

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS—FEBRUARY 15, 2021

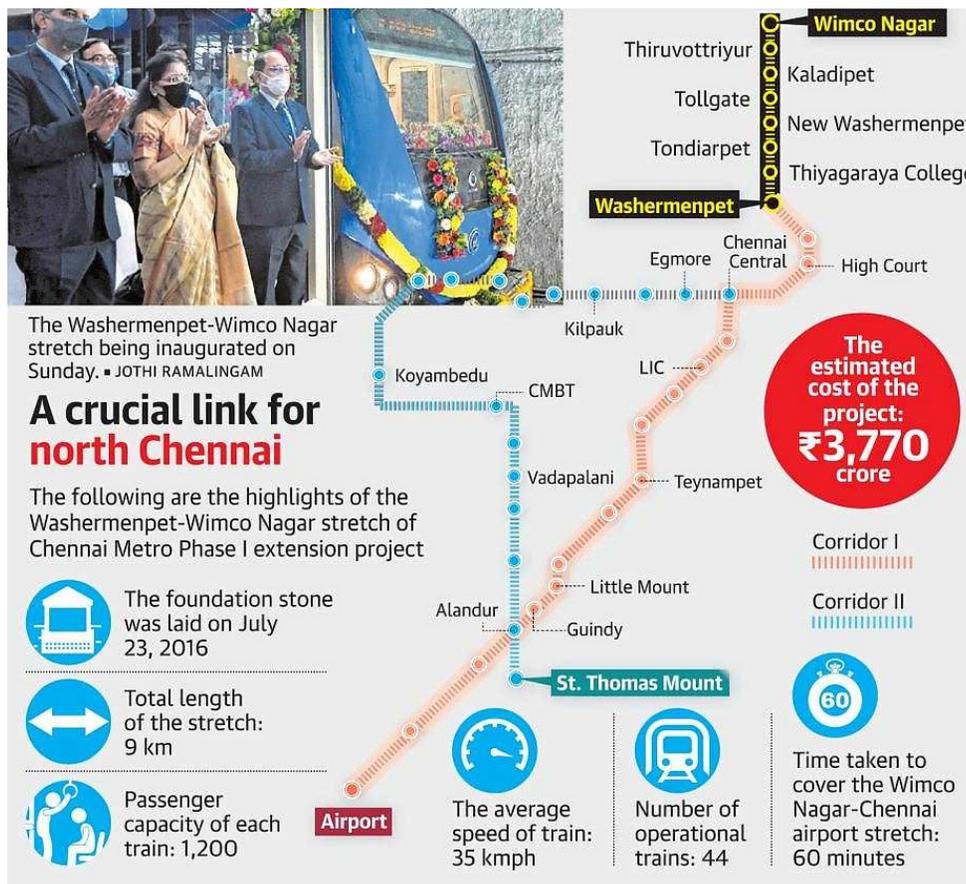
TAMIL NADU

- On February 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi - dedicated the indigenously designed and manufactured 'Main Battle Tank Arjun Mark 1A' to the nation in a function at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Chennai.



- ✓ The PM handed over a miniature tank model to Army chief General M M Naravane, marking the handover of the tank to the Indian Army.
- ✓ The tank was designed and developed by Chennai-based Combat Vehicles Research & Development Establishment (CVRDE), a unit of the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO).
- ✓ The Arjun Mk-1A has superior firepower, high mobility, excellent protection and crew comfort, with 14 major upgrades from Arjun Mk-1, according to the CVRDE.
- ✓ The Army is expected to soon approach the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) for approval after which it would place the indent for 118 tanks at a cost of ₹8,956.59 crore with the Heavy Vehicle Factory (HVF) at Avadi near Chennai.
- ✓ The Prime Minister unveiled key infrastructure projects, including the phase I extension of Chennai metro rail, completed at a cost of ₹3,770 crore.

- ✓ He also commissioned the passenger services from Washermenpet to Wimco Nagar.
- ✓ The 9.05-km extension links north Chennai with the airport and the Central railway station.
- ✓ The event was attended by Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and other dignitaries.
- ✓ The PM flagged off the fourth line between Chennai Beach-Attipattu and the ₹423-crore electrification project of a 228-km single line Villupuram-Cuddalore-Mayiladuthurai-Thanjavur and Mayiladuthurai-Tiruvarur section that would save Rs 14.61 lakh per day on fuel cost



- ✓ Laying the foundation stone for the extension, renovation and modernisation of 636km long Grand Anicut canal system, the PM invoked Tamil saint poet Avvaiyar's poem, "Varappura neer uyarum."
- ✓ The modernisation of this canal will be taken up at a cost of ₹2,640 crore and it will improve irrigation facilities for 2.27 lakh acres, predominantly in Thanjavur and Pudukottai districts
- ✓ The PM said India had undertaken a massive effort to become self-reliant in the defence sector inspired by celebrated national poet, Subramania Bharathi's vision.

