Current Affairs March 2021

CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY PDF

Table of Contents

Awards and Honours 7
Economic Development 11
Geography, Environment, Biodiversity & Disaster Management 18
History, Art & Culture 23
Important Days & Events 28
International Affairs 33
Polity & Governance 49
Science & Technology 68
Security 76
Society and Social Justice 77
Sports 88
Miscellaneous 89-101

Awards and Honours

1. Sahitya Akademi fellowship for Professor Velcheru Narayana Rao
2. Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain assumes office as CISC
3. Jaideep Bhatnagar takes over as Principal Director General of PIB
4. CERAWeek Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award
5. ICAR received King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award of FAO
6. Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal win Pritzker Architecture Prize 2021
7. Gandhi Peace Prizes awarded to Sultan Qaboos and Mujibur Rahman
8. 67th National Film Awards
9. Asha Bhosle conferred with Maharashtra Bhushan Award
10. Mahinder Giri won International Ranger Award

Economic Development

1. Chief Economic Advisor Backs Proposal to Bring Petrol under GST
2. Agriculture Ministers celebrated the first anniversary of the Central Sector Scheme
3. FAO pledges to scale up direct use of digital financial transfers
4. Centre garners ₹77,814.80 cr after spectrum auction
5. India added 1 billionaire every week in pandemic-hit 2020
6. SEBI calls for mechanism to prevent market abuse
7. Assam's famed red rice on way to US markets
8. India's first grade- separated Urban Expressway
9. Income tax returns in the pandemic year
10. IMPCL to sell products on Government e-Market portal
11. Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare signs MoU with Central Silk Board
12. Delhi govt unveils ₹69,000 crore 'Deshbhakti Budget'
13. India's arms imports decreased by 33 per cent
14. Revised cost for strengthening power transmission system
15. Cabinet approves bill to set up Development Finance Institution
16. FDI limit increased from 49 to 74 % in Indian

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17. GPS-based toll collection to be rolled out within a year
18. NPPA brings 80 plus medicines under Price Regulation
19. MoU signed for implementation of City-Specific Action Plans in 132 cities
20. Cellphone makers seeking lockdown-hit FY21 as zero year for PLI

Geography, Environment, Biodiversity & Disaster Management

1. In a 'first', Himalayan Serow spotted in Assam
2. Simlipal forest Fire finally brought under control
3. Long-Lost Babbler Bird Documented in Borneo
4. Experts panel takes stock of turtle conservation
5. Nine Compressed Biogas Plants Commissioned
6. SC asks Centre why environment regulator has not been set up
7. Delhi is the most polluted capital city globally
8. Six tigers 'missing' in Ranthambore
9. PM launched the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' campaign
10. New Nagar Van Scheme to help in creation of Urban forests in cities
11. 'Buldhana Pattern' for Water Conservation
12. Odisha sends back tigress from Satkosia reserve to Madhya Pradesh
13. PM Modi asks people to visit Tulip garden in J&K
14. Political parties are frequently invoking rhinos in Assam
15. New species of red algae seen in West, South East Indian coast
16. PM underlines role of micro forests in minimising havoc caused by cyclones

History, Art & Culture

1. Channapattana toy makers thank PM for his support to artisans
2. Discovery of a large ceremonial chariot
3. Kerala church scheduled to be demolished for widening road now of importance
4. Development of Maa Bamleshwari Devi Temple, Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh
5. Institute of National Importance tag for National School of Drama
6. Declaration of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO
7. Afghan buddha's virtual return 20 years after being destroyed by Taliban
8. Kindle Version of Swami Chidbhavananda's Bhagvad Gita
9. PM slammed for calling 17th century Ahom general Lachit Borphukan
10. Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair's significant role in making classical dances
11. Shut down of Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India
12. The legacy of Tomar king Anangpal II
13. Significance of jaapi, xorai and gamosa in Assam poll battle
14. Chhatrasal Convention Centre developed under Swadesh Darshan Scheme
15. New Raag composed to pay tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

Important Days & Events

1. Magh Purnima 2021
2. National Science Day 2021
3. Bir Chilarai Divas 2021
4. Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) Celebrates its 9th Foundation Day
5. World Hearing Day 2021
6. National Safety Day 2021
7. International Women's Day 2021

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8. Kashmiri Pandits' festival 'Herath'
9. INAS 310 to celebrate diamond jubilee on March 21
10. World Water Day 2021
11. International Day of Forests 2021
12. World Sparrow Day 2021
13. Birth anniversary of shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan
14. World Tuberculosis Day 2021
15. Shigmo festivities in Goa
16. World Meteorological Day 2021

International Affairs

1. Pakistan to remain on FATF 'greylist'
2. UN body recommends Bangladesh graduation from LDC
3. Second edition of Maritime India Summit
4. Japan law requiring married couples to have the same surname
5. IAF's Suryakiran, Sarang teams to perform at Colombo air show
6. PM Modi Inaugurated Maritime India Summit 2021
7. IAF to participate in Exercise Desert Flag VI in UAE
8. India Japan back in another Sri Lanka port project
9. Significance of March 4 for QAnon supporters
10. First Strategic, Counter-Terrorism Dialogue between India-Nigeria
11. Virtual Summit between Prime Ministers of India and Sweden
12. India Science Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021
13. Scientists want Australia's worst female serial killer
14. France has admitted to killing an Algerian freedom fighter
15. Saudi-led coalition jets pound Sanaa
16. China gives green light for first downstream dams on Brahmaputra
17. Alliance Air Operates Maiden Flight to Bareilly
18. Modi inaugurates 'Maitri Setu' between India and Bangladesh
19. India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise DUSTLIK II commences in Ranikhet
20. PM attended first Quad Summit on March 12, 2021
21. UK's Turing Scheme affects Indian universities
22. First Virtual Trade Fair by APEDA draws huge response from foreign participants
23. Italy joins International Solar Alliance
24. Tanzania swears in first female president
25. India partners with Israeli firm for aluminium-air systems
26. Dignitaries to don Khadi Mujib Jackets during PM"s visit to Bangladesh
27. Chinese fishing flotilla leave disputed South China Sea reef
28. World Summit on Information Society Forum 2021
29. Former senator Bill Nelson nominated by Biden to lead NASA
30. US, EU, Britain, Canada Impose Sanctions on Chinese Officials
31. China-Taiwan clash kicked off the Freedom Pineapple campaign
32. India abstains in UN Human Rights Council vote on Sri Lanka
33. Suez Canal Blocked After Giant Container Ship Gets Stuck
34. Special-purpose acquisition companies are under the scanner
35. PM expresses gratitude to UNITAR
36. Defence Minister inaugurated Indo-Korean friendship-park in Delhi

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37. One of the pillars in the park encompasses Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's narration of Korea as "The Lamp of the East" which was published in Korean daily "Dong-A-Ilbo" in 1929. 3rd phase of Indian Beamline for Materials Research in Japan
38. Eritrea will pull out troops from Tigray
39. Commerce Department is planning re-routing shipments through the Cape of Good Hope
40. India - Bangladesh signed 5 Memorandum of Understandings
41. China and Iran sign 25-year 'strategic pact'
42. 9th Ministerial Conference of 'Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process on Afghanistan'
43. India US agree to revamp Strategic Energy Partnership
44. US suspends all trade engagement with Myanmar
45. Fiji, Zimbabwe, Niger & Paraguay received Made in India Covid-19 vaccines
46. Nepal to close all educational institutions amid degrading air quality
47. Militant attack on Palma town
48. India along with Pakistan Russia and China Attends Myanmar Parade
49. Myanmar Air Strike on Thai Border

Polity & Governance

1. Lateral entry inadequate to fill 22% vacancies' gap in IAS posts
2. Revision in the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013
3. Registration of Political Parties under section 29A
4. The fine print of Haryana's quota law
5. EVMs were used first time in Kerala in 50 booths in 1982
6. Only NRI quota seats based on entrance exams for OCI cardholders
7. Surat court acquits 122 accused of being members of SIMI
8. SC asks States to make it clear whether reservation should remain within 50% or not
9. BJP uses defection as a political device in Bengal election run-up
10. Lok Sabha passed National Capital Territory Bill
11. Rajya Sabha passes Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021
12. Wire wants the new IT Rules Struck Down
13. Tirath Singh Rawat sworn-in as new Uttarakhand CM
14. Uttarakhand wants Centre to withdraw ILP from Niti valley
15. Gujarat High Court's guidelines to end menstruation taboo
16. New scheme for tourist vehicle operators
17. Govt reconstitutes panel for studying Sarasvati river
18. Members of air quality panel 'surprised' at dissolution
19. Rajya Sabha passed bill to declare food tech institutes as national ones
20. SC asks Centre to respond to plea for fresh polls if most votes are NOTA
21. Supreme Court steps in to protect Great Indian Bustard
22. Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers moved in Lok Sabha
23. Jharkhand to reserves 75% jobs in private sector for locals
24. Bill raising upper limit to 24 weeks for abortions passed by Parliament
25. Census, NPR data to be ready before 2024 polls
26. Come out with rule curve for Mullaperiyar
27. Lok Sabha passed Appropriation Bill
28. Solicitor General urges Supreme Court to demarcate role of amicus curiae
29. ADR's analysis of the balance sheets of the national parties
30. Bihar Assembly passed Lokayukta Bill

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31. SC stays HC decision barring aided school teachers from contesting polls
32. Lok Sabha passed supplementary demand for grants
33. SC to hear on March 24 plea against sale of electoral bonds
34. Lok Sabha passed bill to amend the Mines and Mineral Act
35. Lok Sabha passed bill to place seven castes under Devendrakula Vellalars
36. Govt introduces NaBFID Bill in Lok Sabha to support funding infra projects
37. EC bans bike rallies 72 hours before polling
38. No plan to introduce Panchayat system in Assam tribal areas
39. Indus water panel holds meeting
40. National Commission for Allied & Healthcare Professions Bill
41. Chief Justice Bobde Recommends Justice NV Ramana as His Successor
42. Supreme Court bats for women officers in Army
43. Supreme Court for posting retired judges to clear backlog in High Courts
44. General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies
45. Almost 40% of RTI rejections last year did not invoke valid reason
46. Bihar special police bill passed amid unprecedented chaos in the assembly
47. Indian Government Says Companies Must Disclose Crypto Holdings
48. OCI card holders no longer required to carry old passports for India travel
49. President prorogues fifth session of 17th Lok Sabha
50. Chief Justice of India (CJI) S A Bobde lauded Goa's Uniform Civil Code
51. Election Commission's new rule for polling agents
52. Quran case and the powers of judicial review

Science & Technology

1. ISRO Successfully Launches PSLV-C51 Carrying Brazil's Amazonia-1
2. NASA's Perseverance rover makes historic Mars landing
3. Pixxel India's delayed flight to new space frontier
4. Hyderabad CSIR lab helped develop key molecule for Covaxin
5. Indian Railways install MTRC system, commuters to get real-time updates
6. Sugamya Bharat App launched to ease accessibility issues faced by differently abled
7. New Science Centre Inaugurated At Tripura
8. Karnataka launches engineering research policy
9. India's DRDO achieves new milestone in AIP system development
10. Contract inked for construction of 11 ammunition-cum-torpedo-cum missile barges
11. Gadkari inaugurated MSME technology centres in Bhopal and Visakhapatnam
12. India's biggest floating solar plant to be commissioned in next three months
13. NIO scientists mapping genomes in the Indian Ocean
14. India, Japan space agencies review cooperation
15. NewSpace India Limited to own and operate capital intensive space assets of ISRO
16. Mosquito protein inhibits number of viruses raises hope against Covid too
17. Global energy meet calls for accelerated shift to renewables
18. The diatom test done in the Mansukh Hiran death case
19. Parosmia: An odor distortion associated with COVID-19
20. India reports unique 'double mutant' coronavirus variant
21. NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite "NISAR"

Security

1. Army to induct 6,000 new Light Machine Guns

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2. Defence, security new criteria for 'trusted sources, products'
3. Defence Ministry deals with BDL to acquire 4,690 anti-tank guided missiles
4. India ranked 4th most powerful military in world

Society and Social Justice

1. Healthcare workers are foremost champions of humanity
2. In Nagaland, an itch for reviving prickly cages for offenders
3. Freedoms in India have reduced
4. Ease of Living Index 2020
5. Political significance of Assam's tea garden workers
6. India's first 'Transgender Community Desk' opens in Telangana's Gachibowli
7. Indian Railways launches single helpline no 139 for all queries
8. Promote women entrepreneurship across the country
9. All Major Schemes of WCD Ministry classified under 3 Umbrella Schemes
10. Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply
11. Rise in Arrests by 72% between 2015 and 2019
12. Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi as single non-lapsable reserve fund
13. Railways ensures 100% minimum wage payment to contract workers
14. Improving ranking in the World Press Freedom Index
15. Bee fences to ward off elephant attacks
16. Orunudoi scheme as game changer in Assam
17. Home Ministry informed Rajya Sabha about the Return of Kashmiri Pandits
18. Safety of Inter-State Migrant Workers
19. Global Wage Report 2020-21
20. Development of Nomadic Tribes
21. SAAMAR scheme to be launched to contain Anaemia
22. Pandemic may have doubled poverty in India
23. Agriculture MoS questions Global Hunger Index report's methodology
24. Labour Bureau and BECIL signed a service level agreement
25. NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar ignores tribal, ecological concerns
26. TB notifications register fall due to pandemic disruptions
27. India sends 200000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to UNPKF
28. Centre to Launch Unique ID Number for All Plots of Land by 2022

Sports

1. India leads medals tally with 13 Gold in ISSF Shooting
2. Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame begins in North Eastern prefecture of Fukushima

Miscellaneous

1. New digital regulations threaten media freedom
2. IIT Bombay to offer courses on gaming
3. Government Launches Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship for Students
4. Govt urges car manufacturers to build engines for alternative fuels
5. Nag River Pollution Abatement Project approved to treat waste flowing
6. Central Revenues Control Laboratory gets recognised as a RCL
7. Merger of Lok Sabha-Rajya Sabha TV into Sansad TV finalised
8. Opening of 2 new Kendriya Vidyalayas in Karnataka and Punjab
9. Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad best cities in EoLI 2020

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10. QS World University Rankings 2021
11. Uttarakhand govt is grooming Gairsain as its summer capital
12. President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates conservation works at Singorgarh Fort
13. New rule on airbags means for passengers and carmakers
14. EV financing industry to be worth ₹3.7 lakh crore by 2030
15. 89th birthday of Indian scientist Udupi Ramachandra Rao
16. Indian Navy's third stealth Scorpene class submarine INS Karanj commissioned
17. Education Minister announced linking of OTPRMS certificates with DigiLocker
18. INS Jalashwa arrives at port of Anjouan in Comoros
19. BRO begins opening of key pass to Leh ahead of schedule
20. Over 60% OBC, SC positions vacant in IIMs
21. Japan hold Myanmar's first satellite on space station after coup
22. Telemedicine service eSanjeevani completes 3 million consultations
23. Harsh Vardhan appointed as chairman of 'Stop TB Partnership Board'
24. Azim Premji University launches volume one of its 'Issues in Education' series
25. Power Ministry launched the GRAM UJALA programme in Arrah
26. The emerging crisis of obtaining helium in India
27. Ganga Quest 2021 online quiz competition
28. Centre readies draft plan for district-wise export promotion
29. Cabinet apprised on progress under National Health Mission 2019-20
30. CBSE launched new assessment framework for Classes 6 to 10
31. Government offers 67 blocks in second tranche of commercial coal mine auction
32. Education Ministry launched 100 comic books created by teachers
33. Sabarmati River Front Development project
34. New version of 'Exam Warriors' to make them stress free

Awards and Honours Current Affairs

Sahitya Akademi fellowship for Professor Velcheru Narayana Rao

A distinguished scholar, writer, translator and critic, Professor Velcheru Narayana Rao has been elected honorary fellow of Sahitya Akademi.

The election of Narayana Rao has been made based on his contribution to the Telugu literature.

His publications include Girls for Sale: Kanyashulkam and A play from Colonial India.

The Sahitya Akademi Fellowship is a literary honour in India bestowed by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.

It is the highest honour conferred by the Akademi on a living writer, the number of fellows at no time exceeding 21.

Elected from among writers thought by the Akademi to be of acknowledged merit, the fellows are sometimes described as the "immortals of Indian literature."

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was the first writer elected to the Fellowship; Mulk Raj Anand was the first Indian English writer to be inducted in 1989.

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Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain assumes office as CISC

Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain took over as Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC).

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) is the head of the Integrated Defence Staff which acted as the point organisation for jointmanship in the Ministry of Defence.

The CISC is a Three-star rank officer from the three Services in rotation.

The CISC reports to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (Chairman COSC) in New Delhi.

He is assisted by the following five Principal Staff Officers (all three-star appointments) who headed the various branches within the IDS.

Jaideep Bhatnagar takes over as Principal Director General of PIB

Jaideep Bhatnagar has taken over as Principal Director General, Press Information Bureau. He takes over from Shri Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia who superannuated on 28th February 2021.

It is one of the media units working under the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.

It is the nodal agency for public communication and media relations for the entire Union Government of India

It is based in National Media Centre, New Delhi.

It was established in 1919 as a small cell under Home Ministry under the British government.

In 2019, the PIB set up a fact-checking unit to check government related news.

CERAWeek Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has received the prestigious CERAWeek Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award.

CERAWeek Global Energy and Environment Leadership Award was instituted in 2016.

It recognizes the commitment of leadership on the future of global energy & environment and for offering solutions and policies for energy access, affordability & environmental stewardship.

CERAWeek

CERAWeek was founded in 1983 by Dr. Daniel Yergin.

It has been organized in Houston in March every year since 1983 and is considered the world's premier annual energy platform.

CERAWeek 2021 is being convened virtually from 1st March to 5th March, 2021.

ICAR received King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award of FAO

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research received the prestigious "King Bhumibol World Soil Day - 2020 Award" of FAO.

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The international recognition was announced by the FAO, Rome on the eve of World Soil Day - 2020 in view of the ICAR's excellent contributions in "Soil Health Awareness" on the theme "Stop soil erosion, save our future" during the last year.

Launched in 2018, the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award acknowledges individuals or institutions that raise public awareness of soils by organising successful and influential World Soil Day celebrations.

The award, sponsored by the Kingdom of Thailand, is named after King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand for his lifelong commitment to raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management and rehabilitation for food security, poverty alleviation and more.

Formers winners of the King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award include Practical Action in Bangladesh in 2018 and the Costa Rican Soil Science Society (AACS) in 2019.

Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal win Pritzker Architecture Prize 2021

Social housing architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, founders of French studio Lacaton & Vassal, have been named the 2021 winners of the Pritzker Architecture Prize.

French architects Lacaton and Vassal were named the winners of the award for their body of work that "reflects architecture's democratic spirit" and their "commitment to a restorative architecture".

Their recognition marks the first time a French female architect has won the prize, with Lacaton becoming the sixth woman to receive the award since it was established in 1979.

The Pritzker Architecture Prize is awarded annually to honor a living architect

Founded in 1979 by Jay A. Pritzker and his wife Cindy, the award is funded by the Pritzker family and sponsored by the Hyatt Foundation.

It is considered to be one of the world's premier architecture prizes, and is often referred to as the Nobel Prize of architecture.

Gandhi Peace Prizes awarded to Sultan Qaboos and Mujibur Rahman

The Gandhi Peace Prize for the past two years will be conferred on late Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said and Bangladeshi leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for their contributions to social and political transformation through non-violent methods.

The Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2019 is being conferred on (Late) His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said of Oman.

The Gandhi Peace Prize for the year 2020 is being conferred on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi.

The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.

The Jury for Gandhi Peace Prize is chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sh Narendra Modi ,and comprises of two ex-officio members, namely the Chief Justice of India and Leader of the single largest Opposition Party in Lok Sabha.

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67th National Film Awards

The winners of the 67th National Film Awards were announced. The ceremony had been delayed by almost a year due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Every year, the National Film Awards ceremony is held on May 3.

Priyadarshan's Marakkar Arabikadalinte Simham was chosen as the best feature film and Sanjay Puran Singh Chauhan won the best director award for Hindi film Bahattar Hoorain at the 67th National Film Awards.

Headlined by Mohanlal, Marakkar Arabikadalinte Simham, or the Lion of Arabian Sea, is a period action drama about a 16th century Malayali naval chieftain who fought the Portuguese invasion.

Manoj Bajpayee and Dhanush shared the best actor award. While Manoj was awarded for his measured performance as a retired police constable in Bhonsle, Dhanush won it for depicting a range of emotions in Vetrimaaran's multi-layered revenge drama Asuran.

Kangana Ranaut won the best actress award for her varied performances in Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi and Panga.

Sikkim has bagged the award for being Most Film Friendly State.

Asha Bhosle conferred with Maharashtra Bhushan Award

Legendary singer Asha Bhosle to be presented the Maharashtra Bhushan award for the year 2020.

A committee headed by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held a meeting earlier today in this regard.

The award, instituted in 1996 by the State government to recognise distinguished work and achievements of eminent persons from the State, representing different walks of life, carries a cash prize of ₹10 lakh and a citation.

Born on September 8, 1933, in Maharashtra's Sangli district, Ms. Bhosle was initiated into music by her father, the renowned Marathi stage actor-singer Dinanath Mangeshkar.

Bhosle received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2000.

Mahinder Giri won International Ranger Award

Prakash Javadekar, Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change has congratulated Mahinder Giri, range officer of Rajaji Tiger Reserve for being the only ranger from Asia to win the prestigious International Ranger Award for his contribution towards conservation.

The award has been announced for 10 professionals across the world by the International Union for Conservation of Nature IUCN and World Commission on Protected Areas WCPA.

Developed through a collaboration between the IUCN WCPA, the International Ranger Federation, Global Wildlife Conservation, and Conservation Allies, these awards, created in 2020, aim to highlight and felicitate the extraordinary work that rangers do in protected and conserved areas worldwide.

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Economic Development Current Affairs

Chief Economic Advisor Backs Proposal to Bring Petrol under GST

Chief Economic Advisor K V Subramanian has backed a proposal to bring petroleum products under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas including domestic cooking gas, naphtha, and furnace oil are covered under the GST.

Several other products such as crude oil, aviation turbine fuel, petrol, diesel, and natural gas continue to remain outside the purview of GST.

According to official statements union government is half way to bring petrol and diesel products under GST.

Bringing petrol and diesel products under the GST poses no legislative hurdle as it just requires the GST Council's nod. It will address the problem of varying fuel prices and ensure similar petroleum across the nation.

Customers can claim their Input tax credit for the petrol and diesel. It will reduce the cascading of taxes on intermediate products. Maintaining the GST value chain will also provide significant efficiency gains.

Agriculture Ministers celebrated the first anniversary of the Central Sector Scheme

Union Ministers for Agriculture celebrated the first anniversary of the Central Sector Scheme on "Formation & Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)".

The scheme was launched by Prime Minister on 29.02.2020 at Chitrakoot (Uttar Pradesh) with a budgetary provision of Rs 6865 crore.

FPOs will make farming more viable by aggregating land.

More than 2200 FPOs produce clusters have been allocated for the formation of FPOs in the current year, of which 100 FPOs for specialized Organic produce, 100 FPOs from Oilseeds & 50 commodity-specific FPOs with value chain development will be formed.

Implementing Agencies (IAs) are engaging Cluster-Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) to aggregate, register & provide professional handholding support to each FPO for a period of 5 years.

CBBOs will be the platform for an end to end knowledge for all issues related to FPO promotion.

FPOs will be provided financial assistance up to Rs 18.00 lakh per FPO for a period of 03 years.

FAO pledges to scale up direct use of digital financial transfers

In another step towards creating a "digital FAO", the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is committing to increasing by 50 percent its delivery of digital financial transfers and vouchers to beneficiaries.

Based at the United Nations, the Better than Cash Alliance is a partnership of governments, companies and international organizations that accelerates the transition from cash to responsible digital payments.

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The Alliance has 75 members which are committed to digitizing payments.

The Alliance Secretariat works with members on their journey to digitize payments by:

- Providing advisory services based on their priorities.
- Sharing action-oriented research and fostering peer learning on responsible practices.
- Conducting advocacy at national, regional and global level.

It was created in 2012. It was launched by the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the United States Agency for International Development, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Citigroup, the Ford Foundation, the Omidyar Network, and Visa Inc.

Centre garners ₹77,814.80 cr after spectrum auction

The telecom spectrum auctions concluded after a day and a half of bidding, with the Centre garnering ₹77,814.80 crore in revenues. The amount exceeded the expectations of the government as well as analysts, as telcos focussed on renewing expiring spectrum and consolidating holdings in select bands.

The amount exceeded the expectations of the government as well as analysts, as telcos focused on renewing expiring spectrum and consolidating holdings in select bands.

The Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Jio was the biggest bidder, acquiring 488.35 MHz of spectrum for ₹57,122.65 crore, followed by Bharti Airtel, which bid for 355.45 MHz of spectrum for ₹18,698.75 crore. Vodafone Idea bid for only 11.8 MHz of airwaves for ₹1,993.4 crore.

The spectrum will be assigned to bidders for a period of 20 years.

In the auction — the first in nearly five years and among the shortest, with participation from only three players — a total of 2308.80 MHz of spectrum across seven bands and worth about ₹3.92 lakh crore was put up for sale.

Bids were received for 855.60 MHz, or 37%, of the spectrum. No bids were received for the premium 700 MHz and 2500 MHz bands. The 700 MHz band remained unsold during the 2016 auctions as well due to the high prices.

Reliance Jio acquired spectrum in all 22 telecom circles, across 800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2300 MHz bands, and its owned spectrum footprint had increased by 55% to 1,717 MHz.

India added 1 billionaire every week in pandemic-hit 2020

India retained the third spot on the list of countries with a maximum number of billionaires. The country's elite billion dollar club saw the addition of 55 new entrepreneurs in 2020 despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

India is now home to 177 resident dollar billionaires while overall Indians with a net worth exceeding 1 billion dollars is 209, according to Hurun Global Rich List 2021.

Tesla's Elon Musk added $151 billion to become the richest man in the world for the first time with a net worth of $197 billion, followed by Amazon's Jeff Bezos ($189 billion).

