

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – OCTOBER 6, 2020

TAMIL NADU

- **Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IITM) - were part of an international team that won the first two phases of the 'Waves to Water Prize' in a competition organized by US department of energy.**



- ✓ The aim of the competition was to design a wave energy-based desalination system to provide post-disaster drinking water supply to coastal areas.
- ✓ Team 'Nalu e Wai' (Hawaiian for 'waves into fresh water'), a collaboration between the US, India and Sweden, has designed a rapidly deployable, small-scale wave-powered desalination system.
- ✓ The usage of these devices in such water-scarce regions could produce life-changing results for water-starved coastal communities.
- ✓ Team 'Nalu e Wai' was among only 17 winners, out of more than 100 global teams.
- **On October 5, Tamil Nadu – reported 5,395 fresh Covid-19 infections and 62 deaths.**
- ✓ This takes the state's case tally to 6,25,391 and the death toll to 9,846

- ✓ A total of 5,572 people were discharged, taking the total number of people recovered to 5,69,664.
- ✓ The state has 45,881 active cases under treatment as on date

AS IT STANDS		The Covid situation in Tamil Nadu as on Monday		
Zone	New Cases	Deaths	Active cases	Total toll
Chennai Region	2,060	26	17,878	4,757
North	614	8	4,981	1,186
Central	663	4	4,983	748
South	555	9	4,574	1,890
West	1,500	15	13,435	1,264
Other	3	0	30	1
Total	5,395	62	45,881	9,846

- ✓ Chennai reported the maximum of 1,367 new cases on the day, followed by Coimbatore (468)
- ✓ Chennai's neighbouring districts, Chengalpet (344), Tiruvallur (195), and Kancheepuram (155) together reported 693 cases
- ✓ Further, Salem (337) and Thanjavur (251) logged more than 200 cases.
- ✓ In the last 24 hours, 80,868 people were tested for the viral infection.

STATES

- **On October 5, the Assam government - announced a onetime grant of ₹50,000 to journalists who have no affiliation to any political party**
- ✓ To avail the benefit, the journalists should have published or broadcast at least three "success stories" of government schemes in the last 12 months.
- ✓ The "One-Time Grant for Media Personality" scheme of the government will come into immediate effect and will be provided every year.
- ✓ The state government has issued guidelines for the new scheme
- ✓ The monetary assistance to the journalists will be made from budgetary allocations set aside for the scheme during the financial year.
- ✓ Under the scheme, photojournalists and video journalists must submit at least three still photographs or video of events or happenings during the last 12 months "which are effective and beneficial for the people in terms of development, unity and integrity".
- ✓ A total of 20 journalists will be selected for the benefit every year.
- ✓ The eligible journalists should be a permanent resident of Assam, holding an accredited or recognised card of DIPR, Assam, with 15 years of experience
- ✓ They should have a minimum age limit of 40 years with no upper limit

NATIONAL

- **The 42nd GST Council meeting, chaired by Union finance and Corporate Affairs minister Nirmala Sitharaman – was held on October 5 through video conferencing**
- ✓ During the meeting, the GST Council had decided to extend the levy of compensation cess under the GST regime on cars, coal and soft drinks beyond June 2022
- ✓ The cess collections will be used to repay borrowings to be made this year for meeting the compensation shortfall
- ✓ The meeting has also exempted 18% of GST levied on Indian firms for launching their satellites, to encourage domestic launching
- ✓ The Centre ruled out further negotiation on compensation to the states, arguing that the modalities of borrowing funds can't be finalised by the panel comprising union and state finance ministers.
- ✓ Earlier, the GST council had agreed to meet again on October 12 to resolve the borrowing issue with the states.
- ✓ The compensation issue has been the focus of the meeting, as state's revenues have dwindled due to the impact of Covid-19 induced lockdown.
- ✓ The government had assured to compensate states in case GST collections did not grow 14% annually.

