

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – DECEMBER 12, 2020

TAMIL NADU

- On December 11, the Tamil Nadu government - announced two monuments in the State as protected sites.



- ✓ They are Ammakulam at Keezhraivanthavadi village in Tiruvannamalai district and an elephant statue at Azhagarmalai village in Ariyalur district.
- ✓ As per the Department of Tamil Culture and Archaeology, Ammakulam might date back to the 16th century during the reign of the Nayakkar kings.
- ✓ It contains several symbols inscribed around the ponds, having references to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, scenes from Periyapuram and war scenes.
- ✓ Also, on the four corners of the pond, there are Nandi statues
- ✓ A similar pond is found at Chinnayampettai in Chengam circle.
- ✓ Chinnamanayakkar, who had constructed the pond there, could have set up the Ammakulam pond as well, as per the Department of Tamil Culture and Archaeology.
- ✓ The elephant statue at Azhagarmalai, spanning a height of 81 ft, length of 41 ft, and width of 12 ft likely dates back to 16th-17th century.
- ✓ Azhagarmalai was a part of the first Rajendra Chola empire when Gangaikonda Cholapuram was its capital.
- ✓ The place was an important centre for the subsequent empires of the Vijayanagar and Nayakkar kingdoms

- **Tamil Nadu – has received the highest allocation of foodgrains in the entire southern region under various schemes during the Covid-19 pandemic period**
- ✓ The state has bagged nearly one-third of foodgrains supplied by the Centre to southern states to tackle the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- ✓ Between March 25 and November 30, the Centre has allocated about 157 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat to the southern states
- ✓ Of this, Tamil Nadu's share accounted for 49.5 lakh tonnes, according to data compiled by the Food Corporation of India (FCI).
 - ✓ Of this quantity, rice was 46.77 lakh tonnes and wheat, 2.75 lakh tonnes.
 - ✓ With reference to the schemes, 22.97 lakh tonnes of rice was provided under regular allocation under the National Food Security Act (NFSA)
 - ✓ Further, the State was provided with an additional allocation of 13.89 lakh tonnes free of cost under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) and 1.99 lakh tonnes for non-NFSA cardholders at the rate of ₹ 22 per kg.
- ✓ In respect of wheat, the State got 2.75 lakh tonnes, of which 1.99 lakh tonnes was meant for NFSA beneficiaries and 39,000 tonnes under the PMGKAY.
- ✓ Among southern States, Karnataka was given 36.41 lakh tonnes, Andhra Pradesh - 30.49 lakh tonnes, Telangana - 22.04 lakh tonnes and Kerala - 18.15 lakh tonnes, apart from 28,000 tonnes to Puducherry.
- **Greater Chennai Corporation - has started the process of identifying all frontline healthcare workers who will be the first to be given the vaccines for Covid-19 whenever they are made available.**
- ✓ In this regard, the civic body has set up a special desk in Ripon Building to register all doctors and paramedical staff, including nurses, ward boys and technicians, in Chennai.
- ✓ Once the healthcare workers are vaccinated, next in line will be conservancy staff of the civic body, other staff of the corporation and the lower-rung staff of police who are on the field and in close contact with patients.
- ✓ After this, the GCC will vaccinate senior citizens who have co-morbidities.
- ✓ During the early days of Covid-19, the corporation has collected zone, ward and street wise data on the number of elderly in Chennai during the door to door screening

STATES

- **On December 11, the Karnataka government - said that it would take the ordinance route to introduce a new anti-cow slaughter law and implement it with immediate effect**

- ✓ The Karnataka assembly has already passed the bill on the anti-cow slaughtering, but is yet to clear the legislative council, where the ruling party is outnumbered by the opposition
- ✓ The new law aims to strengthen existing rules and protect cattle in the state
- ✓ The state assembly passed the Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill, 2020, on December 9.

