



EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – DECEMBER 9, 2020

TAMIL NADU

- **Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit - gave his nod to the Bill to amend the Tamil Nadu Appointment on Preferential Basis in the Services under the State of Persons Studied in Tamil Medium Act, 2010.**
 - ✓ The Act aims to provide 20% reservation to Tamil medium candidates in direct recruitment to government services
 - ✓ Accordingly, Students who had completed their school and college education in Tamil medium will be given preference in government jobs
 - ✓ As per the amendment, the candidate should have completed his/her studies in Tamil medium up to the educational qualification prescribed for a specific recruitment.
 - ✓ Till now, it was sufficient if the candidate had completed the basic educational qualification for jobs in Tamil medium.
 - ✓ The bill was passed to amend the Act in March this year
 - ✓ It was published in the gazette on December 8 after getting the governor's assent.

- **On December 8, Nokia – has announced that it had started the production of the next generation 5G equipment at its manufacturing site in Sriperumbudur, near Chennai.**
 - ✓ The company has started to produce the cutting-edge Nokia AirScale massive Multiple Input Multiple Output (mMIMO) solution.
 - ✓ Massive MIMO is a main element of 5G technology that delivers high capacity, especially in densely-populated locations.
 - ✓ It integrates antennas at the transmitter and receiver to ensure improved speed and spectrum efficiency
 - ✓ According to Nokia, the company was the first to manufacture the 5G New Radio (NR) in India, and it is now producing the mMIMO solution.

- ✓ The equipment is already being exported to many countries, which are in advanced stages of 5G deployment
 - ✓ Established in 2008, Nokia had invested over ₹600 crore in developing a best-in-class manufacturing facility at Chennai, which is spread over 140,000 sq m.
 - ✓ This factory has manufactured more than 5 million telecom network equipment units over the years.
 - ✓ It was the first factory to deploy India's first 'real-world' application of Industry 4.0 including AR/VR, automation and analytics to enhance operational efficiency and productivity
 - ✓ The Chennai facility is one of the largest telecom manufacturing units in India, catering to both domestic and the international markets and shipping to over 100 countries.
 - ✓ The plant is a significant contributor to the Centre's 'Make in India' programme to promote domestic manufacturing.
 - ✓ In 2019, South Korea became the first country to roll out 5G network
- **The Greater Chennai corporation - is planning to renovate the historic Victoria Public Hall in Chennai**
- ✓ Located next to the Ripon Building, the building is likely to be converted into a museum.

STEEPED IN HISTORY

➤ Built in 1887 by Namberumal Chetty. Each hall in the ground and first floors of the redbrick structure can accommodate 600 people

➤ It was historically called 'Jubilee Hall'

➤ It is associated with the freedom struggle as several leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaji, had delivered speeches there during the pre-independence period

➤ Noted dramatist Pammal Sambandha Mudaliar had staged several plays at the hall

➤ The first renovation work, post independence, was carried out in 1967 under the regime of former chief minister C N Annadurai

➤ About 40 years later, the building had a second



Victoria hall

renovation in 2009 and Rs7cr was allotted for Ripon building and Victoria hall, though it still remains incomplete

➤ Again in 2016, a renovation process was started but it was stalled due to metro rail work

➤ Now, the civic body has given administrative sanction of Rs1.75cr from its capital funds for restoration

Plans of the corporation

➤ To convert it into a museum

➤ Set up sound and light show

➤ Have musical concerts

➤ Make it into a tourist attraction

- ✓ Way back in 2010, ₹7cr was first allotted for the restoration of both Ripon Building and Victoria Town Hall.

- ✓ At that time about ₹2.5cr was spent to complete almost 70% of the work and the flooring, staircases and plastering of the interior walls were completed.
- ✓ Later, the work got stalled due to lack of funds.
- ✓ The building, which doesn't belong to GCC, was part of a committee that was under AVM Saravanan and the corporation will only restore and renovate it.
- ✓ The hall was used during pre-independence period for holding political meetings
- ✓ In 2016, the restoration work was restarted but stalled again due to the metro rail project.
- ✓ At that time, the false ceiling, roof work, plastering, doors and windows restoration were completed.
- ✓ The civic body has sanctioned ₹1.75 crore for the remaining works of completing balcony, flooring and outer plastering
- ✓ The hall's history dates back to 1887 when it was constructed to celebrate the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria.
- ✓ Since then, it has been a public space in Chennai where dramas, plays, theatre and public meetings were held.

