7qC)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 7, 2021](#)

Johnson & Johnson collaborates with Biological E:

A spokesperson of Johnson & Johnson said in a statement that on August 5, 2021, the company has applied for the Emergency Use Authorization of its single-dose COVID-19 vaccine to the Indian Government.

The statement further added that this will be an important milestone that will pave the way for bringing the company's single-dose vaccine to the people of India and the rest of the world, through a collaboration with Hyderabad-based Biological E Limited.

Biological E will be a significant part of Johnson & Johnson's global supply chain network, helping to supply the COVID-19 vaccine through the extensive collaborations and partnerships that the

company has with governments, health authorities, and organisations such as the COVAX facility and GAVI.

EUA submission in India:

The Emergency Use Authorization submission is based on the topline efficacy and safety data from the phase 3 ENSEMBLE clinical trial. It demonstrated that the company's single-shot vaccine was 85% effective in preventing severe disease across all the regions studied.

The trial showed the protection against the COVID-19 related deaths and hospitalization, beginning 28 days after the vaccination.

COVID-19 cases in India:

According to the Health Ministry on August 6, 2021, the country recorded 44,643 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total tally to 3,18,56,757, while the active COVID cases registered an increase for the third consecutive day.

National Handloom Day: History, Significance and day to honour India's rich heritage of handlooms

National Handloom Day is celebrated on August 7 every year in India. The Central Government and other organisations, on **this day, honour the handloom weaving community of the country** for their contribution to the socio-economic development of India.

National Handloom Day commemorates the Swadeshi Movement and celebrates the country's colorful weaves and rich fabrics.

As this year India will mark **7th National Handloom Day**, the day will be dedicated to raise awareness among the public and increasing the contribution towards the weavers of the country.

Ministry of Textiles cordially invites you to celebrate the Virtual edition of the 7th National Handloom Day. Support the local weavers & propagate strength of our Handlooms by buying at least one handloom item and share it with [#MyHandloomMyPride](#) [@PiyushGoyal](#) [@DarshanaJardosh](#) pic.twitter.com/PiVN2FoyPq

— Ministry of Textiles (@TexMinIndia) [August 7, 2021](#)

National Handloom Day: History

The Indian Government had announced August 7 as the National Handloom Day to mark the 100th anniversary of the Swadeshi Movement, which started in 1905.

National Handloom Day was first observed in 2015 in the country and the day was organized by PM Modi in Chennai. The purpose was to make the citizens of the country aware of the rich history of Indian handloom as synthetic fabrics have taken over the textile industry in the present era.

National Handloom Day: Why is it significant?

The handloom sector in India has been an important source of livelihood, particularly for women who form around 70% of the weavers or the allied workers in the sectors.

National Handloom Day is celebrated to recognize the efforts that are put in to continue an

essential part of India's cultural heritage and to honour the handloom community of the country.

Our Country, our Heritage and our Handlooms: Saluting the weavers & artisans who help preserve India's cultural heritage through handlooms.

On this National Handloom Day, let's pledge our support to them by adopting [#MyHandloomMyPride](https://twitter.com/Osm9zNCRi8) in our daily lives. [pic.twitter.com/Osm9zNCRi8](https://twitter.com/Osm9zNCRi8)

— Piyush Goyal (@PiyushGoyal) [August 7, 2021](#)

National Handloom Day: What are the plans to promote the sector?

- Delhi will be hosting this year's function and similar events have been organized in Guwahati, Varanasi, Bhubaneswar, and Jaipur.
- The Ministry of Textile informed on August 6 that the Central Government has been taking measures to ensure the sustainable development of the handloom sector, instilling pride in weavers' exquisite craftsmanship and empowering the handloom weavers and workers financially.
- Three handloom craft villages at Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala; Kanihama, Budgam, Srinagar; and Mohpara Village, District Golaghat, Assam are being established in collaboration with the respective state governments.
- The objective of these villages will be to ensure the attraction of international and domestic tourists as well as to promote the well-known handicraft and handloom products of the region.

Parliament passes Essential Defence Services Bill; What are the key details and who it will impact?

The **Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021**, was passed by **Rajya Sabha** on August 5, 2021. It was earlier passed in Lok Sabha on August 3 amidst uproar and without any form of discussion.

The latest bill seeks to replace the Ordinance promulgated in June 2020 and **allows the Central Government to prohibit lockouts, strikes and layoffs in the units engaged in the essential defence services.**

The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021, amends the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 to include the essential defence services under the public utility services.

The Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt in Lok Sabha on July 22, 2021, had **introduced 'The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021'** which seeks to prohibit any form of agitation or strike by anyone engaged in the essential defence services.

The bill was introduced by the Government amid the din created by the Opposition over three new farm laws, and the alleged Pegasus Controversy in Lok Sabha.

What is Essential Defence Services Bill?

The Essential Defence Services Bill aims at preventing the staff of the government-owned ordnance factories from going on strike. Around, 70,000 people work with 41 ordnance factories all over the country.

The bill introduced in Lok Sabha mentioned that it aims to provide for the maintenance of the essential defence services in order to secure the security of the country and the life and property of the public at large.

Significance:

As per the Government, it is essential that an uninterrupted supply of the ordnance items to the armed forces is maintained for defence preparedness and that the factories must continue to function without any form of disruptions.

It was felt necessary that the Government must have the power to meet the emergency

situations and must ensure the maintenance of the essential defence services in all the establishments connected with defence.

What is Indian Ordnance Factories?

The Indian Ordnance Factories is the oldest and the largest industrial set up which functions under the Department of Defence Production of the Defence Ministry.

The factories form an integrated base for the indigenous production of defence hardware and equipment, with the primary objective of self-reliance in equipping the armed forces with state of art battlefield equipment.

What does the bill allow Government to do?

The Essential Defence Services Bill, 2021, will allow the Government to declare the services mentioned in it as essential services “the termination of the work of which will prejudicially affect the production of the defence equipment or goods; or the operation or maintenance of any form of establishment or unit engaged in the production of equipment or goods required for any purpose connected with the defence; or repair or maintenance of products connected with defence.

The bill will also prohibit lockouts and strikes in any industrial establishment or the unit engaged in essential defence services.

Essential Defence Services Bill: Why the Government feels the need for it?

The Central Government, in June 2020, had announced the corporatization of the Ordnance Factory Board. Under it, the 41 factories ammunition and other equipment to the armed forces will become part of seven government-owned corporate entities.

The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) was directly under the Defence Production Department and had worked as an arm of the Government. The Center claimed that the decision was taken to improve the efficiency and the accountability of these factories.

While announcing the decision, the Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had assured that the interests of the Ordnance Factory Board employees will be safeguarded.

However, the latest bill mentions that there is a threat that the employees of these factories can go on strike against the decision. The recognized federation of employees gave a notice for an indefinite strike and the conciliation proceedings by the Government failed in the meeting held on

June 15, 2021.

Who will be impacted?

The Essential Defence Services Bill has a direct bearing on around 70,000 employees of 41 Ordnance Factories. The employees are unhappy with the corporatization of OFB and fear that it will impact their service and retirement conditions.

However, the Defence Minister had clarified, through which the decision got the nod, that there should be no change in the service condition of around 70,000 employees of Ordnance Factory Board.

The employee Union and Association, in 2020 as well, had threatened to go on a strike when the government had declared that it will start the process towards OFB corporatization.

Parliament passes Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021 – All you need to know

The Parliament on August 4, 2021 passed the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021 after the Rajya Sabha approved it after a brief discussion amid protests by the opposition on various issues.

The Lok Sabha had passed the bill earlier on July 29, 2021. The bill aims to amend the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) of India Act, 2008 and seeks to encourage smaller airports to expand air connectivity to relatively remote and far-flung areas.

Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021

- The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was introduced in the Lok Sabha in March 2021.
- The Bill will amend the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) of India Act, 2008, by modifying the definition of 'major airport' under the AERA Act 2008.

Amendment of AERA Act 2008 – Significance

- The Amendment of AERA Act 2008 will now refer to an airport with annual passenger traffic of 35 lakh as a 'major airport' as compared to the previous traffic threshold of 15 lakh.
- The Amendment will also enable privatization of smaller loss-making Airport Authority of India (AAI)-run airports by pairing them with larger profit-making airports. As earlier, the move to privatize only larger profit-making airports was met with criticism that this move would leave AAI with only loss-making airports.
- The Amendment will also enable tariff fixation of more than one airport. As of now, the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) determines tariffs and other charges for aeronautical services of a single airport.

Amendment of AERA Act 2008 – Benefits

- Aid in determining the tariff and other aeronautical services charges for a group of airports and development of smaller airports.
- Pair the smaller loss-making airports with larger profit-making airports to make it a viable combination for bidders for investment under PPP mode.
- Increase the air connectivity to relatively remote areas and as a result, expanding the UDAN scheme.
- Allow the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) to regulate tariff and other charges for aeronautical services for not just a 'major airport' with annual passenger traffic of more than 335 lakh, but also for a group of airports together.

Sjoerd Marijne steps down as Chief Coach of Indian women's hockey team

The Indian women's hockey team chief coach **Sjoerd Marijne** stepped down from his position on August 6, 2021. He revealed that India's bronze medal match against Great Britain at the Tokyo Olympics was his last assignment with the Indian side.

Sjoerd Marijne decided to step down after coaching the Indian women's hockey team to its best-ever performance in the Olympic Games, guiding them to a commendable fourth-place finish. The Indian women's hockey team narrowly missed the bronze medal after a 3-4 loss against Great Britain earlier today.

The team's achievements received a lot of praise back home and Prime Minister Narendra Modi specially called the team to urge them to hold their heads high, as despite not winning the medal, they won a lot of hearts with their spirited performances.

[#WATCH](#) | Indian Women's hockey team breaks down during telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He appreciates them for their performance at [#Tokyo2020](#)
pic.twitter.com/n2eWP9Omzj

— ANI (@ANI) [August 6, 2021](#)

The Indian women's hockey team has never come so close to winning a medal in the Olympics before. They not only beat some of the best teams to stand at fourth place but also narrowly missed the bronze medal by just one goal against Great Britain.

We did not win a medal, but I think we have won something bigger. We have made Indians proud again and we inspired millions of girls that dreams CAN come true as long as you work hard for it and believe it! Thanks for all the support!

— Sjoerd Marijne (@SjoerdMarijne) [August 6, 2021](#)

Just few hours after the defeat, 47-year-old Marijne announced that this was his last assignment with the Indian team. The team's analytical coach Janneke Schopman is likely to be named as the team's new chief coach.

Why is Sjoerd Marijne stepping down?

- Sjoerd Marijne announced during a virtual press conference that he does not have any plans because this was his last match with Indian women.
- As per reports, both Sjoerd Marijne and Janneke Schopman were offered contract extension by the Sports Authority of India (SAI). However, Marijne reportedly refused the extension citing personal reasons.
- Sjoerd Marijne said during a virtual interaction that the decision to quit was fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dutch national has been unable to visit his family in the Netherlands, since the last 16 months due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

Marijne said, ***"I don't have any plans because this was my last match with Indian women. It's upto Janneke (Schopman) now. I will miss the girls but I miss my family more. My family is No 1. I want to be with my son, daughter and wife after being away for three and a half years. This is a beautiful way to end this journey."***

Sjoerd Marijne's journey with the Indian women's hockey team

- Sjoerd Marijne, a former Dutch player, had first started coaching the Indian women's hockey team in 2017 but was soon appointed as the coach of the Indian men's team later that year.
- He was appointed as the coach of the women's team again in 2018, while Graham Reid was appointed as the coach of the Indian men's hockey team.
- Under his guidance, the Indian women's hockey team has come the farthest ever, bringing about the much-awaited revival of Indian hockey.
- Sjoerd Marijne previously played for the Netherlands and had guided the Dutch Under-21 women's side to a World Cup title.
- He had also guided the Dutch senior women's side to gold at the Hockey World League Semi-Finals in 2015.

BRICS National Security Advisors meeting to be held virtually on Aug 24: MEA

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on August 5, 2021, informed that the next meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors (NSA) will be held on August 24, 2021, in a virtual format.

MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi informed that India is the current chair for BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). The next BRICS Nation Security Advisors (NSAs) will be held later this month on August 24 in a virtual format.

Agenda of BRICS National Security Advisors (NSA) 2021

- The BRICS National Security Advisors (NSAs) deliberate on security issues.
- The agenda of the meeting on August 24 will be counter-terrorism cooperation, and international peace and security. The agenda is in line with India's chosen priorities as the Chair of BRICS meeting this year.

BRICS National Security Advisors (NSA)

- Since 2009, the representatives of BRICS countries have been meeting to deliberate on security issues such as peace and stability, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, transnational organized crime, and national security of BRICS countries.
- The BRICS Working Group on Security in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) conducts meetings to discuss issues related to cybersecurity.
- The BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism meets to discuss international and regional counter-terrorism issues and to 'strengthen intelligence and information sharing, facilitate research and development on measures to combat terrorism'.

BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group (CTWG)

- Last, the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) held its sixth meeting virtually on July 28-29 under the Chairship of India.
- The meeting was chaired by Mahaveer Sanghvi, Joint Secretary for Counter-Terrorism, MEA.

- The meeting concluded in to finalizing the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Action Plan containing specific measures to implement the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by BRICS Leaders in 2020.

About BRICS

- BRICS** is an abbreviation to represent the group of the world's leading emerging economies namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- The BRICS is not an organization but is convened as an annual summit with every five countries chairing the summits and meetings in rotation annually.
- Initially, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, and China met on the sidelines of the G8 Outreach Summit in 2006. Later in the same year, the group formalized as BRIC during the 1st BRIC Foreign Ministers' Meeting.
- In 2009, the first BRIC summit was held. In 2010, after the acceptance of South Africa to the group, BRIC was renamed BRICS.
- The BRICS leaders convene meetings and summits to deliberate on issues relating to political and security, economic and financial, and people-to-people exchanges.

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award will now be called Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award: Prime Minister Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 6, 2021, announced that the **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award will be now known as the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award. The highest sporting honour in the country which was named after the former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi has been rechristened in the honour of Hockey wizard Dhyan Chand.**

PM Narendra Modi, while making the announcement, said that he had been getting many requests from the citizens all over the country to name the Khel Ratna after Major Dhyan Chand.

PM Modi, while sharing the news via Twitter, said that respecting the sentiments, the Khel Ratna Award will be called Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award. Major Dhyan Chand was among India's foremost sportsperson who brought honour and pride to the country.

I have been getting many requests from citizens across India to name the Khel Ratna Award after Major Dhyan Chand. I thank them for their views.

Respecting their sentiment, the Khel Ratna Award will hereby be called the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award!

Jai Hind! pic.twitter.com/zbStlMNHdq

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 6, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Modi while talking about the exceptional performances of the Men's and Women's Hockey teams, said that they have captured the imagination of the entire nation. There is a renewed interest towards the sport that has been emerging across the length and breadth of India.

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award:

- It was instituted in 1991-92 and was named after the former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi. The first recipient of the Khel Ratna Award was Chess Vishwanathan Anand.

- The other winners of the award include Sachin Tendulkar, Leander Paes, Dhanraj Pillay, Abhinav Bindra, Pullela Gopichand, Mary Kom, Arjun Bobby George, Rani Rampal.
- **The highest sports honour now renamed as Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award** comes with a cash prize of Rs. 25 lakh.

About Major Dhyanchand:

Major Dhyan Chand who was also known as The Wizard was a field hockey player. He played International Hockey from 1926 to 1949 and scored over 400 goals in his career.

Dhyan Chand was born in Allahabad and was part of the Olympic teams that won Gold Medals in 1928, 1932 and 1936.

Apart from the Khel Ratna Award, India's highest award for lifetime achievement in sports is also known as Major Dhyan Chand Award. The National Stadium in Delhi was also renamed in 2002 as Dhyan Chand National Stadium.

Forbes Real-time Billionaires list: Bernard Arnault becomes world's richest, surpasses Jeff Bezos again

Bernard Arnault, French Tycoon, the Chairman and the CEO of the French Luxury Conglomerate LVMH Moët Hennessy- Louis Vuitton, has become the richest man in the world after Amazon's founder Jeff Bezos net worth fell \$13.9 billion in a day.

As per the Forbes Real-time Billionaires list, Bernard Arnault, whose subsidiaries consist of high-end fashion companies such as Sephora, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co, and Moët & Chandon, held a net worth of \$199.1 billion on August 5, 2021.

Meanwhile, Amazon's founder real-time net worth stood at \$193.8 billion, while that of Elon Musk, who is also a cryptocurrency enthusiast, was \$184.7 billion. From India, Mukesh Ambani acquired 12th position on the Forbes list with a net worth of \$79.7 billion.

Not the first time:

This is not the first time that French Tycoon, Bernard Arnault has led the list of the world's wealthiest people.

In December 2019, January 2020, May 2021, and July 2021, Arnault was number one. He spent \$538 million buying shares of the largest luxury goods company in the world in recent months.

Jeff Bezos second on Forbes list:

Jeff Bezos' net worth was tanked by \$590 million. Amazon stock cratered 7.6% on August 6 after the company reported the second-quarter earnings. After Bernard Arnault got more than \$100 billion richer during the first year of the COVID pandemic, LVMH's rally has plateaued most of the summer.

Top 10 on Forbes Real-time Billionaires list:

Ranking	Name	Net Worth	Source
1	Bernard Arnault & Family	198.9 B	LVMH

2	Jeff Bezos	\$194.9 B	Amazon
3	Elon Musk	\$185.5 B	Tesla, SpaceX
4	Bill Gates	\$132.0 B	Microsoft
5	Mark Zuckerberg	130.6 B	Facebook
6	Larry Page	\$116.5 B	Google
7	Larry Ellison	\$116.4 B	Software
8	Sergey Brin	\$112.8 B	Google
9	Warren Buffett	\$101.6 B	Berkshire Hathaway
10	Francoise Bettencourt Meyers & Family	\$92.9 B	L'Oreal

Source- Forbes, Updated at 12.54 PM, August 6, 2021

Kerala govt launches COVID-19 Death Information Portal – All you need to know

Kerala Government on August 5, 2021, launched the COVID-19 death information portal in the state to maintain and manage a proper record of the number of deaths due to coronavirus infection.

Kerala Health Minister Veena George during the launch of the portal noted that the State government has launched the COVID-19 death information portal will help in understanding more details about the deaths due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Death Information Portal in Kerala

- The COVID-19 death information portal will be accessible to both the government agencies and the public in Kerala.
- The public would be able to look up details about their deceased family members, friends, and relatives by entering the name, district, and date of death on the portal.
- The portal will assist the government agencies in verifying the authenticity of the Death Declaration document issued by district medical offices (DMOs).
- Currently, the portal will reflect COVID-19 deaths in the state till July 22, 2021. Any deaths after July 22, 2021, will be updated soon.

Kerala - COVID-19 Tracker

- As of August 5, 2021, Kerala Health Department has reported 22,040 new COVID-19 cases, 20,046 recoveries, and 117 deaths in the past 24 hours.
- Kerala has a total number of 34.7 lakh COVID-19 cases of which recoveries are 32.8 lakh and deaths are 17,211.
- The State has administered a total of 2,13,03,626 doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Approximately 41.72 per cent of the Kerala population is vaccinated, as the State government COVID statistics.

6-member team led by NCDC to monitor COVID in Kerala

- The Union Health Ministry on July 29 had announced to depute a 6-members high-level multi-disciplinary team headed by Dr S K Singh, Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in Kerala to work together with the State Health Authorities in implementing effective public health measures for managing COVID-19 infection in the view of the significantly high number of cases in the State.

RBI's Bi-monthly Monetary Policy Review: RBI retains real GDP growth at 9.5% for FY 21-22, repo rate unchanged at 4%

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on August 6, 2021 retained the real GDP growth forecast at 9.5 percent for the current financial year 2021-2022.

The RBI has also kept the repo rate unchanged at 4 percent and reverse repo rate at 3.35 percent and decided to continue to maintain its accommodative stance.

RBI keeps reverse repo rate at 3.35%: RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das

pic.twitter.com/BIL9TbYVMP

— ANI (@ANI) [August 6, 2021](#)

This was informed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das while making the Bi-Monthly Monetary Policy statement. The RBI Governor also informed that the CPI inflation is projected at 5.7 % during 2021-22, which comprises 5.9% in Q2, 5.3% in Q3 and 5.8% in Q4 of 2021-22 with risks broadly balanced.

The CPI inflation for the first quarter of 2022-23 was projected at 5.1 percent. Speaking on the economy, the RBI Governor stated that the economic activity has broadly evolved along the lines of the Monetary Policy Committee's expectations in June and the economy is recovering from the setback of the second wave of COVID-19.

CPI inflation is projected at 5.7 % during 2021-22 - this consists of 5.9% in Q2, 5.3% in Q3 and 5.8% in Q4 of 2021-22 with risks broadly balanced. CPI inflation for the first quarter of 2022-23 is projected at 5.1%: RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das pic.twitter.com/SXE2HEZDWY

— ANI (@ANI) [August 6, 2021](#)

RBI Bi-Monthly Monetary Policy Review: Key Highlights

- The RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) met on 4th, 5th and 6th August 2021 and voted unanimously to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 4 percent.
- The RBIU based its decisions on the assessment of the evolving domestic and global

macroeconomic and financial conditions and outlook.

- The MPC has also decided with a 5 to 1 majority to continue its accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis and continue to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy while ensuring that inflation remains within the target.
- The marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate remain unchanged at 4.25 percent.
- The reverse repo rate has also been kept unchanged at 3.35 percent.
- The RBI Governor noted that India is at a much better position than at the time of the MPC's meeting in June 2021, due to ease in containment measures and slow build back.
- Yet, he cautioned that the need of the hour is not to drop our guard and to remain vigilant against any possibility of a third wave, especially in the background of rising infections in certain parts of the country.
- The current RBI decisions are aimed at alleviating distress and prioritising growth, while keeping the financial system healthy and stable.

Domestic Growth

- Domestic economic activity has begun normalising with the easing of the second wave of the virus and the phased reopening of the economy.
- Further easing of restrictions and increasing coverage of vaccinations are likely to boost private spending on goods and services including travel, tourism and recreational activities, propelling a broad-based recovery in aggregate demand.
- The robust outlook for agriculture and rural demand would continue to support private consumption.
- Urban demand is likely to accelerate with recovery in manufacturing and non-contact intensive services.

Inflation

- The CPI inflation rose sharply to 6.3 percent in May and remained at 6.3 percent in June.

- However, the core inflation registered an appreciable moderation, noted RBI.
- The revival of the southwest monsoon and kharif sowing, buffered by adequate food stocks is expected to help in containing cereal price pressures in the months ahead.
- High-frequency food price indicators show some moderation in prices of edible oils and pulses in July.
- The inflation in core services like house rentals remains below historical averages, reflecting subdued demand conditions.
- The crude oil prices are expected to be volatile with implications for imported cost pressures on inflation.
- Inflation may remain close to the upper tolerance band up to Q2:2021-22, but the pressures may ease in Q3:2021-22 on account of Kharif harvest arrivals.
- The CPI inflation is now projected at 5.7 percent during 2021-22, which includes 5.9 percent in Q2, 5.3 percent in Q3 and 5.8 percent in Q4 of 2021-22. The CPI inflation for Q1 of FY 2022-23 is projected at 5.1 percent.