NATIONAL

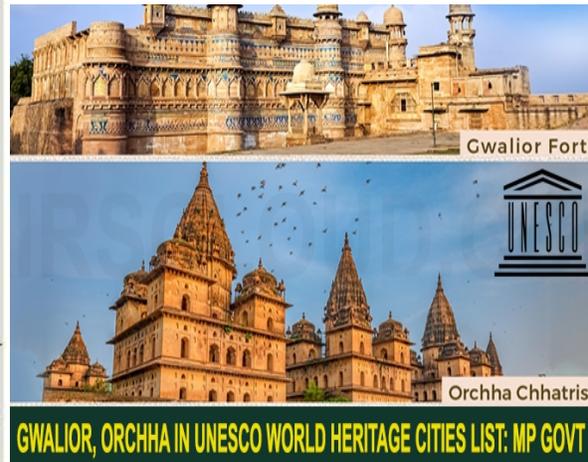
- **The Centre – had shared the draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on vaccination infrastructure with the states on December 10**
- ✓ As per the SOP released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW), the government is planning to give anti-corona vaccine shots to only around 100 per day
- ✓ The government is looking to utilise community halls and temporary tents for vaccination in the later stages.

ONE VACCINATION AT A TIME	
WAITING ROOM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facility for hand washing/sanitising at entrance ➤ Seating to ensure physical distancing of 6 feet ➤ Display of materials on Covid-19 appropriate behaviour 	each; vaccine vials in one of the carriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hand sanitizers, masks ➤ AEFI/Anaphylaxis kit
VACCINATION ROOMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 1 beneficiary at a time ➤ 2 vaccine carriers with 4 conditioned ice packs 	OBSERVATION ROOM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Will require more space as beneficiaries will wait for 30 minutes after vaccination ➤ Seating plan to ensure physical distancing



- ✓ The states have been asked to identify dedicated hospitals for 'adverse events following immunisation' (AEFI) alongwith specific vaccinations sites for Covid-19 inoculation
- ✓ Each vaccination site will have five vaccination officers, including a guard, and three rooms, one each for waiting, vaccination and observation.
- ✓ The decision to have three rooms for vaccination has been taken keeping in mind the need for social distancing.
- ✓ While the vaccination room will see only one person enter at each time, the waiting and observation room will have seating for multiple people.
- ✓ Considering the limitations caused by social distancing, only 13-14 people will be administered the vaccine every hour.
- **Orchha and Gwalior cities of Madhya Pradesh - have been included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Cities.**
- ✓ The Orchha city is famous for its palaces and temples and was the capital of Bundela Kingdom in the 16th century.

- ✓ The city has several prominent places like Jahangir Mahal, Raj Mahal, Rai Praveen Mahal, Gujri Mahal, Mansingh palace, Ram Raja temple, Sahastra Bahu Temple and Lakshmi Narayan Mandir.



- ✓ The city of Gwalior is known for its temples and palaces.
 - ✓ The Gwalior Fort is one of the famous tourist place that can be reached over the road that is lined with sacred Jain statues and occupies a sandstone plateau.
 - ✓ It is now an archaeological museum with high walls of 15th century.
 - ✓ The city of Gwalior was established in the 9th century and was ruled by Rajvansh, Baghel Kachvaho, Tomar and Scindias.
 - ✓ The World Heritage site tags are provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO.
 - ✓ The tags are provided for natural heritages and cultural heritages spread all over the world and are considered to be outstanding in adding historical and geographical value to the humanity.
 - ✓ The World Heritage site list is administered by the UNESCO World Heritage committee.
- **The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) - recently declared “Invest India” as the winner of the United Nations Investment Promotion Award, 2020.**
- ✓ The award recognizes outstanding achievements of investment promotion agencies across the world.
 - ✓ India was declared winner among 180 such agencies, which were shortlisted for the award in 2020.
 - ✓ The UNCTAD had constituted a team to monitor Investment Promotion Agencies in the world during March 2020 to identify the best practices amidst Covid-19 pandemic
 - ✓ The UNCTAD deals with trade, investment and development issues
 - ✓ It releases reports such as Trade and Development Report and World Investment Report

- ✓ According to the World Investment Report, India jumped to 9th position in FDI flows in 2019 with an inflow of \$51 billion.

