



EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – MAY 22, 2021

TAMIL NADU

- ✓ **On May 21, Chief Minister M K Stalin - withdrew a section of cases registered against anti-Sterlite protesters and members of the public during the protests in Tuticorin**
- ✓ The protests were followed by the police firing on May 22, 2018 which left 13 dead and hundreds injured in riots and police excesses.
- ✓ The CM also announced that a compensation of ₹1 lakh each would be given to 93 people arrested at that time for the injuries and mental agony they suffered.
- ✓ However, CBI cases and those booked under Tamil Nadu Property (Prevention of Damage and Loss) Act (TNPPDL) will not be withdrawn by the Government.
- ✓ The cases pending before the Supreme Court in this regard and “a few other cases” will also not be withdrawn.
- ✓ The Government has decided to issue ‘No objection certificate’ to those arrested for pursuing higher education and for jobs.
- ✓ The announcements were based on recommendations given to the government in the interim report by the retired justice Aruna Jagadeesan commission which is probing the riots and deaths.
- ✓ Further, Chief Minister M K Stalin handed over appointment orders for government jobs to 17 relatives of the police firing victims.
- ✓ The new appointment orders were for the post of junior assistants in rural development, town panchayat and other posts

- ✓ **Chief Minister M K Stalin - launched the Covid vaccination programme for those aged between 18 and 44 years at the hosiery hub of Tirupur on May 20.**
- ✓ Launching the programme, the CM gave away certificates to those who took the vaccine shots at Nethaji Apparel Park at Perumanallur in the presence of health minister Ma Subramanian.

- ✓ As soon as the CM launched it, vaccinations began for the people in this age group at 2,100-odd centres across the state.
- ✓ The state has put in efforts to procure 3.5 crore vaccine doses through a global tender and another 1.5 crore vaccines as state's allocation from the Centre.
- ✓ The objective was to prioritise vaccination of high-risk groups and industrial workers in the first phase.
- ✓ **The Greater Chennai corporation - will launch a GCC Brigade, a voluntary force, on May 24**
- ✓ The brigade consisting of 1,073 volunteers in the field will help Covid positive patients find a hospital or an ambulance and for various other activities.
- ✓ The GCC Brigade has about 117 NGOs registered.
- ✓ The brigade will involve in various categories such as assisting Covid positive patients, assisting at call centres, ambulance assistance, field volunteers and burial ground assistants.
- ✓ A group of NGOs will help GCC organise mass vaccination camps, with 60 groups, each of 20 volunteers.
- ✓ While the NGOs will help with the logistics, venue and bring people to get vaccinated, GCC will bring its doctors and nurses.
- ✓ All volunteers will be given an arm band and won't be paid but their safety will be ensured.

NATIONAL

- ✓ **The University Grants Commission (UGC) - proposes that higher educational institutions be allowed to teach up to 40% of the syllabus of every course through online mode even after the pandemic.**
- ✓ However, the examinations for both 40% online (other than SWAYAM course) and 60% offline portions can be conducted offline.
- ✓ The proposals were mentioned in the draft concept note on guidelines for blended mode of teaching and learning put up on the UGC website.
- ✓ Among other key recommendations were open-book examinations, oral examinations and on-demand examinations.
- ✓ There was also a proposal to introduce group examinations even for conventional theory exams to improve average performance of a class by sharing knowledge and to improve general understanding.
- ✓ In the internal assessment, the UGC expert committee wanted to introduce e-portfolio, online quiz and proctored assessments.
- ✓ The e-portfolio would be a comprehensive tool in which students would be asked to compile their best assignments, activities, experiences and challenges faced while working on these assignments.
- ✓ It also prescribes minimum basic facilities needed for online teaching including setting up virtual labs, smart classrooms, studios for recording lectures, learning

management systems (LMS), internet with 1 Gbps bandwidth, Wi-Fi facility on campus and feedback systems.

