

## **EVERYDAY CURRENT AFFAIRS-AUGUST 17,2021**

### **TAMIL NADU**

- **Tamil Nadu government – informed Madras high court that only those candidates who have formally completed training as ‘archakas’ have been appointed as priests of various temples across the state**
- ✓ As per the state government, the prospective candidates should have completed the formal training either in a state-run centre to become priests or in other patashalas.
- ✓ The government made the submission on a plea moved by All India Adi Saiva Sivachariyargal Seva Sangam
- ✓ As per the petitioner, 38 temples in the state insist that a person to be eligible to be appointed as a priest must have completed a certification course in ‘Agama Sastras’.
- ✓ As per the present practice, ‘Sivachariyars’ who get trained by religious gurus from a young age are being appointed as priests.
- ✓ Sivachariyars were believed to be slaves of Lord Shiva and their primary duty was to perform puja in Saivite temples as per the Agamas and Vedas.
- ✓ Sivachariyas, who are experienced in agamas, do not undergo any certificate course.
- ✓ Instead, they obtain diksha from the guru of their sect at a very early age and undergo rigorous vedic education for a minimum period of three years
- ✓ Earlier, on August 14, Chief Minister M K Stalin handed over the appointment orders of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department to 75 persons for 208 positions under various categories.
- ✓ The appointments include 24 aspirants who had formally completed training in a state-run centre for becoming priests in Hindu temples, 34 others who completed ‘archaka’ training in other ‘patashalas’ along with “Bhattacharyas,” “Odhuvars,” “Poojaris” among others



- ✓ Bhattacharyyas are Vaishanaite priests, while Odhuvars are trained in Tamil Shaivite tradition to recite and sing devotional hymns composed by Shaivite saints in praise of Lord Shiva.
- ✓ Of the 24 aspirants, 5 belong to scheduled communities and this is the first time men from scheduled communities were appointed as priests in temples under the State's management
- ✓ Also, it is the second time a woman has been appointed an 'odhuvar' in a Hindu temple, after 2007 when the first woman odhuvar was appointed.
- ✓ 28-year old Suhanjana Gopinath took the position of odhuvar at Dhenupureeswarar Temple at Madambakkam in Chennai
- ✓ In the year 2006, the DMK government under late Chief Minister Dr Kalaingar M Karunanidhi had issued a Government Order for the appointment of persons belonging to all Hindu castes as priests in temples
- ✓ The party had assured in the run up to the April 6 Assembly polls that it would appoint persons belonging to all castes, who have completed training as priests in temples
- ✓ Before the present appointments, only two priests who were trained for one-and-half years at the Archaka training school in Tiruvannamalai since 2008 were appointed
- ✓ Marisamy, the first priest was appointed in 2018 at Ayyappan temple in Madurai, while the second priest Thyagarajan was appointed in 2020 at Ganesha temple also in Madurai.
- ✓ In 1970, EV Ramaswami, fondly called as Periyar, insisted that all caste members should become temple priests, saying not allowing them to perform prayers is 'discriminatory'

## STATES

- **Maharashtra government - announces a new award named "Rajiv Gandhi Award for Excellence in Information Technology (IT)".**
- ✓ The new award named after the former prime minister will be given to companies and institutions for outstanding performance in the Information and Technology (IT) sector.
- ✓ The award will be given every year on August 20, the birth anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi.

- ✓ Maharashtra IT Corporation Limited (MAHA-IT), the state government enterprise, has been appointed the nodal agency to propose the award
- ✓ Recently, the Union government dropped Rajiv Gandhi's name from the Khel Ratna award and renamed India's highest sporting honour after Major Dhyan Chand, the legendary hockey player
- ✓ The youngest PM of the country, Rajiv Gandhi, served as the sixth prime minister of India from 1984 to 1989
- ✓ He is widely credited for starting a telecom revolution in India and encouraging the use of Information Technology

