


## EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS-SEPTEMBER 18, 2020





### TAMIL NADU

- The Centre's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) - recommended clearance for the expansion of East Coast Road between Villupuram and Pondicherry
- ✓ The 70-km stretch between Villupuram and Pondicherry via Cuddalore passes through several thickly populated towns and villages.
- ✓ At present, the shortest route along ECR to reach Central Tamil Nadu supports only two-way traffic and is more often congested
- ✓ Hence, the vehicles choose Villupuram-Tindivanam route, which is a four-lane carriageway and is faster, even though it is longer



**SMOOTH RIDE:** The route along ECR supports only two-way traffic and is often congested

### WHAT'S ON THE CARDS

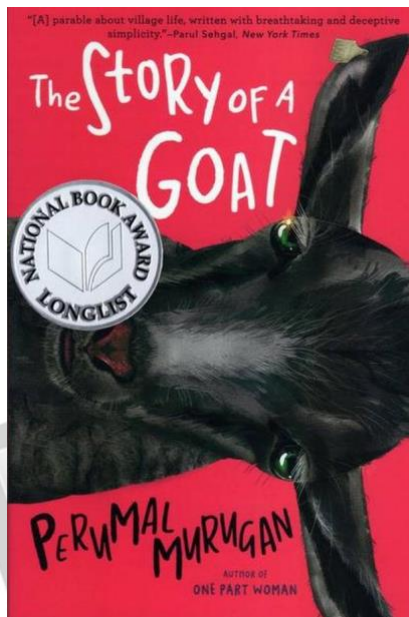
<p>➤ Project to expand ECR along a <b>67km stretch</b></p> <p>➤ NHAI to build Right of Way of up to <b>60m</b></p>	<p> Number of trees to be felled <b>6,000</b></p>	<p>Estimated cost <b>₹1,876 crore</b></p> <p></p>	<p> Number of bridges and flyovers   <b>26</b></p> <p>Employment potential <b>3,000 people</b></p> <p></p>
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**“** Ten trees will be planted for every tree felled as per government norms - Senior NHAI official

- ✓ To overcome this difficulty, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had proposed to expand the 67-km stretch into a four-way bypass road with grade separators at an estimated cost of ₹1,876 crore.
- ✓ Besides this, the project further involves construction of 17 bridges, nine flyovers and one interchange.
- ✓ The plan, however, faced opposition from locals as the proposed design crossed through Oussudu bird sanctuary and the expansion work involved the felling of about 6,000 trees.

- ✓ As per the approved design, the proposed project would be set up outside the ecosensitive zone of the sanctuary and there was no diversion of forest land.
  - ✓ The project was earlier put on hold by the Madras high court
  - ✓ It had directed the NHAI to conduct an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) study and get clearance from the Union environment ministry as the project crossed through Coastal Regulatory Zones (CRZ) too.
  - ✓ But the Supreme Court stayed the HC order.
  - ✓ Against this backdrop, the project got approval now with a clarification that it could be altered based on the SC's decision.
  - ✓ The approval committee also said the NHAI should ensure that flow of natural tidal water to mangroves should remain unaffected and no groundwater extraction should take place in CRZ areas for construction
- **National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) - has sanctioned a term loan of ₹365.85 crore under Nabard Infrastructure Development Assistance to construct a barrage over river Cauvery in Nanjai Pugalur in Karur district.**
- ✓ Nabard chairman G R Chintala handed over the sanction order to chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami in the secretariat on September 17
  - ✓ The project cost is estimated at ₹406.5 crore.
  - ✓ The barrage is one of the five structures proposed by the state government as part of the ambitious Nadanthai Vaazhi Cauvery programme.
- **Southern Railway – is planning to electrify 1,400 route km of lines in the next three years, as per a deadline set by the Union ministry.**
- ✓ This will ensure smoother running of trains across all routes without changing locomotives from electric to diesel.
  - ✓ At present, electric locomotives are delinked and diesel locomotives are attached on some of the non-trunk routes.
  - ✓ Of the total 4,834 km route, 3381 km has already been electrified.
  - ✓ This was announced by Railway Minister Piyush Goyal in a response submitted in the Lok Sabha
  - ✓ According to the Minister, a schedule has been fixed for funding projects that are at different stages and that the ministry plans to complete electrification of all lines in the country by 2023.
  - ✓ Southern Railway has a better track record of electrification compared to the zones that have similar size in terms of route km.
  - ✓ However, Western Railway which has more or less similar route km has made better progress.
  - ✓ The main routes connecting all major cities in Tamil Nadu are already electrified, except a few small sections in Trichy and the ghat section of Sengottai-Kollam route