NATIONAL

- **The government – is planning to set up 28,947 cold chain points with 85,643 pieces of equipment across the country to store the three anti-Covid vaccines under regulatory review for emergency use**
- ✓ The logistics system will be capable of storing the vaccines needed for the first set of 3 crore health and frontline workers.
- ✓ The Centre is mobilising additional vaccinators, a digital platform for vaccine delivery and a detailed implementation plan to inoculate around 30 crore priority population in the first phase
- ✓ The government is procuring additional cold storage capacities, and supply of equipment to states will begin from December 10

3 PRIORITY GROUPS

- Govt says supply of equipment (for vaccination) to states will begin from Dec 10
- Health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said nat'l expert group has recommended 3 priority groups. These include **healthcare & frontline workers, those above 50 and those with co-morbidities**

- ✓ The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC) has recommended three priority groups.
- ✓ These include healthcare and frontline workers, those above 50 years of age and those with co-morbidities.

- ✓ Once supply of vaccine starts increasing, people from different groups can be inoculated simultaneously.
 - ✓ The Centre is also arranging for additional vaccinators for Covid-19 in coordination with states and UTs to ensure that the regular immunization programmes are not impacted.
 - ✓ Of a total 2.39 lakh trained auxiliary nurses and midwife (ANM) vaccinators, 1.54 lakh will be deployed for Covid vaccination.
 - ✓ A total of nine vaccines were currently under development in the country of which six were in clinical trial stages.
 - ✓ The health ministry has developed Co-Win — a digital platform for vaccine delivery — that will track the overall coverage, drop-outs, temperature loggers (for cold chain), sessions planned versus held etc.
 - ✓ The digital platform includes a mobile app where a person can register to receive the shot.
 - ✓ It also includes an electronic vaccination certificate in the form of a quick response code that will acknowledge the shot.
 - ✓ The government is putting in motion a multiple-level coordination mechanism between the Centre, the national vaccine administration committee, steering committee at the state level and task forces at district and block level.
 - ✓ A control room set up at the state level will work 24x7 once the vaccination exercise starts.
- **Union Ministry of Education – has unveiled the new ‘Policy on School Bag 2020’**
- ✓ The recommendations are based on various surveys and studies conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
 - ✓ According to the new policy, school bags should not be more than 10% of the body weight across Classes I to X and there should be no homework till Class II.
 - ✓ It also recommends that the weight of the bag needs to be monitored on a regular basis in schools.
 - ✓ They should be light-weight with two padded and adjustable straps that can squarely fit on both shoulders and no wheeled carriers should be allowed as these may hurt children.
 - ✓ The policy even recommends that the weight of each textbook may come printed on them by the publishers.
 - ✓ It was drafted based on the data collected from 3,624 students and 2,992 parents from 352 schools, which include Kendriya Vidyalayas and state government schools.
 - ✓ The surveys found that children up to Class IV are carrying bags of weight 2 to 3kg more than the universally accepted practice of weight which is 10% of the body weight.
 - ✓ And the bag weight increases as children move to higher classes.
 - ✓ Overall, the new policy made 11 recommendations on the weight of the bags.

- ✓ It had also recommended adequate good quality mid-day meal and potable water to all the students so that students need not carry lunch boxes or water bottles or reduce their size.
 - ✓ The policy also recommended that children with special needs (CWSN) be provided a double set of textbooks through book banks in schools
 - ✓ Lockers should be installed in classes for students with disabilities to store and retrieve books and other items.
- **Among the top 10 Covid-19 worst affected countries, India and Argentina – are the only nations that are yet to be hit by a second wave of infections.**
- ✓ Eight of these countries have either seen or are in the midst of a second or third wave of the pandemic.
 - ✓ Two or more waves of the pandemic appear to be the norm in countries with a sizable number of infections.
 - ✓ In the worst-hit 15 countries of the world, all with caseloads of nearly one million or more, Poland is the only other country hit by a single big wave thus far.
 - ✓ A common feature among India, Argentina and Poland is that in all three countries the first wave of infections peaked relatively late.
 - ✓ In India, the peak came in mid-September, in Argentina it was in the third week of October while Poland had its peak in the first week of November.
 - ✓ All other countries had seen Covid cases peaking latest by August.
 - ✓ The US, the world's worst-hit country by far, is arguably in the midst of a third wave of infections.
 - ✓ Its first peak came in the second week of April and the second in the third week of July.
 - ✓ Thereafter, daily cases fell till the second week of September before climbing steeply again.
 - ✓ In all countries (among the worst 15) hit by multiple waves, the second wave has been deadlier than the first.
 - ✓ The only exception is Brazil, but it's still not clear whether or not the second wave in the country is on the decline.
 - ✓ In India, daily cases have fallen to almost a third of the levels seen during the peak of the pandemic registered three months before.

