



## EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS—FEBRUARY 16, 2021

### TAMIL NADU

- **Chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami - will inaugurate the government's ambitious Cauvery-Gundar interlink project either on February 21 or 22 if Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not launch it during his next visit.**
- ✓ In his next scheduled visit to Coimbatore on February 25, the PM is expected to lay foundation stone for the Lower Bhavani sub-basin project.
- ✓ The Union Jal Shakti Ministry has already cleared the commencement of Bhavani project, but not the Cauvery-Gundar interlink project
- ✓ Once the bhoomi pooja is held for the Cauvery-Gundar link project, PWD will commence the work of a flood carrier canal for about 11km in Karur and Pudukottai districts at a cost of Rs. 331 crore under phase I of the project
- ✓ The phase I of the project aims at constructing a canal for 118.45km to link Cauvery (Kattalai barrage) to South Vellar
- ✓ The phase II involves constructing the canal between South Vellar and Vaigai for about 107.24km and phase III between Vaigai and Gundar for 34km.
- ✓ The state has given in principle approval for Rs. 6,941 crore for the construction of canal under phase I between Cauvery (Kattalai) to South Vellar, in anticipation of NABARD assistance
- ✓ This phase will benefit droughtprone areas of Karur, Trichy and Pudukottai districts
- ✓ The phase I is part of the Mahanadhi-Godavari-Cauvery-Gundar link under the National Perspective Plan of the Union government.
- ✓ **In a separate announcement, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami said that Veeran Pollan's birth anniversary would be celebrated as a State event.**
- ✓ A manimandapam would be constructed in honour of the freedom fighter, he also said.

- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi – to lay the foundation stone for the new oil refinery proposed in Nagapattinam on November 17 through video conference**
- ✓ During the event, the PM will also dedicate the Oil Ministry's Ramanathapuram – Thoothukudi natural gas pipeline project and gasoline desulfurization unit at Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL), a group company of Indian Oil Corporation
- ✓ State owned oil refiner Indian Oil Corporation has already commenced land acquisition in Nagapattinam region for the proposed nine million tonne per year oil refinery.
- ✓ Indian Oil and its refining subsidiary CPCL will own 25% each in a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which will set up the ₹31,500 crore refinery, while the rest will be held by strategic or financial investors.
- ✓ The project needs regulatory approvals from Niti Aayog.
- ✓ The new refinery will produce petrol, diesel and polypropylene.
- ✓ The integrated complex will house a desalination plant and also a 150 MW captive power plant to be fired using natural gas as feedstock.
- ✓ The project has received environmental clearance and is awaiting Consent to Establish (CTE) from the Tamil Nadu state government.

## STATES

- **On February 15, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee - launched the 'Maa canteen project' to provide food at a subsidized rate of ₹5 for a full meal to the urban poor.**



- ✓ The menu comprises rice, dal, vegetables, and egg curry.
- ✓ The canteens will start function from 1pm to 3pm daily in all urban local bodies
- ✓ The budgetary allocation for the project is ₹100 crore.
- ✓ The government will bear a subsidy of ₹15 while people will be provided lunch at ₹5, the CM said.
- ✓ The canteens are to be run by self-help groups with the help of urban development and municipal affairs department
- ✓ The public will be provided food on first come, first served basis.

➤ **On February 15, the controversial anti-cattle slaughter law - came into effect in Karnataka**

- ✓ Governor Vajubhai R Vala accorded his assent to the bill which makes it illegal to slaughter all cattle, barring buffaloes aged over 13.
- ✓ The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill has become a law nearly three months after it was passed in the assembly last year.
- ✓ The government has issued an ordinance earlier as it could not get the bill passed in the legislative council.
- ✓ The law allows authorities to conduct search and seizure operations merely on suspicion, and to restrict transportation of cattle outside the state without certification from a veterinarian or competent authority.
- ✓ The law also brings strict provisions of imprisonment of not less than three years and up to seven years on conviction, apart from a fine of not less than ₹50,000 and up to ₹10 lakh based on the severity of the offence.

## NATIONAL

➤ **Prime Minister Narendra Modi - will virtually lay the foundation stone of the Maharaja Suheldev Memorial on February 16.**



- ✓ During the event, the foundation stone for the development work of Chittaura Lake in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh will also be laid down by the PM
- ✓ Chief Minister of UP Yogi Adityanath and Governor Anandiben Patel will also be attending the virtual event.
- ✓ The project comprises of the installation of the equestrian statue of Maharaja Suheldev in Bahraich district to mark the birth anniversary of Suheldev
- ✓ A statue of Suheldev was also unveiled earlier in February 2016 by the then BJP Chief Amit Shah, along with a book on him.
- ✓ The central government also released a stamp and started a superfast train in the name of Suheldev.
- ✓ Suheldev was an Indian king from Shravasti.
- ✓ He is popular because he defeated and killed Ghaznavid general Ghazi Saiyyad Salar Masud at Bahraich in 1034 CE.

