

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – APRIL 30, 2021

STATES

- **On April 29, the Uttarakhand government – announced the cancellation of this year's Char Dham Yatra**
- ✓ The revered Yatra involves the visit to the four Himalayan shrines of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath by the pilgrims
- ✓ The government has taken the decision considering the surging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic
- ✓ The announcement came a day after the Uttarakhand high court (HC) criticised the state government for holding the Kumbh Mela despite the pandemic
- ✓ The yatra was scheduled to begin next month.
- ✓ The Kedarnath is to be reopened on May 17, Gangotri and Yamunotri on May 14 and Badrinath on May 18.
- ✓ The announcement regarding the yatra being suspended was made by chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat
- ✓ The CM announced that the shrines will remain open as per their announced dates although no pilgrims will be allowed in the temples.
- ✓ Unlike last year when the yatra was suspended, this time, not even locals will be allowed to visit the shrines.

NATIONAL

- **On April 29, the Labour ministry - notified the new 'Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, 2021'**
- ✓ Under the scheme, it has been decided to hike the maximum sum assured from the existing ₹6 lakh to ₹7 lakh
- ✓ The minimum sum assured is to continue at ₹2.5 lakh to member beneficiaries beyond February 14, 2020.
- ✓ The decision to this effect was taken in September 2020 during a meeting of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the retirement fund body
- ✓ The hike in the maximum sum assured will be enforced immediately

- ✓ The provision of minimum sum assured of ₹2.5 lakh will be applicable retrospectively from February 15, 2020.
 - ✓ On February 15, 2018, the ministry of labour and employment had increased the minimum assurance benefit ceiling to ₹2.5 lakh under the EDLI scheme for a period of two years, which had expired on February 15, 2020.
 - ✓ To continue the benefits, the CBT had in September 2020 accorded approval to amendment of portions of the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI), 1976
 - ✓ Accordingly, the maximum assurance benefit was enhanced to ₹7 lakh from ₹6 lakh.
 - ✓ This amendment was aimed at providing additional assistance to families and dependents of members of the scheme in the event of their death while in service.
- **The Road Transport ministry - has proposed a new regime of "IN" series for registration of personal vehicles of government employees**
- ✓ The new series will be applicable to vehicles owned by defence personnel, employees of central and state governments, PSUs and private sector companies and organisations, which have their offices in five or more states/ UTs.
 - ✓ The pilot scheme has been proposed in a draft notification released by the ministry
 - ✓ The proposed move aim to make the transfer and re-registration of such vehicles to other states seamless and hassle-free
 - ✓ There is a high possibility of such persons getting transferred frequently and they need to take their personal vehicles to other states.
 - ✓ The vehicle owners will have the option to go for the "IN" series and in this case they have to pay the road tax for two years or in multiples of two.
 - ✓ The entire process will be made online to ensure there is no need to go to the RTOs.
 - ✓ Currently, while registering private vehicles, owners need to pay the 15 years' road tax up front.
 - ✓ If they transfer their vehicles to any other state and go for re-registration, they need to pay the road tax for the remaining years such as 10 or 12 years.
 - ✓ Then they need to claim the already paid amount from the state where the vehicle was originally registered.
- **Hetero Biopharma – receives the approval for conducting phase III clinical trials for Russian Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V in India**
- ✓ The approval was granted by the subject expert committee (SEC) that advises the Indian drug regulator
 - ✓ SEC has asked Hetero Biopharma to study the immunogenicity samples of Sputnik V made by the company on Day 21, 28 and 42 of the shots being administered.

- ✓ The vaccine comprises two human adenoviral vectors — Ad26 and Ad5 — that have to be injected 21 days apart.
 - ✓ The committee has also asked the company to assess the neutralising antibodies and gamma interferon during the study
 - ✓ Hetero Biopharma will be conducting the bridging phase III trials on around 300 volunteers using the test batches of Sputnik V it has manufactured at its facilities in Hyderabad.
 - ✓ The study is scheduled to take anywhere from 45 days to a couple of months.
 - ✓ As per norms, Hetero Biopharma has to conduct a separate phase III study as it will be manufacturing the vaccine doses in India.
 - ✓ The other Indian manufacturers that have been roped in by Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to make Sputnik V will also have to conduct separate phase III trials before they are allowed to roll out the vaccine in the Indian market.
 - ✓ The permission granted by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to Dr Reddy's Laboratories earlier this month was to import Sputnik V for restricted use in emergency situations
 - ✓ Dr Reddy's Laboratories had conducted a bridging phase II and III trials on 1,600 volunteers to the larger global study using imported Sputnik V shots.
 - ✓ Hetero Biopharma had tied up with Russian sovereign wealth fund Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) in November 2020 for manufacturing around 100 million doses of Sputnik V in India.
- **On April 29, Bharat Biotech - announced a price reduction of ₹200 a dose to fix the price at ₹400 for its vaccine, Covaxin.**
- ✓ A day earlier, Serum Institute of India (SII) announced a ₹100 per dose cut in Covishield prices bringing it down to ₹300 for state governments
 - ✓ The price of a dose of Covaxin for private hospitals, however, remains unchanged at ₹1,200.
 - ✓ SII has pegged the Covishield prices for private hospitals at ₹600 a jab.
 - ✓ The Hyderabad-based vaccine-maker had already said that it would stick to its original pricing of ₹150 per dose for the Centre