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, who emerged as the richest man in India with a net worth of $83 billion, came in at number eight.

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India retained the third spot in the number of billionaires from a country with a total of 177 billionaires living in the country.

In the list of Indian billionaires, Mr. Ambani was followed by Adani Group's Gautam Adani and family with his wealth almost doubling to $32 billion.

SEBI calls for mechanism to prevent market abuse

SEBI asked stock exchanges, clearing corporations and depositories to put in place a code of conduct and institutional mechanism to prevent fraud or market abuse by them and their designated persons.

Under this, the managing director (MD) or chief executive officer (CEO) of market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) will be obligated to frame a code of conduct and put in place an institutional mechanism.

Further, the board of directors needs to ensure compliance by the MD/CEO in this regard.

MIIs will have to formulate a code of conduct to regulate, monitor and report trading by their designated persons and immediate relative of designated persons towards achieving compliance with the prohibition of insider trading regulations.

Assam's famed red rice on way to US markets

In a major boost to India's rice exports potential, the first consignment of 'red rice' was flagged off to the US.

Iron rich 'red rice' is grown in Brahmaputra valley of Assam, without the use of any chemical fertilizer.

The rice variety is referred as 'Bao-dhaan', which is an integral part of the Assamese food.

As the exports of 'red rice' grow, it would bring enhance incomes of farming families of the Brahmaputra flood plains.

India's first grade- separated Urban Expressway

The Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Nitin Gadkari reviewed the progress of India's first grade separated urban expressway, Dwarka Expressway (NH – 248BB) .

The Minister expressed hope that the 29-kilometre long Expressway, being constructed under the Bharatmala Project and with a cost of Rs.8,662 crore, would be completed before the Independence Day next year.

Being built in four packages, total length of the Expressway is 29 kilometres out of which 18.9 kilometre length falls in Haryana while remaining 10.1 kilometre length is in Delhi. It starts from Shiv-Murti on National Highway-8 and ends near KherkiDaula Toll Plaza.

Delhi-Gurugram section of National Highway-8, a part of Delhi-Jaipur-Ahmedabad-Mumbai arm of Golden Quadrilateral (GQ), is presently carrying traffic of over three lakh Passenger Car Units (PCUs). With the construction of the present project, 50 to 60 per cent traffic on National Highway-8 will be reduced.

Income tax returns in the pandemic year

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India's economic stress preceded the Covid-19 pandemic, but worsened in its aftermath as individuals with incomes and salaries took a hit.

The latest government data shows a 6.6 per cent contraction in the number of income tax returns (ITRs) filed by individuals earning up to Rs 50 lakh in financial year 2019-20.

The latest data on ITRs showed a 9.8 per cent contraction in filings of ITR-1 offline and 4.5 per cent contraction in filings of ITR-1 online for FY20.

ITR-1 Sahaj can be filed by a resident individual, who is not included in the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF), having an income of up to Rs 50 lakh.

Total income includes income from salary or pension, income from one house property, income from other sources such as interest from a bank account (excluding winnings from lottery and income from racehorses, income taxable under section 115BBDA, or income of nature referred to in section 115BBE) and where agricultural income is up to Rs 5,000.

IMPCL to sell products on Government e-Market portal

Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL) will sell products on Government e-Market (GeM) portal. The IMPCL and GeM has finalised a deal in this regard and now the Ayurvedic and Unani medicines of IMPCL will figure on the GeM portal to hundreds of government sector buyers.

The deal between IMPCL and GeM was finalised on 03.03.2021, when GeM created 31 categories covering 311 medicines, which are live in the marketplace and IMPCL can now upload these medicines on GeM Portal.

With this decision of GeM, the Ayurvedic and Unani medicines of IMPCL will figure on the GeM portal to hundreds of government sector buyers, at prices finalised by Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure.

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare signs MoU with Central Silk Board

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Central Silk Board under the Ministry of Textiles on a convergence model for the implementation of Agroforestry in the silk sector under the ongoing Sub-Mission on Agroforestry (SMAF) Scheme.

This initiative in sericulture sector is especially targeted for augmentation of sericulture host plants e.g. Mulberry, Asan, Arjuna, Som, Soalu, Kesseru, BadaKesseru, Phanat, etc. to be cultivated both as block plantations and border or peripheral plantations on farmlands.

The Central Silk Board (CSB) is a Statutory Body, established during 1948. It functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Textiles, having head quarter at Bengaluru.

Delhi govt unveils ₹69,000 crore 'Deshbhakti Budget'

Finance Minister Manish Sisodia presented a ₹69,000 crore 'Deshbhakti Budget' for the 2021-22 fiscal replete with provisions seeking to inspire patriotism in the run up to the 75th Independence Day, free COVID vaccination, and a vision for "India at 2047". This was an e-budget which he presented from his tablet.

The theme of the Delhi government's 2021-22 budget is 'deshbhakti' or patriotism.

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This will entail placing 500 national flags across the city, like the one in Connaught Place. Rs 45 crore have been set aside for this head.

Additionally, Rs 10 crore each have been set aside for programmes and events on the lives and contribution of Bhagat Singh and BR Ambedkar.

Following Initiatives have also been clubbed under this particular head

- Starting a youth mentorship programme for underprivileged students.
- Arranging free Yoga camps for small groups of people.
- Starting a Delhi armed forces academy to prepare children for recruitment in the armed forces.
- Giving Rs 1 crore to families of police officials and defence personnel who die in the line of duty.

Last year Delhi government also announced the deskbhakti curriculum.

He also announced that the Delhi government aims to bid for hosting the 2048 Olympic Games.

India's arms imports decreased by 33 per cent

Arms imports decreased by 33% between 2011–15 and 2016–20 while India continues to remain the second largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia, according to a report from Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The overall drop in arms imports between 2011–15 and 2016–20 was due to complex and lengthy procurement processes, combined with attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian arms by diversifying its network of arms suppliers.

Russia was the largest arms supplier in both years. However, Russia's deliveries dropped by 53% between the two periods and its share of Indian arms imports fell from 70 to 49%.

France and Israel were the second and third largest arms suppliers in 2016–20. India's arms imports from France increased by 709% while those from Israel rose by 82%.

The U.S. was the fourth largest supplier in 2016–20.

Combat aircraft and associated missiles made up more than 50% of arms imports.

Revised cost for strengthening power transmission system

The Union Cabinet approved the revised cost estimates of the comprehensive scheme for strengthening power transmission and distribution in Arunachal Pradash and Sikkim at Rs 9,129.32 crore.

The scheme is being implemented through POWERGRID, a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under Ministry of Power in association with Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

The scheme was initially approved in December, 2014 as a Central Sector Plan Scheme of Ministry of Power and the entire cost of the scheme will be borne by the Government of India through the Plan Scheme of Ministry of Power.

It is targeted to be commissioned in phased manner by December 2021. After commissioning, the created transmission and distribution system will be owned and maintained by the respective State Utilities.

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It is a major step towards economic development of the States of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim through strengthening of Intra - State Transmission and Distribution systems.

Cabinet approves bill to set up Development Finance Institution

The union cabinet, on March 16, 2021, approved a bill to set up a Development Finance Institution (DFI), to offer long-term capital support for the sector, in a move that could speed-up the process of infrastructure development in India.

By setting it up, Government can leverage around Rs 3 trillion from the markets in a few years to provide long-term funds to infrastructure projects as well as for development needs of the country.

Besides, the government will give Rs 5,000 crore as grant to the institution. The grant has been provided as tax-saving bonds.

The amount will provide for the hedging cost if the DFI borrows from multilateral or bilateral institutions and it will subsidise the guarantee fee.

The DFI will be fully government-owned initially and the promoter's stake will be brought down to 26 per cent in the next few years. At all times, the government will continue to hold 26 per cent in the entity.

The government will provide a 10-year tax exemption to funds invested in the DFI to attract long-term players such as insurance and pension funds.

FDI limit increased from 49 to 74 % in Indian

The Rajya Sabha has passed the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021. It seeks to amend the Insurance Act, 1938 which will increase the limit of foreign investment allowed in Indian insurance companies.

The Bill amends the Insurance Act, 1938 to increase the maximum foreign investment allowed in an Indian insurance company.

The Act provides the framework for functioning of insurance businesses and regulates the relationship between an insurer, its policyholders, its shareholders, and the regulator (the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India).

The Act allows foreign investors to hold up to 49% of the capital in an Indian insurance company, which must be owned and controlled by an Indian entity.

The Bill increases the limit on foreign investment in an Indian insurance company from 49% to 74%, and removes restrictions on ownership and control.

However, such foreign investment may be subject to additional conditions as prescribed by the central government.

GPS-based toll collection to be rolled out within a year

Union road transport and highways Minister Nitin Gadkari told Lok Sabha that all toll booths across the NH network will be done away with and a complete GPS-based toll collection system will be rolled out within one year.

It means that toll collection will happen via GPS. The money will be collected based on GPS imaging of vehicles.

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He said 93% of the vehicles were paying toll using FASTag — a system that facilitates electronic payment of fee at toll plazas seamlessly — but the remaining 7% had still not adopted it despite paying double the toll.

He also shared details of the vehicle scrapping policy, first announced in the Union Budget for 2021-22, according to which the automobile industry in India will see a jump in turnover to ₹10 lakh crore from ₹4.5 lakh crore.

The new policy provides for fitness tests after the completion of 20 years in the case of privately owned vehicles and 15 years in the case of commercial vehicles.

Any vehicle that fails the fitness test or does not manage renewal of its registration certificate may be declared as an End of Life Vehicle.

The policy will kick in for government vehicles from April 1, 2022. Mandatory fitness testing for heavy commercial vehicles will start from April 1, 2023, and for all other categories of vehicles, including personal vehicles, it will start in phases from June 1, 2024.

NPPA brings 80 plus medicines under Price Regulation

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) NPPA fixes the price of 81 medicines including off-patent anti-diabetic drugs allowing due benefits of patent expiry to the patients.

NPPA has fixed the retail price of 'insulin human injection, 200IU/ml' and '70% isophane insulin human suspension + 30% insulin human injection 200IU/ml' produced by Wockhardt Ltd at ₹106.65 per ml each (excluding GST) and Prasugrel Hydrochloride 10 mg + Aspirin 75 mg capsule by Torrent Pharmaceuticals Ltd at ₹20.16 per capsule (excluding GST).

The decision was taken because the five-year price exemption given to these medicines on account of indigenous R&D got over recently.

Revision in existing ceiling prices of scheduled formulations based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) was also approved by the Authority. The revised prices will be effective from April, 2021.

It also decided to retain the revised ceiling price of Heparin injection up to September this year. Last year, the NPPA had hiked the price of the essential blood thinner on account of rising raw material costs from China. The ceiling price was fixed till March 31 this year.

MoU signed for implementation of City-Specific Action Plans in 132 cities

Representatives of State Pollution Control Boards, Urban Local Bodies & Institutes of Repute (IoR) for 132 identified cities signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for implementation of city specific action plans under National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is a long-term, time-bound, national level strategy to tackle air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.

It targets to achieve 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter concentrations by 2024 (with 2017 as base year).

A National Knowledge Network comprising leading air quality specialists has also been constituted as a technical advisory group to support activities under NCAP and guide local Institutes of Repute (IoRs) in conducting air quality researches.

Cellphone makers seeking lockdown-hit FY21 as zero year for PLI

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The Indian Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) has written letters to the NITI Aayog, the Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, as well as officials from other ministries to consider declaring 2020-21 as zero year for production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for manufacturing of mobile phones.

PLI schemes for all sectors that have been announced since April last year envisage incentives on achievement of a minimum threshold of cumulative incremental investment and incremental sales of manufactured goods net of taxes.

Since the government notified the PLI for mobile manufacturing on April 1 last year, FY21 was considered as the base year for the calculation of incremental investments and sales, and therefore the incentives to be given to companies.

Geography, Environment, Biodiversity & Disaster Management Current Affairs

In a 'first', Himalayan Serow spotted in Assam

A Himalayan mammal, somewhere between a goat and an antelope, has been confirmed as the newest creature to be spotted in Assam.

The Himalayan serow is a subspecies of the mainland serow native to the Himalayas.

The Himalayan serow is mostly blackish, with flanks, hindquarters, and upper legs that are a rusty red; its lower legs are whitish.

- Common name: Himalayan Serow
- Scientific name: Capricornis sumatraensi thar.
- Local name: Jingal, Yemu.
- Description: An appearance of a goat with long, donkey like ears, and a habit of standing with forelegs astraddle, make the Serow an ungainly goat antelope. Its coarse coat(long hair length than the Goral) varies from black to red.
- IUCN status: Near threatened.
- It is listed in CITES Appendix I.

Simlipal forest Fire finally brought under control

The Simlipal forest reserve area frequently witnesses forest fires during dry weather conditions. A fire which started in the biosphere reserve area in February and has been raging for nearly a week now, was finally brought under control.

Similipal, which derives its name from 'Simul' (silk cotton) tree, is a national park and a tiger reserve situated in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district.

Similipal and the adjoining areas, comprising 5,569 sq km, was declared a biosphere reserve by the Government of India on June 22, 1994, and lies in the eastern end of the eastern ghat.

This protected area is part of the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2009.

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Long-Lost Babbler Bird Documented in Borneo

Long-Lost Babbler Bird Documented in Borneo for the First Time in Over 170 Years. The Bird was last recorded between 1843 and 1848, when a scientist collected the first and only museum specimen.

The black-browed babbler (Malacocincla perspicillata) is a songbird species in the family Pellorneidae.

The species is endemic to Borneo.

Its IUCN conservation status is Data Deficient. Formerly, it was classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN.

Only a single specimen, collected in the nineteenth century was known, until the bird was rediscovered in Indonesia during 2020.

Experts panel takes stock of turtle conservation

A three-member panel constituted by Orissa High Court made a field trip to Gahirmatha marine sanctuary and assessed the measures taken for the conservation of endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles.

The action followed a February 4 report on an online environment magazine which said 800 olive ridley turtles have died since January due to negligence of the States Forest and Fisheries department.

The olive ridley turtles turn up in millions for mass nesting along the Odisha coast every year.

Gahirmatha beach off Bay of Bengal coast in Kendrapara district, Odisha is acclaimed as the world's largest nesting ground of these turtles.

Nine Compressed Biogas Plants Commissioned

"Sustainable Alternative towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)" scheme was launched on October 01, 2018 wherein Oil and Gas Marketing Companies (OGMCs) are inviting Expression of Interest (EoI) from potential entrepreneur to procure Compressed Bio Gas (CBG).

Under this scheme few of the enablers like assured price for offtake of CBG with long term agreements by OGMCs; inclusion of bio manures produced from CBG plants as Fermented Organic Manure (FOM) under Fertilizer Control Order 1985; inclusion of CBG projects under Priority Sector Lending by RBI have been provided.

So far 9 CBG plants have been commissioned and started supply of CBG under SATAT scheme. These plants are located in Andhra Pradesh (1 No.), Gujarat (3 No.), Haryana (1 No.), Maharashtra (3 No.) and Tamil Nadu (1 No.).

These plants are set up by entrepreneurs and private companies who have raised financial resources to develop these plants on the basis of LoIs issued by OGMCs.

SC asks Centre why environment regulator has not been set up

The Supreme Courtroom requested the federal government to elucidate why it had not arrange an "impartial surroundings regulator" to supervise inexperienced clearances.

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The top court had ordered the setting up of a national environment regulatory body to ensure independent oversight of green clearances way back in July 2011 in Lafarge Umiam Mining Private Limited v. Union of India, commonly known as the 'Lafarge mining case'.

In 2011, the court had asked the Centre to appoint a national regulator for appraising projects, enforcing environmental conditions for approvals and to impose penalties on polluters.

The court had made it clear that till such mechanism was put in place, the Environment Ministry (MoEF) "should prepare a panel of accredited institutions from which alone the project proponent should obtain the Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and, that too, on the Terms of Reference to be formulated by the MoEF".

Delhi is the most polluted capital city globally

According to the report from IQ Air, Delhi remained the most polluted capital city in the world but India, on the whole, had improved its average annual PM 2.5 (particulate matter) levels higher in 2020 than in 2019.

IQ Air is a Swiss air quality technology company, specialising in protection against airborne pollutants, and developing air quality monitoring and air cleaning products.

India is the third most polluted country in 2020, unlike in 2019, when its air was the fifth most noxious.

Bangladesh and Pakistan were the countries in 2020 with worse average PM2.5 levels than India.

China ranked 11th in the latest report, a deterioration from the 14th in the previous edition of the report.

When ranked by cities, Hotan in China was the most polluted, with an average concentration of 110.2 $\mu g/m^3$, followed by Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh at 106. Of the 15 most polluted cities, 13 were in India.

In the 2020 report, 106 countries were evaluated. The pollution levels are weighted averages, meaning that the population of a country influences the pollution values reported.

In 2020, 84% of all monitored countries observed air quality improvements.

However, of the 106 monitored countries, only 24 met the World Health Organization annual guidelines for PM 2.5.

Six tigers 'missing' in Ranthambore

Six tigers have been unaccounted for since March 2020 in the Ranthambore tiger sanctuary, Rajasthan. However, State forest officials are not willing to label them "missing" and denied reports that they may have been poached.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority, a wing of the Union Environment Ministry, has constituted a committee to ascertain the disappearance of the tigers.

The Ranthambore Reserve is the only source of tigers in the territory with about 53 tigers constituting over 90% of the population in this block, as per the latest census made public last year.

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India has 2,967 tigers, a third more than in 2014, according to results of a census made public on July 29 last year. Ranthambore, according to this exercise, had 55 tigers.

Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of tigers at 526, closely followed by Karnataka (524) and Uttarakhand (442).

Chhattisgarh and Mizoram saw a decline in tiger population and all other States saw an increase.

PM launched the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' campaign

Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi launched the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain' campaign on occasion of World Water Day via video conferencing.

This project involves transfer of water from the Ken to the Betwa River through the construction of Daudhan Dam and a canal linking the two rivers, the Lower Orr Project, Kotha Barrage and Bina Complex Multipurpose Project.

It will provide annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh ha, drinking water supply to about 62 lakh people and also generate 103 MW of hydropower.

The Project will be of immense benefit to the water starved region of Bundelkhand, especially to the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh.

New Nagar Van Scheme to help in creation of Urban forests in cities

Union Environment and Information & Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar has said that the New Nagar Van Scheme will help in creation of Urban forests in the cities.

The scheme will also fill the gap between the cities and villages in terms of having their own forest cover. He cited India's age old tradition of developing and caring for village forests in the vicinity of almost every rural patch.

Under the Nagar Van Scheme, Urban forests will be developed in 200 cities in its first phase.

'Buldhana Pattern' for Water Conservation

NITI Aayog has prepared draft guidelines for convergence of the activities of (i) sourcing earth for improvement/construction of national highways, state roads and railways and (ii) water conservation works through desiltation/ deepening of water bodies.

This two-fold activity has already been successfully implemented as a pilot project in the Buldhana district of Maharashtra state.

Water conservation is the practice of using water efficiently to reduce unnecessary water usage. According to Fresh Water Watch, water conservation is important because fresh clean water is a limited resource, as well as a costly one.

Odisha sends back tigress from Satkosia reserve to Madhya Pradesh

The much-vaunted inter-state tiger translocation drive ended in a whimper after Sundari, the four-and-half year-old tigress relocated from Madhya Pradesh in 2018 to Satkoisa tiger reserve in Odisha's Angul district was sent back to the Kanha reserve in Madhya Pradesh.

The five-year-old tigress spent 28 months in captivity in Satkosia Tiger Reserve, Odisha as the two states lingered on the process for her relocation.

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The tiger relocation project was initiated in 2018 wherein two big cats, a male (Mahavir) from Kanha Tiger Reserve and a female (Sundari) from Bandhavgarh from Madhya Pradesh were relocated to Satkosia Tiger Reserve in Odisha, to shore up the tiger population in the state.

The project was started under the project of "augmentation and recovery of tiger population in Satkosia tiger reserve". Six tigers (three pairs) from different reserves of Madhya Pradesh were to be sent to Odisha under the project.

The project ran into trouble within weeks of initiation. Subsequently, the project was suspended by National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

PM Modi asks people to visit Tulip garden in J&K

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked everyone to visit Tulip garden, located at the foothills of Zabarwan range in Jammu and Kashmir, and enjoy the warm hospitality of the people of the Union territory.

The tulip garden will be thrown open to public on March 25, 2021.

The garden will see over 15 lakh flowers of more than 64 varieties in bloom.

The Zabarwan Range is a short sub-mountain range between Pir Panjal and Great Himalayan Range in the central part of the Kashmir Valley in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in India.

Political parties are frequently invoking rhinos in Assam

Political parties are frequently invoking Assam's world-famous one-horned rhino to connect with the people of the state, the animal has now become a part of poll rhetoric, with promises to save "the pride of Assam".

The projection of rhino as the pride of Assam began during the Assam Movement (1979-85).

Rhino started emerging as a player in the political narrative of Assam as "its poaching was linked to the control of indigenous people over land, resources and influx of immigrants".

According to the rhino census of 2018, there are 2,413 rhinos in Kaziranga alone.

It is common for every party contesting in Bokakhat and Kaliabor, the two constituencies that cover most of Kaziranga (the park spreads over six constituencies), to say that they will protect the rhino.

New species of red algae seen in West, South East Indian coast

Two new species of seaweed have been discovered by a group of marine biologists from Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. Named Hypnea indica (after India) and Hypnea bullata (because of the blisterlike marks on its body – bullate), the seaweeds are part of the genus Hypnea or red seaweeds.

Named Hypnea indica (after India) and Hypnea bullata (because of the blisterlike marks on its body – bullate), the seaweeds are part of the genus Hypnea or red seaweeds.

While Hypnea indica was discovered Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, and Somnath Pathan and Sivrajpur in Gujarat, Hypnea bullata was discovered from Kanyakumari and Diu island of Daman and Diu.

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They grow in the intertidal regions of the coast, namely the area that is submerged during the high tide and exposed during low tides.

The genus Hypnea consists of calcareous, erect, branched red seaweeds. There are 61 species of which 10 were reported in India. With our two new species, the total number of species now would be 63.

PM underlines role of micro forests in minimising havoc caused by cyclones

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has underlined the role of micro forests in minimising the havoc caused by cyclones in coastal areas.

Addressing the nation through his Mann ki Baat program, the Prime Minister said it's nature itself which can prevent natural disasters.

Through his Mann ki Baat program, the Prime Minister, commended two odia activists- one, Mr. Vijay Kumar Kabi of Kendrapara and the other Mr. Amaresh Samanta of Paradeep, for their individual efforts in raising micro forests to fend coastal villages from the wrath of high tides.

Prime Minister's emphasis on creating micro forests in coastal villages assumes greater significance for a state like Odisha, which has been witnessing cyclones almost on a regular basis, be it Phailin in 2013, Hudhud in 2014 down to Titli 2018, Fani 2019 or for that matter, Amphan only last year.

History, Art & Culture Affairs

Channapattana toy makers thank PM for his support to artisans

The Channapattana toy maker Puttaswamy has thanked Prime Minister for his support to the Indian toy makers.

Channapatana is a city and taluk headquarter in Ramanagara District, Karnataka, India.

Channapatana is also called as Channpatna by locals.

The city is famous for its wooden toys and lacquerware. Channapatna is also called Town of toys ("Gombegala nagara").

The origin of these toys is dated back to the reign of Tipu Sultan who invited the artisans from Persia in order to train the local artisans in the art of wooden toy making.

These toys have been given Geographical Indication tag by Government of India.

Discovery of a large ceremonial chariot

Archaeologists working at Pompeii have announced the discovery of a large ceremonial chariot, found with four wheels, its iron components, bronze and tin decorations, mineralised wood remains, and imprints of organic materials.

It is likely that the chariot was used as a transport vehicle by Roman elites during various ceremonies.

This is an exceptional discovery, because it represents a unique find – which has no parallel in Italy thus far – in an excellent state of preservation.

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Pompeii was a Roman town in Southern Italy's Campania region situated along the Bay of Naples. The town was completely buried by volcanic ash after the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, over 2,000 years ago.

Kerala church scheduled to be demolished for widening road now of importance

Centuries-old St. George's Orthodox Church at Cheppad has faced the risk of demolition for widening of National Highway (NH) 66, but it is now set to be declared a Centrally protected monument of national importance by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

The church is one of the rarest in Kerala, having traditional Kerala church architectural pattern with rare and beautiful mural paintings on the walls of the altar.

The church is thought to date back to AD 950, but some experts say it was built in AD 1050. Though rebuilt in 1952, the old apse at the eastern end preserves the murals.

There are 47 murals and the paintings are of St. Paul with a sword, the birth of Jesus Christ, resurrection of Lazarus, the kiss of Judas, the Last Supper, Christ bearing the cross, Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, and Noah's Ark.

These paintings, blending Persian and Kerala mural art styles, draw enthusiasts from far and wide.

Development of Maa Bamleshwari Devi Temple, Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh

Union Minister of State(IC) for Tourism & Culture Shri Prahlad Singh Patel virtually laid the Foundation Stone for the project "Development of Maa Bamleshwari Devi Temple, Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh" approved under PRASHAD Scheme of the Ministry of Tourismin New Delhi.

The 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD) is a Central Sector Scheme fully financed by the Government of India.

It was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in the year 2014-15 with the objective of integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations.

The scheme aimed at infrastructure development such as entry points (Road, Rail and Water Transport), last mile connectivity, ATM/ Money exchange, area Lighting and illumination with renewable sources, waiting rooms, first aid centers, craft bazars etc.

Till now, 13 projects have been successfully completed under PRASHAD Scheme to promote spiritual tourism. The completed projects include two projects each at Somnath, Mathura, Tamil Nadu and Bihar and one project each at Varanasi, Guruvayur and Amaravati (Guntoor), Kamakhya and Amritsar.

Institute of National Importance tag for National School of Drama

The government is actively considering giving the Institute of National Importance tag to the National School of Drama, as well as re-developing its campus in Delhi.

The former BJP MP was appointed to the post in September 2020

He said that the status of Institute of National Importance would strengthen NSD, allowing it to award degrees, start new courses and set up new centres.

