

EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS – MAY 23, 2021

TAMIL NADU

- On May 22, Chief Minister MK Stalin - announced total lockdown across the entire state with no relaxations for a week beginning May 24 to combat the surge in Covid-19 pandemic.
- ✓ Shops selling groceries and vegetables too will remain closed during the lockdown period.
- ✓ A team of medical experts constituted by the state government had suggested intensifying Covid-19 control measures.

SERVICES EXEMPTED FROM LOCKDOWN

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Drug stores including veterinary pharmacies 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fuel pumps, ATMs and banking services. Banks can work with one-third staff
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Supply of milk, drinking water and newspapers 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Transportation of agricultural produce and goods vehicles transporting essential commodities
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Essential services depts in secretariat, collectorate 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Inter-district travel for medical emergencies and funeral/last rites with e-registration. Intra-district travel for medical emergencies without e-registration
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take away service in hotels, restaurants and bakeries between 6am and 10am, 12noon and 3pm, 6am and 9pm. Supply via food delivery apps, Swiggy, Zomato will be allowed only in this permitted time 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continuous process industries, industries manufacturing essential commodities and medical equipment

- ✓ Later, the CM chaired a meeting with the committee of MLAs representing various parties before announcing the decision.
- ✓ Malls will not be allowed to open during the total lockdown.
- ✓ Vegetables and fruits will be supplied by horticulture department through vehicles during the lockdown period.

- **The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) department - has asked all the 44,227 temples coming under its control to upload budgets and audited accounts of all temples on its website – hrce.tn.gov.in**
- ✓ The decision has been taken with a view to improving transparency in the functioning of temples.
- ✓ Any expenditure not uploaded on the website would be deemed as “unauthorized expenditure”
- ✓ It would be recovered from the trustees and executive officers of the temples concerned as per the provisions of the HR&CE Act.
- ✓ As per the Rule 7 of the Manner of Audit of Accounts Rules, trustees submit the budget to the competent authority before the end of March of every year and get approval before 30th June of every year.
- ✓ The commissioner has also instructed the audit team to ensure publication of the approved budget and audited expenditure.

NATIONAL

- **The Indian Railways’ first Oxygen Express train piloted by two women - reached Bengaluru carrying 120 tonnes of medical oxygen from Jamshedpur on May 21.**



- ✓ They covered the last 120km stretch in one and a half hours, clocking an average speed of 80kmph.
- ✓ The train had started from Tatanagar in Jharkhand with six tankers of liquid medical oxygen (LMO).
- ✓ This was the seventh Oxygen Express to Karnataka.
- ✓ The Indian Railways has done meticulous planning while running such trains to ensure they reach destinations on time considering the urgency.
- ✓ Since these trains run non-stop unlike road tankers, this is a more reliable mode for transport of LMO for longer distances.
- ✓ The railway ministry said they have delivered nearly 14,500 tonnes of LMO in more than 884 tankers to 13 states, as on May 22.

- ✓ The railways had started Oxygen Express trains on April 24 with a train carrying 126 tonnes reaching Maharashtra.
- **Union Minister of Petroleum Dharmendra Pradhan - flagged off the first supply of used cooking oil-based biodiesel blended diesel recently through video conferencing**



- ✓ It was launched under the Expression of Interest (EOI) Scheme from Indian Oil's Tikrikalan Terminal, Delhi
- ✓ The EOI scheme for "Procurement of Bio-diesel produced from Used Cooking Oil" was launched on the occasion of World Biofuel Day on 10th August, 2019
- ✓ The scheme mainly aims to create an eco-system for collection and conversion of Used Cooking Oil into biodiesel and to develop entrepreneurship opportunities in the process
- ✓ Under the process, 7% biodiesel extracted from the Used Cooking Oil is to be blended with diesel.
- ✓ In the first phase, 11 Eols were launched between 10.08.2019 to 09.11.2020 for 200 locations
- ✓ Under this initiative, Indian Oil has received 51KL of UCO-Biodiesel at its Tikrikalan terminal in Delhi as of 31.3.2021.
- ✓ Indian Oil has also started constructing eight Biodiesels plants across Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh.
- ✓ Biodiesel is an alternative fuel, similar to conventional or 'fossil' diesel, which is rapidly biodegradable and completely non-toxic
- ✓ It can be produced from vegetable oils, animal fats and waste cooking oil.
- ✓ One of the main characteristic of biodiesel is its carbon-neutrality, i.e. the oilseed absorbs the same amount of CO₂ during its release in comparison to its combustion in a vehicle.
- ✓ Currently, India produces 23 million tonnes of edible oil annually.
- ✓ Of this, 3 million tonnes of oil is discarded after use, which is to be used now under the initiative.