INTERNATIONAL

- **On December 10, the US panel of experts - formally recommended that the US Food and Drug Administration authorise the Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine for emergency approval.**
 - ✓ The agency is accelerating the timeline for issuing an emergency authorisation for Pfizer's vaccine
 - ✓ The regulators are going ahead with the processes required to complete the paperwork that goes with the authorisation, including a fact sheet and information for physicians.
 - ✓ Infections are spreading fastest in North America and parts of Africa, whereas Europe's second wave has started to stabilise and cases are down in Asia and the Middle East.
 - ✓ A total of 2.9 million doses of the vaccine could be sent around the US within days of an authorisation.
 - ✓ While this is only about half of the doses that Pfizer will provide in the first week, the other half will be reserved so that the initial recipients can have the second, required dose about three weeks later.
 - ✓ First in line to get it are health care workers and nursing home residents.
 - ✓ The FDA's vaccine advisory panel, composed of independent scientific experts, voted 17-4, with one member abstaining, in favour of emergency authorisation for people 16 and older.
 - ✓ With rare exceptions, the FDA follows the advice of its advisory panels.
 - ✓ Regarding the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine was found to be 95% effective in a late-stage clinical trial.
 - ✓ According to Pfizer, there were no cases of serious allergic reactions in its trials.
 - ✓ Britain became the first Western country to roll out the Pfizer-BioNTech jab this week, followed by the approval of Canada, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia
 - ✓ Russia and China have already begun inoculation efforts with domestically produced vaccines, while European Union (EU) countries are eagerly awaiting clearance.
- **On December 10, Time magazine - named President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris as its persons of the year**
 - ✓ Biden, 78, and Harris, 56, a US senator from California who became the first black woman and the first Indian-American elected to the vice presidency, will appear side by side in a portrait on the magazine's cover on December 21.
 - ✓ They edged out frontline health care workers (along with the nation's leading infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci), the racial justice movement and President Trump for the distinction.



- ✓ It was the first time that the magazine had chosen to include the vice-president as a person of the year.
- ✓ Indian-American Rahul Dubey has been hailed among the “Heroes of 2020” by the Time magazine.
- ✓ Dubey had opened the doors of his Washington DC home to over 70 people demonstrating against the killing of George Floyd
- ✓ LeBron James, who won an NBA title with Los Angeles Lakers and formed a coalition to battle voter suppression, was named Time magazine’s 2020 Athlete-of-the-Year.
- **Argentina - has imposed ‘millionaire tax’ on the country’s richest people to fund coronavirus countermeasures of the government.**
- ✓ Under this scheme, people with declared assets worth more than 200 million pesos will pay a progressive rate of up to 3.5% on wealth within the country and up to 5.25% on wealth outside the country.
- ✓ The revenue arising from this tax will be used to finance health, social development, student scholarships and natural gas ventures.
- ✓ The millionaires’ tax is a one-time contribution affecting 12000 taxpayers, which will help Argentina to fund about 3.7 billion USD.
- ✓ The funds collected through these taxes are to be allocated to small and medium business (20%), medical equipment and supplies (20%), fund natural gas projects (25%) and support student scholarships (20%) and social development programmes (15%)
- ✓ Argentina has a population of 44 million and around 1.4 million are badly affected due to covid-19.
- ✓ Also, the country is currently facing third straight year of recession.
- ✓ Similar law was passed by New Jersey State of USA in September 2020
- ✓ In India, the wealth tax was abolished in 2016 and was replaced with a 2% surcharge on super-rich individuals in the country.

- **The US State Department - has recently announced the ending of 5 cultural exchange programmes with China under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961**
 - ✓ The Act seeks to promote educational and cultural exchange between the US and other countries in a bid to enhance mutual understanding of the US people and the people of other countries.
 - ✓ These programmes include the Policymakers Educational China Trip Program, the US-China Friendship Programme, the US-China Leadership Exchange Program, the US-China Transpacific Exchange Program and the Hong Kong Educational and Cultural Programme.
 - ✓ The USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the Department of State are responsible for the US sponsored exchanges made under the act.
 - ✓ In India, the ICCR is responsible for cultural exchanges between India and other countries.