SUPREME COURT VERDICT

- **On December 8, the Supreme Court - upheld the notification to acquire farmlands, and allowed Centre to proceed with the Chennai-Salem 277-km eight-lane greenfield corridor project**
- ✓ A bench of Justice A M Khanwilkar, Justice B R Gawai and Justice Krishna Murari allowed the central government and/or National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) to proceed further in the matter in accordance with law for the construction of a national highway or the proposed section/stretch in Chennai-Krishnagiri-Salem

- ✓ The eight-lane highway (NH179A and NH179B) is a part of the first phase of the 'Bharatmala Pariyojna' project
- ✓ It stretches across 24,800 km and has an estimated outlay of ₹5.35 lakh crore
- ✓ The highway intends to cut travel time for freight and passenger movement between Chennai and Salem by half.
- ✓ As a consolation for the farmers affected by the project, the judges upheld a part of the Madras high court order which ordered reversal of entries or mutation of records of those lands which are merely identified and not taken possession of.
- ✓ The bench was passing orders on the appeals filed against the madras high court orders, by the central government and the NHAI, besides a batch of intervenor pleas from farmers.
- ✓ Justice Khanwilkar, who authored the 140-page judgment, said the Madras High Court had been wrong to quash the acquisition proceedings on the ground that no prior environmental clearance was taken.
- ✓ He asked how it was possible to get environmental clearance before even identifying the exact site for the highway.
- ✓ According to the apex court, none of central enactments/rules specify any express condition requiring central government to obtain prior environmental/forest clearance before issuing notification under Section 2(2) declaring the stretch/section to be a national highway or Section 3A of the NH Act
- ✓ This is in relation to the intention to acquire land for the purpose of building, maintenance, management or operation of a national highway.
- ✓ The farmers contended that the original project was expansion of Chennai-Madurai highway and it was changed into a Chennai-Krishnagiri-Salem greenfield corridor arbitrarily
- ✓ However, the judges countered this by ruling that the decision was taken by a committee of experts after taking all relevant issues into consideration.
- ✓ The Central Government had full authority to adopt such a change of stretch/section, by way of substitution/replacement whilst ensuring that there is no need for higher budgetary allocation than envisaged in the already approved programme for Phase I" the court observed.
- ✓ The project faced opposition from locals, including farmers, over fears of losing their land
- ✓ Further, environmentalists were against felling of trees, as the project runs through reserve forest and water bodies.

INTERNATIONAL

- **On December 8, China and Nepal - have jointly determined the height of the world's tallest mountain as 8,848.86m (29,031.7ft).**
- ✓ According to these countries which share a mountainous border, Mount Everest has risen almost 3 feet.

STANDS AT 29,031.7FT

- Mount Everest officially stands at 8,848.86 metres, or 29,031.7 feet, according to Kathmandu and Beijing
- For 65 years, the consensus height had been 8,848 metres, or 29,028.87 feet
- The two countries decided to jointly measure the mountain during Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal last year

- ✓ The new height of 8,848.86 metres (29,028.87ft) replaced the long-associated 8,848 metre-height, which was a legacy from 1954, and a measurement carried out by the Survey of India.
- ✓ India had in 2017 offered to remeasure Everest, but Nepal rejected it, saying its surveyors were capable of doing it.
- ✓ This was accepted worldwide except China
- ✓ This time, China, sent a survey team to the summit with global satellite receivers to measure its northern side.
- ✓ Nepal had measured the southern side in 2019.
- ✓ The New Zealand government provided Global Navigation satellite and trained technicians to measure the mountain.
- ✓ It is to be noted that sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to climb Mount Everest was from New Zealand.
- ✓ The announcement fulfilled a promise Xi Jinping, China's top leader, made a year ago during a visit to the Nepali capital, where he announced that the countries would jointly measure the mountain.
- ✓ Everest was also known as Sagarmatha in Nepal and Mount Qomolangma in China
- ✓ The mountain lies on the border between Nepal and Tibet and the summit can be accessed from both sides, although the Nepal route is more popular.
- ✓ The previous calculation by China in 2005 finalised the peak at 8,844 metres, while Nepal said it was closer to 8,847 metres
- ✓ In 1999, a team from the US sponsored by the National Geographic society put the elevation of the Mountain as 8850 metres.
- **United Kingdom – became the first country in the world to offer a clinically authorised, fully tested vaccine to its people**
- ✓ Britain's National Health Service delivered its first shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine on December 8
- ✓ 90-year old Margaret Keenan, a former jewellery shop assistant living in Coventry in central England, received the first shot of the Covid-19 vaccine
- ✓ May Parsons, a nurse originally from the Philippines who worked for Britain's state-run National Health Service (NHS) for 23 years, called it a "huge honour" to administer the shot to Keenan.