STATES TO GET ₹20K CR NOW, ₹25K CR NEXT WK

➤ Centre will transfer ₹20,000 crore to states immediately as first tranche of compensation for the current year

➤ Next week, another ₹25,000cr to be transferred to states that received less than their share of Integrated GST in FY18

➤ Businesses with annual

turnover up to ₹5cr can pay part of tax dues every month, clear entire liability while filing quarterly returns

➤ From January, refund to be paid to validated bank accounts linked to PAN, Aadhaar

➤ From April, product and service codes to be shared in GST returns



- ✓ With a projected deficit of Rs.2.3 lakh crore, the Union government has announced two options to fund the GST compensation due to the states
- ✓ Both the options involved market borrowings to bridge the gap with repayment funded through the compensation cess.
- ✓ During the meeting, as part of the first option, the Centre reworked the formula and stated that the deficit due to GST implementation is Rs.1.1 lakh crore instead of Rs.97,000 crore estimated earlier.

- ✓ The Centre has offered to help states getting this money via a special RBI window at competitive rates and also help them use the compensation cess to repay the interest and principal
 - ✓ This offer has been accepted by 20 states.
 - ✓ The other option is for states to borrow Rs.2.3 lakh crore directly from the market, which means at a higher cost.
 - ✓ Ten opposition-ruled states and Union territories, including Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Tamil Nadu have refused to accept the two options on the table and wanted the Centre to borrow funds and allocate it to states.
 - ✓ During the meeting, Tamil Nadu government has urged the Centre to immediately release the IGST dues of Rs.4,321 crore for the year 2017-18 in one instalment.
 - ✓ The IGST dues were finalized by the Group of Ministers constituted for the purpose.
 - ✓ The total GST compensation dues for 2020-21, up to July, 2020 is Rs.12,258.94 crore is due to Tamil Nadu.
 - ✓ During the meeting, the Tamil Nadu government chose option 1 of the two choices laid out by the Centre for the States to borrow money in lieu of the GST compensation dues
 - ✓ The state has taken the decision hoping that the Centre would rework the option to reflect a higher proportion of the actual loss in revenue of States.
- **On October 5, the urban affairs ministry and Swiggy, a major online food ordering and delivery platform - have signed an agreement to enable street food vendors using Swiggy's e-commerce platform to get more business.**
- ✓ To begin with, a pilot will be carried out involving 250 vendors across five cities – Ahmedabad, Chennai, Delhi, Indore and Varanasi
 - ✓ This coverage, under the MoU, will be expanded subsequently to other cities.
 - ✓ As per the ministry, the government will help out street vendors with PAN and FSSAI registration, training on technology and partner app usage, menu digitisation and pricing, hygiene and packaging best practices.
 - ✓ The agreement was signed as a part of Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmanibharNidhi (PM SVANidhi) scheme
 - ✓ Under the scheme, urban street vendors will be provided loans of up to Rs. 10,000 at subsidised interest rate to help them resume their livelihood affected due to Covid-19 lockdown.
 - ✓ The scheme, which also has provision for the extension of the loan credit amount upto Rs. 20,000, is valid till March 2022.
 - ✓ Till October 4, over 20 lakh loan applications had been received under the scheme

- **On the occasion of Gangetic Dolphin Day on October 5, National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) - launched the 'Dolphin Jalaj Safari' at six locations in the country**



- ✓ The six locations are Haiderpur Wetland in Ganga in Bijnor, Brijghat, Prayagraj and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Kahalgaon (Bihar) and Bandel (West Bengal).
 - ✓ The move was aimed at preserving Ganga ecology as well as promoting tourism in the region
 - ✓ This is a unique initiative to integrate Gangetic dolphin and Ganga conservation with local livelihoods which is in line with the concept of Arth Ganga.
 - ✓ The 'Ganga Praharis' — trained volunteers from among the local community working for cleanliness of Ganga — will take tourists at these sites on boat rides to view dolphins in the Ganga.
 - ✓ Besides, a new campaign, 'My Ganga My Dolphin', was also launched on the occasion to conduct a dolphin census in a 250 km stretch from Bijnor to Narora.
 - ✓ Currently, there are 36 dolphins in the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary comprising five districts of west UP — Bijnor, Amroha, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Hapur
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- **The government – has proposed to lift the ban on export of dehydrated onions of all varieties in cut, sliced or broken in powder form.**
 - ✓ This was announced by the government in a letter addressed to the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT)
 - ✓ The consumer affairs ministry has also recommended allowing export of two special quality onions — 10,000 tonnes each of Bangalore Rose and Krishnapuram onions.
 - ✓ Further, the ministry has also recommended allowing monthly export of 150 tonnes of onions to Bhutan for the next three months.
 - ✓ Almost all quantities of Bangalore Rose onion are meant only for export to southeast Asian countries.
 - ✓ Similarly, Krishnapuram onions are not used in Indian kitchens due to their size and pungency and these are imported by Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