Financial Market

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will conduct the open market purchase of government securities of Rs 25,000 crore on August 12 and August 26 under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 2.0).

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will conduct open market purchase of government securities of Rs 25,000 crore on August 12 under the G-sec Acquisition Programme (G-SAP 2.0). The result of the auctions will be announced the same day: RBI pic.twitter.com/ylnMM5fcN5

— ANI (@ANI) [August 6, 2021](#)

- The result of the auctions will be announced the same day. The RBI Governor said that it will continue to undertake these auctions and other operations like open market operations (OMOs) and operation twist (OT), among others and calibrate them in line with the evolving macroeconomic and financial conditions.

Additional Measures

- The RBI has announced over 100 measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The apex will continue the monitoring of measures that are still in operation to ensure that the benefit of all our measures percolate down to targeted stakeholders.
- The RBI, based on its continuing assessment of the macroeconomic situation and financial market conditions has announced the following additional measures:

1. On-tap TLTRO Scheme

The scope of the on-tap TLTRO scheme, which was initially announced on October 9, 2020 for five sectors, has been extended to stressed sectors identified by the Kamath Committee in December 2020 and bank lending to NBFCs in February 2021.

The operating period of the scheme has also been extended in phases till September 30, 2021 and on-tap TLTRO scheme further by a period of three months, till December 31, 2021.

2. Marginal Standing Facility (MSF)

The banks have been allowed to avail funds under the marginal standing facility (MSF) by dipping into the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) up to an additional one percent of net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).

To provide comfort to banks on their liquidity requirements, including meeting their Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) requirement, this relaxation which is currently available till September 30, 2021 is being extended for three months, up to December 31, 2021.

Conclusion

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das stated that there is optimism that with adequate pandemic protocols and ramp-up in the vaccination rate, we should be able to tide over a third wave, if it occurs.

He however noted that as a nation, we should continue to be vigilant to proactively deal with any resurgence of the pandemic with more rapidly transmissible mutants of the virus, should it happen.

The recovery so far remains uneven across sectors and needs to be supported by all

policymakers.

Kerala Assembly passes resolution demanding Government to withdraw Electricity (Amendment) Bill

The Kerala Assembly on August 5, 2021, unanimously passed a resolution demanding the Central Government to withdraw the **Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021**.

K Krishnankutty, in the House, moved the resolution in the Assembly which is proposed to be present in the Parliament.

The State Electricity Minister, before moving the resolution in the House, said that the Central Government failed to discuss with the States the electricity amendment bill and was unable to reach a consensus.

As both the Central and State Governments have the right to make laws in the matter of power distribution, the Government must be committed to discuss the matter with the States and reach a consensus.

Electricity (Amendment) Bill: All you need to know

- **The amendment bill will enable the private companies to enter the power distribution sector and notably, no license will be required for that.**
- The State Government or the Electricity regulatory commission will not have any form of control over the private companies in the public sector.
- The criteria for the private firms to enter this sector will be decided by the Central Government and the amendment will take away the power of State Governments in the Power Sector.
- The proposed amendments in the bill will give the Central Government more power over the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs). They will also give the Government the power to entrust the functions of the State regulator to any other State Commission.

Why there is opposition against the amendment bill?

The private companies, with this amendment bill, will not have any form of obligation to invest in the sector or laying new electricity lines to carry electricity or maintenance.

The companies will be able to use the existing lines which will help them to stop their operations if the targeted profits are not collected. It will further create uncertainty in the power sector.

The amendment in the bill does not deny the private companies to distribute the electricity for all and if this continues, it will lead to a concentration of industrial and commercial clients on a large scale in urban areas. Eventually, it will become the responsibility of the public sector to provide electricity to poor sections.

The other issue which was also highlighted in the assembly was that when the Central Government enters into the power sector, the right of power distribution, which was with the State Government earlier, will lie in the hands of the Center. This will undermine the federal principles.

Background:

The Central Government has decided to introduce the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2021, in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament, however, the bill has started seeing protests from various state governments as well as from the power sector workers.

Parliament passes bill to amend Scheduled Tribes list relating to Arunachal Pradesh

Rajya Sabha on August 5, 2021, passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021. The bill seeks to amend the constitutional list of the Scheduled Tribes as recommended by the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The bill in Rajya Sabha was passed by voice vote amid the ongoing protest by the Opposition parties over the issues of Agricultural laws, Pegasus and others.

The Union Tribal Affairs Minister, Arjun Munda while informing about the amendment bill said that it will bring justice to tribals.

The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill

Inclusion and Exclusion of tribes-

- On the basis of the recommendation of Arunachal Pradesh, the amendment bill provides for modifying Part-XV111 of the Schedule of the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, relating to the State of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The bill provides for the deletion of Abor Tribe from the list of identified STs in Arunachal Pradesh. The Abor (tribe) in serial No.1 will be deleted, as it is the same as 'Adi' in serial No. 16.
- The bill also proposes to replace 'Tai Khamti' instead of 'Khampti' at serial No. 6 of the list.
- The amendment bill provides for the inclusion of 'Mishmi-Kaman (Miju Mishmi)', 'Idu (Mishmi)' and 'Taraon (Digaru Mishmi)' in serial 8 in lieu of 'Mishmi, Idu, Taroan' in the list.
- The bill will facilitate the inclusion of 'Tangsa', 'Nocte', 'Tutsa', 'Wancho' in lieu of 'Any Naga Tribes' in serial No. 10 of the list.

Other details-

- The amendment done in the list of Scheduled Tribes relating to Arunachal Pradesh will entail no additional recurring expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India on account of the benefits

that are likely to be provided to the persons belonging to the communities proposed in the bill.

- The ministry has already been funding for the welfare of 10.45 crores Scheduled Tribes Population.
- Further, the STs are also eligible for the benefits under the Scheduled Tribes Component (STC) of the schemes under the Central and State Governments.

Background:

The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was introduced in Rajya Sabha by the Union Minister on August 2, 2021. At present, there are communities with their synonyms appearing in the illustrative list of the Scheduled Tribes in respect of Arunachal Pradesh.

INDRA: India-Russia begins 12th edition of joint military exercise in Volgograd

India and Russia started the 12th edition of the Indo-Russia Joint Military Exercise (INDRA) at Volgograd city in Russia on August 4, 2021.

As per the Indian Army, 250 personnel from the armies of India and Russia will form part of the military exercise.

The Indian Army contingent which will participate in the upcoming military exercise will comprise a mechanized infantry battalion. The contingent also underwent rigorous training at different locations in India to refine their drills for participation in the joint military exercise.

Volgograd is a major city in Russia that is situated on the Western Bank of the Volga River.

Indo-Russia joint training Exercise INDRA 2021 commenced at Prudboy Ranges, Russia today.

Aim of exercise is to facilitate joint training between Indian & Russian Armies to jointly plan & conduct counter-terror operations under the United Nations mandate: Indian Army official pic.twitter.com/PxVeXrYhFv

— ANI (@ANI) [August 4, 2021](#)

Objective:

The 12th edition of the INDRA military exercise between India and Russia will entail the conduct of the counter-terror operations under the United Nations mandate by a joint force against the International Terror Groups.

Significance:

- The 12th edition of the INDRA exercise will be yet another milestone in strengthening bilateral security cooperation.
- It will also serve to reinforce the long-standing friendship between India and Russia.
- The military exercise will further strengthen the interoperability and mutual confidence between the Indian and the Russian armies. It will enable the sharing of best practices between the

contingents of both nations.

About INDRA Military exercise:

INDRA is a joint biennial military exercise that was first conducted by India and Russia in 2003. The military exercise is aimed to boost the cooperation and interoperability between the Indian and the Russian navies.

It involves live-firing drills, as well as air defence and anti-submarine operations. Additionally, terrorism, counterpiracy, and drug smuggling operations are also carried out in the exercise.

New Hydrogen-producing method shows energy-efficient route to manufacture fuel- All you need to know

The Department of Science and Technology informed on August 4, 2021, that researchers in India have come up with **an innovative hydrogen manufacturing route that can increase its production three times and lower the energy required**. It can pave the way towards environment-friendly hydrogen fuel at a lower cost.

Hydrogen, as a fuel, has a critical role to play in driving the paradigm shifts towards sustainable and green energy.

In addition to having about three-fold higher calorific value in comparison to the non-renewable energy sources such as gasoline and coal, the combustion of hydrogen to release energy produces water and thus, is completely non-polluting.

Researchers [@iitbombay](#) develop an innovative hydrogen manufacture route which increases its production three times & lowers energy required that could pave the path towards environment-friendly hydrogen fuel at a lower cost. [@DrJitendraSingh](#) [@Ashutos61](#)
<https://t.co/aHTsdq3Tul> pic.twitter.com/25JEajAgfW

— DSTIndia (@IndiaDST) [August 4, 2021](#)

Transition to Green-Hydrogen-economy:

Because of the extremely low abundance of molecule hydrogen in the Earth's atmosphere, electrified-field driven breakdown of water is an attractive route for the production of hydrogen.

But such electrolysis requires high energy input and is associated with the slow rate of hydrogen production. Simultaneously, the use of expensive platinum and iridium-based catalysts also discourages it for widespread commercialization.

Therefore, the transition to 'green-hydrogen-economy' demands approaches that lower the energy, as well as material costs and also, improves the hydrogen production rate.

New Hydrogen-producing method: What is it?

A team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, led by C Subramaniam, have come up with an innovative way that will provide a viable solution to the mentioned challenges.

The method involves the electrolysis of water in the presence of an external magnetic field. Under this, the same system that produces 1ml of hydrogen gas required 19% low energy to produce 3ml of hydrogen at the same time. This is achieved by synergistically coupling the magnetic and electric fields at the catalytic site.

The simple approach by the researchers also provides the capability to retrofit any existing electrolysed (that uses electricity to break water into hydrogen and oxygen) with external magnets without any drastic changes in the design, leading to the increased energy efficiency of hydrogen production.

Significance

The electrocatalytic material- cobalt-oxide nanocubes that are dispersed over the hard-carbon-based nanostructured carbon florets- is of prime importance in order to achieve this effect.

The interface between the carbon and the cobalt oxide is key to magneto-electrocatalysis.

It will be advantageous as it will form a system that will not require the constant presence of the external magnetic field and is able to sustain the magnetization for prolonged time periods.

This route can be directly adopted in the existing electrolyzers without any form of change in designs or the mode of operation. One-time exposure of the magnetic field for 10 minutes is enough to achieve a high rate of oxygen production for over 45 minutes.

According to Dr. Subramaniam, the intermittent use of an external magnetic field provides a new direction for achieving energy-efficient hydrogen generation. Other catalysts can also be explored for the same purpose.

He further added that given the importance of a hydrogen-based economy, the aim is to implement the project in a mission mode and realize an indigenous magneto-electrolytic hydrogen generator.

Wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya wins Olympic silver, goes down in hard-fought final

Ravi Kumar wins silver! Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya settled for silver after losing a hard-fought final against ROC's Zaur Uguev in the Men's 57kg Gold medal match.

The Indian wrestler gave it his all but could not get better than Zaur Uguev, who is a two-time world champion. Ravi Kumar lost the final bout 4-7. He has won the silver medal, which is India's second silver medal at Tokyo Olympics 2020 after Mirabai Chanu's silver.

This is also India's fifth Olympic medal at Tokyo Olympic Games 2020.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, ***"Ravi Kumar Dahiya is a remarkable wrestler! His fighting spirit and tenacity are outstanding. Congratulations to him for winning the Silver Medal at #Tokyo2020. India takes great pride in his accomplishments."***

Ravi Kumar Dahiya is a remarkable wrestler! His fighting spirit and tenacity are outstanding. Congratulations to him for winning the Silver Medal at [#Tokyo2020](#). India takes great pride in his accomplishments.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 5, 2021](#)

Former Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju was one of the first in wishing the Indian wrestler. His tweet read, ***"Ravi Kumar Dahiya, you are Indian hero! You have made India proud by winning Olympic Silver medal !! Hearty Congratulations on the great performance at the #Tokyo2020 Olympics #Cheer4India "***

Ravi Kumar Dahiya, you are Indian hero! You have made India proud by winning Olympic Silver medal !!

Hearty Congratulations on the great performance at the [#Tokyo2020 Olympics](#) [#Cheer4India](#) pic.twitter.com/OuthaKWzRI

— Kiren Rijiju (@KirenRijiju) [August 5, 2021](#)

Ravi Kumar Dahiya storms into finals

Ravi Kumar Dahiya had advanced into the finals of men's freestyle 57 Kg event on August 4, 2021, guaranteeing India another medal at Tokyo Olympics 2020.

Ravi Kumar stormed into the finals after defeating Kazakhstan's Nurislam Sanayev in the semi-finals here at Makuhari Messe Hall A, Mat B.

Ravi Kumar Dahiya is the first Indian wrestler to enter the finals since Sushil Kumar in 2012 London Olympics.

India's Medals at Tokyo Olympics 2020

Athlete	Medal	Event
Mirabai Chanu	Silver	Women's 49kg weightlifting
Ravi Kumar Dahiya	Silver	Men's 57kg wrestling
Lovlina Borgohain	Bronze	Women's welterweight boxing
PV Sindhu	Bronze	Women's singles badminton
Indian hockey team	Bronze	Men's hockey

List of Indian Olympic Medalists in Wrestling

Ravi Kumar Dahiya- Silver at 2021 Tokyo Olympics

Sakshi Malik - Bronze at 2016 Rio Olympics

Yogeshwar Dutt- Bronze at 2012 London Olympics

Sushil Kumar- Bronze at 2008 Beijing Olympics, Silver at 2012 London Olympics

KD Jadhav- Bronze at 1952 Helsinki Olympics

Ravi Kumar Dahiya

- Ravi Kumar Dahiya belongs to Nahri village in Sonipat, Haryana.
- He was trained in North Delhi's Chhatrasal Stadium.
- He had previously won a bronze medal at the 2019 World Wrestling Championships in the 57 kg category.

- He had earlier won the silver medal in the 55 kg freestyle category at the 2015 Junior World Wrestling Championships in Salvador de Bahia.
- He won the silver at the 2018 World U23 Wrestling Championship in Bucharest, India's only medal at the competition.
- He settled for bronze in his 2019 World Championships debut after losing to defending champion and eventual gold medalist Zaur Uguev. This earned him one of the six available quota places for the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Kerala CM announces Educational Empowerment Fund – All you need to know

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on August 4, 2021, announced that an Educational Empowerment Fund as a part of the Vidyakiranam initiative will be set up to offer digital services and tools such as laptops or tablets to ensure digital education for all students. The Fund will be like the Disaster Relief Fund.

While inaugurating the Vidyakiranam project and the web portal said that the funds will be used for educational purposes only. "The government is confident that all those interested in the country and the education of their children will cooperate with it," he added.

Vidyakiranam project – key points

- The Vidyakiranam project has been developed to aid children who cannot afford digital services. The State government said digital services and equipment such as laptops or tablets are as important as other learning tools such as pencils, books, and pens.
- Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Kerala is making efforts to elevate its education system to world-class. CM said that amid the current disruption in the education situation due to COVID-19, it is a must that all students have access to digital tools to ensure the same learning opportunity.

How will Vidyakiranam project be executed?

- Teacher-parent committees across the schools in the State have invited people from various fields to assist with the project. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has also offered to assist with the project.
- The State government has also held discussions with internet service providers to ensure internet connectivity under the project for students to get an education at home.
- The project is being implemented in each area through local bodies. Further, a system for disbursing funds through a web portal as a part of the Vidyakiranam project has been set up.
- The Vidyakiranam portal will offer a system for individuals, organizations to place orders for digital tools such as laptops or tablets, and a payment system for the orders placed.

UK moves India to Amber list: What does this mean for Indian travellers?

The United Kingdom has moved **India from red to amber list**, lifting the mandatory 10-day hotel quarantine for fully vaccinated passengers from India.

The United Kingdom has a **traffic light system for international travel** and those returning from countries in the Amber list are not subjected to compulsory institutional quarantine, instead, they have to undergo a 10-day quarantining at home.

The change was announced by the Department for Transport and it will come into effect from August 8, 2021.

Significance

The decision has come as a relief for the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, who had been demanding relaxations in the travel norms between India and Britain.

With this change, the Indian nationals will be able to quarantine at a location of their choice for 10 days after arriving in the UK instead of undergoing mandatory institutional quarantine. The travellers will also have the option of **"Test to Release"** after five days of quarantine.

The change will directly impact thousands of Indian families and students looking to travel to the UK.

What does this mean for travellers from India?

Those travelling to the United Kingdom from India will need to follow the following steps:

1. Take a Covid test within three days of their flight.
2. Book in advance for two Covid tests to be taken upon arrival in England
3. Complete a passenger locator form on arrival.
4. Quarantine at home or any place they have confirmed as their location in England for 10 days.

5. Test on or before day two and on or after day eight.

Test to Release Option

Indian national can pay for a private COVID-19 test through the "Test to Release" scheme to test on day five and can be released from quarantine if the test result comes negative and the result of the day 2 test had also come negative or was inconclusive.

The test to release option can not be taken unless the traveler has been in England for five full days.

Who is exempted from home quarantine in the UK?

- Those below the age of 18 years and those who are fully vaccinated in the UK or in a country with a vaccination programme approved by the UK are exempted from home quarantine.
- India-manufactured Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, Coshield is likely to be covered under this exemption.
- Those who have received two doses of the Covid vaccine in the EU and the US are also exempted from home quarantine.

Which countries have been moved to the Amber list under the new change?

The UK Transport Department informed through a tweet that **UAE, Qatar, India and Bahrain** will be moved from the red list to the amber list. The change will come into effect from August 8, 2021.

Other Changes

The United Kingdom has also moved **seven countries from the amber list to the green list including France, Germany, Austria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Latvia and Norway.**

Those travelling from countries on the green list will not have to quarantine regardless of their vaccination status. They will have to take a pre-departure test and another test two days after arrival.

Four countries will be placed on the red list - Georgia, Mexico, La Reunion and Mayotte.

Tamil Nadu Government launches doorstep healthcare scheme

The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin on August 5, 2021, launched the **'Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam' (healthcare services at people's doorstep) scheme** in Krishnagiri, Tamil Nadu.

The state government launched scheme aims at eliminating the need for patients to visit hospitals for the treatment of non-communicable diseases.

After the launch of the scheme, Chief Minister MK Stalin said that the healthcare scheme will be a pioneer for the whole country. The details of the scheme were issued on August 4 by the Tamil Nadu Health and Family Welfare Department.

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin today launched a doorstep healthcare scheme - 'Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam' (healthcare services at doorstep) in Krishnagiri for the needy. "It aims at eliminating the need for patients to visit hospitals for treating non-communicable diseases," says CM pic.twitter.com/b4kz0I74NG

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

Tamil Nadu healthcare scheme: Features

- The programme by Tamil Nadu Government will focus on community-based interventions in order to improve disease control in the state.
- One of the important features of the project will be that every listed beneficiary under the scheme will be brought under the Population Health Registry (PHR) which will form the common denominator to ensure continuous monitoring and the follow-up of the patients.

Doorstep healthcare scheme in Tamil Nadu: Key details

- The doorstep healthcare scheme in Tamil Nadu will be expanded to other parts of the state as well by the end of 2021.
- A total of Rs. 242 crores have been allocated for the scheme. It is expected that one crore people from 30 lakh families will be benefitted from the healthcare scheme this year.
- Under the scheme, a total of 1,264 women health volunteers, physiotherapists are to be

deployed for the identification of non-communicable diseases and to provide treatment at the doorstep.

- A field team comprising of existing ASHAs in tribal areas, Women Health Volunteers under TN Corporation for Development of Women, Mid-level health providers, Health inspectors, Village Health nurses, and physiotherapists with the support of other health staff will be deployed to provide healthcare services at home.
- The first phase of the scheme will cover 189 primary health centers, 1172 Health sub-centers, and 50 community health centers in 50 Universal Health Coverage blocks all over the state.

Significance:

The Government felt the need to strengthen the responsiveness of the health system of the state by providing holistic home-based health care services and addressing the health needs of all the members of a household.

Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam will offer a comprehensive set of health services in order to ensure a continuity of care and sustainability of all the services.

Combinations of Sputnik V components with three other COVID-19 vaccines show favourable results: RDIF Study

The Russian Direct Investment Fund announced on August 4, 2021, that the combination of the first component of the Sputnik V vaccine with other COVID vaccines by Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, and Moderna has shown favourable results.

The official statement by RDIF informed that it took the lead in initiating the partnerships with other vaccine producers to conduct the joint studies of a combination of the first component of Sputnik V with foreign COVID-19 vaccines.

[#RDIF](#) announces initial safety results of the world's first study of a combination between the [@AstraZeneca](#) vaccine (developed jointly with the [@UniofOxford](#)) and the first component of the [@sputnikvaccine](#) (Sputnik Light vaccine) in [#Azerbaijan](#). pic.twitter.com/tSvDNYKAbf

— RDIF (@rdif_press) [July 30, 2021](#)

Mix & Match of COVID vaccines: What the latest study state?

A study conducted in Argentina showed that the heterogenous boosting approach (vaccine cocktail using human adenovirus serotype 26 as the first component and human adenovirus serotype 5 as the second component) was at the core of Sputnik V Vaccine, which is also the world's first registered vaccine against COVID-19.

This approach proved successful in creating a longer and more durable immunity against the COVID-19 virus.

121 volunteers corresponding to the Russian Vaccine combination groups were analyzed in these regimens:

1. Sputnik Light/AstraZeneca
2. Sputnik Light/Moderna
3. Sputnik Light/Sinopharm

4. Sputnik Light/Sputnik Light compared to control group Sputnik V 1 Comp./Sputnik V 2 Comp.

What was the result?

The CEO of RDIF, Kirill Dmitriev informed that the studies conducted by Argentina and other countries have proved that the Sputnik V Light vaccine can be effectively used in combination with other vaccines.

He further added that this approach is the most promising one to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and the new strains of the virus emerging around the world.

Russia offers vaccine cooperation:

While speaking of the successful trial, Dmitriev said that Russia is the country that has offered vaccine cooperation to other producers to conduct joint mix and match studies.

He said that the Russian Direct Investment Fund is ready to partner with other producers for further mix and match studies of the COVID vaccines in other parts of the world.

Indian men's hockey team clinches bronze at Tokyo Olympics 2020, end 41-year-old medal drought

Indian men's hockey team created history on August 5, 2021 by winning the bronze medal after a stunning 5-4 victory over Germany in the bronze medal match at the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020. The team has brought home India's first Olympic medal in hockey after 41 years.

Germany had taken an early lead in the first quarter of the bronze medal match however, India equalised it. Germany then scored two goals to take its lead to 3-1 in the second quarter. Team India with the help of goals by Hardik Singh and Harmanpreet Singh equalised it again to 3-3 at halftime.

India's Rupinder Pal Singh and Simranjeet Singh then scored to push India in the lead at 5-3. India maintained its lead in the thriller all the way to pick up the bronze. Though German scored another goal and then brought in an extra field player in place of its goalie but was unable to score an equaliser.