- ✓ He quoted the poet's famous verse "in the oldest language in the world, Tamil -- Aayudham Seivom, Nalla Kakitham Seivom"
- ✓ The PM also inaugurated the satellite campus of the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras coming up at Thaiyur in Chengalpattu district.



- ✓ The 163-acre sprawling campus will have 2 lakh square metres of built-up space with research facilities, academic blocks and hostels to be built at a cost of ₹1,000 crore in the first phase.
- ✓ The Centre will also have a 360-degree ship's bridge simulator dedicated to studies involving operations at all major ports by the end of 2021
- ✓ The bridge simulator will be housed in the National Technology Centre for Ports, Waterways and Coasts, which is being built with the support of the Union ministry of shipping, ports and waterways.
- ✓ It will help train officers in coastal navigation and approaching and berthing at harbours in different conditions — poor visibility, night time, strong winds and currents.
- ✓ It will house India's first large shallow water basin, measuring 95m x 65m, for coastal and estuarine research and industrial applications.
- ✓ The basin will assist in studying the effects of modification of ports, waterways, sedimentation, water currents and cyclones on ship navigation
- ✓ The solid propellant combustion modelling facility of the Centre of Propulsion Technology, funded by DRDO, was also inaugurated by the Prime Minister
- ✓ It will be the first to be established under the Centre of Propulsion Technology.
- ✓ Profusely thanking the PM for the launch of projects, Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami urged the PM to facilitate sanction for Chennai metro rail phase II

under 50:50 joint venture partnership between the central and state governments, similar to the funding for phase-I.

- **The Centre - has decided to call members of the Devendrakula Velalar community by their heritage name and not by the names listed on the Schedule of the Constitution**
 - ✓ This was announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Chennai on February 14.
 - ✓ The draft Gazette to amend the Schedule to correct their name as Devendrakula Velalar had been approved by the Centre.
 - ✓ The PM said the draft Gazette would be placed before Parliament at the start of the next session.
 - ✓ He also thanked the Tamil Nadu government for the detailed study on this demand
 - ✓ The demand of the seven communities — Devendrakulathan, Kadaiyan, Kalladi, Kudumban, Pallan, Pannadi and Vathiriyar — that they be known as 'Devendrakula Velalar' has been a long-pending one.

- **The Government of Tamil Nadu - launched e-Kaiyoppam, an online platform for paperless execution of non-registrable contracts and agreements, recently**
 - ✓ It was developed in association with National e-Governance Services Limited (NeSL), a Union Government Company
 - ✓ The e-Kaiyoppam platform enables all the parties to a contract to remotely execute the contracts/agreements in a completely automated manner from the convenience of their home or office.
 - ✓ The e-Kaiyoppam platform aims to digitise non-registrable contracts like Rent Agreements, Affidavits, Bank Guarantees, Power of Attorney documents, etc., and facilitate all the parties to remotely stamp and sign these documents
 - ✓ Equipped with NeSL's e-Signing and e-Stamping features embedded within the e-Kaiyoppam platform, the parties can sign and stamp the contracts virtually anytime, anywhere.
 - ✓ A 'Digital India' initiative, the e-Kaiyoppam platform is set to further ease of doing business and create a transparent and unambiguous ecosystem for paperless contract executions.

- **The Pulicat bird sanctuary in Tiruvallur district - has been declared an 'Ecologically Sensitive Zone' (ESZ) to ensure total protection.**
 - ✓ The demarcated area, within a 500 metre radius, will include the villages of Elavur, Injur, Selliabedu, Uppanavoyal, Periaveppathur, Kolar, Poovami, Tirupalaivanam, Pralayambakkam, Andarmadam and Thangal Perumkulam.

- ✓ A map of the villages and the Pulicat lake, under the zone, will be sent to the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEFCC) for approval.



- ✓ Once the demarcation is notified by the state and the Centre, wildlife officials will announce the guidelines for residents of the 11 villages
- ✓ In case the Union ministry rejects the proposal, an area of 10m radius will become ESZ by default.
- ✓ In 2019, the authorities declared a '0' kilometre of the Pulicat sanctuary ESZ, effectively meaning there would be no eco-sensitive zone, and sent it to the MoEFCC which rejected the proposal.