- ✓ Three electrification projects of Southern Railway have been allotted funds for the current financial year.
  - ✓ The Tambaram-Chengalpet third line, which is nearing completion and has received ₹10 lakh, will be electrified along with the construction work.
  - ✓ Villupuram-Dindigul doubling with electrification has received ₹1 lakh and Omalur-Mettur dam with electrification work got ₹56 crore.
- **Perumal Murugan's novel, The Story of a Goat - is one of the contenders for this year's National Book Award for Translated Literature.**



- ✓ Of the ten authors on the longlist for this year's award, Murugan is the only one author who has been nominated previously," as per the New Yorker magazine which announced the nominations.
  - ✓ In 2018, Perumal Murugan's novel One Part Woman (translated from Madhorubagan) was on longlist.
  - ✓ It had sparked a controversy and he declared, "The writer Perumal Murugan is dead." The Story of a Goat was penned after he resumed writing.
  - ✓ The book follows a black goat named Poonachi as she witnesses the indignities suffered by animals and humans on a farm in South India
  - ✓ It was translated by N. Kalyan Raman and published by Grove Atlantic.
  - ✓ The Tamil edition of the nominated book was titled 'Poonachi'.
- **Panchayat Union Primary School, Edamalaipattipudur, Trichy – has designed its own mobile application to aid students in online learning**
- ✓ The mobile application, named 'PUP School Trichy', has been made available to all students enrolled at the school.
  - ✓ The application is a one-stop access point for all the students' needs to learn amid the Covid-19 induced restrictions.

- ✓ Teachers can record audio, video and even send worksheets through the app, while pictures of the textbooks and samples can also be uploaded
  - ✓ The app has a special calling and text message facility, which can be utilised by students with low or no internet connectivity for whom the videos may not load.
  - ✓ When schools reopen, parents can use the app to track the location of their child, their class attendance, time table, progress card and even their yearly planner.
  - ✓ The app can also be used as a means to communicate with the headmistress and other teachers by the Parents
  - ✓ The app was developed by a private company, Best Shine, as per the directives of School Education Department
  - ✓ It was launched by S. Shanthi, Chief Education Officer, Tiruchi, on September 16.
- **The Greater Chennai Corporation - will conduct a second serosurvey in the city in the last week of September.**
- ✓ Chennai would be the first city to conduct a study of T cells in recovered Covid-19 patients, in addition to the serosurvey.
  - ✓ According to the earlier survey, seroprevalence of the infection was higher among women in the city, with 23.7% of the women and 19.3% of men were found to have been exposed to Covid-19.
  - ✓ The survey will assess seroprevalence of Covid-19 among residents aged over 10, in the capital city's 15 zones.
- **On September 17, Tamil Nadu – reported 5,560 fresh Covid-19 cases and 59 deaths, taking the cumulative case tally to 5,25,420 and the death toll to 8,618**
- ✓ The number of active cases undergoing treatment at various hospitals in the state stands at 46,160, as on date.