- ✓ British regulators had provided an emergency use authorization to the Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine last week
- ✓ The U.K. has ordered 40 million doses of the jab, which was enough to vaccinate 20 million people
- ✓ The first batch of 800,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for Britain were transported from a manufacturing plant in Belgium to federal warehouses and then to hospitals in Britain.
- ✓ Initially, fifty hospitals will be administering the shots to the general public
- ✓ Further, the government is planning to distribute doses beyond hospitals to cover nursing home residents
- ✓ The vaccine must be transported at South Pole-like temperatures before it can be stored for five days in a normal refrigerator.
- ✓ The Moderna and Pfizer BioNTech vaccine must be transported at negative 20 to 80 degree Celsius unlike Oxford vaccine, which can be refrigerated at 2 to 8 degrees Celsius.
- ✓ First to receive the shot will be doctors and nurses, people aged 80 and over, and nursing home workers.

NO BIG SIDE-EFFECTS

- Pfizer vaccine effective within 10 days of taking 1st shot, say documents released by US FDA
- Worked well across races, age groups and body weights of participants
- No major side effects but many did report fevers, chills, aches and fatigue

- ✓ The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine provides strong protection against Covid-19 within about 10 days of the first dose, according to the US Food and Drug Administration
- ✓ Last month, Pfizer and BioNTech announced that their two-dose vaccine, based on mRNA technology, had an efficacy rate of 95% after two doses administered three weeks apart.
- ✓ The vaccine worked well regardless of a volunteer's race, weight or age
- **On December 8, Australia - finalised plans to make Facebook Inc and Google pay its media outlets for news content**
- ✓ Thus, it becomes the first country in the world to announce the move aimed at protecting independent journalism that has been strongly opposed by the internet giants.
- ✓ Based on the laws that will be decided in parliament this week, the Big Tech firms must negotiate payments for content that appears on their platforms with local publishers and broadcasters.
- ✓ If they can't strike a deal, a government-appointed arbitrator will decide for them.

- ✓ The final version of the law would not affect news content distributed on Facebook's Instagram or Google's Youtube.
- ✓ The law follows three years of inquiry and consultation
- ✓ In August, the US companies warned that they may stop offering their services in Australia, in case the law becomes a reality.

INDIA AND NEIGHBOURS

- **China - has cancelled plans to jointly launch commemorative stamps with India**
- ✓ The move is attributed to the strained relations over a military stand-off at the border of both countries.
- ✓ China's State Post Bureau had planned with India to jointly launch a stamp in April commemorating 2020 as the 70th year of bilateral relations
- ✓ Also, a special stamp was planned showing the Mogao Caves, a renowned site in China's Gansu province where the Buddhist grottoes reflect the two countries' cultural links.
- ✓ The Post Bureau now announced on its website that these plans had been cancelled.
- ✓ Diplomatic relations between China and India have been tense since June, when at least 20 Indian soldiers were killed in the western Himalayas after being attacked by Chinese troops.

PERSONALITIES

- **Indian-origin global health expert, Anil Soni - has been appointed as the first CEO of the newly launched The WHO Foundation**



- ✓ The Foundation will work alongside the World Health Organization to address most pressing health challenges globally.
- ✓ Soni will assume his role on January 1
- ✓ He will accelerate the foundation's "work to invest in innovative, evidence-based initiatives that support the WHO in delivering on its mission"
- ✓ Soni joins the Foundation from Viatrix, a global healthcare company, where he served as head of global infectious diseases.

- ✓ WHO chief Tedros Ghebreyesus described Soni as a “proven innovator” who has spent two decades in service of communities affected by HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases

SPORTS

- **On December 7, Breakdancing – was announced as an official Olympic sport for the 2024 Paris Games by the International Olympic Committee**

BEGAN IN NY

- Breaking, as participants prefer to call it, originated in New York in the 1970s
- 2019 Red Bull BC One World Final in Mumbai racked up over 50m views across streaming platforms
- Key elements in breaking include top rock, footwork, power moves and freezes