INTERNATIONAL

- **On April 29, China - launched an unmanned module for its proposed permanent space station called 'Tiangong'**
- ✓ The module contains the proposed living quarters for three of its crew on the permanent space station
 - ✓ China plans to complete its own space station by the end of 2022
 - ✓ The module, named "Tianhe", or "Harmony of the Heavens", was launched on the Long March 5B, China's largest carrier rocket, from the Wenchang Space Launch Centre on the southern island of Hainan.

- ✓ Tianhe is one of three main components of what would be China's first self-developed space station
- ✓ Still eleven more modules are to be launched and assembled to complete the space station.
- ✓ The lifespan of the space station, weighing 90 tonnes, is fifteen years.
- ✓ The proposed space station is aimed at competing with the only other station in service — the International Space Station (ISS).
- ✓ According to the Chinese Government, the completed Space Station will look like the Russian "Mir Station" that orbited between 1980s and 2001
- ✓ It will orbit the earth in the low earth orbit at a height of 400 to 450 kilometres.
- ✓ The ISS is backed by the US, Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada.
- ✓ China was barred from participating by the US
- ✓ The size of Tiangong Space Station will be a quarter the size of the International Space Station.
- ✓ In 2011, Chinese launched the Tiangong – 1, which served as the first prototype module that laid groundwork for the permanently crewed station.
- ✓ Later, in 2016, the second lab Tiangong – 2 was launched.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **The Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay – has offered a quick and simple solution to the oxygen crisis unfolding nationally amidst the Covid-19 pandemic**
- ✓ The IIT-Bombay, in collaboration with Tata Consulting Engineers (TCE) Ltd, has successfully carried out a pilot project on the technology
- ✓ The Powai-based IIT-Bombay converted nitrogen generator plants into oxygen generators, simply by replacing the molecular filters.
- ✓ Conversion of existing nitrogen plants will take only around three to four days
- ✓ However, the setting up of a new oxygen plant for medical use that could take at least 45 days.

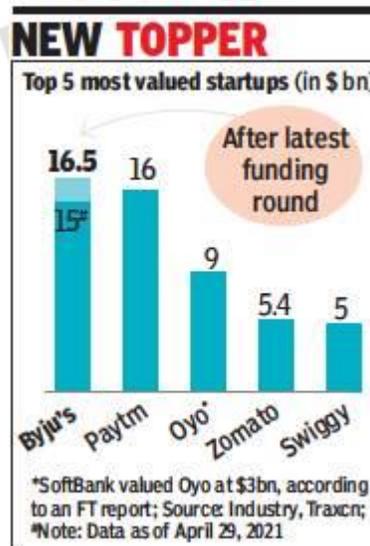
MOU SIGNED FOR SOP TO SCALE UP TECH	
<p>To convert PSA nitrogen plant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contact equipment provider of nitrogen plant, IIT-Bombay or TCE ➤ Change complete adsorber with zeolite or change only the molecular sieve to zeolite from carbon. (Adsorption is adhesion of atoms, ions or molecules to a surface) ➤ Add bacterial filter and an oxygen analyser sensor <p>Converting a decent-sized nitrogen plant may cost 10-15% of new O2 unit</p>	
<p>IIT-Bombay director Subhasis Chaudhari (right) and Prof Milind Atrey show a demo plant at IIT-B</p>	

- ✓ And, these pressure swing adsorption (PSA) nitrogen plants are available in abundance in industrial units across the country.

- ✓ Conversion of a decent-sized nitrogen plant will cost around 10-15% of the total cost of setting up a new oxygen plant.
- ✓ Such nitrogen plants reject oxygen from the atmosphere, filter the nitrogen and then liquefy it for laboratory or industrial use.
- ✓ If the molecular carbon sieves (filters) in these plants are replaced with zeolite (another mineral) and the settings are modified a bit, the conversion process produces oxygen instead of rejecting it from the atmosphere
- ✓ Nitrogen plants are used in oil refineries, food and several other industries.
- ✓ An MoU was signed between IIT, TCE and Spantech Engineers (which deals with PSA nitrogen and oxygen plants) to finalise a standard operating procedure (SOP) to scale up the technology.