- ✓ The consumer affairs ministry has recommended that these two varieties of onion should be allowed for export in consultation with the state horticulture departments
- ✓ The export of these onions will be done through Chennai port following the same procedure adopted in 2019.
- **The Centre - issued guidelines for reopening of schools in a graded manner after the pandemic break**
 - ✓ According to the guidelines, states/UTs may take a decision after October 15 with students being allowed only with consent of parents.
 - ✓ The guidelines were issued by the ministry of education (MoE) on October 5
 - ✓ The attendance norms for the students will be 'flexible' alongwith the option for attending the online classes too.
 - ✓ The guidelines also mandated a thorough cleaning and disinfection of premises, no assessment for up to three weeks and ensure a smooth transition from home-based schooling to classrooms.
 - ✓ It has also asked the states/ UTs to frame their own SOPs for health and safety precautions based on their local conditions.
 - ✓ The ministry also recommended that schools adopt flexible attendance and sick leave policies.
 - ✓ The schools will ensure physical distancing while planning seating arrangements and staggered time tables, besides entry and exit timings and points.
 - ✓ Functions and events have to be avoided, while all the students and staff will be required to wear face cover/mask.
 - ✓ Schools have to ensure availability of a full-time trained health care attendant, nurse or doctor and counsellor to take care of the physical and mental health of students.
 - ✓ Further, the use of ICT and online learning shall continue to be encouraged
- **An Indian laboratory – has been chosen for the global vaccine test network by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)**
 - ✓ The Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI) has been chosen as one of the global network of laboratories for centralised assessment of COVID-19 vaccines.
 - ✓ The THSTI is an autonomous institute of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT)
 - ✓ The CEPI network will involve six labs.

INTERNATIONAL

- **The Financial Action Task Force - to decide on Pakistan's grey list status in a virtual meeting scheduled to be held later this month**
 - ✓ The virtual FATF plenary is scheduled to take place from October 21 to 23, 2020

- ✓ The money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog, FATF had placed Pakistan on the grey list in 2018
- ✓ The watchdog had asked Pakistan to implement an action plan to curb money laundering and terror financing by the end of 2019, but the deadline was extended later.
- ✓ As part of its action plan, Pakistan in August imposed curbs on 88 banned terror groups and their commanders, including 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind and JuD chief Hafiz Saeed, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim.

INDIA AND NEIGHBOURS

- **India – is planning to build a petroleum refinery in Myanmar at an investment of \$6 billion.**
- ✓ This was discussed during the joint visit of foreign secretary Harsh Shringla and Army chief M M Naravane to Myanmar on October 4-5, 2020



- ✓ India proposes to build the refinery in the Thanlyin region near Yangon
- ✓ China currently accounts for almost 70% of foreign investments in the energy sector in Myanmar.
- ✓ Burma, India's eastern neighbour, comes under India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies
- ✓ It has very few refineries and imports mostly account for its domestic fuel consumption.
- ✓ During their joint visit, Shringla and Naravane also called on state counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and commander-in-chief of defence services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.
- ✓ The two sides also discussed maintenance of security and stability in their border areas and reiterated their mutual commitment on the same.
- ✓ They discussed the progress of Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
- ✓ The government appreciated Myanmar's decision to hand over 22 Indian insurgents to New Delhi.

- ✓ India announced a grant of \$2 million for the construction of the border haat bridge at Byanyu/Sarsichauk in Chin State
- ✓ Recently, the Indian government has notified that India and Myanmar have agreed to operationalise the Sittwe port in the Rakhine state by first quarter of 2021.