India's bronze medal is its first Olympic hockey medal after it won gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Indian Men's Hockey Captain Manpreet Singh, Head Coach Graham Reid and Assistant Coach Piyush Dubey to congratulate them. He congratulated the team for emerging victorious and bringing home the Bronze from #Tokyo2020.

#WATCH | PM Narendra Modi speaks to the India Hockey team Captain Manpreet Singh, coach Graham Reid and assistant coach Piyush Dubey after the team won **#Bronze** medal in men's hockey match against Germany **#TokyoOlympics** pic.twitter.com/NguuwSISsV

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

PM told Men's Hockey Captain Manpreet Singh, "You have scripted history." He remarked that today Manpreet's voice is loud and clear, whereas it was slightly muted the other day (when India lost to Belgium).

Manpreet thanked PM Modi for his constant encouragement to the team.

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also tweeted, ***"Historic! A day that will be etched in the memory of every Indian. Congratulations to our Men's Hockey Team for bringing home the Bronze. With this feat, they have captured the imagination of the entire nation, especially our youth. India is proud of our Hockey team."***

Historic! A day that will be etched in the memory of every Indian.

Congratulations to our Men's Hockey Team for bringing home the Bronze. With this feat, they have captured the imagination of the entire nation, especially our youth. India is proud of our Hockey team.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 5, 2021](#)

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur also tweeted, ***"A BILLION CHEERS for INDIA! Boys, you've done it ! We can't keep calm ! #TeamIndia. Our Men's Hockey Team dominated and defined their destiny in the Olympic history books today, yet again ! We are extremely proud of you!"***

President Ram Nath Kovind also congratulated the Indian men's hockey team for winning an Olympic Medal in hockey after 41 years. He said, ***"the team showed exceptional skills, resilience & determination to win. This historic victory will start a new era in hockey & will inspire youth to take up."***

Congratulations to our men's hockey team for winning an Olympic Medal in hockey after 41 years. The team showed exceptional skills, resilience & determination to win. This historic victory will start a new era in hockey & will inspire youth to take up: President Ram Nath Kovind
pic.twitter.com/TneBZte96e

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

A BILLION CHEERS for INDIA !

Boys, you've done it !

We can't keep calm ![#TeamIndia](#) !

Our Men's Hockey Team dominated and defined their destiny in the Olympic history books today, yet again !

We are extremely proud of you! [#Tokyo2020 pic.twitter.com/n78BqzcnPK](https://twitter.com/n78BqzcnPK)

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 5, 2021](#)

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik also said, ***"Brilliant in Blue. Congratulations Indian Men's Hockey Team on the spectacular victory to give us an Olympic medal after 41 long years. This historic win at #Tokyo2020 will inspire generation of sportspersons. All the very best for the future."*** Odisha state is the official national sponsor for the Indian hockey teams.

Brilliant in Blue. Congratulations Indian Men's Hockey Team on the spectacular victory to give us an Olympic medal after 41 long years. This historic win at [#Tokyo2020](#) will inspire generation of sportspersons. All the very best for the future: Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik
[pic.twitter.com/9rVG5mmFMS](https://twitter.com/9rVG5mmFMS)

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

The Odisha CM also spoke with the Indian team to congratulate them for winning the Bronze medal in match against Germany. The Chief Minister has invited the Indian Olympic hockey team to Bhubaneswar on August 16.

Punjab, MP announce cash prize of 1 crore to hockey players

The Punjab Government has announced a cash award of Rs 1 crore each to the Indian men's hockey team players from the state

The Madhya Pradesh government has also announced Rs 1 crore cash prize for the hockey players who were trained in the state- Vivek Sagar and Nilakantha.

Why is this important?

- The Indian men's hockey team has simply been fantastic throughout the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020, losing just once to Australia in the group stage and then against Belgium in the semifinals. The team has put up a strong performance throughout and this helped them get the bronze medal with another stunning win.
- The victory is extremely significant as it indicates towards the revival of field hockey in the country, after 41 years.
- India Men's hockey team coach Graham Reid tweeted a picture after the team won Bronze in

Tokyo #Olympics saying, " Pretty proud of these legends!"

"Pretty proud of these legends!" tweets India Men's hockey team coach Graham Reid with a picture after the team won #Bronze medal in Tokyo #Olympics pic.twitter.com/I11LOldFCN

— ANI (@ANI) [August 5, 2021](#)

- The Indian hockey team had not been fairing too well in the last few decades as performances had dried up. From winning the gold medal almost every time in the Summer Olympics between 1950-1980, the men's field hockey team failed to get a single Olympic medal ever since.
- The period after the 1980 Olympic success saw a decline in India's performance and the following decades proved to be full of ups and downs for the national team. However, there was a resurgence in 1998 and ever since the team has been trying to rebuild itself.
- The recent bronze medal victory over Germany has brought back a glimpse of the old glory and dominance due to the diligent efforts of the team led by captain Manpreet Singh.
- Both the men's and women's teams had spent the last year and a half in SAI Bengaluru to train, strategise and adapt to the bubble life.
- Hockey India also arranged tours for the teams and received tremendous support from the government of Odisha, who came on board as official sponsors of the teams three years back, becoming the only state to sponsor a national team.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also noted the marvelous performance by both men's and women's hockey teams at Tokyo Olympic 2020 after the women's semifinal match, which they lost by just one goal despite putting up a strong fight.

PM Modi tweeted, "One of the things we will remember #Tokyo2020 for is the stupendous performance by our Hockey teams. Today and through the Games, our Women's Hockey team played with grit and showcased great skill. Proud of the team. Best of luck for the game ahead and for future endeavours."

One of the things we will remember [#Tokyo2020](#) for is the stupendous performance by our Hockey teams.

Today and through the Games, our Women's Hockey team played with grit and showcased great skill. Proud of the team. Best of luck for the game ahead and for future endeavours.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 4, 2021](#)

India's Olympic medals in hockey

The Indian field hockey team has won seven Olympic gold medals between 1928 and 1964, losing only in 1960 final to claim silver. India claimed the gold medal again in 1980 but has been evaded of it ever since.

Overall, this was India's 12th medal in hockey at the Olympics. This makes India the most successful team in men's hockey at the Olympics, followed by Germany that has won 11 medals so far, Australia that has won 9 and the Netherlands that has won 9 medals as well at the Olympics.

Indian men's hockey at Summer Olympics 1928-2021

Olympic Games	Position
1928 Amsterdam Olympics, Netherlands	Gold
1932 Los Angeles Olympics, United States	Gold
1936 Berlin Olympics, Germany	Gold
1948 London Olympics, United Kingdom	Gold
1952 Helsinki Olympics, Finland	Gold
1956 Melbourne Olympics, Australia	Gold
1960 Rome Olympics, Italy	Silver
1964 Tokyo Olympics, Japan	Gold
1968 Mexico City Olympics, Mexico	Bronze
1972 Munich Olympics, West Germany	Bronze
1976 Montreal Olympics, Canada	7th
1980 Moscow Olympics, Soviet Union	Gold
1984 Los Angeles Olympics, United States	5th
1988 Seoul Olympics, South Korea	6th
1992 Barcelona Olympics, Spain	7th
1996 Atlanta Olympics, United States	8th

2000 Sydney Olympics, Australia	7th
2004 Athens Olympics, Greece	7th
2008 Beijing Olympics, China	DNQ
2012 London Olympics, United Kingdom	12th
2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, Brazil	8th
2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japan	Bronze

RBI issues guidelines to implement its circular on opening of current accounts

The **Reserve Bank of India issued guidelines** for the **implementation of the circular** on the opening of current accounts by banks on August 4, 2021.

The apex bank has given all the banks time until October end to implement the new rules on current accounts issued in 2020. RBI had previously set the deadline of July 31, 2021.

The RBI had issued three circulars in 2020 on the opening of current accounts by banks and CC/OD facilities. The circulars comprised instructions to enforce credit discipline among the borrowers.

They were also aimed at facilitating better monitoring by lenders and for this, RBI had suggested a graded approach on opening and operating of current accounts.

Reserve Bank of India issued guidelines for implementation of the circular on the opening of current accounts by banks

RBI has given banks time until October end to implement the new rules on current accounts issued in 2020. The regulator had previously set a deadline of 31 July pic.twitter.com/ZLqtdMqgz9

— ANI (@ANI) [August 4, 2021](#)

The banks were required to implement the following instructions :

1. For borrowers who have not availed CC/ OD facility from any bank, there would be no restriction on the opening of current accounts in any bank if the exposure of the banking system to such borrowers is less than Rs 5 crore.
2. For borrowers who have not availed CC/ OD facility from any bank and the exposure of the banking system is Rs 5 crore or more but less than Rs 50 crore then also there is no restriction on banks to let such borrowers from opening a current account.
3. The restriction applies to borrowers in case they avail of CC/OD facility since all operations that can be carried out from a current account can also be carried out from a CC/ OD account.

4. Banks are not allowed to open current accounts for borrowers who have availed agricultural/ personal overdraft (OD) or OD against deposits.

Banks generally follow the one-bank-one customer model as against the one-branch-one-customer model.

Why has the deadline for implementing the RBI instructions been extended?

The Reserve Bank had received requests from banks to resolve operational issues while implementing the RBI circulars. To ensure that the instructions are implemented in a non-disruptive manner, the RBI decided that:

a) The banks will be allowed to implement the provisions of the circulars till October 31, 2021.

The extended time can be used by the banks in engaging with the borrowers to arrive at mutually satisfactory resolutions. The issues that the banks were unable to resolve themselves will be escalated to the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) for appropriate guidance. If there are any remaining issues, they will be flagged by the IBA to the RBI for examination by September 30.

b) The banks will be required to put in place a monitoring mechanism at the head office and regional and zone-level offices to monitor non-disruptive implementation of the circular and to ensure customers are not put under undue inconvenience during the implementation process.

c) Banks shall ensure that the contents of the circular are implemented in spirit without causing inconvenience to the borrowers.

Ram Temple in Ayodhya to be open to devotees by December 2023

The Ram Temple being built in the Ayodhya will be open to devotees by December 2023. The entire construction work of the temple is scheduled to be completed by 2025.

As per media reports and sources from the Ram Temple Trust, the main Garbha Griha (sanctum sanctorum) and the temple's first floor will be ready by December 2023 for the devotees for Lord Ram's darshan.

Ram Temple in Ayodhya – Key Features

- The Temple premises will be spread across 100 acres of land, including 66 acres sanctioned by the Supreme Court.
- The entire cost of the Temple has been estimated to be between Rs 900 crores to Rs 1,000 crores.
- The Temple's length, width, and height are 360 feet, 235 feet, and 20 feet, respectively.
- The Temple will have 160 columns on the ground floor, 132 columns on the first floor, and 74 columns on the second floor.
- The top of Garbha Griha (sanctum sanctorum) will be 161 feet from the ground floor and will be built with Rajasthan stone and marble.
- No bricks or steel will be used in the structure of the Temple instead copper will be used to join the stones.
- The Temple will also have a pilgrim facilitation centre, archives, museum, research centre, administrative building, auditorium, yagya shala, gau shala, and sant niwas.
- Larsen and Toubro have been assigned the construction project of the Temple and the Tata Consulting Engineers will serve as the monitoring agency.

Design and heritage value of Ram Temple

- The designs of the Temple have been finalized keeping in mind the changes that occurred in the past three years.
- The master plan shows that the conservation and development of 'Sita Koop' and 'Kuber Tila' have been taken up.

Significance

- The development of the move to open the Ram Temple in Ayodhya to devotees holds political significance as the Lok Sabha elections due in 2024 would strengthen BJP's position before hitting the campaigns.

Ram Temple Trust

- After the Supreme Court passed a verdict in the favour of the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, PM Narendra Modi on February 5, 2020, had announced the formation of the Shri Ram Janm Bhumi Teerth Ksheshtra Trust in the Lok Sabha for the construction and management of the Temple.
- PM Modi on August 5, 2020, had laid the foundation stone of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN receives certificate of Good Manufacturing Practice from Hungarian authorities

COVAXIN, a COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by Bharat Biotech, on August 5, 2021, received a certificate of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) compliance from the authorities of Hungary.

The news was shared via a tweet by Bharat Biotech in which it mentioned that this marks the 1st EUDRAGDMP compliance certificate to the firm from the European authorities.

COVAXIN received approval from the National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition Hungary certifying the GMP for the manufacture of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Another milestone in our account as COVAXIN® receives GMP certificate from Hungary. This marks the 1st EUDRAGDMP compliance certificate received by Bharat Biotech from European regulatory authorities. [#BharatBiotech](#) [#COVAXIN](#) [#covaxininhungary](#) pic.twitter.com/0x8BLF2jWR

— BharatBiotech (@BharatBiotech) [August 5, 2021](#)

In an official statement, Bharat Biotech said that with this approval, the firm has achieved another significant milestone in innovating and manufacturing vaccines at the global quality standards and moving forward in an ongoing fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.

It further added that the recognition by Hungary complements the firm's commitment to driving world-class innovation as well as being a front-runner in the research and development of vaccines.

Key Highlights:

- The certificate of Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) is now listed on the EudraGMDP. It is the database of the European Community of Manufacturing authorizations and certificates of good manufacturing practice.
- Bharat Biotech also intends on submitting the documentation for the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) in several additional countries worldwide.

Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN: Key Information

Meanwhile, as per the study by the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology, COVAXIN of Bharat Biotech has shown less reduction in 'neutralizing activity' while comparing with the Delta and Delta AY.1 (Delta Plus) variants in those who have been fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine.

This means that those who have been vaccinated with COVAXIN will be protected against the current variants Delta, Delta AY.1, and B.1.6.17.3.

COVAXIN is a Coronavirus vaccine that has been developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research. It is an inactivated virus-based vaccine.

The vaccine was granted emergency use authorization in January 2021 by India's drug regulatory body. It was the third vaccine to apply for authorization after Serum Institute and Pfizer.

INS Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier begins maiden sea trials

INS Vikrant: India's first indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant began its much-awaited maiden sea trials on August 4, 2021. INS Vikrant is the largest and most complex warship built in the country.

INS Vikrant's sea trials have brought India into the league of select nations that have the capability of indigenously designing and building a state-of-the-art aircraft carrier.

The maiden sea trials of the 40,000-tonne aircraft carrier have begun 50 years after its namesake played a major role in the 1971 war. The aircraft carrier was built at a cost of around Rs 23,000 crore.

[#WATCH](#) Indian Navy's future aircraft carrier 'Vikrant' at sea on the first day of its sailing near Kochi. The warship is being built by the Cochin Shipyard Limited and would be commissioned into service after extensive trials pic.twitter.com/3Ps0bkNII9

— ANI (@ANI) [August 4, 2021](#)

INS Vikrant, also known as IAC-1, is expected to be commissioned in the Indian Navy by 2022.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted, ***"Maiden sea sortie of Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, 'Vikrant' is a true testimony to our unwavering commitment to Atmanirbharta. Realisation of this historic milestone, regardless of COVID, shows true dedication& commitment of all stakeholders."***

Maiden sea sortie of Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, 'Vikrant' is a true testimony to our unwavering commitment to Atmanirbharta. Realisation of this historic milestone, regardless of COVID, shows true dedication& commitment of all stakeholders, tweets Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pic.twitter.com/aDo7tuNMmV

— ANI (@ANI) [August 4, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, ***"The Indigenous Aircraft Carrier 'Vikrant', designed by Indian Navy's Design Team and built by @cslcochin, undertook its maiden sea sortie today. A wonderful example of @makeinindia. Congratulations to @indiannavy and***

@cslcochin on this historic milestone."

The Indigenous Aircraft Carrier 'Vikrant', designed by Indian Navy's Design Team and built by [@cslcochin](#), undertook its maiden sea sortie today. A wonderful example of [@makeinindia](#). Congratulations to [@indiannavy](#) and [@cslcochin](#) on this historic milestone.
pic.twitter.com/AjnafkxOaT

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 4, 2021](#)

Defence Minister reviews construction of INS Vikrant

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on June 25, 2021 reviewed the progress of the construction of India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1) INS Vikrant at the Cochin Shipyard, Kochi, Kerala.

The Minister said, "The IAC-1 boasts of nearly 75 per cent indigenous content. This includes the design, the steel used in the construction and key weapons, and sensors."

The combat capability, versatility, and reach of the IAC-1 will add formidable capabilities in the country's defence, Singh added. The Defence Minister described the aircraft as India's pride and an example of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Reviewed first-hand the ongoing work on the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier, which is India's pride and a shining example of Atmanirbhar Bharat. The IAC has made significant progress. Commissioning of the IAC next year will be a befitting tribute to 75 years of India's independence.
pic.twitter.com/N9542pJneq

— Rajnath Singh (@rajnathsingh) [June 25, 2021](#)

When is INS Vikrant expected to be commissioned?

- India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1) INS Vikrant is expected to be commissioned by 2022 as a tribute to the country's 75 years of Independence.

INS Vikrant: Background

- INS Vikrant also referred to as Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-1) is an aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy. The aircraft carrier is being built at the Cochin Shipyard, Kochi, Kerala.
- INS Vikrant is the first aircraft carrier that is being built in India. The name Vikrant means 'courageous' and its motto is Jayema Sam Yudhi Sprdhah that has been borrowed from Rigveda 1.8.3.

- The aircraft carrier is 262 metres long and 62 metres wide. It displaces approximately 40,000 metric tonnes.
- Work on Vikrant's design began in 1999 and its foundation was laid in 2009. The aircraft was floated in the dry basins in December 2011 and launched on August 12, 2013.
- The aircraft carrier completed its basin trials in December 2020 and expected to begin its sea trials by end of 2021.
- The aircraft carrier is expected to be commissioned by the Indian Navy by 2022. Initially, IAC-1 was to be commissioned in 2018.

Modernization of Indian Navy

- 44 warships are being constructed at Indian shipyards which are a testimony to the country's way forward to modernization and harnessing the capabilities of the country's indigenous industry, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.
- “The Defence Acquisitions Committee (DAC) has also recently accorded approval for a request for Proposal of Project 75-I under the Strategic Partnership model,” Singh added. This will further boost the indigenous development of niche manufacturing technologies.
- The modernization measures are aimed at enhancing the Indian Navy's operational reach and protect India's maritime interests.

Visited Karwar Naval Base today to review the progress of ongoing infrastructure development under 'Project Seabird'. I am confident that after the completion of this project, the Karwar Naval Base would become Asia's largest and most efficient Naval base. pic.twitter.com/8z6QcST4QM

— Rajnath Singh (@rajnathsingh) [June 24, 2021](#)

- During his visit to Karnataka's Karwar on June 24, 2021, to review the Indian Navy's Project Seabird, he said, Karwar Naval base will be Asia's biggest Naval Base of the Indian Navy.

Code of Conduct on South China Sea must be consistent with UN Convention: India at EAS meeting

The External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on August 4, 2021, stressed that the **Code of Conduct on the South China Sea** must be fully consistent with the relevant UN convention.

He also mentioned that the negotiations on it should not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of the nations that are not part of the discussions.

While speaking at a **meeting of the East Asia Summit (EAS)** virtually, Jaishankar highlighted the growing convergence of the approaches on the Indo-Pacific region among different members of the group.

Addressed the 11th EAS Foreign Ministers Meeting today.

Highlighted the growing convergence of approaches on Indo-Pacific among different members.

pic.twitter.com/iPsdxojbt5

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 4, 2021](#)

The EAM, separately, also addressed a **meeting of ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers** and talked about various issues including connectivity. He also said that India has been looking forward to an early review of the 'trade in goods agreement'.

A substantive and fruitful ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting today.

1. Much of India's interests and relationships now lie to its East, a testimony of its ties with ASEAN.

2. Looking forward to early review of our Trade in Goods Agreement.

pic.twitter.com/kEO5Wseawy

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 4, 2021](#)

South China Sea: Significance

China has claimed sovereignty over all of the South China Sea which is a huge source of hydrocarbons. However, several ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member nations, including the Philippines, Brunei, and Vietnam, have counterclaims.

India has been calling and pitching for a rules-based order in the South China Sea region, including through upholding the adherence to international law, particularly the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).

Stressed that Code of Conduct on South China Sea should be fully consistent with UNCLOS 1982. Should not prejudice legitimate rights and interests of nations not party to discussions.

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 4, 2021](#)

Jaishankar during East Asia Summit: Key details

- In his address at the East Asia Summit, S Jaishankar, apart from highlight South China Sea region, also extended support to the 'ASEAN-five point' consensus on Myanmar as well as welcomed the appointment of a special envoy.

Supported the ASEAN five-point consensus on Myanmar and welcomed the appointment of Special Envoy.

Noted the growing Covid-19 challenge faced by ASEAN and conveyed our support and solidarity.

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 4, 2021](#)

- The External Affairs Minister of India, during the summit, also spoke about the growing Coronavirus pandemic challenge faced by ASEAN nations and conveyed India's support and solidarity to the member nations.

India at ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting:

- As per Jaishankar, the broader context in which India approaches its relationship with ASEAN today, as indeed anything else of significance is undeniably that of the Coronavirus crisis. He also noted that ASEAN member nations responded individually and collectively.

- EAM also mentioned that these challenges brought India and ASEAN even closer, as support was extended to each other during the time of stress.

- Jaishankar, while talking about ASEAN, noted that the group is held up across the world as a good example of multilateralism, regionalism, and globalization.

- The theme 'We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper' under the chairmanship of Brunei also captures the outlook of ASEAN.
- Jaishankar during the meeting also proposed 2022 as the ASEAN-India Friendship year for the 30th anniversary of the ties between India and ASEAN.

ASEAN-India relations:

- The relations between India and ASEAN have been on an upswing in the last few years with a focus being on increasing the cooperation in the areas of security and defence as well as trade and investment.
- India has been committed to supporting a unified, strong, and prosperous ASEAN, whose centrality in the Indo-Pacific is fully appreciated.
- The strong convergence between the Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative (IPOI) and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) proposed by India also adds another dimension to the contemporary partnership of India and ASEAN.

A substantive and fruitful ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting today.

1. Much of India's interests and relationships now lie to its East, a testimony of its ties with ASEAN.

2. Looking forward to early review of our Trade in Goods Agreement.

pic.twitter.com/kEO5Wseawy

— Dr. S. Jaishankar (@DrSJaishankar) [August 4, 2021](#)

- As much of India's interests and relationships now lie to its east, it is a testimony of its healthy ties with ASEAN.
- India has also been emphasizing accelerating the connectivity projects with a particular focus on trilateral highway and Kaladan projects.
- The ambitious India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway is expected to boost connectivity between three nations while Kaladan multi-modal transit project is being viewed as India's gateway to Southeast Asia.

About ASEAN:

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is considered to be one of the most influential groupings in the region. India and several other nations including China, the US, Australia, and Japan are its dialogues partners.

About East Asia Summit:

It is a premier forum in the Asia-Pacific region that deals with issues relating to security and defence. EAS was formed in 2005 and since its inception, it has played a significant role in the geopolitical, strategic, and economic evolution of East Asia.

Apart from the 10 ASEAN member nations, EAS also includes Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, China, Australia, Russia, and the United States.