## **NATIONAL**

- **India - is likely to have new national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) in 2022**
  - ✓ The new standard will incorporate more pollutants, including ultra-fine particulate matter of less than PM2.5.
  - ✓ The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has awarded the work of updating NAAQS to the IIT Kanpur-led team of experts, including scientists from IIT Delhi, National Physical Laboratory (NPL), NEERI and AIIMS.
  - ✓ The team will recommend the revised standards by fine-tuning and broadening the pollutants' base within the next 12 months
  - ✓ India's first NAAQS was adopted in 1982
  - ✓ It was subsequently revised in 1994 and 2009, including eight more pollutants—particulate matters (PM2.5 and PM10), sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, benzene, ammonia and ozone.
  - ✓ The expert group will examine the criteria adopted by different countries and WHO's guidelines before arriving at its final suggestions.
  - ✓ The scientists will also factor in India's geographical position and meteorological conditions while recommending updates for the NAAQS.
- **The government - has reduced the loans disbursement target under the PM Mudra Yojana (PMMY) at Rs 3 trillion for the current financial year as compared to Rs 3.21 trillion sanctioned in FY21**
  - ✓ Under the scheme, credit up to Rs 10 lakh is provided by banks and non-banking financial companies to small and new businesses.
  - ✓ The loans are given for income-generating activities in manufacturing, trading and services sectors and for activities allied to agriculture
  - ✓ The government has sanctioned loans of Rs 15.5 lakh crore under PMMY since its inception in April 2015.
  - ✓ In FY21, Rs 3.12 trillion were disbursed to entrepreneurs out of the total sanctioned loans to the tune of Rs. 3.21 trillion

- ✓ The figure was even higher in the FY 2019-20 with total loans sanctioned at Rs 3.37 trillion, out of which loans worth Rs 3.29 trillion were disbursed to entrepreneurs
  - ✓ In FY22, loans worth Rs 3,804 crore have been sanctioned by 13 public sector banks (PSBs) as on June 25.
  - ✓ In FY21, loans worth Rs 9.5 trillion were disbursed to MSMEs, which was significantly higher than FY20 when Rs 6.8 trillion in loans were disbursed
  - ✓ The government has recently informed the Parliament that Rs 167 crore has been sanctioned by public sector banks under the Stand Up India scheme in the current FY as on June 28.
  - ✓ Stand Up India scheme provides credit of Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore for setting up greenfield enterprises in manufacturing trading or services sector and activities allied to agriculture.
  - ✓ However, public sector banks (PSBs) have seen a sharp surge in the amount of Mudra loans turning into non-performing assets (NPAs) over the last three years.
  - ✓ NPAs in Mudra loans had jumped to Rs 18,835 crore in 2019-20, from Rs 11,483 crore in 2018-19 and Rs 7,277 in 2017-18, as per the Finance Ministry
  - ✓ PMMY was launched by government in 2015 to disburse loans through a financial institution called MUDRA - Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd.
- **India and World Bank – recently signed a \$250 million project to make existing dams safe and resilient in the country**
- ✓ The Union government, Central Water Commission and representatives from 10 participating states have signed the agreement with the World Bank for ensuring the long-term safety and performance of dams across the country.
  - ✓ The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently approved the second and third phases of Rs.10,211 crore Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) to improve the safety and operational performance of 736 dams across the country.
  - ✓ The project will be implemented in approximately 120 dams across the states of Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu, and at the national level through the Central Water Commission (CWC)
  - ✓ The \$250 million loan has a maturity of 13 years, including a grace period of 6 years.
  - ✓ The Second Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP-2) will strengthen dam safety by building dam safety guidelines, bring in global experience, and introduce innovative technologies.
  - ✓ It also proposes to introduce a risk-based approach to dam asset management that will help to effectively allocate financial resources towards priority dam safety needs.

- ✓ World Bank has supported the recently closed DRIP-1 (\$279 million + \$62 million Additional Financing) that improved the safety and sustainable performance of 223 dams in six states of India and one central agency
- ✓ India consists of more than 5000 large dams with a storage capacity of more than 300 billion cubic meters.
- **National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) – is proposed to be conceptualized as an international tourist destination at Lothal in Gujarat**



- ✓ This was informed by minister for culture, G. Kishan Reddy in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha recently
- ✓ The centre, dedicated to the legacy of maritime heritage of the country, will have various facilities/amenities to attract tourists
- ✓ It includes the setting up of National Maritime Heritage Museum, Heritage Theme Park, Maritime Research Institute, landscaping and recreational venues
- ✓ Further, there were plans for providing digital tourism, which includes Augmented/virtual reality shows, sound and light shows, touch screen kiosks and short films related to maritime history
- ✓ Lothal was the southernmost cities of ancient Indus Valley Civilization, whose construction started in 2400 BCE.
- ✓ The city had world's oldest dock, which connected Lothal to the ancient course of Sabarmati River on the trade route of Harappan cities in Sindh and peninsula of Saurashtra.
- **Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi - has emerged among world's Top-50 airports in the 2021, as per the UK-based Skytrax World Airport Award rankings**