CONFERENCES & SUMMITS

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping – are expected to participate in the 12th BRICS summit to be held on November 17 via a video-conference**
- ✓ This will be the first time the two leaders will meet each other in the same event, since the ongoing military stand-off in Ladakh
- ✓ Moscow is organizing the meeting, as Russia is the current Chair of the 5-nation Brics group
- ✓ Despite the best efforts of Russia to have a physical summit, all member-states finally agreed that they should have a virtual meeting.
- ✓ The theme for the summit this year is 'BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth'.
- ✓ The two leaders have attended all summit meetings of BRICS in the past several years.
- ✓ The BRICS Summit 2019 had taken place in Brazilia, the capital city of Brazil
- ✓ The BRICS bloc comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- ✓ The BRICS nations have a combined GDP of about \$16.6 trillion and represents over 3.6 billion people, about half of the world's population.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **A team of researchers from the CSIR-Central Leather Research Institute - has developed a synthetic tanning agent without the toxic 'formaldehyde', which is traditionally used to enhance leather quality.**

WHAT'S NEW?

➤ Scientists at CLRI have developed chromium-melamine synthetic tanning agent free of formaldehyde

➤ Tanning agents are used to fill and tighten loose portions of cattle hide and give leather a uniform appearance

➤ Team has developed chromium III-melamine synthetic tanning agent and replaced formaldehyde with a patented relatively environment friendly chemical

➤ Chromium in the agent could be filtered during discharge using existing technology during tanning process

WHAT IS FORMALDEHYDE?

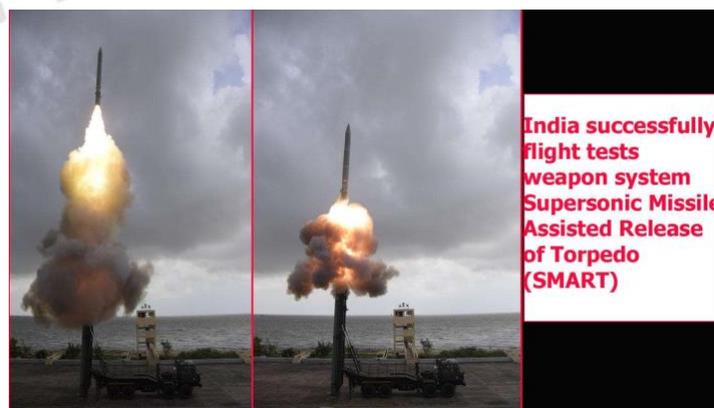
➤ Formaldehyde is a banned colourless, strong-smelling chemical usually used to crosslink or bond aromatic compounds in the synthetic tanning agents. When used in tanning agents, it leaves residue on the leather that can be harmful to humans



- ✓ Formaldehyde, which is used to crosslink or bond two chemical compounds, leaves a residue on the leather.
- ✓ Long-term exposure to this colourless gas could be harmful to humans while its discharge is toxic to aquatic life.
- ✓ Formaldehyde is also used as a preservative in seafood but banned in many countries
- ✓ A team led by K J Sreeram, director, CSIR-CLRI, and chief scientist J Raghava Rao has developed a chromium-melamine synthetic tanning agent, free of formaldehyde, for use after the primary tanning process to enhance leather quality.
- ✓ Chromium gives strength, colour and thermal stability to the leather, while melamine acts as the synthetic tanning agent.
- ✓ After the primary chrome tanning process to convert hides and skins into leather, the leather undergoes a re-tanning process to make its surface smooth, fill the pores and tighten the material.
- ✓ For this, traditionally phenol-formaldehyde resins or melamine formaldehyde are used.
- ✓ The newly developed agent also enhances leather by tightening the hide, leaving a fine grain effect, and natural sheen.
- ✓ The technology, which won CSIR Technology Award 2020, has been transferred to industry for commercial production.

DEFENCE

- **On October 5, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) - tested a new weapon for anti-submarine warfare that involves a supersonic missile assisted release of torpedo (SMART)**



- ✓ The lightweight anti-submarine SMART version has a far greater range of around 650 km than conventional torpedoes.
- ✓ It is the fastest Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) missile in the world.
- ✓ The SMART was “successfully” flight-tested from the Wheeler Island off the coast of Odisha.