Cabinet approves continuation of Samagra Shiksha Scheme till March 2026

Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of Samagra Shiksha Scheme for School Education for five years from April 1, 2021 till March 31, 2026.

The scheme will cover 1.16 million schools, 156 million students and 5.7 million teachers of government and aided schools from pre-primary to senior secondary level.

The scheme has been approved with a total financial outlay of Rs.2,94,283.04 crore which includes Centre's share of Rs.1,85,398.32 crore.

What is Samagra Shiksha Scheme?

- Samagra Shiksha Scheme is an integrated scheme that aims to cover the whole school education from school to class XII.
 - The scheme, which is in line with Sustainable Development Goal for Education (SDG-4), aims to ensure that all children have access to quality education.
 - It aims to create an equitable and inclusive classroom environment that will take care of the children's diverse background, multilingual needs and different academic abilities, encouraging them to become active participants in the learning process.
 - The government schools will have playschools as well under the scheme and teachers will be trained accordingly, informed Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.
 - For the first time, centre has also added child safety within the Samagra Shiksha scheme. Under the scheme, the states will be given aid to make a commission for the protection of child rights.
- For the first time, govt has added child safety within the Samagra Shiksha scheme. States will be given aid to make a commission for protection of child rights: Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan pic.twitter.com/N314P200CY

— ANI (@ANI) [August 4, 2021](#)

The scheme proposes:

- (i) Universal Access including Infrastructure Development and Retention
- (ii) Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
- (iii) Gender and Equity
- (iv) Inclusive Education
- (v) Quality and Innovation
- (vi) Financial support for Teacher Salary
- (vii) Digital initiatives
- (viii) RTE Entitlements including uniforms, textbooks etc.
- (ix) Support for ECCE
- (x) Vocational Education
- (xi) Sports and Physical Education
- (xii) Strengthening of Teacher Education and Training
- (xiii) Monitoring
- (xiv) Programme Management
- (xv) National Component.

Impact

The Samagra Shiksha Scheme aims to universalize access to school education to promote equity through the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and weaker sections and to improve the quality of education across all levels of school education.

Key Objectives

- Implementing the recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)

- Implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009
- Early Childhood Care and Education
- Emphasis on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
- Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students
- Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education
- Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education
- Ensuring safe, secure and conducive learning environment and maintenance of standards in schooling provisions
- Promoting vocational education
- Strengthening and up-gradation of State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs)/State Institutes of Education and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIET) as nodal agency for teacher training.

Rajasthan Government plans to bring policy for protection of forests

The Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot informed on August 1, 2021, that the state government has been planning to soon bring a policy for the protection of forests in Rajasthan.

He informed about the forest policy during the virtual launch of the scheme under which the medicinal plants will be distributed to the people of Rajasthan.

—, —, —, —

— Ashok Gehlot (@ashokgehlot51) August 1, 2021

Significance:

The Chief Minister while talking about the significance of forests said that due to the disturbance in nature's balance, calamities such as drought, global warming, excessive rains, landslides, and floods are being faced.

He added that the expansion of forests is necessary in order to prevent these disasters, and for the promotion and protection of the forests in the state.

'Ghar Ghar Aushadhi' scheme launched in Rajasthan:

Rajasthan Government has launched the 'Ghar Ghar' Aushadhi' Scheme under which various types of medicinal plants will be given to the people in the state.

The Chief Minister, during the launch, said that the importance of naturopathy has been proved during the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that to realize the resolve of healthy Rajasthan, it is required for the future generation to get information about the significance and use of the medicinal plants.

72 ‘ - ‘

pic.twitter.com/kTJe336yFz

— Ashok Gehlot (@ashokgehlot51) August 1, 2021

Details:

- Forest Minister of Rajasthan, Sukhram Vishnoi said that under the scheme, eight medicinal plants such as Giloy, Tulsi, Ashwagandha, and Kalmegh will be provided at no cost to all 1.36 crore families of Rajasthan three times in 5 years.
- The Forest Department of the state will prepare the saplings in its nurseries.
- The State Government will spend Rs. 210 crores on the scheme.

Uttarakhand Bhookamp Alert: India's first earthquake early warning mobile app launched

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee informed on August 4, 2021, that it has launched the 'Uttarakhand Bhookamp alert' app. It is India's first Earthquake Early Warning (EEW) mobile app.

The Earthquake Early Warning App was launched by the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Trivendra Singh and the project was sponsored by the Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority. The app has been available for both the iOS and Android Platforms.

IIT Roorkee, in an official statement, said that it is a path-breaking achievement for the Institute as it will be India's first application that will notify people about earthquake alerts.

Significance:

- The Uttarakhand Bhookamp alert app will be significant for the timely dissemination of information regarding the occurrence of an earthquake in the neighbourhood.
- The app will also be able to provide the expected time of arrival as well as the intensity at the location in order to prevent any loss of life.
- Earthquake Early Warning (EEW) mobile app is also the world's only app that will be able to record the location of the people who are stuck somewhere during the earthquake and will send this information to the Disaster Response Force.

India's first Earthquake Early Warning app: How does it work?

The Earthquake Early Warning is a real-time earthquake information system that will be to detect the onset of the Earthquake and will issue warnings.

According to IIT Roorkee, the physical basis for an earthquake early warning system is the speed of the seismic waves, which propagate after the release of stress from faults movement.

The ground shaking during an earthquake is caused by shear waves which travel at

about half the speed of the primary waves and are much slower than the electromagnetic signals. The Earthquake Early Warning system exploits this advantage.

Background:

The app was initially launched as a pilot project only by the Earth Science Ministry for the Garhwal region for Uttarakhand, however, the project proposal was further extended by the State Government.

Extreme weather events in world: World staggers through deadly summer of floods, wildfires, forest fires, heat dome

Climate change has hit the world harder in 2021 with the deadly summer bringing extreme weather events such as extreme floods, tyoons and deadliest forest fires and wildfires.

Several major nations have been hit hard this time with extreme weather events including the United States, Europe, Canada, China and even India. Scientists call the extreme weather events human-caused climate change.

Climate scientists had long warned that the 21st century will see more natural disasters made worse by global warming. These climate predictions have become a reality in 2021.

From extreme floods in Europe, US and China to deadly wildfires around the Mediterranean from Turkey to Spain, the world is reeling with extreme climate change effects.

List of extreme weather events in 2021

Floods in India

Floods have ravaged several states across India including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and north Bihar due to torrential rains. Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh witnessed cloudbursts and landslides.

These events indicate the increasing intensity of extreme weather events across the Indian landscape.

Floods in Germany, Belgium, Netherlands & Luxembourg

- Devastating flash floods caused by the heaviest rainfall in Germany and Belgium left hundreds dead and several thousand missing and thousands more stranded and homeless in Western Europe.

- Streets turned into rivers, causing several shops and houses to collapse. Germany was the worst affected with fast-moving torrents of water flooding entire towns and villages in western and

southern parts.

- The flooding also caused damage in the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

Floods in China

- China's central Henan province witnessed the heaviest rainfall in 1,000 years, which caused major flooding in cities, turning streets into rushing rivers. Over 300 people have reportedly died in the flooding and most of them in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan and many are missing.
- The flooding caused by record rainfall flooded the entire city that caused vehicles to be washed away and flooding in subways, trapping people in subway cars.
- UN Climate Change had tweeted saying, "Dramatic climate impacts continue around the world. Zhengzhou in China has seen the highest daily rainfall since weather records began, receiving the equivalent of 8 months of rain in a single day."
- As per scientists, the extreme rainfall in China is linked to global warming, just as were other climate events in the world.

Deadliest Forest Fires in the Mediterranean

- The deadliest wildfires triggered by the worst heat wave have been sweeping across Mediterranean countries and regions including Turkey, Greece and the Italian island of Sicily, causing devastating damage. Major forest fire in the northern outskirts of Athens has forced thousands to flee their homes.
- The fires and the extreme heatwave have brought the Greek electricity grid on the brink of collapse. This is the worst heatwave since 1987.
- Turkey has also been ravaged by the deadly forest fires that have engulfed several homes and resorts. The blazes even encircled a Turkish thermal power plant on August 3rd. The European Union has sent three firefighting planes to Turkey, one from Croatia and two from Spain after Turkey requested help from other European countries.
- Support teams from Russia, Ukraine, Iran and Azerbaijan have also deployed to help firefighters.

- The Turkish government has pledged to rebuild the damaged homes and compensate for the losses in areas affected by the fires.
- Sicily has also been battling the worst wildfires that reached the town of Catania, forcing people to flee their homes and the local airport was also temporarily shut down.

Heat Dome in Canada, US

Western Canada was caught reeling under a severe 'heat dome', caused by extreme temperatures when hot air is trapped by high-pressure fronts. It caused a 195 percent rise in sudden fatalities within the past five years.

In Lytton in British Colombia, the temperatures crossed 46 degrees Celsius. Even in Portland city in Oregon, United States, temperatures went up as high as 46 degrees Celsius.

Wildfires in California

Yet again this year, California is seeing the worst wildfires that have engulfed acres of land and destroyed hundreds of homes. The wildfire season is, in fact, just starting in the American West and thousands of firefighters are ready had to tackle more than 80 large blazes.

COVID-19 second wave not over yet, 'R number' high in 8 states: Government

The Union Health Ministry said on August 3, 2021, that the second wave of COVID-19 is not over yet and the Reproduction (R) number is high in 8 Indian states. The ministry added that the case trajectory needs to be controlled here.

Lav Aggarwal, the Joint Secretary of Union Health Ministry, while addressing a press conference over the COVID-19 situation in the country said that whenever the R number is above one, it means that the case trajectory has been increasing and it needs to be controlled.

He also informed there are few Indian states where over 3 crore vaccination doses have been supplied. Uttar Pradesh has been given 4.88 crore doses, Gujarat has been given 3.4 crore doses and Maharashtra has been given 4.5 crore doses.

Why the higher R-number is dangerous?

Reproduction (R) number is the average number of new infections generated by one infected individual during the entire infectious period.

The Joint Secretary of Health Ministry said that the US, Canada, India, and Australia have 1.2 R numbers, on average. This means that one infected individual has been infecting more than one person. He added that the R number is high in 8 states in India. Active cases and growth numbers are also assessed using the Reproduction (R) Number.

Whenever the R number is above one, it means that the case trajectory has been increasing and it needs to be controlled.

Which of the 8 states are reporting a high R Number?

Luv Aggarwal stated that the eight states include Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Lakshadweep, Karnataka, Mizoram, Kerala, and Puducherry.

[#IndiaFightsCorona](#)

18 Districts are reporting increasing trend in Daily New [#COVID19](#) Cases in last 4 weeks; these 18 districts account for 47.5% of the total cases

Kerala : 10
Maharashtra : 3
Manipur : 2
Arunachal Pradesh : 1
Meghalaya : 1
Mizoram : 1

- JS, [@MoHFW_INDIA](https://twitter.com/MoHFW_INDIA) pic.twitter.com/zAyXI80o6m

— #IndiaFightsCorona (@COVIDNewsByMIB) [August 3, 2021](#)

COVID 2nd wave in India: Is it over?

On the question, Luv Aggarwal said that as far as India is concerned, the second wave of COVID-19 is still not over.

He further added that a high number of COVID-19 cases are being reported all over the world and the pandemic is far from over.

COVID positivity rate in India: Details

- There are 44 districts in the country where the case positivity rate is over 10 percent. These districts are in Manipur, Kerala, Nagaland, and Mizoram, among others.
- On June 1, 2021, there were 279 districts where over 100 cases were reported but it has now come down to 57 districts, where over 100 COVID-19 cases are being reported.
- The number of COVID-19 cases decreased by 222 districts and the case trajectory is seen in the limited area.
- There are 18 districts including the 10 districts of Kerala where an increasing trend in the cases is seen. These 18 districts constitute 47.5% of the cases.

Lovlina Borgohain wins India's third medal, becomes third Indian boxer to win Olympic bronze

Lovlina wins India's third Olympic medal! Lovlina Borgohain has won the bronze medal after going down 0-5 against Turkey's Busenaz Surmeneli in the 69kg welterweight semifinals on August 4, 2021.

Lovlina Borgohain has become the second Indian female boxer to win an Olympic bronze after MC Mary Kom achieved that feat in the 2012 London Olympics.

This is India's third medal at this year's Tokyo Olympics 2020 after Mirabai Chanu's silver in weightlifting and PV Sindhu's bronze in badminton women's individual event.

#IND's Lovlina Borgohain wins India's THIRD medal at #Tokyo2020 - and it's a #Bronze in the women's #Boxing welterweight category! #StrongerTogether | #UnitedByEmotion | #Olympics pic.twitter.com/wcX69n3YEe

— #Tokyo2020 for India (@Tokyo2020hi) [August 4, 2021](#)

Key Highlights

- The olympic debutant had assured India of a medal by defeating world no. 2 Chen Nien-Chin of Chinese Taipei 4-1 in the quarterfinals of women's welterweight event at Tokyo Olympics 2020.
- She had also beaten Germany's Nadine Apetz 3-2 in the Round of 16 by a split decision to enter the quarterfinals.
- Lovlina Borgohain has become the first-ever Assamese woman to win an Olympic medal.
- Lovlina Borgohain has also become the third Indian boxer to win Olympic bronze after legendary boxers Mary Kom and Vijender Singh. The 23-year-old is currently ranked world no. 3.
- Indian boxers Mary Kom and Vijender Singh had won the bronze medal in 2012 London Olympics and 2008 Beijing Olympics respectively.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted, *"Well fought @LovlinaBorgohain! Her success in the boxing ring inspires several Indians. Her tenacity and determination are admirable. Congratulations to her on winning the Bronze. Best wishes for her future endeavours. #Tokyo2020"*

Well fought [@LovlinaBorgohai](#)! Her success in the boxing ring inspires several Indians. Her tenacity and determination are admirable. Congratulations to her on winning the Bronze. Best wishes for her future endeavours. [#Tokyo2020](#)

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 4, 2021](#)

Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur tweeted saying *"Lovlina, you gave your best punch ! India is extremely proud of what you have achieved ! You've achieved a medal in your first Olympics; the journey has just begun!"*

Lovlina, you gave your best punch !

India is extremely proud of what you have achieved !

You've achieved a medal in your first Olympics; the journey has just begun!

Well done [@LovlinaBorgohai](#) ![#Boxing](#) [#Olympics](#) [#Tokyo2020](#) [#Cheer4India](#)
pic.twitter.com/kIW7qkeze5

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 4, 2021](#)

Who is Lovlina Borgohain?

- Lovlina Borgohain hails from the Golaghat district of Assam. Her father is a small-scale businessman.
- **Lovlina started her career as a kickboxer** but later switched to boxing when she found the opportunity to do so. She participated in the trials that were held at her high school by the Sports Authority of India.
- She was noticed and selected by renowned Coach Padum Boro, who began training her in 2012.
- Her elder twin sisters Licha and Lima had also competed in kickboxing at the national level but did not pursue it beyond that.
- Her biggest break was when she was selected to participate in the 2018 Commonwealth Games

in the welterweight boxing category. She failed to win a medal though after losing in the quarterfinals.

- She had previously won a gold medal in the International Boing Championship held in February 2018 in the welterweight category.
- She also won bronze at the Asian Boxing Championships in Vietnam in November 2017.
- She also won bronze at the President's Cup held in Astana in June 2017.
- She won a silver medal at the Ulaanbaatar Cup in Mongolia in June 2018.
- She went on to win bronze at the 13th International Silesian Championship in Poland in September 2018.
- She represented India at the 2018 AIBA Women's World Boxing Championship, held in New Delhi, for the first time. She went on to win the bronze medal in Welterweight(69 kg) category.
- She had to settle for bronze again in the 2019 AIBA Women's World Boxing Championship after getting defeated in the 69 kg category semi-final.

Olympic Qualification

- Lovlina Borgohain booked herself a spot in Tokyo Olympics 2020 in the 69 kg category in March after a 5-0 win over Uzbekistan's Maftunakhon Melieva in the 2020 Asia & Oceania Boxing Olympic Qualification Tournament.
- She became the **first-ever sportswoman from Assam to qualify for the Olympics.**
- She had told the Olympic channel during her qualification that her priority was to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. "Once I did that, I probably let myself relax a bit."

Awards

She was honoured with the prestigious **Arjuna Award** by President Ram Nath Kovind virtually for her outstanding performance in boxing

Parliament passes Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021- Check key features

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was passed by Parliament on August 3, 2021. Rajya Sabha approved the bill amidst the din.

Earlier, the bill was passed by Lok Sabha on July 28, 2021, and was introduced in the Lower House of Parliament on July 26 during the ongoing Monsoon session.

The amendment bill was tabled by the Union Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. **It amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.**

The Bill replaces the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021, which was promulgated on April 4, 2021.

What will be new under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill?

The latest amendment bill will introduce an alternate insolvency resolution process for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), called the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process (PIRP).

The code will introduce a time-bound process to resolve the issue of insolvency of the corporate debtors (within 330 days) known as the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP).

What will happen under CIRP?

- The debtor himself or its creditors will be able to apply for the initiation of CIRP in the event of a default of at least Rs. 1 lakh.
- A committee of creditors, under CIRP, will be constituted to decide on the insolvency resolution.
- The committee may consider a resolution plan which typically provides for the payoff of the debt by acquisition, merger, or restructuring of the company.
- If the committee of the creditors does not approve of the resolution plan within the specified

time, the company will be liquidated.

- During the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), the affairs of the firm will be looked over and managed by the Resolution Professional (RP), who is appointed to conduct CIRP.

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016:

It was the bankruptcy law of India which sought to consolidate the existing framework by creating a single law for bankruptcy and insolvency.

The bill was passed by Lok Sabha on May 5, 2016, and by Rajya Sabha on May 11, 2016. The bankruptcy code is a solution to resolve bankruptcy and insolvencies which previously was a long process. Its purpose was to protect the interests of small investors and make the process of doing business less cumbersome.

COVID-19 in China: Beijing on high alert, restricts people entering from medium and high-risk areas

The highly contagious Delta variant of Coronavirus has raised major alarm in China as it has spread to 18 provinces with fresh positive cases emerging in capital Beijing on August 1, 2021. This has brought the Capital City of China under high alert, restricting the movement of any mode of transportation and people.

The official media of the country reported that at least 18 provinces in China have raised concern about COVID-19 as more than 300 domestic cases were detected in 10 days. It poses great challenges to the Chinese Government as it deals with the worst epidemic in months.

At least 27 cities in 18 Chinese provinces reported more than 300 cases in recent days, including Jiangsu, Beijing and Sichuan.

Beijing on high alert:

The capital city Beijing has come under a high alert to stop a flare-up of COVID-19 cases in the city as more cities have been reporting the cases linked to the outbreak in Nanjing from July 20 onwards.

All the buses, flights and trains from the current high-risk areas of the country to the Chinese Capital have been cancelled. In a meeting on August 1, 2021, the Beijing Communist party secretary, who chaired the meet, said that Beijing must be guarded at all costs with the strictest, fastest measures and the most decisive actions.

Anyone from a city with confirmed Coronavirus cases has been banned from entering the Capital City and the trains, flights, buses from those places have also been halted.

According to Beijing Municipal Government, vehicles, people, trains and airlines from the regions which have been reported COVID-19 infections are being restricted from entering the Capital city.

COVID-19 cases on rise in Chinese regions: Key details

- The number of medium and high-risk regions in China rose to 95 on August 1, 2021, of which 91 are medium-risk regions and four are high-risk regions, including Nanjing of Jiangsu, Dehong Prefecture of Yunnan and Zhengzhou of Henan.
- Beijing reported two new confirmed COVID-19 cases and one asymptomatic case on August 1. The three are all the family members who have returned from Zhangjiajie, a tourist destination in South China's Hunan Province with recent outbreaks.
- The confirmed patients were tested by Beijing Centre for Disease Control and the test result has shown that they all contracted the contagious Delta variant.
- The CDC of China further compared the cases with the cases found in Nanjing and discovered that they were on the same infection chain.

From where domestic COVID-19 outbreaks in China started?

This wave of the domestic COVID-19 outbreaks started with the infections of cleaners from Nanjing's Lukou International Airport.

Later, it had spread to more local people and other provinces after the shared travel experiences in tourist destinations in Zhangjiajie, Central China's Hunan Province.

On July 31, over 11,000 tourists were found to have visited Zhangjiajie. All the tourist spots, after the outbreak, were shut down and all the tourists were asked to under Coronavirus tests before leaving the area.

Expert expresses concern over latest outbreak in China:

China's top respiratory disease specialist, Zhong Nanshan expressed grave concern over the latest outbreak in Zhangjiajie.

Zhong mentioned that Nanjing as a big city has been doing a good job in epidemic prevention and control, however, whether the epidemic in Zhangjiajie will further spread within the smaller city is still unknown.

Chinese cities rolled out mass testing:

Authorities from Nanjing, where the recent outbreak of the virus is most severe, reported that the city has detected 204 domestic confirmed cases in recent three rounds of nucleic acid testing, mostly related to the Lukou airport and its neighbouring areas.

Several other cities in China also rolled out mass testing of millions of people and also imposed fresh travel restrictions.

As the outbreak is geographically the largest to hit the country, authorities have conducted three rounds of testing on Nanjing's 9.2 million residents and have placed hundreds of thousands in lockdown.

Officials have also been tracking down people nationwide who recently travelled from Nanjing or Zhangjiajie, a tourist city that has locked down all 1.5 million residents and has shut down all tourist attractions.

Travel restrictions in China:

- Authorities at the Lukou Airport, which has been shut down, stated that the airport will be disinfected thoroughly, including the accommodation of the working staff.
- Apart from Nanjing and Zhangjiajie, several other cities in China have also adopted concrete measures to prevent and control the spread of the infection domestically in the wake of COVID-19 infections.

Mixing AstraZeneca with mRNA vaccines offers a 'good protection': Danish study

Denmark's State Serum Institute on August 2, 2021, said that combining the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine with the second dose of mRNA vaccines either Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccines offers a 'good protection'.

Over 1,44,000 people of Denmark, including mostly frontline workers and the elderly, were administered with the first dose of AstraZeneca followed by a second dose of either Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines.

The move to administer different COVID-19 vaccines became necessary in Denmark because the country discontinued vaccination with AstraZeneca over concerns of side effects. Many countries across the world are looking into administering different COVID-19 vaccines for second doses.

What did the study tell?

- The study showed that 14 days after completion of vaccination with different COVID-19 vaccines, the risk of infection was reduced by 88 per cent compared to unvaccinated individuals.
- The study noted a 'high efficacy' compared to the 90 per cent efficacy rate of two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine.
- The study was conducted over a span of 5 months from February to June 2021. It was published last week.
- The study however did not provide data on whether the combination of different COVID-19 vaccines as mentioned showed protection against the Delta variant, which is rampant in Denmark.
- The study did not report any deaths or hospitalizations due to COVID-19 after administering the combination of vaccines as mentioned.

What are mRNA COVID-19 vaccines?

- mRNA vaccines, known as messenger RNA vaccines, demonstrate the cells of the human body

the process of producing the spoke protein to trigger an immune response inside our bodies so that in case of actual exposure to the COVID-19 virus, the body knows the immune response to fight against it.

- Both Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccines are mRNA vaccines.