<b>TN COVID TRACKER</b>					
ZONE	New cases	New Deaths	Active cases	Total cases	Total deaths
Chennai Region	1,701	24	15,194	2,33,804	4,319
North	942	9	7,949	79,172	996
South	736	8	6,263	1,03,794	1,771
Central	667	5	5,176	43,589	621
West	1,513	13	11,995	62,804	910
Other	1	0	33	2,257	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,560</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>46,610</b>	<b>5,25,420</b>	<b>8,618</b>

(Till September 17)

- ✓ Chennai continued to report the maximum number of fresh cases with 992 fresh cases and 12 deaths.
- ✓ Neighbouring Chengalpattu (283), Tiruvallur (239) and Kancheepuram (187) together reported 709 cases and 12 deaths.
- ✓ Further, Coimbatore reported 530 cases and Salem 291 cases



- ✓ A total of 5,524 persons were discharged from hospitals after treatment, taking the total recovered to 4,70,192 persons
- ✓ At the end of the day, more than 82,000 people were tested in the state, taking the total number of samples tested so far to 62,17,923.
- ✓ The state has a total of 174 testing facilities — 66 in the government sector and 108 private facilities, as on date, after the approval of few more laboratories

## STATES

- **The Kerala government - has revised the Covid-19 guidelines issued for the guest workers.**
- ✓ The guidelines issued earlier by the state government on September 14 had allowed asymptomatic guest workers testing positive for Covid-19 to continue work.
- ✓ According to the revised guidelines, those guest workers who are found to be Covid-19 positive, should be segregated even if they are asymptomatic and should be put on Covid-19 care and should not be engaged in any kind of work.
- ✓ As per the initial guidelines, if the guest workers are found to be positive but are asymptomatic, then they may work in the areas exclusively marked for the work to be done by the asymptomatic positive workers.
- ✓ The guidelines had further said that they should not mix with any other worker or officer
- ✓ Also, their food arrangements should be done exclusively as per Covid first-line treatment centre (CFLTC) guidelines for an asymptomatic positive.
- ✓ The earlier guidelines of the state government were issued due to the shortage of guest workers and the stoppage of certain specialised kind of work because of the absence of skilled labourers.
- ✓ However, medical experts had criticised the government's guidelines as going against the ICMR guidelines
- ✓ As per the experts, the infected patients should be provided supportive care and not allowed to work.

## NATIONAL

- **On September 17, Lok Sabha passed two farm bills — one on agri market reforms and the other on contract farming provisions**
- ✓ The two legislations are - the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 and Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020,
- ✓ Another bill on amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 was passed on September 15.
- ✓ The bill seeks to impose stock limits on the agricultural produce only if there is an extraordinary situation like famine, war, pandemic, steep price rise etc.,

- ✓ These three bills will replace the existing ordinances promulgated on June 5, once passed by Rajya Sabha.
- ✓ These bills were introduced by Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Narendra Singh Tomar

## WHAT'S IN THE BILLS AND WHY THE OPPOSITION

### BILL ON AGRI MARKET

Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020

#### Provisions

- To create an ecosystem where farmers and traders enjoy the freedom to sell and purchase farm produce outside registered 'mandis' under states' APMCs
- To promote barrier-free inter-state and intra-state trade of farmers' produce
- To reduce marketing/transportation costs and help farmers in getting better prices
- To provide a facilitative framework for electronic trading



#### Opposition

- States will lose revenue as they won't be able to collect 'mandi fees' if farmers sell their produce outside registered APMC markets
- What happens to 'commission agents' in states if entire farm trade moves out of 'mandis'?
- It may eventually end the MSP-based procurement system
- Electronic trading like in e-NAM uses physical 'mandi' structure. What will happen to e-NAM if 'mandis' are destroyed in absence of trading?

