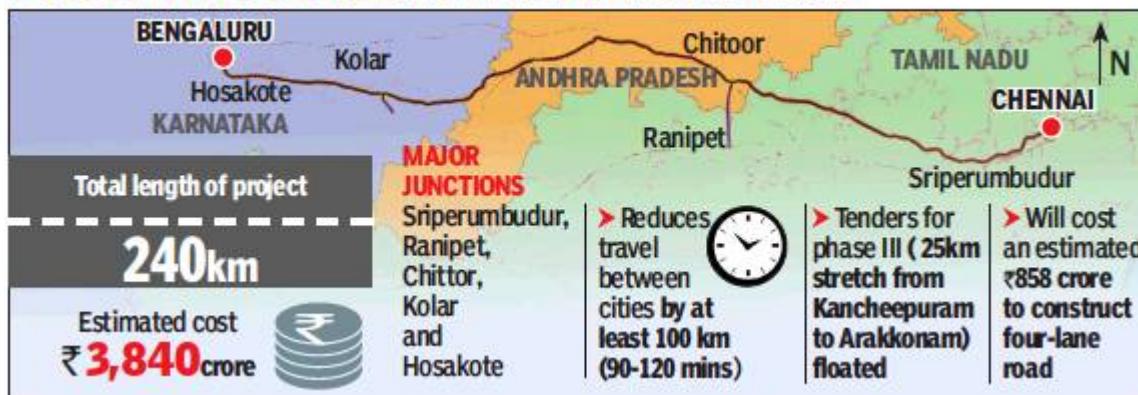


EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – NOVEMBER 20, 2020

TAMIL NADU

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) - has floated a tender for phase III of Chennai-Bengaluru Expressway project under Bharatmala scheme.
- ✓ The tender involves the construction of the four-lane road between Kancheepuram and Arakkonam at a budget of ₹858.93 crore.
- ✓ The 240km-long expressway will pass through various industrial and mining corridors including Sriperumbudur and Kolar Gold Fields.
- ✓ At present, most vehicles from Chennai take NH-48 and NH-44 route (Vellore-Krishnagiri-Hosur) to reach Bengaluru, taking at least 6 hours 30 minutes for the 350km-journey.
- ✓ Once the expressway project is complete, travel time is expected to reduce by at least 90 to 120 minutes.

FOR A SMOOTHER & FASTER JOURNEY



- ✓ The project has a unique feature called - the Advanced Traffic Management System (ADMS) - that aims at uninterrupted traffic flow, real-time info for users and round-the-clock emergency assistance

- ✓ As per the new feature, traffic volume will be displayed at a board near the proposed toll gate
- ✓ Besides this, ADMS will help in automatic vehicle classification before it enters the toll lanes so as to eliminate waiting of vehicles
- ✓ NHAI has also proposed an emergency call booth at every 2km-mark
- ✓ Further, CCTV cameras are to be installed at various points to monitor vehicular movement 24/7 so as to track accidents and other crimes.
- ✓ At present, cameras are fixed only at toll plazas.
- ✓ The 25-km phase III stretch will have no flyovers, but seven major bridges over local water bodies, and a railway over bridge near Govindavadi.
- ✓ A deadline of 730 days has been set to complete the entire project.

NATIONAL

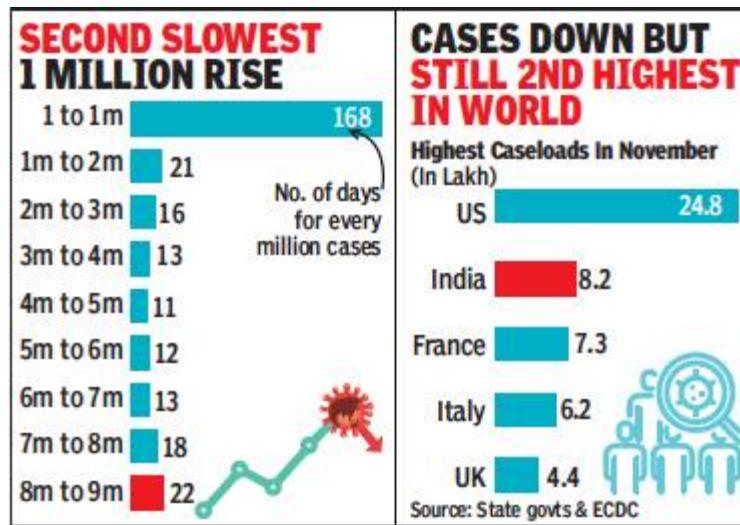
- On November 19, the government announced two major interventions to end hazardous manual cleaning of sewer lines and septic tanks.
- ✓ The first one involves the amending of law by the social justice ministry to make machine-cleaning mandatory
- ✓ The second one involves the launching of “Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge” by the urban affairs ministry to ensure that no person needs to enter a sewer or septic tank.
- ✓ Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri launched the challenge among 243 major cities on the occasion of World Toilet Day.