The NSD, which has four regional centres in Varanasi, Bengaluru, Agartala and Gangtok, had received a request from Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor for setting up a centre in J&K.

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Declaration of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO

At present, India has 42 sites listed under Tentative List which is a pre-requisite condition for inscription as World Heritage Site. 'Dholavira: A Harappan City' has been submitted for nomination of World Heritage Site in 2019-2020.

Nomination dossiers of 'Santiniketan, India' and 'Sacred Ensemble of Hoysalas' have been submitted to UNESCO for the year 2021-22 cycle.

At present, India has 38 World Heritage Properties. All the sites under the Ministry are conserved as per ASI's Conservation Policy.

At present, India has 42 sites listed under Tentative List which is a pre-requisite condition for inscription as World Heritage Site.

'Dholavira: A Harappan City' has been submitted for nomination of World Heritage Site in 2019-2020.

Nomination dossiers of 'Santiniketan, India' and 'Sacred Ensemble of Hoysalas' have been submitted to UNESCO for the year 2021-22 cycle.

Augmentation of sites on the World Heritage List/Tentative List is a continuous process and sites are selected on the basis of their potential for fulfilling criteria under Operational Guidelines and demonstration of Outstanding Universal Value.

Afghan buddha's virtual return 20 years after being destroyed by Taliban

Twenty years after being blasted out of Afghanistan's rugged central highlands, one of the country's famed Buddha statues made a brief virtual return as a three-dimensional projection.

In March 2001, the Taliban began blowing up two monumental Buddha statues in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley.

Now, two decades later, on the anniversary of the annihilation, the Bamiyan Buddhas have been brought back to life in the form of 3D projections in an event called "A Night With Buddha".

In their Roman draperies and with two different mudras, the Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.

They are said to date back to the 5th century AD and were once the tallest standing Buddhas in the world.

Salsal and Shamama, as they were called by the locals, rose to heights of 55 and 38 metres respectively, and were said to be male and female. Salsal means "light shines through the universe"; Shamama is "Queen Mother".

The statues were set in niches on either ends of a cliff side and hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs.

Following the fall of the Bamiyan Buddhas, UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003, with subsequent efforts made to restore and reconstruct the Buddhas in their niches with the pieces available.

Kindle Version of Swami Chidbhavananda's Bhagvad Gita

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Kindle version of Swami Chidbhavananda's Bhagavad Gita.

Swami Chidbhavananda (1898 – 1985) was the founder of Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam Ashram at Thirupparaithurai, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu.

He authored 186 books and all genres of literary composition.

His scholarly work on the Gita is one of the most extensive books on the subject. Tamil version of the Gita with his commentaries was published in 1951, followed by the English in 1965. Its translations into Telugu, Oriya, German and Japanese were undertaken by devotees.

PM slammed for calling 17th century Ahom general Lachit Borphukan

The opposition parties in poll-bound Assam have slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for referring to 17th century Ahom general Lachit Borphukan as a freedom fighter.

Lachit Borphukan (1622 - 1672) was a commander and Borphukan (Phu-Kon-Lung) in the Ahom kingdom, located in present-day Assam.

He is known for his leadership in the 1671 Battle of Saraighat that thwarted a drawn-out attempt by Mughal forces under the command of Ramsingh I to take over Ahom kingdom.

On 24 November each year Lachit Divas (Lachit Day) is celebrated state-wide in Assam to commemorate the heroism of Lachit Borphukan and the victory of the Assamese army at the Battle of Saraighat.

The best passing out cadet of National Defence Academy is conferred the Lachit Borphukan gold medal every year from 1999.

Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair's significant role in making classical dances

Guru Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair was a seasoned Kathakali actor and he played a significant role in making classical dances such as Bharatanatyam popular in north Kerala.

Chemancheri Kunhiraman Nair, also known as Guru Chemancheri (1916 – 2021) was a noted Indian Kathakali actor.

He also played a significant role in making Bharatanatyam popular in north Kerala.

He established an institution named Bharateeya Natya Kalalayam at Kannur in 1945. Later, he established another school, Cheliya Kathakali Vidyalayam, in 1983, in Cheliya.

Shut down of Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the closure of Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation of India Limited (HHEC), a government of India undertaking under the administrative control of the Ministry of Textiles.

The Corporation has been continuously incurring losses since financial year 2015-16 and not earning sufficient income to meet its running expenses.

There is little scope for its revival, necessitating closure of the Company.

The approval will benefit the Government exchequer in reducing recurring expenditure on salary/wages of sick CPSE which is not in operation and earning no income.

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All the permanent employees and Management Trainees serving in the Corporation will be given an opportunity to avail the benefit of a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) as per norms laid down by the Department of Public Enterprises.

The legacy of Tomar king Anangpal II

The government has recently formed a committee to popularise the legacy of 11th-century Tomar king, Anangpal II.

Crediting him with giving Delhi its present name and also repopulating it, the National Monument Authority which functions under the Ministry of Culture has embarked on a mission to present "correct history" to the people through the works of historians, academics and archaeologists.

Anangpal II, popularly known as Anangpal Tomar, belonged to the Tomar dynasty that ruled parts of present-day Delhi and Haryana between the 8th and 12th centuries.

Anangpal II is credited to have established and populated Delhi during his reign in the 11th century. Anangpal II was instrumental in populating Indraprastha and giving it its present name, Delhi. It was he who built Lal Kot fort and Anangtal Baoli.

Anangpal Tomar II was succeeded by his grandson Prithviraj Chauhan, who was defeated by the Ghurid forces in the Battle of Tarain (present-day Haryana) after which the Delhi Sultanate was established in 1192.

Significance of jaapi, xorai and gamosa in Assam poll battle

As the polling date draws closer, decorative jaapis (field hats), hand-woven gamosas and bell-metal xorais are making frequent appearances in Assam.

The Jaapi is a conical hat made of bamboo and covered with dried tokou leaves. Today, the bulk of Assam's jaapis are made by artisans based in a cluster of villages in Nalbari district.

The Gamosa, which literally translates to a cloth to wipe one's body, is omnipresent in Assam, with wide-ranging uses. It can be used at home as a towel or in public functions to felicitate dignitaries or celebrities.

Made of bell-metal, the Xorai, essentially a tray with a stand at the bottom, with or without a cover can be found in every Assamese household.

Chhatrasal Convention Centre developed under Swadesh Darshan Scheme

Union Minister of State for Tourism and Culture (Independent Charge) Prahlad Singh Patel and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chouhan inaugurated the 'Chhatrasal Convention Centre at Khajuraho.

The Ministry of Tourism has framed 'Development of Iconic Tourist Destinations Scheme' a Central Sector Scheme for development of nineteen identified iconic destinations in the country following a holistic approach.

They will also launch "MICE Roadshow – Meet in India" Brand and Roadmap for the Promotion of India as MICE Destination (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.

New Raag composed to pay tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

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On the occasion of the birth centenary of the founding father of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, renowned vocalist Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty has composed a new Raag named 'Moitree' as a tribute to the Bangabandhu.

The new Raag is dedicated to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with elements of 'maitree' or India Bangladesh friendship.

It is a newly composed Raag incorporating the classical rules for the composition of Raag.

Three compositions will be presented which are written in Sanskrit, Hindi and Bengali languages.

Important Days & Events Current Affairs

Magh Purnima 2021

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has greeted the people on the occasion of Magh Purnima.

Maghi Purnima is also known by the name of Magha Purnima.

It is known to be a day of the full moon that occurs during the Hindu calendar month of Magh.

This day falls during the Gregorian calendar month of January or February.

During this time period, the auspicious Kumbh Mela is held every twelve years, and the Magha Mela is held on an annual basis at the confluence of three rivers or Triveni Sangam all around north India, such as in cities like Allahabad or Prayag.

National Science Day 2021

National Science Day is celebrated in India on 28 February each year to mark the discovery of the Raman effect by Indian physicist Sir C. V. Raman on 28 February 1928.

On this day, Physicist CV Raman announced the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930.

The day is aimed at spreading the message of the importance of science and its application in human life.

The theme for National Science Day 2021 is 'Future of Science and Technology and Innovation: Impact on Education Skills and Work'.

With a view to promote science and innovation, the government presents the National Science Communication Awards on this day. It was instituted in 1987.

Bir Chilarai Divas 2021

Chilarai's Birth Anniversary is being observed as Bir Chilarai Divas every yeart honor the courageous and heroic deeds of the Great General of Assam.

Bir Chilarai Divas 2021 would be celebrated all over Assam on February 27.

He was Nara Narayan's commander-in-chief and got his name Chilarai because, as a general, he executed troop movements that were as fast as a chila (kite/Eagle).

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Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) Celebrates its 9th Foundation Day

The Land Ports Authority of India (LPAI) celebrated its 9th Foundation Day at its Headquarter in New Delhi. Secretary, Border Management in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri Sanjeeva Kumar was the Chief Guest on the occasion.

The Land Ports Authority of India or LPAI is a statutory body working under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India is responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing border infrastructure in India.

It manages several Integrated Check Posts all across Borders of India.

- Founded: 1 March 2012
- Parent organization: Ministry of Home Affairs
- Headquarters: New Delhi

World Hearing Day 2021

The World Hearing Day is observed on March 3, every year to highlight and spread the message that timely and effective care can help people with hearing loss to achieve full potential.

This occasion is to spread awareness about action that can be taken to protect the auditory nerves and adopt preventive measures.

This year, the theme is 'Screen, Rehabilitate, Communicate', to address hearing loss and ear diseases across the life course.

World Hearing Day 2021 will mark the launch of the first-ever World Report on Hearing (WRH).

The Report has been developed in response to the World Health Assembly resolution (WHA70.13), adopted in 2017 as a means of providing guidance for Member States to integrate ear and hearing care into their national health plans.

The report proposes a set of key H.E.A.R.I.N.G. interventions that must be delivered through a strengthened health system to realize the vision of 'Integrated people-centered ear and hearing care' (IPC-EHC).

National Safety Day 2021

National Safety Day is observed on 4 March every year to celebrate the base and foundation of the National Safety Council.

The day is observed with the aim of increasing the awareness regarding all the guidelines including the workplace safety, road safety, safety of human health and the safety of environmental health.

The National Safety Council is a non-profit and self-financing organisation running at the national level.

The National safety day is significant in the light of increasing accidents on Indian roads.

As per the data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), total number of accidental human deaths accounted for 421,104 in the year 2019. Out of it, traffic accidents stood at 467,171.

International Women's Day 2021

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International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 every year which is symbolic of the historic journey women around the world have taken to better their lives.

It comes as a reminder that while a lot has been achieved, the journey is long and a lot more needs to be done.

International Women's Day 2021 is being celebrated on 8th of March with theme #ChooseToChallenge. It indicates that a "challenged world is an alert world, and from challenge comes change".

IWD has occurred for well over a century, with the first IWD gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.

Prior to this the Socialist Party of America, United Kingdom's Suffragists and Suffragettes, and further groups campaigned for women's equality.

IWD is not country, group or organization specific. IWD belongs to all groups collectively everywhere.

It is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

Kashmiri Pandits' festival 'Herath'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people on the occasion of Herath, one of the biggest festivals of Kashmiri Pandits.

Herath festival is one of the biggest festivals of Kashmiri Pandits.

The festival is marked by a night of praying followed by a day of feasting.

Some say Herath means the night of the Lord Shiva.

INAS 310 to celebrate diamond jubilee on March 21

Indian Naval Air Squadron (INAS) 310, the Cobras, a maritime reconnaissance squadron of the Indian Navy based at Goa, will be celebrating its diamond jubilee on March 21, 2021.

Commissioned at Hyéres, France on 21 Mar 61, the squadron holds the distinction of being the most decorated unit of the Indian Navy.

INAS 310 continues to carry out daily surveillance operations over the coastline.

The squadron operated the carrier borne Alize aircraft until 1991 and subsequently migrated to the shore based Dornier-228 aircraft.

In the last one year, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the aircraft of the squadron have delivered critical medical supplies, COVID test kits and transported medical teams and samples, clocking close to 1000 sorties.

World Water Day 2021

World Water Day is celebrated on March 22 each year aimed at raising awareness about 2.2 billion people living without access to safe water resources globally.

The Campaign will be undertaken across the country, in both rural and urban areas, with the theme "catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls".

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It will be implemented from 22nd March 2021 to 30th November, 2021 - the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country.

It will be launched as a Jan Andolan to take water conservation at grass-root level through people's participation.

It is intended to nudge all stakeholders to create rainwater harvesting structures suitable to the climatic conditions and subsoil strata, to ensure proper storage of rainwater.

After the event, Gram Sabhas will be held in all Gram Panchayats of each district (except in the poll bound states) to discuss issues related to water and water conservation. Gram Sabhas will also take 'Jal Shapath' for water conservation.

International Day of Forests 2021

The United Nations observes March 21 as the International Day of Forests, commemorating the green cover around the world and reiterating its importance.

The theme of the International Day of Forests for 2021 is "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being".

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21 as the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012.

The Day is celebrated by the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with governments, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other relevant organisations in the field.

World Sparrow Day 2021

World Sparrow Day is celebrated every year on March 20 all over the globe with an aim to raise awareness and protect the bird.

Every year March 20 is observed as World Sparrow Day to raise awareness about the bird.

The need for marking this day was felt due to the tremendous decrease in its population. The house sparrow is on the verge of extinction.

The initiative was started by Nature Forever Society (NFS) of India, founded by Mohammed Dilawar, an Indian conservationist.

The first World Sparrow Day was celebrated in 2010 in different parts of the world.

Birth anniversary of shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan

The birth anniversary of world-famous shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan is celebrated on 21 March each year.

Khan's contributions in taking Shehnai to a global stage is unparalleled.

Bismillah Khan's first big break came with the opening of the All India Radio in Lucknow in 1938.

It was Ustad 'Bismillah" Khan Who also played the Shehnai at the first Republic Day celebration in 1950.

Bismillah Khan was the first Indian to be invited to perform at the prestigious Lincoln Centre Hall in the United States of America.

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He was conferred upon national awards like the Padmashri, the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan for his immense contribution to the field of music. In 2001, Ustad Bismillah Khan was awarded India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna.

World Tuberculosis Day 2021

World Tuberculosis Day is observed on 24 March each year to build public awareness about the global epidemic of tuberculosis and efforts to eliminate the disease.

On this day in the year 1882, Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the bacteria that causes TB. It paved the way for diagnosis and cure of this deadly disease.

The theme of World TB Day 2021 - 'The Clock is Ticking' –conveys the sense that the world is running out of time to act on the commitments to end TB made by global leaders.

Shigmo festivities in Goa

Shigmo is the celebration of a 'rich, golden harvest of paddy' by the tribal communities of Goa. Agricultural communities including the Kunbis, Gawdas and Velips celebrate the festival that also marks the onset of spring.

Shigmo celebrations last over a fortnight in the months of Phalgun-Chaitra months of the Hindu calendar that correspond with March-April every year.

With a rise in Covid-19 cases in Goa, questions are being raised over the scale of celebrations for the annual Shigmotsav.

While the Goa Carnival was held with all the pomp in February, 'Shigmo' as it is called in Konkani, is another vibrant celebration full of colour, song and dance rooted in Goan culture and traditions.

World Meteorological Day 2021

India Meteorological Department celebrated World Meteorological Day: Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav on 23rd March, 2021. Dr. M. Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Science inaugurated Climate Data Services Portal of IMD on this occasion.

Climate Data Services Portal has been developed by IMD, Pune with user-friendly platforms for climate data management and supply to the users.

The Web Portal will be available through IMD Website (http://www.mausam.imd.gov.in/) and IMD Pune website (http://www.imdpune.gov.in/).

It complements fully automated climate data management process from real-time data acquisition to expeditious data dissemination.

The major components of the portal are listed below:

- Real-Time monitoring of weather observations recorded by IMD Observatories.
- Encapsulated IMD Metadata Portal, other reports and dashboards
- Online access to meteorological data through Data Supply Portal.
- Free download facility for Gridded Temperature and Rainfall Data of India.
- Climatological Tables, Extremes and Normal.
- Information on Monsoon Rainfall and Cyclone frequencies.
- Data analytics and info graphics.

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International Current Affairs

Pakistan to remain on FATF 'greylist'

Global money laundering watchdog the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) decided to keep Pakistan on its terrorism financing "grey list".

FATF President Marcus Pleyer said Pakistan must demonstrate in taking action against UN-designated terrorists and their associates. It also said once Pakistan completes three unfulfilled tasks, the FATF will verify and take decision on Islamabad's present status in June plenary.

In its plenary held in October last year, the FATF had kept Pakistan on the grey list citing its failure to fulfill six out of 27 obligations of the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.

The FATF is an inter-governmental body set up in 1989 to combat money laundering, terror financing and other related threats to the international financial system.

Currently, it has 39 members. Pakistan has been on the grey list since June 2018.

UN body recommends Bangladesh graduation from LDC

The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) has recommended graduation of Bangladesh from the category of Least Developed Country (LDC) as it fulfilled the eligibility criteria in terms of per capita income, human assets and economic and environmental vulnerability.

This is the second consecutive time since 2018 that the CDP has made recommendation for Bangladesh for graduation from LDC category.

The CDP decides on the LDC status of a country based on three criteria-

- per capita income,
- human assets index and
- economic vulnerability index.

A country must achieve at least two of the three criteria at two consecutive triennial reviews to be considered for graduation.

The proposal will be sent to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for endorsement in June to be finally approved by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September this year.

Second edition of Maritime India Summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually inaugurate the second edition of Maritime India Summit (MIS) on March 2, 2021.

The Maritime India Summit 2021 is being organized by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on a virtual platform www.maritimeindiasummit.in from 2nd March to 4th March 2021.

Denmark is the partner country for the three-day summit.

The Summit will visualize a roadmap for India's Maritime sector for next decade and will work to propel India to the forefront of the Global Maritime Sector.

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Eminent speakers from several countries are expected to attend the Summit and explore the potential business opportunities and investments in Indian Maritime domain.

Japan law requiring married couples to have the same surname

A section of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has signalled its opposition to changing a law that forces married couples to have the same surname.

In the recent past, Japan has witnessed heated debates over the century-old law, with women's rights activists pitted against conservative figures.

Under Japan's civil code, married couples are required to share the same surname, thus making the country the only industrialised nation where having different surnames for married spouses is illegal.

The requirement was first introduced in 1896 during the Meiji era (1868-1912), when it was common for women in the country to leave their families and become a part of the husband's family.

While the law makes having one surname compulsory, it does not specify which name a couple should adopt. However, in an overwhelming number of cases, couples choose to adopt the husband's surname at birth. Currently, 96 per cent of women drop their maiden name in Japan, reflecting the country's male-dominated society.

The law even forbids in-between options, such as hyphenating last names, keeping one's family name as a middle name, or combining the two surnames into a new one.

IAF's Suryakiran, Sarang teams to perform at Colombo air show

Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter aerobatic team Sarang displays it's skills during the 'Air Fest 2021" at the Sulur Air Force Station in Coimbatore on February 19, 2021.

This will be the first performance for the SKAT team outside India since it was resurrected in 2015 with the Hawk advanced jet trainers.

Earlier, the SKAT team had toured Sri Lanka during the 50th anniversary of the SLAF in 2001.

The SKAT team, also known as 52 Squadron or The Sharks, is based in Bidar.

The team was formed in 1996 with Kiran Mk-II aircraft and had enthralled spectators across the country till 2011. It was revived in 2015 with Hawk trainers initially with four aircraft and grew to the nine-aircraft formation.

Since its inception, the SKAT team has carried out over 600 displays all around the country. It has also represented India across southeast Asia including China.

PM Modi Inaugurated Maritime India Summit 2021

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated the "Maritime India Summit 2021'. The Maritime India Summit 2021 has been organised by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways on a virtual platform from March 2-4.

He informed that capacity of major ports have increased from 870 million tonnes in 2014 to 1550 million tonnes now.

Mega ports with world class infrastructure are being developed in Vadhavan, Paradip and Deendayal Port in Kandla.

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India aims to operationalise 23 waterways by 2030.

India has as many as 189 lighthouses across its vast coastline and has drawn up a programme for developing tourism in the land adjacent to 78 lighthouses.

Steps are also being taken to introduce urban water transport systems in key states and cities such as Kochi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Goa.

To encourage domestic shipbuilding, approval has been given to the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy for Indian Shipyards.

The Ministry of Port Shipping and Waterways has created a list of 400 investable These projects have an investment potential of $ 31 billion or Rs 2.25 lakh crores.

The Maritime India Vision 2030 outlines the priorities of the Government.

The Sagar-Manthan: Mercantile Marine Domain Awareness Centre has been launched. It is an information system for enhancing maritime safety, search and rescue capabilities, security and marine environment protection.

Government is in the process of installing solar and wind-based power systems at all the major ports across the country and aims to increase usage of renewable energy to more than 60% of total energy by 2030 in three phases across Indian ports.

IAF to participate in Exercise Desert Flag VI in UAE

The Indian Air Force is participating for the first time in Exercise Desert Flag along with air forces of United Arab Emirates, United States of America, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Bahrain.

Exercise Desert Flag is an annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates Air Force.

Exercise Desert Flag VI is scheduled from 03 Mar 21 to 27 Mar 21 at Al-Dhafra airbase, UAE.

The IAF is participating with six Su-30 MKI, two C-17 and one IL-78 tanker aircraft.

The aim of the exercise is to provide operational exposure to the participating forces while training them to undertake simulated air combat operations in a controlled environment.

India Japan back in another Sri Lanka port project

Sri Lanka will develop the West Container Terminal (WCT) at the Colombo Port along with India and Japan. The decision comes a month after the Rajapaksa government ejected the two partners from a 2019 tripartite agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal (ECT), citing resistance to “foreign involvement”.

While the High Commission of India had “approved” Adani Ports, which was to invest in the ECT project earlier, Japan is yet to name an investor.

In the ECT project agreed upon earlier, the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) was to hold majority 51%, but in the WCT proposal, India and Japan will be accorded 85% stake, as is the case in the nearby Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT), where China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited holds 85%.

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The WCT is adjacent to the China-run CICT and just a couple of kilometres away from the China-backed Port City being built on reclaimed land, making it a strategically desirable spot for India, whose concerns over China's presence in Sri Lanka are well known.

Significance of March 4 for QAnon supporters

Some of former US President Donald Trump's followers, who believe in the QAnon conspiracy, think that he will return to power on March 4.

As per some media reports, US Capitol Police believe that the group may be plotting to breach the Capitol again, following the events of January 6, when an armed mob of Trump supporters clashed with the police.

QAnon is a pro-Trump conspiracy theory that took shape around 2017 when an anonymous user called "Q" or "Q Clearance Patriot" started posting conspiracy theories. "Q" refers to a security clearance given by the US Department of Energy for access to top-secret information.

The followers of this movement believe that the world is being run by a cabal of paedophiles who worship Satan and that one of Trump's aims as US President is to unmask the cabal and punish them. According to the conspiracy theorists, Trump is secretly preparing for a day of reckoning, "The Storm", when members of the "deep state" will be executed.

The conspiracy theorists believe that Democrats such as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and Hollywood actors Tom Hanks and Oprah Winfrey, are part of a global child sex-trafficking ring.

First Strategic, Counter-Terrorism Dialogue between India-Nigeria

The National Security Adviser of Nigeria Major General (Retd.) Babagana Monguno visited New Delhi for the First Strategic and Counter-Terrorism Dialogue between India and Nigeria at the level of NSA.

Within the framework of the close and strategic partnership between India and Nigeria, the National Security Advisors held in-depth discussions on the threats and challenges faced by democratic societies from terrorism, extremism, and radicalization.

The two sides identified specific areas of cooperation to enhance their fight against all forms of terrorism, reaffirming their firm belief that there can be no justification for terrorism in any form or manifestation.

Virtual Summit between Prime Ministers of India and Sweden

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi held a Virtual Summit with Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden H.E. Stefan Löfven on 5th March, 2021.

The Prime Minister Modi recalled his 2018 visit to Sweden for the first India-Nordic Summit, and the India visit of Their Majesties the King and Queen of Sweden in December, 2019.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the implementation of the Joint Action Plan and Joint Innovation Partnership agreed during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Sweden in 2018.

Prime Minister Modi welcomed Sweden's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

The leaders also noted the growing member-ship of the India-Sweden joint initiative – the Leadership Group on Indus-try Transition (LeadIT) that was launched during the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019 in New York.

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India Science Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021

Forty scholars from six countries have been awarded with the opportunity to carry out their research in Indian Institutes and Universities using state of the art facilities in these places. These scholars have been selected based on research proposal, experience, academic merit and publication record and recommended for the award of India Science and Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021.

These scholars have been selected based on research proposal, experience, academic merit and publication record and recommended for the award of India Science and Research Fellowship (ISRF) 2021.

As a part of India's initiatives to engage with neighbouring countries to develop S&T partnerships, the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India has launched ISRF Programme for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand researchers to work in Indian Universities and Research Institutions.

It has been implemented since 2015.

Scientists want Australia's worst female serial killer

Leading scientists and medical experts are calling for the pardon of convicted child killer Kathleen Folbigg after a recent study showed that her victims four of her children may have died of natural causes.

Folbigg was convicted in 2003 for smothering her children to death as infants between 1990 and 1999, a series of crimes that have earned her the title of 'Australia's worst female serial killer'.

Medical experts have argued that her children died due to a rare genetic defect. They inherited a genetic mutation from their mother called CALM2.

CALM-2 mutations are known to cause sudden death due to cardiac arrest.

Calmodulin 2 is a protein that in humans is encoded by the CALM2 gene. Mutations in CALM2 are associated to cardiac arrhythmias.

France has admitted to killing an Algerian freedom fighter

In a move aimed at improving its relations with former colony Algeria, France has admitted that its soldiers tortured and killed the Algerian lawyer and freedom fighter Ali Boumendjel, whose death in 1957 had until now been covered up as a suicide.

37 years old at the time of his death, Boumendjel was an Algerian nationalist and independence activist when the North African country was under French colonial rule.