Moderna's mRNA COVID-19 vaccine: Efficacy

- Moderna's vaccine has been found to be 94.1 per cent effective, beginning 14 days after the first dose. It has also been found effective against the Delta variant of COVID-19.

Pfizer-BioNTech's mRNA COVID-19 vaccine: Efficacy

- Pfizer-BioNTech's mRNA COVID-19 vaccine has been found to be 97 per cent effective after two doses.

Also read: [Mixing COVID-19 vaccines – Possible Benefits and Concerns | Explainer of the Day](#)

India: CDSCO granted approval for trials for mixing of COVAXIN and COVISHIELD

- Regarding the mixing of COVID-19 vaccines in India, on July 29, 2021, The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) had granted permission to Christian Medical College in Vellore for conducting trials of mixing COVID-19 vaccines – COVAXIN and COVISHIELD.

Also read: [COVID-19 Vaccines: CDSCO grants approval to mixing of COVAXIN and COVISHIELD](#)

ISRO to cooperate with Israeli, European Space agencies to higher orbit

The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is in talks with the Israeli and European Space Agencies to enhance cooperation and identify the potential opportunities to work together.

K Sivan, Secretary in the Department of Space and ISRO Chairman held virtual meetings with the Director-General of European Space Agency (ESA) Josef Aschbacher and the Director-General of Israel Space Agency (ISA) Avi Blasberger.

Chairman, ISRO/Secretary, DOS Dr. K. Sivan had a meeting with the Director General of Israel Space Agency today.

More Details: <https://t.co/Jc3LwlumL4> pic.twitter.com/Db9c7AbriF

— ISRO (@isro) July 30, 2021

ISRO Chief's meeting with ISA:

K Sivan during the meeting with Blasberger of Israel Space Agency reviewed the progress of the ongoing activities between ISRO and ISA, including the cooperation in electric propulsion system for small satellites and GEO-LEO (Geosynchronous Earth Orbit-Low Earth Orbit) optical link.

As per the ISRO statement, they also discussed the potential opportunities that can be collaborated on in the future, including the launch of Israeli satellites in Indian launcher as well as commemorating the 75th anniversary of India's Independence and 30 years of diplomatic relations between India and Israel through an appropriate event in 2022.

Meeting between ISRO and European Space Agency:

K Sivan and Josef Aschbacher, during the virtual meeting, reviewed the status of ongoing cooperation activities in space science, earth observation, space situational awareness, satellite navigation, and human space flight.

I was pleased to meet Chairman Sivan for the first time today. I place @ESA's cooperation with @ISRO high on the ESA international agenda. #India's space portfolio is expanding thus many more cooperation opportunities between our agencies are on the horizon.

— Josef Aschbacher (@AschbacherJosef) [July 30, 2021](#)

An arrangement between ISRO and ESA concerning the network and operations Cross-Support which will enable the use of the ground stations to support each other's spacecraft missions was also signed recently.

They both also agreed to form thematic working groups which will discuss to identify the potential opportunities of working together to further enhance the cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation and the European Space Agency.

Playback singer Kalyani Menon passes away at 80

Playback singer Kalyani Menon passed away on August 2, 2021, at a hospital in Chennai due to an age-related illness at the age of 80.

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan while offering his condolences said Menon was an active presence in the field of film music. He further said that songs sung by her in Malayalam and Tamil films will always remain in the minds of the people.

Opposition leader VD Satheesan also offered his condolences and said songs like 'Pavanarachezhuthunnu' and 'Ritubheda Kalpana' are enough to keep her in memories of Malayalees.

Who was Kalyani Menon?

Kalyani Menon was a renowned playback singer who worked in the South film industry during the 90s with eminent music directors like AR Rahman.

Menon was born in Kerala. She graduated from Maharaja's College, Ernakulam. She was a disciple of eminent Carnatic musicians such as Shri Late Chertala Sivaraman Nair.

She has sung over 100 songs in Tamil and Malayalam movies, including hit Malayalam songs such as 'MookambikaStotram', 'Narayaneeyam', 'Mukundamela', 'Ritubheda Kalpana Charutha Nalikaya', and 'Mangalam Nerunnu'.

While working with AR Rahman during the late 90s and early 2000s, she sang the iconic anthem 'Shyama Sundara Kera Kedarabhoomi' for Asianet Channel.

She also sang the traditional 'Vande Matharam' in the 'Vande Matharam' album of AR Rahman along with the Malayalam lyrics interlude in the song 'Omana Penne'.

Awards and Recognition

The Kalaimamani Award was awarded to her in 2010 by Tamil Nadu Government.

She also received the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academi Award.

Centre de-licenses sugar industry to set up new sugar mills

The Union Government has **de-licensed the sugar industry** to encourage the setting up of new sugar mills in the country.

This was informed by Consumer Affairs and Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal during a reply to supplementaries in the Lok Sabha.

The Minister that the government is encouraging sugar mills to divert excess sugarcane to ethanol blended with petrol a long-term measure to deal with the problem of excess sugar.

Significance- This will not only serve as a green fuel but also save foreign exchange on account of crude oil import. Around 21 lakh tonnes of excess sugarcane was diverted to ethanol in 2020-21, as per ISMA.

Background

The Union Minister informed the lower house of the Parliament that in the past three sugar seasons 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, around Rs 22,000 crore revenue was generated by sugar mills and distilleries from the sale of ethanol to oil marketing companies.

He stated that during the normal sugar season from October to September, the production of sugar in the country is around 320-330 lakh metric tonnes (LMT), as against the domestic consumption of 260 LMT. Hence, there is a lot of excess production of sugar in the country.

Sugar Production in India

- The sugar production in India is estimated to remain steady at 310 lakh tonnes during Financial Year 2021-22, as per the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA)
- The total coverage area for sugarcane is estimated to be around 54.55 lakh hectares in 2021-22, which is about 3 percent higher than the sugarcane coverage area of around 52.88 lakh hectares in 2020-2021.
- The total sugar production is estimated to be around 344 lakh tonnes during the 2021-22

marketing year, without the diversion of cane juice and molasses into ethanol.

- The ethanol manufactured from sugarcane juice is expected to be around 230 crore litres.

Government to establish 1,000 Khelo India Centers across the country

The Central Government informed on August 2, 2021, that the Youth Affairs and Sports Ministry has decided to set up 1,000 Khelo India Centers in India. Out of them, 360 centres have already been notified.

The Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, Anurag Thakur in a written reply to Rajya Sabha, said that the athletes are being selected under the Khelo India Scheme and will be assisted with the annual financial assistance of Rs. 6.28 lakh per annum.

He further informed that 236 sports academies are also being accredited across India under the 'Support to National, Regional, State Sports Academies'.

Khelo India Scheme: Key details

- Under Khelo India Scheme's 'Talent and Development' Vertical, athletes will be identified and selected under the scheme.
- The selected athletes will be provided with the annual financial assistance of Rs. 6.28 lakh per athlete per annum.
- It will include Rs. 1.20 lakh per year as pocket allowance of the athlete and Rs. 5.08 lakh for other facilities such as sports science support, coaching, equipment, diet, insurance charges, consumables.
- Talent identification will be carried out in 20 sports disciplines in the age group of 8 to 14 years.

Schemes and plans to promote sports in the country:

The Youth Affairs and Sports Ministry has formulated various schemes and plans to promote sports in the country including in tribal, rural, and backward areas.

- Khelo India Scheme
- Assistance to National Sports Federations

- Special Awards to winners in International Sports Events and their coaches
- National Sports Awards
- Pension to meritorious sportspersons
- Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay National Sports Welfare Fund
- National Sports Development Fund
- Running Sports Training Centers through SAA (Sports Authority of India)

Significance:

The Union Minister informed that the majority of the sportspersons benefitting from these schemes belong to the rural, tribal, and backward areas.

He also mentioned that women athletes are particularly facilitated with regular training on a residential and non-residential basis as per the approved norms of the scheme.

Earth's longer days reason behind oxygen growth, suggests new theory

Scientists have come up with a new idea for how Earth got its oxygen. The theory is, it is because the planet slowed down and days got longer.

A study which was published on August 2, 2021, proposes and puts to the test the theory that **longer, continuous daylight kick-started the weird bacteria into producing lots of oxygen, making most of the life on Earth as we know possible.**

The scientists dredged up the gooey purple bacteria from a deep sinkhole in Lake Huron and tinkered it with how much light it got in lab experiments. The more continuous light the microbes received, the more oxygen they produced.

Oxygen on Earth: What led to the new theory?

One of the greatest known mysteries in science is just how planet Earth went from a planet with minimal oxygen to the breathable air we have now.

Scientists and experts in the area had long figured microbes called cyanobacteria, were involved in the oxygen growth but were not able to figure out and tell what started the great oxygenation event.

What does the new theory say?

Researchers involved in a study in Monday's Nature Geoscience have theorized that Earth's slowing rotation, which gradually lengthened the days from 6 hours to the current 24 hours, was key for the microbes or cyanobacteria in making the planet more breathable.

About 2.4 billion years ago there was so little oxygen in Earth's atmosphere that it could hardly be measured, so no plant or animal lifelike, as know now, could have lived. **Instead, lots of microbes breathed in the carbon dioxide, and in the case of cyanobacteria, produced oxygen in the earliest forms of photosynthesis.**

The study's lead author, Judith Klatt, a biogeochemist at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, said that at first, it wasn't much, however, in only about 400 million years Earth's atmosphere went to one-tenth the amount of oxygen we have now, which is a huge jump.

That oxygen burst on the planet allowed animals and plants to evolve, with other plants joining in oxygen making.

What led the bacteria to go on oxygen production?

To answer this, Michigan University's oceanographer Brian Arbic comes in as he studies the tidal forces on Earth and how they have slowed down the rotation of the planet.

He was listening to a colleague's lecture about **cyanobacteria and noticed that the oxygen event coincided with the timing of the longer days on Earth.** The rotation of Earth slows because of the complicated physics of tidal friction and interaction with the moon.

The researchers from Germany and Michigan put their theory to test with bacteria similar to what would have been around 2.4 billion years ago. The scientists used purple and white mats of cyanobacteria living in an eerie world of the sinkhole nearly 79 feet deep in Lake Huron.

Judith Klatt and the colleagues exposed the bacteria, which smelled like rotten eggs, to varying amounts of light, up to 26 straight hours. They discovered that more continuous light caused the microbes to produce more oxygen.

Conclusion

The authors of the study and the outside scientists stated that this is just one possible but plausible explanation for the oxygen increase on Earth.

Tim Lyons, a professor of Biogeochemistry at the California University, Riverside, who wasn't part of the research team, said that what makes the current idea so impressive is that it does not require any form of big biological changes in bacteria or the world's oceans.

Bhubaneswar becomes first city to achieve 100 per cent COVID-19 vaccination coverage

Bhubaneswar in Odisha has become the first city in India to achieve 100 per cent vaccination coverage against COVID-19, said Anshuman Rath, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Zonal Deputy Commissioner of South-East, Bhubaneswar.

As per the report, 18 lakh 16 thousand people in Bhubaneswar have been vaccinated against COVID-19. A set of around 1 lakh migrant population in Bhubaneswar has also been vaccinated with their first dose of vaccine, said Rath.

BMC is running 55 vaccination centres, including 30 primary health and community centres, 15 mobilized centres, and more than 10 drive-in vaccination centres across Bhubaneswar, said Rath.

CEO of NITI Aayog Amitabh Kant also congratulated Odisha's Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and the people of Odisha for achieving 100 per cent COVID-19 vaccination coverage.

How did Bhubaneswar become fully vaccinated against COVID-19?

- Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation had a set target and a specific timeline to make its city fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- As per the records of BMC, around 9 lakh people in the above 18 years age category, including 33,000 frontline workers and 31,000 healthcare workers, have been vaccinated. Of these include 5 lakh 17 thousand people belong to the 18 to 44 years age group and 3 lakh 25 thousand people belong to above 45 years age group.
- The state has set a district-wise target to vaccinate a total of 3.5 lakh people per day.
- Pregnant women are being administered with their first dose at vaccination centres.

Odisha: COVID-19 Tracker

- On August 3, 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases went up to 9,79,737 of which 9,60,386 recovered and 6,033 deaths have been reported in the state.

- Currently, there are 15,000 active COVID-19 cases in the state.

First-ever Zika Virus case reported in Maharashtra, Centre rushes a high-level medical team

First Zika virus case in Maharashtra: Maharashtra reported its first-ever Zika virus case on August 1, 2021 after a 50-year-old woman from Belsar village in Purandar tehsil (Pune) was diagnosed with the infection.

The woman was diagnosed with Zika virus and also Chikungunya on July 30. The Union Health Ministry rushed a high-level multidisciplinary team on August 2nd to monitor the situation in the state, support in the management of Zika cases and recommend necessary public health interventions.

Centre's high-level medical team

The centre's medical team comprises an entomologist from National Institute of Malaria Research and a gynecologist from Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi. The expert team will assess the implementation of Health Ministry's 'Action Plan for Zika Management'.

Zika virus in Maharashtra: All you need to know!

- A 50-year-old woman from the Purandar area in Pune district had tested positive for Zika virus. The woman has reportedly recovered from the infection.
- Several cases of fever were reported from a village in Purandar early last month, according to the state health department. Three samples sent for testing to Pune tested positive for chikungunya.
- Overall, 25 cases of chikungunya, three cases of dengue and one Zika virus were reported after more tests were conducted in the village.
- The Maharashtra health department immediately sent a quick response team to the area to educate the local residents about the precautions they should take.

Zika virus in India

Prior to this, Kerala is the only state that has reported Zika virus cases this year. The state reportedly has recorded over 60 cases of the virus infection. Kerala is also witnessing an alarming surge in COVID-19 infections.

What is Zika Virus?

Zika virus is a virus infection that is transmitted by mosquitoes, which mostly causes asymptomatic or mild infection including fever and rash in humans. It was originally identified in Africa and later in other tropical regions, including South America.

How does Zika virus spread?

The Zika virus is spread by the Aedes mosquito, which also causes dengue and chikungunya.

What are the common symptoms of Zika virus?

Common symptoms of the Zika virus include fever, rash, red eyes, body ache, joint and muscle pain, conjunctivitis, headache and malaise.

Zika- a virus of grave concern?

Medical experts have expressed "grave concern" over the rise in the number of Zika virus cases. They are concerned that like coronavirus, the Zika virus may also have unknown variants and have urged health authorities to increase testing to identify and immediately isolate infections.

Lok Sabha passes General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021: All you need to know

Lok Sabha on August 2, 2021, passed the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2021. The bill was passed amid the protests by the opposition over various issues including the demand for a probe into allegations of surveillance through Pegasus spyware.

The bill passed by the Lower House of Parliament aims at providing greater private participation in the public sector insurance companies as well as enhancing insurance penetration and social protection.

The Insurance Business Amendment Bill was introduced by the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha on July 30, 2021.

The minister had also announced in her budget speech that under the private agenda of the government, one general insurance company and two public sector banks will be taken up.

General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill: What do we know?

- The bill seeks to amend the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972 to provide greater participation in the public sector insurance companies.
- The bill seeks at enhancing insurance penetration and social protection and better secure the interests of the policyholders. It also aims at contributing to the faster growth of the economy.
- The amendment bill also seeks to remove the proviso of the Act to remove the requirement that the Central Government holds not less than 51% of the equity capital in a specified insurer.

Why there is opposition against the bill?

The latest bill, which was passed by the Lower House of Parliament without any discussion, has been protested upon by the opposition and West Bengal Finance Minister Amit Mitra. A letter was also written to the Finance Minister, urging her not to privatize the public sector insurance

companies.

The opposition showed concern as the bill seeks to remove the requirement that the Government should not hold less than 51% of equity capital, it also calls for greater private participation in public sector insurance companies.

The bill was termed as anti-people and anti-national legislation by the Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary, who spoke briefly on the bill amid the protests in Lok Sabha.

However, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman refuted the charges by the opposition and said that the Central Government was not snatching any rights. She said that if the opposition is serious, they should sit down, debate, and ask questions.

Four major state-owned insurance companies are:

1. National Insurance Company Limited
2. New India Assurance Company Limited
3. Oriental Insurance Company Limited
4. United India Insurance Company Limited

Hockey Olympic Games Tokyo 2020: Indian men's hockey team crash out of semifinals, to play for bronze

Indian men's hockey team **crashed out of the semifinals after they lost 5-2 against Belgium** at the ongoing Tokyo Olympics on August 3, 2021.

The Manpreet Singh-led team will now play for the bronze medal against the loser of the match between Australia and Germany. The Indian hockey team despite a good start lost the tempo slightly in the last quarter.

We go down fighting hard against Belgium.

Here are some glimpses from [#TeamIndia's](#) Semi-Final match. [#HaiTayyar](#) [#IndiaKaGame](#) [#Tokyo2020](#) [#TokyoTogether](#) [#StrongerTogether](#) [#HockeyInvites](#) [#WeAreTeamIndia](#) [#Hockey](#) pic.twitter.com/CBdjmlm5YI

— Hockey India (@TheHockeyIndia) [August 3, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had also tuned in to watch the men's hockey semi-final clash between India and Belgium said that he is already proud of what the team has managed to achieve in the Olympics so far.

I'm watching the India vs Belgium Hockey Men's Semi Final at [#Tokyo2020](#). Proud of our team and their skills. Wishing them the very best!

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 3, 2021](#)

After the team's defeat, the Prime Minister tweeted saying, *"wins and losses are a part of life. Our Men's Hockey Team at #Tokyo2020 gave their best and that is what counts. Wishing the Team the very best for the next match and their future endeavours. India is proud of our players."*

Wins and losses are a part of life. Our Men's Hockey Team at [#Tokyo2020](#) gave their best and that is what counts. Wishing the Team the very best for the next match and their future endeavours. India is proud of our players.

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 3, 2021](#)

The Indian men's national field hockey team had created history earlier by reaching the

semi-finals of Tokyo Olympics 2020, first time in 41 years after defeating Great Britain 3-1. The team led by Manpreet Singh has performed incredibly well this year and made a great comeback after their 7-1 defeat against Australia, never losing a single game after that.

The last time Indian men's hockey team had advanced to the semifinals was during 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, where the team led by V Baskaran had won the eighth gold medal for India.

Indian women's hockey team reach first-ever semifinals

The Indian women's hockey team also created history by becoming the first-ever Indian women's team to reach the semifinals in the Olympics. The women's field hockey team beat Australia 1-0 to achieve the historic feat.

Splendid Performance!!!

Women's Hockey [#TeamIndia](#) is scripting history with every move at [#Tokyo2020](#) !

We're into the semi-finals of the Olympics for the 1st time beating Australia.

130 crore Indians to the
Women's Hockey Team -
"we're right behind you"! pic.twitter.com/vusiXVCGde

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 2, 2021](#)

India's dream is coming to reality! Our Women's Hockey Team has defeated Australia! India's Men's and Women's teams have reached semi-finals at [#Tokyo2020](#) Olympics! I have no words to express my excitement and happiness! <https://t.co/3swWYTvH6O>
pic.twitter.com/bM6the9vh6

— Kiren Rijju (@KirenRijju) [August 2, 2021](#)

Former Indian hockey players speak

Former Indian hockey player **Ashok Kumar** wants the hockey team to bring back the gold for the nation in the ongoing Tokyo Olympics. He said that the side has not claimed a medal in the Summer Olympics since 1980 and the Manpreet Singh-led squad is looking to end the 41-year-old medal drought.

Ashok Kumar is the son of hockey legend Dhyan Chand. He said that the focus of the Manpreet Singh-led side will be on winning the next game against Belgium.

Hockey legend Dhanraj Pillay also fell short of words to describe the feeling after the

men's hockey team registered a scintillating win against Great Britain. He applauded the overall effort of the Indian team saying, "What a show Team India! #Hockey Well deserved Victory. Words fail me as I try to compose my emotions. Crossed fingers for the semifinals against #Bel Wishing my blue army the very best, you are on the threshold of making history. Good luck."

What a show Team India! #Hockey Well deserved Victory. Words fail me as I try to compose my emotions. for the semifinals against #Bel Wishing my blue army the very best, you are on the threshold of making history. Good luck

pic.twitter.com/RysXCykzdZ

— Dhanraj Pillay (@dhanrajpillay1) [August 1, 2021](#)

Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing declares himself Prime Minister, says elections in 2023

The military leader of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing declared himself as the Prime Minister of Myanmar on August 1, 2021. He said that he plans to be in charge for two years during an extended state of emergency before holding an election in the country in 2023.

The leader promised multi-party elections as well as the lifting of the state of emergency by August 2023, extending an initial timeline given when he had deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government earlier in 2021.

The latest announcement by Myanmar's military leader comes six months after the country's democratically elected government was overthrown into a military coup and had sparked waves of protest throughout the country.

What did Min Aung Hlaing say in his speech?

Min Aung Hlaing, in his speech, said that the military authorities must create conditions to hold a free and fair multiparty general election.

He said that we have to make preparations and pledged to hold the multiparty general election without fail. The Military leader added that the military will accomplish the provisions of the state of emergency by August 2023.

The State Media on August 1 had also reported that Hlaing had taken the role of the Prime Minister in a newly formed caretaker government. It will replace the State Administration Council that the generals had set up shortly after seizing power.

Hlaing was quoted saying, "In order to perform the country's duties easily, fast and effectively, the State Administration Council has been re-formed as a caretaker government of Myanmar".

Military annuls the elections held in November 2020 in Myanmar:

The Military in Myanmar has granted itself the power under the State of Emergency to allow it to

annul the results of the November elections 2020 that Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy had won by landslide.

The military justified its actions by claiming that the vote was fraudulent, but has not yet provided any evidence. The election commission of Myanmar had also said that the vote was free and fair.

What is happening in Myanmar?

- Myanmar's democratically elected government was overthrown by the country's military in February 2021, claiming that the elections held in November 2020 were fraudulent.
- Myanmar ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party had won the elections democratically, was arrested. She has since been charged with multiple crimes by the country's military, including the illegal possession of walkie-talkie radios and violating the COVID-19 rules.
- As protests continue to intensify in the country against the military coup, 940 people have been confirmed to be killed since the military takeover on February 1, 2021.
- Human Rights Watch has also said that the military in Myanmar has committed numerous abuses against civilians and crimes against humanity since the coup.
- The country has also been battling a surge in COVID-19 cases, with many hospitals in the country empty of medical staff amid the targeting of doctors and nurses as they spearheaded the Civil Disobedience Movement that urged the civil servants and professionals to not cooperate with the military.

e-RUPI: PM Modi launches digital payment solution- Know all about e-RUPI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched **e-RUPI**, an electronic voucher promoting digital payment solution, through video conferencing on August 2, 2021.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launches e-RUPI, an electronic voucher promoting digital payment solution, via video conferencing pic.twitter.com/n7a1wSiuTu

— ANI (@ANI) [August 2, 2021](#)

The Prime Minister said that e-RUPI is an example of how India is moving forward & connecting people in the 21st century with the help of advanced technology. He said that he is glad that it has started in the year when India is celebrating its 75th year of Independence.