FUTURE ASSESSMENTS

- Open book exams (to facilitate better understanding and application of knowledge)
- Group exams even for conventional theory papers (to boost knowledge sharing, average performance of class)
- Oral examinations (can make exams faster, easier and will be a different experience for students)
- On-demand examinations (to offer more flexibility and student centricity)
- E-portfolio (internal assessment, compilation of best assignments and experiences during the course)
- Online quizzes (a few ICT tools for quizzes and games can be used)



- Artificial intelligence tools for proctoring and assessment (can be used to check concentration levels, speed and depth of learning)

- ✓ The online learning will include approaches such as face-to-face video lectures, internet-based learning and project-based learning
- ✓ It also proposed that teachers who wish to implement the hybrid or blended system follow the **IPSIT** model -- Identify resources, learner-centred activities, Provide resources and announce activities on LMS, Scaffolding and support to learners, Identification of learning gaps and feedback and Testing.
- ✓ **On May 21, the Ministry of Labour and Employment - announced a hike in the variable dearness allowance (VDA) for workers in the railway administration, mines, oil fields, ports and other sectors in the central government**
- ✓ The move is expected to benefit about 1.5 crore workers working in these sectors.
- ✓ The hike will be effective retrospectively from April 1, 2021
- ✓ It will range from ₹105 per day to ₹210 per day, depending on a worker's occupation and geographical location
- ✓ The hike will also have a resultant impact on minimum wages for workers.
- ✓ The VDA is similar to the dearness allowance for government employees.
- ✓ The hike will also be applicable equally to all contractual and casual workers.
- ✓ The cumulative hike is expected to be in the range of ₹2,000 and ₹5,000 per month.
- ✓ Revision of VDA has also been done for agriculture workers across skill categories, and building and construction workers.
- ✓ The VDA was revised on the basis of average Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPIIW)
- ✓ The ministry took the average CPI-IW for the months of July to December 2020 to revise the VDA.

- ✓ **Covaxin, manufactured by Bharat Biotech – is not included in the list of vaccines approved by the regulatory agencies of various countries**
- ✓ It is also not named in the list of vaccines on the WHO's Emergency Use Listing (EUL).
- ✓ This will affect the Indian international travelers, at least in the initial months of international travel.
- ✓ The list of approved vaccines in the EUL includes those made by Serum Institute of India (Covishield), Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca (two), Jansenn (in US and Netherlands) and Sinopharm/ BBIP
- ✓ As per the WHO's latest guidance document, Bharat Biotech has submitted its Expression of Interest, but "more information is required."

- ✓ **Taxi ambulances used in Tamil Nadu during Covid-19 pandemic – has figured among a list of 14 best practices implemented by states, as identified by the centre**
- ✓ These practices were implemented by states to combat the surge of Covid-19 cases
- ✓ Kerala's oxygen nurses, who ensured rational use of the key medical aid in hospitals also figure in the list
- ✓ Further, the list includes door-to-door Covid tests in places like rural Rae Bareli in UP which brought down the positivity from 38% to 2.9% in a period of one month.
- ✓ These innovative best practices were shared by the districts with the PM during his recent meetings
- ✓ Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with states, district collectors and municipal commissioners on public health response to Covid management on May 18 and 20
- ✓ Like Kerala's 'oxygen nurses', "oxygen mitra" in Bikaner in Rajasthan, who checks oxygen wastage, also figure in the list
- ✓ Mumbai too figures in the list of cities adopting best practices with the use of geographically distributed oxygen buffer stock manned by senior officers.

SUPREME COURT VERDICT

- ✓ **On May 21, the Supreme Court – ruled that personal guarantors are liable for corporate debts and lenders can recover dues from them if firms fails to repay**
- ✓ The decision comes as a big blow to promoters of several companies facing insolvency action
- ✓ Accordingly, personal assets of chairpersons and directors, who stood guarantee for corporate loans from banks that turned into bad debts, would face liability in the resolution process under IBC against insolvent companies.
- ✓ A bench of Justices L N Rao and S R Bhat upheld the validity of November 15, 2019, notification issued by the Union government

- ✓ The apex court ruling will help banks go after those who have offered guarantees to recover dues in case the resolution amount is short of the claims filed by them in the National Company Law Tribunal.
- ✓ Over the years, many companies have repeatedly defaulted in loan repayment and got banks to restructure the debt, often citing systemic issues.
- ✓ But as part of the clean up initiated five years ago, the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code was enacted and banks were told to go after those who were not paying their dues
- ✓ The SC said the resolution proceedings and the Committee of Creditors under the IBC would now look into the assets of personal guarantors while formulating a resolution plan

