



## EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – DECEMBER 31, 2020

### TAMIL NADU

- **Tamil Nadu - won a gold award under the category 'Excellence in Digital Governance - State/U.T.' at the Digital India Award, 2020.**
  - ✓ The award was conferred by President Ram Nath Kovind during a virtual ceremony on December 30.
  - ✓ Hans Raj Verma, Additional chief secretary, IT department, received the award on behalf of the state government
  - ✓ Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also took part in the prize distribution ceremony
  - ✓ The Digital India Awards were instituted under the aegis of the National Portal of India to promote innovative digital solutions.
  - ✓ They acknowledge States and Union Territories that display initiative in establishing a comprehensive digital presence in sectors leading to the accomplishment of sustainable development goals.
  
- **Amazonia-1, a mega satellite developed by Brazil and to be launched by Isro next year – has been successfully transported via a cargo flight from Sao Jose dos Campos to Chennai**
  - ✓ Amazonia-1 will help monitor the ecosystem of the Amazon rainforest, the world's largest tropical rainforest
  - ✓ Brazil had taken eight years to develop the massive satellite
  - ✓ It will be launched into space in February next year from the Sriharikota launch centre through PSLV's C51 mission
  - ✓ The satellite will become part of Indian Space Research Organisation's first satellite launch of 2021.
  - ✓ Isro's PSLV's C51 will launch Amazonia-1 alongwith three other private satellites built by Indian startups as secondary payloads

- ✓ The other three privately-built Indian satellites are 'ANAND' from startup Pixel India, 'SATISH SAT' from Space Kids India and 'UNITSAT' by a consortium of universities.
- ✓ Amazonia-1 will be the first earth observation satellite of Brazil developed indigenously by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE)
- ✓ It was successfully airlifted to Chennai from Brazil by Emirates SkyCargo, the freight division of Emirates airlines
- ✓ According to the airlines, "this was the first time that it has transported a satellite from South America" to the Indian subcontinent.

## STATES

- **On December 29, the Gujarat government - announced the new solar power policy, 2021.**
- ✓ According to the policy, any person or industry or private developer can set up a solar project on the roof top and backyards in the state.
- ✓ The policy aims to reduce the power cost of industrial units by around 50%.
- ✓ This is to be achieved by removing capacity ceiling for setting up a solar project in the state.
- ✓ The security deposit provided to the power companies has been reduced to five lakh rupees per megawatt from the earlier twenty-five lakh rupees per megawatt.
- ✓ The consumers are also allowed to offer their space to third parties for power generation and utilisation.
- ✓ The policy allows a group of consumers to set up solar projects as a collective ownership project for self-usage.
- ✓ Under the policy, the state government is to purchase the surplus power generated by the public users.
- ✓ The state of Gujarat has already achieved 11,000 megawatts of production capacity in green energy.
- ✓ Currently, the state has set a target of producing 30,000 megawatts of clean energy by 2022.

## NATIONAL

- **The government - has shortlisted 50 key infrastructure projects worth more than ₹2 lakh crore for regular monitoring by the prime minister's office (PMO) to ensure their early completion.**
- ✓ The PMO has set up a monitoring group consisting of secretaries to sort out the issues holding up these mega projects or causing delay.
- ✓ The projects include Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project, Char Dham road connectivity improvement, Delhi-Meerut expressway, redevelopment of New Delhi railway station, JNPT terminal-4 in Mumbai, phase-1 of Pune Metro Rail, Navi Mumbai International airport and 1,200-km Paradip Hyderabad Product Pipeline.
- ✓ Many of these projects have been delayed due to various reasons including non-availability of land and green clearances