- ✓ Suheldev was also mentioned in the 17th century Mirat-i-Masudi which is a Persian-language historical romance.
- ✓ The city of Bahraich, located on Saryu River which is a tributary of Ghaghara river, shares an international border with Nepal.
- **UK-based Cambridge International - is the first education board to come up with a curriculum based on the National Education Policy-2020.**
- ✓ The Cambridge International is introducing an early childhood curriculum from the current academic session for children in the age group of 3-6 years in its Indian schools.
- ✓ The Board also plans to take the childhood curriculum to its schools in other countries.
- ✓ Cambridge International recorded 12.5% growth in number of students in 2019-20 and 58% growth in the last five years in India.
- ✓ The Cambridge Early Years programme is aligned with NEP 2020, so that when the children completes it, they can also progress to the local state or national curriculum in India
- ✓ The curriculum is in sync with NEP 2020, which says that Early Childhood Care and Education should be flexible and multifaceted
- ✓ The Cambridge International curriculum includes six areas— communication, language and literacy, creative expression, mathematics, physical development, personal, social and emotional development and understanding the world.
- ✓ As part of the curriculum, Cambridge University Press has designed skill books and workbooks for the learners and digital resources that parents can also access at home, as well as those which can be used in the classroom.
- ✓ While NEP speaks about the importance of home language, the Cambridge International curriculum will be delivered in English
- ✓ The curriculum also speaks about recognising “the importance of language and communication development as a fundamental tool for learning” and providing guidance to support a multilingual approach.
- **On February 15, the Centre - announced the setting up of 10 biotech URJIT (University Research Joint Industry Translational) clusters**
- ✓ These biotech hubs will integrate resources between research labs and industries, thereby filling gaps in the current research, innovation and education ecosystem
- ✓ These clusters form umbrella structures in 9 cities for better coordination among R&D institutions and focus on identified national priority thrust areas under National Research Foundation (NRF).
- ✓ Major cities having universities, research institutions, start-up hubs and industries will get such clusters.
- ✓ The NRF, which got a budget allocation of Rs 50,000 crore for five years, will be governed by a board appointed by the Prime Minister, and consist of accomplished and eminent researchers and professionals.

- ✓ The NRF is an autonomous body envisaged to support researchers working across several streams of science & technology with special focus on universities
- **The Union telecom ministry - has decided to set up an intelligence unit and a consumer protection system.**
- ✓ These systems will take action against the threats associated with the unsolicited calls, messages on mobile phones and the financial frauds involving telecom resources.
- ✓ They were launched following a direction from the telecom minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.
- ✓ The move aims to make digital transactions safer and secure for the general public.
- ✓ The Minister of Communication has directed officials to take strict action against telemarketers and individuals who are involved in harassment cases.
- ✓ The Delhi High Court has directed the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) on February 3, 2021 to ensure complete and strict implementation of the regulation of 2018 to curb the Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC).
- ✓ For effective handling of Unsolicited Commercial Communication (UCC) and also tackle financial frauds, the Government has decided to develop a web/ mobile application and SMS-based system for redressal mechanism.
- ✓ Also, the Centre is setting up a Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU) to coordinate with various stakeholders when investigating fraudulent activities that are conducted using telecom resources
- ✓ It will coordinate with various Law Enforcement Agencies, financial institutions and telecom service providers to investigate any fraudulent activity that involves the telecom resources.
- ✓ Further, a Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFMCP) system will be created in mobile service area.
- ✓ Under the new system, the government has decided to impose penalty on the tele-marketers, while disconnecting resources in case of repeat violations.
- ✓ The government recently informed the Parliament that over 2.9 lakh cyber security incidents related to digital banking were reported in 2020.
- ✓ The cases, as per the information sourced from the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), rose from nearly 1.6 lakh incidents in 2018, to about 2.5 lakh in 2019
- ✓ The incidents included phishing attacks, network scanning and probing, viruses and website hacking, the government said in Rajya Sabha earlier this month.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

- **Seven West Media - has become the largest Australian news media business to strike a multimillion deal to join Google's News Showcase platform**