### BILL ON CONTRACT FARMING

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020

#### Provisions

- Farmers can enter into a contract with agri-business firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters or large retailers for sale of future farming produce at a pre-agreed price
- Marginal and small farmers, with land less than five hectares, to gain via aggregation and contract (Marginal and small farmers account for 86% of total farmers in India)
- To transfer the risk of market unpredictability from farmers to sponsors



- To enable farmers to access modern tech and get better inputs
- To reduce cost of

marketing and boost farmers' income

- Farmers can engage in direct marketing by eliminating intermediaries for full price realisation
- Effective dispute resolution mechanism with redressal timelines

#### Opposition

- Farmers in contract farming arrangements will be the weaker players in terms of their ability to negotiate what they need
- The 'sponsors' may not like to deal with a multitude of small and marginal farmers
- Being big pvt cos, exporters, wholesalers and processors, the sponsors will have edge in disputes

### BILL RELATING TO COMMODITIES The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020

#### Provisions

- To remove commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities. It will do away with the imposition of stockholding limits on such items except under "extraordinary circumstances" like war
- This provision will attract private sector/FDI into farm sector as it will remove fears

- of pvt investors of excessive regulatory interference in business operations
- To bring investment for farm infrastructure like cold storages, and modernising food supply chain
- To help both farmers and consumers while bringing in price stability
- To create competitive market environment and cut wastage of farm produce

#### Opposition

- Price limits set for "extraordinary circumstances" are so high that they are likely to be never triggered
- Big cos will have freedom to stock commodities – it means they will dictate terms to farmers, which may lead to less prices for the cultivators
- Recent decision on export ban on onion creates doubt on its implementation


- ✓ According to the Minister, farmers would now be freed from the restriction of having to sell their produce at designated places only and can sell their produce through 'direct marketing' at better prices
- ✓ The Minister also assured that the procurement at MSP would continue and 'mandis' established under state laws would also continue to operate.


- ✓ These bills will increase competition and promote private investment which will help in development of farm infrastructure and generate employment” as per the minister
  - ✓ The key provisions of the proposed legislation are intended to help small and marginal farmers (86% of total farmers) who could not bargain for their produce to get a better price or invest in technology to improve farm productivity.
  - ✓ On the other hand, the legislations are likely to impact influential middlemen or ‘commission agents’ in ‘mandis’, whose grip will be weakened now.
  - ✓ The other concerns of farmers include the end of ‘minimum support price’ (MSP) regime in due course, irrelevance of state-controlled Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) ‘mandis’, risk of losing out land rights under contract farming rule, reduction in price of farm produce due to market domination by big agribusinesses and exploitation of farmers by big contractors through contract farming provisions.
- **On September 17, BJP’s oldest ally Shiromani Akali Dal - withdrew from the central government in protest against the legislations designed to liberalise trade in agricultural commodities**
- ✓ The party’s sole representative in the government — MP and Minister for food processing Harsimrat Kaur Badal — submitting her resignation on the day
  - ✓ Her resignation was announced in the Lok Sabha by fellow Akali MP, and her spouse, Sukhbir Singh Badal
  - ✓ According to Akali Dal, its request to consider the apprehensions and concerns of farmers for the three legislations was not accepted by the government and it could never be a party to any decision that went against the interests of farmers.
  - ✓ The erstwhile JD(U), one of the founding members of the NDA, consisted of the Akalis along with Shiv Sena and Samata Party
  - ✓ In the current parliament, Akali Dal’s has only few representations - the two Badals in Lok Sabha and three MPs in the Rajya Sabha.
  - ✓ Harsimrat requested the PM to accept her resignation with “immediate effect”.
  - ✓ The three contentious legislations are - the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020; Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020
  - ✓ All these legislations are part of the government’s Atmanirbhar Bharat package, announced in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak
  - ✓ These bills replace the Ordinances promulgated in June.
  - ✓ They are meant to liberalise farm trade by ending the monopoly of Agricultural Produce Market Committees and the dominance of middlemen.
  - ✓ The proposed legislations seek to promote barrier-free trade of farm produce by facilitating contract farming as well as agricultural marketing