- **The National Academy of Sciences in USA - has recently found that the 'directed' microwave radiation is the major cause of the mysterious neurological illness called 'Havana syndrome'.**
 - ✓ The Havana syndrome infected the American diplomats and intelligence officials located in China, Cuba and other countries for more than four years now.
 - ✓ Microwave weapons are direct energy weapons that produce highly focused energy in the form of laser or microwaves.
 - ✓ These weapons have long-term and acute damages without any signs of physical damage.
 - ✓ In 2016, the US Diplomats and intelligence officials placed in Havana (Cuba) reported to hear strange buzzing sounds and physical sensations in their homes and hotel rooms.
 - ✓ The strange physical sensations were accompanied with severe headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, hearing loss and sleep problems.
 - ✓ Since then the condition is known as Havana syndrome.
 - ✓ Cuba had denied any knowledge of the illnesses even though the US had accused it of carrying out "sonic attacks", leading to an increase in tensions.

CONFERENCES & SUMMITS

- **The International Climate Ambition Summit – is to be held on December 12, marking the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Agreement**
 - ✓ The summit is to be jointly hosted by the United Nations, the United Kingdom and France, in partnership with Chile and Italy
 - ✓ Prime Minister Narendra Modi is among the 78 leaders expected to address the summit.

- ✓ Attending heads of states are expected to declare enhanced commitments to prevent global temperature increase going beyond 1.5°C.
 - ✓ Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar addressed the media briefing ahead of the Summit
 - ✓ According to the Minister, India was the only major G20 country that was on track towards keeping to its nationally determined commitments to arrest global warming and compatible with a less than 2°C world
 - ✓ India had achieved 21% of its emissions intensity reduction target as a proportion of its GDP in line with its pledge to a 33-35% reduction by 2030
 - ✓ In 2015, ahead of the United Nations' significant climate conference in Paris, India announced three major voluntary commitments called the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) -
 - ✓ to improve the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33–35% by 2030 over 2005 levels
 - ✓ to increase the share of non-fossil fuels-based electricity to 40% by 2030 and,
 - ✓ to enhance its forest cover, thereby absorbing 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide.
 - ✓ Chinese President Xi Jinping is also expected to address the summit.
 - ✓ According to the International Institute of Sustainable Development, the summit is prelude to the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
 - ✓ The COP 26 is scheduled to take place from November 1–12, 2021.
 - ✓ The summit will feature some of the world's top 10 emitters - China, the European Union, India, Japan and Canada.
 - ✓ The Paris Agreement was adopted at COP 21 in Paris on December 12, 2015
 - ✓ It constitutes a landmark agreement on climate change that seeks to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and endeavour to limit the increase to 1.5°C.
 - ✓ The agreement, which came into force on November 4, 2016, currently has 188 parties.
 - ✓ In the first round, 186 parties submitted their first NDC and two have since submitted a second one.
- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi – delivered the inaugural address at the virtual India Mobile Congress on December 8, 2020.**
- ✓ The Congress is organized by the Department of Telecommunications and Cellular Operators Association of India.
 - ✓ It is being organized under the theme “Inclusive Innovation-Smart, Secure, Sustainable”.
 - ✓ The Congress is to be held between December 8, 2020 and December 10, 2020
 - ✓ It aims to make improvements in the areas of research and development in telecom sector, local and foreign investments and emerging technology sectors.



- ✓ It will mainly focus on the domains of Artificial Intelligence, Cyber Security, Block Chain, 5G, Cloud Computing and Edge Computing, Data Analytics and Smart Cities and Internet of Things.
- ✓ The IMC 2020 is organized in alignment with PM Modi's vision to promote 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', 'Digital Inclusivity', 'Sustainable Development', entrepreneurship and innovation.
- ✓ India was one among the few countries to launch “Cyber Security Policy” in 2013.
- ✓ In India, each state government has their own Cyber Emergency Response Team.
- ✓ Further, the Centre has launched Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre) in 2017.

PERSONALITIES

- **Raja Jon Vurputoor Chari, an Indian-American with roots in Telangana – will be part of Nasa’s 18-member Artemis team that will reach moon in four years**



- ✓ With this, he becomes the third Indian-American to go to space after Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams.