- ✓ Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone for all these projects barring the redevelopment of New Delhi railway station for which the tenders are yet to be flouted.
- ✓ Earlier, the PMO had sought details of projects from different ministries and departments which could be completed in 2022 when India celebrates the 75th year of independence.
- **The government – extends the temporary suspension of flights between India and the UK till January 7, 2021**
  - ✓ It had decided to extend the earlier announced December 23-31 suspension by a week after the spreading of new strain of coronavirus.
  - ✓ The Centre has also extended the suspension of scheduled international flights till January 31, 2021.
  - ✓ However, Vande Bharat Mission and scheduled flights under travel bubbles that India has so far created with 24 countries like the US, Germany and France will continue as per government norms
  - ✓ India-UK has 67 weekly flights operated by four airlines — Air India, Vistara, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic — under the air travel bubble between the two countries.
- **On December 30, the government - approved interest subvention of ₹4,573 crore for new distilleries producing grain-based ethanol in the country**
  - ✓ The centre's move will help bear the interest of loans taken for setting up ethanol distilleries for a period of 5 years, including one year moratorium
  - ✓ It seeks to raise ethanol manufacturing and distillation capacity to 1,000 crore litres by including grain-based distilleries in addition to just molasses-based units.
  - ✓ The scheme aims to boost the production of non-sugarcane farm produce such as cereals such as rice, wheat, barley, maize, corn and sorghum as well as sugar beet.
  - ✓ As per Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the scheme would help in meeting the goal of 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2030.
  - ✓ The expenditure on the scheme would be ₹8,470 crore, of which ₹4,573 crore was approved by the Cabinet.
  - ✓ The decision will bring in investment of ₹40,120 crore in setting up new ethanol distilleries, boost local industries, generate jobs and give a much-needed boost to the economy
- **On December 29, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) - approved three infrastructure proposals estimated at ₹7,725 crore**
  - ✓ The proposals intend to set up greenfield industrial cities with connectivity to major transportation corridors such as the eastern and western dedicated freight corridors, expressways and National highways.

- ✓ The three projects were proposed by the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade
- ✓ It includes construction of various trunk infrastructure components for
  - ✓ the Krishnapatnam Industrial Area in Andhra Pradesh at an estimated cost of ₹2,139.44 crore
  - ✓ the Tumakuru Industrial Area in Karnataka at ₹1,701.81 crore and
  - ✓ a multi-modal logistics hub (MMLH) and multi-modal transport hub (MMTH) at Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh at ₹3,883.8 crore.
- ✓ These projects are aimed to generate massive employment opportunities through industrialisation.
- ✓ For the Krishnapatnam node, estimated employment projection on the completion of the first phase of development is likely to be around 98,000 persons
- ✓ For the Tumakuru node, employment of about 88,500 persons is estimated
- ✓ The MMLH at Greater Noida will be developed as a world-class facility that will provide efficient storage/transitioning of goods to/from dedicated freight corridors, and offer a one-stop destination to freight companies and customers.
- ✓ **The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) also approved a ₹3,004.63-crore project to enhance the facilities at Paradip Port, including the development of a Western dock to accommodate the larger cape size vessels**
- ✓ The project would be on the build, operate and transfer model under the public-private partnership mode.
- ✓ The port development project cost would be ₹2,040 crore and the capital dredging works would cost ₹352.13 crore.
- ✓ The project would cater to imports of coal and limestone.
- **The government – to conduct four separate surveys on migrant workers, domestic workers, employment generated by professionals, and the transport sector soon**
- ✓ The surveys would be started in March 2021 and completed by October 2021
- ✓ This was announced by Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar on December 30, 2020
- ✓ The Minister also released a stamp commemorating the centenary of the Labour Bureau, which will carry out the surveys.
- ✓ The Labour Bureau had conducted the first-of-its-kind quarterly employment surveys of enterprises that would be re-launched in a new format soon
- **The Ministry of Home Affairs - has declared the entire State of Nagaland as a “disturbed area” for six more months under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958**
- ✓ The Act empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without prior notice.
- ✓ The State of Nagaland has been under AFSPA for more than six decades now