## GREAT MOMENT... FARMERS TO BE EMPOWERED: PM

- Main provisions of the proposed legislations are meant to help small and marginal farmers, who comprise 86% of the total farmers in India
- But are likely to hit influential 'commission agents' (known as 'arhatiyas' in Punjab & Haryana) in mandis
- Another grouse in Punjab: States will lose revenue as they won't be able to collect 'mandi fees' if farmers sell their produce outside registered APMC markets
- Agriculture minister N S Tomar allays fears, says MSP-based procurement will stay, states are free to run APMC 'mandis' and contract farming provisions will cover produce on pre-agreed price. BJP chief J P Nadda also says MSP will continue for farmers

 I have resigned from the Union Cabinet in protest against anti-farmer ordinances and legislation. Proud to stand with farmers as their daughter & sister  
—Harsimrat Kaur Badal

 It is a great moment for farmers of the country. The bills will do away with middlemen and other impediments in the growth of farmers  
—Narendra Modi, PM

- ✓ However, the bills faced protests from farmers in Punjab, Haryana and a few pockets in western UP
- ✓ But, the government has defended the three bills saying that they were aimed at expanding the options of farmers by dismantling the regime of compulsorily selling their produce to mandis at prices determined by them.
- ✓ Further, the agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar has announced in Lok Sabha that the minimum support price regime will continue for the farmers.
- **On September 17, India - confirmed that it had asked for appointment of a Queen's Counsel (QC) as Kulbhushan Jadhav's defence lawyer in the ongoing ICJ-mandated review of his death sentence in Islamabad high court.**
- ✓ Queen's Counsel (QC) refers to a title awarded to senior barristers for excellence in some Commonwealth countries
- ✓ Accordingly, senior advocate Harish Salve, who is also QC in the courts of England and Wales, was the obvious choice.



- ✓ However, the government is open to enlisting the services of lawyers of other nationalities too provided they are QC too.
- ✓ Pakistan had not been able to fulfill its obligations on implementation of the ICJ judgment in letter and spirit
- ✓ It is yet to provide all documents related to the case, offer unconditional and unimpeded consular access to him and appoint an Indian lawyer or a Queen's Counsel to ensure free and fair trial

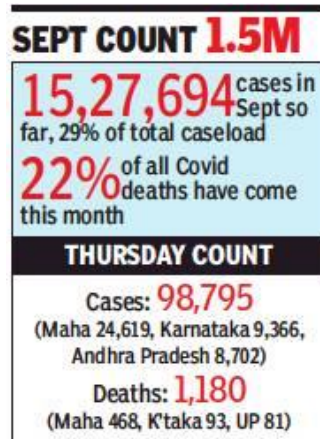


- ✓ Last year, the ICJ had asked Pakistan for an effective review and reconsideration of Jadhav's conviction and upheld India's demand for consular access to Jadhav.
- ✓ Pakistan is yet to respond on India's demand for a QC to represent Jadhav.
- **BJP President J P Nadda - released a book, "Lord of Records", highlighting 243 "unprecedented" achievements of the PM Narendra Modi government**



- ✓ The book was released on the eve of 70<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Prime Minister on September 17
- ✓ The occasion is marked by organizing a number of events, mainly aimed at public services, as part of the 'Seva Saptah'
  - ✓ The Seva Saptah is observed between September 14, 2020 and September 20, 2020.
  - ✓ The theme for Seva Saptah this year is 'Seventy'
  - ✓ The BJP party is to provide artificial limbs to 70 people, spectacles to 70 blind people, distribute fruits to 70 hospitals and organize 70 blood donation camps on the day.
- ✓ Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Nepal's PM K P Sharma Oli and Bhutanese PM Lotay Tshering were among the world leaders who extended wishes to the PM.
- ✓ Every year, Seva Diwas is celebrated on the birthday of the Prime Minister
- ✓ On the eve of the occasion, the Chief Minister of Gujarat will launch cow-based organic farming wherein the government is to provide a monthly assistance of Rs 900 to the farmers.
- ✓ Further, a budget of Rs 1,000 crores has been allocated to support 10 lakh women in Gujarat to help them start their own business.
- **The Indian Railways – is planning to levy a "token user fee" from passengers taking trains from busy stations, which will result in marginal increase in the total fare.**
  - ✓ The user fee will be collected for redevelopment of railway stations and modernisation of station infrastructure
  - ✓ It will be included in the ticket fare itself, as it is done in the case of air travel.
  - ✓ This was announced by Railway board CEO and chairman V K Yadav.