- ✓ Delhi Airport, ranked at 45<sup>th</sup> position, emerged as best airport in the country for the third consecutive year.
- ✓ It was ranked at 50<sup>th</sup> position as per the rankings released in 2020
- ✓ In 2006, management of Indira Gandhi International Airport was transferred to Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), led by the GMR Group.
- ✓ Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru have been ranked among world's 100 best airports.
- ✓ Hyderabad has been ranked at 64<sup>th</sup>, Mumbai at 65<sup>th</sup> and Bengaluru at 71<sup>st</sup> position in this year's rankings
- ✓ These airports have been ranked at 71<sup>st</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> rank respectively in last year's rankings
- ✓ World's top-5 airports include Doha Hamad International Airport, Tokyo Haneda airport, Singapore Changi airport, Seoul Incheon International Airport and Tokyo Narita airport in the order.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

- **The United Arab Emirates - has approved the emergency use of Sinopharm's coronavirus vaccine for children aged 3 to 17**
- ✓ The decision to approve the vaccine for children was based on the results of clinical studies and local evaluation
- ✓ The Sinopharm immune bridge study that was launched in Abu Dhabi in June this year saw the participation of 900 children.
- ✓ The UAE has started manufacturing the vaccine under a joint venture between Sinopharm and Abu Dhabi-based technology company Group 42
- ✓ The UAE is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa region to have conducted a study of the vaccine's effectiveness for this age group
- ✓ Singapore, Hong Kong and some U.S. states have authorized shots for those aged 12 and above, while China has already authorized its Sinopharm vaccine for children aged 3 and above
- ✓ The UAE has so far approved vaccines from Moderna Inc., Pfizer Inc. and AstraZeneca Plc
- ✓ The Gulf Arab state, among the world's highest immunisation rates, had already inoculated 78.95% of the population of roughly 9 million with one dose, while 70.57% had been fully vaccinated
- ✓ The Sinopharm vaccine or BBIBP-CorV is one among two inactivated virus Covid-19 vaccines that were developed by Sinopharm's Beijing Institute of Biological Products.
- ✓ The Phase III trials of the vaccine were completed in Argentina, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Peru, Pakistan and United Arab Emirates (UAE) on some 60,000 participants.

- ✓ As per phase III trials in United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, BBIBP-CorV vaccine is 78.1% effective against symptomatic cases while 100% effective against severe cases.
- ✓ World Health Organization approved this vaccine for use under the COVAX initiative on May 7, 2021.
- **The UN General Assembly - approved a resolution establishing a Permanent Forum of People of African Descent recently**
- ✓ It will be a 10-member advisory body that will work closely with the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.
- ✓ Of the 10 members, five members are to be nominated by Governments and then elected by the General Assembly, and five additional members appointed by the Human Rights Council.
- ✓ The new Forum will serve as a consultation mechanism for people of African descent and other stakeholders
- ✓ Further, it will work to identify and analyze best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives to address issues relevant to people of African descent, including the challenge of racial discrimination
- ✓ The new body's creation comes ahead of the 20th anniversary of the September 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa
- ✓ The first session of the Permanent Forum will be held in 2022, with subsequent annual sessions rotating between Geneva and New York.
- ✓ Earlier, in November 2014, the General Assembly officially launched the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024).

## **INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES**

- **India and America - have signed an agreement on monsoon data analysis and cooperation to improve weather forecasts in the region**
- ✓ The agreement was signed by India's National Institute of Ocean Technology and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States
- ✓ The two bodies would enhance technical cooperation in the development of the Research Moored Array for African-Asian-Australian Monsoon Analysis and Prediction (RAMA)
- ✓ Further, the Ocean Moored buoy Network in the northern Indian ocean (OMNI) will be developed for improving weather and monsoon forecasts between NOAA and India's Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- ✓ The agreement is a follow-up to the MoU signed between the Ministry of Earth Sciences and NOAA last October for Technical Cooperation in Earth Observations and Earth Sciences.
- **Bangladesh – has joined the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) recently**

- ✓ The initiative has been joined in by 25 countries and 7 international organisations as members, as on date.
- ✓ Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the CDRI on September 23, 2019 during his speech at the UN Climate Action Summit.
- ✓ It was launched to promote resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks to support sustainable development.
- ✓ The initiative was first proposed by the PM during 2016 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction that was held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.
- ✓ It was conceptualised in first and second edition of the International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (IWDRI) held in 2018-19.
- ✓ The IWDRI was organised by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in association with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), World Bank, UN Development Programme, and Global Commission on Adaptation.