PM Modi further said that e-RUPI can be used not only by the government but also by a non-govt organisation that wants to support anyone in their education or medical treatment. He said that this will assure that the amount donated is being used only for the said work: PM Narendra Modi

Not only govt but if a non-govt organisation wants to support anyone in their education or medical treatment, then they can use e-RUPI instead of giving cash. This will assure that the amount donated is being used only for the said work: PM Narendra Modi pic.twitter.com/7uf95lVSvA

— ANI (@ANI) [August 2, 2021](#)

The prepaid electronic voucher aims to take forward PM Modi's vision of good governance and creating a digital India.

What is e-RUPI?

e-RUPI is a prepaid, cashless and contactless instrument for digital payment. It is a QR code or SMS string-based e-Voucher, which can be sent on the mobile of the beneficiaries. It is a seamless one-time payment mechanism.

Benefits of e-RUPI

- The users of e-RUPI can redeem the electronic voucher without using a card, internet banking or digital payments app at the service provider.
- e-RUPI will connect sponsors of the services with the beneficiaries and service providers in a

digital manner without any physical interface.

- The voucher will ensure that the payment is made to the service provider only after the transaction is completed.
- Being pre-paid, it assures timely payment to the service provide without the requirement of any intermediary.
- e-RUPI is expected to be a revolutionary initiative as it will ensure leak-proof delivery of welfare services.
- It will also be useful for delivering services under schemes meant for providing drugs and nutritional support under various Mother and Child welfare schemes and TB eradication programmes and drugs and diagnostics under schemes like Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

Background

e-RUPI has been developed by the National Payments Corporation of India on its UPI platform. It has been developed in collaboration with the Department of Financial Services under the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and the National Health Authority.

The electronic voucher will also benefit the private sector, as they can use them as a part of their employee welfare and corporate social responsibility programmes.

Rajya Sabha passes Coconut Development Board (Amendment) Bill, 2021 – All you need to know

Rajya Sabha on July 30, 2021, passed the Coconut Development Board (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

The bill will make the post of the Chairman of the Coconut Development Board a non-executive position, increase the number of members of the Board to six from four, and allow Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh to be able to nominate their representatives to the Board.

The Coconut Development Board (Amendment) Bill, 2021 amends Sector 4 of the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979.

The Coconut Development Board (Amendment) Bill, 2021 – Key Benefits

- Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar stated the bill aims at developing coconut cultivation in the country, increase the income of the coconut farmers, and extend facilities for them.

The Coconut Development Board Act, 1979

- The Act was introduced by the Coconut Development Board on January 12, 1981, to offer development of the coconut industry.

The Coconut Development Board

- The Board is a body under the Ministry of Agriculture that is responsible for promoting the development of the coconut industry, adopting measures to aid small coconut farmers in becoming beneficiaries and participants in the development of the coconut industry.

- The Board also introduces various schemes to boost production, marketing, export, global competition, and promotion of health benefits of coconuts.

Coconut Industry in India

- India is one of the largest producers of coconut in the world. It ranks 1st in production and 3rd in

the area in terms of coconut production in the world.

- The annual coconut production in India was reported to be 23.90 billion nuts from an area spread across 2.15 million hectares with average productivity of 9,897 nuts per hectare, as per statistics reports published during 2018-19.
- Since 2013, Coconut production in the country has been witnessing significant growth, the production has increased from 42,104 million nuts in 2013-15 to 44,405 million nuts in 2015-17.
- Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala are the major coconut-producing states in India. These states account for more than 90 per cent of the production and area.
- The latest scientific technologies for coconut cultivation have reported a four-fold increase in yield.
- From 2016 onwards, India began exporting coconut oil to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

Parliament passes Inland Vessels Bill 2021- All you need to know!

Parliament passed the Inland Vessels Bill 2021 after the Rajya Sabha approved it on August 2, 2021. The Lok Sabha had passed the bill **earlier** on July 29, 2021. The bill seeks to replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917 and promote cheaper and safer navigation.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal tweeted saying that the Inland Vessels Bill 2021 promotes cheaper and safer navigation, ensures protection of life & cargo and brings uniformity in the application of laws related to inland waterways & navigation.

Lok Sabha passes the Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 which will replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917.

The Bill promotes cheaper and safer navigation, ensures protection of life & cargo and brings uniformity in application of laws related to inland waterways & navigation.

pic.twitter.com/i6EolpZy3v

— Sarbananda Sonowal (@sarbanandsonwal) [July 29, 2021](#)

The bill was introduced in the House by the Union Minister last week. It will now be sent to the Rajya Sabha for its approval.

Significance

Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said that the bill will boost trade, commerce and economic activities across the country and fulfil PM Narendra Modi's vision of achieving a forward-looking and robust legal regime in the critical areas of infrastructure and governance.

Inland Vessels Bill 2021: Key Features

- The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 was introduced in the lower house of the Parliament on July 22, 2021. It seeks to replace the Inland Vessels Act, 1917, which provides for the regulation of inland vessel navigation by states.
- The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 seeks to do away with separate rules framed by the States and instead incorporate a uniform regulatory framework for inland vessel navigation across the country.

- The registration certificate provided under the new law will be considered valid all over the country and there will be no need of separate permissions from the states.
- The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 defines mechanically propelled inland vessels to include boats, ships, container vessels, sailing vessels and ferries. Under the law, the centre will prescribe the classification, standards of design, construction, and crew accommodation and type and periodicity of surveys for these vessels. The construction or modification of such vessels will also require prior approval from the designated authority.
- The bill provides that all such vessels must have a registration certificate and survey certificate to operate in inland waters. The registration certificate will be valid across India. The survey certificates will be given by state governments.

What are Survey Certificates?

The certificate survey will indicate the inland water zones such as areas of operation for such vessels. The areas will be demarcated by the state governments.

- Besides this, the vessels should also have an insurance policy to cover liability for death, injury, or damage caused due to the usage of the vessel including accidental pollution.

•Navigation of vessels

- (i) The bill also proposes that the vessels will have to follow certain specifications for signals and equipment to ensure navigation safety. This would be specified by the central government.
- (ii) The master of the vessel will be required to immediately send a distress signal to other such vessels in proximity in case of a navigation hazard.
- (iii) In case any vessel master abstains from providing assistance after answering a distress call, he will face a penalty with a fine of up to Rs 10,000, unless he is unable to render such assistance on certain specified grounds.

•Accidents aboard vessels

- (i) The bill proposes that all accidents aboard such vessels must be reported to the head officer of the nearest police station and to the state government-appointed authority.
- (ii) The state may require the District Magistrate to inquire into such matters and submit a report

recommending actions to be taken.

•Vessel Crew

(i) The bill provides that the centre will prescribe the minimum number of people that vessels must have, for various roles. Any violation of these requirements may attract a penalty of up to Rs 10,000 for the first offence and Rs 25,000 for subsequent offences.

(ii) The centre will also prescribe standards for qualification for the crew as well as training, examination and grant of certificate of competency, which indicate the fitness of the recipients to serve in the specified roles. The certificates will be granted by the state governments.

•Disposal of waste

All such vessels will be required to discharge or dispose of sewage, as per the standards specified by the centre. The centre will notify a list of pollutants that will be prohibited for discharge or disposal. The state governments will provide the vessels with the certificate of prevention of pollution.

•Central Database of inland vessels

The Inland Vessels Bill 2021 provides for maintaining a central database, an electronic centralised record of data on inland vessels, which will include all information about registration of vessels, vessel crew and certificates issued.

•Development fund

(i) The Inland Vessels Bill 2021 also provides to set up a development fund that will be utilised for various purposes such as for emergency preparedness, containment of pollution and boosting inland water navigation.

(ii) The bill provides that each state will be required to constitute such a development fund and the sources will include stakeholders, schemes of state governments and collections from the sale of wreck or cargo.

•Further, the Inland Vessels Bill 2021 empowers the state governments to prescribe certain functions related to non-mechanically propelled inland vessels including collating of data, conducting advisory programmes for owners, operators and users of such vessels. The state will

also prescribe the criteria such as size, purpose, age, and design for the identification and categorisation of such vessels.

Background

The navigation of mechanically propelled inland vessels operating on inland waters is currently governed by the Inland Vessels Act, 1917. The Act has, however, become obsolete and inadequate to address the increasing complexities of this sector, as per Union Shipping Minister.

The Minister said that operational bottleneck impacts the smooth and interstate movement of inland vessels across the country and it is important to ensure that the movement along the waterways is absolutely seamless across state boundaries to realise the true potential of inland water transport and promote it as an eco-friendly mode of transport to the congested road and rail network.

RBI's new rules on interchange fee, bulk payment system come into effect: How will it affect us?

The Reserve Bank of India's **new rules on raising interchange fee and making bulk payment facility available on all days of the week** came into effect from August 1, 2021.

The Reserve Bank of India has raised the interchange fee for financial transactions from **Rs 15 to Rs 17** to help banks meet the costs of ATM deployment and maintenance.

The interchange fee for non-financial transactions has also been increased from **Rs 5 to Rs 6**.

What is interchange fee?

An interchange fee is a fee that is charged by the banks to the merchant who processes a credit card or debit card payment.

How will the change in interchange fee affect us?

- Customers can now conduct only five free transactions, including both financial and non-financial from the ATMs of their banks.
- In case of other bank ATMs, customers have been allowed to make three free transactions in metro centres and five free transactions in non-metro centres.
- The bank will charge the customer Rs 20 per transaction after all the free transactions are exhausted. The RBI has allowed the banks to increase the customer charges to Rs 21 per transaction to compensate the banks for the higher interchange fee and given the general escalation in costs.
- The last change in interchange fee rules happened in August 2012.

NACH made available on all days

National Automated Clearing House (NACH) has now been made available on all days of the

week, starting from August 1, 2021.

What is NACH?

- NACH is a bulk payment system, which is operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- It facilitates one-to-many credit transfers such as payment of dividend, interest, salary and pension.
- It also facilitates payment collection pertaining to gas, electricity, telephone, water along with investments in mutual funds, insurance premium and periodic installments towards loans.
- RBI governor Shaktikanta Das had announced during the bi-monthly monetary policy review in June that NACH will be available on all days of the week to further enhance the convenience of customers.
- Earlier, the facility was available only when the banks were open, generally between Monday to Friday. So the auto-debit instructions provided by the bank account holder were not processed on days when the banks were closed such as Sundays, bank holidays and gazetted holidays.

How will this affect us?

- By making the bulk payment system-NACH available on all days of the week, salary payments to employees would become smoother as most companies use NACH for salary credits.
- Earlier, due to the non-availability of the facility on holidays or Sundays, the salary payments could not happen on those days and usually got delayed to the next working day.
- In fact, with the new changes, all the transactions conducted using the NACH system can now be done anytime, any day of the week.

COVID-19: Third wave likely to hit India in August: Report

India is most likely to witness a third wave of the COVID-19 by August 2021 which may peak by October 2021 with 100,000 cases in the best-case scenario or approximately 150,000 cases in the worst scenario, stated a study led by Manindra Agrawal and Mathukumalli Vidyasagar by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur and Hyderabad, respectively.

As per media reports, Mathukumalli Vidyasagar stated that States with a high number of COVID-19 cases such as Maharashtra and Kerala could 'skew the picture'.

Based on the same mathematical model, these researchers in May 2021 had accurately forecasted that India could witness a peak in the number of COVID-19 cases and could hit 20,000 cases per day by the end of June.

COVID-19: Third-wave likely to hit India in August: Report

- The study is based on a mathematical model. The researchers stated that the third wave is unlikely to be as severe as the second wave when the country reported more than 400,000 daily COVID-19 cases.
- However, India will have to expand its vaccination coverage, detect emerging hotspots, implement surveillance methods, and stay alert about new variants to study them with genome sequencing.
- The researchers have also issued a warning that Delta variant could fuel the third wave. According to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortium (INSACOG), Delta variant caused 8 out of every 10 COVID-19 cases in May, June, and July 2021.

India: COVID-19 Tracker

- India overcame the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic recently, now reporting around 40,000 daily cases.
- Kerala accounts for the highest number of COVID-19 cases with over 20,000 cases in a day.

- As of August 2, 2021, India's active COVID-19 caseload is at 4,13,718, with 40,134 cases in the past 24 hours. India's vaccination coverage has crossed 47.22 crores, with 17 lakh doses administered in the past 24 hours.

Former Australian PM Tony Abbott to visit India to progress Indo-Australian Trade Partnership

Tony Abbott, the former Prime Minister of Australia will be visiting India in early August 2021 to progress the Indo-Australian economic and trade partnership under the comprehensive strategic partnership. The news was shared by the Australian Minister for Education and Youth, Dan Tehan.

In a statement, Dan Tehan said that the visit will be an opportunity to progress the ambitious agenda of the Australian Government to energize and expand the Australian bilateral trade and investment relationship with India.

He further added that Tony Abbott will also be meeting the ministers and business leaders during his visit to India.

Ex-Australian PM Tony Abbott (in file pic) will travel to India in early August to progress our significant economic and trade relationship under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. He will meet Indian ministers and business leaders: Australian Minister for Dan Tehan

pic.twitter.com/VIrebEoQEA

— ANI (@ANI) July 31, 2021

India-Australia bilateral ties: Partnership and agreements

- India and Australia, earlier, had elevated their bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). They had signed seven agreements including on mining and defence during a virtual summit between Prime Minister Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison.
- Both the countries have also announced a shared vision for maritime cooperation in Indo-Pacific to harness the opportunities and meet challenges together as Comprehensive Strategic Partners.
- India and Australia agreed to continue to broaden and deepen the defence cooperation by enhancing the scope and the complexity of their military exercises as well as engagement activities for developing new ways to address the shared security challenges.

- Framework arrangements have been signed on Cyber and Cyber-Enabled Critical Technology Cooperation. An MoU on cooperation in the field of mining and processing of critical and strategic minerals has also been signed.

Tony Abbott's relations with India:

The former Prime Minister of Australia Tony Abbott is known to have developed a working relationship with Prime Minister Modi before he was ousted from the position of PM by Malcolm Turnbull in 2015.

However, despite Abbott's past hopes of negotiating a free trade agreement between India and Australia as soon as possible, that never happened. Tony Abbott is currently an adviser to the British Government's Board of Trade.

India takes over UNSC presidency, key focus on maritime security, peacekeeping, counterterrorism

India assumed the **presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** on **August 1, 2021**. India took over the rotational presidency of the 15-nation UNSC from France.

Indian Ambassador to United Nations, TS Tirumurti thanked France Permanent Representative to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere, for steering the UN Security Council for July month.

[#IndiainUNSC](#)

Thank you Ambassador [@NDeRiviere](#), PR of France for steering the UN [#SecurityCouncil](#) for the month of July.

India takes over the Presidency for August [@MEAIndia](#) [@IndiaembFrance](#) [@franceonu](#) [@FranceinIndia](#) [@afpfr](#) [@Yoshita_Singh](#) [pic.twitter.com/fCAdYj244g](#)

— PR/Amb T S Tirumurti (@ambtstirumurti) [August 1, 2021](#)

This is India's first UNSC presidency during its 2021-22 tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. India began its two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC on January 1, 2021. India had last assumed UNSC presidency ten years ago.

India UNSC Presidency: Key Focus Areas

India said it will be focusing mainly on **maritime security, peacekeeping and counterterrorism** during its presidency of the powerful 15-nation UN security body.

A momentous day!

takes over the Presidency of the [@UN](#) [#SecurityCouncil](#) for the month of August. A world view anchored in [#VasudhaivaKutumbakam](#).

Here is a glimpse of our priorities [#IndiainUNSC@IndiaUNNewYork](#) [pic.twitter.com/dot5vujxoC](#)

— Arindam Bagchi (@MEAIndia) [August 1, 2021](#)

India's Representative to the United Nations TS Tirumurti said in a video message that India

will be organizing signature events in three key areas -**maritime security, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism.**

1. Counterterrorism agenda

- TS Tirumurti said that India, as a country that has been at the forefront of the fight against terrorism, will continue to keep the spotlight on counter-terrorism.
- He said that India hopes to keep the spotlight on the Secretary-General's report on the Islamic State (IS) terrorists.
- He continued by saying that India has never failed to highlight the manifestations of terrorist activities across the world, especially now for example in Africa, where it is increasing. "So we hope to discuss the Secretary General's report on ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and Daesh (ISIS) and keep the spotlight on this matter," he explained.

2. Maritime Security

- Speaking on the maritime security agenda, TS Tirumurti said that maritime security discussion is a first, as maritime security has always received a very high priority in India's foreign policy.
- He said that India believes it is time for the UN Security Council to take a holistic approach to the issue of maritime security, that safeguards common prosperity and other security interest.

3. Peacekeeping

- India will mainly focus on ensuring the safety of the peacekeepers by using better technology. It will also focus on how to bring perpetrators of crimes against peacekeepers to justice.
- TS Tirumurti said "India is strongly advocating for proactive measures to what we call as to protect the protectors."

Russia, France congratulate India on UNSC presidency

Russia and France congratulated India on taking over the presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on August 1, 2021.

Russia said that it is "truly impressed" with India's agenda for its presidency, as it "embraces pressing global issues" including maritime security peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.

Congratulations on [#India](#)'s taking over the [#UNSC](#) presidency! Truly impressed with the agenda, which embraces pressing global issues including maritime security, peacekeeping & counter-terrorism. Expecting fruitful & effective work. Wishing many happy returns & all the success! pic.twitter.com/1f8tDfbxel

— Nikolay Kudashev (@NKudashev) [August 1, 2021](#)

France said that it is committed to working with India on strategic issues such as maritime security, peacekeeping and counter-terrorism.

Delighted that India is today taking over [#UNSC](#) presidency from France. We are committed to working with India on strategic issues as maritime security, peacekeeping & counter-terrorism, and upholding a rules-based, multilateral system to face today's many ongoing crises. pic.twitter.com/f91aWoBjUQ

— Emmanuel Lenain (@FranceinIndia) [August 1, 2021](#)

Significance

The UNSC presidency means India has the power to decide the UNSC agenda for August. India will focus on the themes of maritime security, peacekeeping, and counter-terrorism and preside over three high-level signature events on these issues.

This is India's eighth term in the UN Security Council. India's first working day was August 2, 2021 when TS Tirumurti held a hybrid press briefing in the UN headquarters on the Council's programme of work for the month.

It has been seven months since India began its UNSC term. India will again preside over the Council in December 2022, the last month of its two-year tenure.

A feeling of great pride and humility as I take my place in the [@UN #SecurityCouncil](#) as PR of [#India.#IndiainUNSC](#) [@MEAIndia](#) pic.twitter.com/QxzAIUgheT

— PR/Amb T S Tirumurti (@ambtstirumurti) [January 5, 2021](#)

PM Modi to be first Indian PM to preside over UNSC meeting

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be the first Indian PM to preside over a meeting during India's UNSC presidency. This was informed by India's former envoy to UN Syed Akbaruddin.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and foreign secretary Harsh Shringla will also chair high-level meetings on topics of global importance during India's UNSC presidency term.

The last time an Indian PM was engaged in this effort was the then PM PV Narasimha

Rao who had attended a UNSC meeting in 1992.

Kerala's first twin road tunnel opens on one side to traffic – All you need to know

One side of Kerala's first twin road tunnel, the Kuthiran tunnel on the Thrissur-Palakkad highway, was opened for traffic on July 31, 2021.

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari in a tweet announced, "We will open one side of the Kuthiran Tunnel in Kerala today."

The tunnel is situated in the mountainous terrain on Kuthiran on the Mannuthy-Wadakkanchery stretch of the Thrissur-Palakkad highway which is highly accident-prone.

Work on the Mannuthy-Wadakkanchery six-lane stretch began in 2010 and the construction of the Kuthiran tunnel began in 2016.

We will open one side of the Kuthiran Tunnel in Kerala today. This is the first road tunnel in the state and will drastically improve connectivity to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The 1.6 km long tunnel is designed through Peechi- Vazhahani wildlife sanctuary. pic.twitter.com/9yGOVhrsLq

— Nitin Gadkari (@nitin_gadkari) [July 31, 2021](#)

Kerala's first twin road tunnel, the Kuthiran tunnel

- The Kuthiran tunnel is the first twin road tunnel in Kerala on the Mannuthy-Wadakkanchery stretch of the Thrissur-Palakkad highway.
- The 1.6 km long tunnel developed through the Peechi-Vazhahani Wildlife Sanctuary will improve the connectivity to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and Coimbatore and Kochi. Each tunnel is 964 meters long.

How will Kuthiran tunnel benefit?

- The Kuthiran tunnel will be a boost to Kerala's transport infrastructure. The Mannuthy-Wadakkanchery stretch of the Thrissur-Palakkad highway which is highly accident-prone is subjected to traffic ordeals during an accident.
- The tunnel will also improve connectivity to important towns and ports in the North-South Corridor without putting the wildlife at risk.

When will the entire tunnel open to public?

- There is not a fixed date for the completion of both tunnels. The second tunnel is almost 70 per cent completed. The State government will monitor the progress to ensure the timely opening of the second tunnel. Toll collection will start only after the completion of the second tunnel.
- A formal inauguration ceremony will be conducted to mark the tunnel's opening once the second tunnel becomes operational.

Saturn comes closest to the Earth today; How and When to watch it in India

Saturn and Earth will be closest to each other in a year on August 2, 2021, and people all over the world that will be in their nighttime will be able to see the mammoth planet with rings at its brightest.

Dr. Suvendu Pattanaik, Deputy Director of Pathani Samanta Planetarium, informed that in scientific terms, this is called Opposition.

It is a yearly event when Saturn or any other outer solar system planet can be seen at its closest point. At that time, it becomes the brightest as the planet comes closer to the Earth.

Saturn comes close to Earth: When to watch in India?

Deputy Director of Pathani Samanta Planetarium, Dr. Suvendu Pattanaik informed that as per IST (Indian Standard Time) at 11.30 am in the morning, Saturn and Earth will come closest to each other.

It will be daytime in India, but in the places where there is nighttime, folks will be able to see a bright Saturn.

We're sitting ringside!

Saturn is in opposition, forming a straight line with us and the Sun, and making its closest approach to Earth for the year.

It's prime time to observe the ringed giant, and learn about the first spacecraft to get close:

<https://t.co/DpXhG3ABBI> pic.twitter.com/WV9jntPdPS

— NASA Ames (@NASA Ames) [August 1, 2021](#)

Saturn comes closest to Earth: Details

Dr. Suvendu Pattanaik while talking about the two planets coming closest to each other informed that the Earth takes about 365 days to orbit the sun. On the other hand, Saturn takes around 29.5 years to complete one full revolution of the sun.

He added that one time every year, both the planets come close to each other while revolving in their own orbital path. In a time span of 1 year and 13 days, Earth and Saturn come closest to each other.

Earlier, both the planets came close on July 20, 2020. They will again do so on August 14, 2022.

How to watch?

According to Dr. Pattanaik, Saturn will appear bright in the sky even with the naked eye. It can be seen throughout the night in entire August. Few of the satellites of Saturn will also be visible with a small telescope.

What is the distance once Earth and Saturn are close?

Dr. Suwendu Pattanaik stated that once both the planets are very close to each other, the average distance between them will be around 120 crores kilometers.

It is 50 crore kilometer less in comparison to the maximum distance between both the planets, which happens after six months when Saturn will be across the other side of the Earth.