In 1957, French troops detained and placed him under solitary confinement during the Battle of Algiers, a part of the eight-year-long Algerian War of Independence. To pass off his death as suicide, Boumendjel was thrown from the sixth floor of a building after he was killed.

The conflict lasted until 1962, and ended with it 132 years of French domination.

Significance of the admission: Algeria, which celebrates sixty years of independence from France next year, welcomed the admission.

Saudi-led coalition jets pound Sanaa

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A Saudi-led military coalition mounted air strikes on Yemen's Houthi-controlled capital Sanaa after it intercepted 10 drones launched by the Iran-backed rebels, state media reported.

Sanaa also spelled Sanaʿa or Sana, is the largest city in Yemen.

Under the Yemeni constitution, Sanaʿa is the capital of the country, although the seat of the Yemeni government moved to Aden, the former capital of South Yemen in the aftermath of the Houthi occupation.

Aden was declared as the temporary capital by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in March 2015.

It is located next to the Sarawat Mountains of Jabal An-Nabi Shu'ayb and Jabal Tiyal, considered to be the highest mountains in the country and amongst the highest in the region.

The Old City of Sanaʿa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has a distinctive architectural character, most notably expressed in its multi-storey buildings decorated with geometric patterns.

China gives green light for first downstream dams on Brahmaputra

A draft of China's new Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), which is set to be formally approved on March 11, has given the green light for the first dams to be built on the lower reaches of Yarlung Zangbo river, as the Brahmaputra is known in Tibet, before it flows into India.

The draft outline of the new Five-Year Plan (FYP) for 2025 and "long range objectives through the year 2035" specifically mentions the building of hydropower bases on the lower reaches of the river as among the priority energy projects to be undertaken in the next five years.

The lower reaches refer to the sections of the river in Tibet before it flows into India.

The inclusion of the projects in the draft plan suggests the authorities have given the go-ahead to begin tapping the lower reaches for the first time, which marks a new chapter in the hydropower exploitation of the river.

Other major projects include the construction of coastal nuclear power plants and power transmission channels.

The project is also listed along with the Sichuan-Tibet railway and the national water network.

Alliance Air Operates Maiden Flight to Bareilly

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri flagged off the first flight from Delhi to the newly upgraded Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly Airport, Uttar Pradesh.

The Bareilly airport has been upgraded for commercial flight operations under the Regional Connectivity Scheme – Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (RCS-UDAN) of the Government of India.

Trishul Military Airbase, Bareilly belongs to the Indian Air Force and the land was handed over to the Airport Authority of India for construction of the interim civil aviation operations. The upgradation was undertaken by the AAI with a cost of Rs. 65 crores.

Alliance Air was awarded the Delhi - Bareilly route under the UDAN-4 bidding process last year.

Modi inaugurates 'Maitri Setu' between India and Bangladesh

Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the India-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge (Maitri Setu) over the Feni river at Sabroom in south Tripura. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for eight other infrastructure projects together worth ₹ 3,518 crore.

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The bridge 'Maitri Setu' has been built over Feni river which flows between Indian boundary in Tripura State and Bangladesh.

The 1.9 Km long bridge joins Sabroom (in Tripura) with Ramgarh (in Bangladesh).

The name 'Maitri Setu' symbolises growing bilateral relations and friendly ties between India and Bangladesh.

The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd at a project cost of Rs 133 crore.

With this bridge, Tripura is set to become the 'Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is just 80 km from Sabroom.

PM Modi also laid the foundation stone for setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom.

India-Uzbekistan joint military exercise DUSTLIK II commences in Ranikhet

The India - Uzbekistan joint military exercise DUSTLIK II commenced in Foreign Training Node Chaubatia, Ranikhet in Uttarakhand.

This is the Second Edition of annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies. It will continue till the 19th of this month.

45 Soldiers each from Uzbekistan and Indian Army are participating in the exercise.

Both contingents will be sharing their expertise and skills in the field of counter terrorist operations in mountainous/rural/urban scenario under UN mandate.

This is the Second Edition of annual bilateral joint exercise of both armies.

The first edition of the exercise was held at Uzbekistan in Nov 2019.

PM attended first Quad Summit on March 12, 2021

Access to COVID-19 vaccines, cooperation on technology, and climate change are at the top of the agenda as Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined U.S. President Joseph Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga for a virtual summit of the Quadrilateral Framework (Quad) on 12th March, 2021 — the first time leaders of the Indo-Pacific grouping are meeting.

The Quad meeting, that China has referred to as an "Indo-Pacific NATO", will be watched most closely for signals on how the grouping will deal with the challenge from Beijing's recent moves in the Pacific as well as at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh.

India, the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines that has already shipped out more than 48 million doses worldwide, is expected to request Quad investment to scale up its outreach further.

UK's Turing Scheme affects Indian universities

Having left the European Union's flagship Erasmus scholarship programme after Brexit, the UK launched its own replacement called the Turing scheme to enable UK students to study abroad.

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Named after the celebrated English mathematician and codebreaker Alan Turing, the scheme will enable schools, colleges and universities in the UK to apply for government funding to allow students to study and work across the globe, including in India.

The scheme, for which the British government has allocated 110 million pounds for the first year, starts in 2021/22, and would enable up to 35,000 students from across the country to study or work across the world from September this year.

Under the programme, after schools and universities successfully apply for funding for exchanges, university study and work placements, they can invite their students to apply for individual funding's.

The scheme would be a global programme in which every country in the world will be able to partner with UK institutions. This is in contrast with the Erasmus+ programme, which only included European countries.

India, already a top source of international students to the UK, could be among the leading list of countries with which UK universities seek to strike student exchange projects.

First Virtual Trade Fair by APEDA draws huge response from foreign participants

First Virtual Trade Fair (VTF) organised by APEDA to boost exports potential of India's agricultural and processed food products during COVID19 pandemic drew huge response from participants, exporters and buyers from countries including India, UAE, Brazil, New Zealand and France.

The VTF was organised during March 10-12, 2021.

The fair with a theme 'India Rice and Agro Commodity', focussed on showcasing the exports potential of various agricultural commodities.

Because of COVID19 related restrictions on physical travel and trade, APEDA has initiated the concept of VTF for sustaining India's agricultural and processed food products exports and also exploring new markets for expanding export footprints.

Italy joins International Solar Alliance

Italy has signed the International Solar Alliance under the amended ISA Framework Agreement.

The amendments to the Framework Agreement of the ISA entered into force, opening its Membership to all Member States of the UN.

The International Solar Alliance is a group of nations that lies within the Tropics (Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn) and receive sunshine for more than 300 days.

It is a platform for the collaboration of sunshine countries in the domain of energy security.

The energy that comes from the Sun in a day is enough for the entire globe to use for a whole year, however, we are not able to capture the entire energy that comes.

Most of the sunshine countries are poor and the least developing. Hence, solar power becomes critical for energy security.

The underlying rationale for ISA is to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all",

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It also plans to increase the share of renewable energy substantially by 2030. By 2030, it envisages enhancing international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency, and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology.

Tanzania swears in first female president

Tanzania's Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as the country's first female president after the sudden death of John Magufuli from an illness shrouded in mystery.

John Pombe Joseph Magufuli (1959 – 2021) was a Tanzanian politician who served as the fifth President of Tanzania from 2015 until his death in 2021.

Magufuli was known for promoting misinformation about COVID-19 during his leadership over the pandemic in Tanzania.

His death on 17 March 2021 was attributed to a long-standing heart issue by the government.

India partners with Israeli firm for aluminium-air systems

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) has inked a pact with Israeli start-up company Phinergy, specialising in hybrid lithium-ion and Aluminium-Air and Zinc-Air battery systems, to form IOC Phinergy Private Ltd.

Top automakers, including Maruti Suzuki and Ashok Leyland, have already signed letters of intent with the newly formed joint venture to commercially deploy the battery solutions produced by IOC Phinergy.

Aluminium-air batteries are said to be a lower cost and more energy-dense alternative to lithium-ion batteries which are currently in widespread use for electric vehicles in India.

Aluminium-air batteries utilise oxygen in the air which reacts with an aluminium hydroxide solution to oxidise the aluminium and produce electricity.

Aluminium-air battery-based electric vehicles are expected to offer much greater range of 400 km or more per battery compared to lithium-ion batteries which currently offer a range of 150-200 kilometres per full charge.

The aluminium plate in an aluminium-air battery is converted into aluminium trihydroxide over time and that aluminium can be reclaimed from aluminium trihydroxide or even traded directly for industrial uses.

Aluminium-air based batteries are also expected to be significantly cheaper than lithium-ion batteries, thereby reducing the cost of electric vehicle.

Dignitaries to don Khadi Mujib Jackets during PM"s visit to Bangladesh

Khadi, the heritage fabric of India, is all set to catch eyeballs during the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Bangladesh on March 26 & 27.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has supplied 100 custom-designed "Mujib Jackets" that will be the attire of dignitaries during the visit of the Prime Minister.

"Mujib Jacket" is famed as the signature garment worn by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who is called Bangladesh's Father of the Nation.

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As Bangladesh celebrates "Mujib Borsho", the birth centenary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, had placed an order for 100 Mujib Jackets, ahead of the PM's visit.

The specially designed Mujib Jackets have been made of high quality handcrafted Poly Khadi fabric. These jackets will be carried in specially designed plastic-mixed handmade paper carry bags made at KVIC's Kumarappa National Handmade Paper Institute (KNHPI) in Jaipur.

Chinese fishing flotilla leave disputed South China Sea reef

The Philippines has demanded that China recall more than 200 Chinese boats it said had been spotted at a disputed reef claimed by both Manila and Beijing, describing their presence as a "clear provocative action."

It urged China to recall the boats saying the presence of the vessels violated Manila's maritime rights by encroaching into the Philippines' sovereign territory.

The boats are believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel. The boats were spotted on March 7 at the Whitsun Reef, which Manila calls the Julian Felipe Reef.

World Summit on Information Society Forum 2021

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021 represents one of the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community, is co-organized by International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD.

The telecom minister mentioned that under the flagship program BharatNet, nearly 6,00,000 villages are being connected through laying of more than 4,00,000 Km length of optical fiber cable and use of satellite communication services.

Through submarine cable networks small and remote islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep and other inaccessible areas are being connected with funding from Government.

Establishment of ITU Area office and Innovation Centre in India with involvement of SMEs, Academia and Startups in the region will go a long way in development of technologies, standards and solutions best suited for rural and remote areas of developing nations.

Former senator Bill Nelson nominated by Biden to lead NASA

President Joe Biden has chosen a former senator from Florida who flew on the space shuttle right before the Challenger accident to lead NASA.

Nelson will serve as NASA's chief executive officer and will be directly accountable to President Biden.

In this role, he will articulate the space agency's vision, will set its programmatic and budget priorities, internal policies and assess the agency's performance.

A one-time astronaut, Nelson flew aboard the space shuttle Columbia as a payload specialist on the STS-61C mission in 1986.

US, EU, Britain, Canada Impose Sanctions on Chinese Officials

The United States, the European Union, Britain and Canada have imposed sanctions on several Chinese officials for human rights abuses against the Muslim Uyghur minority in China's Xinjiang province, prompting retaliation from China.

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This is the first time the EU has imposed sanctions on China since an arms embargo after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. That embargo is still in place.

Although the EU sanctions are not very damaging, they show a hardening of stance against its largest trading partner. Also significant is that the Western powers moved together.

China retaliated with sanctions of its own. It has consistently denied all reports of atrocities against Uighurs, maintaining it is only "deradicalizing" elements of its population in the interests of security.

China-Taiwan clash kicked off the Freedom Pineapple campaign

Ties between China and Taiwan, which have historically been rocky over issues such as sovereignty, foreign relations and military build-up, are now being tested by an unusual subject – pineapples.

On March 1, China banned the import of pineapples from Taiwan, alleging there was a risk of "harmful creatures" that could threaten its own agriculture.

Since then, an angry Taiwan has refuted China's claims of pests being found in imported pineapples, and has gone on to insist that the move is aimed at increasing political pressure on Taiwan, which China considers its own province.

Following this, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen kicked off a "pineapple challenge" on social media to attract more Taiwanese consumers to buy the fruit and counter China's move.

Taiwan's foreign minister also urged "like-minded friends around the globe to stand with #Taiwan & rally behind the #FreedomPineapple".

India abstains in UN Human Rights Council vote on Sri Lanka

India recently abstained from a crucial vote on Sri Lanka's rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The resolution on 'Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' was, however, adopted after 22 states of the 47-member Council voted in its favour.

Sri Lanka, which had earlier deemed the resolution "politically motivated", was quick to reject the UN move to collect and preserve evidence of war crimes in the country, committed by the armed forces and the LTTE.

The Sri Lanka resolution was the first to be voted on using the extraordinary e-voting procedures established for the UNHRC 46th Session, which has been held virtually.

Suez Canal Blocked After Giant Container Ship Gets Stuck

A giant container ship the length of four football pitches has become wedged across Egypt's Suez Canal, blocking one of the world's busiest trade routes.

A human-made waterway, the Suez Canal is one of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes, carrying over 12% of world trade by volume.

Built in 1869, it provides a major shortcut for ships moving between Europe and Asia, who before its construction had to sail around Africa to complete the same journey.

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The 150-year-old canal was controlled by British and French interests in its initial years but was nationalised in 1956 by Egypt's then leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. Over the years, the canal has been widened and deepened.

In 2015, Egypt announced plans to further expand the Suez Canal, aiming to reduce waiting times and double the number of ships that can use the canal daily by 2023.

Special-purpose acquisition companies are under the scanner

The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued an investor alert, which was the first warning of sorts, when it came to or special purpose acquisition companies (SPACs).

A SPAC, or a blank-cheque company, is an entity specifically set up with the objective of acquiring a firm in a particular sector.

The aim of this SPAC is to raise money in an initial public offering (IPO), and at this point in time, it does not have any operations or revenues.

Once the money is raised from the public, it is kept in an escrow account, which can be accessed while making the acquisition. If the acquisition is not made within two years of the IPO, the SPAC is delisted, and the money is returned to the investors.

Certain market participants believe that, through a SPAC transaction, a private company can become a publicly-traded company "with more certainty as to pricing and control over deal terms as compared to traditional IPOs.

PM expresses gratitude to UNITAR

The Prime Minister Modi has expressed gratitude to UN Institute for Training & Research (UNITAR). UNITAR has commended India's remarkable progress in reducing the premature mortality from Non Communicable Diseases.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) is a dedicated training arm of the United Nations system. Its Headquarters are based in Geneva (Switzerland).

UNITAR provides training and capacity development activities to assist mainly developing countries with special attention to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and other groups and communities who are most vulnerable.

UNITAR was founded in 1963, following the recommendation of the UN Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly.

Operated as an autonomous body within the United Nations system, UNITAR is headed by an Executive Director. Present executive director is Nikhil Seth from India who was appointed in 2015.

UNITAR is a project-based organization and does not receive any funds from the regular United Nations budget. The institute is financed entirely from voluntary contributions.

Defence Minister inaugurated Indo-Korean friendship-park in Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of National Defence of South Korea Suh Wook jointly inaugurated an Indo-Korean friendship park at Delhi cantonment.

The park's significance is not only because of it being a symbol of strong India-South Korea friendly relations, but also as a monument to India's contributions as part of 21 countries which participated in Korean war 1950-53, under the aegis of the United Nations.

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The park has been developed in joint consultation with Ministry of Defence, Government of India, Indian Army, Delhi Cantonment Board, Embassy of Korea and Korean War Veterans Association of India.

One of the pillars in the park encompasses Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's narration of Korea as "The Lamp of the East" which was published in Korean daily "Dong-A-llbo" in 1929. 3rd phase of Indian Beamline for Materials Research in Japan

The third phase of the Indian beamline project, a facility for materials research set up under India-Japan Scientific and Technological Cooperation, was initiated on March 23, 2021, with special focus on industrial application research.

The phase would increase the number of young researchers from India to be trained in advanced X-ray techniques of material research.

Besides, steps will be taken to allocate more beamtime so that more researchers can get access to it. At present, only 50 % of Indian researchers who apply receive beamtime.

The Indian beamline has been constructed and maintained by Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP), Kolkata and Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bangalore; in Japanese synchrotron light source Photon Factory (PF) of High Energy Accelerator Research Organization (KEK), with support from Nano Mission, Department of Science and Technology (DST).

This India-Japan Scientific and Technological Cooperation project was initiated between the DST and the KEK on 24 July 2007.

In the first phase (2009-2015) of this project, an X-ray beamline (BL18B) was constructed by SINP in PF. In the second phase (2016-2021), JNCASR and SINP jointly developed the beamline further to cater to the need of various users from India.

Eritrea will pull out troops from Tigray

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reported that Eritrea will pull its troops out of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. It is a potential breakthrough in a drawn-out conflict that has seen atrocities carried out against civilians.

The Tigray Region is the northernmost of the nine regions (kililat) of Ethiopia. Tigray is the homeland of the Tigrayan, Irob and Kunama peoples.

Tigray is also known as Region 1 according to the federal constitution. Its capital and largest city is Mekelle.

Tigray is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, the Amhara Region to the south and the Afar Region to the east and south east.

Commerce Department is planning re-routing shipments through the Cape of Good Hope

The Suez Canal blockage that has disrupted east-west shipping could impact India's trade and curtail key manufacturing supplies while raising transport costs as shipping rates spike due to the crisis. Department of Commerce is planning re-routing shipments through the Cape of Good Hope.

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The Cape of Good Hope is a rocky headland on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa.

A common misconception is that the Cape of Good Hope is the southern tip of Africa. Contemporary geographic knowledge instead states the southernmost point of Africa is Cape Agulhas.

When following the western side of the African coastline from the equator, however, the Cape of Good Hope marks the point where a ship begins to travel more eastward than southward.

India - Bangladesh signed 5 Memorandum of Understandings

India and Bangladesh signed 5 MoUs in the fields of Disaster Management, trade, NCC, ICT and setting up of sports facilities on the concluding day of the 2-day long official visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Foundation stone was laid for infrastructure development for power evacuation facilities from the Rooppur Nuclear power plant.

The Bangladesh leg of the Banagabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition was inaugurated by the two Prime Ministers. It will be taken to other parts of the world including the UN.

Both the leaders also unveiled the foundation stone for the construction of a memorial at Ashuganj honoring the martyrs of Indian armed forces in the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh.

India gifted 109 life support ambulances to Bangladesh and also 1.2 million doses of the Covishield vaccine.

Three border haats were also opened along the India-Bangladesh border.

China and Iran sign 25-year 'strategic pact'

China and Iran signed what was described as a 25-year "strategic cooperation pact", during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's on-going six-nation tour to West Asia.

While details of the new 25-year pact were not immediately available, it includes "political, strategic and economic" components.

This document can be very effective in deepening relations and would establish a blueprint for "reciprocal investments in the fields of transport, ports, energy, industry and services".

The agreement comes amid a major push from China to back Iran, which counts on Beijing, its largest trading partner, as it deals with the continuing weight of sanctions re-instated following then U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal.

Earlier this week, China and Russia called for the U.S. to "unconditionally return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as soon as possible and revoke the unilateral sanctions against Iran".

In this context, they proposed "the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform to converge a new consensus on resolving the security concerns of countries in the region".

9th Ministerial Conference of 'Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process on Afghanistan'

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar attended the 9th Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process on Afghanistan at Dushanbe in Tajikistan.

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As the lead country for Trade, Commerce and Investment Confidence Building Measure under Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process, India has made concerted efforts for strengthening regional connectivity for the greater economic integration of Afghanistan with the region.

A dedicated Air Freight Corridor between cities of India and Afghanistan and operationalisation of Chabahar Port in Iran are steps in that direction.

India, as an important stakeholder for peace, prosperity and stability in Afghanistan has played a constructive role in the international processes on Afghanistan.

India has engaged regional and international stakeholders on Afghanistan. The visit will further enhance the outreach to Central Asian countries with a special focus on Afghanistan.

India US agree to revamp Strategic Energy Partnership

Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and US Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm have agreed to revamp India-US Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP).

The two leaders agreed to revamp the India-US SEP to reflect the new priorities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden with focus on promoting clean energy with low-carbon pathways and accelerating green energy cooperation.

During the meeting, they also agreed to prioritise greater collaboration in cleaner energy sector and joint R&D through Partnership to Advance Clean Energy Research among other initiatives.

Besides, both sides agreed to convene the third meeting of a revamped India-US SEP at an early date. They decided to intensify the efforts to take advantage of the complementarities of both the countries-advanced US technologies and rapidly growing India's energy market, for a win-win situation through a cleaner energy route with low carbon pathways.

US suspends all trade engagement with Myanmar

United States is immediately suspending all engagement with Myanmar under a 2013 trade and investment agreement until the return of a democratically elected government.

Recently, the Myanmar military has grabbed power in a coup - the third time in the nation's history since its independence from British rule in 1948.

A one-year state of emergency has been imposed and democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained.

'Coup' is generally described as a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is in South East Asia and neighbours Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, China and India. The main religion is Buddhism. There are many ethnic groups in the country, including Rohingya Muslims.

Fiji, Zimbabwe, Niger & Paraguay received Made in India Covid-19 vaccines

Under the Vaccine Maitri initiative of the Government of India, four nations received the Made in India Covid-19 Vaccines.

Planes carrying the consignments of vaccine doses landed in Fiji, Zimbabwe, Niger and Paraguay.

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Vaccine Maitri Initiative is an initiative launched by India to gift COVID-19 vaccines to neighbouring countries. Recently, Sri Lanka and Bahrain have received the COVID-19 vaccines from India under the initiative.

The Vaccine Maitri initiative was launched by India on January 20 to gift COVID-19 vaccines to neighbouring countries.

India has already delivered over 5 million doses to seven countries in the neighbourhood under the initiative before Sri Lanka and Bahrain.

The 7 countries are- the Maldives (100,000 vaccines), Bhutan (150,000 vaccines), Nepal (1 million vaccines), Bangladesh (2 million vaccines), Myanmar (1.5 million vaccines), Mauritius (100,000 vaccines), and Seychelles (50,000 vaccines).

Commercial supplies of Covishield have also been sent to Morocco, Brazil, (2 million doses each), and Bangladesh (5 million doses).

Nepal to close all educational institutions amid degrading air quality

Nepal government has decided to close all educational institutions till 2nd April 2021, owing to degrading air quality. Ministry of Education decided to close the educational institutions for this week.

Education Ministry has requested parents to ensure children are mostly staying indoors, limiting their exposure to hazardous haze that has shrouded Nepali skies in recent days.

Due to wildfire in more than 54 districts, the quality of air has deteriorated sharply for the past few days, with thick smog blanketing most of the country.

Air quality refers to the condition of the air within our surroundings. Good air quality pertains to the degree to which the air is clean, clear and free from pollutants such as smoke, dust and smog, among other gaseous impurities in the air.

Air quality is determined by assessing a variety of pollution indicators. Good air quality is a requirement for preserving the exquisite balance of life on earth for humans, plants, animals and natural resources

As such, human health, plants, animals and natural resources are threatened when pollution in the air reaches high concentrations.

Militant attack on Palma town

In Mozambique, several people have died following a militants attack on the town of Palma, in Cabo Delgado province.

Palma is near a major gas project run by the French energy giant Total, and more than 100 workers and civilians took refuge in the town's Amarula Palma hotel. Northern Mozambique has been torn apart by an insurgency since 2017.

Palma is a resort city and capital of the Spanish island of Mallorca (Majorca), in the western Mediterranean.

The massive Santa Maria cathedral, a Gothic landmark begun in the 13th century, overlooks the Bay of Palma.

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The adjacent Almudaina is a Moorish-style Arab fortress converted to a royal residence. West of the city, hilltop Bellver Castle is a medieval fortress with a distinctive circular shape.

India along with Pakistan Russia and China Attends Myanmar Parade

India sended a representative to attend the Myanmar Armed Forces Day military parade in Naypyitaw on March 27, a day that saw the country's military shoot and kill at least 90 civilians, with some reports putting the death toll at 114.

Indian officials confirmed that India's military attaché attended the massive parade. The date marks the 76th anniversary of the Burmese National Army's resistance against the occupying Japanese during the Second World War.

Myanmar is important to India from a geopolitical point of view as it geographically stands at the crossroads of India-Southeast relations.

Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country that shares a land border with northeastern India, stretching some 1,624 kilometers. The neighbors also share a 725-km maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.

Myanmar Air Strike on Thai Border

Myanmar army fighter jets launched air strikes recently on a village near the Thai border in territory controlled by an armed ethnic group, the group said, as fears grow of civil war following last month's military coup.

Unrest in coup-hit Myanmar has thrown the spotlight on some of the country's armed ethnic groups, after three of them threatened the junta with retaliation for its deadly crackdown on protests.

An estimated one-third of Myanmar's territory mostly the border regions is currently controlled by 20-odd armed rebel outfits, according to the International Crisis Group.

Key groups include the United Wa State Army, the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independence Army, the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army.

Polity & Governance Current Affairs

Lateral entry inadequate to fill 22% vacancies' gap in IAS posts

The lateral hiring initiative by the government for the bureaucracy may have stirred up a debate but the number of appointees is insignificant to bridge the gap, especially as India faces a shortage of civil servants, primarily for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).

These individuals, who would make a "lateral entry" into the government secretariat, would be contracted for three to five years. These posts were "unreserved", meaning were no quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs.

NITI Aayog, in its three-year Action Agenda, and the Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance in its report submitted in February 2017, recommended the induction of personnel at middle and senior management levels in the central government. These 'lateral entrants' would be part of the central secretariat which in the normal course has only career bureaucrats from the All India Services/ Central Civil Services.

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Lateral recruitment is aimed at achieving the twin objectives of bringing in fresh talent as well as augment the availability of manpower.

Revision in the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013

The NITI Aayog recently circulated a discussion paper on a proposed revision in the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.

The NFSA provides a legal right to persons belonging to "eligible households" to receive food grains at subsidised price– rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse grain at Rs 1/kg — under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

These are called central issue prices (CIPs).

Under sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the Act, the term "eligible households" comprises two categories — "priority households", and families covered by the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).

- Priority households are entitled to receive 5 kg of food grains per person per month.
- AAY households are entitled to 35 kg per month at the same prices.