ECONOMY

- **Ed-tech major Byju's - is set to be the most valued internet startup in India at a valuation of \$16.5 billion soon**
- ✓ It is set to overtake Soft-Bank and Alibaba-backed Paytm, which is valued at \$16 billion
- ✓ Byju's is in advanced stages of talks to raise another \$150-\$200 million from UBS Group to take its valuation around \$16.5 billion
- ✓ At present, Byju's valuation is over \$15 billion from various new and existing investors
- ✓ Byju's had raised \$1 billion in capital last year.
- ✓ However, Byju's is yet to make any official announcements on these discussions.



- ✓ Meanwhile, Byju's has also sought Competition Commission of India (CCI)'s nod for its nearly \$1 billion deal to acquire coaching network Aakash Institute, which was announced earlier this month.
- ✓ Byju's was last officially valued at \$11 billion based on the announcements it has made seven months before.

- ✓ It has acquired Aakash Institute, WhiteHat Jr and US-based Osmo.
- ✓ The company is also acquiring rival Toppr and has started expanding aggressively outside India.

OBITUARY

- **Former AIADMK minister C Aranganayagam (90 years) - passed away due to age related illness at a private hospital in Chennai on April 29.**

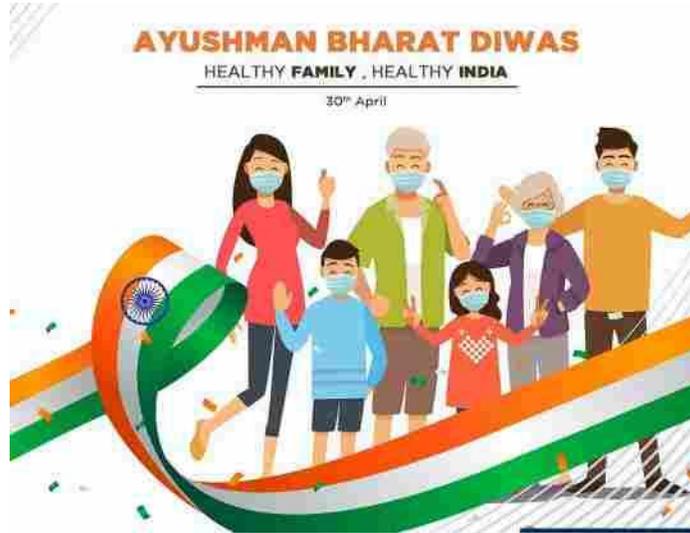


- ✓ Aranganayagam served as the education minister (July 1977-October 1986) in AIADMK founder M G Ramachandran
- ✓ He got back the portfolio in February 1992 when Jayalalithaa was the Chief Minister and served in the capacity till May 1993
- ✓ In the Jayalalithaa Cabinet, he also held the portfolio of Labour for about eight months.
- ✓ Starting his career as a school teacher, he practised law and was one of those who played a role in the formation of the Coimbatore Bar Association
- ✓ Aranganayagam was the first person to get elected to the Assembly on the AIADMK's two leaves symbol.
- ✓ He was a four time MLA, winning twice from Thondamuthur(1984 and 1991) and twice from Coimbatore south (1977 and 1980).
- ✓ He had quit AIADMK and joined DMK in 2006 only to return to parent party after a shortwhile.
- ✓ Aranganayagam held various party posts including headquarters secretary during his long association with the party.
- ✓ Aranganayagam was good at administration and played a crucial role in improving the school enrolment ratio, especially in higher secondary education in the 70s.
- ✓ During his stint as education minister, the State government introduced, in June 1978, the 10+2 schooling system or higher secondary course in the place of the Pre University Course (PUC), which was abolished a year later.
- ✓ He strongly supported the common entrance test for admission to professional courses which was introduced in the State in 1984

- ✓ The area of higher education was opened up in the mid-1980s as private colleges, mainly in the discipline of engineering, began to come up.

NATIONAL DAY

➤ Ayushman Bharat Diwas - April 30



- ✓ The Ayushman Bharat Diwas is celebrated to promote health and wellness to the poor and also to provide insurance benefits to them.
- ✓ The day aims to promote affordable medical facilities in remote areas of the country based on the Socio-Economic Caste Census database.
- ✓ The Ayushman Bharat Scheme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April 2018.
- ✓ According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ayushman Bharat Scheme has so far operationalised 75,532 Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centre.
- ✓ The scheme has fixed a target of 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centre by 2022.
- ✓ The largest health cover scheme in the world aims to provide five lakh rupees of health cover per family per year.
- ✓ The scheme also covers fifteen days of pre-hospitalisation and fifteen days of post-hospitalisation.
- ✓ This includes the expenses of medicines and tests.
- ✓ The scheme subsumed the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana.
- ✓ The flagship scheme was launched along the lines of universal health coverage to meet one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations - "leave no one behind."