- ✓ The challenge has been launched to switch over to mechanised cleaning of sewers and septic tanks by April 30, 2021.
- ✓ The results of the challenge are to be announced on independence day
- ✓ The country has existing laws along with several Supreme Court judgements, which prohibits hazardous cleaning of sewer lines and septic tanks without taking enough safety precaution

- ✓ However, nearly 800 septic tank cleaners have died in the past five years.
 - ✓ Hence, the government is planning a fundamental change in the existing Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 to make mechanised cleaning mandatory and not optional.
 - ✓ The act aims to prohibit manual entry into a sewer without protective gears.
 - ✓ The ministry will also provide funds to sanitation workers to purchase machineries.
 - ✓ The Supreme Court of India, in 2014, made it mandatory to provide Rs 10 lakhs as compensation to the families of those who have died during sewerage works.
- **The government - has decided to reserve five MBBS seats under the central pool for wards of Covid-19 warriors for the academic year 2020-2021 in recognition of their services to contain the pandemic.**
- ✓ In this aspect, the health ministry has introduced a new category in the guidelines for selection and nomination of candidates against central pool of MBBS seats
 - ✓ Accordingly, the seats may be allocated for wards of Covid warriors who lost their lives due to Covid-19 or died on account of Covid-related duty.
 - ✓ This reservation system will initially be implemented as a pilot for the academic year 2020-21, but eventually extended if there are eligible candidates.
 - ✓ The scheme will use the same definition of a 'Covid warrior' as prescribed by the Centre for the insurance package of ₹50 lakh for such people who died while combating the pandemic.
 - ✓ Covid-19 warriors are public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of patients and who may be at risk of being impacted by this.
 - ✓ The respective state/UT government will certify the eligibility for this category
 - ✓ The final selection of candidates will be made by the Medical Council Committee (MCC) through online application on the basis of rank obtained in NEET-2020
- **India - has become the second country in the world after the US to record nine million Covid-19 cases.**
- ✓ The rise of the last one million cases is the second slowest after taking 22 days for the case count to increase from the eight-million mark
 - ✓ This reflects the considerable slowdown in the pandemic in recent weeks.
 - ✓ On November 19, India recorded 46,260 fresh infections, taking the total to 90,03,800.
 - ✓ The day's death toll, at 589, was the highest in the last two weeks.
 - ✓ The country witnessed the pandemic's peak in mid-September, when it took just 11 days for cases to rise from four million to five million.
 - ✓ Only the first one million cases took more days than the last million.
 - ✓ However, India still recorded the second highest number of new cases in the world in November.

- ✓ The country has reported a little over 8.2 lakh in the month so far, second to only the US's November case count of 24.8 lakh.
- ✓ France ranks third with 7.3 lakh, followed by Italy (6.2 lakh), the UK (4.4 lakh), Poland (4.3 lakh) and Brazil (4.3 lakh).