India, China armies establish hotline for Sikkim sector; Know everything about Indo-Sino clash in Sikkim

Indian and Chinese armies have established a hotline in the North Sikkim Sector in order to further boost the confidence along the Line of Actual Control in the region. The news was shared by the officials on August 1, 2021.

Indian Army, in an official statement, said that the event of setting up a hotline also coincided with China's PLA (People's Liberation Army) day today.

The Indian Army also informed that the inauguration of the hotline was attended by the ground commanders of the respective armies and the message of friendship and harmony was exchanged through a hotline.

The setting up of the hotline between the armies of India and China has come amid a continued standoff between the two countries in a number of friction points in eastern Ladakh.

Where the hotline between India and China is set up?

The hotline has been established between the Indian Army in Kongra La, North Sikkim, and China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) at Khamba Dzong in Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Objective:

According to the Indian Army, the hotline between the armies of India and China aims at furthering the spirit of trust and cordial relations along the Line of Actual Control in the region.

Mechanisms for communication between India and China:

- The Armed forces of India and China have well-established mechanisms for communication at the ground commanders' level.
- These kinds of hotlines in various sectors go a long way in enhancing and maintaining the peace and tranquility at the borders.

- This is also the 6th hotline that has been established between India and China including two each in Sikkim, Eastern Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh.

India-China clash in Sikkim: All you need to know

- The Nathu La and Cho La clashes which are sometimes also referred to as the Sino-Indian war of 1967, consisted of a series of border clashes between the two countries alongside the border of the Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim which was then an Indian protectorate.
- The Nathu La clashes started on September 11, 1967, when China's PLA launched an attack on Indian posts at Nathu La, in East Sikkim district, and lasted till September 15, 1967.
- Another military duel, in October 1967, took place at Cho La and ended on the same day. Chola is a mountain pass in the Cho La range of the Himalayas that connects India's Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.
- In the conflict, India achieved the decisive tactical advantage and managed to push back the Chinese forces. PLA fortifications at Nathu La were destroyed.
- As per the observers, these clashes indicated the decline of claim strength in China's use of force against India. The Indian government was also pleased with the combat performance of its forces in Nathu La clashes and saw it as a sign of improvement since its defeat in the Sino-Indian war in 1967.

Coronavirus Lockdown: List of States under Corona Curfew / Lockdown- What will be open, what will be closed?

Coronavirus Lockdown in states: Kerala state government announced that a triple lockdown will be imposed at locations in the state where more than 10 COVID-19 cases are detected among 1000 people.

Odisha Chief Minister warned people that the state would have to impose a complete lockdown if people continue to be careless and violate COVID protocols. He reminded the people that Odisha was spared from a harsh second COVID wave and scientists have estimated an early third wave.

The Bihar government, on the other hand, eased COVID-19 restrictions by allowing schools to resume academic activities with 50 percent.

Full List of states under Lockdown/ Curfew

1. Delhi begins Unlock

The Delhi government announced further relaxations in COVID-19 restrictions from July 26, 2021 by allowing theatres and multiplexes to open with 50 percent seating capacity and Delhi Metro to operate with 100 percent seating capacity.

- The Delhi's public buses have also been allowed to operate at full seating capacity.
- However, no standing passenger will be allowed in the Delhi metro.
- Business-to-business (B2B) exhibitions have also been allowed, but only with business visitors.
- The number of people allowed at marriage functions and last rites have also been raised to 100.
- Spas have also been allowed to open but all their employees have to be fully vaccinated or undergo RT-PCR test fortnightly.

CM Kejriwal had imposed the lockdown on April 19 when the second wave of COVID-19 was at its peak. After a continuous decline in daily coronavirus cases, phased unlocking process was

started by CM Kejriwal from May 31.

2. Maharashtra Curfew

Maharashtra is currently mulling over easing restrictions in the state and allowing businesses to open and fully vaccinated people to travel.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has called a meeting with the state Covid-19 task force to discuss the same

What can be expected?

- Local train travel may be allowed for those who have taken both Covid vaccine doses.
- Ease in restrictions in 25 district
- Cinema halls likely to be opened
- Shop timings may be increased beyond 4 pm to 8-9 pm.

3. Uttar Pradesh

The Uttar Pradesh government has announced certain relaxations in the COVID-19 lockdown by allowing cinema halls, multiplexes and stadiums in the state to open from July 5, 2021 while following strict COVID-19 protocols. This comes after the state saw a decline in the number of coronavirus cases.

The new guidelines will come into effect from July 5th. The weekend lockdown will continue in the state.

The state Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had chaired a high-level meeting on July 2nd. The decision to ease the lockdown came after several businesses faced losses during the pandemic.

The state government has issued the following guidelines for cinema halls and multiplexes:

- No arrangement for food and drink in the cinema hall.
- Only packaged food will be provided to the visitors.

- Tickets will be booked online.
- In places where online booking is not available, tickets will be available through the window.
- Ticket buyers will keep a distance of six feet from each other.
- The entire cinema hall will be sanitized after every show.

4. Kerala

Kerala has announced that a triple lockdown will be imposed at locations where more than 10 COVID-19 cases are detected among 1000 people.

Kerala's health minister Veena George informed that only shops selling essential items will be allowed to open in such locations. In other parts of the state, all shops will be allowed to function on six days except Sundays.

The health minister urged people to remain vigilant of the Covid spread in the state, adding that the shops should have proper arrangements to manage crowds and ensure social distancing during the festive season.

The police and local bodies will be responsible to supervise the arrangements.

5. Jharkhand Lockdown

- Jharkhand state government has decided to relax more lockdown-like restrictions for business establishments and educational institutions.
- Under the new guidelines, physical classes have been allowed to resume for students from classes 9 to 12.
- However, schools can stay open only till noon and children will be allowed to attend only with the permission of parents.
- Colleges have also been allowed to reopen for the final year classes of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. However, students will be required to be vaccinated with at least one dose.
- Besides this, cinema halls, multiplexes have been allowed to resume at 50 percent capacity.

- Restaurants and bars can also resume operations till 10 pm with 50 percent capacity.
- All shops except for vegetable-fruit grocery/restaurant/bar, eatables and essential services will have to be closed by 8 pm on Saturday and will open at 6 am on Monday.

6. West Bengal

West Bengal government on July 29, 2021 extended lockdown like restrictions in the state till August 15 with certain relaxations. The night curfew will remain in place from 9pm to 5am with the exception of emergency and essential services.

- The state has capped the number of people allowed to attend social gatherings like weddings at 50.
- Government programmes have been allowed indoor places with 50 per cent of total seating capacity.
- The vegetable markets will remain open from 6 am till 12pm.
- Gyms and salons have been allowed to open with 50 percent strength from 11 am to 6 pm.
- Public transport such as buses, autos and taxis have been allowed to operate with 50% seating capacity.
- Both government and private offices can also function with 50% staff.

7. Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh state government had also extended the existing night curfew in the state for another week. The decision came after the state's chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy held a Covid-19 review meeting.

What is allowed, what is not?

- Night curfew remains in place from 10 pm till 6am.
- All commercial establishments are required to close by 9pm.
- There are no restrictions between 6am to 10pm.

- All business activities can be carried out during these relaxed hours.

8. Assam Restrictions

Assam government has announced complete lockdown in Golaghat and Lakhimpur districts due to high positivity rate. The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) issued a notice that read 24 hours curfew will remain in place in Golaghat and Lakhimpur from July 28, 2021.

- All private/government workplaces, shops/commercial establishments have been ordered to remain shut till further orders.
- Dine-in restaurants, dhabas, takeaway of food items from eateries, showrooms and cold storage and warehouses and opening of sale counters have been prohibited in the two districts.
- Only shops selling groceries, vegetables, fruits, milk booths, dairies can open till 5 pm in Golaghat and Lakhimpur.
- The state government has also decided to impose curfew from 2pm to 5 am in few districts that have been showing moderate coronavirus positivity rate such as -Goalpara Morigaon, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Biswanath.
- In these districts, the government/private workplaces, shops and commercial establishments, restaurants/dhabas and other eateries, take away of food items, showrooms will be allowed to operate till 1 pm.
- The milk booths, dairies and shops dealing with essential items such as groceries, vegetables and fruits will be permitted to open till 5 pm.
- Few other districts have shown improvement like- Dhubri, Kamrup(M), South Salmara, Majuli, Bongaigaon, Chirang, Udalguri, West Karbi Anglong, Dima, Hasao, Charaideo, Hailakandi, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, Baksa, Bajali, Kamrup, Darang, Nagaon, Hojai, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Cachar, Karimgam and Karbi Anglong.
- These districts will have curfew from 5 pm to 5 am. All workplaces, commercial establishments, dine-in restaurants, hotels, dhabas, resorts and other eateries will be allowed to operate till 4pm in these districts.

9. Goa Curfew

The Goa state government has decided to extend the COVID-induced curfew in the state till August 9. The COVID-19 curfew in the state was set to end on August 2.

No fresh relaxation has been granted and all COVID-19-related curbs will continue in the state.

The state curfew was first imposed on May 9 in the wake of rise in COVID-19 cases and has been extended multiple times since then.

What will be allowed in the state during the curfew?

- Essential services and shops selling essential items including medicines can remain open.
- Bars/ restaurants can open from 7am to 9pm with 50 percent seating capacity.
- Indoor gyms can open with 50 percent capacity.
- Sports complexes can operate without spectators
- Banks and other financial institutions can also operate.
- Religious places can open with 15 people at one time.
- All industries/factories and related activities have been allowed.
- Hotels and hospitality sector have been allowed for inhouse guests/residents/staff.

What is prohibited?

- Casinos are still prohibited.
- Shops can open from 7pm to 7am.
- Auditoriums, waterparks, entertainment parks, spas, massage parlours, cinema halls, theatres, multiplexes to remain closed.
- Schools, colleges, educational and coaching institutions will also remain closed.
- Weekly markets still banned.

- Only 100 people allowed at social/political/academic gathering or marriage function or 50 percent of hall capacity.

10. Haryana Lockdown

The Haryana government has also extended the Mahamari Alert-Surakshit Haryana (COVID-19 lockdown in the state) by another week from 5am on August 2nd till 5am on August 9th.

- The current lockdown relaxations related to the reopening of malls, shops, restaurants, religious places and corporate offices will continue.
- The order was issued under Disaster Management Act, 2005 provisions. Under it, the anganwadi centres and creches run by women and child development department will remain closed till August 15th.
- The vice chancellors of universities have been advised to plan reopening of universities from the next academic session and share the programme of the same with the concerned departments.

11. Punjab Curfew

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on July 9, 2021 ordered lifting of weekend and night curfew amid falling COVID-19 positivity rate in the state. The state has also allowed gathering of 100 people indoors and 200 people outdoors.

The state government has also allowed bars, restaurants, spas, swimming pools, malls, gyms, museums, cinema halls and sports complexes to open, subject to all eligible staff members and visitors having taken at least one dose each of the vaccines.

The schools will continue to remain closed but colleges, coaching centres and other higher education institutions

shall be allowed to open by the concerned Deputy Commissioner, subject to a certificate having been submitted, that all teaching, non-teaching staff and students have been given at least one dose of vaccination, at least 2 weeks ago.

12. Rajasthan Lockdown

The Rajasthan government has decided to lift the weekend curfew on Sundays, which was enforced during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ashok Gehlot-led government has also granted other relaxations in the COVID restrictions such as allowing the reopening of

cinema halls with certain restrictions, skill training centres and other outdoor activities.

What's allowed, what's shut:

- The state has allowed cinema halls/theatres/multiplex operators who have made their seating capacity information online to reopen with 50 per cent capacity from 9 am to 8 pm only for those who have got at least the first dose of vaccine.
- The skill development centres in the state have also been allowed to open with 50 per cent capacity from 6 am to 8 pm with the same condition.
- Marriage functions have been allowed from 6 am to 8 pm with a maximum of 25 people. The number of guests can be increased to a maximum of 50 based on a review by the area sub-divisional magistrate.
- Those who have got the first dose of the COVID vaccine will no longer require a negative RT-PCR test report or home/institutional quarantine while entering the state.

13. Gujarat Curfew

The Gujarat government on June 24, 2021 announced lifting of night curfew from 18 towns and relaxing its timing in 18 urban centres by one hour.

The state government has allowed cinema halls, multiplexes and auditoriums to function with 50 per cent capacity in view of a sharp drop in new COVID-19 cases.

All shops have been allowed to remain open till 9 pm now instead of earlier 7 pm. The public buses have also been allowed to ply at 75 per cent of their seating capacity.

14. Karnataka Lockdown

- Bengaluru has issued new prohibitory orders to control the spread of COVID-19 in the city. Night curfew has been implemented from 10 pm to 6 am till August 16.
- Section 144 of the CrPC, which prohibits the assembly of four or more people, has been imposed till 6 am on August 16th.
- Besides this, all major pilgrimage centres in Dakshina Kannada including Dharmasthala, Kukke Subramanya and Kateel will remain closed for devotees on weekends.

- All special poojas, head tonsuring rituals and serving of prasada has been cancelled in the wake of a resurgence in Covid cases in these districts sharing borders with Kerala.
- The decision has been taken to halt the movement of devotees from other states, as well as other districts.
- A negative RT-PCR test, taken 72 hours before, has been made compulsory for those who wish to visit the temples on weekdays and stay in dormitories.

15. Odisha

The Odisha state government has extended the partial lockdown till 6 am on August 1, 2021 with certain relaxations. This is the fourth time that the state has extended the lockdown in the second wave of the COVID pandemic.

Under the revised guidelines, the state government has allowed the movement of the passenger buses and reopening of barber shops and beauty parlours. The partial lockdown has been extended because the pandemic situation has not yet come under complete control in the state.

- The state has also allowed gyms to reopen but has ordered schools, colleges, coaching centres and religious establishments to remain closed till August 1.
- Wedding ceremonies have been allowed with a maximum of 25 people in attendance and 20 people have been allowed at funerals and last rites.
- Shopping malls, cinema halls and parks will remain closed in the state.
- Theatres, exhibitions and fairs will also not be allowed during the partial lockdown.
- The state has allowed indoor and outdoor shootings for films and serials across the state with strict adherence to the COVID-19 protocols.

The state had earlier divided the 30 districts into A and B categories on the basis of the test positivity rate (TPR). The 20 districts that have TPR less than five per cent have been placed in the A category, while the remaining 10 coastal districts, where the TPR is high, have been placed in the B category.

The category A districts include- Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh,

Kalahandi, Bolangir, Nuapada, Sonepur, Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Boudh, Koraput, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Angul, Dhenkanal and Keonjhar.

The category B districts include-Nayagarh, Cuttack, Puri, Khurda, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Balasore and Mayurbhanj.

Guidelines for Category A districts:

1. Shops will be allowed to remain open from 6 am till 8 pm on all days and no weekly shutdowns.
2. Buses to ply with passengers up to the seating capacity, the taxis and autorickshaws can carry a maximum of two passengers.
3. Daily markets and weekly haats, small salons allowed to reopen and street food vendors allowed to operate with takeaway businesses.
4. Film shooting has been permitted in these districts.

Guidelines for Category B districts:

1. Shops allowed to open from 6am to 5pm. The night curfew in Category B districts will be from 5 pm to 6 am. Weekend lockdowns to continue.
2. Shopping malls, spas and beauty parlours to remain closed. The weekly and daily markets will also remain closed for the next two weeks in Category-B districts.
3. Bus services not allowed to resume.

Besides this, night curfew from 5pm to 6 am will continue to remain in force throughout the state.

The religious and educational institutions and cinema halls will also remain shut.

The ban on public gatherings, trade fairs, exhibitions and jatra (theatre) will also continue.

The restrictions on weddings will also continue, the government has though modified funeral guidelines of COVID patients to let the grieving families pay their last respects. The families of COVID-19 patients can now take the body of their dear one testing negative for the virus at the time of death.

16. Chhattisgarh Lockdown

- Chhattisgarh has extended the state-wide lockdown with some relaxations in districts where Covid-19 positivity rate (TPR) is less than 5%. The government has not specified the date when the lockdown will end.
- However, no relaxation have been announced in districts such as Raigarh, Janjgir and Surajpur, where the test positivity rate is above 5%.
- In all other districts, the state has allowed opening of all shops and establishments. The shops and markets will open in the morning at their scheduled time and close at 6 pm.
- However, entertainment places such as cinema halls, theatres, swimming pools, water parks, theme parks and places of gathering will remain shut.

17. Jammu and Kashmir Corona Curfew

- Jammu and Kashmir has begun the process of partial unlocking after a month of COVID-19 curfew. The shops and business establishments re-opened partially on May 31st across the union territory.
- However, educational institutes including schools, colleges, universities and private coaching centres will remain closed till June 15.
- All gyms and parks will also remain closed till further orders in Kashmir, where weekend and night curfew would continue.
- The Jammu and Kashmir administration had extended the COVID curfew, which was supposed to end on May 23, by another week till May 31 in all 20 districts of the Union Territory.

18. Chandigarh Lockdown

Chandigarh has allowed schools to start functioning physically from July 19 for Class 9 to Class 12 subject to parents' consent. The online mode of teaching will also continue. The UT Administration has also allowed reopening of coaching institutes from July 19 on the condition that all the eligible students and staff have got at least one vaccine dose.

The cinema halls and spas in the union territory have also been allowed to function with 50%

capacity.

19. Nagaland Curfew

The Nagaland government has extended the total lockdown in the state till June 11. The lockdown was first imposed on May 14 for seven days but was later extended till May 31.

20. Tripura Night Curfew

The Tripura state government extended the corona curfew from 12pm to 5 am in Agartala and all other urban areas in the state till June 10. The restrictions were scheduled to end in the state on June 6.

The evening curfew in rural areas from 6 pm to 5 am will also continue. Only shops dealing with essential items like groceries, vegetables, milk, meat and fish will be allowed to remain open till 2 pm instead of the earlier deadline of 12pm. All other restrictions will continue as usual.

The state had first imposed the restrictions in the Agartala Municipal Corporation area on May 16 and 10 days later, extended corona curfew to all the 29 urban local bodies.

21. Himachal Pradesh Lockdown

Himachal Pradesh government led by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur is mulling to bring back Covid curbs, especially for visitors in the wake of a spike in the Covid-19 infections over the past week.

The state has reintroduced mandatory RT-PCR reports for tourists visiting the state with immediate effect.

The Disaster Management Cell of the government has recommended a mandatory negative RT-PCR report not older than 72 hours for those visiting for tourism purpose. Those carrying Covid vaccine certificates, one or both jabs will also be allowed to enter the state.

22. Uttarakhand Lockdown

The Uttarakhand government has extended the COVID-19 Lockdown till August 10, 2021. As per an official notice by the state government, the state will continue the ongoing vaccination process even during the lockdown.

The COVID-19 curfew will remain in force across the state from August 3 to August 10. As per the latest guidelines, the schools will reopen in the state from August 16. The state government has issued a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in this regard.

The classes with higher number of students will function in two shifts.

The state government has also allowed participation of a maximum of 50 people in funeral processions.

23. Tamil Nadu Curfew

The Tamil Nadu government has extended the coronavirus lockdown in the state till July 19, with few relaxations in restrictions. The state government has now allowed shops to remain open for an hour longer and they can now shut by 9 pm.

The restaurants, tea shops, bakeries, roadside eateries and sweet shops have been allowed to stay open till 9 pm with 50 per cent customers. However, the places will need to comply with Covid protocols such as ensuring people in queues follow social distancing and placing of sanitizers.

The air-conditioned outlets must have adequate ventilation with doors or windows open.

The state has allowed up to 50 people to attend weddings and 20 to attend funerals.

What will remain closed?

The schools, colleges, bars, theatres, swimming pools and zoos will remain shut.

All cultural and political events with public participation too cannot be held.

Though the state has not re-opened inter-state buses, it has decided to resume bus services to Puducherry.

24. Puducherry Lockdown

The Puducherry government had extended the lockdown till midnight of July 15 with certain relaxations. As per the statement, the beach road, park and gardens will be opened for walkers till 9 pm on all days.

Religious places and places of worship have also been allowed to reopen for the public till 9 pm. The essential poojas and rituals can be conducted by priests or employees of the respective religious places. A congregation at the place of worship will not be allowed.

The UT has also allowed bars and restaurants within the hotels, guest houses and lodges and other standalone eateries to operate with 50 percent capacity till 9 pm. The retail liquor shops and arrack vends have also been allowed from 9 am to 9 pm.

25. Bihar

The Bihar government has eased Covid-19 restrictions by allowing schools to resume academic activities with 50 percent attendance from August 7, 2021. Classes 9th and 10th will be allowed to resume with 50 percent attendance.

Primary and middle schools will also be opened from August 16.

Coaching institutions will be allowed to resume with 50 percent attendance of students on alternate day.

The decision was taken at meeting of crisis management group headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The new relaxations will be effective from August 7 till August 25.

26. Madhya Pradesh

The Madhya Pradesh state government issued the new COVID-19 guidelines on July 14, 2021 that will remain in force until July 31, 2021. The state government has now relaxed the restrictions amid declining number of COVID-19 cases and has allowed cinema halls to re-open.

The new guidelines are as follows:

- Markets have been allowed to open till 10 pm now instead of earlier 8 pm.
- All places of worship have been allowed to reopen but not more than six people can gather in at any spot at a time.
- Cinema halls and theatres have also been allowed to reopen with up to 50 per cent of seating capacity.

- Restaurants have been allowed to operate normally with 100% capacity. Earlier, they were allowed to operate with 50 per cent seating.
- Gyms and fitness centres can also reopen with 50 per cent capacity.
- The number of people allowed to attend wedding ceremonies has been raised to a maximum of 100 from earlier 50.
- Further, 50 people can attend funerals from earlier limit of 20.
- Training programmes can be organised in the state with the strength of 50 per cent.
- Besides this, the state has allowed all the sports activities and has also allowed the stadium to be opened, but without spectators.

27. Manipur

The Manipur state government has decided to impose a total curfew of 10 days starting from July 18 in the wake of wide prevalence of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in the state.

During the curfew period, only essential services related to COVID-19 testing, vaccination, medical services, power & water supply, telecom services, air travel and agricultural activities will be allowed.

The state's health department said that there is a need to take stringent measures to break the chain of transmission. Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh announced that all the institutions, except the essential services, will remain closed during the curfew period. Further, only the people going for vaccination or testing will be allowed to move out of their homes.

28. Meghalaya

Meghalaya Chief Secretary M S Rao announced that the state lockdown has been extended till further orders as the number of COVID-19 cases is still very high. The lockdown was supposed to end on June 21 but it will continue till further orders.

There has been a significant spread of the virus in rural areas of the state. Hence, in order to avoid an uncontrollable surge in COVID-19 cases, the containment measures issued will continue to be enforced in the state with effect from June 21 until further orders.

29. Sikkim

The Sikkim government has extended the statewide lockdown for one more week till June 14. The lockdown restrictions were scheduled to end on June 7.

The state government has also announced some relaxations such as allowing hardware shops to remain open from 7 am to 2 pm.

The shops selling groceries and vegetables can open for 2 more hours from 7 am to 2 pm.