Registration of Political Parties under section 29A

Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

A party seeking registration under the said section with the Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Commission in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

As per existing guidelines, the applicant association is, inter-alia, asked to publish proposed Name of party in two national daily newspapers and two local daily newspapers, on two days for submitting objections, if any, with regard to the proposed registration of the party before the Commission within 30 days from such publication.

The Commission has announced the General Elections for the Legislative Assemblies of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry on 26.02.2021.

The Election Commission has given a relaxation and has reduced the notice period from 30 days to 7 days for the parties who have published their public notice on or before 26.02.2021.

The fine print of Haryana's quota law

The Haryana government notified a new law that requires 75% of private sector jobs in the state, up to a specified salary slab, reserved for local candidate.

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2020 requires private companies to set aside for domiciles 75% of jobs up to a monthly salary of Rs 50,000 or as may be notified by the government from time to time.

The law is applicable to all the companies, societies, trusts, limited liability partnership firms, partnership firms and any person employing 10 or more persons and an entity, as may be notified by the government from time to time shall come under the ambit of this Act.

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While constitutional guarantees for reservation has been limited to public employment, attempts to extend it to private sector are not new either. In July 2019, the Andhra Pradesh government had passed a similar law, which was challenged in court.

EVMs were used first time in Kerala in 50 booths in 1982

The use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in some booths of the Paravur Assembly constituency in Ernakulam is etched in the electoral history as they were introduced in the constituency in the 1982 polling, a first in the country.

The EVMs were introduced in 50 polling stations in the election in which the late A.C. Jose of the Congress and the late N. Sivan Pillai of the Communist Party of India were locked in a tight contest. The Congress candidate was defeated by a razor-thin margin of 123.

Jose challenged the election of Sivan Pillai in the Kerala High Court, arguing that the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 did not empower the Election Commission to use EVMs. The High Court refused his plea.

But on an appeal by Jose, the Supreme Court in 1984 ordered a re-poll in the 50 polling stations using conventional ballot papers. Jose won the seat.

In 1992, Parliament inserted Section 61A in the Act and rules validating the use of the EVM and paving way for their use in elections.

The EC started using EVMs widely since 1998. The new generation of EVMs has Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), which prints a small slip of paper that carries the name, symbol and the serial number of the candidate.

The plea for abolishing EVMs has been repeatedly rejected by the top court. The top court has issued directives for using VVPAT to ensure accuracy and fairness in the EVM practice in 2013.

Only NRI quota seats based on entrance exams for OCI cardholders

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has reiterated through a gazette notification that OCI cardholders can lay claim to "only Non Resident Indian quota seats" in educational institutions based on all-India entrance tests such as National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Entrance Examination (Mains), Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) or other such all-India professional tests.

The notification also said that OCIs are not entitled to undertake any "missionary, mountaineering, journalism and tabligh activities" without prior permission of the Government of India.

OCI citizens are of Indian origin but they are foreign passport holders and are not citizens of India. India does not allow dual citizenship but provides certain benefits under Section 7B(I) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 to the OCIs.

The fresh notification replaces three previous notifications which did not specify the special permission required for "missionary, Tabligh, mountaineering or journalistic activities" and were merely part of the November 2019 guidelines.

Surat court acquits 122 accused of being members of SIMI

A court in Gujarat's Surat acquitted 122 persons arrested under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for participating in a meeting organised here in December 2001 as members of the banned outfit Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).

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The Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) is a banned terrorist organisation that was formed in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh in April 1977.

The stated mission of SIMI is the 'liberation of India' by converting it to an Islamic land. It has declared Jihad against India, the aim of which is to establish Dar-ul-Islam (land of Islam) by either forcefully converting everyone to Islam or by violence.

The Indian government describes it as a terrorist organisation, and banned it in 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks. In February 2019, the Government of India extended ban on SIMI for a period of five more years starting February 1, 2019 under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

SC asks States to make it clear whether reservation should remain within 50% or not

The Supreme Court decided to examine whether its nearly three-decade-old judgment, which fixed reservation for the marginalised and the poor in government jobs and educational institutions at 50%, needs a re-look.

In the Indira Sawhney verdict of 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court had drawn the "Lakshman rekha" for reservation in jobs and education at 50%, except in "extraordinary circumstances".

However, over the years, several States, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, have crossed the Rubicon and passed laws which allow reservation shooting over 60%.

A five-judge Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, set up to hear the challenge to the Maratha quota law, decided not to confine the question of reservation spilling over the 50% limit to just Maharashtra.

The Bench expanded the ambit of the case by making other States party and inviting them to make their stand clear on the question of whether reservation should continue to remain within the 50% boundary or not.

BJP uses defection as a political device in Bengal election run-up

In a rally in April 2019 ahead of the Lok Sabha election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent a warning to the Trinamool.

Agri-voltaic system of 105 KW capacity was developed by ICAR-Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur.

This technology can increase the income of farmers by generation of electricity and growing of cash crops simultaneously on the same piece of land.

Under component-I of KUSUM (Kisan Urja Suraksha Utthan Mahabhiyan) scheme, there is a provision for installation of agri-voltaic system in farmers' fields with a capacity ranging from 500 KW to 2 MW.

Moreover, National Solar Energy Federation of India (NSEFI) has also documented 13 operational agri-voltaic systems in the country managed by different solar PV functionaries and public Institutes.

Lok Sabha passed National Capital Territory Bill

The Lok Sabha passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that seeks to regularise unauthorised colonies that existed in the National

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Capital Territory of Delhi as on June 1, 2014, and had seen development up to 50% as on January 1, 2015.

The legislation aims to amend the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second Act, 2011. The 2011 Act was valid till 31st December last year. The Bill seeks to extend this deadline to till the end of December 2023.

The 2011 Act provided for the regularisation of unauthorised colonies in the National Capital which existed as on 31st March, 2002, and where construction took place till 1st June, 2014.

The Bill amends this to provide that unauthorised colonies will be identified for regularisation as per the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Recognition of Property Rights of Residents in Unauthorised Colonies) Act, 2019, and the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Recognition of Property Rights of Residents in Unauthorised Colonies) Regulations, 2019.

The legislation provides that the unauthorised colonies which existed as on 1st June 2014, and have 50 per cent development as on 1st January, 2015, will be eligible for regularisation.

Rajya Sabha passes Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021

The Parliament gave its nod to the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021. The Lok Sabha has already passed the bill last month.

The legislation seeks to amend the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. The Act contains provisions to deal with domestic and international arbitration and defines the law for conducting conciliation proceedings.

The Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Bill, 2021 provides for the following:

- To grant unconditional stay of enforcement of arbitral awards, where the underlying arbitration agreement, contracts or arbitral award is induced by fraud or corruption;
- To omit Eighth Schedule of the Act which laid down the qualifications, experience and norms for accreditation of arbitrators; and
- To specify by regulations the qualifications, experience and norms for accreditation of arbitrators and the said amendment is consequential in nature.

Wire wants the new IT Rules Struck Down

The Delhi high court issued notice to the Centre on a petition filed by the Foundation for Independent Journalism, publisher of The Wire, which pleads that the government's new Information Technology (IT) Rules which seek to dictate content to digital news media platforms go beyond the scope of what is permissible under the IT Act and need to be struck down.

The court issued notice to the Centre on a petition filed by the firm challenging the rules regulating digital news media, curated content (OTT platforms), and social media intermediaries.

The petition said Part III of the rules imposed an unconstitutional three-tier complaints and adjudication structure on publishers.

The creation of a grievance redressal mechanism, through a governmental oversight body (an inter-departmental committee constituted under Rule 14) amounted to excessive regulation.

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Rule 4(2), which makes it mandatory for every social media intermediary to enable tracing of originators of information on its platform, purportedly in furtherance of Section 69 of the IT Act, violated Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression).

It also deprived the intermediaries of their "safe-harbour protections" under Section 79 of the IT Act.

The rules obligating messaging intermediaries to alter their infrastructure to "fingerprint" each message on a mass scale for every user to trace the first originator was violative of the fundamental right to privacy of Internet users.

Tirath Singh Rawat sworn-in as new Uttarakhand CM

BJP's surprise choice for the top job in Uttarakhand Tirath Singh Rawat was sworn-in as the state's new chief minister, replacing Trivendra Singh Rawat ahead of next year's Assembly polls.

Article 163(1): There shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except in so far as he is by or under the Constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion.

Article 164(1): The Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and the other Ministers shall be appointed on the advice of the Chief Minister.

Article 164(2): The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly of the State.

Uttarakhand wants Centre to withdraw ILP from Niti valley

The Uttarakhand government had sought withdrawal of "inner-line permit" (ILP) system in Niti Valley of Chamoli district and Nelang Valley of Uttarkashi district for better border management and expansion of tourism and other economic activities in villages located there.

The ILP system restricts movement in areas close to the border for everyone other than those with a formal permission.

In Uttarakhand, tourists have to obtain ILP for locations near China border, at least in the three districts of Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh and Chamoli.

Pithoragarh is strategically more sensitive as it shares boundaries with both China and Nepal.

Nelong valley is an inner line area (India-China border) opened to domestic tourists only during the day. It is approximately 100 km from Uttarkashi headquarters.

Niti village, Chamoli is located at an altitude of around 3600 metres, Niti village in Joshimath in Chamoli district is the last populated village before China border.

Gujarat High Court's guidelines to end menstruation taboo

The Gujarat High Court last month passed an order proposing nine guidelines that the state should follow to end menstruation taboo and discriminatory practices pertaining to it.

The guidelines call for Prohibiting social exclusion of women on the basis of their menstrual status at all places, be it private or public, religious or educational.

It also list the state government's role in raising awareness, including the topic in school curriculum and sensitisation drives.

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The Sabarimala temple entry judgment of the Supreme Court in 2019: Regarding menstruation as polluting or impure, and imposing exclusionary disabilities on the basis of menstrual status, is against the dignity of women which is guaranteed by the Constitution.

The Delhi High Court in November 2020: It had asked government authorities to treat a PIL seeking direction to grant paid period leave to all women employees for four days each month and payment of overtime allowance in case the women opt to work during the menstruation period.

New scheme for tourist vehicle operators

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has announced a new scheme, under which any tourist vehicle operator may apply for an "All India Tourist Authorization/Permit" through online mode.

It will be issued, after relevant documents are submitted and fees deposited, within 30 days of submission of such applications.

The new set of rules, to be known as, "All India Tourist Vehicles Authorization and Permit Rules, 2021" will be applicable from 01 April 2021.

The new rules for permits are expected to go a long way in promoting tourism across the States in our country, while simultaneously, growing the revenue of state Governments.

The rules come even as the Ministry is in the pursuit of providing seamless movement to tourist passenger vehicles, after the success of goods carriage vehicles under National Permit Regime.

Govt reconstitutes panel for studying Sarasvati river

The Centre has reconstituted an advisory committee to chalk out a plan for studying the mythical Sarasvati river for the next two years, after the earlier panel's term ended in 2019.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on March 10 issued a notification for "reconstitution of the Advisory Committee for the Multidisciplinary Study of the River Sarasvati".

The ASI had first set up the committee on December 28, 2017 for a period of two years.

The committee would continue to be chaired by the Culture Minister.

It would include officials from the Culture, Tourism, Water Resources, Environment and Forest, Housing and Urban Affairs Ministries; representatives of the Indian Space Research Organisation; officials from the governments of Gujarat, Haryana and Rajasthan; and an ASI official.

The committee would review the work done by the previous panel and then formulate a plan. The committee would advise the Government Departments conducting research.

Members of air quality panel 'surprised' at dissolution

Members who were part of the Commission for Air Quality Management said they were taken aback by the sudden dissolution of the body, constituted last October and via an ordinance.

The commission was headed by M.M. Kutty, a former Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

The dissolution happened despite the nodal Union Environment Ministry submitting the paper work to the Union Cabinet Secretariat, required to give legal backing to the commission.

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The body came into being in last October on the back of an ordinance — a temporary measure — and the law requires that a formal Bill be presented to Parliament within six weeks of it reconvening — in this case — January 29 when the Budget Session began. Before a Bill is tabled in Parliament it needs to be approved by the Union Cabinet.

However in spite of several Cabinet meetings since January, it wasn't taken up for discussion due to which, the tenure of the body expired, without ever making it to Parliament. It is still technically possible to revive the body during the ongoing Parliament session.

Rajya Sabha passed bill to declare food tech institutes as national ones

Rajya Sabha recently has approved a bill to declare two food technology institutes at Kundli in Haryana and Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu as national institutes. The Rajya Sabha passed The National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019 by voice vote.

The Bill declares certain institutes of food technology, entrepreneurship, and management as institutions of national importance.

These institutes are the:

- National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Kundli, in Haryana
- Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology, Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu.

The Bill declares these institutes as National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management.

SC asks Centre to respond to plea for fresh polls if most votes are NOTA

The Supreme Court recently asked the Centre and the Election Commission of India to respond to a plea that fresh elections should be conducted in constituencies where the maximum votes polled are NOTA.

The petition said candidates 'rejected' by voters should not be fielded again in the fresh polls.

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde expressed doubts initially about the feasibility of the petition to arm the electorate with the "right to reject" and nudge political parties to present voters with a better choice of candidates to pick from.

Chief Justice Bobde said if voters kept rejecting candidates, Parliament/Assembly seats would continue to remain vacant, affecting legislative functioning.

But the petition argued that "if voters are given the power to reject, political parties will take care to field worthy candidates in the first place."

Supreme Court steps in to protect Great Indian Bustard

The Supreme Court swooped-in to intervene on behalf of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustards over the birds falling dead after colliding with power lines running through their dwindling natural habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Scientific Name: *Ardeotis nigriceps*

Physical description: Black crown on the forehead contrasting with the pale neck and head. The body is brownish and the wings are marked with black, brown and grey.

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Diet: They feed on grass seeds, insects like grasshoppers and beetles, and sometimes even small rodents and reptiles.

Distribution: India, effectively the only home of the bustards, now harbours less than 150 individuals in five States. Today, its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat. Small population also occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. It is the State bird of Rajasthan.

Habitat: Bustards generally favour flat open landscapes with minimal visual obstruction and disturbance, therefore adapt well in grasslands. They avoid grasses taller than themselves and dense scrub like thickets.

Conservation status: Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection)Act, 1972, Listed in Appendix I of CITES, Listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Bill to define Delhi L-G's powers moved in Lok Sabha

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) moved a bill in the Lok Sabha where it proposed that "government" in the national capital territory of Delhi means the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G of Delhi even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 proposes to amend Sections 21, 24, 33 and 44 of the 1991 Act.

Section 44 of the 1991 Act says that all executive actions of the L-G, whether taken on the advice of his Ministers or otherwise, shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the L-G.

The Bill gives discretionary powers to the L-G even in matters where the Legislative Assembly of Delhi is empowered to make laws.

The proposed legislation also seeks to ensure that the L-G is "necessarily granted an opportunity" to give her or his opinion before any decision taken by the Council of Ministers (or the Delhi Cabinet) is implemented.

Jharkhand to reserves 75% jobs in private sector for locals

The Jharkhand government announced 75% reservation in private sector jobs with a salary of up to Rs 30,000 for locals. Here's a look at the applicability, exemption, penalties and other provisions in The Jharkhand State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2021.

The bill will treat shops, establishments, mines, enterprises, industries, companies, societies, trusts, Limited Liability Partnership firms and any person employing ten or more persons as the private sector and an entity.

Every employer needs to register employees on a designated portal who are receiving gross monthly salary or wages not more than Rs 30, 000 — or as notified by the government from time to time — within three months of this bill (after turning into an Act) coming into force.

No local candidate will be eligible to avail 75 per cent benefit without registering herself in the designated portal.

The bill defines a local candidate as a person who belongs to Jharkhand and is registered on the designated portal.

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The employer may claim exemption where an adequate number of local candidates of the desired skill qualification or proficiency are not available.

Bill raising upper limit to 24 weeks for abortions passed by Parliament

Parliament has passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which increases the upper limit for abortions from 20 to 24 weeks for certain categories of women, and removes limits in the case of substantial foetal abnormalities, with the Rajya Sabha approving the measure.

Currently, abortion requires the opinion of one doctor if it is done within 12 weeks of conception, and two doctors if it is done between 12 and 20 weeks.

The Bill allows abortion to be done on the advice of one doctor up to 20 weeks, and two doctors in the case of certain categories of women, between 20 and 24 weeks.

For a pregnancy to be terminated after 24 weeks in case of substantial foetal abnormalities, the opinion of the State-level medical board is essential.

Opposition MPs said the Bill still did not give women the freedom to decide, since they would need a nod from a medical board in the case of pregnancies beyond 24 weeks.

The original Bill was framed in 1971.

Census, NPR data to be ready before 2024 polls

According to information provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to a parliamentary committee, the provisional data for the latest Census and National Population Register (NPR) will be available before the next general elections in 2024.

The previous Census was conducted in 2011 and the NPR, which has a database of 119 crore residents, was last updated in 2015.

The first phase of Census House-listing and Housing Census that was to be conducted along with the NPR from April 1, 2020, was indefinitely postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Provisional Census results will be released in the financial year 2023-24 and the primary Census abstracts (PCA) will provide village-level data on important indicators.

A mobile application has been developed for collecting the Census details and NPR and residents can also self-enumerate. The mobile app through which Census will be conducted will be available in 16 languages.

Come out with rule curve for Mullaperiyar

The Supreme Court said that the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary shall be “personally responsible” and “appropriate action” will be taken on failure to give information on the rule curve for Mullaperiyar dam to the Supreme Court-appointed Supervisory Committee.

The ‘rule curve’ in a dam decides the fluctuating storage levels in a reservoir. The gate opening schedule of a dam is based on the ‘rule curve’. It is part of the “core safety” mechanism in a dam.

Mullaperiyar Dam is a masonry gravity dam built at the confluence of Mullayar and Periyar rivers.

The dam is located in Kerala but is operated and maintained by the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu.

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It was constructed between 1887 and 1895 by John Pennycuick and also reached in an agreement to divert water eastwards to the Madras Presidency area (present-day Tamil Nadu).

Lok Sabha passed Appropriation Bill

The Lok Sabha has cleared the Appropriation Bill, allowing the Central government to draw funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for its operational requirements and implementation of various programmes.

Under Article 114(3) of the Constitution, no amount can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund without the enactment of such a law by Parliament.

After the Demands for Grants are voted by the Lok Sabha, Parliament's approval to the withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund of the amounts so voted and of the amount required to meet the expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund is sought through the Appropriation Bill.

The Bill was passed after Speaker Om Birla put it through guillotine, a legislative mechanism to approve the fast-tracking of the passage of outstanding demands for grants without discussion.

While guillotine literally is a large, weighted blade used for executing a condemned person, in legislative parlance, to "guillotine" means to bunch together and fast-track the passage of financial business.

It is a fairly common procedural exercise in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session.

Solicitor General urges Supreme Court to demarcate role of amicus curiae

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta made a strong appeal to the Supreme Court to frame guidelines to rein in lawyers appointed as the court's amici curiae in various cases, especially sensitive ones.

An amicus curiae (literally, "friend of the court"; plural: amici curiae) is someone who is not a party to a case who assists a court by offering information, expertise, or insight that has a bearing on the issues in the case.

The decision on whether to consider an amicus brief lies within the discretion of the court.

The amicus curiae figure originates in Roman law. Starting in the 9th century, it was incorporated into English law, and it was later extended to most common law systems.

ADR's analysis of the balance sheets of the national parties

According to a report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), over 54% of the assets declared by seven national parties for 2018-2019 belonged to the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Congress accounted for 58% of all liabilities reported by the parties.

The ADR's analysis of the balance sheets of the national parties at that time — the BJP, the Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India-Marxist and the All-India Trinamool Congress — showed assets of ₹5,349.25 crore.

Forty-one regional parties declared assets of ₹2,023.71 crore that year. Of the national parties, the BJP declared assets of ₹2,904.18 crore or 54.29% of the total assets of the national parties.

Bihar Assembly passed Lokayukta Bill

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The state assembly passed the Bihar Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that proposes to punish people filing false cases before the anti- corruption ombudsman body to prevent any waste of time or misuse of the institution.

Lokayukta carries out expeditious investigation and prosecution relating to allegations involving corruption against public servants of all grades.

The proposed legislation has been brought keeping in view the misuse of the Lokayukta institution in false cases.

It was proposed by the Lokayukta itself that there should be a provision for punishing people filing false cases before it. The Lokayukta acts of other States have the provision of punitive action against such erring persons.

The Bill proposes that a case against a person filing a false case can be filed in the district court.

If the person is found guilty of it or for giving false testimony or filed wrong affidavit, he/she will be sentenced to a jail term of upto three years besides a provision for fine.

SC stays HC decision barring aided school teachers from contesting polls

The Supreme Court stayed a Kerala High Court decision barring aided school teachers and non-teaching staff from contesting Assembly elections or engaging in political activities.

It issued notice to the Kerala government while staying the High Court verdict in February.

The High Court had declared Section 2 (IV) of the Legislative Assembly (Removal of Disqualifications) Act of 1951, which allowed aided school teachers to become legislators, as unconstitutional.

Petitioners in the High Court had challenged the 1951 law, saying their participation in politics would affect the quality of education.

They had argued in the HC that since Kerala Government Servants Conduct Rules prohibits government school teachers from taking part in political activities, the rule should extend to school teachers also.

The government had however contended in the High Court that as per a government order issued in 1967, the teachers of aided schools had political rights. There were no rules or Act prohibiting them from participating in political activities or contesting polls.

Lok Sabha passed supplementary demand for grants

The Lok Sabha passed the supplementary demand for grants (second batch for 2020-21) but not before significant concerns raised by Opposition leaders on the government's disinvestment and asset monetisation plans, and rising fuel prices.

During the year, if the government needs to spend any money which has not been approved by Parliament or needs to incur additional expenditure, it can introduce Supplementary Demands for Grants.

Typically, Supplementary Demands for Grants are passed in every Parliament session.

Article 115 of the constitution provides for Supplementary, additional or excess grants.

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Note that, unlike the Demands for Grants presented with the budget, these supplementary demands have never been scrutinised by Standing Committees.

SC to hear on March 24 plea against sale of electoral bonds

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde agreed with advocate Prashant Bhushan to urgently hear a plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms to stay the sale of a new set of electoral bonds on April 1, before Assembly elections in crucial States such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Election Commission had both said that the sale of electoral bonds had become an avenue for shell corporations and entities to park illicit money and even proceeds of bribes with political parties.

Data obtained through RTI has shown that illegal sale windows have been opened in the past to benefit certain political parties.

There is a serious apprehension that any further sale of electoral bonds before the upcoming State elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam would further increase illegal and illicit funding of political parties through shell companies.

The scheme had "opened doors to unlimited political donations, even from foreign companies, thereby legitimising electoral corruption at a huge scale, while at the same time ensuring complete non-transparency in political funding".

Lok Sabha passed bill to amend the Mines and Mineral Act

The Lok Sabha passed a Bill to amend the Mines and Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR Act) through a voice vote, with Mines Minister Pralhad Joshi stating that the amendments will create jobs and allow private players with enhanced technology into the mining sector.

The amendment proposes to allow captive miners of both coal and other minerals to sell up to 50 per cent of their production after meeting the requirements of the end-use plant and on paying additional royalty to the state government.

Operators are currently only allowed to use coal and minerals extracted from captive mines for their own industrial use. This increased flexibility would allow miners to maximise output from captive mines as they would be able to sell output in excess of their own requirements.

The amendment also proposes to fix additional royalty payments to states for the extension of mining leases for central public sector enterprises.

The Bill also proposes to empower the central government to conduct auctions or re-auction processes for the grant of a mining lease if a state government fails to complete the auction process in a specified period, decided after consultations between the Centre and state.

Lok Sabha passed bill to place seven castes under Devendrakula Vellalars

The Lok Sabha passed The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021, that seeks to put seven castes under one nomenclature of "Devendrakula Vellalars" with some exceptions for some of the castes in certain districts of Tamil Nadu. The castes include Devendrakulathan, Kadaiyan, Kalladi, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Vathiriyan.

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The State government had earlier accepted a recommendation of a committee to reclassify the seven sub sects under the generic name 'Devendrakula Velalar' and forwarded it to the Centre.

The change in nomenclature was a long pending demand of the community and did not involve either the deletion or addition of any community in its ambit.

The reason why a whole new addition was not made to the Scheduled Castes list was to ensure that old caste certificates issued to these communities under the old name not be rejected.

Govt introduces NaBFID Bill in Lok Sabha to support funding infra projects

Finance Minster Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill 2021 in the Lok Sabha to pave the way for setting up of a government-owned development finance institution to help fund about 7,000 infra projects under the National Infrastructure Pipeline.

The bill seeks to establish the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development.

Its objective is to support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India including development of the bonds and derivatives markets necessary for infrastructure financing and to carry on the business of financing infrastructure.

EC bans bike rallies 72 hours before polling

The Election Commission ordered a ban on bike rallies 72 hours before polling and on the day of voting itself in the Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal Assembly elections, citing instances of "anti-social elements" on bikes intimidating voters.

The EC wrote to the Chief Electoral Officers of the four States and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The EC decided that bike rallies would not be allowed at any place 72 hours before the date of poll and on the poll day in all constituencies where elections are being held.

The complaints came up particularly during the EC's meetings with parties in Kolkata, adding that the ban had been in place during the previous elections as well.

No plan to introduce Panchayat system in Assam tribal areas

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that "presently, there is no proposal to implement Panchayat system in Sixth Schedule areas of Assam".

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution protects tribal populations and provides autonomy to the communities through creation of autonomous development councils that can frame laws on land, public health, agriculture and others.

As of now, 10 autonomous councils exist in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

The specified tribal areas are the North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and the Bodoland Territorial Area in Assam, Khasi Hills, Jaintiya Hills and Garo Hills in Meghalaya, Tribal Areas in Tripura, and Chakma, Mara and Lai districts in Mizoram.

Indus water panel holds meeting

After a gap of more than two and half years Indian and Pakistani delegations began the 116th Meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission.

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The meeting which coincided with the National Day of Pakistan is being viewed as part of the broader process of normalisation of bilateral ties between the two neighbours.

The Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) is a bilateral commission consisting of officials from India and Pakistan.

It was created to implement and manage the goals and objectives and outlines of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) which was signed in September 1960 with World Bank standing guarantee for any dispute resolution.

The last meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission was held on August 29, 2018.

The two-day meeting of the Commission is being led on the Indian side by Indus Water Commissioner Pradeep Kumar Saxena. The Pakistani delegation is led by Pakistan's Commissioner for Indus Waters Syed Mohammad Mehr Ali Shah.

National Commission for Allied & Healthcare Professions Bill

Lok Sabha cleared the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, a Bill to set up a commission for regulating and prescribing uniform education standards for allied and healthcare professionals.

The Bill defines 'allied health professional' as an associate, technician, or technologist trained to support the diagnosis and treatment of any illness, disease, injury, or impairment. Such a professional should have obtained a diploma or degree under this Bill.

A 'healthcare professional' includes a scientist, therapist, or any other professional who studies, advises, research, supervises, or provides preventive, curative, rehabilitative, therapeutic, or promotional health services. Such a professional should have obtained a degree under this Bill.

The Bill specifies certain categories of allied and healthcare professions as recognised categories. These include life science professionals, trauma and burn care professionals, surgical and anaesthesia related technology professionals, physiotherapists, and nutrition science professionals.

The Bill sets up the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions. It will frame policies and standards for regulating education and practice, create and maintain an online Central Register of all registered professionals, and providing for a uniform entrance and exit examination, among others.

The Commission will constitute a Professional Council for every recognised category of allied and healthcare professions.

Within six months from the passage of the Bill, state governments will constitute State Allied and Healthcare Councils.

Chief Justice Bobde Recommends Justice NV Ramana as His Successor

Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde has recommended Justice N.V. Ramana, the senior most judge of the Supreme Court, as the next top judge.

Justice Ramana is now set to take over as the 48th Chief Justice of India from April 24.

The Centre had recently asked Chief Justice Bobde, who is retiring on April 23, to initiate the transition process to the top judicial office. Justice Ramana will be the CJI till August 26, 2022.

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Article 124 of the Constitution of India provides for the manner of appointing judges to the Supreme Court (SC). But there is no specific provision in the Constitution for appointing the Chief Justice.

CJI should be the senior most judge of the Supreme Court (SC). Law Minister has to seek recommendation of the outgoing CJI for appointment of new CJI at an appropriate time.

In case of doubt about the fitness of the senior-most Judge to hold office of CJI consultation with other Judges under Article 124(2) to be made.

Law Minister then puts up recommendation to Prime Minister (PM) who will advise the President on appointment.

Supreme Court bats for women officers in Army

The Supreme Court has held that the Army's "selective" evaluation process discriminates against and disproportionately affects women short service commission officers seeking a permanent commission.

The evaluation pattern of women officers has caused them economic and psychological harm, the court said.

The court ordered that the cases of women officers who have applied for permanent commission should be reconsidered in a month and the decision on them should be given in two months.

They would be considered for permanent commission subject to disciplinary and vigilance clearance. The court said physical standards should be kept at a premium during selection.

Supreme Court for posting retired judges to clear backlog in High Courts

The Supreme Court pushed for the appointment of retired judges to battle pendency of cases in High Courts.

Of the pending recommendations, 44 were made to fill vacancies in the Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh, Gauhati, Rajasthan and Punjab High Courts. These recommendations have been pending with the government for over seven months to a year.

The total sanctioned strength in the 25 High Courts is 1,080. However, the present working strength is 661 with 419 vacancies as on March 1.

The Supreme Court has been repeatedly conveying to the government its growing alarm at the judicial vacancies in High Courts.

General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies

Election Commission of India, in exercise of the powers under sub-section (1) of Section 126A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 has notified the period between 7:00A.M on 27th March, 2021 and 7.30 PM on 29th April, 2021, as the period during which exit polls are banned.

During this period, conducting any exit poll and publishing or publicizing the result of exit poll by means of the print or electronic media or in any other manner shall be prohibited in the ongoing General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal & Puducherry.

Further, under Section 126(1)(b) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951,displaying any election matter including results of any opinion poll or any other poll survey, in any electronic

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media, would be prohibited during the period of 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for conclusion of poll.

Almost 40% of RTI rejections last year did not invoke valid reason

The Centre has only rejected 4.3% of all Right to Information (RTI) requests in 2019-20, the lowest ever rate, according to the Central Information Commission's annual report.

However, almost 40% of these rejections did not include any valid reason, as they did not invoke one of the permissible exemption clauses in the RTI Act, according to an analysis of report data by RTI activist Venkatesh Nayak.

This includes 90% of rejections by the Prime Minister's Office.

Public authorities under the Central government received 13.7 lakh RTI requests in 2019-20, out of which 58,634 were rejected for various reasons.

Rejection rates have fallen since the 13.9% rate in 2005-06 and have been steadily trending downwards since the 8.4% spike in 2014-15. In 2019-20, they hit their lowest level so far.

The Home Ministry had the highest rate of rejections, as it rejected 20% of all RTIs received. The Agriculture Ministry's rejection rate doubled from 2% in 2018-19 to 4% in 2019-20.

The Delhi Police and the Army also saw increases in rejection rates.

Bihar special police bill passed amid unprecedented chaos in the assembly

The Opposition in Bihar has called a statewide bandh on March 26 to protest the passed of the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021 by the Bihar Assembly.

The bill aims to develop the Bihar Military Police into a well-trained and fully equipped armed police force with multi-domain expertise to cater to the development needs and the larger interest of the state.

At present, the Bihar Military Police is entrusted with the security of the Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya, the Darbhanga airport, and other industrial and commercial establishments.

The new Bill renames the Bihar Military Police as the Bihar Special Armed Police, and gives the force more teeth, on the lines of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), so it can better secure the commercial and industrial assets of the state.

Mandate of the force will be the "maintenance of public order, combating extremism, ensuring the better protection and security of specified establishments in such manner as may be notified and perform such other duties, as may be notified."

It empowers Special Armed Police officers to carry out searches and arrests without warrant, and courts being able to take congnizance of certain offences by the officers only after government sanction.

The mahagathbandhan in Bihar has called the Bill "draconian".

Indian Government Says Companies Must Disclose Crypto Holdings

The Indian government is amending current legislation to require companies to disclose cryptocurrency holdings in their financial statements.

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All companies will now have to disclose in their statutory financial filings to the RoC any profit or loss on transactions involving cryptocurrency, the amount of cryptocurrency held on the reporting date, and any deposits or advances received from anyone for the purpose of investing in cryptocurrencies or virtual currencies.

Some experts have said these disclosure requirements indicated the government is open to regulating cryptocurrencies instead of banning them.

The government's new bill – Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021 — aims to prohibit all private cryptocurrencies while setting the stage to roll out the legal framework for an "official digital currency".

However, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the Centre will take a calibrated approach to cryptocurrencies and will not close the window on experimentation with cryptocurrencies.

OCI card holders no longer required to carry old passports for India travel

People of Indian origin and Indian diaspora having overseas citizens of India (OCI) card are now not required to carry their old, expired passports for travel to India, as required earlier.

According to the embassy, the Indian government has also decided to grant further extension of time till December 31, 2021, to get the OCI cards re-issued for those below the age of 20 years and above 50 years.

As per the current OCI guidelines that have been in force since 2005, an OCI card is required to be re-issued each time a new passport is acquired by the cardholder up to the age of 20 years or after completing 50 years of age.

Recently, the Union government has told the Delhi High Court that Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders do not enjoy fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, including the right to freedom of speech and expression. This response was to a plea seeking information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005.

Article 19(1)(a)- Freedom of speech and expression: It provides every citizen with the right to express one's views, opinions, beliefs, and convictions freely by word of mouth, writing, printing, picturing or in any other manner.

Article 21: It declares that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. This right is available to both citizens and non-citizens.

President prorogues fifth session of 17th Lok Sabha

President Ram Nath Kovind has prorogued the fifth session of 17th Lok Sabha. The session had commenced on 29th January.

President also prorogued the Rajya Sabha. The House was adjourned sine die on 25th of this month.

Termination of a session of the House by an order made by the President under article 85(2) is called 'prorogation'.

The President in exercising the power to prorogue the House acts on the advice of the Prime Minister.

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Usually, prorogation follows the adjournment of the sitting of the House sine die.

The time-lag between the adjournment of a House sine die and its prorogation is generally two to four days, although there are instances when a House was prorogued on the same day on which it was adjourned sine die.

It is not necessary that both the Houses should be prorogued simultaneously.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) S A Bobde lauded Goa's Uniform Civil Code

Chief Justice of India (CJI) S A Bobde lauded Goa's Uniform Civil Code, and encouraged "intellectuals" indulging in "academic talk" to visit the state to learn more about it. Earlier in September 2019, the Supreme Court had described Goa as a "shining example" with a Uniform Civil Code.

A Uniform Civil Code is one that would provide for one law for the entire country, applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc.

Article 44 of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for the citizens throughout the territory of India.

Election Commission's new rule for polling agents

The Election Commission's recent decision to change the rules for appointing polling agents has sparked off a debate in West Bengal.

As per the new regulations, a political party can now nominate a polling agent for any booth within the assembly segment he/she is a voter from. Earlier, the polling agent had to be a voter of the booth or an adjoining booth that he/she is working at.

A polling agent is a person appointed as a representative of a political party as it is not possible for a candidate to be physically present at every polling booth on the day of the elections.

Therefore, the Election Commission allows a candidate to appoint a polling agent who keeps an eye on the voting process.

As per the Election Commission's rules, a polling agent should be familiar with the rules and procedures to conduct elections using EVMs and VVPATs, and with the working of these machines.

Towards this end, a polling agent attends the demonstrations arranged by the Returning Officer, where the functioning and operation of these machines are explained.

Quran case and the powers of judicial review

A public interest litigation has been filed in the Supreme Court by Wasim Rizvi seeking declaration of 26 verses of the Quran as unconstitutional, non-effective and non- functional on the ground that these promote extremism and terrorism and pose a serious threat to the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country.

Millions have memorised the Quran; the petitioner has not mentioned how any court can delete these verses from their memory.

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Under Indian law, only a "law" can be challenged as unconstitutional. Article 13(3) defines law, which includes any ordinance, order, by-law, rule, regulations, notification, custom or usage having in the territory the force of law.

"Laws in force" on the commencement of the Constitution include laws enacted by a legislature or other competent authority.

This definition certain does not cover any religious scripture including the Quran. Similarly, neither the Vedas nor the Gita, nor the Bible, nor the Guru Granth Sahib can be said to be "law" under Article 13 and thus challenged in a court of law.

The divine books can be sources of law but not law in themselves. Thus, Quran in itself is not "law" for the purposes of Article 13.

It is the paramount source of Islamic law and Muslim jurists extract laws from it through interpretation and also taking into account other sources of law such as Hadees (Prophet's sayings), Ijma (juristic consensus), Qiyas (analogical deductions), Urf (customs), Istihsan (juristic preference) and Istisilah (public interest).

Science & Technology Current Affairs

ISRO Successfully Launches PSLV-C51 Carrying Brazil's Amazonia-1

Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) first launch of 2021, PSLV-C51 carrying Amazonia-1 and 18 other satellites took off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.

PSLV-C51, which is the 53rd mission of PSLV, will launch Amazonia-1 of Brazil as primary satellite and 18 Co-passenger satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.

PSLV-C51/Amazonia-1 is the first dedicated commercial mission of NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a Government of India company under Department of Space. NSIL is undertaking this mission under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc. USA.

Amazonia-1 is the optical earth observation satellite of National Institute for Space Research (INPE).

This satellite would further strengthen the existing structure by providing remote sensing data to users for monitoring deforestation in the Amazon region and analysis of diversified agriculture across the Brazilian territory.

The 18 co-passenger satellites include four from IN-SPACe (three UNITYsats from consortium of three Indian academic institutes and One Satish Dhawan Sat from Space Kidz India) and 14 from NSIL.

NASA's Perseverance rover makes historic Mars landing

NASA's science rover Perseverance, the most advanced astrobiology laboratory ever sent to another world, streaked through the Martian atmosphere and landed safely on the floor of a vast crater, its first stop on a search for traces of ancient microbial life on the Red Planet.

Among the scientists who are part of this historic mission, Indian-American Dr Swati Mohan spearheaded the development of attitude control and the landing system for the rover.

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Besides that she was the lead systems engineer throughout the development.

She is the key communicator between the GN&C subsystem and the rest of the project's teams.

Dr Mohan had emigrated from India to the United States at the age of One. She has worked on Mars-2020 since almost the beginning of the project in 2013 and is currently working at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena.

Pixxel India's delayed flight to new space frontier

PSLV-C51 mission was supposed to carry a satellite from Pixxel India, one of the several new start-ups. But eventually the satellite could not be part of the launch.

Pixxel India is a Bengaluru-based start-up that completed two years of existence recently.

It is planning to place a vast constellation of earth-imaging satellites for continuous monitoring of every part of the globe, and beam high-resolution imagery and other data that can be utilized for a variety of applications in climate change, agriculture and urban planning.

The first of its satellites, called Anand, was supposed to be on this PSLV-C51 rocket that took off from the Sriharikota launching range this morning.

But less than a week before the launch, the company announced that due to "certain software issues" during testing, it would not go ahead with the launch of the satellite at this time.

Hyderabad CSIR lab helped develop key molecule for Covaxin

The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) lab here, played a role in the development of Covaxin, the indigenous vaccine developed by city-based Bharat Biotech International Limited.

The vaccine is a highly purified, whole virion, inactivated SARS-Cov-2.

The vaccine has been formulated with 'Algel-IMDG', which contains chemically absorbed TLR7/8 as an agonist or an adjuvant onto aluminium hydroxide gel to generate the requisite type of immune responses without damaging the body.

The firm had approached the IICT to develop the synthetic route for the adjuvant molecule TLR 7/8 with indigenous chemicals at an affordable price and with highest purity.

This indigenously developed molecule aided Bharat Biotech to scale up the production of the adjuvant.

Indian Railways install MTRC system, commuters to get real-time updates

Indian Railways' Western Railway zone has introduced the Mobile Train Radio Communication (MTRC) system which will play an important role in preventing train accidents through effective communication.

The Mobile Train Radio Communication system is an effective and a technologically advanced communication system which can play an intrinsic role in preventing train accidents and reducing delays through effective communication.

MRTC acts in a similar way to that of Air traffic control (ARC) for aircrafts. The system will monitor, track and aid in communication between the trains and the control room thereby ensuring smooth movement of rakes as well as help in preventing adverse events.

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This is the first time that MTRC is commissioned in Indian Railways. It is a historic move of the Indian Railways.

The new system has already been installed in 90 out of 100 rakes running between Churchgate and Virar.

Sugamya Bharat App launched to ease accessibility issues faced by differently abled

Union minister Thaawarchand Gehlot virtually launched "Sugamya Bharat App", a crowd-sourcing mobile application, and a handbook entitled "Access - The Photo Digest" to enhance accessibility.

The App has been developed by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Sugamya Bharat APP — a Crowdsourcing Mobile Application is a means for sensitising and enhancing accessibility in the 3 pillars of the Accessible India Campaign i.e. built environment, transportation sector and ICT ecosystem in India.

The app provides for five main features, 4 of which are directly related to enhancing accessibility, while the fifth is a special feature meant only for Divyangjan for COVID related issues.

The accessibility related features are: the registration of complaints of inaccessibility across the 3 broad pillars of the Sugamya Bharat Abhiyaan; positive feedback of examples and best practices worth emulating being shared by people as jan-bhagidhari; Departmental updates; and guidelines and circulars related to accessibility.

New Science Centre Inaugurated At Tripura

The Governor of Tripura Ramesh Bais has inaugurated the Udaipur Science Centre, at Udaipur, Tripura on February 28, 2021.

Udaipur Science Centre is the 22nd Science Centre which has been developed by National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) and handed over to the State Governments under the Ministry of Culture's Scheme for Promotion of Culture of Science.

This Science Centre has been developed at a cost of Rs 6 crore funded jointly by Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India and Dept. of Science, Technology & Environment, Government of Tripura.

With this; NCSM has now set-up science centres in all the north eastern states.

Karnataka launches engineering research policy

Karnataka launched the country's maiden Engineering Research & Development (ER&D) Policy to raise its contribution to the sector in the country to 45% in the next five years.

The State government anticipates the policy has the potential to create over 50,000 jobs in the ER&D space in five years.

According to industry apex body Nasscom, ER&D has the potential to become a $100-billion industry in the country in the next five years.

The ER&D sector in the country is the fastest growing industry with a CAGR of 12.8%. Meanwhile, the global engineering research and development industry is expected to reach a spend of $2 trillion by 2025.

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The new policy has identified five key focus sectors such as aerospace and defence; auto, auto components and EV; biotechnology, pharma and medical devices; semiconductors, telecom, ESDM; and software products.

India's DRDO achieves new milestone in AIP system development

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has achieved an important milestone in the development of an air independent propulsion (AIP) system.

The system is being developed by Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL) of DRDO.

AIP has a force multiplier effect on lethality of a diesel electric submarine as it enhances the submerged endurance of the boat, several folds. Fuel cell-based AIP has merits in performance compared to other technologies.

While there are different types of AIP systems being pursued internationally, fuel cell-based AIP of NMRL is unique as the hydrogen is generated onboard.

The technology has been successfully developed with the support of industry partners L&T and Thermax. It has now reached the stage of maturity for fitment into target vessels.

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO, Indian Navy and Industry for the achievement.

Contract inked for construction of 11 ammunition-cum-torpedo-cum missile barges

A contract for construction and delivery of 11 ammunition-cum-torpedo-cum missile (ACTCM) barges has been concluded by the Ministry of Defence with Suryadipta Projects, Thane, on 05 March 2021. The delivery of barges is scheduled to commence from 22 May 2021.

The Ammunition Cum Torpedo Cum Missile Barges will be inducted in Indian Navy to undertake the mission needs for embarking/ disembarking Ammunition, Torpedo & Missile etc.

These barges will be built under the Classification Rules of Indian Register of Shipping (IRS).

Delivery of Barges is scheduled to commence from May 22.

The project adds another milestone to the Atmanirbhar Bharat & Make in India initiative of the Government of India.

Gadkari inaugurated MSME technology centres in Bhopal and Visakhapatnam

Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari virtually inaugurated the MSME Technology Centres at Bhopal and Visakhapatnam.

The Ministry of MSME has rolled out the Technology Centres Systems Programme to develop the competitiveness ecosystems of MSME in the country.

These Technology Centres will train more than 16 thousand students annually and have infrastructure for training and production.

The minister also launched the 7 Udyan Express Mobile Vans with a view to provide assistance to MSME in remote areas and also make aware the youth of rural areas about government's schemes.

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India's biggest floating solar plant to be commissioned in next three months

The country's biggest floating solar power plant, by generation capacity developed by NTPC in the reservoir of its thermal plant at Ramagundam in Peddapalli district of Telangana is set to be commissioned by May-June next.

Work on this 100 megawatt floating solar power plant at Ramagundam is in the final stages of completion.

This will be one of the renewable (solar) energy plants being developed by the NTPC with an installed capacity of 447 MW in the southern region and the entire capacity will be commissioned by March 2023.

Except for the 230 MW ground-mounted solar power plant at Ettayapuram in Tamil Nadu, the remaining 217 MW capacity was to be commissioned by May-June this year.

NIO scientists mapping genomes in the Indian Ocean

A 30-member team of scientists and researchers from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in Panaji and another 30 crew members on board its research vessel Sindhu Sadhana will spend the next three months traversing the course of over 10,000 nautical miles in the Indian Ocean on a research project to reveal the internal working of the body of the ocean at a cellular level.

The first-of-its-kind research project in the country is aimed at understanding the biochemistry and the response of the ocean to climate change, nutrient stress and increasing pollution.

The research project will take three years to complete.

Researchers will travel the Indian Ocean from India's east coast, all the way to Australia, then onward towards Port Louis in Mauritius and up to the border of Pakistan, off India's west coast, gathering samples for genome mapping of microorganisms in the Indian Ocean.

The researchers will collect samples from various stretches of the ocean at an average depth of about 5 km.

Just like gene mapping is carried out on blood samples collected from humans, the scientists will map these in the bacteria, microbes found in the ocean. This will help scientists understand the internal working of the ecosystem of the Indian Ocean.

At various stages and stretches, samples will be collected by lowering a Kevlar cable of up to 8 km with a set of 24 teflon coated bottles to collect samples.

India, Japan space agencies review cooperation

Indian and Japanese space agencies reviewed cooperation in earth observation, lunar cooperation and satellite navigation, and also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in "space situational awareness and professional exchange programme".

This was agreed during a bilateral meeting between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) held virtually.

Both agencies signed an Implementing Arrangement for collaborative activities on rice crop area and air quality monitoring using satellite data.

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India and Japan are already working on a joint lunar polar exploration (LUPEX) mission and the two space agencies have been working on the mission that aims to send a lander and rover to the Moon's south pole around 2024.

NewSpace India Limited to own and operate capital intensive space assets of ISRO

The NewSpace India Limited, a subsidiary company under the Department of Space will own and operate capital intensive space assets of ISRO as part of the space reforms process initiated in June last year.

During a media conference in Bengaluru, the Chairman and Managing Director of NewSpace India Limited Mr.G Narayanan informed that they are in advance stage of discussion with the Department of Space to take ownership of two new communication satellites for commercial purpose.

The transponders on these satellites will be leased to the private companies with DTH and Broadband services.

The company he added is in talks with five private Industries to manufacture under license five Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles.

The Executive Director of NewSpace India Limited Mr.D Radhakrishnan informed that they have received orders for four launches of private satellites.

NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) is a Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) of Government of India and commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

It was established in 2019 under the administrative control of Department of Space (DoS) and the Company Act 2013. The main objective of NSIL is to scale up industry participation in Indian space programmes.

Mosquito protein inhibits number of viruses raises hope against Covid too

A mosquito protein, called AEG12, strongly inhibits the family of viruses that cause yellow fever, dengue, West Nile, and Zika, and also weakly inhibits coronaviruses, according to scientists at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and their collaborators.

The researchers found that AEG12 works by destabilising the viral envelope, breaking its protective covering. The protein does not affect viruses that do not have an envelope.

At the molecular level, AEG12 rips out the lipids (the fat-like portions of the membrane that hold the virus together).

The findings, however, could lead to therapeutics against viruses that affect millions of people around the world.

While the researchers demonstrated that AEG12 was most effective against flaviviruses — the family of viruses to which Zika, West Nile, and others belong — they felt it is possible AEG12 could be effective against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid-19.

But, it will take years of bioengineering to make AEG12 a viable therapy for Covid-19.

Global energy meet calls for accelerated shift to renewables

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World Energy Transitions Outlook report, brought out by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) says that the COVID-19 crisis offers an unexpected opportunity for countries across the world to decouple their economies from fossil fuels and accelerate the shift to renewable energy sources.

Previewed at the virtual Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue, which began on March 16, 2021, the report proposes energy transition solutions for the narrow pathway available to contain the rise of temperature to 1.5 degree Celsius.

The COVID-19 crisis offers an unexpected opportunity for countries to decouple their economies from fossil fuels and accelerate the shift to renewable energy sources,

It estimated that by 2050, 90% of total electricity needs would be supplied by renewables, followed by 6% from natural gas and the remaining from nuclear.

The agency has identified 30 innovations for the integration of wind and solar PV in power systems.

The diatom test done in the Mansukh Hiran death case

The Maharashtra (ATS) relied on a forensic test known as diatom tests for leads in the alleged murder case of Mansukh Hiran.

Diagnosis of death by drowning is deemed as a difficult task in forensic pathology.

A number of tests have been developed to confirm the cause of such deaths with the diatom test emerging as one of the most important tests.

The test entails findings if there are diatoms in the body being tested. Diatoms are photosynthesizing algae which are found in almost every aquatic environment including fresh and marine waters, soils, in fact, almost anywhere moist.

Parosmia: An odor distortion associated with COVID-19

Parosmia is a medical term used to describe a condition in which affected individuals experience “distortions of the sense of smell”. Some people may experience parosmia as a symptom of COVID-19.

A person with parosmia can detect certain odours, but they might experience the smell of certain things as different and often unpleasant. For instance, to someone with parosmia, coffee may smell like burnt toast.

Parosmia is a temporary condition and is not harmful.

This abnormality is typically experienced by those people who are recovering their sense of smell following loss from a virus or an injury.

Some common triggers of parosmia include roasted, toasted or grilled foods, coffee, onions, chocolate, garlic and eggs.

It is likely that parosmia manifests itself due to the damage caused to the olfactory neurons when “the delicate and complex structure in the nose is attacked by a virus.”

India reports unique ‘double mutant’ coronavirus variant

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A unique "double mutant" coronavirus variant with a combination of mutations not seen anywhere else in the world has been found in India.

However, it is still to be established if this has any role to play in increased infectivity or in making COVID-19 more severe.

Genome sequencing of a section of virus samples by a consortium of 10 laboratories across the country, called the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG), revealed the presence of two mutations, E484Q and L452R together, in at least 200 virus samples.

Mutations in the virus per se are not surprising but specific mutations that help the virus evolve to thwart vaccines or the immune system or are linked to a spike in cases or in disease severity are causes of concern.

While the two mutations have been individually identified in other variants of SARS-CoV-2 globally and have been associated with a reduction in vaccine efficacy, their combined effect and biological implications have not yet been understood.

In the days ahead, the INSACOG will submit details of this variant to a global repository called GISAID and, if it merits, classify it as a "variant of concern" (VOC).

So far, only three global VOCs have been identified: the U.K. variant (B.1.1.7), the South African (B.1.351) and the Brazilian (P.1) lineage.

After the new double variant has been submitted to GISAID, it will be categorised under a formal lineage, and will have its own name.

NASA and ISRO are collaborating on developing a satellite "NISAR"

To developing a satellite called NISAR, NASA and ISRO are collaborating which will detect movements of the planet's surface as small as 0.4 inches over areas about half the size of a tennis court.

NISAR is an SUV-sized satellite that is being jointly developed by the space agencies of the US and India.