STATES

- **On February 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi – inaugurated five major developmental projects at Ambalamukal in Kochi, Kerala**



- ✓ The projects inaugurated included
 - ✓ the ₹6,100-crore Propylene Derivative Petrochemical Complex at BPCL's refinery in Kochi
 - ✓ the Sagarika International cruise terminal
 - ✓ the construction of south coal berth at Cochin port
 - ✓ Vignan Sagar, the knowledge and training centre at Cochin shipyard and
 - ✓ RoRo (roll on, roll off) vessels service in Willingdon Island and Vallarpadam (Bolgatty)

- ✓ Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan was present during the occasion
- **The Health and Family Welfare Department of Odisha - has announced recently to establish a COVID-19 Warrior Memorial in Bhubaneshwar.**
- ✓ The memorial will be set to recognize and honour the sacrifice and services provided by the COVID-19 warriors.
- ✓ The proposed memorial will be set in the Biju Patnaik Park in Bhubaneshwar.
- ✓ This memorial will be inaugurated August 15, 2021 as per the plan of the Odisha Government
- ✓ In Odisha, around 60 Covid-19 warriors and health workers died amid the pandemic.
- ✓ The COVID-19 war memorial is being constructed in the backdrop of announcement made by the Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik in 2020.
- ✓ The chief minister had announced in the year 2020 that, all the health personnel and support services staffs who died due to the Coronavirus pandemic, will be given the status of martyr.
- ✓ The government had also announced Rs. 50 lakh ex-gratia to all the public and private health personnel and the members of all the support services who died while providing services amid the pandemic.

NATIONAL

- **On February 14, the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways (MoRTH) – has mandated that any vehicle passing through NH toll plazas without a FASTag from the midnight of 15-16 February will have to pay up twice the toll charge.**



- ✓ This is being mandated based on the NH Fee Rules, 2008.
- ✓ As of now, most toll plazas have at least one cash payment lane but that will also be removed immediately
- ✓ Around 20% of vehicles crossing plazas in Tamil Nadu do not have FASTag cards that allow electronic collection of fee

- ✓ The tag is mandatory for private and commercial vehicles with four or more wheels.
 - ✓ Even those not venturing onto highways would face a challan for violating provisions of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules.
 - ✓ The penalty would be Rs 300 for first offence and Rs 500 for repeat offence.
 - ✓ On November 7, the Union Ministry of Transport had mandated FASTag for all four-wheeler vehicles from 1 January 2021 onwards.
 - ✓ The decision was invoked via amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989,
 - ✓ From April 2021 onwards, the FASTag is made mandatory for renewing a vehicle's insurance policy.
 - ✓ Earlier, it had been decided that from 1 December 2019 onwards all four-wheelers, trucks and buses will have to pay toll electronically on Indian highways through a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag called a FASTag.
 - ✓ The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) had introduced electronic toll collection through FASTag across the country back in 2016, but it was an optional system
 - ✓ The new cars sold since December 2017 are already coming with FASTags
 - ✓ Estimates suggested that nearly two crore four-wheeler and bigger vehicles are yet to buy FASTag in the country
 - ✓ FASTag is an electronic toll payment system that helps people make contactless payments at toll plazas, which aims to reduce traffic congestion and wait times.
 - ✓ A FASTag is valid for five years from the date of purchase
 - ✓ The tag cannot be shared because once removed, it cannot be installed again.
- **Union Textile Minister, Smriti Irani - has launched the commercial Jute seed distribution scheme on February 15**



- ✓ The scheme was launched following a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Jute Corporation of India and the National Seeds Corporation
- ✓ The MoU was signed in the year 2020 for the commercial distribution of 1000 metric tonne certified jute seeds in the year 2021-22

- ✓ During the launching ceremony, the Minister highlighted the increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Jute to support Jute farmers in the country
 - ✓ Currently, the MSP for Jute has been kept at Rs. 4,225 in the financial year 2020-21.
 - ✓ This price has been doubled when compared to MSP of Rs. 2,400 in the year 2014-15.
 - ✓ Recently, the centre announced the mandatory packaging in jute materials.
 - ✓ Jute is also called as the Golden Fibre.
- **The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship - recently rolled out the Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme in all the districts across the country**
- ✓ The programme was earlier implemented in 69 districts.
 - ✓ It will help the selected fellows to get attached to District Skill Committees.
 - ✓ The ministry of skill development has also joined hands with Kerala Institute of Local Administration so as to conduct the capacity building programmes for district officials from the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Lakshadweep.
 - ✓ The ministry highlighted that, this fellowship programme along with the recent launch of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0 and other academic partnerships with IITs, IIMs, KILA and GIZ-IGVET under the SANKALP scheme will ensure skill development in the districts and empower them.
 - ✓ The SANKALP scheme stands for the “Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion”.
 - ✓ This programme is assisted by the World Bank loan.
 - ✓ The Mahatma Gandhi National Fellowship (MGNF) programme is a two-year fellowship programme.
 - ✓ It was launched with the objective of boosting the skill development at the district level under the SANKALP scheme.
 - ✓ Under the programme, the fellows should be aged between 21 to 30 years to get enrolled

INTERNATIONAL

- **Russia - has launched a new ‘Progress’ cargo ship into orbit in February 14 to deliver the cargo to the seven crew members in the International Space Station (ISS).**
- ✓ The space agency of Russia, Roscosmos, launched the Progress MS-16 cargo ship, which is also called Progress 77.
 - ✓ The cargo ship was launched using the Soyuz rocket from Site 31 of the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.
 - ✓ The cargo ship will arrive the ISS on February 15, carrying approximately 2,460 kg of cargo and supplies.