- ✓ US vice-president Mike Pence announced the 43-year-old astronaut's name for the Artemis programme at Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida on December 9
- ✓ He had been among 18,000 applicants for the Artemis programme when it was announced in 2017.
- ✓ Chari has logged over 2,000 hours of flight time as a US Air Force pilot.
- ✓ Chari's father Srinivas had moved to the US and married American Peggy Egbert after getting his degree from Hyderabad's Osmania University.
- ✓ Chari was born on June 24, 1977, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- ✓ Chari has a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering and a master's in aeronautics and astronautics.
- ✓ A graduate of the US Naval Test Pilot School, he worked on F-15E upgrades and then the F-35 development programme before joining the Nasa programme.
- ✓ He was among 11 new Nasa graduates to successfully complete their basic astronaut training in January 2020.
- ✓ Chari has been awarded the Defence Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, among others

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **British drugmaker, AstraZeneca – to start clinical trials of a combination of its experimental Covid-19 vaccine with a part of Russia's Sputnik V shot**
 - ✓ Trials will start by the end of the year and Russia wants to jointly produce the new vaccine if it is proven to be effective
 - ✓ Russia was one of the first countries to announce the development of a Covid-19 vaccine.
 - ✓ Russian government backed RDIF wealth fund, which has funded Sputnik V, named the vaccine after the Soviet-era satellite that triggered the space race.
 - ✓ AstraZeneca was considering how it could assess combinations of different vaccines.
 - ✓ It would soon begin exploring with Russia's Gamaleya Institute, which developed Sputnik V, whether two common cold virus-based vaccines could be successfully combined.
 - ✓ The RDIF said it would start to enrol adults aged 18 years and older for the trial.
 - ✓ As per the clinical trials of Sputnik V, it has an efficacy rate of over 90%, higher than AstraZeneca's own vaccine and similar to US rivals Pfizer and Moderna.
 - ✓ The average efficacy rate of AstraZeneca's vaccine was found to be 70.4% in interim late-stage data
- **The Indian drug regulator, Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) - has allowed human trials of the first local mRNA Covid vaccine candidate**
 - ✓ The preliminary results of the trials are likely by March 2021.

- ✓ Pune-based Gennova Biopharmaceuticals has developed the vaccine candidate in collaboration with Seattle-based HDT Biotech Corporation.
- ✓ Covid vaccines based on this platform, like those by Pfizer-BioNtech and Moderna, are expected to have better efficacy but will not be available in India
- ✓ On December 9, the Subject Expert Committee under the CDSCO recommended grant of conditional approval for phases 1 and 2 human clinical trial of the vaccine candidate.
- ✓ The mRNA vaccines carry the molecular instructions to make protein in the body through a synthetic RNA of virus.
- ✓ The host body uses this to produce the viral protein that is recognised and thereby makes the body mount an immune response against the disease.
- ✓ The mRNA vaccine is considered safe as it is noninfectious, non-integrating in nature, and degraded by standard cellular mechanisms.

RANKINGS

- **India – is ranked at 77th position in terms of bribery risks, according to the TRACE Bribery Risk matrix released recently**



- ✓ India scored 45 in the Business Bribery Risk, 2020 and stood at 77th rank.
- ✓ In 2019, India was ranked at 78th place
- ✓ India has performed better than its neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and China in this year's rankings
- ✓ China and Pakistan have been ranked 126th and 153rd spots respectively.
- ✓ Only Bhutan was ahead of India at 48th rank
- ✓ Denmark topped the list and was followed by Norway, Finland, Sweden and New Zealand.
- ✓ The countries at the bottom most of the list were Turkmenistan, North Korea, Venezuela, South Sudan and Eritrea
- ✓ The TRACE Bribery Risk Matrix is an annual listing that measures the likelihood of bribe demands in 194 countries.
- ✓ It was first published in 2014 to provide more reliable information regarding the risks of commercial bribery worldwide.
- ✓ It is released by TRACE International, which is an anti-bribery standard setting organization.

- ✓ The agency aggregates data from the leading international organizations such as World Bank, United Nations and World Economic Forum.
- ✓ The scores are calculated based on the four parameters namely business interactions with the Government, civil service transparency, capacity for civil society oversight and anti-bribery deterrents.
- ✓ Apart from these parameters, the role of media is also considered while formulating the scores.
- ✓ India has scored 50 in the parameter of business interactions with the Government, 40 in the civil service transparency, 36 in the capacity for civil society oversight and 53 in the anti-bribery deterrents