The name NISAR is short for NASA-ISRO-SAR. SAR here refers to the synthetic aperture radar that NASA will use to measure changes in the surface of the Earth. Essentially, SAR refers to a technique for producing high-resolution images. Because of the precision, the radar can penetrate clouds and darkness, which means that it can collect data day and night in any weather.

The partnership agreement was signed between NASA and ISRO in 2014. NASA will provide one of the radars for the satellite, a high-rate communication subsystem for science data, GPS receivers and a payload data subsystem. ISRO, on the other hand, will provide the spacecraft bus, the second type of radar (called the S-band radar), the launch vehicle and associated launch services.

The satellite will be launched in 2022 from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota, India, into a near-polar orbit.

It will scan the globe every 12 days over the course of its three-year mission of imaging the Earth's land, ice sheets and sea ice to give an "unprecedented" view of the planet.

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Security Current Affairs

Army to induct 6,000 new Light Machine Guns

The Army will begun inducting the first lot of 6,000 new Light Machine Guns (LMG) from Israel, with frontline troops on the borders set to receive them later this month.

These are part of the 16,497 Negev LMGs contracted from Israeli Weapons Industry (IWI) in March 2020 under fast track procurement to meet the immediate requirement. The remaining guns in the order will be delivered by March 2022.

The contracted Negev 7.62X51 mm LMG is a combat proven weapon and currently used by several countries around the globe.

This LMG will greatly enhance the lethality and range of a soldier vis-a-vis the presently used weapon.

Defence, security new criteria for 'trusted sources, products'

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) amended licensing conditions for telecom companies by including defence and national security as parameters in purchase of telecom equipment for trusted sources.

Including defence and national security as parameters means the designated authority can, at any time, citing these two aspects, ask telecom companies not to use products which it has deemed unsafe.

The new norms will kick in from June 15, following which telecom companies will not be able to use any products that do not appear on the trusted telecom equipment source list or the trusted telecom product list.

If a telecom company wishes to expand its network by using any equipment that does not come from a trusted source or is not on the list of trusted telecom products, it will have to take prior permission from the designated authority, which is the National Cyber Security Coordinator.

Defence Ministry deals with BDL to acquire 4,690 anti-tank guided missiles

Defence Ministry inked a contract with Defence Public Sector Undertaking (DPSU) Bharat Dynamics Limited to supply 4,960 MILAN-2T Anti-Tank Guided Missiles to Army at a cost of Rs 1,188 crores. The induction is planned to be completed in three years.

The Milan-2T is produced by BDL under license from a defence firm from France.

MILAN-2T is a man portable (Infantry) second-generation ATGM, that can destroy battle tanks fitted with explosive reactive armour, moving and stationary targets.

The Milan-2T is a Tandem Warhead ATGM with the range of 1,850 metres, produced by BDL under license from MBDA Missile Systems, France.

These missiles can be fired from ground as well as vehicle-based launchers and can be deployed in Anti-Tank Role for both offensive and defensive tasks. Induction of these missiles will further enhance the operational preparedness of the armed forces.

India ranked 4th most powerful military in world

According to the Miltary Direct's study report China has the strongest military force in the world while India stands at number four.

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The USA, despite their enormous military budgets, comes in 2nd place with 74 points, followed by Russia with 69, India at 61 and then France with 58. The UK just about makes the Top 10, coming in 9th place with a score of 43.

The study said "ultimate military strength index" was calculated after taking into consideration various factors including budgets, number of inactive and active military personnel, total air, sea, land and nuclear resources, average salaries, and weight of equipment.

The world's biggest military spender with a budget of USD 732 billion per year is the USA, it noted, adding that China comes second with USD 261 billion, followed by India at USD 71 billion.

Society and Social Justice Current Affairs

Healthcare workers are foremost champions of humanity

Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare addressed the Global Indian Physicians Congress, organized by the Global Association for Physicians of Indian Origin (GAPIO).

GAPIO is a non-profit organization established in 2011.

Padma Vibhushan, Dr. Prathap C Reddy, Chairman of Apollo Hospitals Group is the Founder President of GAPIO along with Dr. Sanku Rao – Past President of AAPI, USA and Dr. Ramesh Mehta – President of BAPIO, UK.

The aim of the organization is to bring together 1.4 million physicians of Indian origin in the world on one professional platform.

GAPIO has held 10 annual conferences in India and has held 9 midyear conferences overseas since 2011.

In Nagaland, an itch for reviving prickly cages for offenders

Some villages in Nagaland are trying to revive a traditional form of punishment that seeks to check crime with an itch in time.

Social offenders or violators of Naga customary laws have over the ages dreaded a cramped, triangular cage made from the logs of Masang-fung, a local tree that people avoid because of the irritation it causes.

The dread is more of humiliation or loss of face within the community or clan than of spending at least a day scratching furiously without any space to move.

Such itchy cages are referred to as khujli ghar in Nagamese — a pidgin lingua franca — but each Naga community has its own name. The Aos, one of the major tribes of Nagaland, call it Shi-ki that means flesh-house.

The cage is usually placed at a central spot in the village, usually in front of the morung, or bachelor's dormitory, for the inmate to be in full public view.

Freedoms in India have reduced

Freedoms in India have reduced, according to a report from a U.S. thinktank, Freedom House, resulting in India being classified as 'partly free'.

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India's score was 67, a drop from 71/100 from last year (reflecting 2019 data) downgrading it from the free category last year (based on 2020 data).

According to the report "Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy under Siege", the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and its State-level allies continued to crack down on critics during the year.

The ruling Hindu nationalist movement also encouraged the scapegoating of Muslims, who were disproportionately blamed for the spread of the virus.

The U.S. dropped three points over one year, down to 83/100.

China, classified as 'not free', dropped a point from last year going down to 9/100.

Ease of Living Index 2020

Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020 has been released by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). Bengaluru has emerged as the top performer among all the cities with more than one million population in the Index.

The EoLI aims to measure the well-being of Indian citizens in 111 cities, across the pillars of Quality of Life, Economic-ability, and Sustainability, with 49 indicators under 13 categories.

The EoLI 2020 strengthens its scope by consolidating the framework with the addition of a Citizen Perception Survey in the index, holding a weightage of 30%.

The rankings under Ease of Living Index 2020 were announced for cities with a population of more than a million, and cities with less than a million people.

Bengaluru emerged as the top performer in the Million+ category.

In the Less than Million category, Shimla was ranked the highest in ease of living.

Political significance of Assam's tea garden workers

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra visited tea gardens in Assam, interacted with the workers and went to their huts, and posed for photographs.

To bolster the symbolism, one of the photographs showed her plucking tea leaves with a basket held with a strap over her head, like the women workers traditionally do.

One of the five promises Priyanka announced if Congress comes to power was increasing the per day wage of tea garden workers to Rs 365.

Assam accounts for over half of India's total tea production. Tea garden workers were brought by the British from states like Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal afterwards of 1860.

Till today it is marked by exploitation, economic backwardness, poor health conditions and low literacy rates.

The tea tribe community — comprising 17 per cent of the state's population — is a deciding factor in almost 40 Assam assembly seats out of the 126.

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Last month, the Assam government increased the wages of tea garden workers from Rs 167 to Rs 217. Tea gardens workers' bodies have already expressed their dissatisfaction with the hike, which they consider inadequate.

India's first 'Transgender Community Desk' opens in Telangana's Gachibowli

In what is claimed to be the first-of-its-kind gender inclusive community policing initiative in the country, Cyberabad police inaugurated a 'Transgender Community Desk' at Gachibowli police station.

The desk will be managed by a police liaison officer and a transgender person who is designated as community coordinator.

It will be the focal point for all grievance redressal among the transgender community in the Cyberabad Commissionerate. The desk will provide support to file cases in offences related to violence or discrimination against any transgender person

Among other services, the desk will also provide counselling, legal aid, life skills, soft skills training, job placements, and referral linkages to welfare schemes in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and District Legal Services Authority.

Indian Railways launches single helpline no 139 for all queries

Indian Railways announced an integrated Helpline number "139" for all type of queries, complaints, assistance for passengers during travel.

To overcome the inconvenience over multiple helpline numbers for grievances and enquiry during railway travel, Indian Railway has integrated all railway helplines into single number 139 (Rail Madad Helpline) for quick grievance redressal and enquiry during the journey.

As the new helpline number 139 will take over all the existing helpline numbers, it will be easy for the passengers to remember this number and connect with Railways for all their needs during the travel.

The Helpline 139 will be available in twelve languages.

There is no need of a smart phone to call on 139, thus, providing easy access to all mobile users.

Ministry of Railways has also launched Social Media campaign #OneRailOneHelpline139 to inform and educate the passengers.

Promote women entrepreneurship across the country

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is implementing Pradhan Mantri YUVA (PM YUVA) Yojana, a pilot scheme, for creating an enabling ecosystem through entrepreneurship education, training, advocacy and easy access to entrepreneurship network.

The scheme covers 10 States and 2 Union Territories (viz. i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, Delhi and Puducherry).

Ministry of Skill Development is implementing the pilot project, 'Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs and Startups by Women' in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaftfür Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Germany.

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Ministry of MSME is implementing the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), which has the target to generate self-employment opportunities through establishment of micro enterprises for non-farm sector.

Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Skill development program through Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) enabling a trainee to take Bank credit and start his/her own Micro-enterprise.

Ministry of Rural Development is also implementing Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) which aims at eliminating rural poverty through promotion of multiple livelihoods for each rural poor household.

Under the Sub-scheme i.e. Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) covered under DAY-NRLM, a total of 194,144 enterprises have been set-up (up to 31st January, 2021).

All Major Schemes of WCD Ministry classified under 3 Umbrella Schemes

For effective implementation of various schemes and programmes of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, all major schemes of the Ministry have been classified under 3 umbrella schemes viz. Mission Poshan 2.0, Mission Vatsalya and Mission Shakti.

Schemes included under the Umbrella Scheme are as follows:

(i) Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0: Umbrella ICDS - Anganwadi Services, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, National Creche Scheme.

(ii) Mission VATSALYA: Child Protection Services and Child Welfare Services.

(iii) Mission Shakti (Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women):

- SAMBAL (One Stop Centre, Mahila Police Volunteer, Women's Helpline/Swadhar/Ujjawala/Widow Homes etc.)
- SAMARTHYA (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Creche, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Gender Budgeting/Research).

Only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply

According to information provided to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources, only half of government schools and anganwadis have tap water supply, despite a 100-day campaign for 100% coverage being launched by the Jal Shakti Ministry in October 2020.

Less than 8% of schools in Uttar Pradesh and 11% in West Bengal have it, while it is available in only 2-6% of anganwadis in Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bengal.

The campaign to provide potable piped water supply for drinking and cooking purposes and tap water for washing hands and in toilets in every school, anganwadi and ashramshala or residential tribal school was launched on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti.

The 100-day period should have ended on January 10, 2021. However, as of February 15, only 48.5% of anganwadis and 53.3% of schools had tap water supply, the Ministry told the Parliamentary panel.

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Seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab — achieved 100% coverage.

Rise in Arrests by 72% between 2015 and 2019

According to data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the Lok Sabha, there has been a 72% increase in the number of arrests made under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in 2019 in relation to those made in 2015.

As many as 1,948 persons were arrested under the UAPA in 1,226 cases registered across the country in 2019. From 2015 till 2018, the cases registered under the Act annually stood at 897, 922, 901 and 1,182 respectively, while the number of arrests was 1,128, 999, 1,554 and 1,421.

In 2019, the highest number of such cases were registered in Manipur (306), followed by Tamil Nadu (270), Jammu & Kashmir (255), Jharkhand (105) and Assam (87) cases.

The highest number of arrests in the same year were made in Uttar Pradesh (498), followed by Manipur (386), Tamil Nadu (308), Jammu & Kashmir (227) and Jharkhand (202).

The government had declared 42 organisations as terrorist organisations and listed their names in the First Schedule of the UAPA

Only 2.2 % of cases registered under the UAPA between 2016-2019 ended in convictions by court.

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi as single non-lapsable reserve fund

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN) as a single non-lapsable reserve fund for share of Health from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess levied under Section 136-b of Finance Act, 2007.

Salient features of the PMSSN

A non-lapsable reserve fund for Health in the Public Account;

Proceeds of share of health in the Health and Education Cess will be credited into PMSSN;

Accruals into the PMSSN will be utilized for the flagship schemes of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare namely, Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs), National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), Emergency & disaster preparedness and responses during health emergencies

Any future programme/scheme that targets to achieve progress towards SDGs and the targets set out in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.

Administration and maintenance of the PMSSN is entrusted to Ministry of Health & Family Welfare; and

In any financial year, the expenditure on such schemes of the MoHFW would be initially incurred from the PMSSN and thereafter, from Gross Budgetary Support (GBS).

Railways ensures 100% minimum wage payment to contract workers

The Indian Railways on March 11, 2021 has ensured 100 percent compliance of payment of minimum wages to contract workers through its e-application.

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Indian Railway Shramik Kalyan e-application has been developed and launched on 1st October, 2018.

E-Application ensures the compliance of provisions of Minimum Wages Act and also ensures that contractual workers working in Indian Railways get their rightful due by enforcing the contractors to regularly upload wage payment data into e-application.

This helps Railways as Principal Employer, in keep vigil over wages disbursed by contractors to contract workers.

All PSUs working under Ministry of Railways are also using this e-application.

Improving ranking in the World Press Freedom Index

A committee set up by the Narendra Modi government last year to suggest ways of India improving its ranking in the World Press Freedom Index has concluded that the media is doing well and that India's poor score – which it says is "not in line with the ground situation" – is the product of "western bias".

The Index Monitoring Cell (IMC) was set up by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry with stakeholders to improve India's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index and to evolve an objective yardstick to gauge media freedom.

The 15-member committee, which had four meetings between May and December last year, has four journalists and government functionaries.

Chaired by Kuldeep Singh Dhatwalia, Principal Director General of the Press Information Bureau, the committee has 10 government employees.

Among the key recommendations is the decriminalising of defamation. India is one of the few countries in the world to criminalise defamation.

The panel has also recommended that consent of the Press Council of India is a prerequisite before filing an FIR against the media or a publication.

Bee fences to ward off elephant attacks

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has launched a 'bee-fences' project to mitigate human-animal (elephant) conflict in the country.

An initiative of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), Project RE-HAB (Reducing Elephant-Human Attacks using Bees) intends to create "bee fences" to thwart elephant attacks in human habitations using honeybees.

The pilot project was launched at four locations around Chelur village in Kodagu district by KVIC. These spots are located on the periphery of the Nagarahole National Park and Tiger Reserve, known conflict zone.

Project RE-HAB is a sub-mission of the KVIC's National Honey Mission.

Between 2015 and 2020, nearly 2,500 people have lost their lives in elephant attacks across India, of which 170 human fatalities have been reported in Karnataka alone, says the KVIC.

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Orunudoi scheme as game changer in Assam

Out of the slew of beneficiary schemes the sitting government announced ahead of the Assam Assembly elections, the Orunudoi scheme, with women as its primary target group, is perhaps its most popular.

In December 2020, when the scheme was launched, Assam Chief Minister described it as the "largest DBT scheme in the history of Assam which will empower women and serve the needy".

Through Orunodoi — announced in the 2020-21 Budget — a monthly assistance of Rs 830 is transferred to women members of marginalised families of Assam.

On account of being a Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme, the money is credited directly to the bank account of the woman head of a family because they are "primary caretakers of the household".

The applicant, a woman, has to be a permanent resident of Assam, whose composite household income should be less than Rs 2 lakh per annum.

Families without any women members, MPs, MLAs (former and current), members of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies, government officials and employees of cooperative societies are excluded from the scheme.

Families owning four-wheelers, mechanised boats, tractors or refrigerators, ACs and washing machines, or more than 15 bighas of agricultural land, are not eligible either.

Home Ministry informed Rajya Sabha about the Return of Kashmiri Pandits

Union Home Affairs Ministry has informed Rajya Sabha about the Return of Kashmiri Pandits to Kashmir Valley.

As per the report of Relief Office setup in 1990 by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 44,167 Kashmiri Migrant families are registered who had to move from the valley since 1990 due to security concerns. Out of these, the count of registered Hindu Migrant families is 39,782.

The Government has devised policies for Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants, under the Prime Minister's Packages in 2008 and 2015 for Return and Rehabilitation of Kashmiri Migrants to Kashmir Valley.

Various components of these policies are: Housing; Cash assistance; Employment and Construction of Transit Accommodation.

A total of nearly 3800 migrant candidates have returned to Kashmir in the last few years to take up the PM package jobs.

Post abrogation of Article 370, as many as 520 migrant candidates have returned to Kashmir for taking up the jobs that have been provided to them under the rehabilitation package.

Safety of Inter-State Migrant Workers

The Ministry of Labour and employment proposes to develop National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW), which will be a comprehensive data base of the Unorganised Workers including the Building and other Construction Workers and Migrant workers, seeded with Aadhaar.

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It will have details of name, occupation, address, occupation type, educational qualification, skill types & family details etc. for optimum realization of their employability and extend the benefits of the social security schemes to them.

The Ministry of Labour and employment proposes to develop National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW), which will be a comprehensive data base of the Unorganised Workers including the Building and other Construction Workers and Migrant workers, seeded with Aadhaar.

Schemes/programme implemented by Government for welfare of migrant labourers includes: Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri SVANIDHI Scheme, Aatm Nirbhar Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, One Nation One Ration Card, financial assistance to Building and Other Construction workers etc.

Labour Bureau, an attached office of the Ministry of Labour& Employment, has been entrusted with the task of conducting the All India Survey on Migrant Workers.

An Expert Group has been constituted by the Government of India on 9th September, 2020 to examine and finalize the schedules, sampling design and other technical details of the aforesaid survey being conducted by the Labour Bureau.

Global Wage Report 2020-21

The International Labour Organization (ILO) report titled 'Global Wage Report 2020-21: Wages and minimum wages in the time of COVID-19' was recently released.

The Report inter-alia, comments on various issues including on Indian workers having low average wages, longer hours as well as that the workers in Asia and the Pacific enjoyed the highest real wage growth among all regions over the period 2006–19.

Further, while comparing average wage, the report has taken into account the National Floor Level Minimum Wage which is Rs.176/- per day. However, actual wages are far higher.

If the median of the minimum wages in different states is drawn, it would be Rs.269/- per day in the country.

Development of Nomadic Tribes

To promote the socio-economic development of De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities, the Development and Welfare Board for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities (DWBDNCs) has been constituted on 21.02.2019 for a period of three years extendable up to 5 years.

In addition, the following schemes are being implemented by the Central Government through State Government/UT Administrations for the DNTs:-

- Ambedkar Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship for DNT Boys and Girls.
- Nanaji Deshmukh Scheme of Construction of Hostels for DNT Boys and Girls.

As per the Cabinet decision, a Committee under the Chairmanship of Vice Chairman NITI Aayog is in place, which has taken up the task of identification of DNT communities which are yet to be formally classified.

NITI Aayog has assigned the task of ethnographic survey of 62 tribes to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) to conduct the studies of these communities in different parts of the country.

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SAAMAR scheme to be launched to contain Anaemia

The Jharkhand state government recently announced the launch of SAAMAR (Strategic Action for Alleviation of Malnutrition and Anemia Reduction) campaign to tackle malnutrition in the state.

The campaign aims to identify anaemic women and malnourished children and converge various departments to effectively deal with the problem in a state where malnutrition has been a major problem.

AAMAR has been launched with a 1000 days target, under which annual surveys will be conducted to track the progress.

To tackle severe acute malnutrition children, every Anganwadi Centres will be engaged to identify these children and subsequently will be treated at the Malnutrition Treatment Centres.

In the same process the anaemic women will also be listed and will be referred to health centres in serious cases.

All of these will be done through measuring Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) of women and children through MUAC tapes and Edema levels, swelling in a small area or the entire body—malnutrition is one of the reasons attributed to this disease.

Angawadi's Sahayia and Sevika will take them to the nearest Health Centre where they will be checked again and then registered on the portal of State Nutrition Mission.

Pandemic may have doubled poverty in India

India's middle class may have shrunk by a third due to 2020's pandemic-driven recession, while the number of poor people — earning less than ₹150 per day — more than doubled, according to an analysis by the Pew Research Center.

In a comparison, Chinese incomes remained relatively unshaken, with just a 2% drop in the middle class population, it found.

The report uses World Bank projections of economic growth to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on Indian incomes. The lockdown triggered by the pandemic resulted in shut businesses, lost jobs and falling incomes, plunging the Indian economy into a deep recession.

The middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 3.2 crore in 2020 as a consequence of the downturn, compared with the number it may have reached absent the pandemic, defining the middle class as people with incomes of approximately ₹700-1,500 or $10-20 per day.

Meanwhile, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of $2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 7.5 crore because of the COVID-19 recession. This accounts for nearly 60% of the global increase in poverty

It also noted the record spike in MGNREGA participants as proof that the poor were struggling to find work.

Agriculture MoS questions Global Hunger Index report's methodology

Union Minister of State for Agriculture Parshottam Rupala, in the Rajya Sabha, questioned the methodology and data accuracy of the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, which has placed India at 94th (out of 107 countries) rank in 2020.

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The Minister said the government had written to the NGO, Welthungerhilfe, which compiles the report, expressing concerns about their methodology, data accuracy and sample size.

India's ranking had improved from 102 in 2019 to 94 in 2020. But still, India was ranked below countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4, the percentage of wasted, stunted and malnourished children in 2015-16 stood at 21, 38.4 and 35.7, respectively.

Compared to NFHS-4 data, the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) of 2017-18 showed an improvement of 4%, 3.7% and 2.3% in wasted, stunted and malnourished children respectively.

The first-ever CNNS was commissioned by the government in 2016 and was conducted from 2016-18, led by the Union Health Ministry, in collaboration with the UNICEF. The findings were published in 2019.

CNNS includes only nutrition data, whereas NFHS encompasses overall health indicators.

Labour Bureau and BECIL signed a service level agreement

Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL) signed a service level agreement with Labour Bureau for providing technical and manpower support to Labour Bureau in the conduct of All India Surveys on Migrant Workers & All India Quarterly Establishment based Employment Survey (AQEES).

The signing of the agreement marks the beginning of a new era in the field of IT-enabled surveys.

The Ministry in order to implement the newly introduced category of 'Fixed Term Employment' (FTE) has decided that the manpower engaged through the IT partner for supporting these surveys will be offered Fixed Term Employment.

The Fixed Term Employment is a historic provision in the recent labour codes which will bestow various benefits on the workers engaged for a fixed term by treating them at par with permanent workers.

This year Bureau will launch and complete five All India Surveys on Migrant workers, Domestic workers, AQEES, employment generated by professionals and employment generated in transport sector.

The Labour Bureau is an attached office of the Ministry of Labour & Employment.

Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL) is a Government of India enterprise under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

NITI Aayog vision for Great Nicobar ignores tribal, ecological concerns

In what appears to a re-run of recent developments in Little Andaman Island, more than 150 sq. km. of land is being made available for Phase I of a NITI Aayog-piloted 'holistic' and 'sustainable' vision for Great Nicobar Island, the southernmost in the Andaman and Nicobar group.

This amounts to nearly 18% of the 910 sq. km. island, and will cover nearly a quarter of its coastline. The overall plan envisages the use of about 244 sq. km, a major portion being pristine forest and coastal systems.

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Projects to be executed in Phase I include a 22 sq. km. airport complex, a transshipment port (TSP) at South Bay at an estimated cost of ₹12,000 crore, a parallel-to-the-coast mass rapid transport system and a free trade zone and warehousing complex on the south western coast.

In mid-2020 the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) was designated as the nodal agency for the process.

In January, 2021, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) denotified the entire Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to allow for the port there.

Nicobar megapode is the globally endangered bird unique to the Nicobars. The proposed project areas are important foraging grounds for this hunter-gatherer nomadic community.

TB notifications register fall due to pandemic disruptions

According to the India TB report released by the Health Ministry, in 2020, there were 18.05 TB notifications, which was a fall of 24% from 2019 due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Between January and February 2020, the notifications were on an upward trajectory, with 6% more cases reported in the same period in 2019.

As a result of the lockdown, notifications in the public sector fell by 38% and 44% in the private sector in April and May.

Of the reported 24.04 lakh TB cases in 2019, treatment success was 82%, mortality rate was 4%, 4% patients were lost to follow up and treatment failure and regimen change after initiation of treatment was about 3%.

The approved budgets toward the programme have increased substantially, from ₹640 crore in 2016-17 to ₹3,333 crores in 2019-20, however, there was a fall in budget to ₹3,110 crore in 2020-21.

Over 95% of all cases reported were initiated on treatment in 2020 and the treatment success rate for patients reported in 2019 was 82% (83% among patients in the public sector and 79% in the private).

The report said 20,892 (42%) of patients were initiated on a shorter MDR-TB regimen at the time of diagnosis. This is a significant decline from 2019.

India sends 200000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to UNPKF

India delivered on its promise of 200000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPKF) worldwide, sending a shipment bound for Copenhagen.

UN peacekeepers provide security and the political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace.

UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles - Consent of the parties; Impartiality; Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the responsibility to maintain international peace. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations through Chapter VII authorizations.

There are currently 12 UN peacekeeping operations deployed. For its services, UN Peacekeeping has also received the Nobel Peace Prize.

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UN peacekeepers are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets.

Centre to Launch Unique ID Number for All Plots of Land by 2022

The Central government has plans to introduce 14-digit identification number for every plot of land in the country within a year.

It will subsequently integrate its land records database with revenue court records and bank records, as well as Aadhaar numbers on a voluntary basis, according to a parliamentary standing committee report submitted to the Lok Sabha last week.

The Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) scheme has been launched in 10 States this year and will be rolled out across the country by March 2022, the Department of Land Resources told the Standing Committee on Rural Development.

An official, who did not wish to be named, described it as "the Aadhaar for land" — a number that would uniquely identify every surveyed parcel of land and prevent land fraud, especially in rural India, where land records are outdated and disputed.

The identification will be based on the longitude and latitude of the land parcel, and is dependent on detailed surveys and geo-referenced cadastral maps.

This is the next step in the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP), which began in 2008 and has been extended several times as its scope grew.