- ✓ Earlier, Nagaland was declared as “disturbed area” for a period of six months on June 30, 2020
  - ✓ A disturbed area is declared by notification under Section 3 of AFSPA
  - ✓ The Governor of the state or the central government can declare the whole or part of the state or union territory as disturbed area
  - ✓ Once declared, the region will continue to remain in “disturbed” category for three months according to the “Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976”.
- **The Centre - had lifted the ban on export of all types of onions recently**
- ✓ The ban was imposed by the central government in September, 2020 and is to be lifted from January 1, 2021.
  - ✓ Earlier, the government banned the exports of onions as their wholesale price increased steadily
  - ✓ Another reason is the high Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) value released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI).
  - ✓ Further, the price rise of onions is related to its removal from the Essential Commodities list under the Essential Commodities Act.
  - ✓ Accordingly, there was no stock limit imposed on onions and also on production and distribution of onions.
  - ✓ In September 2020, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020 was passed.
  - ✓ According to the Bill, the food items such as rice, onions will no longer be treated as essential commodities.
  - ✓ Hence, there is complete freedom to produce, distribute and supply agricultural products.
  - ✓ The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 empowers the government to regulate the production, supply and distribution of essential commodities to consumers at reasonable prices.
  - ✓ In the recent amendment, the central government has banned the limit and movement of stock of commodities in extreme situations like war, pandemic or natural disaster.

## INTERNATIONAL

- **On December 30, Britain - authorised emergency use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine**
- ✓ The U.K. government, in a statement, said it had “accepted” the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine for use.
  - ✓ With the announcement, UK becomes the first country to approve the vaccine that is expected to be the major source for India’s inoculation programme in the initial months of 2021.

- ✓ Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) has tied up with AstraZeneca to introduce the vaccine in the country.
- ✓ Meanwhile, the subject expert committee of the Drugs Controller General of India sought more data relating to the vaccine's immunogenicity from SII, extending the emergency-use approval by few more days
- ✓ The committee is set to meet next on January 1, to take a decision on vaccine rollout in early January and aiming to inoculate around 30 crore people in the first phase by July
- ✓ The efficacy claims of Bharat Biotech, which is testing its "Covaxin" vaccine candidate and Pfizer, with its m-RNA vaccine, were also to be reviewed
- ✓ The Emergency Use Authorisation is for active immunisation of individuals of 18 years or older and recommends two doses with an interval of between four and 12 weeks.

<b>SPLIT INTO 6 TO HUNT DOWN VARIANT</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Country split into 6 regions for massive molecular hunt for variant in positive samples. Search to include everyone, not just foreign returnees</li> <li>➤ 7 infected in K'taka: 3 from Bengaluru, 4 from Shivamogga. One case also in Bengal</li> <li>➤ 4 Delhi patients infected with UK strain admitted at LNJP Hospital, put in separate rooms. Two belong to South-West district, others to South district. Families quarantined, samples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sent for genome sequencing</li> <li>➤ A person from Noida tests positive for UK strain; 3 primary contacts negative. Meanwhile, health department officials locating &amp; testing as many as 86 people who came in contact with the 2-year-old who tested positive for the UK variant</li> <li>➤ Two residents of Gurgaon who returned from the UK on Dec 22 tested positive for mutated virus. They are at an isolation centre in Delhi</li> </ul>

- ✓ The SII had already stockpiled 40-50 million shots of Covishield and is increasing this number every week.
- ✓ Covishield could become the most widely used vaccine, given its moderate pricing of \$3 to \$4 a dose and that it can be transported and stored in normal refrigerators for several weeks.
- ✓ Pfizer-BioNTech requires freezers at – 70 degrees while Moderna's needs – 20 degrees, and they both cost more than Oxford vaccine
- ✓ Interestingly, the UK authorities are planning to give Covishield shots at enlarged intervals between 4 to 12 weeks to achieve higher efficacy
- ✓ The OAZ vaccine becomes the second vaccine shot to be authorised for use in the UK
- ✓ Earlier, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine became the first in the world to get emergency use authorisation on December 2
- ✓ An Emergency Use Authorisation allows an organisation to launch vaccine without putting it through the full range of tests that a new untested vaccine must usually go through.