- ✓ At 9,937, India's death toll from the virus in November so far was the third highest in the world.
- ✓ The US recorded 20,829 fatalities, followed by 10,133 in France, with Italy (8,896) and Iran (8,563) in the fourth and fifth spots, respectively.
- ✓ The country has conducted 10.3 lakh tests on November 18.
- **The government – has decided to link property registration with the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) to improve the country's ranking on World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index**
 - ✓ This will not only bring more transparency in land-related disputes but also help in fast-tracking commercial cases.
 - ✓ This was announced by the law ministry after a meeting with representatives from eCommittee of Supreme Court, the department of land resources and others in pursuance of the cabinet secretary's directions
 - ✓ A working group has been constituted to come up with a detailed action plan on the subject.
 - ✓ Earlier, the first meeting on ease of doing business was held on October 12
 - ✓ During the meeting, the department of legal affairs was 'bringing about simplification of forms and rules and Pre-Institution Mediation and Settlement (PIMS)'
 - ✓ The e-Committee of the SC held a meeting with representatives of the High Courts of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Karnataka to further simplify procedures.
 - ✓ India ranked 63rd in the World Bank's ease of doing business index in 2020, up from the 130th position it held out of 190 countries in 2016.
 - ✓ In another step, law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has written to all chief ministers to set up dedicated special courts under the Specific Relief Act.

- ✓ To further ensure timebound disposal of commercial cases, the government has created 42 additional posts of higher judicial services in Delhi HC which will help it to set up additional dedicated commercial courts.
- ✓ At present, Delhi has 22 dedicated commercial courts.

- **On November 19, the Army – has “declassified” the results of the ‘Special No. 5 Selection Board’ constituted to screen short-service commission (SSC) women officers**
- ✓ As per the results, almost half of the women officers considered for permanent commission (PC) in the Army have made the grade
- ✓ This is the first-ever special selection board held for providing PC in the army to women officers in the 13-lakh strong force.
- ✓ Accordingly, almost 300 of the total 615 women officer candidates were selected for PC.
- ✓ The women not selected included those who did not opt for PC as well as the ones who did not meet the selection criteria or pass the medical test.
- ✓ They will retire after completing 20 years of service, which will make them eligible for pension.
- ✓ In September, the Army finally begun screening of women officers who could be granted PC in 10 of its branches
- ✓ This was in accordance with the Supreme Court directive in February to end gender bias in the force
- ✓ The special board, headed by a Lt-General, included a woman officer of brigadier rank.
- ✓ Women officers were also permitted to witness the proceedings as observers in order to add transparency to the entire process.
- ✓ In July, the defence ministry had issued the formal order to grant PC to women officers in eight more branches of the Army, in addition to the existing ones of the legal and education wings.
- ✓ The eight branches are Army Air Defence (AAD), Signals, Engineers, Army Aviation, Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Army Service Corps (ASC), Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), and Intelligence Corps.
- ✓ The army has just over 1,600 women officers in the 43,000-strong officer cadre.

INTERNATIONAL

- **On November 19, an anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore - sentenced Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief and mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks Hafiz Saeed and his two accomplices to 10-and-a-half years of imprisonment each in two terror-related cases.**
- ✓ The court had also imposed a fine of almost \$700 (about Rs 51,892) on Saeed and ordered confiscation of his properties.

- ✓ The move is seen as a measure to score points with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global terror financing and money laundering watchdog



- ✓ The watchdog is scheduled to review Pakistan's case early next year and decide whether or not to blacklist it.
- ✓ FATF had recently concluded that Pakistan had not addressed six of its 27-point action plan items to check terror-financing and money laundering.
- ✓ It had retained Pakistan on its grey list till February 2021
- ✓ One of the six points to be addressed relates to action against UN security council proscribed terrorists like Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed.
- ✓ Saeed is also yet to face prosecution for his role in the Mumbai attacks, as Pakistan has cited 'no enough' evidence to book him.
- ✓ The JuD chief's two close aides — Zafar Iqbal and Yahya Mujahid — have been sentenced to a jail term of 10-and-a-half years each
- ✓ Saeed's brother-in-law Abdul Rehman Makki was sentenced to six months imprisonment.
- ✓ Earlier, the counter terrorism department (CTD) of Punjab province had registered dozens of FIRs against 70-year-old Saeed and his accomplices in 2019 on terror financing charges in Lahore, Gujranwala, Multan, Faisalabad, Sahiwal and Sargodha.
- ✓ All cases were transferred to Lahore following an order passed of the high court on the petitions of the accused.
- ✓ Many JuD leaders have been convicted in terror financing cases while trial in several others are pending adjudication.
- ✓ Saeed was sentenced to 11 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in February this year in two other terror financing cases.
- ✓ He has also been indicted in at least five cases along with his aides.
- ✓ The CTD accused them of using properties of religious seminaries and mosques for terror financing.
- ✓ Saeed was arrested on July 17, 2019, and has been lodged in the high-security Kot Lakhpat jail in Lahore.
- ✓ JuD is the front for Lashkar-e-Taiba, the terror organisation behind the 2008 Mumbai carnage that left 166 people dead, including six Americans.
- ✓ The US Department of the Treasury has named Saeed as a 'specially designated global terrorist' and has offered a \$10 million reward for information to arrest him.