- ✓ Google and the publicly listed broadcast TV, print and online publishing firm jointly announced they had agreed on a “long-term partnership” after discussions
  - ✓ Meantime, Australian ministers had elaborate discussions with media executives, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg and Alphabet’s Sundar Pichai.
  - ✓ Kerry Stokes owns 21 publications
  - ✓ Google has reached pay deals with more than 450 publications globally since News Showcase was launched in October.
  - ✓ Google announced two weeks ago that it had begun paying seven far smaller Australian websites
- **On February 15, the World Health Organisation - listed AstraZeneca and Oxford’s Covid vaccine for emergency use**
- ✓ The decision aims to provide widespread access to the relatively inexpensive shot in the developing world.
  - ✓ The listing comes days after a WHO panel provided interim recommendations on the vaccine
  - ✓ As per the advisory, two doses with an interval of around 8 to 12 weeks should be given to all adults, and can be used in nations with the South African variant as well.
  - ✓ The WHO’s review found that the Astrazeneca shot met the “must-have” criteria for safety, and its efficacy benefits outweighed risks.
  - ✓ The shot has been hailed because it’s cheaper and easier to distribute than some rivals, including Pfizer’s, which was listed for emergency use by WHO in December.
  - ✓ Astra-Zeneca’s doses make up the lion’s share of doses in the Covax sharing scheme.
  - ✓ Over 330 million doses of the vaccine will be rolled out to poorer nations from the end of February

## DEFENCE

- **On February 15, the country’s third diesel-electric Scorpene submarine – was delivered to the Navy by Mazagon Docks (MDL)**
- ✓ It will be commissioned as INS Karanj next month



- ✓ The acceptance document was signed by Vice-Admiral Narayan Prasad (retd.), who is the Chairman of MDL, and Rear Admiral B. Sivakumar from the Western Naval Command.
- ✓ The Navy has commissioned two vessels, INS Kalvari and INS Khanderi, till now as part of 'Project-75'
- ✓ The ₹23,000 crore 'Project-75' is currently under way at MDL for construction of six French-origin Scorpene submarines
- ✓ The fourth submarine called Vela, which was launched in May 2019, has now commenced its sea trials
- ✓ The fifth, Vagir, was launched last November.
- ✓ The sixth, Vagsheer, is currently in an advanced stage of construction.
- ✓ The Scorpene project is critical for the Navy since it currently has just 12 other ageing diesel-electric submarines, with just half of them operational at any given time.
- ✓ India also has two nuclear-powered submarines, INS Arihant and INS Chakra
- ✓ But, INS Chakra does not have nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles because it has been acquired on lease from Russia.
- ✓ India needs at least 18 conventional submarines, six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) and four nuclear-powered submarines with nuclear-tipped missiles (SSBNs).
- ✓ The defence ministry is now getting set to formally launch the long-pending over Rs 42,000 crore project to construct six new-generation stealth submarines with foreign collaboration domestically.
- ✓ Under this 'Project-75 India', the six new submarines will have land-attack cruise missiles as well as air-independent propulsion (AIP) for greater underwater endurance.
- ✓ However, it will take almost a decade from now for the first such submarine to roll out.

## APPOINTMENTS

- **Nigerian economist, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala – appointed as the first woman and first African head of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**
- ✓ Okonjo-Iweala was named as the Director-General by the representatives of the 164 member countries of WTO.



- ✓ The 66-year old Okonjo-Iweala was a former Nigerian finance minister and was also the World Bank's MD-operations
- ✓ She was a Harvard graduate with a doctorate from MIT
- ✓ India has been backing her appointment as the seventh DG of the global trade body
- ✓ Members of the Geneva-based multilateral agency was chosen by consensus after the Joe Biden administration approved to the new DG's appointment
- ✓ The US government under former President, Donald Trump, had blocked the appointment by arguing that the world trade organization is slow-moving, bureaucratic and ill-equipped to handle the state-dominated economy of China.
- ✓ The appointment will come into effect on March 1, 2021 and her term, which is renewable, will run until August 31, 2025
- ✓ She has been the African Union's special envoy against the Covid-19 pandemic and has also been a board member of Gavi, the vaccine alliance.
- ✓ WTO deals with the trade rules between various nations on the basis of negotiated agreements.
- ✓ It was established in January 1995 in accordance with the Marrakesh Agreement.
- ✓ This agreement was signed by 123 nations after the Marrakesh Declaration in April 1994 in Marrakesh, Morocco.
- ✓ It had replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).