## INDIA AND NEIGHBOURS

- **The Union Cabinet - recently approved the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bhutan for peaceful use of outer space.**
- ✓ The agreement was signed between the countries on November 19, 2020.
- ✓ It allows the countries to collaborate mutually in areas such as space science, navigation, planetary exploration, use of space system, spacecrafts and ground systems.
- ✓ The MoU will help in creating a Joint Working Group consisting of ISRO members and Ministry of Information and Communications, Bhutan.
- ✓ The agreement will provide opportunities for mutual cooperation in the field of satellite communication, space science, satellite navigation and exploration of outer space.
- ✓ Both India and Bhutan are signatories of Outer Space Treaty, which decides the use of outer space between the countries
- ✓ As of June 2020, 110 countries are parties to Outer Space Treaty
- ✓ The Outer Space Treaty prohibits placing nuclear weapons in space and limits its usage to peaceful purposes.
- ✓ It establishes that the outer space is free for exploration but no nation may claim sovereignty of outer space.
- ✓ The Outer Space Treaty was passed by United Nations in 1963 and signed by UK, USSR and USA in 1967.

## PERSONALITIES

- **Reshma Mariam Roy of CPM - became the youngest head of a local body in the entire country on December 30**



- ✓ The 21-year old Reshma took charge as president of Aruvappulam grama panchayat in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district.
- ✓ Born on November 18, 1999, Reshma was 21 years and 42 days when she achieved this feat.

- ✓ She had turned 21 a day before the deadline for filing nominations for the local body polls on November 19.

## DEFENCE

- **On December 30, the government - approved the export of indigenously developed and manufactured 'surface-to-air' Akash missile system**



- ✓ In this regard, the government set up a committee to ensure faster approvals for acquisition proposals by various countries
- ✓ The committee comprising the Defence Minister, the External Affairs Minister and the National Security Advisor had been created to expedite clearance of defence exports
- ✓ The Government of India has a target of \$5 billion in Akash missile exports
- ✓ The move is aimed at boosting domestic defence manufacturing and to achieve the government's target of \$25 billion turnover in defence manufacturing by 2025
- ✓ The Akash missile systems have over 96% indigenous components and the weapon can hit multiple targets at a range of 25km.
- ✓ According to Defence minister Rajnath Singh, the export version of Akash missiles would be different from the system currently deployed with Indian armed forces.
- ✓ The decision to export the missile systems was taken at a cabinet meeting presided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ✓ Besides Akash, there was interest coming in for other major platforms such as the Coastal Surveillance System, radars and air platforms
- ✓ Akash missile has been developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) under the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program
- ✓ The missile, manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited, can go up to 18,000 meters in the air.
- ✓ Each regiment of Akash missile has 6 launchers and each launcher has three Akash missiles
- ✓ It has the capability to destroy fighter aircraft, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles

- **The Ministry of Defence – has recently tested successfully the country’s first indigenously developed air droppable container, SAHAYAK-NG**
- ✓ The SAHAYAK-NG can carry payload up to fifty kilograms and can be dropped from heavy aircraft.
- ✓ They are completely water tight and can withstand water entry shocks
- ✓ The GPS enabled container is controlled by a parachute system.
- ✓ It is an advanced version of SHAYAK Mk I.
- ✓ The SHAYAK-NG was designed by Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO) and Avantel, a private company.
- ✓ The other agencies involved in the development of SAHAYAK-NG are NTSL, Visakhapatnam and ARDE, Agra.
- ✓ The test trials of SAHAYAK-NG were conducted by the Indian Navy and DRDO.
- ✓ The SAHAYAK-NG will be useful to provide critical engineering materials to ships that are deployed more than two thousand kilometres from the coast.
- ✓ The airdrop where no parachute is used and the load is allowed to fall under gravity is called free fall airdrop.

## APPOINTMENTS

- **Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) chairman K Sivan, due to retire on January 14 next year - has been given a one-year extension.**



- ✓ On December 30, the appointments committee of the cabinet approved the extension of his tenure for a period of one year up to January 14, 2022 or until further orders
- ✓ The Cabinet extended his tenure as several major space programmes like Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3 and the rollout of recently-announced space reforms are still pending.
- ✓ K Sivan is also serving under the capacity of Secretary, Department of Space, and Chairman, Space Commission