- **The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) - recently signed an agreement with The LINK Fund to mutually collaborate towards tribal development**



- ✓ Under the agreement, they will work towards tribal employment generation.
- ✓ This is to be achieved by providing support to the tribals, increasing value addition to their produce and by improving the skill training provided.
- ✓ They will also create women-based centers that will promote innovation, infrastructure and entrepreneurship opportunities among tribal women.
- ✓ The LINK Fund is a philanthropic organisation that strives to end extreme poverty and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- ✓ Their focus is mainly on India, US, Mali, Indonesia, Mali, Nigeria, Nepal, Mauritania and Senegal.
- ✓ The fund addresses basic human needs such as education, food and nutrition, large scale infrastructure and women economic empowerment.

COURT VERDICT

- **The Madras High Court – has ruled that two degrees obtained simultaneously by students in the same academic year are not valid unless approved by the University Grants Commission**
- ✓ Mostly, students obtain their second degree through distance education, while pursuing the first degree through regular mode
- ✓ As per the Court, students are not permitted to undergo a second degree programme formally in the same academic year
- ✓ A full bench comprising Justice V Bharathidasan, Justice M Dhandapani and Justice P T Asha passed the order in this regard.
- ✓ The bench was answering a reference as to whether two degrees obtained simultaneously during the same academic year could be considered for employment.
- ✓ The bench also held that there is no obligation on the part of the employer to recognise such degrees till they are approved by UGC.
- ✓ The reference was made to the full bench following conflicting judgments passed by two division benches on the issue.

- ✓ While a division bench held that the two degrees obtained simultaneously in the same academic year was not recognised, another division bench held that there were no strict rules prohibiting the students to pursue two-degree simultaneously.

INTERNATIONAL

- **Nepal's president Bidya Devi Bhandari - dissolved the House of Representatives on May 22 for the second time in five months and announced snap elections in November**
 - ✓ The President has rejected the caretaker Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli's and the opposition alliance's separate claims to form a government
 - ✓ Oli claimed the support of 121 lawmakers from his own party CPN-UML and 32 lawmakers of Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) for his reappointment as PM.
 - ✓ On the other hand, Nepali Congress President Deuba claimed to have the support of 149 parliamentarians.
 - ✓ Earlier, the President has set a deadline of May 21 for demonstrating a majority to form a new government
 - ✓ As per Article 76(7) of the constitution, a date to conduct another election within six months must also be fixed.
 - ✓ The president has ordered the first phase of polls on November 12 and the second phase on November 19
 - ✓ According to the President, the decision was made on the recommendation of the cabinet headed by Oli to dissolve the 275-member House.
 - ✓ The president's announcement is a reminder of her December 2020 decision when she first dissolved the House at Oli's recommendation.
 - ✓ The Supreme Court had annulled the move in February 2021
- **Two doses from either the Oxford-AstraZeneca or the Pfizer vaccine - are found to be over 80% effective in preventing infection from the B.1.617.2 variant of Covid-19, first discovered in India**
 - ✓ This was revealed in a new UK government study.
 - ✓ The Oxford-AstraZeneca two-dose vaccine is also being produced by the Serum Institute of India as Covishield and being administered among the adult population in India.
 - ✓ The UK findings are said to be based on data from Public Health England (PHE)
 - ✓ It has also revealed that the two doses provide 87% protection from the B.117 variant, first discovered in the Kent region of England and also considered highly transmissible.
 - ✓ The latest study's findings were presented to a meeting of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group this week.