- ✓ A very small amount will be charged as 'user fee' at stations which are being redeveloped and also those which are not being redeveloped.
  - ✓ When the redevelopment of the stations gets completed the user fee will go to the concessionaires and till then the collected user fee will be utilised by railways for providing better facilities to passengers across stations
  - ✓ Out of about 7,000 stations on the Indian Railways network, the user fee will be levied at barely 10-15% of the 'developed' stations where the footfall is projected to increase in the next five years.
  - ✓ Going by that calculation, the number of such potential stations would be between 700 and 1,000.
  - ✓ The proposal to levy a nominal user fee for the redevelopment of stations was suggested by a group of secretaries (GoS) constituted earlier
  - ✓ The GoS was mandated to study about the ways and means for redevelopment and modernisation of railway stations to provide better safety, passenger amenities and services.
  - ✓ In the highways sector, charging the toll or user fee without providing the promised facilities has been one of the biggest concerns for commuters.
  - ✓ The railway ministry has set the target of obtaining tenders for redevelopment of 50 railway stations by 2021 end, which includes New Delhi station and Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminal in Mumbai.
  - ✓ In another development, for passenger trains, the Railways had revised the basic passenger fare, increasing it by up to 4 paise per kilometre from January 2020 onwards.
  - ✓ This was the first fare revision since 2014-15.
- **On September 17, India – reported the highest-ever record of 98,795 fresh Covid-19 cases, taking the total caseload to 52,10,317**
- ✓ The previous highest daily count was 98,100, recorded a day earlier



- ✓ A total of 1,180 deaths were reported on the day, taking the death toll to 84,325
- ✓ The recoveries from the infection rose to 40,99,047, while active cases increased to nearly 10,26,000.

- ✓ Maharashtra reported the maximum of 24,619 new Covid-19 cases and 468 deaths.
- ✓ The state has a cumulative caseload of 11,45,840, as on date.
- ✓ Karnataka has reported 9,366 cases on the day, taking the total casecount to 4,94,356
- ✓ With 8,702 infections and 72 deaths on the day, Andhra Pradesh was the only State after Maharashtra to witness over six lakh infections

## INDIA AND NEIGHBOURS

- **Nepal – has added its new political map showing Indian territories as its own into its academic curriculum and currency.**
- ✓ The move comes three months after passing an amendment to sanction a new political map that identifies Indian Territory in Pithoragarh as its own

### COINS BASED ON MAP

- Nepal shows 460sqkm of Uttarakhand's Kalapani as its own area in a textbook
- Oli cabinet also asks Nepal central bank to mint coins reflecting new political map
- Earlier, Nepal parliament amended the Constitution to claim Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani areas

- ✓ The book, 'Nepalko Bhubhaag Ra Seemasambandhi Swadhyay Samagri' (Nepal's geography and territorial boundary) has been introduced for higher secondary students incorporating the changes.
- ✓ It shows Uttarakhand's 460sqkm Kalapani as part of Nepal's territory.
- ✓ The Nepal cabinet also gave permission to the country's central bank to mint new coins of one- and two-rupee denominations with the new political map.
- ✓ The coins may come into circulation by Dussehra or Dashain, as called in Nepal, which is celebrated as a major festival in the neighbouring country.
- ✓ The textbook mentions Nepal has a geographical area of 1,47,641.28sq km, of which 460 sq km is the Kalapani area.
- ✓ In November last year, Nepal had protested against the inauguration of a key Lipulekh road in Pithoragarh by Union defence minister Rajnath Singh, alleging that a part of the stretch passed through Nepal's territory.
- ✓ Earlier, Nepal's parliament unanimously voted to amend the Constitution to update the country's map to include three areas — Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani- as part of its territory.