PV Sindhu wins bronze, becomes second Indian to win two individual Olympic medals

PV Sindhu won the bronze medal after defeating China's He Bingjiao 21-13, 21-15 in the bronze medal match on August 1, 2021. This is historic as **she has become the first Indian woman to clinch two Olympic medals.**

PV Sindhu has become the second Indian after Sushil Kumar to win two individual Olympic medals. She had won silver in 2016 Rio Olympic Games after losing in the final to Spain's Carolina Marin.

Despite a great Olympic campaign, PV Sindhu lost her semifinal match against world no. 1 Tai Tzu Ying in two straight sets on July 31st. Prior to this, she had not lost a single set in this year's Olympics.

And with this shot, [#IND's @Pvsindhu1](#) won her SECOND OLYMPIC MEDAL!

Make. Some. Noise. [#BestOfTokyo](#) | [#StrongerTogether](#) | [#UnitedByEmotion](#) | [#Tokyo2020](#) | [#Olympics](#) pic.twitter.com/wowfgNtqBs

— [#Tokyo2020 for India \(@Tokyo2020hi\)](#) [August 1, 2021](#)

PV Sindhu's statement after winning Bronze

Sindhu said in a statement after winning the bronze medal, *"I'm on cloud nine. Worked hard for so many years. I think I've done really well. I had a lot of emotions going through me - should I be happy that I won bronze or sad that I lost the opportunity to play in the final?"*

She said that her family worked hard for her and put in a lot of effort so she is very thankful. *"Indian fans showed me their love & support and I'm very thankful to each and everyone of them. There were really long rallies but I had to be patient & calm. Even though I was leading, I didn't relax,"* Sindhu added.

My family worked hard for me & put in a lot of effort so I'm very thankful. Indian fans showed me their love & support & I'm very thankful to each and everyone of them. There were really long rallies but I had to be patient & calm. Even though I was leading, I didn't relax: PV Sindhu

— ANI (@ANI) [August 1, 2021](#)

Congratulations poured in from each and every corner of the country, applauding the grit and

determination of the Indian shuttler, who has been consistently delivering for India.

Speaking to ANI, PV Sindhu's mother P Vijaya said, *"We are very happy. She won two medals, a silver at Rio Olympics and a bronze in Tokyo. We will definitely celebrate. She was a little upset yesterday. We simply asked her to relax and play well."*

Hyderabad | We are very happy. She won two medals, a silver at Rio Olympics and a bronze in Tokyo. We will definitely celebrate. She was a little upset yesterday. We simply asked her to relax and play well: PV Sindhu's mother P Vijaya. pic.twitter.com/Jhl5tkQYF7

— ANI (@ANI) [August 1, 2021](#)

Sindhu's father, PV Ramana said, *"I think she's coming on Aug 3. I'm planning to go to Delhi. We have to get as many medals as we can for country at Olympics. PM encouraged her & told Sindhu that we'll eat ice-cream together after returning from Tokyo. Now, she'll eat ice-cream with PM."*

I think she's coming on Aug 3. I'm planning to go to Delhi. We have to get as many medals as we can for country at Olympics. PM encouraged her & told Sindhu that we'll eat ice-cream together after returning from Tokyo. Now, she'll eat ice-cream with PM: PV Ramana, Sindhu's father pic.twitter.com/5tChxNm3SG

— ANI (@ANI) [August 1, 2021](#)

President Ram Nath Kovind congratulated Sindhu with a tweet that read, "PV Sindhu becomes the first Indian woman to win medals in two Olympic games. She has set a new yardstick of consistency, dedication and excellence. My heartiest congratulations to her for bringing glory to India."

"PV Sindhu becomes the first Indian woman to win medals in two Olympic games. She has set a new yardstick of consistency, dedication and excellence. My heartiest congratulations to her for bringing glory to India," tweets President Ram Nath Kovind pic.twitter.com/l0xjmE6Z2F

— ANI (@ANI) [August 1, 2021](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also tweeted saying, "We are all elated by the stellar performance by @Pvsindhu1. Congratulations to her on winning the Bronze at @Tokyo2020. She is India's pride and one of our most outstanding Olympians."

We are all elated by the stellar performance by [@Pvsindhu1](#). Congratulations to her on winning the Bronze at [@Tokyo2020](#). She is India's pride and one of our most outstanding Olympians. [#Tokyo2020](#) pic.twitter.com/O8Ay3JWT7q

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [August 1, 2021](#)

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur also congratulated Sindhu and said that she has made India proud. He said that she has done it twice and has become the second athlete to do so. "Today she was dominating in the game. One after the other, whether Mirabai Chanu, Sindhu, & now we're also expecting (a medal) from Lovlina," *the Minister added.*

He further highlighted that "*PV Sindhu's performance in Olympics proves that 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' is working well. Daughters have outdone others, even in Sports.*"

SMASHING VICTORY PV Sindhu !!!

You dominated the game & made history [#Tokyo2020](#) !

An Olympic medalist twice over!

India is so proud of you & awaits your return!

YOU DID IT ! pic.twitter.com/kpxAAYQLrh

— Anurag Thakur (@ianuragthakur) [August 1, 2021](#)

PV Sindhu: All you need to know

- Pusarla Venkata Sindhu is the first Indian ever to become a world champion in badminton and she was the first Indian woman to win the Olympic silver medal in 2016.
- Winning bronze in Tokyo Olympics makes her the first-ever Indian woman and second Indian athlete to win two Olympic medals.
- Her career's highest world ranking has been world no. 2 in April 2017. She is currently ranked 7th in the world.
- She had become the first Indian badminton player to reach the finals in Rio 2016 Summer Olympics. She had won silver after losing to Spain's Carolina Marin.
- She was born in Hyderabad and both her parents were national-level volleyball players.
- Her father PV Ramana was a member of the Indian volleyball team that had won the bronze medal in the 1986 Seoul Asian Games. He had received the Arjuna Award in 2000 for his contribution to sports.

- Getting inspired by the success of Pullela Gopichand, 2001 All England Open Badminton Champion, she chose to play badminton.
- She started playing badminton at the age of eight years. She later joined Pullela Gopichand's Gopichand Badminton Academy and was coached by Gopichand for a major part of her career so far.
- However, recently, she parted company with Gopichand and chose South Korean coach Park Tae-sang.
- She is the only fourth women's singles player to win a medal at successive Olympics after Susi Susanti (gold in 1992 and bronze in 1996), Bang Soo-Hyun (silver in 1992 and gold in 1996) and Zhang (gold in 2004 and 2008).

What does this mean for India?

This is India's third medal at the Tokyo Olympics 2020, the first coming from Mirabai Chanu who won silver in weightlifting. Boxer Lovlina Borgohain has also assured India a medal after reaching the semifinals.

How did India's forex reserves cross \$600 billion mark? Know its impact here

India's forex reserves reached a **lifetime high** of \$621.464 billion in the week ended August 6, 2021, after it witnessed an increase of \$889 million.

The surge in India's forex reserves is owed to **an increase of \$1.508 billion to \$577.732 billion in the country's Foreign Currency Assets (FCAs)** in the reporting week, stated weekly data by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

In the week ended July 30, 2021, the country's forex reserves had jumped by \$9.427 billion and touched \$620.576 billion.

India's forex reserves crossed the \$600 billion mark for the first time in June 2021

India's forex reserves crossed the \$600 billion mark for the first time, as per the latest data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday, June 11, 2021.

The country's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$6.842 billion taking it to \$605 billion in the reporting week ended June 4, 2021. India now stands behind Russia by only \$200 million in terms of foreign exchange reserves.

Shaktikanta Das, RBI Governor said, "The current level of forex reserves is enough to cover nearly 16 months of imports". The central bank has earned enough resources with the increased reserves to tackle any challenges arising due to sudden policy or geopolitical shifts that could lead to depletion of funds from India.

How did India's forex reserves cross \$600 billion mark?

- The increase in the country's foreign reserves in the reporting week ended June 4, 2021, is mainly being attributed to a **rise in the value of foreign currency assets (FCA)** that are held by the central bank.
- As per the data, the foreign currency assets (FCA) comprising a major component of the overall reserves held by the central bank increased by \$7.362 billion to \$560.890 billion.

- The foreign currency assets (FCA) reflect the depreciation or appreciation of non-US currencies such as the yen, euro, or pound held in the foreign exchange reserves.
- In the reporting week, the gold reserves held by RBI also fell by \$502 million to \$37.604 billion.
- Though after a volatile end to FY21, the country's forex reserves reported a rise due to continued foreign investment flow into the capital markets.
- The RBI's strategy to buy dollars during a sudden spurt of inflows has led to a pile-up of foreign exchange reserves. The RBI in FY20 was successful at adding over \$100 billion to the reserves.
- In FY21, as per the CDSL, the country reported net inflows of \$37 billion were reported through foreign fund buying while another \$400 million net flows were added to these.
- In the reporting week, the country's reserve position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also dipped by \$16 million to \$5 billion, and the special drawing rights (SDRs) with the IMF also dropped by \$1 million to \$1.513 billion.

What will be the impact of rise in forex reserves?

- As Shaktikanta Das, RBI Governor said, "The current level of forex reserves is enough to cover nearly 16 months of imports".
- The central bank has earned enough resources with the increased reserves to tackle any challenges arising due to sudden policy or geopolitical shifts that could lead to depletion of funds from India.
- Such an accumulation of surplus forex reserves will also aid the RBI in maintaining the exchange rate at a comfortable level.
- Market experts state that such a rise in forex reserves is indicative of RBI's intervention in the market at a strong pace to ensure the rupee does not appreciate.

Tokyo Olympics: China's weightlifter Zhizhui not taken for anti-doping tests

Tokyo Olympics: India's weightlifter Mirabai Chanu who bagged a silver medal in the 49-kg women's weightlifting competition at the Tokyo Olympics 2020 will remain the silver medallist while China's Hou ZhiZhui who had won gold in the 49-kg women's weightlifting will remain the gold medallist.

Zhizhui was not taken for anti-dope testing. Further, there has been no update from the routine anti-doping procedures that were conducted after the 49-kg weightlifting event.

Earlier, on July 27, 2021, as per a media report by ANI, China's Zhizhui was to be tested by anti-doping authorities thereby offering Chanu a medal upgrade, also known as Olympic medal reallocation to gold. However, it has been clarified that the media report was an error.

India's weightlifter Mirabai Chanu on July 24, 2021, had bagged a silver medal in the 49-kg women's weightlifting competition at the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

Chanu bagged a silver for lifting a total of 202-kg, (115-kg in clean and jerk and 87-kg in snatch) in four successful attempts. China's Zhizhui Hou had bagged gold for lifting 210-kg while making a new Olympic world record. Indonesia's Windy Cantika Aisah won a bronze for lifting 194-kg.

After winning a silver, Chanu has become the second Indian weightlifter who has won an Olympic medal after Karnam Malleswari who had won a bronze in the 69-kg category at the 2000 Sydney Games.

What is Olympic Medal Reallocation?

- The Olympic Medal Reallocation plays a crucial role in creating a clean sporting environment that upholds the values of the Olympics and rewards those clean athletes.
- The Olympic Medal Reallocation Principles support the Athletes' Declaration and promote a transparent, fair, and clean sporting environment that prohibits doping and competition manipulation.

What are Anti-doping rules?

- Competing clean in the Olympics or any sporting event is key to maintain the fairness of sport. Athletes competing in the Olympics are barred from doping or using any performance-enhancing substances.
- The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) founded in 1999 by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) is the regulatory body and custodian for monitoring of the World Anti-Doping Code (Code).

Disclaimer: The source of the previous version of the copy was one ANI report, which was changed later. So, the copy has been corrected as per the updated information.

Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated as Iran's new President

Ultra-conservative cleric and judiciary chief **Ebrahim Raisi was inaugurated as Iran's eighth president** on August 3, 2021.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote in a decree, *"Following the people's choice, I task the wise, indefatigable, experienced and popular Hojatoleslam Ebrahim Raisi as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran."*

Ebrahim Raisi said in his inauguration speech that his new government will seek to lift the *"oppressive US sanctions, but would not tie the nation's standard of living to the will of foreigners"*.

Ebrahim Raisi replaces moderate President Hassan Rouhani who was not allowed run for a third consecutive term by the Iranian constitution. He congratulated the people for their choice after Raisi's win.

Top Challenges

- Ebrahim Raisi will have to tackle the challenge of reviving the 2015 nuclear agreement from which the United States had withdrawn and then imposed sweeping sanctions on the nation.
- The landmark agreement had been reached under moderate president Hassan Rouhani's term. The agreement was signed between Iran and six major powers.
- He also faces the warnings from the US, Britain and Israel to Iran over a deadly tanker attack last week for which Iran denies responsibility.
- Iran is also facing economic challenges, which has been further impacted by the US Sanctions. This would be the new president's top challenge.

Iranian Presidential Elections 2021: Key Details

- Raisi had won the Iranian presidential elections in June with 61.95 percent of the vote. The elections saw a total voter turnout of 48.8 percent, which is the lowest turnout for a presidential election since the 1979 revolution.

- More than half of the electorate abstained from voting after many political heavyweights were barred from standing in the elections.
- Ebrahim Raisi had got 28,933,004 votes, while former Revolutionary Guard commander Mohsen Rezaei finished third with 3,412,712 votes.
- He was followed by moderate candidate Abdolnasser Hemmati with 2,427,201 votes and conservative Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi with 999,718 votes.
- Void votes finished second in the Presidential race with 3,726,870 such votes, which is happening for the first time since the establishment of the Islamic Republic.
- Mohsen Rezaei, Abdolnasser Hemmati and Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi had conceded defeat ahead of the announcement of Raisi's win.

First Iranian President to face US sanctions

Ebrahim Raisi has become the first Iranian president to be sanctioned by the United States even before assuming office as he was designated in 2019.

What had happened?

The United States blacklisted Ebrahim Raisi in 2019 for his role in the:

- Mass execution of political prisoners in 1988.
- Crackdown on the 2009 Green Movement protests.
- Administration of oversight over the executions of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime.

About Ebrahim Raisi

- Ebrahim Raisi grew up in the northeastern city of Mashhad, which is an important religious centre for Shia Muslims where Imam Reza, the eighth Shia religious leader, is buried.
- He has studied under some of Iran's most prominent Muslim scholars, including Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei.
- He initially served as the prosecutor for several jurisdictions, then he moved to the Tehran in 1985 after being appointed deputy prosecutor.

- He then moved up the ranks in the judicial system in March 2016 and was appointed by the supreme leader as the custodian of the Astan-e Quds Razavi, which is the influential shrine of Imam Reza.
- He had run for presidential elections against Rouhani in 2017 as well but he had garnered just 38 percent of the vote then.

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: PM Modi meets BJP MPs from all north-eastern states

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: PM Narendra Modi on August 2, 2021, met 16 BJP MPs from all North-Eastern States to deliberate on different issues including the Assam-Mizoram border dispute. The meeting was attended by Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, 12 MPs from Assam, 2 from Arunachal Pradesh, and 1 each from Tripura and Manipur.

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said that the MPs have shared their memorandum with PM Modi regarding Congress politicizing the Assam-Mizoram border issue and issuing proactive statements. The MPs stated that several confidence-building measures have been taken place over the last few days.

PM Modi urged to not look at the Assam-Mizoram border dispute under the prism of politics while expressing that his love and affection for the Northeast is natural.

On August 1, 2021, the Mizoram Government had announced to remove Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's name from an FIR.

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: Assam Govt issues travel advisory against traveling to Mizoram

- Assam Government on July 29, 2021, had issued a travel advisory directing people of Assam to not travel towards Mizoram stating a 'threat to personal safety'.
- A directive by Assam's advisory from the State's Home and Political Department said that amid the ongoing border dispute, "the people of Assam are advised not to travel to Mizoram as any threat to the personal safety of people cannot be accepted."
- Assam government on July 29 also issued two more directives ordering that all vehicles coming from Mizoram will be checked for 'illicit drugs' and asked senior police officers in Kamrup and Cachar districts to ensure the security and safety of Assamese people living in Mizoram.
- On July 26, amid the ongoing Assam-Mizoram border dispute, six Assam Police personnel were killed and around 50 were injured during a firing from Mizoram at the Assam-Mizoram Border for which the Assam government had announced a three-day state mourning on July 27.

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: Assam Govt announces 3-day state mourning

- Assam Government on July 27, 2021, announced a 3-day state mourning to pay respects to the five police personnel and one civilian who lost their lives in a firing at the Assam-Mizoram border on July 26.
- In a press conference, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that Assam Government will be providing financial assistance of Rs 50 lakhs each to families of the police personnel who lost their lives yesterday in a firing at the Assam-Mizoram border and the injured will be offered Rs 1 lakh each. The injured SP has been sent to Mumbai for treatment.
- Sarma further said that the Assam government has also decided to move Supreme Court over the border dispute stating that encroachment has taken place. "This is not a political issue. This is a boundary dispute between two states. This is a long-standing border dispute," he said.

#UPDATE | Assam Govt announces 3-day state mourning as a mark of respect to the five police personnel & one civilian who lost their lives in Assam-Mizoram border clashes yesterday
<https://t.co/I0JN8eu2g8>

— ANI (@ANI) [July 27, 2021](#)

I called Mizoram CM six times when firing was taking place (at Assam-Mizoram border yesterday). He said 'sorry' & invited me for talks in Aizawl. No one can take even an inch of our land. We're committed to securing our territory. Police are on the border: CM Himanta Biswa Sarma pic.twitter.com/7l3K9BN5Xe

— ANI (@ANI) [July 27, 2021](#)

The incident took place at the border of Assam. Our Police will investigate the matter. It will be investigated that where did the civilians get the arms from. Five Police personnel lost their lives: Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on violent clashes at Assam-Mizoram border y'day
pic.twitter.com/HxxlzkekNw

— ANI (@ANI) [July 27, 2021](#)

3-day state mourning in Assam - Background

- On July 26, 2021, six Assam Police personnel were killed and around 50 were injured during a firing from Mizoram at the Assam-Mizoram Border.
- Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma had tweeted to inform that six Assam Police personnel have sacrificed their lives while defending the constitutional boundary at the Assam-Mizoram border.

- In response, Mizoram Home Minister Lalchamlia said in a statement that Mizoram Police responded 'spontaneously by firing back' at Assam Police after its 200 personnel forcibly entered a duty post manned by CRPF personnel and began firing unarmed people.

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke with the Chief Ministers of Assam and Mizoram over the border dispute to ensure an amicable situation after both the CMs engaged in a spat on Twitter on July 26. After Shah's intervention requesting both CMs to resolve the dispute mutually, the Assam Police personnel retracted and handed over Mizoram's duty post to CRPF personnel.

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: All you need to know

- H Lalthlangliana, Deputy Commissioner, Kolasib district, Mizoram earlier had written a letter to Assam's Cachar district administration alleging human rights violation and atrocities on tribal people by Assam government officials and police during a stand-off on July 10, 2021, said an official in Aizawl.

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) also have received copies of the letter.

- In response, GP Singh, Special Director-General, Assam Police, said that the basic issue is encroachment. There is a Constitutional boundary for both Mizoram and Assam.

Lalthlangliana's letter to Assam's Cachar DA – Key points

- Without prior notice, on July 10, a road was constructed from Assam to Buarchep, and crops belonging to people of the Mizo tribe were destroyed by officials of Assam with support from the police. Further, the tribal people who were protesting the damage were forcefully forced out by Assam police personnel.

- On July 11, 2021, around 2.40 am, Mizoram police forces on the border at Saihapui V village and Buarchep on the Assam border heard two loud explosions. A criminal case under the Explosive Substances Act was also lodged at the Vairengte police station, Mizoram.

Assam-Mizoram Border Dispute: Background

- During the British era, Mizoram was called Lushai Hills, a district of Assam.

- The Mizoram-Assam Border Dispute dates to the notifications passed during the British era:

(i) **The Notification of 1875**, derived from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act, 1873, that demarcated Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) from the Cachar district of Assam.

(ii) **The Notification of 1933**, that demarcated Lushai Hills and Manipur.

- Mizoram's stance is the demarcation should be based on the 1875 Notification. As per the Mizo leaders, the Mizo society was not consulted hence they are against the 1933 Notification.

- Assam government follows the Notification of 1933.

- A 164.6-km inter-state border demarcates Mizoram and Assam. Three Mizoram districts namely Aizawl, Mamit, and Kolasib share a border with three Assam districts namely Karimganj, Hailakandi, Cachar.

Vice Admiral SN Ghormade takes charge as Vice Chief of Indian Navy

Vice Admiral Satish Namdeo Ghormade on July 31, 2021, assumed charge as the new Vice Chief of the Naval Staff. Ghormade succeeded Vice Admiral G Ashok Kumar.

Ghormade has served as the commanding officer of the guided-missile frigate INS Brahmaputra, minesweeper INS Alleppey, and submarine rescue vessel INS Nireekshak.

Prior to taking charge as the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Ghormade was serving as the Deputy Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff (Operations and Training) since March 8.

VAdm SN Ghormade, AVSM, NM has assumed charge as the Vice Chief of Naval Staff from VAdm G Ashok Kumar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC at a formal ceremony held this morning at South Block, #NewDelhi. VAdm G Ashok Kumar retires today after glorious service of 39 years. [@DefenceMinIndia pic.twitter.com/KzrWhCDo7O](https://twitter.com/KzrWhCDo7O)

— SpokespersonNavy (@indiannavy) July 31, 2021

Who is Vice Admiral S N Ghormade?

- Commissioned into the Indian Navy on January 1, 1984, Vice Admiral S N Ghormade is a Flag officer in the Indian Navy. He is currently serving as the 36th Vice Chief of the Naval Staff.
- Ghormade graduated from the Naval War College, Mumbai, and the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakwasla, Pune. He is also an alumnus of the Naval Staff College at the Naval War College, Rhode Island, US.
- During his service, Ghormade has been the Chief of Staff of the Eastern Naval Command and the Deputy Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff (Operations and Training).
- Along with a specialization in Navigation and Direction within the Navy, he holds an M Phil in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Mumbai, an MSc in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Madras, and a Master's degree in Personnel Management from Symbiosis Institute of Business Management.
- He was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal in 2017 and the Nau Sena Medal in 2007.

About Vice Chief of the Naval Staff

- Vice Admiral Satish Namdeo Ghormade is the current Vice Chief of the Naval Staff. He took over on July 31, 2021, from Vice Admiral G Ashok Kumar.
- The Vice Chief of the Naval Staff is the second-highest-ranking officer in the Indian Navy. He reports to the Chief of the Navy Staff.
- The Vice Chief of the Naval Staff is a Principal Staff Officer (PSO) at Naval HQ in New Delhi. The post is held by a Three-Star Officer in the rank of Vice-Admiral. The Vice Chief is responsible for Naval operations.

Who is Chief of the Naval Staff?

- Admiral Karambir Singh is the current Chief of the Naval Staff. He is the 24th CNS in the Indian Navy. He took over from Admiral Sunil Lanba on May 31, 2019.
- The Chief of the Naval Staff is the highest-ranking in the Indian Navy unless the Chief of Defence is a navy officer.
- The Chief of the Naval Staff serves as an adviser to the Indian government on naval affairs, governs and directs the naval staff.
- The Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) is abbreviated CNS in the Indian Navy. The post is held by a full Admiral since 1966.