- **The United Kingdom – has proposed to reduce its funding to the United Nations Global Family Planning Programme.**
 - ✓ According to the UN Population Fund, the UK had pledged 154 million Euros.
 - ✓ However, now UK is to provide only 23 million Euros to the agency.
 - ✓ Last year, the UK government announced that it will reduce its international aid spending from 0.7% of its National income to 0.5% of its national income.
 - ✓ This cut amount to reduction in aids by more than 4 billion Euros.
 - ✓ Under the UN global family planning programme, UK funds maternal health care schemes and the provision of contraceptives to millions of women in the poorest countries

- **The International Energy Agency - recently released the Global Electric Vehicle Outlook.**
 - ✓ As per the report, 3 million new electric cars were registered in 2020, which was 41% higher than those registered a year earlier
 - ✓ The report seeks international support to the climate goals in order to increase the number of global electric vehicles to 230 million by 2030.
 - ✓ Currently, there are 10 million electric cars on road.
 - ✓ Korea has the largest number of hydrogen car distribution in the world.
 - ✓ The consumer spending on Electric Cars in 2020 amounted to \$120 billion, which is a 50% increase compared to 2019
 - ✓ In India, the report predicts that around 30% of new vehicle sales in 2030 will be Electric vehicles in India.

INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

- **India and South Africa - have proposed a three-year patent waiver for Covid-19-related health products and technologies**
 - ✓ The products range from drugs and vaccines, along with “their material or components and their methods and means to manufacture”.

120 NATIONS' SUPPORT

➤ India-SA's proposal goes beyond Covid drugs & vaccines to include diagnostics, therapeutics & medical devices

➤ They claim the support of over 120 countries, including Pakistan and Indonesia. China is seen to be coming out in support of plan and govt is trying to get Brazil on board

➤ US has also reached out to countries like Japan willing to engage in discussions

- ✓ It includes diagnostics, therapeutics, medical devices and personal protective equipment with the coverage proposed to include “the prevention, treatment or containment of Covid-19”.

- ✓ Both the countries are supported by several poor and developing countries from Africa and Latin America in the proposal.
 - ✓ India and South Africa were the original proponents of waiver of Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which also includes relaxations in rules related to copyrights and designs
 - ✓ Both the countries now claim the support of over 120 countries, including Pakistan and Indonesia.
 - ✓ China is seen to be coming out in support of the proposal and the government is trying to get Brazil on board.
 - ✓ The United States also recently announced its support to negotiations for a waiver for vaccines
 - ✓ It has also reached out to countries such as Japan and Switzerland with the European Union too willing to engage in discussions.
- **The United States State Department - recently approved the sale of six P-8I Patrol aircrafts and the related equipment to India.**
- ✓ The deal is estimated to cost \$2.42 billion to the government
 - ✓ The original proposal was for 10 such aircrafts but the number was later cut down to 6 due to budgetary constraints
 - ✓ With India having signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) foundational agreement with the U.S., the six aircraft will come fitted with encrypted systems
 - ✓ The P-8I is based on the Boeing 737 commercial aircraft and India was its first international customer.
 - ✓ In November 2019, the Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, approved the procurement of the long-range maritime surveillance aircraft manufactured by Boeing.
 - ✓ The Indian Navy is currently in the process of inducting the four P-8Is contracted under the offset clause in 2016.
 - ✓ The Navy had procured eight P-8Is in a \$2.2-billion deal in 2009 with the optional clause for four more.
 - ✓ The aircraft are part of the 312A Naval Air Squadron based at Arakkonam in Tamil Nadu.
 - ✓ The P-8I long range patrol aircrafts are the variant of P-8A Poseidon used by the US Navy
 - ✓ It is capable of conducting maritime patrol, anti-submarine warfare, reconnaissance missions and surveillance.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **The researchers from the Minnesota Institute for Astrophysics - have discovered the first galaxy in a 'blow away' state using the "Gemini Telescope".**