- ✓ Other sports that are confirmed for the Paris extravaganza by the IOC executive board includes skateboarding, sport climbing, and surfing.
- ✓ Those three sports will make their Olympic debuts at the Tokyo Games, which were postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic by one year to July 23, 2021.
- ✓ Alongside the additions, the IOC has also reduced the number of medal events in Weightlifting and boxing for the Paris event in comparison with the Tokyo Games, following the issues with the respective global Federations.
- ✓ Breakdancing will be called ‘breaking’ at the Olympics, as it was in the 1970s by hip-hop pioneers in the United States.
- ✓ It was proposed by Paris organisers almost two years ago after positive trials at the 2018 Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires.
- ✓ Breaking passed further stages of approval in 2019 from separate decisions by the IOC board and full membership.
- ✓ In Paris, breaking has been given a prestige downtown venue, joining sport climbing and 3-on-3 basketball at Place de le Concorde.
- ✓ Surfing will be held more than 15,000km away in the Pacific Ocean off the beaches of Tahiti, as the IOC already agreed in March.
- ✓ Among the 28 established Summer Games sports, a total of 41 additional events were proposed.

FARM LAWS – A REPORT

- **On December 8, Union Home Minister Amit Shah - told a select group of protesting farmers’ leaders that the Centre would not repeal the three contentious farm sector laws**

'HOW NEW LAWS WILL HELP FARMERS, MAKE AGRI COMPETITIVE'

The Centre sees the new farm laws as much-needed reforms to make agriculture competitive, improve investments and provide options to farmers. A paper by Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand explains how the laws will help Indian agriculture become future-ready. Proposed amendments are not part of Chand's paper. Main points of his paper:

LIMITATIONS OF APMC SYSTEM

- Notified commodities cannot be sold outside the APMC mandis
- Multiple levies for sale and purchase
- No direct farmer to trader sale. Even if allowed, user charges/ cess levied
- Commissions, cess became revenue streams, FCI-Centre footed the bill



CHANGES IN CONTRACT FARMING

- Not to be confused with corporate farming, where production activity is undertaken by firms.
- No provision for leasing land to sponsor or firm
- No recovery of dues can be done against land
- Already, firms like Nestle, McCain, Tatas and Mahindra have successful partnerships with farmers



MANDI FEES-COMMISSIONS

- Of 25 states with APMC acts, 12 do not charge commission on notified crops
- In these 12 states, service charges vary from 0-1% in 9 and 2% in MP, Tripura. Level with pvt trade
- In 5 states, commission varies between 1-2%. Total charge in Karnataka is 3.5%. They can set mandi charge at 2% or less to protect APMC markets
- In 7 states total charges vary from 5-8%, highest in Punjab and Haryana
- If high charge states lower rates to be competitive, their infra will continue to attract farmers



HOW MSP IS A HELP AND A TRAP

- Modi govt has revised MSP benchmark upwards, expanded to more crops, Centre-state incentives for pulses
- Officially procured crop output is 11% or total CO and 7% of total agriculture output
- If legal status to MSP is way out, states can easily do so. But if demand does not support prices, this will fail. In 2018, Maharashtra approved jail, fine for violating MSP. Buyers withdrew, farmers suffered
- Is sugar states, when state prices did not match market, mills stopped crushing, leading to legal battles
- Moderate fees/commission encourage pvt trade to match MSP, offer farmers options
- States like Bihar, Kerala have procured paddy at MSP without APMC act
- Sectors like horticulture, fishery, milk outside MSP are growing at 4-10%, cereals since 2011 is just 1.1%.
- Private corporate investment is just 2% of total investment in agriculture, more needed urgently



ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES ACT

- Setting 100% increase in retail price as trigger for stock limits make it predictable
- Previously use of ECA to cool prices ended up hurting producers
- Should increase investment in cold storage, warehouses



RECENT CHANGES IN APMC AND OTHER REGULATIONS

- UPA in 2003 sought to move fruits, vegetables out of APMC, 16 states did so
- After 2014, NDA framed a model act, only Arunachal adopted
- APMC reforms remained partial for 18 years, Modi govt legislated three bills
- Attempts to change essential commodities act began in 2002, remained partial till now



LAW RELATING TO TRADE IN FARM PRODUCE

- More than half marketable surplus sold outside mandis, new law makes this legal, protection from fines and raids
- Allows direct purchase from farms, as in the case of milk
- Development of farm producer organisations will develop this system
- Old system involved six-seven transactions, this will be compressed



AMENDMENTS OFFERED TO FARMERS DURING TALKS

- Ready to make taxes equal for APMC mandis and private markets
- Registration of all traders with their verified details on portal
- Will allow higher court of appeal beyond SDM, collector for contract disputes