INTERNATIONAL

- ✓ **For the first time in nearly three decades, the State of Alabama in US - will allow yoga to be taught in its public schools**
- ✓ However, teachers will be barred from saying “namaste” and using Sanskrit names for poses.
- ✓ Also, the chanting is forbidden alongwith the sound of “om” which combines breathing exercises and stretches.
- ✓ The changes follow the signing of a bill on May 20 by Governor Kay Ivey, a Republican
- ✓ This overrides a 1993 ban on yoga instruction in public schools by the state’s board of education contending that it amounts to a religious activity.
- ✓ The measure takes effect from August 1 and schools can decide whether to offer yoga to students from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- ✓ Participation will be optional under the legislation

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ **National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (Neeri) – has developed a new sample collecting technique for Covid-19 testing that eliminates nasal and throat swabs**
- ✓ The new technique will involve collecting samples through gargling and then running RT-PCR tests
- ✓ It is a world’s first alternative method of sample collecting and has got approval from the Indian Council of Medical Research.
- ✓ Under the new technique, no RNA extraction is necessary, as is the case with existing testing of samples.
- ✓ The RNA extraction process is costly and hence makes the overall test cost higher.
- ✓ Even though the RT-PCR procedure remains the same, using this technique, a person can get the test result much faster.

NEERI'S INNOVATION TO BOOST COVID TESTING

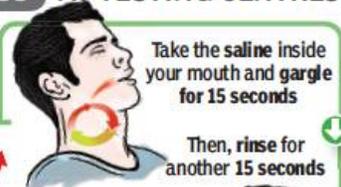
The **gargling method** for **RT-PCR test** eliminates nasal, throat **swab collection** and promises to deliver **results faster**

THE PROCESS AT TESTING CENTRES



Krishna Khairnar, the scientist behind the innovation

A wide-mouth conical tube with 5 millilitres of sterile saline is given



Take the saline inside your mouth and gargle for 15 seconds

Then, rinse for another 15 seconds

Put the liquid back in the tube and close the lid properly

IN THE LAB



> Sample is mixed in a special **buffer medium** innovated by Neeri

> Sample is incubated for 30 minutes at room temperature

> Then, it is heated for six

minutes at 98 degree Celsius

> A reasonably good **RNA template** for direct RT-PCR is ready



BENEFITS

> Nasal, oral swabs and viral transport medium not required



> Trained **healthcare professionals** not needed for sample collection

> **Non-invasive** and patient-friendly sampling

> Waste generation during sample collection minimized

> **Time-saving** technique, long queues at collection centres can be reduced

> **Cost-effective** method as **RNA extraction kit** not required

> Results will be available faster



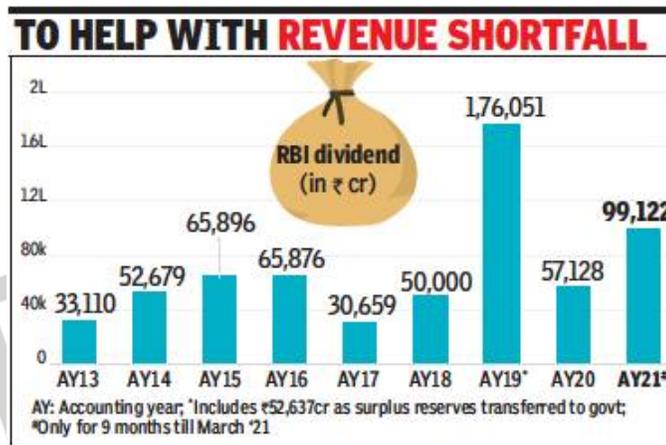
Pics: Ranjit Deshmukh, Text: Manka Behl, Graphic: Shreyas Bedare

✓ The technique is completely non-invasive as it eliminates the need for nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swabs, and a viral transport medium.

- ✓ Neeri has prepared a special buffer medium in which the collected sample is mixed.

ECONOMY

- ✓ **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) - has approved a ₹99,122-crore dividend payout to the government for an accounting period of nine months ended March 31, 2021 (July 2020-March 2021).**
- ✓ The amount is more than 73% higher than the entire previous year's ₹57,128-crore dividend, despite the period being only nine months due to a change in accounting year to April-March.
- ✓ This is also the highest dividend after the ₹1.23 lakh crore paid out for FY19, along with a separate ₹52,637-crore surplus reserve transferred to the government in that fiscal, based on the Jalan Committee formula