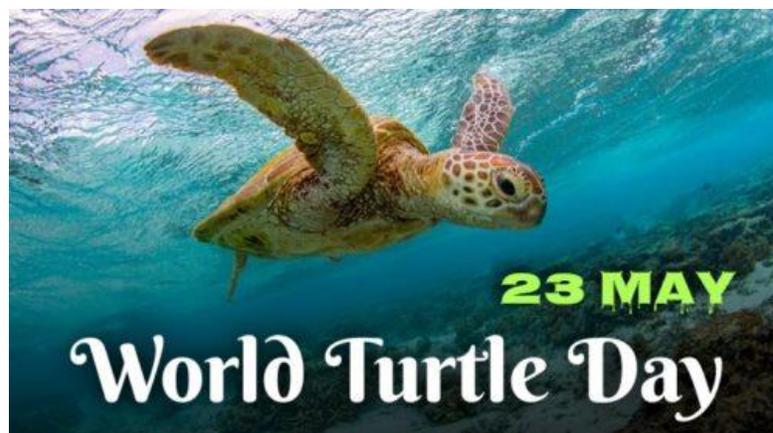
- ✓ Named Pox 186, the galaxy is so small that it can be fit within the Milky Way.
- ✓ When the Universe evolved billions of years ago following the Big Bang, it was in an ionized state, with protons and electrons moving freely across the space
- ✓ Then, following the expansion and cooling down of the Universe, it transformed into a neutral state where the electrons and protons combined into atoms
- ✓ But scientists have now observed that the Universe is changing back to an ionized state
- ✓ The discovery confirms that a blow-away is viable, adding that small galaxies were mainly responsible for the reionization of the Universe
- ✓ The study was financially supported by grants from the University of Minnesota and NASA.
- ✓ The Gemini Telescope is an astronomical observatory that consists of two telescopes namely Gemini North and Gemini South and is located in Hawaii and Chile respectively.

ECONOMY

- **The Reserve Bank of India - recently joined the 'Network for Greening the Financial System' (NGFS).**
- ✓ By joining the system, RBI seeks to learn and contribute to the Global Climate risk management in the financial sector.
- ✓ The NGFS was announced during the One Planet Summit held at Paris in 2017.
- ✓ The initiative was launched by eight central banks under the leadership of Banque de France.
- ✓ The main objective of the system is to accelerate green finance initiatives
- ✓ There are 83 central banks associated with the NGFS system with 75 member and 13 observers

INTERNATIONAL DAY

- **World Turtle Day – May 23**



- ✓ The day is celebrated to create awareness about turtle and tortoises alongwith their natural habitats.

- ✓ World Turtle Day was sponsored since 2000 by the American Tortoise Rescue (ATR), which was founded by husband and wife team, Susan Tellem and Marshall Thompson in the year 1990
- ✓ It is a nonprofit organisation that rescues and rehabilitates all species of tortoise and turtle.
- ✓ Theme 2021 - "Turtles Rock!"
- ✓ Turtle is the oldest reptile, whose origin dates back to nearly 200 million years back, during the time of Dinosaurs
- ✓ There are a total of 300 species of turtles across the globe, out of which 129 species are endangered because of human interference

➤ **International Tea Day – May 21**



- ✓ The celebration of the day aims to promote sustainable production and consumption of tea
- ✓ In 2019, the United Nations recognized the importance of Tea, world's oldest beverage
- ✓ The UN has also considered Tea as an important ingredient of its Sustainable Development Goal Programme
- ✓ The International Tea Day is observed every year by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)
- ✓ Prior to this, December 15 was observed as International Tea Day in various tea producing nations including Sri Lanka, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda
- ✓ The Day is observed on May 21 because the season of tea production begins in May in most tea producing countries
- ✓ The Intergovernmental Group of Tea operating under Food and Agriculture Organization proposed the concept of International Tea Day in 2015.
- ✓ India is the second largest tea producing country after China.
- ✓ Also, India is the largest consumer of tea in the world, consuming around 30% of global tea output.

- ✓ The International Tea Day is celebrated on the motto, “Harnessing Benefits for all From Field to Cup”.

➤ **World Bee Day – May 20**



- ✓ The day aims to create awareness about the importance of bees for our planet and nature.
- ✓ The day is observed on May 20, which marks the birth anniversary of Anton Janša, considered the pioneer of modern day beekeeping techniques
- ✓ Bees act as pollinators and helps in improving the biodiversity of this planet by pollinating thousands of plants.
- ✓ According to the United Nations and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the bee population is under constant threat due to various human activities such as usage of pesticides, development encroaching into the natural habitats of the bees, etc.
- ✓ Theme 2021 - Bee engaged: Let's Build Back Better for Bees