The Department has taken new initiatives under the programme like NGDRS [or the National Generic Document Registration System], ULPIN, linking of court to land records, integration of consent based Aadhaar number with land records etc. which necessitated its further extension beyond 2020-21 till 2023-24.

Sports Current Affairs

India leads medals tally with 13 Gold in ISSF Shooting

India is leading the medals tally with 13 Gold in Shooting, Eight Silver and Six Bronze medals in the ISSF World Cup Competition in Delhi.

India's Vijayveer Sidhu and Tejaswani claimed Gold medal in the 25 meter rapid fire pistol mixed team event.

In an all-Indian gold medal match, they beat the combo of Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Abhidnya Patil 9-1 at Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

This was India's 13th gold of the competition.

294 athletes from 53 countries are taking part in the tournament.

It is the last major international outing for pistol and rifle shooters before the upcoming Tokyo Olympics.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame begins in North Eastern prefecture of Fukushima

The Olympic flame has begun its journey across Japan, after a year-long delay caused by the global pandemic. This relay will be traveling through all 47 prefectures.

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It kicked off this morning in the northeastern prefecture of Fukushima.The flame was brought to Japan from Greece last March.

The 2020 Summer Olympics, officially the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, and also known as Tokyo 2020, is an upcoming international multi-sport event scheduled to be held from 23 July to 8 August 2021 in Tokyo, Japan.

The 2020 Summer Olympics will award medals across 339 events, representing 33 different sports. Five are new sports entirely (baseball/softball, skateboarding, surfing, sport climbing and karate), while others like basketball see the inclusion of new events within the discipline.

Miscellaneous Current Affairs

New digital regulations threaten media freedom

The Centre's new rules to regulate the digital space is being viewed with alarm by media organisations, social media platforms and over-the-top video (OTT) platforms, who see some of the provisions as striking at the heart of the fundamental right to free speech and expression, besides imposing a high cost of compliance.

It said that certain misgivings are being raised regarding Rule 16 of the new guidelines which mention that in case of emergency nature, interim blocking directions may be issued by the Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

In a statement, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said that the same rule was being exercised by the Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology since the past eleven years under the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009.

Now, under the new rule, this provison will be exercised by the I & B Secretary in place of IT Secretary.

IIT Bombay to offer courses on gaming

Union the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Minister Prakash Javadekar announced that I & B ministry in collaboration with IIT Bombay has decided to form a Center of Excellence in gaming and other related areas.

The Centre is at an advanced stage of preparation and will come into effect as the new session of IIT begins in 2021.

This was announced by Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar while addressing the virtual exhibition and prize announcement of "Khel Khel Mein", a Pan Maharashtra toy/game project design competition.

Government Launches Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship for Students

The Union Government's Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor has launched Swachhta Saarthi Fellowship for the students, community workers, self-help groups and municipal and sanitary workers engaged in tackling the waste management scientifically and sustainably.

Aim of the fellowship to recognize students, community workers/self-help groups, and municipal/sanitary workers who are engaged in tackling the enormous challenge of waste management, scientifically and sustainably.

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The Waste to Wealth Mission is one of the nine national missions of the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

The three categories of awards under the fellowships are as below:

- Category-A – Open to School students from 9th to 12th standards engaged in waste management community work
- Category-B – Open to College students (UG, PG, Research students) engaged in waste management community work
- Category-C – Open to Citizens working in the community and through SHGs, municipal or sanitary workers working beyond specifications of their job requirement/descriptions

The last date for applying to the fellowship is March 19th, 2021. Up to 500 fellows will be recognised under the fellowship.

Govt urges car manufacturers to build engines for alternative fuels

The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways & MSME, Nitin Gadkari met a delegation of carmakers from the Society of India Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) to discuss the production of engines and the implementation of the upcoming BS6 Cafe Phase II standards.

CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) regulations are similar norms to BS6 but with a different approach towards reducing the carbon footprint in the exhaust gasses of the vehicle.

CAFE majorly focuses on COx emissions. BS6, on the other hand, focuses on overall emissions which include NOx (Nitrogen Oxides), SOx (Sulphur Oxides).

The CAFE regulations aim to reduce the overall COx (Carbon Oxides) from the exhaust of the vehicle. The reduced carbon footprint leads to increased fuel economy.

These regulations were first implemented in India on 1st April 2017 with the introduction of BS4 exhaust emission norms.

Nag River Pollution Abatement Project approved to treat waste flowing

Nag River Pollution Abatement Project has been approved in order to treat the sewage and industrial waste flowing into the river in Nagpur.

This was announced by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari after chairing a meeting of World Bank officials, DG NMCG and Nagpur Municipal commissioner.

The project, approved under the National River Conservation Plan, will be implemented by the National River Conservation Directorate, NRCD.

It will reduce the pollution level in terms of untreated sewage, flowing solid waste and other impurities flowing into the Nag river and its tributaries.

Central Revenues Control Laboratory gets recognised as a RCL

Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL), New Delhi, under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs, was recognized as a Regional Customs Laboratory (RCL) of the World Customs Organisation (WCO) for Asia-Pacific Region.

Central Revenues Control Laboratory (CRCL), New Delhi is under the administrative control of Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs.

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Established in 1939, CRCL is the headquarters of 14 Revenue Laboratories, including 2 laboratories working at Government Opium & Alkaloid Works, Ghazipur & Neemuch.

With its recognition as RCL, CRCL joins a select group of Customs Laboratories in the region like those in Japan & Korea.

Merger of Lok Sabha-Rajya Sabha TV into Sansad TV finalised

The merger of the Lok Sabha TV and the Rajya Sabha TV has been finalised and will be replaced by a single entity Sansad TV. On March 1, retired IAS officer Ravi Capoor was appointed the Chief Executive Officer of the channel.

Retired IAS officer Ravi Capoor was appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Sansad TV. Mr. Capoor's mandate is also to work out the nitty-gritty of the merger, including the integration of the assets and manpower.

In November 2019, a committee headed by former Prasar Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash was set up. It submitted a report in February 2020.

The Surya Prakash panel held a meeting with Members of Parliament from different political parties and they strongly recommended the continuation of the live telecast.

Under the banner of Sansad TV, the LSTV would continue to telecast live the House proceedings and the RSTV that of the Upper House.

During the inter-session period and beyond the working hours of Parliament, both will telecast common content to a large extent. The LSTV platform would telecast programmes in Hindi, while RSTV would do so in English.

Opening of 2 new Kendriya Vidyalayas in Karnataka and Punjab

Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' announced opening of two new Kendriya Vidyalayas in Karnataka and Punjab.

KV Sadalaga, Belagavi, in Karnataka and KV IIT Ropar in Punjab will be two new additions to Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan.

With this, the total number of KVs across the country will rise to 1247.

The Scheme of Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVS) (Central Schools) was approved in 1962 to provide uninterrupted education to the wards of transferrable central government employees.

The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan was registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act in 1965 to manage the Kendriya Vidyalayas located all over India and abroad. The Government of India wholly finances the Sangathan.

Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad best cities in EoLI 2020

Minister of State (Independent Charge), Housing and Urban Affairs announced the release of the final rankings of Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020 and the Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020.

In the Million+ category, Indore has emerged as the highest ranked municipality, followed by Surat and Bhopal.

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In the Less than Million category, New Delhi Municipal Council has emerged as the leader, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.

The MPI examined the sectoral performance of 111 municipalities (with Delhi being assessed separately for NDMC, and the three Municipal Corporations) across five verticals which comprise of 20 sectors and 100 indicators in all totality.

The five verticals under MPI are Services, Finance, Policy, Technology and Governance.

QS World University Rankings 2021

This year's QS World University Rankings reveals the top 1,000 universities from around the world, covering 80 different locations.

As many as 25 courses by Indian universities have figured in the top 100 globally, according to QS World University Rankings by Subject.

Three Indian Institutes of Technology have entered the top 100 engineering institutes with IIT-Bombay grabbing the best-ever 49th position in the engineering and technology category followed by IIT Delhi (54) and IIT Madras (94). MIT, USA has retained its top position.

Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore — that secured number one position in the NIRF 2020 — is placed at the 92nd spot for natural sciences, followed by IIT Bombay (114), IIT Madras (187), and IIT Delhi (210).

Similarly, IIT-Madras is at number 30 for its petroleum engineering programme, IIT-Bombay and IIT-Kharagpur have grabbed 41 and 44 positions, respectively, in the subject ranking for mineral and mining engineering.

In the life sciences and medicine category, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) bagged 248th spot.

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been ranked 159th for arts and humanities, followed by the University of Delhi (252).

Also, Delhi University bagged 208th spot worldwide in the social sciences and management category.

Uttarakhand govt is grooming Gairsain as its summer capital

Gairsain in Chamoli district had announced as the summer capital of Uttarakhand. After this Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat sprung a surprise in the state assembly by declaring the town as a new administrative division of the state, a third commissionerate after Kumaon and Garhwal.

Gairsain division would be comprised of four hill districts, including Almora and Bageshwar (both in Kumaon) and Rudrapyarag and Chamoli (in Garhwal). A commissioner and a DIG will be deployed in Gairsain.

On March 4 last year, CM had announced in the Budget Session of the Assembly held in Gairsain that the town will become summer capital of the state. Three months later, Governor had given her assent for declaration of Bhararisen (Gairsain) as the summer capital.

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Gairsain, a tehsil in Chamoli district, is located nearly 270-km from the existing temporary capital of Dehradun.

Even when Uttarakhand was carved out as a separate state from Uttar Pradesh on November 9, 2000, statehood activists had contended that Gairsain was best suited to be the capital of the mountainous state since it was between both Kumaon and Garhwal regions.

But it was Dehradun in the plains that was named the temporary capital.

President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates conservation works at Singorgarh Fort

President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurates conservation works at Singorgarh Fort in Damoh district of Madhya Pradesh.

He also inaugurated the newly carved Jabalpur Circle of Archaeological Survey of India.

Singorgarh Fort is located in Singrampur village of Damoh district in Madhya Pradesh.

It is a hill-fort of Gondwana Kingdom, spread over the hills of a forested area.

Before coming in hand of Gond rulers, Singorgarh fort was under Chandel rulers in 1308. It was Gond ruler Sangram shah who conquered the Singorgarh fort in early period of 16th century.

It is presently in a ruined condition with no caretaker.

New rule on airbags means for passengers and carmakers

The central government has made front passenger airbags mandatory for all vehicles.

The Ministry has mandated that "Vehicles manufactured on and after the April 1, 2021, in the case of new models, and August 31, 2021, in the case of existing models, shall be fitted with airbags for the person occupying the front seat, other than the driver."

This has been mandated as an important safety feature and is also based on suggestions of the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety."

The latest mandate is for all existing models in the M1 category — passenger motor vehicles having not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's.

An airbag pops up as a protective cushion between the passenger and the car's dashboard during a collision.

In moderate to severe frontal crashes, front airbags are designed to inflate in order to prevent a person's head and chest from contacting hard structures in the vehicle.

EV financing industry to be worth ₹3.7 lakh crore by 2030

NITI Aayog and Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) India released a new report called 'Mobilising Electric Vehicle Financing in India'.

The new report highlights the role of finance in India's transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and analyses that the transition will require a total capital investment of $266 billion (₹19.7 lakh crore) in EVs, charging infrastructure, and batteries over the next decade.

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The report also identifies a market size of USD 50 billion (Rs 3.7 lakh crore) for the financing of EVs in 2030—about 80% of the current size of India's retail vehicle finance industry, worth USD 60 billion (Rs 4.5 lakh crore) today.

End-users currently face several challenges, such as high interest rates, high insurance rates, and low loan-to-value ratios.

To address these challenges, NITI Aayog and RMI have identified a toolkit of 10 solutions that financial institutions such as banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), as well as the industry and government can adopt in catalysing the required capital.

89th birthday of Indian scientist Udupi Ramachandra Rao

Google celebrated the 89th birthday of renowned Indian professor and scientist Udupi Ramachandra Rao, remembered by many as "India's Satellite Man."

Udupi Ramachandra Rao (1932 – 2017) was an Indian space scientist and chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation.

He supervised the 1975 launch of India's first satellite --"Aryabhata"-one of over 20 satellites he developed that transformed much of rural India by advancing communication and meteorological services.

He developed rocket technology such as the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), which has launched over 250 satellites.

He was also the Chairman of the Governing Council of the Physical Research Laboratory at Ahmedabad and Nehru Planetarium at Bengaluru and chancellor of the Indian Institute for Space Science and Technology (IIST) at Thiruvananthapuram.

Indian Navy's third stealth Scorpene class submarine INS Karanj commissioned

Indian Navy's third stealth Scorpene class submarine INS Karanj was commissioned at the Naval Dockyard Mumbai through a formal commissioning ceremony.

Six Scorpene Class submarines are being built in India by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) Mumbai, under collaboration with M/s Naval Group, France.

INS Karanj would form part of the Western Naval Command's Submarine fleet.

The Scorpene Submarines are one of the most advanced conventional submarines in the world.

These platforms are equipped with the latest technologies in the world. More deadly and stealthier than their predecessors, these submarines are equipped with potent weapons and sensors to neutralise any threat above or below the sea surface.

Education Minister announced linking of OTPRMS certificates with DigiLocker

Education Minister announces linking of OTPRMS certificates with DigiLocker with complete waiver of registration fees in order to ensure hassle-free access to verified Online Teacher Pupil Registration Management System (OTPRMS) certificates.

The issued certificates will automatically be transferred to DigiLocker and the same may be traced at the website of National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).

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The registration fee of Rs. 200/-, payable for obtaining OTPRMS Certificates, issued by NCTE has been waived off. This will enable all stakeholders across India to be digitally empowered facilitating ease of doing business.

DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) under the Digital India initiative. It aims for the digital empowerment of citizens by providing authentic documents to citizens' digital document wallets.

INS Jalashwa arrives at port of Anjouan in Comoros

Indian Navy Ship Jalashwa arrived at port of Anjouan in Comoros with one thousand metric tonnes of rice. It will be received by Foreign Minister of Comoros Dhoihir Dhoulkamal in a ceremony.

The Comoros is an island country in the Indian Ocean.

The Comoros is formed by Ngazidja (Grande Comore), Mwali (Mohéli) and Ndzuani (Anjouan), three major islands in the Comoros Archipelago, as well as many minor islets.

The archipelago is situated in the Indian Ocean, in the Mozambique Channel, between the African coast (nearest to Mozambique and Tanzania) and Madagascar, with no land borders.

Its capital and largest city is Moroni.

As a member of the Arab League, it is the only country in the Arab world which is entirely in the Southern Hemisphere.

It is also a member state of the African Union, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Indian Ocean Commission.

BRO begins opening of key pass to Leh ahead of schedule

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has started work on reopening the crucial Baralacha Pass in Himachal Pradesh much before schedule to restore connectivity to Leh in Ladakh.

Bara-lacha la also known as Bara-lacha Pass is a high mountain pass in Zanskar range, connecting Lahaul district in Himachal Pradesh to Leh district in Ladakh, situated along the Leh–Manali Highway.

The pass also acts as a water-divide between the Bhaga river and the Yunam river.

The Bhaga river, a tributary of the Chenab river, originates from Surya taal lake, which is situated a few of kilometers from the pass towards Manali.

Over 60% OBC, SC positions vacant in IIMs

Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank told Lok Sabha in a written response to a question from three Congress MPs that more than half of the faculty positions reserved for OBCs in central institutions of higher education are vacant, while about 40% of those reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes also remain unfilled.

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The situation is particularly acute in the elite Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), where more than 60% of SC and OBC reserved positions are vacant, while almost 80% of positions reserved for the STs have not been filled.

This means that out of 24 positions reserved for the STs, only five have been filled.

For the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), data has only been provided for non-faculty positions.

Both the IITs and the IIMs have been lobbying for exemption from such faculty quota requirements.

Within the Central Universities, vacancies were higher at the level of professors. Less than 1% of the 1,062 professors in Central universities are from the ST communities.

Despite the high levels of vacancies, Education Minister claimed that, "After implementation of 'The Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019', the OBC reservation has been implemented at all levels."

Japan hold Myanmar's first satellite on space station after coup

Myanmar's first satellite built by Japan's Hokkaido University in a joint project with Myanmar's government-funded Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University (MAEU) with the cost of $15 million is being held on board the International Space Station following the Myanmar coup

It is the first of a set of two 50 kg microsatellites equipped with cameras designed to monitor agriculture and fisheries.

Human rights activists and some officials in Japan worry that those cameras could be used for military purposes by the junta that seized power in Myanmar on Feb. 1.

The satellite was launched by NASA on Feb 20 as a small part of a large and varied payload of supplies to the International Space Station 400 km (250 miles) above the earth.

It has since been kept by JAXA inside Japan's Kibo experiment module. JAXA astronaut Soichi Noguchi is one of the seven crew members now on board the space station.

Telemedicine service eSanjeevani completes 3 million consultations

Indian government's National Telemedicine Service – eSanjeevani has crossed another milestone by completing 3 million (30 lakh) consultations.

Currently, the National Telemedicine Service is operational in 31 States/Union Territories and daily over 35,000 patients across the country are using this innovative digital medium – eSanjeevani, to seek health services.

The National Telemedicine Service, set up by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare comprises of two variants of eSanjeevani namely –doctor to doctor (eSanjeevani AB-HWC) telemedicine platform that is based on hub and spoke model and patient to doctor telemedicine platform (eSanjeevani OPD) which provides outpatient services to the citizens in the confines of their homes.

eSanjeevani AB-HWC is being implemented at Health & Wellness Centres under Ayushman Bharat Scheme, and by December 2022 it will be made operational at 1,55,000 Health & Wellness Centres across India.

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It was rolled out in November 2019 and Andhra Pradesh was the first State to roll out eSanjeevani AB-HWC services.

eSanjeevani OPD was rolled out on 13th of April 2020 during the first lockdown in the country when all the OPDs were closed. So far, over 21,00,000 patients have been served through eSanjeevani OPD.

Harsh Vardhan appointed as chairman of 'Stop TB Partnership Board'

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the movement to eradicate tuberculosis (TB) from India by 2025, Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union minister for health and family welfare has been appointed chairman of the Stop TB Partnership Board.

The Union Health Minister will serve a three year term, commencing July 2021, as the Chair of the Board of Stop TB Partnership.

Established in the year 2000, the 'Stop TB Partnership' is mandated to eliminate Tuberculosis as a public health problem.

The organization was conceived following the meeting of the First Session of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Tuberculosis Epidemic held in London in March 1998.

In its inaugural year itself, the Stop TB Partnership through the Amsterdam Declaration gave a call for collaborative action from ministerial delegations from 20 countries that bear the highest burden of TB.

It has 1500 partner organizations which include international, non-governmental and governmental organizations and patient groups.

The Secretariat is based at Geneva, Switzerland.

Azim Premji University launches volume one of its 'Issues in Education' series

The Azim Premji University in Karnataka has released a series named 'Issues in Education'. This newly launched series aims to highlight the fundamental issues that play a significant role in India's education system.

With as many as nine million teachers in around 1.5 million schools in India, the quality of education imparted to aspiring teachers is equally important.

Of the 17,503 TEIs in India, more than 90% are privately owned, stand-alone institutions, offering single programmes localised in certain geographies. Four States, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, account for 54% of all TEIs in the country. Only 12 States/UTs have at least one TEI in each district.

Equally worrying is the level of corruption. There are many substandard, dysfunctional TEIs functioning as 'commercial shops'.

TEIs deliberately neglected basic curricular requirements. Classes are neither conducted seriously nor taken seriously by students. Almost all private TEIs allowed students with shortage of attendance to appear for examinations.

There is increasing prevalence of contract teachers, who are recruited for short periods on inadequate salaries with little or no benefits. This had caused long-term damage to not just the teaching profession, but has also affected student learning.

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Power Ministry launched the GRAM UJALA programme in Arrah

State-run EESL arm Convergence Energy Services Ltd (CESL) launched the Gram Ujala programme under which high quality energy efficient LED bulbs will be given for Rs 10 per piece in certain villages of five states in the first phase.

Under the programme, 7 watt and 12-Watt LED bulbs with 3 years warranty will be given to rural consumers against submission of working Incandescent bulbs.

LEDs will be available for only Rs 10 each for each household, in exchange for working condition old incandescent lamps. Each household will get up to 5 LEDs.

In the first phase of this programme, 15 million (1.5 crore) LED bulbs will be distributed across villages of Aarah (Bihar), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Vijaywada (Andhra Pradesh), Nagpur (Maharashtra), and village in western Gujarat.

The Gram Ujala programme will be implemented in villages of the 5 districts only.

These rural households will also have metres installed in their houses to account for usage.

The emerging crisis of obtaining helium in India

Helium is colourless, odourless, tasteless, inert and a noble gas. India imports helium for its needs, and with the U.S. appearing set to cut off exports of helium since 2021, Indian industry stands to lose out heavily.

Yet, it finds many applications, mainly in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, in rockets and in nuclear reactors.

Dutch physicist Kamerlingh Onnes liquefied Helium by cooling the gas to -270 degrees Celsius.

India's Rajmahal volcanic basin in Jharkhand is the store house of helium trapped for billions years. At present, India is mapping the Rajmahal basin extensively for future exploration and harnessing of helium.

Ganga Quest 2021 online quiz competition

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has got a tempting opportunity for young quizzers for the third edition of Ganga Quest – an online national quiz on Ganga with the aim to increase the public participation and to enhance ownership of children and youth for rivers and Ganga has started from March 22, 2021.

Ganga Quest is an international bilingual (Hindi and English) online quiz on Ganga.

It is being organized by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), an authority under Government of India which implements the 'Namami Gange' programme and TREE Craze Foundation (TCF), a not for profit organization committed to Ganga, Rivers, and Environment.

The online competition was conceptualized in 2019.

Centre readies draft plan for district-wise export promotion

The government has readied a draft district-wise export promotion plan for 451 districts in the country after identifying products and services with export potential in 725 districts.

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Aiming for double-digit export growth from 500 districts over 3-5 years, the Commerce Ministry has asked States to prepare an annual 'export ranking index' of districts on export competitiveness with the assistance of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).

While foreign trade constitutes 45% of India's GDP, most export promotion efforts are driven by the Centre.

The district-specific approach, that involves the States in identifying potential export sectors and the logistics bottlenecks to be fixed, was taken up after Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushed for each district to aim to be an export hub during his Independence Day address in 2019.

In the initial phase, products and services with export potential in each district have been identified and an institutional mechanism of State and District Export Promotion Committees (SEPC) are being created, with an action plan to grow exports from each district.

District Export Promotion Committees have been notified in the districts of all the States except West Bengal.

Cabinet apprised on progress under National Health Mission 2019-20

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi was apprised on the progress under National Health Mission (NHM) during FY 2019-20 including accelerated decline in Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) and Total Fertility Rate (TFR).

It also noted the progress in respect of various diseases programmes like TB, Malaria, Kala-Azar, Dengue, Tuberculosis, Leprosy, Viral Hepatitis etc.

Social Awareness and Actions to Neutralize Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS) initiative was launched to accelerate action to reduce deaths due to childhood pneumonia.

Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN) initiative was launched to provide assured, dignified, respectful and quality healthcare at no cost and zero tolerance for denial of services and all existing Schemes for maternal and neonatal health have been brought under one umbrella.

Midwifery Services Initiative aims to create a cadre of Nurse Practitioners in Midwifery who are skilled in accordance to competencies prescribed by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and are knowledgeable and capable of providing compassionate women-centered, reproductive, maternal and new-born health care services.

School Health and Wellness Ambassadors Initiative has been launched under the AB-HWCs Programme in partnership with Ministry of Education to promote health and well-being through an active lifestyle amongst school children.

CBSE launched new assessment framework for Classes 6 to 10

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced a competency-based assessment framework for classes 6-10 based on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

As per the board, the framework will replace the "existing rote learning model and will focus on assessing students based on their competencies needed to solve day-to-day problems."

Under the new system, teachers will be trained to create question papers and other assessment methods that test the actual competency of students in these subjects, rather than their ability to memorise chunks of text.

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The new framework was launched by Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank.

It is aligned with the National Education Policy's vision of achieving a global standard in assessments.

Government offers 67 blocks in second tranche of commercial coal mine auction

The government offered 67 coal mines for sale, launching the second tranche of commercial coal mining auction and termed it a step towards 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

This is the highest number of mines on offer in a particular tranche of auction after commencement of the auction regime since 2014.

Out of the total 67 mines offered by the Ministry of Coal, 23 mines are under CM(SP) Act and 44 under MMDR Act.

The coal mines on offer are spread across 6 States Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Education Ministry launched 100 comic books created by teachers

Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' launched over 100 comic books created by teachers and students of CBSE schools and curated by the NCERT.

Department of School Education and Literacy, in its endeavour to provide holistic learning to students and to usher in vision envisaged in New Education Policy 2020 has launched comic books aligned to chapters of NCERT textbooks across grades 3-12.

This innovative initiative will help in increasing the cultural and social sensitivity in our children while imparting knowledge.

These comics can be accessed online on DIKSHA web portal (diksha.gov.in) or via the DIKSHA app on any android Smartphone.

The comics can also be accessed through a new WhatsApp powered Chatbot. The chatbot presents a unique opportunity to expand the scope of digital learning.

Sabarmati River Front Development project

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, in its draft budget for 2021-22, has set aside Rs 1,050 crore for the Sabarmati River Front Development phase 2, work on which is to begin soon.

Sabarmati Riverfront is a waterfront being developed along the banks of Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad.

Proposed in the 1960s, the construction began in 2005.

The major objectives of project are environment improvement, social infrastructure and sustainable development.

By channelling the river to a constant width of 263 m along the part that passes Ahmedabad city, 204 hectares have been reclaimed along the 11-km stretch of the Sabarmati Riverfront in the first phase of the project, on both the banks.

New version of 'Exam Warriors' to make them stress free

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The new version of Exam Warriors written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is now available with many new mantras for students as well as parents. It is available at retail stores as well as online.

The Exam Warriors module is also available on the NaMo App.

The new edition of the book has been enriched with valuable inputs from students, parents and teachers.

Substantive new parts have been added that would especially interest the parents and teachers.

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Best of Luck for Your Exams!

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