## CONFERENCES & SUMMITS

- **Chief Election Commissioner of India and current Chairman, Sushil Chandra - inaugurated the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of the Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) for the year 2021 recently**



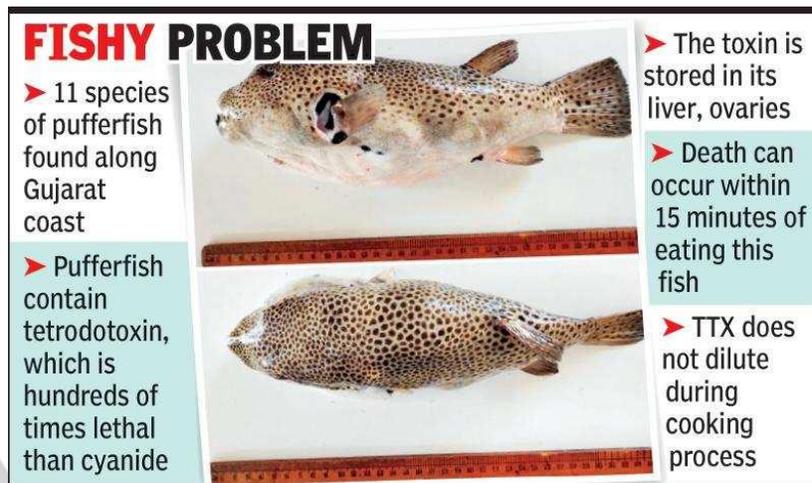
- ✓ The inaugural event was accompanied by Election Commissioners Rajeev Kumar and A.C. Pandey
- ✓ The meeting in Virtual mode was hosted by the Election Commission of Bhutan.
- ✓ Along with India, delegations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated in the day-long meeting.
- ✓ Sushil Chandra, CEC, as the outgoing Chair of FEMBoSA, virtually handed over the Chairmanship of FEMBoSA to H.E. Dasho Sonam Topgay, Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan at the meeting
- ✓ During the meeting, Chandra shared India's experience of conducting Assembly elections in Bihar in November 2020 and Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West

Bengal, and Puducherry in March/April 2021 during the tough, testing times of COVID 19 pandemic

- ✓ The theme of the meeting was 'Use of Technology in Elections'
- ✓ A Thimphu Resolution was unanimously adopted by the FEMBoSA members to extend tenure of chairmanship to two years during the current pandemic situation

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **Scientists of Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Cochin - have confirmed the first case of poisoning in humans due to pufferfish consumption in India.**



- ✓ A 23-year-old man from Veraval in Gujarat complained of giddiness, vertigo, aphasia among other symptoms after he unknowingly ate this poisonous species last year.
- ✓ The man had consumed Stellate Puffer, also known as Arothron stellatus, which contains tetrodotoxin (TTX), which is said to be about 1,500 times more lethal than cyanide.
- ✓ The man developed symptoms after 15 minutes of eating pufferfish in May last year.

## RANKINGS

- **India - was ranked at 122nd position among 181 countries in Global Youth Development Index, 2020, released by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London**
- ✓ The triennial rankings of youth development ranked India among the top five risers on the index between 2010 and 2018, alongside Afghanistan, Russia, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso
- ✓ Singapore ranked at the top position, followed by Slovenia, Norway, Malta and Denmark.
- ✓ Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Niger were ranked at the bottom of the rankings respectively.

- ✓ The index ranks countries between 0.00 (lowest) and 1.00 (highest) based on the developments in youth education, employment, health, equality and inclusion, peace and security, and political and civic participation
- ✓ It is based on 27 indicators including literacy and voting to highlight the state of the world's 1.8 billion people between the age of 15 and 29
- ✓ The rankings released this year have indicated that the conditions of young people have improved around the world by 3.1% between 2010 and 2018
- ✓ The index was supposed to be released at the now-postponed Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2020