- ✓ A number of DRDO laboratories, including RCI Hyderabad, DRDL, NSTL Vishakhapatnam, ADRDE Agra have developed the technologies that were required for SMART
- ✓ During the test, all mission objectives, including missile flight up to the range and altitude, separation of the nose cone, release of torpedo and deployment of velocity reduction mechanism (VRM), were achieved perfectly
- ✓ The tracking stations, with radars and electro-optical systems, along the coast and telemetry stations, including ships, monitored all the events during the launch
- ✓ Earlier in September 2020, DRDO had also successfully tested the Laser-Guided Anti Tank Guided Missile

ECONOMY

- **The government - has chosen three economists — PMEAC member Ashima Goyal, NCAER's Shashanka Bhide and IIM-Ahmedabad professor Jayanth Varma — as the new members of the RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC) to decide on interest rates.**
- ✓ The appointments were made after the decision was cleared by the Appointment Committee of the Cabinet chaired by PM Narendra Modi.

GET 4-YEAR TERM



➤ **Ashima Goyal** is a member of the PM's economic advisory council (PMEAC) and is professor of economics at Indira Gandhi Institute For Development Research



➤ **Shashanka Bhide** is senior adviser, research programmes, at the National Council Of Applied Economic Research



➤ **Jayanth Varma** is professor in finance and accounting area at IIM-Ahmedabad

- ✓ The central bank was forced to postpone a crucial meeting of the panel last week, as the three external members were not nominated by the government.
- ✓ The panel is chaired by RBI governor Shaktikanta Das with deputy governor Michael Patra and the executive director in charge of monetary policy as its members.
- ✓ The new members of MPC, which was set up in 2016, are expected to get a four-year term without reappointment
- ✓ The MPC was constituted under Section 54ZB of the reserve Bank of India (RBI) act, 1934

- ✓ It consists of six members, out of which three are appointed to RBI and the rest by government
- ✓ The RBI Governor acts as the ex-officio chairperson of the committee while the Executive Governor of the bank acts as the Deputy Governor.
- ✓ The committee prepares the monetary policy, decides on the policy interest rate, bank rate, repo rate, Reverse Repo Rate etc and strives to keep the inflation rates under control

AWARDS

- **On October 5, Americans Harvey J Alter and Charles M Rice and British-born scientist Michael Houghton - jointly won the Nobel Prize for medicine for their discovery of the hepatitis C virus, a major source of liver disease.**



- ✓ According to the Nobel committee, the trio's work identified a major source of hepatitis that couldn't be explained by the previously discovered hepatitis A and B viruses.
- ✓ Their work led to sensitive blood tests for the virus which have helped saved millions of lives
- ✓ It has helped to limit the spread of the fatal disease and develop antiviral drugs to cure it.
- ✓ The discoveries have created a chance of eradicating the Hepatitis C virus — a goal the WHO wants to achieve in the next decade.
- ✓ The three share the 10 million Swedish crowns (\$1.1 million) award for discovering and proving that a bloodborne virus could cause Hepatitis C, which afflicts over 70 million people and causes about 4,00,000 deaths each year.
- ✓ During the 1960s, Alter, who was working at the US National Institutes of Health, found liver disease could be spread by blood transfusions that weren't caused by Hepatitis A or B.
- ✓ In mid-1980s, a team led by Houghton, then working for pharma firm Chiron, created a clone of a new virus belonging to the Flavivirus family 'Hepatitis C' from fragments found in the blood of an infected chimpanzee.

- ✓ Its identification made it possible to develop tests to screen bloodbank supplies and greatly reduce the spread of the disease, which can cause cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- ✓ Finally, Rice, then at Washington University in St Louis, used genetic engineering to generate a version of the Hepatitis C virus and demonstrate that it alone could cause symptoms in a chimpanzee comparable to an infection in humans.
- ✓ It's the second Nobel Prize for Medicine for hepatitis research, after Baruch Blumberg won in 1976 for determining that one form of blood-borne hepatitis was caused by a virus that came to be known as Hepatitis B.
- ✓ Due to the pandemic, the Nobel Foundation has cancelled the traditional banquet in December, and will confer the medals and diplomas in a televised event
- ✓ The prize carried particular significance this year due to the Covid pandemic, which has highlighted the importance of medical research and the damage that a single virus can wreak