- ✓ He was listed as a terrorist under the UNSC Resolution 1267 in December 2008.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **The world's first CRISPR Cas-9 (gene-editing tool)-based diagnostic test for Covid-19, Feluda - will be launched in Delhi-NCR from December first week**



- ✓ Following this, the test will be soon rolled out in Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Pune
- ✓ Further, it will be available for testing in remaining cities across the country subsequently in a phased manner
- ✓ The test was developed indigenously by the CSIR's constituent lab, Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB)
- ✓ It was named after the fictional detective created by doyen of Bengali cinema, Satyajit Ray
- ✓ The cost of the test will be based on the respective state government guidelines.
- ✓ The new test will be able to give results in 6-7 hours
- ✓ The main advantages are its affordability, relative ease of use and non-dependency on expensive RT-PCR machines.
- ✓ These kits will not be available for individuals.
- ✓ Initially they will be available only at Apollo Hospitals based on a partnership with Tata Medical and Diagnostics (Tata MD), a new healthcare venture of the Tata Group, for launching the TataMD Check test, powered by Feluda, in the country.
- ✓ Earlier, the Tata Group had got the licence from CSIR-IGIB for development and commercialisation of the testing kit for rapid and accurate diagnosis of Covid-19.
- ✓ The TataMD Check testing kits are currently being manufactured at the company's production facility near Chennai.
- ✓ During the next few weeks, Apollo Hospitals group will ensure availability of TataMD Check testing in eight hospitals across the chosen cities in Phase-I.
- **AstraZeneca and Oxford University's potential Covid-19 vaccine – was found to have produced a strong immune response in older adults, as per the late-stage trial data released on November 19**
- ✓ As per the data, those aged over 70, who are at higher risk of serious illness and death from Covid-19, could build robust immunity with the vaccine.

- ✓ The complete results of the ongoing Late-stage, or Phase III, trials are expected by the year end
- ✓ During this phase, the 560 healthy adult volunteers who took part in the Phase 2 trials were given two doses of the vaccine candidate, or a placebo.
- ✓ The Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine candidate, called AZD1222 or ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, had been among the front-runners in global efforts to develop shots to protect against Covid-19.
- ✓ But rival drugmakers Pfizer Inc, BioNTech and Moderna Inc have in the past 10 days raced ahead, releasing data from late-stage Covid-19 vaccine trials that shows more than 90% efficacy.
- ✓ The Oxford group has a tie-up with the Pune-based Serum Institute of India.

DEFENCE

- **India's first indigenous air-to-air missile, Astra - will soon be tested from the first indigenous fighter Tejas in the next few months**



- ✓ The integration of the Astra beyond visual range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) on the Tejas and the "initial ground trials" are complete now.
- ✓ Astra has the capability to fly at over four times the speed of sound at Mach 4.5
- ✓ The all-weather day and night capable 'Astra' has a strike range of around 100-km
- ✓ It will eventually replace the expensive Russian, French and Israeli BVRAAMs that are currently imported to arm IAF fighters.
- ✓ DRDO also plans to begin testing the Mark-2 version of Astra, with a range of 160-km, in the first half of next year.
- ✓ Further, it is also planning simultaneously for a 350-km range Astra Mark-3 as well.
- ✓ The Astra Mark-1 has already been successfully demonstrated on the Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKI fighters
- ✓ In July, the Rajnath Singh-led Defence Acquisitions Council had granted "acceptance of necessity" for an initial order of 288 Astra Mark-1 missiles.
- ✓ Defence PSU Bharat Dynamics is scheduled to produce the missiles in bulk at a unit cost of about ₹7.5 crore.