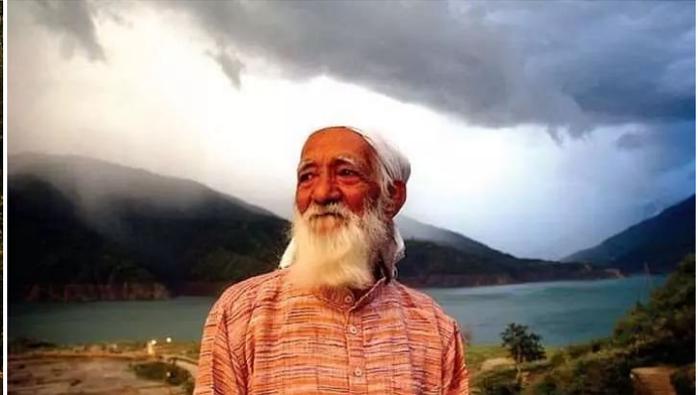


- ✓ The dividend is also higher than what the government had expected for FY21 in its Budget, which was announced in February this year.
- ✓ Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had earmarked a transfer of Rs 53,511 crore in the Budget.
- ✓ The windfall will help the government with the revenue shortfall arising out of lower tax collections due to the lockdown induced by the pandemic in April-May 2021.
- ✓ The RBI said that its central board approved the payout in its 589th meeting held on May 21 through videoconference.
- ✓ Unlike commercial banks, the RBI generates a higher surplus during adverse financial conditions as it has to repeatedly intervene in the money and foreign exchange market.

OBITUARY

- **Renowned environmental activist and leader of Chipko Movement Sundarlal Bahuguna (94 years) - died in Uttarakhand at the AIIMS in Rishikesh due to Covid-19 on May 21**

- ✓ A long-time follower of Gandhian principles, Bahuguna transformed the Chipko Movement against deforestation in the 1970s across garhwal region into a key milestone in India's forest conservation efforts.



- ✓ People associated with the movement hugged the trees (chipko in Hindi means 'to hug') to prevent them from being axed.
- ✓ Bahuguna gave the direction to the movement and his appeal to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi resulted in a 15-year ban on chopping of green trees in 1980.
- ✓ Born on January 9, 1927 in Maroda village in Tehri — now a district in Uttarakhand — Bahuguna's life was dedicated to social causes, activism, and writing
- ✓ He participated in the Independence movement and was subsequently a part of Vinoba Bhave's Sarvodaya movement.
- ✓ He was associated with environmental issues — the Chipko movement and Gandhian methods of protest and hunger strikes against the building of the Tehri dam in Uttarakhand on the Bhagirathi river from the 1980s to 2004.
- ✓ He even went for jail in 1995 as part of his protests against the Tehri dam
- ✓ Bahuguna was awarded India's second-highest civilian honour, Padma Vibhushan, in 2009.
- ✓ In 1981, he had refused to accept the Padma Shri over the government's refusal to cancel the Tehri dam project despite his protests and also due to the rampant felling of trees in the Himalayas
- ✓ He also undertook a near-5000 km march across the Himalayas where he saw the pace of deforestation and devastation brought by developmental projects and submitted his findings in reports to the United Nations.
- ✓ **Om Prakash Bhardwaj, former national chief coach of Boxing - passed away after brief illness on May 22**
- ✓ The 82 year old veteran holds the distinction of being India's first Dronacharya awardee in boxing in the year 1985 along with Bhalchandra Bhaskar Bhagwat (wrestling) and O M Nambiar (athletics).
- ✓ He was the country's longest-serving chief boxing coach from 1965 to 1989.

- ✓ The highlight of Bhardwaj's coaching career was 1986 Seoul Asian Games when Indian men's boxing team won medals in all 12 weight categories. (5 silver and 7 bronze medals)



- ✓ Some of India's finest yesteryear pugilists – including Birender Thapa, Kaur Singh, J L. Pradhan, Hawa Singh, Jaipal Singh and MK Rai – began their careers under Bhardwaj.
- ✓ He was one of the officials involved in organising a show bout between Indian boxers, including Kaur Singh, and Muhammad Ali in early 1980s in New Delhi
- ✓ Bhardwaj retired from Army Physical Training Institute in Pune in 1973 and joined National Institute of Sports in Patiala
- ✓ He was instrumental in starting NIS diploma course in boxing in 1975
- ✓ Bhardwaj was a student as well as teacher during the 1975 diploma course in Patiala.
- ✓ He joined Sports Authority of India (SAI) as coach in 1984 and retired in early 1990s.
- ✓ After he retired from SAI, Bhardwaj set up a boxing academy at his house in New Delhi.