- ✓ It includes 1,400 kg of research and crew supplies such as food and clothing.
 - ✓ It also carries a supply of fresh water, nitrogen gas and propellant for the Zvezda service module propulsion system of the ISS.
 - ✓ The ISS is a modular space station or a habitable artificial satellite that has been installed in low Earth orbit.
 - ✓ It is a multinational collaborative project that involves the participation of five space agencies namely, NASA from United States, Roscosmos from Russia, JAXA from Japan, ESA from Europe, and CSA from Canada.
- **The UAE's Hope Probe - sent back its first image of Mars, days after the spacecraft successfully entered the Red Planet's orbit.**



- ✓ The picture captured the largest volcano in the solar system, Olympus Mons, emerging into the early morning sunlight
- ✓ The image was taken from an altitude of 24,700 km above the Martian surface on February 10, a day after the probe entered Mars' orbit
- ✓ The mission is designed to explore the details of Martian weather
- ✓ Hope became the first of three spacecraft to arrive at the Red Planet this month after China and the U.S., which have also launched missions in July
- ✓ These missions are designed to take advantage of a period when the Earth and Mars are nearest.
- ✓ The UAE's mission is also timed to mark the 50th anniversary of the unification of the nation's seven emirates.
- ✓ Hope will orbit the Red Planet for at least one Martian year, or 687 days.

- **The Pakistan Army – is holding a month-long exercise, code-named ‘Jidar-ul-Hadeed’, in the Thar Desert located in the Sindh province**
- ✓ The exercise is aimed at preparing the army for conflicts in extreme desert environments.
- ✓ It began on January 28 and is scheduled to conclude on February 28
- ✓ Troops from the Karachi Corps will be practising tactical drills and procedures as part of the exercise.
- ✓ According to the Army, the exercises are being conducted in extreme desert conditions, 74 km ahead of Chhor in Sindh, under conventional operations.
- ✓ The Pakistan Army has a Desert Warfare School at Chhor, which is 165 km from Hyderabad, Sindh.
- ✓ The school was established in 1987 to promote desert warfare.
- ✓ The Thar Desert is an arid region that covers over 2,00,000 sq km.
- ✓ It forms a natural boundary along the border between India and Pakistan.
- ✓ Meanwhile, a multinational naval exercise hosted by Pakistan, **Aman-2021**, began in the Arabian Sea.
- ✓ As many as 45 countries, including the U.S., Russia, China and Turkey, will be participating in the exercise.
- ✓ It will conclude on February 16.

INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

- **The Indian government - has gifted 2000 metric tonnes of rice to Syria in a bid to strengthen the food security in Syria**



- ✓ The consignment was handed over by India’s ambassador to Syria, Hifzur Rahman
- ✓ It was received by Hussain Makhoulf who is the Minister of local administration and head of the Supreme Relief Committee of Syria
- ✓ India is providing the help to Syria following the request from the government of Syria for emergency humanitarian assistance.
- ✓ Recently, India gifted 10 metric tonnes of medicines to Syria as COVID assistance in July 2020.

- ✓ Before that, the Ministry of External Affairs had organised artificial limbs fitment camp in Damascus in January 2020 in partnership with Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti.
- ✓ India is also establishing a NextGen Centre for Information Technology in Damascus

CONFERENCES, FESTIVALS & SUMMITS

- **The Governor of West Bengal, Jagdeep Dhankhar - inaugurated the 11th edition of 'Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav' on February 14**



- ✓ The event was inaugurated in the presence of Minister of State (I/C) for Culture and Tourism, Prahlad Singh Patel.
- ✓ It was inaugurated at Cooch Behar Palace in West Bengal.
- ✓ The first edition of the festival took place in November 2015.
- ✓ Since then, 10 editions of the festival were organised in Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Tawang, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tehri and Madhya Pradesh.
- ✓ The Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is a flagship festival of the Ministry of culture and tourism.
- ✓ It involves the active participation of Seven Zonal Culture Centres and reinforces the goal of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat".
- ✓ This festival showcases the folk and tribal art, music, dance, cuisines and culture of one state in other states.
- ✓ The festival is being held in between 14th to 28th February, 2021 in West Bengal.
- ✓ It will be organised at Cooch Behar in between 14th to 16th February, 2021, at Darjeeling in between 22nd to 24th February, 2021 while at Murshidabad in between 27th to 28th February, 2021.

